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Railroad Poetics: Infrastructure, Stories, and Worldmaking

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by

Geoffrey Kyle Bucy

Committee in charge:

Professor Kay Young, Chair

Professor William B. Warner

Professor Carl Gutiérrez-Jones

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The dissertation of Geoffrey Kyle Bucy is approved.

____
Carl Gutiérrez-Jones

____
William B. Warner

____
Kay Young, Committee Chair

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Railroad Poetics: Infrastructure, Stories, and Worldmaking

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By

Geoffrey Kyle Bucy

Dedicated to Randi and Max

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VITA OF GEOFFREY KYLE BUCY
August 2016

EDUCATION

Bachelor of Arts with English Honors, University of Oregon, June 2006 (*summa cum laude*)
TEFL Teaching Certification, August 2006
Masters of Arts in the Humanities, University of Chicago, June 2009
Doctor of Philosophy in English, University of California, Santa Barbara, December 2016

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

2009-2010: Program Specialist, Literacy Volunteers of Illinois, AmeriCorps
2010-2015: Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of California, Santa Barbara
2012-2015: Teaching Associate, Department of English, University of California, Santa Barbara
2013-2014: Teaching Assistant, Writing Program, University of California, Santa Barbara
2016-Present: English Teacher, The Hun School of Princeton

PUBLICATIONS

"The Literary Railroad Experience: The Production of Continuity in Paul Theroux's *The Old Patagonian Express*." *Stet: An Online Postgraduate Research Journal*, *King's College, London*. Issue 3: Dis/Orientation. (2013)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

"Railroad Entanglements in Walden Woods: The Deep Cut and Thoreau's Metaphor of Rebirth." American Comparative Literature Association National Conference, Boston, MA. March 2016.

"The Built Environment Re-Visioned: Adapting the Real in Action Movie Set-Pieces." Literature/Film Association National Conference, York, PA. October 2015.

"'I Just Made That Up': Meditations on the Shovel in the Railroad Western." Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association National Conference, New Orleans, LA. April 2015.

"'A Relaxing Walk Indeed': 19th-Century Railroad Landscapes in the 21st Century." Nineteenth Century Studies Association Conference, Boston, MA. March 2015.

"Clocks, Depots, and the Noon Train: The Role of the Railroad in Zinnemann's *High Noon*." Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association National Conference, Chicago, IL. April 2014.

"Rethinking the Machine in Thoreau's Garden: *Walden*'s Debt to the Fitchburg Railroad Line." Nineteenth Century Studies Association Conference, Chicago, IL. March 2014.

"On Beaten Paths and Cabin Passages: The 'Authentic' Traveler and Tourism Anxiety in Thoreau's Self-Exploration." Northeast Modern Language Association Convention, Boston, MA. March 2013.

"'What Does the West Stand For?': Transcendentalist Readings of the American West in Emerson and Thoreau." Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association National Conference, Washington, DC. March 2013.

"'Explore Thyself": Metaphors of Travel in Thoreau's Poetics of Introspection." Nineteenth Century Studies Association Conference, Fresno, CA. March 2013.

"The Literary Railroad Experience: The Production of Continuity in Paul Theroux's *Old Patagonian Express*." Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery: The Image of the Road in Literature, Media, and Society Conference, Colorado Springs, CO. March, 2012.

AWARDS

UCSB Graduate Division Dissertation Fellowship, Fall 2015
Dean's Fellowship, Winter 2015
Award for Outstanding Achievement as a Teaching Assistant, UCSB English Department, 2012-2013
Arnhold Award Winter/Spring 2011

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: 19th- and 20th-century U.S. Literature and Film
Technology, Information, and Media Studies with Professor Bill Warner
American Literature with Professor Stephanie LeMenager
Literature and the Mind with Professor Kay Young

ABSTRACT

Railroad Poetics: Infrastructure, Stories, and Worldmaking

By

Geoffrey Kyle Bucy

"All objects have a poetics: they make the world and take part in it, and at the same time, synthesize, block, or make possible other worlds" (Fuller 1-2). Matthew Fuller's argument for nonhuman poetics challenges the critical tendency toward human exceptionalism. In suggesting that textual meaning is to be found solely in language, culture, discourse, power, economics, or politics, critique implicitly assumes that "worldmaking" is a strictly human affair. In this dissertation, I theorize and practice a mode of literary and film interpretation based on the Nonhuman Turn's "decentering [of] the human" (Grusin *vii*). Cultivating an interpretive attunement to the nonhuman *affects, affordances* and *agencies* that swirl through our most human stories challenges many of our implicit ontological and epistemological assumptions about narratives, textual objects, and our own relationships with the nonhuman. In drawing attention to the "worldmaking" capacities of objects that often go unnoticed, I make visible some of the innumerable threads of translation, mediation, and interpretation that inextricably entangle our thoughts, perceptions, and stories with the nonhuman world.

More than any other technology, the railroad transformed the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries. From standardized time zones and westward expansion to modernized warfare, early cinema, and the rise of finance capitalism, our world was undeniably "made" by trains. The railroad also holds a place of privilege in the history of literature, film, and culture. The locomotive was *the* symbol of progress and speed in the 19th century, and trains are historically tied to early cinema, from their starring roles in "actualities" and "phantom rides" to their use as film dollies. What better case study for developing this unorthodox approach to interpretation? In order to theorize "railroad poetics," I bracket symbolic interpretations of the railroad. Instead, I "follow the railroad actors" (to adapt the Latourian turn) in order to explore the complex ways that compartments, cat-walks, tunnels, shovels, deep cuts, and graded causeways are inextricably entangled with metaphor, genre, structure, and narrative action.

The Nonhuman Turn adds refreshing tools to our interpretive tool-kit. In each chapter, I trace a slightly different dialogic interplay between trains, bodies in canonical and popular American literature and film. In explicating these tripartite co-mediations, I challenge our inattention to the nonhuman agencies that shape our stories. In doing so, I hope to encourage a radical re-interpretation of the role infrastructure plays in our everyday lives. We need to be able to theorize the relationship between humans and nonhumans without falling into one-sided theories of social constructivism or technological determinism. This project develops a methodology for doing just that. In challenging our interpretive approach to the literary and filmic railroad, I lay a theoretical foundation for rethinking the role of the nonhuman in human narrative, the ontology of the fictional object, and our own entanglements with the nonhuman world in everyday life.

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All objects have a poetics: they make the world and take part in it, and at the same time, synthesize, block, or make possible other worlds.

— Matthew Fuller

Oh well. It was a great prop. I did some awful wild things with the railroads.

— Buster Keaton

Introduction:
Nonhuman Actors in Human Stories

All objects have a poetics: they make the world and take part in it, and at the same time, synthesize, block, or make possible other worlds.

— Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies*

The modern world began with the coming of the railways.

— Nicholas Faith, *The World the Railways Made*

Kurosawa and the Sealed Window: The Dispersed Agency of Worldmaking

In the original script of Akira Kurosawa's *High and Low* (1963)*,* kidnappers demand that millionaire Kingo Gondo (Toshirô Mifune) drop a suitcase of ransom money from a speeding Shinkansen train. As Donald Richie relates, however, "in the making of the film, after this cinematic idea became a part of the script, it was discovered that the real Shinkansen has sealed windows and hydraulically controlled doors" (35). The windows on a Shinkansen are sealed because at high speeds, passing a train on the next track or entering a tunnel would cause significant discomfort and pain for passengers in an unpressurized train. Faced with this infrastructural constraint, both the fictional kidnappers and the real screenwriters[1] had to re-examine the possible actions available to a human body inside a 1960s Shinkansen passenger car.

The screenwriters had crafted the fictional world of *High and Low* in conjunction with the affordances of a recently outdated transportation technology. In the early 1960s, Japan began replacing their older narrow-gauge railroads with what are colloquially referred to as "bullet trains." Construction began on the first high-speed rail line—the Tōkaidō

[1] Hideo Oguni, Ryûzô Kikushima, Eijirô Hisaita, and Kurosawa.

Shinkansen—in 1959,[2] and part of the line was operational for test runs by 1962. The full route of the Tōkaidō Shinkansen, from Tokyo to Osaka, was not operational until 1964, a year *after* the release of *High and Low*, so Kurosawa was working within a very new, and relatively unknown, technological space.[3] As it turned out, the new bullet train was not just faster; slight changes in infrastructure, seemingly negligible, re-organized the possibilities for narrative action, movement, and meaning. The agency of the sealed window[4]—its capacity to

Image 1: ***The dimensions of the suitcase fit the aperture perfectly.***

Image 2: ***The millionaire contorts his body to look out the small window in hopes of seeing the kidnapped boy.***

[2] Incidentally, this is the same year that Ed McBain published *King's Ransom*, the American novel on which *High and Low* is based. In the original story, the drop is made from the open window of a black Cadillac on a curving road (198). The screenwriters were not drawing from an American railroad story, then, but adapting a kidnapping plot to a new infrastructural milieu.

[3] It is interesting to note that the particular problem Kurosawa faces is not only temporally but geographically specific. It is no accident that, for example, the United States did not face the problem of passenger-car pressurization in the 1960s. In 1947 Congress passed a bill limiting all passenger train services to a maximum of 79 miles per hour. As John Stilgoe laments, "[t]he United States became the only nation in the world to deliberately limit the speed of its passenger trains" (*Train Time* 72). Because of a sustained lobbying effort by highway, trucking, and automobile industries, high-speed-rail (HSR) projects like the Tōkaidō Shinkansen were not possible in the United States until much later. Sealed windows were not introduced into the American railroad assemblage until the 1930s, following the invention of air-conditioning (Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor* 251).

[4] For Bruno Latour, agency does not require will or consciousness. In fact, agency does not even require an "agent." For Latour, any entity that "makes a difference" in the world, no matter how small, is an "actor." "Agency," for Latour, refers to an actor's capacity to affect and to be affected by other actors. Latour reminds us that "[i]n addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'backdrop for human action,' things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" (*Reassembling* 72). As these "things" make a difference in the world by affecting other actors (making certain things possible, encourage certain actions, forbidding other actions), they assert their agency. In this example, then, the sealed window of the Shinkansen train asserts its particular agency when it "blocks" the suitcase and "renders impossible" the drop scene as written in the screenplay.

block a fictional suitcase from crossing the threshold from corridor to embankment—affects both the kidnappers, millionaires, and police of *High and Low*, and the director, screenwriters, properties managers, and cinematographers of our own world.

Kurosawa scoured the real Shinkansen for an opening that would allow him (and Gondo) to make the drop. Eventually, as Richie continues, "it was decided to use the small vent in the toilet window for the drop, necessitating a much smaller pack of ransom money than was originally envisioned" (35). In this dialogic process of worldmaking, the size of the aperture through which money could conceivably be dropped altered the size and shape of the cases that the kidnappers could ask the millionaire to fill with money, and this changed the amount of money the kidnappers could demand, which in turn required re-writing major scenes. Money here is not an abstraction, but a thing-in-the-world with physical dimensions that must interact with particular spatial arrays. The kidnappers and Kurosawa are equally bound by the constraints of the train.

The properties manager specially designed two unique suitcases, each 2.75" wide, the precise width of the opening in the washroom, and the script was re-written to include a scene in which Tokyo police explain how *they* procured these strange looking cases. For the drop scene, Kurosawa and his screenwriters and cinematographers were forced to re-block the movement of bodies within the constraints of the train-car washroom, a space that encourages and blocks an entirely different range of actions than the long, narrow corridor. The potential shots available to cinematographers Asakazu Nakai and Takao Saito changed, as they too were bound by the tight dimensions of the washroom. While a public corridor might have called for obsessive glances up and down the hall, staring out at the landscape, sticking a head out the window, and pacing, the dimensions of the washroom produce an

Image 3: ***After tossing out the briefcase, the millionaire turns to splash water on his face. What would he have done had he been in the corridor instead of the washroom?***

altogether more confined and claustrophobic world. In this new space, the millionaire is forced to press his body flush against the wall to procure the slightest glimpse of the drop point, and sticking his head out the window is no longer an option. His impotence is exacerbated by his inability to move or procure a good sightline, while the tight space contributes to the viewer's feelings of claustrophobic suspense. When he is done and the train has passed, instead of nervously pacing he immediately turns to the washroom sink and splashes water on his face in order to relieve his anxiety. Actors and characters, filmmakers and audiences, are all affected by the different ways that corridor windows and washroom windows "make the world and take part in it" through their affordances and constraints, their tendencies and capacities, and their nonhuman agency. The storyworld of *High and Low* was brought into existence through dialogic negotiations between humans and nonhumans; between writers, directors, actors, windows, film cameras, pressurization technology, fictional characters, suitcases, and train-car washrooms. But as we imagine Kurosawa and his team scrambling to re-construct this world in the face of infrastructural constraint, it would be just as appropriate to say that the "real" world in this anecdote was *also* brought into existence through precisely the same type of dialogic negotiations.

Trains and the Modern World

Most railroad histories begin with a variation on Nicholas Faith's claim that "the modern world began with the coming of the railways" (1). A recent self-published history of

the Victorian railroad by Philip Sparks is typical of how trains have entered public consciousness as an agent of modernity: "the introduction of the railway marked the start of the age of progress and the definite turning point of the transitionary phase of the early modern period into that of the modern age" (1). Established historians likewise tend to treat the railroad in these terms. William R. Everdell claims that we call modern "everything that happened to any culture after it had built its first railroad" (4). Noting that the "class of men" from before 1840 is now extinct, having been replaced by a "race of hereditary businessmen," Stewart Holbrook argues that "[i]t was the railroad, more than any other one influence, that had brought them into being" (98). John Stilgoe says that in the early 20th century, the "forces of modernization" flowed along the "metropolitan corridor," bringing the wealth, spectacle, and "character of the twentieth century" into the American suburbs and rural areas (*Metropolitan* 3). These readings of the coming of the railroad as the schismatic event that separates us from an "old" world are in line with Jurgen Habermas' definition of the "modern" as the word has been used since at least the 5th century: "With varying content, the term 'modern' again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new" (3).[5] The literary and filmic railroad often acts as both an agent and a symbol of the violent break that separates the "modern" world from the "past of antiquity."[6]

[5] This is also how Latour defines modernity in *We Have Never Been Modern*: "The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern,' 'modernization,' or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past" (10).

[6] Perhaps the greatest example of this historical break comes from *The Education of Henry Adams.* The memoir begins by citing the opening of the Boston and Albany Railroad in 1844 as the moment when "[Adams] and his eighteenth-century, troglodytic Boston were suddenly cut apart—separated forever" (5). Leo Marx has chronicled the recurrence of this symbolic use of the railroad in American literature, arguing that our greatest canonical writers tend to use the train as the representative "machine" that brought us into the modern age. The image of the railroad and steam power, for example, was ubiquitous in American literature and popular culture

This worldmaking—or at least, world-changing—power of the railroad is generally taken for granted in critical studies and histories alike, and the rise of the railroad is consistently aligned with the advent of modernity. For Faith, this means that trains brought with them "the development of modern capitalism, of modern nations, [and] the creation of new regions," while giving "the human frame, the human spirit, [and] the human imagination . . . the first and most shattering mechanically-induced shock they had ever experienced or are ever likely to experience" (1). To this list of world-shaking changes we could add standardized time zones, the rapid urban- and suburbanization of the 19th and early-20th centuries, dramatic changes in the health and diet of city-dwellers,[7] the first labor unions,[8]

between 1830 and 1860. As Marx says, trains and steam engines "stood for progress, productivity, and, above all, man's new power over nature. And they invariably carried a sense of violent break with the past. . . . It is the suddenness and finality of change—the recent past all at once a green colonial memory—to which American writers have persistently called attention" ("Machine" 114).

[7] In *Blood, Iron, and Gold*, Christian Wolmar reminds us that, before railways, fresh food was hard to come by in major cities: "Farmers and fishermen soon realized that the railway opened up a huge market for their produce. The transport of fresh dairy products, vegetables, meat, and fish helped to revolutionize the diet of ordinary people, in particular the urban masses, who previously had rarely seen fresh food" (10). Refrigerated railroad cars and the transportation of ice continued to change the way people ate. In addition, this increased the sanitation in large cities that no longer had to house their own cows in order to have fresh dairy. Before 1841, New York milk came from "evil-smelling, swill-fed cows kept in basements" (225).

[8] The railroads played an important role in the development of unions in the 19th century. As Wolmar tells us, "[t]he vast number of people taken on by the railroads made them unwitting catalysts for the development of new patterns of industrial relations, stimulating the creation of mass labor unions. The railroads were the first business to employ people in such numbers that the rigidity of the division between workers and management became entrenched" (*Great Railroad Revolution* 231). The first African-American labor union in the United States was the union of railroad porters.

mass middle-class tourism, early cinema, the U.S. National Parks system,[9] the "Anthropocene" era,[10] and modernized warfare.[11]

Less well-known, but no less remarkable, are the vestigial contours of 19th-century railroad infrastructure that remain with us today and continue to mediate our movements. According to Dolf Sternberger, "[t]he violently and thoroughly altered landscape of the nineteenth century has remained visible until today, or at least traces of it have. It was shaped by the railroad" (27). Towns across the American West are still spaced out along old railroad corridors; rights-of-way continue to guide our footsteps and vehicle wheels, often in their new incarnations as designated bike paths, hiking trails, or highways;[12] and we still live our

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[9] In "Trains in the Wilderness," Kevin Michael DeLuca emphasizes the role the Southern Pacific Railroad played in the development of Yosemite National Park as an official "wilderness" site. The Southern Pacific financed John Muir's "travels, research, and writing since the 1870s" and sent artists, writers, and photographers to Yosemite throughout the 19th century, disseminating their work through the magazine *Sunset*, which they also founded in order to promote "natural scenery" (639). Promoting wilderness scenery helped draw easterners west on the railroad, and the railroads participated in a large-scale marketing campaign designed to promote the "romantic" West of the Sierras. When a bill was proposed to give federal protection to Yosemite (the first instance in which the federal government set aside park land for preservation and public use), it was pushed through Congress by the lobbying efforts of the Southern Pacific (640).

[10] In their oft-cited 2000 article in *Global Change NewsLetter* on the rise of the "Anthropocene," Crutzen and Stoermer locate the beginning of this epoch in the late 18th century: "we choose this date because, during the past two centuries, the global effects of human activities have become clearly noticeable. . . . Such a starting date also coincides with James Watt's invention of the steam engine in 1784. About at that time, biotic assemblages in most lakes began to show large changes" (17-8). It has also been suggested that the Anthropocene began with the agricultural revolution or the dropping of the atomic bomb. In any case, it is undeniable that the railroad—along with the industrial revolution more generally—had a massive geological and atmospheric effect on the planet.

[11] Christian Wolmar: "Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the railways were an invention for which the military had been waiting for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. They would become a key development in the technology of warfare because of their ability to shift unprecedented amounts of matériel and huge numbers of people. It was, therefore, not so much that they could be used as a weapon . . . but that they allowed a step change in the scale of warfare. Once railways became involved, the very nature of warfare changed, and wars increased in length, intensity, and destructiveness" (*Engines of War* 2-3). The American Civil War is generally considered to be the first full-scale "railroad" war.

[12] The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, for example, has been transforming old railroad corridors into walking and biking paths since 1986. According to their website, they are "creating a nationwide network of trails from former rail lines and connecting corridors to build healthier places for healthier people." They boast more than 30,000 miles of trails across the United States, and continue to fund, plan, and build new trails. In

lives according to "railroad time," even if we have forgotten that the temporality we take for granted was imposed by the railroads in order to help their trains run on time.[13]

This way of reading the railroad as an agent of modernity has strong historical links to literature and film—those quintessentially human modes of narrative worldmaking. The railroad was *the* most powerful symbol of modernity for the Victorian age. Bill Phillips argues, for example,

> there is no more potent symbol [of the industrial revolution] than the railway. The phallic locomotive represents man's barely controlled, brutal domination of nature, time and space; the land is restrained and tamed under a network of iron rails which have been cut, gouged and torn into the earth while the ordinary people become the captives and servants of the new iron lord; they build it, they live with it, they service it and they travel on it. It is hardly surprising, then, that railways figure so prominently in the literature of the industrial age. (131)

Grant Burns suggests that "through straightforward literal representation and through the most suggestive symbolism, the railroad has gained a place in American literary history that probably surpasses in scope that attained by any other commercial entity" (7). From the

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short, the grading, bridge-building, tunnel-blasting, and rights-of-way planning of the 19th century still shape the movements of 21st-century walkers and bikers across the country, often without their knowledge. For a great performance art project involving abandoned railroad rights-of-way, see Lisa Conrad's "4 ½ Feet." She is leading a group of bicyclists across the abandoned rights-of-way of the United States, starting in Seattle and heading east. Her project statement begins: "The project's aim is to explore the American landscape by bicycle, from the perspective of abandoned railroads, and to illuminate a new line, drawing it as we go. In so doing, to navigate—through the experience of the trip and additional research—the tension between the romantic pull of the railroad and the complex history of its making."

[13] On November 18th, 1883, the four standardized-time-zone system of the continental United States and Canada was conceived of and put into effect by a convention of major U.S. railroads.

American Renaissance[14] to Dick Francis;[15] from *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) to *The Lone Ranger* (2013);[16] from Theodore Dreiser and Frank Norris[17] to Steven Seagal and Chuck Norris,[18] the railroad runs through the veins of American literature and film.[19] But do

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[14] The American Renaissance took place during the first years of railroad development in New England, and trains accordingly fill the pages of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau (see Chapter 1), Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman. Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* includes a memorable railroad scene in which reclusive siblings Clifford and Hepzibah Pyncheon ride the rails for the first time: "At last, therefore, and after so long estrangement from everything that the world acted or enjoyed, they had been drawn into the great current of human life, and were swept away with it, as by the suction of fate itself" (219-20). But while Hawthorne here aligns the railroad with "the great current of human life," he elsewhere indicts it for making life too easy. In his allegoric parody of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress,* "The Celestial Railroad," Hawthorne suggests that in taking up most of our burdens, the railroad appears to be a blessing, but is in fact leading us—via idleness and lethargy—straight to Hell. In both cases, the railroad clearly acts as an agent and icon of modernity. Whitman celebrates the railroad in a number of poems, most notably in "To a Locomotive in Winter," where he also interprets the railroad as an explicit symbol of modernity: "Type of the modern! emblem of motion and power! pulse of the continent!" Herman Melville didn't write about trains as much, but even he published a parody of "the great improvements our age" in *Harper's*. In the story, "Cock-a-Doodle-Do!," he calls the train a "chartered murderer," an "iron fiend," and a "lantern-jawed rascal" (215).

[15] Dick Francis is a popular mystery author who set one of his books, *The Edge*, entirely on a trans-Canadian railroad. Francis plays with the "closed circle of suspects" created by the train (see Chapter 3). He is not interested in the link between trains and modernity so much as in the ways the railroad helps him plot his murder mystery.

[16] Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* is generally considered to be both the first Western film and the first narrative film. However, when it was released it was marketed as a "Railroad Film." I discuss this legacy in Chapter 3. *The Lone Ranger* was a box office flop with spectacular train set-pieces. I discuss this film in Chapter 2.

[17] The railroad plays an integral role in many of Theodore Dreiser's novels. The train routes between Chicago, Montreal, and New York link the different locales and actions of *Sister Carrie*; the class divide at the heart of *Jennie Gerhardt* is represented by the marriage between a railroad magnate and a poor girl who is forced to steal coal from unguarded train tenders; and *The Financier* deals with financial speculation in railroads. Railroads were built using stocks and bonds, making many people incredibly wealthy and leaving others destitute. Railroad speculation was notoriously corrupt, and gambling on new railroads was a national obsession for a number of years. Mark Twain and Andrew Dudley famously skewered the incompetence and greed that drove railroad speculation in *The Gilded Age*: "The whole country is opening up, all we want is the capital to develop it. Slap down the rails and bring the land into market" (99). Frank Norris wrote perhaps the most famous railroad novel in the United States. *The Octopus*—based loosely on the history of the Central Pacific Railroad in the San Joaquin Valley—tells the story of California wheat farmers whose livelihoods are destroyed by the greed and bureaucratic corruption of railroad monopolies.

[18] Steven Seagal and Chuck Norris, like many action heroes, have set fight scenes on top of speeding trains. Here, I refer to *Under Siege 2: Dark Territory* and *Code of Silence*, respectively. The number of railroad set-pieces in late-20th-century action films far exceeds the number one would expect were these scenes to have any relation to the number of people who *ride* trains in the United States.

[19] Leo Marx even suggests that "the unprecedented changes then taking place [in the 1840s] may have provided a direct impetus to the use of symbolic techniques" ("Machine" 115). John Millichap picks up this

railroads figure so prominently in American literature and film simply because they are the "most potent symbol" of modernity and the industrial revolution available? Are the innumerable railroad stories produced in the past 150 years to be understood solely in terms of "straightforward representation" and "suggestive symbolism"?

At this point, rather than sparking new thinking about the railroad in literature and film, these interpretive truisms serve as an all-too-easy stopping point. It is precisely the symbolic power of the railroad that makes it so tempting to treat the literary locomotive as nothing more than an image, operating solely in a world of discourse. Leo Marx's chronicle of "repeated" images of the railroad throughout canonical American literature, from Emerson to Hemingway, shows beyond a doubt that artists have tended to incorporate the railroad into their stories to serve similar symbolic purposes. Other studies by John Millichap and Paul Youngman—focusing on the U.S. Southern Renaissance and German realism, respectively—acknowledge the power of the railroad to alter culture, but, like Marx, do so by investigating the railroad as representation, image, and symbol.[20] This is to be expected; after all, literary critics are trained to interrogate language and discourse.

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argument with more specificity, arguing that "the power and speed of railroads not only affected modernist themes such as the sense of disconnection and alienation in the age of the machine, but they also affected modernist style and its use of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and montage as artistic technique. The landscape, especially the cityscape, was radically reframed by the window of a speeding express" (13). Hugh Kenner also develops this argument in *The Mechanic Muse*, claiming that changes in technology inspire and mediate not only fictional worlds, but the literary forms and structures used to "represent" those worlds: "the wireless superimposed the voices of twenty countries (*Finnegans Wake*), newsreel quick-cutting helped prompt *The Waste Land*" (9). And as for the railroad: "The day . . . that *Ulysses* reflects would have been impossible a generation earlier, before electric trams were moving people quickly about a large city" (11). Joyce's experiments with literary form and the possibilities of rapid movement across the urban landscape of *Ulysses* are, for Kenner, inseparable. Already, then, we see an inextricable entanglement between transportation technology, human bodies, and narrative.

[20] In *Dixie Limited*, Millichap does reflect on Southern U.S. trains as real entities, pointing out in his conclusion that, "[i]t becomes even more appropriate, as we enter the twenty-first century, that we recall how much the twentieth-century South was shaped by railroads built in the 19th century, and how much our future will be determined by the technological and cultural tracks laid down before and after us" (133). However, his

But as we see in *High and Low*, specific trains participate in the act of worldmaking in much stranger ways that lurk below the discursive realm of signifiers, symbols, and cultural images. In this example, the train acts not (only) as an agent or symbol of "modernity" but as a shifting assemblage of actors, each of which engages in dialogic interaction with scripts and props, actors and directors, cinematographers and characters. It is not only "the train" that affects *High and Low,* but sealed windows and hydraulic doors, washrooms and corridors, tunnel-mouths and the pressurization technology specific to the early-1960s Shinkansen train. I will thus bracket the truism that "the modern world began with the railways" in order to highlight the ways that specific trains—as collections of human and nonhuman actors—participate in the production of narrative action and meaning via affordances, agencies, and affects. By exploring the nonhuman agencies that swirl through our human narratives, I hope to draw attention to the ways that every story—from a work of fiction to an anecdote to a history to a personal memory—emerges through our dialogic interactions with a variety of nonhuman actors. The literary or filmic railroad, as we will see, is more than a representation or an image. Each is a unique actor in its own right: a chimeric assemblage of language and steel, iron rails and celluloid.

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investigation of the railroad in Southern literature remains undeniably centered on human discourse, representation, and symbolic interpretation: "Contemporary critical formulations of intertextuality, canonicity, and cultural meaning in terms of gender, race, and class have influenced my thinking as well—especially in the cultural formation, reception, and interpretation of complex technologies such as railroads" (viii). In *Black Devil and Iron Angel*, Youngman more explicitly transplants the railroad into the world of human mythmaking, proclaiming early in the monograph that, "myths are narratives composed of basic patterns of images, events, or situations already known to us in our cultural tradition that provide a nonscientific explanation of the natural world" (2). For Youngman, "the railway . . . became its own aesthetic idea. Many authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some influential and others less so, used the railway as an integral literary device in their work. In this way alone, the rail had a tremendous impact on the world of ideas" (9). For these critics of the literary railroad, worldmaking is a strictly human affair. Nonhuman actors, such as railroads, enter into human myths through artists, who utilize them as symbols and representations.

The Nonhuman Turn: Affects, Affordances, and Agency

While academic approaches to literature and film tend toward critique, critical analysis does not help us think about the role of nonhuman agency in human stories.[21] A different interpretive angle is required. Instead of standing above, or outside of, the text and attempting to master it through critical analysis, I propose to follow various thinkers of the so-called "Nonhuman Turn"[22] by positing a "flat ontology" in which "no entity, whether artificial or natural, symbolic or physical, possesses a greater ontological dignity than other objects" (Bryant 246).[23] This is an important first step toward tempering our tendency to replace fictional objects with discursive meanings; to explain texts by appeals to larger structures like economics or psychoanalysis or power; and to treat storyworlds as second-

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[21] Jane Bennett tells us that "demystification presumes that at the heart of any event or process lies a *human* agency that has illicitly been projected into things. This hermeneutics of suspicion calls for theorists to be on high alert for signs of the secret truth (a human will to power) below the false appearance of nonhuman agency" (xiv). But, as we saw in *High and Low*, the "human will to power" isn't even in control of its own stories. Demystification and critique is particularly good at uncovering hidden human agencies, but in doing so it inadvertently blinds us to the various ways that meaning is indebted to a *dispersed* agency.

[22] The "Nonhuman Turn" is a very loose collection of thinkers involved, as Richard Grusin says, in "decentering the human in favor of a turn toward and concern for the nonhuman, understood variously in terms of animals, affectivity, bodies, organic and geophysical systems, materiality, or technologies" (vii).

[23] Flat ontologies are opposed to hierarchical ontologies that privilege "one sort of entity as the origin of all others" (Bryant 245). Examples of hierarchical ontologies include atomism (atoms are the only "true" reality) and spiritual holism (the total interconnection of things is the only "true" reality). As Bryant explains, "the broader strategic import of the concept of flat ontology is to diminish the obsessive focus on the human, subjective and the cultural within social, political, cultural theory and philosophy. In particular, my ambition is to diminish an almost exclusive focus on propositions, representations, norms, signs, narratives, discourses, and so on, so as to cultivate a greater appreciation for nonhuman actors such as animate and inanimate natural entities, technologies, and such" (246-7).

While I share Bryant's ambition to "cultivate a greater appreciation" for the nonhuman actors that populate our world, I am approaching the question from within the realm of literature and film studies, which means that I cannot fully dismiss narratives, discourses, signs, and representations. Indeed, much of this project depends upon treating these very things as "nonhuman actors" in their own right. A flat ontology does not *get rid* of these things, but rather treats them as having an equal reality to everything else: the representation of the train has an equal reality to the actual train; a narrative and a lived experience share equal ontological dignity and one cannot be subsumed into the other; signifiers and signifieds remain unique nonhuman actors and never disappear into the dialectic synthesis of the sign. Adopting a commitment to flat ontology challenges us to reconsider the ways that texts, textual objects, objects in the world, and writers/readers are inter-related. This will become especially clear in Chapter 2 when I attempt to parse out the various "real trains" that are always already entangled within the assemblage of the *Filmic Train*.

order representations of our "more real" reality. This move might seem counter-intuitive, but in experimenting with this conceptual lens, new insights into the worldmaking capacities of humans, nonhumans, and narratives alike come to light.

The imperative to treat all actors—human and nonhuman, including so-called representations—as ontological equals means that no entity can be "explained away" by appealing either to its component parts or to its place within a larger whole. The fictional railroad, in this reading, cannot be understood by appeals to modernity (reducing the fictional railroad to its role as emblematic figurehead), to representation (reducing the fictional railroad to a second-order copy of a "real" railroad), or to cultural symbolism (reducing the fictional railroad to its symbolic valences). The claim that the railroads populating our literature and films are unique actors in their own rights, entangled with but not reducible to either the trains that chug through our cities or the narrative and media structures that house them, may appear extravagant. Why do we need to acknowledge the nonhuman agency of a human creation? This interpretive move requires some theoretical grounding up front, as it drives the interrogations of each chapter.

In a flat ontology, *everything* is an assemblage. It has long been acknowledged, even as literary and film critics continue to treat the train as a unified symbol, that the railroad is a massive, heterogeneous, collection of components that cannot be reduced down to its figurehead locomotive. Leo Marx, for example, challenges the critical tendency to treat "technology" as "a virtually autonomous, all-encompassing agent of change" ("Technology" 564) by reminding us that the "engine" of a railroad is only "a relatively small but crucially definitive part of the whole" that includes "several kinds of ancillary equipment" (tunnels, tracks, rolling stock, signal systems), a new corporate organization, specialized technical

knowledge, a specially trained workforce, and institutional changes (standardized time zones and rail-gauges, for example)" (567-8). As Marx makes clear, a train never arrives alone, but always enters the world as a Trojan Horse, smuggling in a motley crew of human and nonhuman actors required to keep the trains running. Grant Burns refers to these objects as "attendant phenomena" and adds "depots, diners, hoboes, boom-towns, ghost towns, strikes, speed, and sundry other matters" (7). No matter what we include in our lists of "ancillary equipment" or "attendant phenomena," the point is that even if a writer introduces a railroad into her storyworld as a unitary symbol of modernity or progress, it never enters as a unified object, and its effects on the storyworld exceed its symbolic capacities. The various actors a train requires in order to run—wheels, axels, tracks, drivers, engines, coupling links, switches, timetables, whistles, tunnels, windows—inevitably mediate the narrative by shaping possibilities for movement, action, and dramatic encounter in surprising ways.

When I speak of "trains," then, it should always be read as a shorthand for this heterogeneous collection of human and nonhuman actors, none of which can be entirely subsumed into what Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls the "machine ensemble." But, to take Marx's point one step further, "the film" or "the novel" in which a railroad appears is equally multiple—and the train, with all its "ancillary equipment," is also part of *this* heterogeneous assemblage. The literary or filmic railroad, then, is not a second-order representation of the "real" railroad so much as a site of dialogic encounter that puts smokestacks, coal tenders, and boxcars in conversation with literary structures, metaphors, genre, and narrative action.

So we are on tricky terrain indeed—objects wrapped in objects wrapped in objects,[24] assemblages made up of assemblages and taking part in other assemblages.[25]

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[24] This phrase is borrowed from Graham Harman's *Guerilla Metaphysics* (85). There are significant differences between the "objects" of object-oriented ontology and the "assemblages" of assemblage theory, but both are fundamentally multi-scalar. That is, objects are composed of objects and assemblages are composed of assemblages, and at no scale can we claim to have found a "more real" or "ultimate" object or assemblage. Bruno Latour's "actors" are also very different, but again Latour stresses that, for instance, a railroad network is just as much an actor as an individual train, which is just as much an actor as a locomotive, which is just as much an actor as a single wheel or axle. In this project, then, I tend to move between the language of objects, actors, and assemblages depending upon which aspect of an entity I want to stress (its actions, its autonomy, or its place within a collective).

[25] In speaking of assemblages, I draw explicitly on Manuel DeLanda's "assemblage theory," which is based on the original concept of assemblage found in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus.* While I will avoid their theoretical terminology of "territorialization" and "deterritorialization" for the sake of clarity, this project is in many ways built upon the conceptual scaffolding provided by Deleuze and Guattari, and it is thus helpful to briefly explain their theoretical position.

For many, the most memorable explanation of de- and reterritorialization comes from the example of the wasp and the orchid in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of the wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece of the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen" (10). To put this in assemblage terms, particular components of the wasp and orchid "detach" themselves in order to form a new set of relations: the "image" of the orchid detaches to form an assemblage with the wasp; but in doing so the wasp's capacity for carrying pollen detaches from the rest of the wasp and becomes part of the orchid's reproductive system. The point is that—contrary to appearances—this is not a matter of "the wasp" and "the orchid" coming together, but rather the emergence of a novel reproductive assemblage composed of particular components of the wasp and the orchid *but not others.* The orchid's aesthetic beauty plays no role in this assemblage, nor does the wasp's poison. This shows that neither wasp nor orchid is an organic "whole," but rather that both are "machinic" collections that are constantly disassembling as various components "team up" with other actors in the world to form new assemblages.

This example suggests that "[i]t may be all but impossible to distinguish deterritorialization from reterritorialization, since they are mutually enmeshed, or like opposite faces of one and the same process" (*Anti-Oedipus* 258). We will find this to be the case in Chapter 2, when the driving-rod of a locomotive detaches from its position within the machine ensemble (resulting in an act of "deterritorialization," or coming-apart) at precisely the moment it enters into a new set of interrelationships with the body of Buster Keaton, who has drawn upon the rod's latent affordance of "sittability" in order to re-reappropriate it as a chair (an act of "reterritorialization," or coming-together). These de- and reterritorializations occur quickly and often vanish ephemerally. In this case the original assemblage re-asserts itself, leading to a comic situation in which the driver-rod is asked to simultaneously participate in two assemblages that demand contradictory affordances (movement and stability). On top of that, the entire scene takes place within the assemblage of *The General*.

One way in which Deleuze and Guattari's project of "schizoanalysis" resonates with my own work is their resistance to "artificial reterritorializations" such as—in their example—Freud's Oedipus Complex. As they put it: "Psychoanalysis settles on the imaginary and structural representatives of reterritorialization, while schizoanalysis follows the machinic indices of detteritorialization" (316). In other words, Freud attempts to "reterritorialize" modern man by bringing all of his disparate components together into the single unity of Oedipus. Deleuze and Guattari, on the hand, are interested in the ways that the components of the "machinic" human (i.e. the human-as-assemblage) break apart and continuously enter into novel relations with other machinic components. This is why they speak of the spectator at a Charlie Chaplin film as engaging in "a kind of perceptive gymnastics" that forecloses a direct "identification" with the character, instead producing a series of surprises and perceptual shocks as events and objects in Chaplin's films continually act in surprising ways (317). Something similar can be said about the above Keaton scene.

Deep Interobjectivity: Dialogic Encounter, Stories, and Meaning

Psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity provide a critical precedent for exploring the ways that meaning in literature (and life) emerges through dialogic encounter. George Butte's theory of "deep intersubjectivity," in particular, suggests that we never make meaning on our own, but are always engaged in dialogic interaction with other human minds. Butte defines deep intersubjectivity as:

> [T]he web of partially interpenetrating consciousnesses that exists wherever perceiving subjects, that is, human beings, collect. [T]he process begins when a self perceives the gestures, either of body or word, of another consciousness, and it continues when the self can perceive in those gestures an awareness of her or his own gestures. Subsequently the self, upon revealing a consciousness of the other's response, perceives yet another gesture responding to its response, so that out of this conversation of symbolic behaviours emerges a web woven from elements of mutually exchanged consciousnesses. (27)

Butte's theory suggests that we are constantly attuning and re-attuning ourselves through encounters with other minds. He reminds us that, for example, the *interpretation* of a glance does not replace or subsume the glance, but rather exists alongside the glance as a new strand in the web. The conversation, in Butte's reading, is fundamentally *emergent*, depending as it does on the specific gestures and responses that play out in the actual process of conversing.

Schizoanalysis resonates not just with my approach to the set-pieces of slapstick comedy, but with my general approach to the study of literature and film. Instead of attempting to "master" a text by constructing an "artificial reterritorialization" that reduces the complexity of the text in order to confidently assert its expressive "meaning," I am also interested in following the entangled webs through which the component parts of a text become aligned with the component parts of other texts, people, and objects in the world. In this case, the various ways that railroads, texts, and human bodies come together to form fascinating new assemblages. While the conceptual terminology of Deleuze and Guattari is thus helpful in articulating the ways that actors become enmeshed in various interrelationships, I think the theoretical moves I attempt in this project can be made without recourse to the notoriously challenging neologisms of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy.

Deep intersubjectivity thus demands a reading practice that follows both the gestures *and* the perception of gestures as they flow between characters in a textual world. A conversation that takes place in text or on film, like those that take place in life, is a "web woven from the elements of mutually exchanged consciousness."

Rita Felski argues that "deep intersubjectivity gives us representations of persons neither as solipsistic Enlightenment monads, nor empty linguistic signifiers but as embedded and embodied agents, mediated yet particular, formed in the flux of semiotic interchange" (*Uses* 91). If meaning and self are created through "semiotic interchange," then nonhuman objects (at least, anything without a "consciousness") have no place in the process of worldmaking except as "empty linguistic signifiers," capable of making meaning only when mediated by semiotics and the symbolic agency of the human mind. I contend that stories emerge out of a much more complex web of interactions. These interactions cannot be reduced to "symbolic behaviors" and are not limited to "consciousnesses" because they include nonhuman actors as well.

Adding nonhuman actors to "the conversation" requires that we adapt Butte's theory to accommodate participants who do not communicate or interact via language and consciousness. If nonhuman objects are also "embedded and embodied agents," then "the web" must be woven from elements shared by all the actors taking place in the dialogue. This is the reason I turn to *affects, affordances, and agencies*, rather than symbols or signifiers. To adapt Butte's definition, we can speak of a "deep interobjectivity" made up of "the web of partially interpenetrating *objects* that exists wherever *objects*, that is, all human and

nonhuman actors, collect. The process begins when an object '*prehends*'[26] another object, and it continues when the object re-translates the other object in its own terms. Out of this dialogue of prehensions—which includes semiotic and symbolic mediation when involving human consciousness, but also includes embodied encounters, sensations, movements, interactions—*emerges a web woven from elements of mutually exchanged affects, affordances, and agencies*."

In other words, the nonhuman object must be taken not just as a linguistic signifier (at which point it has already been subsumed into the realm of human consciousness), but as an actor in its own right, participating in the "worldmaking" process in its own ways. As Laurence Kardish says in his 1991 MoMa exhibition celebrating the history of trains in cinema: "Trains may signify, but they also exist in and of themselves, as moving sets for fiction, mobile decor in, on, or under which protagonists play out their stories" (15). What does it mean to think about the railroad in literature and film in asignifying terms? To ask not how the train operates as a sign or symbol, dutifully carrying the meanings prescribed by the author or filmmaker, but to ask how it "exists in and of itself"?

[26] The concept of "prehension" is drawn from Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead defines prehension as "uncognitive" or "pre-epistemic" apprehension. In this sense, it is similar to the concept of "affect." I use the term as a way to level the playing field—all objects, human and nonhuman, sentient and non-sentient, are capable of prehension according to their own modes of interpretation. In this sense, human interpretive tools like reason, imagination, abstraction, analysis, and synthesis are particular modes of prehension among others. They are not epistemologically superior modes of access to reality.

Additionally, prehension refers not only to the object doing the "apprehending," but also to the external reality that is "apprehended." As Whitehead says, a prehension is "referent to an external world, and in this sense will be said to have a 'vector character'" (19). Instead of thinking about the ways that humans make meaning out of the world, then, it would make more sense to talk about how meaning emerges through encounters between "humans" and "the world." "Actual entities involve each other by reason of their prehensions of each other," Whitehead continues. "There are thus real individual facts of the togetherness of actual entities, which are real, individual, and particular, in the same sense in which actual entities and the prehensions are real, individual and particular. Any such particular fact of togetherness among actual entities is called a 'nexus'" (20). When I discuss assemblages or environments or milieux or "worlds," I mean something like Whitehead's "nexūs": each of these terms is meant to refer to a "togetherness" that highlights both the relative autonomy of every "actual entity," and the fact that no entity exists in a vacuum. This means that the experiences and interpretations of every entity emerge through particular encounters with particular entities and environments.

Worldmaking: A Nonhuman Approach

I have been speaking a great deal of "worldmaking," but in acknowledging and theorizing the role of nonhuman agency in this process I am consciously swerving from the traditional use of the term. The most influential philosophical concept of "worldmaking" comes from Nelson Goodman's 1978 *Ways of Worldmaking,* a short treatise on radical relativism and the plurality of worlds. Goodman explicitly places his work in a tradition of anti-realism that "began when Kant exchanged the structure of the world for the structure of the mind." Worldmaking, for Goodman, is part of a movement "from unique truth and a world fixed and found to a diversity of right and even conflicting versions or worlds in the making" (x). He means a diversity of *human* versions of worlds "in the making," and focuses almost exclusively on concepts and symbols. Indeed, in his own words, "my approach is rather through an analytic study of types and functions of symbols and symbol systems" (5). For Goodman, the existence of a "reality" outside of human consciousness—the Kantian "thing-in-itself"—is irrelevant to this world of symbols, which is "correct," regardless of correlation to an outside world, insofar as it yields scientific and aesthetic knowledge for humans.[27]

[27] In arguing against the common-sense notion that "a right version" of the world differs from a wrong one "in applying to the world," Goodman argues, "[w]e cannot test a version by comparing it with a world undescribed, undepicted, [or] unperceived . . . all we learn about the world is contained in right versions of it; and while the underlying world, bereft of these, need not be denied to those who love it, it is perhaps on the whole a world well lost" (3-4). We see here that Goodman's conception of worldmaking follows Kant in its axiom that we only ever have access to our own descriptions and representations. As Kant says in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, "something which originally is itself only appearance, for instance, a rose, is taken by the empirical understanding for a *thing in itself,* which, nevertheless, with regard to colour, can appear differently to every eye" (66, italics added). Thus, for Kant, we only ever have access to this appearance: "objects in themselves are not known to us at all, and . . . what we call external objects are nothing but mere representations of our sensibility, the form of which is space. The true *correlate* of sensibility, that is, *the thing in itself, is not known, nor can it be known at all through these representations*" (66, italics added). Kant makes the important distinction between the rose *as it exists for us* and the rose *in itself.* But in bracketing the "thing-in-itself" as *entirely unknowable*, Kant ushered in an era of western philosophy concerned almost exclusively with human structures—categories, intuitions, logic, language, discourse, history, perception, cognition—as if we somehow

Matthew Fuller's striking rethinking of "poetics" complicates the constructivist anthropocentric ancestry of the term by ascribing worldmaking capacities to "*all objects*." When Fuller says that "all objects have a poetics" (1), he draws on the etymological roots of the word: from the ancient Greek *ποίησις,* meaning "creation, production" and *ποιεῖν,* meaning "to make, create, produce" ("Poesis").[28] The claim is calculated to shock, not

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had direct access to these things (as objects of study) but only indirect access (through these things as mediators) to *everything else.* In short, all we have access to are the particular ways we distort the world.

Kant's introduction of what Quentin Meillassoux has called "correlationism" (5) changed the face of philosophy in the modern era. Before Kant, Meillassoux tells us, philosophers were primarily concerned with "substance," while ever since Kant "correlation" became one of the "principle problems of philosophy." And not just philosophy. Meillassoux reminds us that "[d]uring the twentieth century, the two principle 'media' of the correlation were consciousness and language" (6), which also happen to be the primary "media" of the linguistic and cultural turns that drove most of Humanistic inquiry in the 20th century. The problem is not in highlighting the media of consciousness and language but rather in suggesting that we only ever have epistemological access to the "correlate." This leads directly to positions like Goodman's which explicitly ignore the nonhuman world and claim that meaning and truth are only to be found in the symbols and concepts by which humans organize our lives.

[28] I have opted to use the somewhat antiquated term "worldmaking" instead of the more familiar "worlding." Matthew Fuller's etymological definition of "poetics" provides the main reason for this decision. Fuller reminds us that *poeisis* means "to make." I want to highlight this concept of "making," with the reminder that it applies to a capacity inherent in *all* objects. The central argument of this dissertation is that a fictional world of literature or film (and, by extension, our own "real" world) is "made" by the various actors—human and nonhuman—that come together to form that world. Part of the project is thus to think through nonhuman poetics, and for this reason I find it useful to remember that we are talking about an ongoing creative production —a "making."

This causes some problems because the history of the term, especially in Goodman's work, lies in human-centered constructivism. But this only demands that I take a concept historically aligned with human capacities and extend it to include all entities, which is precisely what Fuller does in his rethinking of poetics. This is an interpretive move that I will make use of throughout this project—already I have suggested an extension of George Butte's "deep intersubjectivity" to include objects, and I will make similar moves in relation to metaphor, genre, action, meaning, and interpretation. In addition, Goodman's theory has fallen out of favor and, at this point, is no longer an important touchstone in the Humanities. This makes "worldmaking" more available for reappopriation.

"Worlding," on the other hand, currently holds a place of privilege in postcolonial studies, human geography, affect theory, and urban planning. The strong ties between the concept of "worlding" and these disciplines makes it difficult to enlist the term for my own purposes. In particular, the concept of "worlding" immediately brings to mind the postcolonial work of Gayatri Spivak. In "The Rani of Sirmur," Spivak calls for "an alternative historical narrative of the 'worlding' of what is today called 'the Third World'" (247). For Spivak, treating "the Third World" as a convenient signifier of "distant cultures" effectively "allows us to forget" the "worlding" practices of European imperialism that actually *created* the Third World. Since Spivak first started using the term in 1985, it has become an important concept in postcolonial studies, complete with its own entry in Ashcroft (et al.)'s *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*: "**worlding.** A term coined by Gayatri Spivak to describe the way in which colonized space is brought into the 'world', that is, made to exist as part of a world essentially constructed by Eurocentrism" (241). For a good example of how Spivak's theory has

because the idea that objects help to "make the world and take part in it" is particularly radical, but because the syntax introduces a causal ambiguity into the poetic act of worldmaking. If "creativity" is not a uniquely human attribute, but a property shared by all objects, then the world must be continually "made" and "remade" through complex ongoing negotiations between the staggering number of human and nonhuman actors that populate that world.

If worldmaking is not a uniquely human attribute, but a power of all objects, then "railroad poetics" is not simply a matter of the human imagination exploiting the affordances of the railroad (though it is this too), but also of the railroad asserting its own worldmaking tendencies. When a storyteller invites the railroad into her story, it inevitably participates in

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grounded recent work in postcolonial and cultural studies, see Rob Wilson and Christopher Leigh Connery's *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization.*

Spivak draws on Martin Heidegger's concept of "worlding," which explicitly privileges the human as ontologically distinct from other entities in the world. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger says that nonhuman entities like tables, chairs, and walls are "*worldless*" and thus can never "touch each other" (81). While humans inquire into their own existence through their embodied position as a "being-in-the-world," and thus gain knowledge of this world through encounters with the other entities that compose that world, nonhuman entities, in the Heideggerian account, are merely present "within" a world that properly belongs only to *Dasein* (humans). Thus, Heideggerian "worlding" is a capacity of humans, but not of any other entity. If there is any doubt about Heidegger's position, he makes sure to erase it: "If no *Dasein* exists, no world is 'there' either" (417). This is borne out in Spivak's work insofar as her concern is with the ways that "European imperialism" "worlds" the world. I want to avoid any terminological confusion that would arise if I were to utilize such an important term for the entirely different purpose of teasing out the issue of nonhuman agency within human narratives.

The recent social anthropology of Tim Ingold and the affect theory of Kathleen Stewart have more affinity with my own project. Ingold makes an impassioned argument for returning our focus to "worlding" as an aesthetic process, rather than treating aesthetic objects as products. Drawing on Heidegger's celebrated essay on "The Thing" (as does Spivak), Ingold treats "things" as "knots," whose threads become intertwined with the threads of other knots (4). This resonates with the work I do using assemblage theory. Kathleen Stewart re-imagines affect as a "worlding refrain." In thinking about homelessness, for example, Stewart argues that it is not only a "self-evident process of abject poverty" but also "a worlding, an attunement to a singular world's texture and shine. The body has to learn to play itself like a musical instrument in this world's compositions" (341). I strongly support Stewart's focus on "attunement" and the act of "worlding" that occurs between the human body and the exterior world. The work of Ingold and Stewart, among others, is extremely useful for thinking about the ways that "worlds" are created through emergent interactive dialogue. However, I find the term too loaded with the human exceptionalism of Heidegger and the political imperatives of postcolonial studies. This, in combination with the etymological connection between "making" and "*poiesis,*" makes "worldmaking" the more appropriate term for this project.

the creation of meaning in that story in a variety of ways that cannot be attributed entirely to the storyteller.[29] To complicate matters further, we have already seen that trains are not single actors, but assemblages of actors, each of which—according to Fuller—has its own "poetics." Again, a train never arrives alone. The depots, tracks, conductors, firemen, whistles, smoke, embankments, ticket offices, timetables, grade crossings, ballast stones, passengers, and dining cars that enter alongside "the train" each have unique worldmaking capacities.[30]

This suggests that it is not only (or even primarily) the train *qua* train that makes its mark on a story. And this is, in fact, borne out empirically: most "trainy" interactions involve its components: passengers waiting on platforms; fistfights on catwalks; meet-cutes in dining cars; lonely rambles down abandoned tracks. The assemblage of actors "making the world and taking part in it" is staggering. It quickly becomes clear that the dialogic, emergent, entanglement of "Railroad Poetics" requires a mode of interpretation that differs significantly from the paradigm of critique that dominates academic inquiry.

If the production of meaning in a literary text or a film emerges out of the dialogic interplay between numerous human and nonhuman actors, the production of meaning in

[29] As Baruch Spinoza says, "men are deceived in that they think themselves free . . . an opinion which consists only in this, that they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. This then, is their idea of freedom—that they do not know any cause of their actions. They say, of course, that human actions depend on the will, but these are only words for which they have no idea" (53). To think that the storyteller is in full control of her story is simply a refusal to acknowledge the manifold "causes" through which any action emerges. Storytellers have long acknowledged this. How often have we heard an author passionately exclaim that his characters began "speaking for themselves"? As Bruno Latour says of the puppeteer: "She will tell you, as will everyone else—as will any creator and manipulator—that her marionettes dictate their behavior to her: that they make her act; that they express themselves through her; that she could never manipulate them or mechanize them. . . . She will straightforwardly admit that she is slightly outstripped by what she controls" (*On the Modern Cult* 62). This claim only sounds like false modesty or occult mysticism if we deny the existence of nonhuman agency. As soon as we acknowledge this agency, it becomes obvious that all creations *must* outstrip their creators and "act for themselves" for the simple reason that the creation is *not the same entity as* the creator.

[30] Again from Spinoza: "Nothing exists from whose nature some effect does not follow" (25).

interpretation operates in the same way. Fuller's poetics tells us that "human" worldmaking involves a continuous creative interaction with the nonhuman others that share and shape our worlds, so the interpreter must acknowledge that all objects—texts, films, trains, fictional objects, ideas—have unique worldmaking capacities that do not disappear into our attempts to define or interpret them. Fuller invites us to entertain theories of dispersed agency, actor-networks, and the dialogic production of meaning. In the process, we cede interpretive control, but gain something else: an increased ability to affect and be affected by more and more actors, whose forces we begin to feel more acutely and powerfully. We gain a voice in the dialogue of worldmaking by giving up a position of critical distance.[31]

The Itinerary

Each chapter operates as a case study, designed to experiment with the various methodological, interpretive, and ontological implications of taking nonhuman agency seriously in textual analysis. The purpose of the chapters is to open up productive examples of new ways to experience the worldmaking capacities of literary and filmic railroads based on an attunement to affordances, affects, and nonhuman agencies. By design, these readings are non-prescriptive, affirmatively creative, provisional, and experimental. The intended

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[31] According to Spinoza, "[w]hatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to man; the more it renders the body capable of being affected in a great many ways, or of affecting other bodies, the more useful it is; on the other hand, what renders the body less capable of these things is harmful" (137). Interpretive theories that are only capable of investigating the world through human consciousness, discourse, ideology, or representation render us incapable of acknowledging the ways in which we are affected by non-discursive, nonhuman agencies. This limits our ability to participate productively in the "making" of a heterogeneous world that includes a multitude of objects and actors outside of the realm of human discourse.

effect is not to increase critical prowess and mastery but to increase our sensitivity to the nonhuman agencies that swirl through our human stories.[32]

I begin with Henry David Thoreau, living and writing in New England during the very years that the train was introduced to the United States. The Fitchburg Railroad line was extended to Concord, MA, just months before Thoreau began his "life in the woods," slicing through the middle of both Walden and *Walden* and transforming everything in its wake. Environmentalists have held Thoreau as a "back-to-nature" poster-boy since the 1970s. This figurehead position prescribes an interpretation of the railroad in *Walden* as a destructive "machine in the garden." As we will see, however, Thoreau's rhetorical strategies of meaning-making, such as symbolization, metaphor, and trope, explicitly draw on and play

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[32] As Graham Harman says, "[w]hat we really need are not more critical readers, but more vulnerable ones" (*Guerilla Metaphysics* 239). Harman is one of many thinkers in the Humanities who argue that we need alternatives to the hegemonic interpretive paradigm of critique. Rita Felski points out that critique, though good at some things, "proves a poor guide to the thickness and richness of our aesthetic attachments" (*Limits of Critique* 17). Thus, Felski encourages readers to foster "aesthetic attachment" rather than "critical distance." Feminist scholar and quantum physicist Karen Barad complains that "critique is too easy, especially when a commitment to reading with care no longer seems to be a fundamental element of critique" (Dolphijn and van der Huin 49). She suggests that critique has become our default mode of both reading and thinking, and that we often run on "autopilot," churning out critical explications and pronouncements without taking the time to really engage a text (or a fellow thinker) through close reading. Felski agrees, saying that critique's "gestures of demystification and exposure are no longer oppositional but obligatory. . . . It no longer tells us what we do not know; it singularly fails to surprise" (115-6). Media archeologist Jussi Parikka believes that critique "does not provide the solutions we need, or is not useful as a tool to tackle the problems we face" ("Karen Barad . . ."). Bruno Latour opens his 2004 anti-critique manifesto memorably by asking if scholars should "be at war": "Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins? Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destruction? More iconoclasm to iconoclasm? What has become of the critical spirit? Has it run out of steam?" ("Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" 225). This echoes Barad's concern that critique often operates as a militant "againstness" that threaten rival modes of interpretation through attack. Too often, Barad says, critique is not a "deconstructive" but a "destructive practice meant to dismiss, to turn aside, to put someone or something down—another scholar, another feminist, a discipline, an approach, et cetera" (49). I mention these thinkers in order to situate my project within a growing anti-critical movement in the Humanities. Like them, I have the sense that critique has become both somewhat banal (it "singularly fails to surprise us") and often militant (critique is ruthlessly intolerant of rivals). The basic interpretive difference between critique and creation, as I see it, is that the critic attempts to look "through" texts to find a "deeper" meaning while the creator participates in the positive production of *new* meanings by cultivating attachments and entanglements with the text.

with the affordances, affects, and agencies of an environment created (to a large extent) by railroad infrastructure. Even as he metaphorically re-imagines the railroad, he remains acutely sensitive to the debt that poetic interpretation owes to both the particularities of embodiment and to the mediations of language. For this reason, Thoreau continually (if subtly) undermines his own interpretations of the Fitchburg Railroad by speculating about how nonhuman bodies like sand particles and swallows would interpret this strange new being in the world, by wildly shifting through contradictory metaphors, and by reminding us that actual locomotives speeding through the landscape always outstrip any symbolic or metaphoric representation. In this way, Thoreau presents a productive model that both takes responsibility for interpretation as a creative act and remains open to the ways that "reality" always surprises us by operating outside of our interpretations. Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theory and the psychological concept of "priming" will help me theorize the dialogic interplay between Thoreau's embodied interactions with infrastructure and the rhetorical play of metaphor that drives the meaning-making strategies of *Walden.*

In the second chapter, I draw on William K. Everson's definition of the filmic railroad as a "Mobile Gymnasium" as a way to focus attention on the train's material agency in the cinematic set-pieces that fill slapstick, Western, and action films. Because the very idea of a mobile gymnasium presupposes bodies running through, swinging on, and jumping off of the moving "jungle gym" created by the machine ensemble of the speeding train, it forces us to acknowledge the train as an embodied actor rather than a discursive symbol. I argue that the set-piece anticipates the nonhuman turn toward "speculative realism" in its dedication to exploring and exploiting the latent capacities lurking in the real objects that populate fictional worlds. While the cinematic set-piece has often been dismissed as mere

spectacle, the first half of this chapter argues for its theoretical, experimental, and affective value as a tool for "re-visioning" the ostensibly familiar built environment as a playground—a collection of not-yet-known objects, structures, and spaces that we get to know through embodied experimentation, exploration, and play. Rethinking the filmic railroad in terms of the mobile gymnasium, however, also requires that we think of the filmic train as an assemblage of entangled but different trains that all remain present (in some way) in the assemblage that is final film: the trains of history that lend their affordances and affects to the story; the trains of the script and storyboard that are manipulated and choreographed by screenwriters; the trains of the set upon which actors and stunt-people run, jump, and swing; the trains of the diegesis encountered by fictional characters; and the trains of the screen that we experience as a film-going audience. The second half of the chapter thus posits an ontology of the filmic train that recognizes both the entanglements and the irreducible differences between these various trains, all of which retain the capacity to affect both the diegetic reality of the film and the experience of the film spectator.

The third chapter theorizes the relationship between railroad infrastructure and genre. I argue that the filmic railroad has the capacity to challenge traditional taxonomic genre categories in two ways. First, trains do not simply fit into an *a priori* generic syntax, but rather carry with them generic imperatives. I look at how the arrival of the noon train into Hadleyville station brought the affects of the Victorian suspense-thriller to the Western syntax of *High Noon*, and argue that the pacing of the film and the patterns of character movement are directly indebted to "railroad time," which has been entangled with the temporal urgency of the thriller since the 19th century. Second, expanding upon the insight of assemblage theory that a train is not a unified object (material or symbolic) but rather an

assemblage of nonhuman actors, I argue that *each* component of the railroad assemblage carries with it generic affordances, affects, and agencies. This complicates things considerably. Using Donald Norman's theory of accidental affordances and New Rhetoric's focus on genres as "recurrent situations," I argue that "mini-genres" emerge out of the recurrent situations encouraged and mediated by railroad shovels, compartments, and tunnel entrances. I then trace the ways that these objects have encouraged particular non-conventional uses that tend to repeat themselves across taxonomical genres. If this is the case, genres must be seen as multiple and overlapping, and emerging from within the reality of the film, rather than taxonomic and imposed by extra-diegetic archetypal structures.

My final chapter turns to U.S. travel writing in the age of Amtrak and the airplane, focusing on Paul Theroux's 1979 *The Old Patagonia Express*. While Theroux was the best-selling travel writer of the 1970s,[33] and continues to write prolifically, his work has been critically discarded (when not ignored) as nostalgic, imperialistic, and ethnocentric. Without wishing to debate these points, I argue that Theroux's train narratives offer important explorations of our embodied entanglement with transportation infrastructure. I use a rhetorical comparison of Theroux's anti-airplane rants and John Ruskin's 19th-century argument that trains were "annihilating space and time" to point to the ways that our

[33] Even today, Theroux is remarkably polarizing. Rolph Potts opens his 2011 *Atlantic* interview with Theroux by claiming that "[i]f there were an 'A-List' of living American travel writers, Paul Theroux's name would be at the top," and *Wanderlust* reporter Peter Moore calls Theroux "[t]he world's greatest living travel writer." On the other hand, Gwyneth Kelly titles her 2015 review of Theroux's *Deep South*: "Travel Writing Doesn't Need Any More Voices Like Theroux's." And in his review of *The Last Train to Zona Verde* (2013), Hedley Twidle laments that "[t]he rhetoric is so offensive and plain bizarre to anyone making her or his life in 'Africa' that I had no option but to pretend that we were in a different genre, to keep imagining the book as a comic novel with a deliberately unlikeable narrator." Critical approaches to Theroux predictably tend toward Kelly and Twidle's position, while there remains a strong popular fan-base for Theroux among travelers and lay-readers. I am not interested arguing about whether Theroux "tells it like it is" or imposes his own stereotypes and prejudices on everyone and everything he sees (he clearly does the latter); I am interested specifically in his relationship to trains, and why a railroad traveler would be particularly popular in the 1970s, by which point most Americans had traded in trains for automobiles and airplanes. There are some obvious answers (nostalgia, romanticism), but I think it is more complicated than this.

sensations and perceptions are always already mediated by our transportation technologies. I then turn to Theroux's literary structure in order to explore the ways that storytelling mediates the railroad (specifically, the experience of traveling by train) as much as the railroad mediates storytelling. I argue that Theroux self-consciously constructs a "literary railroad experience" for the armchair traveler, and then uses this mediated experience as tautological evidence for affects that he argues are inherent in train travel. Rather than critiquing Theroux's flawed logic here, I want to suggest that this interplay between "raw material" and "literary remediation" is always part of our experiences, and becoming aware of this co-mediating feedback loop allows us to move past theories of representation and focus instead on the ways that meaning and worldmaking are continuously emerging from a dialogic interplay that includes, but is not reducible to, human discourse, metaphor, and the structures of storytelling.

A basic premise of this dissertation is that "stories" and "reality" are not cut off from one another as across a strict ontological abyss separating "representation" and "the real." Instead, stories are sites of human/nonhuman entanglement and encounter. The affordances, affects, and agencies of the railroad[34] enter into complex dialogic conversation with literary structures, metaphors, and representational media. Humans (characters, authors, readers, critics, interpreters) do not stand outside of these stories looking in, but are always already enmeshed in narrative assemblages. Just as trains enter stories, so stories enter humans; and as stories remake trains by transplanting them into narrative, so humans remake stories

[34] In the present study I am concerned specifically with the railroad as both a "real" entity and as a literary object, but there is no difference *in kind* between the railroad and any other object of the world that is remediated by narrative storytelling. The railroad may be unique in its privileged position within the history of U.S. literature, film, and culture, but it is not unique in its ontological status.

through creative acts of interpretation.[35] Studying the ways that nonhuman agency mediates our stories is a starting point for thinking about how the "stories of our lives"—anecdotes, memories, personal narratives, histories, grand narratives, mythologies—emerge from our embodied interactions with the environment, built and otherwise. The conclusion is my opportunity to recap why the study of nonhuman agency in action movies, memoirs, travelogues, and farces tells us something about how infrastructure shapes all of our lives in unpredictable and emergent ways. Here, I develop some general rules-of-thumb and an experimental methodology for analyzing the flows of affect, agency, and affordances that infrastructural assemblages necessarily bring into any story—fiction or non-fiction—and the ways that storytelling techniques negotiate the constraints and affordances of infrastructure. I will also use this opportunity to make explicit some of the theoretical connections between chapters that will not become evident the end of the project.

My hope is that in becoming more sensitive to the ways that infrastructure shapes meaning, we begin to see our embodied relationships with the material world in a new light. In recognizing the power of infrastructure to shape metaphor, genre, narrative organization, and meaning, we actually increase our own agency for meaning-making. By relegating the

[35] Again, this argument is indebted to Deleuze and Guattari. In *A Thousand Plateaus* they argue against a "tripartite division between a field of reality (the world) and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author). Rather," they state, "an assemblage establishes connections between certain multiplicities drawn from each of these orders" (23). In this project, I use the railroad to think through this difficult ontological proposition by exploring each literary or filmic train as a node that draws together particular components from the material train, the representational medium, and the human body in order to form a new object. This project thus aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's proposition that the book is an "assemblage with the outside" rather than an "image of the world" (23). Drawing on Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, Rita Felski makes a similar argument: a "text's ability to make a difference . . . derives not from its refusal of the world but from its many ties to the world" (*Limits of Critique* 154). As readers, we should strive to become sensitive to, and to increase, those ties—to interpret in a positive, creative manner. The interpretations that emerge—as essays, articles, monographs, half-baked thoughts—should have the capacity to engage in dialogue with the texts, rather than stand above them. In these interpretations, we should self-consciously strive to create new "assemblages with the texts" instead of seeking to produce an "image of the text."

material world to the shadows of representation and signification, we remain insensitive to the ways that the environment (built and otherwise) shapes the pace and patterns of our lives, and the ways that our metaphors and genres and literary structures are indebted to the constraints and affordances of our material surroundings. Thus, we diminish our own capacities for engaging in emergent and creative meaning-making not through appropriating objects but through conscious acts of metaphoric and embodied experimentation, encounter, and dialogue.

The railroad truly did change the world, and shaped all of our lives and our stories in the process. But this is not because it is an "agent and symbol" of modernity—as if "modernity" exists on a higher ontological plane than a locomotive—but because the railroad and its "attendant phenomena" seeped into every corner of the country (and the world), shaping thoughts and perceptions, altering our relationship to time, giving rise to new embodied encounters and imaginative metaphors, creating new possibilities for action and movement, and—in short—both affording and making necessary radically new ways of making meaning.

"What's the Railroad to Me?": Rethinking the Machine in Thoreau's Garden

Introduction: The Perfect Symbol

> *[M]achine technology inculcates its message directly, imagistically, wordlessly. A locomotive is a perfect symbol because its meaning need not be attached to it by a poet; it is inherent in its physical attributes. To see a powerful, efficient machine in the landscape is to know the superiority of the present to the past. . . . During the nineteenth century, therefore, no one needs to spell out the idea of progress to Americans. They can see it, hear it, and, in a manner of speaking, feel it as the idea of history most nearly analogous to the rising tempo of life.*
>
> – Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*

When Leo Marx celebrates the "perfect symbol" of the locomotive in his influential study, *The Machine in the Garden*, he simultaneously erases the agency of both the poet and the locomotive.[36] The poet, in the above quote, is superfluous: "meaning" emerges "directly, imagistically, wordlessly" from the machine itself. Language, creativity, and embodied sensual experience are swept away in the fantasy of unmediated access to the "inherent" meaning of the symbol. The "idea of progress" is "seen," "heard," and "felt," as if sight, hearing, and touch were not mediated by the physiologically specific capacities of human eyes, ears, and skin, but were rather transcendental conduits to eternal "spiritual facts" (to use the Emersonian term). At the same time, the vibrant agency of the locomotive—what Jane Bennett would call its "Thing-Power"[37]—also disappears, as the material locomotive is read

[36] In this quote, Marx is paraphrasing John Stuart Mill's reading of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. However, he uses Mill's thoughts on the railroad to undergird his own analysis of the locomotive as a widespread cultural symbol representing the incursion of industrial modernity on the American pastoral ideal in U.S. literature and culture. Working within the Myth and Symbol school of American Studies, Marx's project relies heavily on "those mediating forms which organize, define, and subdue the details of experience, bringing them into conformity with existing patterns" (Trachtenberg 667). This involves quieting the idiosyncratic details of individual interactions with railroad infrastructure in favor of those that conform to "existing patterns" of signification. While the American Myth & Symbol School has given way to other critical paradigms, we saw in the introduction that railroad histories and critical approaches to the railroad in culture and literature tend toward a similar celebration of the train—and especially the locomotive—as a "perfect symbol" of modernity.

[37] In her 2010 monograph, *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett defines "Thing-Power" as "the curious ability of

as nothing more than the "token" representative of the symbolic "type."

The Myth and Symbol School is no longer a viable critical paradigm, but *The Machine in the Garden* remains *the* touchstone in American railroad studies, and Marx's interpretation continues to influence popular and scholarly readings of technology in American literature. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in critical readings of the railroad in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. Marx himself argues that the railroad is the abstract cultural symbol of "the machine," intruding upon Thoreau's pastoral idyll (15). Thomas Allen calls it "an obvious, indeed unavoidable, sign of the incursion of commerce and industry upon the natural environment of Walden" (84).[38] Jane Bennett says that Thoreau "hates the railroad" because it is indicative of "claustrophobia, routinization, and the reactive will to mastery" (*Thoreau's Nature* xxviii).[39] Celebrated Thoreau biographer Robert Richardson notes that Thoreau is a "technological conservative" who is "hostile" to the railroad (277). The Walden Woods Project (WWP) simply ignores the railroad as already spoken for—a space beyond preservation and thus without importance to the ecological

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inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6). In this project, Bennett cultivates a critical "aesthetic-affective openness to material vitality" (x) that resonates with my own attempt to increase our vulnerability to nonhuman agency in human stories. Interestingly, her thinking about nonhuman vitality is strongly indebted to Thoreau, and especially to *Walden.* In her first monograph, *Thoreau's Nature* (1994), Bennett uses Thoreau to think through this dialogic relationship between human and nonhuman actors and its political and ethical entailments.

[38] In his book-length project on time in 19th-century America, *A Republic in Time,* Allen argues against reductionist models of "factory time," suggesting instead that relationships to industrial timekeeping were heterogeneous and idiosyncratic. This sensitivity to specificity makes his reductive reading of the railroad in his shorter work on Thoreau and Catherine Beecher surprising.

[39] Bennett later qualifies this statement by noting that Thoreau also feels "refreshed" when the railroad goes by. Bennett does a lot of work to counteract the reductionist models set forth in traditional Thoreau studies, but here she echoes the standard critical reduction of the railroad in *Walden*.

project.[40] There is a general critical consensus that *Walden* is about "nature," and therefore that the railroad can only operate as the representative of "anti-nature," whether that takes the form of the industrial revolution, urbanism, modernity, capitalism, the "hustle and bustle of the nineteenth-century," or the technological destruction of nature.

Ironically, environmentalist readings of *Walden* tend to elide the specifics of place that Thoreau himself celebrates. By transforming the environment of *Walden* into a dialectical binary of nature and culture, the land itself is partitioned into a collection of spaces and entities that are "representative" of one side of the divide or the other: the pond is "nature," the train is "culture." In this binary, Thoreau is often read as an ineffectual recluse, failing in his attempt to "return to nature." Marx tells us that, "the Walden site cannot provide a refuge, in any literal sense, from the forces of change" and that "the presence of the machine casts a shadow of doubt (the smoke of the locomotive puts Thoreau's field in the shade) upon the Emersonian hope of extracting an answer from nature" (253).[41] This reading

[40] There is a fundamental tension in the WWP between its commitment to Thoreau and its commitment to environmentalism. According to the home page of the WWP website: "The Walden Woods Project preserves the land, literature and legacy of the quintessentially American author, philosopher, and naturalist, Henry David Thoreau, to foster an ethic of environmental stewardship and social responsibility." But, according to Jeffrey S. Cramer, president of the Thoreau Society and curator at the Thoreau Institue, the WWP's efforts to preserve Boiling Spring, as an example, do not take into consideration the Fitchburg Railroad's transformation of the spring. Because this transformation occurred *before* Boiling Spring was immortalized in the works of Emerson and Thoreau, preserving "the land of Thoreau" is in direct conflict with the environmentalist agenda of returning the spring to its "natural" state. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this project. However, the conflation of two "worlds"—the "land of Thoreau" and a mythic pre-industrial, pre-railroad "Nature"—makes clear just how much the environmentalist legacy of *Walden* has blinded us to the fact that this "life in the woods" takes place within the larger ecology of the Fitchburg Railroad. In acting as though the railroad is not part of "the land of Thoreau," the WWP perpetuates an image of Thoreau's "world" that denies its material reality. As it happens, the question is a moot point. As Cramer explained in conversation, The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) owns the rights to the Fitchburg right-of-way, and WWP is only interested in the preservation of natural ecosystems that can be purchased or otherwise preserved, so the train doesn't figure in their thinking. It is just a thing that is "already there." But again, it is worth noting that the train is also a thing that is "already there," "making the world and taking part in it," in the ostensibly "natural ecosystem" of *Walden.*

[41] The foreboding rhetoric of the "shadow of a doubt" plays into the Emersonian fantasy of transparency: the darkness of the smoke disrupts the beautiful "light" of Nature. For Emerson, "extracting an

assumes that Thoreau is *attempting* to find a refuge from the presence of the machine, in which case it is odd that he built his house in between the railroad and the highway.[42] Marx concludes that *Walden* has "nothing to do with the environment, with social institutions or material reality, [and] the writer's physical location is of no great moment" (264).[43] This assumption has allowed critics to simultaneously argue that *Walden* is a paradigmatic "environmentalist" tract *and* that the specific environmental contours *Walden*'s landscape are irrelevant to interpretations of *Walden*. "The railroad" as a unified symbolic representative of modernity might intrude upon "Walden" as a unified symbolic representative of nature, but the specific ways in which shifting sands or patterns of sunlight or melting ice are shaped by speeding trains and deep cuts have no place in this dialectic. The strict separation of the train and Walden Woods as a pair of binary opposites blinds us to the ways that *Walden* emerges out of Thoreau's dialogic embodied encounters with a landscape that owes its very existence to railroad construction and maintenance.

While critics have been quick to point out that the railroad "blocks" the pastoral world that Thoreau is supposedly attempting to inhabit, it also makes possible the world of

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answer from nature" means becoming a "transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all" ("Nature" 11). But if Emerson values transparency and answers, Thoreau finds truth in opacity and interpretations, both in Nature and in his writing: "I do not suppose that I have attained obscurity, but I should be proud if no more fatal fault were found with my pages on this score than was found with the Walden ice" (210). I wonder, then, if Thoreau would have welcomed the shadowy doubts of locomotive smoke as he welcomed the opaque distortions of Walden ice. For a good reading of Thoreau's commitment to obscurity, see Barbara Johnson's "The Hound, the Bay Horse, and the Turtle Dove: Obscurity in *Walden*."

[42] As biographer Walter Harding says, "[i]t was not a lonely spot. The well-traveled Concord-Lincoln road was within sight across the field. The Fitchburg Railroad steamed regularly past the opposite end of the pond. Concord village was less than two miles away, and the Texas house was less than that along the railroad right-of-way" (181).

[43] Raymond Adams concurs: "Walden is not significant as a place at all. . . . It is significant only because the word Walden suggests some thoughts a man had once. Where he had them doesn't really matter" (qtd. in Maynard, 8).

Walden in a number of ways. This is difficult to grasp because of our attachment to an image of Thoreau as a "back-to-nature" figurehead.[44] Perhaps it will help us move past this simplistic version of a truly complex man to note his views on forest fires caused by locomotive sparks:

> A fire is without doubt an advantage on the whole. It sweeps and ventilates the forest floor, and makes it clear and clean. . . . I have often remarked with how much more comfort and pleasure I could walk in woods through which a fire had run the previous year. It will clean the forest floor like a broom perfectly smooth and clear—no twigs left to crackle underfoot, the dead and rotten wood removed—and thus in the course of two or three years new huckleberry fields are created for the town—for birds and for men. (*Journal* 39)

We might note the link between industrial violence and domestic chores—sweeping, ventilating, cleaning—that transform and tame the wilderness, turning Walden Woods into an ideal "middle-ground" for the suburban poet.[45] We might also note the striking disregard

[44] Lawrence Buell calls Thoreau the "Patron Saint of American environmental writing" (115). Barksdale Maynard attributes this version of Thoreau to Houghton-Mifflin's promotional campaign: "Houghton-Mifflin, formerly Ticknor and Fields, had first published *Walden*, and later they promoted Thoreau to the point that one is tempted to rename Walden 'Houghton Mifflin Pond.' To some extent the back-to-nature movement itself, a genre in which Houghton specialized, created Thoreau, and not the other way around" (220). Whoever was responsible for aligning Thoreau with the American environmentalist movement, the link has become so strong that it is now more or less unquestioned.

[45] Somehow, the assumption that Thoreau was seeking "wilderness" and an escape from civilization still lingers, despite clear evidence that Thoreau thought of himself as fundamentally suburban. After his trip to Mt. Katahdin in the first section of *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau tells us: "Nevertheless it was a relief to get back to our smooth, but still varied landscape. For a permanent residence, it seemed to me that there could be no comparison between this and the wilderness, necessary as the latter is for a resource and a background, the raw material of all our civilization. The wilderness is simple, almost to barrenness. The partially cultivated country it is which chiefly has inspired, and will continue to inspire, the strains of poets, such as compose the mass of any literature" (210-1). Barksdale Maynard, Laura Dassow Walls, and Jane Bennett in particular have offered

for the trees that are so sacred to the preservationist version of Thoreau we have grown accustomed to. In any case, this focus on the ways that the railroad transformed the spatial order (fewer trees, more open space) and what those transformations afforded (comfort and pleasure, a silent footpath, new huckleberry fields for birds and men) offers a different way to think about the "meaning" of the railroad in *Walden*.[46]

The railroad participates in the production of narrative action and meaning in *Walden* in at least four ways:

1) It brings into the world a slew of new spaces, structures, and objects that Thoreau appropriates, uncovering novel affordances above and beyond their proper uses. The railroad spikes and Irish laborers that help him survey the pond and the railroad shanty that he turns into the most famous "back-to-nature" cabin in literary history are two examples of how Thoreau re-appropriates the components of the railroad assemblage in order to create something new—in these cases, an accurate survey and a cabin, respectively.[47]

2) It transforms what Michel de Certeau would call the "spatial array" of Walden Woods, bringing to the landscape sloped embankments, iron rails, shifting gravel, wooden sleepers, and the graded causeway between Concord and Walden. Every change to the

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compelling arguments for rethinking Thoreau's relationship with the suburbanized space of Walden Pond. For a good account of Thoreau's investment in domesticity, see Cecilia Tichi: "Domesticity on Walden Pond."

[46] "Meaning" means two things, according to Manuel DeLanda: *signification* refers to "semantic content" while *significance* refers to "importance or relevance" (*New Philosophy* 22). Most critics approach the question of the railroad's "meaning" in *Walden* by way of its *signification*: "What does it *mean*?" I attempt to approach the same question by way of its *significance*: "How does it *make meaning*?" This passage from Thoreau's journal suggests that Thoreau himself is interested in the latter formulation of the question as well. Rather than attempting to uncover the "moral or intellectual fact" of the railroad (or a forest fire)—as Emerson would have advised—Thoreau is interested in the ways that the railroad, operating through smokestack cinders and subsequent forest fires, reshapes the topography of Walden Woods and creates new things in the process: sight-lines, footpaths, huckleberry fields. As literary interpreters, considering this second meaning of "meaning" leads to dramatically different readings of nonhuman objects in literature.

[47] It might be productive to think of *Walden* itself as a similar creative re-appropriation of Walden Woods.

topographical contours of the woods has effects on the ways that humans and nonhumans alike move through the space. Forest fires and clear-cutting create new paths, new sightlines, new patterns of sunlight and shade. Cuttings funnel and intensify wind, alter acoustics, and guide the pathways of flowing sand and melting ice. The easy grade of the causeway attracts perambulatory Transcendentalists, while the shelter created by the overhanging eaves of viaducts and bridges attracts swallows looking for safe sites for nests.

3) It produces new conventionalized spaces that invite novel kinds of activity and experience. The causeway, for example, is a new kind of space that allows Thoreau to confront "wild nature" on its edges while remaining safely within the flat, clear, grade of landscaped gravel and wooden sleepers.[48]

4) Perhaps most importantly for Thoreau, it produces the raw material for metaphors, parables, and analogies. When Thoreau claims that the locomotive is *Atropos* (the goddess of fate and death), for example, he projects the material reality of unswerving tracks onto the abstract concept of fate.[49] As we will see, however, Thoreau is never content to settle on any

[48] The production of new spaces is clearly linked to the alteration of the "spatial array." The difference lies in emphasis. When speaking of a "spatial array," the emphasis is on the affordances and constraints of spatial contours like slopes, grades, and obstructions. When I speak of "spaces," on the other hand, I draw loosely on M.M. Bakhtin's notion of the "chronotope" or "time-space." According to Bakhtin, "[a]ll the novel's abstract elements—philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect—gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood" (250). He examines how the "fundamentally new space" of parlors and salons in Balzac and Stendahl affords a "place where encounters occur" and "where *dialogues* happen," allowing for a new kind of plot based on "webs of intrigue" that circulate through these meetings in salons (246). In other words, parlors and salons afford certain kinds of actions and interactions through which the abstract and philosophical import of the novels take shape. In *Walden*, the Deep Cut and the causeway are "fundamentally new spaces" that afford Thoreau the opportunity to engage in new kinds of actions and interactions as well, and any abstract or philosophical meaning to be gained from *Walden* is likewise located in his interactions with the material spaces of Walden Woods. Chronotopes, unlike interactions with a spatial array, entail an act of artistic creation that uses these spaces specifically to create narrative meaning.

[49] Mark Turner tells us that our minds operate by projecting "image schemas" (skeletal patterns of movement) from the realm of experience onto abstract concepts. The production of new image schemas affords the opportunity to conceptualize abstract concepts in new ways, thus adding new dimensions to these concepts. For example, the *existence* of "unswerving tracks" makes possible the opportunity to project the *image schema*

one metaphoric appropriation of the railroad, but instead shifts quickly between various contradictory metaphors, making it impossible to reduce the material object to any single symbolic abstraction.

This is not an exhaustive list of the ways the railroad acts within *Walden*, but a schema that allows us to think of the railroad as more than a "technological image." Instead, the emergence of new transportation infrastructures "make the world and take part in it" in surprising and unpredictable ways. Rather than imagining that the Fitchburg Railroad operates in opposition to Walden Pond, we should take note that the railroad helps shape the world of *Walden*. Bronson Alcott famously said that if you took away Walden Woods, Emerson and Thoreau would disappear as well (qtd. in Matthiessen 157). I would add that if you took away the Fitchburg Railroad, you would lose Walden Woods—at least that version of the Woods immortalized in *Walden*.[50]

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of "unswerving tracks" onto the abstract concept of "fate." This allows us to both conceptualize *and experience* fate (and thus, recursively, railroad travel) in new ways.

In this example, Thoreau tropes *Atropos* by aligning railroad tracks with fate, death, and commuters: we have "constructed a fate, an *Atropos*, that never turns aside" (77). "Atropos," one of the three Greek goddesses of fate, or destiny, comes from the ancient Greek for "without turn," and is variously translated as "inflexible" or "inevitable." Of the three goddesses of fate, it is *Atropos* who chooses the mechanism of death for every individual, and the one who cuts the "thread of life." In addition to the clear metaphoric connection between the inflexibility of *Atropos* and the inflexibility of the railroad tracks which force the train (and its passengers) to follow fixed tracks, then, the lethal power of the locomotive adds the specter of instant death to Thoreau's conception of fate. This means that the railroad-as-Atropos mediates our conception of fate in two connected but distinct ways: The train fates commuters to predetermined trajectories of travel (in other words, the destination of the commuter on the Fitchburg Railroad is "fated" to be Concord), but the bolt that speeds down the unswerving tracks is also the fated "mechanism of death" chosen by Atropos. The fate of the commuter is thus aligned with death.

But this reading is itself complicated by the concept of the "turn," which reminds us that Thoreau is here indulging in his own poetic troping, transforming the railroad through metaphor into that which it is not. He has "swerved" the "unswerving tracks" and in the process created something new: a chimeric assemblage of fate, Atropos, death, railroad tracks, commuters, and predetermined destinations that did not pre-exist the novel metaphor but now plays upon our experience (and our interpretation) of the train in *Walden* and in life. Which of the components of this assemblage properly belong to the Fitchburg Railroad and which properly belong to the text? The dialogic hybrids of infrastructure and trope infuse almost every moment of *Walden*, to the point where it becomes very difficult to determine where the railroad ends and where *Walden* begins, and vice versa.

[50] In *American Renaissance* (1941), F.O. Matthiessen focuses on the refreshing natural landscape of Concord, claiming that the Concord Woods "constituted a major resource unknown to cities . . . the beauty of

I Should Have Liked to Be in Walden Woods with You, But Not With the Railroad

It is no coincidence that Thoreau moved to Walden Woods in 1845. Leo Marx calls 1844 the "take-off": the moment "when the old blocks and resistances to steady development are overcome and the forces of economic progress 'expand and come to dominate the society'" (26-7). In other words, the year the railroads hit a saturation point. Henry Adams cites the opening of the Boston and Albany Railroad in May of this year as the moment he was "suddenly cut apart" from 18th-century Boston (5). In the same month, Samuel Morse sent the first telegraphic message—"What Hath God Wrought?"—from Washington, D.C., to the B&O Railroad Depot in Baltimore (Howe 1). In July, Nathaniel Hawthorne, relaxing in Sleepy Hollow, was startled by the sudden appearance of the railroad, which "brings the noisy world into the midst of our slumbrous peace," providing Marx with his most enduring archetype of the "incursion text" (qtd. in Marx 13). In October, Emerson published "The Poet," urging readers to "consecrate" the railroad and the factory into the "poetry of the landscape" (398). Across the Atlantic, William Wordsworth placed his anti-railroad sonnet "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway" in *The Morning Post*, famously asking the rhetorical question: "Is then no nook of English ground secure / From rash assault?" The railroad was transforming the world in the year leading up to Thoreau's experiment.

In fact, Thoreau's "life in the woods" takes place within an ephemeral infrastructural space, and many of the key moments of *Walden* are only possible in the immediate wake of the Fitchburg Railroad's construction. Petitions to extend the Massachusetts ice trade brought Fitchburg Railroad construction to Concord in 1843. In that year, "a thousand Irish workmen and their families arrived," working for menial pay from sunup to sundown. Thoreau was

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[the] surroundings" (157). He finds the railroad so unimportant to *Walden* that he doesn't even mention it, though it completely transformed the topography of these "beautiful surroundings."

living as a tutor in Staten Island at the time, and Emerson wrote him that, "the town is full of Irish & the woods of engineers with theodolite & red flag singing out their feet & inches to each other from station to station" (qtd. in Maynard 52). Theodolites are precision instruments for measuring the angles of horizontal and vertical planes, and Emerson is complaining about a large scale surveying and engineering team, flattening the grade and preparing the undulating topography for the coming of the railroad. They are, in fact, grading the very causeway that will become the favorite Transcendentalist walking route for decades, and will serve as Thoreau's connection to Concord. Shantytowns popped up along the tracks at Railroad Spring in Heywood's Meadow, at Ice Fort Cove, and at Deep Cut. Thoreau was not impressed. Writing to his mother, he told her "I should have liked to be in Walden woods with you, but not with the railroad" (qtd. in Maynard 53). Within the decade, he would exploit the railroad to produce his own surveys, walk its causeway every day, and live in a house built out of discarded railroad materials, on land purchased in response to rising firewood prices caused by the high demand for railroad ties.

Trains began running past Walden Pond in June 1844, thirteen months before Thoreau moved to his house in the woods. That fall, Joel Britton set up a sawmill near Flint's Pond and began turning chestnut trees into railroad sleepers at an alarming rate (Maynard 61). The price of wood rose, and Emerson began buying up forested land—partially to maintain a cheap supply of firewood for himself, but also as an early, private, and entirely self-interested preservation effort (62).[51] On September 21, he bought eleven acres at $8.10 per acre. Less than a year later, Thoreau built his house there.

[51] As Maynard says, "Emerson acted out of self-interest, not communal spirit, rescuing the tracts where he most liked to stroll and, as his holdings expanded, establishing himself as the Yankee equivalent of an English squire" (64).

Upon completion, the small temporary shanties along the right-of-way, constructed to house track-builders, were auctioned off to the highest bidder. In May of 1844, Thoreau's father bought "one or two" shanties from an official Fitchburg Railroad auction and, with his son's help, used the materials to construct a lean-to shed on the side of their house, where they ran their growing pencil business (Harding 178). A year later, Thoreau avoided the middleman and bought another shanty directly from James Collins, but the transaction was part of an established railroad practice corresponding with the final days of line construction. A few years later, new inhabitants were drawn back to the abandoned cut. The Riordan family set up shop in the late 1840s when infrastructural deterioration required that the Fitchburg replace its original railroad ties. The Riordans bought the old rotten sleepers at three dollars per hundred and sold them for firewood. Thoreau would often see them as he walked the causeway to Walden and back. One of their boys, four year-old Johnny Riordan, walked a mile down the causeway to school everyday.[52]

We think of trains as transporting bodies and goods around the country in passenger and freight cars, but here we see daily patterns of life shaped by embodied interactions with the heterogeneous components that make up the railroad assemblage.[53] Collins, the Riordans,

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[52] This boy makes an appearance in *Walden*: "Men are advertised that at a certain hour and minute these bolts [trains] will be shot toward particular points of the compass; yet it interferes with no man's business, and the children go to school on the other track" (77). This is the moment that precedes Thoreau's Atropos trope.

[53] In his introduction to *Assemblage Theory*, DeLanda points to the original French term (used by Deleuze) of *agencement*: "a term that refers to the action of matching or fitting together a set of components, . . . as well as to the result of such an action: an ensemble of parts that mesh well together" (1). The problem with the English term, "assemblage," according to DeLanda, is that it seems to connote a *product* rather than a *process.* To speak of the railroad as an assemblage is not merely to note the fact that it is made up of heterogeneous components (wheels, axels, cars, tunnels, iron rails), but to note that it is in the performed act of "fitting together" that assemblages are made (and thus, that assemblages are always capable of being "unmade"). Furthermore, "the parts matched together to form an assemblage are themselves treated as assemblages, equipped with their own parameters, so that at all times we are dealing with assemblages of assemblages" (3). "The Railroad" is a particular assemblage that includes "The Train," which is another

Emerson, and Thoreau are entangled with cedar trees, sleepers, sawmills, and wood prices; with walking paths, causeways, deep cuts, and train schedules. These relationships constantly shift during different phases of construction, maintenance, and renovation, though they become conflated as Thoreau compresses a decade of walking and writing into one mythological year.[54] *Walden* emerges out of the shifting infrastructural assemblage of the 1840s and 1850s Fitchburg railroad line. This assemblage includes James Collins and his shanty, the Riordans and their firewood business, Joel Britton and his sawmill, Emerson and the Wyman Lot, Thoreau and his walking routes. It also includes the townspeople who "think and talk faster" in the Concord depot (77), the "large tool box" that Thoreau briefly considers boring holes in and transforming into a house (18), and the whistle that screams like a hawk (75). Anybody familiar with *Walden* can surely think of many more examples.

Walden may seem immortal, immaterial, eternal, and ideal. It may seem like an attempt to transcend the phenomenal flux of the material world and enter the noumenal

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assemblage that includes, among other things, "The Locomotive," which is another assemblage…and so on. By thinking of "assemblage" as *agencement*, we see that *Walden* is not just as an assembled product (made up of language and footsteps and loons and train tracks), but process of assembly: a nine-year experiment in "matching or fitting together a set of components."

The upshot of this is that we are able to "conceive of emergent wholes in which the parts retain their autonomy, so that they can be detached from one whole and plugged into another one, entering into new interactions" (10). This allows us to see how different components of the railroad assemblage "detach" at the moment in which they form a new assemblage with different actors: the way in which rotting sleepers combine with the Riordans and the firewood industry to form an economic assemblage; the way a railroad shanty is detached from the temporary assemblage of "railroad construction" and becomes part of Thoreau's "life in the woods"; the way the chestnut trees are detached from the assemblage of "Walden Woods" by Joel Britton and modified in order to fit into the railroad assemblage (thus re-entering the assemblage of "Walden Woods" as part of the railroad). The point is that we need not spend our time purifying those objects that belong to "nature" or "culture," because assemblage theory cuts across that divide with ease. And we shouldn't think of "The Train" as a unified symbol, but rather we should think of the symbol itself as another assemblage—an act of "matching" the train with the idea of progress, the industrial revolution, rhetorical devices, unswerving tracks, capitalism, and the various national mythologies of the United States already in play. In fact, "The Railroad," as it is used in the American Myth & Symbol School, has no place in assemblage theory because it is a "reified generality" rather than an historically specific individual entity (14).

[54] This conflation allows Collins and the Riordans to occupy the same space simultaneously—a space that was actually uninhabited during the two years Thoreau lived at the pond.

spiritual truths of transparency that Emerson so desires. But Walden Woods is in flux, and Thoreau's experiment takes place in the only years that it could take place. Had Thoreau moved to the Pond in 1840 there would have been no shanty, no property, no connection to Concord, no train rumbling past his front door, no ice trade. Less than a decade after he published *Walden*, a picnic ground and amusement park—constructed by the railroad in an effort to boost tourism revenue—inhabited the northwest corner of the Pond. The world was changing rapidly in the 1840s, in that trivial and bustling nine 19th century, and Thoreau's experiment took place in the "nick of time."

But it is not enough merely to locate *Walden* within the historically specific and contingent space of 1840s-50s Walden Woods. After all, every experience takes place within a historically specific space. The purpose of drawing our attention to the specific techno-natural landscape that Thoreau encounters is to counteract the critical tendency to elide the particular spatial array of Walden Woods in favor of the more general symbolic nature/culture dialectic. Now that we have established that Thoreau is engaging with the embodied particularity of the railroad as an infrastructural assemblage (he engages not just the unity "train" but the multiplicity of embankments and rails, cuts and shanties, as unique spaces, structures, and objects) as it exists in a specific place (Walden Woods) and time (1840s-50s), we can now turn to Thoreau's specific poetic interactions with the components of the railroad itself. If Thoreau does not (always) treat the railroad as an abstract symbol of modernity, what *is* the railroad for Thoreau?

What's the Railroad to Me?

What *is* the railroad? What is the railroad *to me*? The first is a question of the "thing-in-itself." The second suggests an entangled ontology, where things—railroad and self—do not exist independently of one another; where observer and observed are not separate but co-constitutive. If the first question points toward the brute fact of rails on the ground, the nonhuman agency of the railroad, and its ability to act upon others (what Donna Orange would call "the given") the second suggests the poetic interpretation or narrative organization of the brute fact (what Orange calls "the made").[55]

So what *is* the railroad to Thoreau? Is it a "pretty toy," distracting our attention from "serious things" (*Walden* 33)? Is it the causeway, connecting Walden to Concord (75)? Is it "long battering rams going twenty miles an hour against the city walls" or the "fiery dragon" of a "new Mythology" (75-6)? Is it our new sun, dictating time, or is it "a fate, an *Atropos*, that never turns aside" (77)? Is it the terror of a "devilish Iron Horse, destroying woods and "muddying" Boiling Spring (125), or merely a "cart-path in the woods" (80)? Thoreau's treatment of the train wanders to such a degree that Leo Marx refers to the "sustained ambiguity" of his railroad representations as "double images" (251).

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[55] As Orange argues, "experience results from the the endless and constant interaction, or dialogue, between the given and the made. It emerges within and between the subjectivities involved in any intersubjective field" (88). As a psychologist, Orange focuses on human intersubjectivity, but her insight is applicable to dialogic experiences that emerge "within and between" humans and nonhumans, sentient and non-sentient beings. We interact not just with other subjects, but with countless objects as well. For Orange, both "the given" and "the made" "are necessary to constitute experience from any perspective." Thus, they are intertwined and co-constitutive. To speak of one is always to imply the other (86). Orange's focus on perspective also draws our attention to Thoreau's own sensitivity to embodied perspective, which (I argue below) anticipates Nietzschean perspectivism. The relationship between the "given" and the "made" runs through each chapter of this dissertation in various forms, and through the lens of various thinkers. I address it most explicitly in the final chapter when I theorize Paul Theroux's experiments with "riding" and "writing" the literary railroad.

When Thoreau answers this question, however, he turns first not to its value as a symbol, but to the railroad's material affordances as they emerge through embodied interactions with nonhuman actors:

What's the railroad to me?
I never go to see
Where it ends.
It fills a few hollows,
And makes banks for the swallows,
It sets the sands a-blowing,
And the blackberries a-growing. (80)

Thoreau appears to dismiss the railroad by reasserting a pastoral order that remains undaunted by industry, and this fits nicely with the traditional reading of Thoreau as attempting to evade modernity.[56] The fact that he never goes to see where the railroad ends, in this reading, "represents" his ability to live outside of the industrial corridor and his lack of interest in the trappings of modernity.[57] The railroad does "nothing more," we might say, than kick up a bit of sand. Blackberries and swallows simply invade, colonizing industrial

[56] We already saw that Leo Marx and others have read *Walden* as an attempt to escape modernity. For more traditional critical responses that start from a strict nature/culture divide see: Michaels, "*Walden*'s False Bottoms"; McLean, "Thoreau's True Meridian"; Hochfield, "Anti-Thoreau"; Lane, "On the Organic Structure of *Walden*"; Edel "*Walden*: The Myth and the Mystery." Laura Dassow Walls has used Actor-Network Theory to persuasively argue against this persistent trend in Thoreau studies. See "From the Modern to the Ecological: Latour on Walden Pond."

[57] In fact, Thoreau traveled extensively by railroad: to Canada, Maine, New York, and Minnesota for example. He was also active in the Underground Railroad and helped runaway slaves escape to Canada by rail. In addition, he walked the causeway to Concord almost every day. For railroad journeys, see Harding or Richardson. For walking the causeway, see Thoreau's *Journal*.

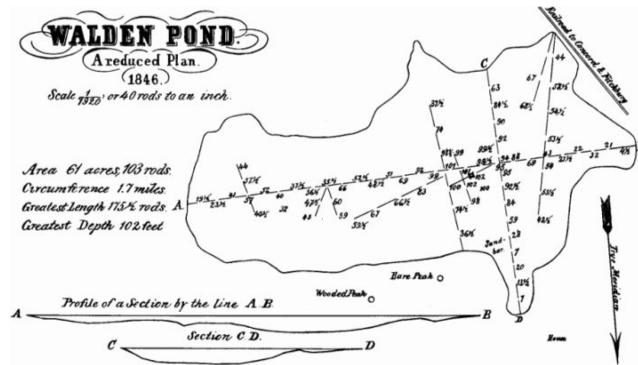

Image 4: ***Thoreau's survey of Walden Pond is the only illustration in*** **Walden.** ***Notice the railroad line on the southwest corner.***

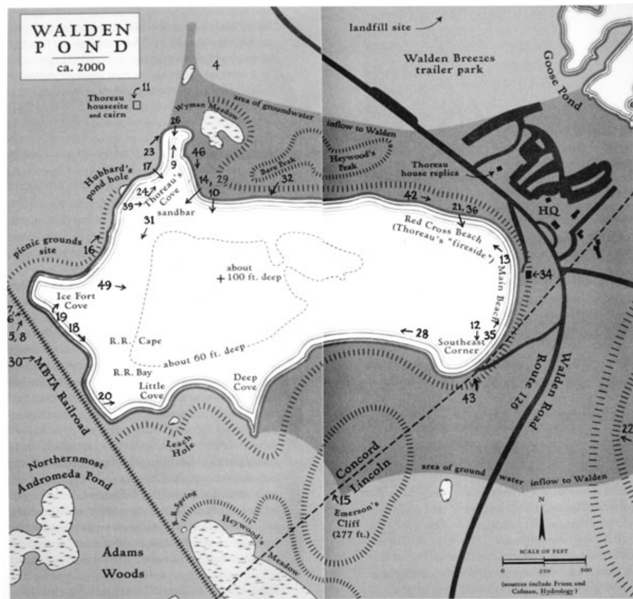

Image 5: ***This map of Walden Pond circa 2000 is from Barksdale Maynard's*** **Walden Pond: A History.** ***Here, what Maynard calls "R.R. Bay" is clearly amputated by the railroad line.***

space in the name of "nature." In naturalizing the causeway, this poem ostensibly counters and pastoralizes the "despoiling" intrusion of the industrial corridor.

But beginning with the *a priori* assumption that Thoreau is attempting to flee culture by turning to nature obscures the fact that the railroad's "meaning" in this poem emerges out of its material encounters with other actors: animal, vegetable, mineral, and human. On first glance, Thoreau may appear to dismiss, for example, the effects of the railroad by saying that it merely "fills a few hollows," but this is an understatement that Thoreau elsewhere undermines. If we pay attention to the specific changes wrought by the Fitchburg Railroad, we quickly see that one "filled-in hollow," at least, plays an important role in *Walden.*

The twenty-foot embankment that skirts the southwest corner of Walden Pond required the draining and refilling of Railroad Cove. This filled-in "hollow" is a key actor in Thoreau's survey of Walden Pond. Patrick Chura notes that Thoreau used the front of his

cabin, the southwest corner of the railroad embankment, and the center of the pond as his three stations for taking bearings, creating what Chura calls a "pond-cabin-railroad triangle" (31). Whatever meaning we attach to this pond-cabin-railroad triangle,[58] it is clear that Thoreau is not measuring an eternal, natural pond, but a landscape already re-shaped by the railroad. The important takeaway here is that filling in hollows is not a negligible side-effect of railroad construction.[59] For Thoreau, every alteration to the contours of the landscape has effects on meaning-making potential. Because the "filled-in hollow" is not an abstract symbol but a concrete object in the environment, it inevitably encounters the other human and nonhuman actors that populate Walden Woods, and new meanings continuously emerge from these encounters.

Thoreau's comment about swallows is indicative of his knowledge as an amateur

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[58] Chura argues, for instance, that Thoreau's decision to use the railroad as a sight-marker was a symbolic choice, partially because it allows him to link the railroad to the pond and the cabin, and partly because of his predilection for creating analogies out of material facts, or, as Thoreau puts it, of translating "inches" into "ethics": it is no coincidence that the deepest point in the pond is equidistant from the cabin door and the railroad embankment, thus allowing Thoreau to draw experimental analogies to the "deepest point" of the human mind. The "filled-in hollow" thus acts not only as a sight-marker for Thoreau's survey, it also transforms the dimensions of the Pond, which takes on a great deal of importance when we consider the importance of measurement in *Walden*. When he famously measures the Pond at 107 feet in order to dispel the popular myth of its "bottomlessness," he reminds readers that "not an inch [of its depth] can be spared by the imagination" (184). Likewise, Thoreau will "mine" every inch of the Pond's dimensions for imaginative reappropriation: by altering those inches, the railroad alters the poetic potential of the Pond.

The important point is not that *Thoreau* makes meaning out of the embankment, but rather that he sees the hollow as a part of the Pond that transforms the possible ways in which meaning arises out of encounters with the Pond. In this sense, the "filled-in hollow" is very much a part of what the railroad is *to Thoreau* (one of the ways the railroad makes meaning in *Walden* is through its participation in the survey and all of its metaphorical implications), but also that the "filled-in-hollow" is part of what the railroad is *to the Pond*.

[59] It is interesting to note that Thoreau attributes the "filling in" to the railroad itself, and not to the laborers who actually shoveled dirt out of the Deep Cut, transported it to Railroad Cove, drained the corner of the lake, filled it with the dirt, and built the embankment. On the one hand, this could be seen as an elision of human agency. On the other hand, we could consider these maintenance workers—insofar as they do this work—as components within the railroad assemblage, in which case Thoreau is right to say that "the railroad" fills in the hollows. This brings up questions about the human and nonhuman agency involved in filling the cove (or indeed in writing a book). Rather than calling Thoreau out for mistaking the agents that "actually" shoveled the sand, it is more productive to use this moment to think about how agency is always dispersed among multiple human and nonhuman actors.

natural historian. Swallows have indeed excelled at adapting to human-made environments, to the extent that barn swallows and house martins (as their names imply) rarely use natural nesting sites, preferring the undersides of bridges, eaves, artificial houses, and railroad embankments.[60] Thoreau returns to the relationship between birds and railroad infrastructure in *Cape Cod*, where he tells us that, “the new telegraph-wires are a godsend to the birds, affording them something to perch upon” (271). The “meaning” of the railroad (to the swallow) lies in the graspability of telegraph wires and the shelter afforded by embankments and the undersides of railroad bridges.

Like swallows, blackberries are drawn to the railroad as a dwelling place. They thrive on the flat, dry, railroad grade, especially with the mixed sunlight produced by a thinning tree line.[61] Once again, Thoreau covers this ground elsewhere, this time in *The Maine Woods*. Crossing a “crude log-railway” during a portage, Thoreau tells us,

> this was an interesting botanical locality for one coming from the South to commence with; for many plants which are either rare, and one or two which are not found at all, in the eastern part of Massachusetts, grew abundantly between the rails,—as Labrador tea, Kalmia galuca, [and] Canada blueberry (125).

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[60] See Kenn Kaufman’s *Lives of North American Birds* (411).

[61] The relationship between the flat, dry, gravel bed created by railroad grades and the plants that thrive there is easy to miss, but the implication is striking: railroad infrastructure isn’t always at odds with “nature”; the particular micro-environments created by railroad grades are actually conducive to some plants. This relationship is highlighted almost 150 years later, and across the Atlantic, by activists attempting to preserve the Royate Hill Nature Reserve in Bristol, England in 1992: “The richness of the fauna and flora of Royate Hill is attributed to the unique features that abandoned railway embankments provide, notably the old gravel bed of the former railway that supports so-called ‘ballast communities,’ that is, plants that like dry conditions such as rat’s tail fescue” (Whatmore and Hinchcliffe 456).

Even crude log-railways create new ecosystems for plant life, suggesting not that the pastoral is reasserting itself, but that the grading required by railroad infrastructure creates optimal conditions for specific unique micro-environments.[62]

It may seem especially unimportant that the railroad "sets the sand a-blowing," and thus this might appear to be proof that Thoreau is dismissing the railroad's agency and meaning. In fact, Thoreau is especially attuned to the movement of sand particles as an important component of the newly emerging field of geology. In his compelling account of Thoreau's intellectual engagement with developments in 19th-century science, Robert M. Thorson catalogues all of the references to sand found in Thoreau's *Journal*. Thorson discovers that Thoreau tracks geological changes from "granular residues produced by the disintegration of crystalline rocks" (64) to the "shifting islands" of the Merrimack River (70). Thoreau traces the movements of sand in order to describe "a full spectrum of river channel materials and morphology" (69), suggesting that his attention to the ostensibly negligible movements of sand particles has the weight of a sustained interest in geology behind it. Thorson calls those parts of *Walden* that deal "with material nature," "Geo-*Walden*" (15). Aligning the poem with Thoreau's many other detailed treatments of sand again complicates a strict nature/culture divide by suggesting that the way the railroad moves sand particles around may not be so different from the way that the Merrimack River moves sand particles around.

Far from the eternal "spiritual facts" of Emersonian Transcendentalism, Thoreau

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[62] As John Stilgoe puts it, "the railroad as depicted in *Walden* is a new sort of ecosystem, one born in the disruption of an older one and offering the naturalist an intriguing place for investigation" (*Metropolitan* 140). While there is no fence separating Thoreau from the Fitchburg causeway, Stilgoe notes that this "new sort of ecosystem" is extended once stone walls and rail fences (and, later, barbed-wire fences) were erected to protect the railroad right-of-way in the 1850s and -60s: "any fence created an artificially protected ecosystem between it and the rails" (141).

notes the historical specificity of the Fitchburg Railroad, and highlights the ways that "meaning" is produced through dialogic encounters not only with humans but with swallows and sand. This suggests that the "meaning of the railroad" is necessarily in excess of any human-centered "perfect symbol." In his attention to the ways that different bodies create and support different meanings, he anticipates Nietzsche: "there are many kinds of eyes. Even the Sphinx has eyes—and consequently there are many kinds of 'truths,' and consequently there is no truth" (291).[63] If we mistakenly believe that the machine inculcates its "message" directly by "being seen," this is only because we have failed to consider the dramatic physiological differences between human eyes and, say, the eyes (and small, grasping feet) of a swallow. Nietzsche suggests that "a thing would be defined once all creatures had asked 'what is that?' and had answered their question. Supposing one single creature, with its own relationships and perspectives for all things, were missing, then the thing would not yet be 'defined'" (301- 2).[64] Thoreau here merely gestures toward this perspectival complexity, but in turning to nonhuman perspectives he, like Nietzsche, forecloses the possibility that "human creatures" have the final say.[65] The meaning of a "thing" is not a transcendental truth to be located in the thing itself or in human consciousness, but is rather an historically

[63] Like Orange's "intersubjective field," Nietzschean perspectivism forecloses the possibility that any one entity (or any one *kind* of entity) has transcendental access to truth or meaning. Instead, particular perspectival truths and meanings continually emerge through concrete embodied encounters between entities.

[64] Thoreau and Nietzsche both anticipate work being done now in animal studies, science and technology studies, new feminist materialism, and continental philosophy. In *Alien Phenomenology*, object-oriented ontologist Ian Bogost argues, "human perception becomes just one among many ways that objects might relate. To put things at the center of a new metaphysics also requires us to admit that they do not exist just for us" (9). Indeed, the speculative interest in nonhuman perception and interaction lies at the heart of the Nonhuman Turn.

[65] Nietzsche famously admired Emerson, and the intellectual ties between these two thinkers have been well documented. For detailed studies, see George Stack's *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity* or David Mikics' *The Romance of Individualism in Emerson and Nietzsche*. However, in the case of nonhuman perspectivism, it is with Thoreau that Nietzsche has a more compelling affinity.

contingent, intersubjective creation that shifts quickly with each new encounter.

This interpretative stance toward the railroad stands in stark contrast to Leo Marx's. Far from immediately recognizing an unambiguous and unmediated "perfect symbol" in the locomotive, Thoreau turns instead to a series of questions designed to destabilize the question of "meaning": what is the railroad to a swallow? To a blackberry? To a grain of sand? Whether the railroad creates a new home, changes the dimensions of Walden Pond, or moves the landscape around, the meaning of the railroad lies in embodied, unpredictable, idiosyncratic interactions between nonhuman (even non-sentient) actors and various components of the railroad assemblage.

Only in the line immediately following the poem does Thoreau hint at what the railroad means "to him": "I cross it like a cart-path in the woods." If a bank affords swallows safety and the graded right-of-way affords blackberries new opportunities for growth, the causeway seems to afford Thoreau nothing more than a flattened path to step over. But here Thoreau subtly introduces a swerve: the simile ("*like* a cart-path") reminds us that the human poet's encounters with railroad infrastructure involve not just material affordances but conceptual and perceptual transformations that inevitably mediate the encounter even as its happening. For each entity, including the human, the railroad is always already an entangled product of "the given" and "the made." For Thoreau, the "made" includes tropes, metaphors, similes, symbols, and other literary devices. The poem reminds us that the railroad exceeds the meanings ascribed to it by Thoreau the poet. The simile reminds us that *we can't help* but experience reality through metaphoric lenses: as humans, we inevitably translate objects through metaphor, trope, and the particular capacities (and limitations) of the embodied human mind.

Even as he engages the fantasy that the causeway is no different from a cart-path, however, he never forgets that the train has no responsibility to comply with his metaphoric play. Before reciting the railroad poem, Thoreau tells us that, "the bell rings, and I must get off the track and let the cars go by" (80). He knows what the bell signifies and is savvy enough to remove his body from the path of the oncoming bolt. While he tells us that the graded causeway is nothing but a cart-path, he also acknowledges the new industrial sounds and signals of impending danger with which he must familiarize himself if he wants to survive his encounter with this new space.

Thoreau's acknowledgment of the oncoming bolts that force him off of the "cart-path" tells us that he is not engaged in the erasure of history, the railroad, or the industrial corridor. His metaphors do not replace gravelly causeways with perfect symbols but rather highlight and hide particular aspects of reality. Through metaphor, Thoreau draws our attention to both the creative power of the poet and to the inevitable schism that opens up in the wake of interpretation: whatever the metaphor "hides" can always return. Thoreau knows he is playing, and knows the limits of his play. He is engaged in what psychologists call "double knowledge," a game of make-believe that requires holding two concepts in his head simultaneously.[66] He is only allowed to re-imagine the tracks as a cart-path if he simultaneously remains aware of train schedules and warning signals. The nonhuman actor

[66] James Geary notes that a child's ability to imaginatively transform a banana into a telephone requires that she simultaneously holds both concepts in her head at once. In "pretend play, two people both know that a specific scenario is not literally the case—and they both know that the other person knows this too" (50). This type of make-believe depends upon either "functional similarity" (two objects serve similar functions) or "perceptual similarity" (two objects look similar). In Thoreau's case, the relationship between the railroad causeway and the cart-path is both functional and perceptual—both paths allow vehicles to transport bodies and goods between places, and they look similar. This type of rhetorical shapeshifting will occur throughout *Walden*, and it is important to note that Thoreau is engaging in double knowledge, not simply replacing material reality with imaginative reality. In fact, the affordances of material reality (functional or perceptual) are the necessary condition for the imaginative metaphor, and Thoreau takes pains to remind us that, even as interpretations create meaning, the entities that we interpret are always in excess of our interpretations.

retains its agency, and always threatens to undermine the rhetorical or metaphorical novelties created by Thoreau's poetic acts of narrative remediation.

We learn three things from Thoreau's railroad poem: 1) Thoreau locates the meaning of the railroad in embodied interobjective encounters not just with humans but with all kinds of creatures, including swallows, blackberries, sand, and hollows. Each of these actors has "different eyes" (i.e. different physiological and cognitive capacities for interaction), and is thus capable of uncovering novel affordances of the built environment. The railroad's "meaning" lies both in its nonhuman agency and in the contextual affordances that emerge through encounters with interlocutors, not in a stable underlying "spiritual fact."

2) For humans, embodied interaction is always already mediated by conceptual and perceptual lenses that are fundamentally metaphoric. For Thoreau, with his human walking legs and poetic mind, the railroad affords not just a smooth walking path, but the material preconditions for tropes that inevitably shape his experience.

3) The "brute fact" of the railroad as an autonomous being retains its agency, and its right to be more than any interpretive reduction. The simile here is based on highlighting certain similarities—causeways and cart-paths are both flat, straight grades that one can cross over—but Thoreau warns us not to mistake interpretation for reality.[67] Seeing the causeway

[67] This is not to say that there is an ontological hierarchy between "reality" and "mere surface appearance" or interpretation. Rather, perspectivism suggests that reality *is* interpretation, but that interpretation emerges through on-going dialogic encounter between *all entities.* This means that neither interpretation nor reality belong solely to the human, and thus that, as humans (or, more generally, as particular embodied entities in the world), we have finite access to any truth and meaning. By paying attention to the ways that the "meaning" of the railroad is enacted by swallows, sand, hollows, and blackberries, Thoreau speculates about interobjective meanings that he doesn't have access to, and reminds us that these are just four of the innumerable entities that are simultaneously encountering the railroad and articulating new meanings. Thoreau thus places himself within this field of entities, reminding us that whatever meanings he attaches to the railroad, they will always be *his* meanings, to be understood as emerging alongside *other* meanings—none of which can fully encapsulate what the railroad *means.* At some point, the locomotive will barrel down all of our various cart-paths (or nesting-banks) and force us to get off the line.

as a cart-path does not stop the train from running you over. These lessons apply not just to Thoreau's interpretation of the railroad, but to our interpretation of the railroad in *Walden*. As Walter Benn Michaels warns us about reading *Walden*, beware of the moment you find the answer—like the oncoming bolt of the train warning you to get off the track, Thoreau will always reassert his independence from interpretive reductions.[68]

The poetic interpreter is necessary here at two levels. First, Thoreau reminds us that the railroad does not house an unambiguous symbolic message, but rather affords contingent meanings that are created via embodied interaction and the experimental meaning-making activity of the human poet (or the blackberry bush). It follows that the interpreter (reader) is necessary for creating meaning out of *Walden* itself. Like the locomotive, *Walden* does not inculcate its meaning directly—"meaning" only emerges, as with anything, through dialogic encounter and experiential interpretation. *Contra* Marx, the poet (Thoreau) is required to create meaning (symbolic or otherwise) out of the locomotive. By extension, the poet (the reader) is required to create meaning both out of *Walden* and out of the railroad that runs through its pages. The meanings we draw out of Thoreau's book are intersubjective

[68] Michaels argues persuasively against normative readings of *Walden* that attempt to resolve its contradictions by positing an organic whole or a synthesis: "the central problem of reading Walden is the persistence of our own attempts to identify and understand its unity, to dispel our nervousness by resolving or at least containing the contradictions which create it" (134). This persistence can be found in a number of interpretations, utilizing a number of different resolution strategies. While the environmentalist readings of *Walden* most obviously elide the contradictions of *Walden* by locating its "solid bottom" in ecological preservation and "getting back to nature," most interpretations of *Walden* (and, by extension, its railroad) make similar movies. Stanley Cavell, for example, says that *Walden* is "explicitly said to be a scripture" (*Senses* 14) and therefore that it "must have a doctrine" (68). Charles Anderson argues that we should read *Walden* not as a "scripture" but as a "poem": "Perhaps it is through language that all the seemingly disparate subjects of this book are integrated into wholeness" (14). Both of these interpretations, as with many others, attempt to locate what Michaels calls a "hard" or "tight" bottom to *Walden*. But, Michaels warns us, "[i]f our reading claims to find a solid bottom, it can only do so according to principles which the text has both authorized and repudiated; thus we run the risk of drowning in our own certainties" (148). *Walden* always exceeds our "solid bottoms" because it always both authorizes and repudiates them, just as the train tracks both authorize Thoreau's metaphor of the cart-path through functional and perceptual similarity while simultaneously repudiating it by warning Thoreau to get off the track.

productions indebted to both the text and the reader's poetic agency. We would be wise, then, when interpreting *Walden*, to acknowledge Thoreau's own refusal to engage in acts of interpretive mastery. In other words, reading the railroad as a transcendent symbol is problematic not just because Thoreau enjoys exploring the railroad as a material spatial array, but also because this type of reading is already incompatible with Thoreau's own model of interpretation.

Spatial Stories: Walking Walden Woods

Let us return briefly to Thoreau's footsteps as he crosses the tracks like a "cart-path" in the woods. In his celebrated essay on "Walking," Thoreau tells us that he has "met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks,—who had a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering*" (330). *Walden* itself is organized around Thoreau's "sauntering" explorations of Walden Woods throughout the seasons, and it is easy to think about Thoreau's commitment to walking from within a nature/culture binary that places the railroad on the opposite side of the dialectic. Thoreau himself says as much in the opening lines of "Walking": "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society" (330). Walking, then, is aligned with "Nature," freedom, and wildness. Other modes of transportation, we would imagine, are aligned with "a freedom and culture merely civil." It is statements like this that lead us to unquestioningly accept that Thoreau is a "back-to-nature" writer. But if walking is an "art" that involves "genius," it will be illuminating to explore *where* and *how* Thoreau walks. In doing so, it quickly becomes clear that Thoreau's

investment in infrastructural spaces is to be found not just in his metaphors but in his footsteps. Or, as the above simile has already suggested, in both simultaneously: in a poetics of walking the railroad.

For Michel de Certeau, spatial stories "traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them" (115). Thoreau may have added the cart-path simile after the fact—even years after the fact—or it may have informed the way he experienced those footsteps in real time, but the footsteps and the simile occur simultaneously, each informing the other, to the "I" as it exists within the world of *Walden*. According to de Certeau, stories,

> do not merely constitute a "supplement" to pedestrian enunciations and rhetorics. They are not satisfied with displacing the latter and transposing them into the field of language. In reality, they organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it. (115-6)

The simile organizes the footsteps, giving them direction and purpose; the footsteps, interacting with the causeway, enact the simile and make it possible.[69]

From Thoreau's travel writing, we know that he is both averse to the beaten path in principle and constantly drawn down the beaten path in everyday practice. In his first book, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, the river itself is the main highway. Thoreau acknowledges that this river is no wilderness path, but the transportation infrastructure required by an economy based on canal trade. In fact, Thoreau notes that he is exploiting the opportunities of this "beaten path" in the nick of time—the extension of the railroad means

[69] I will return to de Certeau and the entangled relationship between stories and "walks" in Chapter 4. In this later chapter, I think about how Paul Theroux crafts his travelogues in notebooks while on board the very trains that he is writing about.

there is “no little boating on the Merrimack,” making it ideal for a small private boat to meander down, but also leading to the inevitable closure of the route: “The locks are wearing out fast and will soon be impassable, since the tolls will not pay the expense of repairing them, and so in a few years there will be an end of boating on this river” (136). Transportation infrastructure creates new paths, but these paths require maintenance or they will fall into what John Stilgoe calls “bewilderment”—when “nature slowly overwhelm[s] land abandoned by people” (*Train Time* 28). Thoreau depends here upon exploiting the affordances of a transitional space—a beaten path in the process of being abandoned. The lock system affords canoeing; the failing infrastructure affords solitude.

In *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau’s book that is most associated with “true” wilderness, beaten paths continually pop up in the most unlikely places. Thoreau is eager leave roads behind, as when he hops a fence and declares that “there was now a road no further,” or proclaims it “a bran-new [*sic*] country; the only roads were of Nature’s making” (19-20). But he is always startled to find that someone has been there before him and created pathways that he then inevitably either follows or crosses with trepidation: “But it was always startling to discover so plain a trail of civilized man there” (54); and again, “[a]t one place we were startled by seeing, on a little sandy shelf by the side of the pond, the fresh print of a man’s foot” (91). When he crosses over these paths, residues of affect—shock, the startling rush of discovery, disappointment—inevitably linger.[70]

In a different context, Tiziana Terranova observes that airplane flights are never simply about transporting bodies from *A* to *B*. Rather, they are “a potential transformation of

[70] In *Cape Cod*, Thoreau also complains of “the hard graveled walk” of towns, but notes that his footsteps along the comparative wildness of the beach leave footprints, creating an “account” of his presence (251; 234).

the space crossed that always leaves something behind—a new idea, a new affect (even an annoyance), a modification of the overall topology" (51).[71] Adapting this insight to think about the swaths cut by any transportation infrastructure, we might note that paths in Thoreau's walking and writing are rarely about transporting bodies from *A* to *B*, and are never reducible to this utilitarian function. Instead, they are the carriers of affect, and as such, we should ask ourselves: What novel ideas, movements, and modifications swirl in the wake of each transportation infrastructure?[72] Paths tell stories of those that came before us, as Rebecca Solnit argues,[73] and our footsteps interact with those stories—stories of exploration or commutation or conformity or discovery. When Thoreau encounters a path in *The Maine Woods*, his sense of being in the "wilderness" alerts him to the "stories" of previous walkers enshrined in the thinginess of a footprint, a log railway, or a nail in a tree.

Paths also fill *Walden*, from the Indian Path around the pond to the paths and ruts created by his own feet. When Thoreau decides to leave Walden Pond, he has this to say about the footpaths that he himself has created:

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[71] Drawing on the work of Henri Bergson, Terranova argues that "the plane's movement affects the space it moves in and modifies it. It transforms the chemical composition of the atmosphere. It affects the passengers and staff through a transformation or qualitative change in their relationship with what they have left while they wait to change what they are moving towards." She then transitions from airplanes to information: "Information is not simply transmitted from point *A* to point *B*: it propagates and by propagation it affects and modifies its milieu" (51). This observation can easily be adapted to Thoreau's relationship with paths of all kinds, which tend to leave residues of affect which Thoreau then exploits to create meaning in his travel narratives.

[72] In *Nature*, Emerson exclaims, "[w]hat new thoughts are suggested by seeing a face of country quite familiar, in the rapid movement of the rail-road car!" (21).

[73] Solnit also considers walking to be an act of worldmaking: "The path is an extension of walking, the places set aside for walking are monuments to that pursuit, and walking is a mode of making the world as well as being in it. Thus the walking body can be traced in the places it has made" (29). If walking is a method of "worldmaking," so too is every mode of transportation. As we will see in Chapter 4, worlds are made not just when Henry David Thoreau steps over the tracks of a Boston commuter line, but also when fellow Bostonian Paul Theroux *rides* those commuter rails all the way to the heart of Patagonia.

> It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pondside. . . . It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! (209)

Other travelers simply “fall into” the trajectory of his footsteps, sacrificing their own pedestrian agency to the easy contours of the already-beaten track, but Thoreau’s anxiety about falling into a beaten path, or a “rut” of conformity, doesn’t require other travelers. “Falling into a particular route,” even one’s own route, is enough to create a “beaten track for ourselves.” It is not enough, then, to follow one’s own path: one must continually create new paths. Because the earth is soft and impressible, moving off the “beaten track” only creates new “beaten tracks” that we must be careful to continue to avoid. If Thoreau’s tracks across the railroad are emblematic of forging a “path of one’s own,” the caveat here is that from the moment Thoreau’s foot hits the soft and impressible earth, he is in the process of producing a *new* beaten track. Like those deep in the Maine Woods, Thoreau’s footsteps tell a story. Each alteration of the landscape, no matter how small, holds the potential for new rhetorics of walking.[74]

[74] Additionally, in transforming those footsteps into stories, Thoreau creates new “paths which the mind travels.” This explicit metaphoric projection of the image-schema of the “beaten track” onto the neuro-pathways of the brain reminds us that Thoreau is always drifting seamlessly back and forth between material reality and the embodied mind. Thus, we see that “beaten tracks” proliferate exponentially, with each new thought and each new footstep both trail-blazing and contributing to the ruts of conformity simultaneously.

The highways of the world—the material infrastructure that allows masses of people to all travel the same routes to the same places—become "ruts of tradition and conformity" in Thoreau's reading, giving a distinctly touristic feel to an old Transcendentalist anxiety that (for Emerson) is mainly concerned with not following the dusty intellectual traditions of Europe. When Thoreau says that he crosses the tracks "like a cart-path in the woods," he suggests that both railroad and cart-path are the paths of others. Thus, he produces the image of a perpendicular personal trajectory, set in opposition to the mass trajectory of the Fitchburg commuters. While his neighbors are "on hand when the bell rings" (77), conditioned by the temporal rhythms of "railroad time," Thoreau is self-consciously and explicitly choosing to go in precisely the opposite direction.

It is easy to argue that the railroad is the "beaten path" *par excellence*; that tracks are the "perfect symbol" of fate and destiny, which ("obviously") act as a foil to Thoreau's imperative to "keep your own track." But we should remember three things before we fully accept this reading. The first is that in crossing the tracks, Thoreau was not forging his own path but following an *actual* cart-path that ran behind his cabin. Second, even if Thoreau *were* forging his own path, his footsteps are as much a part of creating the ruts of conformity as the path he is crossing. Third, and most important, Thoreau's "own path" was quite often the railroad causeway itself.

The causeway was his primary walking route between his home at Walden and his "Texas Home" in Concord, built just west of the Concord depot on the railroad right-of-way. Referring to the 20th-century vogue for walking abandoned causeways, Stilgoe tells us that average Americans "know a gentle walk when they walk it, and railroad rights-of-way, usually almost dead level, make for relaxing walking indeed" (*Train Time* 30). The material

transformation of the landscape outlasts the "proper use" of the grade, and even the visible presence of rails and sleepers which, long overgrown and "bewildered," still provide a flat surface that affords "easy" walking. Thoreau was well aware of this in the 1840s and -50s, when he walked the causeway between Concord and Walden almost daily for over a decade.[75] Simply skimming through his *Journal*, it is striking how often he mentions causeway walks. Multiple entries consist simply of the two words, "Up railroad," following a timestamp (e.g. 351; 378; 495).

In fact, Thoreau calls the railroad "our pleasantest and wildest road. It only makes deep cuts into and through the hills—on it are no houses nor foot travellers. The travel on it does not disturb me. The woods are left to hang over it—Though straight it is wild in its accompaniments—all is raw edges" (qtd. in Maynard 108). Unlike the economic thoroughfare of the canals along the Merrimack River, which must be abandoned before they can provide Thoreau the type of isolation his trip requires, the Fitchburg causeway gives Thoreau access to the wild well before "bewilderment" begins to take effect. This re-organization of the spatial order—a flat grade cutting through the woods, with "wildness" on both sides, and an absence of homes and pedestrians--is as much "the railroad" as the

[75] The "easy walkability" of the graded causeway aligns *Walden* generically with a heterogeneous collection of works that are also indebted to this affordance. As in Thoreau, the "art of walking" is entangled with Stilgoe's "gentle walk" when the protagonists of the coming-of-age film *Stand By Me* follow the local tracks to find a dead body; when the survivors of AMC's zombie show *The Walking Dead* follow abandoned railroad tracks in their post-apocalyptic efforts at survival; and when everyday hikers, bikers, and runners utilize the re-appropriated paths created by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. It is important to note that the railroad connects these texts, films, and TV shows through its *affordances,* not through any expressive symbolism. In *Train Time,* Stilgoe tells the story of "[h]ikers and short-cutting teenagers [who] made a narrow footpath down the center of [the abandoned train tracks in Wampatuck State Park], almost precisely halfway between the locations of the long-gone rails" (27). Even though the tracks themselves were long gone, and these hikers had no conscious knowledge that they were interacting with a "railroad space," *their leg muscles still responded to the gentle grade of the causeway.* This shows that railroad infrastructure is capable of asserting its agency on human walkers through embodied affordances *even when it has lost the capacity to exert itself through expressive symbols.* In Chapter 3 I will argue for a theory of genre that acknowledges not just intertextual generic lineages, but also the ways that particular objects encourage the recurrence of particular interactions (like walking the railroad tracks) that have "genre-like effects" on our stories.

locomotive. Thoreau exploits both the easy access to Concord afforded by the causeway and the vast potential for exploration afforded by its close spatial relationship with trees, plants, and animals. He notes a "female white ash near railroad" (48) and sees "the first wild-rose . . . on the west side of the railroad causeway" in 1851 (57); in 1852 he finds "the first bee of the season on the railroad causeway, also a small red butterfly" (120) and then hears the first pine warbler of the year (129), as well as martins singing from their artificial boxes (145); in 1854 he discovers that crickets make different "creaks" depending on whether they are on the causeway or a dry pasture (272); in 1856 he follows rabbit tracks leading from the snow covering the railroad (353). Thoreau is caught in a nexus of previous paths, drawn down the easy familiarity of the railroad grade only to be sidetracked by a new path, a new story, of rabbit tracks in the snow—a path that he will both transform and "help keep open," at least until the snow melts, by adding his own human footprints.

Whenever Thoreau walked westward from his cabin, he quickly reached the causeway, and each time he approached this junction he had a choice. Often, he turned north, and walked along the tracks, through the Deep Cut, to the Concord depot and the town center. But in the moment following the railroad poem he doesn't; this time he crosses the tracks like a "cart-path in the woods." Again, the urge to treat this as a dismissal of the power of the train is palpable, but this urge falsely suggests that a "cart-path" is "natural" while simultaneously reducing it to the ontological equivalent of "nothing." But a cart-path also acts upon consciousness, encouraging eyes to "look both ways," ears to perk up, heads to turn, attuned to the possibility of carts. The tenor of footsteps would change if one were to step onto the relatively flat and clear space of a cart-path from the thicket of the woods. Most of the time, however, Thoreau approached this imagined cart-path from the *real* cart-path

that passed behind his cabin. In any case, the metaphoric link between train tracks and cart-paths should remind us that paths are always created by modes of transportation, and that different modes of transportation produce different kinds of paths with different affordances, and unique residues of affect.

Coming from Concord, after a long night in town, Maynard tells us that Thoreau "followed the tracks before finding his way by instinct down the cart path in the rear of his Walden house (68). In practice, then, the causeway is different from the cart-path, where "instinct" kicks in (presumably he is also able to relax a bit, no longer keeping his ears alerted to the possibility of an "invisible bolt"). But there is a third kind of path created by transportation infrastructure that Thoreau also follows. Unlike the "woodland paths" where his feet find their way by instinct, and the "wild" causeway where he comes face-to-face with plants and animals, highways and roads destroy his relationship with nature: "You no longer hear the whip-poor-will, nor regard your shadow, for here you expect a fellow-traveller. You catch yourself walking merely. The road leads your steps and thoughts alike to the town. . . . You are no longer in place. It is like conformity—walking in the ways of men" (*Journal* 51-3). An easy reading of Thoreau's decision to cross the railroad tracks suggests that "conformity" aligns with the causeway, but here Thoreau associates conformity with the country road, not the right-of-way where he seldom encounters other foot-travelers. Unlike the road, Thoreau's attention on the causeway is highly attuned to the sounds and sights of nature—of rabbits and birds and butterflies and blackberries and wild-rose.

Even if the causeway *were* "nothing more" than a cart-path, the fact that he could follow it in either direction—and often did—even if he does not at this point, would create residues of affect, a brief pull, a "what if" moment, or a memory. When he crosses similar

paths in *The Maine Woods*, this affective shift manifests itself as shock. Remembering Terranova's insight, we should be very careful before we accept the idea that Thoreau's footsteps over this "cart-path" are either empirically or poetically no different than his footsteps would have been over this same geographical space in 1840, before the railroad had transformed the landscape. If footsteps organize and traverse places through narrative, those footsteps are always already moving through a particular space, shaped and re-shaped both by infrastructure and by the footsteps that preceded us.

The Universe Answers to Our Conceptions

The railroad, then, is an important actor insofar as it mediates Thoreau's footsteps and affords Thoreau novel opportunities to practice the art of walking. But Thoreau is also a writer, and as a walker/writer he has a particularly sharp attunement to the entanglements of bodies and stories. I want to "switch tracks" here, so to speak, and formulate an argument about how Thoreau engages in rhetorical and metaphorical strategies that deliberately destabilize any attempt to reduce the railroad (or anything else) to one particular "meaning." Instead, Thoreau attempts to increase "perspectives" on the railroad by engaging in playful metaphoric shapeshifting. Attention to this model of interpretation highlights the ways that the railroad inevitably re-shapes not just the itinerary of our footsteps, but the very percepts and concepts through which we understand reality, while simultaneously precluding the possibility of technological determinism by acknowledging the role of human poetic agency in this dialogic dance of worldmaking.

Perhaps the reason that Leo Marx's critical move to seek out the underlying "hidden" meaning of the railroad in *Walden* sits so comfortably with readers is that it aligns nicely

with Emerson's Transcendentalist theory of correspondences—a philosophical relationship between people, words, and things that is often axiomatically ascribed to Thoreau.[76] In *Nature*, Emerson outlines a theory of correspondence between words, facts, and meaning:

1. Words are signs of natural facts.
2. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.
3. Nature is the symbol of the spirit. (10)[77]

The word "railroad," in this theory, signifies the material railroad. The material railroad, what Emerson would call the "natural fact," is in turn emblematic of a deeper spiritual fact. It is the poet's job to see through the phenomenal flux of material reality to the unchanging noumenal truths of which matter is emblematic. If the Emerson of *Nature* understands the relationship between "natural facts" and "spiritual facts" as emblematic, with the line of signification going in one direction, Thoreau is more attuned to the complex ways that

[76] It is generally accepted that Thoreau simply "enacts" Emerson's philosophical theory of correspondences, and thus that he accepts its ultimate goal of transparency. However, we have already seen that Thoreau prides himself on the attainment of obscurity and is self-consciously engaged in a *creative poetics* that reads facts as the foundations for imaginative play; he is fundamentally *not* interested in the hermeneutic exegesis of natural facts. As we will see, where Emerson believes that "true" concepts unlock the secrets of the universe, Thoreau remains skeptical, noting that concepts alter our perceptions of the universe. Thoreau's poetic activity is not an "uncovering" of pre-existing truths but a self-consciously playful act of translation and invention. He wields this power with gusto, but never without the caveat that each act of interpretation not only opens the material object up to new meanings, but also closes it down by highlighting some attributes at the expense of others.

[77] Emerson's "theory of correspondences" is directly indebted to the "doctrine of correspondences" proposed by 18th-century Swedish mystic and philosopher Emmanuel Swedenborg. Emerson dedicated a chapter to Swedenborg in *Representative Men.* Here, his description of Swedenborg's doctrine is almost identical to the theory of correspondences he outlines in *Nature*: "He fastens each natural object to a theologic notion:—a horse signifies carnal understanding; a tree, perception; the moon, faith; a cat means this; an ostrich, that . . ." (116). By the time Emerson wrote *Representative Men* in 1850, fifteen years after the publication of *Nature,* he had revised his own theory of correspondences dramatically. Here, Emerson challenges Swedenborg by arguing that "[i]n nature, each individual symbol plays innumerable parts. . . . The central identity enables any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being" (117). In "The Poet," Emerson says "all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance. . . . Mysticism consists in the mistake of an accidental and individual symbol for a universal one" (260). By "The Poet," published in 1844, the year before Thoreau moved to Walden Woods, had publicly re-theorized the relation between language and things that he famously developed in *Nature*. And yet, it is still to *Nature* that we tend to look for the philosophical doctrine underlying *Walden.*

"natural facts" and "spiritual facts" shape each other. A look at the ways both poets "uncover" the meaning of interconnected networks of rails suggests that Emerson's belief in the transparency of material meaning is at odds with Thoreau's playful poetic remediation of material affordances.

Emerson outlined his theory of the "true" meaning of the railroad in "The Young American," a lecture delivered before the Mercantile Library Association in Boston the same year the Fitchburg Railroad began running through Concord:

> Not only is distance annihilated, but when, as now, the locomotive and the steamboat, like enormous shuttles, shoot every day across the thousand various threads of national descent and employment, and bind them fast in one web, an hourly assimilation goes forward, and there is no danger that local peculiarities and hostilities should be preserved. (352)

Focusing on the iron rails that materially connect different points of the country as well as the intermodal transportation networks that "bind" the nation "fast in a web," he metaphorically projects the connections created by transportation infrastructure onto the abstract idea of social unity. On the verge of the Civil War, Emerson is optimistic that this vast "web" of iron rails will "hold the Union staunch." By metaphorically conflating social unity with the material affordances of the transcontinental rail network (the connection of iron rails, the networked movement of bodies and goods), Emerson's claim becomes natural and "obvious" to the extent that it becomes infused in the hard "thinginess" of iron and wood, of circulating bodies and goods.[78]

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[78] This was not a novel interpretation of the emerging network culture of the railroad, and was so widespread that it could be called a cliché. Interestingly, it assumes a seamless connection between different railroad lines that didn't exist. All over the United States, and especially in the South, track gauges varied,

Thoreau follows this intermodal transportation network outside national boundaries and across the Atlantic, tracking the Massachusetts ice trade's transfer of Walden ice chips into glasses of water in Calcutta: "thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well" (192). In a certain sense, this is true. The ice harvested in 1847 from Walden Pond went to twenty-eight different cities in the United States alone, including Washington D.C., New Orleans, Savannah, Key West, Philadelphia, and Mobile. Abroad,

> 258 vessels carried ice . . . about 23,000 tons were carried in 95 ships to foreign ports. As well as Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, cargoes were sent to more than half a dozen West Indian islands, Hong Kong, Ceylon, Whampoa (China), Rio de Janeiro, Batavia (now Jakarta), and three Cuban ports . . . [and] Liverpool. (Weightman 171-2)

The intermodal, international transportation network, and the ice trade that carried frozen blocks of Walden Pond through that network, allow Thoreau to make cosmopolitan claims which, like Emerson's, depend upon the material affordances of the transportation network that begins with the refrigerated railroad cars that stopped at Walden Pond in the winter of 1846-7. But while Thoreau exercises poetic agency in his rhetorical move to transform *Walden* into a cosmopolitan hub, Emerson denies his own poetic agency and suggests a causal relationship between transport networks and social unity. Emerson's attribution of agency solely to the network itself is a necessary move if he hopes to uncover the inherent "spiritual fact" of the railroad—a spiritual fact that may be revealed by the poet, but that

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making cross-state travel difficult and discontinuous. This metaphor was also not limited to the United States. Paul Youngman chronicles this metaphoric interpretation as one of the primary "meanings" of the railroad in 19th-century German realist novels.

exists prior to, and apart from, the poet's act of creation. This is not the case for Thoreau, who relishes his capacities for creating meaning through poetic extravagance.[79]

Looking back on Emerson's highly conventional metaphoric appropriation of iron rails, the cause and effect relationship appears tenuous.[80] But this is precisely the relationship between matter and meaning that is exemplified in Leo Marx's reliance on the abstraction of "the machine." Appropriations of material objects through the act of metaphoric or narrative remediation "stick" because they recursively infuse themselves into the material thing, thus back-forming their own evidence. The two contradictory claims for social unity and for cosmopolitan internationalism both project networks of iron rails, welded together across the country, onto abstract concepts that then gain substance through their new association with the material infrastructure they have become metaphorically entangled with. The evidence for these claims lies not in theory but in matter—the movement of material bodies, the connection of iron rails, the fact that the locomotive is, quite literally, a machine.

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[79] "Extravagance" comes from Thoreau. In *Walden* he (extravagantly) re-defines extravagance as *extra-vagance.* "Extravagance" can be broken down into the Latin *extrā,* meaning "outside," and *vagārī,* meaning "wander." The first (obsolete) meaning listed in the OED is: "That wanders out of bounds; straying, roaming, vagrant" ("Extravagance"). Thoreau is clearly invested in "wandering out of bounds" as a walker. Both in crossing the causeway like a "cart-path in the woods" *and* in following the causeway in search of wildness, he exhibits acts of transgression: he does not ride the railroad like he "should," but rather roams beyond its prescriptive uses and experiences new kinds of embodied encounter. But Thoreau also strives for extravagance explicitly in terms of language: "I fear chiefly lest my *expression* may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced" (209, italics added). First, then, he wants to "jump the fence" of Concord and live a "life in the woods." But second, he wants to wander beyond the "brute facts" of experience via *extravagant expression* in order to reach an *adequate truth.* This means constantly pushing both words and things toward new meanings (as he does here via creative etymology). Thoreau wants to *wander out-side of prescribed boundaries, both experiential and linguistic.* The importance of this point will become clear as I develop my theory of how Thoreau uses a combination of embodied experimentation and "wandering metaphors" as his primary tool for producing meaning both in his time at Walden and in *Walden* itself.

[80] Though we should note that similar democratic claims of social unity tend to be made with each new advancement in communications and transportation technology. For example, Marshall McLuhan on television: "The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village" (*The Gutenberg Galaxy* 36); or John Perry Barlow on the Internet: "We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth" (par. 7).

The reflexive self-evidence of the material symbol can be traced back to Emerson's treatment of the firmness of rocks in *Nature*: "the moral influence of nature upon every individual is that amount of truth which it illustrates to him. Who can estimate this? Who can guess how much firmness the sea-beaten rock has taught the fisherman?" (17). Emerson argues that the material properties of natural objects "illustrate" moral principles through which humans learn how to be in the world. James Geary bears out Emerson's claim, using modern cognitive theory to both support and rethink the relationship between sea-beaten rocks and fishermen. Geary studies the way in which "physiological facts insensibly shape our beliefs and behavior" through the psychological concept of priming:

> Priming posits that, through a process of metaphorical association, the physical profoundly impacts the psychological, and vice versa. Sensations, objects, and experiences, repeatedly occur together with internal states, thereby becoming linked in our minds. . . . In priming, the physical fuses with the psychological. (96)

The material interactions between solid rocks and crashing waves, in Emerson's example, suggest metaphoric applications that extend the physiological concept of firmness to the abstract idea of emotional, intellectual, or social durability. The two concepts become metaphorically entangled, as the abstract concept of firmness depends upon the steely nature of the firm rock, while the firm rock provides a self-evident reflexive proof that patient, unwavering durability can withstand the constant beating of ocean waves—or any other force a sea-beaten fisherman (or Transcendentalist) might encounter in life.

While the Emerson of *Nature* understands this "priming" relationship in much the same way as Marx—as an uncovering of the "perfect symbol"—Thoreau has a more

complex understanding of the relationship between words and things, viewing them as engaged in a dialogic relationship, each transforming the other. For example, Thoreau tells us in *Walden* that "the universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us" (66). On first glance, this seems to be a straightforward Emersonian reading of the "moral lessons" learned by railroad tracks. The semi-colon suggests that the second clause is a simple reformulation of the first, locating the lesson about the universe and conceptions in the material railroad tracks, much as Emerson locates the lesson of durability in the sea-beaten rock. But this is hardly the case. Instead, the second clause is an *example* of the universe answering to our conceptions. The perception of life as a "fixed track" is made possible by the conception and construction of the fixed tracks that *actually* traverse Walden Woods (and the rest of the world). The Massachusetts ice trade conceived of the straight and level track that could take commuters (and ice) quickly and efficiently between Boston to Fitchburg, and then the Boston-Fitchburg line transformed the landscape in order to actualize this conception. Once materialized, the straight and unswerving tracks wormed their way into 19th-century brains, and became the raw material through which Emerson, Thoreau, and others developed metaphors that shaped new perceptions—perceptions of our movement through life, for example. As David Rothenberg explains this phenomenon, "what we saw in it it has become."[81]

[81] Following Heidegger, Rothenberg argues that our tools realize our intentions in material form, and in this realization transform the landscape: "A strip mine that has denuded a hillside upon the idea that the significance of the site is the coal which the trees and grasses kept hidden before. . . . What we saw in it it has become" (16). This is simply another way of saying that the universe answers to our conceptions. The strip mine is a self-fulfilling prophecy that begins by focusing all of our attention on the presence of minerals in the dirt, at the expense of every other quality and component of the landscape. Once we transform the landscape (by building a strip mine), the "meaning" of the hillside as a provider of resources appears self-evident and blocks the opportunity for further poetic action (in the Heideggarian theory of "enframement," at least). Speaking of the clock, Rothenberg notes that minute and second hands extend our "dream of a regular temporal pattern" into the universe (16-7). First we dream of this temporal pattern, then we build the machine to mark this temporal

This seems to suggest that the railroad has limited Thoreau's ability to conceive of his movement through life as anything other than a fixed track, but Thoreau is too alert to become trapped within the limitations of any one metaphor. He follows the potentially enframing metaphor with the antidote: "let us spend our lives in conceiving then." Perhaps Thoreau means that we should reconceive the "laid track" by moving off the tracks—maybe even by crossing them like a "cart-path in the woods." Or, instead of sitting on the commuter train, one could exploit the new spaces created by this infrastructure as the "most wild path" for walking. Or perhaps we need to reconceive of a trackless movement through life—on a footpath, or a river, or deep in the Maine wilderness. In any case, it is clear that Thoreau is positing a dialogic relationship between concepts and percepts that anticipates Semir Zeki's work in cognitive theory 150 years later: "[i]t is not as if perceptions lead to abstractions and concepts, but the other way round: we form our percepts from abstractions and concepts" (21). According to Zeki, the brain "modifies concepts in the light of new experience" (24),

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pattern, and then once we experience our dream as a (now self-evident) reality, the machine transforms our intentions, our desires, and our very sensory experience of time itself.

For Heidegger, in "The Question Concerning Technology," this feedback loop transforms the world into a "standing reserve" by reducing the complexity of the material world to a single meaning that is then ratified by "modern technicity." The hillside, for Heidegger, is no longer a polyvalent entity but now merely a stockpile, good for one thing: the extraction of coal. Every time we add technology to a landscape, then, we "enframe" it, foreclosing the poetic possibilities that *used to* exist (the hillside as playground, as nature preserve, as picturesque landscape). Thus, Heidegger perpetuates a strict Nature/Culture divide that dreams of a lost pre-technological "golden age" when we could still encounter the hillside "as it really is." This is at odds with Thoreau, who continues to create poetic meaning out of technologically mediated landscapes. In doing so, Thoreau denies the railroad infrastructure the right to "enframe" Walden Woods even as he acknowledges its alteration of the landscape.

For Rothenberg, the feedback loop creates a perpetual cycle of intention and desire—we transform the world based on our desires (for a regular temporal order, for instance), and then those transformations lead to further desires, further possibilities for "progress" or human extension. Perhaps even more to the point, Rothenberg argues that, "nature itself changes as a result of different techniques that both extend human reach and offer new metaphors for the description of the surrounding, enveloping, present world and the forces which underlie it" (8). We cannot separate the (intrusive) railroad from the (pastoral) woods in Rothenberg's eyes precisely because the nature of Walden Woods has changed in the wake of the railroad. And one of the ways that "nature" changes (and changes *us*), according to both Rothenberg and Thoreau, is by supplying us with new metaphors.

while concepts form the structures through which we perceive the world. In light of this cognitive support for Thoreau's recognition of the dialogic relationship between concepts and percepts, his imperative to "spend our lives in conceiving" amounts to nothing less than fighting against the inevitable perceptual limitations of any one concept.

But in our rush to abandon the railroad, let's not forget that Thoreau here uses its material affordances to posit a theory about the relationship between concepts and the universe. The existence of straight tracks from which we cannot swerve plays upon his imagination, suggesting through metaphoric projection that life itself is an unswerving track. In this paradoxical passage, the materialized conception of unswerving tracks is projected onto the abstract conceptual metaphor, "Life is a Journey," thus priming Thoreau's poetic imagination and potentially enframing the journey itself—were it not for the imperative to spend our lives in reconceiving. The track is laid for us if we can't think our way back out of the projected abstraction that created the track in the first place.

The metaphor echoes an earlier passage in *Walden* in which Thoreau suggests that we "spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails" (63). As Ron Balthazor points out, "'thrown off the track' equates us with the train" (and, we should add, equates the train with "Nature"). The metaphor also uses the locomotive to suggest a healthy approach to one's life—a poetic affordance of the railroad that contradicts its symbolic reduction to an incursion upon the pastoral life within the Machine/Garden schema. As Balthazor continues, "nothing in Nature is as deliberate as a rail, and in an inversion of the metaphor, the humblest, most friable bits of Nature throw us off. Trains are not disturbed by such insignificance—minds are" (165). Here, it is not the fixed nature of the unswerving track that shapes Thoreau's thinking but the

deliberate direction (and weightiness) of the locomotive—as a Natural thing—that provides a model for how to live. Railroad tracks, as a basis for the metaphoric re-organization of concepts, are both potentially enframing ("the track is laid for us") and potentially liberating (if we learn how to keep a straight, deliberate, heavy track and not be "thrown off" by minutiae). The railroad creates both the track of life and *the very possibility* of being "thrown off the track." Thoreau exhibits an awareness that the metaphors he draws from the railroad are both constructed and natural, are both imposed upon him from the outside and shaped through his own acts of *poiesis*.

Thoreau offers a third reading of how the railroad primes us to experience life in particular ways: "I watch the passage of the morning cars with the same feeling that I do the rising of the sun, which is hardly more regular" (76). On the one hand, he acknowledges that the clockwork schedule of the train has reshaped his understanding and experience of temporality—his "feelings" for the railroad and the sun have merged and now the sun is "hardly more regular" than the train. In fact, the sun is *less* regular. The sun rises and sets at slightly different times every day, and dramatically different times throughout the year. If he watches the early train with the "same feeling" as he does the rising sun, then he has already allowed the world to conform to a conception that he had no part in creating—natural temporal rhythms now appear to conform to clockwork and train schedules. "Regularity" becomes synonymous with "punctuality," or the ability to set your clock by the railroad. The new temporal order has made the sun appear "off." Thoreau is aware of the intrusion of railroad time upon his own temporal patterns, lamenting: "if the enterprise were as innocent as it is early!" It is not innocent at all. Its lack of innocence has nothing to do with pollution, industrial corruption, or class warfare in this case, but with the ways that "railroad time" has

reshaped the world in its own image. This train may be "petty"—its destination may be Boston instead of heaven[82]—but it has the power to usurp the sun as timekeeper. It has redefined the meaning of "morning"—something that Thoreau will use to great advantage elsewhere in *Walden*.

Wandering Metaphors We Live By

Thoreau is hyper-aware of the nonhuman agency evinced by an object's ability to "prime" us and he is equally attuned to the poet's capacity for manipulating metaphors and thus transforming reality. He is willing to allow the railroad to play upon his brain to a certain extent, but he also develops an important rhetorical strategy designed to intertwine his poetic agency with the poetic agency of the landscape. A quick detour to his famous bean-field will help to elucidate.

After devoting pages to his bean-field, Thoreau tells us that he doesn't grow beans to eat. In fact, he doesn't eat beans at all. Rather, he works on his field "as some of us must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day" (105). This echoes an earlier journal entry: "He is the richest who has most use for nature as *raw material* of tropes and symbols with which to describe life" (qtd. in Anderson 99). Thoreau makes it clear that beans are never just beans, and if he is searching out the raw material of new tropes and symbols, he is also bringing to that raw material a rich metaphoric framework that will destabilize the bean-field through metaphoric "shapeshifting." Thoreau

[82] The full passage: "I watch the passage of the morning cars with the same feeling that I do the rising of the sun, which is hardly more regular. Their train of clouds stretching far behind and rising higher and higher, going to heaven while the cars are going to Boston, conceals the sun for a minute and casts my distant field into the shade, a celestial train beside which the petty train of cars which hugs the earth is but the barb of the spear" (76). This is the scene that Leo Marx interprets in terms of Emersonian transparency.

claims he "was determined to know beans (104)," but not in any objective sense; he wants to "know" these beans by learning what tropes can be drawn from them, and how his stock of tropes can transform them.

In five pages, his work becomes a "Herculean labor"; worms, woodchucks, and cool days become his "enemies," while the beans themselves become warriors, going "forward to meet new foes"; he later locates his bean-field as the "connecting link between wild and cultivated fields," while his hoe turns into a Swiss horn and Thoreau himself into a Swiss herdsman; the dirt becomes the "ashes of unchronicled nations"; the plants of the garden become actors in the Trojan War, and one even becomes Hector himself. Eventually he turns back to the beans themselves to complain that "most men I do not meet at all, for they seem not to have time; they are busy about their beans" (100-7).

This is a long (though incomplete) list of the various forms the beans and the bean-field take in Thoreau's imagination within a short space, and it is indicative of the kind of free-flowing metaphoric play that destabilizes *Walden*'s material reality. This is an example of what Ron Balthazor calls a "wildly shifting metaphor" (164), which we find throughout the text—shifting through various metaphoric structures so quickly that we are unable to find solid symbolic ground to stand on. This is also the type of metaphoric play that Marx refers to as Thoreau's "sustained ambiguity," which leads to the "double image" of the railroad, making the project of uncovering the "true" meaning of *anything* in Thoreau a dangerous one.

I am suggesting that this is a deliberate rhetorical strategy designed to short-circuit both the potential of matter to enframe our conceptual organization through priming and the power of the "perfect symbol" to enframe the complexity of the material object through a

back-formed “obviousness.” This epistemological strategy of the “wandering metaphor” anticipates Freud, who was also aware of the power of the metaphor to disguise its own metaphoricity and infuse itself into the object. He, too, came up with the rhetorical strategy of the wandering metaphor: “In psychology we can describe only with the help of comparisons. This is nothing special, it is the same elsewhere. But we are forced to change these comparisons over and over again, for none of them can serve us for any length of time” (qtd. in Draaisma 8). For Freud, the danger of any metaphor lies precisely in its “correctness” —in the possibility of mistaking the metaphor for reality. In order to draw out the irreducible complexity of reality, we must periodically shift our metaphors. Thoreau engages in this process, but at a rapid speed.

In *Metaphors We Live By,* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson echo Semir Zeki in arguing that “our concepts structure what we perceive.” The metaphors we use to organize the world engage in a recursive feedback loop that shapes our perceptions. In their work on metaphor, they argue that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life. . . . Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). If metaphor allows us to understand and experience one thing in terms of another (5), then being aware of the metaphors that shape our conceptual systems increases our capacity to affect both those metaphors and that reality. Lakoff and Johnson set forth an alternative to both “objectivism,” which posits access to neutral, objective, facts, and “subjectivism,” which runs the risk of relativism and social construction. They call this third option the “Experientialist Approach,” and it consists of four strategies:

1) Developing an awareness of the metaphors we live by and an awareness of where they enter into our everyday lives and where they do not.

2) Having experiences that can form the basis of alternative metaphors.

3) Developing an "experiential flexibility."

4) Engaging in an unending process of viewing your life through new alternative metaphors. (233)

Thoreau engages all four steps simultaneously in the bean-field episode. He is certainly aware of the metaphors that he lives by, as his desire to hoe beans for the sake of "metaphors and tropes" suggests. He explicitly states that growing a bean-field is an attempt to create an experience "that can form the basis of alternative metaphors," or, as he says, create tropes that can be used by the "parable-makers." The parable he eventually draws out of his bean-field transforms the abstract concepts of "sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, [and] innocence" into food that he must harvest through toil and "manurance" (106). His "experiential flexibility" is in full force here, as he refuses to allow himself (or his readers) to get locked up in any one metaphoric structure. And finally, we see Thoreau "engaging in an unending process of viewing [his] life through new alternative metaphors." He is not content to merely be a bean-grower; he wants to be Hercules and Antaeus and a Swiss herdsman as well. The bean-field is never stable or "objective"; by shifting through alternative metaphors, Thoreau does not allow us to lay claim to its "true meaning." Instead, he supplies a number of possibilities in quick succession, many of them in sharp contradiction to each other.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that "new metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and, therefore, new realities" (235). As we have already seen, the new objects and spatial relationships of the railroad are not only capable of creating new metaphors, but do so inevitably through priming. Thoreau's treatment of the railroad is the same as his treatment of the bean-field. He mines it for parables and tropes, and re-imagines it through a

stockpile of parables and tropes drawn from Greek mythology, from German folk tales, and from New England history. If Thoreau's metaphoric appropriations of the railroad at times provide evidence of the "machine in the garden," we need to be conscious of Thoreau's ability (and desire) to shift metaphoric frameworks without warning, to set the steely nature of the material world into flux through metaphoric re-imaginings, through perceptual play, and through the deliberate disruption of self-evident conceptual schemata. Sometimes the railroad intrudes upon a pastoral reverie; sometimes our attempts to live as deliberately as a locomotive are "derailed" by a mosquito's wing. Leo Marx tells us that Thoreau is interested in "imaginative perception, of the analogy-perceiving, metaphor-making, mythopoeic power of the human mind" (264). But in noting this "mythopoeic power," he fails to note the fluid movement of the "wandering metaphor" that underlies it.

As with metaphors, literary interpretations of what the railroad "means" in Thoreau must be changed over and over again, for the metaphor of "the machine" can't make sense of the "wildest path," and the intrusion of capitalism can't capture the flowing lava-like formations in Deep Cut. The only way to uncover what the railroad "means" in *Walden* is to "follow the actors."[83] Thoreau followed blackberries and swallows to see what the railroad meant to them. We must follow Thoreau to see what the railroad means to him. I will now follow him into the Deep Cut.

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[83] Here, I follow Bruno Latour's imperative to "follow the actors": "Your task is no longer to impose some order, to limit the range of acceptable entities, to teach actors what they are, or to add some reflexivity to their blind practice. . . . [Y]ou have 'to follow the actors themselves', that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish" (*Reassembling* 11-2). It almost sounds as if he's talking specifically about Thoreau here.

Inside Deep Cut

Deep Cut,[84] the famous and vexing infrastructural space now filled with empty spray-paint cans and beer bottles and covered by a Highway 2 overpass, has long attracted attention from critics who attempt to uncover its symbolic signification. How are we to reconcile the fact that the most important moment of rebirth in the prototypical back-to-nature text takes place in the bowels of the industrial corridor? As Laura Dassow Walls suggests, if we begin with the assumption that Thoreau is escaping to "pure" nature, the railroad can only be a "violent intruder:

> Thoreau's vantage on nature is widely recognized; ironically, given the heavily socialized nature of the landscape, his house at Walden Pond has become an icon of the poet's escape to "pure" nature. This view leaves no room for the railroad except as a violent intruder, the counter-icon of modernism's despoliation of nature. Yet there it is, cutting through the cove across from Thoreau's house, a stone's throw away. . . . (105)

Read in this way, the "meaning" of the Deep Cut is straightforward:

> The Deep Cut is a wound inflicted upon the land by man's meddling, aggressive, rational intellect, and it is not healed until the book's climax, the resurgence of life in "Spring." . . . The event [the thawing of ice, sand, and clay in the railway causeway] provides this parable-maker with his climactic

[84] For a railroad to function properly, it requires a causeway with as gentle a grade as possible. For this reason, engineers must figure out ways to make undulating landscapes as flat and straight as they can. Some options include building bridges (over valleys), viaducts (over water), and tunnels (through mountains). Another strategy is called the "cut-and-fill." This technique is used when the tracks must pass through a landscape of small hills and valleys. It involves digging a passageway through the hills and then (usually) using the dirt to "fill" in the valleys. This creates an "embankment" that connects the cuts, and thus allows the train to move on a straight, flat, path, through an uneven landscape. In this case, the dirt that was removed from Deep Cut (located just northwest of Thoreau's cabin) was used to fill in Railroad Cove on the southwest corner of the Pond. This particular cut-and-fill, then, produced *two* distinct actors that have major roles to play in the world of *Walden.*

> trope: a visual image that figures the realization of the pastoral ideal in the age of machines. (Marx 260-1)

Deep Cut as a wound inflicted upon nature fits with Marx's dichotomy of Garden and Machine and, when combined with the cyclical and seasonal reading of *Walden* that is a perennial favorite with Thoreau scholars, this allows Marx to align Spring's "rebirth" with the "healing" power of Thoreau's poetic imagination. This reading suggests that Thoreau is attempting to merge nature and culture, to provide a poetic reconciliation that does away with the violence of Deep Cut. But such a project is profoundly unsatisfactory. Imagining that clayey formations oozing down the sides of a railroad cutting could somehow undo the violence of the industrial revolution (could "heal" the "wound") is delusional to say the least. It is here that Marx claims that Thoreau's physical location is of "no great moment." He argues that this scene removes the pastoral hope "from history, where it is manifestly unrealizable, and relocates it in literature, which is to say, in his own consciousness, in his craft, in *Walden*" (265). This suggests a solipsistic and constructivist Thoreau—replacing material reality with a linguistic representation—which is precisely what has given rise to the anti-Thoreau backlash that locates him as an ineffectual hermit protester who is out of touch with material and historical reality.

We want so desperately to place Thoreau in "nature," but the railroad always seems to get in the way. "Yet there it is"—not only cutting through the cove, but surrounding Thoreau on all sides. I propose a different reading of the Deep Cut that assumes that Thoreau's physical location *does* matter and that his reading of the clayey formations does not take the pastoral out of history, but rather uncovers and exploits novel affordances of a new historic space. In fact, the way he exploits this space is not even idiosyncratic.

Eight years earlier, in Britain, Hugh Strickland wrote in the *Proceedings of the Geological Society of London* that he regretted the "irrecoverable loss which science has experienced, in full advantage not having been taken of the valuable geological information, which has been exposed by the railway cuttings in different parts of England during the last ten years" (qtd. in Freeman 51). The same year, a grant of money was made to collect and preserve the geological information "which is now available in sections of the strata exposed in cuttings on the numerous railroads" (Freeman 52). Passengers were beginning to notice strata from the windows of trains moving through deep cuts, and engineers were becoming amateur geologists, sometimes commissioning studies of the rock strata themselves when they saw something interesting. Railway cuts transformed the discipline of geology. No longer a "gentlemanly" pursuit of wealthy aristocrats, geology started down the path toward professionalization. As an amateur hobby, no geologist could afford the kinds of massive excavations now being accidentally performed by railroad crews every day. But with this influx of new data, the British Association began to get new ideas about merging "science and industry" (61).

In addition, the information gathered through railway cuts was beginning to challenge diluvian theories, which claimed that marshes and bogs were created in the great flood, and to provide evidence to support theories of glacial land-ice. The Geological Survey from 1846 to 1854, precisely the time that Thoreau was studying his own local railroad cut, used cuts at the Yatton Station in Somerset, and erratic deposits between Alderley Edge and Manchester to support the argument for an ice age. Fossils were uncovered and analyzed, and land formation theories were challenged by the stratification of rocks discovered in railroad cuts.

As Freeman says, "[a]n extended knowledge of the earth was an inevitable by-product of the practical endeavour of railway-building" (65).[85]

As an amateur natural historian, Thoreau studied these geological strata as well, but in *Walden,* the "extended knowledge" produced by the cut lay elsewhere:

> Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a deep cut on the railroad through which I passed on my way to the village, a phenomenon not very common on so large a scale, though the number of freshly exposed banks of the right material must have been greatly multiplied since the railroads were invented. (197)

Indeed, across the Atlantic, the British Geological Society was frantically trying to document all of the freshly exposed banks. As it turns out, however, these banks were not merely "multiplied" through the invention of the railroad, but actively produced (and re-produced) by railroad construction and maintenance.

If we begin with the assumption that Thoreau is attempting to undo the violence of Culture on Nature, it is difficult to imagine why he would be exploring this artificial railroad space to begin with, or why he would feel comfortable telling us that "few phenomena gave me more delight" than hanging out inside the belly of the iron devil. If we begin by following Thoreau and paying attention to how he interacts with the railroad—just as Thoreau followed blackberries and swallows—we see that he loved the causeway, and especially the section that ran through Deep Cut, because of what it afforded him in terms of new opportunities for exploration. He walked the causeway because it was flat and easy (and "wild," with swallows

[85] Here we begin to see the connection between "setting the sand a-blowing" and Thoreau's investment in amateur geology.

and blackberries and wild nature overhanging it), and his attention was arrested by these magnificent formations that came into existence in the wake of industrial cutting. If anything, he was grateful for this “happy accident.”

When he was in the Deep Cut, he wasn’t thinking about violence and “wounds,” but about the 20-to-40-foot high bank that was full of “foliage” for a quarter of a mile on both sides, all springing up in one day of thaw—“what makes this sand foliage remarkable is its springing into existence thus suddenly” (197-8). In Marx’s incursion texts, the train comes upon the pastoral scene “suddenly,” meaning that it disrupts the idyll. Here we see the incursion of a different component of the machine ensemble bursting upon the scene “suddenly”—an eruption of “living earth” within the industrial corridor.

Because the sun hits one bank first, Thoreau is able to compare the two sides of the cut—one inert, and one full of “luxuriant foliage, the creation of an hour.” Standing in the “unnatural valley,” patterns of sunlight are shaped by the contours of the space. One bank is highlighted, coming alive with flows of foliage that Thoreau likens to the design of the maker himself. The other side is backlit, inert in the shade. The locomotive is nowhere to be found in this scene, and yet Thoreau is surely “consecrating” the railroad in poetry by exploiting the affordances of the cut. His wild, shifting rhetoric moves seamlessly from leafy lava to leaves themselves: “You find thus in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf” (198), moving into etymological studies of lobe and labor, shifting to the wings of birds and feathers, to the butterfly, to ice, to trees and back to leaves, and then to rivers, the ova of insects, and to towns and cities. And he concludes: “Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature. The Maker of this earth but patented a

leaf" (199).[86] The sands are no longer "a-blowing," but "a-flowing," and their movement remains important to the world of *Walden*. "There is nothing inorganic," he tells us. "The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit,—not a fossil earth, but a living earth" (199). Rather than using the strata to look at the dead past, Thoreau uses the flowing clay to look at the living present.

As it turns out, the Deep Cut is more intimately bound up in the "living earth" than Thoreau knew. As Thorson tells us:

> [B]efore excavation [in 1843], frost penetration on this hill would have been minimal, its melting would have been invisible, and no surface flow would have taken place. This is because everything was insulated, armored, and woven together by the surface litter and root mesh respectively. During construction, however, these organic horizons were stripped away and the deep subsoil was nakedly exposed to the elements. Additionally, the cold air of midwinter was channeled through the artificial canyon from both directions, enhancing the loss of heat from the ground. Under these conditions, the moist silt, sand, and clay froze downward to a depth of several

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[86] Here Thoreau, like Emerson, draws on Emmanuel Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences, directly alluding to one of Swedenborg's favorite examples of the leaf. Compare Thoreau's reverie in the Deep Cut to Emerson's note on Swedenborg in *Representative Men*: "In the old aphorism, nature is always self-similar. In the plant, the eye or germinative point opens to a leaf, then to another leaf, with a power of transforming the leaf into radicle, stamen, pistil, petal, bract, sepal, or seed. The whole art of the plant is still to repeat leaf on leaf without end . . ." (104). Thoreau was clearly as influenced by Swedenborg as Emerson was. However, Thoreau appears to be more interested in the wild connections Swedenborg allows him to make, tying many different entities together through playful metaphoric assemblages. Emerson—in *Nature,* but not by the time he writes "The Poet" and *Representative Men*—is more convinced by Swedenborg's argument that the natural world is an emblem of the spiritual world.

> feet. . . . [M]assive snowdrifts blown into the "wind-shadow" created by the excavated gap, and held in place by plants draped over the top by the root mesh . . . provided an additional source of water for the flowage yet to come. (280)

In short, this is part of an ecological system that has as much to do with the artificial cut of the railroad excavation as it does with natural phenomenon.

Thoreau suggests that these formations must be more common now that the railroads are making them visible, but in fact these formations are *created by* railroad infrastructure. In addition to producing the initial conditions during construction, railroad workers are invisibly present in these moments of reverie. Most cuts are inherently unstable and only last a few years "because the gravitational transfers lower the slope angle, thereby diminishing the power driving the process and fostering re-vegetation and stabilization." But in the case of the Deep Cut, the flowing sedimentation ends up clogging the railroad's drainage ditch and "therefore would have been removed as part of routine maintenance." Every year, the Fitchburg workers were forced to re-create the excavation in their clearing of the drainage ditch, "keeping the bank exposed and the sand flowing, year after year" (280-1). So when Thoreau pauses, also "year after year," to contemplate this "natural" phenomenon, which he ascribes to "the maker," he is actually indebted not only to the artificial space of the Deep Cut, but to the continued work of maintenance workers who produce this artwork annually. The "divine artist in his laboratory" morphs into a manual laborer cleaning out a drainage ditch.

The deeper we delve into Deep Cut, the more entangled it becomes with the ecologies of the Fitchburg Railroad. The "unnatural valley" funnels the wind, exposes the subsoil to the

elements, creates new sunlight and shade patterns, moves snowdrifts around and determines where and when they melt, and, of course, sets people like Thoreau "a-walking"—seducing him with the flat and easy and wild railroad grade. All of these acts of nonhuman agency come together when Thoreau finds himself enjoying the beauty of the sand formations at Deep Cut. Can we then pretend that this is the moment that the pastoral re-emerges in the age of the machine, or that it is the moment when Thoreau turns his back on history and physical location and "heals" the penetrating violence of the "rational" railroad? Or is this precisely the moment that Thoreau fronts *living* history, exploiting the novel affordances of railroad infrastructure, and taking advantage of the "higher uses" of this new space, rather than its "lower" "proper" use?[87]

Conclusion: Reading the Railroad with Thoreau

This all goes back to the simple question: "What's the railroad to me?" Though he came out of the Transcendentalist school, Thoreau's embodied engagement with the railroad allows us to think about material meaning in a much more complex and nuanced way than the Emersonian theory of correspondences. Thoreau does engage in the creation of symbols and metaphors, of course, but he is acutely aware of the power of those symbols to reinvest

[87] In speaking of "higher" and "lower" uses, I draw on Thoreau's discussion of the telegraph as an enormous Aeolian Harp in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*: "It was the telegraph harp singing its message through the country, its message sent not by men but by gods." As Thoreau explains: "So have all things their higher and their lower uses. I heard a fairer news than the journals ever print. It told of things worthy to hear, and worthy of the electric fluid to carry the news of, not of the price of cotton and flour, but it hinted at the price of the world itself and of things which are priceless, of absolute truth and beauty" (111-2). Incidentally, it was in the Deep Cut, where the wind was artificially funneled through the "unnatural valley," that Thoreau first noticed the "higher use" of the telegraph: "Yesterday and to-day the stronger winds of autumn have begun to blow, and the telegraph harp has sounded loudly. I heard it especially in the Deep Cut this afternoon, the tone varying with the tension of different parts of the wire" (*Journal* 81). Twenty years later, Charles Dickens plays upon the unique interactions of telegraph wires, human ears, and the artificial wind patterns produced by railroad cuts in his short ghost-story, "The Signal-Man": "[D]o but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires" (317).

themselves in the material reality and thus mediate our relationship with things. Lakoff and Johnson's work on embodied metaphor makes it clear that even these abstractions have a basis in embodied interactions, and as we see in Thoreau's interactions with both the bean-field and the causeway, he is acutely aware of the relationship between the body's sensory perceptions and the mind's conceptual worldmaking capacities.

The railroad's "meaning" here lies in its interrelational affordances. Its flat grade creates homes for blackberries and gives Thoreau an easy walking path. It mediates his footsteps. This affordance is then drawn upon when Thoreau suggests that it connects his home in Walden to his home in Concord. Its material presence becomes a symbol of the "middle ground" between the wilderness and civilization, but a rhetoric of footsteps preceded—and remains irreducible to—the production of the symbol. Thoreau's rhetorical strategy for destabilizing the potentially limiting effects of this act of remediation is to continually play with the "meaning" of the object—to experiment, to look beyond "proper uses" and to uncover novel affordances, both material and metaphorical.

Thoreau is not trying to slip out of reality or create a pastoral idyll away from, or even within, the industrial order, but is instead mining *everything* for tropes and parables. It is telling that Thoreau asked his publishers to remove the subtitle—"Life in the Woods"—from the second edition of *Walden*. Perhaps he realized his error. As Barksdale Maynard says, "*Life in the Woods*?—actually it was life on a tract cut over by Wyman, a stump-strewn area larger than eight football fields surrounded by a larger, patchwork forest" (74). And, we should add, a very important railroad line.

I begin with Thoreau partially for chronological reasons: he encounters the railroad in its early days, and he is one of the first great American writers to treat the railroad at length.

In addition, his role as a figurehead in the environmentalist movement has led to a remarkable effacing of the train in *Walden*, so that—even though the book is quoted in almost every railroad history—many readers ignore the presence of the train altogether. This makes it an exemplary study of how "following the actors" and paying attention to the nonhuman agency of infrastructure can radically transform our experience and interpretation of a text.

But there is another reason to open with Thoreau. As a poetic interpreter (i.e. worldmaker) he models a method of "reading the railroad" that informs the project as a whole. Thoreau's self-conscious experiments with the Fitchburg Railroad via a combination of embodied exploration and "wandering metaphor" evinces a nuanced poetics that refuses to delimit a clear boundary between "reality" and "representation," or between body and text. Thoreau's worldmaking practices take place in Walden and *Walden* simultaneously, and there is often no way to distinguish between the two: the affordances and constraints of infrastructural space, Thoreau's embodied exploration of that space, and his poetic extravagance in translating that space (and his experience) into literature, co-mediate each other at every step. From Buster Keaton and Jackie Chan's acrobatic invocations of "the real train" in Chapter 2, to the genre of "The Railroad Film" in Chapter 3, to Paul Theroux's simultaneous riding and writing of *The Old Patagonian Express* in Chapter 4, each chapter can be traced back to Thoreau's nuanced entanglement of trains, bodies, and stories.

The Mobile Gymnasium:
Cinematic Set-Pieces, Speeding Trains, and the Re-Visioning of Infrastructure

[W]ith more and bigger Westerns being made, the train came to the fore as a kind of mobile gymnasium, just made for stuntmen and all-out action. Stuntmen transferred from horses to trains, leapt from overhanging rocks, fought on the roofs and in the cabs of engines, chased each other from coach to coach, hung underneath and from the sides, leapt back onto their horses again, and generally had a merry old time.

— William K. Everson, "The Railroad in the Western"

For indeed, no one has yet determined what the body can do.

— Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*

Introduction: Mobile Gymnasiums and the Real

William Everson's refreshing take on the role trains played in the Hollywood Westerns of the 1920s and -30s appears, initially, to be so obvious as to be trivial. Who is surprised to see a Western hero running through a passenger car, or fighting on top of a speeding train, or tumbling down an embankment, or clinging to a side-ladder? At first glance, these moments in film history seem to be nothing more than a bit of spectacular fun. But Everson's observation forces us to reconsider the ontology of the filmic train as an actor that straddles the realities of fictional movie characters, Hollywood stunt-workers, film directors, and audiences. To think about playing on a gymnasium, we must consider the embodied capacities of the gymnasium itself, and thus are forced back to the relationship between moving trains and moving bodies. While film theorists tend to see in Western railroads encroaching capitalism, globalization, or the forward march of progress, Everson sees a wonderfully energetic playfulness, a love of bodily improvisation, and a celebration of running, jumping, grasping, and falling.

I propose that we take Everson seriously, and consider the implications of re-casting the train as a "Mobile Gymnasium." Trains don't always act as jungle gyms, but Everson

does offer a heuristic for getting "closer" to the embodied interactions that take place in a film, rather than immediately looking "through" the action on the screen in order to unveil what Laura Mulvey famously calls "the film behind the film."[88] In this chapter I look at two implications of this experimental approach to the filmic railroad:

1) Thinking the Mobile Gymnasium requires attention to the often overlooked actors and objects that comprise the railroad assemblage. When stuntmen leap or grab or swing or run, they are not interacting with "the train": they leap onto catwalks, they grasp luggage racks, they swing through windows, they run down aisles. Thinking the Mobile Gymnasium means paying theoretical attention to the specific embodied interactions that comprise a railroad set-piece as moments of emergent meaning.

2) The Mobile Gymnasium also requires that we rethink the ontology of the filmic railroad. The Mobile Gymnasium challenges theories of representation, symbolism, and image: famous silent-film stuntwoman Helen Holmes doesn't engage in fisticuffs on top of a second-order representation of a train; she fights on the sturdy support of the catwalk that lines the roof of a speeding railroad car. Buster Keaton doesn't ride on an image of a

[88] Mulvey argues that "the mass of mainstream film, and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy" (61). Mulvey is invested in breaking out of this "hermetically sealed world" by challenging the patriarchal codes upon which "voyeuristic phantasies" depend. I argue, on the contrary, that mainstream action cinema has *never* portrayed a "hermetically sealed world." While theories of filmic representation might produce a sense of separation between audience, screen, and reality, the Mobile Gymnasium highlights the permeable boundaries between worlds across which the affordances of objects and the capacities of the human body move constantly. In other words, instead of searching for a "more real" film lurking "behind" the mere "surface" of the mainstream film experience, the Mobile Gymnasium re-focuses our attention on that surface and allows the dance of the action set-piece to play upon our perceptual experience. In doing so, however, we do not sacrifice complexity or engage in a naïve celebration of "mere spectacle." Instead, we run into strange ontological entanglements that reveal all kinds of interpenetrating "worlds" (the historical world of the milieu, the world of the writer/director, the world of the set, the world of the diegesis, the world of the audience) all of which come into dialogic contact, and none of which is capable of subsuming or effacing the others, even while they engage in continuous co-mediation.

Image 6: ***Helen Holmes fights a train-robber on the catwalk of a freight train in*** **The Hazards of Helen Episode 13: Escape on the Fast Freight** ***(1915).***

Image 7: ***Buster Keaton poses in his most famous publicity photo for*** **The General** ***(1927).***

cowcatcher; he rides on the cowcatcher itself. The "reality" of these embodied interactions retain an affective force in the viewing experience even as they are translated, via film camera and celluloid, into "mere" plays of shadow and light. The Mobile Gymnasium requires an ontology of the filmic object that simultaneously recognizes the screen image, diegetic reality, and the embodied interactions that take place in front of the camera, without privileging one of these realities over the others.

When Spinoza famously claimed that "no one has yet determined what the body can do" in the 17th century, he did not mean to suggest that someone may *someday* determine what a body can do (71). He was not noting an empirical shortcoming, but making a metaphysical claim about the latent capacities housed in each and every body that exists—capacities that emerge through interactions with other bodies and cannot be exhausted by any descriptive list. This is not just true of human bodies but of cars, buildings, street signs, rocks, birds, and trains. We simply don't know everything that these objects are capable of. Novel capacities are always possible when actors enter into new situations, experience new encounters and interactions, and find themselves in new embodied positions within a milieu. In fact, Manuel DeLanda argues that this is precisely how we gain knowledge about entities: by "performing

interventions on them with the aim of forcing them to manifest their tendencies, or of getting them to interact with a variety of other entities so that they exhibit their full repertoire of capacities" (*Intensive Science* viii). Speculating about the novel capacities of both human bodies and nonhuman environments (and the two in conjunction)[89] is one of the many things that action cinema is very good at doing.

The cinematic set-pieces that fill action, Western, and slapstick movies anticipate both the Nonhuman Turn in general and speculative realism in particular through a long history of exploring, speculating about, and experimenting with the hidden capacities lurking in the bodies of humans and nonhumans alike. The set-piece has always already precluded the possibility of approaching filmic reality through theories of representation by virtue of what I see as the underlying metaphysical celebration of, and experimentation with, the inexhaustible and unpredictable agencies lurking within the filmic milieux. It is the set-piece's unabashed belief in the realism of everyday objects that Everson highlights in his metaphor of the Mobile Gymnasium.

While this is true of all set-pieces, there is something special about the train and train-spaces that invites this particular kind of embodied play. Michel Foucault famously calls the train "an extraordinary bundle of relations because it is something through which one goes, it is also something by means of which one can go from one point to another, and then it is also

[89] While "properties" properly belong to the innate "essence" of an entity, "capacities" and "tendencies" *always* entail a multiplicity of actors since they are not inherent in an individual but rather emerge via interaction. As DeLanda says, "a capacity to affect must always be coupled to a capacity to be affected" (viii). This means that, in affirmation of Spinoza's metaphysical claim, knowledge of an object's capacities is always partial, is only gained through experimentation and intervention, and is dependent upon those experiments and interventions. This is one of the reasons why the interobjective choreographies of cinematic set-pieces are so exciting: they reveal novel capacities with breath-taking speed and "*of-course*ness." In this exploration of interrelational capacities and tendencies as they emerge within both a milieu and a narrative, action films, slapstick comedies, and other genres that depend upon the spectacle of the set-piece perform valuable metaphysical work. This work is missed if we think of the fight scene or the dance scene or the comic pratfall as merely entertainment, or believe that the true value of a film lies only in its expressive "meaning."

something that goes by" (23). The Mobile Gymnasium highlights this "bundle of relations" by asking us to experience the filmic train as something that actors and characters run through, climb on top of, and try to leap on as it speeds by. The simultaneous experience of different movements, directions, and velocities (the speeding train, the running or falling body, the panning camera) heightens the dynamism of the set-piece and raises the affective stakes of bodies playing on jungle gyms. The sheer *variety* of spaces available to stunt-people on a speeding train—the catwalk, the side-ladder, the undercarriage, the cowcatcher, the locomotive, the coal tender, the passenger car, the dining car, the caboose, the boxcar, the water tower, the embankment, the vestibule—provides more options for play than an automobile or an airplane. The speed of the train, and its proximity to an urban environment complete with its own collection of sites available for interactive play (waiting platforms, guard arms, grade crossings, streets, bridges, buildings, tunnels, ticket offices, terminals) makes it a more versatile site than the cruise ship. As the examples below will show, the train affords an "extraordinary bundle of relations" indeed, and the cinematic set-piece is well equipped to exploit those relations; to take advantage of every component of the speeding jungle gym.

Parkour, the Cinematic Set-Piece, and the Re-Visioning of Zero Degree Architecture

But before I turn to the speeding train, a brief non-cinematic detour through the static train-spaces of the urban milieu will help me sketch out some preliminary thoughts about how the cinematic set-piece re-imagines the built environment as a vibrant actor rather than an inert backdrop. Below, we see a young man standing on the concrete wall that horseshoes a subway entrance stairwell at Chicago's Daley Plaza. His knees are slightly bent, his hands

hover in front of him for balance, and he eyes the opposite wall intently. The walls are about eight feet apart, what Donald Norman would call an "anti-affordance," designed to block pedestrians from falling into the stairwell.[90] The drop to the jagged right-angles of the steps below is serious, but not lethal. In contemplating the leap, this man transforms a safety feature into the material prerequisite for physical danger. Just before he jumps, Jeffrey L. Kidder snaps a photo, capturing the gaping chasm of empty space below the man, whose body is framed in the top left corner of the shot. "The designers of Daley Plaza never intended the structure to be used as a platform for jumping," says Kidder: "Walls meant to provide safety are used here as a catalyst for risk-taking" (234).

Image 8: ***A* traceur *prepares to leap over a stairwell leading to a C.T.A. subway concourse in Daley Plaza, Chicago.***

Below the man, framed near the center of the photograph, a sign reads: "C.T.A. Subway / Richard J. Daley Center / Concourse." In marking the way to the subway concourse the sign signifies the "proper use" of this urban space. It is part of a larger transportation infrastructure, a necessary hole opening up to the labyrinthine tunnels below the bustling cityscape, permitting the flow of human bodies from one infrastructural space (the sidewalk and street) to another, subterranean, space (the subway

[90] The term "anti-affordance" is a departure from J.J. Gibson's original work on affordances. Gibson defines an affordance as what the environment "*offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill" (127). I take this to mean that the walls are an affordance, insofar as they afford safety, but this can get clunky: "The walls afford *not* falling into the stairwell." For this reason, I have followed Norman and adopted "anti-affordance" and "constraint" for the sake of clarity.

concourse). But in Kidder's photograph this act of signification is nothing more than a footnote, a dramatic irony if we imagine that we, the viewer, know something the concourse sign does not: that in the act of protecting and directing the people of the city, the concourse entrance has inadvertently made possible—perhaps even encouraged—the impending leap. The sign plays no role in the jumper's state of affairs, and its presence in Kidder's photograph highlights its inability to completely control the flow of bodies within this infrastructural space. For this man, the sign, and the concourse to which it leads, are of no material importance. The narrow width of the walls, the space between them, the distance from the top of the wall to the bottom of the stairwell, and the steps below his soon-to-be airborne body are the salient actors in the scene.[91] This relation of bodies among bodies is captured by Kidder's photographic decision to highlight the space beneath the man's feet and thus reduce the man to one component within a larger ensemble of actors, instead of zooming in on the man's body and presenting this moment as a scene of merely human drama. To frame the photograph around the man's body would be to sacrifice the open space of the concourse stairwell, and thus to sacrifice the embodied vulnerability that emerges when the man's body is seen in relation to height, gravity, and sharp right angles.

[91] According to Bruno Latour, the concourse and the sign are "actants" in this scene, while the walls, the stairs, and the twenty-foot drop are the important actors. In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour defines actors as "*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference" (71). While the concourse sign itself doesn't make a difference to the jumper, the width of the walls determines the mechanics of his leap. "Actants" are simply actors that "have no figuration yet." While the sign doesn't "act" in the parkour drama, it might be the most important actor in the scene for a tourist, while the flatness of the walls and the depth of the chasm would become actants that do not affect the tourist's state of affairs. "Actor" and "actant" are therefore not ontological designations but descriptive categories that change depending on the "state of affairs." Latour's distinction is important insofar as it alerts us to the ways that components within an infrastructural space shift depending upon the "story" being told or the action being performed.

The young man is a *traceur*, practicing a combination of skateboarding without the skateboard, freestyle running, and martial arts called parkour.[92] According to the parkour community, practitioners eventually develop what is known as "PK Vision." Through practice, the built environment begins to "look" different. As Kidder tells us, PK vision is about "reimagining what the environment can afford" (245), meaning that this vision is not *prescriptive* (like the Daley Plaza subway sign) but rather *creative*, severing things from their proper uses by imagining how they would act in novel interrelational situations.[93] Parkour takes the "dead" spaces left over by urban infrastructure—what Iain Borden calls "zero degree architecture"[94]—and brings them to "life" through embodied interaction. For Kidder, "the spatial barriers of the city are transformed into playful obstacles to jump, run, and vault

[92] Initially, the idea behind parkour was to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible, transforming the "obstacles" created by urban infrastructure (walls, sculptures, rooftops, stairways, railings, benches) into possibilities for improvised movement. The way it's practiced in Chicago, as Kidder found after spending a year doing ethnographic research, has more to do with seeking out the paths of *most* resistance; challenging the body and mind by making jumps or climbing walls that seem impossible. This embodied reappropriation of urban infrastructure always involves elements of play, athleticism, and, most importantly, a new way of seeing and interacting with infrastructural spaces and structures. While parkour has the potential to be explicitly political (e.g. could be understood, through Henri Lefebvre's Marxist interpretation of urban planning in *The Production of Space*, as a refusal to submit to capitalist planning and building practices by reappropriating urban spaces and structures), it is generally practiced in unoccupied spaces, and practitioners usually leave to find a new space if asked. While skateboarding and ball-playing are easy to legislate against because laws can aim at the tools required for these kinds of urban play, parkour does not require tools and is thus more ephemeral and transient—the moment a practitioner lands a jump, she becomes a pedestrian again. For more on this, see Rawlinson and Guaralda's "Play in the City: Parkour and Architecture."

[93] Here, theories of parkour echo DeLanda's assemblage theory, and we can think about how the *traceur*'s leap entails that the walls and stairs of the larger subway assemblage "detach" themselves from their interrelations with the subway and enter into a new set of relations, and thus a new assemblage, with the *traceur*, Kidder and his camera, and the imperatives of parkour.

[94] "Zero degree architecture," according to Borden, is the architecture that is designed to slip into the background unnoticed, like electrical boxes, retaining walls, handrails, curbs, and subway entrances. It exists as an accidental byproduct of urban infrastructure and is meant to be ignored, avoided, or hidden whenever possible. The *traceur* re-articulates this architecture as a set of affordances—or, to use Foucault's terms, a "bundle of relations"—available for embodied interaction. For a full reading of zero degree architecture, see Borden's "Zero Degree Architecture and Urban Rhythm" in *Skateboarding, Space and the City.*

over" (230), like the spatial barrier surrounding the Daley Plaza subway entrance, which is transformed through both parkour and photography into a "playful obstacle" that affords a spectacular leap.[95] As Christopher Rawlinson and Mike Guaralda argue, the "space" of a city is *created* when *traceurs* "imagine new possibilities and meanings for seemingly banal and nondescript architectural elements" (21). This suggests that the contours of a city emerge through embodied interaction, and are not determined *a priori* by urban planners. The new spatial possibilities that emerge are then disseminated through YouTube videos and large gatherings called "jams" that celebrate the spectacle of parkour. As people watch *traceurs*, these "spatial meanings" are disseminated and the urban architecture of the city transforms from spaces with well-known and easily understood prescriptive uses—"stairway," "corridor," "room"[96]—into sites of emergent possibility: walls for climbing, benches for vaulting, stairwells for making spectacular leaps. The cultivation of the perceptual consciousness entailed by this new way of seeing is called, within the parkour community, PK Vision.

PK Vision does not encounter the built environment as a reified representation of power and thus does not attempt to "uncover" or "demystify" it. Instead, it enacts an

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[95] Notice the resonance between Kidder's "playful obstacle" and Everson's "merry old time." Parkour, like the action movie set-piece, celebrates the creative power of embodied play.

[96] When a *traceur* walks into a building, she doesn't see what the rest of us see. A stairway is not the shortest route downstairs, but rather a collection of affordances: rails for grinding, walls for jumping on or over, ledges for flipping off of, and perhaps most thrillingly, the series of descending right-angles for breaking bones, the hard concrete that threatens concussions, and the force of gravity always pulling the body down toward the hazards and offering the most "oppressive" constraint against which to strive and with which to dance. As we think about this static train-space, we should also have in the back of our minds what it would mean to add the movement of a speeding train to the equation: What an enticing bundle of relations for the *traceur* and the stunt-person!

Incidentally, this distinction between conventional spaces and "bundles of relation" is consistent with the distinction, made in Chapter 1, between "spaces" and "spatial arrays." Through embodied play, the *traceur* transforms codified space and its "proper uses" into an uncodified spatial array, which is then re-articulated (in a YouTube jam, for example) as a *new* "conventional" space within the world of parkour.

experimentally interrelational dialogue that re-articulates human and nonhuman bodies simultaneously. In this sense, the word "vision" is slightly misleading. The rich metaphorical history that aligns vision with detached knowledge suggests a *traceur* standing "above" a milieu and looking down on it as something separate from her own body. This detached "vision" is anathema to the practice of parkour*,* which relies on touch, balance, movement, improvisation, and muscle memory as much as vision. In fact, this vision is directly indebted to the continued embodied experimentation that teaches the eyes what bodies are capable of: the *traceur* "sees" affordances that must be tested empirically, and she knows as a matter of experience that this vision is speculative, and that she is always vulnerable to the thingy repudiation of material constraints.[97] However, the optical focus does highlight the importance of YouTube videos within the parkour community, and suggests that the "re-visioning" of the built environment can occur—at least partially—through spectatorship: watch enough parkour videos and you'll find yourself walking through once-familiar cityscapes that now pulse with untapped potential and withdrawn agencies. Abandoned urban spaces, for example, cease to be empty, dilapidated urban leftovers, as the opportunities for running, jumping, climbing, grasping, hanging, vaulting, hiding, falling, flipping, and crashing become visible. If this is the case, the cinematic set-piece participates in the same kind of re-visioning process. Watch enough action movies and weapons, shields, projectiles, and hiding places start popping out of the milieux of everyday life.

[97] In the forgettable action film *Tracers* (2015), Taylor Lautner's character is beginning to develop PK Vision when he is faced with a large chasm on the deck of a ship. He runs toward it, alongside his new *traceur* friends, and "sees" a jumpable abyss. He makes the leap, but miscalculates and comes up short of his mark, grabbing desperately onto a hanging rope in order to avoid falling to his death. His more practiced colleagues saw an unbridgeable gap and thus didn't attempt to throw their bodies across it. The point here is that "PK Vision" is not a mode of constructivism that celebrates the human imagination. Rather, it is a "vision" that re-imagines the human as a "body among bodies." When the *traceur* performs the move suggested by her "vision," she immediately makes herself vulnerable to a world of interobjective affordances and constraints that she cannot "know" except through experimentation and practice.

Like parkour*,* the Mobile Gymnasium asks us to continually re-imagine the interrelational capacities of trainworlds. We have already seen that a train is not just a train: as it cuts a swath through filmworlds and "real" worlds alike, it is always accompanied by a motley crew of spaces, structures, and objects that tumble out and make their way into the world. Retaining walls, stairwells, signs, and concourses are all entailed by Chicago's subway system, and yet when we see the *traceur* standing atop one of the walls, ready to make a leap, we see they are not *exhausted* by the roles they play in that system. Parkour is explicitly dedicated to seeking out and experimenting with the vibrant infrastructural actors that pop up all over the cityscape: What can my body do with these walls? What can these stairs do with to my body? In the process, every body is continually re-articulated in relation to other bodies.

If the *traceur* attunes his body to the affordances and constraints of the spatial array of the Daley Plaza subway entrance, the cinematic set-piece likewise disseminates a non-symbolic, non-prescriptive re-visioning of both the zero degree architecture of railroad infrastructure (driver-rods, mail hooks, embankments, ditches) and the more canonical figureheads of the railroad (locomotives, tenders, boxcars, tracks). In set-pieces, the spaces, structures, and objects required to keep trains moving take on new lives beyond their proper uses. For instance, the subway concourse lurking in the subterranean shadows of the Kidder photograph is full of support pillars that human bodies can easily hide behind, as they do in *Carlito's Way* (1993), *The Matrix* (1999), *Underworld* (2003), and *Safe* (2012). There are glass walls on the concourse floor that bodies can be hurled through (*Fast and the Furious 6* [2013]) and tracks that helpless victims can be shoved onto (*The Matrix, Kontroll* [2003]*, House of Cards* [2014]). The coin dish for buying tickets can be filled with gasoline and lit

on fire (*Money Train* [1995]),[98] but an engagement ring can also be dropped inside (*While You Were Sleeping* [1995]). Turnstiles exist to be jumped over (*Stag Night* [2008], *Fruitvale Station* [2013]) and at night a waiting platform is easily transformed into a raging "Metro Party" (*Kontroll*) or the secret lair of monsters and psychopathic killers (*Creep* [2004], *Midnight Meat Train* [2008]). In order to make sense of the nonhuman agencies that inhabit filmic trainworlds, we need an approach as playful and extravagant as parkour: the interpretive equivalent of leaping over the concourse sign.[99]

In his wonderful analysis of Jackie Chan's playful fight scenes, Gordon Coonfield asks the inherently speculative and implicitly experimental question: "Of what effects and relations is [this object] capable under particular conditions, given the assemblage of which it is a part?" (293). Coonfield's question gets to the heart of what both slapstick and action "set-pieces" are trying to do: To perform a spectacular barrage of improvisational, unpredictable, and shocking answers to two key questions suggested by Spinoza: 1) how is my body capable of acting on, with, and through the spaces, objects, and structures that comprise a particular spatial array?; 2) How are those spaces, objects, and structures capable

[98] After *Money Train* was released, two "copycat" attacks on New York City subway token clerks led Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole to call for a boycott of the film (Goldman). Again, the affordances of the infrastructural assemblage slip seamlessly across ontological borders: the opening in the front of a token booth is vulnerable to streams of gasoline in real life as much as in the fictional world of *Money Train.* The danger of the set-piece, exemplified here, does not lie in its celebration of violence but its very experimentation with infrastructural affordances. In making visible novel affordances, PK vision and the filmic set-piece effectively "re-vision" the world, making seemingly "dead" spaces more lively and full of potential. But as this case suggests, there is a dangerous side to this new vision: the re-articulation of affordances and vulnerabilities means something very different to a *traceur* and to an arsonist.

[99] By entangling ourselves with Henry David Thoreau's playful engagement with infrastructural space through embodied exploration, poetic extravagance, and nonhuman perspectivism, Chapter 1 has already contributed to the cultivation of such an approach. Indeed, Thoreau's strategy of "leaping over" boundaries through a combination of walking and language resonates nicely with the *traceur's* decision to "leap over" the linguistic sign that signifies conventional uses and thus to "roam" or "wander" through the cityscape in extravagant ways.

of acting upon my body? More often than not, the narrative arc of action films and slapstick comedies is nothing more than a pretense for asking these questions of various "sets."[100] The "meaning" of these films, then, is to be found in the complex interrelations of human and nonhuman bodies as choreographed in the dance of the set-piece. It is in this dance that our world is defamiliarized and re-visioned—and it is through the train set-piece that the awesomely unpredictable agencies and affordances of each actor comprising the complex assemblage that we call the railroad emerge.

The French Door Thing: Putting the "Set" Back in Set-Piece

There is no theoretical consensus on the definition of "set-piece." The only point of agreement is that the phrase comes from the old studio system, when everything was shot on sound stages. A "set-piece" was a scene that was so big, so important, had such a "wow factor" that it demanded the construction of a new set. As films began to be shot on-location, the term remained, but often referred to a spectacular location in the "real world."

On his blog, "Living the Romantic Comedy," script consultant Billy Mernit defines the set-piece by drawing on its history both in the Hollywood studio system and in theater. In the theater, "set-piece" refers—quite literally—to a piece of the set: a living room, a couch, a door, a table. When this piece of the set asserts itself as a key actor, the result is a scene or a moment that is explicitly and self-consciously interobjective: humans and nonhumans come together as equals in these scenes. In these moments, the affordances and constraints of the various objects populating the stage come to the forefront. Characters, directors, and

[100] Tom Gunning says as much about the early chase film and the appropriation of the "cinema of attraction" by narrative cinema. I will return to this issue in Chapter 3.

audiences alike are forced to negotiate with the stubborn (or comically flexible) Thing-Powers[101] of the objects we initially mistook for an inert backdrop.

Mernit calls this phenomenon "The French Door Thing," referring to the series of French doors that line the stage in classic farces. The doors are part of a realistic *mise-en-scene*, as the farces are set in aristocratic houses that simply tend to have French doors. But, as Mernit points out, "during the big scene where all the comedy's duplicitous adulterers and confused dupes end up caught in the same tight spot, this bunch of doors, though nice enough as scenery, exist for one real purpose: to send various characters flying in and out of the bedroom with escalating hilarity." In other words, the French doors are invited on to the stage for the sake of their *affordances.* They become active agents in the structure of the storytelling, performing both a functional and a comedic role, and often emerging as the most visually striking and memorable actor in a scene.[102]

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[101] Recall that for Jane Bennett, "Thing-Power" refers to "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6).

[102] Michael Frayn's 1982 farce about theatrical farces, *Noises Off*, provides an excellent examination of the generic importance of doors. In Frayn's opening directions for set design, he focuses on the doors to the set of "Nothing On," the play-within-a-play: "A notable feature [of the set] is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided." He goes on to list four doors: a front door, a door to the study, a door to the service quarters, two bathroom doors, a bedroom door, a closet door, a full-length window, and a corridor that "gives access to all the other rooms in the upper parts of the house" (8). Doors are mentioned no fewer than 97 times in Frayn's 150-page stageplay. During the first act, the actors putting on the play-within-a-play have continual trouble remembering when to enter and exit with a plate of sardines. Director Lloyd Dallas memorably tries to explain to one of his actors, Belinda, that the only thing they need to do on opening night is get the doors and sardines right: "That's what it's all about, doors and sardines. Getting on, getting off. Getting the sardines on, getting the sardines off. That's farce. That's theatre. That's life" (23).

The takeaway from Frayn's joke, and from Mernit's theory of the "French Door Thing," is that exits and entrances require infrastructural openings to enter and exit *through*, and thus that the farce works better in environments that include a lot of doors that, as Lloyd elsewhere says, "open when they open, and close when they close" (22). The train, unlike the airplane and automobile (but like the large cruise ship) is *full* of doors: compartment doors, connecting doors, vestibule doors, bathroom doors, and drawing-room doors. In addition to the train's dynamism as a moving "bundle of relations," then, we can add that trains afford the perfect conditions not just for stunt-work but for the frantically comedic movements required by the farce. I will return to this point in Chapter 3 when I look at Howard Hawks' 1934 film adaptation of the MacArthur/Hecht stage farce, *Twentieth Century.*

Set-pieces are intimately tied to the set, though the importance of this relationship is overlooked if we focus only on "wow-factor." Mernit defines a set-piece as follows: "A set-piece is an extended scene or sequence that exploits the setting or 'world' of the movie to build from one joke or thrill to a series of the same, climaxing in a satisfyingly big pay-off topper." The key here is the exploitation of the set, or the "world" of the film. The set-piece self-consciously plays with the affordances and constraints of a particular set. When I speak of a "set-piece," then, I follow Mernit insofar as I am referring to those scenes or moments in which the "set" (or milieu, or *mise-en-scene*, or "world") becomes a major player; when the the nonhuman actors that populate a filmworld rival the human characters as objects worthy of attention. Because these scenes are invested in asking questions of particular spatial arrays, to relocate the action—say, from a railroad passenger car to the interior of a steamship or a first-class cabin on an airplane—would change everything. These are the moments when the the milieu emphatically asserts itself as an assemblage of actors (in both the Hollywood and Latourian sense of the term).[103]

The revelatory power lurking in the cinematic set-piece lies not in symbolism or representation but, in the words of Stanley Cavell, in a "revelation of the familiar." According to Cavell, the power of the set-piece is in its twisted ordinariness: it is "as natural to the place as the conventional events we might expect there," just as the *traceur's* leap over the subway steps strikes us immediately with its banal obviousness. Speaking of the famous crop-dusting scene in *North By Northwest*, Cavell says: "*Of course* the Great Plains is a region in which men are unprotected from the sky" (83, italics in original). The meaningful revelations of the set-piece lie in this o*f-course*ness. *Of course* club cars are the semi-

[103] In other words, as both "stars" of the film, and as Latourian actors that "affect" and are "affected by" others.

informal public spaces in which one meets psychopathic strangers; *of course* deep cuts are the makeshift motorcycle ramps that allow one to jump on to the tops of trains; *of course* tunnels are the dark, noisy, hidden region in which one can dump a dead body out the window of Drawing Room C.

The detour through parkour and the definition of the set-piece sets a foundation for thinking about specific train scenes as explorations, and re-visionings, of the built environment. With this foundation in mind, I can now turn to concrete examples of film actors "playing around" on the Mobile Gymnasium.

BK Vision: Re-Visioning the World Through Slapstick Comedy

> *In truth, if Keaton's work has a meaning, one must seek it, not in some questionable message, but in his* mise-en-scene.
>
> — Jean-Pierre Courdoso[104]

> *Oh well. It was a great prop. I did some awful wild things with the railroads.*
>
> — Buster Keaton[105]

When Keaton speaks of the "awful wild things" he did with railroads, he is not speaking as someone who manipulates train-symbols. It would be more apt—though playfully metaphorical—to say that Keaton speaks as a schoolboy on the playground at recess, experimenting endlessly with the unknown possibilities lurking in a particular array of metal bars, wooden planks, plastic slides, and open spaces known as the jungle gym. The

[104] Cited in Peter Parshall's "Buster Keaton and the Space of Farce" (29).

[105] This quote comes from an interview with Kevin Brownlow. It is in response to Brownlow's question: "You're obviously fascinated by railroads anyway, aren't you—apart from using them in motion pictures?" (190).

Wildness[106] of the trainy gymnasium is found in interactive play: a coming together of hands and arms and legs and bodies (and Keaton's famous "stone face") with windows and catwalks and fireboxes and cordwood and water towers and axles and cowcatchers. Keaton asks the question: How can my body interact with the particular array of objects organized by an "era-appropriate" steam engine? Buster provides experimental answers by throwing his body into the mix. This speculative work is done through the medium of the cinematic set-piece.[107]

In his 1927 masterpiece, *The General,* Keaton plays Johnnie Gray, a Southern locomotive engineer who, in a matter of moments near the beginning of the film, is rejected by the Confederacy (because he is more important as an engineer than a soldier), and by his girlfriend, Annabelle Lee (because she thinks he didn't try to enlist). Dejected, Johnnie sits down on the driver-rod of a locomotive, lost in his own thoughts. A driver-rod is a metal bar that connects the driving wheels of the locomotive, thus transferring power to all the wheels.

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[106] I capitalize "Wildness" here to point to the fortuitous coincidence between Keaton's celebration of "wild things" and Thoreauvian Wildness, as theorized by Jane Bennett. For Bennett, Thoreauvian "Wildness was a not-quite-human force that addled and altered human and other bodies. It named an irreducibly strange dimension of matter, an *out-side*." Wildness, for Thoreau, was to be found not just in Walden Woods and on Mount Katahdin, but also in "that monster called the railroad and that alien called his Genius" (*Vibrant Matter* 2-3). Here, we see Keaton encountering precisely this kind of railroad "Wildness," as his stunts on moving trains "addle and alter" his body in strange and unpredictable ways. Thoreauvian Wildness is also aligned with speculative realism insofar as it "speaks to the idea that there always remains a surplus that escapes our categories and organizational practices, even as it generates them" (*Thoreau's Nature* xxvii). Each time we actualize novel affordances of the railroad, or uncover its heretofore-unknown capacities, we not only increase our knowledge of "what a body can do," we also increase our attunement to this Wild *out-side* of human experience: *how much trainy Wildness still lies outside our knowledge?*

[107] Following other Keaton scholars, I reserve the appellation "Keaton" to refer to Buster Keaton the director, writer, and filmmaker and I use "Buster" to refer to his role as a body among bodies, performing acrobatic stunts and acting in front of the camera. While it is Keaton who makes films and choreographs gags, it is Buster who jumps around on trains. Character names, like Johnnie Gray, I reserve for discussions of the filmworld's reality.

Image 9: ***In medium-shot, the driver-rod looks like the perfect bench.*** **Of course** ***it is a bench on which to sit.***

Image 10: ***In the wide-shot, however, we see the engineer in the cab getting ready to actualize a contradictory affordance of the driver-rod.***

Image 11: ***When driver-rod*** **qua** ***driver-rod meets driver-rod*** **qua** ***bench, we get the wonderful and unforgettable image of Buster's body circling clockwise as the train moves forward.***

Image 12: ***In this later scene, the wheels and driver-rod are spinning furiously because they have lost traction. It's difficult to tell in a still-frame, but notice the blur on the spokes as compared to the previous three images.***

This is the role it was designed to play within the railroad assemblage. While at rest, the driver-rod's relative height, flatness, and sturdiness afford an ideal seat for a dejected lover, and in sitting down, Buster actualizes this latent affordance. This is done in a medium shot, with the locomotive filling the camera frame as a stationary object. Johnnie Gray (in the movie) and Buster (on the film set) are engaging in an act not unlike the *traceur* of Daley Plaza—performing an embodied improvisation that re-articulates the built environment.

Keaton, the director and filmmaker, like the *traceurs* who disseminate their parkour playfulness via YouTube videos and "jams," films and distributes this playful act as a scene in a Hollywood film. Part of the humor lies in the fact that driver-rods tend to vanish into the larger machine ensemble as a necessary but inherently uninteresting (and thus invisible) component—a piece of "zero degree architecture."[108] Through Buster's embodied interaction with the driver-rod, it pops out of the machine ensemble, no longer an intermediary, but a full-fledged actor in its own right (and a famous one for Keaton fans).

When Keaton moves from a medium-shot to a wide-shot, we notice that the driver-rod is not going to acquiesce to Buster's reappropriation of its "sittable" components—its relative height, support, flatness. In the wide-shot, Buster sits on the driver-rod in the lower right-hand part of the frame while the upper-left is dominated by the window of the locomotive cab, through which we see the engineer preparing the engine for departure. In its slow acceleration forward, the train re-enlists the driver-rod as a tool for transferring power, and Johnnie's bench begins to act in a conspicuously un-bench-like manner. Johnnie's body is swung in slow clockwise circles, lifting his feet off the ground more and more quickly as the train gathers speed.

Buster translates the driver-rod as a seat, which actualizes *real* affordances based on its conformation to the contours of the human body. At the same time, the engineer translates the rod as a distributor of power between locomotive wheels. The comedy comes from the incompatibility of these two simultaneous translations. In this scene, assemblages come together that both enlist the driver-rod as a component. The problem is that the driver-rod is a *moving component* of the "moving train" assemblage and a *static component* of the "Johnnie

[108] Unless you are a railfan, engineer, or train mechanic, all of whom have acquired unique perceptual powers when it comes to "seeing" trains.

sitting on a bench" assemblage. Both Johnnie and the engineer remain mutually oblivious to the fact that they are caught in the middle of competing sets of interrelations. The engineer is focused on his duties, looking ahead toward the tunnel, and attuning himself to the finicky nature of the throttle, but totally unaware of the human body that is spinning in circles as a direct result of his actions. Meanwhile, Johnnie is simultaneously lost in his own melancholic obliviousness, and continues to exploit the sittability of the driver-rod long after this relationship has become absurd. Henri Bergson would call this an example of the "absentmindedness" that exists in "automatism" (15). Comedy, for Bergson, comes when an object continues to act according to its role even when to do so is absurd: the dejected lover who continues to sit and mope long after his "bench" has morphed into a dangerous piece of machine equipment; the engineer who does his duty in complete disregard of the human drama playing out just below him; the driver-rod that continues to act as a bench even as it starts powering the locomotive, or continues to act as a driver-rod even after Johnnie re-appropriates it as a bench.

Driver-rod *qua* driver-rod and driver-rod *qua* bench merge as two humans actualize different affordances, and in the process the driver-rod comes alive, pops out of the larger machine ensemble and exerts its agency—its ability to affect Johnnie's body in this strange and unpredictable context as well as its ability to be affected by the actions of the engineer. We are first treated to the *of-course*ness that translates a piece of zero degree architecture (one that most of us ignore) as a common chair, and then a good laugh as the driver-rod is re-enlisted by the train to perform its duty while Johnnie, rigidly oblivious to the shifting milieu, circles the screen. He doesn't notice the problem until they approach the tunnel, at which point he looks around, surprised and confused, before disappearing into the darkness.

According to Raymond Rohauer, this was a deceptively dangerous stunt. Keaton's commitment to using an era-appropriate locomotive meant that if "the steam was not fed to it just right," the wheels would not gain traction, which would lead to "spinning out." If the wheels spun out, the driver-rod would whip around so quickly that it would throw Keaton onto the tracks, possibly killing him, and at best resulting in serious injury.[109] The engineer was nervous about the gag and practiced on his own until he felt absolutely certain that he had the "knack"—that his touch was one with the machinery—and then they did the shot (7).

Buster always performed his own stunts, and in order to show the audience that his embodied interaction with the driver-rod was "real," he filmed the entire sequence in one long wide-shot. As Noël Carroll tells us:

> The danger . . . is authenticated by the long-shot. This shooting format reveals that the stunt is not faked. Keaton is not tightly framed, sitting on a moving metal rod. Shot that way, it would be possible to disconnect the rod from the train and manipulate it by some directly controllable method. Shot from afar, however, we see there is no chicanery. (77)

In other words, the train itself—the "real" train, as Keaton insists—plays an important role not only in narrative action but in a particular relationship with the audience (mediated by the camera). The anticipated affect is dependent not just on the belly laughs of a gag, but on the audience's knowledge of the actor's embodied engagement with material reality.[110]

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[109] For an example of what it would look like for the wheels to spin out, look at the later scene in which The General loses traction (Image 12). Jumping off the train, Johnnie Gray grabs dirt from the right-of-way to throw onto the tracks in order to gain traction again. In the background, we see the wheels and the driver-rod spinning furiously. Imagine Buster's body sitting on that driver-rod and it is easy to see the potential catastrophe underlying this gag.

[110] The "reality effect" of the long shot is not as simple as Carroll's reading of Keaton makes it out to be. Andre Bazin notes in "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage" that Lamorisse's *The Red Balloon* (1956)

As becomes clear in this example, the driver-rod is not completely controlled by any human—not Johnnie the character or Buster the Hollywood actor or Keaton the director and writer; not even the engineer, who is both an actor and a real railroad engineer. Indeed, the engineer is the most nervous person on the set, because he knows the finicky and unpredictable nature of wheels, driver-rods, and steam on this era-specific locomotive. In the filmworld, the driver-rod acts out against Johnnie's reappropriation but acts according to the engineer's desires (and to the dictates of Keaton's script); in "real life," there was no such guarantee, and practice was necessary in order for the engineer to attune his movements to fit the touchy requirements of the locomotive.

Keaton's merging with the machine in this scene can easily be interpreted as an example of modernity's mechanization of the human body. In fact, this is precisely what Tom Gunning argues in "Buster Keaton: or, the Work of Comedy in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In this article, Gunning argues that Keaton has,

> a peculiarly *modern insight* about individuality and systems which contrasts rather sharply with Chaplin's romantic vagabond. While both these masters of silent comedy devised a style of physical performance in which *the human body seemed possessed by the machinelike rhythms and manic tempo of*

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relies on precisely this "reality effect." Like Keaton, Lamorisse uses an un-edited wide-shot of the red balloon following the child protagonist around like a dog. Had Lamorisse relied on montage (or editing) to show us the relationship of the boy and balloon (for instance, cutting back and forth between the two), then "the magic balloon would only exist on the screen" (45). Even though the audience knows that the movements of the balloon are "faked," it is the unedited long-shot of Lamorisse that "brings us back to reality" (45). For Bazin, "if the film is to fulfill itself aesthetically we need to believe in the reality of what is happening while knowing it to be tricked" (48). This suggests that Keaton's gag would have worked even if we knew it to be "tricked"—as long as he didn't cut to close-ups of the driver-rod, which would have destroyed the "reality" of the scene. But Keaton takes the "reality effect" a step further by consciously perpetuating a mythology of himself as engaging in his "own stunts." This is to say that Keaton (like Jackie Chan after him) provides a special case, but that the bodies on screen don't necessarily have to "really" interact in order to engage in "realism." I discuss the question of realism in more depth in Chapter 4, but it is an important issue throughout the project: if "reality" emerges through interrelations and interpretation, then how must we rethink the relationship between "reality" and "representation"?

> *modern life*, Keaton's whole world and visual style reflected *an intricate Taylorized and Fordian environment*. Keaton's character was caught in *impersonal systems* long before he had surrendered artistic control. (14, emphasis added)

For Gunning, the locomotive represents an "all-embracing mechanics" (16), that the "vulnerable human body" must navigate through "lightning reactions" and "identification" (15). Gunning even goes so far as to conflate the locomotive with "the modern world": "Keaton's characters contend with a modern world in which nothing is stable and in which the rhythms of large machines (particularly the emblem of the industrialization of America's garden, the locomotive) seem to rule" (15).[111] The locomotive, according to Gunning, "rules" a film like *The General*, and Keaton can do nothing more than scramble to attune himself to this new "machinelike" world that Gunning calls an "alien and alienating system" (15).

The Mobile Gymnasium offers a different approach to *The General.* This is not a case of reversing the reading and arguing, for example, that Keaton does not wallow in the automatism of modernity, but rather offers a liberation from the machinelike world (Gunning himself makes this argument, claiming that Keaton blurs the line between the "promise" and the "threat" of the machine better than anyone). This reading would still assume a strict demarcation between the "machinelike world" and the (gardenlike?) world that preceded modernity. Gunning argues that Keaton's *The General* "reflects the image of the heroic nineteenth-century locomotive engineers and steamboat pilots who seemed to meld with their machines" (16). But while there is certainly a great deal of tuning that goes on in the film, we

[111] Gunning is clearly drawing on the traditional symbolism of Leo Marx's "machine in the garden" that we saw in Chapter 1, and which we will see again in Jim Kitses' reading of the American Western film in Chapter 3.

have just seen that Buster and the train are fundamentally *not* melded—in fact, the train is not even (completely) melded with itself, as the driver-rod remains capable of acting *out-side of* the machine ensemble. The key to *The General* is not that Buster and the train are "melded" but that new embodied capacities, affordances, and meanings emerge through their interactions as autonomous entities. Buster's acrobatic stunts in fact presume his autonomy from the train. The spinning rod is a jolt that tells him that he is *not* "melded" with his surroundings. But he can't be totally alienated from the train either, because alienation precludes the possibility of attuning his body to the contours and movements of the railroad: he couldn't swing on it, jump on it, or climb on it if he were not in some way capable of "melding" with it, if only partially and ephemerally. This is to say that "melding" (and "un-melding") is a continuous process in which bodies temporarily come together to form new assemblages that are constantly shifting, re-making, and un-making themselves.[112]

Buster never stands outside of or in front of the milieu but always operates within it—manipulating objects but also being manipulated by objects like a good *traceur*.[113] As Bazin tells us, "man in the world enjoys no *a priori* privilege over animals and things" ("Theater and Cinema" 106), and film—particularly Keatonian slapstick comedy—is uniquely suited to

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[112] In the Introduction, I noted that Deleuze and Guattari refer to this process as one of "deterritorialization" (breaking apart) and "reterritorialization" (coming together). Both processes are always already present, as deterritorialization necessarily entails a reterritorialization—as when some components of an assemblage detach in order to form part of a new assemblage. Thus, when Keaton "melds" with the train it is not indicative of some uniquely modern technological appropriation of the human body, but rather of the ways in which we continuously enter into interrelations with the heterogeneous actors that populate our world. We momentarily come together to form an ephemeral assemblage (like Johnnie coming together with the driver-rod), or enter into more stable relationships that last over a period of time (like the roles of the engineer and the driver-rod within the early-20th-century technology of the steam locomotive).

[113] Cavell says of film that "human beings are not ontologically favored over the rest of nature . . . objects are not props but natural allies (or enemies) of the main character." For Cavell, this ontological equality allows for Chaplin's "relationships with Murphy beds and flights of stairs and with vases on runners or tables on rollers" (37). His insight is even more applicable to Keaton, who famously refused to build his films around social commentary and *pathos,* as Chaplin did, and instead focused on the interplay of physical bodies.

uncovering the vital agency of the milieu (121). Gunning's argument presupposes that the meaning of *The General* is to be found in the realm of discourse and representation, and thus his analysis is concerned with the ways that Keaton comments on a reality that exists outside of (both chronologically and ontologically "before") the cinematic image. But the driver-rod straddles the ostensible abyss between representation and reality: Keaton speculates about the "wild things" he can do with the rod; Johnnie actualizes a latent affordance by sitting down in melancholic oblivion; Buster gambles by throwing his body on the moving jungle gym. Keaton, Johnnie, and Buster are each interacting with a very different train. They each translate the train in different ways, bridging the gap between the historical "General" and the screen image we encounter in a movie theater.

"Something Unlike Anything Else We Know": Three Real Trains

Stanley Cavell, speaking of human beings projected on silver screens, argues that "it is an incontestable fact that in a motion picture no live human being is up there. But a human something is, and something unlike anything else we know" (26). That "something" is a "human-something" because of its entanglements with human bodies. It looks like the human body that once stood in front of the camera. It talks and moves and acts like the humans that occupy the world of flesh-and-blood humanity. And yet, it is also nothing more than a play of light and shadow projected on a screen. Unlike a human, it is two-dimensional, it is not sentient, it operates entirely within a scripted world and interacts with its environment in pre-scripted ways. In order to understand this "human-something" we must acknowledge both its humanness and its somethingness. Focusing only on humanness leads us directly to a naïve realism that fails to account for the mediating agency of the film apparatus (camera, script,

editing studio, sound equipment). Focusing only on somethingness, on the other hand, creates an unbridgeable ontological abyss between representation and reality, thus relegating cinematic beings to the shadowy realm of discourse, illusion, and simulacra.

Cavell eventually concludes that filmic reality is something that is present to the spectator, while the spectator is absent to that filmic reality—it can affect us, but we cannot affect it. But this analysis is slightly misleading, as it depends upon an equivocation of two different realities. What Cavell means is that the screen image is present to the spectator, but the spectator is not present to the actual actor who, at some point, stood in front of the film camera. But these are two different entities. The human-something we encounter on the silver screen is emphatically *not* the human being that was translated by the film. We are as present to the nonhuman humans (and trains) that populate a filmworld as they are to us. The Hollywood actors (and trains) that stood in front of the camera at one time are as absent to us as we are to them. And yet, these objects remain connected through a series of translations and relations. Cavell's "human-somethings" can neither be disentangled from nor made the maidservants of "real" humans: they are both *human*-somethings (indebted to the humans that they translate into a screen image) and human-*somethings* (real objects in their own right).

Like the "human-something," that train-like object we see on screen is no "live train up there," but even though it is "unlike anything else we know" we can be confident that it is "a train-something," as opposed to, say, a "lizard-something." It is not itself ontologically identical to a train—we can't, for example, walk into the filmworld and steal the locomotive or kick the wheels.[114] This is the crux of Cavell's observation that the filmic reality is present

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[114] In saying that audiences recognize that it is no "live train up there," I need to address what Martin

to us while we are absent to it. One way of making sense of this paradoxical object—both a train and not a train—is to say that it is a "representation" of a train. This move severs our epistemological access to the "real" train, but places the "representation" fully within our grasp as an element of human discourse. But a Mobile Gymnasium *cannot* be a mere second-order imitation of a "real" train because the embodied play it illuminates takes place on multiple train-somethings (each of which ontologically straddles the worlds of "real" and "representation") simultaneously. This requires some explanation.

In the case of *The General*, there is an actual locomotive upon which the filmic train is modelled. The historical General that participated in the U.S. Civil War as a Confederate locomotive now sits in the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History in Kennesaw, Georgia. It should not be controversial to say that Keaton's General is not *this* General. Even if Keaton had attempted an historically accurate portrayal of the locomotive, any attempt to translate the historical object into language or image would result in an entirely new being in the world. This is because, as Timothy Morton memorably puts it,

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Loiperdinger has called "Cinema's Founding Myth": the apocryphal accounts of audience members shrieking in terror as a train sped toward the screen (and thus, toward the audience) in the Lumière Brothers' *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat* (1896). According to Loiperdinger, the first screenings of the film have entered into the mythological folklore of cinema. He cites as a typical example the words of German Railway's customer magazine: "The spectators ran out of the hall in terror because the locomotive headed right for them. They feared that it could plunge off the screen and onto them" (90). As Loiperdinger argues, "[t]he story of the audience's terror circulates as a generally agreed-upon rumor. Mainstream film historiography has provided neither evidence nor even references to contemporary sources. Film historians repeat without examination the claim that, viewing the locomotive approaching the camera, spectators at the time mistook the images on the screen for reality. Such a tale of more or less drastically amplified panic assumes naïve viewers who had the wool pulled over their eyes and therefore succumbed to a filmic delusion of reality" (91). The myth is often used as evidence of film's power over the spectator, or as an example of the sensory shocks experienced in modernity. Such naïve spectators may have populated early film comedies, such as Robert W. Paul's *The Countryman's First Sight of the Animated Pictures* (1901) and Edwin S. Porter's *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1902), but, as Loiperdinger's archival work shows, there is no evidence that early film audiences were as naïve as these comedies—and later film history—represent them. The theoretical and historical evidence marshalled by Lopierdinger is impressive, and we need not delve into the details here. The important point is that, despite the continued prevalence of this "agreed-upon rumor," it should not be taken as evidence that at some point in the past ostensibly naïve audiences actually believed that "real live trains" inhabited film screens.

“[a]ll the things by which we specify the object are not the object” (*Realist Magic* 27). Because each attempt to “specify” The General produces a new object in the world, it’s safe to say that the General of William Pittenger’s first-hand account, *Daring and Suffering,* is not quite the General of historian Russell Bonds’ *Stealing the General,* is not quite the General of Disney’s family film *The Great Locomotive Chase* (1956), is not quite the General in Kennesaw. And yet, it would not be accurate to say that each of these new objects is entirely *separate* from its namesake (or each other) either.

Instead of attributing primary “reality” to the historical locomotive and treating each depiction as a more-or-less accurate representation, we can read each of these “Generals” as unique entities within a flat ontology. Each depiction translates and distorts the General both through selective omission of some of its qualities and components *and* through the creative combination of the locomotive with narrative structures, generic conventions, and representational media. Each new incarnation reveals novel capacities of the locomotive: Keaton, for example, highlights the potential of the General to support his personal brand of slapstick acrobatics, while Pittenger reads the General in relation to the story of his own life, Bonds interprets its importance in terms of its role in military history, and the Disney film sees the affinities between “the great locomotive chase” as it occurred in history and the generic conventions of the family adventure film. The General itself remains inexhaustible by any of these depictions, no matter how accurate, even as each depiction brings into existence a new entity that is indebted to, but irreducible to, its namesake.[115] As Latour

[115] In *The Anxiety of Influence,* Harold Bloom famously claims that the “meaning” of any poem can only be *another poem*. Bloom’s argument is that interpretations are always selective and distorting, and thus that they are fundamentally *creative*. No interpretation can be a neutral or objective gloss. In OOO terms, we cannot begin to interpret an object (like a text) except through the creation of a *new* object (an essay, a monograph, a lecture, a half-baked intuition). Likewise, the only way to “know” The General is through

would say, "instead of the *vertical* abyss between words and world . . . we now have a sturdy and thick layering of *transverse* paths through which masses of transformations circulate" (*Pandora's Hope* 113).

According to object-oriented ontology, film is not unique in its production of what Cavell calls "human-somethings." Every being in the world distorts the objects it encounters simply by its inability to *be* that object. The camera may pick up only certain qualities of the train (sound, color, movement, extension) while completely missing other attributes (weight, smell, hardness, three-dimensionality). But this is not an ontological schism that uniquely traps human filmgoers inside the illusory realm of discourse and representation. The camera might translate the train into "camera-ese," but every actor—human and nonhuman—translates the world according to its own unique modes of creative distortion. As Morton memorably puts it in *Realist Magic,* riffing off of Heidegger's observation that you never hear "the wind," but only the wind in the chimney:

> when I listen to the frog croaking, my hearing is carving out audible chunks of frog croak essence in a cavalierly anthropomorphic way. When the MP3 recorder takes a perforated sample of the same sound forty thousand times a second, it MP3-morphizes the croak just as mercilessly as I anthropomorphize it. . . . The ears otomorphize; the recorder recorder-morphizes. When you hear the wind, you hear the wind in the trees—the trees dendromorphize the wind.

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translations that inevitably fail to reproduce its inexhaustible and irreducible reality. As Timothy Morton argues, every act of interpretation is an act of ekphrasis: "In strictly OOO terms, ekphrasis is a translation that inevitably misses the secretive object, but which generates its own kind of object in the process" (*Realist Magic* 133). We do not need to follow OOO in thinking of the new entity as an "object." The important takeaway is that every translation of the train always selects and distorts the original train, but also gives birth to a new "train-something" through an act of *poiesis.* The filmic train, to use Bloom's terms, is not just a representation of the "real" train, but also "another poem." In Fuller's term, the filmic train has slightly different ways of "making the world and taking part in it" than the "real" train. The obviousness of this statement suggests that the ontological difference between these two entities can be most clearly seen in their unique poetics.

> You hear the wind in the door: the door doormorphizes the wind. You hear the wind in the wind chimes: the chimes sample the wind in their own unique way. (120)

The fact that film translates the three-dimensional object into a two-dimensional play of shadow and light is thus not a schism that separates us forever from the "real" by way of an illusory "image." Instead, it is one of innumerable translations that each take a part of the train and leave the rest: inscribed on celluloid, the train is translated into light and shadow; inscribed on the pages of Pittenger's autobiography, the train is translated into inky words on a page; inscribed on a penny (laid carefully on the tracks), the train is translated into the warped "footprint" of its wheels. And this is true for any encounter: a bird's nest encounters only the safe enclave of a viaduct arch and "nest-morphizes" the entire global infrastructure; passengers anthropomorphize the train by using it as an efficient mode of transport from point A to point B (like the warped penny, are we "train-morphized" in the process?). Notice that the train "inscribes" itself on each object differently, resulting in an "itself-morphized" translation or caricature. In other words, trains are *always* "train-somethings"—not just when a film camera distorts them, but when *anything* distorts them.[116]

This means that our goal is not to somehow bridge the gap between "representation" and "reality," but rather to trace the innumerable smaller translations that weave together the "train-something" we see up on screen and the "real trains" that lurk in the particular imprints they make. Buster Keaton offers an ideal case study for working out these *other*

[116] We already saw this happen, in different terms, in Thoreau's poem, "What's the Railroad to Me?" It might be helpful to read the cinematic set-piece in terms of the Nietzschean perspectivism that Thoreau's poem exemplifies: like any entity in the world, the slapstick artist, the Western hero, and the action star each interpret the train according to his own unique perspective as an embodied human-something operating within the imperatives a particular film genre. What's the railroad to Keaton? The wildest gymnasium around.

trains that operate as translators and mediators (and actors in their own right) somewhere between the *Historical Train* ("The General," now sitting in a Kennesaw museum) and the *Screen Train* (the image we seen on the screen) because he already exemplifies an analogous complexity in the way that critical convention has distinguished between Keaton, Johnnie, and Buster as three separate (but clearly entangled) entities:

1) Keaton, the writer and filmmaker, engages in thought experiments: "That train looks like a fun jungle gym. I wonder what stunts I could choreograph with/on/in/around it?" Keaton imagines some "wild things" that he might be able to do with this crazy object called The General, and in doing so he "slapstick-morphizes" a veteran of the Civil War. On the one hand, he caricatures the historical train when he invites it into his script and storyboards.[117] On the other hand, he creates a new object in the process. I call this new train the *Ideal Train.* On this level, we can talk of Keaton the writer, director, and actor as having PK vision:[118] the ability to see the world as a collection of potential affordances that can be exploited for slapstick gags, or even for narrative. Keaton speculates about the complex choreography of human and nonhuman actors that produces the comic moment on the driver-rod ("what if I sat down?…").

This is the level of authorial intention and thus it is often the level that critics implicitly presume. When we focus on the symbolism of the locomotive, for example, we are

[117] This is actually somewhat misleading when dealing with Keaton specifically, as he didn't work with scripts and storyboards until he moved to MGM late in his career. Instead, he and a team of "gag men" would brainstorm ideas, come up with an opening and an ending, and then improvise the middle, using the sets and props at their disposal to invent gags on the spot. While I separate these trains for the sake of conceptual clarity, in practice they are most often as inseparable as Keaton and Buster.

[118] Or, to indulge in a bad pun off of Keaton's name, "BK Vision."

invoking the authorial intention of screenwriter and director as discursive puppet-master.[119] When we attempt to reduce the railroad to its "true meaning," we are implicitly moving into the ideal world where directors and writers and critics have control over the nonhuman objects with which they make meaning. But even if the filmic train cannot be reduced to this level, we cannot ignore it. Writers and filmmakers choreograph the interactions of the set-piece, and enlist it within the wider narrative of the story.

2) The *Ideal Train* that exists in scripts and storyboards, however, already contains another train. I call this the *Diegetic Train.* If the first train is constructed out of ideas, words, and screenwriting software, it contains within it a strange being made out of steel and iron.[120] This is the train that characters within the reality of the story encounter; part of their built environment. On this level, the driver-rod (as character) interacts with Johnnie Gray (not Buster Keaton). We can talk about Johnnie being oblivious to the agency of the driver-rod, or the engineer being blind to the human body that has somehow entered into the mechanical assemblage that makes the train drive, only if we assume that this fictional object is "real"—it has agency, and it cannot be replaced by some other object (a train made out of words or celluloid, for example). This does not supersede the *Ideal Train*, which the director "controls," but in fact already exists within the script—the two are entangled in such a way that they cannot be torn apart, though each remains distinct and retains partial autonomy.

3) And yet, a third level is evidenced by the anecdotal mythology that has become encrusted on to the *The General*. While Keaton may have a relative amount of control over the idealized actions as they take place within a script or a storyboard, and while Johnnie

[119] Or, as Latour points out in *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods,* some even *greater* puppet-master like "power" or "capitalism" that manipulates all objects, including the writer or director (62-3).

[120] By this, I mean that it is made out iron and steel *in the reality of the story*.

Gray can afford to be oblivious to the train because Keaton the director has already choreographed the scene, the slapstick genre requires that the choreography eventually must be performed in front of the camera. We cannot jump immediately from storyboard to finished product: at some point Buster has to actually *encounter* the Mobile Gymnasium. *This* train is made neither out of light and shadow nor script and storyboard. Instead, it is an era-appropriate steam locomotive that Keaton commissioned for the shoot, and historically (but not geographically) authentic narrow-gauge railroad tracks in Oregon.[121] We may think, when we watch the movie, that Keaton and the engineer are in control of the driver-rod and the moving train, but the unpredictable agency of coal, fire, steam, throttle, wheel, slick iron rails, and driver-rod all make their presence known through the anecdote of the engineer's anxiety. On this level, we don't have Keaton the master choreographer or Johnnie the oblivious character, but "Buster," the material body always acting in relation to other material bodies, ready to be thrown about and injured, but reveling in his athletic play on the Mobile Gymnasium. I call this train the *Studio Train.*

These three trains are always present to some degree whenever we see a train-something up on the silver screen, and granting ontological priority to any one level denies the filmic train its complex reality. Each of these trains enacts translations and entanglements that tie *The Historical Train* to *The Screen Train*; that tie the Confederate locomotive to the train-something we experience on the film screen. If we privilege *The Historical Train* in the traditional "reality vs. representation" schema, we are left with a "vertical abyss" in which reality is always-already inaccessible due to the distortions of representation. But even if we

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[121] It could just as easily have been constructed out of green-screens and wind machines or miniature models or computer graphics. The point is not that it is "authentic" but that it is a real object in the world that the actors on set must reckon with.

acknowledge that the filmic train is a new object, not reducible to (or beholden to) its "source material," we still run into problems.

Relying too heavily on *The Ideal Train* leads quickly to an over-reliance on authorial intention and suggests that our goal as critics lies in the unlocking of the "true" meaning of the object (which is paradoxically not to be found in the object at all, according to the critical tendency to read "the film behind the film"). Sticking entirely to the *Studio Train* swings too far in the opposite direction, denying the agency of the filmmaker and ignoring the mediating agency of cameras, scripts, and editing software. In this case, the camera is still "representing" a "reality," which has shifted from the historical General to the "real" object sitting in front of the camera. Finally, to focus entirely on *The Diegetic Train* naïvely pretends that fictional characters act outside of their entanglements with scripts, sets, and directors. Instead, we need to recognize each of these trains as semi-autonomous actors that the *Filmic Train*—which is constructed out of light and shadow, celluloid and projection equipment, editors and cinematographers, steel and iron, directors and audiences—assembles. This is not an illusory train cut off from all reality by virtue of one representational leap, but instead remains entangled with all of the objects of which it is composed. This means that it would *also* be a mistake to read the filmic train dialectically, as if Keaton's General is a synthesis of *Diegetic* and *Studio* train.

I am assuming a definition of the "real" that draws on two frameworks that highlight different aspects of the real object: Latourian actor-network theory and Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology. From a Latourian perspective, a thing is "real" insofar as it is produces effects on other objects: "there is no other way to define an actor but . . . by asking what other actors are modified, transformed, perturbed, or created by the character that is the

focus of attention" (*Pandora's Hope* 122). The driver-rod is "real" insofar as it moves Buster's body (and Johnnie's body) and provokes our laughter. As such, even if the scene had been shot with special effects and the rod was added with computer graphics in post-production, its ontological reality would not be diminished because it would still act on Johnnie's body and the spectator's experience. However, it would be a different kind of being, capable of different kinds of actions, because it no longer acts directly on *Buster*'s body. Graham Harman takes Latour to task for this definition of "realism," claiming that "a thing is real for Latour only if it affects or perturbs other things" (*Prince* 106). This means that, for Latour, the essence of an actor is defined through "trials" that make clear its particular effects on others (81), and thus that the reality of the driver-rod is to be found in the ways it "makes a difference" on Buster, Johnnie, Keaton, the audience, the film camera, the engineer, or any other entity.

For Harman, a thing might by *known* by its effects, but it cannot be defined by its effects because this would be to conflate epistemology and ontology. For Harman, an object's reality comes from the fact that it cannot be translated into any other thing, and this we see in the example of the driver-rod as well: in translating the driver-rod into a bench, Johnnie uncovers some novel affordances but fails to capture the entire nature of the driver-rod (its capacity for powering wheels, for example). This should remind us of the wild *out-side* of the driver-rod: no matter how many creatures translate the driver-rod, there is always the possibility of a new creature or a new situation uncovering new capacities via interaction.[122] The fact that the object always keeps such capacities in reserve suggests an

[122] To reiterate the Nietzsche quote cited earlier: "Supposing one single creature, with its own relationships and perspectives for all things, were missing, then the thing would not yet be 'defined.'"

essential "withdrawn" nature to the ontology of the object.[123] In both the Latourian and the Harmanian sense, however, all four trains are equally real, entangled, and partially autonomous: They all "perturb" other actors in unique ways; none of them is fully captured by any particular embodied translation, nor by a complete list of all known translations. In order to understand the complexity of the Mobile Gymnasium, we must acknowledge the improvisations, experiments, interactions, and nonhuman agencies occurring at each level. We must see how Keaton, Johnnie, and Buster each perform a (slightly different) re-vision of the built environment, each of which undermines representational realism. This is not an academic splitting of hairs. On the contrary, each of these trains provides real pleasure and thrills to actual audiences.

The Ideal Train: Acting in Scripts, Storyboards, and Thought Experiments

The *Ideal Train* exists in scripts and storyboards, in the thought experiments of the writer and in the vision of the director. When Michael Walker dedicates a section of *Hitchcock's Motifs* to "Trains and Boats / Planes and Buses," he is implicitly operating at this level. Walker focuses on the ways Hitchcock exploits trains according to the symbolic logic that privileges the intentions of the *auteur*. Thus, he is able to say that Hitchcock uses the train as a site of risk and threat, claiming that "Hitchcock's train journeys almost always lead his couples into potentially fatal situations, so that, even if death is avoided, the film includes a cathartic climax in which its threat is confronted and overcome" (377). In readings such as this, the train itself is relatively unimportant. What *is* important is the "meaning" ascribed to

[123] It is important for Harman that all objects maintain a "withdrawn" essence (a concept he borrows from Heidegger) that never fully gives itself up to any relation or translation. This is what allows objects to continue to surprise us. For a full discussion of these differences see Harman and Latour's 2008 debate at the London School of Economics, published in transcript form by Zero Books: *The Prince and the Wolf*.

it by the *auteur*. In this case, any particular threat encountered on the railroad journey is nothing more than a "token" example of a general recurring "type" of scene: the cathartic climax. In other words, if the director used another means of accomplishing this catharsis, the overall meaning of the film would remain the same. On this level, we can deny agency to the filmic railroad by assuming that it is nothing more than a reified symbol of which the director is fully in control.

The Mobile Gymnasium suggests a different way of viewing the ideal train. Instead of puppet-masters, the director and screenwriter operate here as choreographers, imagining the interplay between human and nonhuman bodies on storyboards and in scripts and then attempting to direct the dance in front of a camera. As choreographers, the writer and director need to know how the nonhuman will and won't act in any given situation. No longer completely in control of all the pieces of the film assemblage, we see the director now entering into negotiations with things and their Thing-Powers. He is never able to fully anticipate the semi-autonomous actors that comprise a *dramatis personae* that far exceeds the human cast list.

To begin to ask questions about how objects will interact in given situations is inherently speculative. It involves thought experiments that will be tested in production and ultimately judged by an audience. Already it is entangled with historical railroad infrastructure (this is the raw material with which the author begins to speculate), the train as it will exist in the story (the set-piece also operates within a larger narrative context), and the studio trains that exist on soundstages and location shoots (what is the best way to *film* this choreographed dance of human and nonhuman bodies? A real train, or a model, or CGI, or a hybrid? These are questions that the writer and director must entertain even while engaging

the *Ideal Train*). The ability to choreograph a convincing interplay between human bodies and material infrastructure in words or storyboards, then, presupposes a certain level of "PK Vision" already attained by the writer or director. This involves the cultivation of a sensitivity to the material affordances and constraints of particular bodies in particular milieux.

The Diegetic Train: Acting in the Filmworld

If the author (Keaton) speculates about the affordances of the railroad via thought experiments and storyboards, the character (Johnnie) and the train come together within the filmworld. The built environment of this world is "real" as far as Johnnie is concerned.[124] The *Diegetic Train*'s interrelations with the characters in the film is analogous to the *Historical Train*'s interrelations with flesh-and-blood humans. As critics and filmgoers, we begin to see this train when we willingly suspend our disbelief and accept the "human-somethings" and the "train-somethings" as "real" humans and trains. However, this train's existence is not dependent upon the audience: it does not disappear when we cynically refuse to immerse ourselves in a fictional universe. It is *real* whether we acknowledge it or not. Remember that I am defining reality based on two criteria: 1) The object affects others (the *Diegetic Train* interacts with Johnnie, even if nobody is in the theater to see it); 2) The object cannot be replaced by anything else (the train that Johnnie encounters exists in its embodied particularity, not in its symbolic value or its representative type). At this level, characters improvise with the affordances of the built environment, regardless of how that environment

[124] Remember, Johnnie is not a representation of a human but a unique actor in his own right. As such, there is no problem in speaking of his agency.

was created by set designers and property managers,[125] and regardless of the fact that "in reality," their actions are guided by scripts, blocking, the interpretive decisions of Hollywood actors, and production schedules.

In a key scene of the Jackie Chan film, *Police Story 3: Supercop* (1992), for instance, Michelle Yeoh's character drives a dirt bike up the side of a cut-and-fill, jumps off of it as if it were a ramp, and lands on top of a moving train. This ramp leading up the side of the cut must be—in the reality of the film—an accidental affordance of railroad infrastructure. It is emphatically *not* a dirt bike ramp made to look like the side of a railroad cut, as it so obviously is in the reality of the set. As the train moves into the cut, the right-of-way alongside the tracks rises up the side of the cut, creating a "natural" ramp for Yeoh's dirt bike. She leaps off the sloping wall of the cut and lands her bike on the catwalk, her back wheel striking the back of the boxcar as she barely covers the distance. Skidding, she rolls along the train-top while her bike flies off the side and lands next to the tracks.[126] We can

Image 13: ***Michelle Yeoh rides a motorbike up the side of a railroad cut. Notice that the studio ramp has been made to look like an accidental affordance in the reality of the filmworld.***

Image 14: ***Yeoh leaps her dirt bike from the railroad cut on to the top of a speeding train.***

[125] Again, the train can be green-screened or composed using computer graphics. It doesn't matter: from within the filmworld, CGI objects are ontologically equivalent to objects shot "in camera."

[126] When thinking about how a railroad cut acts within a storyworld, it might be useful to juxtapose Yeoh's spectacular dirt bike leap with Thoreau's investigation of Deep Cut's clayey formations. In neither case can the symbolic affordance of cut (the violent connotations of the term in its suggestions of surgery, murder, and violation) or the violent history of the construction (blasting through rock and earth) make sense of these unpredictable interactions. Furthermore, a familiarity with one of these scenes would teach us *nothing* about how to interpret the cut in the other scene. There is no way to link these two moments together except to say that both Yeoh and Thoreau uncover novel capacities of a strange infrastructural space that most often operates as a piece of "zero degree architecture." Thus, Yeoh and Thoreau contribute to our knowledge of the railroad cut in the Spinozist sense: both by revealing new capacities and affordances, *and* by reminding us that "we do not yet know what a body can do."

already see a difference between *The Ideal Train* and *The Diegetic Train* in this scene simply by noticing how ramp-like the cut looks. In translating a speculative idea about interobjective relationships from thought experiment to silver screen, director Stanley Tong has to *construct a set that would afford the action that the filmworld ascribes to the "natural" infrastructural array.* In other words, *The Studio Train* (in this case, a hybrid of "real" train infrastructure and a cut modified into a ramp) is a necessary actor that makes this translation possible. But I am getting ahead of myself—this is only to note that the three trains are always inextricably entangled, existing as layers within each other.

If we can read the train as a symbol or a sign at the level of the author, this becomes a problem in the filmworld, where trains continue to interact with human characters according to the affordances and capacities of their particular embodiments. This is nowhere more obvious than when one of Chan's opponents is knocked in the back of the head by a billboard welcoming rail passengers to the Kuala Lumpur railroad station. Ostensibly, this sign is a mere transmitter of information. Its self-evident "meaning" is *Selma Datang Ke-Kuala Lumpur* ("Welcome to Kuala Lumpur). But both Chan (the fight choreographer) and Inspector Chan Ka Kui (Chan's character) recognize that signs are always embodied. Author and character are thus able to exploit material affordances that are hidden when signs are treated as nothing but discursive messages. In doing so, they remind us of the tough thinginess of every billboard.[127] The billboard exists to

Image 15: ***The materiality of the sign in action.***

[127] While the *traceur* leaps over the Daley Plaza concourse sign, thus rendering its signification impotent or, at best, ironic, Chan here highlights the material agency of the signifier by calling into action the accidental affordances of the sign-as-material-object. The "sign," as theorized by Ferdinand de Saussure, is "the

transmit information, but whatever its intended "meaning," when it is sent out into the world its embodied reality bursts forth with untapped affordances and hidden capacities just waiting to emerge through novel interactions with other entities. In short, its embodied reality *far* exceeds its utilitarian reality as envisioned by its creator.

These interactions don't even require a "human-something." The objects that compose a film's railroad infrastructure interact with each other, and with other diegetic nonhumans, and these interactions can be captured in film in such a way that we are surprised by the nonhuman agency evinced. The cargo hatch on the top of a boxcar, for example, exists for filling that car with freight, but when it hooks the rung of a rope ladder, it is re-articulated (however ephemerally) as hatch *qua* grabber.[128] To use the language of assemblage theory, the cargo hatch enters into a new set of interrelations (i.e. a new assemblage) that has nothing to do with the cargo the train is shipping but everything to do with bad guys in helicopters. Here, the rope ladder "rung-morphizes" the cargo hatch while the hatch "hatch-morphizes" the ladder (and the film camera "cinemorphizes" the interaction). This surprisingly unsurprising encounter occurs in a cinematic close-up,

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whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified" (833). "Signifier" (the linguistic marker—for example, "Kuala Lumpur") and the "signified" (the extra-linguistic referent—in this case, the actual city of Kuala Lumpur) are treated as binary "opposites" in the Saussurian system that, when taken together, make up the entirety of "the whole": what Saussure calls "the sign." But in *Supercop*, we see that "the sign" always exists in excess of the signifier *and* the signified, and cannot be exhausted by appealing to any dialectic synthesis of the two. In order to exist, the sign must take some form—a spoken word, a thought, a handwritten note, a screen image, a street sign, a recorded message, or, in this case, a billboard—and each of these embodied forms has particular affordances and constraints that exceed their role as disseminators of information. The billboard, in this example, is made out of wood and iron, which interacts with a human body and a speeding train-top catwalk in very particular ways that have nothing to do with welcoming anybody to Kuala Lumpur (unless we posit an irony in the sort of "Welcome" that the sign actually gives to the man it knocks down). No longer simply transmitting information, the billboard ceases to be the Saussurian "sign" and becomes instead a "bundle of relations" that we call a billboard: equally capable of knocking a body off a train as providing useful information. This is a good reminder that we cannot be content to interpret literary or filmic objects as mere signifiers, but must remember that at least *some* nonhuman agency, at least *some* material affordances and constraints follow every nonhuman actor over the threshold from our reality to the reality of the storyworld.

[128] "*Of course* a rope ladder is a thing which hooks on to a cargo hatch!"

Image 16: ***The cargo hatch and the the rung of the rope ladder come together as the two most important actors in this shot.***

meaning that in this particular shot, the star "actors" are a rope ladder rung and a cargo hatch, not Jackie Chan and Michelle Yeoh. Sigfried Kracauer tells us that "film is equipped to sensitize us, by way of big close-ups, to the possibilities that lie dormant in a hat, a chair, a hand, and a foot" (45). Here, the dormant possibilities of ladder rung and cargo hatch are articulated through the close-up and thus made visible, sensitizing us to the possibilities of this unique spatial array. If Buster Keaton made visible the agency of the train through the use of the authenticating long-shot, here we see the close-up performing a similar function—not authenticating the shot (we know that this dangerous and complicated helicopter/train fight scene could not have been done in one fluid take) but rather making visible all of the various human and nonhuman actors and interactions and articulations of agency that come together to produce this scene. When the cargo hatch is re-articulated as grabber, and the rung reminds us that it is not materially different than a hook (and sometimes even acts like one), and we see these two actors couple together in perfect union, we get that thrill of recognition ("*of course!*"), that shock of perception whereby the infrastructure of the railroad becomes a site of wild potential, rather than a collection of zero degree architecture.

The Studio Train: Acting in the "Real" World

Live-action film differs from literature insofar as the translation from historical train to the fictional train passes through a required *embodied performance*. In film, in order for a

speculative idea to become a diegetic reality, it must pass through the phase known as "production"—a phase in which real actors interact with real objects in front of a real camera.[129] Keaton prefers cinema to vaudeville because it allows him to play around on "real" objects—particularly large dangerous ones like railroads, steamboats, and speeding cars. Keaton tells us that "the camera allow[s] you to show your audience the real thing; real trains, horses and wagons, snowstorms, floods. Nothing you [can] stand on, feel or see [is] beyond the range of the camera" (qtd. in Carroll 78). The initial (dubious) [130] claim that the audience is shown "the real thing" obscures a more fundamental argument that Keaton is making: film allows *him* to "*stand on*" and "*feel*" the trains, horses, wagons, snowstorms, and floods that he will be interacting with. While the vaudeville stage limits the types of things he can interact with, film (at least potentially) gives him everything and anything in the world.

[129] Again, theoretically CGI objects and green-screens are just as real as Hollywood actors and on-site location shoots. That said, Keaton's sense of "realism" *does* involve on-site embodied interaction with "real" props.

[130] It is ontologically dubious to suggest that what is shown on the screen is simply "the real," not only because of CGI and special effects, but because this denies the mediating work of editing, cinematography, and the manipulations of set design. However, in practice (with the exception of full animation or full-CGI scenes), the camera does capture *something* that is there "in reality," and it is perhaps for this reason that filmmakers continue to speak of the "reality" of the *mise-en-scene* and why film scholars are drawn to this rhetoric of the real. Erwin Panofsky tells us that "the medium of the movies is physical reality as such" (120) and Bazin says that the essence of cinema is "a dramaturgy of Nature" ("Theater and Cinema" 110). Drawing explicitly on both of these thinkers, Stanley Cavell reminds us that "you can always ask, pointing to an object in a photograph—a building, say—what lies behind it, totally obscured by it" (*World Viewed* 23). The answer could be "the back wall of a sound stage," but this still reminds us that we are dealing, often enough, with the filming of action that took place "in real life." Indeed, Panofsky qualifies his use of the term "physical reality" by refusing to make a distinction between "the physical reality of eighteenth-century Versailles" and "a Hollywood facsimile indistinguishable therefrom for all aesthetic intents and purposes" (120). We thus cannot know *a priori* the various entanglements between what we think of as "reality" and the diegetic *mise-en-scene* of the film (will the rocks be projections of real rocks or papier-mâché rocks? Will the scene use an authentic locomotive or a toy model or a CGI animation or a contemporary engine dressed up like a Civil War engine?). These entanglements can only be parsed out in the individual project, and as such no universal theory of the ways in which film entangles with "material reality" is possible. We can only continue to probe and ask, as Cavell does, "what happens to reality when it is projected and screened?" (16).

Image 17: ***Buster gets to feel the "real" train beneath his feet.***

Image 18: ***When he runs out of catwalk, he leaps onto the water tower spigot.***

Image 19: ***After breaking his neck on the tracks, Buster stands up and runs away.***

The importance of "standing on" things, of feeling their solid thinginess beneath his feet speaks to Buster's love of the Mobile Gymnasium. For a train to operate symbolically, it doesn't much matter whether it is a real huffing and puffing era-appropriate steam engine or a cardboard cut-out on a stage. But the specific material differences between the *Studio Train* that he gets to play around with on the set of *The General*, and the cardboard cut-outs that fill the stages of vaudeville theaters, are precisely the differences that excite Keaton. Now that he can run around on real locomotives and boxcars, the possibilities for embodied play and complex human/nonhuman choreography increase dramatically. Keaton posits an ontology of the film image that has *as its foundation* "real" embodied interactions. And this is not just about Buster Keaton feeling a real train beneath *his* feet. It is important—not just for Keaton, but for any slapstick comedian—that audiences have affective access to this extra-diegetic reality. For a good slapstick gag to work, it requires an audience that experiences the acrobatics as taking place simultaneously on the screen, in the narrative, and as a "real encounter" *simultaneously*.

While the driver-rod gag went off without a hitch, Buster was not always so lucky. In *Sherlock, Jr.,* the unnamed protagonist played by Buster finds himself on top of a moving

train. While the train leaves the depot (screen-left), Buster sprints in the opposite direction, trying to return to the depot (screen-right). The result is a comical gag in which Buster appears to be running in place on top of a giant industrial treadmill.[131] At least, until the train ends, at which point he leaps off the final car and on to the water tower's spigot arm (which until this moment had been waiting patiently as an inert backdrop). Steam trains used to stop every thirty miles in order to refill their tender with water. To do so, the boilerman would "jerk" a chain attached to the spigot arm. When Buster jumps on the arm, the weight of his dangling body pulls it slowly down, chain and all. When the water is released, it dumps Buster's body unceremoniously onto the tracks below. This is all done in the same authenticating long-shot that captured him running over the tops of the boxcars, producing the "naïve realism" that Noël Carroll attributes to the cinematographic technique. The vast majority of writers on Keaton—both popular and academic—point out that Buster fractured his neck in the fall but didn't notice it until years later when he started getting migraines. The dissemination of the anecdote through biographies, popular articles, and critical essays contributes to an authenticating mythology of the Buster body that, when combined with the "naïve realism" of Keaton's cinematography, works to entangle and confuse the relationship between *Screen Train* and *Studio Train* in both the audience's experience of the film (are we wowed by the cinematic excitement of the gag or by Buster's real-world acrobatics and athleticism?) and in terms of analytical interpretation (which train is more "real"? Can they be separated?).

[131] We will see this gag again in the next chapter when we look at the recurring situation of the "tunnel-duck." As we will see, Keaton is not the only actor to exploit the spectacle of two bodies—human and train—running in opposite directions.

Stuntwork was crucial in the golden age of slapstick comedy, drawing on the genre's roots in vaudeville and highlighting the performance of the embodied spectacle. The audience expects the double thrill of the laugh and the awe-inspiring audacity, agility, and corporeal intelligence of the performer. James Agee calls Harold Lloyd a prized performer precisely because he "continued to do his own dirty work, like all of the best comedians," climbing a real building in the climax of *Safety Last!* (1923) even though he had blown apart half of his right hand when a "comedy bomb exploded prematurely" (115). The *sine qua non* of the slapstick performer is the ability to perform all stunts and gags "in reality," and Lloyd's career would have been over had he been unable to climb tall buildings with his busted hand. Agee's comment reminds us that the genre itself relied on the naïve realism that Keaton produced using the authenticating long-shot.

Carroll suggests that these long-shots of Keaton playing on the train serve three purposes: 1) Keaton's pride in displaying his own ability; 2) audience appreciation of Keaton's acrobatic skill; 3) the titillation of the audience by actual danger to Keaton (78). To cut away during a gag would be to cheat the audience—to suggest that the danger was produced by movie magic rather than embodied acrobatics. This also suggests that audience interest in slapstick comedy shifts between the film itself and the "real" stuntwork that was assumed to have taken place "in camera." This is to say that Keaton isn't just indulging in an empty rhetoric of the real. We can theorize all we want to about the gap separating the representational image from the reality it is supposed to represent, but Buster's fractured neck (and Lloyd's missing fingers) are powerful reminders that in practice the genre of the slapstick comedy always already assumes that the "real" stunts are part of the film-going

experience. Keaton asks us to acknowledge the presence of the *Studio Train* (and the studio Buster) as part of the viewing experience.

His cinematography, his work with "real" trains, his fractured neck, and the entire ethos of vaudevillian slapstick all point to the translations that entangle these different "realities." To appreciate Buster's slapstick, we must accept that real interactions took place in front of the camera. Which means that, as everyday moviegoers, we regularly violate the central metaphysical axiom of post-Kantian metaphysics and the film theories it supports: thou shalt not speak of the "thing-in-itself." But it seems that slapstick comedy as a genre *requires* that we experience filmic objects and pratfalling actors as straddling the ontological realities of the screen and the set. That, as an audience, our experience of slapstick is fundamentally shaped by the way that "actual danger" seeps through the celluloid and "titillates" us.

Jackie Chan, who often cites Keaton as an influence,[132] takes this realism to the next level through his inclusion of outtakes during the credits of each of his films. While Keaton relies on the cinematographic technique of the authenticating long-shot, the dissemination of anecdotes, and a general expectation that slapstick comedians perform their own stunts, Chan explicitly entangles the *Diegetic Train* and the *Studio Train* through the hybrid genre of the

[132] In fact, Jackie Chan models much of his fight choreography on the slapstick routines of early silent film comedians. In his autobiography, *I Am Jackie Chan,* Chan says that he has "always loved Hollywood's black-and-white silent classics—the comedies of Keaton and and Lloyd and Chaplin." He even goes so far as to call them "the first actions heroes": "Without special effects and without stunt doubles, they did amazing things, falling and flying, climbing and tumbling, using their bodies to make miracles on screen" (301). The link between Keaton and Chan is clearly the commitment to "make miracles on screen" through actual embodied interactions with the environment.

Image 20: ***Yeoh's missed jumps are as much a part of*** **Supercop** ***as her character's perfect landing.***

Image 21: ***The outtakes bring Yeoh's real-world missed jumps into the viewing experience.***

outtake. The outtakes from *Police Story 3: Supercop* include a number of "bloopers" drawn from the final train set-piece. This scene required the film's most difficult and dangerous stunts, so it isn't surprising to see it dominate the outtakes. We may think, when we watch the dirt bike jump cited earlier, that Michelle Yeoh and Stanley Tong are in control of the bike and the train—or that the scene is nothing but a "representation" of dirt bikes and trains—but the outtakes disabuse us of this antirealist fantasy. In the outtakes, we see that the momentum created by the jump, combined with Yeoh's use of the throttle and the speed of the train, sends her flying off the train-top and onto the embankment on three occasions.[133] As viewers, assuming we know that Yeoh performs her own stunts (if we don't know it yet, the outtakes will educate us), we are awed by this scene not only for its choreography, but for its "actual danger," and both the skill and the courage required to perform it "in-camera."

[133] In a 1997 interview with fan and blogger "Agent Ricochet," Yeoh reveals her own ambivalence about doing stunts: "Why would you DO something like that? It's good that it's not necessary nowadays to do that, because in that particular scene, when I had one of my stunt boys doing it, he crashed off the boxes at the other end and ended up in the hospital with a broken leg." But like Buster's broken neck and Harold Lloyd's missing fingers, the stunt boy's broken leg only serves to heighten the affective impact of Yeoh's successful leap. Indeed, while Yeoh asks the rhetorical question—"Why would you DO something like that?"—in order to express her gratitude that Hong Kong cinema now has access to CGI effects and green-screens that take some of the danger away, the question gets to the heart of a certain pleasure we get from watching Yeoh's stunt. When a similar scene takes place in Jean-Claude Van Damme's *Derailed* (2002), for example, the quick cuts and cross-fades make it obvious that he didn't "really" jump his motorcycle onto the top of a moving train, and in some sense we feel cheated. The scene may be exciting in theory or within the filmworld, but it lacks, as Carroll says, the "titillation" we feel when we sense that the actors are in "real danger."

Image 22: ***In the filmworld, the characters use the side-rails to push their bodies back onto the safety of the train-top.***

Image 23: ***The same side-rail that Chan's character used to keep himself from falling is now being utilized by Jackie Chan, the actor, for the same purpose.***

Image 24: ***When he climbs back onto the moving train, Chan shows us that the danger was real by putting his hand on his heart and breathing deep sighs of relief.***

Outtakes are a strange genre, because all of the actors (human and nonhuman) exist in a liminal space between the worlds of the studio and the diegesis—the same components of the train that serve particular purposes in the story are capable of transforming instantaneously (and completely) when something goes wrong and the studio reality forcibly replaces the reality of the story. In Image 23, we see Chan falling off of the moving train. He grabs hold of the side-rail to keep from landing on the causeway below, and his two opponents in the film instantly morph into colleagues, reaching down to help the movie star back onto the train. The genre of the outtake depends upon a naïve realism that allows the *Studio Train* to infiltrate the film. "Reality" is here expressed by Chan putting his hand over his heart and breathing deep sighs of relief (Image 24), as well as engaging in some nervous laughter.[134] All of this is as much a part of Chan's legacy as any of his characters, meaning

[134] The fact that he is conscious of a camera, and aware that his actions will be captured for the outtakes reel, is always already mediating his performance of the "real," but the fact remains that Chan the actor is aboard a material train that has the capacity to hurt him.

that Chan's embodied play on the Mobile Gymnasium (as it exists on the movie set) is as present in the audience experience as the reality of the diegesis.

In another major stunt, Chan is picked up off the catwalk by the spigot of a water tower and carried in a large arc around to the next train car. This is a common use of both water spigots (and mail hooks) in film, and can be seen in The Marx Brothers' *Go West* (1940), the Gene Wilder comedy *Silver Streak* (1976), and the contemporaneous action film *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989). Seen from the level of *The Ideal Train*, we could speak knowingly of Chan's intertextual homage to the action and comedy film gags of his Hollywood heroes. The scene, in this reading, is merely a convention of the train film. Viewed from within the confines of the filmworld, the gag is funny and exciting (we never fear for Inspector Chan Ka Kui's life), and it advances the story by taking our protagonist closer to the helicopter, where the final battle will take place. But the outtakes show us that something else is going on that can't be understood without positing a permeable boundary between reality and representation. Here, we see Chan's body accidentally hooked on to the water spigot with a tether that was designed to be a safety mechanism.[135] This connection brings him too close to the spinning helicopter blades and he is visibly shaken by the encounter. It is unsettling to watch the crew cut Chan's limp body down from the spigot, as

[135] In our initial discussion of the Chicago Daley Plaza *traceur* we saw that "[w]alls meant to provide safety are used here as a catalyst for risk-taking." Here we see another "safety mechanism"—the tether—participating in parkour-like risk-taking, but with a twist. The tether exists in the world of the studio, but not in the world of the diegesis. It is supposed to remain hidden—a piece of zero degree architecture that keeps Chan "safe" while he plays on the Mobile Gymnasium. Instead, it *increases* the risk by acting *out-side of* Chan's intentions. Instead of blocking Chan from *accidentally falling*, the tether stops Chan from *purposefully escaping.* Its emergence as a major player in the film via its cameo role in the outtakes is striking because we see that it is not just the Mobile Gymnasium on which Chan is playing—he is simultaneously operating within the machinic ensemble of the film apparatus, of which the tether is a part. Thus we must remember that the various components of the film apparatus are *also* capable of acting upon the bodies of film actors. This is not just because film distorts and translates those bodies into screen images, but because the movie-making ensemble is a collection of embodied objects in the world.

Image 25: ***On film and on paper, the stunt is funny and exciting.***

Image 26: ***But on set, the water spigot took him too close to the spinning helicopter blades.***

he appears traumatized by the sudden refusal of his nonhuman co-actors to follow his intricate choreography. His outtakes elicit excitement, then, but also a felt connection with Chan the human being—fear, awe, relief, perhaps even some ambivalence about whether the stunt was worth it. In a scene like this, if we go back and re-watch the film, or have some advanced knowledge that the actor is "performing his own stunts," we marvel at Chan's masterfully intricate choreography and indulge in the spectacle of the fight scene within the diegesis *while at the same time* enjoying the awe-inspiring stuntwork that took place on the other side of the camera once upon a time.[136]

[136] We are asked to feel this strange layering of realities every time we are told that an actor "does his own stunts." A famous example is the long set-piece on Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the world's tallest building, in *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* (2011). Speaking of this scene, Tom Cruise told Total Film: "I literally had to figure a way to fly . . . because even with months of training, I didn't anticipate the crosswinds you get when you're up that high. Once I figured out how to use my feet as rudders and got the spatial awareness, we got the shots we wanted" (qtd. in Kennedy). Cruise is talking about a kind of Keatonian realism where the material elements of the built environment interact with the body in a way that doesn't happen on a soundstage in front of a green-screen. "Spatial awareness" is a kind of knowledge that can only be produced through embodied interaction. Even after "months of training," he still has to improvise with his body in order to engage with the particular constraints and affordances of an infrastructural space that does not exist anywhere else in the world. Thought experiment: Imagine that director Brad Bird could reproduce this scene on a sound-stage with wind machines and special effects so that it looked identical to the finished product as it exists now. The only difference would be that the anecdotal mythology of Tom Cruise "actually" climbing the tallest building in the world and thus having to renegotiate his embodied relationship with the material world through spatial awareness is gone, and audiences are aware that this scene, however thrilling within the diegesis, was filmed in Hollywood in front of a green-screen. How does this change the viewing experience?

Image 27: ***A technician cuts Chan's safety tether and frees him from the spigot.***

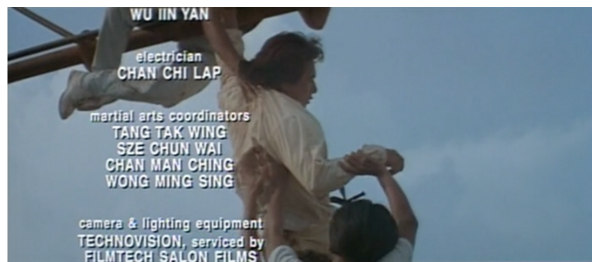

Image 28: ***After cutting the tether, Chan has to be carried off the set. Aren't gag reels supposed to be funny?***

The genre of the "outtake" teaches us about the "reality" of the stunts, and it disseminates a Keatonian mythology of realism that adds extradiegetic thrills to our viewing experience. In fact, the outtakes are an expected convention of the Chan film, and often the most highly anticipated and talked-about "scene." In *Supercop*, where the outtakes focus primarily on the train stunts, they serve to further entangle the material and the filmic trains in the audience experience, making it impossible to speak of one without the other. Indeed, the very notion of the "stunt" suggests such an entanglement.

"From the Fully Digital to the Death-Defyingly Real": The Mobile Gymnasium and CGI

In elucidating the layered ontology of the filmic train, I hope to have shown that, as we saw in *Walden*, fictional trains are always already entangled with affordances, affects, and agencies that bind representations and realities together in ways that neither hierarchical ontologies nor a post-Kantian bracketing of the "thing-in-itself" can can account for. In making this point, I drew heavily on films that employed very "real" studio trains and film actors that built their careers around playing on *actual* speeding trains. Before leaving this argument, I want to make it clear that the ontology suggested by the Mobile Gymnasium in no way depends upon the extreme acrobatics of Keaton or Chan. The interpretive

methodology I have employed is all about "following the actors": How do the trains at various levels interact with each other in specific ways in specific films? If the *Studio Train* is not a "real" train but a computer-animated train or a model train, these are differences that must be taken into account, but they by no means undermine the fundamental lesson learned in this chapter: that the train-somethings we encounter in film are *never* "representations" that are cut off from reality; instead, they are always entangled with various humans and nonhumans operating within the realities of the studio, the film, and the audience.

The *Studio Train* does not have to be composed of actual locomotives and passenger cars. As it turns out, we can move from *Historical Train* and *Ideal Train* to *Filmic Train* and *Diegetic Train* through a *Studio Train* that is not a train at all. Or rather, it is a train-something whose "somethingness" can be made out of *anything*. If it is composed of detached boxcars carried along highway roads on flatbed trucks (as we will encounter later), actors and stuntmen will have no problems exploiting this train-something's gymnastic affordances. If it is made completely on a computer (like *The Polar Express* [2004]) then we have sacrificed the "merry old time" of the stuntmen, but managed to retain the Mobile Gymnasiums of the *Ideal Train* and the *Diegetic Train.* I don't see a problem there. The *Studio Train* still exists; it just exerts its agency in different ways: usually by strapping special effects artists into computer chairs (as we will also see later).

In fact, the "real" railroad infrastructure remains an important mediator no matter what *The Studio Train* is made out of—even if it is animated or created with CGI. In Disney's 2013 remake of *The Lone Ranger*, for example, Gore Verbinski eagerly mixed a "real" train—led by its locomotive, The Constitution—with CGI and other special effects without sacrificing either the rhetoric of "the real" or his joy in playing with the Mobile

Gymnasium. A brief analysis of this hybrid train will help make two points. First, that neither the theoretical value nor the affordances of the Mobile Gymnasium necessarily go away when special effects and “fake” *Studio Trains* are introduced. And second, that the *Historical Train* is entangled with the *Filmic Train* in far more complex and subtle ways than we have examined thus far, including in its relationship with special-effects technicians.

Does a CGI train have agency at all three levels, even though it doesn’t fully emerge until post-production? Using Latour’s simple acid test, we have to say yes—it has the ability to affect and be affected by others at the ideal, the diegetic, and the studio levels (audiences, actors, film critics, directors, cinematographers, editors, and visual effects artists all negotiate with this thing called the CGI train). Does it have the same agency as a material train? Of course not. That’s why CGI trains exist: to do things that real trains can’t do, or that real filmmakers can’t (financially) afford to do with real trains. And for this reason, it also accords with Harman’s definition of a real entity: it cannot be replaced by any other entity. The CGI train has unique (and “withdrawn”) capacities and tendencies that a “real” studio train does not have, and vice versa. Instead of pitting *The Lone Ranger* against *Supercop* or *The General* in a fake/real binary, we can explore the strange entanglements taking place in each film. The CGI train is equally capable of re-visioning the built environment, and its entanglements with human and nonhuman actors in this case are more, not less, complex than if The Constitution had been entirely “real.”

Keatonian naïve realism remains in full effect here, even though the film is built on the shoulders of a special effects team. In interviews and “behind-the-scenes” exposés that preceded the release of *The Lone Ranger*, the filmmakers and actors speak of the train in two seemingly contradictory ways. First, the “real” danger of the studio train and its historical

authenticity are stressed, suggesting that filmmakers and audiences alike have a vested interest in both historical realism (like Keaton, Verbinski goes to great lengths to procure an "era-appropriate" steam locomotive), and the kinds of extradiegetic thrills produced by a foreknowledge that actors are "really" on the train. In almost the same breath, they celebrate the excess of visual effects required to create a "photorealist" *mise-en-scene*. Verbinksi wanted fifty percent of the film done "in-camera" and fifty percent supplemented with CGI and special effects. This ratio, referred to as "The Fifty Percent Rule," is regularly stressed in interviews with the cast and crew, even though in practice the "Rule" was discarded almost immediately as an impossible goal. According to some sources, as much as 95 percent of what audiences see on screen was done through visual effects and CGI. How can Verbinski and his actors simultaneously promote the film as a "visual effects" spectacle *and* double-down on Keatonian naïve realism? The two rhetorical modes are not as contradictory as they first appear.

We could engage in a critical debunking of Verbinski, Armie Hammer, Johnny Depp, and William Fichtner, "proving" that they are either attempting to trick us in their interviews or they are deluding themselves as to the "reality" of the studio train. It would be easy to point to the various artificial methods in place to produce the illusion of reality (computer graphics, framing, editing, safety mechanisms, model trains). But it might be more interesting to take them at their word. After all, the "reality" of the on-set experience is always a few translations down the path from the eventual film—is it possible to have a "real" experience with a "real" train that is simultaneously the artificial product of a visual effects team? Once we forgo the desire to locate "reality" in only one place (the place that is forever cut off from human access), it is remarkably easy to answer: Yes. Of course.

First, let's look at the ways that the director and stars of *The Lone Ranger*—Verbinski, Hammer, Depp, and Fichtner—invoke the same naïve realism as Buster Keaton. Their realism is not created through the use of the long-shot (which would have been impossible), but through the dissemination of interviews, and through a vested (and expensive) interest in historical authenticity and the building of five miles of track in the New Mexico desert. In interviews with Josh Wigler of MTV News, they all focus on the same theme: this train is *real*.[137]

Verbinski tells us that "[a]ctors act differently when they're acting on top of a moving train than when they're standing in front of a blue-screen. Trying to get honesty in there was important. . . . You have to go in and embrace the elements."[138] For Verbinski, "the elements" (wind, dust, dirt, grime, the speed of the causeway shooting by ten feet below the actor's feet) play on the actor's ability to act. Through the interaction of human bodies and speeding trains emerges something he calls "honesty," whereas green-screens,[139] presumably, produce "dishonesty." Here, Verbinski highlights the train's agency in terms of its ability to

[137] Nevermind the artistic license taken in running a transcontinental railroad through Texas, where it never existed. The emphasis here is on material and technological, rather than historical, accuracy.

[138] The belief that actors must feel the emotions of the characters in order to act "honestly" or portray emotions "authentically" can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*: "he who feels the emotions to be described will be the most convincing; distress and anger, for instance, are portrayed most truthfully by one who is feeling them at the moment" (245). This is also the theory of acting that drives the "method acting" techniques of Constantin Stanislavsky and Lee Strasberg. However, I want to highlight Verbinski's focus on the dispersed causality of good, "honest," acting. Instead of arising solely from the actor's imagination or sensory memory (Aristotle claims that good actors might have a "touch of madness" in them because of their ability to inhabit an emotional state of being at will), Verbinski suggests that this "honesty" emerges out of an interactive encounter between human actors and the nonhuman objects that populate the set. "Acting," this suggests, is always already "interacting."

[139] There are a number of factors involved in choosing to use blue-screen or green-screen: costuming, whether you are shooting at night or during the day, whether you are using film or video cameras. While most filmmakers today are moving toward the use of green-screens (digital cameras are especially sensitive to green tones), Hollywood originally used blue-screens for special effects. While Verbinski speaks of blue-screens, I have adopted the more common green-screen. There is, however, no difference in the effect. Both screens are used to "key in" a background that wasn't there "in reality."

affect actors, but through the dissemination of this interview, the train's agency works its way into the experience of the audience who are now able to go see *The Lone Ranger* on opening weekend and know that the actors are "really" on top of the train—the "honesty" promoted by Verbinski can now be projected back into the train by an audience "primed" to see it.

Armie Hammer agrees: "It's the difference between a bunch of guys sweating their asses off and feeling the heat . . . versus a bunch of guys standing in an air-conditioned hangar with a bunch of green fabric all around them. It made it feel that much more real for the actors, and hopefully that translates for the audience." Again, Hammer engages the rhetoric of the real—the "reality" of the *Studio Train* affects the actors, allowing them to produce more "honest" performances which, Hammer hopes, will be visible to the audiences. But again, telling the audience beforehand to be on the lookout for that authentic embodied relationship between humans and trains will help with this "translation." While the broken bones of Buster Keaton and Jackie Chan speak directly to the nonhuman agency of their film sets, The Constitution (unfortunately) failed to break any bones on the set of *The Lone Ranger,* and thus we must take Johnny Depp's word for it that it "hurts when you're doing it." While not as rhetorically effective as Buster's fractured neck, we can recognize the same authenticating work being done here to entangle the "real" train with the filmic train.

William Fichtner takes it a step further:

> That will go to the absolute top of my list of most terrifying things I've ever shot. They're filming us moving at good speed, on top of train cars. Sometimes on top of flatbeds being pulled through canyons by trucks. There were so many things involved in that. Think about the height! It's a sloped

roof. I've got a gun in one hand, Ruth Wilson in the other, looking around for the Lone Ranger, going around bends at 35 mph with a little tether that holds on to you. (Marshall)

Fichtner's affective relationship with the train, evidently, involved a great deal of "real" terror. This supports Verbinski's claim that putting actors on top of moving trains creates more "honest" performances. Instead of having to "fake" terror in front of a green-screen, Fichtner instead channels the "real" terror coursing through his body. Fichtner also tells us exactly which nonhuman actors are responsible for this terror. It's not just "the train" moving at high speed: it's the spatial relationship between the train-top and the causeway below (otherwise known as "height"), it's the sloped roofs, it's the other actors (both human and nonhuman) that are occupying his hands, it's the centrifugal force created by track curvature and miles-per-hour, and (luckily) it's that little tether that keeps Fichtner safe without eliminating the terror that Hammer and Verbinski hope will "translate" to the audience.

All of these actors—sloped roofs and tethers as much as Fichtner and Wilson—participate in creating the spectacle that audiences will enjoy, and we need to take these actors at their words. Like the mythology of Keaton or Chan, these interviews help to create a *Lone Ranger* mythology of authentic terror and danger. As Barry Pepper says: "It's mind-blowing. Doing all these gunfights and live action on these trains while they're careening around these corners. People are bouncing and rattling all over the place and it's just, it's alive and electric" (Rosen). What makes it particularly alive? Track curvature, movement, speed, bouncing and rattling, "live action."[140]

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[140] The implication is that without these things, the scene would be "dead," which is unfair to a great railroad set-piece built around green-screens and wind-tunnels, like the show-stopper in *The Wolverine* (2013). Despite the lack of "reality," it still creates enough of a thrilling "liveness" to warrant a spot in *Scene Creek*'s

Image 29: ***Hammer hangs off the side of a speeding train. Does the "real" fear translate?***

Image 30: ***Fichtner and Wilson on top of the train: "Think about the height!"***

But take a closer look at Fichtner's interview. While the acrobatics of Keaton and Chan may have suggested that the reality of the Mobile Gymnasium breaks down if the *Studio Train* is not an actual train, Fichtner tells us that *reality has nothing to do with representational reality.* Fichtner unabashedly celebrates the naïve realism of "real embodied interactions" while simultaneously telling us that the *Studio Train* was sometimes nothing more than a "flatbed being pulled through a canyon by trucks." Like the *Filmic Train*, the *Studio Train* is a strange chimeric beast—not a train exactly but a "train-something." The point is that this strange being is *no less real than Keaton's General.* It affects others and remains inexhaustible. And as a real actor in the studio-world, it is just as capable of inducing real-life terror as any era-appropriate steam engine.

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top five set-pieces of 2013 (Lewis). (Incidentally, the final train scene in *The Lone Ranger* also made this list. It's remarkable that in 2013, half a century after the decline of passenger rail in the United States, two railroad set-pieces could make a top five list in one year. There really must be something special about the train as a Mobile Gymnasium to give it that kind of staying power in cinema.) But the point is taken that the train adds something to the human. Actor + green-screen is not the same being, does not have the same dispersed agency, as actor + train. In altering the assemblage of human and nonhuman actors, every actor is also altered. Changes include the affective life of the film actor (terror, aliveness, electricity, fear, sweat), the exterior presentation of a character (otherwise known as "acting," which can be "honest" or "simulated"), and the audience experience of the film (what Hammer refers to as "translation" is nothing more than audiences somehow noticing that ineffable quality of "honesty" produced by human + train). This latter change also streams out of the theaters through word-of-mouth, critical reviews, and box office returns that will affect the possibility of continuing the franchise.

But it gets worse—or rather, it gets more "artificial." To this strange trainy contraption we should add Rick Marshall's claim that "approximately 95 percent of what you see on the screen was added digitally." At first this appears to contradict Armie Hammer's claim that "ninety-nine percent of it was real" (Taylor), but they are talking about different things. Hammer is talking about the stunts, most of which were done "in reality" (which could mean they were done on top of a "real" train or that they were done on top of a boxcar that was removed from its chassis and placed on top of a flatbed truck). Marshall, on the other hand, is talking about details like locomotive smoke—which obviously must be added in post-production if the *Studio Train* is a detached boxcar pulled by diesel trucks. Marshall actually backs up the naïve realism of Hammer and Verbinski: "In order to produce the scenes Verbinski had envisioned for *The Lone Ranger*, the visual effects team used several different techniques, ranging from the fully digital to the death-defyingly real."

If we are attuned to a flat ontology of entanglements, we don't need to debunk Marshall for blatantly conflating representation and reality. Instead, we can begin thinking about this "artificial" smoke. It is not severed from the historical train—on the contrary, it is the smoke's stubborn reality that lies at the center of this entanglement. Tim Alexander, the VFX (video effects) supervisor on the film, tells Jim Thacker at CG Channel, "[w]e had about 150 people on the show, and at one point we had almost 20 FX people just doing smoke!" Smoke is originally released from the era-appropriate locomotive smokestack because of the coal-burning furnace that builds the steam that drives the engine. It is a by-product of infrastructure, something akin to "zero degree architecture." In the 21st-century context of CGI filmmaking, its agency is *extended* rather than reduced. Its very existence in the world, and its inseparability from the "authentic" 1860s locomotive, requires attention.

Verbinski tells us that people "intuitively" know what railroads look like, so authenticity is not a luxury but a requirement for a train film, and you don't have to be a railfan to know that steam locomotives produce smoke. The smoke first asserts its agency by merging with directors, cinematographers, visual effects coordinators, audiences, cameras, and "authentic" locomotives and forcing its way into the filmworld. It worms its way into scenes that are done almost entirely in CGI, drawing *twenty* "FX people" away from other duties (or perhaps necessitating their inclusion on the payroll in the first place) in order to deal with the difficult task of creating not only photorealistic smoke, but attempting to follow that smoke through all of its interactions with other things: in order to do their jobs, VFX technicians must attune themselves to the ways that smoke moves and dissipates, the ways it obscures vision, creates shadows and plays of light, fills boxcars through open windows, swirls up into the air and infiltrates an otherwise pristine skyscape (pristine, but no less demanding—these VFX artists are also in charge of clouds and wind which, like smoke, refuse to stay put).

Alexander doesn't just tell us that smoke is a tricky actor, requiring creative strategies for working with it as it interferes with the visual details of a CGI shot. He also emphasizes precisely how many human bodies are stuck in ergonomic computer chairs staring at screens and manipulating keyboards for excessive numbers of hours *because of the smoke.* While the goal of these VFX smoke-workers is to integrate their artificial smoke so seamlessly that audiences won't be able to tell the difference between "in-camera" ("real") and CGI locomotive smoke, the

Image 31: ***Here we see the New Mexico track and the locomotive smoke. Which parts of this shot are real and which are faked?***

purpose of the interview is to alert audiences to this work in order to create a new spectacle. What was once an unimportant byproduct of an old (but authentic) transportation technology now demands attention to the ways it moves, the ways it plays with other actors (human and nonhuman) on the screen, and the twenty VFX people who now lurk in each puff of smoke through an entanglement that audiences are able to perceive because of the interviews. It becomes an awe-inspiring spectacle of its own, partially autonomous from the rest of the film but contributing to the overall effect. In this situation, the "real" smoke is not "replaced" by its "representation." To put it into these terms doesn't make sense, because it is precisely the properties of real smoke that assert their agency on the FX people and force them, through the aesthetic medium of photorealism, to pay attention to the things that it does in and with the world. In the viewing experience, both the vital agency of the smoke (it took twenty men to pin it down!) and the excessive artistry of the FX team swirls through the film, creating extradiegetic thrills that rely on the affective presence of smoke's actual affordances and constraint and the audience's sensitivity to the human work that goes on in production and post-production. If we enjoy the "titillation" of "actual danger," we also marvel at the artistic skill of good special-effects work that "looks real." In both cases, our affective film-viewing experience is always caught up in a nexus of realities, and we are capable of experiencing narrative excitement and extra-diegetic thrills simultaneously. As a viewer, is it necessary that I bracket the reality of the VFX crew, the reality of Johnny Depp and Armie Hammer, and the reality of The Lone Ranger and Tonto, and keep these realities strictly separated within my own affective-aesthetic attachments to the film? Or is it more accurate to say that my viewing experience is shaped by simultaneous attachments to *all* of these realities?

The Mobile Gymnasium doesn't necessarily give us a framework for thinking about the agency of the smoke, but it does do the important work of forcing us to acknowledge the complex ways that film images are always already intertwined with "the real." The flat ontology that the Mobile Gymnasium demands allows us to trace the ways that things like computer-generated locomotive smoke also straddle the ontological pseudo-divide between representation and reality. More importantly, if trains entered Westerns not (only) because they were useful symbols of progress or capitalism but (also) because stuntmen wanted to play on them, then we need to seriously rethink both the ontology of filmic object and thus we need to rethink our interpretive practices. As we have seen, the filmic train, like any "real" train, is an assemblage. At least three other real trains are always present in every filmic train. The abyssal gap between the train we experience on screen and "the train" as a real-world historical transportation infrastructure is actually filled with translations and transformations, encounters and mediations, storyboards and scripts, studio trains and stunt-people, all of which serve to bind the image and the reality together in such a way that it would be impossible to disentangle them if not for the prevailing metaphysical belief that representation cuts us off from reality.

It is this series of translations that allows—and forces—the writers and directors of the set-piece to engage in a brand of speculative realism. The set-piece is nothing other than a prolonged experimental speculation about what various bodies will do under certain circumstances. It is "realism" because the set-piece, by definition, acknowledges the affordances and constraints that follow real-world objects into fictional universes. It is speculative because it acknowledges the inevitable gaps produced by translation and mediation. The metaphysical assumption of the set-piece is that *nobody has yet determined*

what the body can do. Like the practitioner of parkour who "*traceur*-morphizes" the urban environment, the set-piece self-consciously re-articulates the infrastructural milieu as a site of embodied play. It doing so, it challenges us to "re-vision" the built environment entailed by railroad infrastructure, to re-imagine the capacities of the human body within that environment, and to re-think the ontology of film.

The Recurrent Situation:
Trains and Genre / Trains as Genre

The term "genre" is relatively recent in critical discourse. . . . Its root terms are genre, gignere*—to beget and (in the passive) to be born. In this latter sense it refers both to a class and an individual.*

— Ralph Cohen, "History and Genre"

From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses; hence rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar, and style are established.

— Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation"

Introduction: Recurring Situations, Genealogy, and Entangled Lines of Descent

The final railroad set-piece of Marvel's 2015 film, *Ant-Man*, surely meets the criteria for Everson's Mobile Gymnasium. Locked in a life-and-death battle, Ant-Man chases his nemesis, Wasp, to a speeding train, leaps on top of the caboose, and hurls projectiles toward the locomotive, trying to knock off his enemy. As happens so often in this situation, the fight is briefly interrupted when the train enters a tunnel. The fast-approaching obstacle created by the low overhang threatens to knock both human insects off of the train-top, and they must respond to the exigencies of the situation. Wasp smashes two ant foot-soldiers against the overhang as he ducks under it. But what will Ant-Man do?

Image 32: ***Ant-Man stands on top of a speeding train that has just entered a tunnel. What will he do? Duck? Run? Jump?***

Image 33: ***The situation (and the shot) echo any number of train films that negotiate the same problem. Here, James Bond and villain respond reflexively to a tunnel-mouth in* Skyfall.**

The situation is not new: Harold Lloyd faces it, and responds by turning and running frantically in the opposite direction, in *Now or Never* (1921)—a move that James McAvoy unsuccessfully attempts to imitate in *Wanted* (2008); Cantinflas throws himself face-down on the boxcar to avoid being hit in *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), as do Daniel Craig (as James Bond) in *Skyfall* (2012), and Sean Connery in *The Great Train Robbery* (1979); The Lone Ranger (Armie Hammer) leaps his horse onto a flatbed car and Zorro (Antonio Banderas) rides his through the top of a boxcar to avoid the oncoming tunnel in *The Lone Ranger* (2013) and *The Legend of Zorro* (2005), respectively; Hero Boy dives headlong into a coal tender in *The Polar Express* (2004) while the Hobo, as a ghost, simply dematerializes. The slow, smooth, and stylized tunnel-ducks of William Fichtner (in *The Lone Ranger*) and Angelina Jolie Pitt (in *Wanted*) suggest that

Image 34: ***Harold Lloyd turns and makes a run for it in*** **Now or Never.**

Image 35: ***James Bond and villain throw themselves face down on the cat-walk in*** **Skyfall.**

Image 36: ***Angelina Jolie Pitt acrobatically swivels and performs a stylized limbo in*** **Wanted.**

Image 37: ***The Lone Ranger jumps his horse onto a flatbed car just before the tunnel-mouth.***

Image 38: ***If he fails to respond, or responds ineffectively, he will be flattened by the tunnel, like James McAvoy in* Wanted.**

this has happened before: these aestheticized maneuvers mark the characters as well-practiced in navigating the infrastructural hazards one inevitably faces when standing on top of a speeding train. So what will Ant-Man do? Turn and run? Jump between the cars? Fall on his face? Do the limbo? Our horizon of expectations, conditioning how we anticipate this situation playing out, draws on a long multi-generic lineage of tunnel-ducks. In any case, we are not surprised that Ant-Man faces the inevitable tunnel mouth. It makes sense given both the infrastructural milieu and the repetition of the situation throughout film history. In other words, it is both an interobjectively and intertextually predictable situation. The only question is: can director Peyton Reed do something interesting with the tunnel-duck, given how often it's been done before?

While Reed draws on a recurrent situation with a rich intertextual lineage, the affordances of this particular *mise-en-scene* are strikingly novel. The twist: Ant-Man and Wasp are the size of insects, and the speeding train upon which they fight is a child's Thomas the Tank Engine train set.[141] The tunnel, in this case, is not made out of stone or brick or cut into the side of a mountain, but consists of a single toy wooden block, arching over the tracks. The material affordances and "Thing-Powers" of the "tunnel" are thus very different from the tunnels that James Bond, Zorro, and The Lone Ranger must negotiate. To return to

[141] As in movies like *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), much of the action and humor driving *Ant-Man* comes from an exploration of familiar milieux as experienced from a radically different perspective. What are the affordances and constraints, the dangers and opportunities, of a household bathtub, a sidewalk storm drain, or a toy train to a tiny person? What if that tiny person has superhuman powers? This reinforces the point that affordances are emergent and interrelational, depending equally upon the embodied capacities of both actor and environment.

Spinoza, not only do we "not yet know what the body can do," bodies don't even remain stable across iterations of a recurring situation. The audience is primed by a horizon of expectations that has been shaped by the particular interrelational affordances and constraints of two bodies: the human and the tunnel-mouth (usually made out of brick, stone, or wood, and almost always immovable). The possible responses to the situation have generally been shaped by the limitations of the human body. Peyton Reed's brilliance here lies in invoking this rich intertextual history of tunnel-ducks and then subverting it by drawing on the capacities of two entirely new bodies: the toy tunnel block and the ant-size superhero. We delight in Ant-Man's novel improvisation: he simply picks up the tunnel and hurls it at Wasp, knocking him off the train and causing a derailment. We do not yet know what the toy tunnel-block can do, because we have never seen what Ant-Man can do with it; we have never seen how it could act within this entirely novel situation. And yet, when we first see the tunnel approaching, we know we have seen this before, and our expectations are shaped by our long experience with filmic tunnel-ducks.

In the previous two chapters, I have often noted how trains are strikingly *different* and *singular* in every text, thus making it impossible to know these strange strangers in advance, or explain them away using predetermined symbolic logic. I have argued, repeatedly, that the only way to learn anything about a train-scene was to move away from preconceived ideas and "follow the actors." Ant-Man's playful re-appropriation of a

Image 39: ***His response—to pick the tunnel up and throw it—has never been seen before. As the affordances and constraints of the milieu shift, so do potential responses to the recurrent situation.***

child's toy-*cum*-infrastructural milieu is a case in point. But one of the reasons we enjoy this improvisation is precisely because we've seen this situation play out so many times before, often with predictable results. How do we explain the fact that—given the liberating freedom suggested by PK vision and the experimental practices of the set-piece—the same kinds of things always seem to happen in train movies? People are always fighting on catwalks and tumbling down embankments; trains are always flying off bridges and derailing and running late; couples are always honeymooning and sociopaths are always conspiring and dead bodies are always being tucked away in compartments and thrown out of windows; lonely protagonists are always walking down empty tracks and staring out of windows and meeting strangers in the lounge car. It's no wonder we think we've seen it all before. I've accounted for the differences that make every trainworld unique by theorizing the Mobile Gymnasium as a site of improvisation and play. But how can we account for the inevitable repetition of situations across train films? Clearly our preconceived notions about how interactions tend to occur within particular milieux is an important component of our experience of these situations. Just as clearly, then, we must "follow the actors" *outside* of the particular text and into the vast entangled web of railroad scenes and stories that precede any given iteration.

The contested field of genre theory offers a way to do this. In this chapter, I utilize theories of genre drawn from both film studies and New Rhetoric in order to offer an historical and theoretical case for the existence of something called the "railroad film." However, this is not meant to be an addition to generally accepted taxonomic genre categories that one might find at a local video rental store or on Netflix (like "sports film" or "romantic comedy"). Keeping with my commitment to view both trains and films as assemblages, I simultaneously argue that every film—that every scene—houses a

multiplicity of genealogical lineages, and thus that every "railroad film" necessarily outstrips any such categorization. But it is not just films that operate as heterogeneous assemblages; we have already seen that every *train* houses a multiplicity of actors, each of which has its *own* "genre-like" effects that entangle each film with recurrent situations not limited to the infrastructural milieu of the railroad. As we will see, it is not just the train that operates generically but train-tops and tunnels, shovels and clocks, compartments and doorways, upper berths and "phantom rides."

This is a complicated argument and it will take me through a number of twists and turns. I begin with a look at the genre theories of New Rhetoric, which allow us to re-think "genre" in terms of social action and process, and also highlight "humble genres" like grocery lists and ransom notes. This work provides a precedent for thinking about recurrent situations like the tunnel-duck in generic terms. After laying the theoretical foundation, I turn first to the ways that the railroad has operated in firmly established canonical genres such as the farce, the murder mystery, and the Western. I argue, however, that the train is not a neutral actor in these films but rather brings its own generic tendencies and capacities to the filmworld, making it a remarkably "fit" actor for particular genres. From here, I turn to the more difficult aspect of my argument. Not only do the particulars of train assemblages "meld" with the generic imperatives of established genres, not only do trains bring with them particular generic tendencies and effects, *every object within the train assemblage does likewise,* from corridors and compartments to catwalks and coal shovels.[142]

[142] It should immediately be clear that I don't follow the canonical Derridean conception of "genre" as a "law," or even as a "mixing of laws." Derrida opens his seminal essay, "The Law of Genre," by stating, "[a]s soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind: 'Do,' 'Do not' says 'genre'" (56). While this is clearly true of a long-standing taxonomic theory of literary and film genre, recent

In this sense, the "railroad film" always already houses a heterogeneous collection of generic lineages just as it houses a heterogeneous collection of component parts. The only way to convincingly state my case here is by tracing particular "mini-genres" like the tunnel-duck, so I provide as an admittedly odd example the "recurring situation" of the "shovel-fight" as evidence that the affordances and constraints of the component parts of the railroad participate in generic processes that bind scenes intertextually across canonical genres and also interobjectively across representational media. I will close the chapter with a brief look back on the history of the "railroad film" as a recognized genre in both early film marketing and contemporary on-line fan sites. By this point, however, we should be well prepared to accept both that the train holds a special place in film history *and* that *every* object that populates a filmworld acts as a node within multiple generic nexūs, giving rise to recurrent situations that have genre-like effects on the film. In short, I argue that genre, like Thoreauvian metaphors and the embodied choreographies of the action film set-piece, emerges out of a dialogic conversation between humans and nonhumans: between directors,

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developments in New Rhetoric and film genre theory have successfully rehabilitated the concept of genre as a dialogic interaction between writers, texts, conventions, publishers, and representational media. That being the case, it is unclear if the concept of "law" is relevant to the discussion at this point.

However, his work remains a seminal touchstone in the history of genre theory, and I want to point to a few of his conclusions that superficially bear some affinity with my own work. Derrida's suggestion that it might be "impossible not to mix genres" (57) is borne out by this study, albeit in a sense very foreign to Derrida's argument that hybrid genres suggest "contamination" or "impurity." Likewise, his positing of genre-identity as "a sort of participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of, without having membership in a set" (59) is groundbreaking, and could be productively used to think about my own theory of "entangled lines of descent." And his claim that "a text cannot belong to no genre" (65) remains as important to remember now as it was when he articulated it in 1980. Indeed, every text emerges in relation to the texts that came before. On this point I couldn't agree more. These could potentially be interesting interfaces between my project and Derrida's, but in the end our very different starting points mean that there is a fundamental tension between our conclusions. I mention Derrida primarily to distance myself from any strand of genre theory that still holds on to a conception of genres as "pure" taxonomic categories. While his complication of the "purity" thesis yields some important insights that resonate with this project, at heart he is still operating within a dialectic of purity/impurity and law/madness that can't account for the role genre-as-process plays in the dialogue of worldmaking.

writers, audience members, marketing executives, and critics on the one hand, and tunnel-mouths, compartment doors, coal-shovels, and catwalks on the other.

Composition pedagogues working in New Rhetoric have developed a situation-based genre theory indebted to Lloyd Bitzer's concept of the "rhetorical situation." New Rhetoric recognizes that no speaker is "the first speaker," and thus that every speaker is responding not just to a rhetorical situation but simultaneously to the attempts of previous speakers to respond to similar situations. As Bitzer says: "From day to day, year to year, comparable situations occur, prompting comparable responses" (13). Each new speaker of a eulogy or a closing argument or a State of the Union speech is responding not just to the situation at hand, but to the corpus of precedents set down by previous speakers. Bitzer doesn't refer to genre, but his claim that rhetoric is inherently a "response to a situation of some kind" (3) has led thinkers like Kathleen Jamieson and Carolyn Miller to argue that these rhetorical responses tend to operate generically. In building her theory of genres as "social actions," Miller argues that Bitzer

> essentially points the way to genre study . . . in observing that situations recur. . . . The comparable responses, or recurring forms, become a tradition which then "tends to function as a constraint upon any new response in the form." Thus, inaugurals, eulogies, courtroom speeches, and the like have conventional forms because they arise in situations with similar structures and elements and because rhetors respond in similar ways, having learned from precedent what is appropriate and what effects their actions are likely to have on other people. (152)

By broadening Miller's point only slightly, we can see how Ant-Man conforms to the requirements of "genre as social action" in the following ways: 1) Ant-Man faces a recurrent situation and thus is not the first action-hero (or "speaker") to respond to it; 2) The comparable responses that constitute the canon of previous tunnel-ducks create a "traditional response" which acts "as a constraint" on Ant-Man's response;[143] 3) The conventional forms of the tunnel-duck are born from the similar responses of "rhetors" or actors (over time and across genre) to similar structures (the material infrastructure of the railroad); 4) Director Peyton Reed, if not Ant-Man himself, has learned from these precedents, knows the canon of "appropriate" responses and has a good idea of how each of these responses resonates with audiences, shapes the character development of the hero, and participates in the narrative.

Miller's redefinition of genre studies moves beyond the canonical genres as defined by literary and film studies by including as "potential genres such homely discourse as the letter of recommendation, the user manual, the progress report, the ransom note, the lecture, and the white paper, as well as the eulogy, the apologia, the inaugural, the public proceeding, and the sermon" (155). From here, it is but a short step to the "tunnel-duck," which may not be a linguistic or rhetorical situation, but is certainly an embodied response to the exigencies of a situation that recurs often. Like Miller, I would argue that this widening of scope "is not to trivialize the study of genres; it is to take seriously the rhetoric in which we are immersed and the situations in which we find ourselves" (155). I differ from Miller and New Rhetoric by adding that we are not just immersed in rhetoric but in embodied interobjective relations as well.

[143] In this case, it is a constraint that highlights the novelty of the situation.

Ralph Cohen draws on the etymology of the word to argue that *genre* means "to beget" or to "be born." New Rhetoric shows us how we can think of train-scenes as begetting more trains-scenes, a claim predicated on the traditional assumption that generic lineage is intertextual and discursive. In Kathleen Jamiesen's words: "the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows *not merely from the situation* but also from antecedent rhetorical forms" (414, emphasis added). In *Ant-Man*, Peyton Reed is clearly responding to the "antecedent rhetorical forms" drawn from numerous other filmic train-top scenes, from Harold Lloyd to James Bond. But I offer the following chiastic reversal of Jamiesen's insight: "the proper response . . . grows *not merely from the antecedent rhetorical forms* but also from the situation."

As defined by Bitzer, a "situation" is "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence" (6).[144] In other words, we need to complicate this reading by pressing the equally valid point that *trains themselves* beget train-scenes: the spatial arrays created by railroad infrastructure, the particular interactions they afford the human (as a Mobile Gymnasium, but also in more mundane interactions), mediate the potential situations that can arise. The particular exigencies of the situation are rooted as

[144] William Benoit argues, importantly, that Bitzer's theory "oversimplifies the production of rhetorical discourse by highlighting a single factor in the inherently complex rhetorical event" (178). Benoit accuses Bitzer of myopically considering only one agent (the situation) as contributing to rhetorical genre, at the expense of everything else: "Not the rhetor and not the persuasive intent, but the situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity" (6). Benoit, on the other hand, wants to include not just the agency of the rhetor and the intent, but the medium of delivery and the rhetor's nature, as well. Drawing on Kenneth Burke, he argues that "[o]nly by including purpose, scene, agent, and agency as potential influences on the act can we obtain a complete understanding of rhetorical action" (180). While I agree with Benoit's critique, and applaud the effort to "increase the actors," Bitzer's argument can easily be extended to include the actors Benoit refers to. Bitzer himself underestimates the heterogeneous assemblage of agents that comprise a situation when he denies agency to the rhetor and her intent. His definition of the "situation" as *including* "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations" suggests a theoretical openness to multiple agents participating in the construction of the generic response. Thus, I take Benoit's critique as an important clarification that allows me to draw Bitzer out of the limited realm of rhetoric and use him to think about the dialogic interactions of nonhuman actors.

much in the affordances and constraints of particular milieux as in filmic syntax and intertextual allusion. The train itself encourages the repetition of particular situations, while making other situations unlikely. In short, the "birthing" process through which the tunnel-duck grows and morphs has two parents: an intertextual lineage that aligns each tunnel-duck to previous filmic iterations of the tunnel-duck, and an interobjective lineage that aligns the response with the affordances and limitations of particular tunnels, particular trains, and particular bodies. Drawing on Cohen's etymological work and the broadening scope of genre in New Rhetoric, I suggest that the tunnel-duck is as much a "genre" as the greeting or the ransom letter. As such, it is one example (among many) of how the railroad operates generically in film and literature.

In literary genre theory, David Fishelov makes a similar move by rethinking Wittgenstein's "Family Resemblance" theory of genre.[145] According to Fishelov, Wittgenstein misses one crucial element of "family." While Wittgenstein focuses on the

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[145] In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein thinks about the genre of "games" in terms of family resemblance: "What is common to them all?—Don't say: 'They *must* have something in common or they would not be called 'games'"—but *look and see* whether there is anything common at all.—For if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, affinities, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!" (36). Wittgenstein here anticipates Latour's call to "follow the actors": instead of deciding beforehand what you should find through *a priori* synthetic "thinking," simply *look*. What you will find, according to Wittgenstein, is not that all members of a genre (or a family) share one specific quality; rather, we will find "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing." He uses the metaphor of the family because "the various resemblances between members of a family—build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth—overlap and criss-cross in the same way" (36). Likewise, it is not that every "railroad film" has one specific thing in common, but rather that the railroad tends to act as a site of encounter, drawing together the various threads that criss-cross and overlap and tie these films together. We might argue, of course, that it is "the train" that acts as the common denominator, and in some sense this is true (why else would I call them "railroad films?"), but when you begin looking at particular trains as they make their marks on particular films, it becomes clear that even this is too easy. As we will see, in *High Noon*, it is almost entirely *train time* that infuses the film via clocks and pocket-watches, while in *Twentieth Century* it is the drawing-room with all its many doors, and in *Ant-Man* it is the top of a toy Thomas the Tank Engine train set and a wooden arched block. Clearly, the train itself always enters a film as a particular (selected) set of components and not as a unified totality. In this sense, Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances provides a good insight into the relationship between train films. But Fishelov allows us to think more clearly about the specific *positive* interrelations that shape train scenes and not just the *negative* or "loose" similarities between them. "Family" is not just about similarity, but also about lineage, and this is the direction I will follow in my discussion of the "railroad film."

“negative” aspect of “family resemblance, namely the statement that there is no single trait shared by all members,” Fishelov stresses the “positive” aspect of family: that all members of a family are “related through common ancestry” (134). Instead of the “loose” connections suggested by the traditional approach to genre through “family resemblance,” Fishelov suggests that a genealogical reading of genre provides a strong glue for thinking through textual interrelation: “Every writer in this line carries on the *textual heritage* of the genre, or participates in the ‘genetic pool’” (135, italics in original). This suggests a “line of descent,” or, as Fishelov says, “a ‘genealogical’ line, i.e., the series of writers who have participated in shaping, reshaping and transmitting the textual heritage” (135). While Fishelov, following Wittgenstein, remains committed to a linguistic model of genre history, the metaphor of “lines of ancestry” and the New Rhetorical model of “the recurrent situation” can be read productively as referring not just to the recurrence of discursive significations or syntactical structures, but to the affordances and constraints of embodied interaction as well. Reading the railroad generically, in this sense, does not mean categorizing it within a taxonomy. It means attuning ourselves to the multiple lines of descent, or ancestral genealogies, that shape every railroad scene. These lines are immanent and emergent, and cannot be defined via transcendental or transhistorical genre taxonomies. Instead, we must understand genre as a process, with each new generic iteration of a situation emerging out of the entangled strands of intertextual *and* interobjective affordances and constraints. Ant-Man’s remarkable simultaneous remediation of both a toy wooden arch and the intertextual genealogical lineage of the “tunnel-duck” can only be understood if we take into consideration the responses to both the rhetorical situation (the moment as film-scene) and the embodied situation (within the diegesis).

Additionally, this focus on situation suggests that micro-genres like the "tunnel-duck" may not be organic components of a larger generic structure from which they draw their meaning, but partially autonomous genres with particular historical genealogies that are not bound by canonical genre boundaries. Ant-Man may be plying his trade within a superhero movie, but the ancestral lineage of the tunnel-duck lies in slapstick comedies, espionage films, Westerns, science-fiction, and action/adventure films. This suggests that all films house a heterogeneous collection of genealogical lineages that entangle them with different constellations of films depending upon individual situations. The train, then, as one major contributor of "situations" has "genre-like" effects on films that are irreducible to the role they play within the larger generic syntax.

These are strong claims that, while internally consistent with assemblage theory, diverge significantly from contemporary and traditional genre theory. In addition, film-genre theorists do not take kindly to the application of either literary genre theory or New Rhetoric to the study of film genre, and are quick to point out that all three theoretical lineages have developed in different ways. However, New Rhetoric's illuminating re-conceptualization of genre as a process, and its broadening of genre to include mini-genres like postcards and grocery lists, fundamentally challenges taxonomic and essentialist theories of film genre. "Lines of descent," "ancestral heredity," and "recurrent situations" allow us to consider not just formalistic taxonomic genres like "Comedy" and "Western," but the micro-genres that populate every movie, generically entangling films across taxonomic genres as a rule, rather than an exception.

Besides, film genre theory has also been pointing in this direction at least since 1999, when Rick Altman published his groundbreaking study *Film/Genre*.[146] Altman was the first to truly complicate film genre theory by focusing on the material history of genre production, and attending to a wide variety of agents involved in the creation of genres: not just academic or popular critics but writers, directors, producers, stars, technology, marketing, and individual audience members. He also noted that different genres are defined in different ways:

> [E]ven so simple a question as the meaning and extent of the term *genre* remains confusing, for the term inconsistently refers to distinctions derived from a wide variety of differences among texts: type of presentation (epic/lyric/dramatic), relation to reality (fiction vs. non-fiction), historical kind (comedy/tragedy/tragicomedy), level of style (novel vs. romance), or content paradigm (sentimental novel/historical novel/adventure novel. (11)

The upshot of this, according to Altman, is that hybrid genres are the norm rather than the exception: "because they depend on diverse elements (plot materials, themes, images, style, tone, etc.), different genres may be combined with only minimal interference" (131).[147] This is the foundation of his famous argument that mixing the semantic elements of one genre with the syntax of another leads to the hybridization of genres (and thus the creation of new genres).

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[146] In fact, Altman had been developing his unique approach to film genre since the mid-1980s, most importantly in his 1984 *Cinema Journal* article, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre."

[147] Altman here comes to the same conclusion as Derrida, though from a very different starting point and with very different implications. Rather than positing an "impurity" at the heart of each ostensibly "pure" genre, Altman suggests that genrification is a dialogic process that involves many different types of entities. The very heterogeneity of these entities, combined with their ability to combine effortlessly, means that genres are inevitably mixed.

In an even more unorthodox move, Altman persuasively argues that ratings like "G," "PG," "R," and "X" "have a genre-like effect on producers, exhibitors and audiences . . . audiences learn what to expect of a particular rating—not just in terms of violence, nudity or strong language, but also in terms of plot, type, pace and sophistication of dialogue" (93-4). If extradiegetic factors such as rating systems can have "genre-like effects," shaping audience expectations as well as directorial and production decisions (like not mixing a plot aimed at young kids with images likely to draw an "R" rating), surely (human and nonhuman) actors *within* a filmworld can do something similar. We have seen enough train-films and read enough train-stories to have a rich stockpile of precedents that shape our experience of any new addition to the "canon." Train-films are shaped by previous train-films, and our shared knowledge of these films shapes our horizon of expectations. But train-films are also shaped by the trains themselves,[148] and their material affordances, constraints, and affects remain meaningful even where overt intertextual reference is absent.

As a site of encounter, the railroad brings with it not only a slew of nonhuman actors, but a teeming tangle of genealogical lineages, generically linking films and stories across traditional taxonomic genres and representational media, shaping our horizon of expectations, and driving directorial decision-making. Every filmic and literary train is always already entangled with a rich genealogical history that ties it both to intertextual precursors and to the affordances of its "real-life" counterpart. Now that I have cleared the

[148] We have already seen a good example of this. In *High and Low*, Kurosawa originally drew on a recurrent situation—the bag-drop out of a train window—that was indebted both to the affordances of a particular transportation infrastructure and to intertextual repetition (how many times have we seen this in literature and film?). And yet, when it came time to shoot the scene, he realized that the transportation infrastructure had shifted, and with that shift the affordances and constraints of the corridor had changed. Thus it is clear that the recurrent situation of the bag-drop has two intertwined genealogical lineages that can be traced both through film history and through infrastructural affordances (and, in practice, always through both at the same time).

ground to make room for my idiosyncratic approach to genre, I turn back to the farce—already encountered in Chapter 2—to think about how generic imperatives and infrastructural affordances become entangled.

Trains and Genre: Compartments, Farces, and Murder Mysteries

> *Isn't it interesting how the great movie farces are all set on trains?* . . . Palm Beach Story. Some Like It Hot. Twentieth Century. *It's because the action has to be contained. People have to enter and exit but have no way out.*
>
> — Scott Rudin (Film Producer, *The Darjeeling Limited*)[149]

Scott Rudin's observation draws attention to the long-standing love affair between the generic syntax of the farce and the material affordances and constraints of the moving passenger train. Rudin notes two things: 1) the syntax of the farce requires that "people have to enter and exit but have no way out"; and 2) trains contain their passengers for the duration of a trip, but are filled with entrances and exits between different interior spaces (compartment, lounge, bar car, bathroom, observation car, etc.).[150] Neither observation on its own is particularly revelatory, but by aligning them, Rudin poses a productive question: What is the relationship between abstract generic conventions and the material conditions of a film's milieu?

Rudin suggests that the interior spatial array of a Luxury Limited's passenger car has a set of pre-existing material affordances and constraints that the farce can exploit. I already touched briefly on the farce in my discussion of "the French Door Thing"—Billy Mernit's

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[149] Quoted in Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks* (241).

[150] In light of the comic comments on the importance of "many doors" in *Noises Off,* the train seems custom-made to house the 20th-century film farce.

theory that aristocratic French doors on stage sets are "set-pieces" precisely because they mediate action and participate in the movement of bodies around the stage. French doors are realist components of the aristocratic *mise-en-scene*, but once they are on stage, they serve a dual function: no longer simply a metonymic representation of aristocratic households, they are quickly and effectively exploited for their comedic affordances, and in the process they become memorable actors in their own rights rather than inert settings or backdrops. Turning to one of Rudin's examples, *Twentieth Century* (1934), we can see how the luxury limited acts as the early-20th-century American version of the French aristocratic household. Once again, the farce plays out within a space filled with the wealthy, the powerful, the narcissistic, and the famous. And once again that space is filled with doors—this time, the train doors that not only connect the various train cars, but also the drawing-rooms and the observation lounge.[151] In order to truly flesh out Rudin's insight, then, we should turn to the particular spatial array that Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur first exploited in

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[151] It is easy to forget doors. Mernit's theory of the set-piece makes clear that the generic imperatives of the farce demand spaces with lots of doors, even if we don't always think about the important role they play in allowing bodies to *enter* and *exit*. For those of us inclined to take doors for granted, however, Bruno Latour (writing as "Jim Johnson") reminds us of their inherent *weirdness*: "Walls are a nice invention, but if there were no holes in them, there would be no way to get in or out; they would be mausoleums or tombs. The problem is that, if you make holes in the walls, anything and anyone can get in and out (bears, visitors, dust, rats, noise). So architects invented this hybrid: a hole-wall, often called a *door*, which, although common enough, has always struck me as a miracle of technology" ("Mixing Humans and Nonhumans" 298-9, italics in original). Thinking of doors as "*wall-holes*" helps bring them into the foreground as "strange strangers." But the real crux of Latour's argument has to do with thinking about nonhuman agency: "[E]very time you want to know what a nonhuman does," Latour says, "simply imagine what other humans or other nonhumans would have to do were this character not present" (299). What would have to happen for the characters in a farce to *enter* and *exit* a room with no "wall-holes"? Simply to imagine the changes to plot, pacing, character development, and affect in *Twentieth Century* were the action relocated to a space without doors is enough to be convinced that the doors of the train play a constitutive role in the making of this world. Indeed, as we will see later, the compartment that is filled with doors by the 1930s was once a door-less prison, thus aligning its affordances more strongly with the genre of the murder-mystery than the farce.

choreographing *Twentieth Century*, and to both the stage and film sets that contain and structure the action of the farce.

The original play takes place almost entirely within the observation car of the Twentieth Century Limited.[152] The consist[153] of the actual Twentieth Century Limited includes a variety of cars with different combinations of drawing-rooms, compartments, staterooms, lounges, and other rooms, but this farce depends upon the particular arrangement of the observation car. This car—at least in one historical manifestation—consists of two drawing-rooms on one half of the car (stage left) and a lounge on the other half of the car (stage right). A corridor runs behind the two drawing-rooms, with doors leading to each room and an open doorframe connecting the corridor to the lounge. Most importantly, the drawing-rooms are linked by a "connecting-door" that turns the rooms into a suite if desired. Predictably, the famous Broadway director in the play, Oscar Jaffe (John Barrymore in the film version), is placed in Drawing Room A, while his erstwhile lover and current Hollywood actress Lily Garland (Carole Lombard) occupies the drawing-room directly next door. As the farcical action speeds up, actors fling themselves through all three doors with increasing intensity,

Image 40: ***When Lily throws a tantrum, attendants come running into the room from two different doors simultaneously.***

[152] Brief scenes are set on the platforms at New York's Grand Central Terminal and Chicago's Union Station. In the original set design, these scenes were performed on the stage space left open directly in front of the open fourth-wall of the observation car.

[153] "Consist" is the North American railroading term for the order of the various vehicles that, when coupled, make up a single train unit. The consist of a typical 21st-century Amtrak passenger train, for example, might include a locomotive, passenger cars, sleeping cars, a dining car, an observation car, and luggage cars. The number and order of these various cars, when coupled together, is the "consist" of the train.

Image 41: ***Jaffe flies through his drawing-room door and into the observation car next door.***

making exits and entrances worthy of a classic farce, and much of the plot depends upon the permeability afforded by the connecting-door.

The set design for the original Broadway play was hailed for its attention to realistic detail. In his celebratory history, *20th Century: "The Greatest Train in the World*," railroad buff Lucius Beebe claims that there was no difference between the stage train and the real train, and that audiences flocked to the theater to see "the greatest train in the world" in its stage debut (110-3).[154] Beebe may have been referring to the degree of representational fidelity expressed by the set design, but the realistic portrayal of the observation car, like the aristocratic French doors, simultaneously capitalized on the set of affordances and constraints noted by Rudin. As with "the French Door Thing," what appears at first glance to be fidelity to a realistic *mise-en-scene* is actually a self-conscious exploitation of infrastructural affordances.

In his film version of *Twentieth Century*, Howard Hawks alters the spatial array of the "Compartment-Lounge-Observation Car" by turning Lily Garland's drawing room into a compartment. This change entails the inclusion of a second connecting door, leading to an

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[154] In his history of the Twentieth Century Limited, Beebe includes a number of photographs of the original stage set, and notes "[t]he remarkable fidelity of the stage set to the interior of *The Century*'s observation lounge *Elkhart Valley*" by comparing a photograph of the stage with a photograph of the actual "Elkhart Valley" observation lounge. As he tells us, "[t]he degree of realism represented by the stage sets for 'Twentieth Century' fascinated New York audiences, many of whom were, of course, familiar with the train itself. . . . Throughout the play offstage sounds faithfully reproduced the muted progress of a fast train through the darkness" (113). Even more telling is Beebe's anecdote that "[r]ailroad buffs and spies from the New York Central" scoured the stage design and could "detect no flaw behind the footlights." The set, these aficionados noted, "faithfully duplicated their originals down to the last detail of Pullman décor and the attire of train crews" (110). As Verbinski told us in Chapter 2, audiences simply know too much about trains for a director to get away with inauthenticity. In this case, wealthy Broadway audiences were precisely the clientele of the Twentieth Century, and the stage set's degree of representational realism was *itself* a box office draw.

Image 42: ***When Oscar Jaffe opens the connecting door to Lily Garland's compartment, he is surprised to see her kissing another man.***

unseen room opposite Oscar Jaffe's Drawing Room A.[155] This means that Lily's compartment has three doors, allowing characters to move in every direction except off the train. In the film, then, there are four actual doors plus the open door-frame between the corridor and the observation lounge. The film script was adapted to include more action off the train, but approximately 51 minutes of the movie take place within the interior of the Twentieth Century. During this time, 135 bodies pass through these four doorways. On average, then, a human body crosses a door's threshold approximately every 23 seconds. Remarkably, a door opens and closes 38 distinct times, or every 81 seconds. This does not include implied exits and entrances, but only those times we actually see bodies moving through doorways. Following Mernit's sensitivity to the *ways* in which bodies move through doorways in farces, it is worth noting that of these 38 exits and entrances, six of them involve running, six involve being pushed or pulled, seven involve bodily collisions on the threshold of the doorway, and five involve overhearing private conversations or observing other characters without their knowledge.

[155] There were a number of different models of observation car on the Twentieth Century over time, with different arrangements of drawing-rooms, compartments, bathrooms, and lounges. Hawks' decision to use a different layout benefits Lily's character development (her placement in a compartment instead of a drawing-room fuels her sense of inadequacy), and the compartment's extra door allows Hawks to move bodies around even more chaotically. However, it is also an historically accurate change. The Observation-Lounge-Compartment car in Hawks' film is architecturally identical to the blueprint of the car provided by Edward Hungerford in his 1930 book, *The Run of the Twentieth Century* (16).

Image 43: ***Jaffe flings open the door and rushes out of the room as Lily yells and tries to strike him.***

Image 44: ***Mass confusion as too many bodies try to run through doors in different directions.***

Rudin and Mernit are both right: doors are an essential player in the blocking and pacing of a successful farce. Doors on trains are even better than French doors because characters can't leave when the train is in motion. Early in the film, Oscar tries to have Lily's boyfriend thrown off the train only to find that the "Twentieth Century stops for no man."[156] Thus, we see that Hawks and original Broadway writers, Hecht and MacArthur, capitalize on the affordances of interior train-space, the constraints of a moving train, and the ways these affordances and constraints align with the codified requirements of the pre-cinematic genre of the stage

[156] This isn't exactly true. On the map that Lucius Beebe includes at the beginning and end of *20th Century*, he notes stops in Elkhart, Toledo, Cleveland, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Albany, and Harmon on the way from Chicago to New York City. He also notes that "standby locomotives" were kept at Albany, Syracuse, Buffalo, and other locations "in addition to the regular changes of engine scheduled at these points" (47). Every section of the Twentieth Century had to stop at least in Harmon, just outside New York City, to switch engines. While the majority of the run was done with a steam engine, the train had to go underground to enter Manhattan. Because a steam locomotive was too dangerous to run under the Hudson River, the Twentieth Century stopped in Harmon to switch over to the electric engines that operated in New York City (Hungerford 71-2). Other than Harmon, different sections of the Century made different stops. Railfan site "Streamliner Schedules" includes a schedule of the Twentieth Century from August, 1938, that includes stops at Harmon, Albany, Syracuse, and Toledo (Bowen). The final section of the day (which included the mail car) picked up passengers at *every* intermediate stop. Even the fast sections of the Express only "omit *some* of the few intermediate stops . . . at Albany, Utica, Syracuse, and Rochester" (Hungerford 82, emphasis added).

In addition, we could point to Preston Sturges' *The Lady Eve,* in which Barbra Stanwyck pulls the emergency brake cord in order to throw Henry Fonda out in the mud, or Alfred Hitchcock's *North By Northwest,* in which the Twentieth Century stops for the detectives searching for Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant). We might also note Thornhill's reason for taking the train from New York to Chicago in the first place. On a phone call to his mother, who presumably asks him why he isn't flying, Thornhill replies, exasperated: "You expect me to jump out of a moving airplane?" The implication is that it is in fact *easier* to exit a moving train than it is to exit an airplane. Still, it is undeniably true that it is much *harder* to exit a moving train than to exit an aristocratic French mansion, and Hecht, MacArthur, and Hawks exploit this infrastructural constraint.

farce. We can easily tie the train compartment doors back to the aristocratic French doors of Billy Mernit, and the inescapable space of the train (the "mobile prison," as Michel de Certeau calls it)[157] only adds to the hilarity as characters are unable to leave the shared space before they reach New York. The speed of the train also dovetails nicely with the increasing speed and frenzy of the classical farce.

However, the entrances and exits so important to Rudin's observation depend upon the historical development of compartment doors, which historically emerged alongside covered gangway planks, dining cars, sleepers, and express trains. The seemingly "natural" alliance between interior train-spaces and the farce is historically contingent upon the very technological changes that made a luxury train with sleepers and diners like The Twentieth Century possible in the first place: the doors, corridors, and covered gangway planks that afforded movement between cars. In fact, these were all notably absent in the first (European) train compartments, and it was this *absence* of doors that led to the entanglement of the compartment with a very different generic legacy: the murder-mystery.

In early incarnations, train compartments were accessible by a single door that opened onto a waiting platform when the train was stationary, but otherwise led only to the tracks shooting by dangerously below. Once seated in a compartment, passengers were trapped inside until the next stop. The claustrophobia, the fear of industrial accident, and the mutual suspicion between passengers all led to the train compartment's place of honor in

[157] De Certeau includes a short section in *The Practice of Everyday Life* called "Railway Navigation and Incarceration." Here, he claims that riding by train is a "travelling incarceration. Immobile inside the train, seeing immobile things slip by. . . . The unchanging traveler is pigeonholed, numbered, and regulated in the grid of the railway car" (111).

both true-crime stories and in the public imagination.[158] As Matthew Beaumont says, "train compartments make scopophiliacs and potential psychopaths out of us all" (129). The most worrying aspect of the train compartment in this sense "is not that one might meet someone who seems dangerous but that one might meet someone to whom one seems dangerous oneself" (130). Beaumont thus dubs the train compartment a *locus suspectus,* "because it is structured by the most contingent of intimacies, because it is dependent on anonymous, accidental and strangely personal encounters in public" (129-30). While railroad companies attempted to alleviate these inevitable suspicions through the segregation of classes and sexes, a few high profile compartment murders[159] cemented its legacy in the public mind. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch puts it:

> The compartment's total optical and acoustical isolation from the rest of the train and its inaccessibility during the journey . . . caused the travelers' interrelationships to change from mere embarrassment to fear of potential mutual threat. The train compartment became a scene of crime—a crime that could take place unheard and unseen by the travelers in adjoining

[158] Now we see Latour's thought experiment in action. What difference do a few "wall-holes" make to both the interrelational affordances and constraints of a given space, and to the affective experience of that space? In this case, the difference between a comical farce and a terrifying imprisonment.

[159] Particularly the Poinsot murder in France in 1860 and the Briggs murder in England in 1864. In the introduction to his 1996 Oxford World's Classics English translation of Émile Zola's *La Bête Humaine,* Roger Pearson tells us that the first murder in Zola's novel was based on "the Poinsot affair." In 1860, senior judge Victor Poinsot was shot and robbed in a first-class compartment while "the passengers in the next compartment heard nothing" (xv). The first railway murder in England occurred in 1864, when Franz Müller knocked Thomas Briggs unconscious with a heavy stick, robbed him, and threw his body out of the carriage door and onto the right-of-way. Briggs died the next night after being discovered by railway workers. The subsequent investigation and trial caused a sensation in British newspapers (British Transport Police). These two murders are generally cited as the catalysts for re-designing the train carriage to be a more public space. Pearson attributes the development of footboards (as he says, "of the kind which play a crucial role in the plot of *La Bête Humaine*) to the Poinsot and Briggs cases (xv). Schivelbusch notes that the French Commission, "appointed in 1861 after the Poinsot murder," was responsible for the introduction of peepholes between compartments (85-6). The British Transport Police claim that the installation of communication cords in private carriages was a direct result of the Briggs murder.

> compartments. This novel danger captivated the nineteenth-century imagination: "The loudest screams are swallowed up by the roar of the rapidly revolving wheels, and murder, or violence worse than murder, may go on to the accompaniment of a train flying along at sixty miles an hour." (79)

Thus, the "trapping" of people on board the speeding train—so beneficial to the hilarity of the farce—takes on a more sinister note in the murder-mystery. Passengers are not just physically restricted while the train is in motion, they are acoustically isolated as well: their screams—should they be required—would be immediately swallowed up by the roar of the machine ensemble and the walls of the enclosed compartment. As Ian Carter puts it: "Isolated by that extreme speed which led Victorian critics to make railways the prime symbol of onrushing modernity, a moving train is a sealed room" (48). Laura Marcus even cites the "closed carriage mystery" as a sub-genre of detective fiction, pointing to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Story of the Man with the Watches"[160] (185) as a typical example. Thus, the conditions of the traveling railway compartment are ideal for both the

[160] "The Story of the Man with the Watches" first appeared in *Strand* Magazine in July 1898. Like many railway mysteries, this story depends upon the fact that nobody can enter or exit a train compartment while the train is moving. The mystery is as follows: 1) The train departs on time. In a smoking compartment sits a man with a cigar. In the compartment next door sits a tall man and a woman. 2) At Willesden Junction, twelve minutes later, a ticket-check confirms that nobody either entered or exited the train. The train leaves Willesden at 5:14. 3) At 6:50 the train arrives at Rugby. The smoking compartment is empty (save the cigar) and locked from the inside. The door to the next-door compartment is open. Inside is a young man with a bullet in his heart, six gold watches in his pockets, and no train ticket. All three of the original occupants have vanished. The mystery here depends upon how the particular constraints of the railroad compartment were bypassed: How does one leave a locked compartment on a speeding train? How does a dead body appear inside a compartment? Where have these people *gone*? Anybody familiar with the genre of detective fiction will immediately note this is as a classic "locked-room" mystery. As Marcus suggests, so many of these mysteries occur on speeding trains that the "closed carriage mystery" deserves recognition as a sub-genre of its own, complete with a unique set of conventions. As seen in this example, a detailed chronicle of the train's schedules, the precise times the train enters and exits each station, whether or not the train is on time, the precise timing of ticket-collection, an analysis of the consist, an account of the people occupying the waiting platform and the other compartments, a detailing of the train's various speeds, and a thorough investigation of the railroad right-of-way (including tunnels and embankments) are important components of this "sub-genre."

sensationalism that made a spectacle of gruesome murders, shock, and trauma and the "Locked Room" puzzles that fill Enlightenment detective stories from Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" to Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express.*

Schivelbusch cites the public spectacle of true-crime compartment murders as the catalyst for changing the spatial architecture of the compartment interior, which was originally transplanted more or less wholesale from the compartment of the traveling coach.[161] A makeshift solution was to cut square holes called "Muller's Lights"[162] in the partitions between compartments in order to facilitate communication between cars. Unfortunately, the result was an increased fear of peeping toms (Carter 49). Some railroads began experimenting by placing doors in the partitions between compartments, producing a corridor down the middle of each seating area. Predictably, passengers (especially when sleeping) complained of the noise and constant interruption. Heusinger von Waldegg then decided that "the only way to avoid [this inconvenience] would be to either provide sliding doors or curtains between the two sides of the compartment and the passageway, or to move the latter . . . to the side of the carriage" (qtd. in Schivelbusch 87). Railroads eventually opted to move the passageway.

Von Waldegg developed the "side-corridor" in 1863, a model that is still in use on most continental and British trains today. As Beaumont points out, however, "von Waldegg's device made the compartment easier to police but also obviously easier to intrude upon. So

[161] The United States opted for a more "democratic" architecture with the open passenger car modeled after the steamboat rather than the coach. European trains continue to utilize the compartment, with the addition of the interior corridor that both ensures the safety (and sanity) of its passengers and affords movement between cars during travel (and thus creates the conditions of possibility for the sleeping car, the dining car, and the bar car). For more on the relationship between North American and European passenger cars, see Schivelbusch on "The Compartment" (70-88) and "The American Railroad" (89-112) in *The Railway Journey.*

[162] Named after Franz Müller, the murderer of Thomas Briggs.

although the architecture of the train altered, the psycho-social dramas staged there remained much the same" (133). In other words, even in the labyrinthine space so conducive to the frantic movements of the farce, the lingering fear of crime and murder continued to grow. Carter points out that "as railway equipment grew more sophisticated, one or several carriages linked by gangways could form the crime scene" (48). Thus, as the exits and entrances proliferated, this only led to a widening circle of potential suspects. Citing S.S. Van Dine's "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories," Charles Rzepka reminds us that "the closed circle of suspects" is of the utmost importance to a workable detective story, which accounts for "the high rate of crime to be found at boarding schools, colleges, country houses, and on moving trains in the land of classic detection" (15). When Agatha Christie includes a diagrammatic blueprint of an Orient Express sleeping car in *Murder on the Orient Express* (91), she provides visual evidence that mystery and detective writers continued to think of the train car as a "locked room"—one that simply contained more hiding places (and thus a wider, but still limited, "circle of suspects").[163]

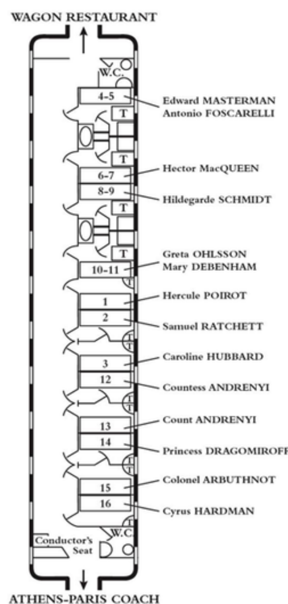

Image 45: ***The only illustration in Christie's famous train mystery is this diagram of the sleeping car.***

[163] The diagram of the sleeping car comes during the "Evidence" section of the novel, in which Hercule Poirot interviews each occupant of the car in order to gather his evidence. This section lays out, in intricate detail, precisely those components of the "closed carriage mystery" sub-genre we saw in "The Story of the Man with the Watches": At what time did the train stop? Which doors were locked? Who visited which room and at what times? How are each of the rooms connected? When did the porter answer calls, and what activity did he see in the corridor and when? Notice that the diagram itself includes crucial information for solving the mystery: a visual representation of how the sleeping compartments are organized within the car, including which compartments are shared and which are occupied by individuals, as well as which compartments share a wall; the specific person(s) occupying each compartment (this is the "closed circle of suspects"); the locations of the bathrooms, closets, and doors; the location of the "conductor's seat"; and the location of this particular car within the larger consist (between the "Athens-Paris Coach" and the "Wagon Restaurant").

It is especially important to note that the links between trains and pre-established canonical genres like the murder-mystery and the farce are not essentialist. The relationships are historically contingent insofar as they are tied to specific spaces, structures, and actors located within a particular historical configuration of railroad technology and architecture. Thus, the "locked room" of the door-less compartment shares a genealogical lineage with the various locked rooms of detective fiction—from the inaccessible fourth-floor room in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" to the in-flight airplane in *Flightplan* (2005)—with the added sensation of the moving train. The "entrances and exits" of the railroad farce, on the other hand, share a genealogical lineage with the aristocratic French doors of the traditional stage farce. We therefore can't locate this generic linkage in some essential "train-ness" but only in the historically contingent assemblage of train-actors, some of which are more stable than others.[164] However, once the train becomes entangled with a genre, it seems to stick there in the public imagination, as we see with the case of the murder-mystery that lingers long after the compartment is opened up to a side-corridor.

This lengthy digression is to show that we would be wise to take a media-archeological perspective on the train—and on the compartment itself—as an entity that changes over time.[165] The compartment of the farce and the compartment of the murder-

[164] The side-corridor, for example, has lasted much longer than the short-lived "Muller's Lights."

[165] Lisa Gitelman makes this point in her introduction to *Always Already New*. Rather than speaking about "the telephone" as an ahistorical unity, Gitelman tells us, "it is better to specify telephones in 1890 in the rural United States, broadcast telephones in Budapest in the 1920s, or cellular, satellite, corded, and cordless landline telephones in North America at the beginning of the twenty-first century. *Specificity is key*" (8, emphasis added). Likewise, it is better to specify bullet trains in mid-1960s Japan, the 19th-century Orient Express, or the luxury limited passenger trains in early-20th-century North America. Furthermore, as John Stilgoe reminds us, by the time *North By Northwest* opened in theaters "the New York Central took the astonishing step of adding coaches to its finest train: the style Hitchcock depicted had begun to fade" (*Train Time* 119). Like Thoreau, then, each of these stories takes place in the "nick of time" within a rapidly shifting infrastructural "bundle of relations." As we are about to see, even the three films mentioned by Rudin rely on

mystery depend upon particular historically contingent affordances that are linked to the absence or presence of the compartment door and the side-corridor. These generic syntaxes exploit and manipulate very real material affordances and constraints of particular trains as they exist in history. Thus, we might note that Scott Rudin's comment on farces is, in some ways, misleading. While each of the three farces he cites does take place on a train, each one exploits the affordances and constraints of very different train-spaces. If *Twentieth Century* mines the comedic affordances of compartment and drawing-room doors, aligning them generically with Mernit's French doors and the classic aristocratic farce, Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* takes place in an "open-accommodation car," which has *no* doors. In this more "democratic" car, pioneered in the United States, seats fold down into beds, and upper berths are lowered at night, to accommodate sleeping passengers. Curtains are then drawn across each individual bed creating a semi-private enclosure.

If *Twentieth Century* harks back to French stage farces, *Some Like It Hot* resonates with slapstick's historical mining of the open-accommodation berth for comedic potential. Laurel and Hardy's *Berth Marks* (1929) and *The Big Noise* (1944), as well as Buster Keaton's *Pardon My Berth Marks* (1940), all play with the claustrophobic space of the upper berth, and the permeable curtain separating it from the corridor, for sight gags. *Some Like It*

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very different train-spaces that become entangled with the generic imperatives of the farce in different ways. As Gitelman says, specificity is key if we want to understand how these relationships operate.

I am not building my argument on the foundation of media archeology, though it is tempting to consider how the project could have proceeded from this theoretical framework. In *What is Media Archeology?*, Jussi Parikka states that, "[t]he basic question of media archeology could be seen simply, and in a manner indicated by Foucault, to be: what are the conditions of existence of this thing, of that statement, of these discourses and the multiple mediated practices with which we live" (18). In many ways, this is a good description of what I am attempting in this project. However, like most media theorists, Parikka is particularly interested in media of representation and storage (though he does discuss Lumière's *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* and the Coney Island Leap Frog Railway [25]). Still, media archeology is a valuable rubric through which to read the relationship between the shifting assemblage of actors that constitute historical railroad spaces and the narratives that make meaning out of moving human bodies through these spaces. Like Matthew Fuller's brand of media ecology, Parikka's media archeology investigates the ways that material objects "participate in the constitution of the world" (65).

Image 46: ***Billy Wilder is playing off of a classic slapstick gag. Here are Laurel and Hardy in*** **The Big Noise.**

Image 47: ***The premise of the Buster Keaton short,*** **Pardon My Berth Marks*****, revolves around the upper berth gag.***

Image 48: Some Like It Hot ***pushes the gag to its limit by piling far too many bodies into the upper berth.***

Hot pushes the gag to its limits by piling far too many bodies into a single berth. Preston Sturges' *The Palm Beach Story*, while it also exploits both the private compartment and the upper berth for laughs, also takes place in a private club car chartered by a group of drunken hunters. These hunters proceed to shoot up their lounge with hunting rifles, sending Gerry Jeffers (Claudette Colbert) running for the open-accommodation car. Because they are in a separate car, the train's conductor (and director Preston Sturges) is able to decouple them and leave them behind in a rainstorm (along with all of Jeffers' belongings) while the train continues moving. Clearly, none of this is possible in the private compartment or the open-accommodation car.

Rudin's observation, while apt, thus elides the architectural differences at play in each of these farces, which are all historically contingent upon particular technological developments in the history of the railroad. Hawks, Wilder, and Sturges each draw on dramatically different "bundles of relations" created by open-accommodation cars, observation cars, and private club cars. Each space presents a different set of affordances and constraints, and ties in to the needs of the

farce in different ways, although there is a great deal of "criss-crossing" and "overlapping" (as Wittgenstein would say) between the films. Still, it is no coincidence that 20th-century film farces gravitated toward the railway: the speed, the doors, the variety of spaces, the proximity of human bodies, and the inability to deboard make trains an ideal candidate for replacing the aristocratic household as a privileged comic space.

Clocks, Tracks, and Constant Movement: Railroad Affect, Genre, and High Noon

While these examples might suggest that pre-established genres exploit train-spaces to fit their own logic, the relationship between generic syntax and the nonhuman actors that populate a film is much more complicated. It would be just as plausible to say that the logic of the railroad—its prison-like claustrophobia, the inevitability of suspicious encounters, and the frantic frenzy of its speed—invites certain generic responses. Indeed, the Victorian suspense-thriller affords an historical example of how the railroad carries with it particular generic tendencies regardless of the storyworld it enters.

Nicholas Daly traces the origins of the sensation drama, the thriller, and the suspense film to the beginnings of the railroad era, and to the development of railroad time. The thriller, according to Daly,

> [is a] punctual form, depending on accurate time-keeping and scrupulous attention to the calendar. . . . The highlighting of clock time, location, and motion is not incidental to the suspense for which these novels are famous, but its precondition. The pleasures of fictional suspense and the anxieties of clock-watching appear as part of the same historical moment. (47-49)

Daly's argument is not just that the thriller arose at the same time as the railroad, but that the railroad's restructuring of space and time in the 19th-century was the "precondition" for the rise of the theatrical, novelistic, and (later) filmic suspense-thriller as a major genre.[166] Daly argues that the genre of the suspense-thriller is defined by its affective capacities, which are contingent upon the possibility of "highlighting clock time." For "clock time," we could easily replace "railroad time."

There is a direct historical link between the hands on the clock-faces that populate suspense stories and train schedules: on November 18, 1883, a convention of the major railroads, held in Chicago, decreed that all U.S. and Canadian trains (and the cities they connected) had to readjust their clocks according to a new four-time-zone system. Telegraphs

[166] This is not to say that suspense itself is a product of the railroad or of railroad time. Indeed, suspense holds a place of privilege in narrative theory as a fundamental component of all stories. For David Lodge, narratives *require* suspense insofar as they must "[hold] the interest of an audience by raising questions in their minds, and delaying the answers." The questions that can be asked are generally of two kinds: "having to do with causality (e.g. whodunnit?) and temporality (e.g. what will happen next?)" (14). In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes categorizes these two modes of narrative suspense as the *hermeneutic* (what does it mean?) and the *proairetic* (what happens next?) codes (19). For Barthes, "the hermeneutic terms structure the enigma according to the expectation and desire for its solution. . . . [W]hereas the sentences quicken the story's 'unfolding' and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up *delays* (obstacles, stoppages, derivations) in the flow of the discourse" (75). While a narrative may work to resolve enigmas, it is the delay between the posing of an enigma and its solution that leads to the pleasure of suspense in the reading experience. Lodge's sense of "causality" as a mode of suspense is hermeneutic insofar as we act like detectives when we set out to uncover the meanings inherent in narrative enigmas. The proairetic code aligns with Lodge's second type of suspense: What happens next? Again, suspense is produced when the reader poses questions that the narrative or discourse has not yet answered. These kinds of suspense draw on and play with the basic cognitive activities of expectation, anticipation, and prediction. Treated in these terms, suspense is an important element of any and every story.

The kind of suspense that Daly locates in the "suspense-thriller" is something slightly different. While this genre clearly produces pleasure by triggering our need to predict and anticipate solutions to uncertainties, the rise of standardized time makes the very ticking of the clock suspenseful. It is not just that narrative or discourse is posing enigmas and delaying their solutions, or that audiences are swept up in questions of "what happens next?" Rather, we are now faced with an inexorable countdown, a constant reminder of time ticking away, a specific moment of reckoning that can be anticipated (and of which we are constantly reminded) by the hands on a clock-face. While Barthes persuasively challenges Daly's claim that "the pleasures of fictional suspense" did not arise until the 19th century, the important takeaway here is that clock-watching and the generic foregrounding of suspense are inextricable within the specific historical genre of the "suspense-thriller" *as it emerged* in the 19th century.

made this synchronization possible, and standardized time reshaped the spatiotemporal order of North America overnight without any act of Congress. In other words, the railroads made this decision unilaterally in order to move their trains safely and efficiently.[167] The rise of the railroads led to a proliferation of pocket-watches, household clocks, and precision timekeeping. Suddenly everybody needed to know exactly what time it was, which led to a culture of "clock-watching" and "time-anxiety." On the one hand, we could say that the suspense-thriller operated as a response to the new anxieties of industrial modernity, but on the other hand, the genre cannot be separated from the very technologies that produced the anxiety in the first place: "clock time" requires a proliferation of clocks, and clocks accompany the railroad into every town it enters, whether that town exists in our world or in the reality of a literary or filmworld.

It should be clear to anybody who has seen the film that *High Noon* (1952) comes out of this tradition. The movie is famously 85 minutes long and takes place in (approximately)

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[167] Prior to this standardization of time, each city operated according to local time zones, which were notoriously chaotic: Michigan had 27 separate local times while Wisconsin boasted 38. Because railroads operated based on the time-zone of a particular city, each railroad station had to organize itself around these different local times. Buffalo, then, had three clocks in its station, set to the local times of New York City (for New York Central services), Columbus, OH (for the Michigan Southern), and local Buffalo time. Cross-country travelers would pass through twenty different time-zones on their way from Maine to San Francisco (Wolmar, *The Great Railroad Revolution* 219).

In speaking of the relationship between "solar time" and "railroad time" it is interesting to note that there was a strong religious resistance to the adoption of standardized time. In a favorite anecdote, cited in innumerable railroad histories, Mayor Dogberry of Bangor, Maine, vetoed the city's adoption of Eastern Standard Time (EST): "It is unconstitutional, being an attempt to change *the immutable laws of God Almighty* and hard on the working man by changing day into night" (219-20, emphasis added). The sense that time was an "immutable law" of God or nature conflicted with the railroad industry's need to standardize time. Church bells in Bangor continued to operate on "natural" time. The irony here is that, as Wolmar points out, "[f]ew Americans today know that it is because of the needs of the railroad that they have four time zones" (220). The feeling of "naturalness" has returned to our experience of temporality, thus making it difficult to notice just how much the ticking of clock-hands and the experience of time in terms of "punctuality" shapes our everyday experience and the pace and patterns of our stories.

real time—a precursor to films like *Nick of Time* (1995) and *Timecode* (2000).[168] As Daly points out, the train is not incidental to the production of suspense and anxiety in the time-anxiety genre, but rather the historical development that *entails* suspense and anxiety through its insistence on "clock-watching" as a way of life. If the affects that define the genre of the suspense-thriller are entailed by the railroad itself, then the train's entrance into other genres always brings a potential generic challenge. *High Noon* is obviously a canonical Western film, making its meaning through the dialectic syntax of law and lawlessness, civilization and desert wilderness. And yet the anxiety of clock-watching, and its explicit entanglement with the "noon train," suggests that *High Noon* could also be categorized as a thriller. I don't mean to suggest that we need to choose between these two canonical genres, nor that *High Noon* is a hybrid of the two. Rather, by reading *High Noon* through the entanglement of railroad affect, clock-watching, and the suspense genre, I claim that the railroad *itself* has "genre-like effects" on the filmworlds it enters. In short, the noon train doesn't just bring Frank Miller to Hadleyville; it brings the suspense-thriller as well.

Director Fred Zinnemann promotes the generic ambiguity entailed by the arrival of the railroad through his decision to open the film outside of the industrial corridor. Frank Miller's gang assembles on the prairie, sitting on rocks and cooking over an open fire. We might not recognize it, but this opening scene, when read in relation to the title, *High Noon*, sets up a particular horizon of expectations that the film then subverts. "High Noon" was originally a synonym for solar noon, drawing on a spatial logic that aligns "noon" with the

[168] The tagline of the former film is: "Ninety minutes. Six bullets. No choice." With some minor editing, this could be on the poster for *High Noon*. And it's no mistake that this Johnny Depp film also begins with the railroad, as Gene Watson (Depp) and his daughter (Courtney Chase) arrive into Los Angeles Union Station via Amtrak. *Timecode*, on the other hand, suggests that the anxiety of clock-watching is no longer linked to the railroad, but now emerges through our encounters with other media, in this case the "timecode" of the late 20th-century digital camcorder.

Image 49: ***Frank Miller's gang is introduced in "nature," sitting on rocks, cooking, and rolling cigarettes.***

Image 50: ***Soon, they move to the railroad depot to await the arrival of the noon train. In the process, the temporal rhythms of the sun and the seasons are replaced by the "clock-watching" anxiety of railroad time.***

moment the sun reaches its highest point in the sky—a good time for a showdown, incidentally, because the sun won't be in either shooter's eyes. Solar noon properly belongs to a world in which temporality is structured by the movements of the sun and moon and the changing of the seasons.[169] But Zinnemann almost immediately replaces the rocks with boxes of cargo, the prairie with the depot waiting platform, and solar time with railroad time. As we enter the infrastructural milieu of the depot, we move from the Western wilderness to a town caught in the liminal transition period of urbanization and modernization. While this framing can surely be read in typical syntactic terms as privileging the Western's thematic concern with the dialectic struggle of civilization and wilderness, I want to focus on the radical change in temporal experience and its ties to genre history. The opening scene is the only moment in the film in which both characters and

[169] Recall Thoreau's comparison of the "regularity" of the sun to that of the railroad in *Walden.* Zinnemann, like Thoreau, plays with the tension that arises when the two types of regularity—one rigid, the other changing with the seasons—are made to compete with one another for the right to shape our lived experience of temporality.

audience are not inexorably caught in the anxiety of clock-watching, and thus Zinnemann explicitly invokes an affective shift between the first scene and the rest of the film that highlights *High Noon*'s generic ambiguity.

One cultural connotation of the phrase "high noon" has to do with a temporal end-point: a fast-approaching apocalyptic moment of reckoning. We see this metaphoric meaning in political cartoons, book titles, and lectures about everything from the debt ceiling to climate change.[170] This "temporal end-point" is directly related to tropes of fatalistic

Image 51: ***Every scene, and almost every shot, in* High Noon *includes a clock. Often, clocks are framed in extreme close-ups, but even when the camera focuses on the characters, clocks lurk in the background, intrusively counting down to the immanent moment of reckoning. Image arrangement by illustrator John Dyess.***

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170 A quick Google search reveals the following examples: A 2015 climate change rally sponsored by the Butte Environmental Council called "High Noon For the Planet" ("Chico Climate Rally"); a 2003 book by J.F. Rischard: *High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them*; a 2013 article in the *Texas Enterprise* by Steve Brooks called "High Noon at the D.C. Corral: The Debt Ceiling Showdown." Plenty of other examples can be found easily.

inevitability and uncontrollable forward momentum symbolized by the "unswerving tracks" of 19th-century railroad rhetoric.[171] "High Noon" in a railroad town is an anachronism, no longer having anything to do with the highest point of the sun, but with the highest point of the minute and second hands on a clock, and with the punctuality of the railroad.

Time in Hadleyville is dictated by train schedules, whose power is delegated to the scores of clocks that fill every room in town with an oppressive and anxiety-producing ticking. Within the reality of the film, each tick brings Frank Miller one second closer to town, and everyone knows it: the countdown to his immanent arrival invades every house, every room, every scene, through the ubiquitous clocks and watches that occupy every wall, mantle, table, and pocket of Hadleyville. The audience experiences this countdown as cinematic suspense, which Zinnemann actively cultivates by exaggerating the ticking of the clocks, and lingering on close-ups of anxious faces. In other words, railroad time mediates the pace and patterns of life in Hadleyville, as well as the affective experience of the audience. When Marshall McLuhan famously said that "the medium is the message," he understood the "message" of a medium to be the "change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs." For McLuhan, the railroad "accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure" (8). Hadleyville is rapidly becoming one of these "totally new kinds of cities," but in this case, the "paces and patterns" of movement introduced by the medium of the railroad *also* align the film with the essential affective characteristics of the suspense-thriller. We might say, then, that "the medium is the genre."

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[171] Again we can think back to Thoreau. Here, the "temporal end-point" that provides the affective foundation of the railroad thriller is directly related to the unswerving tracks and predetermined trajectory of the Thoreauvian *Atropos.*

The nervous glances, obsessions, hurry, anticipation, and anxious waiting experienced by every character in the film are all tied directly to the railroad's clocks. The beads of sweat trickling down Gary Cooper's face, as well as the looks of consternation and the worry lines for which he's famous (and which are usually attributed to a painful stomach ulcer) are, within the reality of the film, produced by the inexorability of train time. As viewers, we are also caught in the clutches of the ticking clock, which we experience both directly, through the close-ups of the clock and the driving rhythm of Dmitri Tiomkin's score, and indirectly through those very glances and beads of sweat, all of which mediate our affective experience of suspense. In his autobiography, Zinnemann himself highlights the importance of clocks and the railroad to *High Noon*:

> In developing the visual style I used three separate elements: One: the threat—hanging over the entire movie, the motionless railroad tracks, always *static*. Second, the victim—looking for help, in constant *movement*, black against the white sky. The tension is enhanced by three: the urgency—time perceived as enemy, shown by obsessive use of clocks (as indicated in the script); clocks looming larger as time slips by, pendulums moving more and more slowly until time finally stands still, gradually creating an unreal dreamlike, almost hypnotic effect of suspended animation. (109, italics in original)

In Image 52, we see Miss Amy in her moment of "suspended animation," during the anxious escalation of anticipation that begins at 11:58, when the beats of Dmitri Tiomkin's score merge with the clock's pendulum and the camera cuts between close-ups on human faces, clock faces, and the empty railroad tracks. Time operates on the characters in different ways. Amy, as we see here, is unable to look away from the clock. It has taken over her

Image 52: ***In the minutes leading up to noon, Miss Amy is unable to take her eyes off the clock.***

Image 53: ***Zinnemann relies on close-ups of clock-faces to produce a sense of temporal urgency that builds suspense and drives the narrative.***

Image 54: ***By inter-cutting close-ups of faces, close-ups of clocks, and this shot of the empty railroad tracks, Zinnemann ties infrastructure, genre, and narrative together.***

life—nothing exists but the anticipation of the noon train's arrival. Zinnemann's three elements are in full force in this scene: Kane's frantic movements are still mediated by train time, though he is no longer running through town but attempting to finish his last will and testament before noon; the clocks take center stage, with clock-face close-ups, the psychological implications of character eye-lines aimed at unrelenting tick-tock of the clock-hands, and the pulsing aural intensity of the music; the tension created by the static empty tracks, which Zinnemann lingers on between facial close-ups, only grows with each beat.

Despite Zinnemann's claim that he is playing with three "separate elements," the clocks, the tracks, and the frantic movement of Kane cannot be separated. This version of noon—not the solar noon when the sun is highest overhead, but the punctual noon of railroad time that comes at the same moment every day no matter the season—was created and is maintained by the railroad in order to run

locomotives over those tracks. This is the infrastructural prerequisite that turns those same empty tracks into a "threat." Clocks, accurate timekeeping, and the anxiety of clock-watching are inevitable side effects of an effective and efficient railroad infrastructure. The movement of Will Kane is also mediated by the railroad schedule, as he attempts to round up deputies before the arrival of the train. And the train will eventually appear on those empty railroad tracks—the fact that they face north might symbolize the town's move toward industrialization, as Stephen Prince argues,[172] but they are also the material infrastructure that will carry Frank Miller to town. People, trains, clocks, tracks, are all caught up in the imperative temporality of the railroad.[173]

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[172] Prince argues that "[w]ithin the film, the tracks go north, to the land of business and banks, to the investment capital that entrepreneurs in developing-hungry Hadleyville are anxious to secure for themselves, and, therefore, within the genre's logic, the tracks go toward the future as embodied by an expanding industrial and capital-based economy" (86). This is a strong reading of *High Noon* within the dialectic generic logic of the Western, and it adds layers of complexity to the "meaning" of the railroad tracks. In this sense, the "threat" they bring to town in the form of Frank Miller is representative of the threats that tracks always already bring by tying Hadleyville into a fragile network of trade with other cities. As Christian Wolmar outlines in *The Great Railroad Revolution*: "The effect of the arrival of a railroad connection on a community was immediate: the very nature of the village or town would be transformed overnight. . . . A small town that had been self-sufficient could quickly change into one dependent on the regional, or even the national, economy as people switched to using the larger town's amenities" (218). By opening itself up to outsiders—both people and goods—Hadleyville made itself vulnerable even as it began to grow. While Prince's nuanced reading of the tracks-as-symbol-of-modernity is intimately tied to the material capacities and tendencies of the railroad network itself, I want to focus on the logic of a different genre, which requires bracketing the productive readings that Prince's approach encourages.

[173] Critics have, predictably, paid a lot of attention to these clocks. Neil Lerner argues that "the urgency of the clocks . . . may have carried the most potency as an anxiety-provoking symbol" (158). Here, clocks act as visual markers of the Doomsday Clock, the metonymic figurehead of Cold War tensions, and the ultimate symbol of the temporal end-point. There is a clear visual resonance between the clocks in *High Noon* and the famous Doomsday Clock: both are portrayed as larger-than-life, with a focus on the hands as they reach the noon hour. While the iconographic similarity (and the historical entanglement) with the Doomsday Clock suggests a productive reading of *High Noon* in the context of the Cold War, it is important to note that the clocks in the film *also* participate in the functioning of the railroad. These clocks are not just abstract symbols but—within the film's reality—delegates of railroad time, exerting a pull on the townspeople through the omnipresent indexing of the train moving ever closer to Hadleyville. The clocks populate the town because the precise timing of the train's schedule demands it. They are, in other words, components of the larger railroad assemblage. The Doomsday Clock, then, is not an explanation of the clock's presence in *High Noon*, but one of many examples of the kind of fast-approaching temporal end-point entailed by the anxieties of clock-watching.

As Daly says, "the sensation novel is not *about* the railway in any simple sense, but there are indications that the latter is something like a determining absence for these novels" (46). The railroad also operates as a "determining absence" in *High Noon,* hovering over every moment of the film and made present by Zinnemann's "three elements"—which, incidentally, look a lot like Daly's three preconditions of fictional suspense: clock time, location, and motion. *High Noon* is not "about" the railroad in any simple sense, but the railroad infiltrates every scene, palpable in every nervous glance at a clock, every rise in emotion, every failed attempt to deputize a townsman. Insofar as railroad time structures the pacing of the film, then, it remediates the themes and iconography of the Western through the generic imperatives of the suspense-thriller.

This is not an isolated example. The temporal end-point, the "moment of reckoning," produced by railroad timetables and a culture of clock-watching can be found in any number of train films across canonical genres. Daly traces this trope back to 1860s Victorian theater, but some popular examples from the 20th century will help make the point. In Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), Iris must solve the case of her missing friend before the train arrives in Trieste, at which point the enclosed space of the train opens up to the outside world, allowing suspects and dead bodies to disperse into the crowded chaos of the waiting platform. In Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), a snowdrift helps to extend train time, but again the mystery must be solved before the snowplow meets the locomotive. In Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* (1995)*,* Ethan Hawke must woo Julie Delpy before the train stops in Vienna. In *Twentieth Century*, John Barrymore must re-sign Carole Lombard to his play before the train arrives in New York. In farces, murder-mysteries, action-adventure films, and romantic comedies, the temporal structure of the

railroad thriller intrudes. Already we see that a movie like *Twentieth Century* is shaped not just by the spatial architecture of the train's interior (filled with doorways), but by the temporal order of the railroad as well. As with *High Noon*, the actions, thoughts, and affects of the characters are all entangled with the countdown to the train's arrival in New York, by which point all the loose ends of the plot must be tied up. This is not because trains are incidental to plot but because the particular agency of the train helps to create these stories. For the typical train film, characters are train passengers, literally speeding toward the end-point of their fate. *High Noon* does something different. Here, fate is speeding *toward* Hadleyville, and we see that even those who are not actually on board are entangled with the spatiotemporal affects of the machine ensemble—their movements, their thoughts, their feelings, are wrapped up in the inexorable drive forward not merely "represented" but *created* by the train.

The implications of this generic reading of *High Noon* are substantial. Notice that I have put the film in dialogue not with *Stagecoach* and *Shane* and *Unforgiven*, but with *Nick of Time* and *Twentieth Century* and *Murder on the Orient Express*. This is in keeping with my argument that the railroad has a tendency to structure narratives in ways that cross traditional taxonomic genre boundaries. Traditional taxonomies operate at the syntactic level, as Jim Kitses' influential definition of the Western (as paraphrased by Altman) suggests: "The western grows out of a dialectic between the West as garden and as desert (between culture and nature, community and individual, future and past). The western's vocabulary is thus generated by this syntactic relationship, not vice versa" (32).[174] In this syntactic reading,

[174] In "Authorship and Genre," Kitses explains the "the philosophical dialectic" that lies at the center of the Western by positing "a series of antinomies" that should be very familiar from *The Machine in the Garden*: The Wilderness vs. Civilization, Nature vs. Culture, The West vs. The East (90-1). Dialectic interpretations

it is very easy (and convincing) to relegate the railroad to its role within a predetermined symbolic vocabulary. The railroad in the Western, in this reading, takes its meaning from the formal totality of the dialectic. Either it represents an agent of lawlessness, tied to robber barons and corruption (as in revisionist Westerns like AMC's *Hell on Wheels* [2011-present] and Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* [1968]), or it is the bringer of law and order into the desert of the lawless Wild West (in classic Westerns such as *The Iron Horse* [1924], *Union Pacific* [1939], and *How the West Was Won* [1963]). In either case, the symbolic meaning of the train merely reverses within a more-or-less stable dialectic syntax.

While traditional genre theories, like Kitses', focus on the syntactic structure of the genre, there are also theories that categorize genres according to the so-called "semantic elements." Altman suggests that we can,

> distinguish between generic definitions that depend on a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, sets, and the like—thus stressing the semantic elements that make up the genre—and definitions that play up

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(with their suggestion of synthesis) tend to shunt every element of the film onto one side of the antinomy or the other, although there is a certain degree of ambiguity as to which side any particular object should be place. As Kitses says, "[t]he plains and mountains of a western landscape can be an inspiring and civilizing environment. . . . Equally the terrain can be barren and savage, surroundings so demanding that men are rendered morally ambiguous, or wholly brutalized" (90). But even if the various elements of a Western film—including the train—can operate on either side of any given antinomy, the reading still understands genre as operating at the level of syntax, and understands the meaning of any component of a film—an object, a scene, a shot, a character—as produced in relation to the organic whole.

On the other hand, Kitses is suspicious of anybody who claims the existence of something called *"the* Western." Instead, he suggests that "the Western" is "a loose, shifting and variegated genre with many roots and branches. The word 'genre' itself, although a helpful one, is a mixed blessing: for many the term carries literary overtones of technical *rules*. Nor is 'form' any better; the western is many *forms.* Only a pluralist vision makes sense of our experience of the genre and begins to explain its amazing vigour and adaptability. . . . Yet for years critics have ever tried to freeze the genre once and for all in a definitive model of the 'classical' western" (94). For Kitses, as for Derrida, the word "genre" is too entangled with "rules" and "law." As I have argued, however, after the rise of New Rhetoric, "genre" does not have the same valences at it did for Kitses, and we can use the concept more productively to think about genre as a process rather than an attempt to "freeze" a genre into a "definitive model." I agree with Kitses that only a pluralist vision can make sense of the Western, but I see that pluralist vision as encompassing more than two sides of a dialectic. Rather, the plurality at the heart of genre extends beyond discourse and includes the material actors that come together to produce a film.

> instead certain constitutive relationships that might be called the genre's fundamental syntax. The semantic approach thus stresses the genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged. (31)

Such "lists of common traits," however, are often indicative not of a generic definition based on semantics, but of a syntactic definition that acknowledges objects as "semantic *markers*" of genre. Edward Buscombe, for example, in his landmark "The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema" (1970), which set the tone for film genre studies for years, argues that generically stereotypical objects provide an interpretive clue for the viewer by indicating the film's genre.

Because trains make his list of "formal elements" operating within the Western, it's worth looking at Buscombe's reading of the railroad. It is listed under the "fourth" type of recurring formal elements: "a large group of miscellaneous physical objects which recur and thereby take on a formal function. Trains are inevitably of the same kind: cow-catcher in front of the engine, carriages with a railed open platform at the back (useful for fights) and seats either side of a central aisle" (36).[175] He goes on to say, "all these things operate as formal elements. That is to say, films are not 'about' them any more than a sonnet is about fourteen lines in a certain metre" (38).[176] But we have seen that, although *High Noon* may not

[175] While Buscombe tends to dismiss the agency of the railroad, he actually can't help himself in one parenthetical comment. Notice that in his example of how Western railroads tend to be "of the same type," he notes that the "railed open-platform" is (in parentheses) "useful for fights." In this one aside, Buscombe belies his own argument. Here, the "railed open-platform" does not operate merely as a semantic marker or a formal element, but actually asserts its own agency.

[176] This suggestion that all films are "about people" goes against the film theories of Cavell and Kracauer who note that the filmic frame does not ontologically prioritize the human body, but instead puts it into entangled relationships with the entire *mise-en-scene*. I think that this belief in the priority of the human in films is skewing Buscombe's understanding of how "formal elements" act. He also seems to dismiss the

be "about" the train in a traditional sense, the train certainly acts upon both the characters and the audience, shaping the pace and patterns of the film and thus complicating its generic legacy. It cannot be shunted into the background pile of "miscellaneous objects" that simply pop up in Westerns and remind us what genre we're watching.

Because the benefit of the inclusive nature of semantic theories of genre comes at the expense of the greater explanatory power of syntactic theories, Altman suggests a "dual approach" that catalogues the confluences and divergences of syntactic structures and semantic elements. Such an approach allows us a theoretical vocabulary that makes sense of genre-mixing and innovation through the combination of "the syntax of one genre with the semantics of another" (34).

Altman's project is invested in acknowledging the "interpenetration of the semantic and the syntactic," and in order to do so, he focuses on audience expectation, noting that "syntactic expectation" is "set up by a semantic signal" while "syntactic signals lead to predetermined semantic fields" (39). In other words, when we see a railroad in a Western, we have a certain set of expectations about how it will operate within the syntactic structure of the Western (as symbol of progress, for example). Likewise, when we watch a Western, we have a certain set of expectations about what kinds of objects we will encounter (horses, cowboys, guns, trains). Altman suggests that "this interpenetration of the semantic and the syntactic through the agency of the spectator clearly deserves further study" (39), and I agree, though I'm suggesting something much more radical with the example of *High Noon.*

My argument is not simply that the standardized syntax of the Western is hybridized in *High Noon* by the inclusion of a semantic actor traditionally aligned with the suspense-

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mediating agency of a sonnet's fourteen lines, as well as the possibility—as in Edna St. Vincent Millay's "I Will Put Chaos Into Fourteen Lines"—of a sonnet, in fact, being "about" them.

thriller. If we accept Nicholas Daly's argument that the birth of the thriller is historically entangled with the affective tendencies of railroad time, then the railroad is not just an "actor" in the historical Victorian stage-thriller, but a constitutive condition of its existence. If suspense and anxiety are unintended consequences of railroad time, we could just as easily classify *High Noon* as a canonical thriller clothed in the traditional semantic garb of the Western. This is not a matter of a "dual approach" that maintains the purity of semantics and syntax (or the purity of "Western" and "Thriller" as transhistorical forms) by positing hybridity. Rather, this is a matter of increasing our sensitivity to the multiple, heterogeneous generic "lines of descent" that inform every movie, and which are attributable simultaneously to intertextual lineages and to the material affordances and affects of the nonhuman actors that star in this movie.

The train is entangled with the suspense-thriller in two ways. First, in the traditional way of tempering audience expectation. By the time it reaches *High Noon*, the train already boasts an enormous résumé*,* filled with numerous thrillers dating all the way back to the Victorian theater. In this way, the train comes encrusted with generic echoes that participate in our "horizon of expectations." But the historical relationship between trains and thrillers is not arbitrary. Rather, it is based on the fact that "clock-watching" is *entailed by* railroad timetables and *entails* temporal anxiety, which is the precondition for suspense. Trains actively produce the affects that define the thriller through their spatiotemporal imperatives. Thus, it is not just that trains are linked to the thriller through longstanding association, but rather that the train carries within itself the seeds of the genre. When the train enters *High Noon* in the second scene, it challenges the temporal order of solar noon, and in doing so, re-structures the film according to the spatiotemporal logic of the railroad. Since the thriller, as

a genre, is defined by a set of affects (anxiety, suspense) that are produced by "clock-watching," it is impossible to disentangle the train from the genre. Zinnemann's cinematographic clock-face close-ups and Dmitri Tiomkin's pulsing tick-tock score affirm and reinforce the relationship between trains and the thriller.

Genres Wrapped in Genres: Railroad Films, Phantom Rides, and Bakhtinian Heteroglossia

But we need to complicate this reading even further. The Western, no less than the thriller, is an historically contingent genre, muddied by the process of its emergence and subsequent canonization and by no means a "pure" transhistorical or stable taxonomic category. And, like the thriller, its filmic roots are tied to the railroad. Charles Musser's groundbreaking historical analysis of both the marketing strategy and audience reception of the so-called "first" Western film—Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)—shows that in no way was the film written, produced, directed, marketed, or experienced as a Western at the time of its release. Indeed, the very genre of the film Western did not appear until almost ten years later, at which point critics and film historians retroactively codified a pre-history of the genre by marking *The Great Train Robbery* as a "first text." In its initial reception, Musser argues, *The Great Train Robbery* was experienced as a "Railroad Film."

Evidence in favor of this generic recasting includes the fact that the main actor of the film (Broncho Billy Anderson) "was not a Western star [in 1903] but a railway vedette";[177] the fact that Edwin S. Porter's most recent film prior to *The Great Train Robbery* was *A Romance of the Rail* (1903); and the fact that the film was originally distributed to the particular kind of theater developed by "Hale's Tours" (Altman 35). Hale's Tours used old

[177] "Vedette" and "star" are synonyms.

railroad cars and replaced the windows with film screens, thus simulating the experience of riding a train.[178] Musser explains that "[t]he process of viewer identification with the passengers in a Hale's Tour presentation of *The Great Train Robbery* was overdetermined: introductory railway panoramas, reinforced by the simulated railway carriage . . . turned viewers into passengers." However, he goes on to complicate the generic purity of the "railroad film" by adding that "[t]he second portion of the film . . . breaks with the railway genre and this overdetermination and becomes a chase. The presence of the passengers is forgotten" (130). In other words, the practice of screening the film inside a train car may have "overdetermined" the way in which audiences related to the film—experiencing it as a "train film," for example, rather than a "crime film"—but the second half of the film also *resists* this overdetermination, breaking with the passenger point-of-view and shifting abruptly from a train/crime film to a chase film, "forgetting" the passengers in the process.

While the embodied viewing experience of Hale's Tours is clearly important, I want to draw attention to another component of Musser's argument. With an eye to extradiegetic detail, he notes that the juxtaposition of *The Great Train Robbery* with the preceding "railway panoramas" (which were shot specifically to be viewed inside the fake passenger car) may have had a decisive effect on the audience's "horizon of expectations" and their viewing experience. "Railway panoramas" are also known as "phantom rides," a genre that dominated the film market in the mid-1890s. Phantom rides are, quite simply, single point-of-view shots of the landscape, filmed from a moving train. When viewed through the windows of a faux-passenger car by a turn-of-the-century audience, the effect was, by all accounts, a stunning novelty. As Musser says, the genre was privileged because it "elided

[178] Hale's Tours even included complex machinery for jostling the train, as well as sound effects to make the audience feel like "real" passengers.

camera, character, and narration. The introduction of moving pictures to this form of screen practice reinforced parallels between travel and projected image" (127). Films were back-projected onto a screen in front of the windshield, thus hiding the film machinery, and the screen disappeared under the bottom of the train, meaning that the phantom ride appeared as if it were an actual view from the front of a moving train.

Biograph mounted the first camera on the front of a locomotive in 1897, and other companies quickly followed suit, sending cameras flying down rights-of-way, through tunnels and cuts, over bridges, up switchbacks, and into scenic vista points that audience members might never see on their own. Cameras were mounted on top of locomotives, boxcars, and cabooses (facing forward, backward, or sideways), secured to the sides of trains, placed on cowcatchers, or aimed out of windows. As one contemporary reviewer said:

> The spectator was not an outsider watching from safety the rush of the cars. He was a passenger on a phantom train ride that whirled him through space at nearly a mile a minute. There was no smoke, no glimpse of shuddering frame or crushing wheels. There was nothing to indicate motion save that shining vista of tracks that was eaten up irresistibly, rapidly and the disappearing panorama of banks and fences. (qtd. in Musser 128)

In a cinematic scene dominated by "actualities," this was just one of many prominent genres at the time. In their 1902 "Advance Partial List" of films for sale, for example, Biograph lists "Railroad Views" alongside other riveting genres such as "Military Views, . . . Miscellaneous Views, Trick Pictures, . . . Pan-American Exposition Views, . . . [and] Parade Pictures" (Neale 165). It is compelling that "Railroad Views" (as well as these other "mini" genres)

were produced, marketed, and sold as products of an autonomous genre, *even though they consisted of only a single shot.*

Of course, the popularity of the phantom ride couldn't last forever. Once the novelty wore off, "phantom rides became incorporated into the travel narrative, enabling the showman to literalize the traveller's movements through time and space" (Musser 128). In other words, they were imported wholesale *directly into films that belonged to other, more complex, genres.* Perhaps the best example of this generic heteroglossia is G.A. Smith's 1899 *A Kiss in the Tunnel*. According to Michael Brooke of the British Film Institute, Smith decided that the phantom ride genre needed to be "spiced up," and thus filmed a narrative designed to be cut into the middle of existing phantom rides: "The Warwick Trading Company catalogue offered exhibitors just this middle shot—they were advised to splice it into train footage that they almost certainly would own from previous programmes." In other words, early instances of the phantom ride / narrative film hybridization worked by splicing a narrative segment *into the middle* of the pre-existing phantom ride. What would later come to be known in the syntax of narrative film as an "establishing shot" thus historically preceded the narrative to which it

Image 55: ***The phantom ride from G.A. Smith's remake of Edison's* What Happened in the Tunnel *(1898) created a more "realistic" experience.***

Image 56: ***Edwin S. Porter's 1903* The Great Train Robbery *includes this brief phantom ride which was soon populated by characters.***

is now subordinate. The establishing shot of *A Kiss in the Tunnel* was not shot in order to contextualize the story, but rather *pre-existed* the narrative form as an autonomous film, belonging to an autonomous genre.

I have been circling around the argument that each situation, each scene, and each component of the train carries with it unique genealogical lineages whose entanglement makes any film multi-generic. It is important to take a moment to recognize the historic importance of the phantom ride as both a *recognized autonomous genre* and as a *single shot within a narrative film.* This legacy of the phantom ride forces us to ask serious questions about the relationship between "simple" and "complex" genres: Does the phantom ride, as it still exists in the 21st century, retain its own generic legacy, or has it become a convention of narrative cinema?

At first glance, the phantom ride's appropriation by larger genres seems tailor-made to be read through a Bakhtinian lens of primary (simple) and secondary (complex) speech genres.[179] For Bakhtin, complex genres like the novel, scientific research, and political speeches, arise only in highly developed modes of communication (artistic, scientific, political). As he puts it:

> During the process of their formation, they absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communion. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others. For example, rejoinders of everyday

[179] The distinction between primary and secondary speech genres is ultimately arbitrary and depends upon an untenable ontological distinction between genres of "unmediated reality" (primary speech genres like greetings) and more complex genres of "mediated reality" (secondary speech genres like novels).

dialogue or letters found in a novel retain their form and their everyday significance only on the plane of the novel's content. They enter into actual reality only via the novel as a whole. ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 62)

A relatively "simple" genre, consisting of only one shot, like the phantom ride, is ultimately "absorbed and digested" by the more complex genre of narrative cinema—including taxonomic genre categories such as "Romantic Comedy" and "Action-Adventure" films. Like a "greeting" (a simple speech genre that also exists within these more "complex" genres), the phantom ride begins to take its meaning from the context of "the film as a whole."

While Bakhtin here suggests that smaller genres are absorbed by (and thus determined by) larger genres, we should not be too quick to assume that the phantom ride disappears into the deterministic frame of narrative cinema. As Tom Gunning has persuasively argued, the cinema of attraction (of which the phantom ride is an important example) did not disappear with the arrival of narrative cinema: "It would be too easy to see this as a Cain and Abel story, with narrative strangling the nascent possibilities of a young iconoclastic form of entertainment . . . [but] the cinema of attraction remains an essential part of popular filmmaking" ("The Cinema of Attraction" 68). Gunning suggests, alternatively, that the

Image 57: Under Siege 2 ***(1995) intercuts phantom rides into its action sequences.***

Image 58: ***Another 1995 film, the romantic comedy*** **While You Were Sleeping,** ***opens with a phantom ride on Chicago's El rails.***

cinema of attraction continues to exist *inside* of the narrative films that have dominated Hollywood since D.W. Griffith.

Gunning draws his theory of "attraction" from Russian filmmaker and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein, whom he cites in his definition:

> An attraction aggressively subjected the spectator to "sensual or psychological impact." According to Eisenstein, theater should consist of a montage of such attractions, creating a relation to the spectator entirely different from his absorption in "illusory imitativeness . . . that of an exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption." (66)

Gunning points out that early narratives like "the chase film" make it impossible to delimit where the cinema of attraction ends and narrative cinema begins. It would be difficult indeed to say whether the "sensory spectacle" produced by the speeding cars, trains, and horses of early chase films serves a narrative purpose, or whether, as Gunning argues, "[t]he story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of cinema" (65).[180] While the phantom ride may serve a narrative purpose when

[180] This is true not just of early chase films, but of contemporary actions films as well. Jose Arroyo argues that Gunning's insight offers the best reading of, for example, Brian De Palma's 1996 *Mission: Impossible.* Arroyo takes issue with interpretations that appeal to the film's implicit critique of East/West relations: "This is a reading of the film that appears to give it a degree of depth. But to look at *Mission: Impossible* only in this way is perhaps to miss what is most interesting about it. It's built around set pieces . . . each involving some element of action and ingenuity (from characters or film-makers). These scenes are woven through the film like songs and dances are in an old-fashioned musical: it isn't so much that they don't tell us anything about the characters, but that their function as spectacle exceeds their function as narrative" (23-4). This is similar to the argument I made in Chapter 2 regarding the importance of the cinematic set-piece. Like Arroyo, I find that critical interpretations of action and slapstick movies often *appear* to add depth to these films when they actually *omit* what is most interesting about them. In this case, we see something slightly different but similar at work: by reducing the phantom ride to its role within narrative cinema, we appear to give it narrative substance when in fact we look past it spectacularity, which may be its most interesting quality. If we ever feel as though a film lingers on one of these landscape shots for too long, this may be because we have already reduced it to its subordinate role as an "establishing shot," whose purpose is solely to set the scene so we can move on with the story. But it may be—as in the case of *Before Sunrise* in particular—that the spectacle of a world seen through the eyes of a moving train is the primary purpose of the phantom ride, and that we should attune ourselves to the beauty and strangeness of this world.

Image 59: ***In the same year, Richard Linklater opened his romantic drama* Before Sunrise *with a series of phantom rides, including this variation in which the camera is mounted on the back, rather than the front, of the train.***

Image 60: ***The 2012 musical documentary* The Big Easy Express*, features numerous phantom rides.***

it enters a narrative film, it likewise retains the attraction it always had, as can be seen by the tendency in films throughout the 20th and 21st centuries to linger on the moving landscape for far longer than narrative would require. As the G.A. Smith example suggests, the narrative convention of the "establishing shot," when a moving train is involved, is historically entangled with the non-narrative spectacle of the "phantom ride." 20th- and 21st-century train films often begin with phantom rides (usually accompanied by credits), and almost every filmic train journey includes one at some point. Indeed, the difficulty of imagining a contemporary train film that does *not* include a phantom ride is striking. Thus, this is a genre that has not disappeared at all but merely gone underground, parasitically plying its trade within more widely accepted canonical genres such as the Western, the action film, the romance, the thriller, and the comedy.

As John Dorst argues, in his application of Bakhtinian genre theory to the "Neck-Riddle," "perhaps the first genre will have the capacity to infiltrate, even victimize, the second, inhabiting its body and turning it to alien purposes" (416). Dorst uses Bakhtin to develop a theory of "generic conflict" in which the particular ways that each individual genre

conceptualizes the world (particularly through its unique spatiotemporal logic) clash within the larger secondary genre, creating generic ambiguity and conflict.

Bakhtin's theory that complex genres swallow up and digest "simple" genres goes against Gunning's theorization of the cinema of attraction. But it is also at odds with Bakhtin's own theory of heteroglossia, as he develops it in regard to the novel. The novel, according to Bakhtin, is the generic site of "multiple voices," all coming together in "dialogic" relation, and thus—unlike in the eventual synthesis inherent in the dialectic—none of them completely assimilating the others.[181] As he says, "languages do not *exclude* each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways (the Ukrainian language, the language of the epic poem, of early Symbolism, of the student, of a particular generation of children, of the run-of-the-mill intellectual, of the Nietzschean and so on)" (*Dialogic Imagination* 291). Likewise, narrative cinema does not *exclude* the phantom ride (or assimilate it completely into its generic logic) so much as intersect with it. For Bakhtin, the novel is a privileged site of dialogism, as opposed to epic poetry or philosophy which he views as monologic: "The style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its 'languages'" (291). But I see no reason why we should limit Bakhtin's insight into heteroglossic combinations to the novel when we see it at work in other genres and mediums.

[181] Bakhtin actually does argue that individual utterances submit to the novel's generic logic of heteroglossia: "These heterogeneous stylistic unities, upon entering the novel, combine to form a structured artistic system, and are subordinated to the higher stylistic unity of the work as a whole, a unity that cannot be identified with any single one of the unities subordinated to it" (262). However, this is a strange subordination insofar as the "unity of the work as a whole" is not "organic" or enclosed, but rather predicated generically upon open-ended dialogism. In other words, a monological philosophical tract, upon entering the novel, gives up its pretensions of being a single voice as it is forced into dialogue with the rest of the voices within the novel, but in no way does it give up its partial autonomy as a distinct genre.

To push this even farther, I see no reason to limit the multiple voices of heteroglossia to discursive genres. As we have seen, nonhuman objects have unique capacities, tendencies, and agencies that contribute to the production of narrative action and meaning. The "voice" of the railroad—which is never fully assimilated into the railroad story—deserves to be acknowledged as part of the heteroglossic dialogue. Furthermore, drawing on the theory of assemblages, each of the components of the railroad also contributes its own "voice"—its own affordances, constraints, capacities, and tendencies. The generic conflict, then, is much more complicated than Altman's syntactic/semantic dialectic, and much more complicated than a linguistic, rhetorical, or discursive theory of genre can account for. As we saw in the earlier discussion of the tunnel-duck, the embodied capacities of each actor in the scene contribute to the specific iterations of a recurrent situation. Part of the heteroglossia at play in any film, then, includes the ancestral voices of previous iterations of a situation, both in terms of intertextual and interobjective entanglements.

Bakhtin says "we speak in diverse genres without suspecting that they exist. . . . We are given these speech genres in almost the same way that we are given our native language, which we master fluently long before we begin to study grammar" ("The Problem of Speech Genres" 78). As Bakhtin is at pains to point out, no "utterance" exists in the abstract. Each is historically situated as a particular utterance made by a particular speaker under particular circumstances. His genre theory is thus intrinsically historical, suggesting that every utterance (and every speaker) is implicitly responding to previous utterances that the speaker has assimilated either unconsciously (simply in learning to speak through imitation and reiteration) or consciously through a reflexive study of generic codes. As Bakhtin says: "He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe."

Rather, every utterance presupposes "not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances." Every utterance thus enters into a complex relation to all previous utterances as a "link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (69). This heteroglossic theory of diverse genres all co-existing within a single "complex genre" explains the parasitic survival of the phantom ride within Hollywood blockbusters, indie films, and home videos, and its ability to both move across genre and assert itself as a vital spectacle within genre. Bakhtin's theory of assimilationist speech genres, on the other hand, simply can't account for the way a "simple genre" like this can continue to maintain an existence outside of any particular "complex genre."

The remarkable upshot of the phantom ride's continued existence as a semi-autonomous "cinema of attraction" *within* narrative film is that genre must be multi-scalar and heteroglossic. A film may be categorizable by a dominant syntactical structure—we may be able to meaningfully call a film a "Western," for example—but once we begin unpacking the various situations, shots, and styles that compose its narrative, we will find a texture of generic lineages interwoven and never fully sublimated into the organic whole. *The Great Train Robbery* can easily be classified as a Western, but its production history, initial reception, and marketing strategies point toward a much messier generic lineage. The retroactive codification of the "Western" fails to fully capture the generic heteronomy of the film, which remains a train film, a crime film, a chase film, and a travel film. Each designation alerts us to different aspects of the film and conditions our viewing experience, but it is their refusal to assimilate one another that marks the generic heteroglossia at work inside Porter's film.

"I Just Made That Up": Object-Oriented Shovel-Fights and Train Movies

The phantom ride is an historically recognized genre that continues to exist inside narrative films, but we can, by extension, theorize any recurrent situation in similar generic terms. What is the difference, after all, between the phantom ride and the tunnel-duck as they operate in 21st-century cinema? Both draw upon rich intertextual and interobjective generic lineages that are not explainable by or reducible to the variety of canonical genre categories in which they occur. We have now come full circle. Beginning with an admittedly strange recurrent situation—the tunnel-duck—I then moved into more traditional territory in mapping out the historical entanglements between the railroad and various genres. In doing so, however, I have tried to avoid thinking about this relationship as occurring between "trains" as unified objects and "genres" as stable categories. Rather, I argued that farces and murder-mysteries are entangled with historically contingent manifestations of railroad technology that include compartment doors and corridors; that thrillers are inextricably intertwined with the anxiety of clock-watching; and that the railroad film and the phantom ride are historically recognized genres that contributed to the codification of the Western via *The Great Train Robbery.* But my argument is not limited to historically recognized genres. In fact, every actor that the railroad brings into the filmworld participates in the production of recurrent situations, and thus has "genre-like" effects on the film. I turn now to an even stranger situation than the tunnel-duck: the shovel-fight.

In Barry Sonnenfeld's 1999 remake of *Wild Wild West*, James West (Will Smith) finds himself inside a giant steampunk spider, face-to-face with a martial arts expert. The man puts on a show of his skill, with flying kicks and acrobatic leaps. He stops, facing West, ready to fight, and says: "I learned that from a Chinaman." Moving past the uncomfortable

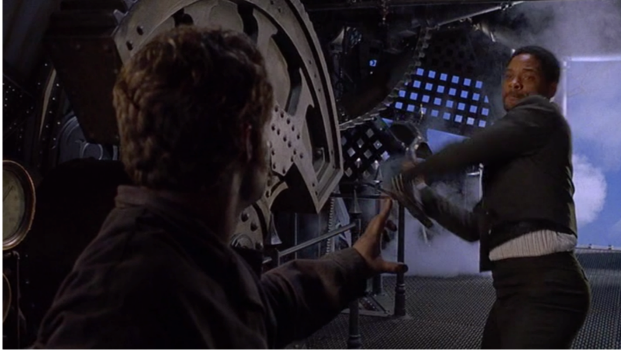

Image 61: ***Will Smith "makes up" hitting a villain in the face with a shovel.***

political incorrectness, West uses this line as a cue. He kicks a shovel up in the air with his foot, grabs the handle, and smashes the man in the face with the broad side of the blade. The punchline: "I just made that up."

Of course, he didn't just "make that up." In film history, this particular re-appropriation of the shovel dates back at least to *The Great Train Robbery*, and thus to the pre-history of the Western genre that West/Sonnenfeld are operating in. Since then, iterations of this maneuver have occurred not just in Westerns but in all kinds of train films: *Oh, Mr. Porter!* (1937), *Union Pacific* (1939), *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *The Train* (1964), *Blazing Saddles* (1974), *Terror Train* (1980), and, after the Sonnenfeld film, *Shanghai Noon* (2000), *3:10 to Yuma* (2007), and *The Lone Ranger* (2013).

These are all "railroad movies," and all of them involve somebody hitting somebody else with a shovel plucked from the film's infrastructural milieu: fireman's shovels, end-of-track shovels, or maintenance shovels. Notice, however, that there is no consistency in generic syntax: in addition to a number of Westerns, the lineage includes a World War II film (*The Train*), a horror film (*Terror Train*), comedies (*Oh, Mr. Porter!, Blazing Saddles, Shanghai Noon)*, a crime/train/travel film (*The Great Train Robbery*), and a civil rights drama (*In the Heat of the Night*). At first, this seems to support Altman's thesis about the development of hybrid genres by combining the syntax of one genre with the semantic elements of another. But there's nothing about the train in *Terror Train* or *In the Heat of the Night* that suggests relationship with the Western, and neither of these films invite such a

hybridization. This means we need a different conceptual vocabulary for thinking about the ways that situations tend to recur *across* taxonomic genre lines. Following what we've just learned about the ability of the phantom ride to integrate itself into more complex genres, I suggest a working hypothesis that the objects that populate a filmworld participate in a complex process of *genrification* that occurs at multiple scales.[182]

Let's return to Donald Norman's theory of "accidental affordances" and "signifiers" in *The Design of Everyday Objects.* I touched on this briefly when discussing the *traceur* in Chicago Daley Plaza in Chapter 2. For Norman, the first time a party guest notices that an empty drink cup would rest perfectly on the flat top of a wall, she actualizes an accidental affordance of the house's infrastructure. Like the retaining walls in Daley Plaza, this wall exists to block people from accidentally falling down a stairwell. Its capacity for supporting cups is strictly an unintended consequence—the flat top is a byproduct of the need to construct a wall at a certain height and with a certain thickness: an accidental affordance.

The next person who walks by, however, sees not only the flat top of the wall, but the empty cup as well. This cup, according to Norman, acts as a "signifier." The cup signifies the "accidental affordance" that the first guest actualized. The second party guest might then place his empty cup next to the first cup, following the precedent. Both acts share a common

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[182] I borrow the term "genrification" from Rick Altman, who uses it to think about the ongoing process of genre creation in *Film/Genre.* Altman is attempting to challenge traditional classificatory practices that treat "genres" in essentialist terms. As Altman memorably says, "[i]n the genre world, . . . every day is Jurassic Park day. Not only are all genres interfertile, they may at any time be crossed with any other genre that ever existed" (70). Altman is interested primarily in official "genre categories," which he notes are much more numerous and strange than we often realize (he cites, for example, Warners' mid-1930s genre attempt: *mirthful martial musical romantic comic dramatic poetic discourse* [63]). I am less interested in official categories, but Altman's insight that the map of genres can never be complete "because it is a record not of the past, but of a living geography, of an ongoing process" (70) is an important point for this project. Thus, I am adapting Altman's term to refer to the process by which *every* filmic object (not just human directors, marketers, audiences, and critics) asserts "genre-like effects" in dialogic interplay with innumerable other "genre-like effects" to create the strange hybrid creation that is an individual film.

"ancestry" in terms of actualizing the same material affordance. But the second person is also responding to the signifier that did not exist in the first case, and thus is engaged in an act of repetition. A third party guest might also place a cup there, at which point we might say that a "genre" is beginning to develop in the New Rhetorical sense that a situation is recurring. The third guest is engaging with material affordances, of course, but also with the first two cups, which index a specific potential action. "Ah, so this is where the empty cups go," the third and fourth and fifth party guests might think.[183] The extent to which any one of these individuals responds to the material affordance versus the signifier is impossible to know. This should sound familiar: it is another way of articulating the combination of intertextual and interobjective affordances and constraints that shaped Ant-Man's tunnel-duck.

The wall, as an actor within the infrastructural assemblage of the private home, operates like the shovel, as an actor within the infrastructural assemblage of the railroad. When West picks up the shovel and hits the martial arts expert, claiming that he "just made that up," he implies that his improvisation was born solely from the exigencies of the situation, the materials at hand, and the spontaneous recognition of accidental affordances. While this may or may not be true for the character within the filmworld, the rest of us have seen this situation play out in similar ways many times before. A long lineage of "signifiers" precede this improvisation.

While the more-or-less stable (and obvious) affordances of the shovel allow this situation to repeat itself in many situations, the "signifiers," as with the tunnel-duck and the phantom ride, come from a variety of generic lineages. This suggests three things. First, that

[183] To invoke Stanley Cavell's "revelation of the familiar": "*Of course* a wall is for placing empty cups!"

Image 62: ***The shovel fight has literally been in train movies "from the start." This is from Edwin S. Porter's*** **The Great Train Robbery.**

Image 63: ***Joel McCrea takes down a mutinous railroad worker with a shovel at end-of-track in*** **Union Pacific.**

Image 64: ***Burt Lancaster pretends to shovel coal into the hotbox in*** **The Train.** ***When his Nazi escort isn't looking, he hits him in the stomach with the shovel and pushes him off the train.***

Image 65: ***Perhaps the most famous shovel-fight in cinema history is from*** **Blazing Saddles.** ***Here, Cleavon Little hits Slim Pickens in the back of the head at end-of-track.***

Image 66: ***When Sidney Poitier fights off a gang of rednecks in a railroad shed in*** **In the Heat of the Night,** ***one of them grabs a shovel.***

Image 67: ***During the climax of*** **Terror Train,** ***the conductor saves Jamie Lee Curtis by knocking the psychopathic killer out of the boxcar door using a shovel found on the train.***

Sonnenfeld is operating within a multi-generic heritage that includes (at least) the Western, the action film, the crime film, and the railroad film.[184] Second, that the shovel is capable of having "genre-like effects" that are irreducible to the genres in which it is found. It participates in the production of recurring situations and a corpus of "signifiers" that

Image 68: ***Owen Wilson picks up a shovel at a railroad camp and uses it to rescue Jackie Chan in* Shanghai Noon.**

Image 69: ***In order to save Russell Crowe from a gang of railroad engineers in* 3:10 to Yuma*, Alan Tudyk uses a shovel to start a fight along the right-of-way.***

undergird our situational "horizon of expectations." And third, that the likelihood of shovels accompanying the railroad into a filmworld as a piece of "ancillary equipment" leads to an increased tendency for this situation to play out within railroad milieux. We can thus say that the introduction of the railroad into the Western encourages the recurrence of situations through both the material affordances of its component parts, and through the intertextual legacy born from the actualization and exploitation of these affordances.

Graham Harman explicitly theorizes the relationship between human and shovel in *Tool-Being*:

> We can imagine that Dasein is involved, for instance, with a shovel. It does not run across such an object in a vacuum, as if it were some sort of drifting sensory irritant. In the first place, Dasein finds the shovel already available, makes use of or *retains* this object as something "alongside which" it exists. Second, the shovel-object is not encountered as a neutral datum divorced from the situation in which it is inscribed. (58).

Harman is rethinking Heidegger, so we have to sift through some sticky jargon. In this case, it's enough to say that "Dasein" is the human actor.[185] It's important to note that human actors never just run across nonhuman actors "in a vacuum." Harman's point is that the shovel is "ready-to-hand," to invoke some more Heideggarian terminology:[186] characters

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[185] Etymologically, "Dasein" means "Being-there." For Heidegger, this quality of "Being" is unique to human beings. He distinguishes "Being" from "entities" by pointing to our inner existential experience of life: "[t]his entity which each of us has in himself" (27). Dasein is thus the individual human *as experienced in existence*. As Heidegger later says, "[o]nly the particular Dasein decides its existence, whether it does so by taking hold or by neglecting. The question of existence never gets straightened out except through existence itself" (33). This is the act of "worlding" cited in the introduction. For Heidegger, it would be James West's act of "taking hold" of the shovel that "decides its existence" by providing for it an "as-structure" (i.e. by transforming the inert shovel into a "shovel-as-weapon." Its purpose now lies in the role it plays in the totality). The shovel, on the other hand can never "decide its existence" because it is "worldless" and lacks the capacity for interpreting or interrogating its surroundings.

In their translation of *Being and Time,* John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson provide this footnote to Heidegger's use of Dasein: "Though in traditional German philosophy [Dasein] may be used quite generally to stand for almost any kind of Being or 'existence' which we can say that something *has*, . . . in everyday usage it tends to be used more narrowly to stand for the kind of Being that belongs to *persons*" (27). When Harman speaks of the relation between the shovel and Dasein as an object-oriented ontologist, he assumes that both entities are capable of interpreting and encountering the world in their own ways, and thus that both entities engage in "worlding." Rather than following "everyday usage," Harman harks back to the etymological definition of Dasein and its original application to *all* entities.

Without getting too side-tracked by Heidegger, however, the important takeaway here is that every being always already operates within a particular milieu (Heidegger would say we are "thrown" into a world that we enter "too late"). One way to think about how trains make storyworlds, then, is to pay attention to the particular ways that characters are "thrown" into a milieu that has been populated by the entities composing the railroad assemblage. James West's potential for "worlding" is made possible (and constrained) by the particularity of the world he is "thrown" into.

[186] For Heidegger, this accompanies an ontological distinction between *Dasein* and "mere" objects in the world. As I noted in the introduction, a chair can never "touch" a wall because both entities are merely "present-at-hand" in the world—existing side-by-side but incapable of "encountering" the world or "being-in" the world. "Readiness-to-hand," on the contrary, is what makes an object usable by *Dasein*. An object—like a hammer—is "ready-to-hand" insofar as it is equipment, or insofar as it is "essentially 'something in-order-to'" (97). A hammer, for example, exists "in-order-to" hammer a nail, and thus is ready-to-hand *for this particular work.* In this example, the activity of "hammering" "uncovers the specific 'manipulability' of the hammer" (98). Likewise, digging uncovers the specific manipulability of the shovel. Hitting someone in the face with the shovel-blade makes manifest a more-or-less *novel* affordance of the shovel, thus re-visioning "the specific manipulability" of the shovel by altering its "as-structure": in altering the "in-order-to" of the shovel from digging to hitting, Dasein re-interprets the world and thus engages in the creative act of "worlding." The shovel is "ready-to-hand" only insofar as Dasein incorporates it into an equipmental totality. In this case, this involves its existence "as-weapon" within the totality of the recurrent situation, or the totality of *Wild Wild West.* The "manipulability" of the shovel thus exceeds any particular equipmental design, and its capacities only emerge as it enters into new interrelations in novel situations—as it becomes "equipment" in different totalities.

Harman, *contra* Heidegger, argues that *all entities*—human and nonhuman—interpret and "touch" the world according to the particular ways they affect and are affected by other entities in the world. For Heidegger, the shovel is *ready-to-hand* for the fireman insofar as it is part of an equipmental totality that includes the coal and the boiler and the tender and the steam engine. But the relationship is not reciprocal: "worlding" is a strictly

who need to fight and find themselves within the milieu created by railroad infrastructure tend to appropriate shovels because shovels tend to already be there. Additionally, shovels afford a particular response to a recurrent situation through their material capacities. They are capable of being used as a weapon in a way that steam gauges and pocket-watches are not. According to Harman, objects are not useful because we use them, but because they have certain properties that *make them useful*. In this case, the long handle affords a good grip and the potential to generate torque in the swing, while the flat iron blade makes possible the heavy blow to the face that will knock out the martial arts expert. Like the flat top of the wall, these are accidental affordances that emerge in response to the exigencies of a recurrent situation that West/Sonnenfeld, like Edwin S. Porter, actualize in the pseudo-improvisatory moment.

The shovel-fight presents an interesting problem that is not immediately apparent in either the tunnel-duck or the phantom ride. Shovels are obviously not monogamously bound to the railroad. We should expect, then, to find shovel-fights popping up not just in different genres, but in different settings as well. And in fact, we do: when Richard Gere kills his co-worker at the beginning of Terence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978) with his fireman's shovel; when Jason Statham mimics Will Smith's kick-move to fight an opponent with a warehouse shovel in *Transporter 3* (2008); when Sofia Vergara kills a rat with a garden shovel (this time with the sharp edge of the blade) in *Modern Family* (2010); and when John

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human affair; the shovel is "ready-to-hand" only insofar as it exists *for Dasein*. Otherwise, it is merely "present-at-hand." For Harman, on the other hand, there is no ontological distinction between the fireman and the shovel. *Every* object, for Harman (including humans), is both "ready-to-hand" insofar as other objects (human or nonhuman) appropriate it "in-order-to" do something, *and* present-at-hand, insofar it withdraws itself from being *fully* appropriated by any other object, or within any particular context. This is as much as to say that we can use Heidegger to productively think about how we are always already *thrown* into a world that we then interpret via manipulation, experimentation, and using objects "in-order-to" do something, without relying on Heidegger's particular ontological or metaphysical commitments.

Wayne spanks Maureen O'Hara with a shovel-like kitchen tool in *McLintock!* (1963). While the shovel-fight may tend to occur on trains, it is not bound to the train film. Instead, it is a partially autonomous recurring situation tied neither to any particular syntax nor to any particular milieu.

It should not surprise us that this recurrent use of shovel-as-weapon floats between genres and milieux with ease, popping up in Westerns, comedies, TV sitcoms, Oscar-winning dramas, B-horror movies, traditional shoot-em-up action flicks, and home videos.[187] In accordance with our reading of the train as an assemblage of partially autonomous actors, it should not surprise us that its component parts are capable of participating in generic lineages that are not contained by the railroad milieu or the railroad film. The railroad, in this sense, acts as a site of repetition and difference, producing horizons of expectations that change over time with each new "utterance."

Image 70: ***The dramatic arc of Terence Malick's* Days of Heaven *is set in motion when Richard Gere uses his fireman's shovel to kill a co-worker.***

Image 71: ***Jason Statham uses Will Smith's kick-move to procure a shovel in a warehouse, which he uses to dispatch a giant opponent in* Transporter 3.**

Image 72: ***In the TV sitcom* Modern Family, *Sofia Vergara's Gloria is notorious for killing rats with the blade of a typical garden shovel and then cutting their heads off with the sharp edge.***

[187] In a 2014 YouTube home video, teenager Miranda Fugate grabs a shovel that is leaning up against her house and throws it at her friend, hitting her in the head with the blade. The video went viral and Fugate became an instant internet sensation as "Shovel Girl." See "Shovel Girl Video: Cops Conduct Criminal Investigation" on TMZ (http://www.tmz.com/2014/05/07/shovel-girl-fight-video-police-investigation-criminal-charges/).

Image 73: ***We might even include this scene from* McLintock!, *where John Wayne spanks Maureen O'Hara with a shovel-like tool from the kitchen fireplace.***

Trains provide filmmakers with a rich history of approaches to recurrent situations, and a rich intertextual legacy within which to make meaning. But they do so, partially, in the way that they bring together a heterogeneous mix of actors that each participate in multiple genealogical lineages that exceed the part they play in the railroad. We have seen this play out in multiple ways: compartment doors/French doors/farces; isolated compartments/"locked room" puzzles/detective fiction; railroad time/the anxieties of clock-watching/suspense-thrillers; phantom rides/establishing shots/narrative film; low-overhangs/tunnel-ducks/action films. In fact, each component of the railroad milieu (doors, compartments, lounges, train-tops, tunnels, clocks, landscapes, windows) brings with it unique affordances and affects as well as a particular intertextual lineage that includes not just previous train-films, but any film in which the milieu tends to include similar components.

The (steam) railroad tends to bring massive numbers of shovels into whatever fictional world it enters, and many of those worlds (action/adventure, Western, crime, slapstick, war), pivot on physical violence. In both the reality of the film, and the directorial choreography of human and nonhuman actors, the objects composing the realist *mise-en-scene* become the objects-to-hand, offering their services to characters and directors as each new situation arises. The introduction of shovels (entailed by the introduction of railroads) into the Western encourages the introduction of shovel-fights, just as the introduction of a flat surface into a party encourages the introduction of a new cup-shelf. As recurrent

Image 74: ***When Johnny Depp's Tonto sees a track switch up the line, he ducks into the locomotive cab. What objects are "ready-to-hand" in order to throw the switch?***

Image 75: ***The camera pans down to show the shovel blade in a dramatic portrayal of the "ready-to-hand." The shovel is not "run across . . . in a vacuum," but is "already available," as part of the infrastructural assemblage.***

situations move effortlessly across taxonomic genres (comedy, action, Western, horror, thriller), it makes sense to speak of the shovel-fight as a partially autonomous genre in its own right. Though it is not an historically recognized genre like the phantom ride, it follows the same logic: they both are born of a combination of accidental material affordances and intertextual signifiers; they easily move between canonical genres without suggesting genre hybridity; they have a unique genealogical lineage that is irreducible to the syntax of the stories in which they arise. But the shovel-fight is clearly just one of innumerable examples: every individual component within the railroad assemblage ties the railroad's recurrent situations with similar situations as they recur across genres and across milieux.

This suggests two conclusions. First, the introduction of the railroad into any filmworld necessarily mediates the generic resonances of the film by shaping the possibilities for recurrent situations. But second, that none of these recurrent situations is necessarily tied to the railroad. The anxiety of clock-watching is produced not just by trains, but by airplanes and timecodes and time-bombs, and by clocks themselves, which are historically entangled

with the rise of railroad time but which also exist as autonomous actors in their own right. Neither locked rooms nor doorways are unique to the spatial array of the railroad. Shovels and tunnels and landscape panoramas exist within a variety of milieux. For this reason, it is easy to dismiss the idea that railroads shape narrative action generically. And yet, situations seem to recur on and around trains, even if they are not determined by the train. The spaces, structures, and objects that the train sends into filmworlds tend to encourage recurrent situations, and it is this tendency that I have attempted to articulate through specific case studies.

Conclusion: The Railroad Film

All of this suggests that a canon of railroad films would not simply be an arbitrary grouping of films based on the mere presence of a train. Rather, the train, to a greater or lesser extent in each film, contributes a certain set of semi-stable affordances and constraints (which nevertheless change over time and location) that allow for repetition and difference across syntactic taxonomies of genre. This does not mean we need to do away with canonical genre categories, but rather that we need to understand the various ways that genre cuts across genre, the ways that taxonomic genre categories can never completely contain the generic work done by its individual "members," and the ways that individual scenes and individual actors (both human and nonhuman) entangle individual films within a heterogeneous array of genealogical histories. This means that "genre" is operating at every level, from the situation and the scene to the overarching syntax of the film, and that film genres operate both intertextually and interobjectively.

As Altman says, "[a]ny group of films may at any time be generically redefined by contemporary critics" (81). While I take up Altman's challenge by arguing for the existence of a "railroad genre," his claim is by no means an open invitation for a constructivist mode of genre canonization. Genres are redefined not out of some whimsical cobbling together of similarities and differences, but through attention to genealogical lineage, intertextual reference, and audience expectations. The "railroad film" is both an historically and currently robust genre. I submit the following pieces of evidence: 1) Producers and directors have historically operated under the assumption that they are producing "railroad films"; 2) audiences have acknowledged it as a legitimate genre, and folk-canons of "train films" flood the internet; 3) contemporary directors have acknowledged working from a fairly well-established canon of train films as they prepare to add new additions to the genre; and 4) even where overt intertextual lineages are absent, the particular constraints and affordances entailed by railroad milieux *tend* toward recurrent situations, and thus provide a a shared generic ancestry for all railroad films.

The historical legacy of the "railroad film" has already been substantiated by Biograph's marketing of the phantom ride, and the reception of *The Great Train Robbery* within an established railroad genre: "When the old Blackhawk Films catalogue listed *The Lonedale Operator* and *The General* alongside railroad documentaries and train slides," Altman explains, "Griffith and Keaton could not help but join the railroad genre" (92). Institutional pressures, then, have historically pushed for the existence of the "train film" as an autonomous genre, complete with its own horizon of expectations.

In addition to the official marketing strategies of Blackhawk Films, Biograph, and other film studios, fans have historically responded to "train films" in surprising fashion.

Drawing on Henry Jenkins' claim that "fandom generates its own genres" (279), Altman focuses on the vast collection of people, clubs, and technologies that created the historical railroad genre:

> The popular railroad genre . . . included films (and other media) offering exterior shots of trains. Sustained by magazines, model train clubs, narrow-gauge railways and distributors of railroad paraphernalia, the railroad genre served as an imaginary meeting place for hundreds of thousands of spectators. Anyone who has seen Blackhawk's version of Griffith's *Lonedale Operator*, with its incessant inter titles describing the engine and the railroad operations depicted in the film, will understand just how radically railroad genre fans could reformulate a film according to alternative genre expectations. (162)

If genres are defined by the shared conceptions of "any particular group or society," as Andrew Tudor argues (9), then there is no doubt that the "train film" is a robust genre. Even as model train clubs and narrow-gauge enthusiasm are on the wane, contemporary audiences continue to recognize the unique "genre-like effects" of the railroad set-piece. Indeed, on-line audiences have been busy canonizing "train films" for years. Christopher Muller at *RailServe* offers his selections for the "Top Ten Classic Train Movies,"[188] accompanied by a list of 140+ train movies for quick reference. The *America by Rail* blog lists the top train movies of all time by (canonical) genre: comedies (*Some Like It Hot* [1958]); "magical" train movies (*Dumbo* [1941]); "train Westerns" (*The Great Train Robbery* [1903]); "train action movies"

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[188] 1) *The Train;* 2) *Emperor of the North Pole*; 3) *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three;* 4) *La Bataille Du Rail;* 5) *The Great Locomotive Chase;* 6) *Night Passage*; 7) *Von Ryan's Express*; 8) *La Bête Humaine*; 9) *Runaway Train*; 10) *The General.*

(*From Russia With Love* [1963]); and "crime/thrillers" (*Union Station* [1950]). *Ranker*, a website devoted to ranking films through audience votes, has an "Ultimate List" of "The Best Train Movies."[189] *Unstoppable* (2004), *Silver Streak,* and *North By Northwest* top their list.[190] The number of independent websites, International Movie Database (IMDb) lists, and personal blogs boasting canons of railroad films, novels, short stories, poems, and songs is staggering.

It is striking that the same films tend to top these lists.[191] There seems to be some consensus not only on the value of categorizing films this way, but on the particular films that deserve to be at the center of the canon. Oddly enough, the train sequences in movies like *North By Northwest, Strangers on a Train*, *Some Like it Hot,* and *From Russia With Love* are relatively short, which means that these canon-compilers value the memorable qualities of the railroad set-piece over the time spent on-board.[192]

When Tony Scott's *Unstoppable* was released in 2010, Sharon Knolle at *Moviefone* published a list of the "10 Most Suspenseful Train Movies," including *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), *Night Train to Munich* (1940), and *The Narrow Margin* (1952). Knolle's list suggests a very specific genealogical heritage for this Denzel Washington action/suspense film, and alerts audiences to potential intertextual resonances. These public lists and promotional pieces contribute to a horizon of expectations that derives not solely from the canonical genre

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[189] "List Criteria: Movies must feature trains."

[190] As of 11 August 2016. The lists on *Ranker* are voted on by fans, so the order changes constantly.

[191] Almost every "train film canon" includes *The Great Train Robbery, The General, The Train, La Bataille du Rail, La Bête Humaine, North By Northwest, Strangers on a Train, Silver Streak, The Lady Vanishes, Runaway Train, From Russia With Love,* and *Emperor of the North Pole,* among others.

[192] We might remember here that one of Billy Mernit's criteria for a set-piece is its "wow-factor." Even though the "train scenes" in these movies are relatively short, they are among their most memorable scenes.

of the thriller, but from a seemingly arbitrary hybrid genre: "Suspenseful Train Movies." While we have seen that the suspense film and the train film are intertwined at their very roots, this rhetorical move of hybridizing the genres re-links them for the contemporary viewer. Thus, we see *Moviefone* re-articulating genre history so as to suggest that Tony Scott[193] is taking his cues from a particular set of films that share a common heritage in both railroad infrastructure and the thriller.

We could think of this as a "sub-genre" common to the train film and the suspense film (as if it could be marked by the shared area of a Venn Diagram), or as a hybrid of two stable genres, but neither of these options explains the heterogeneous genre effects produced by both a syntactic genre (thriller) and what would normally be considered a milieu, a setting, or at best a "nonhuman character" (the train). And yet, we see this entangled generic legacy at play not just in the canons of railfans or the marketing of a film but in directorial decisions as well. For example, Gore Verbinski tells us that he prepared to film *The Lone Ranger* railroad sequences by watching "classic" train films, such as *The General* and John Frankenheimer's *The Train* (Taylor).[194] The railroad scenes in Verbinski's Western, then, are born in part from a slapstick comedy and a World War II film, respectively.[195] Clearly there

[193] Scott had already flirted with trains and intertextuality in his remake of *The Taking of Pelham 1-2-3* (2009).

[194] Verbinski tells Drew Taylor that to prepare to film *The Lone Ranger*, he and his crew "looked at a lot of old train movies"—including *The General, The Train*, and the 1970s thriller *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*—and tried to emulate them. He also mentions Tony Scott's recent *Unstoppable* as an inspiration. Most surprisingly, he says that one major influence on his train set-pieces was Nick Park's animated 1993 Wallace and Gromit film, *The Wrong Trousers*: "I think Wallace & Gromit's *The Wrong Trousers* is one of the greatest train sequences. I remember watching it with my kids years and years ago. When we were working on this, I thought, 'Could you get that outrageous but still have it be gravitationally correct?' It turns out, you could."

[195] Journalists picked up on this as well. In her *Moviefone* interview with Verbinski, Sharon Knolle tells the director: "With some of the film stunts, you seem to be paying homage to early film classics with Buster Keaton." Verbinski agrees: "[O]nce you put the Transcontinental Railroad as the backdrop of your movie, you have to have a pretty amazing train sequence, and there's a lot of great train sequences that have

is something about “train films” that is irreducible to the canonical genres through which they emerge: a legacy that is important for viewers (who compile canons of train films), producers and marketers (who solicit articles alerting moviegoers to intertextual echoes) and directors (who watch “train films” in order to create new “train films”).

To invoke Cohen’s etymological definition of genre, it is clear that *The Lone Ranger* and *Unstoppable* are in some ways “born from” the previous canon of train films which shapes the way they are written, shot, edited, marketed, and received by audiences. But even if nobody acknowledged the autonomous category of the “train film,” this would not diminish the “genre effects” that the railroad has on the films it enters. Most of us would not consider the tunnel-duck to be an established “genre,” and when *Ant-Man* turns to face the tunnel, most viewers probably don’t even consciously register the fact that they’ve seen this so many times before. Still, our horizon of expectations is shaped by preconceived notions of “what the body can do,” which are indebted to the fact that we’ve seen this scene play out in all kinds of narrative contexts. Even if we are not willing to grant “train films” the status of a genre, we cannot deny that the train has “genre-like effects.”

“The railroad,” then, is not a unified actor but rather, as I have been reiterating throughout this project, a heterogeneous assemblage of human and nonhuman actors. Each recurrent situation indebted to a railroad milieu could conceivably emerge through a different infrastructural lineage. Shovels are found in garages, gardens, warehouses, and construction sites, and the shovel-fight as a recurrent situation predictably follows the shovel into all of these environments. We can imagine an action-hero avoiding low-overhangs when standing on top of a bus or a speeding car. “Railroad time” can now be produced by digital

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been filmed over the years. Certainly, ‘The General’ with Buster Keaton is up there.” In fact, almost every article and review on *The Lone Ranger* mentions Buster Keaton.

camcorders, airplanes, office jobs, and anything else that encourages "clock-watching" and precision timekeeping. Compartments and lounges are found on steamships, which structure any number of romantic comedies, farces, and action films, from *The Lady Eve* and *An Affair to Remember* (1957) to *Titanic* (1997). Any "genre-like effect" we locate in railroad infrastructure can be found in any number of other situations.

This is not an argument against the genrification capacities of the railroad. On the contrary, it highlights the partial autonomy not just of the railroad but of every space, structure, and object that composes the railroad assemblage. The uniqueness of the railroad lies in part in its autonomy as an actor, but in part in the ways that it draws together an array of humans and nonhumans, and spaces and structures, in particular ways. The railroad ties together the shovel-fight, the tunnel-duck, the compartment tryst, the paranoid prison-like encapsulation, the temporal end-point, the thrill of speed, the reveries of train-dreaming, and any number of other situations that each has its own unique set of generic lineages. Thus, railroads cannot be understood as semantic actors or formal markers of genre. Rather, they participate in the creation of genre through their shaping of the recurrent situation, both in terms of material affordances and intertextual references.

Riding and Writing the Literary Railroad: Travel Practices and Narrative Remediation in Paul Theroux's *The Old Patagonian Express*

[T]ravels performed in a particular manner do not merely reflect views of reality but create and confirm them . . . like the greatest arts, travel serves to invoke realities that cannot be encountered in the same way through any other means.

– Judith Adler, "Travel as Performed Art"

Anything is possible on a train: a great meal, a binge, a visit from card players, an intrigue, a good night's sleep, and strangers' monologues framed like Russian short stories.

– Paul Theroux, *The Great Railway Bazaar*

Introduction: Remediating the Railroad Through Motion and Words

Poring over maps one evening and trying to think of "something to write," novelist Paul Theroux made the simple but startling discovery that "there was a continuous [railroad] track from my house in Medford [MA] to the Great Plateau of Patagonia in southern Argentina" (*Old Patagonian Express* 6). From this epiphany was born the journey that he would immortalize in his classic 1979 travelogue, *The Old Patagonian Express*. As important as this moment is to the origin myth of both the trip and the text, no critical attention has been paid to the relationship between trains and narrative, between riding and writing, in Theroux's work. Why does Theroux build a travel narrative around a transportation infrastructure instead of a travel destination? Why does this continuous track strike him as important? And what is the relationship between embodied travel practices and the travelogues they spawn? The track does more than simply guide Theroux's travels. It also serves as the material basis for an embodied metaphor of continuity and connection in what Theroux feels to be the increasingly fragmented and disconnected world of air travel. In locating and traversing the seamless continuum of geographic points between Medford and Patagonia by train, Theroux attempts to counteract a profound sense of spatiotemporal

disorientation brought on by the rise of middle-class commercial air travel in the mid-20th century. But a problem immediately presents itself when Theroux's project is understood in this way. Namely, the "continuous" track between Medford and Patagonia is itself discontinuous, fragmented, and filled with gaps. Or, to put it more succinctly, the track that Theroux claims to have discovered on his map did not exist on that map. Instead, it was created by Theroux's narrative ordering of his railroading experiences.

Theroux understands all travel as an "experiment with space," and the travel book as "motion given order by its repetition in words" (6). It is not easy to distinguish between Theroux's spatial and narrative experiments. His actual railroad journey clearly provides the raw material for his literary work, but it is only in the narrative "order" of the travelogue that the "continuous track" emerges, despite the fact that he continually reiterates that experiences of continuity and connection are "inherent" in train travel. Though The Old Patagonian Express is a real train,[196] running through the rural Argentine pampas, *The Old Patagonian*

[196] The "reality" of The Old Patagonian Express poses an interesting question. The train that Theroux actually rides to Esquel, when he rides it, is still known by its historical name, *La Trochita*. The name means "little gauge," in reference to the narrow gauge of its tracks. While it was originally part of a vast network of Argentine railways called *Ferrocarriles Patagónicos* (built in 1909), it now runs as an autonomous heritage railway. Its popularity as a tourist destination remains indebted to its pseudo-eponymous role in *The Old Patagonian Express.* And yet, even in the narrative, the train Theroux rides and the train Theroux writes are difficult to disentangle. While en route to Esquel, he has a conversation with a young boy:

> "Does this train have a name?" I asked.
>
> "I don't understand."
>
> "The train I took to Buenos Aires was called the North Star, and the Bariloche express is called the Lakes of the South. The one to Mendoza is called the Liberator. That sort of name."
>
> He laughed. "This train is too insignificant to have a name. The government is talking about getting rid of it."
>
> "Isn't it called the Esquel Arrow or something like that?"
>
> He shook his head.
>
> "Or the Patagonian Express?"
>
> "The *Old* Patagonian Express," he said. "But express trains are supposed to go very fast." (396)

It is Theroux who suggests the name "Patagonian Express." When the boy jokes that he should amend the name to include the adjective "*Old,*" the name sticks, even though he immediately reminds Theroux that it isn't an express train at all—a fact put in relief by the reference to narrow gauge tracks in its actual name. Theroux re-

Express that connects Boston to the tiny town of Esquel is a chimeric creation, born from a combination of embodied experience and literary remediation: a seamless "ordering" of the stops and starts, detours and digressions, gaps and flights of Theroux's fundamentally discontinuous "motion." The unified rail-line connecting the Americas is thus a self-conscious literary creation, a poetic assemblage of disconnected local and regional lines, that nevertheless draws its meaning from the generic requirement of the travelogue: that the trip actually occurred. Which means, strangely enough, that we must imagine Theroux's writing of *The Old Patagonian Express* as retroactively allowing Theroux to ride The Old Patagonian Express. Or, to put it another way, in practicing an art of travel, we must imagine Theroux riding and writing the literary railroad into existence simultaneously. His embodied interactions with transportation infrastructure and his narrative ordering of those interactions are mutually constitutive.

It is telling that Theroux studies maps in order to find "something to write," rather than something to ride. In fact, Theroux's discovery lies not so much in locating the continuous track on a map, but in imagining the possibility of creating such a track. It is this

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christens the train at least four times: in this conversation (assuming it is based in historical fact), in the narrative version of the conversation, in the table of contents, and in the title of the book. When the book becomes a best-seller, the new name loops back onto *La Trochita* through the experiences of the fans and travelers who headed south to discover the "real" Old Patagonian Express, and through the tourist industry that capitalizes on the train's newfound fame by blessing the name-change. This means that even if Theroux rode *La Trochita* in "real life," he actually *is* riding The Old Patagonian Express by the time many of his readers join him. Ironically, then, readers travel to the pampas to ride a train (the "real" Old Patagonian Express) that Theroux wrote into existence (by remediating and re-naming *La Trochita*).

Much later in Theroux's career, in *The Last Train to Zona Verde* (2013), we are reminded of the sleight-of-hand that transformed a local Argentinian narrow-gauge train into a cultural icon. For the first timein his life, Theroux tells us in this travelogue, he decides *not* to take a train: "My hesitation was much more of a reversal than he knew. I was the man bewitched by the Chattanooga Choo Choo and the Patagonian Express and the Trans-Siberian" (333). Sandwiched between two historical train lines (both of which, I should note, have rich histories of literary entanglements of their own), the Patagonian Express assumes their reality when in fact it is unclear whether Theroux is here "bewitched" by an actual train or by his own literary creation.

new railroad—the one that emerges through the dialogue of "motion" and "order" and is eventually encountered by the reader—that I call the "literary railroad."[197] This railroad, at least as it exists in *Express*, is designed to produce for the armchair traveler precisely the experience of continuity and connection that Theroux claims to be inherent in railroad travel itself. And at the same time, it serves as what Judith Adler calls an "enacted trope," recursively shaping Theroux's real-life travel experience as it's happening.[198]

In this chapter, I use Theroux's 1970s travel writing to theorize the co-mediations of transportation infrastructure, the historically-situated human body, and narrative ordering. This is a difficult task that involves juggling three media (the train, the body, the text) simultaneously, and thus it requires a complex braiding of various theoretical threads that must each be set forth in different sections. It may strike some readers as odd to treat the train as a medium, but the media theory developed by Marshall McLuhan actually encourages this move. Because this goes against the traditional understanding of media, however, I will first turn to McLuhan in order to build a strong theoretical ground for this work. Bolter and Grusin, extending McLuhan to construct their theory of "remediation," provide a conceptual framework for thinking about the ways that textual ordering appropriates "real-world" objects without fully displacing them into language.

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[197] In this chapter I theorize Theroux's "literary railroad" but the concept can be applied to every train we have encountered thus far. The basic quality of the literary (or filmic) railroad is simply that it is a hybrid being, constructed of both iron and steel and language and structure. While Theroux gives us a good case study for fleshing out the co-constitutive relationship between embodied experience and narrative remediation, it should be clear that I have been circling around this issue in every chapter.

[198] Adler uses the phrase "enacted trope" to highlight the fact that tropes in travelogues don't just structure the narrative, but mediate actual travel practices as well. She cites a number of "master narratives" that operate as common tropes enacted by travelers throughout history: the trip as "allegorical miniature of earthy life, or as search for a vantage point from which to grasp and understand life 'as it really is'"; the promise of "time travel" either forward or backward in time (to more or less developed regions); the discovery of new territory; the search for a "homeland of the soul"; the study of "the 'book' of the world"; the "exploration of terrestrial paradise or hell" (1375). For Theroux, the "master narrative," or the trope that he is enacting both through movement and language, is the rediscovery of spatiotemporal continuity and connection.

Indeed, it is the issue of narrative ordering that lies at the heart of this chapter. As I argue, Theroux is historically operating in response to a growing sense of disorientation and "discontinuity" brought on by the rise of middle-class air travel in the United States in the 1950s. As we will see, these are affects that emerge when a human body, whose senses have been mediated by the space-time continuum of a particular transportation technology, is forced to adapt to the new spatiotemporal experiences produced by an emerging technology. Theroux's anti-airplane rhetoric reiterates almost verbatim the anti-railroad rhetoric of John Ruskin, Victor Hugo, Thomas de Quincey, and others. While this problematizes Theroux's assumption that "connection" and "continuity" are inherent properties of the railroad, the historical comparison of Theroux's rhetoric with 19th-century anti-railroad rhetoric helps to explain why the embodied trope of railroad connection is existentially important both to Theroux and to his contemporary readers, who were living through a transitional period in the 1970s when air travel was taking over train travel as the primary mode of transportation.[199] By extension, historicizing Theroux's work in this way will make clear why his travelogues remain important to the 21st-century reader who likewise must confront periods of dramatic technological and infrastructural change, and is potentially grappling with similar feelings of disorientation, disconnection, and discontinuity.

After establishing the theoretical and historical lens through which I read Theroux, I turn to an analysis of his work—particularly the way he structures the travelogue in order to efface gaps in the continuous train journey (while leaving evidence of those gaps available to the astute reader). Theroux, I argue, creates a new object in the world—The Old Patagonian

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[199] As Theroux says in his *Granta* piece on writing *The Great Railway Bazaar*, "[i]n an age of mass tourism, everyone set off to see the same things, and that was what travel writing seemed to be about. I am speaking of the early 1970s" ("First Train Journey" 167).

Express—that is indebted both to the material trains he rides and to the narrative ordering that creates connections and continuities in the reading experience that were not actually present in his travels. The complex co-mediations by which the railroad shapes the narrative and the narrative shapes the travel experience suggest that travel stories and lived experience are co-constitutive. Furthermore, Theroux's creation of the "literary railroad" produces a new kind of train, meant to be metaphorically "ridden" by readers. Theroux thus invites his readers to practice similar modes of creative distortion that Theroux himself practices by glossing over gaps and intentionally blurring the ontological distinction between infrastructural affects and narrative interpretation.[200]

The conclusion of the chapter will turn to the reader—or, in this case, the armchair traveler—who is invited along for the ride. While I have been circling around the issue of the reader throughout the project (Thoreau's invitation to mine *Walden* for tropes and metaphors; the development of PK Vision through spectatorship; the ways that generic lineages operate via the viewer's horizon of expectations), I am now ready, at the end of the final chapter, to turn explicitly toward the reader's relationship with this "train-something." I call this object "the literary railroad," for lack of a better term. The term is meant to highlight the fact that this particular entity is composed of both literary language and "real" railroads. But before

[200] This should sound familiar. As I progress, it will be useful to keep in mind the many ways that this reading resonates with Henry David Thoreau's interpretation of Walden Woods and the Fitchburg Railroad (and his invitation to the reader to interpret *Walden*); with Buster Keaton's re-vision of railroad infrastructure through slapstick comedy (and his invitation to the viewer to cultivate a mode of "BK Vision"); with the phantom ride's appropriation of the moving train and narrative cinema's appropriation of the phantom ride (and the viewer's appropriation of narrative cinema). The theorization of "the literary railroad" is in some ways the culmination of this line of thinking: it is the "new object" that enters our world through the dialogic encounters of embodied mind, material infrastructure, and narrative order that lie at the heart of each chapter. However, it is also in some ways specific to the case study of Theroux, who sets out explicitly to bring such an object into the world for the purpose of creating an affective experience that he claims to be inherent in the railroad itself.

we get to that point, I need to take a step back and situate myself within the contested field of media theory.

In the opening pages of "The Medium is the Message," Marshall McLuhan claims that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (1).[201] Bolter and Grusin extrapolate on this enigmatic statement through their concept of "remediation," the term they use to refer to "the representation of one medium in another" (45). But representation isn't quite the right way to think about the "more complex kind of borrowing in which one medium is itself incorporated . . . in another medium" (45). Rather, even when the new medium attempts to "absorb" the older medium completely, "so that the discontinuities between the two are minimized. . . . The very act of remediation . . . ensures that the older medium cannot be entirely effaced; the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways" (47).[202] The travelogue, even in the most realistic

[201] McLuhan doesn't extrapolate on this bold claim until much later in *Understanding Media*, in his chapter on "Radio." Here, his argument becomes more clear: "The content of the press is literary statement, as the content of the book is speech, and the content of the movie is the novel" (305). By this point he seems to have forgotten his initial turn toward the media of the railroad and electric light, and is instead focused entirely on media of representation—a move that Bolter and Grusin, along with almost every post-McLuhan media theorist, follow. It is also noteworthy that McLuhan here seems to believe that the "content" of any medium is always only *one* other medium. Bolter and Grusin will complicate this by turning to the computer (which has moved well beyond its original incarnation as a word-processor and now houses *every* other medium). But I am curious about the railroad which, though it is privileged as an exemplary medium in "The Medium is the Message," is not considered within the schema of remediation by either McLuhan or Bolter and Grusin. But to think of the railroad—as opposed to the "literary statement" or "speech" or "the novel"—as a medium capable of being remediated is to open the door to a much more robust theory of remediation that moves beyond representational media and allows us to acknowledge the teeming multitude of human and nonhuman mediators at play within any narrative or representational assemblage.

[202] We already encountered this issue in relation to narrative cinema and the phantom ride. When narrative cinema "remediates" the phantom ride, it does not completely efface the "cinema of attraction," as Tom Gunning has shown. Rather, the "older media" (the cinema of attraction; the phantom ride) continues to operate *inside* the "newer media" (narrative cinema), and the narrative train film remains dependent upon the particular ways that the phantom ride affects the "scale or pace or pattern" of the narrative, as well as the ways it affects the viewer. This is true whether the directors of narrative cinema acknowledge it or not, though the decision to linger on the phantom ride for much longer than necessary in films like *Before Sunrise* and *It Could Happen to You* suggests that filmmakers are very aware of the ways that the affects produced by narrative cinema depend to a great degree upon the many older media it draws into its assemblage.

mode of representationalism (i.e., even when it tries to absorb the travel completely by displacing it into the field of language), remains dependent on the mediating capacities of the material railroad in "acknowledged and unacknowledged" ways.

This claim requires some clarification. Colloquially, "media" tends to refer to media of communication and representation: TV, radio, film, newspapers, books, and digital media.[203] Indeed, Bolter and Grusin limit their discussion to the digital remediation of painting, music, photography, text, and other forms of older communication media. But McLuhan himself has a much broader concept of media. I have already touched on McLuhan's initial turn toward the railroad while explaining his theory that "the medium is the message" (8). I want to return to McLuhan's railroad now in order to make clear my reasons for considering the train a "medium," even though it cuts against the usual use of the concept. McLuhan touches directly on the issue at hand when he discusses the different ways that railroads and airplanes organize the "scale or pace or pattern" of our lives: "The airplane . . . by accelerating the rate of transportation, tends to dissolve the railway form of city,

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[203] Lisa Gitelman opposes this colloquial use of "the media." In *Always Already New,* she argues that "[n]aturalizing, essentializing, or ceding agency to media is something that happens at the lexical level every time anyone says 'the media' in English, as if media were a unified natural entity, like the wind. This turn of phrase doubtlessly comes about because of widely shared perceptions that today's news and entertainment outlets together comprise a relatively unified institution . . . [we f]orget that the word *media* is rightly plural, not singular. Media are. A medium is" (2). I share Gitelman's concern about the tendency to treat "the media" as a unified entity, but differ on two points. First, I am clearly more open to "ceding agency" to nonhuman objects like radios and trains (though this is not the same thing as ceding agency to "the media" and is certainly not the same thing as "naturalizing" media). Second, Gitelman's point serves to highlight the heterogeneous nature of "the media," but still does not account for non-representational media like the train, or so-called "natural" objects. This is clear in the way she ironically "naturalizes, essentializes, and cedes agency to" the wind, which she unreflectively assumes to be a "unified natural entity." But we have already seen, through Heidegger and Timothy Morton, that we *never* encounter the wind as such an entity. Instead, we encounter the wind *as interpreted by* chimneys, tree leaves, wind-chimes, and our own human ears and skin. Our treatment of the ways that the "artificial valley" of the railroad cut intensifies and funnels the wind should suggest that there is no such thing as "the wind," just as there is no such thing as "the media." In both cases, as Gitelman herself says, "specificity is key."

politics, and association, quite independently of what the airplane is used for" (8). In *The Laws of Media*, working with his son, Eric McLuhan, he clarifies the concept of media that he articulates in "The Medium is the Message": the "laws of media" apply to "everything man makes and does, every procedure, every style, every artefact, every poem, song, painting, gimmick, gadget, theory, technology" (ix). Thus, Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation demands a much broader application than they themselves give it. Indeed, once we begin considering every "manmade artefact" as a medium (or, as Latour would put it, a mediator), then every story, every film, and every song is a jostling collective of "older media" that it remediates but does not entirely efface.[204]

But it gets even more complicated when we consider that McLuhan's "artefacts" include not just physical objects (like TVs and railroads), but literary structures, philosophical systems, mathematical equations, and any other kind of manmade form or structure used to make sense of the world. Again, from *Laws of Media*:

> It makes no difference whatever whether one considers as artefacts or as media things of a tangible "hardware" nature such as bowls and clubs or forks and spoons, or tools and devices and engines, railways, spacecraft, radios, computers, and so on; or things of a "software" nature such as theories or laws

[204] In some ways, this is a reformulation of what I have already argued using DeLanda's assemblage theory. By turning to media theory I now hope to make explicit the connection between representational media (which fall under the usual purview of literary, film, and media studies) and nonhuman objects that mediate the pace and patterns of our lives but have received relatively less attention due to our sense that they don't "carry" traditional informational "messages." In other words, McLuhan and media theory have already proved useful to literary and film studies in a way that object-oriented ontology and assemblage theory may not have. Thus, by suggesting that assemblage theory is already implicitly part of media theory via Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation, I hope to build another bridge between the study of literature and film, and the study of the nonhuman objects that populate literature and film.

> of science, philosophical systems, remedies or even the diseases in medicine, forms or styles in painting or poetry or drama or music, and so on. (3)[205]

Thus both the railroad (an inextricable component of Theroux's art of travel practice) and literary structure (the way Theroux orders this practice in narrative) act as media, asserting their own "pace and patterns" on human affairs. McLuhan already hints at the ways that both railroads and airplanes profoundly mediated the human sensorium, by "modernizing" the senses and altering spatiotemporal perception, and it is precisely these embodied mediations that Theroux attempts to grapple with in both his travel practices and in his literary experiments.

If we consider the train travelogue as a remediation of the railroad, we gain some insight into the entangled relationship between train and text. Most importantly, we become unable to speak of the text as if it exists in an intertextual vacuum of linguistic "difference," because the travelogue "remains dependent" on the transportation technologies that shape it. In other words, Theroux's trains are not merely displaced into a field of language. And yet, thinking of the travelogue as an act of creative remediation also allows us to recognize the hybrid nature of the literary railroad and begin to make sense of the co-constitutive

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[205] While I use McLuhan to ground my argument for treating the train as a "medium," my thinking differs in regard to nonhuman agency. McLuhan is clear in *Laws of Media*, that "the laws apply only to human utterances and artefacts: they reveal nothing about animal products, such as webs or dams or nests" (x). This is because McLuhan defines media as "extensions of man," whereas I am skeptical of this reduction. While manmade artifacts undoubtedly "extend" the human senses in many ways, once they are put into the world they act as autonomous nonhuman actors, capable of many affects that have nothing to do with their role as a human prosthesis. As always, the creation outstrips its creator. There is also in McLuhan a linguistic monism that I find difficult to reconcile with his sensitivity to the agency of, for example, the railroad and electric light. In *Laws of Media* he tells us that "[u]tterings are outerings (extensions), so media are not as words, they actually are words" (ix). I am more comfortable when he makes similar claims in metaphoric terms: "each of man's artefacts is in fact a kind of word, a metaphor that translates experience from one form into another" (3). His understanding of metaphor in terms of "making" rather than "matching" (122) means that he should be aware of the act of creation inherent in treating artifacts as words (in translating objects via the terms of linguistics), but he often slips into an unreflective linguistic monism that seems at odds with his project as a whole. These are lingering methodological questions that accompany my use of McLuhan's theory of mediation.

mediations of riding and writing, of trains and text, as each continually mediates and is mediated by the other.

At times, it is tempting to read Theroux's prose as an attempt at "transparent" representational realism. On the one hand, Theroux clearly attempts to reproduce for the reader an experience of continuity by organizing his travelogue as if it were a train journey, and he often reiterates that this spatiotemporal orientation is simply "inherent" in train travel. And yet, he does not hide from the reader the acts of creative interpretation that distinguish the literary railroad (found in the travelogue) from embodied travel practices. One of the strangest tensions in Theroux's work comes from his decision to include maps of his journey, which clearly show a discontinuous trajectory, full of air travel and east-west detours that contribute nothing to his southward movement. It is the inclusion of these gaps, however, that invites the reader to acknowledge and thus emulate the interpretive work that creates meaning out of embodied interactions with transportation infrastructure. In Theroux's cartographic acknowledgement of a reality that exists outside of (and remains irreducible to) the travel text, he forces the reader to grapple with the relationship between travel-as-text and travel-as-practice. Theroux offers a supremely well-ordered account of railroad continuity complete with cracks and fissures that serve to remind us that ordering is inherently a creative act that depends upon its performance. This means that Theroux's literary railroad cannot be read as a transparent or neutral signifier, authentically reproducing his lived experience; nor can it be read as a purely textual creation, drawing its meaning from intertextual allusions and structural difference. The text requires as its foundation the "real-life" railroad that it nonetheless transforms via literary remediation. It is the act of translation that ties the two railroads together.

As Judith Adler argues in “Travel as Performed Art,” literary critics have been too content to treat travel writing as a *writing* genre alone, ignoring the fact that this genre depends to a great extent on the development of embodied travel practices. As Adler argues, travel writers experiment not just with language and representation, but with movement through space and time. Our best travel writers “consciously practiced and perfected an art of travel, *not* simply an art of travel writing” (1367). In other words, in critiquing travel writing as *writing*, we fail to recognize the way that remediation entangles the text with the travel practices it incorporates. We only have access to Theroux’s words, of course, and yet he tells us, as Adler does, that these words are inherently intertwined with an extra-linguistic world of movement through space and time. This means both that the genre of the travelogue presupposes a bond with extra-textual reality *and* that its language does not represent or recreate authentic travel experiences; rather it creates something new by *ordering* travel experiences. Thus, interpretation of any travelogue must take seriously both travel practices (including choices about, and encounters with, transportation infrastructure) and language, as both lived experience and literary tropes remain active mediators in the genre, contributing to the production of meaning both for the traveler/writer and for the reader/traveler.

The Art of Travel: A Dialogue of Styles

Adler tells us that travel is “art” when it is “undertaken and executed with a primary concern for the meanings discovered, created, and communicated as persons move through geographical space in *stylistically specified ways*.” Insofar as embodied interaction with travel infrastructure “bestows” meaning “on the self, and the social, natural, or metaphysical realities through which it moves,” travel becomes “one means of ‘worldmaking’ and self-

fashioning" (1368, emphasis added).[206] Because travel "style" inevitably includes decisions about modes of transport, the art of travel is directly invested in exploiting and experimenting with the interrelational worldmaking capacities of transportation infrastructure. To move through time and space in "stylistically specified ways," the traveler must make conscious decisions about transportation. The decision to travel by plane, train, or automobile (or on foot, for that matter) is based on the meaning-making affordances and constraints of particular infrastructural assemblages, not on their relative efficiency as a way to get somewhere.[207]

Meanings created through "stylistic" movement cannot be produced in any other way, because to change the way is to change the style.[208] But these meanings also exceed the

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[206] Adler's use of the term "worldmaking" suggests that her "poetics of travel" can be productively understood through Matthew Fuller's etymological redefinition of *poiesis* as an interrelational, dialogic, worldmaking. If "all objects make the world and take part in it," the worldmaking capacities of the traveler/writer are intimately connected (through the specificity of "style") with modes of transport and infrastructural "styles."

[207] We can think here of Hitchcock's use of the Twentieth Century Limited in *North By Northwest*. I already argued that Roger Thornhill's decision to ride the train was indebted to the relative affordances and constraints of railroads and airplanes (Thornhill takes the train because he can jump out of it if required). But Hitchcock also had his own reasons for placing Thornhill on the train: he wants to use the community seating feature of the dining car to bring Thornhill and Eve Kendall together; he wants to hide Thornhill's body in washrooms and an upper berth; he wants to allow railroad detectives to infiltrate the train-space; he wants to give Thornhill the red cap of a porter so he can sneak off the train undetected; and he wants to use the private drawing-room to hint at a romantic tryst. So even when we're not talking about "travel as performed art," the use of transportation infrastructure in any narrative is rarely about its efficiency. It always has to do with the "stylistically specific ways" the narrative makes meaning.

[208] In *Guerilla Metaphysics*, Graham Harman dedicates an entire section to "The Style of Things." His thoughts on style are helpful here. In Harman's "ontology of styles," all objects—human and nonhuman—exhibit "a certain kind of behavior or way of dealing with situations" (57). While the human body is a "universal translation tool" (49), so is *every* physical body. In this context, we can complicate Adler's argument by clarifying what it means to engage in "stylistically specific movement." If, in the case of Theroux, trains have a particular style (a particular "kind of behavior and way of dealing with situations"), and travelogues have a particular style, and Theroux's body has a particular style, then the "style" of *The Old Patagonian Express* is just as heterogeneous as we discovered genre to be in Chapter 3. Drawing on Nietzsche, Graham Harman argues that "to alter one's style would be to alter one's thoughts" (45), which is in keeping with Adler's faith in travel writing as a "worldmaking" activity. But this suggests that "altering one's style" is not merely a matter of altering one's *own* style; rather, it requires purposefully entangling oneself with new objects, new structures, and new ideas, and entering into a mutually constitutive stylistic dialogue in which a *new* style emerges. The

particular mode of transportation because the "stylistically specific way" that the body moves through space and time is always already in dialogue with the "stylistically specific way" that the experience is interpreted and remediated—in this case, through the style of Theroux's travelogue.[209] Thus, "meanings" cannot be attributed to any given transportation technology *a priori*. When we argue that the capacities and affordances of the railroad shape the meaning of a travelogue like *The Old Patagonian Express*, the line between the railroad as it exists in language and the railroad as it exists for Paul Theroux in "real-life" is blurry indeed. While the affordances and limitations of the real-life railroad shape the contours of the trip (and thus the story), the "order" imposed upon those travels via genre, trope, metaphor, and narrative mediate the travel experience (and thus the reading experience).

Here, Michel de Certeau's theory of "narrated adventures" is useful. In *The Practice of Everyday Life,* de Certeau argues that narrated versions of walks "do not merely constitute a 'supplement' to pedestrian enunciations and rhetorics. They are not satisfied with displacing the latter and transposing them into the field of language. In reality, they organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it" (116).[210] While

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takeaway is that when Theroux chooses to travel by train and to write a book about it, the thing we eventually will call Theroux's style emerges out of dialogic interactions between the style of the railroad, the style of the travelogue, and the style of his own 20th-century body. This tripartite entanglement will become more clear as the chapter proceeds.

[209] There is a third "medium" here that has a specific style: Theroux's own body. Adler's argument that travel writing presupposes the actual movement of "the body" already suggests that its affordances and constraints are always already involved in the specific styles of movement we choose. I will develop this thought below when I discuss the historical "modernization of the senses" as it relates to train travel. Theroux's body is historically situated in a world that includes trains, but is rapidly moving away from the railroad and toward highways and airplanes.

[210] I already touched briefly on de Certeau's rhetoric of walking in my discussion of Henry David Thoreau's footsteps as he crosses the "cart-path in the woods." Here we see Theroux picking up where Thoreau left off—transforming the "unswerving tracks" of the commuter by re-imagining the possibilities of train travel. While Thoreau aligns the Boston commuter with both fate (he must end up in Concord) and death (through the metaphor of *Atropos*), Theroux offers a way out: don't get off in Concord; ride that train all the way to Patagonia.

de Certeau is speaking specifically of urban walking as a travel practice, the fact that Theroux was writing his travelogue while simultaneously engaging in embodied travel practice suggests that, as de Certeau argues, his "narrated adventure" shaped his "footsteps" (or train trips) "before or during the time" he was actually traveling. This means that the tropes of the narrative have the potential to bleed into the choices, actions, perceptions, and feelings of his lived experience, making it impossible to chronologically or ontologically prioritize either the travel practice or the narrative.

Theroux's decision to include verbatim transcriptions of his notes in the travelogue itself means that this narrative ordering is at work not only in Theroux's travel experience (he is consciously ordering his experience for the explicit purpose of writing a book) but also in the narrator's experience (and thus in the reading experience as well). Take, as a typical example, a moment when Theroux has been traveling on "The Passenger Train to Tapachula" for twelve hours, and has become fed up with the mosquitoes, spiders, and ants, the man kicking the back of his seat, and the heat. Here, he narrates his own act of narration by including the action of writing in the narrative: he opens his copy of *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* and begins writing on the flyleaf:

> *Two classes: both uncomfortable and dirty. No privacy, no relief. Constant stopping and starting, broken engine, howling passengers. On days like this I wonder why I bother: leaving order and friends for disorder and strangers. I'm homesick and feel punished for my selfishness in leaving"* (79, italics in original)

At the end of a long transcription of his notes (ostensibly verbatim, as suggested by the use of italics to demarcate this text from the rest of the narrative), he says: "I stopped. Writing can

make you very lonely” (80). Not only are we taken into the mundane activity of writing as practiced by Theroux the travel-writer, we also see that the process of narrating is shaping his railroad experience as it’s happening in two ways. Most obviously, Theroux “orders” the “disorder and strangers” he encounters by jotting down specific details of the train and by tying those details to his emotional state. But we also see that the practice of writing affects his mood and experience by making him “lonely.” It is clear that this is not just anybody riding the train, but specifically a *writer* riding the train, and writing *while riding* the train, and that these two stylistic choices are always already shaping both his lived experience and his eventual book.[211]

Thus, it is not simply that the train is displaced into the linguistic structures of the travelogue. Like a house of mirrors, we here see a train (as it exists in the scribbled note) inside of a narrative (the scribbled note) inside of a train (as it exists in the diegesis) inside of a narrative (the travelogue). We see a narrative taking shape on the flyleaf of another narrative inside the passenger car of the slow-moving Passenger Train to Tapachula. This provides a glimpse of the scattered, haphazard notes that must be underlying the rest of the story, jotted down on napkins and notebooks and then *re-ordered* once again as Theroux translates them into the story that we are reading. This should not surprise us. After all, he tells us that he originally conceived of the continuous track (on the map) as “something to write.”

[211] We could easily say of Theroux in *Old Patagonian Express* what Stanley Cavell says about Thoreau in *Walden*: “It is hard to keep in mind that the hero of this book is its writer. . . . I mean that the ‘I’ of the book declares himself to be a writer. . . . It takes a while to recognize that each of his actions is the act of a writer, that every word in which he identifies himself or describes his work and his world is the identification and description of what he understands his literary enterprise to require” (*Senses* 5). As with *Walden*, it is important to remember that the hero of *The Old Patagonian Express* is always already both a traveler and a writer, constantly translating his experiences on the railroad into language even as both language and the railroad translate his experiences.

For Adler, “the baseline elements of any travel performance are space, time, and the design and pace of the traveler’s movement through both” (1369). If the baseline elements of a literary performance—as a working hypothesis—are language, medium, genre, and representation, the travelogue is a hybrid being, made up of an entangled set of worldmaking practices from both travel and literary performance that bleed into one another and shape each other. In interpreting a travelogue, we cannot simply ignore the art of the travel performance in favor of the book’s intertextual or structural literary qualities, nor can we ignore the mediating qualities of language, genre, and structure in favor of a transparent “realism” that pretends to present the journey “as it actually happened.” If we do either, we lose track of the particular ways that travelogues make meaning. Not only does a travelogue tell us about the world, or about one person’s experiences in the world, it models for us a mode of worldmaking that we ourselves practice both in our literary interpretations *and* in our daily embodied encounters with infrastructure. Here, then, is the stylized mode of worldmaking that Theroux presents during the first real leg of his train journey:

> As the Lake Shore Limited pulled out of Platform 15, I felt as if I were still in a provisional state, as if everyone were going to get off soon, and that only I was riding the train to the end of the line. It was a nice conceit, but I kept it to myself. If a stranger asked where I was going, I said Chicago. (6)

While he goes to great lengths to produce the feeling of the continuous line in the reading experience, he is also forthcoming with the fact that this “continuous line” is a “conceit”—an extended metaphor that ties his travel experience together. Here he explicitly blurs the lines between travel experience and poetic remediation by suggesting that the “conceit” (what Adler would call an “enacted trope”) exists not only in the narrative but in his very

thoughts—or, in a more embodied sense, in the way he "felt." Even more telling is his decision to keep this conceit "to himself." When encountering other travelers, he told a different "story," reorganizing the meaning of his movement by rail in order not to draw attention to himself. But in telling us that he kept his conceit to himself, he lets us in on the "secret." By allowing the reader access to the secret conceit that is shaping his experience (it is precisely this conceit that produces the feeling of the "provisional state"), we are aligned with Theroux as against the "ordinary" commuter who believes Theroux is simply traveling to Chicago. We might say that the reader, sitting in a coffeeshop with a copy of *The Old Patagonian Express*, is enacting an analogous "secret" conceit—the conceit of "armchair traveling"—that is presented to "ordinary" people as the mundane act of reading a book in a coffeeshop. By "keeping it to himself," Theroux means "keeping it to myself and to my readers who are joining me on this metaphoric journey." I will return to this entanglement of infrastructure, narrative, writer, and reader throughout the chapter, but before that I need to place Theroux's journey in historical context. Trains do not have immutable qualities, and the experience of riding the rails is shaped not only by narrative remediation but also by the embodied senses, which have their own entangled history with transportation infrastructure.

The Problem with Airplanes: The (New) Annihilation of Space and Time

Theroux frames his decision to travel by rail as a response to the disorienting effects of air travel. Ironically, his visceral response to airplanes can best be understood through a rhetorical comparison to 19th-century anti-railroad rhetoric. In the 19th century, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch's archival work[212] makes clear, experiences of disorientation affected railway

[212] All archival quotes in this section are quoted in Schivelbusch. Page numbers correspond to *The Railway Journey*.

travelers who had grown up traveling by carriage or horse, and thus found the railroad's uniform speed, mechanized power, and independence from the vagaries of landscape and weather to be unnatural and unnerving. For example, railroad passengers in the 19th century were forced to learn a new way of seeing. As Victor Hugo noted in 1837, the "flowers by the side of the road are no longer flowers but flecks, or rather streaks, of red and white" (55). It took time to learn how to view the landscape from a train window by re-focusing the eyes on distant objects that passed more slowly and thus allowed for sustained visual focus (56). Similarly, Thomas de Quincey argued in 1849 that in a carriage the passenger "needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity" of travel because "we heard our speed, we saw it, we felt it" (11). The sensory perception of wind, water currents, and animal exhaustion that marked pre-industrial travel was linked, Schivelbusch argues, to the "perception of spatial distance" (12). Thus, when the train passenger was disconnected from these "natural" elements, she experienced a disconnection from the "natural" space that existed between points of departure and arrival.

As Charles Dunoyer put it in 1840, trains "only serve the points of departure . . . they are of no use whatsoever for the intervening spaces, which they traverse with disdain and provide only with a useless spectacle" (38). This perceived loss of the "intervening spaces" between departure and arrival was widely expressed as "the annihilation of space and time" (10). According to Schivelbusch, however, the sense of space and time being destroyed, "must be seen as the reaction of perceptive powers that, formed by a certain transport technology, find suddenly that technology has been replaced by an entirely new one" (37). For those travelers who had grown accustomed to carriage travel, the railroad disrupted their visual, aural, and olfactory relationship to the landscape, shrunk geographical space, and

replaced an experience of time that was linked to physical exhaustion and sensory experience with an abstracted and uniform "railroad time." As Schivelbusch argues, the rise of any new transportation technology always produces a sense of disorientation as the traveler's perceptual consciousness is challenged by a new relationship to space, time, and motion.[213]

In the early 1800s, following the development of steam power, the railway supplanted the carriage as the primary mode of land transportation, and in doing so separated the traveler from his environment. Up until that point, travel was linked inextricably to nature. Ships were dependent on wind and currents while "overland motion followed the natural irregularities of the landscape" and was dependent upon the "physical powers of the draught animals" (9). For those riding on horses or in carriages, the exhaustion of the animal was a clear indicator of distance traveled. Movement through space and time was directly correlated to depletion of energy.

The rise of the railroads changed all this. No longer did the natural world provide exploitable resources for the traveler (wind, animal power). Rather, nature was understood to be "in the way" and railroad workers evened out the ground, cut down trees, and sliced through the natural world as if it were nothing but an inconvenience. The fast, uniform speed of train travel made all arrival times predictable, and forced different cities to adopt standardized time, resulting eventually in Greenwich Mean Time and the implementation of standard time zones (44). As a result, time was quantified in a way it previously had not

[213] Adler makes a similar point in terms of travel practices: "Any major change in a travel style affects the social and economic interests of those whose concerted activity has sustained it. Such interests range from direct economic investment in the infrastructure of production to intellectual investment in the perspective on the world that a particular style confirms and status investment in the hierarchy of honor and reputation supported by its practice" (1379). We could read Theroux as intellectually, perceptually, and conceptually invested in the railroad's stylistic "perspective on the world." Which, to use Harman's language, is to say that Theroux is invested in both the railroad and the travelogue as "kinds of behavior and ways of dealing with situations."

been. Instead of measuring journeys in distance, or by exertion of energy, travelers were able to measure journeys in time, confident that the railway timetables would accurately predict the precise minute they would arrive at their destination (assuming the train was on time). Space was merely an abstract emptiness between point A and point B. Now that there were no visible signs of fatigue, it was as if the travelers had not moved through space at all. On the railroad, one hour of travel time literally brought the traveler "one hour" closer to arrival; in a carriage, on the other hand, one hour of travel time might bring the rider closer, but the variables of the journey—the weather, the roads, the animals—forced the rider to measure progress in miles or kilometers, as temporal predictions remained uncertain.

As Schivelbusch argues, disorientation occurs when our perceptive powers, which have been "formed by a certain transport technology," are suddenly challenged by the new space-time continuum of an entirely new transport technology (37). In the 19th century, the new transportation technology was the railroad. The "annihilation of space and time," Schivelbusch tells us, "was the *topos* which the early nineteenth century used to describe the new situation into which the railroad placed natural space after depriving it of its hitherto absolute powers" (10). In the early 19th century, general consensus was that railroads did, indeed, "annihilate" space and time, which resulted in disorientation.[214]

[214] It is telling that Einstein used the moving railroad carriage in his exemplification of the "Special Theory of Relativity." If new transportation technologies re-shape our experience and interpretation of space, time, and movement, then it isn't surprising that the greatest re-conceptualization of spatiotemporality in the 20th century should draw on railroad experiences. The fact that we must learn to "see" in a new way when looking at the landscape out of a train window challenges the ontological condition of events that occur along the embankment—a falling stone, lightning strikes, or a flying raven now exist in relation to two very different possible vantage points: from the spectator standing on the embankment and the spectator sitting on the moving train. To take just one of Einstein's examples, consider two simultaneous lightning strikes on the railroad embankment. For a human spectator standing equidistant from these strikes, the light travels to her eyes in the same amount of time and thus the strikes are simultaneous. But now consider the same spectator, in the same equidistant position, but situated on board a moving train. The velocity of the train means that the lightning that strikes the embankment *in front* of the train will reach her eye slightly before the lightning that strikes the embankment *behind* the train. Einstein's question: Do these two lightning strikes still occur simultaneously, or

Schivelbusch reminds us, however, that space and time are not objective qualities that can simply be destroyed by new forms of transportation. Rather, "what was being annihilated was the traditional space-time continuum which characterized the old transport technology" of the carriage (36). Trains produced a new space-time continuum that the 19th-century traveler could not comprehend immediately and to which he was forced to adapt. However, this only occurred during a transitional period, and only to those who had been raised on carriage travel and were forced to transfer to the railway. Those who began their travels on rail (both children and the lower classes, who had not been able to afford carriage travel) did not experience the sense of loss that former carriage travelers did. "It did not take long," Schivelbusch says,

> for the industrialization of the means of transport to alter the consciousness of the passengers: they developed a new set of perceptions. The uniform speed of the motion generated by the steam engine no longer seemed unnatural when compared to the motion generated by animal power; rather, the reverse became the case. (14)[215]

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is simultaneity an effect of the relationship between bodies and not a product of fixed temporality? In Einstein's words, "every event which takes place along the line also takes place at a particular point of the train" (34). The issues of human perception facing Theroux, Lieber, Hugo, and Ruskin, it seems, throw into question the very spatiotemporal coordinates of ontological reality. If we experience space and time differently depending upon our motion and speed, what does this say about the ontological status of space and time as fixed categories?

[215] Harman says that "to alter one's style would be to alter one's thoughts," and here we see his insight borne out to an even greater degree: to alter one's style is not just to alter one's thoughts, but to alter one's perceptual consciousness; to literally *see* and *feel* the world differently. This also suggests that often we don't have a choice in the matter: in the 21st century, we are thrown yearly into new "styles" of infrastructural and technological worldmaking with which we must grapple even as our thoughts and perceptions remain stubbornly affixed to the "old" world.

Indeed, by the late 1970s the space-time continuum of railways had become normalized to the point that Theroux does not even question it as the "natural" way to experience movement through space and time.

The rise of the railroad also resulted in the perception of a shrinking world. As locations moved closer together temporally, they were understood in the imagination to have moved closer together spatially, as well. Contemporary traveler D. Lardner claimed at the time that "distances practically diminish in the exact ratio of the speed of personal locomotion" (33), and the anonymous author of an article in the *Quarterly Review* from 1839 worried that "as the distances were thus annihilated, the surface of our country would, as it were, shrivel in size until it became not much bigger than one immense city" (34). This shrinking of space also threatened the individuality of each city, which had, up until that point, been maintained by distance. On the other hand, it should be noted that the railroad also expanded space. It broadened the conceivable realm of travel destinations and therefore expanded one's spatial imagination.

In the 20th century, this diminution and expansion of space would again be greatly accelerated by the rise of the airplane. Theroux is traveling and writing just twenty years after the rise of widespread middle-class commercial air travel in the United States, during a period of transportation transition similar to the transition of the early 1800s following the rise of the steam railroad. The rhetorical similarity between Theroux's numerous derisions of air travel and the 19th-century lamentation about the "annihilation of space and time" is remarkable. "[F]rom the moment he departs," Theroux tells us of the airplane passenger, "his mind is focused on arrival. That is, if he has any sense at all. If he looked out the window, he would see nothing but the tundra of the cloud layer, and above it empty space. Time is

brilliantly blinded: there is nothing to see" (5).[216] The red flecks of Hugo and the disdained "spectacle" of Dunoyer give way to the "nothing" of cloud layer, but the effect is the same. The loss of a sensory connection to the landscape leads to an inability to mark the passage of time.

Theroux links the lack of things to "see" with the "blinding" of time, projecting his own loss of vision onto time itself. This reading suggests that spatial emptiness inflicts violence on "time" by mutilating its personified eyes, burning them blind with the "brilliancy" of the unobstructed sun. However, we could also read "empty space" *as* a "blind," or a curtain, standing between time and the air traveler and thus rendering time invisible or hidden. In this reading, time will only become visible again with the restoration of a landscape full of "things" to see. This sounds strikingly like de Quincey complaining that he is no longer able to "see" his velocity, and thus cannot register the passage of time with his own body. At the end of the same paragraph Theroux suggests that we should "lament the fact that airplanes have made us insensitive to space" (5). This sensory numbness is precisely what de Quincey noted over a hundred years earlier regarding the railroad. For both travelers it is only the sensory connection to space, especially through sight, that allows one's body to register the passage of time.

Because the airplane passenger is no longer able to experience time, according to Theroux, "he" becomes "a time traveler. . . . Time is truncated or, in any case, warped: he leaves in one time zone and emerges in another" (5). The "warping" of time suggests the

[216] This is a common criticism of airplane travel in the 1970s. Writing around the same time, Paul Fussell echoes Theroux's concern for the warping of time in air travel: "Locked in this flying cigar where distance is expressed in hours instead of miles or kilometers, the tourist is in touch only with the uniform furniture and fittings and experiences the environment through which the whole non-place is proceeding only as he is obliged to fasten or loosen his seat belt" (*Abroad* 44).

time-warps of science-fiction, but also reifies time as a spatialized object. Not only does it suggest that time can be physically twisted out of shape, it is striking that the verb "to warp" used to mean "to project through space. To cast, throw, fling" ("Warp"). Though now obsolete, this definition aligns with Theroux's assumption that there is an essential link between the arced trajectory of the airplane, as a projectile that is "flung" through space, and the temporal perversions of the time-warp.

Rather than leaping to a distant geographical point, Theroux has the air traveler jumping into a new time zone, thus transforming the spatial traveler into a time traveler, even as the "warp" spatializes this time travel. But time travel also occurs because the traveler's mind moves forward to the moment of arrival, creating an experiential void of "intervening spaces" through which the desensitized body must move. The physical violence inflicted upon time, then, is actually a product of the traveler's experience of the journey. The truncation of time occurs in the moment of this experiential time warp. This too is a reiteration of 19th-century rhetoric on railroad travel. In *Stranger in America* (1844), Francis Lieber anticipates Theroux:

> The traveler . . . thinks in a steam car of nothing else but the place of his destination, for the very reason that he is moving so quickly. Pent up in a narrow space, rolling along on an even plain which seldom offers any objects of curiosity, and which, when it does, you pass by with such rapidity, that your attention is never fixed; together with a number of people who have all the same object in view, and think like you of nothing else, but when they shall arrive at the journey's end. (59)

Here, Hugo's "red flecks" reappear as "curious objects" passing by so rapidly that they "unfix" the passenger's attention, but the primary concern is mental time-travel rather than the loss of visual acuity. Like Theroux, Lieber highlights the mental leap from the moment of departure to the moment of arrival, thus cutting short the temporal experience of moving through the "intervening spaces." For both travelers, disorientation registers as a disconnection from a sensory relationship with the landscape and, most importantly, the annihilation or "emptying" of the space between departure and arrival points, resulting in the perversion or mutilation of time. The difference for Theroux, writing over a century later, is that his perceptual capacities are shaped in part by early childhood train travel. He is more than capable of distinguishing objects as seen through the window of a speeding train, ignoring the closest trackside scenery and focusing instead on mid-range landscapes that pass more slowly. When speaking of the capacities of the human body, then, we must consider the historically situated human body. When asking "what the body can do," we are never dealing with bodies as they exist in a vacuum: the capacities and tendencies of Theroux's body (including his perceptual capacities) are intimately tied to formative encounters with both railroads and airplanes.

Because Theroux leaves Boston in the middle of a winter snowstorm the weather offers the perfect example of how his movement through time is made visible by changes in the landscape. He is able to watch the seasons change as he moves south: "It was early spring here in the first week of February," he says, "and if I kept to the trains it would be summer for me in a few days" (34). On a train, "time is made visible, and it moves as the landscape moves. I was shown each second passing as the train belted along" (7), as evidenced by the change from winter to spring, and finally to the summer of Texas and Mexico. "The air

traveler can be jetted to any climate at short notice," he continues, "but the railway passenger on the southbound express has the satisfaction of seeing the weather change hour by hour and watching for its minutest alteration" (34). Of course, it is a time warp in itself to shoot through the seasons at such a rapid speed, and Victor Hugo or John Ruskin would have experienced it as such, but Theroux's perceptual consciousness is molded to the contours of this particular warp.[217]

For Theroux there is a strong relationship between continuous time (that is, non-truncated or warped time) and vision. Because there is nothing to see from an airplane window, time is "blinded" and warped—it doesn't even exist except in terms of "flight time." Because the changing landscape (and weather) exists outside the window of the train, time is spatialized, made visible. Theroux can track his distance in the changing of the seasons and the changing of the landscape. This is in line with Lakoff and Johnson's theory of time as an embodied phenomenon produced by the iteration of events. Iterative events include the seasons, the daily movements of the sun and moon, and the uniform ticking of a clock's second hand. The human embodied experience of time passing has historically shaped and reshaped itself to these iterative rhythms.[218] In the sensations of temporal vacuums, as

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[217] Thoreau also engaged in something of a seasonal time-warp by compressing not just his two years of living at Walden Pond, but also his *nine* years of exploring Walden Woods while revising *Walden* into the four seasons of a single year. However, the effect is quite different: instead of speeding through time on a train, Thoreau lingers in each season, inviting us to get comfortable for a while in each of the very different Pond-worlds of summer, fall, spring, and winter.

[218] In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson argue that temporal experience is "characterized by the comparison of events": "We choose certain canonical events as temporal 'yardsticks': the movement of the hands of an analog clock or the sequential flashing of numbers on a digital clock. These in turn are defined relative to other events—the movement of the sun, a pendulum, or wheels, or the release of subatomic particles" (138-9). While "neural firings" inside the human brain act as "internal regular, iterative events" that produce the sensation of "biological time" (138), our relation to iterative events in the environment profoundly shapes our experience of time passing. If temporality is tied to our experience of iterative events, then changes in transportation technology inevitably mediate our experience of time by changing both the pace of iteration and the "yardsticks" themselves. We see in the examples of Theroux and Lieber both a sense of temporal

articulated by Theroux and Lieber, we can see that the succession of objects that we pass by in our movements also "mark time" in important ways. If we experience only a visual blur or the empty space above the clouds, the experience of time must come from something else. Theroux and Lieber both mark time by the events of arrival and departure, creating an experiential void in between.

Theroux understands his project as an attempt to reclaim a "sensitivity to space," meaning a visual experience of the ever-changing landscape that spatializes time and thus makes it "continuous." On a train, he is not moving through empty space, but through states and countries, towns and mountains and valleys and forests and deserts, rain and snow and sunshine. Instead of measuring the distance in time, Theroux finds that time is spatialized by the changing scenery.[219] This experience was not possible for Lieber and other 19th-century travelers, even though they were riding on the same transportation technology (at much slower speeds), because their sensory and perceptual capacities had not conformed yet to the space-time continuum of the railroad. They could not *see* the very objects that Theroux cites as evidence of the railroad's spatiotemporal continuity.

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annihilation (when the only events are "departure" and "arrival," time is experienced as ceasing to "move" in-between the events) and a self-conscious attempt to put oneself in contact with more regular events (by learning how to see objects pass by from a train window, Theroux is able to re-capture an embodied sensation of time passing). We might also think of Fred Zinnemann's use of clock-hands, musical beats, and the pace of his editing as temporal "yardsticks" designed to produce a certain (suspenseful) sensation of time.

[219] Interestingly, this isn't true at the end of the narrative when Theroux enters the "empty" landscape of Patagonia. Here, Theroux finds himself lost in a timelessness because the landscape of Patagonia refuses to supply him with the landmarks he has grown to expect from train travel: "One of the virtues of train travel is that you know where you are by looking out the window. No signboards are necessary. A hill, a river, a meadow—the landmarks tell you how far you have come. But this place had no landmarks, or rather, it was all landmarks, one indistinguishable from another" (397). Later, a passenger asks him, "How far to Norquinco?" Theroux says he doesn't know: "They all look the same to me." The man behind him says it is two hours away. "He did not gesture out the window," Theroux says. "He looked at his watch. The landscape was no help in determining where we were" (398).

Keeping Schivelbusch in mind, it is not surprising that Theroux would turn to the transportation technology of his youth as the primary experiential metaphor for spatiotemporal continuity and connection. While it is interesting that this technology should be precisely the one that caused feelings of discontinuity in the 19th century, this only serves to remind us that disorientation emerges through interrelational encounter when a person raised in one space-time continuum is forced to adapt to another. Thus, disorientation cannot be inherent in any given technology or infrastructure. But the intersubjective *phenomenon* of disorientation is historically real and is in fact well documented. This could account for Theroux's appeal in the late 1970s: he may not have uncovered an inherent "truth" of rail travel, but he may have tapped into a widespread spatiotemporal experience shared by many of his contemporaries.

Theroux provides a great deal of experiential evidence to back up his claim that trains offer a "natural" relationship to space and time, whereas airplanes do not. Indeed, the book itself is an attempt to create a literary experience of long distance train travel, through descriptions of landscape, dialogue, thoughts, and trips to the dining car. In his first travelogue, *The Great Railway Bazaar,* Theroux tells us that "anything is possible on a train: a great meal, a binge, a visit from card players, an intrigue, a good night's sleep, and strangers' monologues framed like Russian short stories" (1). This is exactly what Theroux gives us in *Express*: an invitation to join in the variegated experiences of long-distance train travel.[220] As his attention shifts from the passing scenery, to the aesthetic qualities of train

[220] Theroux's memorable introduction to *The Great Railway Bazaar* is echoed in the epigraph from Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Amateur Emigrant* that precedes *The Old Patagonian Express.* In the epigraph, Stevenson says that the railroad, "brought together into one plot all the ends of the world and all the degrees of social rank, and offered to some great writer the busiest, the most extended, and the most varied subject for an enduring literary work. If it be romance, if it be contrast, if it be heroics that we require, what was Troy town to

travel, to conversations, to his own thoughts, to the books he is reading, to the dining car, to the passengers, to sleeping or drinking or writing or feeling sick, so the narrative shifts, inviting us to experience it all with him, including the mundane, the uncomfortable, and the boring. For example:

> I was still sitting in my compartment. The champagne at South Station had left me groggy, and though I had a copy of William Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* in my lap, I had done no more than read three pages. On the back cover I had scribbled, *policeman's face like salami* and *inky water* and *flags*. The rest of the time I spent with my face turned to the window. I did not see any other passengers—I didn't look. I had no idea who was traveling on this train, and in my listless state thought there would be plenty of time for socializing further on. . . . But I found the Faulkner impenetrable; my curiosity overcame my listlessness." (9)

One of the things that is possible on a train is to hole up in a private compartment and read, or write, or doze off, or stare out the window and ignore everyone else on the train, and Theroux often takes us into this world. Again we see the blurred lines of the narrative, as enigmatic notes jotted on the pages of *Wild Palms* refer back to anecdotes the reader has only just encountered in the preceding pages.[221] And again we are taken into Theroux's moods—

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this?" (i). The focus on creative interpretation ("plot," "writer," "subject," "literary work," "romance") reinforces the relationship between what the railroad "brings" and how the writer shapes the experience. Stevenson is already interpreting train travel through the generic lens of the romance and the epic poem ("Troy town"), and even as Theroux seems to write in the style of representational realism, his awareness that literature always translates experience into its own terms comes out in this epigraph. The quote from Stevenson suggests that Theroux will take on the project of "bringing together into one plot all the ends of the world"; of working to create order out of the bustling heterogeneity of the passenger train.

[221] When she sees Theroux writing, the anecdotes evoked by those scribbled notes about salami, inky water, and flags should be fresh in the reader's mind. Theroux is only just now leaving the greater Boston area,

his inability to concentrate on Faulkner, his listless gazing out the window (with no description of what he saw there), his champagne-induced grogginess. What is important here, at least for Theroux, however, is that he is dedicated to giving the reader access to the *experience* of long-distance train travel: not simply the spectacular views or the romance of the rails, but the listlessness and grogginess, the thoughts and feelings.

When he eventually leaves his compartment and meets fellow passengers, the results are usually grouchy and condescending. The first passenger he meets in the corridor tells him that the snow outside makes this train ride like "the Trans-Siberian" and Theroux snaps back that it doesn't (9-10). He then meets a college student studying Eastern Philosophy and proceeds to ridicule her thoughts on Marx and raw-food diets. He says "it is hard for anyone to be interesting at twenty" (11) and calls her a "pedant" (13) and then tells her to her face that her views are "smug" and "self-important" (14). He accuses her of being "profoundly incurious," though he himself could be accused of smugly and self-importantly mocking her views. Still, the narrative consists primarily of a mix of conversations with passengers and

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and each of these words refers to moments that have occurred in the previous two pages. First, the Lake Shore Limited holds up traffic on main street in Framingham, just outside of Boston. Outside, "a policeman whose puffy face was chilled the color of salami held the cars back with gloves like a bear's paw" (7). On the next page, Theroux tells us that "water has been constantly in view" since leaving Boston: "frozen lakes and ponds, half-frozen rivers, or streams with conches of ice at their banks and the moving water turned to ink by the twilight" (8). This thought comes on the heels of a meditation on the American flags that fly over gas stations and supermarkets and private yards: "But the flags puzzled me. Were these the pious boasts of patriots or a warning to foreigners or decorations for a national holiday? And why, in the littered yard of that rundown house, was a pretty little flag flapping loyally from a pole? On the evidence here, it seemed an American obsession, a kind of image worship I associated with primitive political minds" (8).

In the opening pages of the travelogue, then, Theroux walks us through the multiple translations that tie a lived experience to a reading experience: 1) The experience. Theroux sees some things and thinks some thoughts as his train moves him away from Boston. Ostensibly, the reader is right alongside, presumably seeing the same things and thinking the same thoughts. 2) Later, Theroux decides he wants to remember these things so he can write about them. He scribbles down a few words. 3) At some later time, presumably, Theroux uses those scribbles to jog his memory and then reconstructs the original experience. He decides to also reconstruct the experience of writing the notes. 4) At some (much) later time, the reader picks up the book and joins Theroux on his journey. Ostensibly, the reader is right along there with him through the experiences. 5) Is the reader "right alongside" as Theroux scribbles his notes on the next page? Or does this acknowledgment of creative translation jar the reader into recognizing Theroux as a writer as well as a rider of railroads?

isolated reveries in his compartment, both encouraged by the long stretches of time he faces on his train travels.

Often, these long stretches of time are a burden more than an opportunity, and while Theroux often skips over landscapes and tourist attractions, he spends a great deal of time articulating his boredom, discomfort, and restlessness. At one point, Theroux articulates a common struggle during long-distance travel:

> It was frustrating to be so tired in such a beautiful landscape, like dozing at a concert. The train picked up speed and shot along this savannah, skirting the majestic mountains, but the heat and the dirt and my fatigue, and now the noise of the speeding train, prevented me from being able to concentrate or steady my gaze on the bright rocks or the trees whipping past. It was punishing to feel so battered and incapable, but also further punishment to know how the best of Chiapas was eluding me. Struggling to stay awake to see it, the effort exhausted me; the bright air and yellow land overwhelmed me, and I slept. (92-3)

Anybody who has ever been tired will recognize the situation: a desire to appreciate a landscape, or be present in an important moment, is undermined by physical exhaustion and fatigue, an inability to concentrate, and thus a sense that an important experience is passing one by. He tries to "steady his gaze" and concentrate on the "bright rocks or the trees whipping past" but in the end he just feels "incapable" and eventually becomes so exhausted by the effort needed to concentrate that he falls asleep. What is telling in this passage is not that Theroux is unable to appreciate the beauty of Chiapas but that his efforts at seeing are directly tied to his efforts at writing: he cannot translate the experience into prose because he

is too exhausted both to see clearly and to write well. Thus, not only Theroux but also the reader is deprived of the scenery. We are given some vague half-hearted attempts at visualization ("beautiful landscape"; "majestic mountains") but it isn't enough to sustain an image in the reading experience, and we are left with the impression that Chiapas may be beautiful, but we have no sense of this beauty, and cannot even begin to imagine the scene, other than placing a few mountains, rocks, and trees in an otherwise unarticulated and unvisualized landscape.

What we *do* experience is Theroux's affective state of being. The exhaustion and the frustration rise to the forefront of the reading experience. The frustration is doubled in that we experience Theroux's frustration but we are also frustrated as "armchair travelers" who perhaps *want* the images that Theroux's exhaustion denies us. The exhaustion may also be doubled if we recognize the inevitable analogous experience of reading. Theroux explicitly links his frustration to "dozing at a concert," and it is easy to extend the experience to include "dozing while reading"—perhaps even dozing while reading Theroux's book. How much do we miss in our distracted states of reading? Are we always perfectly present to the storyworld shooting by as we read, or are we often half-alert and half-asleep, trying to concentrate, but forced to content ourselves with vague images of "majestic mountains," reminding ourselves that there's something important to be found here, but too exhausted to fully appreciate the moment?[222] As we enter the world through Theroux's eyes, we experience his frustration in

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[222] There are similarities between Theroux's dozing and Roland Barthes' concept of tmesis, as outlined in *The Pleasure of the Text*: "[O]ur very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as 'boring') in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote . . .: we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations" (10). Barthes locates tmesis at the linguistic level (both in terms of the structure of language and in terms of the consumption of language), but here Theroux shows us that tmesis is an everyday existential experience that it is entangled with, but not reducible to, language. There is a difference between Theroux's and Barthes' explanation of how the gaps are produced, however. Barthes locates these perceptual schisms in "our very avidity for knowledge," and our

this particular moment, but more importantly it reminds us that we have had and will continue to have many of these experiences, even throughout our reading of this very narrative. Some moments will stand out and strike us, while some will slip away in our inability to concentrate, leaving us frustrated by the perceptual gaps and diversions in our seemingly continuous experience.

And yet, it is precisely by taking the reader on board to experience the frustration and exhaustion, the conversations and the interior monologues, the restlessness and listlessness, the failed attempts to read Faulkner and Twain and the failed attempts to fully appreciate mountains and landscapes, that the reader is granted the experience of continuity and connection that Theroux's narrative attempts to create. Interspersed with descriptions of dining-car, compartment, and corridor experiences are continued reiterations that a continuous experience is produced by tying these experiences together:

> And, having taken the train, I had the illusion that I was not terribly far from Boston—I had left the American border just a week ago. The train had given me a sense of continuity which, unlike the dislocation and disconnection one experiences after a plane journey, had made Guatemala seem incongruous and puzzling. On this branch line from Boston I had found barefoot Indians and

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desire to move quickly on to the next thing, which we have deemed more important. Theroux, on the other hand, notices that gaps are produced through fatigue, boredom, and "dozing." Our avidity for knowledge does not compel us to skip in this case; it is instead undermined by our embodied feelings of fatigue and an inability to concentrate. A Barthesian gap would be akin to the air traveler who just wants to get to the exciting stuff as quickly as possible and thus chooses to jump over the intervening spaces, while Therouxian gaps are produced by willingly submitting oneself to those (often exhausting) in-betweens and inevitably falling asleep.

There are two takeaways from this comparison. First, even though Theroux broadens Barthesian tmesis to include embodied experiences of landscapes (and not just languages), he also inextricably ties his experience to writing, and thus forces the reader to "skip" parts of the journey *even if they pay attention to every word.* Second, Theroux produces gaps and schisms *all over the place* in this text: not just in terms of the airplane flights that disrupt his train travel (as we will see), but also in terms of narrative selection (he can't include everything), and in terms of explicit perceptual gaps in his experience (sleeping, dozing, laziness, grogginess, absent-mindedness).

starving children and rather ominous-looking peasants with two-foot knives resting on their knees. (102)

We, as readers, also have this strange experience of juxtaposition. We are also not very far from Boston—100 pages, traversed only in a matter of hours—but, like Theroux, we have experienced a lot in that time. Each conversation with a college student or a businessman, each attempt to read *The Wild Palms* or *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, each reflection on the history of a railroad line or the passing of the weather, takes us to another stop, a little farther down the line. In failing to capture the scenery of Chiapas, in falling asleep, the landscape continues to pass and the "illusion" remains in tact. Despite his rants about airplanes annihilating time, Theroux values the strangeness of the time-warp that occurs overnight on a sleeper train: "There seemed to me nothing more perfect in travel than boarding a train just at nightfall and shutting the bedroom door on an icy, riotous city and knowing that morning would show me a new latitude" (27). The inevitable gaps produced by nightfall, by sleeping, by lack of attention, are tied together by the movement of the train down the tracks. It is precisely the slowness of the journey that makes the experience "puzzling": by participating in the long hours of the trip the reader is given the opportunity to feel the strange sensation of continuity as it develops over time through moving slowly and stitching together each location with its neighbors through embodied traversal.

In fact, at the end of the book, Theroux suggests that discomfort is directly tied to the "conceit" of connection: "The conceit of this, the idea of being able to report it—for I had deliberately set out to write a book, hadn't I—made up for the discomfort" (391). The discomfort here takes on another, aesthetic, dimension. We are reminded that it is not merely boredom or exhaustion, but that each of these experiences was always already experienced in

literary terms. The “reporting” of the discomfort “makes up” for the discomfort itself, by transforming it and putting it to work as a component in a larger narrative. Theroux reminds us that he deliberately set out not to go to Argentina but “to write a book,” and implicitly reminds us that what we have just experienced is not a second-order representation of a now inaccessible “authentic” travel experience, but rather the book itself—the book that Theroux set out to write, the book that hovered over every experience we encountered in the narrative before the narrative was even written.

If we, as readers, feel spatiotemporally oriented in this book, if we feel that we have been taken on a continuous journey and that Theroux has indeed discovered an antidote for that lingering sense of disorientation we may feel, it is because Theroux appeals both to our own reading experience and to an historically situated experience of air travel to support his claims for the “naturalness” of train travel. By stitching together a series of anecdotes and vignettes that include long passages on boredom and restlessness, Theroux produces a reading experience meant to be analogous (but not identical) to the travel experience. By appealing to a widespread spatiotemporal discomfort that Theroux’s largely western, middle-class, late 1970s readership is likely to share, the reading experience of continuous train travel creates a feeling of continuity in the reader, even if (and because) that continuity is self-consciously organized in terms of a literary “conceit.” The comparison of his rhetoric with the rhetoric surrounding rail travel in the early 19th century, however, problematizes Theroux’s ahistorical claims about the inherent properties of each transportation technology.

This should not be read as de-legitimizing Theroux’s project. Growing up with the space-time continuum of trains, and understanding trains as part of the “natural” landscape, Theroux’s turn to the railway in search of continuity and orientation is not only

understandable, it is predictable. Theroux may mistakenly ascribe inherent qualities to rail travel itself, but "naturalized" space can be reclaimed for Theroux by turning to old transportation technology, even if that technology "annihilated" space for a 19th-century consciousness. What is important here is not whether Theroux has correctly located some objective quality of train travel, but rather that he speaks to a particularly pressing existential issue: how do we situate ourselves within a world that continually forces upon us ever-novel spatiotemporal rhythms to which our bodies are not attuned? Theroux suggests that we can recapture a stable sense of being-in-the-world by returning to the technological landscape of our youth, but I want to use Theroux to make a different point. By recognizing the co-constitutive natures of human bodies and the built environment we can do away with reactive claims about "inherent" capacities and focus instead on the capacities of bodies as they emerge in interaction. In this sense, *The Old Patagonian Express* is an important text for thinking about how the human sensorium grapples with periods of technological transition, as well as for considering the relationship between embodied experience and narrative remediation. If Theroux himself sometimes seems reactive and nostalgic for the comfort of the railroad, his decision to "make worlds" through a combination of stylistically specific travel and narrative practices offers a rich model of interpretation as an act of interactive creation.

From Travel Practices to Travel Writing

Theroux suggests that traditional travel books are complicit in the airplane's act of spatial erasure. Discussing the "measly" state of the contemporary travelogue, Theroux laments that "we have become used to life being a series of arrivals or departures . . . with

nothing noteworthy in between." Frustrated with travelogues that begin with the view from an airplane window as the traveler descends into a foreign city, Theroux asks for something else: "How did you get there?" (4). If the space between Boston and Patagonia can be hopped over in the flung projectile of an airplane, thus producing a false sense of proximity between the foreign and the familiar through the erasure of "intervening spaces," the 400 pages of *Express* are an attempt to refill this space with encounters, objects, and other iterative markers of temporal passing. Theroux's experiment, then, lies not only in embodied rail travel, but also in the particular "order" of his corresponding narrative structure. When Theroux says that he will "end my book where travel books begin" he means that *Express* is a book about reclaiming the "intervening spaces" between arrival and departure, but also that it is a book about reclaiming a narrative erasure common to contemporary travelogues (6).

Theroux's efforts to reinforce the continuity of this "continuous track" through literary structure are evident before we even start reading, beginning with his title and the table of contents. *The Old Patagonian Express* is the name of a small Argentine railway that is metonymically applied to the entire book, and thus the entire journey. By suggesting that every train in the narrative, beginning with the Boston subway, is actually one leg of this tiny train, Theroux christens an imaginary railway that spans two continents. This rhetorical conflation of 22 separate lines is reinforced through bold assertions that book-end the text. The book begins *in medias res*, with Theroux on a "sliding subway train," heading for South Station in Boston. "For some," he tells us, "this was the train to Sullivan Square or Milk Street . . .; for me, it was the train to Patagonia" (1). The final line of the narrative reiterates this sentiment. Reminiscing as he deboards in Esquel, he once again claims that "I had come here from Boston, on the subway that people took to work" (404). The fundamental

imaginative claim here, of course, is that the subway train in Boston and the tiny railway line in the middle of Patagonia are the same train. But by qualifying his claim ("*for me*, it was the train to Patagonia"), Theroux makes clear that the ontology of the object, "The Train to Patagonia," lies in subjective experience and literary translation, even while it remains dependent upon the physical trains that carry Theroux's body across the continental Americas. In other words, the literary railroad is both a fictional creation and a lived experience. Theroux's narrated body connects these trains together just as the narrated trains connect the Americas.

The title prepares us for a train trip, and the syntactical order of the subtitle—"By Train Through the Americas"—reinforces a primary encounter with transportation technology rather than geographical location. Notice that this is not an "Through the Americas by Train," but rather the other way around. The Americas are almost incidental—which is not to say unimportant—to the primary narrative regarding train travel. Before we even open the book, we are already primed for a train trip.

Debbie Lisle claims that *Express* is structured in a typical home-away-home fashion. This structure creates a feeling of closure, accompanied "by a powerful sense of resolution and catharsis: Theroux returns home invigorated, he is now ready to begin a new novel and reinstate himself into the familiarity of his America life" (37). But Theroux does not return home in the narrative, invigorated or otherwise. The book ends in Esquel, with Theroux reminiscing about how he began the journey in Boston. This is a mental return to Boston as the *starting* point, it is not a physical return to Boston as an *ending* point. The return trip home is omitted precisely because this is *not* a book written in the standard home-away-home fashion. The stated purpose of the book is not to return home, but to "end . . . where travel

books begin" (6). Lisle also has Theroux traveling to the "tip of Patagonia," again under the assumption that his interest is in traversing the Americas. But there is a very clear reason why Theroux stops where he does: "There was no line to Tierra del Fuego." He stops where the railroad stops, in Esquel, approximately 1,000 miles north of the "tip of Patagonia." In fact, Esquel is so far north that Tierra del Fuego does not even appear on his map of South America. It is important that Theroux stops in Esquel instead of continuing on to Tierra del Fuego, and it is important that he does not return home at the end of the narrative. Theroux produces an account of moving through the space that is generally skipped over, in experience by tourists in airplanes, and in narrative by travel writers, both of whom are interested primarily in the destination, rather than the journey.

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Image 76: *Paul Theroux's table of contents is structured as a railroad itinerary.*

Theroux's table of contents functions as an itinerary for the trip, which begins in Boston on "The Lake Shore Limited," and ends on "The Old Patagonian Express" in Esquel, Argentina.[223] Each chapter, and thus presumably each train, leads

[223] Incorporating the structure of the railroad itinerary into his table of contents is a telling break from generic convention (at least at the time), as a quick look at two of Theroux's favorite travel books, Alexander Kinglake's *Eothen* and Robert Byron's *Road to Oxiana,* makes clear. In these narratives, chapters are named after places (Cairo, The Desert, Kabul, Baghdad), or people (Lady Hester Stanhope, Greek Mariners, The Prophet Damoor). The shift from names of places and people to names of trains transfers the focus from destination(s) to journey. While Kinglake and Byron include accounts of actual travel in their narratives, it is understood that their physical movement is only a necessary prelude to the real subject of the chapter: The Pyramids, or Damascus, or a conversation with Lady Hester. Reversing this convention, Theroux's chapter titles suggest that the time he spends off the train in Quito, or San Salvador, or talking with Jorge Luis Borges, is to be read in relation to the subject of *his* chapters. In this case, the Autoferro to Guayaquil, the Atlantic Railway, and the Buenos Aires Subterranean, respectively, take narrative precedence.

seamlessly to the next, creating the impression of a continuous train ride from start to finish. The focus of each chapter, the contents imply, is the train, while anything that takes place outside of the train is relegated to secondary importance. This acts as a framing device, creating a sense of orientation, connection, and continuous movement from Boston to Esquel before we even begin reading. And again, it makes us aware, before he has told us explicitly, that this will be a book about the journey, rather than the destination. A chapter entitled "Macchu Picchu" would presumably be about Macchu Picchu. It would refer to the destination, even if that destination were only a brief pause in the midst of continuous travel. Theroux's chapter entitled "The Passenger Train to Macchu Picchu," on the other hand, is explicitly *not* about Macchu Picchu as a location, but about the journey that any trip to Macchu Picchu necessarily entails. In the narrative, when Macchu Picchu actually comes into sight, the chapter ends without even so much as a general description: "For once, the tourists were silent" (318), is all Theroux says. And then we continue on with the train ride.

Cartographic Confessions: Discontinuity in the Continuous Journey

Theroux's travel practices (following the train tracks, stopping when they stop) and his act of narrative ordering (title, table of contents, beginning and ending the narrative with his home and end-of-track) are inseparable from the affordances of the railroad (the "grounded" connection with the landscape; the ability to stitch tracks together both in lived experience and narrative imagination; the limitation of going where they go and stopping where they stop). Neither the travel nor the text, however, is as continuous as the chapter headings suggest. I already mentioned the numerous perceptual gaps that fill the text, but there are major gaps in the *track* as well, which is more problematic for Theroux.

Least disruptive are the chapters in which the trains listed in the table of contents are either of minor importance to the chapter itself, or do not contribute to his "continuous" southward journey down continuous railroad tracks. For example, in "The Buenos Aires Subterranean," Theroux takes the subway to visit Jorge Luis Borges. The chapter is sixteen pages long, but the Buenos Aires Subterranean is limited to the following thirteen-word cameo: "I entered the Subterranean and, after a short ride, easily found his house" (362). In "The Autoferro to Guayaquil," Theroux attends parties in Quito and takes two flights before eventually missing the Autoferro altogether. The chapter, therefore, is named after a train that Theroux never rides, in the narrative or otherwise. Other chapters, such as "The Passenger Train to Machu Picchu," "The Atlantic Railway," and "The Pacific Railway," involve taking trains from east to west on round-trip tickets that eventually bring Theroux back to his starting point without moving him closer to Patagonia. Again, these digressions don't fundamentally threaten the "continuous track," because Theroux has woven them into the "continuous" itinerary of the table of contents.

The maps provided at the beginning of the book are more incriminating. Train tracks are represented on the maps as lines crossed with small hatch-marks, like stitches binding the Americas together. In tracing his trajectory on the *Express* maps from Boston to Esquel, it quickly becomes clear that the continuous line is not exactly continuous. Interspersed with the track-lines are slightly arched dotted lines, which signify travel by airplane. The dotted lines complete the "continuous line" from Boston to Patagonia on the map, and they are similar enough to the track-lines that they are difficult to distinguish at first glance. As a visual representation of the "continuous track," it is important that differences between the two lines be minimal. The necessity of a map key, however, makes it impossible to ignore

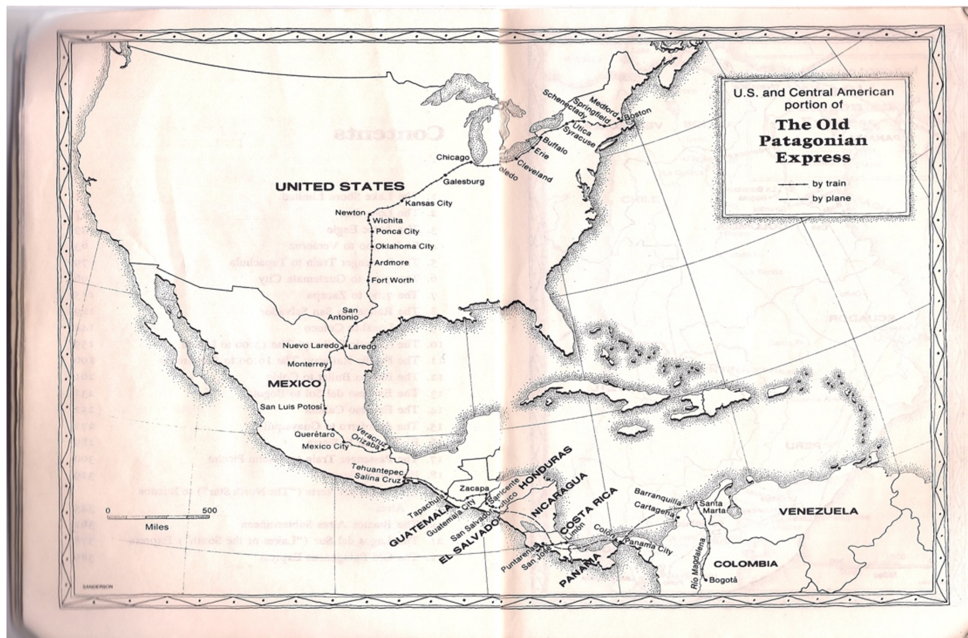

Image 77: ***The first half of Theroux's journey south. Notice that the map key includes two symbols: "by train" and "by plane."***

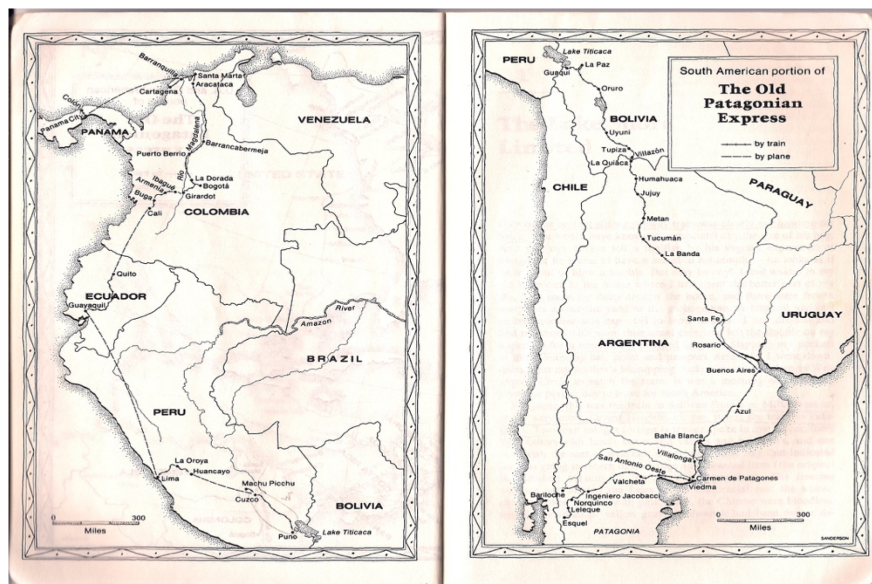

Image 78: ***The second half of Theroux's itinerary. Notice the long airplane flights that connect Panama to Colombia, Colombia to Ecuador, and Ecuador to Peru. Also, notice that the map cuts off the tip of Patagonia. This trip ends when the track ends.***

the hybrid nature of the continuous line. This cartographic confession seriously undermines Theroux's claim that he traveled by railway all the way to Patagonia, while simultaneously

highlighting the tendency of the narrative project to erase these gaps and produce the armchair experience of the continuous railway journey.

The first dotted line connects Cutuco, Honduras, to San José, Costa Rica. Where this ghost-like flight appears on the map, there is nothing but trains in the table of contents. Chapter Nine does take us to Cutuco, but Chapter Ten takes place on "The Atlantic Railway," from San José to Limón, both in Costa Rica. There is no indication within the table of contents that there is a gap in the itinerary. The impression one gets from the chapter list is that Theroux took The Atlantic Railway from Cutuco, all the way across Nicaragua, to Limón in Costa Rica.

The narrative itself gives the same impression. Theroux reaches Cutuco toward the end of Chapter Nine. He spends four pages doing a cursory exploration of the city and ends the chapter by claiming, "I had a train to catch." Chapter Ten begins: "I was a bit surprised to find a Chinese man in a bar in San José, Costa Rica" (158-9). The astute reader should be a bit surprised to find Theroux in Costa Rica at all. It is odd that the space between Cutuco and San José, a distance of 500 miles, would go unmentioned in a travel book that claims to be about traversing precisely those forgotten spaces. The gap is glossed over so smoothly it would take an active reader with a strong mental geography of Central America to notice the splice, despite the fact that Theroux "absolve[s himself] of any responsibility to travel through Nicaragua" nine pages earlier when he discovers that the border is closed (146). This detail is conveniently not reiterated at the end of the chapter when Theroux fails to make it explicit that the train he had to catch presumably went to the airport, and not to San José.

This does not happen just once. In *Express* there are seven breaks in the ostensibly unbroken itinerary. Six of these gaps involve taking airplanes to the next railway station, and

Theroux omits any mention of airplanes in four of the six instances. The first mention of an airplane comes after his third plane ride, from Panama City to Barranquilla. "True," Theroux mentions casually, as if this detail were unimportant, "I had to fly somewhere from Panama." Becoming more explicitly contradictory, he tells us that he had to fly because "there is no road or rail link through the Darién Gap between Panama and Colombia" (236). While the discrepancy between the content and the chapter headings of "The Buenos Aires Subterranean" and "The Autoferro to Guayaquil" does not undermine his overall project, taking an airplane from Panama to Colombia due to a lack of railroads has profound consequences for his claim that "there was a continuous track from my house in Medford to the Great Plateau of Patagonia in southern Argentina." Theroux hints at no irony here and does not admit to any potential implications arising from this "lack of railroads." He simply mentions the plane ride, and continues with his narrative.

Judging by the map, there are two sections of his trip that are dominated by air travel. Between Honduras and Colombia, Theroux travels 1000 miles by plane, and less than 200 miles by train, none of which move him any closer to Esquel. Then, between Colombia and Bolivia, he covers 1200 miles by air, and 300 by bus and boat. By train, he covers a total of slightly more than 300 miles during this second section, 200 of which are on the Autoferro from Quito to Guayaquil, a route which he first flew twice, adding an extra 400 miles of air travel. These numbers force us to ask questions about the continuous track that both structures the journey and acts as its central extended metaphor, but Theroux remains insistent that his train from Boston led him all the way to Argentina.

The only flight that he discusses at any length takes him from Guayaquil to Quito. He justifies this trip because it will give him the opportunity to take the train back to Guayaquil

once he lands. And, the only reason he includes this plane trip at all is to reinforce his views on air travel:

> And it was arriving in Quito on that plane that reminded me of the hopelessness of air travel and how futile it would be if every arrival and departure were recorded in the out-of-window glimpse. . . . No, anything but that. If I were to travel, it would be overland, where every sight and every place had its own smell. (288)

In short, the plane trip is mentioned only to explain that it was a mistake. And presumably, the implication that he will now re-traverse the route via train makes it okay to mention the flight. Theroux uses the opportunity to remind himself (and his readers) that he is powerless against the time warp of air travel. He gestures again toward the "measly" travelogues that begin with the "out-of-window glimpse" and reiterates his commitment to the railway journey, which reconnects the traveler with the individual sensory impressions of sights and smells that attend each specific geographical location through which the train travels.

The omission and marginalization of all other flights within the narrative is far from accidental. Theroux is forced to systematically strike or marginalize all air travel precisely because it threatens to destroy the metaphoric power of the "continuous track." For the reader who notices the incongruity between the ostensibly continuous line to Patagonia and the 2500 miles of air travel that break that line into isolated sections, it becomes clear that the central claim for spatiotemporal continuity and connection lies in the narrative "order" that Theroux has given to his journey through its "repetition in words." The track connecting Boston to Patagonia may not exist, but the "continuous track" of *The Old Patagonian Express* must be protected from the unfortunate discontinuities of its material counterpart.

The suppression of these airplane trips may leave the reader feeling cheated, but they explicitly undermine the central conceit, and thus they must be cut. For Theroux, disorientation, lack of continuity, and the focus on arrival are inherent qualities of air travel, to the point that even mentioning a flight within the narrative threatens to produce such affects in the reading experience. The gaps are subtle enough to be missed by the casual reader, thus producing the impression of continuous travel. The question then arises whether these gaps are evidence of hypocrisy or of an act of interpretive creativity.

The Post-World War II Travel Boom and the "Effect of the Real"

As far as I know, no critic of Theroux has noticed his omission of air travel from the text, and if pressed, I'm not sure many would find this suppression important. This is because there is something else going on in Theroux's work that demands critical attention: in his degrading depictions of South America and its peoples, he slips into an unreflective mode of naïve realism, treating language as a neutral conveyer of "things as they are."[224]

Theroux is something of a puzzle to me. I find his treatment of the co-mediating interrelationships between the railroad, the human body, and language endlessly fascinating.

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[224] Theroux himself seems to pride himself on this. In attempting to defend *Riding the Iron Rooster* against critics, he turns explicitly to claims of representational realism in his *New York Times* piece, "Travel Writing: Why I Bother." Here, he says things like, "I've taken people as I found them," and "a travel writer must report faithfully on what he or she encounters in a country." Theroux is convinced that in showing "the discomforts as well as the pleasures, the dissonance as well as the melody," he is doing a great service to mankind by "telling it like it is." First, as we will see below, these "discomforts" are aligned with Pratt's "reality effect." But there's also the issue of "telling it like it is." This requires the rhetorical elision of one's own words as mediators. Instead, they are presented as transparent conduits connecting referent and signifier. This is what Roland Barthes has called the "reality effect." For Barthes, it is the presumed "direct" correlation between "referent" and "signifier" (at the expense of the "signified") that "becomes the very signifier of realism." Or, to put it another way, Theroux's "people," taken "as they are," are akin to Flaubert's barometer and Michelet's "little door" in Barthes' seminal essay on the reality effect: finally, they "say nothing but this: *we are the real*" (148, italics in original). Theroux is indeed guilty of both Pratt's "effect of the real" and Barthes' "reality effect." I find this denial of creative agency (and responsibility) troubling, especially when considered in the light of Theroux's more positive contribution to railroad literature.

He appears to be well aware of his own creative responsibility when it comes to translating a train ride into a narrative—after all, he locates a "conceit" at the center of his own *lived* travel experience. And yet, it is impossible to ignore the disempowering metaphors through which he "remediates" the peoples and places of South America. Furthermore, he seems completely unaware of the fact that he's *using* metaphors: he seems to believe he really is "telling it like it is." I find it hard to reconcile the self-conscious creativity of the "conceit" that drives *The Old Patagonian Express* with the naïve representational realism that fills many of its pages.

In order to make sense of this tension in Theroux's work, I propose that he engages two contradictory modes of realism. In his depictions of people and places, Theroux generally utilizes *representational realism.* He denies the mediating agency of language and posits a direct correlation between signifier and referent. In his work on the train, however, I argue that he engages in *philosophical realism*. It is this more interesting component of Theroux's work that tends to get overshadowed. I want to push this question of "realism" because it gets to the heart of one of my core questions: what is the relationship between trains in literature and trains "in reality"? First, then, let's turn to Theroux's more naïve version of realism, as it has been powerfully interpreted by postcolonial critics.

Mary Louise Pratt, the most influential postcolonial critic of Theroux, provides a good historical argument for Theroux's negative depictions. She places Theroux within the historical context of an unprecedented tourism boom of the 1960s and -70s. His "othering" of South America—his depictions of the "foreign" as dirty, stupid, poor, and ugly—directly responds, she argues, to the tourism industry's beautification of developing countries. Pratt's thesis regarding Theroux is that he exemplifies "a discourse of negation, domination,

devaluation, and fear that remains in the late twentieth century a powerful ideological constituent of the west's consciousness of the people and places it strives to hold in subjugation" (215).

Indeed, Theroux's rhetoric regarding South America provides damning evidence that he is engaging in the literary domination and devaluation of the "other" under the unquestioned assumption of his own superiority. For Theroux, Patagonia is empty, devoid of interest (404); Mexico is full of "bumbling and passionate disorder" (41); Guatemala City is "like a city on its back. Its ugliness . . . is a threatened look" (123) and the Guatemalans are a "pretty gloomy bunch" (114); Peruvian Indians "have a broad-based look, like chess pieces" —"they are stocky and squat and you think, looking at them, that they would be impossible to tip over" (301); and the Andean high plains are a "world of kitty litter" (345). The list goes on and on, and examples could be drawn from every country he passes through. His sweeping generalizations (which are based on minimal actual contact) are almost always negative. Theroux's portrayals of the countries he passes through and the people he meets have led multiple critics to take issue with his ideological perpetuation of a western imperialist project played out through the popular genre of travel writing.[225]

According to Pratt, "exoticist visions of plenitude and paradise were appropriated and commodified on an unprecedented scale by the tourist industry [in the 1960s and -70s]" (217), inundating the western public with picture-postcard representations of countries, cultures, people, and natural wonders. Theroux, Pratt argues, challenges this glossy touristification of the world through countercommodified "realist" representationalism. By

[225] See Eric Hansen's *New York Times* review of *Happy Isles of Oceania*, "Can This Voyage Be Saved?"; Mark Salzman's *New York Times* review of *Riding the Iron Rooster,* "He Hated Sightseeing"; and Debbie Lisle on his first travelogue, *The Great Railway Bazaar*, in *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing.*

“realist,” Pratt means “degraded” and “countercommodified”; in other words, the opposite of tourist brochures. Instead of beautifying everything, Theroux takes it upon himself to render everything as dirty, ugly, stupid, and boring. Readers who are skeptical of the tourist industry’s representations of beauty and perfection will read these uglified versions as someone “telling it how it is.” Pratt calls this the “effect of the real” (217).

In order to stress the effects of such countercommodification on the reader, Pratt makes an example of one of her undergraduate courses. In this course her students responded to *Express* by claiming that “this guy had *really* captured the way South America *really* was” (216, italics in original). As opposed to glossy magazine ads, through which the tourism industry “markets the world” to these students, Theroux appeals to “their expectations, stereotypes, and prejudices” regarding the developing world with assured self-confidence and an opinionated style (216-7). The fact that the ulterior motives of his uglification (imperialism and ethnocentrism, according to Pratt) are not as obvious as those of tourism’s beautification (marketing the world as a consumer good) also contributes to his ability to produce the impression of “truth.” But it is not just undergraduates who are taken in by the “effect of the real.”

Paul Fussell, in his review of *Express* in the *New York Times*, praises Theroux’s “sharp eye, which is capable of such shrewd perception,” citing (remarkably) the kitty litter and chess piece metaphors as examples of this alleged shrewdness. Fussell happily agrees that South America “lacks character.” “For anyone experienced with Europe it is desperately boring,” he says. “Squalor in Mexico is identical to squalor in El Salvador. . . . Illiteracy here is like illiteracy there” (“On the Go Again”). When Fussell laments that *Express* is “not so delightful” as *The Great Railway Bazaar*, he reasons that “the fault is as much geography’s

as Theroux's." While claiming that Theroux has "failed to make literary travel sense of Mexico," he is completely sold by Theroux's claim that Mexico is so squalid and poor and ugly that "literary travel sense" might be impossible (*Abroad* 159).

In his monograph on the author, Samuel Coale claims that Theroux's eye is "stripped of romantic lenses," suggesting a binary distinction between the "romance" of sentimental writers and tourist brochures and the "reality" of Theroux's unmediated and unmediating vision. To illustrate, Coale cites Theroux's description of Indians in *Express*: "they were small, stout, bandy-legged, with thick black hair, like kindly trolls" (274-5). Theroux's depiction of Native Americans, according to Coale, gives us "real" hair, "'thick' and 'black' as opposed to the gentler and more generalized 'braided' [the word used in the 'romantic' piece he compares to Theroux]." The students in Pratt's class, Fussell, and Coale, are all working under the impression that countercommodification is synonymous with "real." Pratt disabuses us of this illusion, but points out that the "effect of the real" comes from the need to counter the perceived falsity of touristic representations of the world. Here the travel writer's need to "compete with the ten-day nine-night air-hotel package, trips included, and the glossy, disembodied fantasies of tourist propaganda" (216-7), coincides with the reader's desire to free herself from the specious truth-claims of tourist propaganda.

Clearly, the "effect of the real" has a great deal in common with late-19th-century literary realism. As Pam Morris puts it: "realism as a literary form has been associated with an insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence. The stuff of realism is not selected for its dignity and nobility" (3). One reason why Theroux's countercommodified images strike us as "real" is through their depiction of a

gritty, dirty, underbelly of reality. Theroux thus becomes the "true" artist who insists on "not turning away" from reality, and "telling it like it is."

In Bolter and Grusin's terms, literary realism is the attempt of narrative to "erase itself." This is the epitome of the rhetorical strategy of "immediacy": the attempt to minimize differences, "as if the content of the older media could simply be poured into the new one" (45); as if the medium played no creative or mediating role in the presentation of the thing "as it is."

Philosophical realism is something quite different. As the speculative realist movement puts it, "realism" entails both the ontological axiom that a world exists beyond our thinking of it and the epistemological axiom that we are capable of thinking a world that exists outside of our thoughts.[226] Morris offers a similar approach to re-thinking literary realism in her contribution to the "New Critical Idiom" series: "As a starting point I shall define literary realism as any writing that is based upon an implicit or explicit assumption that it is possible to communicate about a reality beyond the writing" (6). These definitions point to a theory of literary realism that emphatically *refuses* the rhetorical possibility of "telling it like it is." Instead, they require that texts acknowledge both the reality of representation as a mediating agent *and* the extra-textual reality that can never be fully captured by representation (but which *can* be communicated in meaningful ways). Theroux's realism, if we follow Morris and the speculative realists, lies not in his "ugly" depictions of "things as they are," but rather in the moments when he alludes to real travel practices while simultaneously acknowledging the interpretive artifice inherent in the travelogue. For example, when he commits to the narrative of the "continuous track" while acknowledging—

[226] See Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman's introduction to *The Speculative Turn*: "Towards a Speculative Philosophy.".

through the strikingly *dis*continuous maps that open his travelogue, his framing of lived experience as always already mediated by a "conceit," and his inclusion of "writing" scenes within the narrative—that such a track is a creative translation of reality, rather than a realistic representation of reality.

What Pratt calls Theroux's "effect of the real" is thus, paradoxically, Theroux at his most fervently anti-realist. In depicting South Americans, Theroux fails to recognize the creative remediations enacted by the writer-as-translator. In appealing to "expectations, stereotypes, and prejudices," Theroux invites his readers into an echo chamber that defines the "real" as an opposition to beautified images, reproduces real/artificial binary thinking, and fails to acknowledge the poetic, creative work done by language, representation, and perception. This is precisely what anti-realist or naïve realist writing does: by either refusing to acknowledge extra-linguistic reality or by presuming unmediated access to that reality, anti-realism erases its own agency. The affirmative, creative model of interpretation presented by Theroux's philosophically realist treatment of the railroad lies precisely in the opposite direction: here, Theroux celebrates both an extra-linguistic reality that exceeds the order he confers upon it, *and* the power of literary ordering to transform and mediate a reality that it cannot presume to authentically "represent."

There is a surprising corollary to Theroux's two divergent approaches to interpreting the real. In focusing only on the "effect of the real," the critic ends up affirming the very anti-realist mode of representation she critiques. As important and penetrating as Pratt's critique is, it is only capable of approaching Theroux through the terms of representational realism. If we begin with the negative critique of representation, we have no way of encountering Theroux's travel practices *except* in terms of a representational logic in which his actual

movement through space and time is effaced by its transcription into text. In other words, beginning with critique, the train can be nothing but a sign. We cannot recognize the railroad as an extra-textual actor, shaping the text as it is shaped by the text. We thus become skillfully attuned to the *dialectic* that takes place between representations: Theroux's representations, the representations of the tourist industry, and the representations of postcolonial critique. But we remain insensitive to the *dialogue* taking place between textual and extra-textual actors: Theroux's body, transportation technologies, language and narrative ordering. We are trapped in the binary thinking that is forced to choose between commodified/countercommodified, critical/uncritical, and real/illusion (or, real/"effect of the real"). In critiquing Theroux's representations, Pratt sets herself up as an opponent, and thus reproduces the very binary, oppositional anti-realism that problematizes Theroux's depictions in the first place. In doing so, she runs the risk of merely producing her own "effect of the real" by "seeing through" the illusions of representational realism by "telling it like it *actually* is." Beginning with the irreducible but entangled differences between travel practice and narrative remediation forces us to grapple not just with issues of representation, but also with questions of the nonhuman agency and embodied affects that are never completely effaced in their narrative translations.

I offer, then, a re-thinking of Pratt's historical contextualization that includes its entanglement with the rise of a new transportation technology and its corresponding space-time continuum. The tourism boom began with car travel. After World War II, U.S. citizens found themselves, for the first time since the 1920s, with extra money. In addition, many industrial workers successfully lobbied for paid vacations for the first time in their lives. In 1946, the American Automobile Association predicted that the "most significant reflection of

post-war prosperity . . . will be in a tremendous increase in the tourist traffic." This prediction was correct. By 1949, over sixty percent of Americans took a vacation, averaging ten-and-a-half days (Baranowski and Furlough 322). Travel rapidly became "more democratic." In the words of Canada's *Saturday Night* magazine, the "wealthy few ha[d] been supplanted by the masses" (323). With a newfound material prosperity and paid vacation time, the American tourism industry flourished.

Additionally, during the war, flight technology research was accelerated in order to produce bigger, faster, more efficient aircraft, originally designed for bombing and reconnaissance missions. When the war ended, the United States had a surplus of aircraft that no longer served a war-time purpose, and these planes were retrofitted and re-born as commercial airliners. Tourist-class commercial jet travel emerged in the late 1950s, giving the middle-class, and even the working-class, newfound access to parts of the world that were formerly out of reach. The vogue for travel that emerged after World War II now extended beyond the limited scope of railroad and highway networks, sparking the global tourist boom of the 1960s and -70s (9).

When Theroux traveled to South America in 1978, tourist-class air travel was only 20 years old, but it had become so popular that Paul Fussell, writing at the same time, pronounced "true" travel dead, killed by its democratization and the annihilation of space and time by "flying cigars" (*Abroad* 44). Dean MacCannell, writing only three years earlier, made the sweeping assertion that "we are all tourists now" (191), a claim that was a response not only to the tourism boom, but to air travel itself. Average people were able to travel easily to what were once, in popular western consciousness, the darkest corners of the world. The democratization of travel predictably led to a cultural backlash from the so-called "elite,"

who immediately began to separate themselves from the masses through the binary rhetoric of the "traveler" vs. the "tourist."[227]

Gary Krist, writing in response to Fussell's claim that travel is dead, notes the importance of trains in Theroux, but claims that they function as an "artificial obstacle," meant to put Theroux "in the way" of quirky experiences. Krist begins his work ominously by taking for granted that "the opportunities for authentic travel, let alone travel *writing,* have become increasingly rare" (593). He cites the tourist industry's commodification of place as the primary reason why such "authentic" travel is no longer possible, but he never problematizes the term "authentic," relying solely on the assumption that the tourist industry has destroyed the "purity" and "particularity" of "previously genuine places," turning them "into Disneyland versions of themselves" and "adulterating" the travel experience (593-4). In Fussell, MacCannell, and Krist we see a prominent reliance on the real/artificial binary that undergirds "the effect of the real." Our options are severely limited once we start down this onto-epistemological path. Krist finds his rebuttal to the alleged death of travel and travel writing in Theroux's decision to travel by train, but his solution originates in a misreading of Fussell, and ultimately reduces Theroux's travels to little more than a gimmick or a publicity stunt.

Fussell's response to the Post-World War II travel boom is to try to find a place "so remote" that "something like travel might still be possible" (41). He plans a trip to the South Seas in hopes of experiencing "real" travel again, but alas, it is already "too late for such daydreams." By 1979, ships had stopped sailing to Fiji and Bora Bora, making way for huge commercial airliners that took travelers to big tourist hotels. This is the last straw for Fussell,

[227] See MacCannell's *The Tourist* for a detailed history of the traveler/tourist binary.

and instead of searching out deeper, darker corners of the world, he throws in the towel: "I am assuming that travel is now impossible," he says, "and that tourism is all we have left." Then, tongue-in-cheek, he suggests that "[p]erhaps the closest one could approach an experience of travel in the old sense today would be to drive in an aged automobile with doubtful tires through Roumania [*sic*] or Afghanistan without hotel reservations and to get by on terrible French" (41). This is a joke (as the absurdity of seeking out a car with "doubtful tires," deliberately *not* making a hotel reservation, and purposefully limiting one's acquisition of French suggests), though it is a gallows humor for Fussell, who is writing a eulogy for "true" travel.

Fussell knows that such an artificial production of travel conditions would not result in "travel in the old sense," but only in a parody of travel. Krist, however, does not catch the humor of the suggestion, and latches onto it, not only as a possibility for "authentic" travel in the modern age, but as the *only* possibility. He calls this an "admission" from Fussell that "travel is not stone-dead yet" and argues that that this is "precisely the kind of thing travel writers are still doing, and writing books about" (595). Krist's ultimate conclusion is that, "in order to travel in the world as it exists today, the traveler (as opposed to the tourist) must often create artificial obstacles for himself" (595). When Graham Greene walked across French Guinea in 1935, Krist reminds us, it was because he had to, but when Allen Booth attempts to walk across Japan in 1985, it is because he needs "the imposed difficulty of long-distance walking in order to put himself in the way of experience" (595). It would seem that the contemporary travel writer's job, in Krist's view, is to trick the world into providing "experience" by means of "artificial obstacles." Krist calls this a "requirement of

inconvenience" and claims that it "accounts for all of the highly idiosyncratic journeys being made in recent travel books" (595), including Theroux's.

Krist says that Theroux, "when he chooses to travel by the pokiest local train in China or Bolivia, is responding to . . . the need for slowness and complication in a world where transportation is too fast and too easy" (596). While this bears a superficial similarity to my own position that Theroux is attempting to navigate a radically new, and thus disorienting, space-time continuum, the two positions couldn't be more different. Far from seeking out "unnecessary complications," I see Theroux as engaging a self-conscious "art of travel." As we saw in Adler, any art requires attention to "style." In the case of travel, this style is not merely one's *own* style, but the style of particular transportation technologies. I argue that Theroux draws upon the stylistic worldmaking capacities of the railroad in response to a very real existential crisis: the world of his embodied sensorium is at odds with the spatiotemporal "worldmaking" tendencies of the commercial airliner, and he is desperately striving to stitch his world back together through a combination of stylized travel practices and literary remediation. This has nothing to do with the traveler/tourist binary.

Besides, even *within* this binary, the desire for unnecessary complication does not result in the "true" traveler, as Krist assumes. Rather, it results in what Fussell, following Dean MacCannell, calls the "anti-tourist." The anti-tourist is primarily interested not in the travel experience, but in distancing herself from the tourist. Every decision the anti-tourist makes is based on a desire *not* to appear to be a tourist. Fussell calls these decisions "devices," and they include "ostentatiously not carrying a camera," always proclaiming a love for local food, and "eschewing taxis in favor of local public transportation (the more complicated and confusing the better)" (47-8). Certainly, the searching out of "artificial

obstacles" and the need for "slowness and complication" simply for the sake of inconvenience would fall under the anti-tourist's domain, and not the "true" traveler's. To say that modern travel writing has a "requirement of inconvenience" is to submit to Fussell's claim that "true" travel is dead, not to challenge it. In fact, by organizing his interpretation of Theroux around the very *concept* of the "true" traveler, Krist has already condemned Theroux (and his readers) to an anxiety-producing dialectic in which the traveler's very identity is always already defined by the tourist (and vice versa).

Krist's reliance on the tourist/traveler binary is only capable of reading travel practices via signifying oppositions. As Deleuze has argued, dialectic proceeds by transforming everything into a "figure," reducing the complex reality of objects into a set of linguistic oppositions that then resolve themselves through dialectic synthesis. For Nietzsche, the dialectic term always already carries within itself the negation of its opposite, meaning that the best-case scenario for the "traveler," once inserted into this oppositional binary, is to be nothing but the negation of the tourist. Rather than opposition, Deleuze and Nietzsche propose a focus on the very differences that are elided in the reductive schema of opposition.[228] From this perspective, Theroux's work on the train draws our attention to the differences between the material railroad and the textual railroad, and thus to their entanglement. The train that Theroux rides and the train that Theroux writes are not dialectic opposites, finding their ultimate synthesis in "the literary railroad." Rather, the "literary railroad" should be read as a site of dialogic tension between text and train—a whole that

[228] See, for example, Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy*: "This is why Nietzsche presents the dialectic as the speculation of the pleb, as the way of thinking of the slave: the abstract thought of contradiction then prevails over the concrete feeling of positive difference, reaction over action, revenge and ressentiment take the place of aggression" (10). Dialectics are inherently abstract, relying as they do on contradictions that exist only in representation and not in life. Following Nietzsche, Deleuze suggests a focus on "positive difference," action, and creation.

nevertheless fails to efface its parts in organic synthesis. Instead it is a heterogeneous assemblage of linguistic and extra-linguistic components—each of which is continually mediating and remediating the others.

There is no doubt that "tourism anxiety" was prevalent in the 1970s, or that Theroux himself is part of the elitist reaction to the democratization of travel. But this reactive and conservative spirit manifests itself primarily in his countercommodofied "effect of the real," as critiqued by Pratt. Trains give Theroux a different dimension. Theroux's obsession with trains is not artificial or arbitrary, but an attempt to produce continuity in the face of a disorienting world. Theroux chooses to travel by train not at random, and not because they are outmoded, but because the rise of airplanes has reconstituted the "ground" of perceptual experience. Most importantly, train travel does not put Theroux *in the way* of experience, as Krist would have it; rather it *is* the experience.

This detour into the issue of realism is important for two reasons. First, because the critical response to Theroux—both positive and negative—has historically adopted an implicit interpretive position analogous to "representational realism." This comes in two forms: either as the celebration of Theroux's "telling it like it is" or in a critique of his "effect of the real." It is important to position my own reading of Theroux within this critical conversation by positing an alternative approach through the lens of philosophical realism. But the issue of realism is also fundamental to my project as a whole, which is interested in creative interpretation—or, as I have called it, "worldmaking." The two modes of realism evident in Theroux thus allow me to articulate a distinction between those modes of interpretation that acknowledge their own worldmaking capacities and tendencies and those modes of interpretation that deny their own mediating agencies and attempt to "tell it like it

is." In the latter, all we can do is explicate the "meaning" of the railroad as it already exists in Theroux's text, just as Theroux presumes to explicate the "meaning" of South America by "representing" it "faithfully." In the former, we encounter a *new* object in the world that is not reducible to its meaning and acts as a site for creative encounter. Just as Theroux creatively remediates the railroads he rides on his journey south, the "armchair traveler" is granted the opportunity to creatively remediate a new object: what I am calling "the literary railroad." It is to this object that I now turn.

Riding the Literary Railroad

Theroux affords the reader the opportunity to "ride" this new railroad: one cobbled together out of subway lines, Amtrak sleepers, pokey old rural narrow-gauge tracks, language, genre, and literary "order." Theroux creates meaning by narrating his travel practices, which means that the "meaning" of the travelogue cannot be reduced either to the raw movement through space and time that undergirds the narrative nor to the narrative-as-text. As Adler puts it,

> like the greatest arts, travel serves to invoke realities that cannot be encountered in the same way through any other means and yields its knowledge by recourse to some classic aesthetic devices: framing, distancing, isolating and emphasizing some senses at the expense of others, representing allegorically, and using metonymy. (1382-3)

Theroux's meanings require his embodied enaction of the literary trope of connection and continuity. However, in creating these meanings he also creates a new railroad: one to be boarded by the reader rather than the traveler. If travel practices "invoke realities that cannot

be encountered in the same way through any other means," then reading practices must do likewise. After all, part of the generic contract of the travelogue is the assertion (and reiteration) that a "real" body moving through "real" space and time exists beyond the purview of language and representation. We, as readers, have no access to the experiences of this body and mind except through a mode of speculative interpretation that uses the text to think beyond the text, and yet we *must* think this body in order to take the travelogue seriously. We also must recognize our own extra-textual presence as "passengers" aboard the literary railroad as we remediate it through our own embodied reading experience.

Theroux doesn't offer us unmediated access to *his* art of travel, but something else. On the one hand, travelogues famously act as catalysts for new travels, serving as both pre-constructed itineraries for the new traveler and as literary interlocutors through which to interpret new journeys. One way to make meaning out of Theroux's literary railroad is to use it as the itinerary for a new journey, as Rachel Pook ("The Old Patagonian Express—Revisited," 2010) and Bridget Gleeson ("Channeling Theroux: Riding the Old Patagonian Express," 2014) have done recently. But we don't have to use Theroux as a catalyst to actual travel to ride his rails. Travelogues also offer readers the opportunity to "invoke realities" by riding the "literary railroad."

Like travel practices, reading practices create meaning and invoke realities that are not possible in any other way. If travel writing for Theroux involves mutually constitutive experiments with movement and narrative ordering, the art of reading/interpretation requires something analogous. As we "ride" the literary railroad, we too must practice an art of travel. We too must practice the creative translation of a unique journey through experiments in interpretation. In addition to his constant use of literary language (such as "conceit" and

“trope”), Theroux actually tells us that reading a book and riding a train are analogous in the ways that embodied interaction produces affective experiences:

> Reading alters the appearance of a book. Once it has been read, it never looks the same again, and people leave their individual imprint on a book they have read. One of the pleasures of reading is seeing this alteration on the pages, and the way, by reading it, that you have made the book yours. (363)

Here, Theroux is in the study of Jorge Luis Borges, and speaking about Borges’ personal library, which does not include “fine editions”; rather, all the books have “the look of having been read.” Theroux highlights the interobjective meaning that emerges when a particular embodied reader encounters a particular embodied book. It is not just about a transfer of information for Theroux, but about the ways in which both book and reader make their marks on each other—one leaving thumbprints and worn spines while the other leaves impressions and encounters, new perceptions and experiences.

But Theroux is also speaking directly to the reader here, reminding the reader that in thumbing through her copy of *The Old Patagonian Express* she has “made the book her own.” The reader alters the book as she reads, just as Theroux alters his trains as he rides. We can think through this passage in terms of Theroux’s particular encounter with trains: In riding these trains he has clearly altered their “appearance”—if not in the material train, then in the public consciousness. Riding (and writing) these trains inevitably alters them, as attested by the transformation of *La Trochita* into The Old Patagonian Express. Theroux leaves his individual imprint on these trains—an act of violence, to be sure, but also an act of creation. In riding the trains and in writing the trains he produces the train that readers encounter in *The Old Patagonian Express.*

But the interpretive movement doesn't end here. Theroux tells us quite explicitly that we, as readers, engage in the same sort of violence and creation. The trains aren't just Theroux's. When we thumb the pages, we make Theroux's words our own, shaded by our own knowledge and experiences and moods and preconceptions, shaped by our own "dozing" and inattention. Just as one of Theroux's travel pleasures lies in watching once abstract railroad lines change through encounter and experience, one of our reading pleasures lies in the book shifting under our fingers, bearing the smudged imprints of our thumbs, the frayed dog-ears of our attention, and the new creations enacted by our own interpretive encounters with the literary railroad that lies therein.

Here, Barthes' distinction between "readerly" and "writerly" texts can be of service. According to Barthes, the writerly text is "*ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world . . . is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" (*S/Z* 5). Through the cartographic inclusion of gaps, Theroux acknowledges the openness of his travelogue; its inability to "stop" the "play of the world" by enclosing it with a "singular system." Even as he claims to tie up his journey in a nice unified package through the table of contents and the narrative reiteration that the Boston subway and *La Trochita* are the "same train," he destabilizes these claims with the discontinuous maps. It is precisely in the interplay between these two realities that the reader can slip in as a writer, acknowledging that the construction of any textual interpretation, while necessary, inevitably produces similar gaps.

The "readerly text," on the other hand, is a product. These texts are "read, but not written" (4), consumed reactively but not performed actively. The "effect of the real"

produces potentially "readerly" portions of *The Old Patagonian Express*, as they evade their own creative responsibility by pretending to present things "as they really are." It is in this denial of language as a mediator of "the real" that the travelogue becomes "readerly." Ironically, it is in the attempt to critique this effect that criticism itself falls into a readerly mode: a "singular system" (Barthes calls this system "Criticism") that, by design, "reduces the plurality of entrances" to the text.

Focusing on Theroux's creation of the "literary railroad" affords an approach that does not close down the plurality of entrances into the reality of the text. Instead, it suggests that in each interaction lies a moment of creative distortion. Theroux's embodied consciousness—shaped and reshaped by various transportation technologies over the course of his life—translates and distorts train travel in ways that create (in experience) a vastly different conception/perception of the train than, say, the bodies of John Ruskin or Victor Hugo. When he decides to actively engage in an "art of travel" that includes narrative remediation, his language again distorts both the train and the original experience, thus creating a "literary railroad" that depends for its existence on steel-and-iron trains that it doesn't even approximate. When we encounter the literary railroad, we again translate and distort, creating something new that still owes a debt to the various railways and literary tropes that make up the assemblage that we encounter. In affirming difference, we inevitably find ourselves in a position that requires us to acknowledge interpretation. We cannot be drawn into the dogmatic belief in representational realism that undergirds "the effect of the real" because we always already know that *no* interpretation "tells it like it is." Thus, we are highly attuned to the fact that Theroux *created* the counter-commodified "kindly trolls" that populate the "dirt and squalor" of South America and we can ask ourselves why he would do

this and what effects it has. Thus, the affirmation of Theroux's positive work leads to an implicit critique of his negative reduction, whereas negative critique fails to recognize anything positive in Theroux, thus leading to a reduced text that can only be "mastered" (and subsequently dismissed) and can never be "known" or "experienced."

If Theroux's anti-realist "othering" of South America can lead to the dismissal of *Express* as the product of imperialist nostalgia and a lingering sense of western superiority, his realist account of the entanglement of travel practices and narrative remediation cannot be dismissed so easily. Lisle attaches his love of trains to a desire to return to a "golden age" of travel, but as we have seen, trains are operating in a much more complex manner in this text. They function metaphorically as a way to establish continuity and orientation in a disorienting world, and they provide the opportunity for Theroux to show us what we are missing when we focus solely on the destination. At the same time, the train's capacity to transform the human sensorium shapes both the existential themes of the book and its narrative structure. We cannot understand Theroux's work without recognizing the nonhuman agency of the railroad and its effects on the human body and perceptual consciousness.

According to Schivelbusch, "if an essential element of a given sociocultural space-time continuum undergoes change, this will affect the entire structure; our perception of space-time will also lose its accustomed orientation" (36). Schivelbusch's study is about early-19th-century responses to the rise of railroads, but the echoes of 19th-century anti-railroad rhetoric in Theroux's visceral response to air travel shows its relevance extends to the spatiotemporal challenges posed by any emerging transportation technology. It is all too easy to believe in the "natural" qualities of those forms of technology one is accustomed to,

as Theroux does of the railroad, and to place the blame of disorientation on the emerging technology itself, rather than on the challenge of undergoing a transition in perceptual consciousness.

Theroux may claim to have found the antidote for the disorienting effects of one particular emerging technology, but this antidote is no less historically contingent than the 19th-century argument that we eschew the "unnatural" railroad in favor of carriages. In *Express,* Theroux cites a "Bostonian" who, traveling through Central America in 1886, "regarded the coming of the railway with a kind of horror" (99). With no sense of the irony, Theroux lashes out at this Bostonian: "His was in a sense a typical curmudgeonly snobbery about travel, a bragging about the glory of traveling through trackless woods with a pack of Indians and mule skinners" (99). Immediately following, Theroux derides the ignorant prophecies of William T. Brigham, whose opening passage of *Guatemala* deserves to be quoted in full:

> When the Northern Railroad extends through Guatemala, when the Transcontinental Railroad traverses the plains of Honduras, and the Nicaraguan Canal unites the Atlantic and the Pacific, the charm will be broken, the mule path and the *mozo de cargo* will be supplanted, and a journey across Central America become almost as dull as a journey from Chicago to Cheyenne. (99-100)

Theroux's response to Brigham: "How wrong he was" (100).

And how "wrong" is Theroux about airplanes? Brigham's fears are Theroux's fears, though Theroux fails to comprehend this, forgetting that both trains and human bodies exist in history. In *Express*, Theroux is the curmudgeonly snob, bragging about the glory of

traveling through the back doors of cities on the old railway lines; Theroux is the false prophet, proclaiming (like Fussell) the imminent decline of travel in the wake of rising technology. But perhaps we should not be as harsh on Theroux as he is on his predecessors. After all, we have the benefit of seeing how this feeling of disorientation recycles itself in every generation that is confronted with changes in space-time continuum.

If we ignore the centrality of trains in this narrative, and focus solely on Theroux's depictions of South America, all of his tricks to erase, gloss over, or subsume the gaps, discontinuities, and detours in his journey remain a mystery (if they are even noticed). But by contextualizing the narrative as a response to the disorientation brought on by the rise of the airplane, the discrepancy between the narrative claims and the underlying reality begins to make sense. The transformation of the table of contents into a continuous railroad itinerary, the metonymic use of The Old Patagonian Express to fuse the legs of this journey together into a continuous whole, and the narrative erasure or marginalization of those gaps and discontinuities that would otherwise undermine his central project, all suggest that Theroux is engaged primarily in the *literary* production of spatiotemporal connection and continuity. In other words, we cannot so easily separate Theroux's "experiment with space" from the "order" he gives that experiment through its "repetition in words."

The takeaway is not the hackneyed cliché about "enjoying the journey," because this cliché is itself caught up in a same dialogic web of mutually constitutive mediations. As Schivelbusch, Nicholas Daly, and others have argued, the modernization of the senses that structures the perceptual capacities and tendencies of the 20th-century industrialized human body is in no small part indebted to the space-time continuum of the railroad. In this sense, transportation technology shapes not just the narrative movement of the travelogue, but the

existential embodied sensoria of writers, riders, and readers. In addition, Theroux's self-conscious and explicit admission of creative ordering, his sublimation of any experience that occurs outside of the train, and his suppression of airplane travel and other itinerary gaps, provides for the reader a text that models a creative mode of being-in-the-world. This mode of being takes responsibility for its own worldmaking capacities while acknowledging the ways in which those capacities themselves are dependent upon other human and nonhuman actors. This mode of reading recognizes that different transportation technologies afford very different experiences. "Meaning" emerges out of our encounters with infrastructure in different ways, which are also mediated through the historically situated human body, whose perceptual reality is always already mediated by the very transportation infrastructure it now sets out to interpret. In short, *The Old Patagonian Express* provides for the reader the experience of spatiotemporal continuity while simultaneously reminding us that this experience is "made" rather than "given." Or rather, that there is no way to separate the two.

Conclusion:
It's Not Just About Trains

Trainworlds, Storyworlds, Everyday Worlds

At first glance, it may seem as though this dissertation is limited to a relatively specialized subject: railroads in U.S. film and literature. While trains did more than any other technology to shape the literature, culture, and film of the 19th- and 20th-century United States, it may still be reasonable to wonder why this matters for readers in the 21st century. I have deliberately chosen case studies that blur the line between "stories" and "reality": Walden and *Walden*; *La Trochita* and The Old Patagonian Express; Buster, Keaton, and Johnnie; and the dual genealogical lineages of the recurrent situation depend upon co-mediating interrelations between fictional worlds and our own world. I have also drawn on theories that explicitly straddle the ontological realms of, as Donna Orange says, "the given" and "the made": for instance, Lakoff and Johnson's embodied metaphors; de Certeau's "rhetorics of walking"; Manuel DeLanda's flat ontology; Bruno Latour's actor-networks; Judith Adler's "art of travel"; and Lloyd Bitzer's "recurrent situation." Each chapter is thus simultaneously an investigation into storyworlds and real-worlds. And as I hope to have shown, it is indeed impossible to differentiate between the two, as "real" affordances, affects, and nonhuman agencies swirl through our human stories, and even participate in essentially human modes of meaning-making like metaphor, genre, literary structure, and narrative action.

This dissertation is about much more than the railroad. It is about how infrastructure shapes the stories of our lives in surprising ways. In attuning ourselves to the everyday affects and affordances of infrastructural components—those contingent actors of any

infrastructural assemblage that we take for granted, from sidewalk curbs and elevators to shopping carts and underground sewers to fiber optic cables and satellite dishes—the world begins to shift before our very eyes.[229] No longer the masters of our own domains, we find that our everyday interactions, our memories, our anecdotes, our national mythologies, and every story in between is infused with the constraints and affordances of the nonhumans that share and shape our world. This realization demands new forms of reading, interpretation, and knowledge that are capable of acknowledging nonhuman poetics. Things do not make meaning exclusively *through* humans; rather, all entities—including creations like stories and fictional objects—are real actors in the world that *always* act outside of our interpretations. We do not yet know what *any* entity is capable of. Indeed, as we have seen, even a familiar object like the train is capable of "making the world and taking part in it" in surprising and unpredictable ways. If we hope to attune ourselves to these "strange strangers," our only recourse is through knowledge-as-intimacy, not through knowledge-as-mastery. Critical distance and ironic detachment keep us too far removed from the extraordinary beings that share with us the capacity for worldmaking. Every object has a poetics. Our own poetic capacities are intimately bound up in the poetics of infrastructure. To see this, we must cultivate our attachment to nonhuman actors, from sidewalks and windowsills to embodied metaphors and recurrent situations. In other words, we must make ourselves vulnerable to our entanglements.

[229] I have focused on transportation infrastructure, but the work can easily be extended to include infrastructure more broadly conceived to include communications, sanitation, power, or economic infrastructures.

Encountering Strange Worlds: A Methodology

With this in mind, I propose a non-critical interpretive heuristic of *encounter* as a close-reading alternative to the hermeneutics of *suspicion*. I propose the following provisional rules-of-thumb as a foundation:

1) **Acknowledge the Nonhuman Actors**. This is the most obvious takeaway. Simply by acknowledging the nonhuman actors that "make and take part in" both real and fictional worlds, the very act of "interpretation" alters dramatically. We can't, for example, assume that our human dramas play out against a relatively inert backdrop of nonhuman environments and props. Nor can we reduce fictional objects to their discursive or symbolic roles: as we have seen, textual objects assert asignifying affects, regardless of the creator's intention. Acknowledging the agency of the fictional object short-circuits representationalist interpretations of literature and film by denying the hegemony of (human) discourse to "swallow up" everything that enters its domain. Attuning ourselves to the agencies, affects, and affordances of the nonhuman actors that populate human stories makes us more vulnerable to the dialogic interplay between real-world objects and so-called "representations."

Instead of trying to delimit the actors we consider "important," we should strive to *increase* the human and nonhuman actors we acknowledge as participating in the production of narrative meaning and action.[230] This is more difficult than it sounds. As we have seen,

[230] I am not suggesting that the goal of literary analysis is to produce an exhaustive list of all participating actors. Instead, the point is that no actor or set of actors has a monopoly on "meaning." Levi Bryant has coined the phrase "Hegemonic Fallacy" to refer to any interpretive theory that "consists in treating one difference as being the only difference that makes all the difference or as treating one difference as overdetermining all other differences" ("Ontic Principle" 277). For example, it is a hegemonic fallacy to assume that literature (or anything else) can be "explained" by reference to linguistics, or economics, or power, or culture. In ignoring the nonhuman agencies that shape our stories, we have made the mistake of treating *the human* as the hegemon that "overdetermines all other differences." Insofar as we restrict our inquiry into film,

even limiting our attention solely to the trains that populate literature and film, the number of actors contributing their "worldmaking capacities" to a literary or filmic railroad is theoretically limitless. A textual train is a nonhuman actor, but so is the real train from which it borrows its axles and bogies, its chassis and smokestack, its passengers and windows—all of which (both the "real" and the fictional versions) are *also* nonhuman actors. So is the entire infrastructural assemblage out of which the individual train emerges. So are words, metaphors, images, literary structure, syntax, and genre. So is the writer, and the characters, and the reader. As Graham Harman says, the universe is full of "objects wrapped in objects," and no scale trumps the reality of objects at other scales. While it is impossible to acknowledge all of the actors, it is important to remember that we don't have the final word: the actors and objects we exclude from our readings retain their agency and remain lurking in the background, ready to rise up and challenge us, surprise us, and enchant us.[231] We need to

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literature, and culture to human-oriented aspects of reality (culture, power, history, ideology) we are committing a hegemonic fallacy.

[231] Using Latourian terminology, interpretive theories actively "externalize" actors by delimiting which are relevant to interpretation and meaning-making and which are not: New Criticism externalizes the "outside-of-the-text"; New Historicism externalizes "stable truths"; object-oriented ontology externalizes "process" and "flow" while process philosophy externalizes the stable object. All interpretations externalize as they assemble a new collective. In *Politics of Nature*, Latour makes this argument in relation to political collectives. The important thing for Latour is that every externalized actor (what he calls an "enemy") may, at any point, return "to demand its place as partner and ally" (240-1). For Latour, the current ecological crisis is a prime example of an externalized entity—"nature," or "the environment"—demanding its return to the global political collective. We can no longer afford to relegate "nature" to "another world" with which human politics need not concern itself, and thus we are faced with the necessity of assembling a *new* collective (58). We have already encountered the "return" of the "externalized entity": when Thoreau re-imagines the train tracks as a "cart-path," his metaphor re-assembles the world into a new "collective" that acknowledges certain components of the railroad at the expense of others. Thoreau is a master at acknowledging the vast *out-side* of each of his interpretations and metaphors, and thus when he hears the warning signals, the metaphoric collective of the "cart-path" quickly recedes, making room for the excluded actor, and Thoreau steps off the track. Once we have discovered the meaning of the railroad, Thoreau seems to say, we must be careful: the part we left out can always return to run us over. Similarly, we have historically ignored the nonhuman agencies that shape our stories by *externalizing* nonhumans—relegating them to "another zone": the unknowable "thing-in-itself," "mere matter," landscape, symbol, "referent," or the inert backdrop for human dramas. But the warning signals are there in animal studies, ecocriticism, affect theory, new materialism, and speculative realism: these nonhumans are knocking on the door of the collective, and we need to let them in. Once we do, we quickly realize that they've always been there anyway.

be open to this inevitability, which requires a methodological stance of vulnerability. This also means that we must take full responsibility for our own acts of translation that selectively distort the text. Interpretation is a creative act, not a matter of uncovering hidden truths.

2) **Recognize Dispersed Agency and Causality**. According to Latour, "agency" is not willfulness or intention but "the ability to affect and be affected by others." It does not require a mind, nor even sentience, which means that there is no problem ascribing agency to fictional characters and even fictional trains. Acknowledging the various actors at play in any narrative moment requires tracing flows of affect between the actors. How do human and nonhuman actors affect other human and nonhuman actors within the reality of the story? How do affects flow between text and reader, or text and writer, or text and "reality"? The more actors we acknowledge, the more entangled these webs of agency and affect become.

Various thinkers of the nonhuman are dramatically reconfiguring our concepts of causality and agency. In addition to Latour's theory of nonhuman agency, Karen Barad's "agential realism" moves beyond "traditional conceptions of causation [that] are concerned with the causal relationship between distinct sequential events" (393). Instead, she argues that "there are no singular causes. And there are no individual agents of change" (394), but rather a web in which "causes" and "effects" emerge out of what she calls "intra-actions,"[232]

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[232] Barad uses the neologism "intra-action" because for her, every relation is actually a *unique phenomenon*. What we normally think of as two entities interacting are actually, for Barad, two components of the larger assemblage (the "relation") "intra-acting" inside that assemblage. Harman, drawing on Husserl, makes a similar argument. In terms of the current study, we can think about how trains interact with characters *within* a storyworld as "intra-actions" in one sense because they are indeed taking place within the assemblage that is the story. On the other hand, if we are committed to acknowledging the ontological dignity of each nonhuman actor, we must also remember that these "components" are always capable of "detaching" from this assemblage and forming new relations, and thus that they are not fully exhausted by these relations.

rather than flowing directly from one object or event to another. For Barad, this does not limit our responsibility as ethical beings, or allow us to pass the buck onto other causal agents, but rather increases our responsibility because we must be attuned to our own worldmaking[233] practices: the ways in which we "make and the world and take part in it" alongside our fellow actors. Likewise, Timothy Morton argues that "aesthetics" is the study of causality: "causality is the way objects talk to one another, apprehend one another, comprehend one another: causality is the aesthetic dimension" (*Realist Magic* 66). To study the ways that objects leave their imprints on each other, for Morton, is to study causality. Literature and film are very good at speculating about these imprints, and it is work that the interpreter takes up as well.

3) **Treat Objects as Bundles of Affordances *and* as Ultimately Withdrawn.** According to J.J. Gibson, "[t]he *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill" (117, italics in original). Affordances are thus *interrelational.* "Sittability," for example, is not an innate quality of a passenger car seat, but an affordance that is indebted equally to the material dimensions of the seat and to the proportions and mechanics of the average human body. Some affordances, like the sittability of chairs, are purposefully designed by humans while others, like the ability to hide behind those same chairs in the middle of a Wild West shoot-out, are accidental but conventional. Still others—say, John Wayne and Claudette Colbert taking all the chairs and tables in an observation car and piling them up in the aisle to create a fake airplane—are highly idiosyncratic and situational. Each actualization of an affordance uncovers as-yet-unknown interrelational capacities lurking in every object. How do accumulations of affordances

[233] Barad actually uses the more popular contemporary term, "worlding."

Image 79: ***Miners use passenger car chairs according to their prescribed use in Jim Jarmusch's*** **Dead Man** ***(1994).***

Image 80: ***The preacher takes up a position behind the chairs to fight Indians in the Mae West / W.C. Fields vehicle*** **My Little Chickadee** ***(1940).***

Image 81: ***John Wayne, Claudette Colbert, and Don DeFore drunkenly transform the chairs and tables of a lounge car into a makeshift airplane in*** **Without Reservations** ***(1946).***

change the way we understand objects "in their essences"? How does viewing an entity as a site of potentiality differ from viewing it as symbol, or as something with an "underlying meaning"? How do writers and filmmakers exploit the affordances of objects, and how do the capacities and limitations of objects shape storyworlds?

On the other hand, nonhuman actors are not exhausted by even the most rigorous accumulation of affordances. No matter how complex and nuanced our knowledge of the object, it can never be exhausted or reduced to what we know of it. As Harman argues, all objects are at least partially "withdrawn": "There will always be aspects of these phenomena that elude me; further surprises might always be in store" (*Quadruple Object* 39). This is both an ontological claim (these objects are irreducible to their relations) and an epistemological claim (I cannot "know" an object in full). The purpose of remembering the inherent "withdrawnness" of objects is to temper an impulse to assign ontological priority to the "bundle of affordances" (or an object's relations) at the expense of the object itself. We can only make ourselves more vulnerable to more actors through a continual increase in intimacy.

4) **Assume a Flat Ontology of Entanglement.** Representationalist theories posit a hierarchical ontology in which the storyworld is a second-order representation of either "reality" (naïve realism, mimesis, the "mirror of nature"), or of some hidden kernel of abstract "truth" (as when a story "represents" an idea, a thesis, or an ideology). The job of the critic, under this rubric, is to see through the words, images, objects, and characters in order to get at what the story is "really about." Laura Mulvey's "film behind the film" is an excellent example of how hierarchical ontologies elide the text itself in favor of a "more real reality." The text, in this approach, is both the medium of communication by which the story is channeled to the reader *and* the veil that distorts its true meaning. Naïve realism posits a more-or-less "transparent" veil while poststructuralist theories tend toward the assumption that "truth" is nothing but veil upon veil upon veil. A flat ontology bypasses all arguments of "originals" and "copies" and assumes that everything is equally "real." The fictional object has precisely the same ontological dignity as its material counterpart (which is not to say we should ignore the differences between them). Relations in a flat ontology cannot be hierarchical (objects cannot be explained away by appeals to modernity, *zeitgeist*, the unconscious, representations, or structures) because no object can be completely swallowed up by another object. In positing a flat ontology, we deny ourselves these interpretive short-cuts. Instead, we confront the different capacities and tendencies of, for example, a steel-and-iron locomotive and its filmic shadow-and-light doppelgänger. As Rita Felski says, books are not images of the world; they are tied to the world through innumerable threads.[234] We must think about these relations in terms of *entanglement*.

[234] In *Limits of Critique*, Felski draws on Latour to treat texts themselves as "nonhuman actors." In thus challenging the traditional ontology of texts as somehow separate from "the world," Felski argues that "[a] text's ability to make a difference . . . derives not from its refusal of the world but from its many ties to the

Flat ontologies require re-thinking the relationship between "parts" and "wholes." Levi Bryant tells us that in a flat ontology, "one object is simultaneously a part of another object *and* an independent object in its own right" (*Democracy* 214). While conventional mereologies[235] posit a hierarchy in which either parts are subordinate to the whole (holism, pantheism, ontologies of relation and flux, dialectics, historicism) or composites are subordinate to their parts (atomism, scientistic reduction), Bryant argues that parts and wholes share *precisely the same ontological dignity.* While the tunnel and the conductor are both "parts" of the railroad infrastructure (they would not exist without the train), they remain "independent objects in their own right." While "the railroad" mediates the reality of conductor and tunnel by defining their everyday role within the infrastructural assemblage, conductor and tunnel are equally capable of "acting out" against the railroad (for example, going on strike or collapsing, respectively), or simply acting *out-side* of that role (for example, by daydreaming or providing a home for rats, respectively).

This "strange mereology" doesn't attempt to locate "the real" on any privileged level, but instead attributes equal ontological "dignity" to every object, no matter its scale: atom, iron rail, boxcar, train, rail network, story. As Bryant says, "it can . . . be said that all objects are a crowd. Every object is populated by other objects that it enlists in maintaining its own existence" (217). Trains are a "crowd," populated by seats and windows, aisles and corridors, tracks and locomotives. Films are also crowds, populated by people and buildings, sidewalks and streets, trains and airplanes, words and gestures, scripts and lights, cameras and editing machines, writers and directors, key grips and electrical tape. When a train enters

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world" (154). One of the goals of this dissertation is to follow these "many ties" back and forth between textual railroads and the railroads of "the world."

[235] "Mereology" is the study of the relationship between parts and wholes.

a storyworld, this is not a matter of two entities—train and narrative—coming together in abstract dialectical synthesis. Rather, this coming-together always occurs as a constellation of *specific* encounters between various components (at every scale) of both assemblages: driver-rods and slapstick comedians and medium-shots and set-pieces and properties managers; the smoke from a steam-engine and VFX artists and ergonomic computer chairs and "knowing" audiences and five miles of "real" track in the desert of New Mexico. We need to be able to speak of each of these actors as productive agents in the dynamic process of emergent worldmaking.

Karen Barad's theory of entanglement is drawn from quantum mechanics, where "quantum entanglement" refers to particles that interact in such a way that they cannot be described separately. While "entanglement" has a very specific technical definition in quantum theory, I utilize the term in a looser fashion. My usage is closer to that of archeologist Ian Hodder, who uses the concept of entanglement to challenge human-centered approaches to the study of nonhuman objects. A typical critical approach, Hodder says,

> takes one aspect of a thing—its symbolism or the labor needed to produce it or its shiny attractiveness or its efficiency in killing and animal or its material links in actor networks—and shows how that particular aspect is made us of, or even constitutes society, or what it means to be human. Things are broken up in this way. Each approach or study takes what it wants of things. (1-2)

In his archeological research, Hodder tries to place found objects within a variety of entangled relations, rather than choosing "one aspect" of the thing. I have tried to emulate this methodological maneuver by experimenting with a variety of literary and filmic railroads, tracing a variety of entanglements, and always keeping in mind that no matter how

thorough the analysis, the textual object remains "withdrawn," and capable of surprising me. Levi Bryant's use of entanglement theory also speaks to one of the goals of this project. As Bryant says, "an ontology premised on entanglements is attentive to how a variety of different objects or agencies interact in the production of phenomena" (133). Thinking "entanglement" forces us to confront the vast array of human and nonhuman actors always already present in any human moment.

Flat ontologies are wild forests of cross-connections, overpopulated and teeming with life, beyond our capacities to control, master, or explain. The kind of "knowledge" required to navigate a flat ontology is closer to exploration than exegesis—familiarity gained through experience; accumulative and ongoing, open-ended, infused with a healthy recognition of not-knowing, forced to approach each moment anew, using past experience as a guide but not mistaking familiarity for mastery. Timothy Morton's definition of "the ecological thought" could equally be applied to how we approach a flat ontology: "[it] is as much about opening our minds as it is about *knowing* something or other in particular. At its limit, it is a radical openness to everything" (15).

Change Your Style, Change Your Thoughts

Each chapter offers a case study for how these rules-of-thumb might shape an approach to interpreting literary and filmic trains. Each chapter theorizes the relationship between human poets (Thoreau, Keaton, Chan, Verbinski, Porter, Theroux) and the poetics of the railroad assemblage (railroad cuts, driver-rods, catwalks, passenger cars) in slightly different ways. Thus, one should be able to read these chapters dialogically, each adding layers of complexity to every other chapter: Theroux's "literary railroad," as theorized in

Chapter 4, offers a new ontology of the Fitchburg Railroad that Thoreau attempts to "mine" for tropes and parables in Chapter 1, while Thoreau's "wandering metaphor" can help us read the "conceit" at the heart of Theroux's art of travel. The tunnel-duck and the shovel-fight should clearly be read through the lens of the "Mobile Gymnasium," while the entangled lines of generic descent theorized using those set-pieces suggest that *every* train story we encounter is participating in a richly layered dialogic conversation between humans and nonhumans, trains and texts, generic structures and unswerving tracks, embodied metaphors and lonely travelers, narrative cinema and spectacular tumbles down embankments, iron and steel and typewritten pages and celluloid.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Manuel DeLanda tells us that the primary way of uncovering the capacities of an object comes from "performing *interventions on them* with the aim of forcing them to manifest their tendencies, or of getting them to interact with a variety of other entities so that they exhibit their full repertoire of capacities" (*Intensive Science* viii). In the case of the set-piece, I argued that filmmakers act as speculative realists insofar as they continually assemble different collections of human and nonhuman objects, place them into novel situations, and then speculate about their potential interrelations. In the process, film set-pieces reveal heretofore unknown capacities and tendencies lurking in both trains and human bodies. In doing so, to take it a step further, the best set-pieces inevitably uncover hidden capacities of *the set-piece itself.* Likewise with Theroux: in making his literary intervention on the railroad, he reveals the hidden tendencies of the railroad to affect the embodied human traveler, while simultaneously revealing hidden capacities of the human imagination to experience train travel in exciting new ways *and simultaneously* revealing hidden capacities of the travel genre. Trains, bodies, and stories are always already entangled

with each other, and in revealing the capacities of one, the capacities of all three are brought to light.

The Humanities spent most of the 20th century interpreting literature and film using tools drawn primarily from linguistics, economics, psychoanalysis, history, and cultural studies. We have been stuck within a post-Kantian framework that told us we only had access to the structures of our own minds and therefore could only talk about "human" things. The Nonhuman Turn adds refreshing new tools to our tool-kit. Attunement to affordances, affects, and nonhuman agency transform the way we experience not just literature and film, but our own lived experiences. No longer standing outside the world, we find ourselves fully enmeshed in an entangled web that we cannot fully control or even understand. Everywhere we look we encounter "strange strangers" instead of familiar entities. The old Russian Formalist doctrine of "defamiliarization" comes back with a vengeance, no longer part of an avant-garde strategy to disrupt the status quo, but as an uncomfortable and exciting mode of aesthetic attachment to the world and to ourselves. Representations no longer cut us off from reality but serve as threads of translation, binding us ever tighter in the web of entanglement between worldmaking entities. In acknowledging the worldmaking capacities of *every* object we can accept our own bodies and minds as "translation machines" that are inextricably intertwined with the specific contours of the built environment and the nonhuman objects we share our lives with. Graham Harman says, "change your style, change your thoughts." But style and thoughts are intimately bound up with the world *out-side*, and thus these changes are indebted to worlds of entities outside of our own minds. Embodied experimentation with different infrastructural spaces—as Buster Keaton or Thoreau or Theroux or the *traceur* do

as a matter of course—is one way of exploring this *out-side*, and thus altering your thoughts, perceptions, and "style." To learn what the body can do we need to experiment, engage, explore, play, and see what worlds emerge.

These conclusions inevitably shape the dissertation itself. This study of the railroad in U.S. literature and film doesn't have as its goal a more-or-less well-argued proposition for what the railroad "means." It does not attempt to do away with particulars in favor of general patterns. Nor does it attempt to explain the railroad by appealing to ideology, symbolism, history, the rise of modernity, or any other hegemonic *explanans*. Instead, it seeks to "acquire a palate": to "register subtler and subtler distinctions that strike us more and more forcibly."[236] The hope, then, is not that the reader leaves the dissertation with a newfound *a priori* reading of the railroad that can then be used as a template for reading blockbuster films and modernist novels. Rather, the hope is that in following me through this meandering

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[236] In *Politics of Nature,* Bruno Latour offers a thought experiment that I have long held as a positive model for knowledge-work in the Humanities. In this experiment, Latour invites you (the reader) to a wine cellar in Burgundy: "in the course of an hour or two you are going to become sensitive, in the process of continually comparing wines, to differences of which you were completely ignorant the day before. The cellar, the arrangement of glasses on the barrel, the notations on the labels, the pedagogy of the cellar master, the progress of the experimental procedure all contribute to forming an instrument that allows you, more or less rapidly, to acquire a nose and a palate, *by registering subtler and subtler distinctions that strike you more and more forcibly*" (84, emphasis added). "Knowledge," in Latour's account of wine-tasting, has nothing to do with demystifying the wine, or "mastering" it in any way. Rather, it has to do with *increasing the mediators,* each of which allows us to register a new distinction. "Knowledge-work" is thus not about stepping back from the wine through an ironic posture of "critical distance," but rather getting *closer* to the wine, *increasing our attachments* to the wine, refracting the wine through *more and more* mediating lenses. He continues: "*reality grows* to precisely the same extent as the work done to become sensitive to differences. The more instruments proliferate, the more the arrangement is artificial, the more capable we become of registering worlds. Artifice and reality are in the same positive column, whereas something entirely different from work is inscribed on the debit side: what we have there now is *insensitivity*" (85, emphasis added).

This dissertation seeks to emulate Latour's wine-tasting experiment by exploring the worlds of the literary and filmic railroad in the spirit of *getting closer* and *increasing aesthetic attachment*. In my own experience, I have found that critical interpretations of texts and films often have the effect of making them "less real" by focusing instead on the "more real reality" behind the text. My hope is that the methodological and theoretical framework of this dissertation allows the reality of my texts to "grow."

exploration of trains, bodies, and stories across a number of genres and representational media, the reader will have developed a palate for registering the nonhuman agency of the railroad. And, thus, that the next time a train enters a storyworld, the reader might postpone the tendency to interpret this train by reference to its symbolic *meaning*, and take a moment to notice the weird, variegated ways that train-parts and narrative-parts and body-parts all come together in each moment to *make meaning* together. By extension, this project is invested in the ongoing attunement of our interpretive faculties to the particular interactions we have with zero degree architecture on a daily basis. As we become more and more sensitive to our embodied existence in the world and to the ways that stories choreograph the tendencies and capacities of multiple bodies in a dance of meaning-making, these nuanced interactions begin to strike us more and more forcibly, and the felt experience of an entangled web of worldmaking is awe-inspiring. There is no closure in a project like this, but only increased sensitivity, a continual embodied attunement to the world, an expectation of encountering each new novel and each new film and each new lived experience as one encounters a "strange stranger."

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