To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Krisztian Horvath entitled "John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* as an Analysis of Empire." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Kenneth Mostern, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Randi Voss, Professor of English

Allen Dunn, Professor of English

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

JOHN DOS PASSOS'S *U.S.A.* AS A STUDY OF EMPIRE

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Krisztian Horvath
August 1998

Abstract

In this study John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy of novels (*The 42nd Parallel*, *Nineteen Nineteen*, and *The Big Money*) is examined as a political critique. Particular attention is paid to describing Dos Passos's analysis of the rise of the public relations industry during the first thirty years of the twentieth century, and to explaining how the innovative aesthetic strategy of *U.S.A.* performs critical tasks. The scope of this study's research includes a study of the major critical works on Dos Passos, as well as an examination of sociological and historical texts on the period covered in the trilogy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	JOHN DOS PASSOS'S AESTHETIC	1
	The Modernist Project and John Dos Passos	2
II.	THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF U.S.A.: AN INTRODUCTION	4
	U.S.A. as a Collective Novel	8
	U.S.A. and Empire	10
III.	THE BIOGRAPHIES: INVENTION, SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT, AND LABOR RESISTANCE	11
	Industry and Technology	11
	Politicians	17
	Radicals	21
IV.	NEWSREELS AND THE STRUGGLE OVER WORDS	28
	John Dos Passos and Journalism	28
	Newsreels and Ideology	32
V.	FICTIONAL NARRATIVES	39
	J. Ward Moorehouse	39
	Advertising and Publicity	52
	Other Characters	54
VI.	THE CAMERA EYE	60
VII.	CONCLUSION	62
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	64
	VITA	69

CHAPTER I

JOHN DOS PASSOS'S AESTHETIC

Modernity has been defined by Jurgen Habermas as "the belief, inspired by modern science, in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the infinite advance towards social and moral betterment," an ideology which sees human endeavor as a project toward improving the life of the individual (Habermas 126). Modern liberalism, with its founding belief in the preeminent value of the individual, and its corresponding faith in a rational faculty which, in effect, connects all people with a common bond, has taken shape since the Renaissance in political movements which promote the interests of the middle class. That is, in keeping with a faith in the rational individual, with a mind unconstrained by any extrinsic forces, the era labeled commonly as 'modern' has manifested itself as a general movement towards open market economics and representative governments. The narrative to which the ideology of modernism is tied charts a progressive movement toward greater comfort and freedom through the means of open markets, technological innovations, and political structures based on the premise of democracy (Habermas 126-128). The United States, on all three counts, can be seen as a representative symbol of modernity. It began as the "new world" and on its soil appeared the possibility for many Europeans to release themselves from the pre-modern institutions and practices which held back the political ascension of the mercantile class. The idea of progress, of a renaissance and a new world, emancipatory social values, political evolution towards

democracy, the individual, the frontier—these are the defining characteristics of the land that would become the United States. They also outline the narrative of the United States, as it is passed down in school, in the home, and in the media. The world was getting better, and the United States both led the way and represented the future of other nations.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, at a time when the United States would begin to expand its territorial and ideological reach and become an openly imperialist nation, there began a pronounced disappointment with the "modernist project." This disillusionment was particularly evident in literary movements which critiqued the belief of objectivity, in individual autonomy, while at the same time trying to place art back into social life, to both compete with a growing mass culture and to remove art from its fetishized status. Terry Eagleton has described this process in his essay "Capitalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism," writing that modernist literature sought to "dismantle the institutional autonomy of art, erase the frontiers between culture and political society" (61).

The Modernist Project and John Dos Passos

The aesthetic of John Dos Passos can be understood in the context of this description of the movement in literature known as Modernism. In his critical writings he insisted on the importance of writers inserting themselves into history. The writer must step in, he argued, and provide readers with an opportunity to see themselves in history and evaluate lived experience against the ideology of liberal idealism (Foley, "History,

Fiction, and Satirical Form," 360-361). While writing *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos wrote that "the business of a novelist is, in my opinion, to create characters first and foremost, and then set them in the snarl of the human currents of his time, so that there remains an accurate permanent record of a phase of history" (Pizer 160). The historical development with which he was most concerned was the conflict between the ideals of liberalism and the growth of monopoly capitalism. He believed the United States had become an imperial state in support of monopoly capitalism, and in the three novels that make up *U.S.A.* (*The 42nd Parallel*, *Nineteen Nineteen*, and *The Big Money*), he produced an analysis of these developments. The focus of this paper will be on Dos Passos's treatment of language in the formation of imperial monopoly capitalism, in his illustration of the betrayal of the meaning of America and the corruption of words and values. Dos Passos combines fictional and nonfictional elements in the structure he developed for *U.S.A.*, interweaving a fictional narrative proper with three other modes of narration: "Newsreels," "Biographies," and chapters entitled "The Camera Eye." In this paper, I will attempt to show how each mode of narration represents a different level of discourse in American society, and that Dos Passos uses this structure to illustrate the corruption of language itself by the logic of imperialism. Each mode of narration provides for Dos Passos an opportunity to illustrate the way the ideology of imperial monopoly capitalism is produced and reproduced on different levels of American society.

Chapter II

The Narrative Structure of *U.S.A.*—An Introduction

U.S.A. can be best understood as a single work, rather than looking at each novel individually, in order. To organize a treatment of Dos Passos's aesthetic practice and his analysis of the ideology of monopoly capitalism, the following essay will examine the themes introduced above in each of the four narrative modes. By organizing the essay in this way, I intend to show how each mode of narration represents a different level of political discourse that Dos Passos analyzes. Since I will be discussing each mode more or less separately, a brief introduction of each mode's form and function will help to outline the general nature of Dos Passos's concern with the theme of language and empire.

The Biographies are prose-poem descriptions of the lives of prominent Americans of the age. Dos Passos selected the subjects of his Biographies from a variety of fields: politicians, radicals, movie stars, labor leaders, and so on. Dos Passos uses the Biographies to insert his fictional characters within the movement of history. But he also uses the Biographies to illustrate one of the ways America produces an image of itself. Dos Passos's use of irony and satire in the Biographies allows him to criticize the form of Biography itself, in its popular form. His use of ironic language in the Biographies helps him to illustrate the ideological mystifications produced in conventional accounts of the lives of "great Americans." Generally speaking, there are two kinds of biographies in U.S.A.: those that satirize American politicians, industrialists, businessmen and journalists

and biographies of rebels and dissidents. The first type exploits the discourse of biography by reinterpreting the major events of the subject's life and putting those events into a new, ironic context. For example, Dos Passos exposes the various legends surrounding Theodore Roosevelt into the context of class issues. The second type, the biographies that commemorate political radicals, generally describe the demise and failure of their subjects, and thus often read like obituaries. In these biographies, Dos Passos uses the form of "biography" in an ironic way, focusing his analysis on the failure of social movements. An obvious example of this is his biography of Eugene Debs, which is as much an analysis of the failure of Debs's compatriots as it is a description of Debs's life. The biographies help Dos Passos chart America's development as an empire and the entrenchment of economic tyranny. They provide a historical framework through which he describes the movement towards eliminating the "other" and silencing discourses hostile to the dominant imperial consciousness. Many of the biographies are either about people who contributed to the consolidation and expansion of state power or to those who dissented from it and attempted to challenge it. The biographies of the rebels are often pessimistic, bitter accounts of their failure and eventual demise. Their fates represent the movement of empire towards eliminating difference; in a sense, Dos Passos is attempting to illustrate a conflict between "U. S. A." and "not U. S. A."

The "Newsreel" sections are formed of newspaper headlines and excerpts, lines from popular songs, and quotations of speeches. They are meant to imitate the kind of news programs shown before features in movie theaters. In the trilogy, Dos Passos uses them to mark time, to signal the development of world events that will impact the lives of

the fictional characters. An example of this occurs during the narrative of J. Ward Moorehouse's marriage; the narration of his honeymoon is divided into two by a Newsreel section about the start of the world war. In his introduction to the first publication of U.S.A. as one book, Dos Passos wrote that he intended in the Newsreels to "give an inkling of the common mind of the epoch" and to capture the public discourse of the times. In addition to providing a kind of contextual background noise, Dos Passos is able to put forward an analysis of the ideological function of the news media through this technique. He juxtaposes headlines, advertising copy, songs, excerpts from speeches and newspaper and magazine articles, to demystify particular ideological claims, to satirize, and perhaps to train his audience to "read" the printed word of everyday America against itself.

Dos Passos wrote that the "Camera Eye" chapters are designed to "indicate the position of the observer." The Camera Eye chapters follow the narrative along chronologically, but they are impressionistic vignettes written in a stream-of-consciousness form. Although they tend to be autobiographical, with many of them describing where Dos Passos was at a certain time in the narrative and what kinds of experiences he was having, some are written from what appear to be an imaginary point of view. One such non-autobiographical vignette, for example, appears to be the interior monologue of a dying soldier. These are exceptions, though, since on the whole the Camera Eye chapters chronicle Dos Passos's own political development and concerns, and as such illustrate some of the experiences which led him towards his analysis of the United States as an empire and his criticism of it.

The wide variety of narrative modes Dos Passos uses in U.S.A. expresses a vision, typical of modernist literature, of a society fragmented into many points of view. The narrative proper expresses this fragmentation as well, as it is made up of the stories of eleven characters whose lives loosely intertwine. His characters come from a range of backgrounds and represent a variety of levels of American life, ranging from Mac, an I.W.W. typesetter, Ben Compton, the radical activist, to Joe Williams, a sailor, Margo Dowling, a movie actress, Eleanor Stoddard, an interior designer, and J. Ward Moorehouse, a public relations executive. There is no "hero" or "protagonist among the characters. Instead, the main focus appears to be on a larger concept, that of an entire social entity, U.S.A. The other narrative modes that frame the stories perform a linking function, placing the narrative into a larger context and maintaining a sense of continuity across the disparate fictional narratives. The subject of the trilogy is not a particular character, but rather the impersonal reality of American social life—a geographic marker of the industrialized north (*The 42nd Parallel*), the year 1919, or the speculative economic boom of the 1920s (*The Big Money*)—and the three other narrative modes provide the fictional narratives with a continuity while at the same time establishing the historical background of the characters' lives. The fictional narratives illustrate the ways in which the logic of imperialism is produced and reproduced in the culture.

U.S.A. as a Collective Novel

The technique of using a social body as the "protagonist" for a novel was not unique to Dos Passos. Proletariat novels of the 1930s were often focused on a social group. In her discussions of *U. S. A.*, Barbara Foley categorizes a novel using these techniques as a collective novel, and her definition of that genre in Radical Representations can help illuminate the link between *U.S.A.*'s elaborate formal structure and its political claims. Foley defines three primary characteristics of the collective novel. The first, as the phrase "collective novel" suggests, is a focus on social relations and group structures rather than just on individuals, such that there becomes a "treatment of the group as a phenomenon greater than. . . the sum of the individuals who constitute it" (400). To achieve this effect, collective novels tend to employ modernist techniques of narration. This second characteristic of the collective novel usually takes forms that fragment the narrative and present material in a cinematic way. It is through these techniques that collective novels such as *U.S.A.* can "direct attention to the process of textual construction and invite the reader consciously to consider the paradigm the author has chosen for describing and explaining the social totality" (401). This is precisely what occurs in *U.S.A.*: the reader must often piece together different fragments that Dos Passos combines, and discover connections between them. In this way, Dos Passos is, in effect, training the reader to interpret the innumerable texts of America. This process forms the third major feature of collective novels, according to Foley, which involves the reader in the "social totality" further by drawing material in from the outside world but also by

pointing towards the outside world at the same time, such that readers must re-interpret their relationship to institutions and ideology. Foley describes this process, writing that

> collective novels frequently assert direct documentary links with the world of the reader. Many proletarian novels can of course be considered "documentary" in one sense or another. Some texts, by virtue of their detailed evocation of work processes and their verisimilitudinous descriptions of environment, could be said to "document" contemporaneous reality. . . "factual" references—newspaper headlines and news stories, fragments of popular culture, brief vignettes introducing "real" people, both ordinary and famous—signal larger historical processes and forces and suggest a context beyond the immediate environment of the characters. These documentary devices frequently direct attention to the problem of ideology, insofar as they represent not merely historical processes and forces but also the discursive practices through which these are known. (402)

Foley's analysis of *U.S.A.* provides a useful interpretive framework with which to study the politics of the trilogy because she explains how Dos Passos's formal structure provides readers with the means to develop a politicized reading of the text. Dos Passos's own politics are less relevant within this framework, and his well-noted ambivalence toward left-wing political movements less problematic. The extent to which Dos Passos was skeptical of Communism in America aside, Foley writes that he "developed a narrative method that was profoundly dialectical and materialist" (Foley 426).

U.S.A. and Empire

This paper is a study of the way in which Dos Passos analyzes the development of a system of global monopoly capitalism, and in particular on his description of the way the ideology of the ruling elites helped to perpetuate the economic order and resist challenges to it. His analysis focuses in particular on the politics of language. From the opening of the novel where the voice of the Camera Eye first identifies the meaning of America with American speech ("America is the speech of the people") and the meaning of words, there is a concern with the corruption of language. Dos Passos is claiming that the promise of America has been betrayed in that words have been sullied by the ruling elites who have perverted the old liberal ideals. The "old words," as Dos Passos illustrates time and again, appear only in an ideological disguise which the satirical form of the novel seeks to uncover. In the biography of the unknown soldier, for example, Dos Passos emphasizes that the sentiments expressed in the speeches at the monument's dedication are hollow shams and hypocritical lies, which function to cover up the fact that the soldier whose body was destroyed to the point of being unrecognizable died, along with millions of others, in the service of imperial capitalism. Throughout the novel, Dos Passos aims to demystify the language of America and to train his readers to perform that interpretive task themselves.

Chapter III

THE BIOGRAPHIES: INVENTION, SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT, AND LABOR RESISTANCE

Industry and Technology

The biographies outline the definitive ideas, personalities, and events of the twentieth century. In his non-fictional writings of the twenties, Dos Passos wrote about his interest in biography as "raw material" for understanding history, and that by recalling biographies, it is possible to recreate the social context surrounding the individual ("A Great American" 26). The biographies outline both the material and the ideological processes of territorial expansion: technological developments, the modernization of production (of both material and consciousness), and state policy.

Technological growth both fascinated and worried Dos Passos. Although some technological innovations resulted in improvements in living standards, Dos Passos's biographies in *U. S. A.* of inventors and scientists focus on the (largely anti-progressive) political implications of invention. These biographies reveal Dos Passos's cynicism in the way they distinguish between inventors and the interests that their work serves. More specifically, *U. S. A.* illustrates the way technical ingenuity and individual achievement, rather than resulting in a general movement towards progress and liberation, served the interests of empire instead.

The biographies of Thomas Edison and Steinmetz figure most prominently in Dos Passos's description of the way science served the interests of capital. They are portrayed as both the beneficiaries and the servants of big business. In the biography of Edison, entitled "The Electrical Wizard," he describes Edison's youth, when he worked odd jobs all over the country and worked on experiments in his spare time. Of all Edison's inventions, Dos Passos mentions the stockticker and the burglar alarm. An analysis of the dominant narrative of rugged individualism, Dos Passos prefaces his description of Edison's rise to fame in New York with "This part is written by Horatio Alger." Dos Passos then describes several of Edison's inventions, in terms of their social impact. For example, Dos Passos mentions "the poured cement house that is to furnish cheap identical sanitary homes for workers in the electrical age" (*Parallel* 311). Edison's failure was in his detachment from history, in his inability to understand the implications of things. He simply worked, according to Dos Passos, on intuition: "whenever he got a hunch he went to the laboratory and tried it out" (311). Edison worked "in collaboration with Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone" because "he never worried about mathematics or the social system or generalized philosophical concepts" (311).

Steinmetz, on the other hand, did think about philosophy and society. A socialist from Germany, he became an employee and, according to Dos Passos, a trophy of General Electric. Immediately, Steinmetz is depicted as an outsider. The opening line of "Proteus," "Steinmetz was a hunchback," leads into an account of his social beliefs, which also placed him on the margins in his home country. A socialist living in Germany during that country's rapid industrialization in the second half of the nineteenth century,

Steinmetz had to leave the country to avoid prison. Dos Passos establishes an association between Steinmetz's physical deformity and his political sympathies: "on his broken back he felt the topheavy weight of society the way workingmen felt it on their straight backs" (333). Steinmetz's greatest accomplishment was a physical law that bears his name, which makes transformers possible. In 1882, the company Steinmetz worked for was bought out by G.E., and Steinmetz's contract bound him to his new company like an object: "All his life Steinmetz was a piece of apparatus belonging to General Electric" (334). Dos Passos sees Steinmetz's situation as representative of the way monopoly capitalism seizes on technological advances: "Steinmetz jotted a formula on his cuff and next morning a thousand new powerplants had sprung up and the dynamos sang dollars . . . and they let him be a socialist and believe that human society could be improved the way you can improve a dynamo. . ." (334).

The final biography of *U.S.A.*, about Samuel Insull, called "Power Superpower," explicitly links technological growth to empire and capitalism. Insull, whose career began as personal secretary to Edison, became an electrical engineer and an executive for major utility companies. "My engineering," Insull is reported saying in the biography, "has been largely concerned with engineering all I could out of the dollar" (Big Money 524). The biography describes the way Insull united his electric companies, bought out coal companies and gas companies, and aggressively fought against labor unions. The biography tracks the spread of Insull's power and serves as a representative of empire. Quoting his memoirs, Dos Passos has Insull saying "Very early I discovered that the first essential, as in other public utility business, was that it should be operated as a monopoly"

(524). As with the biographies of Edison and Steinmetz, in "Power Superpower" Dos Passos implicitly critiques modernism's faith in human knowledge as a means of improving life and empowering the individual. Instead, he describes the potential of electricity as having been immediately fenced off by hegemonic forces. The possibilities that advancements in electricity had created became absorbed into the imperial logic that seeks to confine all potential within its own limits.

The airplane also falls victim to this logic. As noted by a pilot quoted in Newsreel XXVIII, the airplane had a mythic quality: "'I went through Egypt. . . I flew in an aeorplane making the journey in two hours that it took the children of Israel forty years to make'" (1919 238). The biography of the Wright brothers admires their ingenuity, but, as with Edison and Steinmetz, Dos Passos is quick to lament the way the work of the two bicycle repairmen was absorbed to serve the interests of capital. Dos Passos describes the continuum between the Renaissance and the twentieth century in his account of the Wright brothers looking at birds "that the Wright brothers followed soaring with their eyes as Leonardo watched them centuries before" (*Big Money* 295). Modernism, in its development of experimental science, can be seen as an attempt to regulate and control the variable of time and space; and it is this desire to regulate that Dos Passos represents as an inherently imperial logic. The possibilities of flight, instead of expanding freedom, is imprisoned, leading not to progress but to devolution: "in the snorting impact of bombs and the whine and rattle of shrapnel and the sudden stutter of machineguns. . . we flatten into the mud and make ourselves small cowering in the corners of ruined walls" (297).

In Dos Passos's critique of the modernization of production, he characterizes the ideology of science: everything must be standardized, organized, centralized, regimented, in a systematic effort to eliminate heterogeneity—the obstacle to empire and conquest. *The Big Money* focuses in particular on this theme, and the biographies of Henry Ford and Frederick Winslow Taylor are the clearest articulation of what Antonio Gramsci has described in his Prison Notebooks as the "will to give supremacy in national life to industry and industrial methods, to accelerate, through coercion imposed from the outside, the growth of discipline and order in production, and to adapt customs to the necessities of work" (301).

The biography of Taylor, "The American Plan," associates the widespread implementation of scientific management with the loss of skilled labor. On the level of politics, Taylorization represented the logic of empire situated in the factory. Again, it represents the efforts of the state to regulate time and space and to eliminate deviation. The Taylor plan called for autonomy to be stripped from the worker entirely, with engineers planning each part of production: "The skilled mechanics were too stubborn for him; what he wanted was a plain handyman who'd do what he was told" (Big Money 46). Taylor called his ideal worker a "trained gorilla."

"Tin Lizzie," appearing shortly after "The American Plan" in The Big Money, portrays Henry Ford as the businessman most responsible for putting Taylorization into widespread practice. Ford's plants adopted Taylor's scientific management in 1913, after which they had record profits, even though "they had trouble in keeping the men on the job, machinists didn't like it at Ford's" (*Big Money* 72). Critiquing the rigid discipline of

bodily motion on the assembly line, Dos Passos notes that "Efficiency was the word. The same ingenuity that went into improving the performance of a machine could go into improving the performance of the workmen producing the machine" (72).

Ford also attempted to Taylorize the private lives of workers. Dos Passos's biography emphasizes this effort of Ford's to manage the behavior of his employees when they weren't in the factory. Although Ford paid his workers relatively high wages, which Dos Passos notes had the practical aim of instilling them with a consumerist ethos, Ford insisted on moral rectitude. Ford wanted only "cleancut properly married American workers. . . who didn't drink or smoke cigarettes or read or think" (73). This is more than just Ford's attempt to impose Puritanism; it represents the idea that the market system sees no part of social life, no part of space and time, outside of its administration (Nash 120-126). The dehumanization of the worker is, according to Gramsci, the "purpose of American society—developing in the worker to the highest degree automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation" (*Notebooks* 302).

Both Ford and Taylor felt nostalgic for the world they helped destroy. Ford recreated his hometown on his estate, producing a replica of nineteenth century, pre-modern life. As Dos Passos describes it, Ford fears "the new America of starved children and hollow bellies and cracked shoes stamping on souplines" and that "the idle hands out of work will break through the gates and the high fences" (*Big Money* 76). He fears the people who don't have the resources to live in a re-creation of the pre-modern world, and

must live in the modern. Ford, while helping to transform the world into something new, found comfort in putting himself in another time (Nash 117).

Overall, Dos Passos saw management of production methods as assisting the already existent structures of capitalism and as more firmly entrenching those already in power. In addition, he saw it expanding the reach of their power over greater portions of the space and time of people as well as making imperialism in the traditional sense easier.

Politicians

The treatment of politicians in the biographies supports the theme that capitalism is ideologically opposed to the ideals of liberal democracy. The former rests on the freedom to accumulate and manipulate property and the latter is based on the political independence of the individual. This contradiction manifests itself in every case in which public concerns come under private control. A public economy becomes the property of the few, unaccountable to that public. In the process, of course, the wealthy few, by virtue of their wealth, possess most of the social power, in spite of the ideals of equality assumed in liberal ideology. Several of the biographies illustrate Dos Passos's concern with this contradiction, and the biographies of politicians focus on the encroachment on individual rights by privatized wealth.

Dos Passos portrays the influential presidents of the era in a way that illustrates the process by which the interests of capitalism were often concealed under populist rhetoric. Teddy Roosevelt is portrayed early on as the symbol and driving force of the new

imperialism. Before his presidency, Roosevelt was a public figure who was modeled as rugged individualist who had personally contributed to the cause of expanding the reach of "civilization." He campaigned for the presidency as a populist, claiming to be a progressive who would wield the Big Stick against the monopolies that threatened the "common man."

"The Happy Warrior," Dos Passos's biography of Roosevelt, indicts the American presidency as a sham, an office that functions mainly as an ideological smokescreen, as it is held by men who campaign on behalf of the common interest but who work to advance the power and influence of big capital. Ironically condemning Roosevelt as "righteous," Dos Passos writes that although "he told his friends he was going to devote his life to social service" he in fact concealed his imperial drive ("Roosevelt felt the white man's burden") with a veneer of pat phrases: "Strenuous Life, Realizable Ideals, Just Government" (*1919* 160). The biography of Roosevelt depicts him also as the first President to develop a colorful image as a campaign tool, crafted through stories of his accomplishments. This analysis of Roosevelt is developed throughout the novel through the other narrative modes, ranging from scenes in the narrative proper of a young J. Ward Moorehouse dreaming about the rough rider to an early Newsreel which includes an excerpt showing Roosevelt developing his public image in absurd fashion:

> A grand parade is proposed here in which President Roosevelt shall ride so that he can be seen by citizens. At the head will be a caged bear recently captured after killing a dozen dogs and injuring several men. The bear will be given an hour's

start for the hills then the packs will be set on the trail and President Roosevelt and the guides will follow in pursuit (Newsreel IV)

Dos Passos debunks one of the legends surrounding Roosevelt, illustrating both the shallowness of the public images and the ideological interests served by it:

> The American public was not kept in ignorance of the Colonel's bravery when the bullets sang, how he charged without his men up San Juan hill and had to go back to fetch them, how he shot a running Spaniard in the tail. It was too bad that the regulars had gotten up San Juan Hill first from the other side. . . T. R. charged up San Juan Hill into the governorship of the Empire State" (1919 161).

Then, to place the legend of San Juan Hill against its political backdrop, Dos Passos recounts Roosevelt's call for more regular army troops to join those "who were digging trenches and shoveling crap and fighting malaria and dysentery and yellowjack to make Cuba cozy for the Sugar Trust and the National City Bank" (161). Roosevelt may have busted a few monopolies, but Dos Passos dismisses the sincerity or the impact of his "reforms," depicting Roosevelt as a man who ultimately served the interests of the banking class:

> He engineered the Panama revolution under the shadow of which took place the famous hocuspocus of juggling the old and new canal companies by which forty million dollars vanished into the pockets of the international bankers" (162).

He may have challenged the power of the elite in some instances, but Dos Passos skeptically notes that "he left the presidency to Taft after his second term leaving to that

elephantine lawyer the congenial task of pouring judicial oil on the hurt feelings of the moneymasters" (162).

In his treatment of Woodrow Wilson, Dos Passos continues his critique of state policy during this period, based on the contradiction made most evident by the war, that the logic of imperial capitalism was completely at odds with the ideals of liberal democracy. Like Roosevelt, Wilson presented his campaign as a challenge to privileged interests and himself as a champion of populist idealism. He spoke about his "belief in the common man . . . The New Freedom . . . the truth of justice and of liberty and of peace" (1919 255). But once the war began, Wilson became the servant of "the financial centers in the East . . . and T. R. and the House of Morgan." Newsreel XIV declares, "WILSON WILL TAKE THE ADVICE OF BUSINESS." In pursuit of a declaration of war against the Central Powers, Wilson began to endorse "Force without stint or limit, force to the utmost" and he surrounded himself with corporate managers to help him run the war and organize the nation's resources: "Wilson became the state (war is the health of the state), Washington his Versailles, manned the socialized government with dollar-a-year men out of the great corporations and ran the big parade of men munitions groceries mules and trucks to France." Dos Passos repeatedly assault's Wilson for being a servant of empire, as when he sums up the social impact of the war in the biography of Thorstein Veblen: "These were the years of Debs' speeches, growing labor-unions, the I.W.W. talk about industrial democracy. . . War cut across all that: under the cover of the bunting of Woodrow Wilson's phrases the monopolies cracked down. American democracy was crushed" (*Big Money* 119).

In the biographies of the presidents, Dos Passos intends to uncover the purpose of the presidency in the twentieth century as a performance which publicly denounces but covertly enables the expansion of global capital interests (Hughson 56). American imperialism did have its opponents of course, and the majority of the remaining biographies chart the various strategies by which dissenting intellectuals and labor organizers attempted to mobilize critiques of the dominant political structure. Dos Passos focuses his biographies of dissent on the figures he believed to be most representative of the American Left at the time, contributing to his overall emphasis on the politics of class in the trilogy. Although most of these biographies lionize their subjects, they are also critiques of the failure of Left movements in the United States, describing marginalized leaders falling to the power of the dominant order, which manages to ward off challenges through censorship, regulation, and violence. Each biography of opposition describes the life of dissent as one that inevitably leads to a violent or untimely death, or ignominious exile. This set of biographies analyzes the systematic dismantling of opposition movements in the United States, in three major areas of social life: industry, letters, and politics (Morse 543-545).

Radicals

In politics, those who sought to reform political systems and challenge urban machine politics and corrupt privileged influence faced personal ruin. The biographies of radicals tend to read like obituaries, in which Dos Passos uses the stories of failed

dissenters to shed light on the social situation in which they worked. These biographies, then, tend to function as descriptions of the failure of the supporters of revolutionary leaders and as explanations of the set of forces that opposed them.

The first biography in *U.S.A.*, "Lover of Mankind," is as much about the people that Eugene Debs served and fought against as it is about Debs himself. Dos Passos describes the powerful effect Debs's speeches had on working class audiences, as well as the fear with which the elites regarded him. Debs did not want to be thought of as a leader: "I am not a labor leader. I don't want you to follow me or anyone else . . . I would not lead you into this promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, someone else would lead you out" (*Parallel* 51). When he won nearly a million votes in the 1912 presidential election as a socialist, he "scared the frockcoats and the tophats and diamond hostesses" but he was eventually ruined, done in by the government and the press and the forces of nationalism. Dos Passos describes Debs's imprisonment because of his criticism of the administration, at the time a violation of the Sedition Acts passed by Wilson. He went to prison "on account of the flag and prosperity and making the world safe for democracy." Dos Passos is clearly critiquing the system that imprisoned Debs, but the biography is more of an account of the way Debs was abandoned by his once-enthusiastic followers: "where were Gene Deb's brothers in nineteen eighteen when Woodrow Wilson had him locked up in Atlanta for speaking against the war . . . where were the locomotive firemen and engineers when they hustled him off to Atlanta Penitentiary?" (51).

Like Debs in 1912, Bob LaFollete attempted to challenge the corrupt political system by running for its highest office: "In nineteen-twentyfour La Follette ran for

President and without money or political machine rolled up four and a half million votes" (*Parallel* 372). Before that, Dos Passos's biography lauds his successful dismantling of the Republican machine in Wisconsin, and his introduction of the referendum, recall, and direct primaries. Dos Passos portrays La Follette, after he became a senator, as one of the few politicians willing to vigorously challenge the Wilson Administration's war policies. Like Debs, La Follette suffered public censure and ridicule for his opposition. Dos Passos critiques the collusion between the press and privileged interests, describing the newspapers that "pumped hatred into its readers against La Follette, the traitor." During the war nationalists "burned him in effigy in Illinois" during one of his speeches, and "in Wheeling they refused to let him speak."

Without a voice in the political structure, organized labor became increasingly vulnerable to not only physical oppression but to misrepresentation in the press and in the public discourse about the "labor problem." Dos Passos memorializes three prominent members of the I.W.W., all of whom suffered defeat in a nation that had "learned empire" and "lynched the pacifists and the pro-Germans and the wobblies and the reds and the bolsheviks" (*Parallel* 114). The biography of Wesley Everest describes his courage during the Centralia loggers' riot, but it also describes the violence with which business interests responded to labor movements, particularly during the period immediately after the war. Dos Passos attempts to illustrate the gruesome effects of a nation that had "learned empire" during the war, after which the ideology of nationalism was, in effect, turned inward as the elites worked to define what was, and was not, America:

> The timberowners, the sawmill and shinglekings were patriots; they'd won the war (in the course of which the price of lumber had gone from $16 a thousand feet to $116; there are even cases where the government paid as high as $1200 a thousand for spruce); they set out to clean the reds out of the logging camps. Free American institutions must be preserved at any cost. (*1919* 454)

For Dos Passos, the war was fought on the backs of working class people, on behalf of the interests of the capital elite. The war offered opportunities for financiers to make enormous profits, and the nationalism that was promoted in its service became a powerful public relations tool for industry in the nineteen twenties, as hostility towards dissent and difference shifted away from Germans and towards working-class movements. Big Bill Haywood, another I.W.W. leader treated in a biography in *U.S.A.*, helped to organize dozens of strikes until America entered the war. After that, he was imprisoned and then escaped on bail to Russia where he died in exile. The same fate befalls I.W.W. organizer Joe Hill, who was framed for murder after the war and condemned to death before a firing squad. Repeatedly in their respective biographies, Haywood and Hill are described as outsiders, victims of an imperial logic which seeks to eliminate what is outside itself.

In the field of letters, Dos Passos describes a struggle over the existence of alternative ideas and their availability. Dos Passos portrays three intellectuals who persistently offered critiques of the capitalist order but who became increasingly vulnerable to censorship during the repressive postwar era. Randolph Bourne's dissenting message, "War is the health of the state," was silenced in the wake of the war, a situation

Dos Passos describes with an emphasis on the way language itself was being appropriated by the state:

> . . . in the crazy spring of 1917 he began to get unpopular where his bread was buttered at
> the New Republic;
> for New Freedom read Conscription, for Democracy, Win the War, for Reform, Safeguard
> the Morgan Loans
> for Progress Civilization Education service,
> Buy a Liberty Bond,
> Strafe the Hun,
> Jail the Objectors. (*1919* 120)

Like Bourne, John Reed died young, after having suffered "jail in Finland all his papers stolen" and being exiled to Russia (*1919* 38).

Dos Passos lauds Veblen, a professional intellectual, as a great rebel against the general sentiment of most of his colleagues. Contrary to the "businessmen's flunkey's in all the university offices," Veblen produced an array of books which critiqued American society:

> he established a new diagram of a society dominated by monopoly capital,
> etched in irony
> the sabotage of production by business,
> the sabotage of life by blind need for money profits (*Big Money* 119)

For his critique, Veblen drank the "bitter drink" of ostracism and near-poverty, an example once again of the urge to eliminate all fields of difference. Veblen's critique of a "warlike society . . . forced by the law of diminishing returns to grind down more and more of the common man for profits" is illustrated in the biographies of dissent in *U.S.A.*, each of which reads much like an obituary.

For the interests of capital to minimize the reach and the influence of professional intellectuals like Reed, Bourne, and Veblen is easy enough, compared to the task of constructing a popular historical consciousness. In his biography of the Unknown Soldier, Dos Passos analyzes the way in which historical experience itself is defined in terms that limit or redirect potential sources of protest. Dos Passos brings *1919* to a close with a biography of the American Everyman, in which he contrasts the ceremonial discourse of the memorial services presided over by the elite to the untold horror suffered by the young man before he became the unrecognizable corpse buried in the tomb (Wagner 520-526). His last experiences with democracy were the assembly line impersonality of the army ("they weighed you, measured you, looked for flat feet . . . charted your urine and your intelligence . . . drilled, hiked, learned to salute, to soldier") and the terror of combat:

> The blood ran into the ground, the brains oozed out of the cracked skull and were
>
> licked up by the trenchrats, the belly swelled and raised a generation of
>
> bluebottle flies,
>
> and the incorruptible skeleton,
>
> and the scraps of dried viscera and skin bundled in khaki (*1919* 466)

The official commemoration of the Unknown Soldier continues Dos Passos's critique of the imperial logic of the United States, particularly in terms of its strategies to eliminate difference after the war. In this case, Dos Passos portrays the elites managing the meaning of what threatens to be outside its jurisdiction: the unrecognizable corpse of a soldier of the first world war. The meaning of the corpse must be transformed so as to conform to the interests of the capital elite. Dos Passos excerpts President Harding's speech on the occasion, in which he praises the Unknown Soldier as a patriot and martyr: "as a typical soldier of this representative democracy he fought and died believing in the indisputable justice of his country's cause" (464). The purpose of this official fiction is to mask the contradictions of "representative democracy" and the interests of capitalism.

Chapter IV

NEWSREELS AND THE STRUGGLE OVER WORDS

John Dos Passos and Journalism

In contrast to the insistent, often polemical, style of the biographies, the Newsreels seem dispassionate, mild and familiar. In as historically-conscious a work as *U.S.A.*, the clippings from newspapers that comprise the Newsreels seem to be the raw material of historical memory. Of course, Dos Passos intends to move the reader beyond the assumption that news is truth, and to show that the arbitrary nature of the information distributed on a mass scale functions to shape and channel public consciousness (Seed 182-183). In his introduction to the first edition of *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos described the Newsreels as the articulation "of the common mind of the epoch." This explanation of his use of the Newsreels suggests that Dos Passos did not intend them to represent the raw data of History, but rather uses them to indicate a mass psychology, determined in history. His use of the Newsreel chapters to perform this role suggests that he understood that the general perception of history was mediated by mass communication, in a somewhat simple and direct relationship.

This is reflected in his journalism, where Dos Passos frequently wrote about the technological advances in the field of mass communications, and their political and social effects. In 1932, Dos Passos wrote about the Republican national convention for *The New*

Republic. The articles he produced depicted the candidates as puppets in a carefully manipulated spectacle, theorizing that the production of history "is becoming more and more involved with the apparatus of spotlights, radio, talking pictures, newsprint, so that the image-making faculty, instead of being the concern of the individual mind, is becoming a social business" ("Washington and Chicago" 179). Dos Passos worried that the social perception of history was being increasingly controlled and mediated by a carefully arranged and programmed mass media. As the new methods of communications replaced less mediated means of acquiring historical consciousness, they were becoming effective "resources for provoking and controlling mass action." The war, for Dos Passos, had more or less begun this process. During the conflict, the Wilson Administration's propaganda office, in collusion with the distributors of information in all different kinds of media, had removed the meaning of the war from its most immediate referents, so that the horror of the trenches, the awful suffering and annihilation represented not only by the Unknown Soldier but by the maimed and disfigured returning veterans, was systematically redefined as a national crusade in defense of abstract concepts (Rosenberg 88). Dos Passos criticizes the way that history, once it is intentionally mediated, becomes little more than a series of arbitrary signs that represent only themselves, with those who own the means of communication monopolizing the power to define and display reality, "truth," and to separate the acceptable narratives of history from alternative, critical narratives (Poster 12-13).

By 1930, Dos Passos began writing that the most significant area of the class war in America was in the way mass-produced information was influencing social and political

consciousness. The non-fictional work he was producing during the years he was completing the *U.S.A.* trilogy attest to his interest in the effects of mass communications on political conflicts. In "Facing the Chair," his pamphlet written in support of Sacco and Vanzetti, he attempted to warn the public about the forces that were, in the words of contemporary media specialist Walter Lippmann, manufacturing their consent. Dos Passos argued that the ruling institutions—including the police, the government, churches, the schools—had the means to articulate their interests in the outcome of the trial. Dos Passos describes the power to voice the official position as the power to shape the unconscious mind of the public. The media influence on the mind is "an unconscious (occasionally semi-conscious) mechanism":

> An unconscious mechanism is a kink in the mind that makes people do something without knowing why they do it, and often without knowing that they are doing it. It is the sub-rational act of a group, serving in this case, through a series of pointed unintentions, the ends of a governing class.

The governing class, resistant to any alternatives and meanings outside of its interests, achieves its ends through the manipulation of the public consciousness, via the media. In the Newsreels, Dos Passos attempts to mimetically represent the effects of the media on individual consciousnesses. Unlike the biographies, the Newsreels do not explain themselves, or express interpretations of events. They are comprised of a variety of media sources—newspaper headlines, popular songs, speeches, clippings from articles—that represent the bewildering cacophony that is modern communication, which organizes our relationship to reality in celluloid form.

Actual newsreels offered Dos Passos the metaphor he wanted to analyze the paradigm of mass communications. They were designed to be viewed by individuals in a crowd, looking at the same images and hearing the same sounds simultaneously. Although they view the stimulus individually, their isolated, personal experiences are eclipsed by the images on the big screen. The directors of newsreels selected their material with speed and visual impact in mind, narrating historical events at a furious pace, without complexity or controversy. Such a medium could not easily present controversy, because that would require the presentation of more than one interpretation of an event, a task which requires more depth than the newsreel format can provide. The viewer is in the position of a mute spectator, absorbing the images on the screen and the sounds from the soundtrack. Not an active participant in social life, the viewer takes in manufactured stimulus that intend to impose meaning and order on his or her experiences. Phenomenal experience is replaced by a mediated presentation of history, as all events become the property, in effect, of newspapers, cinema, billboards, radio, and, later, television. In the biography of William Randolph Hearst, Dos Passos quotes the newspaper tycoon saying before the start of the Spanish-American war, "When there's no news make news. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war" (*Big Money* 475).

Rather than obscuring the reader's ability to interpret his or her relationship with each individual news item, Dos Passos wants to remove the screens of culture and read the media against its prior mediation of reality. In his handling of these discourses, Dos Passos develops the characteristics of journalism as Benjamin saw them—"freshness of news, brevity, comprehensibility, and, above all, lack of connection between the individual

and the news item"—but Dos Passos wants the reader to critically scrutinize the materials he has assembled in a montage, a technique which can ironize the content of each individual part of it because "the superimposed element disrupts the context in which it is inserted" (*I* 58-9; *R* 234). Penetrating the screen of mass culture, Dos Passos necessarily works against the grain of its prior mediation of the world. If the "principles of journalistic information," at least as Benjamin lists them, are "freshness of news, brevity, comprehensibility, and, above all, lack of connection between the individual news item," Dos Passos wants to use these principles to perform a critical operation on the materials he selects through a "procedure of montage" in which "the superimposed element disrupts the context in which it is inserted" (*I* 58-59; *R* 234).

Benjamin mistrusts newspapers because they aim to "isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader" (*I* 58). Dos Passos collects newsprint in U.S.A. to achieve the opposite effect. He aims to remove headlines from their proper context in order to make readers aware of the way in which newspapers assemble information to obscure reality.

Newsreels and Ideology

In the Newsreels, Dos Passos intends to reproduce the personal and social alienation fostered by mass communications. In part, the typographical presentation of materials in the Newsreels resemble the disorienting appearance of newspapers. Large headlines in bold print are the first texts seen by readers, and the confusing combination

and juxtaposition of stories represent for Dos Passos an appropriate symbol of intellectual confusion. One technique Dos Passos employs in many of the Newsreels to suggest this confusion is to slap a dozen or so completely unrelated headlines together, suggesting the kind of saturation of superficial information that makes up the discourse of the news media.

In *U.S.A.* however, Dos Passos intends to provide for his readers a kind of implied commentary on the ideological assumptions beneath the headlines. He achieves this by uncovering meanings of these messages—and by extension critiques of those meanings—by juxtaposing them and exposing their ironies. Dos Passos frequently uses lines from songs to undercut or recontextualize material, such as in Newsreel LV:

THRONGS IN STREETS

LUNATIC BLOWS UP PITTSBURGH BANK. . .

Close the doors

They are coming

Through the windows

AMERICAN MARINES LAND IN NICARAGUA TO PROTECT ALIENS. . .

Close the doors they are coming through the windows

My God they're coming through the door

The songs in Newsreel XLIV contrast a patriotic message played over the narration of terrible events:

Yankee Doodle that melodee

COLONEL HOUSE ARRIVES FROM EUROPE. . .

TO CONQUER SPACE AND SEE DISTANCES

but has not the time come for newspaper proprietors to join in a

wholesome

movement for the purpose of calming troubled minds, giving all the news

but

laying less stress on prospective calamities. . .

I'm coming U.S.A.

I'll say

MAY GAG PRESS

There's no land. . . so grand

Dos Passos's point in selection is not so much to criticize violations of the rights to free speech, but to show the way they are overwhelmed by a nation's mass-produced self-portrait, which excludes and forgets events selectively. Newsreel VI vividly illustrates this process, with its combination of benign pro-business headlines juxtaposed with factory violence:

> with the metal poured out of the furnace I saw the men running to a place of safety. To the right of the furnace I saw a party of ten men all of them running wildly and their clothes a mass of flames. Apparently some of them had been injured when the explosion occurred and several of them tripped and fell. The hot metal ran over the poor men in a moment.
>
> PRAISE MONOPOLY AS BOON TO ALL (*Parallel* 100)

Newsreel XIX begins with "U.S. AT WAR" which sets the context of the rest of the items in the headlines. The patriotic song "Over there" divides reports of domestic suppression of civil liberties and the profits American businesses hope to make because of the conflict. The headline "ABUSING FLAG TO BE PUNISHED" indicates the kind of legislation passed by the Wilson administration to discourage dissent. Dos Passos juxtaposes songs extolling the virtues of patriotism and freedom with the headline "PLAN LEGISLATION TO KEEP COLORED PEOPLE FROM WHITE AREAS." Another clipping describes a scene of incredible gaudiness, putting an image onto Moorehouse's hopes that the war will be good for business:

> at the annual meeting of the stockholders of the Colt Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company a $2,500,000 melon was cut. The present capital stock was increased. The profits for the year were 259 per cent (420)

Over the course of the three books, the Newsreels undergo no formal changes, although their thematic focus changes slightly, especially by *The Big Money*. In that concluding novel of the trilogy, Dos Passos uses his Newsreel sections to mimic the media's representation of the expansion of capitalist hegemony over post-war America, and to satirize the supporters of Harding's and Coolidge's call for a return to normalcy and prosperity. Dos Passos's emphasis in constructing the material in these Newsreels is on studying the process by which the public was being pacified, especially by a consumerist ideology, which was itself distributed to the public as news: "COOLIDGE URGES ADVERTISING" (Newsreel LVII). One advertisement in Newsreel LXI links fulfillment to consumption, a strategy widely employed then (and perhaps even more

today: "Your future joy, contentment and happiness is so sure that to deviate is to pass up the outstanding opportunity of a lifetime." The Newsreels in *The Big Money* are full of advertisements: for mouthwash and other hygiene products, dancing lessons, real estate, Fords and Dodges, cigarettes, stockbrokers, accountants, prep schools, cigarettes, and therapy. Often in contrast to advertisements promising bliss, want ads seeking workers for mundane low-paying jobs also appear regularly in these sections. Dos Passos often juxtaposes these two kinds of ads—for products and jobs—to expose the cycle that the promotional discourse, as a unified system, persuades the public to maintain. The ads also create the illusion of competition; Dos Passos's purpose in using so many of them is to present the way they function as a unified discourse which promotes, not just individual products, but the existing order as the only possible reality. Finally, Dos Passos critiques the news media as the servant of capital interests pretending to be objective, but in actuality reporting the status of the banking industry, the military, and the opinions and activities of the wealthy, while consistently contributing to America's self-portrait by depicting it as a well-intentioned nation led by benevolent, rational men (Foley "From *U.S.A.* to *Ragtime*" 85). In Newsreel L, Dos Passos includes a clipping of an editorial which articulates this myth:

> with few exceptions the management of our government has been and is in honest and competent hands, that the finances are sound and well managed, and that the business interests of the nation, including the owners, managers and employees, are representative of honorable and patriotic motives and that the present economic condition warrants a continuation of confidence and prosperity.

Dos Passos intends for the Newsreels to represent the ways in which dominant paradigms are distributed and concealed under the benign banner of "news." The 'reality' that was constructed by this system took the form of an inflexible class structure, with a materialistic and crafty elite at the top of the hierarchy. The twelve characters featured in the fictional narratives of *U.S.A.* do not clearly belong to this group, but they are complicit in reproducing the values of the upper class. "Aping them [the elite] is a servile generation of whitecollar slaves and small moneygrubbers" Dos Passos wrote in *New Masses* in 1927. "And under that," he continues, "making the wheels go around, endless formless and disunited strata of workers and farmers kept mostly in an opium dream of prosperity by cooing radios, the flamboyant movies and the installment plan" ("A Great American" 26). Dos Passos believed that the American people had, at least in part, willingly allowed themselves to be controlled by these structures. His often contemptuous treatment of the featured fictional characters in *U.S.A.* is meant to critique that complicity.

Benjamin makes similar observations about the effects of another new development in mass culture, the movies. His analysis focuses on the speed of the images flowing across the screen, a rapidity which seems to pin the viewer down before a flood of sensations: "No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed" (*I* 238) and the political effects of this relationship between film and viewer begin with the viewer taking in images "in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception" (*I* 240) and that "film corresponds to profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus—changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic" (*I* 250). The

result is an increasing inability to analyze images and reflect on perceptions, due to the speed with which they appear, disappear, and follow one another, making it difficult for viewers to focus on an impression, pause, and reflect. This means of perceiving images from movies, Benjamin argues, mirrors the situation of the assembly line: "That which determines the rhythms of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in film" (*I* 175). Dos Passos theorizes films in a similar way, presenting them as being as mundane and mind-numbing as staring at an assembly line. Leisure, for Dos Passos, is commodofied. Thus people are attracted to films, not so much because they like movies, but because movies offer a familiar conclusion to a working day by repeating the rhythms of one's working life in one's leisure time.

Chapter V

FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

J. Ward Moorehouse

Many of the fictional characters find themselves in some kind of relationship with J. Ward Moorehouse. Moorehouse's origins destine him to serve the interests of capitalism. Dos Passos's treatment of Moorehouse's birth demands close scrutiny because it symbolizes the dramatic shifts taking place in the culture at the time. He was named after his mother's father, "a farmer in Iowa and pretty well off" (202). His parentage links him to an age that begins to disappear as the twentieth century moves forward. By the time Ward reaches maturity, America's wealth begins to leave the countryside and concentrate in the cities;. Land stops being synonymous with wealth as the urban industrial centers become the economic nucleus of the nation. Moorehouse will eventually become a symbol of what it takes to accumulate vast wealth and power in the new America.

Dos Passos overtly inserts class issues into his introduction of Moorehouse, by means of an exchange between his mother and the nurse attending the newborn. The mother asks the nurse if the commotion in the hospital won't harm the baby:

The nurse said the little boy ought to grow up to be very patriotic and probably

> President, being born on the Glorious Fourth, and went on to tell a long story about a woman who'd been frightened by having a beggar stick his hand out suddenly right under her nose just before the child was born and the child had been born with six fingers. (202)

The nurse here explicitly links patriotism with personal success, revealing several important meanings. Her story of the six-fingered baby is used by Dos Passos to satirize the nurse's faith that patriotism leads to success. While Dos Passos introduces Moorehouse as an icon, he uses irony to make the reader aware of the anti-icon, the miserable beggar who turns children into monsters with his very touch. Dos Passos imbues Moorehouse with legendary qualities associated with wealth and power while at the same time dramatizing the demonization of the poor.

Dos Passos further develops Moorehouse's's character by means of historical allusions (and at the same time, he uses his fictional creation to read history). For example, there are frequent references to Theodore Roosevelt that link the former president's values with Moorehouse. As a child, Moorehouse glories in the events of the Spanish-American War, during which an ambitious young Roosevelt used the techniques of a skilled publicist to become a national celebrity. In high school, we learn, Moorehouse writes a prize-winning essay called "Roosevelt, the Man of the Hour," a detail which both develops Moorehouse's attitudes but also comments on the ideological function of educational institutions in America. The narrative moves to his early adulthood when, as a young real estate agent unhappy with his work, he sits at his desk daydreaming about the "Strenuous Life," the phrase coined by Roosevelt to describe his world view. This

technique of historical linkage weaves Moorehouse, a fictional creation, with the political texture of his era. More specifically, the references to Roosevelt express Moorehouse's conformity to the principles of aggressive individuality and nationalism that Roosevelt promoted, and which Dos Passos cites as causes of America's entry into corrupt world politics.

Moorehouse becomes a successful publicist because as a young man he experiences intensely the kind of feelings that advertisers try to exploit. Ward's father breaks his hip at the railroad station and unsuccessfully sues the company, which drains the family's financial resources and thereby ends Ward's college career. From then on, Ward holds a bitter grudge against his father. He must leave the University of Pennsylvania where he was making his way into the nation's upper crust and accept petty jobs to make ends meet. Dos Passos's description of his attitude during this time reveals a great deal about the kind of insecurities advertisers exploit most effectively:

> This was a bad year for Johnny Moorehouse. He was twenty and didn't drink or smoke and was keeping himself clean for the lovely girl he was going to marry, a girl in pink organdy with golden curls and a sunshade. He'd sit in the musty little office of Hillyard and Miller, listing tenements for rent, furnished rooms, apartments, desirable lots for sale, and think of the Boer War and the Strenuous Life and prospecting for gold. (206)

Although he is better off than his cohorts working on an industrial assembly line, Ward's job is boring. In this sense, he suffers from the same mundane, mechanical labor imposed on most working-class Americans. Instead of seeking to revolt against these conditions

and thereby challenge the institutional structures that control him, Ward dreams of achieving success within the same power structure. His daydreams focus on the image that would typify promotional iconography: the "girl in pink organdy with golden curls and a sunshade." Dos Passos is suggesting that the discourse of his daydreams, of his desire, has been invaded by the discourse of advertisement (Berger 22).

Many of his cohorts, rallying behind the voices of radicals like Eugene Debs, would choose revolution rather than conformity when thwarted by the same feelings. The strength of the labor movement, stronger in the early twentieth century than it would ever be again, startled the wealthy interests that controlled the nation. These interests steadily turned toward advertising as a means of turning the attention of the discontented worker away from revolution and toward the glories of the department store. The anger, frustration, and inadequacy created by difficult working conditions could be alleviated by the therapeutic benefits of consumption. By distracting the potential radical away from inequalities of American society, the wealthy interests hoped to discourage the development of class warfare. They accomplished this, Dos Passos will show, through a rhetoric of seduction and mystification, with which they were able to prevent the development of a class-conscious language from entering the mainstream discourse of the nation (Vanderwerken 210-212).

He dreams about being a songwriter, but winds up writing "lyrical descriptions" of real estate properties, which begins his career in advertising. He briefly gets a job with a newspaper reporting the gruesome details of American working class life. Working for the Times Dispatch in Pittsburgh, Moorehouse lives in a house rented out by an old

woman whose husband "had been crushed by a crane dropping a load of pigiron over him" (260). The danger and vulnerability of the working class is all around him at this point in his life, and Dos Passos makes a point of emphasizing that, although he himself feels the indignities of a low social position, Moorehouse develops no sympathy for the people about whom he writes:

> He hated the newspaper office and the inclines and the overcast skies and the breakneck wooden stairs . . . and the smell of poverty and cabbage and children and washing in the rattletrap tenements where he was always seeking out Mrs. Piretti whose husband had been killed in a rumpus in a saloon . . . or some woman with sudsy hands whose child had been slashed by a degenerate. (*Parallel* 260)

Soon enough, his writing gets him a job with a steel company as the director of marketing. A contact he had made working as a reporter, Mr. McGill, an official at the Bessemer Products Company, urges Moorehouse to give up journalism for promotion. "There's no future in that" he tells Moorehouse. In this passage, Dos Passos emphasizes the easy transition between journalism and promotion, as well as the hostility industry leaders obviously felt toward investigative ("muckraking") journalism. It is in Pittsburgh that he learns what clothes to wear, how to behave, to play golf and make connections, to marry into wealth, and to appease executives.

He does a great deal of homework, reading a large stack of material about the metal products trade. He also begins to ponder the psychology of promotion:

He was shaving himself with a Gillette; why was he shaving with a Gillette instead of some other kind of razor? "Bessemer" was a good name, smelt of money and mighty rolling mills and great executives stepping out of limousines. (262)

Of course, Dos Passos is trying to draw attention to the absence in Moorehouse's vision of the mighty power of Gillette. It smells of money and executives but not of workers. Workers do not really exist in Ward's imagination. There seem to be only executives on one end of the line and consumers on the other:

The thing to do was to interest the hardware buyer, to make him feel a part of something mighty and strong, he would think as he picked out a necktie. "Bessemer," he'd say to himself as he ate breakfast. (265)

Once he is in a position of authority, Moorehouse sees an opportunity to expand the reach of promotion, towards the shaping of social perception. The violence during the Homestead Strike inspires him to dream up "an entirely new line in the publicity of the industry." This innovation lands him a promotion, to the manager of a promotions office for the entire steel industry. At Homestead, federal agents fired upon striking workers in an effort to control them. Like other advertising pioneers, J. Ward Moorehouse recognizes that a better way to control an unhappy public exists. Rather than shooting at dissenters, Moorehouse sees the potential that public relations has to control a population:

A strike came on at Homestead and there were strikers killed by the mine guards and certain writers from New York and Chicago who were sentimentalists began to take a good deal of space in the press with articles flaying the steel industry and the feudal conditions in Pittsburgh as they called them, and the Progressives in

> Congress were making a howl, and it was rumored that people wanting to make politics out of it were calling for a congressional investigation. Mr. McGill and Ward had dinner together all alone at the Schenley to talk about the situation, and Ward said that what was necessary was an entirely new line in the publicity of the industry. It was the business of industry to educate the public by carefully planned publicity extending over a term of years. Mr. McGill was very much impressed and said he'd talk around at directors' meetings about the feasibility of founding a joint information bureau for the entire industry. (299)

In the character of Moorehouse, Dos Passos charts the origin and development of the American advertising industry, which he correctly describes as a reaction to social unrest.

Making his contribution to empire, Moorehouse travels to Mexico to promote the value of promotion, giving speeches, notably, to the media and not to representatives of the Mexican government or industry. On the train, Moorehouse talked to his fellow businessmen about the economy: "American industry like a steamengine, like a highpower locomotive on a great express train charging through the night of old individualistic methods." Moorehouse goes on to insist that the success of the train depends on the "co-operation, co-ordination of the inventor's brain, the promoter's brain that made the development of these highpower products possible" (281). The irony of Moorehouse using phrases like "co-operation," and, in a sense, usurping the discourse of the labor movement in a promotional effort to overcome it, becomes a signature of the way Moorehouse uses language.

Shortly thereafter, Moorehouse has a meeting with a right-wing judge and a labor leader named Barrow. His notecard on Barrow reads: "Barrow, G. H., labor connections, reformer type. Once sec. Bro. locomotive engineers; unreliable" (284). With this detail, Dos Passos reveals the imperial logic of Moorehouse's mind, in the way that it represents the way difference is identified, marked, and classified as part of an effort to negate it. In this meeting, Moorehouse further develops his theory of the political uses of publicity:

> "The lack of properly distributed information is the cause of most of the misunderstandings in this world . . . The great leaders of American capital, as you probably realize, Mr. Barrow, are firm believers in fairplay and democracy and are only too anxious to give the worker his share of the proceeds of industry if they can only see their way to do so in fairness to the public and the investor. After all, the public is the investor whom we all aim to serve." (284)

Dos Passos clearly undercuts this statement throughout the trilogy. Its very style and structure runs counter to Moorehouse's claim that there isn't *enough* information being distributed. On the contrary, Dos Passos is attempting to represent and critique the intellectual confusion created in part by the massive overload of information and messages being almost constantly distributed in modern America. This passage also draws attention once again to Moorehouse's understanding of the world as being somehow divided between the "public" and the category of "workers."

In this crucial scene, Dos Passos expresses a deep cynicism about America, in his portrait of Barrow. "I am sure that organized labor would co-operate in such a movement" he tells Moorehouse. In his treatment of Barrow, Dos Passos suggests that

participation in any kind of administration or organization automatically makes vulnerable to the logic of hierarchy, structure, and keeping people in line. Barrow, at least, appears as a kind of pathetic figure in the shadow of Moorehouse: "I've rarely heard a businessman speak with such sympathy and understanding of the labor situation" he says. The day after this conversation, Moorehouse gives a speech before a Rotary Club meeting called "Labor Troubles: A Way Out":

> "American business has been slow to take advantage of the possibilities of modern publicity . . . education of the public and employers and employees, all equally servants of the public . . . Co-operation . . . stockownership giving the employee an interest in the industry . . . avoiding the grave dangers of socialism and demagoguery and worse . . .when two men are sore and just about to hit one another is no time to preach public service to them . . . The time for an educational campaign and an oral crusade that will drive home to the rank and file of the mighty Colossus of American uptodate industry is right now, today." (286)

His efforts on behalf of empire in Mexico are rewarded, when the Wilson administration calls on Moorehouse to join the Committee on Public Information, headed by George Creel. Dos Passos intends Moorehouse's views about the war to represent the views of the business elite. "This war is America's great opportunity" he declares (285).

No other industry benefitted as much from Creel's legacy as did advertising, and so for Moorehouse to serve both the CPI and publicity interests suggests the close connection between the two. Having observed the effectiveness of Creel's posters and films, Advertisers published book after book, advancing the notion that companies could

sell their products by associating them with symbols that appealed to emotions and impulse. Edward L. Bernays, a typical advertising advisor, was a nephew of Freud's and a volunteer for the Creel committee. He insisted that primal urges governed behavior and thus if those urges could be understood and exploited by shrewd businessmen, then large sales would result. In particular, he advised his clients to use sex to sell their wares, by associating their products with beautiful young women. There would be no need to "inform" the viewer of the advertisement about the product, because the image and its sexual association would be enough to elicit the desired response Sociologist Stuart Ewen, writing about Bernays, whose ideas are echoed by Moorehouse in *U.S.A.*, argues that public relations executives like Bernays "felt that representive government must now be delegated to the wisdom of industry, to the 'industrial government'." For this rising generation of advertising leaders, Ewen claims, "marketplace control over popular behavior became tantamount to a 'Declaration of Independence' from less developed and more popular definitions of democracy." Ewen's study of Bernays's writings about advertising reveals that the leaders of the public relations industry viewed democracy as a process which could be scientifically managed:

> "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society," he [Bernays] proclaimed. Speaking affirmatively and patriotically of the emergence of the vast media of corporate propaganda, Bernays placed the responsibility for defining the universe of political discourse in the hands of the anonymous inhabitants of Madison Avenue. "We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed,

> our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized". . . Freedom became increasingly characterized in authoritarian terms, and at times even the democratic rhetoric was dropped from business pronouncements regarding the desirability of corporate social control. One business theorist contended that freedom and equality could be translated into the ability of each person to emulate or aspire to emulate the tastes of the upper class; "and what could be a better method of doing this [proving equality] than by consumption."
>
> (Ewen 93-94)

During the 1920s, Henry Ford had to learn that mere assembly-line efficiency would not be enough to stay ahead of the competition, and that mass-market publicity was necessary to keep consumer interest. Warren Susman writes that success in the emergent consumer culture depended on publicity and for Ford to stay atop the "affluent mass society he had done so much to shape, if not to create: price and efficiency alone would not dictate consumer choice. This world of mass consumption was also a world of mass communications in which national advertising and newer forms of national media (radio, film, the new journalism) helped play upon human needs and desires, hopes, and fears" (137). Dos Passos describes the social process by which Ford would descend in his biography: "Just as soon as his wife discovers that every Ford is like every other Ford and that nearly everyone has one, she is likely to influence him to step into the next social group, of which the Dodge is the most conspicuous example" (43).

The success of advertising grew out of the response to labor's modest gains in the early part of the twentieth century. To succeed, business leaders felt they needed public relations experts and began to hire them in large numbers during the 1920s.. As advertiser Whiting Williams commented, any profitable enterprise required a "leader who possessed the ability to develop and direct men's desires and demands in a way to furnish the organized mass sales required for the mass production made possible by mass dollars" (Williams 317). The amount of money corporations devoted to promotion increased each year. By 1920, in most industries, advertising actually occupied half of the production costs. In industries in which production costs were relatively low—such as whiskey, milk, and cigarettes—promotional expenditures were actually five to ten times the cost of production (Chandler 157). These industries saw advertising as a way of ensuring a reliable consumer market.

Advertising did not catch on immediately as an accepted business practice. In fact, many of its early advocates created controversy by introducing ideas that seemed radical to business leaders of the day. Before the First World War, advertisers felt compelled to promote themselves as essential to good business practice. *Printer's Ink*, the trade journal for advertisers, published several articles every month before 1920 that suggested ways of convincing corporate leaders too dependent on "ancient" ways of doing business to see the light offered by the publicity revolution. By around 1920, however, much of the doubt surrounding advertising disappeared. Advertising became an industry all its own, with agencies amassing revenues of $58.5 million in 1918, doubling to $129.5 million two years later, and reaching $196.3 million by the end of the decade. Innovations in manufacturing

during the previous thirty years had created a glut of finished products that had to be moved off the shelves. Ad men began to speak of their work as "business insurance," in the sense that it ensured that the growing quantity of material spilling off industrial conveyor belts would be paid for (Calkins 236).

Publicity hoped to produce consumers as efficiently as factories turned out product. In *Printer's Ink*, and through countless books devoted to techniques of promotion, advertisers exchanged ideas about the kind of method to employ to reach the largest possible audience. Ad men raised fundamental questions about human nature itself, in an attempt to figure out what could best condition the target towards the desired response. Before 1900, most advertisements merely listed information about the product in a scientific way. There were few slogans and even fewer illustrations that were sexually suggestive. The informative approach assumes a rational viewer capable of independent thought, and thus positions the viewer above the ad, free to judge its merits.

After 1900, advertisers increasingly eschewed information of any kind, appealing instead to the social and sexual insecurities of the viewer. Slogans, illustrations, even explicit threats to the social standing of the consumer who dares not to buy the advertised product became commonplace. These techniques clearly position the viewer in a different way; the suggestive ad assumes an audience that is driven more by irrationality and is more vulnerable to prompting. The consumer here no longer judges the ad; the suggestive ad rather judges the social worth of the consumer.

Moorehouse channels these feelings into longings for better work and an improved social position. He seeks to be rich, powerful, famous. He seeks to be envied by others. His anxieties are shared by the mass, as Dos Passos expresses repeatedly, especially in the Newsreel sections. John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing*, has written about the ways that advertising exploits the feelings of alienation and inadequacy that are the products of contemporary urban life under capitalism:

> The gap between what publicity actually offers and the future it promises, corresponds with the gap between what the spectator-buyer feels himself to be and what he would like to be. The two gaps become one; and instead of the single gap being bridged by action or lived experience, it is filled with glamorous daydreams. The process is often reinforced by working conditions. The interminable present of meaningless working hours is "balanced" by a dreamt future in which imaginary activity replaces the passivity of the moment. In his or her daydreams the passive worker becomes the active consumer. The working self envies the consuming self. (148-149)

Dos Passos anticipates some of these ideas by showing characters who deal with these feelings in one of two ways: by joining a struggle to rebel or by subjecting themselves to the value system of a consumer culture that Dos Passos portrays as a machine. Most Americans, pushed along by the mass media and its publicity specialists, chose the latter option, submitting themselves to the role of day-dreamer. Moorehouse sitting in the real

estate office fantasizing about gold and becoming a songwriter dramatizes this widespread phenomena. "Real" life appears mundane compared to the language of promise and material satisfaction offered by the publicists. The difference between the two worlds explains the success of advertising. The differences between the offers made by advertisers and what they actually offer mimics the relationship between the image the consumer dreams of and the consumer's actual social conditions. Mundane jobs bolster this relationship. The passive, stifled worker becomes the potentially aggressive consumer, the former coveting the latter (Berger 148-9).

Dos Passos's allusions to Moorehouse working for George Creel's Committee on Public Information (CPI) are not incidental, then, nor are they intended merely to provide a historical backdrop for Moorehouse's narrative. Rather, they point towards a discourse that the trilogy examines: the discourse of a state-sponsored propaganda campaign, relying on all types of media available. The allusions to Creel, within the context of *U. S. A.* as a commentary on American ideological apparatuses, invite "the reader to follow the formation of his own interpretive paradigm" (Foley 433).

Congress put an end to the CPI in 1919, as it did with many of the war agencies. Creel protested the move, appealing to the president on the grounds that a peace time CPI could promote Wilson's 14 points and his idea for a League of Nations. Despite its brief history, the well-organized Committee had performed its mission and impacted the cultural atmosphere of the postwar era. Advertisers, especially during the 1920s, borrowed from Creel to develop new ways to manipulate markets and simulate consumerism. The nationalism stirred up by the Committee manifested itself in the years following the war.

The Red Scare, the Palmer raids, the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan, restrictions on immigration, and eugenics characterize the twenties as a reactionary, conservative decade. The various progressive movements which had flourished before the war seemed a thing of the past by the time Eugene Debs was imprisoned for voicing his opposition to Wilson's policies.

Other Characters

A powerful, central force, Moorehouse attracts most of the other featured characters towards him one way or another. Janey Williams becomes his secretary, Eleanor Stoddard his interior decorator. Neither woman is troubled by the social system in which they find themselves, and instead, both attempt to make themselves comfortable and, in effect, leeching off of Moorehouse. Dos Passos depicts Janey as being somewhat incapable of being anything other than a victim of her surroundings. She grows up with an abusive father and a repressive mother, who warns her against reading books or interacting with black people. Although Janey eventually develops some short-lived relationships with leftist people, she eventually becomes a parrot of Moorehouse's values. As U.S. involvement in the war draws near, Janey is inspired to superpatriotism; she even voices suspicions that the Jewish family with whom she boarded for a time may be German spies because they changed their name. She later intends to turn in a co-worker as a suspected pro-German traitor because of some negative comments directed toward French officers. Eleanor is depicted as a crass, materialistic person, rising in status as an

interior decorator. During the war, she, too, becomes a paranoid nationalist like Janey (she believes the rumors that Germans had been cutting off the hands of Belgian children).

Eveline Hutchins and Richard Savage also arrive within Moorehouse's sphere of influence. At the beginning of the war, Hutchins runs with a radical crowd, but when she gets a chance, she eagerly joins the Red Cross in France where she works for (and eventually becomes lovers with) Moorehouse, acting as a director of her unit.

Dos Passos positions Savage as a kind of alter-ego. Like Dos Passos as a young man, Savage joined the Norton-Harjes ambulance corps, became sickened by the spectacle of the violence, and was determined to produce art that severely critiqued the government and inspired people to revolt against it. Instead, he becomes Moorehouse's confidant, supporter, and eventually, promoter of his ideas.

Some of the other characters attempt to threaten the interests represented by Moorehouse and Savage, but they usually suffer the same fates experience by the radicals in Dos Passos's biographies. Mac's experiences as a child and as a worker lets him understand the crushing power of the system Moorehouse and Savage work to mystify with advertising. His parents endured joblessness and poverty before they died. His uncle Tim educates Mac about the socialist movement, and allows him to work in his printing shop, where the new linotype "stood there like an organ in a church." Dos Passos's description of the linotype in religious terms suggests both the influential power of new inventions in communications as well as the liberatory potential of the printed word. It's first words are "Workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains." However, Dos Passos also intends to make clear that the liberatory potential of the

linotype is limited and bounded in a repressive social context; Uncle Tim's shop, responsible for the printing of left-wing literature, goes bankrupt because of his participation in a printer's strike. After a series of odd jobs and political actions, Mac ends up in exile in Mexico, an ineffectual rebel against empire, consumed by feelings of guilt that he has "sold out."

Dos Passos's depiction of Ben Compton and Mary French—radicals who are more committed and perhaps better prepared to participate and lead organized resistance than Mac—expresses his suspicion of the radical movement in the twenties. Dos Passos develops these two characters in a way that suggests that repression was not the only reason the Left failed in America in the nineteen twenties.

The other characters endure different kinds of suffering in the industrial machine. Joe Williams moves from job to job before dying in a bar brawl. Daughter (Elizabeth Anne Trent) becomes involved with Moorehouse's circle in France, where she commits suicide after becoming pregnant. Margo Dowling moves from meager conditions to stardom in Hollywood, where she develops a public image based on a fabricated narrative about her past.

Charley Anderson, a pilot and mechanic, founds an aviating business that is taken over by more competent and shrewd businessmen, who then push him out. He is depicted as an indifferent, hedonistic youth, easily swayed by the company he is in. For example, he joins the A.F. of L. because of the influence of one friend. Later, when he meets Doc, a racist nationalist, Charley is persuaded to join the war. Dos Passos ends the first novel

in the trilogy with a picture of Charley's apathy, as he does nothing while a group of pacifists are attacked for not singing the national anthem.

Charley Anderson lives a rather ne'er-do-well life, but then winds up, improbably enough, fabulously wealthy after landing the engineering job. The significant things about Charley's rise is that he never seems to be in control of his fortunes; he neither succeeds nor fails based on his own merit or effort or lack thereof. Nor does Charley seem to enjoy his wealth and social position, as the traditional Alger-like American mythology suggests, in its correlation between money and happiness. He seems to allow himself to be the passive marionette of the experiences that come to him. Dos Passos narrates his death in a way that suggests this: "He was dropping spinning being sucked down into."

The showroom in which Charely Anderson applies for a job exemplifies the link between automobiles and advertising: "the salesroom had a big plate glass window with *Ford* slanting across it in blue letters. Inside stood a new truck all shining and polished"(57). One of the reasons Charley gets the job is because of his draw as a war veteran: the dealership can capitalize on his identity as a veteran of the war to promote their products, and thereby associate their enterprise with nationalism and loyalty. The manager of the dealership tells Charley that he would represent free advertising for them, especially if "'the newspaper boys . . . came down to the salesroom to interview you'." Through the mass media, the dealership can attempt to stand out apart from its competitors. "'They eat up this returnedhero stuff . . . String 'em along a little, won't you?'" (57).

Charley works for them, but only for a short while, going from job to job, for although he is a skillful mechanic, he has returned from the war to a consumer culture. His daily routine exemplifies the pattern of life emerging in the United States at this time; each day is divided into work and leisure time. As Dos Passos wrote elsewhere, bemoaning a society in which work and play are compartmentalized, "what you get is a division of life into drudgery and leisure instead of into work and play" (Prose 122).

Charley uses much of his leisure time to go to the movies, and through him Dos Passos documents the enormous effect of the movies on the consciousness of individual Americans. In the third novel, Charley runs into an old girlfriend who asks him if he remembers when they went to see *The Birth of a Nation* together (*BM* 346). After the First World War, movies became perhaps the most popular form of entertainment, an activity that attracted members of all classes, particularly after 1920. Dos Passos, however, portrays movies in a negative way. When watching *Birth of a Nation*, Charley ignores the Klansmen on the screen because he is trying to inch his hand up his date's skirt. At another moment, Dos Passos writes that "They went to a moving picture house for a while, but the film was lousy, so charley went uptown glum and tumbled into bed" (224). Movies offer temporary escapes from emotional trauma and anxiety in U.S.A.; they never offer hope or provoke much thought in his characters (Foster 189). In 1915, Vachal Lindsey wrote about the escapism that movies offered from a boring world: "Forced by their limited purses, their inability to buy a Ford car, and the like, . . . many people have begun to go in their loneliness to film after film until the whole world seems

to turn on a reel. When they are again at home, they see in the dark an imaginary screen with tremendous pictures whirling by at a horribly accelerated pace" (229).

The reverse begins to happen as well, where the world begins to resemble the movies, and reality begins to represent film, it has so entered into consciousness. When Charley is recovering in a hospital bed from injuries, he looks up to see "a pretty pink nurse's face bloomed above him like a close-up in a movie" (381). Dos Passos's comment on movies here is made more vivid by Charley's psychological situation. He awakens out of a coma, and into a world that has been taken over by the movies. Earlier, on a date, a nervous Charley is unsure how to act. His date tells him to just "act natural." Charley thinks about movies he's seen and about the way people behaved in them, and he attempts to modify his own behavior against what he has seen on the big screen. Elsewhere, Dos Passos writes that "Tabloids and movies . . . take the place of mental processes" (Prose 99).

Chapter VI

THE CAMERA EYE

In the Camera Eye sections, Dos Passos attempts to chart his own developing reactions to the historical period covered by the trilogy. He wrote that the Camera Eyes were meant to "indicate the position of the observer." Although many of the Camera Eye sections are abstract to the point of complete obscurity, they tend to chart a movement from childhood innocence to disillusionment and finally to political outrage and commitment.

The early Camera Eye sections recreate the confused perceptions of a young Dos Passos, growing up in privilege but clearly in a world threatened by unrest and conflict. The first two Camera Eye sections describe Dos Passos running with his mother through the streets during some kind of riot; the second describes Dos Passos as a young boy on a train in New York, playing with a set of miniature toy cannons given him by his uncle, an image which echoes the war headlines in the Newsreels that surround the piece. Camera Eye (7) is one of several early sections that describe the young Dos Passos's contacts with and reactions to intolerance and violence, with his thoughts about "we clean young American Rover Boys" and the warning he was given that "Bohunk and Polak kids put stones in their snowballs write dirty words up on walls do dirty things up alleys."

The sections that recount his years at Harvard describe his growing interest in politics and a self-conscious awareness of his privileged position. He reacts with great

shock and bitterness towards gruesome events, like Camera Eye (20), which describes the death of a "scab" who dies in a terrible railroad accident in which his head is crushed between the bumpers of two cars. In Camera Eye (26), Dos Passos remembers his experience at an anti-war gathering which featured speeches by Emma Goldman. These interests lead to his service in Europe, where he seeks to see the war first-hand and to explore the possibilities of resistance.

The Camera Eye sections in *The Big Money* tend to be a great deal more direct and polemical, and take the form of both critiques of the government and of radical leftists. They also tend to be preoccupied with ideology, with the way that the discourse of promotion and empire becomes a part of everyday street culture. Camera Eye (46) captures a cityscape that is a kind of collage of materials from newspapers, advertisements, and shop windows and intends to critique the intrusion upon his thought by mass culture: "walk the streets and walk the streets inquiring of Coca-Cola signs Lucky Strike ads price tags in storewindows scraps of overheard conversations stray tatters of newsprint yesterdays headlines sticking out of ashcans." The last few Camera Eye chapters attempt to capture his disappointment with alternatives, his cynicism with the left movement and an attendant feeling of paralysis, and his brooding discontent.

Chapter VII

CONCLUSION

Critics have generally treated *U.S.A.* as a work of naturalism, a genre that can be thought of as a literary technique and a certain point of view on the world. It includes some degree of determinism, in that people's lives are depicted as being determined by some force larger than themselves (class relations, biology, God, etc.). In the United States and Europe, the rapid industrialization and urbanization that took place in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century led authors to investigate the overwhelming and overpowering forces of these developments, which affected the environment (the social environment as well as the natural) in such a way that individuals seemed to be the playthings of forces beyond their control.

Some critics of naturalism have pointed out in their studies that early writers of this school faced problems langley because there was not a literary tradition before them of narratives in which the individual did not count. In naturalistic fiction, it is the environment itself that is the "hero" of the work. Critics of Dos Passos, such as Barbara Foley and John William Ward, have credited him with developing techniques in *U.S.A.* that allowed him to depict a society in which there are no individuals, only a set of depersonalized social structures that behaved, in Alfred Kazin's words, like a "conveyor belt carrying Americans through some vast Ford plant of the human spirit" (Kazin 349). The title of the trilogy suggests this, as well as another key part of Dos Passos's aesthetic.

U. S. A. is the name of a nation, of an enormous social entity. As a signifier, "U. S. A." is extremely unstable, undergoing constant change in changing contexts. It must signify the experiences of a multitude of people and the relationships of individuals to each other and the social whole. It is Dos Passos's concern with power, particularly the power of language—to shape reality and manipulate people—that forms the main theme of *U.S.A.* The novel traces the growth of the public relations industry, and bitterly charts the way that the discourse of public relations—another way of saying 'propaganda,' a word that advertisers themselves used freely and frequently during the 1920s—became the dominant discourse of the culture. From advertising copy itself, to the speeches made by politicians to sell the war to the public, the ascent of the language of promotion is the novel's primary concern.

Walter Benjamin wrote that "Today the most real, the mercantile gaze into the heart of things is the advertisement . . . it abolishes space where contemplation moved and all but hits us between the eyes with things as a car, growing to gigantic proportions, careens at us out of a film screen" (*Reflections* 85). Benjamin's metaphor reveals the extent of his critique—advertising, and by extension movies, it would seem all mass media, produces such an illusion of immediacy and verisimilitude that it obscures critical reflection by closing the distance between the artificial and the real. Dos Passos weaves advertisements and headlines into his narrative to ironize them, to place the fragments he takes from mass culture and to juxtapose them in a way that trains his readers to discover new meanings in them, and thereby achieve a kind of critical agency. The reader sees these fragments, but sees them in a new way—mediated through Dos Passos's narrative.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aaron, Daniel. *Writers On the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism*. New York: Harcourt, 1961.

Allport, Floyd Henry. *Social Psychology*. London: Thoemmes Press, 1924.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127-86.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

--------. *Reflections*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 1986.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Viking, 1973.

Calkins, Ernest Elmo. *Business the Civilizer*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1928.

Carey, James W. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Carr, Virginia Spencer. *Dos Passos: A Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1984

Chandler, J F. *Giant Enterprise, Ford, General Motors, and the Automobile Industry*. New York: Harcourt, 1964.

Creel, George. *How We Advertised America*. New York: Adorno rep 1972

Diggins, John P. "Dos Passos and Veblen's Villains." *Antioch Review* 23 (Winter 1963): 485-500.

Eagleton, Terry. "Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism." New Left Review 152 (July-August 1985): 60-73.

Dos Passos, John. *The Big Money*. New York: Signet Classic reprint, 1979.

_____. *Facing the Chair: The Story of the Americanization of Two Foreignborn Workmen*. Boston: Secco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, 1928.

_____. "A Great American." *New Masses* 3 (December 1927): 26.

_____. *Nineteen Nineteen*. New York: Signet Classic reprint, 1979.

_____. *The 42nd Parallel*. New York. Signet Classic reprint, 1979.

_____. "Washington and Chicago II: Spotlights and Microphones." *New Republic* 71 (29 June 1932): 178-179.

_____. "The Writer as Technician." *American Writer's Congress*, edited by Henry Hart. New York: International Publishers, 1935, 78-82.

Ewen, Stuart. *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. New York: McGraw, 1976.

Foley, Barbara. "From *U.S.A.* to *Ragtime*: Notes on the Forms of Historical Consciousness in Modern Fiction." *American Literature* 50 (March 1978): 85-105.

_____. "History, Fiction, and Satirical Form: The Example of Dos Passos' *1919*." *Genre* 12 (Fall 1979): 357-78.

_____. *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941*. Durham: Duke UP, 1993.

Foster, Gretchen. "John Dos Passos' Use of Film Techniques in *Manhattan Transfer* and *The 42nd Parallel*." *Literature/Film Quarterly* 14 (1986): 186-194.

Gold, Michael. "The Education of John Dos Passos." *English Journal* 22 (February 1933): 87-97.

Gramsci, Antoni. *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.

Greenberg, Clement. "Avant-garde and Kitsch." 1939. *Art and Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1961. 3-21.

Greenblatt, Stephen J. *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Hicks, Granville. "John Dos Passos." *Bookman* 74 (April 1932): 32-41.

Hughson, Lois. "Dos Passos's World War: Narrative Technique and History." *Studies in the Novel* 12 (Spring 1980): 46-61.

Kazin, Alfred. *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*. New York: Harcourt, 1942..

Knox, George. "Dos Passos and Painting." *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 6 (Spring 1964): 22-38.

Lindsay, Vachel. *The Art of the Moving Picture*. 1915. New York: Liveright, 1922.

Marz, Charles. "Dos Passos's Newsreels: The Noise of History." *Studies in the Novel* 11 (1979): 194-200.

Morse, Jonathan. "Dos Passos' *U.S.A.* and the Illusions of Memory." *Modern Fiction Studies* 23 (Winter 1977-78): 543-556.

Mumford, Lewis. *Art and Technics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952.

Nash, Roderick. *The Nervous Generation: American Though, 1917-1930.*

Poster, Mark. *The Mode of Information: Poststructuralism and Social Context*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1990.

Rosenberg, Emily S. *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982.

Seed, David. "Media and Newsreels in Dos Passos' *U.S.A.*" *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 14:3 (Fall 1984): 182-192.

Smith, Paul. *Discerning the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Susman, Warren. *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Vanderwerken, David L. "*U.S.A.*: Dos Passos and the 'Old Words'." *Twentieth Century Literature*. 23 (May 1977): 195-228.

Wagner, Linda W. "The Poetry in American Fiction." *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 2 (1976): 513-526.

VITA

Krisztian Horvath was born in Budapest, Hungary on January 17, 1974. He attended schools in the public system of Fairfax County, Virginia, where he graduated from Fairfax High School in June, 1992. He entered George Mason University in August of 1992, and transferred to James Madison University the following year. He graduated from James Madison University with a B.A. in English in May of 1996. He entered the Master's program in English at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August of 1996, officially receiving the Master's in August, 1998. He is presently preparing to attend law school.