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Bruce Springsteen, Rock Poetry, and Spatial Politics of the Promised Land

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Abstract: The humanistic-geographical associations of popular music foster the potential to articulate the production and reproduction of an activity-centered politicized ontology of space in the everyday social life of any creative communitarian framework where an alternative set of lifestyles, choices, and tastes engage in a constant play. A cursory glimpse at the (counter-)cultural artistic productions of the American 1970s shows that the lyrical construction of real and imaginary geographical locales has remained a distinguishing motif in the song-writing techniques of the celebrated rock poets. In the case of Bruce Springsteen, whether it is the ‘badlands’, constituting the rebellious and notorious young adults, or the ‘promised land’, which is the desired destination of all his characters, his lyrical oeuvre has numerously provided an alternative sense of place. Springsteen’s lyrical and musical characterization of fleeting urban images like alleys, hotels, engines, streets, neon, pavements, locomotives, cars, etc., have not only captured the American cities under the changing regime of capital accumulation but also contributed to the inseparability of everyday social lives and modern urban experiences. Against the backdrop of this argument, this article seeks to explore how the socio-political and cultural aesthetics of Springsteen’s song stories unfurl distinct spatial poetics through their musical language. Also, the article attempts to delineate how Springsteen’s unabashed celebration of the working-class geography of the American 1970s unveils a site of cultural struggle, wherein existing social values are reconstructed amidst imaginary landscapes and discursive strategies of resistance are weaved.

Keywords: rock poetry; popular music; spatial politics; Springsteen; American 1970s; sense of place



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1. Introduction

Outside the street’s on fire in a real death waltz
Between what’s flesh and what’s fantasy
And the poets down here don’t write nothing at all
They just stand back and let it all be
And in the quick of a knife, they reach for their moment
And try to make an honest stand
But they wind up wounded, not even dead
Tonight in Jungleland

—Bruce Springsteen (1975), “Jungleland”, *Born To Run*.

Amidst the tapestry of cultural discourse, popular music emerges as a powerful mediator, intricately interwoven with socially constructed spaces that shape individual subjectivity and identificatory processes. Professor George Lipsitz, in his defining work *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Lipsitz 1990), has meticulously examined the relation between popular music and societal dynamics, highlighting its profound influence on human identity formation. He has opined that “one reason for

popular music's powerful effect is its ability to conflate music and lived experience, to make both the past and present zones of choice serve distinct social and political interests" (Lipsitz 1990, pp. 103–4). Indeed, the cultural legacy of popular music has consistently sculpted social interactions and perceptions, enriching the fabric of everyday life with alternative 'spaces' that breed cultural resistance. This intersection between music and societal contexts has spurred a renaissance in geographical discourse, particularly since the latter half of the 1960s. Having been influenced by radical existentialist and phenomenological ideologies, this new paradigm emphasizes human experience within the geographical interpretations of literature while delving into the complex mosaics of human existence. By infusing popular music with humanistic geographical perspectives, a deeper understanding of socio-political and cultural aesthetics emerges, which offers a nuanced exploration of the musical language. Much like poets, popular musicians and songwriters navigate the continuum of 'social space', forging new associations between everyday places and human interactions. The symbolic resonance of 'space' and 'place' within the lyrics of popular songs not only enriches cultural discourse but also encapsulates collective emotions and societal moods. Through their lyrical representations of territorial locations, popular songs become conduits for collective historical memory, challenging dominant social structures and shaping cultural landscapes. Thereby, from a humanistic geographical standpoint, the exploration of the socio-political and cultural contexts of such popular songs unveils a narrative of struggle wherein existing cultural values are reconstructed amidst imaginary landscapes imbued with discursive strategies of resistance.

Rock poetry, serving as a pivotal medium for articulating the collective dissent of disenfranchised American youth of the 1960s and 1970s, has long exalted the aesthetic allure of transient urban landscapes. In these lyrical narratives, the alleys, hotels, pavements, and clandestine corners of the city intertwine seamlessly with the quotidian experiences of its denizens. The portrayal of urban imagery within rock lyrics reveals a nuanced comprehension of the geographical associations of urban life. As elucidated by Bob Jarvis in his article "The Truth is Only known by Gutter-snipes" (Jarvis 1985), "the life of the city in rock lyrics is that of a street life, a street corner society which finds itself in a glamourized, synthetic hanging out" (Jarvis 1985, p. 111). In rock anthems, urban landscapes often serve as canvases for portraying an idealized realm—a utopia—where mundane emotions gain deep significance within the bustling modern city. This imagined utopia resonates strongly with urban youth, the primary audience for rock music, who actively engage with the spatial fabric of their environment through the consumption of rock songs. Thereby, urban spaces become sites of cultural expression through popular music, shaping and reflecting identities within the social landscape. Rock music's intricate blend of lyrics and melody contributes to a novel portrayal of urban life, particularly in the American context. The rock artists function as architects of this urban imagination, capturing the ever-evolving dynamics of cities influenced by economic forces and shifting demographics. During the transformative decades of the 1960s and 1970s, rock songs emerged as tools of spatial awareness, challenging entrenched systems of racial, class, and gender-based segregation. It is important to mention in this context that Henri Lefebvre's timeless work, *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre 1991), unveils an ontology of space centered on the active politicization of 'everyday life.' He posits that spatial phenomena are integral to lived experiences, shaped by individual and collective actions within socially constructed landscapes. Lefebvre's framework illuminates the dialectical interplay between domination and resistance across varied social terrains, where spaces are both shaped by and shaped societal dynamics. Despite the sense of fragmentation inherent in urban environments, American cities bear a legacy of creative resilience, resisting the forces of alienation. Whether through Jim Morrison's vivid evocation of Los Angeles, Bruce Springsteen's poignant tribute to Asbury Park, Bob Dylan's introspective exploration of Memphis, or Simon and Garfunkel's haunting rendition of New York, their individual projection of the urban areas resonates with a profound 'sense of place', spotlighting hidden enclaves and subcultural subversions. These clandestine urban spaces serve as crucibles of "representational space", which is

inhabited by “artists, writers, and philosophers” (Lefebvre 1991, p. 39). While being shaped by global capitalist hegemony and ideological contradictions, such spaces also harbor the potential for resistance and collective social emancipation. The act of spatial reappropriation emerges as a motif of dissent against neoliberal hegemony, offering lived scenarios ripe for imaginative transformation and societal reformulation. Thus, the realm of ‘representational space’ engenders a dialectic of action and imagination, fostering new vistas of coherence and cohesion amidst societal flux. The conception of ‘representational space’ within urban locales temporally transcends the conventional demarcations of private and public domains, eschewing escapism in favor of a probing interrogation of prevailing social configurations. Throughout the history of American rock music, there exists a vivid reflection of such ‘representational spaces’ as it courageously navigates the recesses of urban corporeality, excavating the substrata of ‘lived’ cityscapes with unwavering resolve.

However, against the backdrop of this argumentative paradigm, this article will explore a humanistic geographical understanding of the real as well as the imaginary places that have been produced and reproduced by the American urban imagination of the 1960s and 1970s through the artistic medium of rock poetry and music, which has remained the most popular cultural production of that era. The article will also explore the spatial construction of the poetics of rock music by focusing on select lyrical oeuvres of Bruce Springsteen, whose contribution to modern American music and poetry has sought to redefine the representation of landscapes, cities, and culture. While emphasizing the first half of Springsteen’s career, which comes under the direct influence of the 1960s, this article attempts to decode the ‘lived’ social space that was inhabited by Springsteen’s characters in select songs. Focusing on Henry Lefebvre’s idea of the production of social space, this article specifically critiques the potential of alternative socio-spatial imagination in Springsteen’s song stories and explores how the formation of new urban imaginaries in his songs has contributed towards the construction of ‘spatial resistance’ across everyday modern urban American lives. Also, this article will try to understand how the identificatory processes in Springsteen’s songs have created a territorial imagination of place inside the imaginary and symbolic realm of American cities.

The phenomenon of American counterculture transcends the confines of the 1960s, extending its spirited essence well into the late 1970s, before the seismic ‘punk’ revolution took hold. Following the zenith of rock ‘n’ roll in 1969, the landscape of popular music underwent a metamorphosis, diversifying its generic functionalities. Amidst the socio-economic tumult and political convulsions of the 1960s, America witnessed a fleeting interlude of depoliticized mass cultural reality. This epoch found the urban youth enraptured by pivotal events such as the Stonewall Riots, the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Movement, and the harrowing Vietnam War, all of which had severely ignited fervent political engagement. However, this fervor gradually waned, and the highly spirited American youth retreated from the politically charged public sphere while seeking solace within the confines of their private realms and fragmented along ideological lines. The advent of an increasingly technologized, privatized, and massified culture facilitated the commodification of private virtues, relegating the once vibrant public spaces of early 1970s America to a diminished state. Consequently, many young individuals relinquished their responsibilities to the broader community amidst despotic social conditions. This decline in socio-economic cohesion within American society finds resonance in the works of scholars such as Robert D. Putnam, whose work *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000) chronicles this societal shift. Similarly, Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (1985) represents early academic endeavors to elucidate the underlying concerns fueling the rise of American individualism. Against the backdrop of such societal fragmentation along the lines of sexuality, class, gender, religion, race, and ethnicity, the communal fervor birthed in the 1960s began to unravel in the early 1970s.

At the nexus of such a tumultuous socio-political and cultural juncture in America, Bruce Springsteen was hailed as the resonant voice of a generation ensnared by the perva-

sive tendrils of alienation and existential disquietude. Embarking on his musical odyssey in the latter epoch of the 1960s, Springsteen, akin to his contemporaries, found himself steeped in the transformative ethos of musical and literary luminaries such as Bob Dylan, Elvis Presley, Roy Orbison, Chuck Berry, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac. While the sonic landscape of the preceding era had indelibly marked its imprint upon his melodic cadence, production aesthetics, and recording methodologies, Springsteen's lyrical oeuvre deliberately eschewed the overtly confrontational political paradigms that typified the earlier part of the decade.

2. Bruce Springsteen and (Re)-Politicization of the American Rock Culture

In stark contrast to the strident politicking of protest anthems and slogan-laden ballads, Springsteen's sonic tapestry wove a rich tableau of the intricate and enigmatic tribulations besetting the quotidian lives of working-class people, the tumultuous psychosocial terrain of adolescence, and the ebullient camaraderie of communal spirit. During the 1970s in the United States, 'blue-collar' communities experienced a rise in influence across various urban areas, ranging from small towns like Freehold, New Jersey, to larger cities like those in Texas, Memphis, and New York City. However, amidst this urban growth, there was a noticeable feeling of existential alienation among the working class. This led to a shift towards more individualistic values over time. Springsteen, attuned to the spirit of the times, adeptly addressed the widespread discontent among the American working class, utilizing it as material for sharp social analysis and striving to preserve the evolving essence of working-class identity within the dynamic urban environment. Thus, through his artistry, Springsteen emerged as a herald of societal introspection, excavating the fissures of existential ennui and societal upheaval to forge a narrative tapestry that resonated deeply with the zeitgeist of his era.

Springsteen's lyrical narratives often depict a metaphorical journey wherein his characters navigate through a vivid urban landscape characterized by bustling activity, incessant car horns, uniform building structures, artificial greenery, and dimly lit streets. Within these figurative journeys, the characters embark on a frantic quest for a sense of completeness and totality that transcends the stark divisions of a technocratic mass society and a culturally polarized environment. Springsteen's characters embody a blend of opposing elements—as McParland has opined, "flesh and spirit, oil and blood, wild engines ready to be turned on" (McParland 2007, p. 21)—representing untamed energy awaiting activation. Consequently, the portrayal of their everyday urban reality becomes notably assertive yet precarious. In other words, the characters' bold assertion of their existence within the urban milieu, asserting their identity and desires despite the overwhelming urban environment, makes them self-assertive. Conversely, the fragile and unstable nature of their reality, highlighting the constant challenges and risks they face as they navigate through this urban landscape, situates the characters in a precarious and vulnerable condition. This juxtaposition captures the complex interplay between resilience and vulnerability inherent in their everyday experiences.

But Springsteen, with his resourceful and poetic song lyrics, instructs his characters to remain ontologically embedded within an impregnable 'sense of place.' This acute 'sense of place' governs the everyday action of the societal individual by producing, as Bob Crane suggests, a kind of "force" that "influences the choices and decisions of his [Springsteen's] protagonists". Springsteen's narratives provide a cluster of "places to stand" for his characters by creating a momentous situation at the very places from where "stirrings of the soul connect with the reality of the place" (Crane 2002, pp. 337–40). The ontological constructions of Springsteen's characters have made them exceedingly anchored to the material urban environment. Much like Whitman's vision of everyday life, Springsteen has narrated the collective voice of the ordinary and working-class people in particular socio-political circumstances, and these are the people "who, in extraordinary circumstances or in the commonest daily ones, have stood in their space and have "stepped out over the line"" (McParland 2007, p. 24). Walt Whitman and Bruce Springsteen, despite temporal and

medium disparities, intricately contributed towards the social production and reproduction of 'differential' and interpretative spaces, respectively, within their lyrical and musical narratives. Whitman's poetic musings, notably in works like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry", meticulously capture the vibrant urban tapestry where diverse populations intersect and co-exist. His verses resonate with the pulsating energy and heterogeneous composition of city life, elucidating the multiplicity of experiences within socially stratified spaces. Similarly, Springsteen's evocative songs vividly depict working-class neighborhoods and industrial towns, spotlighting the socio-economic disparities and cultural intricacies ingrained within urban landscapes. Through their narratives, both artists confront the complexities of race, class, and identity, shedding light on the lived realities of marginalized communities within the urban milieu. Central to the thematic resonance of Whitman and Springsteen's works is the concept of ontological embeddedness, emphasizing the profound connection between individuals and their places of 'belonging.' Whitman's characters, amidst the bustling streets and waterfronts of nineteenth-century America, are deeply intertwined with the rhythms and flows of urban life, their identities intricately shaped by the socio-spatial context of the city. Similarly, Springsteen's protagonists navigate the intricate web of working-class realities, their lives intricately woven into the fabric of urban existence. Through their narratives, both artists illuminate the dynamic interplay between individual agency and the socio-spatial dynamics of urban landscapes, inviting their audiences to ponder questions of identity, belonging, and social justice within the complex urban terrain. Whitman's poetry, with its celebration of diversity and inclusivity, challenges conventional notions of homogeneity amidst the nexus of city life, embracing the multitude of voices and perspectives that converge within its bounds. Similarly, Springsteen's songs serve as poignant reflections of the disparities of wealth, opportunity, and privilege that define contemporary urban life, exposing the fault lines of social inequality that run through the complex matrix of everyday urban lives.

Springsteen has always reciprocated against the demoralizing temperament of his characters, who are unable to take any political stand in their personal lives, by problematizing their everyday social spaces where the very trait of public action is obliterated. However, as a conscious social individual, Springsteen has remained empathetic towards such a depoliticized social environment while simultaneously displaying his ambition of reconstructing the everyday lives of disenfranchised societal individuals. This unique artistic vision of Springsteen has remained a primary impetus behind re-evaluating the political pursuits of the decade. Thereby, through his song stories, he has portrayed a liberal political ideology entwined with a resolution of socio-economic justice by making an "attempt to reclaim a public space for public action and "re-politicized" the "depoliticized"" (Stonerook 2012, p. 203). In other words, Springsteen's evocation of a strong sense of place contains a discernible and quintessential charm of the 'American dream' that boldly transcends the divisionary nature of the regulated social structures.

The notion of such illusory dreams encapsulates a nuanced and philosophically resonant idealism deeply enmeshed within the collective psyche of American society. It reverberates with the idea of embodying aspirations of ambition, opportunity, and the pursuit of an enriched existence. At its essence, the American dream epitomizes a foundational belief in the promise of upward mobility and the liberty to shape one's own destiny. The concept of the 'American dream' stands as an emblem of hope that has historically galvanized individuals to strive for personal betterment, often amidst formidable societal constraints. Within the artistic domain of Bruce Springsteen's oeuvre, the American dream assumes a multifaceted significance, functioning as both a catalyzing force and a trenchant commentary on societal actualities. Springsteen's characters, frequently portrayed navigating the gritty urban landscapes emblematic of working-class America, embody the aspirations and adversities intrinsic to the quest for this elusive dream. Through their narratives, Springsteen grapples with the intricacies of socio-economic disparity and the disillusionment that accompanies the realization of the American dream's unequal accessibility. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the obstacles encountered along their trajectories,

Springsteen's protagonists persist, impelled by an unyielding faith in the transformative potential of hope and resilience. Their pursuit of personal fulfillment becomes entwined with a broader quest for social equity and communal empowerment. In this vein, the quintessential allure of the American dream transcends mere material prosperity, morphing into a symbol of human fortitude, dignity, and the ceaseless pursuit of a more equitable societal fabric. Springsteen's artistic evocation of such an American dream engenders profound introspection into the dynamics of ambition, identity, and the human condition while beckoning a sense of contemplation on the interplay between individual agency and societal structures, as well as the moral imperatives underpinning the endeavor for personal and collective fulfillment. Through his musical compositions, which stand as a testament to the enduring tenacity of human resilience and the transformative potency of collective endeavor amidst the hierarchized everyday existence, Springsteen challenges audiences to confront the paradoxes and incongruities inherent in the American dream, compelling a reevaluation of presumptions and a recalibration of aspirations in pursuit of a more inclusive and compassionate societal paradigm.

Most of his ballads, especially their compositions and cadences, reflect a strong pursuit of escape from the drab and uninspiring urban landscapes. Professor Robert P. McParland, in his article "The Geography of Bruce Springsteen: Poetics and American Dreamscapes" (McParland 2007), has observed this phenomenon while comparing Springsteen's narratorial urge for escape with the Kierkegaardian 'leap of faith.' By emphasizing Springsteen's resolution for the salvation and transformation of the situations of his characters, McParland has also placed him in comparison with the classical poets by stating that Bruce Springsteen is, in a sense, our prophetic bard, an American Homer or Dante, telling the path of modern men and women, or, as in Dante's poem, the story of journeys through hell, purgatory, and paradise. His lyrics and music appear to seek, with great resolve, the ascent of the human spirit, the point of breakthrough into love, passion, or sheer energy and ecstasy (McParland 2007, p. 19).

As an inheritor of the American Transcendentalist tradition, Springsteen's use of classical poetic techniques has made his song stories more compelling. The British popular music critic Simon Frith has also discussed at length Springsteen's art of narrativizing and situating his characters in a specific time and place, which resembles the classical poetic tradition. Frith has also argued about how the devaluation of social abstractions has been celebrated in Springsteen's narratives. He has situated his characters against the backdrop of the symbolic realm of urban neighborhoods, empty highways, dusty pavements, factory machines, car sheds, and riverbanks. Springsteen's metaphorical approach to the sound of a car engine, loneliness on the highway, or economic injustice with the factory workers has severely contributed towards the development of identificatory processes and emotional aspects of his characters as well as those of his readers and audiences. Thus, Springsteen's effort to reconstruct and retrieve the collective politicized ontology of the American urban imagination "links the voices of his characters to the landscape where they stand, with metaphorical power and revelation" (Crane 2002, p. 339). The formation of identificatory processes in Springsteen's narratives is simultaneously forged from the complex moral structure of the societal individual as well as from their sense of social integrity. While reflecting on the build-up of personal identity formation and interpersonal social relationships, Bruce Springsteen has primarily emphasized the working-class issues of the small-town community and the localized notion of identity formation. His pivotal albums, like *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.*, *Born to Run*, and *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, are city-oriented and offer the sensuous charm of nomadic travel across urban landscapes. Springsteen's songs "offer a more detailed, more vivid, and more peopled description, where tension, glamour, and action overlay a realistic drab landscape of backstairs, small bars, and amusement halls" (Jarvis 1985, p. 112). His songs like "Jungleland", "Born To Run", "Backstreets", "It's Hard to Be a Saint in the City", etc. have severely captured the American urban landscapes within terrible conflicts that hinder collective social progress. Much like Dylan, Bruce Springsteen's use of language,

poetic devices, symbolism, imagery, and philosophical insight on the everyday human condition has aptly been materialized by the young American urban imagination of the 1970s. The huge body and diverse range of his musical works transparently reflect the artistic influence of Whitman, Faulkner, and W.C. Williams. Being a gifted storyteller, Springsteen had densely populated his poetic universe with a wide range of personalities and urban imaginaries that fostered a belief system for the runaway American dream. In order to dig deeper inside the wider spectrum of the human condition, Springsteen has situated his characters across a wide range of American landscapes by emphasizing their individual social concerns and eventually navigating those concerns over protruding and interpretative spaces of analysis.

3. Casing the Promised Land: An Ode to Spatial Resistance

3.1. *The Romantic Allure of Born to Run*

Within the realm of Springsteen's lyrical landscape, the idyllic conception of the 'promised land' is permeated with complex layers of reality, interwoven with vivid urban contexts. He extends a universal invitation to his audience while beckoning them to immerse themselves in the aspirations, dreams, and tribulations of his protagonists' odysseys, which are depicted with a variety of emotional dispositions ranging from quiet resignation to defiant assertion (Garman 1996, p. 74). The thematic motif of mobility permeates Springsteen's magnum opus, *Born To Run*, as he intricately maps out expansive geographical terrains, traversing networks of roads, rivers, and highways juxtaposed against the gritty underbelly of urban sprawl. Here, his characters find themselves ensnared in existential limbo, depicted frozen in the melancholic inertia of Tenth Avenue, disoriented amidst the urban jungle of 'Jungleland', or grappling with the allure of self-destruction in the embrace of 'suicide machines.' Commencing with the inaugural track, "Thunder Road", Springsteen punctuates the album with the evocative hum of a car engine, setting the stage for a lyrical dialogue between the narrator and Mary, wherein he tenderly entices her to forsake the monotony of their provincial milieu in favor of a spirited journey towards the mythical American 'promised land', propelled by the pulsating rhythm of rock 'n' roll.

The screen door slams,
 Mary's dress sways
 Like a vision, she dances across the porch as the radio plays
 Roy Orbison singing for the lonely
 ...
 All the redemption I can offer, girl, is beneath this dirty hood
 With a chance to make it good somehow
 Hey, what else can we do now? (Springsteen 1975)

By setting up a measure for an adventurous drive, Springsteen is declaring a romantic desire to escape to some ideal, promised land as his narrator eagerly asks Mary not to turn off her desire to escape while offering her the front seat of his car. One can effortlessly point out Springsteen's outlook towards hyper-charged individual action in the background of a locomotive urban reality, where the narrator has been seen recollecting his rebellious impulses from a Roy Orbison track on the radio. Eventually, the narrator, with an intriguing quest for a new beginning, has ultimately revealed his prior intention of accoupling Mary through the dusty, bumpy, and symbolic 'thunder road.'

Oh-oh, come take my hand
 We're riding out tonight to case the promised land
 ...
 So Mary, climb in

It's a town full of losers

And I'm pulling out of here to win (Springsteen 1975)

Springsteen's utilization of the phrase 'case the promised land' serves as an inaugural gesture, setting the thematic underpinning for the ensuing verses and unequivocally affirming the existence of paradisiacal realms. The persona exhibits a disinterest in the logistical feasibility of infiltrating such idyllic terrains, remaining indifferent to their ontological status, be it corporeal or fantastical; the paramount concern lies in the fervent aspiration to rupture the tether binding him to the mundane and uninspiring landscape of extant commitments.

And I know you're lonely, and there are words that I ain't spoken

But tonight, we'll be free; all the promises'll be broken (Springsteen 1975)

With the masterful deployment of vivid imagery and profound symbolism, Springsteen orchestrates a narrative imbued with a fervent intimacy between the protagonist and Mary, wherein they navigate the clandestine pathways to the metaphorical 'promised land', spurred by their romantic yearning for sustaining their youthfulness. Particularly, the culminating lines of the composition position the protagonist amidst quintessential American disillusionment, compelling a final, desperate quest for a realm steeped in hope, aspirations, and boundless potential. While reflecting on this context, Samuel F.S. Pardini has associated the protagonist of this song with "modern, urban Huck Finn", who, "at the steering wheel of his automobile, the prime American symbol of male escapism (disguised as freedom), wants to light out for the territory ahead and find a heaven for the two of them". (Pardini 2012, p. 103). The sole redemption proffered by the protagonist to Mary resides beneath the hood of his automobile, starkly contrasting the deceptive allure of provincial confines and the false glamor of estranged urban life. Herein, the protagonist constructs a physical landscape within Mary's psyche, delineating a spatial topography of movement through streets, highways, and thoroughfares, seeking to ameliorate her from a terrain of 'loss' wherein echoes of a delusional past impede her mobility. Springsteen's intent to transcend the constricting bounds of a proletarian geography dominated by frigid factories and machinery is palpably manifested in the protagonist's manipulative impetus, recognizing the town's inhabitants as 'losers' and thus compelled to flee the hopeless urban territories.

However, the subsequent compositions stemming from the album, including notable pieces like "Born To Run", "Backstreets", "Meeting Across the River", "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out", and finally "Jungleland", diverge from mere depictions of the travails of the purported working class. William I. Wolff, in his book *Bruce Springsteen and Popular Music: Rhetoric, Social Consciousness, and Contemporary Culture* (Wolff 2019), posits that Springsteen's conceptualization of the working class embodies an idealized, nostalgic, romanticized, and contentious portrayal of a populace far more diverse than initially portrayed (Wolff 2019, p. 67). The expansive vista of an emotionally tumultuous terrain, proffered by Springsteen in subsequent tracks, is significantly augmented by the projection of economic and cultural upheaval across an indistinct white urban American working-class enclave, where the communal fabric teeters on the brink of dissolution. In the composition of "Born to Run", we discern Springsteen's poetic persona intricately entwined with the protagonists and narrators of the song, solidifying his role as the eternal spokesperson for a specific cohort ensnared in a perpetual socio-spatial struggle, fervently seeking a symbolic 'promised land.' Employing a formulaic strophic structure across three successive verses and modulating chord progressions alongside recurring refrains, Springsteen unabashedly articulates a fervent 'promise of escape' within this composition. Here, the impassioned romantic impulse of the narrator yields to the grandeur of both abstract and tangible references to the 'promised land', merging into a symbolic framework endeavoring to rediscover the quotidian socio-spatial existence of the song's characters.

In the day, we sweat it out on the streets

Of a runaway American dream
 At night, we ride through the mansions of glory
 In suicide machines
 Sprung from cages on Highway 9
 Chrome wheeled, fuel injected, and steppin' out over the line
 Oh, baby, this town rips the bones from your back
 It's a death trap, its a suicide rap
 We gotta get out while we're young
 'Cause tramps like us, baby, we were born to run (Springsteen 1975)

Within this narrative ambit, the focal point is Wendy, a quintessential American archetype, yearning for liberation from the relentless and oppressive urban sprawl. As Springsteen's lyrical motif unfolds, it endeavors, akin to Kenneth Burke's notion of 'consubstantiality', to engender a shared essence with both the audience and the song's characters, particularly Wendy. Burke, in his book *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Burke 1962), defines "consubstantiality" as the state wherein one becomes "substantially one" with another while retaining individual agency—a delicate balance of unity and autonomy (Burke 1962, p. 20). In parallel, Springsteen's lyrical imagination weaves a narrative of unyielding blue-collar realism, seeking to empathize with Wendy's existential anguish while maintaining a degree of detachment from her somber plight. Thus, he endeavors to infuse Wendy's troubled psyche with a semblance of optimism, assuring her of the shared destiny of their generation—nomadic souls destined to 'run' towards life's romantic allure. Notably, the temporal landscape of 'night' emerges as a potent symbol in Springsteen's vision of a utopian 'promised land', injected with an unbridled romanticism diametrically opposed to the alienating mundanity of daytime existence. His narrative voice resents the frenetic hustle of daytime, likening it to a 'death trap' and a 'suicide rap', while his characters find resonance in the nocturnal realm, where the fluidity of 'lived time' ignites a revolutionary fervor amidst the banality of their estranged everyday reality.

The highway's jammed with broken heroes
 On a last chance power drive
 Everybody's out on the run tonight
 But there's no place left to hide
 Together, Wendy, we can live with the sadness
 I'll love you with all the madness in my soul
 Oh, someday, girl, I don't know when
 We're gonna get to that place
 Where we really wanna go, and we'll walk in the sun . . . (Springsteen 1975)

The narrator justifies his reason behind an urgent symbolic 'run' or a desperate attempt for a quick escape to the glorious promise of a future, which is tantamount to discovering his ideal 'promised land.' The narrator's utterances of the 'hemi-powered drones', 'rear-view mirrors', 'noisy boulevards', and finally, the unforgettable image of a 'jammed highway with broken heroes' have framed a symbolic network of the collective repressive desires of the young American individuals. Such a symbolic formulation leads to the production of what Lefebvre suggests as 'spaces of leisure' that can be identified in the individual or public urges of denial, resistance, and escape from the rationalized state-dominated spaces of a homogeneous modernity. Lefebvre has called such spaces of leisure the "counter space", which unleashes the libidinal impulse against the normative social order by making its inhabitants explode through the system of contradictory spatialization (Lefebvre 1991,

p. 73). Therefore, Springsteen's narrator in the song, who will perhaps be sooner or later counted on the list of his broken heroes, is destined to run from the hegemonic forces of industrial capitalism until he reaches the differential space of his desired destination. Hence, the frenzied narrator, while persuading Wendy for a redemptive escape, is engaging himself in the act of a spatial struggle by 're-adapting' to his dominated space of 'being' in his everyday life. Similar stances can be found in his other songs like "Jungleland", "The Promised Land", "Badlands", and "Darkness on the Edge of the Town", which are replete with such narratorial desires for an ultimate detachment from the everyday flow of time, or what Bergson calls 'durée.'

3.2. *Jungleland, Darkness on the Edge of Town and the Temporal–Geography of Resistance*

In the culminating song of his pivotal album *Born To Run*, Springsteen masterfully conjures the plaintive echoes of marginalized souls, buoyed by an ethos of hope and audacity that renders them temporally, spatially, and ethically impervious to the specters of their tumultuous pasts and the stifling confines of their urban milieu. Commencing the final composition, "Jungleland", with a lilting symphony of violin and piano, Springsteen orchestrates a romantic tableau inhabited by enigmatic protagonists Magic Rat and the Barefoot Girl, ensnared in the murky throes of an undisclosed transgression, pursued relentlessly by the authoritarian arm of the law, represented by the ominous Maximum Lawmen. Throughout the song's unfolding narrative, the chase persists unabated, while the omniscient narrator, poised from a consubstantial vantage, offers intermittent glimpses of the revolutionary urban landscape, teeming with a tantalizing tapestry of possibilities and perils. Springsteen's creative acumen expands the sonic palette of the composition, culminating in a crescendo of lyrical virtuosity in the third stanza, wherein the listener is transported to the visceral realm of 'Jungleland', a realm pulsating with the frenetic cadence of turnpikes, balletic interludes, nocturnal gangs, shadowy alleys, grand operas, vigilant law enforcement, and the incandescent riffs of burgeoning rock 'n' roll ensembles.

Well, the midnight gang's assembled
 And picked a rendezvous for the night
 They'll meet 'neath that giant Exxon sign
 That brings this fair city light
 ...
 The hungry and the hunted
 Explode into rock 'n' roll bands
 That face off against each other out in the street
 Down in Jungleland (Springsteen 1975)

Springsteen's poetic construction of such a fantasy world of rock 'n' roll is not only a product of his creative imagination but also hints at his everyday 'lived reality' while growing up in the North American suburbs. As he moves the song forward with a frantic and free-flowing saxophone solo, the tragic spectrum of the 'Jungleland' becomes clearer when the narrator shifts our attention to the parking lot—symbolizing the underground urban life—where the 'lonely hearted lovers' have been seen struggling. But none of them seems to care for the clueless victimization of Magic Rat and his girl, even though they belong to their league. Springsteen tries to establish the tragically romantic serenade of Magic Rat and his girl as a futile attempt towards community engagement at the very heart of this Jungleland. Here, the narrator has captured a series of terrifying image sequences, the range of which blurs the boundary between private and public space. Starting from the spectrum of refusal in the private space of a girl's bedroom to the overlooked gunshots in the hallways and uptown tunnels, Springsteen has forebodingly measured the vast hollowness across the city, where everyone finally ends up being wounded and half dead in their vague attempts at redemption. After envisaging such a horrifying range of alienation,

the narrator finally becomes stoic and helpless, with no words left to describe such a pathetic panorama of a petrified urban landscape where everyday life is constantly being resonated with the guttural cries of its denizens from the nooks and crannies. In most cases, Springsteen's narrators have threateningly been silenced after witnessing the unforgiving and suffocating situations in such soul-deadening landscapes where they find it utterly difficult to sustain their euphoric hopes and beliefs and better promise of life in the future. The reason of which Springsteen himself has described in his autobiography—*Born To Run* (Springsteen 2016)—while pointing out “a seismic gap” that he thinks “had opened up between generations” where the young tramps of the American 1960s and 1970s have suddenly started feeling “orphaned, abandoned amid the flow of history” with their “compass spinning internally homeless” (Springsteen 2016, p. 167). Most of Springsteen's sagacious song stories do not map his narrators at the pivot of their self-contentment but relatively make them martyred in their decamping journey of self-exploration, which assures them a sense of victory. Therefore, in “Jungleland”, the ill-fated Magic Rat and Barefoot Girl have failed to create an exception; thereby, they are placed alongside the other victimized and broken heroes of Springsteen and have been seen trying to reach for their desired moment by making an honest stand.

Outside, the street's on fire in a real death waltz
 Between what is flesh and what is fantasy
 And the poets down here do not write nothing at all
 They just stand back and let it all be
 And in the quick of a knife, they reach for their moment
 And try to make an honest stand
 But they wind up wounded, not even dead
 Tonight in Jungleland (Springsteen 1975)

The behavioral tendencies exhibited by Springsteen's characters may sometimes appear ostensibly irrational or driven by materialistic pursuits, as their socio-spatial existence is ensconced within a framework of libidinal desire. As Harvey posits in an alternative context, such socio-spatial dynamics are never devoid of inherent biases and are inherently imbued with class or other social dimensions, frequently becoming focal points of fervent social contestation (Harvey 239). In this vein, Springsteen not only alludes to the tangible formation of youth culture within the harsh confines of urban environments but also underscores the individual's role in shaping societal spatial constructs, thereby offering a critical commentary on the socio-cultural fabric of these locales. The symbolic attachment of Springsteen's narrators to subversive activities within these social spaces is characterized by a cyclic and reversible act of temporality, epitomized in verses such as “I wanna die with you, Wendy, on the street tonight/In an everlasting kiss”, brimming with anticipation, intuition, and fervor. Similar thematic undercurrents permeate other compositions such as “Jungleland”, “The Promised Land”, “Badlands”, and “Darkness on the Edge of Town”, wherein narratorial desires for transcending the quotidian temporal continuum, akin to Bergson's concept of ‘durée’, are vividly articulated. The deliberate pursuit of detachment enables these narrators to apprehend a sense of ‘totality’, encapsulating themselves within the creative thrust of a singular ‘moment.’

However, within the narrative realm under scrutiny, the quotidian existence of the characters unfolds within the embrace of an unbridled compulsion towards romanticism. This act of fervent embrace bears the potential to encounter the barriers imposed by socio-cultural and territorial constraints enforced by the state, thus altering the very essence of their daily existence. In this narrative, the characters embark on a journey of embracing these ‘moments’ with the utmost intensity, challenging societal norms and the homogenizing effects of modernity. Their desire to emerge “wounded” but not “dead” underscores their pursuit of the profound significance found in those fleeting moments, which disrupt

the routinized and objectified nature of their socio-spatial relationships. In Lefebvre's conceptualization, the notion of a 'moment' transcends mere temporal progression, embodying instead what he terms "modalities of presence" or encounters with "partial totalities" (Lefebvre 2014, p. 234). Unlike Bergson's linear understanding of time, Lefebvre characterizes these moments as discrete instances that exist somewhat independently from the conventional flow of time. These individual or collective experiences offer fleeting yet profound insights, aspiring to bridge the gap between the 'particular' and the 'universal'. They neither confine themselves to a singular 'instance' nor fully unveil an absolute conception of totality. Rather, each 'moment' represents a fragment of totality, contributing to the temporal landscape of resistance within everyday life.

Drawing upon Lefebvre's conceptualization, the 'moment' is elucidated as the "modalities of presence" or an encounter with "partial totalities", diverging from Bergson's linear conception of time by comprising a sequence of discrete 'instances' existing beyond the confines of the chronological procession. (Lefebvre 2014, p. 234). Such individual or collective encounters bear the potential for revelation, albeit fleeting and penetrating in essence. Consequently, the 'moments' transcend the banal empirical structures of everyday existence, endeavoring to forge a connection between the individual and the universal. Neither do these 'moments' remain confined within a singular 'instance', nor do they unveil an absolute panorama of 'totality.' Instead, the 'moment' itself emerges as a fragment of the 'totality', thereby delineating the temporal geography of resistance within everyday life. Lefebvre rejects the concept of 'totality' as a singular and uniform entity, opting instead to emphasize the emergence of a multitude of perspectives within social spaces. This highlights the emergence of diverse forms of totality through a revolutionary process of temporalization across various socio-cultural contexts.

However, Springsteen's lyrical impulse becomes darker and grittier in "Darkness on the Edge of Town", where, instead of a demented search for the redemptive moments, his song stories "reflect the obsessions of a relatively naïve white boy who is shocked to learn that the world is not his oyster" (Cullen 2005, p. 64). In this compilation, Springsteen has artfully honed his narrative voice to encompass the vast panorama of American suffering, anguish, and bereavement. The American landscape he presents here is a distorted iteration of the metaphorical 'Jungleland', a realm in which his protagonists frequently find themselves ensnared amidst tumultuous and infernal predicaments, as epitomized in "Adam Raised a Cain", "Badlands", and "Factory". Particularly within these compositions, Springsteen's narrators are denied even the semblance of pursuing their coveted 'moments'. Conversely, tracks such as "Something in the Night", "The Promised Land", and "Racing in The Street" effuse with his lyrical acumen, depicting the 'streets' as avenues where socially marginalized figures endeavor to grasp at the quintessential 'moment' amid the quotidian drudgery of their lives. Notably, in "The Promised Land", Springsteen eschews intricate imagery, opting instead for a direct motif, wherein he unveils the underlying catalyst behind his blue-collar narrator's outpouring of frustration—a steadfast faith in a promised land.

The dogs on Main Street howl

'Cause they understand

If I could wrench one moment into my hands

Mister, I ain't a boy; no, I'm a man

And I believe in a promised land (Springsteen 1978)

Here, Springsteen's thematic focus gravitates singularly towards dismantling the false ideologies and illusory dreams ingrained by capitalist hegemony into the collective consciousness of American youth. The narrative protagonist, steadfast in his aspirations despite disillusionment, symbolically dismantles the icy constraints of industrial capitalism, opting to detonate the figurative shackles of his entrapment. This album notably eschews characters of timidity and juvenility; rather, Springsteen crafts figures of nuanced maturity

and fervor, poised to confront adversity with unwavering defiance and spatial resistance. Through his portrayal of rebellious protagonists, Springsteen affords us a glimpse into the socio-spatial struggle ensconced within the ‘darkness on the edge of town’, a locus emblematic of their existential strife. Notably, in the titular track, the narrator elucidates the physical manifestation of such a locale in the concluding verse—the hill—situated beyond the confines of urbanity, transcending the commodified realm of civilization.

Tonight, I'll be on that hill 'cause I can't stop
 I'll be on that hill with everything I got
 With our lives on the line where dreams are found and lost
 I'll be there on time and I'll pay the cost
 For wanting things that can only be found
 In the darkness on the edge of town (Springsteen 1978)

The narrator has yet to delineate whether the chosen eminence would yield the fruition of all his life's pledges. Nevertheless, an epiphany dawns upon him, elucidating that the essence of his envisioned ‘promised land’ resides within the sanctum of wilderness. This realization unveils the intrinsic incapacity of modern urban capitalism and technocratic epistemologies to inscribe the raw, untamed contours of the natural landscape. Indeed, it is within the sequestered precincts of nature that the elusive essence of fulfillment, impervious to the machinations of contemporary socio-economic paradigms, finds its abode.

4. Conclusions

In his seminal work *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (Huyssen 1986), Andreas Huyssen adeptly examines the postmodern currents within the fabric of the American dream. Huyssen eloquently delineates the tumultuous cultural landscape of the 1960s and 1970s, characterizing the counterculture of this era as a formidable challenge to the rigidity of high modernism. He posits that the essence of postmodernism in America aimed not merely to rebel against established norms but to infuse the European avant-garde tradition with an American ethos, thereby revitalizing it within a distinct cultural milieu (Huyssen 1986, p. 3). In his critique, Huyssen extends his analysis beyond the post-war American panorama to scrutinize the cultural politics of Britain's historical avant-garde, identifying a perceived failure stemming from the waning resilience of cultural revolutionaries and a detachment of everyday life from broader socio-historical frameworks. Unlike the disillusionment witnessed in European movements such as the German protests or France's May '68, Huyssen argues that Americans maintained a unique capacity for novelty and temporal imagination, fostering an unwavering confidence in their position at the vanguard of history (Huyssen 1986, p. 5). The postmodern ethos of the 1960s and 1970s in America gave rise to what Huyssen terms a “creative space”, wherein inhabitants sought to challenge prevailing high-modernist paradigms in favor of contemporary beliefs. However, this burgeoning cultural landscape was swiftly co-opted and hegemonized by the dominant forces of late capitalism, which underpinned American consumer society. Indeed, the advent of postmodernism in American cultural contexts, akin to Fredric Jameson's concept of the ‘logic of late capitalism’, was intrinsically bound to the interests of American bureaucratic apparatuses (Huyssen 1986, p. 5).

Amidst such a vibrant and consumer-driven cultural landscape, Henri Lefebvre emerges with a groundbreaking critique of spatial issues within the fabric of everyday human existence. Departing from the abstract conceptualizations of ‘everyday life’ prevalent in Althusserian and existential Marxist thought, Lefebvre imbues the term with a distinctly Romantic and humanistic essence. Central to his critique is the notion of ‘spatial practice’, which stands in stark contrast to the alienating experiences of modern urban life. Lefebvre delves deeply into the material realm of human existence, where individuals frequently find themselves estranged from their own essence of being. This perspective, as astutely noted by Rob Shields, captures the oscillation between fully engaged living and

alienated withdrawal that characterizes individual consciousness. It acknowledges the often-overlooked aspects of everyday life, from its absent-minded routines to its frenetic pace (Shields 1999, pp. 40–41). Lefebvre's framework redirects historical materialism towards spatial concerns, simultaneously addressing the complexities of social space and capitalism's interaction with geographic landscapes. His emphasis on the 'social' is inherently tied to an understanding of the 'geographical' and 'spatial.' Consequently, the Lefebvrian concept of 'spatiality' becomes a potent tool for social critique, unveiling the cultural significance embedded within different locations. These distinct locations serve as arenas for societal and class struggles, inherently tied to the production and contestation of space. Lefebvre's exploration of spatial problematics destabilizes the homogenizing forces of modernity, reimagining everyday life as a dynamic site of creative resistance against dominant power structures (Soja 2014, p. 110).

Within the realm of popular music, particularly the genre of 'rock', a persistent association with the ethos of rebellious youth culture endures, often regarded as a dissenting subcultural expression. Bruce Springsteen, hailed as one of the paramount spokespersons of the American counterculture, has orchestrated a giant shift in the portrayal of this discontented cultural phenomenon. His oeuvre reiterates the narrative focus of rock music, spotlighting the spatial intricacies of the everyday realities experienced by the working class. Particularly in the nascent stages of his career, Springsteen aptly captures the grim repercussions of everyday existence amidst the swiftly evolving socio-cultural, economic, and political landscapes characteristic of late capitalism. Whether traversing the provincial ambiance of locales like Asbury Park and Kingsley Street or navigating the cosmopolitan labyrinth of New York City, Springsteen's protagonists embark on a quest for 'elsewhere', seeking respite from their urban environs burdened by inertia, entrenched class divisions, and the relentless toil of menial labor (Morris 2007, p. 10). The collective endeavors of these characters underscore Springsteen's thematic motif, which centralizes their agency within the urban milieu. His lyrical narratives not only delve into the social dynamics of his rock heroes but also imbue their spatial context with an ethos of perpetual struggle, thereby engendering fresh cultural interpretations of their societal landscape. Springsteen's evocative imagery and symbolic lexicon not only depict the empirical circumstances of his characters within specific urban settings but also articulate their defiant stance against entrenched inequalities within these locales. His symbolic delineation of an American 'promised land' elucidates the profound democratic potential inherent within urban spaces, where the notion of 'streets' symbolizes a crucible for creative ideation, social disruption, communal engagement, and ultimately, a radical and inclusive urban experience accessible to all denizens. The 'streets' serve as a locus for spontaneous encounters, fostering a milieu conducive to play, learning, and the fertile exchange of ideas (Lefebvre 2003, p. 18). The fervent spirit of revolution animating Springsteen's characters underscores a pressing imperative for creative and imaginative engagement with urban spaces and their inhabitants. It is these restless urban dwellers who harbor the transformative potential to metamorphose urban territories into arenas of novelty and meaningful interaction, subverting the hegemonic structures of American capitalist society.

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