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RESTLESS IN AMERICA (AND BEYOND): EXPANDING SPACE AND TIME FRONTIERS

“Ah, who shall soothe these feverish children?
Who justify these restless explorations?”
—Walt Whitman, “Passage to India”

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Abstract: *The so-called “spatialization of time in American language and culture” (Avadanei 24) is deeply rooted in America’s experience of geographical and social mobility. In the terms used by the Canadian scholar Harold A. Innis, who believes that each society shares a “bias” toward time or space, America has been in many ways a spatially biased society tending toward “extension” (expansion, imperialism, the future), as opposed to a temporally biased one that tends toward “duration” (solidity, permanence, the past). Therefore, in my paper, I am particularly interested in mapping the intersection of American cultural sites with porous, yet persistent spatial and temporal boundaries, such as the wilderness and the frontier experience, the nocturnal underworld of cities and the so-called “night-time frontier,” the “global village” and “time-space compression,” and finally, cyberspace, nowadays regarded as the new frontier, and night-time expansion. Drawing on the insights of historians and sociologists, as well as on the imaginative creations of writers and filmmakers, I highlight not so much the dark, indeed transgressive energies associated with these borderlands, as America’s characteristic restlessness, its constant drive for change, (self-)exploration, and expansion, both outward and inward.*