PREFACE

"Sleep in gentle ease / little eyes shut please, / hear the raindrops in the dark, / hear the neighbour's doggy bark. / Doggy bit the beggar-man, / tore his coat, away he ran, / to the gate the beggar flees, / sleep in gentle ease." The first strophe of Taubert's lullaby is frightening. And yet its two last lines bless sleep with a promise of peace. But this is not entirely due to bourgeois callousness, the comforting knowledge that the intruder has been warded off. The sleepy child has already half forgotten the expulsion of the stranger, who in Schott's song-book looks like a Jew, and in the line "to the gate the beggar flees" he glimpses peace without the wretchedness of others. So long as there is still a single beggar, Benjamin writes in a fragment, there is still myth; only with the last beggar's disappearance would myth be appeased. But would not violence then be forgotten as in the child's drowsiness? Would not, in the end, the disappearance of the beggar make good everything that was ever done to him and can never be made good? Is there not concealed in all persecution by human beings, who, with the little dog, set the whole of nature on the weak, the hope to see effaced the last trace of persecution, which is itself the portion of nature? Would not the beggar, driven out of the gate of civilization, find refuge in his homeland, freed from exile on earth? "Have now peaceful mind, beggar home shall find."

Theodor W. Adorno, ***Minima Moralia: Reflections from a Damaged Life***[1]

In this short excerpt, written sometime between 1944 and 1947, Theodor Adorno registers the tragic effects of fifteen years of global depression and war with a horrifying revision of Walter Benjamin's pre-war dream about the possibility of revolutionary change. The beggar, whose disappearance Benjamin had imagined as a sign of the disappearance of all classes, becomes in Adorno's wilful misreading a much more complicated figure. In Adorno's rendering, because the beggar is the target of the violence that must first be done so that myth can achieve the desired result, sleep comes to the child only by first remembering and then forgetting the hurts inflicted upon the homeless man in the shadows. This process is made all the easier by articulating the man's poverty with the appearances of racial inferiority.[2] Effectively effaced and made an abstract figure, yet still all too human in his ability to experience pain, Adorno's beggar is necessary to the functioning of the whole, not because he can work but because he can suffer, allowing the rest of us to remember, and then forget, and then sleep.

Adorno manages to find a kernel of utopian content in this nursery rhyme by proposing that the bourgeois dream of physically expelling each and every beggar from the whole would, in reality, "make good everything that was ever done to him and can never be made good."[3] In his mind, justice for each individual historical act of persecution is an impossible goal since the very act of calculating an equivalent punishment would make one "the mouthpiece, against a bad world, of one even worse."[4] Nonetheless, Adorno still imagines that the beggar could inflict severe damage by accepting his removal from "civilization," thereby allowing its citizens to stamp out within themselves the only remaining "portion of nature"yet to succumb to rationalization. In this logic, it is only outside of this society — now left alone with its dialectic of enlightenment, where Hitler or Hollywood represented the only choice that remained — that the abject beggar finally "glimpses peace without the wretchedness of others": "Have now peaceful mind, beggar home shall find."

Regrettably, in our present context, Adorno's final question — "Would not the beggar, driven out of the gate of civilization, find refuge in his homeland, freed from exile on earth?" — originates in a kind of curiosity about the possibilities of a utopia that most Canadian historians have learned to leave behind, an occasional object of, but not a guide to, critical historical practice. I offer in this book's opening chapters an excursus into the beggar's "homeland," doing so as something of an antidote to this contemporary historiographic departure away from utopia's long-standing attractions.

This is not to say that my account will be entirely unfamiliar to Canadian historians. Beginning with chapter 3, my interpretive journey follows paths of inquiry that should be easily understood within the framework of conventional Canadian writing on the period. If my account of the changing character of relief governance and provision pertaining to single homeless

men in Vancouver and British Columbia in the early years of the Great Depression sits comfortably within established appreciations of the inadequacies of the state response to the collapsing social formation of the 1930s, I nonetheless destabilize the usual narrative somewhat by introducing two key concepts: Michel Foucault's "governmentality" and Theodor Adorno's "rationalization." This theoretical intervention allows us to grasp more fully how mass need and the market collapse quickly overwhelmed Vancouver's Relief Department. The result was a crisis recognizable throughout the municipality and, to a lesser extent, in the governing chambers of Victoria and Ottawa.

It is my contention that the increasing number of people who distanced themselves from business methods in the face of the obvious contradictions manifesting themselves in the streets can best be situated historically and understood in our own times through an excavation of that long-buried utopian challenge posed by "Hobohemia" against capitalist Fordism. This is why I introduce this study with the real lives of homeless men, the forms of resistance mounted by the jobless, and the social alternatives that germinated in the hobo jungles of Vancouver from 1930 to 1932.

Minorities, of course, make history. The minority that might have remade Canadian history in its utopian image, the builders of Hobohemia, did not, in the end, prevail, although, as I show, they built much in a particular time and place. A smaller but more influential minority looked to the ledger sheet to find the principles of order and governance that might save Vancouver from financial ruin and political riot. This latter group, which included many business leaders, media magnates, religious activists, and social work professionals, sought a way out of the Great Depression. Their view of the chaos precipitated in the dirtiest years of the 1930s differed markedly from the perceptions circulating among the workless and homeless men, whose presence in shantytowns and on street corners caused them considerable anxiety. This minority took from the corporate world a preference for the rationalized social relationships theorized by Frederick Winslow Taylor and made both viable and visible on a mass scale by Henry Ford. Their reorganization of the core practices of relief administration and provision using the leading ideas of North American capitalism created what might be termed "forms of Fordist governmentality" across British Columbia, traces of which we can sense around us still. One part of their original purpose was to vanquish the beggars at their doors, a historical act of violence that ushered into being its own mythologies.

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