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7. Underground Circulation: The Beats in Paris and Beyond

Allen Hibbard

Upon my return to the United States from Amsterdam in November 2010, after the first of two symposia on the 'Paris-Amsterdam Underground', I found myself once again, as so many times before, winding through customs and passport control lines. In one line, trained dogs, obviously in the employ of the state, though without badges or uniforms, sniffed around arriving passengers' feet and luggage. One of the dogs circled the passenger in front of me – a young man in his early thirties, it seemed, dressed in T-shirt and jeans. The pace of the dog's sniffing increased, and the young man's nervousness became palpable. Perhaps, it occurred to me, this young man had spent time in one of those Amsterdam coffee shops, and the smell of marijuana had seeped into his clothing. Customs agents spent a little more time than usual with this passenger, asking him to open bags, dumping out contents, and searching for false bottoms, or secret hiding places. Fortunately, the dog showed no interest in me. Evidently it detected no evidence of transgression.

This scene suggests certain characteristics and dynamics associated with the underground and how it operates. It is at checkpoints and border crossings that heightened vigilance is exercised, and elaborate, sophisticated mechanisms are imposed to police and restrict the movement of certain substances, people, or activities. What is permitted (allowed to circulate fairly openly above ground) in one place (Amsterdam) is forced or driven underground elsewhere (in this case, the United States). Amsterdam, of course, is known for its permissive policies toward prostitution and the use of marijuana. One can do things in Amsterdam that one could not do in the United States without fear of being caught and punished. Cultural and historical context, thus, to a great extent, determines what kinds of activities and thoughts are forced to occupy underground spaces. At borders, norms and laws of particular societies are visibly announced, signposted, enforced. At borders and checkpoints attempts are made to curb perceived threats and dangers. Luggage is x-rayed. Documents are examined and stamped. Identities are checked against terrorist watch lists. Bodies are scanned, sometimes patted down, and (in some instances, at some borders) cavities are searched. The power of the state is forcefully and visibly asserted; the consequences of getting caught for violations of law are serious – fines, trials, jail time. Yet, despite these measures and possible consequences, there are those who – for financial gain, political purposes, or other reasons – assess risks and determine to attempt cross-

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ings, seeking ways to hide contraband substances, disguise identity, disrupt detection mechanisms, or ferret out porous, unpatrolled points of entry.

The underground is often a place to stay put, simply in order to survive: a place to hide out or seek sanctuary until conditions change, allowing for safe movement, or until safe passage can be assured. Historically, numerous examples can be found in which people (revolutionaries, fugitives, asylum-seekers) have sought cover and hidden out in some safe place outside their home countries, waiting for a time to return home, when circumstances were propitious. We might think of the Russian revolutionaries exiled in Geneva in Joseph Conrad's 1911 novel *Under Western Eyes*, or Vladimir Lenin's real exile in Switzerland from 1914-1917 (first in Bern, then in Zurich) where he finished *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* before his famous train ride back to St. Petersburg where he anticipated the role he would play after the Bolshevik Revolution. (This period of exile has taken literary form, in Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties* and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Lenin in Zurich*.) And, later in the century, in 1978, the Ayatollah Khomeini (who had first lived in exile in Turkey, then Iraq), briefly took refuge in Neauphle-le-Château, on the outskirts of Paris, where he made influential speeches before his return to Iran, to jubilant crowds, after the fall of the Shah. Mobility (or at least the expectation and projection of mobility) is, thus, inherently associated with the notion of the underground. The ultimate purpose of the underground is to move something – people, ideas, or things (e.g., books, weapons, documents, films) – from one place to another, as safely as possible, without being detected, under the threat of surveillance, apprehension, and punishment.

When one occupies an underground space there is usually something at stake, should one be detected, forced to surface, so to speak. Angela Davis, for instance, the American Communist 1960s revolutionary, went underground for several months (from around 14 August 1970 to her arrest on 13 October 1970) when she was charged with aggravated kidnapping and first-degree murder and placed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list, after a gun registered to her was used to kill a judge. (She was later tried and found not guilty.) Those involved in political resistance in countries with tight authoritarian regimes could be slapped in jail if caught, if their activities were exposed. In the face of such a restricted way of living – in fear of being apprehended and curtailing movement, speech, and production – some understandably have chosen or been forced into exile, living in a diasporic space outside a repressive homeland.

To cite just one example, among countless others, we might consider how three contemporary Iranian women have chosen to work outside their homeland, more openly, creating or promoting work in ways they could not do in Iran: Marjane Satrapi, author of the graphic novel *Persepolis*; Sharmush Parsipur, author of *Women without Men*; and Shirin Neshat, who made a film loosely derived from Parsipour's novel. Neither these women nor their works would be officially let back in Iran, yet somehow (though banned) their work circulates there, perhaps even creating more interest and demand because of its taboo status. Despite border control mechanisms, some things seem always to manage to slip through.

The underground, as undetected space remaining outside surveillance systems,

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we must note, carries at the same time the potential for damage and destruction as well as the potential for progressive social and political change. Going underground can be a strategy for carrying out terrorist attacks, or – as in the operation of the Underground Railroad and the French Underground during World War II – for liberating slaves and providing refuge or means of escape for Jews.

In my own thinking through the underground here in this chapter, I continue with an examination of one specific instance of what might be conceived as underground activity – the American Beats in Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960 – and move to a consideration of how the productions and ideas of the Beats subsequently circulated, before turning to some theoretical reflections and considerations, and concluding with a consideration of the present possibilities for underground movement, above and below the ground as well as in cyberspace.

The Beats in Paris

From 1958 to 1963, a group of Beat writers that included William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Brion Gysin (at various times) set up temporary residence at 9 Rue Gît-le-Cœur, dubbed the Beat Hotel, where in the summer of 2009, at a marvelous celebration of the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Naked Lunch* in Paris, a rowdy crowd of Burroughsians gathered to unveil a plaque in honor of the Beats on the wall outside what is now a very fashionable hotel at the address. For a thin slice of history, the Beat Hotel served as a kind of underground outpost for these American expatriates who no doubt found the atmosphere freer and more conducive to creative activity than the United States was at the time, bound by Puritan morals, haunted by Communist witch hunts, and writhing in the clutches of the Cold War.

Though they were not forcibly exiled, the group of Beat writers who congregated in Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960s might, like some of the examples mentioned above, be considered a kind of transnational displaced underground, seeking a temporary place of haven where they could sojourn in anticipation of changed conditions that would allow return or further movement. Above all, these people chose Paris because they thought it would be a good place to live and work, and because it allowed possibilities for collaborative exchange. It might seem to be a stretch to call this 'underground' activity, because of its relative openness and visibility. Yet while perhaps not a part of the French underground scene, we might consider this Beat enclave as a kind of displaced underground vis-à-vis the United States.

Of course, historically Paris has been a favored site for American expatriates, serving various purposes for various figures at various times. We might recall Henry James's quintessential expatriate novel, *The Ambassadors*, set primarily in Paris, in which our middle-aged protagonist Lambert Strether comes to rescue and send home the young Chad Newsome, only to succumb himself, belatedly, to the city's (and perhaps Chad's) charms. And of course Gertrude Stein's salon at 27 Rue de Fleurus is legendary, as is the significant shaping role she played in the modernist movement as well as her long-time commitment to her companion

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Alice B. Toklas, famous for her brownie recipe as well as for 'her' autobiography. Stein and subsequent women writers who sought refuge in Paris (such as Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys, and Nancy Cunard) are the subject of Shari Benstock's fine study *Women of the Left Bank*. Similarly, Michel Fabre constructs the history of African American writers who made Paris their temporary home, among them Richard Wright, Chester Himes, William Gardner Smith, and James Baldwin. Somewhat ironically, Americans have often found a freer atmosphere in Paris than in the 'land of the free and home of the brave'. Many have seen Paris as a place where they could escape racism, puritanical morality, and rigid gender roles.

As we consider the experience of the Beats in Paris, we must look at what it was that had to remain underground, what the surface resisted and suppressed. It largely came down to radical political views, illegal drugs, and sexual preference. 'Many of them were gay', as Barry Miles notes in *The Beat Hotel*, 'and they could lead a freer life in France, and most of them using illegal drugs' (4). This underground locale provided a kind of cover, or sanctuary, in which these writers felt free to experiment and produce works they likely would not otherwise have produced. I propose here that writing (especially a kind of avant-garde writing that challenges established forms and norms) is an especially potent mode of underground activity, both in its means of production and its sometimes unpredictable, rhizomatic means of dissemination.

The Beat Hotel was the site of production of a number of significant works of American literature that at the time might have been considered avant-garde but now are recognized as part of the tradition. In Paris Ginsberg wrote 'At Apollinaire's Grave' and a significant portion of *Kaddish*, a long homage to his mother Naomi, written after her death at a mental institution. And Corso wrote 'Bomb' – an explosive poem, innovative in content and form, 'shaped on the page like a mushroom cloud of an atomic bomb' (Miles 5). It was in Paris that Burroughs finished *Naked Lunch*, worked on a number of collaborative projects, and (under the influence of Brion Gysin) developed the cut-up technique, producing *The Soft Machine* and part of *The Ticket That Exploded*.

My focus here will be primarily on Burroughs because I believe his work is most pertinent to an inquiry of underground, while I admit that an examination of Ginsberg, Corso, and Gysin could be productive as well. Burroughs, along with poststructuralist French theorists who were developing and refining their ideas at the same historical moment, thought about how dominant systems could be resisted. One key tactic Burroughs experimented with and developed at the Beat Hotel is what has become known as the cut-up technique, whereby portions of texts or tapes were cut, rearranged, and interspersed with portions of other texts and tapes to create wholly new patterns and meanings: break conventional, established flows of narrative; create new possibilities and meanings; 'Storm the Reality Studio'; reshuffle material formed by traditional modes of production. Contemporary mythologies, world views produced electronically and disseminated widely, were formed and functioned much in the way Greek myths, or tribal myths, once worked in smaller societies. The cut-up had the potential to disrupt, mix and – thus – critique established narratives and world views. In 'The

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Cut-up Method of Brion Gysin' (the Canadian artist-writer who introduced Burroughs to the technique), Burroughs describes the process:

> The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle and across the middle. You have four sections: 1 2 3 4 … one two three four. Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three. And you have a new page. Sometimes it says much the same thing. Sometimes something quite different – cutting up political speeches is an interesting exercise – in any case you will find that it says something and something quite definite … Cut-ups are for everyone. Anybody can make cut-ups … Cut the words and see how they fall. Shakespeare Rimbaud live in their words. Cut the word lines and you will hear their voices … All writing is in fact cut-ups … The cut-ups could add new dimension to films. Cut gambling scene in with a thousand gambling scenes all times and places. Cut back. Cut streets of the world. Cut and rearrange the word and image in films. (Burroughs and Gysin, *Third Mind* 30-2).

Brion Gysin, explaining the cut-up technique, writes: 'What are words and what are they doing? The cut-up method treats words as the painter treats his paint, raw material with rules and reasons of its own … Painters and writers of the kind I respect want to be heroes, challenging fate in their lives and in their art … So if you want to challenge and change fate … cut up words, make them a new world' (qtd. in Miles 195-6).

A number of critics have commented on the revolutionary potential of the cut-up method. Noelle Blatt, for instance, notes how the method disrupts conventional relationships between signs and meanings:

> *Il est important, au moment où l'on cherche à évaluer le role et la valeur du cut-up, de ne pas oublier l'objectif qui motive son emploi, à savoir libérer le sens en rendant au signe sa pleine fonction signifiante et en permettant à nouveau un libre exercice des rapports paradigmatiques et syntagmatiques entre les termes de la langue.* (14)

And, as Timothy Murphy points out, the method has political implications: 'Cut-ups were a form of practical demystification and subversion that could uncover the ideology at work in the political lines of the media – for example, revealing the structural collusion between the police and the drug market in the US and UK' (39).

The extent to which these Beat writers were aware of and interacted with the contemporary French scene around them has been a topic of debate. Being underground does tend to produce a kind of tunnel vision, because one is cut off and often obsessively concerned for one's safety. Sometimes, as we have seen, movement is restricted out of fear of detection, or worse. One gets the sense from Barry Miles's book that the Beats did not venture far from the Beat Hotel, other than to museums, bookstores, or in search of various (mainly forbidden) pleasures. 'As non-French speakers', Miles writes, 'they had no involvement with

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French culture and the issues of the day, nor were they restricted by rules with which the French lived, simply because they were ignorant of them' (19). He goes on to quote Jean-Jacques Lebel: 'They were on an island, isolated in this magic little paradise full of rats and bad smells' (19). Later Miles does acknowledge that the Beats, even though relatively isolated from French politics, could not help being aware of the war in Algeria and the heated debates surrounding the Algerian question.

Recent essays by Andrew Hussey and Timothy Murphy focus directly on the importance of Paris on Burroughs's work and thought. Both Hussey and Murphy dispel the conventionally held view that the Beats were hermetically sealed within their hotel and had no interaction with contemporary French culture. In '"Paris Is about the Last Place ...": William Burroughs In and Out of Paris and Tangier, 1958-1960', first delivered in the form of a paper at a 2008 conference in Tangier, Hussey makes a strong case that in Paris the writer consolidated strands of thinking begun earlier. The Paris Burroughs arrived in was in the throes of conflict over the Algeria question, with ferment among various avant-garde political organizations. Hussey shows how Burroughs would have been aware of (and perhaps influenced by) movements such as the Situationists (Guy Debord) and the Lettrists (Isidore Isou), groups with whom he would have found a good deal of affinity, both in terms of philosophy and method. Indeed, what Burroughs found in Paris 'was a matrix of avant-garde movements, all of them deeply marked by the tensions of their age and with an absolute belief in revolution as real experience rather than metaphor or theory' (78-9).

Timothy Murphy, in his essay 'Exposing the Reality Film: William S. Burroughs Among the Situationists', similarly points to 'Burroughs's and Debord's parallel sensitivities to the postwar economy of the image', as well as to the pivotal connective role between the two played by Alexander Trocchi. Flows of communication would have gone from the Situationists to Burroughs, Murphy notes, with cautions that claims for direct influence remain speculative. Nonetheless, Murphy usefully draws comparisons between the key Situationist notion of spectacle and Burroughs's notion of the reality studio. Murphy cites Debord's description of the spectacle as 'not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (qtd. in Murphy 34) It is, furthermore, 'the self-portrait of power in the age of power's totalitarian rule over conditions of existence' (qtd. in Murphy 34). At once, then, we realize a shared concern for the operation of power, particularly through the careful construction and distribution of images, with corporate mass media playing a key, intermediary role in the process. 'The reality studio,' Murphy writes,

> like the Word or the spectacle, is a totality that is not so much a set of words that we speak or images that we watch as it is a general condition in which we are immersed, even and especially when we are apparently not focused on words or images. (34-5)

Murphy compares the Situationist technique of *détournement* (breaking up previously constructed films – Brecht-like – inserting disruptive material that calls

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attention to fictive constructions of reality, bursting its bubble, so to speak) to Burroughs's cut-up method. Both are experimental techniques with aesthetic and political effects and consequences. Both Burroughs's cut-up technique and the Situationist practice of *détournement* envisioned a transformation of everyday lived experience, springing from a consciousness of shaping forces and optimizing capacity for individual self-determination.

Barry Miles's *The Beat Hotel*, published several years after the death of Ginsberg and Burroughs, in 2000, has a rather nostalgic tone. The vitality and poignancy of the underground at the time it is operative becomes diffuse and less poignant, loses its edge, once it is relegated to the status of history. A revolutionary mood was in the air, with the spring of 1968 just around corner. 'By the spring of 1960,' Miles writes,

> the beginning of the most explosive decade of cultural experimentation since the turn of the century, the Beats of the Beat Hotel had already paved the way with routines, Cut-ups, flicker, and scrying; they had had visions and hallucinations, experimented with hashish, marijuana, Diosan, codeine, morphine, and heroin, and had engaged in orgies and other sexual practices that were probably illegal and were certainly frowned upon in their own countries. (224)

Their innovations, practices, and philosophies, as we will see, continued to worm their way beneath the seemingly stable surfaces of societies.

Beat Circulation

Ideas and works originally contained within the space of the Beat Hotel later spread in unpredictable, unforeseen ways, inspiring others and effecting cultural change. The immediate, intended audience, as is usually the case with diasporic, expatriate, and exilic communities, was back home. The liberatory lifestyle and literary production of the Beats circulated widely in the United States in the 1960s, providing fuel for countercultural movements. Subway ads for *Evergreen Review* in the early 1960s featured Allen Ginsberg, with Uncle Sam hat and caption reading 'Join the Underground' (Morgan 310). Impulses and sensibilities that had, in the 1950s, been repressed, became dominant in the 1960s, a decade that brought student protests against the war in Vietnam, drugs, rock 'n' roll, sexual experimentation, civil rights, the rise of feminism, and Stonewall.

More unexpected was the influence Burroughs had on the Dutch writer Gerard Reve, influence that eventually circled back to Amsterdam. Reve encountered Burroughs at the International Writers' Conference in Edinburgh in August of 1962, where the American writer spoke on panels on 'The Future of the Novel' and 'Censorship.' Reve and Burroughs appear on the list of conference participants, along with James Baldwin, Marguerite Duras, Lawrence Durrell, William Golding, Aldous Huxley, Norman Mailer, Mary McCarthy, Henry Miller, Alberto Moravia, Nathalie Sarraute, Muriel Spark, and Stephen Spender

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('Reality Studio'). While at the time Burroughs was not well-known outside small circles, Reve had already established himself with his acclaimed 1947 novel *De avonden* (The Evenings), 'considered now to be a classic of modern Dutch literature' (Wood).

Apparently Burroughs – both his physical presence and his remarks – made an impression at this conference, enhancing and broadening his reputation. Speaking of the future of the novel, he suggested that writers needed to keep pushing the limits, exploring new territory, like contemporary ventures in space. He spoke specifically about his own experimentation with the cut-up technique. His remarks on censorship, made just prior to the *Naked Lunch* censorship trial, were prescient and relevant to our consideration of the underground: 'In any form censorship presupposes the right of the government to decide what people will think, what thought material of word and image will be presented to their minds – I am precisely suggesting that the right to exercise such control is called in question' ('Reality Studio'). Burroughs went on specifically to talk about sex and censorship:

> The anxiety of which censorship is the overt expression has so far prevented any scientific investigation of sexual phenomena – Few investigators have asked the question: What is sex? – and taken the necessary steps to find the answers – So far as I know the only scientific work on this subject was done by Doctor Wilhelm Reick [Reich] – As a result he was expelled from a number of countries before he took refuge in America where he died in a federal prison – His experiments indicate that sex is in all likelihood an electromagnetic phenomena, that physicists and mathematicians could discover precise formulae of sexual energy and contact leading to a physics of sexual behavior – It would then be possible, on the basis of precise knowledge, to determine what sexual practices were healthy and what practices were not healthy with reference to function of the human organism. ('Reality Studio')

We can imagine that Reve listened sympathetically, with open, eager ears, to Burroughs's words, for they reflected his own views on literature and sexual freedom. After the conference, Burroughs returned to Tangier, where he finished *Nova Express*. Reve soon went to Tangier, evidently hoping to see Burroughs. Though he missed Burroughs, Reve notes that he did meet Alan Ansen, Burroughs's acquaintance who was associated with many of the Beats, in Tangier (Maas 84).

Soon after these encounters and travels, the young Dutch writer published some of his most bold and provocative works, including *Op Weg naar het Einde* (Approaching the End, 1963 and *Nader tot U* (Nearer to Thee, 1966)). Often deploying epistolary form, these works frankly and openly portrayed homosexual behavior, and displayed iconoclastic views toward religion that were shocking to many at the time. A major controversy involving Reve erupted in 1967, after the writer's conversion to Catholicism, when 'he was officially charged with blasphemy for writing an article in the journal *Dialoog* that characterized Christ as a donkey with whom he wanted to have sexual intercourse' (Wood). The scandalous description appeared in his 'Letter to My Bank' (1966), bearing the address

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of a bank in Morocco and noting that his portrayal of this act of bestiality was prompted by his sympathetic observation of the animal's cruel treatment in rural Spain and Portugal. Needless to say, the scandal brought Reve fame and notoriety he otherwise would not have received.

Critical observers have noted the wider cultural implications of Reve's bold, subversive writing. As Mattias Duyves has written, 'in my perspective [this incident was] a crucial cultural opening moment – a turning point – in a redevelopment of relations between status quo and underground.' Perhaps propelled by the example of Burroughs, just following the period he spent in the Beat Hotel in Paris, Reve made public and visible that which before had remained unstated, repressed; thus, his work no doubt played a role in the loosening of traditional Dutch values in the 1960s.

In the meantime, Burroughs and his work, neither of which had been much known by the French during the time the writer lived in Paris, gradually was folded back into French culture as well. *Naked Lunch* appeared in French as *Festin nu*, translated by Eric Kahane and published by Gallimard in 1964, five years after its first English publication in Paris and two years after its first publication in the United States. Soon thereafter, other works by Burroughs began to appear in French, often within a short time after their publication in English. Translation can thus be seen as another means by which ideas are moved from one cultural/linguistic scene to another, often creating fresh and invigorating meanings in the new scene. The gradual emergence of the 'French Burroughs' was followed by critical studies in the 1970s, such as those by Philippe Mikriammos and Serge Grunberg, that introduced Burroughs and his work to French readers, placing him within the context of French avant-garde writers such as the Marquis de Sade, Lautréamont, and Artaud, as well as the thinking of Marx, Lacan, and Bataille.

Theorizing the Underground

Any consideration of the underground, it seems to me, must first confront and wrestle with the question of human agency, a particularly vexing issue in contemporary theory, made all the more compelling in modern and postmodern discourse where notions of what constitutes a self become especially salient and contentious. And, associated with agency, a key motivation often propelling underground activity is the desire – indeed, the imperative – to effect meaningful political or social change. One way of thinking about the underground is to conceive of it physically – not only metaphorically – as an enterprise that will, through its loosening of the ground beneath the surface, through the creation of tunnels and caverns, inevitably, at some point, result in an alteration of the contours of the surface, perhaps even resulting in the toppling of certain established structures, opening the possibility for building new and different kinds of structures.

What then are the limits and possibilities of human action? Have the limits and capacity for exercising agency changed over time? These are questions we must examine over and over again, from moment to moment, from generation to

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generation. As one reviews, reads, and reflects upon modern and contemporary thinking about relations between individuals and surrounding social and political situations, one frequently encounters theories that seem to allow for very little room for human latitude. Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault come to mind. The fundamental question for Althusser in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* is why capitalism has remained such a resilient system. How are ideologies reproduced? His analysis reveals a tight, interconnected system of social and political controls that integrates (in varying degrees, depending on the society) forcible means of control (repressive state apparatuses), and softer means of control (ideological state apparatuses). The former would include police, military, and sometimes legal systems. The latter: religion, education, family, media, cultural institutions, etc. Into these systems the subject is born or cast, literally called into being, and that being is defined and restrained by these powerful forces of ideology – so powerful that it seems difficult if not impossible to step outside of them. This perhaps is the postmodern bind, one that Adorno anticipated: can we ever find a position outside the systems we are apart of, from which to critique or act? Or, are we forever inextricably bound by those systems/ideologies? Is genuine resistance possible?

The same questions arise as we read Foucault, who likewise (though with different inflections) analyzes the power of systems and the potential of human agency. As Foucault describes and accounts for the various modern institutions (jails, mental facilities, schools) that channel and normalize (often with punitive threats) human activity – employing phrases such as 'carceral archipelago' and 'regimes of truth' – we may easily be left with the impression that there is 'No Exit', no way out. Of course Foucault, aware of this bind, does try to pry open spaces and possibilities for movement and change, for example in his delineation of the 'specific intellectual.' While he seems to back off of the possibility or desirability of change on a grand scale – such as a Marxist revolution that supposedly would overturn if not obliterate class distinction – he holds out possibilities for acting within our specific local theaters.

For help in thinking through the underground, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari, who provide powerful metaphors and vocabulary for moving through the binds I have just described. We are all no doubt familiar with key terms and concepts proposed by Deleuze and Guattari: lines of flight, rhizomatic vs. root thinking, smooth/striated space, producing machines, desiring machines, body without organs, etc. Orphans, atheists, and nomads all show us the way to separate ourselves from calcified normative structures: traditional patriarchal families, dogmatic religion, and modern, bourgeois notions of property and territoriality. Their project – paralleling and extending the work of other poststructuralists such as Derrida, Kristeva, Lyotard – examines and critiques powerful paradigms of thought proposed by Marx and Freud. Their goal is nothing short of chipping away at, if not completely dismantling, fascist tendencies, collective and individual, by analyzing 'the flows of desire, the fears and the anxieties, the loves and the despairs that traverse the social field as intensive notes from the underground' (Seem xviii).

'What flow to break? Where to interrupt it? How and by what means?' (38)

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ask the pair of theorists in *Anti-Oedipus*. And the translators in the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* write:

> [A] plateau is reached when circumstances combine to bring an activity to a pitch of intensity that is not automatically dissipated in a climax. The heightening of energies is sustained long enough to leave a kind of afterimage of its dynamism that can be reactivated or injected into other activities, creating a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist. (xiv)

Deleuze and Guattari are the great philosophers of the middle: in the final paragraph of their intro to A *Thousand Plateaus* they write:

> A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and … and … and …' … Kleist, Lenz, and Büchner have another way of travelling and moving: proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than starting and finishing ... The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. (25)

This approach, I propose, is a useful way of thinking of how the underground works, always beginning where we are, in the middle, and moving out in various directions, propelled by desire and physical force, probing the softest, most porous membranes, and pushing our way through. The underground, as we have noted, is a place 'between', neither here nor there, neither starting point nor destination.

Earlier in this introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, once again contrasting root/rhizome thinking, Deleuze and Guattari apply their metaphors to urban landscapes, referencing one of the cities that is a focus for this volume:

> We are tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much … Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes. Amsterdam, a city entirely without roots, a rhizome-city with its stem-canals, where utility connects with the greatest folly in relation to a commercial war machine. (15)

It occurs to me here that one of the various directions our thinking could take would be a line of flight that examines and traces the ways urban space is constructed, and – accordingly – the ways those constructs either foreclose or provide access to underground activity and movement.

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Just a few pages into the introduction of *A Thousand Plateaus*, amid a presentation of the notion of rhizomatic as opposed to root-thinking, Deleuze and Guattari invoke Burroughs: 'Take William Burroughs's cut-up method: the folding of one text onto another, which constitutes multiple and even adventitious roots (like a cutting), implies a supplementary dimension to that of the texts under consideration' (6). That Burroughs and Ginsberg were among the voices Deleuze and Guattari listened to attentively as they thought their way through the legacies of Freud and Marx, seeking to understand and provide ways of resisting fascism of the mind and fascism of the body politic, is perfectly fitting, for these two American writers (among others), as we have seen, were involved in a compatible, parallel project.

Possibilities for the Underground Today

I now take my final turn to a consideration of possibilities for the underground today, during an historical period that has commonly been thought of (using Deleuze and Guattari's terms) as increasingly striated, with a vast interconnected network of checkpoints, surveillance systems, and laws checking civil liberties, often in the name of preventing terrorism and insuring security. Indeed William S. Burroughs lamented this historical condition, the shrinking of freedoms he saw occurring over the past two centuries and in his own times, in the 'Fore!' of *Cities of the Red Night*, the first of his last trilogy, published in 1981:

> There is simply no room left for 'freedom from the tyranny of government' since city dwellers depend on it for food, power, water, transportation, protection, and welfare. Your right to live where you want, with the companions of your choosing, under laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century with Captain Mission. Only a miracle or a disaster could restore it. (xv)

Despite this gloomy prognosis that might seem to ring true, there are still examples of what we might consider fairly traditional modes of underground resistance to rigid borders and law. Residents of Gaza bore tunnels beneath the border between Gaza and Egypt to transport a wide array of goods, including disassembled vehicles, appliances, food, and (no doubt) weapons, circumventing the tight stage imposed on the tiny sliver of territory. Drug traffickers construct tunnels from Tijuana to the United States side of the border, south of San Diego.

Still the possibilities for effective movement through the physical underground, seem to be increasingly circumscribed and unreliable, particularly given the development of sophisticated counter-measures on the part of powerful governments and organizations. As one kind of space becomes more striated, the site of underground movement shifts toward smoother, more porous space. Certainly cyberspace, in our times, opens new channels for conveying suspect, elicit information. I would like to survey various possibilities for underground activity, looking briefly at a number of specific instances. The list is by no means comprehensive; rather, I mean for it to be suggestive.

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1. Flash mobs/Smart mobs

In his 2002 book *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*, Howard Rheingold describes the potential for using new forms of mobile communication devices and computing systems to effect social change. He notes that these technological innovations provide opportunities for good and ill alike. The Smartmobs.org website points to the anti-World Trade protests in Seattle in 1999 as one instance of this phenomenon, and to the toppling of Filipino president Joseph Estrada in 2001, 'through public demonstrations organized through salvos of text messages', as another. The website goes on to describe how smart mobs work, and suggests their revolutionary potential:

> The people who make up smart mobs cooperate in ways never before possible because they carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities. Their mobile devices connect them with other information devices in the environment as well as with other people's telephones. Dirt-cheap microprocessors embedded in everything from box tops to shoes are beginning to permeate furniture, buildings, neighbourhoods, products with invisible intercommunicating smartifacts. When they connect the tangible objects and places of our daily lives with the Internet, handheld communication media mutate into wearable remote control devices for the physical world. ('SmartMobs')

Flashmobs are similar. Social networks are used to mobilize crowds to show up at particular times at particular places to stage some kind of demonstration. One recent example took place in November of 2010:

> A crowd of about 200 gay men and women in Barcelona staged a massive make-out session in front of the Pope Sunday as he was driven through town in the bullet-proof Popemobile on his way to celebrate mass at one of the city's basilicas.
> The monster spit-swap was organized by a Facebook group called Queer Kissing Flashmob, which sought to protest Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Spain and the Catholic Church's policies about homosexuals. (Caulfield)

More famous and significant examples of the use of social networking to effect political change have been seen recently in the Middle East. Following the Iranian elections in June of 2009 efforts were made to organize protests to challenge results that proclaimed Mahmoud Ahmadinejad the winner over Mir-Hossein Mousavi and other opponents. Videos of the shooting of the young Iranian woman identified as Neda Agha-Soltan were spread virally on Facebook and YouTube. Twitter was used to organize protests and post lists of people allegedly killed by the Islamic regime. Social networking has been used as well in recent popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere. Of course, these activities have not, until now, always resulted in the kinds of changes hoped for.

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2. Feral Trade

A short piece in a recent issue of *Adbusters* describes a new means of challenging paradigms of global commerce, feral trade, begun by artist Kate Rich in 2003:

> Rich utilizes social networking (the old-fashioned, sentient kind) to find and contract with producers in nations outside the rubric of established global trade. Through this system of acquaintances, she procures items like coffee from El Salvador and sweets from Iran and then moves those good into the UK via another social network: a loose collective of artists, curators, musicians and relatives, people whose lives dictate a fair amount of international travel. The items essentially hitch a ride with travelers, entering the country via luggage and circumventing traditional channels of freight. Once in the UK, the goods are traded within social spheres: moved between people and organizations that bear a relationship to one another beyond the trade ... Rich maintains a database through which the movement of all goods is tracked. On first inspection, it appears mechanical – nothing more than a logbook detailing the movement of a product between points. But a closer look reveals that the data is actually a story ... The database is both record and narrative, following a product as it passes through human hands. The result is more than a map of trade routes: it's a schema of relationships, one that contextualizes a commodity in social terms. (Nardi)

3. WikiLeaks

In July of 2010, WikiLeaks rose to national and international prominence – lauded by some, vilified by others – when the cyber-organization 'defied the Obama Administration by publishing seventy-six thousand intelligence and military field reports from the Afghan war.' And 'in October, it posted nearly four hundred thousand secret documents generated on the front lines of the Iraq conflict' (Coll 27). When Julian Assange launched his digital enterprise in 2006, he described his purposes in a sort of manifesto: 'We must understand the key generative structure of bad government. We must develop a way of thinking about this structure that is strong enough to carry us through the mire of competing political moralities and into a position of clarity' (Coll 27).

WikiLeaks provides information on the conduct of current, on-going wars that has not previously been widely accessible: 'important new facts about civilian casualties, the torture of detainees by our allies, Iran's exported violence, the disruptions caused by private contractors, and the debilitating patterns of clandestine warfare in two benighted regions' (Coll 27). Not surprisingly, Daniel Ellsberg, who was responsible for making public the 'Pentagon Papers' in the 1970s, has endorsed these actions. WikiLeaks tactics, however, have been controversial. In the realm of cyberspace, WikiLeaks operated nomadically, with no fixed address, rather like small guerilla insurgency groups, though there are reports, mentioned in a column in *The New Yorker*, that WikiLeaks 'has recently been in discussions with lawmakers in Iceland about trying to concoct the world's most extensive press-freedom regime there. The idea apparently is to transform Iceland, in the aftermath of its recent, disastrous experiments with offshore bank-

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ing, into the Cayman Islands of First Amendment-inspired subversion' (Coll 28).

What these various tactics share is a commitment to move goods or ideas from one place to another, avoiding usual channels, or bringing to the surface things that before were hidden from view. At the same time groups and individuals explore new means of circumventing control mechanisms, authorities step in to exert control of these new realms, rather like the way Burroughs's Nova Police try to route out the Nova Mob. National security organizations sift through communications and snag anything suspect or potentially 'dangerous.' The Chinese government blocks Google. The Egyptian and Syrian governments shut down the Internet. The Iranian government stops Internet access for 45 minutes during the most volatile period of protests, reopening with lower bandwidth. It also interrupts mobile phone services and blocks access to the BBC and *The Guardian* websites. There were also reports of intelligence service infiltration of and use of Twitter. WikiLeaks is publicly denounced by the Pentagon and Assange becomes a fugitive.

The central paradox of invisibility/visibility, thus, lies at the heart of the operation of the underground. From the perspective of those in power, for whom underground activities pose a potential threat, there is the question of whether it is best to monitor and permit underground operations rather than apprehend suspects and bring them to the attention of the wider public, for risks can be associated with making the invisible visible. Blatant censorship, for instance, can call attention to material that otherwise might have gone unnoticed. Government suppression of Ginsberg's *Howl*, or the fatwa levied against Salman Rushie's *Satanic Verses* certainly catapulted these works (and thus the ideas they contained) to the forefront of public consciousness. Some – not without reason – have suggested that the United States was better off leaving Osama bin Laden an underground fugitive. Apprehending and killing him, while producing catharsis and cause for jubilation among many in the United States, could possibly result in elevating his profile and propelling his cause in the long run.

This paradox of visibility/invisibility takes on somewhat different meanings when viewed from the point of view of those within the underground. Ultimately, the aim is to stay alive, or at least keep certain ideas alive, in order to effect conditions that will no longer necessitate the need to remain underground. And to reduce risks of being detected, underground units usually are kept small. Yet, there is the acknowledgement, at the same time, that if the number of individuals involved in the underground were to increase dramatically, that if the flow were to become great enough, it might put sufficient pressure on control mechanisms to break them.

The unfolding of events in 2011, in what has become known as the Arab Spring, reminds us that these issues are more than theoretical, academic. Many who have been oppressed and forced to remain underground for many years in places such as Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria, have courageously dared to come to the surface, into the streets and public squares, vulnerable to bullets and brutal recriminations. While these events may inspire us and remind us of the viability of resistance, at the same time we see how tenacious, intransigent and brutal oppressive regimes can be, how difficult it is to dislodge authori-

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tarian systems. Those who have had power and benefited from it are reluctant to give it up. And they can often muster military support for their position.

In the face of all the obstacles and challenges, we pursue various lines of flight. We still might envision communication and transportation systems in which neighbor can connect to neighbor, and any one party in one place connect to any other party in another place without being forced to follow pre-existing channels, thus breaking boundaries and hierarchies and, simply by making connections, establish new relations, rhizomatically.

Note

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