

long-lasting restrictions on moving around the city after nightfall. Artificial light is a building material akin to wood and stone, the architectural historian Sandy Isenstadt compellingly argues. (177) Perhaps, then, darkness provided scaffolding for the power structure in urbanizing Rio de Janeiro. The socio-legal nighttime effectively created architectural and urban space. Laws, buildings, plazas, and artificial illumination all formed part of an urban infrastructure that sustained the racialized process of the criminalization of everyday life outdoors. We have yet to apprehend which interior architectural features may have contributed to this process from the other side of the house's threshold.

**NOTHING BUT A FEW SIGNS, LIKE STARS IN AN IMMENSE BLACK NIGHT**  
Clandestinity and Night-faring Practices in the Underground Railroad

Lucía Jalón Oyarzun

Framing the Connection Between Light, Darkness and Surveillance (178)

The first urban lighting system appeared in Paris at the same moment as the modern police did, in the late 17th century. The lamp posts or *reverberes* were an expression of the power of Louis XIV, the Roi Soleil or Sun King, source of life (and power) himself; and the penalty for intentionally breaking one of them was to be sent to the galleys for life. If you attacked light to regain the night, you attacked the king, but most importantly, you attacked and rebelled against his control. (179) This control could only be understood through the inextricable linkage between light and surveillance.

In his *Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard wrote how "tout ce qui brille voit", or everything that casts a light, sees, (180) that is, everything that casts a light generates a sphere of control defined by the space that gets illuminated. If we look at the 1863 map of the lighthouses of Great Britain engraved by R. H. Laurie, we can see how the space produced by a light is one defined by reach and intensity. How far does it reach, how much intensity is lost along the way? Light does not operate through clear limits or lines, on the contrary, it creates a field of scopes and intensities which requires special spatial tools



178 This article is part of an ongoing research that continues the author's PhD dissertation, "Excepción y cuerpo rebelde: lo político como generador de una arquitectónica menor / Exception and the rebel body: the political as generator of a minor architecture" (PhD diss., UPM, 2017), <http://oa.upm.es/48250/>, focused on the potentialities of minor architecture to study the conflicts between the spatial production linked to the exception as political device, and the spatial production of the rebel body. Now, it is part of a post-doctoral research project carried out at EPFL, and oriented around the question of clandestinity and underground activities as minor spatial practices. 179 For a longer exposé on this topic, see Jalón Oyarzun, 273–86.; for the connections between the night and night-faring practices and the shared political and architectural agency of bodies, see Lucía Jalón Oyarzun, 'Night as Commons: Minor Architecture and Dayfaring Citizens', *Scapegoat: Architecture / Landscape / Political Economy* 10 (2017): 57–70. 180 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 34.

to work with. Furthermore, we need to consider how that light that sees also *touches* the illuminated object, it has a material effect on it, it can interfere in its movement, its disposition, and its actions, as shown for instance in the anti-aerial systems used in the Second World War. With this in mind, we cannot consider the progressive expansion of daylight's rule in modern and contemporary experience without an analysis of the simultaneous development of control and surveillance.



The links had been there for quite a while, *vigilance* has for a long time implied the dominion of the night. We find a family of words in Latin that allows us to frame these links further. First, there was *vigil*, denoting an officer responsible to watch out for any danger during the night, *vigilia*, which was how each of the four parts in which Romans divided the night was named, in correspondence to the four night-watching turns of those night officers, and the verb *vigilare*, which meant to watch and guard the night, thus being awake and alert. To watch and surveil was a key activity of the night which made more vulnerable our senses, and thus our collective being. The original root for all these words was in fact *vigeo*, *vigere*, from the Indoeuropean *weg*, to be lively and strong (which is also at the origin of the English verb to *watch*). (181)

If we move forward in this *light-veillance* entanglement, we arrive at the *panopticon*, where we see a central eye—that of the king, the state, ...—which was emerging already in the Parisian lamps controlling their surroundings. If we focus not so much on



its abstract figure, but as seen in some of its built instances, we see that central element appearing almost like a lighthouse in the middle of a sea of darkness (or dangers), which the light (and sight), just by potentially being there, is enough to overcome. (Figure 3) Now, if we go forward in our search for the links between light, darkness and surveillance, we are faced with the architectural functioning and spatial consequences of a new figure, that of the *oligopticon*, defined by Bruno Latour as a multiplication of eyes that do not see very well, but which, by their sheer

number, give nonetheless a precise image of a given situation. (182) It is the equivalent in our societies of control to the disciplinary societies' *panopticon*. The *oligopticon* quantifies, measures, and constructs a form of technological topography where each body or action is located, identified, measured and linked up with others in a single entity. The *oligopticon* can be thought of in a double dimension. It has, of course, an optical functioning, where every single living or non-living entity is translated into a measurable object, and a second, haptic dimension, where it is the touch of that vision that modulates and shapes behaviors. (183) These technological topographies show it is no longer the eye of a subject, be that human or institutional, but of a networked field of visibility that emerges where the agent that sees (and touches) is a machine, and where the information obtained and transmitted is of a computational nature. (184)

181 "Vigía", Diccionario Etimológico Castellano en Línea, <http://etimologias.dechile.net/?vigi.a>; *A Latin Dictionary*, Lewis and Short (New York, Oxford: Harper and Brothers, Oxford University Press, 1879), s.v. "Vigilo", <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=vigilo>.  
 182 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 181. 183 We have defined this as the *soft touch of capitalism*, or an *algorithmic touch*, in Lucía Jalón Oyarzun, "La Apariencia de Un Toque Humano, o El Diseño de La Pasividad Hiperactiva," *Revista de Occidente*, no. 453 (February 2019): 49–64. 184 On this networked visibility and agency, see the work of Geoff Cox and the Center for the Study of the Networked Image (CSNI), Centre for the Study of the Networked Image et al., 'Affordances of the Networked Image', *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 30, no. 61–62 (2 July 2021): 40–45.

185 For a more detailed analysis of this condition, see Lucía Jalón Oyarzun, "Cuerpos Anestesiados y Estéticas de Lo Clandestino En El Interior Totalizante Del Capitalismo Contemporáneo," (Lecture, IX Curso de introducción al arte contemporáneo: INTERIORES, CENDEAC, Murcia, May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xciqyimUINI>.) 186 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 51.

If we go back to Bachelard's formula and we make the experiment of inverting it, to show that "everything that sees, casts a light" we can explore these eyes as a source of light where the *oligopticon* produces a homogenous field of vigilance and *exposure*, with every single body always in the open, available, reachable, in a new form of internalised exterior or exposed interior. (185) In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt already wrote about "the implacable bright light" brought by constant presence and exposure—what today we would call the need to be always ON, 24/7 connected—while a sphere of darkness and non-exposure was essential for the survival of any healthy political community. (186)

As we have already mentioned, this connection between light and surveillance is not inconsequential. In parallel to the emergence of this implacable field of light, control and exposure, we can trace the process whereby the night was progressively being erased. (187) The urban lighting systems in Paris, London and many cities around the world grew and improved, electricity arrived and along with it a control revolution that would come to shape our informational present. Meanwhile, slowly but steadily, our hours of sleep decreased, and the skies disappeared behind the glow of our expanded nocturnal activity. By now, several cities and institutions have appointed night mayors and other officials with not so straight-forward titles whose role is to manage this new time that must be consumed in our race towards a plentiful 24/7 existence.

However, the night remains, just as nature remains autonomous behind illusions of its control or disappearance. (188) And our physical constraints remain as well, physical

limits that mean that if we don't sleep for a certain number of days we do, quite simply, end up dying. And through the millions of blue lights illuminating the sleepless night, or as the old expression said, "burning the midnight oil", the night still disturbs us, individually and collectively, positively or negatively.

French philosopher Denis Diderot wrote of how "the night conceals forms and gives horror to noises; even if it is only that of a leaf, in the heart of a forest, it sets the imagination in motion." (189) Darkness unsettles our physical experience. As it limits our sight, it puts the weight on our other, often underused, senses so that for each movement or noise felt, our imagination fills up the gaps with unexpected (and quite often dangerous) causes. By night, the corporeal map of our surroundings is faultier. The modern era has turned us into retinal beings, discarding and undervaluing our haptic condition; accordingly, by night we feel more vulnerable, a vulnerability we do not conceive as an asset, on the contrary, it is often presented as a weakness. However, we know that only those who have a trusty map of their environments inscribed on their body through experience, i.e. by making themselves available to the world, will know how to interpret noises or textures, will link signs to their embodied experience and will be able to thus navigate the night autonomously. That much was clear in those Parisian streets of the 17th century. Whoever broke the *réverbères* did it because they knew they had more chances of moving successfully in a neighborhood known *by heart*, that is, through maps written as affective images in his body, than the policeman who came from outside, depending on forms of abstract knowledge and *merely* his eyes. (190)

187 A growing field of night studies has shown this transformation in several studies, we list here just a few references that we consider an accessible but still critical approach to the topic: Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London; New York: Verso Books, 2013); Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit: XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2009); Simone Delattre and Alain Corbin, *Les douze heures noires: la nuit à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000); Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). 188 As well stated in the works of Carolyn Merchant, *Autonomous Nature: Problems of Prediction and Control from Ancient Times to the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2016); or Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2020). 189 Denis Diderot, *Diderot on Art. The Salon of 1767*, ed. John Goodman (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1995), 126. 190 On the notion of invisible maps, see Lucía Jalón Oyarzun, "Nightfaring & Invisible Maps: Of Maps Perceived, but Not Drawn," *The Funambulist*, no. 18 (2018): 40–43.

In what follows, we want to consider this night-faring knowledge as a minor spatial knowledge linked to clandestinity, capable of expanding the repertoire of a minor architectural practice. Departing from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on the minor literature of Franz Kafka, of Michel Foucault on the importance of minor knowledges against normalised disciplines, and of architects like Robin Evans, John Hejduk, Jill Stoner or Jennifer Bloomer, we propose to define minor as an open set of spatial practices and plural know-hows based on the immanent differentiating agency of bodies (or their inexhaustible power of variation). These practices feed on the circumstantial and experimental, operating in the narrow margins and blind spots of major languages, structures and knowledges, and unsettling them. While minor architectures work with and within materially limited spaces, tools and conditions, they manage to bring forth affective amplitude: they enlarge the world through forms of plural material entanglement. Departing from this minor understanding of architecture, what can that person breaking the *réverbère* in Paris and its will to safeguard night and darkness around them tell us about the connection between embodied spatial knowledge and minor spatial practices?

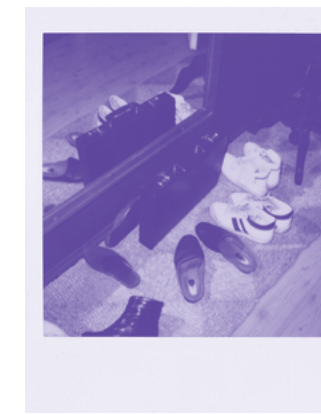
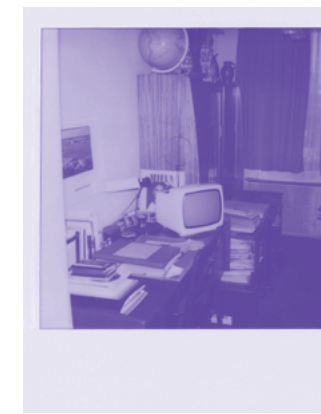
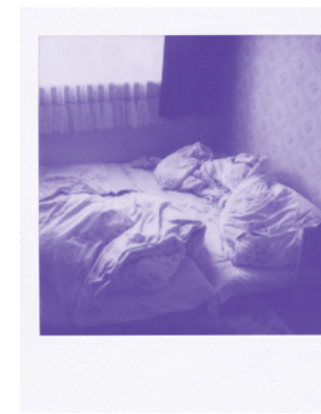
#### Clandestinity as the Production of Darkness

“Our encryption is the real world”. This is how Mr Robot, in the TV-series of the same name, replies to Elliot’s astonishment as he induces him into his hacker cell by bringing

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him to meet the rest of the team at an old arcade in Coney Island. As he arrives, Elliot, a half-alive hacker who survives through self-inflicted numbness, is shocked to see they all work there together instead of hiding behind encrypted digital identities. Mr Robot conveys that, while IPs and codes make everything traceable, there’s a depth, fuzziness and granularity to “the real world” that *encrypts* much better. It is a little scene, at the beginning of a series that would have a lot of twists, however, it helps us point with clarity at the relations between hiding, secrecy and clandestinity and night-faring knowledges as minor spatial practices.

Clandestinity, understood as the articulation of spaces of secrecy and invisibility, is traversed by a singular form of architectural knowledge centered on embodied practices, playing with lines while understanding of scopes and areas of affection. A set of know-hows founded on a fine-tuned awareness of the fuzziness and material qualities of that “real world” referred to by the Mr Robot character. While this notion holds further theoretical folds, here we will merely underline this preliminary definition through a quick overview of cases where this relation between space, secrecy and invisibility comes to the fore. For instance, we can observe how migrants use in a minor way the major syntax of our societies of control’s regime of visibility and spectacle, articulating intermittent strategies of exposure and invisibility in the Straits of Gibraltar, erasing their individual fingerprints while they



collectively overexpose themselves to gain protection. (191) Meanwhile, the collective dimension of secrecy, the need for complicity that collectively weaves the underground space, is laid bare in the construction of shelters and hiding places at the Warsaw ghetto during the Second World War or those where the Spanish “moles” hid during the Civil War and the more than 30-year-long dictatorship that followed. (192) Finally, we can see the importance of the apparently meaningless detail whenever and wherever survival is at stake in the Polaroids taken by the Stasi in the flats they searched, as recovered by Simon Menner in his project *Images from the Secret Stasi Archives or: what does Big Brother see, while he is watching?* These images were used to see how things were before their search so as not to leave any trace, allowing us to reflect on that persistent “clandestinity of private life” as formulated by Guy Debord, “about which one never possesses more than derisory documents” (193). We see then the existence of a spatial knowledge impossible to represent, but alive, embodied and situated. A knowledge based on the reading, interpretation and simultaneous inscription and erasure of traces, where space becomes defined by an ecology of signs, an active interrelation of affective exchanges involving and embedding a variety of material bodies. While in Mr Robot we see this production of darkness in relation to the technological topographies of control societies and the *oligoptic*, where everything casts a light until there’s nothing left to distinguish, we can trace this idea of clandestinity (or en-

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cryption) as a form of spatial practice with a longer history, and one in which the role of the night was essential to create confusion around one’s own figure. In the following pages, we seek to analyse this in relation to some of the night-faring practices evident in the Underground Railroad network threading the North-American continent during the 19th century.

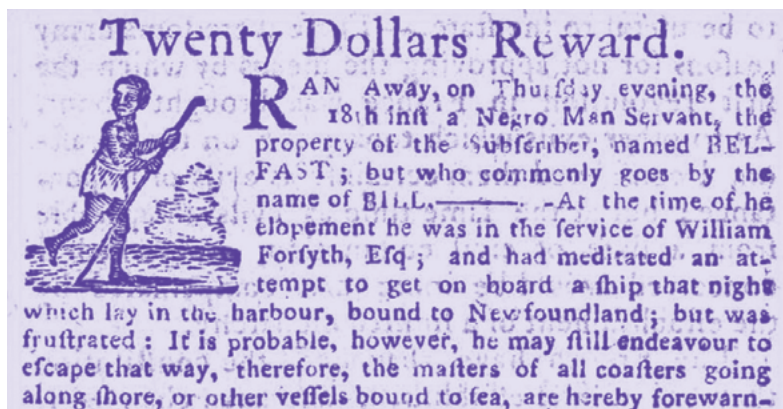
#### The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was a network of people, practices and landscapes that connected the United States with Canada and other free territories during the 19th century. It helped bring an estimated 135,000 fugitives to freedom. Although certain narratives showed it as a deeply organised network linked to the efforts of the Northern abolitionists, even depicted in some images as an actual railroad, recent research has produced a more accurate description, showing it as “a diverse, flexible, and interlocking system ... a model of democracy in action,” not a conspiracy, as it “operat(ed) in most areas with a minimum of central direction and a maximum of grassroots involvement”. (194) Furthermore, it was mostly “free ... African Americans who were not enslaved, (and who) were the bedrock of this



actual railroad, recent research has produced a more accurate description, showing it as “a diverse, flexible, and interlocking system ... a model of democracy in action,” not a conspiracy, as it “operat(ed) in most areas with a minimum of central direction and a maximum of grassroots involvement”. (194) Furthermore, it was mostly “free ... African Americans who were not enslaved, (and who) were the bedrock of this

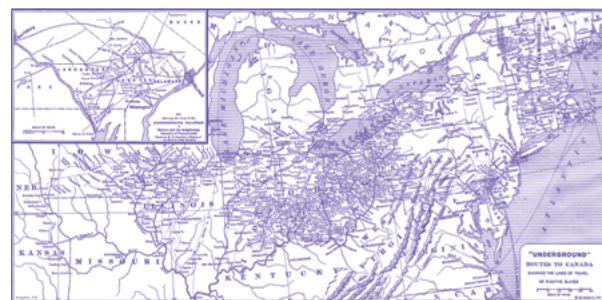
191 On this topic and its architectural analysis, we refer to UPM, 2019 Antonio Giráldez López, “El dispositivo frontera : la construcción espacial desde la norma y el cuerpo migrante” (PhD diss., UPM, 2019), <https://oa.upm.es/63846/>. 192 For a thorough analysis of the *topos* or moles, see Jesús Torbado and Manuel Leguineche, *Los topos* (Madrid: Capitán Swing, 2010). 193 Guy Debord, “Critique de La Séparation,” in *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, n.d.), 546. 194 Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America’s First Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Amistad, 2006), 5–6.



movement...” (195) The infrastructure was large, and the actors diverse, because it was not just about making a safe passage for the fugitives, it required the carrying of messages and information too, as well as the legal aid to defend those escaping as well as those helping them, getting money and funding, “as well as an even wider pool of family members, friends, and fellow parishioners who although they might never engage personally in illegal activity, protected those who did and made it possible for them to continue their work.” (196) While the first African slaves were taken to Virginia in 1619, the enslavement of the native population and slaves coming from Spanish colonies was already a reality during the previous century. In the 1640s the first notices of slaves fleeing their masters emerged and by 1700 they could often be found in American newspapers. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century the clandestine movement worked mostly on a case-by-case strategy, however, through them, a series of lines and strategies started to be drawn up and practiced throughout the territory. It was only around the 1830s that an organised system emerged. This coincided with a deepening of the social divisions over the question of slavery. The South passed the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, to harden the measures that could be taken to recapture fugitives and punish the accomplices helping them in their flight, which meant that a more active and efficient organisation within the network was needed, creating safe routes and systematic practices of movement and communication.

That period was the most active moment of the network, extending its reach across several states and thousands of kilometers. It was also at that moment that the idea of an “underground” started to emerge, symbolically connected to the invention of the actual railroad. Linked to that growing organisation a new vocabulary emerged to describe the different actors, routes and strategies used to traverse the territory. It was the vocabulary of a new spatial practice that was being mastered. And so, there were *agents* whose role was managing information and organizing strategies, *conductors* who “transported or guided fugitives from slave territory, ...across major bodies of water, or through hostile northern territory”, and *station masters* who kept safe-houses along the way. (197) Terms describing bundles of things were used to refer to groups of fugitive slaves, for instance “loads of potatoes, parcels, bundles of wool, (or) bushels of wheat”.

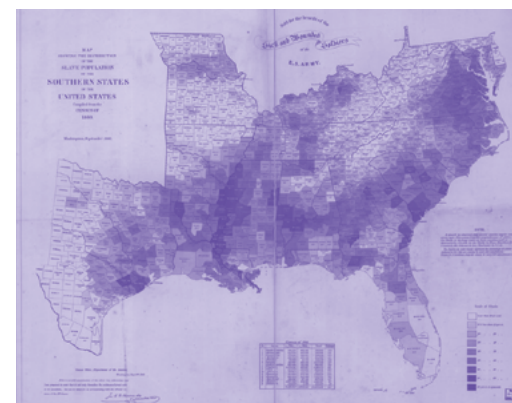
Although there have been some efforts to fix the network of stations and routes, as shown for instance in the Wilbur Siebert’s maps from his 1898 study on *The Underground Railroad*, these attempts were for the most part proof of our inability to work with fuzzy spatialities (198). The spatial lineament of the Underground Railroad, as well as of many other clandestine and minor practices, were not roads or points, but ecologies of signs. Something we can better see



195 J. Blaine Hudson, *Encyclopedia of the Underground Railroad* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2006), 7. 196 Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 6. 197 Hudson, *Encyclopedia*, 8. 198 Tom Nurmi, “Shackle, Sycamore, Shibboleth: Material Geographies of the Underground Railroad,” in *Cartographies of Exile* (New York; London: Routledge, 2016), 115.



a moving property and the legal codes of the time, as explained by Walter Johnson, “expanded the territory of captivity beyond state lines to inscribe servitude within the body itself. In the eyes of the law, it no longer mattered how far a slave might travel (...) his body was already written, spoken for, *signed*”. (200) Around the plantation, the engine of Southern economy, organised around the master’s house and the slave quarters, emerged a larger carceral landscape, a “patterned



ecology of slaveholding agro-capitalism”. (201) The labored land surrounding the slave’s daily existence was “the determining parameter of his condition”, while the open lands created fields of hypervisibility where the slaveholder and their official enforcers—from the elevated position of a horse-rider—dominated all their subjects’ movements, who on their side “could not see any place to run” or hide to. (202) However, at the edge of the plantations, “there was another sort of landscape. In uncleared woods and undrained swamps, (...) the spatial premises of the Cotton Kingdom, the structured and mutual formation of body and landscape called ‘slavery’, disintegrated”. (203) Through “practical navigation rather than ordinal abstraction,” slaves got to develop a singular form of embodied knowledge of this “off-the-grid landscape in the course of their daily work”; and they would use it to “hunt, trap, and fish to supplement their rations”. (204) This embodied knowledge of an alternative geography hidden to the slaveholder would prove essential in their flight, as few slaves “had ever seen a map”. (205) This alternative geographical knowledge was supported as well by shared stories and memories which helped produce a counternarrative to the efforts of the slaveholders to impress on slaves, in the words of Frederick Douglass, “a belief in the boundlessness of slave territory, and of their own limitless power.”

199 Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, xv–xvi, our emphasis. 200 Nurmi, “Shackle, Sycamore, Shibboleth,” 111. 201 Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 210. 202 Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 221. 203 Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 228–29. 204 Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 230–31. 205 Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 113.

This psychological enclosure sought to foreclose the night as well. It was after all the best accomplice in any flight attempt. Darkness short-circuited the hypervisibility otherwise at the service of the slaveholder, allowing for freer movement. The night became a space with specific characteristics, dimensions, and uses. Even if freedom lay far away in a vague notion of the North, the night was a necessary threshold to the path towards it. To block it, white people sought to scare the black population by instilling in them a fear of supernatural stories of ghosts and spirits that haunted the hours of darkness. (206)

In the event of an escape, would-be fugitives would first try to reach those peripheral landscapes of forests and swamps and wait for the night to come. The day was a space-time defined by vulnerability, while the night offered safety and transformed that vulnerability into an asset: an increased awareness allowed for a better interpretation of material signs essential to navigating in the night, such as the stars. Researcher Tom Nurmi writes about the novel *Blake*, written by Martin Delany, where “the hero Henry draws for his fellow runaways a map of the stars organized around ‘the North Star, the slave’s great Guide to Freedom!’” (207)

However, lack of knowledge about abstract navigation methods meant that would-be fugitives needed to master their physical senses far beyond the visual to turn their body into compasses. Aurality and touch were essential to manage the encounters with topography. The fugitive Charles Ball remembered how, “at dark, I again returned to the road, which I traveled in silence, trading as lightly as possible with my feet and

listening most attentively to every sound that I heard.” (208) Sound signals were an important part of the railroad codes. For instance, prearranged signals were used to detect a friend or foe in the road. One fugitive told how: “As a signal of our meeting in safety he would give the signal crying out, ‘yea! yo!’” (209) A sound signal created a common spatiality, a connection between two isolated bodies, a bond capable of orienting the body in darkness. Thus, for the station masters and conductors, using sounds to codify encounters was essential.

Touch was another important bodily orientator, if we go back to Delany’s novel, we see that when the stars could not be seen, haptic navigation had to be used, and “you must depend alone upon nature for your guide. Feel, in the dark, around the trunks or bodies of trees, especially the oak, and whenever you feel moss on the bark, that side on which the moss grows is always to the north.” (210)

We see then, how the night leads to an affective reading or navigation of space that goes beyond the visual and includes an extended material realm. The body orients itself by an exchange of affective intensities with a world that is rendered even. The superiority of the human being is no more and the trees, the stars, the bodies moving through the forest are all at the same level, their signifying or signaling expressions equally meaningful. Learning how to read material signs to move through the unexpected was a minor knowledge needed to escape the slaveholder’s major languages, writings and readings. The night reading had to be made by “physically interacting with objects”, and in the process, new crossings between “the somatic and (the) semantic”

emerged, (211) by listening in Toni Morrison’s words “with his fingertips, to hear what, if anything, the earth had to say.” (212)

We see this minor haptic knowledge at play in the narration of Levi Coffin, an American Quaker living in Newport, Indiana, whose house became one key station of the network:

“Where there was a fork in the road there was a nail driven in a tree three and a half feet from the ground half way round from front to back; if the right hand road was to be taken the nail was driven on the right hand side; if the left was the road the nail was to the left. If there were fences and no tree, the nail was driven in the middle of the second rail from the top, over on the inside of the fence, to the right, or left as in the trees; if neither tree, nor fence was near then a stake, or a stone was so set as to be unseen by day, but found at night. When fugitives started on the road they were instructed into the *mystery*: when they came to a fork in the road, they would go to the nearest tree, put their arms round and rub downwards, and which ever arm struck the nail, right or left, that was the road; and they walked on with no mistake. So with fences, but the stakes, or stones had to found with their feet, which was tolerably easily done.” (213)

The ability to read these signs was key as most of the paths and decisions taken were defined by non-planned encounters, where care, vigilance and alertness were the guide: “the frequency with which people got seriously lost and disoriented along the way (was) striking... (Because) enslaved people’s mode of geographic knowledge handicapped them when they left familiar, memorised ground.” (214)

Aware of his vulnerability, the fugitive needed to turn it into a tool, operationalize it to read those encounters with care and allow for unexpected signals to come in. All those knowledges were inscribed, written into, the fleeing body. They were instructions that had been told by conductors and station masters, but there were also memorised narratives of these semiotic systems given by other fugitives. This minor knowledge was inherently cooperative, and made to be shared in an embodied way, through oral and practiced means. This secrecy through embodiment was important because as Frederick Douglass put, it was essential to leave no traces: “Let us render the tyrant no aid; let us not hold the light by which he can trace the footprints of our flying brother.” (215) By erasing their footprints and making the network invisible to the disciplinary vision of the slaveholders, they were aiding the ones coming after them. We have written elsewhere about these kind of invisible maps, hidden because they remain unwritten in paper while they become inscribed in the body. They operate as affective images, traces left upon the body capable of orienting it as it communicates with the world, or in other words, as it creates a common ground, with the world.

Accordingly, to consider how minor spatial practices were shaped and transmitted it is essential to understand how landscapes worked as ecologies of signs. These traversed ecologies were more important than buildings, roads or houses, in the words of Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, “nothing but a few signs, like stars in an immense black night”. (216) These signals allowed for the experience of space to be rearticulated, creating “improvised material geographies that exploited, altered, and re-wrote the carceral

206 Gladys-Marie Fry, *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). 207 Nurmi, “Shackle, Sycamore, Shabboleth,” 119–20. 208 Quoted in Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 233. 209 Quoted in Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 234. 210 Martin Delany’s novel *Blake* quoted in Nurmi, “Shackle, Sycamore, Shabboleth,” 120.

211 Nurmi, “Shackle, Sycamore, Shabboleth,” 123–24. 212 Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon* (New York: Vintage International, 2004), 279. It is interesting to make here a little side note to consider the connection between these haptic knowledges and Charles Barbier “écriture nocturne” or “night writing”, which was at the origin of Charles Braille system for blind reading. It was a tactile system of reading where sounds are substituted by a series of raised dots within a grid. Connected to this, it is also worth to mention Lewis Carroll *nyctography*, a system to write and take notes with no light. The author of *Alice in Wonderland* invented it himself after often awakening in the middle of the night wanting to jot down ideas but without the need to go through all the process of lighting a light: “Any one who has tried, as I have often done, the process of getting out of bed at 2 a.m. in a winter night, lighting a candle, and recording some happy thought which would probably be otherwise forgotten, will agree with me it entails much discomfort. All I have now to do, if I wake and think of something I wish to record, is to draw from under the pillow a small memorandum book containing my Nyctograph, write a few lines, or even a few pages, without even putting the hands outside the bed-clothes, replace the book, and go to sleep again.” Letter to *The Lady* magazine of October 29, 1891, quoted in “Nyctography”, Wikipedia, last modified May 27, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nyctography>. 213 Quoted in Nurmi, “Shackle, Sycamore, Shabboleth,” 123. 214 Nurmi, “Shackle, Sycamore, Shabboleth,” 112. 215 Quoted in Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 239. 216 Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 61.

landscape” and made movement, caring, hiding and other practices alike possible (217). Even traditional architectural or urban elements like houses or roads needed to be acknowledged as part of these ecologies, as shields, blockers, or buffers. All of this connects us with one final key question, that of clandestinity as production of the confusion and blurriness brought on by night and darkness. Clandestinity is not so much about the creation of invisibility, it could be better defined as the careful and lucid playing with visibility and invisibility. For instance, the railroad network itself was not itself always hidden or operating in the night, on the contrary, it mostly “ran underground” in the first Southern stages and became more active in plain sight as it got to the North. Likewise, the escape did not always mean to hide, as “many free African American communities afforded fugitives the rare opportunity to *hide in plain view*”. (218) And even in the Southern carceral landscape, enslaved people knew how to “hide behind their own hypervisible appearance.” (219) We see then the profound connection between clandestinity and night, not so much because its activities often occurred at nighttime, but because, even when they happened in daylight, they depended on the visibility of control and its technical devices to become subject to the same effects that night causes in the human sensorium: confusion, blurriness and ambiguity, thus showing clandestinity as a minor spatial practice capable of producing night based on a collective embodied repertoire of material knowledge to navigate through it.

