

WHITE NIGHT: CITY AS EVENT

Researching Melbourne's
Festival of Illumination

Research Unit in
Public Cultures

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Melbourne

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Contents

White Night: City as Event

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Foreword: Event Cities

The nature of public events are changing as cities evolve. As people move more and more around the world, and information is circulating in increasingly complex patterns and rapid rhythms, the horizons of our urban landscape are also undergoing radical transformation. Urban illumination projects, which have become popular in cities around the world over the last decade, are a particularly visible sign of the ways in which new technologies and forms of public action are being combined to produce temporary transformations of urban space.

In this project we seek to examine the impact of a major public event — White Night — in the City of Melbourne. Through this event we witness a significant shift in the location and duration of artistic events as they move to inhabit the urban fabric. But the event is also conditioned by a central expectation that the public can engage and interact with art, and with each other. Is the quality of the art or the public experience more important in defining the event? Or does framing the question in oppositional terms miss the point?

It is our belief that events like White Night Melbourne present exciting new questions about how public culture manifests and transforms in contemporary cities. These events provide artists and city planners with new challenges. However, for these events to continue to anticipate and capture the interest of the public, it is important to get a sense of how people interact with publicly situated art, and how they engage with each other when the city becomes part of the artwork. Through this project we seek to examine and represent some of the myriad of ways in which people see and respond to artistic events in urban space, and through these accounts we provide a window into a new range of public experiences.

Nikos Papastergiadis
Scott McQuire

General Editors



White Night: City As Event

Danny Butt

Melbourne's White Night is no ordinary urban event, but is perhaps a mega-event or meta-event, allowing many kinds of energy and movement to flow through the city's capillaries. White Night is a "platform" upon which many art and cultural events now take place. In three short years, the festival of illuminated arts and performances has claimed the night-time city for a diverse range of inhabitants who would usually not be in the CBD together. Initially emerging from the 1997 Berlin *Long Night of the Museums* and Paris' 2002 *Nuit Blanche*, the large-scale all-night festival has spread internationally, becoming an important marker of what Palmer and Richards (2010) call the "eventful city". The urban night-festival has spread rapidly to be held in over 120 cities across the world, joining what Evans (2012) describes as "a global network of 'serial events' such as marathons and biennales."

Supported by municipal authorities to counter perceived anti-social aspects of the growing night time economy (such as mono-use and excessive alcohol consumption), White Night and its ilk represent an important evolution in civic planning and participation internationally. With half a million people convening on the streets, White Night is an entirely new way for publics to collectively participate in Melbourne's urban life. At a time when many of the city's historical functions are becoming informationalised, an event like White Night returns us to the problem of urban bodies, placing intriguing new demands on physical and social infrastructure of the city.

This publication emerged from our sense that the informational evolution of cities as event spaces has both pragmatic and conceptual consequences. Most of the writing about White Night has a promotional or pragmatic character, helping people work out where and how to attend. Media discussions after the fact have concentrated on the economic post-mortem ("was it worth it, how many people attended?").

Nine researchers in the Research Unit in Public Cultures from diverse disciplines (including media studies, performance studies, law, and criminology) used a combination of participant-observation and interview data to report on White Night 2015. The user experiences captured in these reports address many of urban planning's key concerns: universal access, personal security, transportation, water, alcohol, and pedestrian management. Yet these large-scale concerns are also

understood in an intimate way through personal accounts that highlight the differential impacts of seemingly banal planning decisions.

Tom Andrews' inquiry into the "ethics of illumination" sees White Night as a "practiced study in the affects and effects of an atmosphere", with the light soliciting a range of photographic impulses. Given the crowd's attention to their devices, Andrews questions the visibility of the public's co-location, seeing "a public organised and disciplined into the soft-accumulation of light on sensors." These gaps in the public were particularly notable when considering the impact of White Night on the homeless who sleep in the CBD, a community whose spaces of intimacy are a barrier to the normative publics mobilised by the event.

Hoping to mobilise the Situationist method of the *dérive* as a process of "strategic drifting", Alex Lambert finds instead a range of urban scripts that make the sought unplanned encounters unlikely. Encountering the phenomenon of teenage drinking at White Night, however, he sees "a tactical, transgressive mode of participation." Lambert identifies a nostalgic sense of freedom in his response to the lively youths' role as a "minor failure within a project of pacification", highlighting the implicit yet stern logic of urban sorting and modern policing.

Thao Phan notes, however, that these youth were a very small proportion of the White Night public, and that the event was notable in its suppression of the "usual rituals of depravity" that accompany large gathering in the city, such as sporting finals and music festivals. The CBD is transformed from its customary dichotomy between being a centre of productive capital by day and liminal space by night, shifting into a spectacle of heritage under the illumination of the contemporary. The pedestrianisation of the city also has resonance in the context of heated debates about "road sharing" between automotive drivers and cyclists.

Chrissy Thompson's account highlights the implicit assumptions of mobility in White Night's urban place-making. Employing Cresswell's politics of mobility, incorporating "motive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience and friction", Thompson finds that a forced exclusion from determined routes provides an unexpected alliance with similarly posi-

tioned others. Some of the logistical measures employed by the city to enhance mobility (e.g. transportation closures) only did so for some participants, raising questions about access and participation in this event designed to bring the city together.

Caitlin Overington sees the lighting of the city through mechanisms of control, linking previously public spaces to the illuminated corporate spaces of named buildings and securitised retail outlets. However, the populations routinely fail to be managed, through sheer mass or lack of conformance to routines of self-management. For Overington, less illuminated areas such as the *Chorus* installation provided some much needed respite from a regime of “hypervisuality.”

Luke van Ryn considers White Night from a “metabolic” perspective, noting the shifting energies that refocus attention from the illuminated buildings to more material concerns of food and water for bodies or battery power for devices. The desire by attendees for “improvisation” when eating and drinking made for complex logistics for the organisers, and gaps were filled by enterprising water re-sellers extracting significant profits from passers by who were perhaps unaware of the free water sources in close proximity.

White Night is a pedestrian event, and Suneel Jethani focusses on the “happenstance traversal” which in this case is profoundly mediated. Institutional encouragement for participants to “curate” their experience through route planning on the White Night website meet the reality of fatigue and exertion required to actually move through the event. Jethani identifies the use of mobile technology as diagnostic (tracking and registering the body) and prosthetic (navigation, self-distraction), complicating accounts of a singularly-located public in the city.

Asher Warren also traces movement around the city, this time through participants’ self-reported summaries of their route-making. Working with Tim Ingold’s distinction between ‘navigation’ and ‘wayfinding’, Warren notes how participants’ desire for information that could fix a route in advance contrasts with the desire for an improvisational freedom to be in the moment, both of which are managed by an expectation of the residual photographic record to be shared with family, friends and a broader social media network.

This “absent spectatorship” is the focus of Stephanie Hannon’s inquiry into the experience of White Night through its media representations. The “scripting” of White Night through programmed routes resembles a plan your adventure novel. For Hannon, the selfie has become a newly ubiquitous documentary photography genre that “legitimises attendance.” White Night exemplifies the contemporary mashup where archive and event become temporally indistinguishable: the event is designed to be archived, the archive of the annual event comes to program the following year’s expectations of participation.

The “selfie” is perhaps a useful figure to think with in the development of the “event city” as a destination - White

Night is perhaps Melbourne picturing itself at a moment in time. The selfie has been derided as an example of youth culture’s narcissism—as if this was not the standard charge against youth—yet the selfie is a natural response to important developments in contemporary media culture: the collapse of the private and public brought about by social media; the new ubiquity of image capture and distribution through mobile devices; and the growth in personal archives that information and communication technologies have fostered. The selfie reflects all of these new kinds of “participation in the archive” that Jacques Derrida famously identified as being constitutive of democracy itself.

Tom Andrews’ report notes that in his research, “not a single person carrying a so-called ‘selfie stick’ was prepared to be interviewed for this project.” Those taking their selfies seriously enough for use of prosthetics appear to be assuming a mode of autonomous control of media production that was simply unavailable to a pre-digital generation for whom media could only be interpreted, not managed. This raises a question as to the whole purpose or value of media research today: media studies emerged as a discipline to give voice to the new experiences of ordinary citizens in a highly mediated environment. Yet contemporary publics have the tools and capability to archive their own experience of events, rendering much “media effects” research redundant.

While on one level the reports gathered in this volume simply aim to describe the forces surrounding the White Night event, they are notable for their reflexivity around these theoretical issues as well. They do not pretend to be impartial accounts, but reflect an inquiry that seeks what lies behind the journalistically observable. They provide a conceptually-rich account of White Night as a large-scale urban event, one that we hope resonates with the experiences of those in other cities with urban night-festivals. We sense that further research on global event formats like White Night that builds on the work here will yield insights for both academic analysis and planning practice in contemporary urbanism.

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The Bright Lights of White Night: Projection, Photography and Publics

Tom Andrews

White Night takes its naming cues from the northern hemisphere's summer phenomena of extended twilight. As a public event, White Night celebrates the cultural and artistic as well as the seasonal and the affective. White Night is associated with weather, colour and light as much as it is with art, public life and explorations of the host city. Festivals such as this can be read as contemporary, neo-liberal re-workings of



traditional summer celebrations of light and warmth that follow the extended darkness of European winters. In its antipodean inflection, the eponymous whiteness is not provided by the long summer twilight, but rather through the digital projector, streetlights, storefronts, LED panels, billboards, and smartphone screens. Together these elements combine emissions to create a viscous luminal atmosphere. In its third edition, the “event space” of Melbourne’s 2015 White Night emerges as a practiced study in the affects and effects of an atmosphere tuned through lighting design. White Night harnesses advances in digital projection to cast the moving image beyond the human scale, onto building facades, trees, ceilings, and monuments.

This report is a reflection on how particular light-based media can facilitate an understanding of participatory public space. Initial research for this project examined how smartphone photography produced a particular type of public space and crafted certain modes of participation. Following interviews and participant observation it became apparent that photography was only one part of the story, being understood as a practice among a broader set of public responses to light. For various reasons, attention to light and its affects and effects held my concern for thinking about photography, publicity and participation in a “space”. Firstly, all of the people interviewed understood White Night to be primarily about projection-based art onto the buildings of Melbourne. Interestingly, mention of the “public” nature of White Night along with questions of “belonging” were met with a quizzical expression

from most people I spoke to about their photographic practices. Outside of the shared public act of photography, the dynamics of the photograph and its remediation through various platforms, archival spaces and practices was perceived as largely a private activity conducted in public.

Building on Marshall McLuhan’s insight that ‘the electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just

because it has no “content”’ (McLuhan 1964: 2), White Night pulled into focus a type of space predicated on the affects and effects of the communication and content of electric lighting. Between these two perspectives, this chapter responds to the political implications of how shape, colour, intensity and diffusion of light operate as a substance—rather than a mere substrate—of the affective sensitivities of human perception. In turn, this chapter briefly describes how lighting design and projections interact with photography as a way of writing the politics of the public city in light.

Photographic events

During White Night, smartphones were used extensively to take photographs. All evening, a constellation of smartphone screens appeared, danced in the streetscape and disappeared—indexing the viewing, recording, archiving, sharing and retouching of the projections.

Along Flinders Street, the *Wonderland* projection saw largely fairy-tale inspired, brightly coloured animations projected onto the facade of the Forum Theatre and adjoining buildings. As projection sequences changed from one story to another, a collective gasp of enjoyment would rise above the din of the street and music elsewhere. The glow of smartphone screens rose above the heads and shoulders of the crowd. Between the audible communal affects and personalised attempts to inscribe the cinematic through the photographic, a knot of tensions and torsions emerged—between public and private,

media technologies of memory and motion and lighting technologies of emission and reception. It was through the smartphone screen that people were looking up at the projections. Although this was a shared experience, it was not necessarily a public one. In Ariella Azoulay's work on the philosophy of photography she argues that 'the ontology of photography is at base a political one' (Azoulay 2011: 68), further explaining that 'the camera... [is] an object that sows powerful forms of commotion and communion' (70). While Azoulay's work addresses conflict-oriented photojournalism, *White Night* provides a markedly different context through which to apply her understanding of the politics of photography. In the dimmed reflection of coloured light from the projector, elements of sound, gesture, gaze, and the commonality of the community are enacted through the smartphone's camera function.

Smartphones are intensely private social and optical prosthetic devices, enabling users to navigate their various social, physical and creative worlds. As a highly refined commodity, it is not accidental that the smartphone is codified as a deeply private and individual device and yet they are here dispersed along the horizontal plane of the crowd. The digital screen replaces the traditional viewfinder where it focuses the attention of the eye. Here the interpellation of the user by the device—watching their own private, screened world—is made obvious. The physical form of the smartphone necessitates a ritual of gesture and gaze, raising the phone to look through it and out onto the bright lights. From a distance, this act constitutes a constellation of photographers who appear as if a crowd, perhaps even a public. To paraphrase Susan Sontag, my sense was that it was a public organised and disciplined into the soft-accumulation of light on sensors.

While most people who were engaged in photography were using their smartphone cameras, there were also those who performed a more serious mode of engagement through the use of one—and frequently more—SLR-style cameras. Equipment took on a performative function as well as providing a higher level of image performance. It provided an approximate visual index of the level of seriousness with which one sought to remediate their experience of *White Night* via public photography. While far fewer than smartphone photographers, there were still a considerable number of people engaging in such photography. Speaking to people using DSLR cameras, they often described the event as an opportunity to "practice" photography in an interesting lighting environment with social licence. This is particularly important against the backdrop of recent controversies over the status of street photography and questions of privacy in public. Anticipation of a particular atmosphere based on *White Night*'s projections and lighting design was not without drawbacks. For example, one interviewee who is a lighting designer by day and a photographer by night stated that '[t]he problem as a photographer is that it's exactly the same as last year... but less crowded'. What this comment speaks to is an understanding of expectations around the publicity of others as well as a particular kind of loosening of the norms of public photography.

Some interview responses pointed to a very private desire

to remember things in a particular and personalised way. In contrast to the photographers interviewed and observed, there were a group of ladies sketching and painting watercolours of the evening. Encountering them at the Forum Theatre projection display, an older lady was busy drawing the scene. She opened her moleskine and pointed to a drawing of a chess game and a child: "that's what your camera can't capture". Asking her where she felt the public and the city were in ap-ropos to *White Night*, she replied "Melbourne is in my sketch book". Drawing was understood as a personal, private and expressive practice that "captured" something of the city and its public. Under the white security lighting of Swanston Street, police officers were also seen photographing *White Night* through the lens of their smartphone cameras. This was not formal police photography—often conducted with cameras with incredibly high resolving power—but rather moments of aesthetic and memorial practice conducted by individuals against the background of their public function. This has a different texture to the public aspect of photography. The performativity of photography regarding private acts of remembering via the devices produces a kind of shared experience.

Before *White Night* 2015, I sensed that the combination of social media platforms and smartphones would be a definitive part of the experience, both during the night and in its recollection afterwards. I envisaged that the sharing of images and thoughts on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook would be instantaneous, or in the least, contemporaneous with the physical and material experiences of the evening. How this played out on the night was more complicated, less hyperbolic and more interesting insofar as it revealed a more textured set of practices surrounding social media. Social media postings were not of much importance for photographers when it came to their contemporaneous experience of *White Night*. Rather, many of them were more concerned with remembering through their photographic practices, with social media postings occurring in the days after the event.

When asked what their intentions were for their images, most people's response was to archive them: to store the photos, minimally, until there was time to review them and maximally, to keep them in private collections. While these photos perform a social function they did not seem to conform to my expectation of contemporaneous shooting, editing and posting to social media platforms. While the uploading of images was discussed, most people mentioned uploading to Facebook rather than Instagram or Twitter. When Chrissy Thompson and I identified ourselves as researchers, an older lady pulled out her smartphone and started showing us her compilation of images from the previous year's *White Night* on Instagram, through another application called Flipagram. Likewise, a shy female international student echoed her sentiments that the projections drew her to the event and the lights made people feel safe. She was also concerned to record photos of the event during the night and upload them later to Facebook. In my experience of *White Night*, the participant most consistently posting photographs to social media was a journalist friend who, on assignment from *The Age*, was posting images of the evening under the #whitenight hashtag.



This social media practice was interestingly not described as an activity of interviewees. Photos were to be taken on the night, perhaps to be uploaded later or archived in personal collections as opposed to being shared through social media. One man with a large DSLR on a tripod—having recently completed a course in multimedia— was recording video of the moving projections to fashion into montages over music, such as you might see on Vimeo or YouTube.

Projectors and lighting

All of the people interviewed on the evening stated that projections played a central role in their understanding and experience of White Night. These projections were linked to a photographic practice of recording and remembering the evening. Although none were specifically concerned with social media or networked computing, there was a kind of public produced through the performed relationship between projection and photography. Indeed, White Night engenders a rhetorical force through the juxtapositions of opposites in its name. Yet, beyond the illuminated surfaces of the projection-mapped artwork adorning the facades of key sites in Melbourne, light is very rarely thought of as a particular and malleable medium of the visible, the gaze or the photographic. This section describes a relationship between tonalities of light and the totality of the event space. Tonalities of light refer to the various ways that qualities of light can be described. Colour, intensity, diffusion and shape are all characteristics familiar to photographers and students of cinema. For example, warm coloured light sources such as candles and incandescent light bulbs are productive of a range of emotional affects as well as being a variable to be considered in photography. Think of the particular microclimate of intimacy created through the gentle blue glow of the smartphone screen as it carves the faces and fingers of the user from the dark.

Despite the ubiquitous presence of the smartphone's glow, the data projector stood as the technology that enabled the most situationally definitive, intense and shaped emission of light. But this was not the only source of lighting. Street lighting, LED panels, roadside signs, and commercial coloured lighting all combined with other sources of ambient light to produce the electrified atmosphere of the whiteness of White Night. As important to my understanding of the event, the only white infrastructural lights present at White Night were the security lights aligning Swanston Street and the event branding itself. To my eyes, White Night wasn't really "white", but instead a largely comforting and entertaining cloud of coloured diffuse LED (event hubs), welcoming low intensity tungsten (bars, small lighting source throughout the city) and intensely protective white plasma (street lights along main thoroughfares). Indeed, the role that coloured light plays in governing affective responses to spaces is increasingly recognised as an urban design problem to be solved through cybernetic lighting

systems that respond to human presence.¹

All participants, excluding a lighting designer, did not see lighting beyond projections and yet those who mentioned it, described a feeling or an affect of safety in the city. This feeling was emphasised by women and people of colour in their responses to questions of feeling a connectedness to the city. For example, it was the lighting environment that allowed middle-aged ladies from Keilor to continue to feel safe to occupy the CBD at midnight. One way of understanding these responses is to read lighting as productive of the affects of safety. Interestingly, this discussion of feeling was also positively correlated with crowded streets: safety, it seems, comes not only from lighting, but the well lit presence of others. Before midnight, the low threshold of visibility of the affects and effects of alcohol and drug use combined with the 500,000 visitors who were not otherwise engaged in the hedonism of a typical Melbourne Saturday night, combined to produce feelings of novelty and safety.

Between publics and the polis: is there an ethics of illumination?

In thinking about the character of public events, it is necessary to look closely at what it is to live in Melbourne rather than simply the sweaty inconvenience of crowds and their subsequent photographic representation. While crowding plays a role in discourses about White Night, it is worth pausing to consider how political demonstrations, grand final parades and Boxing Day sales come to be read as analogous densities of people in Melbourne's shared spaces. There are a number of traditions of thinking about being in public that need to be read alongside one another in building a critical description of publicity. Authors such as Kurt Iveson compel a more nuanced thinking of public spaces than what is merely asserted. It is necessary to look to *how* a particular type of public is brought into being, both in the sense of the materiality of a given urban space and in terms of the type of public sphere that is produced, through which publics are imagined. In the context of this discussion, it is important to ask who is excluded from participating in the event space of White Night, and how does lighting contribute to this negative definition of 'the' public?

Throwing millions of lumen into the night sky does not guarantee that 'Melbourne's city streets will transform in a celebration of music, food, film, art and light'. One instance made this particularly evident. At about 9:30pm, early in the programme, a man carrying a sleeping roll screams incoherently and storms from a laneway behind Swanston and Bourke Streets. Behind him was a group of well-dressed middle-aged people who had wandered into a lane that *did not* have any projections or installed art while staring at their smartphone screens. To those sleeping rough on the streets, an event that

1 See e.g. the radio programme Future Tense, 'Into the Light', *ABC Radio National* (8 March 2015) <<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/futuretense/into-the-light/6276690>> on the possibility of using sensor activated lighting to activate unused urban spaces.

encourages the culturally interested middle classes to feel comfortable exploring spaces that are otherwise service and access routes largely outside of the night time economy, can be perceived as incredibly disruptive. The facial expressions of wonderment and excitement of following maps on a smartphone is a world away from the incomprehensible anger at being confronted with this kind of event. It is entirely predictable that illuminating the capillaries of the city where the unhoused manage to find spaces of privacy and safety at night would be disruptive, even traumatic for them. This is not to say that White Night's organisers did not employ harm minimisation strategies, but that external factors around hosting White Night in the private spaces carved out in the midst of a 24-hour city were made visible. As such, White Night marketing does not discuss the responsibilities of "exploring" the illuminated city ethically.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to raise one last observation: conspicuously, not a single person carrying a so-called "selfie stick" was prepared to be interviewed for this project. They all took steps, literally, to avoid an encounter. The selfie stick emerged in late 2014 to become one of the most derided symptoms of an expanding culture of narcissism to be facilitated by mass media. The addition of the stick exacerbates how the gesture required to take a selfie is an inversion of the photography of projections. These "almost encounters" need to be read against the broader context developed here about the negotiation of private photographic acts in and as a type of public.

White Night was a photographic event in the sense that Susan Sontag describes that 'an event has come to mean, precisely, something worth photographing, it is still ideology (in the broadest sense) that determines what constitutes an event' (Sontag 1977: 17). More broadly it was an event where writing with light produced a version and a vision of the city. Sontag's sensitivity to the recursive constitution of the event is useful here as a way of thinking about the political implications of public projection festivals. In their luminosity and height above the street, they enable a type of photography that directs arms and gazes upwards. Yet, the dissemination of photographs was seen as intimate, linked to memorial practices and a device to assist in narrating the evening. As a photographic event, being public is performed as a type of shared spectatorship of the bright and the colourful. The smartphone functioned as a metaphor for a prosthetic public, one engaged in a largely disciplined mode of being in common through the glowing rectangle of the screen. On another reading, we witnessed the shared creative expression of the city of Melbourne. Individuating as the screen may be, its glow produces an ambience that illuminates the faces of people. In the mingling of these two light sources—the projection and the dim ambience of the phone—the camera assists in forming a delicate luminal connection between our public and private worlds.

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False Shadows & Tactical Spaces: Encountering Transgressive Participation at White Night

Alex Lambert

Meandering through White Night, Melbournians are invited to experience their city as a luminous wonderland. Exotic animations leap from brick façades, entrancing throngs of revellers as they pilgrimage up and down Swanson Street. Yet, as much as these projections illuminate, they also conceal transgressive participation, hidden amidst the carefully planned flows of light and leisure. The media architecture at White Night produces 'scripted spaces' which subtly direct mobility. This scripting of space is challenged by teenage drinking as a tactical, transgressive mode of participation.



The City of Melbourne and its ever-increasing calendar of festivals is an example of what Richards and Palmer (2010) call the 'eventful city'. Seeking rejuvenation as industrial manufacturing moves to developing regions, cities worldwide are generating wealth through investing in what has been called the cultural, symbolic or experience economy. Diverse cultural events have become more spectacular and carefully staged as these cities compete for tourism and investment. Urban public spaces are transformed into sites for consuming innovative cultural production, bringing together international talent with local creative clusters. Traffic is rerouted, and both the foot-paths and roads become a place for dense sociality beyond the regular rhythms of everyday life.

Although the economic primacy of these transformations seems clear, cities also claim events will solve significant social and cultural problems. Analysing a range of promotional literature, Richards and Palmer describe the social rhetoric of the event: the event facilitates *place making*; the event expresses diversity and generates *hybrid identities*; the event enhances *social cohesion*; the event creates closeness and *intimacy* among strangers. However, despite this rhetoric, many events and festivals are tied up with processes of gentrification, displacement, and the rendering invisible of non-consumers such as the homeless. Events highlight the way cities

produce socio-demographic sorting, creating orderly flows of inclusion, exclusion, visibility and invisibility. My experience of White Night resonates with many of these themes.

Strolling through White Night, I had hoped to encounter the kinds of transformations of identity and intimacy that Richards and Palmer describe. In particular, I wanted to understand how White Night could transform the way people use their mobile devices for socialising on and offline. Mobile phones speak to contemporary anxieties around how we are expected to participate in public. They have been criticised for enabling distant communication at the expense of proximate communication, of blurring public and private life and of harming a kind of civic co-presence with a community of strangers (Ling 2008). Perhaps White Night could allow people to break out of their 'telecocoon' (Habuchi, 2005), to enable new forms of hybrid online/offline sociality; new forms of intimate presence (Hjorth et al. 2012). Reflecting back, I was naively hoping to observe a shift in the meaning and use of media in public spaces.

This hope was largely informed by psychogeography, a theory of urban wandering developed by Guy Debord and the Situationist International. Psychogeography—as a theory and methodology of walking, strolling, drifting, stalking, and other variants of *flâneurship*—seeks to produce new experiences of urban environments. Through psychogeography, alienation and banality are seen to dissolve, rendering the city mysterious and magical (Coverly 2006). Debord theorised a particular form of wandering which he called the *dérive* - a process of strategic drifting which purposefully abandons habitual routes and traverses unconventional paths to create new ways of being in a city (Debord 1958). As a form of political ontology, the *dérive* seeks to challenge the capitalist metropolis and its technocratic planners. Although my intentions were by no means as strategic as Debord, I was hopeful that I would find a similar experience in White Night: something truly new and radical.

Instead what I found was a very safe and orderly affair, in which a vast and highly diverse population appeared to be amiably enjoying the night's offerings. People moved in thick, steady clots down the arterial Swanson Street, despite the crowd being much less dense and intense than in previous years. White Night's layout was evidently more sparse, having been evenly and clearly segmented into ten different zones. Patrons were drawn out of Swanson street to access toilets and food, creating a sense of flow in space. The crowds were subtly ordered and organised by carefully positioned barriers and security personnel directing traffic flow at the perimeter. Of most interest was the way in which the movement of people was dictated by the buildings, which had become public screens lit by projected animations. The churn down Swanson Street appeared as a pilgrimage between these animated buildings, with the State Library at the northern end, the National Gallery at the southern, and various other forms of mediated architecture in between. Most of the people we interviewed were particularly interested in seeing these luminous attractions.

Norman Klein (2004) deftly explores the way that special effects and animation help to create 'scripted spaces', influencing perception, thought and movement within a space. Klein traces a genealogy of modern animation through baroque architecture, art, theatrical miniatures, machines and puppetry. Disneyland and Las Vegas form examples of what he terms the 'electronic baroque'. In these spaces electronic theatrics are used to create enchanted illusions, subtly directing the way people move to facilitate an effortless flow of spectacular consumption. Klein argues that people are both aware and unaware of these illusions and are completely willing to be guided by them. They resemble what Thrift (2004) calls the 'technological unconscious': those technical elements of modern life which influence us without our reflective knowledge. Similarly, they resemble the way software subtly and automatically shapes our experience of environments which rely on systems such as CCTV and transport cards (Graham 2005).

Some of the people we spoke to were using maps to guide their journeys through White Night, although many had abandoned them and were taking pleasure in arbitrary wayfinding. While this may appear haphazard on one level, there is a clear technological unconscious at play. The scripting of how people move through White Night—assisted by the animated buildings—is one of the more interesting components of this. The projections interpolate the wanderer into homogenous, ritual spectatorship, accompanied by the obligatory smartphone photography. This scripting impinged on the possibility of a radical, psychogeographic encounter. Ironically, it was in the false shadow created by one of these projections that my encounter took place.

Walking up the stairs outside the Library we came across a group of teenagers who we later realised were drinking and smoking. They were hanging out in a crook between a grassy area and the main entrance. Surrounded by hundreds of people, including a long queue for the Library, the group appeared to be on public display. Yet, with the apogee of the bright

projections extended to just above their heads, they were also hidden in false shadow. Without realising how young they were, or that they were drinking, my colleagues and I asked if they would like to answer a couple of questions about the event. In turn, we received a blunt 'fuck no' from one of them. This resulted in a decision to put an age range of 18 and up for all future participants.

Asking questions in a public space can be daunting and requires a certain thickness of skin. The 'fuck no' response, along with various ethical dimensions that became apparent, altered my ethnographic subjectivity. I became what Ruth Behar (1996) calls 'the vulnerable observer', whereby the researcher is pricked, bruised and ultimately moved by an ethnographic exchange. For Behar, this affect is significantly productive. It transports the ethnographer into a space of new understanding. I remembered going to Moomba as a teenager, a festival that similarly transforms the quotidian inner-city space where the Botanical Gardens meet the Yarra. My mates and I would enjoy the freedom of manoeuvring through public space, also drunk and 'underage'. The 'fuck no' became a moment of *identification*, and through this the meaning of the event began to change.

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How can these drinking, slightly belligerent youths be conceptualised within this context? They were by no means the norm at the 2015 White Night. In previous years the event had been criticised for public drunkenness and disorder, hence the planning of the event was likely revised to try and avoid a continuation of this behaviour. As Thao Phan describes elsewhere in this volume, the city was far safer and more passive than on a regular Saturday night. Indeed, the Festival admirably seemed to go against one of the predominant trends of urban night time economies based around bars and clubs, which generate significant wealth through the promotion of alcohol consumption, or what David Bell (2006) calls 'drinkatainment'. In this system authorities must strike a careful balance between permitting this wealth generation and policing the so called public disorder it generates (Hobbs, 2003). They must mediate a logic of consumption, on the one hand, with anxieties over violence, vandalism, sex and underage drinking on the other. White Night was not a clear example of drinkatainment, which made the presence of these youths even more striking.

One way of thinking about these youths, then, is as a minor failure within a project of pacification, as an aberrant example of illegal drinking in an otherwise spotless event. This recognises, first and foremost, the negative social, health and safety aspects of drinking, particularly for those who are underage. Given the hegemony of moral discourses which pathologise drinking however (Douglas, 1987), this position is in danger of moral reductionism. It helps to enforce a prescriptive and normative understanding of White Night, as a safe and gregarious space for the consumption of spectacle. Although this perspective is useful, there are other important ways to understand the event and the place that these youths hold within it. I interpret these youths not for what they are explicitly



doing—namely drinking—but what they represent in relation to the scripting of space through mediated architecture and other means.

My moment of identification with the teenagers was founded in a memory of freedom. It made me realise that the false shadow that these youths habituated enabled them to access the event in ways that are usually denied to them. The shadow facilitates a sovereign consumption usually denied to those under 18, as well as a kind of coming of age process. Disguised in the density and mediated architecture of the event, they are able to experiment and transgress in search of the greater freedoms that adults possess. This reminds me of the transgressive participation which Bakhtin (1984) associates with drinking and the carnival. Hence, one of the more interesting things about White Night is that *transgressive participation* occurs beyond the sorting mechanism of the projections, in the interstitial shadows.

This is one of the many forms of transgressive participation that can complicate notions of identity, sociality and consumption. Often this occurs in areas of darkened infrastructure both integral and invisible to the event. As such, it must be understood in relation to space and power, to the planning of the event and the way its technological unconscious scripts movement. Here de Certeau's (1984) concepts of 'strategy' and 'tactics' become highly useful. A strategy is a process by which some agent marks out 'the place of its own power and will from an environment' (ibid: 36). This is a Cartesian, panoptic project which makes boundaries clear and interior and external objects visible, thus enabling effective internal governance and expansion. Strategies are 'technocratic' and 'scriptural', and, like Klein's scripted spaces and electronic baroque, aim to organise mobility. The planning and execution of White Night is a clear example of a strategy. A tactic, on the other hand, is an action without 'a proper locus', which must 'play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power' (ibid: 37). Like the youths at White Night who took cover in the umbra of a projection, tactics carve out temporary spaces for themselves within the remit of strategy.

While strategies seem easy to define and discern, tactics are more elusive in de Certeau's writing. I would argue that he postulates two version of the tactic, though this is never explicitly declared. Tactics are an essential element of everyday consumption. They are the ways in which consumers create their own ways of reading, speaking and moving through space as a result of the heterogeneous influences that surround their lives. These influences allow us to trace 'indeterminate trajectories that are apparently meaningless, since they do not cohere with the constructed, written, and prefabricated space through which they move' (ibid: 34). In contrast to this softer conceptualisation, de Certeau also talks about tactics in a much stronger and more militarised sense, moving away from the everyday. It is as if he is describing a particular *tactical event*. In this inflection, a tactic, 'operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where

it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. [...] It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse' (ibid: 37).

While the first conception of tactics could certainly be used to understand the experiences of all the diverse patrons of White Night, the second seems far more appropriate for understanding those who engage in transgressive participation. Transgressive participation is a tactical approach to the event, which reconfigures the technologies and media used in scripting space. At this point I want to return to the rhetorical nature of contemporary events, presented in the writing of Richards and Palmer and others. This rhetoric emphasises social cohesion and a kind of intimacy among strangers. There is an assumption that, by placing a thick crowd together in an amiable context, a kind of *communitas* will occur that can have lasting effects on the internal harmony of communities. While this is undoubtedly noble and important, transgressive participation does not connect with this rhetoric and its ideals. It carves out spaces of temporary autonomy which have important creative and social effects, yet may necessitate a kind of out-group antagonism. In being a response to scripted spaces, transgressive participation must poach the mockery of punk rock.

What I find to be most constructive about these ideas is that they ask the researcher to look beyond the obvious representational locus of public media. Furthermore, they enable one to focus on the areas beyond public screens and other forms of mediated architecture and installation. As a method for studying future events of this kind, I would advocate dwelling in the tactical spaces and plumbing the false shadows to discover the multiform transgressions which form its underbelly. It is here that we may find illicit consumers such as teenagers, or non-consumers such as the homeless, participating in ways that could not have been anticipated.

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# White Night: Three Themes of Transformation

Thao Phan

The expectation and anticipation of seeing the city of Melbourne ‘transformed’ emerged as a common thread during interviews and in photos posted under the #whit-nightmelbourne hashtag on Instagram and Twitter. Images of video mapping projections on iconic buildings, the crowd engulfing the CBD, and public performance dominated feeds. Elsewhere interviewees noted the rearrangement of streets and the spectacle of crowds as a prominent draw card for attendance. This paper explores three themes of transformation within the context of White Night Melbourne 2015, weaving together interview data along with the interviewer’s own impressions of the event as participant-observer and first-time attendee. It focuses specifically on 1) spectacle and the inverse relationship between the metaphor of the ‘city as digital’ and the ‘digital city’, 2) the flattening of space as a result of the pedestrianisation of city streets, 3) and public gatherings as sites of ‘anti-liminal space.’ Transformation is considered both through visible changes—such as the disruption and rearrangements of normative city spaces—and through altered affective experiences made possible as a result of these physical changes.



## 1. City as digital / digital city

During interviews, the bold light displays and video mapping projections were most commonly cited as motivators for attendance. The majority of images posted under the White Night hashtags on Instagram and Twitter related to the projections on the Royal Exhibition Building, State Library of Victoria, Forum Theatre and Flinders Street Station. For many city-goers, this was likely to be the most tangible marker of change. The city literally transformed as Melbourne’s bluestone and sandstone buildings were overlaid with bright colours and playful imagery. Crowds favoured the inside of the State Library as well as the fantastic Alice in Wonderland projections onto the Forum Theatre.

The popularity of these events can be understood as part of the novelty of spectacle. By definition, spectacle arrests the senses through striking visual phenomena. In this case, the projection of videos onto iconic heritage buildings was not only spectacular (as a process inducing spectacle) but it also illuminated alternative modes of relating to the city. For many residents, the CBD may well be a banal place; banal

in the sense of the familiar, but also in the sense that the city is attached to experiences of the everyday and the mundane. As with most central business districts, Melbourne CBD is synonymous with productive capital and the daily grind of office life. To borrow a line from Joy Division, the city is digital: ‘day in, day out, day in, day out’. It embodies the repetitive cycle between flows of investment and consumption, coming and going, earning and spending. As an event, White Night intentionally disrupts these flows.

The four buildings chosen for video-mapping are cultural heritage sites significant to the State of Victoria and exemplify late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture (Heritage Victoria 2014). The illumination of these buildings acts as a literal spotlight, highlighting their heritage facades along with other unique aspects that for many are seen as familiar and banal. Accompanying this transition from the banal to the spectacle is the inversion of the previous metaphor of the ‘city as digital’ to that of the ‘digital city’. Where the ‘city as digital’ denotes the prosaic, repetitive and mundane aspects of the everyday, its inverse promotes innovation and the rhetoric of progress associated with large-scale infrastructure projects such as the National Broadband Network. Events such as White Night exploit cutting-edge video mapping technology and partnered with initiatives such as the introduction of free wifi zones produce a discourse of high-technology within the Melbourne CBD. These discourses are mobilised in public spaces to motion in new eras of modernity and progress. The clean break from one era to the next is writ large through the

literal eclipsing of industrial era architecture, such as Flinders Street Station and the Royal Exhibition Building, by techniques of digital projection.

## 2. Flattening space

During White Night, flows are disrupted through the physical reorganisation of streets and the sharing of public spaces. Where roads are usually shared between cyclists, trams, cars and pedestrians, the streets of White Night are limited to foot traffic. Within the city of Melbourne, tensions between these four respective groups have recently reached fever pitch as several high profile incidences have highlighted renewed debate around road safety. The memorial ride for Italian national Alberto Paulon on Sydney road in March 2015 is an example of an embodied debate around 'shared road safety'. A driver opening their car door struck Paulon as he rode past, pushing him under the wheels of an adjacent truck. The subsequent conversation around driver awareness and improving cycling infrastructure renewed existing debate around practical means to protect road users. During White Night, commuters became pedestrians as Trams and motorists were limited to the city fringes, with cyclists unable to navigate the crowds due to congested foot traffic. The result was a flattening of interests as once previously divided stakeholders were transformed into a common public sharing a common space. Although the concept of a 'common public' is certainly contestable—for instance, the suspension of trams and road traffic made access for those mobility issues more difficult—the momentary flattening of space deemphasized a so far politicized issue regarding motor vehicle, tram, cyclists access to roads as all three means were deferred in favour of pedestrian foot traffic. This model of cooperation, while certainly not without critique, gave momentary respite from a so far dominant social community issue.

## 3. City as anti-liminal Space

Having never previously attended White Night, my expectations garnered from other public events such as Music Festivals, Football Grand Finals, and New Years Eve events were focused mainly on public filth and waste. These expectations were also noted by White Night staff who rather bluntly stated that they expected a 'pit of depravity', where experiences of large crowds in the city generally meant a mess of 'alcohol', 'drugs' and 'hedonism'. The city as a hot spot for alcohol-related violence has been a common concern in the media and public discourse. The introduction of the 'one-punch law' in NSW coupled with 'alcohol lockout zones' in parts of Victoria and NSW are part of a nationwide move to counter binge-drinking and public perceptions of 'an epidemic of violence' in cities (Bolt 2001: 19). Data from the Victorian Drug and Crime Prevention Committee's 2010 inquiry into assaults in public places paints an unflattering picture of Melbourne CBD after dark; 54 per cent of assaults occurred on the city streets, with 53 per cent occurring between 6pm and 6am on Friday and Saturday nights (Victorian Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee 2010: 23). For this reason, late nights in the city can be considered a 'liminal space' where public etiquette

is often cast off during these hours. Liminality can be a term used to describe spaces that, during times of ritual, suspend established rules of conformity (Creed 2005: 14). Brazil's Carnival is commonly used as an example of a liminal space in which public parades, dancing and music invade city streets. Without suggesting causality, I would venture to say that liminality could be one way of interpreting incidents of crime in the city during these hours. Under the pretence of 'going out in the city' as a form of ritual, activities such as public urination, public drunkenness, vandalism and the defiance of public etiquette feed into the intoxicating effects of ritual for many. White Night audaciously sought to occupy the high-risk 'liminal' zone of the city streets on a Saturday night between 7pm and 7am. The expectation of violence or 'depravity' can be understood against these findings, where on a regular night these occurrences are considered common or expected. White Night can be seen as similar to Carnival insofar as it is an annual and exceptional event on a spectacular scale.

What was most striking was a sentiment shared with the White Night staff that despite the 'big event' the regular spectacle of the city became a non-event. Unlike most of the city of Melbourne on a Saturday night, White Night was by-and-large, a dry zone. The consumption of alcohol was restricted to certified venues with the majority of public precincts not allowing the service or public consumption of alcohol. Despite being in the city until 4am, I observed very few publicly intoxicated event-goers. Curiously there was a shift in demographic from what I would anecdotally observe as people aged between 21 and 35 to a much broader demographic of children under 12 and adults over 60. Coupled with the strident management of alcohol, the expectation of 'liminality' was overturned and White Night was able to restore the city as a safe place for community. In using the term 'anti-liminal', I am referring to the restoration of public etiquette which in turn creates a double-negative effect. The city was able to revel in the spectacle and ritual of White Night without succumbing to the usual rituals of depravity within the city.

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# Participating Publics and the Politics of Mobility

Chrissy Thompson

As I stepped off of the Craigieburn train, White Night immediately made its presence known: a coalescence of publics as variegated as they were unknown. I climbed the stairs and crammed onto the escalators in a bid to exit the station and join in the festivities and activities waiting above ground. There was a thick throng of people around the exit, which involved a staircase sandwiched between two escalators. I tried



to position myself in front of an escalator, knowing that my injured hips would not endure a hike up the stairs, should I be pushed into the middle and away from the mechanical device that would lift me out of this crowd into “the festival of the streets” (Presdee 2000:48). I tentatively jumped onto the escalator and paused for a few seconds to coordinate a grasp of the rail and to step onto the moving stairs with my good leg. This disruption in the flow of moving bodies was enough to cause the person behind me to plough straight into my back. This caused a domino effect, forcing me onto the escalator earlier than anticipated and resulting in my stumbling into the person in front of me. With a searing pain in my left side I tried to smile apologetically to the lady in front of me. In retrospect, I imagine this looked more like a grimace than anything else. I was about to turn around and offer the same expression to the gentleman I was holding up but caught him mumbling angrily to his friend about “consideration for others” and so decided against it. I was acutely self-conscious that my body could not move as quickly as escalator etiquette demanded.

At the top of the escalator a few paces ahead of me was a bottleneck of people stuck behind a woman with a pram. Blocking both isles of traffic, she was balancing a screaming child on her hip as she steadied the pram with the other hand. At the foot of the escalator parallel to the one that was dutifully moving me towards the station exit was an elderly man and his wife, huddled together as if bracing themselves for something. I immediately sympathised and understood; the gentleman had a walking stick and was shaky on his feet, clinging tightly

to his wife’s arm who steadied him as they stepped onto the travelator together. They were oblivious to the second bottleneck forming behind them, identical to the one I imagine I had just created. I had not yet stepped foot onto the streets of White Night and already I had been confronted with the curiousness of the crowd: the concerns, cantankerousness and code of conduct expected and experienced alongside this phenomenon.

These preliminary observations in the depths of Flinders Street Station sharpened my focus for the evening and I set out to explore how people who moved through space differently participated in White Night. Mobility is, as Adey (2006:83) observed, “a highly differentiated activity where many different people move in many different ways”. Influenced by mobilities literature (Jensen 2009; Cresswell 2010; Sheller & Urry 2006; Adey 2006) Tim Cresswell’s work guided my interviews and reflection throughout the evening. Defining mobility as “an entanglement of movement, representation and practice” (Cresswell 2010:19), how is movement during White Night considered by those in charge of organising the event. Further, how is a politics of mobility—involving “motive force, speed, rhythm, route, experience and friction” (17)—enacted during the evening. Walking through the ticket gates and out of Flinders Street Station, a key question emerged: In what ways and spaces could the many publics of White Night participate in the event?

Many of the people I spoke to during the evening were situated around Federation Square. I had initially picked this location to base my interviews, due to the proximity to Flinders Street Station and my inability to navigate Swanston Street due to a hip injury. I quickly discovered a hub of other citizens, unable to move through the event for various reasons, had congregated here. Throughout the evening, I made a concerted effort to talk specifically to parents with young children, people whose disabilities effected their mobility and senior cit-

izens. These were individuals who, from their very first ascent up the Flinders Street Station escalators, enacted a participation that was intrinsically connected to the politics of mobility and access. As the evening progressed, it became apparent that White Night reflected Cresswell's (2010:21) assertion that "mobility is a resource that is differentially accessed [and that] one person's speed is another person's slowness". While the event rendered space accessible and enjoyable for some, it simultaneously restricted how and where others could participate in the festivities.

Spaced out across nine different precincts marked by road closures—spaces where trams, buses and taxis were not operating—the event was designed in such a way as "to allow better movement of people in these areas" (White Night 2015a). It became apparent that these people belonged to an imagined public: one that presumed and privileged a particular kind of able-bodied citizen, able to navigate the huge stretches of space between the precincts. According to the White Night FAQ page (White Night 2015a) "some city streets will be closed during the event so attendees can walk freely throughout the precincts." However, with roads closed and public transport systems suspended, this meant that certain attendee participation was compromised. An elderly trio I spoke with who were congregated on a ledge in Federation Square were unable to manage the walk to other zones. They were complaining that there wasn't enough to see and do, especially since Flinders' Street Station was no longer lit up.<sup>2</sup> This sentiment was echoed in many interviews I conducted and was particularly disappointing for those unable to travel to the other precincts where the projections were displayed. Another elderly woman had said: 'I'm too old to walk up Swanston street!' before asking irritably why the trams weren't running and how she was expected to access the other exhibitions she had hoped to see.

Participation was mediated not only by the closure of the roads and the inability to be transported between precincts, but by the enormous crowds that provoked concern for many participants I spoke with. The road closures were heralded by some able bodied participants as an exciting opportunity to walk in car-only-environments, (Ladd 2008) an experience they described as liberating, in which they felt "free." But as one participant observed, there was a "different kind of traffic" taking over the roads. "Mobility", Adey and Bevan (2006:46) write, is the "social thermometer" of the city. When free flowing mobility is inhibited—whether automotive, pedestrian or otherwise—"the clogged arteries" render the city as unhealthy; sick with congestion and blockages (ibid.). While I continued to conduct interviews in "the heart of Melbourne" (Federation Square 2015), several elderly people I spoke with felt partic-

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2 In previous years the Flinders Street Station projections had attracted many thousands of people resulting in immense congestion and crowds. The empty dome of Flinders Street Station was a source of great disappointment for many people this year and one review online from the White Night Facebook page stated "to not light up flinders st dome because it will attract too many people. Yet advertise the images of it lit up everywhere makes 500,000 pissed off people!" (White Night 2015b).

ularly vulnerable and worried about being jostled or hurt if they attempted to reach other precincts. Parents frequently cited fears that their young children might get lost or injured in the 'crush of the crowd'. These concerns were also shared by some able-bodied citizens I spoke with. Some people expressed that the crowds made them feel "a bit anxious" prior to arriving and that they had intentionally tried to position themselves in a 'safe space' until they found their bearings. This safe space for many was Federation Square: a space that individuals felt was not only accessible, but a space of safety and security from the perceived dangers of the crowd.<sup>3</sup> Repeatedly, parents, senior citizens and attendees with disabilities flocked to Federation Square and stated that they were hesitant (or unable) to explore other more crowded precincts of White Night.<sup>4</sup>

Experiences and feelings of safety and accessibility are paramount when contemplating the potential for different publics to participate in events such as White Night. Problems surrounding the size of crowds and the closure of several roads in Melbourne, meant that while these spaces were accessible to a certain 'public', it simultaneously foreclosed access to those who would otherwise require trams and taxis to navigate a space. Furthermore, questions are raised as to how a public's ability to experience and engage with an event—one that is created on the premise of a public being able to 'walk freely'—is mediated by an imagination of a public with a particular kind of body. There is no one 'public', but rather an assemblage of multiple 'publics' consisting of bodies of all ages and with varying degrees of mobility. What is exciting and accessible for some attendees is equally as intimidating and alienating for others, for whom White Night is a space characterised by risk and uncertainty: a fact that needs to be anticipated and navigated carefully. For a cultural event premised on mobility as a resource necessary to move participants through many of the exhibitions and displays, it is important to consider some

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3 This was particularly interesting given that my initial suspicion was that the design of Fed Square (e.g cobblestone ground, hills and difficult angles to walk up, and several staircases) would be difficult to navigate for anyone with impaired mobility.

4 While the crowds associated with White Night created limitations on how and where some individuals participated in the events, there were others who said that they felt the "dangerous city" had been remade into a more safe and inclusive space *because* of White Night. Two women I spoke with said that they would never usually be in the city on a Saturday evening because they worried it would be a space dominated by alcohol and violence. For these participants, the night time economy they saw as characterising the Melbourne city on a Saturday evening was suspended because of White Night and transformed instead into an evening they looked forward to celebrating. Every year since first stumbling upon the event by chance in 2013, they would "leave their husbands at home" and have a "girls night out". Given the long history of women being excluded from public space (see Highmore 2002), this conversation indicates that the experience of feeling unwelcome or unsafe in the city of Melbourne on a Saturday evening is still a contemporary issue that women encounter. This illustrates the ways in which the White Night event transformed the city space simultaneously into one that some attendees found inclusive, while others found oppressive.



of the questions raised in this albeit brief discussion. If mobility is indeed a resource differentially accessed (Cresswell 2010) then we must pay attention to how these considerations might translate into the potential for attendees from various publics to participate meaningfully in these cultures of movement (Jensen 2009), and how we might create meaningful cultural experiences for the many publics of White Night.

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# Capturing White Night: Light as Control

## Caitlin Overington

Before entering the city on the evening of White Night—or rather the city as White Night—there is already an impression and expectation of the space by those who are moving through it. As a highly publicised event—both through formal and informal channels, such as advertising and/or previous year’s social media—White Night has in a way already been seen. With mediums of vision having inspired and intrigued (rather than repelled) those who meander through the city, they are important to consider. Visual media has created the city as narrative(s), in a way that provokes a desire to experience the event ‘firsthand’. Interviews conducted throughout the evening illustrate how most mediated understandings of White Night, prior to experiencing the event in the corporeal, included a dominant focus on the visual. Attention is paid to the way in which light is manipulated to enhance the built form of the city. One young woman described her desire to participate in White Night as entirely based on viewing her friend’s Instagram posts from last year, which included images of ‘lights’ and ‘different people’ ‘having fun’. Another person reflected a similar experience when they were determined to ‘see everything’ because of ‘seeing friends having a great time and seeing the city at night’ through Facebook and Twitter posts from the year before. Through these mediated versions of seeing, the corporeal experience has intrinsically been affected, propelling people to seek out light. From this position, this account—developed from interviews and observations—will demonstrate how ‘light’ throughout the evening was able to manipulate a range of urban practices and intentionally and unintentionally illuminate spatial encounters with city spaces.



tion’—a variety of effects have been measured, including a transformation of the city into a spectacle of romanticism, fascination and performance. Parallel to such aspects of the illuminated city is the ‘indelible capitalist hue’, with illumination of city streets also linked to an ongoing commodification of such spaces, and through it, control. As McQuire states: a ‘heightened sense of control over space offered by electrical illumina-

tion is counterpointed at every step by heightened existential uncertainty’, for ‘[i]f appearances could shift rapidly, so too could meanings’ (ibid. 124). The historical significance of lighting within city spaces is of importance when understanding the context of White Night. Lighting has transformed the city into an event and subsequently something to be consumed throughout the course of an evening. As will be demonstrated through this piece, tensions between transformative meaning and commodification signifies a potential shift in favour of light as control.

### Capturing light, internalising control

Arriving at Flinders Street, there was an immediate recognition of White Night, as detected through a series of mediated experiences. With interviewees referring to the images projected onto city walls as ‘magical’ and something that ‘adds another dimension’ to the city, the space was transformed into something to be looked at rather than moved through. However, it was not simply the desire to look that I observed; the vast number of smartphones and cameras to be raised above people’s heads as a new projection flickered onto the wall reflected a desire to capture. With each new projection onto the buildings of Flinders Street producing a collective sigh, groups would immediately comment to others as they held their camera up to the site, remarking: ‘that is such a good shot’ and ‘do you like the lights?’. At one point while interviewing an older couple, a new projection appeared and distracted the woman. ‘Excuse me’, she said, turning her body toward

### Part One: Light

As is the precedent of White Night, it is controlled illumination that has the potential to transform urban spaces into an ‘other’ city (McQuire 2008). Through this process of light manipulation—likened as a metaphor to the ‘forces of modernisa-

the building and raising her camera, ‘before this one disappears.’<sup>5</sup> The way in which the crowd would simultaneously gasp in delight before raising their external lenses toward the projection demonstrated how it was the ephemeral nature of these images that drew the audience, with a desire to capture the moment and the light being what contained them.

## Desire for direction

The desire to organically discover and wander as an enhanced and more ‘authentic’ experience was reflected by several participants. Many had either deliberately made loose or no plans, or identified seeing ‘different parts that I wouldn’t have seen’ as the most enjoyable part of the evening. However, underlying this desire to discover (and its perceived ability to create heightened experiences of pleasure) was an ongoing desire for direction. I was asked by several people for advice on where to go, while others told me how they were determined to ‘see everything’ via the map downloaded onto their smartphone, in order to not ‘miss out’. One middle-age man sought me out to comment on his angst around there being a lack of direction within the event. His words highlighted how the fear of missing out trumped the desire to discover the city organically. While he liked that ‘the whole idea of coming [is so] you can walk around and enjoy the city’, he also desired more ‘electronic scoreboards’ to continue directing him to a new place; discovery for him, was something that could still be made through visual direction. Overhearing a young man asking his group of friends, ‘where should we go? Up? Down?’ also illustrated how problematic it was for participants of White Night to move through a city space without a desired sense of navigation or location. The crowd, it seemed, had wished to be directed by the light to the light; through well-lit signs, maps and visible volunteers.

Practices of capturing the light through photos and a desire to be captured and thus directed within the event, suggests an internalisation of control within city spaces. It is from this point that my observations turn to how external practices of control may be enhanced through events such as White Night.

## Captured by the light, external control

### *The captive audience*

Emphasis and expectation of lighting was clearly capitalised by commercial ventures, regardless of initial intention. As a participant acutely aware of the light shows at Flinders

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5 This carried on into the way in which people used their cameras throughout the evening beyond Flinders Street. Indeed, while the projections onto the buildings on Flinders Street attracted what seemed to be the largest number of cameras and smartphones reflecting and reproducing the images, other aspects of the city were subsequently transformed into a ‘photo worthy’ image. Along Swanston Street I observed people taking photos of peking duck as it hung in the window of a take away restaurant. Along Lonsdale Street and within the crowds on Collins Street, pedestrians were halted as groups of people attempted to take photos both as part of the street and as part of the crowd.

Street, I found myself more aware of other light sources in the city than usual, including a blue *Sensis* sign sitting above the QV on the corner of Swanston and Lonsdale Streets and a ten-foot tall illuminated sign spelling out ‘Emporium’ near the entrance to the indoor mall<sup>6</sup>. That people were moving through this shopping centre during White Night demonstrates how audiences captured by the Event light could be captured further to explore what they may not have intended to.

### *...and thus, the bordered city*

While commercial lighting sought to draw citizens back within a regulated circulation of finance (late-night shopping extending beyond its usual hours), it did so only in a divisive way. Standing next to the illuminated and engorged Emporium sign was a security guard, visibly distinguishable through his black suit, shaved head and attached earpiece. The presence of security extended beyond the entrance to Emporium, with many other open shops situating guards at the front of stores. While these companies capitalised on the emphasis of light for a captive audience, they did so in a divisive way; only those who were determined to be suitable shoppers (and therefore who could afford to spend) were welcome within the clearly commercialised spaces. The light source coming from within projecting onto the street, combined with the stark presence of security guards, emphasised the borders that exist within city spaces.

At the edge of the designated White Night zone was a clear opposition between the city as a space in which to ‘wander’ and the city as a space of the ‘banal everyday’ of work and circulation. These were highlighted at the tram stops, both on Elizabeth and LaTrobe Streets and at St Kilda Road and Southbank Boulevard. Trams effectively and efficiently delivered their passengers to the periphery of the White Night zone. It was easy to enter the city for pedestrians, with trams and vehicles relegated to the periphery. Such a clear definition of White Night, as it assumed the identity of ‘the city’ for the evening, was also highlighted when overhearing a young man walking with a young woman. They were speaking into his phone ‘we are just entering the city now’ as they turned onto St Kilda Road from Southbank Boulevard.

I proceeded to identify instances of tension in the (re)purposed spaces of the city<sup>7</sup>. One of the increased numbers of trams to bring people into the city that evening was abrupt-

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6 Capitalising on this emphasis on light was not only exploited by corporate agencies; a sole trader had set up a makeshift stand in Russell Street – a street which was closed to vehicular traffic and yet which had no ‘destination’ aspect to it – and was selling glo-stick toys to those who wished to be part of the light source as well. Mostly bought for children, I observed these items throughout the night, as something that did draw the attention of my eye.

7 My own presence affected this tension. While waiting at the tram stop, I was approached by a Yarra Tram official who reminded me that ‘ma’am, no trams are going further because of the festival’. My presence at the tram stop—standing rather than moving—was unsettling for the workers, who had been given the directive to ensure that the tram stop remained free of bottlenecks and confused travellers



ly stopped by a man who had stepped in front of its tracks. Responding to the dings from the tram by muttering ‘shut up, more fucking bullshit’, he continued to walk at his own pace across the tracks, visibly distressed and angry. Two other similarly distressed individuals captured my attention throughout the evening. These were people who were not necessarily part of the event: they were excluded even though included geographically. Walking through the Swanston Street crowd near Bourke Street, I was struck by two individual men who did not appear to be willing participants in White Night. One man sat on the ground, dejectedly holding his legs toward his chest in an almost catatonic state. The other was reacting violently to the event’s atmosphere, pushing and kicking his empty trolley onto the tram tracks. A group of young men paused to laugh as the man eventually went to retrieve it. No one approached either man. White Night as an all-encompassing event within a geographically expansive place therefore necessarily excludes, or fails to accommodate, certain population groups within the city. In particular it is those individuals who have already been relegated to the CBD in the evenings, due to a lack of access to housing<sup>8</sup>.

Spatial oscillations evident throughout the evening were illustrated by the contrasting temperament of workers, volunteer and public participants. After making my way through a tight bottleneck stretching from Federation Square to Hamer Hall along St Kilda Road, I spoke to a uniformed worker. I asked him why there had been barricades placed on the road in an attempt to push pedestrians to the periphery, to keep the unused tramline clear. With the attempt having failed, pedestrians were proceeding to break through the boundaries. A sea of foot traffic clamoured to occupy this newly found space as a way in which to navigate a shorter or faster route to the next attraction. The worker now stood sweating and overwhelmed by the number of people moving toward him. I asked him what he made of this situation. He merely replied, ‘because people are jerks’, before attempting again to reinstate the borders within the street. Later that evening as I made my way back to Collins Street, the barriers had successfully been reinstated within St Kilda Road. The middle of the street was vacant except for a lone security guard, with pedestrians falling in line with the steady clockwise stream of foot traffic around the makeshift border. I also fell into place, moving with the crowd and remarking at the inconvenience caused by a few smaller groups of people attempting to move in the opposite direction. This exhausted and frustrated sentiment was repeated by two other workers interviewed regarding their perception of White Night. At around 1am, both were annoyed that people didn’t ‘get’ or participate in the event the way they perceived they should be. Similar accounts from those working within White Night show how those attempting to use spaces near or within the event’s imagined and real borders seem to experience an enhanced level of resistance. While trying to achieve aims outside of White Night’s own advertised objectives the city was recreated as a space beyond the everyday.

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<sup>8</sup> While these examples seem simply consequential to overall event planning, overhearing a White Night organiser speaking into a radio that he had moved a busker along from the front of Hamer Hall demonstrated clearly how space remained regulated and bordered.

## Part Two: When the lights go out

While Flinders Street emphasised the hyper-visual spectacle of White Night, the Chorus installation provided participants with an opportunity to engage with other senses facilitated by the city. This area was less populated and was emphasised as an opportunity in which to linger and feel rather than move and see. Ambient sounds created through speakers, situated on the end of rotating arms from giant metal tripods, produced a sphere that directed the focus away from sight. Consumed by the pulsating drone from these machines, I sat transfixed and reflective; allowing myself to feel the presence of the city through those who shared the space with me and through the space itself. As one couple inferred, ‘there is something about being immersed’ which is not replicated through a sole focus on the visual. Observing how others moved within this space, I noticed how different it was compared to Flinders Street (standing still and watching) or Swanston Street (orderly and consistent movement). Here, groups were sitting down on the grass within these spaces. One family had brought picnic rugs, deck chairs and food as they sat at the edge. Others simply lay on the grass, looking up to the machines and the sky beyond. It was within this space that I felt a limited sense of freedom away from the general desires to circulate and capture. This was a moment in which to sit and reflect. Yet even this did not erase entirely a desire to capture some sense, with many people holding out their smartphone as though to record the complete atmosphere, through an isolation of sound recording as they walked through.

## Conclusion

White Night as an urban event tasks itself as providing an opportunity for citizens to experience the city at night, as it would not usually be received. By transforming the city—its buildings, streets and signs—into *the* event, White Night offers particular people a way to engage in potentially new practices of movement and seeing that they may not experience in the same capacity on an ‘ordinary’ evening. While the event seeks to market itself as a moment of ephemeral beauty, the history of the city and the way in which light may be warped and refracted cannot be extinguished. As has been discussed throughout this piece, primary research taken from within the evening ultimately illustrates an ongoing element of control. With a desire to capture photos and audiences, alongside the desire to be directed within the event, internal and external practices of control—as facilitated within urban spatial environments—continue to exist within White Night. Put another way, while we may be capturing light and sight as active participants, in doing so we are also being ‘captured’. Whether enhanced or produced in new ways, White Night ultimately offers a controlled opportunity for a select audience to participate in the spectacle of the city, with the city itself never fully relinquishing its power as space, form and discourse.

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# On the metabolism of #whitenightmelb

## Luke van Ryn

I came to White Night with an interest in the metabolism of the city: in the ability of the city and its residents to digest an extended evening of entertainment, public art, consumption and movement. The concept of urban metabolism has been in use in urban studies since the 1960s with earlier roots in the writings of Karl Marx (especially as elucidated by John Bellamy Foster (2000)). Broadly speaking, urban metabolism encompasses



the processes of production, circulation and consumption that occur in cities and is used to address questions of sustainable development for built environments (Kennedy, Pincetl and Bunje 2011). The relevance of this concept to White Night is clear from a planning perspective, with further interest in how personal metabolisms are being managed through energy consumption in participants throughout the night. This text is concerned with how these two conceptions of metabolism might relate in context to this event.

Conversations I had with people I met throughout the night were primarily around plans to manage food and drink (especially water) consumption, levels of energy and enthusiasm throughout the night and the trails of detritus (digital and physical) that they left in their wake. The route I traced moved south from RMIT's campus at the corner of La Trobe and Swanston Streets to the City Square at the corner of Collins and Swanston Streets. Key sites were the "I could have danced all night" stage sponsored by VicHealth and a food truck precinct where banks of portable drinking fountains and toilets were established. Most of the people I approached for interviews seemed to be in-between moments: sitting at a tram stop, waiting in line, or browsing their mobile phones. These people seemed to have marked their openness to new experiences (or present boredom) by removing their phones from a pocket or bag, illuminating their faces and making them more approachable. A commonly asked question near the start of each interview was whether the respondent had planned to stay out until a particular time. My instinct was that

attendees might set goals for themselves and their expected duration of stay in the city. What was most striking to note in response to this question was that all of the people I spoke to professed to have made no decision about how late into the night they would stay. A common refrain was that they would improvise: "we'll see what happens", "we'll see how it goes", or "we'll just wing it." It is unusual to observe a large

variety of people move around the city without set plans when urban gatherings are usually quite directed, as in protests or parades. Another way this response was phrased was that people would stay out "until we get tired", which was used to segue a discussion around people's conception of their energy levels throughout the night.

The question of energy seemed much more relevant later than earlier on in the night. In keeping with our respondent's general improvisatory approach to the evening, the first few respondents (gathered before 9pm) had not given much thought to their energy demands or expenditure throughout the evening. In later interviews (those conducted after 11pm) energy was a much stronger theme. All of the respondents mentioned that they had been drinking coffee to get them through the night, with the reference being often simply to "caffeine". On this occasion it appeared that people were using caffeine as a tool to facilitate an enjoyment and endurance of the night. This was noted as distinctly different to how coffee is often consumed: as a relaxing moment with friends, a morning ritual, or a gesture of hospitality. As the night wore on, the physical body became more apparent as a limiting factor to one's free movement throughout the event. The energy levels of mobile devices was also of concern for many people, as dwindling batteries restricted people's ability to navigate, make appointments and share images. Several people had brought portable rechargers; others had put themselves on something of a social media diet so that their devices would see the night through.

Food was an important topic for all respondents, with the most apparent difference from a regular night being the visibility of snacking. A family of adults had enjoyed a sit-down dinner on Lygon Street, but otherwise the respondents seemed to have committed to finding food on the go. A group of teenagers nearby thought their food consumption would be much the same as a usual Saturday night: McDonalds and KFC. Another group I interviewed near the food truck park on Lonsdale Street saw food as the evening's main attraction and were planning to spend the night sampling different kinds of street food. Another respondent seemed proud of her city's reputation as a culinary destination when she was founding saying "It's Melbourne, so food's never far away". A pair of women I met in a sushi train restaurant on Swanston Street were wary of eating too much, lest full stomachs get in the way of a full night of dancing. They had eaten a small dinner earlier in the night, followed by occasional snacking in order to maintain their energy levels and to allow them to try a variety of different foods. As the sushi train made its way around the large communal table, it struck me as a kind of inverted analogy of the event as a whole: a series of snacks shuttling around in search of a consumer, against the image of attendees moving around the city in expectation of the next treat.

Water had been a prominent topic on social media platforms before the event. Official and personal accounts alike, advised revelers to bring a water bottle with them. Staying hydrated was considered especially important given the day's high temperature. Of the people I spoke to on the night, only one group had brought bottles from home to carry water with them. Over half of the others knew where to find free drinking taps. The 'foodie' group joked about the price of bottled water (usually between three and four dollars), but had resigned themselves to buying at least one each, presumably for the sake of convenience. As the evening wore on, discussion of water on social media turned more critical. Multiple commentators disliked the closeness of water dispensers to public toilets, creating tensions between logistics and hygienic concerns. A few tweets used the #whitenightmelb hashtag to post photos criticising what they saw as overpriced water being sold in an opportunistic fashion; though I am unsure as to how much more convenient free water taps would have to be in order to ease these complaints.

The simultaneous abundance and scarcity of water was perhaps the most striking element of the night. Organisers of the event seemed to have provided sufficient and freely available water whilst advising revelers to bring a bottle with them. Even so, the demand for disposable bottled water remained very high. One explanation given was similar to the above-mentioned improvisational mood of the people that we spoke to, whereby most people were happy to "play it by ear" and therefore did not prepare for such contingencies. Another is that the night's commitment to conspicuous and carnivalesque consumption extended to water and hydration. Party-goers preferred to be seen holding a branded bottle rather than relying on public drinking fountains. A third explanation relates to the value attached to water by organisers, attendees, city councils, and businesses. Attaching a price to

water—whether extortionate or standard—encourages people to think about their consumption of water. While free water is an important public liberty at events like these, the feeling that water is simply on tap—as opposed to something that must traverse a distributed socio-technical network in order to reach us—can lead to careless wastage (cf. Hawkins, 2011). In a nation familiar with water shortages, it seemed that the majority of people on this occasion did not prepare for their water needs and yet they were frustrated when faced with paying for bottled water.

Just as some of the people we spoke to moderated their consumption of food in order to experience more of the evening, so did the city seem to "make room" for the festivities of White Night. The events were spread out more widely across the city this year than in previous years. A northern precinct around the Royal Exhibition Building drew people out of the main CBD area, giving the southern end of the city more room to breathe. The closure of Russell and Exhibition Streets (or rather their opening up to pedestrian movement) allowed revelers to migrate along the north-south axis more easily, relieving the traffic on Swanston Street. Another noticeable difference from previous years was the absence of projections upon the facade of Flinders Street station. In 2014 these projections drew a large number of people to stand talking, looking and photographing in the centre of one of the night's bottlenecks. This fact made traversing the intersection quite difficult, even if not unpleasant. In 2015, this unadorned intersection was a dedicated space of movement intended to allow a freer passage of revelers between the southern precincts and the CBD. This strategy seemed to be effective where I was able to move through the intersection much more freely than in previous years. Still, I wondered at what cost this smoother movement throughout the city had come.

The hygiene involved in separating spaces of movement from spaces of static enjoyment unsettles the idea of White Night as a pedestrian celebration of the city. The closure of roads and the ability to walk through the streets is a liberating experience for pedestrians but as long as traversal spaces and largely static enjoyment are separated, liberation can only be partial. On the other hand, a sense of organisation might allow people not otherwise comfortable in the city to share in this space also. Attendees seemed to desire a sense of hygiene and disposable bottled water (however large its environmental impact) might play a part in this also.

How then to connect the personal and urban metabolisms? The people I spoke to on the night seemed open to new experiences, to wandering around the city in an unplanned fashion. Rather than following fixed routes or scripts in their movement through the city, they seemed happy to improvise on the night's entertainment, nourishment and refreshment. Yet this ability for improvisation is enabled by a large degree of planning on the behalf of the organisers, estimating the number of people moving through the city with demands for light, food, water and toilet maintenance. The practices and theories of planning that went into organising this event is deserving of further study. On the side of those who attended White

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Night, the respondents I spoke to had little desire to “make the most of” White Night in an extractive fashion any more than they proclaimed to want to eat as much as possible over the course of the evening. Indeed many respondents seemed to resist this idea of extractive opportunism when they came across people taking advantage of the occasion by selling “over-priced” water. The fact of some respondents adjusting their practices of food, eating, sharing and moving to manage their night points to a need for a conversation around limits to urban metabolism. If there is a positive note for sustainable urbanism coming out of White Night, it is in the sense that, for some Melbournians, enough is as good as a feast.

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# Walking White Night: Perceptions of Distance, Fatigue, Frustration and Effort During a “Cultural Event”

Suneel Jethani

It usually takes me about 30 minutes to walk the 2.5 km stretch of the city from north to south at a fairly leisurely pace. During White Night Melbourne, a number of city streets were closed to vehicular traffic, in order to allow for attendees to walk freely throughout the six precincts.

My work during the event was motivated by an interest in participant’s perception of exertion, distance, fatigue and frustrations associated with walking through the city during an extended event of entertainment, participatory art, and culinary consumption. The notion of happenstance traversal—of unplanned, aimless, walking through the city—has featured extensively in critiques of urbanism, mediated urbanism and civic participation (De Certeau 1984; Debord 1994). Broadly speaking, notions of agency contained within acts of walking through the city are contingent on being able to take in the streetscape or to wander in one’s own time without set goals. This is in contrast to the pre-planned nature of White Night, wherein tips, maps and suggested routes were offered up along with the ‘My Night’ section of the website, encouraging users to curate, plan, document and share their experiences of the event. Of particular interest was the ways in which those attending the event were aware of physical distances walked as well as levels of exertion, fatigue and how this might relate to everyday travel through the city.

Questions asked of participants throughout the night related to the provision of self-reported information regarding how much walking (in kilometres) they had done over the course of the evening and how much distance they felt they might cover by the end of the night. Participants were also asked about their levels of fatigue and how their walking on the night compared to a regular day or night in the city. What is interesting to note about perceptions of walking during a crowded public event such as White Night is the way in which the open and unplanned nature of people’s intended stay. What this attitude relates to is the notion of physical exertion being



thought of in terms of time, distance, intention, adherence to predetermined plans and ultimately, enjoyment. It is here that a number of interesting strategies are observed: the use of GPS navigation tools, paper maps and verbal communication around how crowded certain precincts and attractions had been and if they would be worth the walk and the wait.

During many of the interviews, when a respondent would give a fixed estimate of distance—say 5km—I would ask them to estimate how far they perceived the distance to be against what they might usually travel on an average day moving through the city. Of the interviewees asked, all of them suggested that the distance walked during the event was out of the ordinary, relative to their usual walking patterns. When asked if the amount of walking had been taken in consideration and preparation for the evening’s events, some said they had worn comfortable shoes specifically for the occasion. One participant added that he had brought a bottle of water with him in order to stay hydrated.

One respondent—one of a pair of women we interviewed at a Sushi-train restaurant on Swanson Street, between Lonsdale and Little Bourke Streets (time 22:30)—told me she had walked for 89 minutes in total that day by using the Moves app. Feeling satisfied that she was able to answer my question with some degree of accuracy, she added: that she was able to answer my question with some degree of accuracy the conversation turned to how one would figure out, by using the app, how much walking one had done during the event itself. Our discussion then turned to how one would figure out, using that particular app, how much walking was done during the event itself the interviewee suggesting that perhaps a pre-event measurement would have had to be recorded and that she “hadn’t thought about that” at the outset of the evening. Both members of the pair had used the my night planner to map out their route and had planned on “going dancing” at some point in the night. Reflecting on this interaction, it

occurred to me later that the Moves app breaks down a day's walking into timed segments, including distances covered and calories burned. In considering this, the woman did not offer a revised figure or any kind of further information.

Speed and density of pedestrian flow had been a widely discussed issue after the 2014 White Night and also featured in both pre and post event discussions of the 2015 event. Talk of traffic delays, an "unprecedented number of visitors crushing into the city" which would be "heaving under the pressure" (Grace 2015). However, after the event itself, organisers were being praised for "crowd management" which "vastly improved" foot traffic compared to the two years prior (Cuthbertson 2015). In investigating the idea of foot flow, I had been asking participants about what they anticipated the major frustrations of the evening to be. Responses were varied, however there was a common theme around transport options home from the event, with people expressing their frustrations of slowly moving crowds impeding walking. When asked about a possible solution to this issue, some respondents suggested that alternative routes could help to avoid the main thoroughfare of Swanston Street. They further indicated that they would be avoiding particular areas all together, such as Flinders Street Station and Southbank.

Most respondents felt that the amount of walking done during White Night was out of the ordinary but not excessively tiring. Distances were generally not perceived as a disincentive for moving between attractions, although factors of speed impeded by crowd density was. As pedometers and wearable fitness tracking devices are used increasingly by the mainstream, self-reported accounts supported by such data are certainly worth further investigation. Of all the subjects we spoke to, only one pair had planned to follow a suggest walking route. Of all the participants I spoke to, none seemed bothered by the walking but rather by the calculation of an attraction and if it was worth walking to get there.

The perceived exposure of the ambulatory body in the context of a public event is incorporated reflexively into narratives of the night, through the various documented and verbal accounts of walking through White Night. These narratives are expressed through a number of attempts to mediate the body's physiology, movement, performance and endurance. Here we can see two distinct roles for mobile technologies; firstly, as a prosthesis (navigational tool, means of distracting oneself from the fatiguing effects of walking), as a means of economising time and distance through communication with others, and as tool producing memories (via photos shared, messages sent, social media posts). Secondly, through the use of wearable devices or mobile applications design to measure and track the body. Here, mobile technology functions as a means of producing a different kind of imprint of the event onto the body. Through this second modality, the body functions as a means of producing a different kind of imprint for tracking health and fitness. It is this second modality which, due to its priming for intimacy and potential to be aggregated and scaled up, perhaps presents an interesting way of understanding this experience. The question remains: how is

walking during cultural events such as White Night—with the disruption of everyday conceptions of movement, pedestrian flow and fatigue—understood as a collective subjectivity.

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# Knowledge, Movement, Technologies

## Asher Warren

This report was intended to be about interactive art. I sought to ask participants about their interactions with artworks during White Night Melbourne. What came to light was that participants had little to say about individual works. They were willing however to describe their engagement with the festival as a whole — their plans, movements and feelings about the events.



This paper is an attempt to draw out some of my more interesting findings from White Night Melbourne. In many ways it brings the project back to my original intention, albeit on a larger scale. Connections are made between knowledge and movement, behaviour and ambience and through the use of mobile social media. What emerges is the numerous ways in which people interact with cities, festivals, technologies and each other.

### Knowledge and movement

It is important to note that across all the interviews conducted, everyone was aware they were attending a public event. It is clear that publicity for White Night was fairly successful. While there were varying degrees of knowledge about the event, all of the interviewees were aware that it was not an everyday occurrence. Interviewees were asked if they had come for any particular part of White Night Melbourne or for the whole event. Of those asked, all responded that they had come for the event as a whole. This identification—of the event as a unified whole, rather than a series of individual events and exhibitions—is important to note. It blankets each individual part under the larger auspices of White Night, potentially obscuring the recognition of individual artists. Furthermore, it recognises the in-between and intangible aspects of the night, such as movement from place to place and the atmosphere created through the augmentation of public space.

It is also important to acknowledge also the range of pre-existing knowledge amongst attendees. Many who partic-

ipated on the night were local to Melbourne and understood the layout of the CBD. Others, including interstate and international visitors— from Spain, The United States and Columbia— were less knowledgeable regarding the geography of the city. Roughly half the interviewees were attending for the first time, with the other half having attended White Night Melbourne at least once previously. Despite this, there was little correlation

between prior experience and the way interviewees made their way around the event. Broadly speaking, there were two main methods of movement, which can be best described via Tim Ingold's concepts of 'navigation' and 'wayfinding' (2000:231). While there is much that could be said about wayfinding and navigation that falls outside the scope of this paper, the responses of interviewees illustrate some key aspects of relevance.

Attendees were encouraged by White Night Melbourne to follow one of six suggested itineraries or to use the online application 'My Night' to plan their evening. Doing so meant using the White Night Melbourne website to browse the programme of events and to navigate between them, or to follow a suggested route using a map. One participant I spoke to outside the State Library described Ingold's process of navigation well, noting that he had come to see "a couple of particular things", one being the "organist in Flinders Street and most of the Alice in Wonderland themed exhibitions." When asked how he knew where to go, his response was that he was "carrying a map at the moment, of the White Night, it was one that was an insert in the newspapers during the week and that's how I've been getting around and planning." As this example illustrates, navigation involves the premeditated gathering of information and maps to prepare and follow a route.

Alternatively, others moved around the event by 'wayfinding'. As one interviewee explained: "we were just walking

around and we happened to see that there was something inside, we didn't know that we were going to find this," while another noted that "to be honest, the website wasn't that informative on where to go, so we're sort of walking around aimlessly and walking into buildings that are open." Unlike navigation, wayfinding places a focus on responding to the immediate environment, for example: "turning left here because there's a bit of sound." As Ingold (2000: 220) describes it, the wayfinder is "continually adjusting his movements in response to an ongoing perceptual monitoring of his surroundings." While some interviewees deliberately chose to wayfind, a number were unable to procure enough information to navigate and were forced to wayfind. Many participants were disappointed with the event website, stating that: "this morning I went to the website, to see what the whole thing was about and I didn't really get to learn anything. I didn't understand what it was" and another noting they "had a look at the website a little bit, but I wouldn't say it was easy to navigate and find information on things."

Most interviewees, however, used a combination of navigation and wayfinding during the night: gathering information from programmes, websites, printed and online maps and in response to the environment's sounds, lights, open doors and other spectators. As one interviewee put it, finding their way by "trial and error, I would say, that would be the main thing, also using the website and our phones a little bit, like Google maps."

### Social space transformed

There was a remarkable similarity across interviewee responses with regards to the atmosphere or ambience of the evening, particularly when asked how the event compared to the everyday experience of the city. Interviewees described the atmosphere as "more inviting", "amazing", "quite inclusive" with "definitely something happening here, in a big sense." Other responses were of "an energy, buzzing", "excitement", "a fun atmosphere". Various interviewees noted a feeling of camaraderie, that it felt "friendly, safe and generous", with fellow attendees "amiable" and "friendly" with a feeling of "like-mindedness" and being "connected." White Night allowed interviewees to "see the city differently", enabling "a different perspective" of the city. While busier than the everyday, it was calmer than a sporting event. A couple from the United States commended that it "feels like New Years eve, but bigger." In comparison to previous years, those who attended noted that this year's event was "more social" and "nicer than last year." Despite a general feeling that the night was exceptional, one interviewee provided a useful perspective on Australian public culture when he stated: "I am Spanish. For me, it is normal." This is an important observation, particularly in light of the proliferation of White Night events around the globe. It suggests that the model is not uniformly experienced, but rather adapts to local particularities. While White Night Melbourne was an event that felt to be quite out of the ordinary for many who attended, the atmosphere and social behaviour can be understood to be quite commonplace in other cities and cultures.

Three interviewees noted a greater freedom afforded to pedestrians, as cars and trams were not allowed in the festival zone. One interviewee described how the ability to stand in the middle of the street had allowed him to see for the first time, the symmetry of the city, with the Shrine of Remembrance and Swanston Street spatially lining up. Another person noted that (without cars and trams): "It feels like you can get through quicker going down the main roads, than you can on a normal day." One even described the enjoyment that came from breaking the usual patterns of controlled movement, stating that: "it's just incredible that you can cross the street without having to wait for the lights." While the suspension of usual traffic management and the large amount of people created a positive atmosphere, when asked if they felt they could do things they usually wouldn't, most people disagreed. Many claimed they would not behave differently or do more things, which suggests that although there were some civic 'rules' that were suspended (such as obeying pedestrian lights), others, such as orderly queuing, were visibly upheld.

### Social media use

There were a number of surprising findings regarding social media use on the night. Prior to the event it was expected that audiences would use social media heavily: for posting tweets, status updates to Facebook, images on Instagram, and responding to posts by friends. While some interviewees used social media on the night (namely Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat), most people used phones or dedicated cameras to photograph, film or create time-lapses of the various artworks—predominantly projections—sharing them online later. There was one participant who went to Flinders Street Station after seeing an image posted on Instagram, otherwise very few were conscious of the activity of their friends on social media. One reason to emerge was the duration of the event and the need for the phone battery to last throughout the night. As one person explained: "I've taken some photos that I'll put up, but not now while my battery needs to last," with the limitation of battery life also being mentioned during other interviews. Lower than expected social media use could also be attributed to the number of attendees moving in pairs or groups, with physically present companions taking precedence over virtual ones. Another contributing factor was the primacy that interviewees placed on the experience. Many explained that they would "post later", but that for now they "would rather enjoy the experience." While not mentioned explicitly, it is important also to consider the nature of White Night, with so much to see across a large area and over a finite amount of time. These conditions may also have an effect on drawing attention from the mediated and asynchronous social media, toward the experiential spectacle of a limited duration. The understanding that many *could* post later attests to this understanding: "possibly later on, but no, I'm just trying to take photos and have a look, and when I get home I might post some stuff."

Of those interviewed who were using social media on the night, most were using it to send images to friends or family who were not able to attend: whether "sending Snapchat to a



mate in Europe”; posting photos to good friends with a baby who couldn’t come; an exchange student “sending pictures back home” to show family “what is going on”; or simply “making people jealous”; most social media use was focussed on sharing the event with people in other places rather than those attending the event.

Two unexpected instances gave insight into the ubiquity of mobile phone use. Whilst interviewing a couple, one was very happy to talk with the other engrossed in their smart-phone. When asked if they had used their mobile phones, one replied: “not really, I’m pretty much just looking at railway stuff, that’s all.” In this instance, the use of a phone was acknowledged when pressed and immediately discounted. A number of other interviewees also claimed they had not used their phones during the night. When asked however if they were meeting up with friends, they explained that they had been in contact by calling, SMS or messaging applications (such as Facebook Messenger). One interviewee sitting outside Melbourne Central Railway Station explained: “I can’t get a hold of anybody. I’ve tried internet, calling and texting, none of it seems to have worked so far”, acknowledging that there were so many people that it might be causing network congestion. When asked if there was a backup plan, she responded: “No. I was thinking walkie talkies, but we didn’t have enough time to organise it”. This statement is interesting in that it suggests replacing one technology with a similar technology, rather than changing behaviour (such as arranging to meet at a landmark at a certain time). It also shows that there was an expectation that mobile networks would be functioning as usual.

## Conclusions

White Night Melbourne is a public event on a grand scale. It is spread across and beyond the CBD of Melbourne, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors over a twelve-hour period. In considering these findings—taken from twenty-eight interviewees from eighteen interviews conducted across four locations—it is vital to state that these findings should in no way be considered definitive representations. They do however illustrate certain methods of *passage through* and *experience of* the city, as well as various approaches to the use of mobile phones, photographic equipment and social media. Movement through the city was accomplished by navigation and wayfinding, with a number of interviewees using both methods due to a lack of access to information and maps. There was a remarkable feeling of enjoyment and civic cohesion throughout the event: of friendly, generous exchanges with strangers, alongside demonstrable civility such as the formation of orderly queues. There was also a range of uses of mobile and photographic technology—sometimes used so ubiquitously that it was unacknowledged. Most notably, social media use predominantly fell into two broad categories; posting at the time for friends and family who were not present and for photographing and filming, to be posted on social media after the event.

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# White Night: Absent Spectatorship

## Stephanie Hannon

If social networks and mobile communications mean we can watch an event anywhere at anytime, how might the experience of 'being there' differ to 'being absent'? I was not in Melbourne for White Night, therefore I experienced the event at a distance: through newspapers, email promotions and social media. As an absent spectator, I came to construct a narrative of White Night through everyday media use.

What was apparent in the reporting of the event was a tension between the invocation of a community and individual-oriented practices, such as planning and self-representation. Despite the event appealing to a 'Melbourne' audience, the images I saw of the night—via Facebook and Instagram—were focussed on the perpetuation of the individual and the landmarks of the CBD. Through my position as an absent spectator, I did not see a transformation of Melbourne but rather a celebration of its existing sites and audiences.

I began to notice the promotion of White Night in the week leading up to the event. Double-page feature articles in the Arts and Culture section of the weekend papers provided an editorially-curated program of anticipated highlights, as well as tips for planning the night. Although the rhetoric around White Night suggests it is about the "people" (Bailey 2015: 8) or "a community event" (Walsh in Plant 2015: 4), the immediate focus of these articles was about individuals preparing for the evening. *The Age* provided a double-page feature in their '*M*' Magazine, detailing the different precincts and "When to go?" The pitch was to create "your map" and "pick your own way across it". Participation in White Night was structured as an individual map or plan to navigate the area, rather than as a platform for community engagement. Much like a plan your adventure novel, the attendee was the 'hero' of their own White Night adventure.

These tensions—between the individual and collective—became more explicit closer to the event as online publications

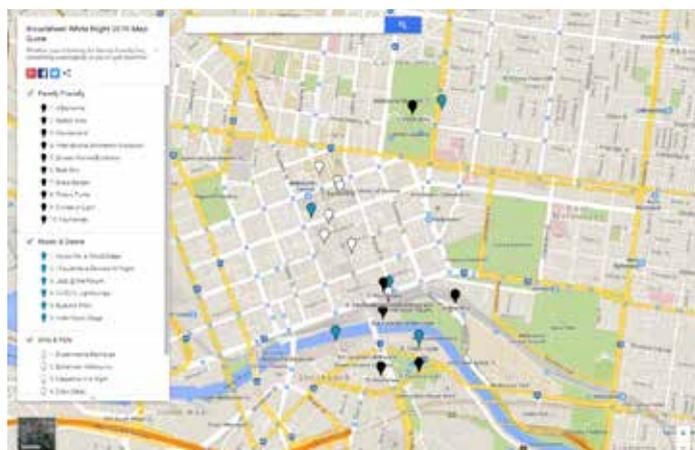


Figure 1 - Broadsheet's Map for the families, musicians and art and culture lovers attending White Night 2015

produced lists and maps that were tailored to an existing audience. Online Melbourne social directory *Broadsheet* used the Google maps platform to produce a tailored map of the event, depending upon whether you were seeking a 'family friendly event', 'music', or an arts and culture experience (see fig. 1).

While 'picking your own adventure' can encourage individual choice

and navigation, this narrative was defined in the given context according to existing social and cultural audiences. Events listed under one route were not repeated across the other routes, thus social groups were unlikely to mingle with people outside of their clique. Melbourne retailers provided their own 'plan' for the evening, The Emporium Shopping Centre emailed a schedule in order for you to plan your evening around their shopping mall and food court. While White Night reconfigures typical routines and rhythms of the CBD, there is a reliance on existing social and cultural groups as means of programming the night's activities and selling it to a ready audience.

Although the event is intent on transforming the built environment, the practice of individual pre-planning according to existing social and cultural formations in turn reifies our perception of the CBD. By pre-planning your attendance you are encouraged to not deviate from your set path or transgress into the potential spontaneity of the evening. This focus on planning was potentially a response to complaints from previous years regarding the congestion and crowding of major thoroughfares. In 2015 the programme reflected a more decentralised approach, with events spread further across the CBD. Yet in doing so, the organisation of space does not seem to appeal to a 'mythic' public but rather to a diverse group of inhabitants intent on following their own route on the evening. In order to follow your own path you need to have appropriate spatial awareness of where you are going, supported by clear markers. During White Night these markers were Melbourne's cultural institutions.

Despite the inversion of their operating hours and the illumination of their façade, their status as part of the event was dependent upon their existing social and cultural capital within Melbourne. Often these sites hosted major works as they are easily identifiable, have large floor spaces and are generally well placed in relation to the CBD grid. Despite the temporary intervention on the city, the pre-planning required for this event reinforces a set of expectations and perceptions of the night that are mapped according to our pre-existing knowledge of the CBD.

For spectators watching White Night elsewhere, the event demonstrates how an individualism of reporting is practiced through social media representations of the night. Given the reporting cycle of traditional media, social media networks became the predominant platform for real-time experiences of the evening. *The Age* and *The Herald Sun* both promoted their twitter feeds, #hashtags and apps to enable people to stay connected on the night. Due to the predominant visual nature of the event, I was able to engage most heavily via Facebook and Instagram<sup>9</sup>. However, the potential of these platforms to act as participatory public spheres that extend beyond the realm of the event is limited. The experience of White Night is very much grounded in the importance of place.

Images from the evening coalesced with my perception of the event as they focussed on Melbourne's built environment and individual presence in the space. Two images of White Night that dominated social media platforms were the illumination displays of building projections and the selfie. There were beautiful images of the illuminated buildings along Flinders Street and the lotus flowers floating down the Yarra river. An interesting post tagged #whitenightmelbourneathome showed a video of a robot with flashing lights in its head break dancing. What this demonstrates is how these illuminations have become synonymous with White Night. In contrast, the 'selfie' documents the journey in preparing, travelling to, and attending the event. This demonstration of 'being present' however was often compromised by close-ups of people's faces and obstructive angles that rendered White Night barely visible within the frame. While the night was intended as a once-a-year transformation of the urban landscape, my lack of physical presence compelled me to try and locate people's locations and to guess the different landmarks. As such, my ability to navigate the night was largely dependent upon my existing knowledge of the CBD and the maps produced by traditional media. My physical absence from the event impeded the transformative intent as I reverted to existing spatial orientations to make sense of these images.

These posts of light displays and self-representation were disconnected from the interaction and dynamism that is expected of a "community event". Given the traditional media's

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9 As is noted in other articles in this edition many attendees did not upload their photos to social media immediately, but chose to do so in the days following. While I surveyed some images on the evening, I traced common hashtags in the days following to find additional images from the evening.

orientation towards individual planning, the coalescence of traditional and social media practices is perhaps not surprising. The stasis of Facebook and Instagram posts is ineffective in capturing the movement and mobility of the event, while the attendees are not expected to act as social participants. As media theorist Shaun Moores (2012: 15) argues, we must acknowledge that through contemporary media the site of reception, or where the "event is watched and heard" becomes a valid experience of the event. This is not the equivalent however of being there. In documenting the sights, social media operates more like a travelogue than a dialogue. As *The Age* highlighted in its post-event coverage, some of the dominant images and messages on social media included where people could buy food, the heat and possibility of rain, as well as the promotion of alternative events for people not wanting to go to the city. For those posting, these images seek to legitimate their participation in public—as evidence that they were there—rather than acting as a platform for participation. As a spectator 'watching' the event from elsewhere, these mediations do not extend spaces for public participation, but rather act as an archive of the event. This fact resonates more closely with a broadcasting modality, whereby the spectator is asked to receive rather than respond to the image.

This becomes one limitation of the event experienced through social media, when the primary connection to the night is via one phone/one interface. Although one has the ability to pick up on many feeds, they are sequential with only one full image being viewable at any given time. As a result, the spatial programming of the event is not clearly articulated. While specific landmarks could be recognised, the music or chill-out zone for example become lost in the user's own construction of their journey, reiterating the perspective of the individual over the collective. Observing White Night via social media was therefore closer to 'reading' or 'witnessing' than offering an opportunity for public participation.

The post-event reporting of White Night praised the event as a success and as demonstrative of Melbourne's cultural prowess. *The Herald Sun* (2015: 64) provided a short editorial describing the festival as "a community event when Melburnians come together to celebrate everything that is great about their city." Yet as someone absent from the evening's festivities, I did not feel connected to this event as a celebration, but rather as a witness or a viewer who legitimated the experience of others. I believe this disconnection was largely due to the dissonance between the representation of White Night as an event for Melbourne and its realisation as a programme of events for distinct cross-sections of the community. As a result, individual needs within the context of a community event are prefaced, rather than encouraging participation with others. But perhaps this is too much to ask of an event such as White Night. Given that the celebrations in Melbourne are for an evening only, perhaps we should enjoy its existence rather than asking for something more.



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White Night  
MELBOURNE

12:00pm  
SATURDAY  
FEB



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE