

Night as Commons: Minor Architecture and Dayfaring Citizens

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EPILOGUE (BY WAY OF PROLOGUE)

34 March 2016. Only a few weeks after finishing this article, a popular movement gathers around the hashtag #NuitDebout (Night on Our Feet) in Paris to protest the French government's latest labour reform. Social media accounts from Place de la République, where the gathering takes place, describe how the first night's festive atmosphere is transformed into strategic will on the second: in the live videos streamed from within the square, anonymous and eager voices weave this desire to organize and work together with the stirring darkness of the night. There is a radical power vibrating in that darkness, and somehow it seems almost natural that reclaiming the political—beyond the police post-politics of our time¹—must be accompanied by a claim for night and darkness. Why is that?

15 May 2011. The words dormíamos, despertamos ("we slept, we awoke"), still trigger, whenever they are pronounced, the energy liberated by the Spanish 15-M movement. We slept with a sleep of disinterest

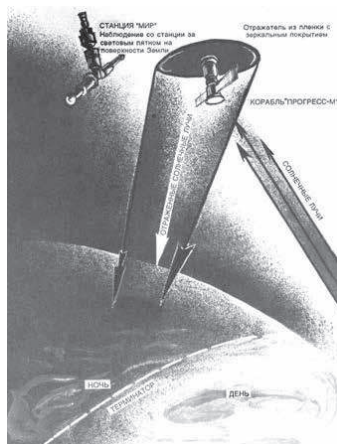


Fig. 1: Illumination scheme for Znamya 2. Once in space the device would unfurl a 20-metre-long spanning mirror that would deflect sunlight back to a nightbound area of the Earth.

and detachment.² But, surely, not that distance of rest that simultaneously affirms the world and its sensual rhythms. We slept with the disturbing sleep of the sleep-walker, trapped in a perpetual apathetic movement. Automaton incapable of distinguishing night from day, unable of finding rest in darkness, nor of living in daylight.

15-M and #NuitDebout symptomatically underline the numerous and complex meanings at work when we talk about night, sleep, darkness, and politics. Apparently contradictory, they are in fact deeply interconnected. Throughout this text we look into past and present articulations of the night and day experience to contribute to our understanding of the intimate entanglements between politics, perception, and space.

NIGHT AS COMMONS

In the early 1990s, a team of Russian scientists developed Znamya, a project to launch a vast mirror-satellite that would eventually illuminate certain areas of the Earth's surface with the intensity of several full-moons (fig.1).³ The notion of a perpetual day and its subsequent endless productivity cycle was already in the air in the 1980s,⁴ steadily transforming workers' relation to labour.⁵ If Znamya ended up failing, it was because of technical issues, not because of the numerous protests it prompted among astronomers and environmentalists, who worried about the consequences such a project would have upon all life forms. Here, we want to elaborate on the idea opened up by those critics who pointed out that the night sky was a commons, and that, consequently, everyone should have access to it.⁶

To think of the night as commons—and thus open up the discussion about a right to the night—implies considering the double dimension of the common, as both a natural resource and a shared production.⁷ First and foremost, night is a physical reality linked to our own animal condition. We need to sleep to survive, but also to keep our imagination and creativity alive, and thus any political sphere active. This means night works as a field of virtuality, a dimension of unresolved potentiality teeming with the still to come.⁸ However, there is a second meaning: the shared production of night or darkness as both physical and conceptual spheres of freedom where potentiality can breathe.

When we recognize this virtual
58

dimension of the real, a new idea of the political as the diagrammatic power of bodies emerges alongside it:⁹ our ability to compose our own affective strategy with the world.¹⁰ Capitalism, not so much as an economic system, but as a way of organizing nature¹¹, demands that we look upon the growing intimacy between power and our affective realm. It has produced, while simultaneously being produced by, a reconfiguration of our bodies' sensory apparatus: our ability to relate, perceive and read, but also to build, compose and create. The articulation between the political, matter, and space serves as the foundation for what we have termed a minor architecture¹². A compositional rather than a building affair, it emerges from the body to organize its affective relation to the world.¹³ It is composed by a minority, but with the tools of a major practice.¹⁴ Form, disposition, geometry, materiality—traditional preoccupations of the architectural discipline—are among its core preoccupations, but they operate here in a quite different key. In its unfolding, everything becomes political, for the common is always vibrating within. We will try to add here another dimension, the importance of secrecy as a realm of darkness,¹⁵ which reorganizes architectural knowledge from discipline into strategy, ruses, and hacking¹⁶—what Keller Easterling has explored under the term of extrastatecraft.¹⁷

After the failure of the first Znamya prototypes, the project was aborted, relegating space mirrors to the realm of conceptual fantasy. However, we will discover that, without any need for sci-fi mirrors, Znamya's ambition to illuminate the night was eventually realized. The only difference is that the superposition of endless smaller lights became a much more efficient means to achieve total illumination in our 24/7 present.

SUSPICIOUS DARKNESS

We have already noted some of the diverse meanings attached to darkness and light, night and day, sleep and wakefulness. Throughout this text we will try to move through them in

the most accessible way without losing their productive polysemy. Language gives us clues about the worldview we share, but also about those we either wish for or reject. That is why the growing number of popular expressions that describe forms of disconnection from our 24/7 illuminated world, as movements of darkness production, have become significant—even more so as they are often met with suspicion.

The term “off-the-grid” was first employed in the early 1990s to describe a self-sufficient lifestyle in which the supply of water, electricity, or any other typically public utility was autonomously secured. “Going off-the-grid” signified a political affirmation of autonomy, and was subsequently met with derision and mistrust. However, its use has recently shifted to being untraceable or unrecorded. This second sense of obscuring oneself requires us to read the grid beyond its classical infrastructural referent (i.e. electricity or water networks), not only as a sectorial organizational device, but as the functional diagram of modern capitalism. Accordingly, “going off-the-grid” means producing a field of darkness around oneself against a system that works under the premise of constant illumination.

“Going dark” is another such expression. Initially, it described a soldier’s or a spy’s decision to suspend any kind of communication in order to protect himself, a camouflage of silence. However, its latest use describes either a period of disconnection from the internet, or, in intelligence jargon, entering communication channels inaccessible to the monitoring eye.¹⁸ It implies the creation of an envelope of darkness as defense, a haven whose activity unfolds parallel to the field of visibility but out of its reach, which means it instantly causes suspicion.

This is nothing new; from the beginning of time, night has always engendered some form or other of mistrust and disquiet. Not only does darkness compromise our senses and alertness, sleep and rest also involve a certain level of vulnerability. As Maurice Blanchot pointed out:

Nocturnal wandering, the tendency to stray when the world is attenuated and grows distant, and even the honest professions which are necessarily practiced at night attract suspicions. To sleep with open eyes is an anomaly symbolically indicating something which the general consciousness does not approve of. People who sleep badly always appear more or less guilty. What do they do? They make night present.¹⁹

Night is a constant reminder of our limited material condition, and so it disquiets us. This troubling feeling is enhanced when confronted with modernity’s project and its will to surrender every aspect of the real to objective dominion. Suspicion and mistrust grow in the crack opened between night and control, from where it feeds the ongoing process of night’s criminalization and annihilation.

CONTROLLING LIGHT

The monitoring eye—an assemblage of surveillance, order, and normality—works as a spotlight. It opens a field of visibility and subjects every fragment of the real it captures within. As Gaston Bachelard writes in The Flame of a Candle, “everything that casts a light sees.”²⁰ Light possesses a power to make everything under its reach visible, and thus subdued. Everything touched by its brightness is bound to the light. Should we invert the formula, we might discover how other types of power—i.e. the State’s—that seek to place something under control will do so by establishing a device capable of producing a field of visibility.

This notion is at the core of the modern biopolitical project, whose overarching field of visibility encompassed all kind of dimensions and implemented all sort of lights.²¹ Some of them were actually built, like street-lighting systems implemented in most European capitals by the early eighteenth century. Others were symbolic, as when an absolutist monarch embodied the regulating power of the Sun, or those disciplinary

spotlights seeking to subsume a field of nature into established bodies of knowledge and practice. Besides their functional differences and effective planes, they all worked towards a total illumination of the real—a global absolute light that has ended up stifling the night's potential, both physical and symbolic.

LIVING WITH NO NIGHT

No human being can survive more than eleven days without sleeping. With a lack of sleep, our senses are compromised, our attention and perception altered, and normal signs like noises or movements might cause unexpected responses. "Perhaps sleep is inattention to the world," wrote Maurice Blanchot, "but this negation of the world conserves us for the world and affirms the world. Sleep is an act of fidelity and of union. I entrust myself to the great natural rhythms, to the laws, to the stability of order. My sleep is the realization of this trust, [...] an attachment."²² Besides the physical, we see how an excess of public light can also compromise our political and social action.²³ The pervasive gaze of social media upon us risks annihilating our private and intimate realms, that is, the space where we build our opinions and views, where an always necessary secret and privacy reside. In much the same way, today's informational avalanche doesn't necessarily illustrate us. On the contrary, more often than not it only provokes disaffection and estrangement.²⁴ The disappearance of darkness renders us victims of a tampered perception, unable to recognize night in a truly reliable way. Our bodies, thus blinded by an excess of light, are abandoned to a new state of physical vulnerability and political alienation.

In the following pages we interrogate the path that took us into this total illumination and the progressive annihilation of the night. First, we journey back to a time when night still existed as a differentiated realm. After that, we present the evolution between what we have termed "sovereignty's focused light"—the illumination device born between the sixteenth and seventeenth

century in relation to new forms of government—and the contemporary "diffuse glow of capitalism." We then analyze this through the spatial functioning of the lighting device, paying attention to the ways in which a field of visibility is built, as well as the effects it has had on the physical experience of night and darkness. If the functional diagram of the first model was the grid, the second is a modulating sieve. This diagrammatic shift will help us return to expressions like "going off the grid" and "going dark,"²⁵ to see the possibilities a minor architecture might offer us in the articulation between space and the political.

MEDIEVAL NIGHTS

Let us turn then, if briefly, to the sensual and conceptual experience of the night an individual of the late Middle Ages might have had.²⁶ Back then, night-time experience was mostly defined by necessity, the day/night cycle being largely unavoidable. Time was felt to flow organically, contrary to the clockwork model that would soon inform society's temporal rhythms.²⁷ Just as the seasons marked the different tasks, obligations, and festivities throughout the year, so too did the solar and lunar movements every day. Beyond a mere absence of light, the hours of darkness possessed a distinct atmosphere. They were certainly fearful hours, when monsters and ghosts roamed free, but they also brought release and freedom from moral, religious, and political restraints, thus becoming a time for neighbourly gatherings, candlelight study, or romantic encounters.

The disordered physical experience induced by darkness caused this ambiguity:²⁸ at night, when our vision is severely limited, every obstacle becomes obscured and every detail is lost in shadows. Our hearing suffers from this confused exposure as well. Diderot wrote about how the night "confers horror on noises; even if only that of a leaf in the depths of the forest, it triggers the imagination."²⁹ To each shadow sensed, sound heard, or unseen texture felt, our imagination vividly

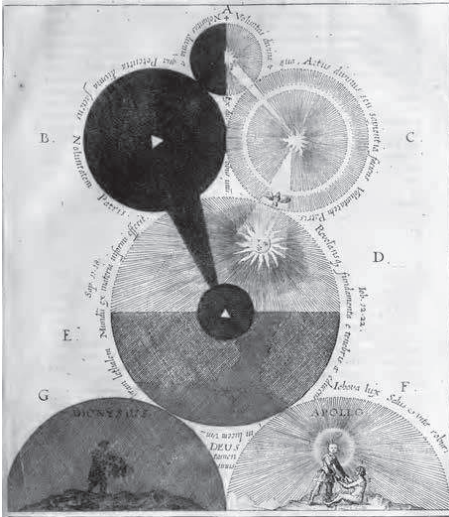


Fig. 2: Diagram of interpenetrating circles of light and darkness from Robert Fludd's *Medicina Catholica*, 1629–1631. Writing on eclipses, astronomer Johannes Kepler declared that their “very darkness is the eyes of the astronomers, while Paracelsian physician Robert Fludd wrote that “darkness is the earliest beginning of all things.” The Internet Archive (<https://www.archive.org/>)

pictures danger at its cause. At night, our perceptual map—the linked relations traced between our body, mind, and surrounding world—is disorganized, faulty, and unreliable. From this excited and confused sensorium grows a respectful, if not fearful, attitude towards the hours of darkness.

Some medieval accounts do in fact liken the night to a storm, which meant that at dusk villages and cities began to prepare for the night.³⁰ Thus there was a lively threshold between day and night, shaped by an extensive set of individual and collective practices. The most important among them, as it set everything in motion, was the couvre-feu, the etymological and cultural origin of our modern curfew. Around 8 or 9, depending on the town and season, the bells tolled for everyone to put out their fires and candles (couvrir le feu) and stop their work in order to avoid fires. At the same time, the rampart's gates were closed and all possible connection to the countryside

was severed. In some cities like Paris, private houses were also closed from the outside, making it impossible to exit them without the express permission of a town's ruling representative. Heavy chains were sometimes even deployed in the streets and rivers to keep anyone from wandering around. A night watch, formed by local residents, guarded the ramparts and patrolled the streets. There were, of course, some night wanderers who defied the curfew and roamed the city, as well as taverns and other places of unrest; but as a whole, in the middle of the night, the city became an isolated bubble of silence and stasis, broken only by the morning bells signaling the beginning of a new day.

SOVEREIGNTY'S FOCUSED LIGHT

This nocturnal experience shifted dramatically during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Against medieval metaphysics, many artistic and intellectual trends explored and reclaimed the value of darkness and night as constitutive elements of the world (fig.2).³¹ Meanwhile, a process of diurnalization expanded throughout many European cities. Promoted and made profitable by a flourishing bourgeoisie, both working and shopping hours were extended, mealtimes were delayed, and theatre and other spectacle schedules were pushed later into the night.³² Finally, political, legal, social, and religious discourses positioned the night as a dangerous space that needed to be further controlled and surveilled, a responsibility that would soon be assumed and organized by the new sovereign States.³³

PARISIAN NIGHTS (OR THE KINGDOM OF THE SUN)

In France, for instance, a series of intertwining strategies were set in place. First, there was the curfew; however, keeping citizens within their houses when the city was teeming outside was becoming more difficult by the day. Consequently, it became necessary to control nocturnal activities. This was done, first, through the establishment of a rich

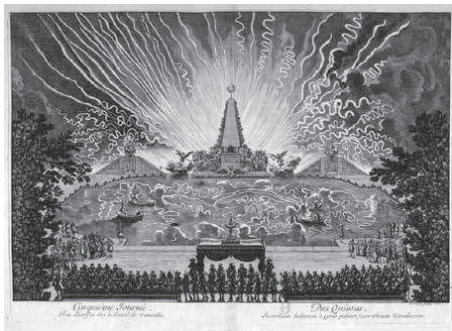


Fig. 3: Jean Lepautre, Fireworks in the Fourth Night of the *Divertissements de Versailles*, 1676. Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>)

and extensive program of official night-time entertainment, and, second, through the concerted policing of the nocturnal city.

The new diversions served another purpose: to elaborate and stage a new political idiom based on the befuddlement of the senses. The new sovereigns were looking to substitute religion as the source of authority, and they were going to do it by articulating a new relation towards darkness. By the second half of the seventeenth century, the most elaborate spectacles linking entertainment and political symbolism had become essential tools of governments throughout Europe, and nighttime was their preferred background. Events that only a century before had been celebrated by daylight were now turned into nocturnal festivals of astounding fireworks and illuminations (figs. 3 and 4).

However, it was Louis XIV, the Sun King, who instituted the most complex and pervasive strategy to articulate this new symbolic order, and alongside it the modern experience of the night/day cycle. The elaborate and flamboyant image of a fourteen-year-old Louis dressed as Apollo, god of the sun, has become one of his most canonical representations (fig.5). The first time he personified this image was on 23 February 1653, during the first performance of the *Ballet de la nuit*.³⁴ The piece, staged over the course of a single night, culminated with the blazing

entrance of the king, dressed in gold against a dark background and impersonating the sun as new organizing force of the cosmos. He spoke: “Without doubt I belong to the World I serve; I exist not for myself but for the Universe. To it I owe the sunny beams that crown my head. It is my duty to regulate the time and the seasons, and Order will not suffer pleasure to keep me from my work” (emphasis added). When he went on stage that evening, he was also entering the larger stage of contemporary politics to announce and assert a blinding solar force that demanded to be reckoned with: the symbolic embodiment as ruler and organizer of time and the seasons, which would inform his policies and transform the role and meaning of light, visibility, and order—within the new sovereign state.

POLICING THE NOCTURNAL CITY

It was also around this time that nocturnality became an aggravating circumstance for most crimes. Inherent in the already mentioned suspicion against the night, and departing from an etymological correlation between night (*nox*) and harm (*nocere*), early-modern legal theory considered that every activity

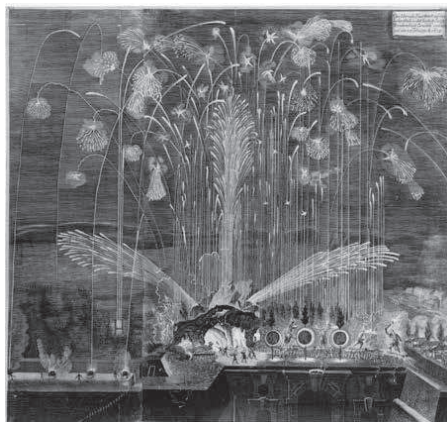


Fig. 4: Anonymous, Festival for the Family of the Elector of Saxony, Dresden, February 28, 1678: Hercules Fireworks, 1678. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953 (www.metmuseum.org)



Fig. 5: Anonymous, Louis XIV dressed as Apollo for the Ballet de la nuit, 1653. Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

undertook by night implied a higher degree of premeditation.³⁵ This is why, from the very beginning, the street-lighting system of Paris was part of a larger surveillance strategy. It was created in 1667 as one of the newly founded police responsibilities. Tasked with control over an incredibly heterogeneous set of spheres—from morality and hygiene, to crime and public festivities—this new administrative force radically transformed the city. It changed its incontrollable heterogeneity, with its overlapping jurisdictions and ambiguous borders, into a homogenous field of visibility through a process of gridding or quadrillage. Every quartier, until then a singular spatial mesh of powers and practices whose geography wasn't officially defined, was turned

into a clearly bounded cell visible to the central eye of the Police Lieutenant (fig.6).³⁶ And by night, this field of police visibility needed to be made physically visible.

LET THERE BE LIGHT: THE STREET-LIGHTING SYSTEM

"Compared with Paris, the darkest and loneliest forest is a safe retreat," wrote Nicolas Boileau in 1665.³⁷ Pretty soon the nocturnal atmosphere of the city had changed radically, and less than a century later Adrian-Joseph de Valois d'Orville prophetically wrote that "the kingdom of the night is now going to end."³⁸ It was only fitting that the Sun King should install the first street-lighting system in Europe, and though many cities would soon follow suit, Paris's remained special, as it combined both physical and symbolic roles. It lit everything that might take place within the police field and submitted it to the gaze of the State. However, as each lamp became a symbol of the king, it also made that eye visible to everyone within—and through it, the sovereign's power reached every illuminated street of the city.

The system, which began with 3,000 lamps lit every night until two in the morning, included around 7,000 a century later. They were placed every sixty to ninety feet, and far from creating a continuous field of light, they mostly drew a dotted line of bright points to follow. Like beacons they "casted a diffuse halo, often opaque, rather than a brightness capable of rendering clear the outlines of things and people."³⁹ The general distribution across the city was also uneven, as central neighborhoods were favoured over the outskirts.

The first lamps were crystal lanterns with a candle within that hung transversally across the street. This position, avoided elsewhere because it obstructed traffic, was essential in Paris, where its overreaching centrality held a symbolic importance that overshadowed any disturbance it might cause (fig.7). The hanging lanterns were akin to the focal tower of Bentham's panopticon, which



Fig. 6: The different reforms promoted by the police culminated in 1702 with the establishment of 20 quartiers. They were cartographically represented for the first time by Jean de la Caille in 1714. A new kind of boundary which could be drawn and thus, abstractly communicated and distantly controlled, appeared. Jean de la Caille, General map and fragment from *Description de la ville et des faubourgs de Paris en vingt planches*, 1714. Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale de France (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>)

explains their frequent vandalism and the severity of the resulting punishment. While breaking a lantern in London resulted in a simple fine, in Paris the offender might find himself chained up or rowing in the Galleys.⁴⁰

Following Bachelard's statement that "everything that casts a light sees," we can assume that within any system of surveillance switching a light off acquires a rebellious and strategic meaning. Breaking lanterns and reclaiming darkness often sought to regain a familiar, immediate space that had been claimed by the police. When darkness ruled the night, only those with an intimate knowledge of a neighborhood's streets and obstacles, as well as its rhythms and practices, could move freely through it. This situation clearly benefited locals in the everyday use of their own territory, thus affirming a certain level of autonomy in response to the *quadrillage*, which had flattened the historically entangled layers of flesh, meaning,



and practice into a new abstract plane that drastically restrained residents' agency.

Walking in the dark, then, was not so much dangerous but suspicious. A 1467 London decree stated that "no man walke after IX of the belle streken in the nyght withoute lyght or withoute cause reasonable in payne of empresonment."⁴¹ By the seventeenth century Paris had a similar regulation, which would soon expand to other European cities.⁴² The aim of this light was not so much for its carrier to see, but to make him visible. It established his position within a policeable space, thereby turning him into an available subject.

Finally, we cannot forget the mobile and living part of the lighting infrastructure, embodied in the *porte-flambeaux*. These light-bearers for hire would light one's way in the middle of the night. Like the rest of the street-lighting system, they were active agents of surveillance. A vast network of police informants, they reported each morning to their corresponding superintendent every single thing seen or heard the night before.⁴³ In less than fifty years, the State had thus arranged a vast, homogenous field of visibility where police intelligence traveled fast and control was strictly maintained.



Fig. 7: In the background, Paris's hanging lanterns, akin to the focal tower of Bentham's panopticon, made the King present to everyone. Anonymous, illustrations for Nicolas-Edmé Rétif de La Bretonne's *Les Nuits de Paris, ou le Spectateur nocturne*, 1788–1789. Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale de France (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>)

THE DIFFUSE GLOW OF CAPITALISM

In 1667, the *Gazette de Robinet* proclaimed that with the new street-lighting system, “the night will feel like broad daylight.”⁴⁴ Could we affirm that today the process is nearing completion, at least in some parts of our planet? If the first 3,000 lanterns illuminating Paris created a diffuse halo incapable of rendering clear the outline of things, our present excess casts that diffuse gleam onto our night city skies, making it impossible to outline even the brightest constellations.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in a race towards absolute daylight, more and more cities aspire to be the best 24/7 urban playgrounds

imaginable,⁴⁶ and the modern State's divertissements and fireworks pale against the new forms of official entertainment. Still mediated by the State, they are nonetheless promoted by the overpowering rule of the capitalist market seeking to overlap a non-stop daylight experience with a non-stop consumption cycle.⁴⁷ This cycle is made pervasively ubiquitous through networks like Facebook and Twitter, where production and consumption dissolve into one another and reshape our anxious perceptions, and we're ever fearful of missing out⁴⁸ while drowning in endless hours of blue-lit insomnia.⁴⁹ If we broke the lanterns today, we would not be reclaiming our neighborhoods, but the most fundamental of territories: our body's numbed sensorium, and along with it the possibility of regaining a material awareness of the world—and maybe our freedom.⁵⁰

This fast-paced race towards total illumination forced the grid to adapt as well. In “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” Deleuze offers significant clues for understanding this shift. First and foremost, he outlines the transformation of the grid from tabulating device to a modulating sieve: “Enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point.”⁵¹ If there is still a field of visibility, it is produced rather differently. Against the panoptical field of the *quadrillage*, the spatiality of the sieve does not rely on cells, rather focusing directly on the individual particles moving through them. The walls that discipline and channel the performances of those bodies have accordingly been substituted by complex, subjectivity-modulating infrastructures. While Ravi Sundaram advances the notion of “sensory infrastructure,” a volatile emergent combination of pirate tactics, media forms, and paralegal spaces, Kazys Varnelis's recent research points to the role of electromagnetic forces in the configuration of “the new modulated world of invisible fields.” Fields whose consequences are, nonetheless,

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radically material in the ordering of our spatial
and sensual experience, as Keller Easterling
shows in “IIRS” (aka Information In Real
Space).⁵²

Second, if the panopticon depended on
a single, central eye that unified the endless
eyes under its reach, the sieve controls the
real through the superposition of endless
autonomous eyes (and their corresponding
fields of visibility). “Oligoptica,” a term coined
by Bruno Latour, are the exact opposite of
the panopticon: “They see much too little
[...] but what they see, they see well,” thus
making possible “sturdy but extremely
narrow views” of interconnected wholes.⁵³
As a result of this extreme narrowness, “the
tiniest bug can blind [them].” But what
happens when these oligoptica are endlessly
multiplied and superimposed? We find one
of the main principles of big data at work.
The smallest error could unbalance classic
statistical science—a tabulating science—
because it is based on limited samples
that, accordingly, need to be as accurate as
possible. Big data, on the other hand, departs
from a massive amount of representative
points, and thus, should one of them fail, the
final picture remains completely unaffected.
We can see that in today’s environment of
total surveillance, if one CCTV camera is out
of order, there will probably exist redundant
systems to locate any (suspicious) bodies.⁵⁴

The panopticon has been replaced by
an endless multiplication of bright oligoptica
that illuminate our every movement. If
modernity sought to lighten the real in order
to make it available to an overarching eye, the
contemporary sieve is seamlessly enmeshed
within a simulated real, itself the source of
absolute illumination. The sovereign’s focused
light has been substituted for the diffuse glow
of capitalism.

RECLAIMING THE NIGHT: DAYFARING CITIZENS

By outlining the historical transformation
of this night-light-control assemblage, we
have tried to grasp more accurately the deep

relations between the political—as power to
compose our own affective strategy with the
world—and space. We will now try to sum
up the highlights of this analysis and their
meaning in terms of a “minor architecture.”

First, the medieval experience of the
night, with its compromised sensorium and
faulty perceptual map, pointed us to the body
as source of all architectural endeavor.⁵⁵ We
are not reclaiming a renewed anthropocentric
approach, nor limiting the body to mere user
or measure of the cosmos. On the contrary,
we want to explore the body as creator of an
individual spatiality: a physical materiality that
creates a relational field around it linking the
actual and the virtual—that is, not only what
a body does, also what a body can do. This
implies a broader materialist understanding of
the body, one that goes beyond the human.
The spatial organization of our medieval
town forces us to acknowledge the spatiality
created by the candle that must be exhausted
by curfew or that of the animals and trees
sending out unsettling sounds through
darkness.

Second, we saw how any strategy
of control needs to deploy a field of
visibility, and in order to do that, it needs
to dematerialize the complexity of any
given territory by flattening the historically
entangled layers of flesh, meaning, and
practice into a new abstract plane. When the
people of Paris revolted against light, it was
the common spatiality of their quartier they
were defending, the physical and historical
entanglement of individual spatialities in play.
The quartier’s political community did not
derive from an abstract identity assigned by
the administration; rather it emerged out
of singular relations as a common fabric.
Furthermore, its inhabitants were fully aware
that their accurate territorial expertise was key
to their political autonomy, and thus rebelled
against its expropriation.

Finally, the configuration of the
diffuse glow of capitalism, and the endless
superposition of oligoptica, forces us to
acknowledge the subject of form and limit.
Beyond the idea of limit as a perfectly defined

line that encloses or channels—either in the shape of a wall, an administrative line, a mold or a conduit—there is a limit that fluidly expands to the bodies’ potential range. The idea of form, previously confined to that of object, broadens to include the scope of the bodies’ potential, incorporating both individual and common spatialities.⁵⁶

These entail other necessary considerations: number turns from arithmetical to organizing device,⁵⁷ geometry from quantification to relation,⁵⁸ structure from equilibrium to metastability.⁵⁹ And finally, we shift from the idea of construction to that of composition. The production of night will be thus understood as the encompassing of minor spatial compositions that rearticulate our everyday relation to light and darkness, publicity and secrecy, officiality and the clandestine, by operating with individual and common spatialities. Architecture thus regains its classical connection with war, strategy and the disposition of bodies and forces.⁶⁰

We can now perhaps understand “going off-the-grid” as an action that threads the absolute illumination of our simulated real with bodily trajectories of material darkness. “Our encryption is the real world,” says Mr. Robot, in the 2015 TV series of the same name, when explaining the workings of his Anonymous-like hacker cell. Against the digital invisibility of the traditional hacker, could it be that blind spots are hidden today in plain sight? That only the unrepresentable complexity of the physical world can offer enough opacity and night in plain daylight?⁶¹ Against the impoverished abstract plane of capitalism’s simulated real, Mr. Robot speaks of a different real, one that encompasses virtuality to gain depth (in the most literal sense).

At the beginning of this article we linked virtuality and night as commons, a field of unresolved potentiality teeming with the still-to-come. It is this ambiguous potentiality of the night that we reclaim and where all the images explored within this piece come together. They share the same need: to keep some darkness around to be free and alive. When discussing the nocturnal experience



“D’Angelo: You’re never gonna hit it, man. Bodie: Bomb! Housing must think we just dumb.” A CCTV camera is broken in David Simon’s The Wire, “Old Cases” (2002).

of the Middle Ages, historian Jean Verdon writes of many clever and skilled “nightfaring” men and women who in the darkest of nights knew how to see in a world only illuminated by their experienced senses. Maybe we could talk today of dayfaring citizens, people who observe and understand the inner physics and material effects of absolute illumination to revolt and create night (fig.8).

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I want to thank Pedro Hernández (@laperiferia) for the conversations that made possible this text.

NOTES

1 For an interesting analysis of the concept of politics, police and the post-political in relation to the city, see Erik Swyngedouw, “The Zero-ground of Politics: Musings on the Post-political City,” New Geographies 1, no. 1 (2009): 52–61.

2 Henri Bergson described sleep as a state of disinterest: “Instead of becoming attached to life, I become detached from it. I become indifferent to everything. Sleeping means becoming disinterested. You sleep in proportion to your disinterest. A mother sleeping beside her child may not stir at the sound of thunder, yet awaken at the whimper of the child. She is not really asleep with respect to the child. We do not sleep with respect to what continues to interest us.” The World of Dreams (Open

Road Media, 2014), ebook.

3 Brian Merchant, “The Man Who Turned Night Into Day,” Motherboard, 20 January 2016, <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/the-man-who-turned-night-into-day>.

4 Characteristically, it was also around that time the expression 24/7, in the sense of an around the clock availability, was born. Some sources point to drug dealers as first users of this expression. In any case, by the early 90s it had expanded into the broader business world.

5 Richard Sennett, The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism (New York: Norton, 1998).

6 Jonathan Crary, 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep (London, New York: Verso, 2013), 5.

Night as Commons: Minor Architecture and Dayfaring Citizens

7 While Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri oppose these two notions of the common—natural resources as a “relatively inert, traditional notion” and the “dynamic [...] product of labor and the means of future production”—night offers us an extraordinary situation to understand the dual condition of this notion. Our affective capacity is rooted in the night’s physical characteristics, thus it sustains a shared production that keeps its richness alive. Commonwealth (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2009), 138–140.

8 “Purely actual objects do not exist. Every actual is surrounded with a cloud of virtual images,” wrote Gilles Deleuze in Dialogues II (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 148. The real is composed of both the actual and the virtual, of the given and the field of immanent productivity or teeming potentiality: “the virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real in so far as it is virtual.” Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 208–209.

9 We are referring here to the concept of diagram explored after Gilles Deleuze, an articulation or modulation process between the actual and the virtual. In Deleuze and the Diagram: Aesthetic Threads in Visual Organization (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2012), Jakub Zdebik gives a broader approach; for a more architectural reading, see Brian Boigon and Sanford Kwinter, “Manual for 5 Appliances in the Alphabetical City: A Pedagogical Text,” Assemblage 15 (1991): 30–41.

10 We distance ourselves here from the main current of recent writings linking politics, the political, architecture, and the city, represented in the work of Pier Vittorio Aureli, The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), Markus Meissen The Nightmare of Participation: Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality (New York: Sternberg Press, 2010), and Erik Swyngedouw (Designing the Post-political City and the Insurgent Polis (London: Bedford, 2011).

Although we also take into consideration the approaches of philosophers like Hannah Arendt, Jacques Rancière, and Chantal Mouffe present in the aforementioned works, we depart instead from the ontological approach developed by Giorgio Agamben in Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). As a result, we define the political not as an activity or a relation happening in-between (what we will call politics), but as the power expressed in a body’s potentiality. This approach immediately forces a reconsideration of the political’s architectural dimension by underlining the ontological link that joins the political and space together. For a broader development of this subject, see the author’s “Common Spatialities: The Production of the Multitude,” Footprint 16, Spring 2015, 51–68, and particularly, What a Body Can Do: The Political as Generator of a Common Spatiality (PhD. diss., Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, forthcoming).

11 Jason W. Moore, Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital (New York: Verso, 2015).

12 This concept was initially conceived as an extrapolation of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of “minor literature” in Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); also, Jill Stoner, Toward a Minor Architecture (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2012). It is now being developed further in the author’s What a Body Can Do. See also, Lucía Jalón Oyarzun, “The Minor Composition of Threshold Domesticities,” MONU Magazine on Urbanism 24 (2016): 28–35.

13 Construction comes from the Latin terms con- (together or globally) and -struere (stack, heap), while composition, implies paying attention to positus, the position and potential reach of each part. This brings forward a different understanding of architecture, either weaving a whole set of relative positions and possibilities,

thus paying attention to the virtual, or assembling a set of available parts reduced to their factuality.

14 A minority does not represent a specific group or identity, but a movement of becoming that resists being fixated and determined as it faces life as a creative act. A minor approach is translated into a singular awareness of the virtual and the potential of bodies (see Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka and A Thousand Plateaus). In reference to architecture, we understand a minor practice as a set of strategies and knowledge that resist being codified into a discipline or major practice.

15 Explored in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 351–423.

16 See also, Spatial Agency, <http://spatialagency.net>, a project by Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, also in Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

17 Keller Easterling, Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space (London, New York: Verso, 2014). It is important to see how, whenever these practices turn into static knowledge, they are easily appropriated, and even perfected, by the State. Eyal Weizman has shown this in great detail when analyzing post-structuralism’s influence on Israel’s IDF spatial strategies. Eyal Weizman, Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation (London, New York: Verso, 2007), 199–201.

18 FBI Director James Comey stated in a Security Forum that “ISIL’s M.O. is to broadcast on Twitter, get people to follow them, then move them to Twitter Direct Messaging.” Once there they evaluate whether they are a legitimate recruit, and “move them to an encrypted mobile-messaging app so they go dark to us.” Scott Condon, “FBI Director Reveals Hidden Threat of ISIS at Aspen Security Forum,” The Aspen Times, 23 July 2015, <http://www.aspentimes.com/news/17381873-113/>

fbi-director-reveals-hidden-threat-of-isis-at. See also, Jenna McLaughlin, “Is Law Enforcement ‘Going Dark’ Because of Encryption? Hardly, Says New Report,” The Intercept, 1 February 2016, <https://theintercept.com/2016/02/01/is-law-enforcement-going-dark-because-of-encryption-hardly-says-new-report>.

19 Maurice Blanchot, The Space of Literature, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 264 (emphasis added).

20 Gaston Bachelard, The Flame of a Candle, trans. Joni Caldwell (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 1988), quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century, trans. Angela Davies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 96.

21 For an understanding of this project, see Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977–78, trans. G. Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For the role of light see his analysis of the panopticon as diagram: “The Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system” (emphasis added). Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 205.

22 Blanchot, The Space of Literature, 264.

23 This facet was explored by political philosopher Hannah Arendt. She believed that, against “the implacable bright light of the constant presence of others on the public scene,” the “darkness” of private life was an essential balance. Today, and although the definition of public and private realms has radically changed, the need for darkness and privacy, remains essential. Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 51; quoted in Cray, 24/7, 21–22. This political dimension of the secret is also explored

NIGHT: INSURGENCIES

in Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 286–290.

24 Franco Berardi, “The Pathologies of Hyper-expression: Discomfort and Repression,” transversal, June 2007, <http://transversal.at/transversal/1007/bifo/en>.

25 It might seem we are working with terms too distanced in time; nonetheless, the grid only began to be used as a modern political device in the 1700s, and since modernity still affects our culture, our expressions and meanings still respond to its organization in many ways. In this respect Kazys Varnelis has undertaken a history of the network’s architecture by going back to the first U.S. postal networks, in “Preliminary Findings toward an Architectural History of the Network,” New Geographies 7 (2015): 57–66.

26 Jean Verdon, La nuit au Moven age (Paris: Perrin, 1993).

27 For a detailed account of this transformation and the role of the clock as a cultural paradigm, see Otto Mayr, Authority, Liberty, & Automatic Machinery in Early Modern Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
28 Alain Cabanous, Histoire de la nuit: Europe occidentale, XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Fayard, 2009), Chap. 1, Sec. 2, “Originalité d’un espace-temps.”

29 Denis Diderot and John Goodman (ed.), Diderot on Art: The Salon of 1767 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 126.

30 Schivelbusch, Disenchanting Night, 81.

31 Maria Rzepińska and Krystyna Malcharek in “Tenebrism in Baroque Painting and Its Ideological Background,” Artibus et Historiae 7, no. 13 (1986): 91–112; Koslosky, Evening’s Empire.

32 Koslosky, Evening’s empire, 128–130.

33 Cabanous, Histoire de la nuit, Chap. 4, Sec. 2.

34 Isaac de Benserade, Ballet royal de La Nuit, divisé en quatre parties, ou quatre veilles: Et dansé par Sa Majesté, le 23 février 1653 (Paris: R. Ballard, 1653). English translations from Alan Sikes, Dancing with the Sun King: The Performance of Privilege in the Reign of Louis XIV (New York; Basingstoke, England: Palgrave

Macmillan, 2007), 23–56.

35 Cabanous, Histoire de la nuit, Chap. 4, Sec. 2.

36 To look further into this quadrillage process, see Michel Foucault’s comparison between the way a city dealt with leprosy and the plague, Discipline and Punish, 195–198.

37 Schivelbusch, Disenchanting Night, 82–84.

38 Cabanous, Histoire de la nuit, Chap. 7, Sec. 2.

39 Schivelbusch, Disenchanting Night, 87.

40 Louis-Sébastien Mercier quoted in Schivelbusch, Disenchanting Night, 87.

41 “After the bells have tolled 9, no man should walk in the night without light or reasonable cause under penalty of imprisonment.”

42 Schivelbusch, Disenchanting Night, 82; Cabanous, Histoire de la nuit, Chap. 7, Sec. 1.

43 Schivelbusch, Disenchanting Night, 89.
44 Gazette de Robinet, October 29, 1667, quoted in Schivelbusch, Disenchanting Night, 90.

45 Phil Plait, “Black Skies, Smiling at Me,” Slate, 23 April 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/bad_astronomy/2014/04/23/light_pollution_what_you_can_do_to_keep_the_sky_dark.html.
46 Feargus O’Sullivan, “A ‘Night Mayor’ Is Transforming Amsterdam After Dark,” The Atlantic CityLab, 29 January 2016, <http://www.citylab.com/cityfixer/2016/01/night-mayor-amsterdam-mirik-milan/433893>.

47 Graeme Evans, “Hold Back the Night: Nuit Blanche and All-night Events in Capital Cities,” Current Issues in Tourism 15, no. 1–2 (2012): 35–49.

48 Jenna Wortham, “Feel Like a Wallflower? Maybe It’s Your Facebook Wall: How Social Media Can Induce Feelings of ‘Missing Out,’” The New York Times, 9 April 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/10/business/10ping.html>.

49 Skye Gould and Kevin Loria, “Here’s why the iPhone’s Night Shift mode is such a big deal,” Tech Insider, 6 April 2016, <http://www.techinsider.io/iphone-night-shift-blue-light-affects-your-brain-and-body-2016-4>.

50 Brandon Keim, “No More Night? The Meaning of the Loss of Darkness,” Wired, 9 December 2013, <http://www.wired.com/2013/09/bogard-end-of-night>.

51 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” in October 59 (1992): 3–7.

52 Kazys Varnelis, “Campos Infraestructurales,” Quaderns d’Arquitectura i Urbanisme 26 (2011); Helen Nissenbaum and Kazys Varnelis, Modulated Cities: Networked Spaces, Reconstituted Subjects (New York: The Architectural League of New York, 2012); Keller Easterling, “IIIRS,” e-flux journal 64, April 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/iiirs>; Ravi Sundaram, “Post-Postcolonial Sensory Infrastructure,” e-flux journal 64, April 2015, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/post-postcolonial-sensory-infrastructure>.

53 Bruno Latour, Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 181.

54 Will Ockenden, “How Your Phone Tracks Your Every Move,” ABC, 16 August 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-16/metadata-retention-privacy-phone-will-ockenden/6694152>.

55 Anthony Vidler, The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 69–84.

56 Keller Easterling, for instance, has explored the broader category of form that goes beyond “object form” to acknowledge what she has termed “active form.” See The Action Is the Form: Victor’s Hugo’s TED Talk (Moscow: Strelka Press, 2012); meanwhile Sanford Kwinter has also criticized “the poverty of what is today collectively referred to by the misnomer ‘formalism,’ [which] is more than anything else the result of a sloppy conflation of the notion of ‘form’ with that of ‘object.’ [...] Form, when seen from (the perspective of) formation) is ordering action, a logic deployed, while the object is merely the latter’s sectional image, a manifest variation on an always

somewhat distant theme.” In “Who’s Afraid of Formalism,” Any Magazine 7/8 (1994): 65. Finally, on individual and common spatialities, see the author’s Common Spatialities: The Production of the Multitude.

57 From the number as measuring and quantifying device for objectifying the world to a number which “distributes itself in smooth space [and] does not divide without changing nature each time, without changing units, each of which represents a distance and not a magnitude. The ordinal, directional, nomadic, articulated number, the numbering number, pertains to smooth space, just as the numbered number pertains to striated space.” Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 484–485. We can see this numbered number in action in approaches like that of Jan Gehl in How to Study Public Life, when he maintains that “every thing can be counted: number of people, gender division, how many people are talking to each other, how many are smiling,” and thus “making a qualitative assessment by counting how many people do something makes it possible to measure what might otherwise seem ephemeral: city life.” (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2013), 13, 25.

58 The first English translation of Euclid’s Elements of Geometry was published in 1570. In the preface, John Dee signaled the etymological connection between “geometry” and “land-measuring” and praised “[t] he perfect Science of Lines, Plaines, and Solides [which] (like a divine Justicier,) gave unto every man, his owne” (Andrew MacRae, “To Know One’s Own: Estate Surveying and the Representation of the Land in Early Modern England,” Huntington Library Quarterly 56, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 333–357). Thus, geometry was quickly turned into a measuring device, an instrumental knowledge for appropriating and quantifying the real, instead of a tool of relational abstraction to position oneself within the materiality of the world. On this subject, see also Michel Serres, The Birth of Physics, trans. Jack Hawkes

Night as Commons: Minor Architecture and Dayfaring Citizens

(Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000).

⁵⁹ See Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," in Incorporations, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 297–319.

⁶⁰ See Keller Easterling's analysis of François Jullien's The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China (New York: Zone Books, 1995), in Cognitive Architecture: From Bio-Politics to Noo-politics, ed. Deborah Hauptmann and Warren Neidich (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), 250–265.

⁶¹ See Easterling, IRS, where she notes that "text and code are not the only mediums of information. Information is immanent in the relative positions and potentials of heavy, material spatial arrangements—in the physical matter, whether or not it is digitally enhanced."