
Digital-Cultural Ecology and the Medium-Sized City

01-03 April

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Abstract Submission Form

- 1. Paper / Proposal Title:** Light Night: "How Beautiful the Street!" / Dialectics at a Standstill.
- 2. Format:** Written Paper / Photo Essay
- 3. Author(s) Name:** Richard Miles
- 4. Email contact details:** richard.miles@leeds-art.ac.uk
- 5. University or Company Affiliation:** Leeds College of Art

6. Abstract (300 words):

'Light Night' is a cultural event originating in Leeds in 2005, designed to be a central spectacle of the City Council's 'place branding' (Julier 2011) strategy for the city. Its secondary function was to lure shoppers into the commercial centre of Leeds under the promise of some form of cultural *dérive*. Though L.C.C's empty civic slogan of "Leeds. Live it, Love it" has long been abandoned, 'Light Night' endures as an increasingly popular cultural phenomenon. Increasingly, it is becoming the annual site where claims and counterclaims are made for the city, by groups as diverse as community interest groups, D.I.Y. art collectives, charitable organisations, performance artists, street-traders, local businesses, and the region's universities. The centrepieces of this veritable heterotopia of cultural practice are always the large spectacles funded by the council, and other activity usually relegated to the city's periphery. However, via a close reading of Walter Benjamin's 'Arcades Project' (2002), this paper locates the meaning of 'Light Night' through the evidence of the digital *flâneurs* documenting their experiences of the city based event on their cellphones and social media. Collectively these form a psychogeography of the city, or, for Benjamin, the 'colportage phenomenon of space' (2002: M1a3), and a co-authored attempt write back to the corporate image of the city by its citizens. This reading is intertwined, as hauntology,

with Guy Debord's (1967) *'Society of the Spectacle'*, Iain Sinclair's (1991) *'Shamanism of Intent: A Retrospective Manifesto'* (1991), and the anonymous letter sent to Lord Montagu (1605), in advance of the anti-monarchist gunpowder plotters who planned a quite different kind of Light Night. Out of this is weaved a complex dialectical narrative that oscillates between spectacle and revolution, expression and co-option, the branded and the lived, history and memory, the intoxication of the streets and the temptation of the shops, which imagines the street in civil war, fought between digital image-statements and 'counter statements that displace each other to think each other'. This academic paper will be accompanied by, and is indivisible from, an accompanying photo essay of author-produced, archival, and found images relating to *'Light Night Leeds'*, which will be submitted alongside it.

7. Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Richard Miles is an academic and political activist, currently working as the Head of Contextual Studies at Leeds College of Art. His work is interdisciplinary, operating at the intersection of philosophy, cultural studies, art and design history, and critical pedagogy. He has a specific research interest in deconstruction, and the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, and Frankfurt School Critical Theory.



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