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Lightspace and the City of Perpetual Moonlight

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Lightspace and the City of Perpetual Moonlight

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Report

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Dedication

Similar to the way that moonlight towers, archaic and brilliant, illuminate Austin standing tall over the changing streets throughout time, my own inner horizon has enduring towers. These enduring towers trace lines, less between light and dark and more between dreams and waking realization. These towers are warm faces, homes in their own right to gather next to and watch the light change in degrees, from place and time. I dedicate this work to you. Your love is what everything means.



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Abstract

Lightspace and the City of Perpetual Moonlight

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Anthropological research discusses the potential of light to act as a social agent, influence culture and substantially effect the ways that people interact. To enrich this scholarship with ethnographic engagement the following analysis applies and expands upon these concepts while discussing a database documentary about the moonlight towers of Austin, Texas. Moonlight towers are historic street lights dating from the late 19th century that are no longer necessary to light the city and yet they remain as fine engineered sentinels, shedding mercury vapor luminance over the city. This is a meditative inquiry into the types of agency light has in particular spaces referred to in this work as the ruminating concept of lightspace. As a concept, lightspace refers to the experience of light in space and is concerned with how light illuminates and shapes the everyday, tracing fissures between inclusion and exclusion. This work acknowledges the existence of lightspace in order to show there are ways that light shapes our experiences of which we are only partially aware. In the midst of this attunement to the experience of light are valid ideas about how people in Austin, Texas relate to space and to each other. The work of Henri Lefebvre is used as a point of departure to develop the concept of lightspace. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre arrives at the conclusion that the

experience of geographical space is fundamentally social by making connections between perceived space and conceived space to create lived space of the imagination (1978: 70). In this philosophy, perceived space as constitutes our lived, everyday experience of space, while conceived space is a translation of perceived space using knowledge, signs, and codes, such as a map. Lived space then is our own unique, individual negotiation of perceived space using conceived space. This introduction to lightspace shows how connecting perceived and conceived lightspace in Austin reveals a lived experience of light in the imagination.

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Section 1: Introduction

“Close your eyes. Think back. One hundred years. No street lighting, candles, or oil lanterns. You come up a hill on East 7th Street and stretching out before you are 31 moonlight towers lighting the night. You can count them because there are not any tall buildings besides the Capitol. Its so startling and you wonder if stars have fallen and formed a new constellation of stars just around Austin. Over one hundred years later that constellation has grown into a galaxy of street lights, building lights, and headlights that glows from miles away. Providing part of that glow are the 15 remaining Moonlight Towers. The only ones left in the world.”

(Austin American-Statesmen 1995: F1)

Anthropological research discusses the potential of light to act as a social agent, influence culture and substantially effect the ways that people interact. To enrich this scholarship with ethnographic engagement the following analysis applies and expands upon these concepts while discussing a database documentary about the moonlight towers of Austin, Texas. Moonlight towers are historic street lights dating from the late 19th century that are no longer necessary to light the city and yet they remain as fine engineered sentinels, shedding mercury vapor luminance over the city. This is a meditative inquiry into the types of agency light has in particular spaces referred to in this work as the ruminating concept of lightspace. As a concept, lightspace refers to the experience of light in space and is concerned with how light illuminates and shapes the everyday, tracing fissures between inclusion and exclusion. This work acknowledges the existence of lightspace in order to show there are ways that light shapes our experiences of which we are only partially aware. In the midst of this attunement to the experience of light are valid ideas about how people in Austin, Texas relate to space and to each other. The work of Henri Lefebvre is used as a point of departure to develop the concept of lightspace. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre arrives at the conclusion that the experience of geographical space is fundamentally social by making connections between perceived space and conceived space to create lived space of the imagination (1978: 70). In this philosophy, perceived space as constitutes our lived, everyday experience of

space, while conceived space is a translation of perceived space using knowledge, signs, and codes, such as a map. Lived space then is our own unique, individual negotiation of perceived space using conceived space. This introduction to lightspace shows how connecting perceived and conceived lightspace in Austin reveals a lived experience of light in the imagination.

In Austin, moonlight towers balance in the skies of the city, punctuating the otherwise everyday urban streets with a sort of archaic brilliance [FIGURE 1]. Research unveils the historical value of the moonlight towers and yet in my own experience talking with people on the streets, few residents of the city, let alone visitors, are aware of their existence or significance.



Figure 1: Maintenance worker climbs early moonlight tower in Austin (First Electric Tower, May 2013).

The origin of this work is rooted in a fascination with the relative invisibility of the historic lights and the ways they are experienced in the everyday by those heading to work and school, out into the neighborhood to run or walk their dogs. By collecting photographs, videos, and interviews I began documenting the towers and the events in which they played an important role in the autumn of 2011. On many evenings just before twilight, I sat below the towers waiting for their halogen bulbs to blink on. I would ask passersby what did they see when they looked at the towers? What did they know about them? How do they feel in the midst of the particular kind of light of the

towers? Collecting these sentiments, I built a database documentary called *City of Perpetual Moonlight* that offers an homage to the perceptions and phenomenological experiences of the Austin community, centered on the historic moonlight towers.

This work unravels how moonlight towers punctuating the urban landscape are perceived today and how the concept of lightspace is useful in order to depict those perceptions in the form of database documentary. Database documentary (also known as interactive or multi-media documentary) is a web-based amalgamation of photographs, videos, sound recordings, graphics, and text that can all be maneuvered by the participant. The documentary provides an inquisitive negotiation between the historical experience of light in the urban environment as well as an introduction to the concept of lightspace. Ultimately the piece is an experiment in the mapping of perception, a collective geography of the seen and unseen. Employing database documentary as a medium, *City of Perpetual Moonlight* serves as an ode to vestigial illumination, to aged urban towers that brighten the skies of Austin. It is less about what these towers are than what they evoke. It is a mediation of the imaginary, in the present with a reverence for the past. An amalgamation of interactivity, visual media, and soundscapes, the documentary serves to celebrate lights with a purpose that is no longer relevant, acknowledging the quiet meaning (ful) and (less) splendor.

The moonlight towers are ideal symbolic devices to illustrate the concept of lightspace. Their relevance is in the past while their invisibility is in the present. This makes them perfect barometers for a discussion of perceived, conceived, and lived lightspace. They provide a locale for what Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro deem to be symbolic truths concerning a collective of latent structures in Austin today (2011: 22). Symbolic truths are iconic in nature and are constituted by the knowledge and values we use to make sense of the world. Symbolic truths open up new ways for us to understand reality. An investigation of the moonlight tower and the particular kind of light that it has shed over Austin historically gives perspective to the values of the city over time. In this

place, historical knowledge and current perception are combined to walk the line between fiction and documentary. To show how connecting perceived and conceived lightspace in Austin reveals a lived experience of light in the imagination, this work will refer to *City of Perpetual Moonlight* as an illustrative example. While this database documentary provides an ideal vantage point from which to consider lightspace, it is not the only way this concept can be applied. A depiction of perceived, conceived and lived lightspace allows most importantly for a heightened and sustained analysis to the cultural implications of the experience of light.

In order to situate this discussion, I will begin by introducing the key concepts of phenomenology and lightspace. To work towards a definition of each concept I will place them amidst meaningful intellectual traditions. In the first section I will provide a background in phenomenology as explored by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I will follow this in the following section by synthesizing scholarship on the anthropology of light and space in order to define lightspace. In the third section I will introduce the moonlight towers as powerful barometers for the discussion of lightspace in the particular urban space that is Austin. In order to do this I will give a historical context for the discussion. Following I will give an introduction to the towers in present day Austin. In the fourth section I focus on understanding the benefits and potential challenges of the database documentary form. The final three sections are dedicated to illuminating perceived, conceived, and lived lightspace working from Lefebvre by illustrating lightspace using moonlight towers and the database documentary *City of Perpetual Moonlight*.

Section 2: Phenomenology

This discussion of the concept of lightspace is not definitive; rather it is the application of theory as acknowledged in scholarship. The concept of lightspace engages with the idea of phenomenology as outlined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Phenomenology provides an ideal theoretical construct for a burgeoning forms of analysis that situates the conversation about the experience of light in the first person point of view. In order to understand the valence of lightspace we first turn to the importance of phenomenology.

In *Worlds of Sense* by Constance Classen, the question is posed: what different modes of consciousness are created by treating olfaction or touch as a fundamental way of knowing? How does the sensory order of a culture relate to social order (1993: 1)? She explains that in the West we are accustomed to thinking of perception as a physical rather than a cultural act. The five senses “simply gather information about the world.” But of course, as she deduces in time, the very notion of the five senses is a cultural construction (Classen 1993: 2). Some cultures delineate between more senses than others. For example, Plato did not distinguish between senses and feelings. The established number of the five senses originates with Aristotle around 350 B.C.E, the number fitting quite neatly with the number of elements that were recognized at that time.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty defines phenomenology as the study of essences, particularly the essence of perception and of consciousness (1964: 5). He expounds on phenomenology as a method of describing the nature of our perceptual contact with the world. To that end phenomenology is concerned with providing detailed description of human sensorium. It is this detailed human sensorial experience that is thought to inform what constitutes us as individuals and cultural beings. Perception provides the setting of our experience and guides our conscious actions (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 16). By this definition the world comprises a

field for perception, while human consciousness assigns meaning to the world. We are intertwined with our perceptions of the world.

Phenomenology then, allows for anthropological investigation to be centered in a particular variety of embodied consciousness that includes sensing as well as reasoning. Merleau-Ponty's work shows that all objects reflect each other in time and space which invites us to consider what kind of reflections occur between the sources of light that brighten our experience of the urban environment and how are they reflected and felt within the inner and outer horizons (1964: 6). The inner horizon is in our consciousness and the outer horizon is in the external world. Considering that, why apply Merleau-Ponty's concept of the inner horizon in consciousness and an outer horizon in the external world to moonlight towers that illuminate Austin? This object-horizon structure allows for perceptual objects to be distinguished and experienced, in a phenomenological manner. An attunement to the idea of reflection in a discussion of lightspace invites the formulation of new concepts. Merleau-Ponty's work shows that all objects reflect each other in time and space through the individuals that experience them. This encourages us to consider what kind of interactions occur between the sources of light that brighten our experience of the urban environment and how they are reflected and felt within the inner and outer horizons.

Section 3: Defining Lightspace

This work is substantially influenced by a recent investment in anthropology to understand the social agency of light. It locates profound points of departure in the work of Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sorensen, Tim Ingold, and Bruno Latour.

Anthropology of Light

In *An Anthropology of Luminosity* Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sorensen examine the relationship between light, material culture and social experiences. They argue that by understanding light as a powerful social agent, we may appreciate how light plays an active role in day-to-day reality (2007: 263). Their examples collectively demonstrate how in the everyday, light can be used as a tool to exercise social intimacy and inclusion, thereby shaping moral spaces and orchestrating movement.

Similarly, in *Stop, Look and Listen: Vision, Hearing and Human Movement*, Tim Ingold argues that we have lost touch with the experience of light (2000: 253). In the tradition of Merleau-Ponty he claims, “Light is the experience of inhabiting the world of the visible.” Note this is different than inhabiting the world of the visible: it is the experience of inhabiting the world of the visible. This statement allows light to preface experience; setting up a place for reflection on the idea that light is experience. In other words light is our experience of being in the world before we even comprehend sight. Light is effectively part of the conditions we associate with producing visibility. Ingold explains that while as individuals we do not see light, we do have the particular experience of seeing in light (2011: 96). This sets up a relationship for the individual with light that prefaces the relationship of the individual with the self.

Returning to *Worlds of Sense*, Classen explains that historically there is a causal link between words and their referents, with the former giving rise to the latter (1993: 50). For example, in the Bible, the word for light precedes and inevitably creates light itself. Today this idea no longer holds valence and referents can be attributed to words.

This means that the experience of light by the individual is simplified into the word light, rather than producing a new word and effectively a new concept. Here the introduction of the word lightspace is a return to the historical linguistic tradition of a word giving rise to a referent. This is important as it exposes nuance in the way we experience both light and space. “Visual space”, writes Alphorns Lingus, “is not pure transparency; it is filled with light... Our gaze is immersed in it and sees with its cast” (1998: 13). Tim Ingold questions why against mounting evidence of this immersion, why are sight and light not identified (2011: 128)? The answer he arrives at is a curious one: the topology of the human head. In western traditions, the ears are holes where we allow sound in, while the eyes are like screens that do not let light through. This, Ingold suggests, leaves us with a noisy but dark space inside our heads (2011: 128). In the midst of this noisy, dark space, it is clear a theoretical construct distinguishing the phenomenological experience of lights and space.

Ingold furthers his argument by showing how as people change locations they subsequently perceive new aspects of light, which simultaneously grants them different experiences of the world. While Bille and Sorensen agree with Ingold they take the reasoning further to emphasize the active use of light in social life. Their work reaches the conclusion that light is more than a medium; it evokes agency (2007: 264). This argument is made in the tradition of Bruno Latour, who gives social agency to what he calls actants that can be nonhuman as well as human (1992: 259). Inherent in this concept is a democratization of who can act, thereby raising awareness of the “agency of things” (Hubbard 2004: 203). Latour refers to the diverse objects and life forms that make up the world as the “missing masses.” He believes they have been ignored socially, politically, and philosophically even though we depend on them in our daily lives. While citizens in the city of Austin no longer depend on the moonlight towers in their daily lives, I find the concept of missing masses poignantly references their capacity for social agency. By offering them agential status we see how there are cultural implications to creating special kinds of lightspace.

As we combine the notions of Merleau-Ponty, Bille and Sorenson, Ingold, and Latour of light as an active social agent, we experience a vantage point from which to inculcate awareness of light as we move through space. This conscious consideration of embodiment is where the concept of lightspace is useful. Lightspace as a term and a concept invites analysis of the poetics of infrastructure of embodiment, light, and the sensorium.

SPACE

To understand space as it relates to the concept of lightspace, this paper is shaped by the three axes of space as outlined by Henri Lefebvre. Space for Lefebvre is a production process that takes place in three interlinked dimensions (Lefebvre 2008: 40). He uses multi dimensional perspective to emphasize the central role of the human body in the experience of space. The key axes are: the perceived space of everyday social life, professional and theoretically conceived space, and imaginative lived space. Perceived space consists of what we experience as physical space. In the context of this discussion and documentary it is how the people of Austin physically experience space with conscious consideration of light. Correspondingly, conceived space for Lefebvre is the space that is the product of our negotiation of abstract representations. *In the City of Perpetual Moonlight* this axes of space is explored through a map of moonlight towers in Austin. Lived space, is further the space that individuals create while negotiating perceived space using conceived space. In this analysis, the lived experience of light in space is articulated using interactive examples from the documentary. The three dimensions of space can be understood as being of equal value (Lefebvre 2008: 43). Individual axes do not represent an origin and none is privileged- their existence should be understood as a relationship. This means that identifying exactly what physical place is by itself is not very useful. Space is understood in the active sense as an intricate web of relationships that is continuously produced and reproduced. Whereas they are identified individually in this work, they do not function separately. Just as a database

documentary relies on images, text, and interactivity to function, so does lightspace only exist as a relationship.

In order to understand how the triecta works as a dialectic it is important to understand the individual contributions of each axes. A convenient way to think about these axes is as perspectives. Each one welcomes a new consideration of the qualities of space as designate Lefebvre or lightspace as illustrated in this work. The first axes, perceived space, are the collective production of urban reality, the rhythms of work, residential, and leisure activities through which a given society develops and reproduces its spatiality (Lefebvre 2008: 68). The second axes, conceived space is a culmination of knowledge, signs, and codes. This culmination can be understood as the information that is used by specialists such as urban planners, who divide space into separate elements that can be recombined. In the everyday, we all negotiate conceived space with bus routes and bike lanes, one-way streets and cul de sacs. Finally, lived and endured space is the experience of space through the mediation of images and symbols. Lived space offers possibilities of resistance because it gives the individual agency to connect perceived and conceived space uniquely. In the midst of the endless possibilities, the endless ways perceived and conceived space can be connected there is the opportunity for subversive meaning making.

Lefebvre finds lived space has the power to refigure the balance of popular perceived space and official conceived space (Hubbard 2004: 212). In this way it is possible to define space as a form of external experience, rather than as a physical setting in which external objects are arranged. The relationships between moonlight towers and their lightspace are revealed by the active experience of the perceiving individual on the streets of Austin. The perceptual field of the Austin street is a field in which perceptions are present in both time and space. Lightspace is modified and restructured by time. How the moonlight towers were perceived, conceived, and lived in the city of Austin fluctuates during the previous century. They have gone from inspiring slogans about the

city and prominent featuring in tourist literature to quiet sentinels amongst led street lamps and fluorescent espousing high-rises. This phenomenological approach shows that lightspace constitutes a concrete materiality, as well as a thought, concept, and a feeling: it is a valid experience in need of ethnographic documentation.

Scholars have challenged this particular formulation of space as designated by Lefebvre. David Harvey finds that to an argument that abstracts and isolates relationships are much too vague (Hubbard 2004: 213). Others including Edward Soja, Rob Shields, and Stuart Elden find it difficult to understand the dialectic as offered by Lefebvre and feel it is in need of application. They suggest that it is too abstract and too simple to be practically relevant. Working from Lefebvre to illustrate lightspace using database documentary, this work refines this concept while offering an ethnographic engagement.

So we understand that space is what exists in between surfaces and forms, serving as a sort of intermediary mass. Considering this social space becomes a sort of transparent medium that is occupied solely by “light” or what Lefebvre construes as presences and influences (1991: 183). In space objects touch, feel, smell, and hear one another. They possess an eye and a gaze that is at once contemplative and reflective.

One truly gets the impression that every shape in space, every spatial plane, constitutes a mirror and produces a mirage effect; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred back to, in an ever-reviewed to-and-fro of reciprocal reflection an interplay of shifting colours, lights and forms. A mere change of an object's passage into the light: what was covert becomes overt, what was cryptic becomes limpidly clear (Lefebvre 1991: 183).

As it is conceived here as an interstitial experience, negotiating movement and endless morphing on all sides, there is a refraction that occurs across space. It is precisely this experience of refraction, this awareness of refraction that brings us to work towards a definition of lightspace.

ARGUMENT FOR LIGHTSPACE

In the fine arts, there are individuals who have chosen to articulate meaning using the careful, subtle forms of directed light and space [Figure 2]. These artists are known as Light and Space artists. Art Historian and Critic Melinda Wortz has coined them as “Architects of Nothingness.” In her perspective, the most remarkable space Architects of Nothingness touch transcends materiality (Butterfield 1993: 16). They create illusions of nothingness by reducing the physical and visual incidence of their work. They challenge the visitors to their installations to share their perspectives, their fascination with the most minimal demonstration of spacial relationships. Wortz emphasizes that these perceptions are important ones that surpass the common experience of states of consciousness we are not able to articulate. By allowing visitors to move through these spaces, the individual obtains access to the unfamiliar and the unknown, which are states of being least acknowledged.



Figure 2: Doug Wheeler's "Infinity Room" at David Zwirner's Chelsea Gallery in January 2012 uses light to remove visual reference points (Infinity Room, May 2013).

As previously discussed, in the work of Merleau-Ponty there has been an effort to understand the embodied experience of light that has agency which has been explored by scholars such as Ingold. Moving on to space we are shown by Lefebvre perceived and conceived space combine to create imagined space and that in between the objects comprising each there is an active, vibrating refraction. In order to expand a scholarship and understanding of the anthropology of light, I find it is useful to refer to the embodied awareness of this special refraction as lightspace. At a most fundamental level, lightspace is the embodied experience of light in a particular space. It articulates most succinctly the way that we are primarily beings that experience light, and our experience of light influences our experience of space. This term acknowledges the work of previous scholars working in both light and space and provides a device through which the anthropology of light can be ethnographically applied. Bureaucracy

It is important to delineate between the concept of lightspace and lightscape. Scholars such as Ingold have found the concept of lightscape to be limiting in their application (2011: 135). He finds that lightscape is subjected to the ways that the land or what he refers to as the medium, changes. As a concept, lightscape articulates a geographic undulation of light that in the absence of geographic application, takes a geographic form. Following from this, he explains that we would be misinformed to assume that sensory experience ties people to places:

We may, in practice, be anchored to the ground, but it is not light, sound or feeling that holds us down. On the contrary, they contrive to sweep us off our feet. Light floods, sound drowns out and feeling carries us away. Light, sound and feeling tear at our mornings, just like the wind tears at the limb of trees rooted to the earth" (Ingold 2011: 135).

Later, he goes on to argue that the experience of space is light, sun, and feeling, not something we obtain by their means. In his words this experience is “Neither optical nor haptic but atmospheric” (Ingold 2011: 134). To this end the concept of lightspace is necessary to distinguish the embodied experience of light in space. In order to elucidate this concept I invite you to join me in Austin, Texas.

Section 4: From Night to Now: Austin and Moonlight Towers

The year is 1895 and the Austin Daily Statesman explains that the city's hilly terrain, crisscrossed by unpaved lanes, had citizens "groping around in that utter darkness that threatened the life and safety of all" (Gallaway 1995: 12). Crime was on the rise and people were concerned about safety negotiating dark city roads. In order to solve the problem, a representative of the Fort Wayne Electric Company suggested moonlight towers. Moonlight towers were special lights being used in cities such as Detroit to light several blocks at once from a bright light atop a tower. The city of Austin had set a stipulation for the lights that on the darkest night, a person with normal eyesight could read a pocket watch at a distance of 1,500 feet in any direction. The moonlight towers met this stipulation and the city traded a railroad built to carry granite to the Colorado River for 31 towers. On May 6, 1895 the towers were lighted and throughout the region, by visitors and residents alike, the city of Austin became known as, "The City of Perpetual Moonlight" (Austin American 1995: F1).



Figure 3: First moonlight tower erected in Austin and Speedway in 1895 (First Moonlight, May 2013).

Fast forward to the year 2012. Urban development is at an all time high and lifelong residents say each time they look at the skyline it seems to be inching across the horizon. Austin is no longer a city devoid of light. To the contrary, it has a glow that can be seen from many miles away in the hill country. Illuminating the grid are streetlights and commercial lights, a proliferation of neon signs and stadium brilliance. Light pollution is a growing concern. Moonlight towers remain although over a century has passed since they complained about groping feebly in the dark down streets at night. They are the only active system of their kind that remains in the world. During this research I spoke with people walking past moonlight towers in Austin to gauge their visibility and meaning. A common response of the passerby was surprise. Many resident walk pass the towers everyday without an awareness that they exist. As the city has

grown their light is no longer so (comparatively) brilliant and despite their brightness they occupy a place of invisibility in the urban landscape. Of the people I spoke with that were aware of the towers, and perhaps even note passing by them on occasion, it was interesting how most did not have any associations, thoughts, or ideas about them. It may seem commonsense that architectural objects do not automatically achieve sustained attention. Although they are the only towers of this variety left in use, the gaze that falls upon them is distracted, seeking elsewhere to land. To those that recognize and do have associations with them, they are symbols of another time, another simpler and darker moment. The concept of lightspace opens up a conversation for the symbolic meaning that the towers present, but as it is situated in space, we now turn to a consideration about the particular kind of urban space that constitutes Austin, Texas.

URBAN SPACE

As of 2012 over half of the world's population lives in towns and cities, and that number is projected to increase to two-thirds in the next 50 years (Urbanization, Accessed May 2013). Accordingly, research in urban settings by anthropologists will increasingly be the norm. In anthropology cities have been considered as powerful places with the ability to provide identities that transcend inherited forms of ethnic and social division (Pardo and Prato 2012: 5). In this way urban space can be understood as unifying and bringing together people based on everyday interactions. Conversely however, anthropology has also conceptualized urban space as uniquely fragmenting. For example, Emile Durkheim developed the idea of anomie to show that anomic suicide was an aggravated side effect of life in an impersonal setting such as the modern city (1997: 320).

Subsequently, there has been some disagreement within anthropology of how to define urban space. In some instances, urban refers to dense areas of population while for others the designation is reserved for density of social interactions (Pardo and Prato

2012: 7). Some feel that urban anthropology is the anthropology of the city and thus should be treated as a specific social institution with particular dynamics and social, economic and political relations. Others thoughtfully illustrate that it poses many complications to suggest that cities can be studied as isolated units devoid of connection to broader national and international contexts. For the purposes of this research considering lightspace I would like to inform my consideration of the urban space of Austin with the latter ideas that urban anthropology is anthropological research conducted in an urban area.

Anthropological inquiries into the lightspace of urban environments constitutes a particular kind of investigation. Teresa Caldeira writes that we attach meanings to the spaces in which we live in a variety of ways, and the factors influencing us are never-ending (1996: 307). My personal consideration of the common factors influencing lightspace in Austin, reveals that given the arid climate, exterior experiences often err to brightness. Most days are filled with sun that refracts off bountiful asphalt and makes diminutive any shadows. Nights are illuminated by a wide spectrum of neon's and the orange glow of sodium streetlight bulbs. The Austin City Council is currently making efforts to install LEDs in half of the city's street lamps (Price, June 2012). The 15 million dollar budget for this project includes flat glass lenses that will be installed in order to focus light downward rather than the scattered effect that the current dome-shaped lenses have. Concern about light pollution is driving this significant investment that should have a considerable effect on experience of night in this particular urban space. Caldeira writes that urban spaces shape inhabitants lives and determine the type of encounters possible (1996: 303). Similarly, I find that the lightspace of a given urban environment is its parameters, often delineating where it begins and where it ends. It is in a given urban space what is open and closed, inviting and prohibitive. As inhabitants of an urban space, our negotiation of the everyday is determined by lightspace.

MOONLIGHT TOWERS

My search for lightspace begins on a late afternoon in November. The sky is brilliant and there are crimson leaves covering the parking lot of Austin Energy when I arrive. I am there to meet with Chris, the lead engineer responsible for the maintenance and restoration of the historic moonlight towers. He has worked for the city of Austin in electric utilities for 27 years, and he has agreed to meet with me to discuss his experiences. The practiced engineer greets me with a very strong handshake in a lobby where a small, fake Christmas tree sits awaiting the holiday. The first time Chris can recall seeing a moonlight tower was when he was eight years old. Every year the moonlight tower in Zilker Park is adorned with lights cascading down from its greatest height [Figure 4].



Figure 4: Zilker Park moonlight tower doubles as the holiday tree for the City of Austin (Zilker Holiday, May 2013).

It serves as the Christmas tree for the city of Austin and during the holidays people gather in celebration under its brilliance. A nostalgic smile spreads across Chris's

face as he fondly recalls looking up in wonder at it as a child. In his mind it was a space of joyful gathering- it never crossed his mind that the tree was a tower. In fact, although Chris is a lifelong Austin resident, his appreciation for the moonlight towers did not begin until he had begun working at Austin Energy. It was around 1987 and one of the wires attached to the ground that anchors the tower upright had come loose. A group of guys he knew were heading out to take care of it and he thought they were cool so he decided to go along. He remembers looking up at and thinking how delicate the tower appeared. It was profound to him how easily the tower starts to lean one way or the other if anything happens to the wires. Over time, Chris explains that the more he has learned about the towers the more delicate they have become. While he has never been to the top of the towers he has looked out over Austin from one at about 70ft. From that height he tells me you can look down and see the triangular pieces of the tower twist with the wind. From up there, Chris tells me the view of the city is serene.

Next to the window in Chris's office overlooking the autumnal parking lot, I notice framed diplomas on the wall. Chris explains that he completed his degree in civil engineering at the University of Texas at Austin and has a enduring fascination for structures and the ways that they function. I wonder if perhaps this fascination led to his current professional position? Actually, he thinks ending up in this position was happenstance. When he began his career at Austin energy he was in transmission line design. He explains to me with an illustrative wave of the hand that transmission lines are the tall structures transporting electricity throughout the city. Now he is the go-to person concerning the moonlight towers: he coordinates their operations, repairs, removals, and installations. Presently he is working on a long-term contract for their restoration. He explains that the last time they were really given substantial attention was in 1995 just before their centennial celebration. Chris is actually ambivalent about their value or importance; he had no grand intentions of ending up in charge of the last remaining light structures of their kind; but since he has, he does his best.

As nationally recognized historical landmarks, the conservation of the towers has included careful attention to their structure and maintaining (within practical means) the original components. When they were last refurbished in 1992, Austin Energy hired engineers and architects to inspect each piece of the towers metallurgically to see how it was made. It was necessary to replace a few of the pieces but care was taken to maintain integrity in material either through iron or steel. The type of light the towers provide has changed drastically through the years. Originally each consisted of six very bright carbon arc lamps. As these were problematic to maintain, in the 1920s they were switched to incandescent lamps. In the 1930s the lamps were switched to mercury vapor bulbs for safety and they have prevailed. Presently the wattage is kept down so they yield a soft, fuzzy light [Figure 5].



Figure 5: Looking up through triangular structure into mercury vapor bulbs (Conquest, November 2011).

Chris shows me drawings depicting the structure and location of the remaining moonlight towers. To date 17 of the original 31 moonlight towers remain standing. Chris asks me if I would like to see two of the towers that have been removed in the last few years. We wander through a dense maze of hallways and out into the brilliance of the afternoon. A short distance from the Austin Energy complex is a field with a padlocked gate. Chris unlocks the gate and allows me to roam around the towers, after making clear he is not responsible if I am to hurt myself. Despite my enthusiasm, I manage to remain unscathed as I walk around the resting towers in a kind of quiet awe. There is a particular power that a resting moonlight tower evokes, even supine in thick golden grasses warm with the sun [Figures 6 and 7].



Figure 6: Tower resting in the grass near Austin Energy (Conquest, November 2012).

Residual in the aura of these members of the missing masses is a triumph of lighting a city, of being at the center, and having witnessed. I find it intriguing to think of the towers as witnesses to movements and happenings of the city. Something feels strange about locking the gate and leaving them to walk back to the office complex.



Figure 7: Mercury vapor lights and guy wires resting near the towers (Conquest, November 2012).

As we walk, Chris and I talk about how residents of Austin walk or ride by the remaining towers everyday without noticing their presence. I explain to Chris that in my experience, prompting passersby to look at them often results in surprise, as they did not notice them. Chris has had a similar experience and tells me that it is only when they are removed or a crew arrives to repair them that the community in their midst takes notice, sometimes with sudden alarm that anything should be done to them because they are historic. In Chris's words, at the end of the day, the "historical folks" win. While

presently there are three towers down because of construction and Chris does get some calls from people who do not want to see them returned, he receives far more from those who want them put back in place. As of 2013, the state government of Texas and the city government of Austin, who have worked for their designation as historical landmarks, protect the towers. During an era of concern about the light pollution of the urban environment, it is fascinating that a historic light tower inspires the protection of a community that tends to remember they exist. To understand this unique set of circumstances, I turn to the database documentary form.

Section 5: Database Documentary as a Form of Representation

This discussion of lightspace is illustrated by an increasingly relevant and yet still unique form of documentary that is called database documentary. Louise Spence and Vinicius Navarro define database documentary as nonfictional representation with tools afforded by digital media (2011: 147). Database documentary is also referred to as interactive or digital documentary, but as I am working here from Spence and Navarro I use their term of database documentary. The use of database documentary allows for an interactive collage of media that can be made accessible to a wide variety of people via the Internet. The potential this documentary form has to be made at once deeply personal and infinitely accessible makes it very valuable for anthropology and in particular an exploration of lightspace. Innovative methods of presenting documentary media allow for alternative ways to develop our imaginary of the world (Spence and Navarro 2011: 157). Database documentary provides for a sort of knowing that is multifarious and of the moment, uniquely created each time it is experienced. It resists being bound by rhetoric determined by an author, structure designated by an editor, or composition favored by a photographer. While each of the previous limitations is present in the media comprising a given database documentary, the meta-experience (what to see and in what order) is determined by the viewer. Database documentaries offer multiple entry points to the historical world without solely relying upon the logic of linear development (Spence and Navarro 2011: 154).

City of Perpetual Moonlight offers nonfictional material in the form of individual pieces that can be experienced from the computer screen as selected by the viewer through either clicking the mouse or a simple rollover of the cursor. Database form is ideal for aesthetic experimentation because it requires the viewer to engage with it in order to experience it. Since the moonlight towers are prone to invisibility in the community, aesthetic experimentation is ideal as a documentary form to give them prominence and inspire intrigue. Because this particular experiment deemphasizes linear

progression, the viewer may never reach a conclusion or resolution. There is no simple trajectory through the documentary; rather by providing options there is the illusion of endless potentialities (Spence and Navarro 2011: 155). The viewer is encouraged to explore different media, allowing them to live their own associations with the material. This method of presentation is well suited for local histories with material that can be arranged as a collection of items. In this way the experience is based less around story and more around the building blocks from which story is created. Database documentary is akin to stumbling across a box of photos, cut but unassembled film, or musical tracks not yet combined. The viewer is able to be the director and formulate from the pieces new kinds of meaning.

However when we consider their potential for making new kinds of meaning, it is important to make a clarification. When Spence and Navarro discuss the database documentary and the provisions of interactivity, they find that the idea that there are unlimited options and absolute user-controlled experience is deceptive (2011: 157). They cite the work of Marsha Kindler showing complete agency of the viewer to experience meaning in an interactive environment is an illusion because the rules established by the designers limit the options of the user. All database documentaries, despite creating options for the viewer through the alternative media each contains, is curated by the documentarian. Considering that limitation, how does my own database documentary limit the viewers lived lightspace? In this documentary, while the emphasis on the experience of the media is non-linear, in actuality there is linearity. There is an introduction, a multitude of options to explore from the map, and then a conclusion. The user can experiment in the center of the documentary but is notified when to start and finish. This principle of linearity is also present in the media itself. While selecting the videos may come from impulse the videos themselves are linear as are the interactive pieces. Spence and Navarro discuss this by saying “All representation is transformation. And that transformation is always partial. Stories are never lifted from life intact” (2011: 11). There is only so far a viewer could live his or her own lightspace in the midst of a

database documentary. And of course there is the provision that I selected and created the media that the viewer encounters in *City of Perpetual Moonlight*. What you are seeing is in essence what I found meaningful for you to see. Given this, I now turn to a discussion of the three axes of lightspace and how they are articulated using database documentary.

Section 6: Perceived Lightspace

There isn't any story. It's not the story... It's just this breathtaking world- that's the point. The story's not important; what's important is the way the world looks. That's what makes you feel stuff. That's what puts you there

David Shields (2011: 49).

The following three sections define lightspace by illustrating the concept using examples from the database documentary *City of Perpetual Moonlight*. In order to most clearly define this concept, I elucidate about the perceived, conceived, and lived axes of space as explored by Lefebvre separately. Recall from the introduction that these concepts were intended by Lefebvre to be treated relationally: space is space because of the particular kind of interaction between the axes. However, here I have found that separating the axes provides an ideal device for detailed analysis. First in this discussion, is perceived lightspace.

To open a discussion of perceived space is to sit and listen to what constitutes space. In every experience of space is the forethought, the presupposing that prepares for what is to come tomorrow. It is the thought of tomorrow, where one might be and what conditions might envelope the self that comprise space. For Lefebvre, perceived space is the spatial practice of a society, how it propounds and presupposes, producing meaning as it appropriates it (2008: 38). Accordingly perceived lightspace can be understood as physical lightspace. To consider perceived lightspace is to consider light as it is experienced amidst the production of urban reality, the rhythms of work, residential, and leisure activities through which society develops and reproduces its spatiality. We now turn to the *City of Perpetual Moonlight*, to clarify this concept using database documentary.

In the year of 1891 Elyce B. Laws picked up everything she owned and moved to Austin (Gallaway 1995: 13). Her voice softens as she says, “My first recollection of Austin was the tower lights. That was the most wonderful thing for us children- those marvelous lights. Oh, it was just wonderful.” Looking through the archives at the Austin

History Center, it is clear recollections of the towers from the early 20th century express an appreciation for the towers that verges on complete and utter fascination. In darker times, to experience a city so brilliantly illuminated was a sensation.

In his recent work, Ingold encourages a sort of embodiment of our experiences, urging us to think of ourselves not simply as observers around the objects of a world that is already formed but rather as participants of a world-in-formation (2011: 129). This world-in-formation has currents that provide “Sunlight we see in, the rain we hear in and the wind we feel in. Participation is not opposed to observation but is a condition for it, just as light is a condition of seeing things, sound for hearing them, and feeling for touching them” (2011: 129). Combining Latour’s idea of the missing masses and Ingold’s world-in-formation we are given a new opportunity to consider what does it mean to embody the experience of light?

City of Perpetual Moonlight shares how people today experience the towers and using multimedia documentation gestures ideas about perceived lightspace. David MacDougall finds that what we see is uniquely predetermined. A great deal of the knowledge we acquire through vision and our other senses, including the way our seeing is directed, is organized (2006: 2). Understanding the way that we see moonlight towers and the process by which perceptions are symbolically attached is one-way *City of Perpetual Moonlight* illustrates perceived lightspace. Using the form of database documentary, perceived lightspace is offered to the visitor in interactive form and consequently becomes personal and memorable.

What techniques does the *City of Perpetual Moonlight* employ to depict this particular kind of lightspace? The introduction to the documentary is a simple sequence of three separate video pieces with text that is superimposed on the top. This creates fascination for as Diane Arbus noted, it is possible to pass through boredom into fascination (Sontag 2001: 42). Because the towers are such undistinguished (and to many

residents of Austin invisible) the sequence is meant to invoke curiosity. The combination of video pieces with text also establishes the visual code for the database documentary. The work of Susan Sontag shows how images equip us with a new visual code and that contained in their frames is an entire grammar and ethics of seeing (2001: 156). In order to illustrate perceived lightspace, the images of *City of Perpetual Moonlight* form a symbolic and historically informed language. With shapes and the presence (and absence) of color they provide letters from which words are formed that eventually make statements. The last video of the introduction to the database documentary is an upward pan shot of a moonlight tower. The viewer of this sequence can see particles floating in the air of this mythical structure and initiates the visitor to the project. Because on the following screen the viewer will be controlling the trajectory and making decisions, the introduction instills the sense of responsibility. Perceived lightspace is in part informed by this embodied experience of responsibility that carries valence with the visitor. By experiencing the introduction a given viewer is invited to reflect upon the moonlight towers as a figure in both place and time.

What is the importance of perceived lightspace as it is illustrated here and what meanings can be derived from considering it as a solo axe in the trifecta? Perceived lightspace allows us to look closely at just how light can reveal people, places, and things in culturally specific ways. A particular moment from *City of Perpetual Moonlight* where this becomes clear is in an interview with the owner of a local lamp shop named Neil. In an effort to illustrate the experience of perceived lightspace and how it relates to the moonlight towers, I spoke with Neil because his life has been and is shaped by building instruments of illumination. In addition to very interesting insights about the ways that the towers light Austin, he finds there is no doubt that light has social agency. He explains, that the wrong light on things can kill the reception by the viewer. Killing the reception, in this instance indicates that the viewer is not receptive to light. The very images available through light are not illustrative or alive without amplified strengths of light. For him bright lights such as the moonlight towers are used to regulate spaces of

temptation. In a way that is similar to other spaces of social gatherings, moonlight towers historically and currently create a particular space where the visitor can be clearly seen and their desire to behave in an prohibitive manner is at once inspired and quelled. With candor he elucidates:

When they go to the bars like on sixth street all they are going for is to guzzle booze and do what they shouldn't be doing and that is what they get the bright lights for. The man who doesn't drink doesn't patronize that bar; he goes where he can have a good cup of coffee or a sarsaparilla. That is the difference of the lighting.

Here we can see how in Austin perceived lightspace is what invites us in or repels us out. It is a fulcrum on which our decision to be in a particular space or not rests. Can light create places of belonging, of inclusion? Definitely, for the moonlight towers that place is Zilker Park [Figure 8]. While originally the other tower lights are easily attributed utilitarian or historical value, the Zilker tower is used as a social gathering place. Even before it was used as a tree, it once used to draw visitors to camp around it in the park.



Figure 8: It is common for children to spin under the Zilker Park holiday tower until they are dizzy (Zilker Holiday Tower, May 2013).

bell hooks opens her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place* by musing, “How do we create community? When can we say that we truly belong?” (2009: 2). She goes on to explore what she calls the geography of the heart, a process that leads her to make a list of places that fit her criteria for providing a sense of connection to place. First on her list is to live where she can walk. She surmises that walking will allow her to establish her presence, as one who is “Claiming the earth, creating a sense of belonging, a culture of place.”

There is something to the idea that walking, physical grounding with feet in direct contact with the earth establishes connection. Similarly, perceived lightspace is most conclusively our conscious experience of light in space that can be accommodating or repelling. Perceived lightspace plays an integral role in determining where we want to be

and what we experience when we are there. But of course it is not alone. Perceived lightspace is not possible without conceived lightspace.

Section 7: Conceived Lightspace

The sky, then, is not an object of perception. It is not so much what we see as what we see in. We see in the sky as we see in the light, because the sky is light. Indeed painters have always known this, as on their canvases they have attempted to convey the experience of the world's coming to light. For them, as for us, the sky is not illuminated, it is luminosity itself (Ingold 2011: 129).

The next axe for our consideration is conceived lightspace. Conceived lightspace is where vernacular concerning light and space turn into aesthetic connotative meanings. This axes of lightspace garners meaning from conceptual space as the space of all of who identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived (Lefebvre 2008: 38). Accordingly, conceived lightspace offers an important distinction of the knowledge of lightspace that is formed through knowledge, signs, and codes. Conceived lightspace refers to representations of lightspace developed by specialists such as cartographers and architects that we all rely upon in order inform our own perceived and lived lightspace. In other words, established signs and codes that are essential for meaning making that informs the way we experience lightspace. Conceived lightspace provides a vernacular for understanding the symbols that index our embodied experience of light and space.

Turning to the *City of Perpetual Moonlight* to elucidate this idea, our discussion of conceived lightspace begins appropriately with the navigational map of Austin and the tower lights from which the rest of the documentary is accessed [Figure 9].



Figure 9: Central navigational map of moonlight towers with mouse over audio layers of voices in the community sharing impressions of towers (Conquest, November 2013).

By creating a custom, navigational map showing light in space, conceived lightspace is simultaneously created. Recall that conceive lightspace consists of the symbols we all negotiate to understand space such as a map. Uniquely, this is a symbolic map of perception. Conceived lightspace is our collective experience of light in space as we make meaning from it through the symbols and official constructs we encounter. In the *City of Perpetual Moonlight* a central map constitutes what James Meyer would term to be an informational site (1995: 24). It is created from text, photographs and sound recordings. Created from a google.com aerial map of Austin, this particular informational site serves as the main page from which the entire database documentary is navigated. In addition to serving as a navigational screen, the map does more than show where the moonlight towers are located. Mousing over accesses a special layer of this

screen, bringing digital geographic space alive with voices. This provides a point of departure for the viewer, a moment where they are faced with all possibilities *City of Perpetual Moonlight* contains and they are in control of what happens next. Simply moving the cursor over the screen reveals imbedded excerpts from interviews about impressions of the moonlight towers gathered on the streets of Austin. The interviews are placed on the map next to the towers where they were conducted.

Ingold finds light and sound are so deeply intertwined they are inseparable (2011: 138). Working off of this insight, it is useful in our discussion of conceived lightspace here consider the interaction between these voices and the map of the moonlight towers. How does the relationship between images and sound, in this instance, illustrate conceived lightspace? To return to our definition of conceived lightspace, we understand it is a tool that shows how we depict the knowledge of light and space. Further, we know lightspace is formed through knowledge, signs, and codes. This means that knowledge is our lived experience of lightspace as it is negotiated by what is conceived, or what signs and codes depict. Conceived lightspace is depicted on the central navigational map of the *City of Perpetual Moonlight* by allowing the visitor to activate the special relationship between light and sound. Here light and sound combine to create conceived lightspace. Viewers experience conceived lightspace by hovering the mouse in a rollover on top of the map and hearing excerpts from interviews taken place on the streets of Austin. These interviews offer a space for the public of Austin to share their experiences of the towers and what they see when they look at the towers. What is most interesting about these interviews is that everyone sees something different when they look at the towers. When looking at the historic structures, some people thought of aliens, others were reminded of a miniature Eiffel, and still others had nothing come to mind at all. Here the use of contradictory statements enriches conceived lightspace with the complexity of the towers (Spence and Navarro 2011: 66). As a viewer of the *City of Perpetual Moonlight* the viewer is given agency to access a variety of perspectives about the towers. Negotiating between these perspectives throughout history offers the viewer a unique venue for engagement with lightscape as it is embodied and felt. While some might find the

observations of the public to be mundane, they are given importance by their placement on the map. We are constantly confronted with a deluge of information, a given memory of an event, an aspect of sociohistorical reality, or a simple aesthetic connotation attained from a symbolic device. Each of these is made relevant to a unique, individual story and proclaimed as evidence. The viewer of a *City of Perpetual Moonlight* is creating conceived lightspace from these audio interviews and symbols on the map of the towers in Austin that give importance to these particular missing masses.

But why is creating and bringing importance to conceived lightspace useful? Conceived lightspace informs our perceptions and brings meaning to how we reference light and space. Conceived lightspace is where official vernacular concerning light and space turn into aesthetic connotative meanings. In order to make this possible, perceived lightspace is activated and the meaning attributed from its connection to conceived lightspace creates lived lightspace. To illustrate this a city of Austin tourist pamphlet introducing the towers from 1943 proclaims that “It’s Moonlight Every Night” [See figure 10].

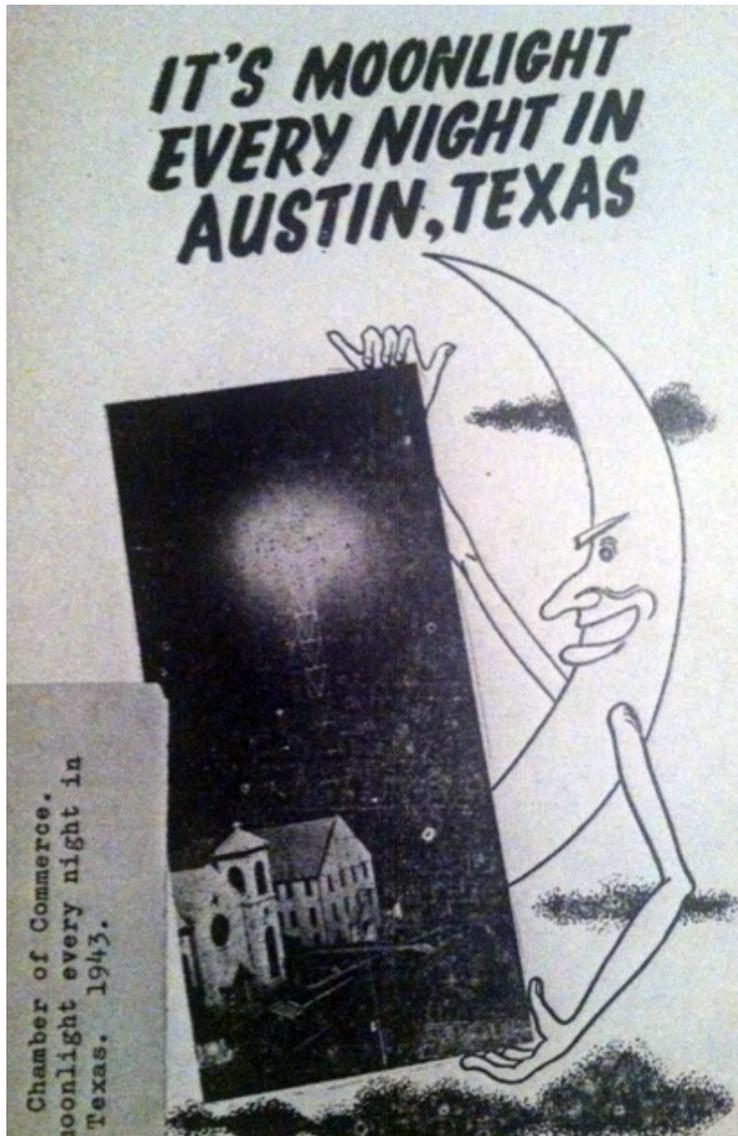


Figure 10: Tourist literature introducing visitors to moonlight towers in Austin (Austin Chamber of Commerce, 1943).

Inside the moonlight tower lights are referred to when seen from a plane at night, as “Pale blue will-o’-the-wisps hovering without apparent support high above the city.” Considering that this statement appears in tourist literature intended for the visitor to Austin, there is an interdependency between officially designated perceptions and meaning. Whereas meaning can shape perception, ultimately perception can refigure meaning, which has the potential to alter perception once again. Locating conceived

lightspace amidst this process allows for us to understand how moonlight towers can be used as a gauge, a barometer that shows the various ways we perceive lightspace.

Section 8: Lived Lightspace

Or were we deluded by the strange equations of the light, the vagrant wind searching the trees, that we believed this brief conjunction of our separate lives was real?

(Dana Gioia, 1991)

Finally, we turn to the last remaining axe of lived lightspace to round out the discussion. Lived lightspace is directly lived through associated images and symbols (Lefebvre 1991: 39). Everyone experiences lived lightspace through the mediation of images and symbols that they encounter in their everyday experiences. Lived lightspace offers possibilities of resistance to common narratives because each person negotiates it differently each time they encounter it in their everyday experience. Due to this, it is infinite and offers an unending reservoir of possibilities and personal knowledge. Merleau-Ponty speaks of the delirium of vision: the sense that lays behind the ability to see that consists of a particular magic that is the result of opening eyes to a world-in-formation (2012: 128). But what if one opens ones eyes in darkness? Does light comprise what we conceive of as the visible world? Or rather does the visible world inform our experience of light?

A vivid example of lived lightspace and the visible world from *City of Perpetual Moonlight* is an excerpt from a conversation about the moonlight towers one afternoon with Jason. Jason is a young adult attending the School of the Blind in Austin. He went completely blind after a steady decrease in his sight and a series of unsuccessful surgeries at the age of fourteen. Even though he has been completely blind before moving to Austin, Jason senses that as a city, it is always bright. When he imagines the lived lightspace of Austin, downtown is at the center and it is bisected by sixth street and the section of Guadalupe near the University of Texas known as the drag. He explains that “It is always bright out there because there are always people out there interacting with each other. And everybody is so bright to each other and it creates this bright atmosphere.” Here it is clear that despite having access to sight, Jason has a unique lived

lightspace of Austin. Accessing his imaginary of symbols such as the University of Texas leads to an experience of luminance that is directly associated to sociality. For Jason bright is automatically populated. Luminosity is filled with people and darkness is devoid. While this may sound commonsensical, it is interesting to note that light is what Jason imagines it to be. Jason is negotiating his own referential symbols pertaining to light and space in order to live lightspace in his imagination.

The interactive sections of the City of Perpetual Moonlight illustrate a more literal depiction of lived lightspace. In the documentary, each visitor experiences lived lightspace uniquely. Beginning with the primary point of navigation, at the central map (conceptual lightspace) visitors are provided with links that offer multiple interpretations and configurations. Of these links, there are two separate interactive pieces. Both serve to engage the visitor with moments in history that pertain to the towers. Swiss literary critic Jean Starobinski's description succinctly describes interactivity as a: "Virtually infinite interlacing of destinies, actions, thoughts, and reminiscences would rest on a baseline that chimed the hours of the terrestrial day" (1995: 75). In this project, the interactive pieces serve as the bass line of lived lightspace. They allow for the story to be told on several levels. The database documentary experience of the moonlight towers can be simultaneously poetic and academic. While there are limits to what interactivity can provide, it is nevertheless true that users participate more actively in the process by which information is encountered (Spence and Navarro 2011: 157). Because lived lightspace is where possibilities of resistance and reinterpretation are actualized, the interactive pages provide insightful representation of the final axe of this discussion.

In the first interactive piece the visitor is faced with several sections of text layered on top of a photograph taken looking up at a moonlight tower. Multiple historic photographs of the same servant girl cover the sections of text [Figure 11].

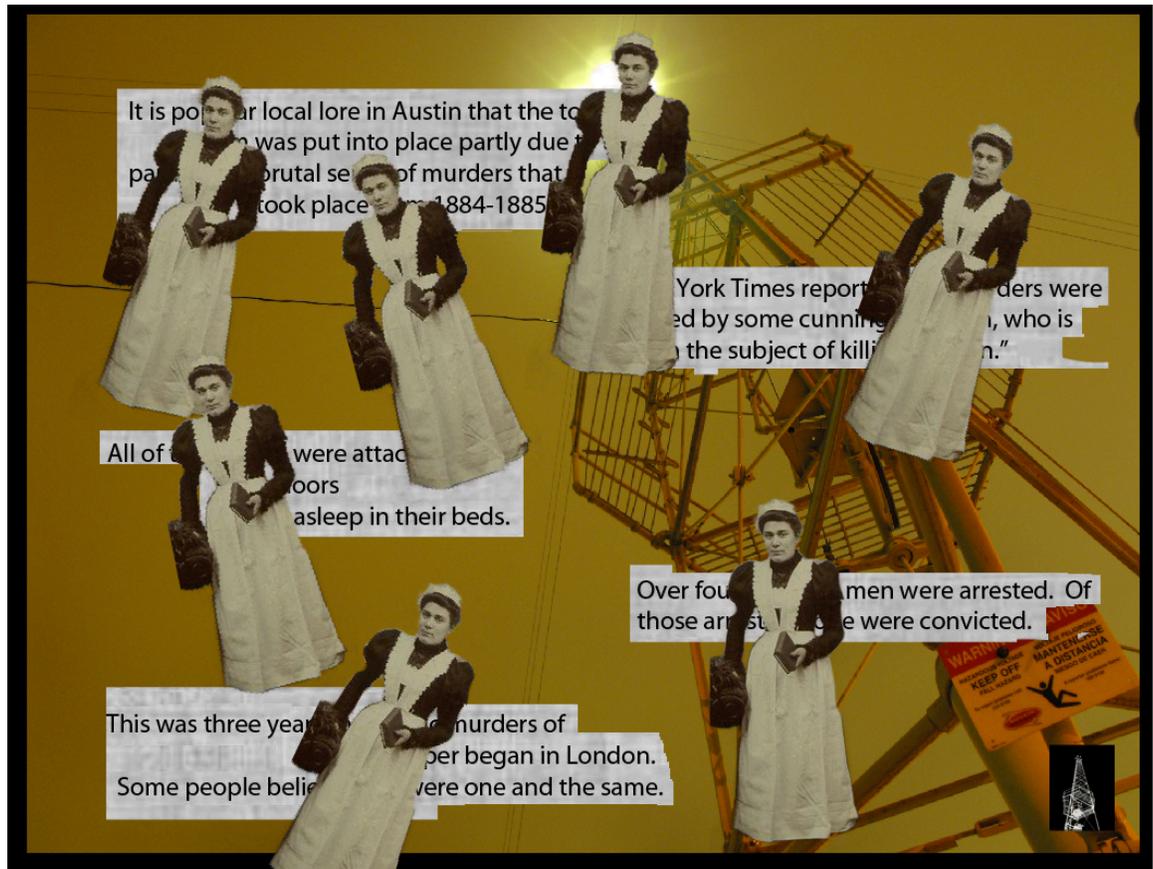


Figure 11: Servant girl interactive page from the City of Perpetual Moonlight (Conquest, November 2011).

In the year of 1884, just ten years before the moonlight towers were installed in Austin, a series of murders took place in the dark city. Some residents of Austin still cite that the reason the towers were installed as being the murders. In order to bring attention to this important story and allow the viewer to experience this history in a unique way, this interactive page is included in the documentary. Each time a viewer clicks on a servant girl, she says her name, the day she died, and then disappears. The same picture was used for each girl while variation between them is illustrated through actual names and murder dates. This variation is reinforced through different voices that are heard for each girl. When enough of the servant girls have disappeared you can read the story of the tragic murders that took place during the turn of the century. Recall that lived

lightspace is how an individual negotiates both perceived (physical) and conceived (conceptual) spaces. In this interactive page, each viewer physically selects servant girls in order to read the story. This occurs uniquely each time and is a world-in-formation that each viewer creates.

The second interactive piece contains more jovial content. Upon selecting the page the viewer can barely make out a black and white photograph of three people in an overgrown garden that is covered with several pieces of text. As the viewer starts to read, gigantic strawberries, green beans, and eggs begin to fall onto the screen, obstructing their view one at a time [Figure 12].

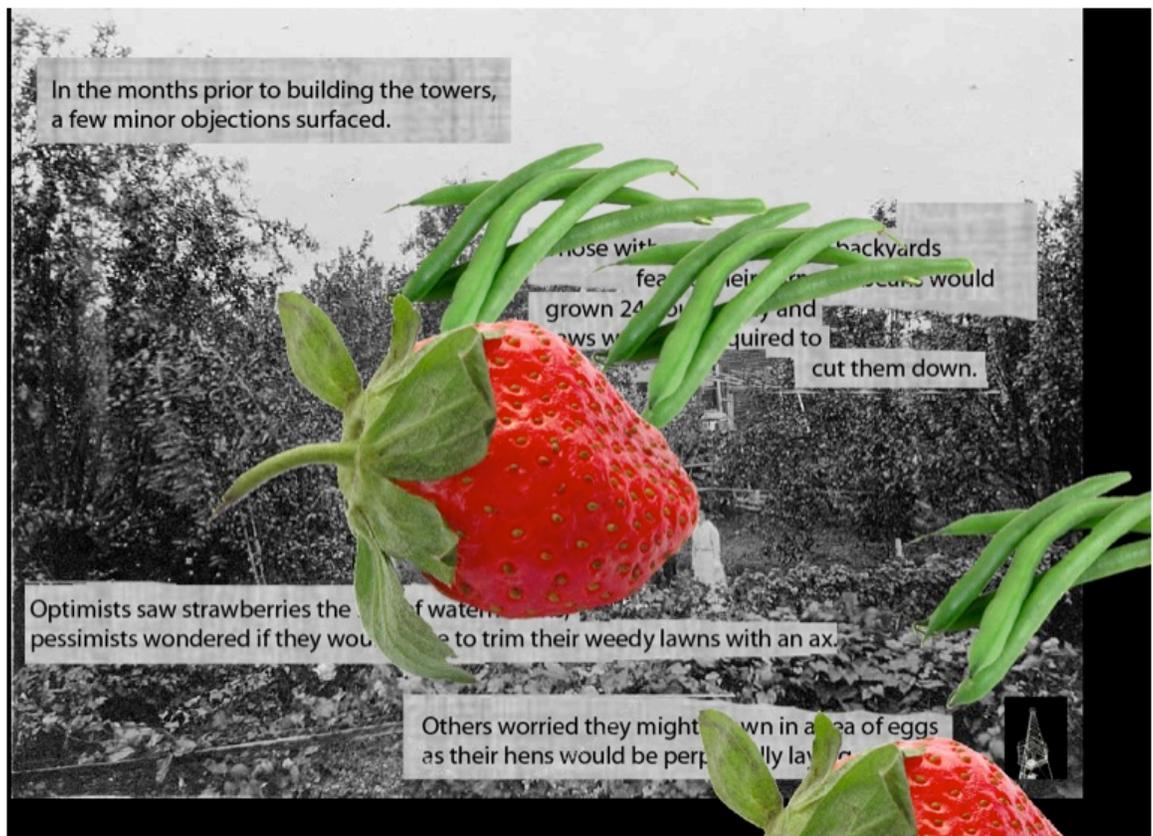


Figure 12: Overgrown garden interactive page from the City of Perpetual Moonlight (Conquest, November 2011).

In order to continue reading, they must click the offending piece to remove it. This animation illustrates the story of how before the towers were built, the citizens of Austin were concerned about the potential effects that lights illuminating the city all night would have. Farmers voiced fears that their gardens would never stop growing and chickens would never stop laying in a city of constant light. As an interactive device, the overgrown garden page works in the opposite way of the servant girl page. The servant girl interactive page sets up a scenario where the viewer must take a decisive role in order to interact, whereas in the midst of the garden the viewer must act more defensively. As clicking and selecting images are routine physical movements that are a part of everyday experience, negotiating through these symbols by conceptually referencing the lore of the moonlight towers makes the viewer a more active participant in the documentary. A viewer lives lightspace by moving through these symbols and connecting them in a unique way.

Both of the interactive pieces are ideal devices with which users can live the lightspace of Austin and the history of the moonlight towers. The interactive examples of the servant girls and the overgrown garden allude to a historic lived lightspace while simultaneously encouraging visitors to the database documentary to physically live their own experience of light and space. Lived lightspace is an important concept from which we can pause the process through which meanings are made and examine the way in which they are being made. To illustrate the idea of lived lightspace in the documentary I found it meaningful to ask some people I interviewed what is normal light in Austin? My intention was to get a sense for how they live lightspace uniquely, how they negotiate the perceived and the conceived. A lighting designer for local electronic shows answered without a pause: "Sunlight. It is life itself." When asked to describe the light in Austin, he immediately thinks of the particular look of the sky and describes it as clean and basic. For him without needing a moment to ponder there is an obvious purity to it. In this perspective normal light is light is all encompassing. While it has particularities that may be determined by longitude and latitude, elevation and the vicinity to water or snow, the people of Austin create the lived lightspace in a unique way. Lived lightspace is

available to everyone and inhabitants of urban space constantly assemble it as they perceive symbols and connotative meanings that have been conceived by city planners, engineers, and architects.

Section 9: Conclusion

While visitors may never reach the end, *City of Perpetual Moonlight* provides a place for effectively illustrating perceived, conceived and lived lightspace. Perhaps the biggest lesson is that a simple historic structure can be an ideal ethnographic device through which identity and perception of individuals constituting a community can be portrayed. The missing masses are observers, and by turning our attention towards them, we obtain a glimpse at the refractive process through which meaning is made in our world. As devices, perceived, conceived, and lived lightspace slow this refractive process and open up new ways of discerning meaning from our individual experience of light and space.

This introduction and illustration of lightspace shows how connecting perceived and conceived lightspace in Austin reveals a lived experience of light in the imagination. To show how connecting perceived and conceived lightspace in Austin reveals a lived experience of light in the imagination, this work has referenced the database documentary *City of Perpetual Moonlight* as an illustrative example. While this database documentary provides a vantage point from which to consider lightspace, it is not the only way this concept can be applied. The concept of lightspace allows most importantly for a heightened and sustained analysis of the experience of light as experienced by the individual in space. This framework needs to be expanded and explored in greater depth in future research. Because it is phenomenological in nature, a deeper analysis of individual narratives is needed.

In order to establish valence and a conversation with contemporary anthropological scholarship lightspace locates a place in the midst of appropriate intellectual traditions for engagement. For this work, phenomenology as explored by Merleau-Ponty, opens up ample room for the ethnographic application of the concept of lightspace. Further, we see how this ethnographic application can be digitized and shared

in the database documentary form. By considering the synthesis of anthropological scholarship of light and space, it becomes clear that there is a need in this discussion for new concepts that clarify commonly overlooked states of perception. The *City of Perpetual Moonlight* situates the overlooked state of lightspace using moonlight towers as a symbolic device using database documentary. However, database documentary is not without limitations and this work is representative only of a burgeoning conversation about the potential benefits and drawbacks of using this form in anthropological research.

This culminates an initial meditative inquiry into the types of agency light has in particular spaces. I am taking away from this project a keen desire to explore what a media rich ethnography of the urban experience and lightspace, would look like. Considering the words of political theorist Jane Bennett urging us to invoke our own ethical generosity, that indeed it is much too difficult to love a disenchanted world, I know that a database documentary about lightspace must involve the imaginary. This project incorporates the imaginary in order to pay homage to the aesthetic connotative potential of a historic moonlight tower and a rich symbolic device. In a simple way it uses the widespread conceived lightspace experiences of people today to celebrate what was perceived and meaningful lightspace yesterday. The use of interactivity in the form of a database documentary makes *City of Perpetual Moonlight* current and expansive. It invites engagement with the concept of lightspace on a level that is at once accessible and personal. Employing database documentary as a medium, *The City of Perpetual Moonlight* serves as an ode to vestigial illumination, to aged urban towers that brighten the skies of Austin. It is less about what these towers are than what they evoke. It is a mediation of the imaginary, in the present with a reverence for the past. Here the mediation of the imaginary is articulated by lived lightspace, the reverence for the past represented in conceived lightspace, and the present is inculcated with perceived lightspace. These are valuable concepts for seeing how the dialectic of lightspace is a relationship and requires sustained interaction between each of the axes.

And then the lights go out. You are left with your own thoughts of what was and what might be. There is the sound of this cityscape, the voices of each person to place in pockets for later. To listen to when you want. And when you do perhaps you sit one facing one direction and another directly opposing. When you press play you can sit in the middle of the coordinates they create. In the middle of the map from which all placements of perception begin.

To see the sky is to be the sky, since the sky is lumosity and the visual perception of the sky is an experience of light (Ingold 2011: 129).

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Vita

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Her research interests are focused on multi-sensory, collaborative, and media-rich ethnography techniques. She enriches exploration of these techniques with studies in conceptual cartography, affect, identity and place. In particular she is seeking ways to elucidate forms of identity with thoughtful consideration to how they are intertwined with the fabric of place.

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This report was typed by Julie Conquest.