

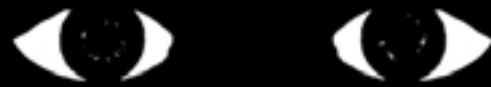
How can the City be Better Illuminated?

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and

Linnaea Tillett

Night in the public realm is a social and a psychological space. It has its terrors, its mysteries, its enchantments.
And most importantly in the city, it offers us all the delights of encountering strangers who are also out in the night.



In this nighttime psychological space everything, that glows sees.
Glow monitors us, looks out for us, leads us, and directs. It watches us and we watch it.



But in the last century we have dropped a curtain of light over the city.
We have altered the night and we have been altered.

And yet until a hundred years ago there were no permanent street lighting systems, and still we went out, we traveled, we got lost and found, we encountered each other on the street. We used pre-industrial, pre-electrification, cutting edge, Dark Ages technology. We amplified what existed, and we carried our own light.

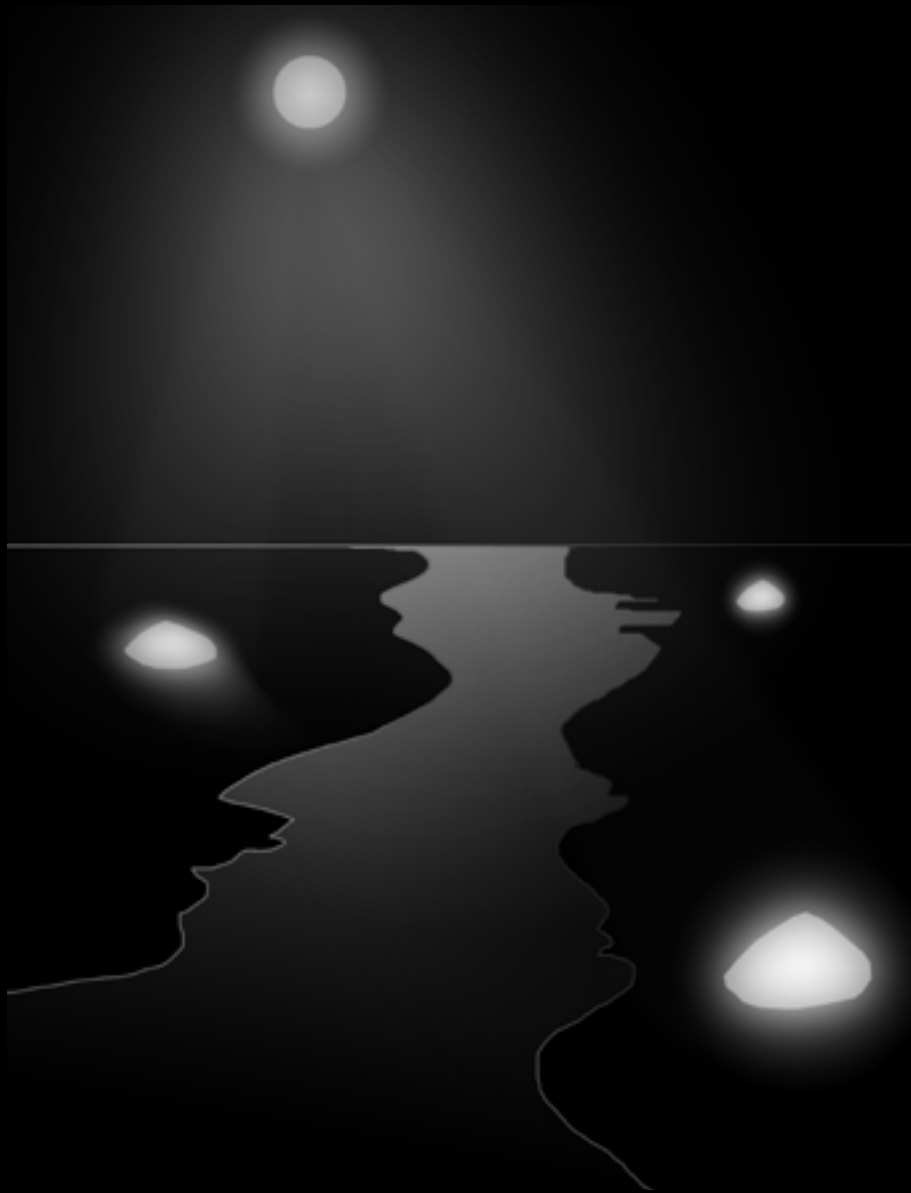


Our roads followed the arc of the Milky Way.

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We made way finding devices out of piles of chalky soil that glowed in the moonlight.

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We painted rocks at the edge of the water to catch stray light so we could see boundaries, and limits to safety.

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The white painted bases of trees became sign posts and road markers.

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We made structures high up in the landscape as beacons to guide us away from danger and orient us.

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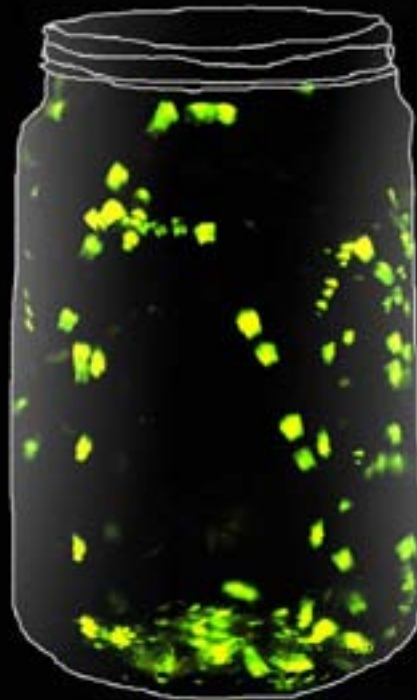


And we made lanterns.
We hollowed out turnips and filled them with a lit spot of oil.

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We captured fireflies and carried them down the road, going house to house.

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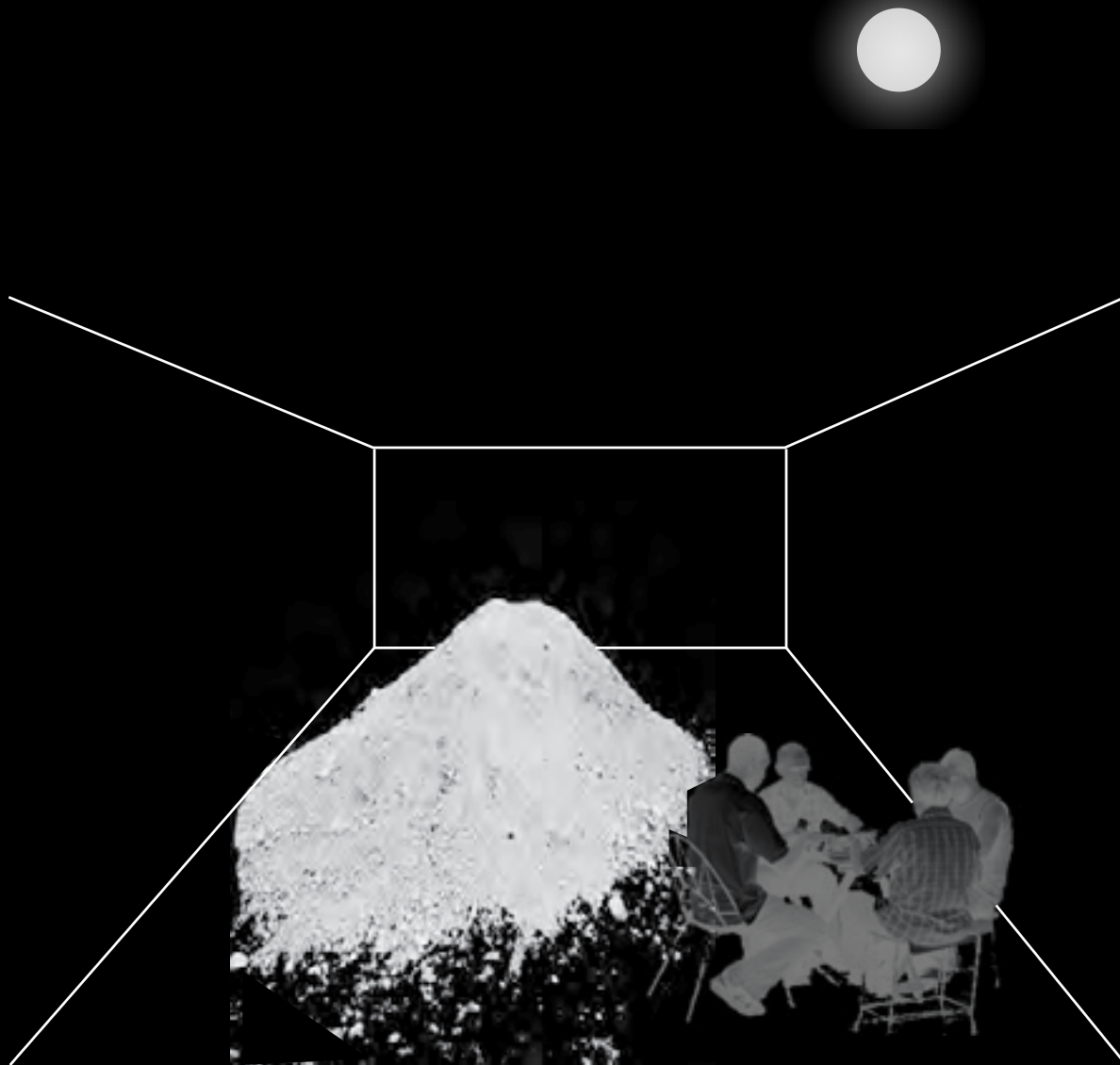


In the 20th and 21st centuries all these functions: the beacon, the lantern, the marker, the way-finding device, have been fused together into the Superman of Utilities – the lamp post. The lamp post wards off rape, stops thefts, vandalism, and even murder. It is our emblem of urbanity and our radiant, always present security device.

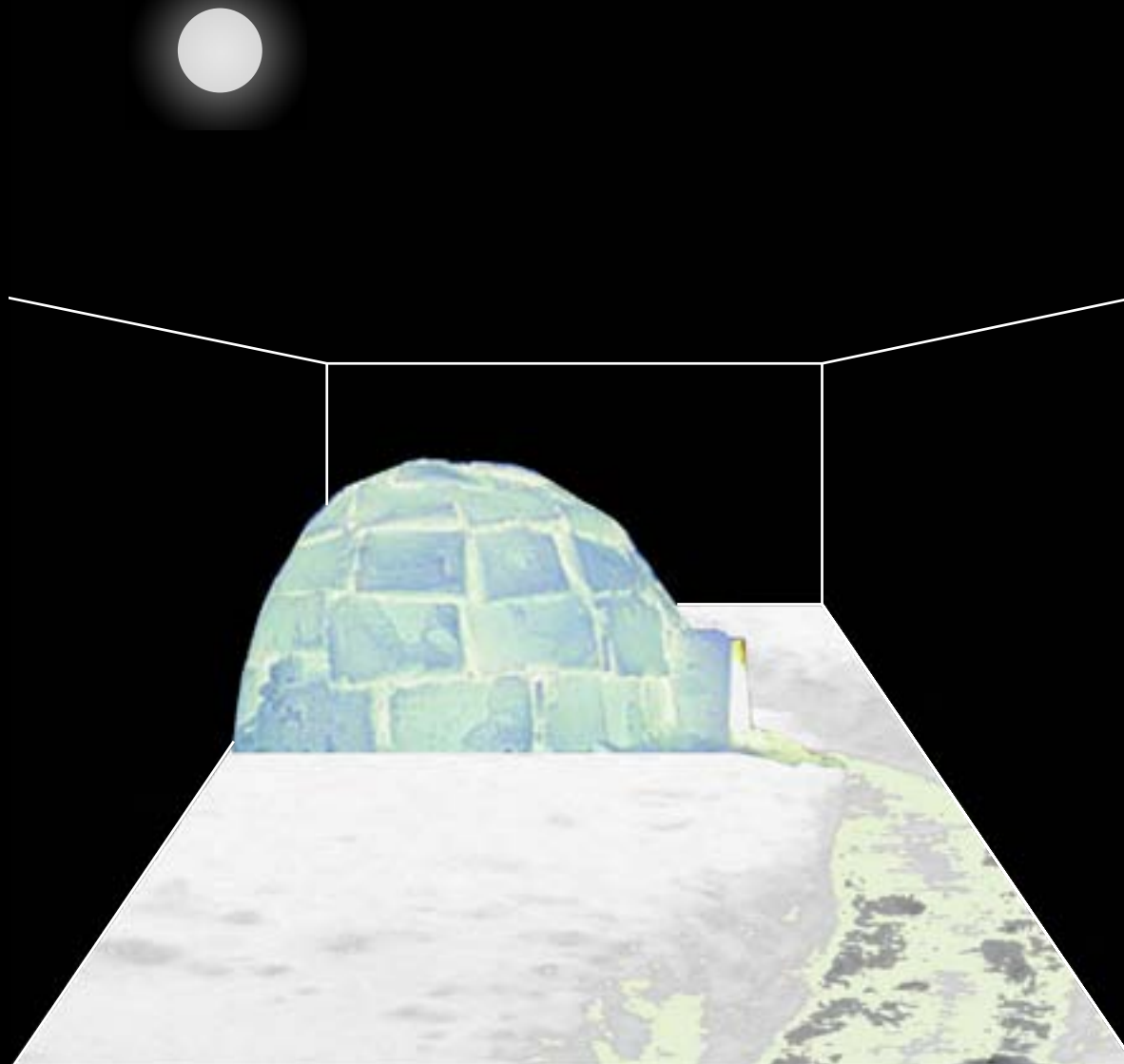


We suggest that perhaps it is time to relieve the lamp post of some (but not all) of its burdens and reconsider the lantern and the virtues of amplifying what exists.

Our response to the request for more light in vacant lots and neglected street scapes is not to up footcandles or suggest a better streetlight but to propose scenarios like the ones presented. The challenges are to animate the dark, to create social space within the city at night and, as a consequence, to make it safer. This challenge exceeds what a city authority can reasonably or sustainably provide and extends to the private realm and to you the people, who can participate in the design. Adopting the mindset of the historical traveler who amplified the sky, we propose some ways to capture the plentiful ambient light of the electrified city.



The chalk that lit the path is here a light installation on a vacant lot.



Installations can be seasonal, as in this ice igloo sculpture reflecting moonlight.



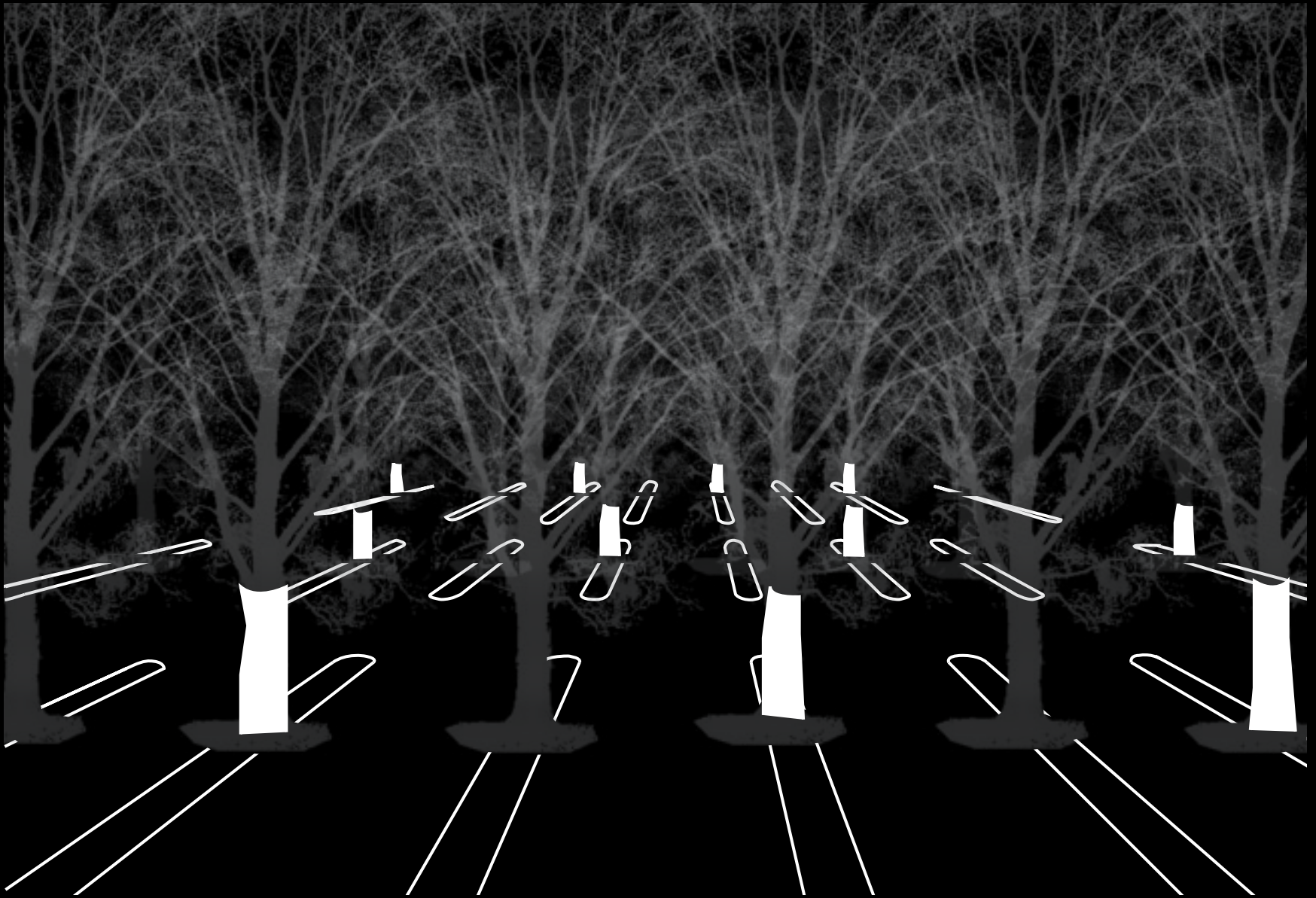
In this performance on a loading dock, the only light is from the glow of the costumes. Chalk pile, igloo, costume are all animated beacons that draw attention to themselves and as a consequence generate a gathering and thereby watchfulness.



We can illuminate the space itself and so provide unexpected social opportunity, as in this lot fenced in a fabric with photovoltaic threads.



The underside of the elevated subway track is painted white turning it from urban threat to urban threshold.
(Designer: Tillet Lighting Design)



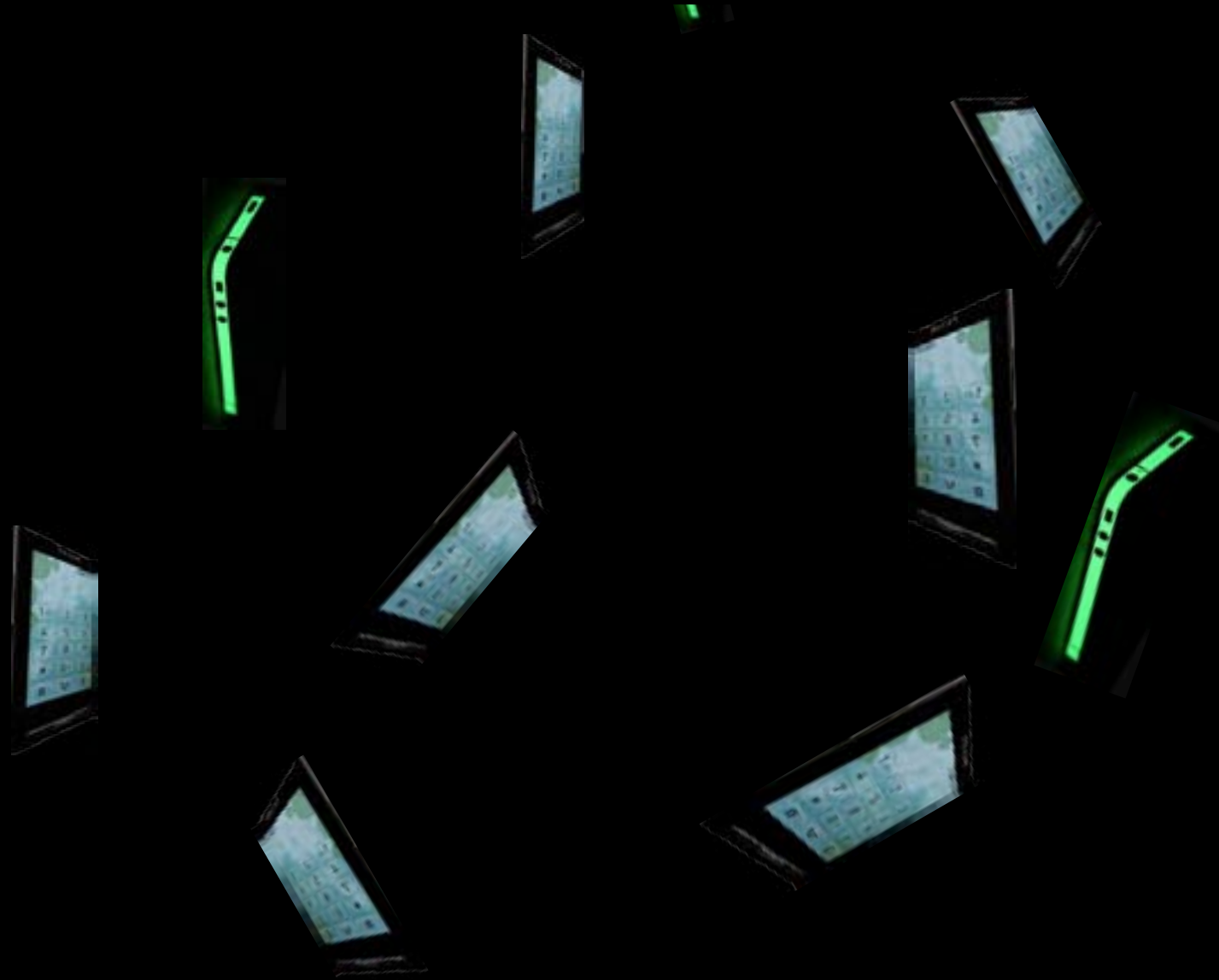
The tree trunks of the parking lot are painted white to mark territory as a nighttime hang-out.



Even inaccessible places can offer light and event, as in this construction site in Bat Yam, Israel where each night a compact fluorescent lantern is hung from a construction crane. (Lantern Architects: Idit Gazan and Michael Gelbendorf)



The lights of passing cars and bikes episodically illuminate the mural on this blank wall. It is the privileged experience of travelers and also their guide. (Designers: Pentagram and Tillet Lighting Design)



We can, once again, without turnips glow. The lantern of the mobile phone indicates the way in which we are willing and able to separate ourselves from the electric grid and its implicitly homogeneous idea of light and safety.



In fact, much of the developing world is intent on skipping some industrial revolutions and the grid, as seen in this scene of children each with their own portable moon powered, like the real one, with light captured from the sun.

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