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## Watching Nightlife Affective Labor, Social Media, and Surveillance — [Source link](#)

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**Institutions:** University of Queensland

**Published on:** 01 Mar 2014 - Television & New Media (SAGE Publications)

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*Publication details*

Carah, N. (2014). Watching nightlife: affective labor, social media and surveillance. *Television and New Media*, 15(3): 250-265.

<http://tvn.sagepub.com/content/15/3/250>

**Watching nightlife: affective labour, social media and surveillance**

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*Abstract*

This article examines the affective labour of nightlife photographers within the surveillance economy of social media. I examine nightlife photographers as 'below the line' cultural labourers who employ their identities and communicative capacities to create and circulate images of nightlife online. These images stimulate interaction that can be watched, tracked and responded to by the databases of social media. The study draws on interviews with nightlife photographers to examine how they account for the creative and promotional aspects of their labour. I argue that the analytical capacities of social media databases, and the modes of promotion they facilitate, depend in the first instance on the affective labour of cultural intermediaries like nightlife photographers.

**Surveillance and affective labour**

If surveillance is purposeful and systematic watching (Lyon 2011: 14-16), then the labour of doing surveillance is often characterised as predominantly analytic. Surveillance is done by workers and machines that deduce patterns, behaviours or qualities by watching the mediation of social life. This article presents a study of nightlife photographers as 'below the line' labourers in the surveillance economy. In doing so, I argue that the analytical surveillance capacities of social media platforms like Facebook rely in part on the affective labour of cultural intermediaries like nightlife photographers. Nightlife photographers are often young aspiring creatives contracted by corporate

brands, alcohol distributors, nightclubs and music industries to go into nightlife and entertainment venues to photograph young, hip and cool consumers.

Critical accounts of social media and surveillance have drawn attention to its capacity to watch users, predict their interests and target promotional messages (for instance, Andrejevic 2011, Fuchs 2011, Turow 2011). A characteristic of these modes of surveillance is their predictive capacities. Social media platforms, and the brands and other cultural producers that use them, can constantly adapt and modulate their messages and appeals based on the real-time data they collect about users. At one level we can view this as a routine and analytical process. As we enter personal information and interact with friends a portrait of our identity and social network develops. The social media platform 'watches' and makes decisions about what content and advertisements it distributes to us. The data the platform uses to make predictions is discreet: our gender, our preference, our location, the proximity of our friends. The predictive capacity of this analysis develops along with the quantity of data being generated. Nightlife photographers demonstrate another important aspect of the developing predictive capacities of these platforms. They assemble particular networks of data based on their capacity to judge and understand cultural identities, meanings and milieu. In doing so, they improve the quality of data on a platform like Facebook by registering links between cultural content, social spaces and identities. And that, I argue, improves its capacity to predict and exploit social networks.

The nightlife photographer is a significant cultural intermediary in modes of production like brand, venue and entertainment promotion. Vicki Mayer's (2011) ethnographic account of videographers, scouts and casters as below the line cultural workers illustrates how they deploy their identities and communicative capacities in entertainment venues to recruit subjects for media production like reality TV. In Mayer's (2011) study these below the line workers exploit their identity to cultivate relationships with people they can commodify as media content. The labourers in this article exploit their identity to create content in much the same way, but there is an added dimension or layer of commodification, they don't just commodify the subjects of their images as media content, they also assemble those identities in the databases of social media.

By examining this labour I contribute to addressing the shortcoming Zwick and Knott (2009) identify in disciplinary approaches to surveillance that focus predominantly on the solicitation, storing and sorting of information to target messages. Zwick and Knott (2009) argue that these approaches overlook how databases produce and modulate consumers. In their account surveillance is a productive activity crucial to a mode of branding and promotion that relies on

tracking and responding to the cultural practices and innovations of a heterogeneous market. A database isn't just a tool for sorting data, it is a device for modulating social relationships and practices. This mode of productive surveillance is interrelated with contemporary approaches to brand management that argue value is created and maintained by channelling, cultivating and coordinating consumer participation (Foster 2008, Hearn 2008, Zwick et al 2008). Rather than specify particular meanings brands establish coordinates within which they manage consumers' cultural activity (Moor 2003, Foster 2008).

### *Affective labour*

The labour of nightlife photographers is affective in the sense that their purposive watching of nightlife is grounded in their capacities to employ their identity and emotions to relate with consumers and to make judgments about taste, style, mood and dispositions. The nightlife photographer uses their status and social network to gain access to venues, attract the attention of hip consumers who want to be photographed, and circulate those images in influential online networks. The concept of affective labour originates with autonomist accounts of networked capitalism's reliance on the communicative and cooperative capacities of social life (Hardt 1999). Terranova (2000) drew attention to the affective labour of individuals whose social capacities shape the internet. Their communicative abilities create the social networks through which meanings circulate. Their activity is freely given and unpaid, simultaneously enjoyed and exploited. This 'free' labour is imperative to the functioning of networked forms of cultural production that rely on the continuous open-ended communication of users (Terranova 2000). Autonomist accounts have been critiqued for their excessive optimism about the immanent potential of cooperation and for not paying attention to the material realities within which people labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). I outline and distinguish here two further conceptualisations of affective labour useful for understanding the work of nightlife photographers:

- The subjective experience of workers and the production and deliberate management of affect (Dowling 2007, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, Wissinger 2007). The photographer employs their affective capacities to create and circulate their images.
- The open-endedly social nature of circulating and modulating affect. The photographer doesn't just create images that contain meanings, they stimulate the production of social networks that circulate and modulate affect (Clough et al. 2007, Wissinger 2007).

Affective labour can involve the deliberate management of emotions, dispositions and feelings (Dowling 2007, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). For Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011: 161) the concept of affective labour 'owes a great deal' to the concept of emotional labour. These accounts focus on the production, management and manipulation of specific affects and emotions by labourers. Labourers are directed or prompted to produce specific affects and social relations, which are then captured, contained and measured (Dowling 2007). Nightlife photographers are required to use their emotional and communicative skills to facilitate exchanges with the subjects of their photos. These aspects of their labour extend beyond specific judgments of taste they make in creating their images. They manage their feelings to produce a particular gesture, tone and disposition. They use their presence within the dark ambience of the club with a camera, the attention others pay them, the movement of their bodies in combination with loud music, and the feelings and dispositions produced in social settings involving the consumption of drugs and alcohol. They work in informal and often unpaid circumstances and their work is coextensive with their identity and social life. Focussing on the subjective experience of work does help to address whether this work is 'good' or 'bad' for that individual worker and how the management of affect is central to both the enjoyable and exploitative dimensions of that work. We need also however to address the inherently relational, irreducibly social and open-ended nature of affective labour. Wissinger (2007: 254) argues that affective labour involves more than the deliberate 'production and manipulation of affect'. Affective labour extends beyond the production, management and containment of particular feelings to the open-ended capacity to circulate and modulate affect.

The labour of 'purposive watching' – which might involve particular judgments of taste or deliberate use of emotions – relies more generally on the capacity to affect, be affected and make affective judgments (Clough et al. 2007: 65). This capacity relies on more than just conscious judgments and the ability to 'narrate' affect (Clough et al. 2007). The capacity to affect and be affected exceeds the individual. The nightlife photographer undertakes the relational work of stimulating and channelling the 'living attention of others' (Brennan 2004: 50). The nightlife photographer registers these networks of attention in the databases of social media. Affect isn't the property or creation of the labourer, but is found in the creative ability of labourers to circulate, manipulate and modulate social connections, ideas and feelings we can access by virtue of our place in the social body.

The images nightlife photographers create bring identities, social spaces and brands together in 'one promotional package' (Hearn 2008: 209). The nightlife photographer is a contemporary kind

of market researcher, one who prompts and manages the circulation of identity and affect rather than just collects information. Social media is composed of the continuous interaction between the social networks that users create and the technical apparatus that stimulates, shapes and valorises those networks. The images nightlife photographers create are devices that animate an online social network as consumers view, like, tag and comment on them. The image, a creation of the photographer's judgments and capacity to create social connections, produces data that enables other forms of 'purposive watching' to take place in the databases of social media. Nightlife photography is an increasingly important part of the nightlife industries. As one small illustration, in 2011 vodka brand Smirnoff put over 8000 photos of consumers at cultural and nightlife events on its Australian Facebook page. They were distributed to their network of over 150,000 Australian Facebook fans and potentially into the news feeds of any friend of a fan that liked, tagged, or commented on a Smirnoff photo. Affective labour is interconnected with the calculative and predictive capacities of social media. A conceptualisation of affective labour grounded in the general capacity to affect is useful when examining modes of cultural production that don't rely on symbolic or ideological forms of control as much as they rely on the capacity to track, respond to and modulate social relations (Clough 2009, Dean 2010). This mode of production calls for labourers who register social connections in databases as much as they produce particular cultural meanings. Value is not grounded entirely in the particular meanings in the images but in the network of social relations that the work of affecting creates. The photographer creates value by enhancing the ability of the technical apparatus of social media to respond to the open-ended nature of social life.

### **Watching in the entertainment precinct**

The nightlife photographers in this study work in an entertainment precinct in the inner-city suburb of Fortitude Valley in Brisbane, the state capital of the Australian state of Queensland. The Valley is emblematic of the widespread regeneration of inner-city areas organised around leisure, cultural and other post-industrial economic activities (Hobbs, et al. 2000). In 2005, legislation passed in state parliament to enable the development of the Valley as a 'special entertainment precinct'. The remodelling of the Valley as a popular nightlife destination – while meant to protect the live music and cultural scene – has mostly led to the development of venues designed to stimulate and manage excessive mass alcohol consumption. With the development of entertainment precincts governments undertake the contradictory activities of stimulating a night-

time economy based on excessive alcohol consumption; while at the same time developing elaborate methods for responding to and managing alcohol-related harm (Roberts 2009).

Surveillance technologies are used to regulate, manage and promote entertainment precincts. A consumer moving through an entertainment precinct like the Valley on a Saturday night might have their ID, face and fingerprint scanned at several venues upon entry. Those venues can share that information with each other in a real-time network. As they enter the club or walk through the streets they will be visible on CCTV camera networks. Camera operators can address consumers using loudspeakers based on their monitoring of their activities. Clubbers we interviewed explained that forms of surveillance like CCTV, ID and face scanning at clubs were routine and opaque. The Queensland Information Commissioner has indicated these surveillance practices amount to either arbitrary interference in people's privacy or may well be illegal. While many clubbers were uneasy about the privacy implications of having their identity scanned as they move through the precinct, they grow accustomed to it because the precinct doubles as both a site of consumption and for them an important cultural space for seeing music, DJs and socialising with peers. At the same time many use their smart phones to mediate nightlife experiences with tags, status updates and check-ins.<sup>i</sup> Their explanations illustrate how these practices are 'purposive' in the sense that they know how to create images, check ins and status updates that position themselves and their peers in advantageous ways. Particular images and check-ins at 'cool' venues are part of constructing a narrative about themselves in their online peer networks.

While disciplinary forms of surveillance like CCTV and scanning arguably stabilise the precinct as a site of consumption, peer-to-peer surveillance normalises the mediation of social interactions in the precinct on social media. Their friends might use mobile phones to create images of them in clubs and circulate those images on social media like Facebook. Using devices to mediate everyday life is integral to being seen and felt within peer networks. A nightlife photographer working for a venue or brand might approach them in the club, take an image, and circulate it online. They might then be tagged in, like or comment on, some of those images. They might like the Facebook page of a venue or brand to access information or images. A brand might target them on Facebook based on their interaction in the venue or information collected from their Facebook profile and peer network. The value that social media platforms' analytic surveillance eventually extracts from its databases begins with these various interrelated forms of 'purposive watching' in everyday life and material spaces of consumption. Nightlife photography is embedded in these practices, stimulating, amplifying and exploiting them.

The analysis to follow draws predominantly on the accounts of 11 nightlife photographers and observations of their work in entertainment precincts and the images they upload online. Nightlife photographers work in a variety of precarious and flexible circumstances and create contradictory and competing narratives about their work (Mayer 2011). They work as both individuals and as part of collective enterprises, some work for cash while others work for in-kind benefits like access to clubs and social networks, free drinks, the opportunity to build a portfolio, and perceived gains in reputation. Where useful I also draw on insights from a larger research project that has examined the use of Facebook by alcohol brands and young consumers' experiences with nightlife culture and social media. By drawing on the accounts of nightlife photographers I aim to illustrate a variety of positions from which cultural labourers account for their role in the production of value. The aim here is not to offer a 'behind the scenes' account but instead to examine what John Caldwell (2008: 2) calls the managed 'industrial self-theorising' of cultural producers like photographers. The aim is not to use these accounts to make general claims about nightlife photographers, but to use their explanation of their practices to illustrate and critically consider some of the features and uses of social media evident in their practices. My focus in this article on the accounts of nightlife photographers necessarily limits the scope for analysing the circulation of these images on Facebook and the political economy of nightlife precincts, questions which also deserve further attention. My aim in focussing on the work of nightlife photography is to expand how we conceptualise the types and qualities of labour that underpin the social media surveillance economy.

### **Identity: promotional and creative labour**

The nightlife photographers interviewed offered two distinct accounts of the way they employ their own identity and creative capacities in their work. In one account, nightlife photographers instrumentally tie their creativity to a promotional business model. In the other account, the photographer discerns aesthetic or artistic value in the work of nightlife photography that they balance out with the promotional aspects of the job. Each account illustrates different ways nightlife photographers negotiate work that requires them to exploit their creative capacities, identity and social relations. The accounts also show the ways in which nightlife photographers position their work in relation to the promotional and surveillance economy of the entertainment precinct and social media.

#### *Promotion*



The promotional labour of nightlife photography involves creating connections between people in nightlife venues and the social web. The content created and the social interaction with the photographer stimulates further interaction online. The photographs are a device for registering social connections online. The photographer uses their identity and communicative capacities to create those connections.

Photographers reinforce these connections by distributing cards and wristbands that direct clubbers back to their websites to find and tag the photos (photographer 3 and 7). One photographer, who ran his own business, described to us how he differentiated himself from others by handing out fabric tags with his website printed on them (photographer 3). He was constantly asked for the tags by clubbers. Handing out the tags helped his photography spread on Facebook by driving traffic to his page. The clubbers would pose with the tags in the photos which 'branded' them as his. They would also wake up the next morning with the tag on their wrist and go check out the content online. In these cases nightlife photographers approach photography as an instrumental device in creating the social networks they then use to make value for their business or the brands and venues they work for. They aim to make photography that stimulates these networks. One photographer explained that nightlife photography enabled people to 'reminisce on the weekend that's just been' (photographer 7). This reminiscing online generates interaction, exposure, and revenue.

Photographs published by large dedicated nightlife photography enterprises tend not to be viewed as 'creative' pieces either by the photographers themselves or other photographers in the scene. One photographer who worked for a large company as an unpaid contributor, saw his work as a promotional tool for the company and its affiliates. He explained that his job was to 'capture the fun' and 'what people don't remember the next day'. He explained that he 'wouldn't call that part photography... I don't see a whole lot of skill put into what we do' (photographer 1). In exchange for his promotional services the photographer would receive free entry into clubs and events and often other perks such as free drinks. Despite not being paid cash, the photographer perceived a reward for the work beyond in-kind benefits like entry to clubs and drinks. As a nightlife photographer he was able to more easily mingle with people in clubs, they would seek him out and talk to him. He said that as a result he had 'made heaps of friends just from doing it'. In this account the work of nightlife photography mixes play and labour. He is mediating his own social world, and his peers treat him as a privileged mediator who they want to know and be photographed by. He employs his social skills and identity to do the work, but the camera and the work also help to create and

distinguish the identity that he then leverages in the social scene. Within the club the nightlife photographer is a node within networks of attention. He reflected, 'having a camera, people just flock to you. It's like you're their new best friend, even though you don't want to be' (photographer 1).

Nightlife photographers learn to seek out and capitalise on people's desire to be seen and photographed (photographer 3). They position themselves in venues and peer groups that enable them to create valuable content. Their accounts indicate how they make decisions about what content will stimulate engagement online and then act on those decisions with their affective and communicative abilities. In the case below, the photographer describes how they discern people's desire to have their photo taken and their strategies for indirectly approaching them.

I try and take pictures of people that look like they want their photo taken, and also people that people want to look at. You can – you just get a – like you can see their body language, whether they were ....looking at you, and I go 'Oh, they obviously want their photo taken'. I say, 'Oh, do you guys want a drink?'. They're like 'no, no, no. we want our photo taken!'. I go, 'Oh, okay, then I'll take your photo'. ... Yeah, so some people who aren't used to it, they want – like, secretly – like, they want their photo taken, but they're not the sort of people that will come up to you and go, 'Would you mind taking my photo?' (photographer 1)

The photographer describes the ways in which he discerns people's desire. Sometimes he plays coy; with people who overtly want to be photographed he pretends he doesn't know what they want by asking if they want a drink. With other people he knows they 'secretly' want to be photographed so he finds way to prompt them to ask him. These interactions rely on his communicative capacities, his ability to know how social relations and identities work in the contexts of these clubs. He understands this activity is instrumental, he uses his ability to get people to interact with him to capture images that support the promotional business model that he works for. At the same time he is paid not in cash, but in friendships and identity this job crafts for him. The job rewards him with social relationships and an identity that he then exploits in order to do the job. The account of this photographer is employed by others in the scene. Another photographer also described to us the sexual politics of this work. As a photographer in clubs women would come to him to be photographed. They would strike provocative poses and pay him attention because he was a photographer. He leveraged this attention by putting wrist tags on the women who were photographed that would then spread throughout the club and be seen online (photographer 3).

The photographers considered here mostly see their work as primarily about creating value for venues and being paid in cash, in-kind incentives, or the chance to perform a desirable identity. Affecting is relational, both photographers and subjects gain and give attention in the exchange. The photographer though converts this affecting into an image which stimulates the production of online networks.

### *Creativity*

Several photographers consider their work to have significant creative elements. These photographers present themselves as serious about pursuing a career in photography and see their nightlife work as one way of developing a portfolio. They point out that their photos don't feature smiling subjects looking directly at the camera for circulation on promotional and venue websites. These are nuanced, and at times contradictory, accounts because nightlife photography is a fundamentally promotional enterprise. A photographer who works exclusively for a Valley nightclub explained to us how she differentiates between photographs the venue pays her for and those which she features in her portfolio. Explaining her work as 'social documentary' photography, she aimed to creatively 'capture the evening' and its 'moments'. But, she also did 'happy snaps' that the bar and clubbers wanted. She would then differentiate in selecting and editing images for the club's site and her own blog depending on which images would be desirable and valuable to the clubbers, venue and her own portfolio (photographer 2).

The photographer's reputation is built on the types of venues and events they get access to and photograph. As much as some consumers want to be associated with particular photographers, photographers want to be associated with particular venues, events and cultural producers. Their images represent not just particular tastes, but also convey moods and dispositions, and create corresponding networks of attention. Photographers draw on their own knowledge of what is 'cool' to identify, discern and evaluate people to feature in their photographs with the intention of crafting both their own reputation and the venue's brand. One photographer explained that they selected people who were 'crazy' or 'cool' and find they were 'more than happy' to pose creatively or provocatively, often because they were 'really drunk... and pulling faces anyway' (photographer 2). While the photographer and the venue benefit from this capturing and circulating of identity, those intentionally chosen or who seek out nightlife photographers in venues must also perceive that being photographed and displayed on a particular photographer's blog is valuable to them. Being photographed means they are seen and felt in the online social networks surrounding venues and nightlife.

These photographers also differentiated themselves from 'promotional' and 'uncreative' nightlife photographers by drawing attention to their editing practices. Editing was considered by one photographer to be an important part of the creative process through which he could demonstrate his skill and impress his 'signature' into the work. He explained that he had developed a distinctive editing style. This 'personal touch' captured the 'vibe' of the night using shadow, tone and other processing techniques that reflected how he 'saw the night' (photographer 5). For this respondent the editing process added considerable value to his work and differentiated him from the ordinary and amateur photographers at the event. The editing imparted his identity onto the image via his affective capacities to judge and convey the mood and feeling of the night.

Photographers suggested that venues didn't understand the value of what they did. This photographer said that just because you were 'having a few drinks, doesn't mean that you're not actually doing work... the work really comes the next day... whenever you do the editing' (photographer 5). Another photographer explained, 'you go to some clubs and they're so crap, but you can make them look good with a good bit of photography' (photographer 4). The photographer described this skill as 'creative documentation'. That is, 'you've got to be quick, you've got to always be on the lookout for what's different, what's going on, and you've just got to be on it' (photographer 4). While at a basic level the work of nightlife photography is just going out and capturing the nightlife as a kind of 'reality' that is just 'out there', photographers also explain a variety of ways in which their job is to 'mediate' and 'edit' reality to fit the desires and demands of clubbers, venues and brands.

While the nightlife photographer's explanation that their job is to 'document' the 'fun' makes it sound like creative and free-flowing activity, each photographer described to us the systematic ways they organised their labour. Photographer 9 explained that it was 'hard' and 'tedious' work. These routines frequently involved particular strategies and innovations they had developed to make the work easier and efficient, and to make the output more valuable and useful. Photographer 4 explained the work involved getting drunk and shooting up to 700 photos in clubs, and then 'going through them all, picking out the ones you like, then narrowing that down to about whatever the club wants'. Then they would edit the photos with a set Photoshop 'action', watermark them and upload them. Photographers work late hours, starting in clubs at about 10pm and then spending several hours culling, editing and uploading when they get home (photographers 1, 3 and 6).

The photographers' accounts illustrate the technical, symbolic and affective aspects of the labour. In the club they make specific judgments about taste and style by selecting patrons who are hip or good-looking. To get them to pose provocatively or creatively they might rely on their affective capacities: attention and desire between photographer and subject, bodily gestures interplaying with the music and ambience, or feelings and moods brought about by alcohol, drugs or the atmosphere in the venue. They then need to deploy their technical ability with the camera to create an image that will stimulate the affects felt by the subject and their peers when they see the image online. 'Picking out the ones you like' involves both selective judgments along with feelings and intuitions. When they get home they go through these images looking for the individuals and poses that 'fit' both how they want to be seen as a photographer and what the club or brand wants. They use their technical editing skills to convey the mood and ambience of the club. These judgments are interrelated with their affective capacities to deduce what kinds of images will attract attention – views, likes, comments and shares – on social media. The images don't need to convey a particular set of meanings or narrative but instead stimulate the further circulation of affect online.

The photographer's specific judgments of taste play a part in their work, but those judgments can only be converted into images that circulate online when the photographer employs their capacity to affect and be affected. The photographer is an affective labourer in two ways. Firstly, they do the work of affecting consumers in the club in combination with other judgments they might be making (Dowling 2007, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011). The photographer uses their emotional and social capacities to 'act' on their judgments of taste and turn them into images (Wissinger 2007). They might be able to pick out a cool or hip clubber for an image, but they can only get the image with their capacity to relate to the potential subject. Secondly, the image they produce stimulates an ongoing open-ended circulation of affect online (Clough et al. 2007, Wissinger 2007). The photographer is an affective labourer in the sense that they contribute to the construction of networks of affecting. It is these networks that produce value for clubs, brands and social media platforms, rather than specific meanings in the image.

### **Productive watching**

Nightlife photographers are a particular kind of cultural labourer created by the surveillance and promotional economy of social media. By purposively watching nightlife they collect and circulate information that produces social networks that can be tracked. The image is a cultural text that prompts consumers to add other information about their identity, peer network and dispositions. The photographer aims to produce 'sticky' texts that will stimulate interaction online through likes,

tags and comments (Andrejevic 2007). They stimulate cultural practices that intensify the connections between the entertainment precinct and social media. In doing so, they contribute to the management of consumption, venues and brands. The entertainment precinct and social media work together as material and mediated components of a communicative enclosure. This interface between material social space and social media platforms relies on new forms of cultural labour. The nightlife photographer illustrates the role of affective labour in integrating surveillance into everyday life.

Nightlife photography is a productive form of watching because it creates and manages social relations that are registered in the databases of social media like Facebook. Nightlife photographers leverage clubbers' desires to 'be seen' and to have their identity associated with particular brands, venues and photographs online. Photographer 1 explained that 'it promotes people... like their friends are seeing, 'Oh, yeah, you were out last weekend. I want to go out this weekend with you', so then it – yeah, it's like a domino effect.' Photographers have to craft and exploit an identity which clubbers 'trust'. They need to feel like they want to *be seen* by that particular photographer, that the photographer's 'watching' will produce images that craft a desirable identity in their peer networks. A promoter at a club explained that 'people go crazy for the idea of being tagged by professional photographers. It's definitely a 'cool' thing to have lots of them on your Facebook profile. If they're good photos, and we look cool, people will want to come hang out with us.' Clubbers develop that trust based on judgments they make about the photographer's identity and appearance and their knowledge of the photographer's work or online social network. While the photographer and their subjects might be making specific judgments of taste about each other, they are also forming a relation of trust. Value is made out of that capacity to affect each other. To be able to make a judgment of taste is not enough, value is made when the photographer uses their affective capacities to capitalise on that judgment by converting it into an image that subsequently contributes to a mediated social network. One photographer explained that when his blog first became popular it had a 'cool, gritty image' and patrons in the clubs wanted to be 'seen' by him and have their images circulated on his Facebook page (photographer 3). Being photographed and circulated through a particular nightlife blog or page affiliated the individual with that blog, its associated venues and peer network. The image circulated is normally 'filtered' through the 'trademark' editing style of that photographer. The individual clubber's images are made over in the aesthetic style of that particular blog. The photographer's style and the clubber's identity circulate together. The photographer wants the image of the cool individual, and the individual wants their identity circulated under the aesthetic brand of that photographer.

People viewing the images as they circulate online recognise nightlife photos by their watermarks, venues and aesthetic styles. A photographer explained that Facebook had a role in intensifying practices of presenting and associating your identity with particular venues, pastimes and brands online. They explained that when they are taking photos in clubs 'everyone asks, 'Oh where can I find the photos?' and you just say, 'Oh, on their Facebook'. It's because of tagging you know, everyone wants to tag themselves. Everyone wants, you know, people to see that they've been somewhere or they're doing something really cool' (photographer 2). Facebook's tagging function accelerated the usefulness of nightlife photography in creating links between clubbers, venues and brands. Photographers find that after each night out taking photographs and handing out promotional cards their Facebook traffic in terms of views, likes, tags and comments would increase dramatically. Photographer 3 attributed this partly to the 'fairly crazy' photos they uploaded, and expressed surprise at the provocative nature of the poses of many of the intoxicated clubbers in the photos.

The watermarked images are micro-advertisements that circulate through Facebook. As clubbers tag themselves and their friends the image becomes further embedded into peer networks online. A photographer indicated that the watermark not only promoted the venue and photographer, it also enabled clubbers to indicate to their friends that they were at particular venues and were photographed by certain photographers (photographer 7). Consumers' creation and circulation of their own identity and social relations becomes coextensive with the surveillance and promotional mediation activities of brands and venues. By engaging with consumers within the entertainment precinct brands and venues both write themselves into the mediation of social life on Facebook and stimulate the production of online social networks that they can access, track and respond to.

### **Watching as alienation**

Nightlife photographers assemble and register a social network that can be watched. Databases capture and modulate identities (Zwick and Knott 2009). Zwick and Knott (2009) argue that databases produce rather than discipline consumers. In their account, databases enable a 'modulation' of consumers, by which they mean databases enable forms of marketing based on 'stimulation, movement and flexibility' rather than 'surveillance, enclosure and control'. Clough (2008: 48) argues databases and affect are interrelated in modes of production that modulate 'the affective background of a way of life' rather than rely on forms of symbolic and ideological control. The value of a database then is its capacity to determine how identities are continuously assembled in relation to each other, cultural practices and social spaces. The databases of social media rely on

consumers and cultural labourers who create media texts that link together identities, practices and places. The nightlife photographer begins the affective and relational work of registering these relationships in databases. The subjects of their images add information with views, tags, likes and comments. The data the nightlife photographers register enriches other data that social media platforms might have. They add layers of understanding and interpretation based on their affective judgments.

The photographer's affective ability to find, collect, upload and tag the image combined with Facebook's analytic ability to extract further information about it, enables the platform to become more flexible and responsive in the way it predicts and targets over time. This labour is affective because Facebook doesn't need to understand in a meaningful way how or why that individual, bar or brand is 'cool' or 'credible'. Facebook just needs to know that the individual, social space and commodity are related and recognised by others. Facebook doesn't need to know any of the particular knowledge the nightlife photographer employs to create and circulate the image. Facebook just needs to know the nightlife photographer can make these particular judgments about individuals and social life and channel them into the general circulation of meaning, attention and affect within the databases of social media.

Nightlife photographers exploit their identities, the identities of their peers, the sociality of nightlife and their communicative capacities in the course of their work. They use their own appearance, bodies, and sexuality, and capitalise on the attention, desire and intoxication of others, to do their work. This might involve the deliberate management of affect – their identities, social relations and emotions – to give and gain attention. More fundamentally however, their work contributes to the deepening interrelationship between cultural life and the surveillance economy. Mark Andrejevic (2011: 286) argues that social media surveillance is exploitative because interaction generates data that users create but cannot control. The data generated through their images, tags, likes, comments and shares is an 'alienated or estranged dimension of their activity' because 'to the extent that this information can be used to predict and influence user behaviour it is an activity that returns to users in an unrecognisable form as a means of fulfilling the imperatives of others'. To this we might add that the form of alienation we see in the practices of nightlife photography is one that begins with photographers exploiting the 'will to image' of the subjects of their photographs (Hearn 2008: 210). As the photographers described, consumers actively seek out opportunities to be in the images because they know they will be circulated online. The desire to be seen and felt in peer networks produces texts that assemble social networks online. Those social networks are used to



predict and modulate social life. The nightlife photographer contributes to the wider circuits of exploitation and alienation that social media, mobile media and entertainment precincts create. Exploitation and alienation begins with the fundamental desire to affect: to be seen and felt by others. Social media is capable of exploiting this affect in general, regardless of the particular sentiments subjects might embody. Nightlife photographers are not instructed to find particular cool identities, but just identities that want to be seen and that others want to see. This is a form of cultural labour that controls and exploits not with the content of particular ideas and identities, but by doing the labour of pushing a general circulation of affect through platforms where they can be managed and modulated.

The nightlife photographer capitalises on both the 'will to image' (Hearn 2008) of clubbers and their own affective, social and communicative capacities to create online networks. Following critiques of creative and cultural work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011), the work of nightlife photographers might be considered exploitative because they often aren't paid, work in precarious and informal circumstances, and commodify their own identities and social relations and those of others. Importantly, nightlife photography gives a sense of pleasure, enjoyment and status to both the photographers and the subjects of their images. Exploitation is not however 'incompatible with a sense of enjoyment or pleasure' (Andrejevic 2011). Once images are registered online and subjects interact with them they contribute to the modes of exploitation-as-alienation enabled by the predictive analytics of social media (Andrejevic 2011). In fact, each of these circuits of exploitation relies on the enjoyment and pleasure of the work and the sociality of nightlife. Nightlife photographers might see their photography as producing a portfolio that may lead toward more meaningful forms of cultural labour. Significantly though, in the process of creating this body of work they produce texts that facilitate other forms of exploitation beyond just the precarious circumstances they work in taking, editing and uploading the images.

Observing the role that social media surveillance plays in affective modes of control (Andrejevic 2011) and social discrimination (Turow 2011), Kennedy (2012) calls for more research of social media surveillance work. Examining the productive surveillance of nightlife photographers in entertainment precincts helps to demonstrate how social media surveillance goes beyond targeting content based on information users enter, their social connections, or meta-data about their movements through urban space. The affective labour of nightlife photography illustrates another significant dimension of the circuits of labour, alienation and exploitation that underpin participatory modes of surveillance, promotion and branding. Nightlife photography suggests that

the analytical capacities of social media databases and the modes of promotion and branding they facilitate depend in the first instance on the capacity to exploit affect. The calculative and predictive capacities of big data depend in part on affective labourers who can assemble connections between social life and databases (Clough 2009, Lury 2009). Affective labour is central to connecting open-ended forms of cultural production with the technical capacities of big data. This examination of nightlife photography points to the need for further exploration of forms of cultural work where labourers produce value by stimulating and channelling an ongoing and open-ended circulation of affect through media platforms, networks and databases.

### **Acknowledgements**

Charlotte Nolan and Michelle Shaul worked as research assistants on this research project. Thank you to Mark Andrejevic for the helpful advice on this manuscript.

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<sup>i</sup> These observations are drawn from interviews with clubbers about surveillance and social media practices around nightlife in the Valley. Research interns conducted 22 interviews.