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## The White City

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## **Cover Page Footnote**

Thanks to Literature Wales for funding towards the research of this project.

## The White City

[see audio download: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/thegoose/vol14/iss1/31/> ]

### Notes on the Text

*The White City* is a guidebook, or map, towards a participatory sensing expedition through the streets of Rhydyfelin, a suburb of Pontypridd in the South Wales Valleys, in search of the White City. This audio guide presents a selection of streets from the guidebook alongside a recording of a walk along the route described in the text. The guidebook is available from Aquifer Press: <http://glasfrynproject.org.uk/w/3387/coming-soon-2/>

I moved to Rhydyfelin in December 2012 and began to reterritorialise through a process of defamiliarisation, conducting dérives around the area and consulting local history books and old Ordnance Survey maps in the library. I found out that ‘the White City’ was a name once used to describe the area around Lime Street, Holly Street, Elm Street, Plane Street and Oak Street. It is unclear why the area was known by this name. It seemed incongruous to refer to this small post-industrial suburb as a city.

Shortly after moving to Rhydyfelin I had a dream that I had written a book called *The White City*, prompted, I think, by reading the William Burroughs book, *The White Subway*, published by Aloes Books in 1973. I described this dream to John Maher as we walked along Holly Street and he referred to “the imperceptible White City whose restless soul creaks under the bulk of sweaters on washing lines and children’s plastic balls and which expands and bulges despite the proliferation of double glazing and junk-full attics and the mournful silences...” (personal communication, 9/3/2013).

The idea of the ‘imperceptible city’ chimed for me with Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities*. When I googled ‘the imperceptible city’ I found an article called ‘Sensory Threads: Perceiving the Imperceptible’, which begins, “As we move through the world in which we live we are surrounded by a myriad of imperceptible phenomena such as high and low frequency sound and non-visible light” (Bryan-Kinns 1). The bibliography references another article entitled ‘Participatory Sensing for Urban Communities’, which describes participatory sensing as “the principal supporting technology to enable grass-roots groups and communities to track and act on information about their local environment” (Airantzis 1). I connected these to Robert Barry’s site-specific installations which make use of imperceptible nylon threads.

I began to think of the project as a participatory sensing expedition into the imperceptible city. Instead of producing the tome-like book of my dream, I would collage my notes from my dérives into the photocopies of library books and old maps to produce a guidebook – to publish the notes as a starting point, so that the book and the city might remain imperceptible, still to be found.

I am interested in the ways in which you might walk *The White City*, imaginatively in reading the texts, and perhaps physically, by superimposing it onto your present environment. This audio tour guide offers one way into the city: a recording of a walk along one of the routes offered by the text. The audio recorder takes imprints of the environment – cars, birds, wind – as it traces its way through the space of the text, registering changes in atmosphere as we turn down a different street, move from page to page.

#### Works Cited

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**STEVEN HITCHINS** lives in Rhydyfelin, Pontypridd. His publications include *Bitch Dust* (Hafan, 2012), *Real Radio* (Gwasg CAD Press, 2014) and *The White City* (Aquifer, 2015). He has performed at the Hay Poetry Jamboree in Hay-on-Wye, Poets Live in Paris, the Bath Arts Fringe Festival and the North Wales International Poetry Festival. He runs The Literary Pocket Book small press, publishing experimental poetry in miniature origami editions: [literarypocketblog.wordpress.com](http://literarypocketblog.wordpress.com)