

# LIGHT AT NIGHT

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH DARKNESS?

Chantal Meng

Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies  
Goldsmiths, University of London

I, Chantal Meng, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own.  
Where I have consulted or presented the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

February 2024

## ABSTRACT

In urban night settings, the darkness available in our environment is less a choice than a given. Technological progress, city growth, and politics have reduced our access to darkness, radically changing our perception of it. It is imperative to understand the influence of urban illumination as this force continues to reshape our approach to the matter of darkness.

This research examines the under-investigated question of how artificial light affects the presence and absence of darkness in the nocturnal cityscape. Most studies on nighttime lighting address safety issues, light pollution, and loss of darkness, but there is little discussion of how darkness is also created by, and understood through, lighting practices. This thesis calls for an overhaul of the city's nighttime light infrastructure and a re-vision of dark atmospheres.

This practice-based investigation presents a new concept of *urban darkness*. It unfolds through photography, drawing, and, finally, an exploration of storytelling—three media that have significantly contributed to understanding how light shapes our perception of darkness. My photographic work shows how our understanding of images is shaped by the effects of shadow and light. The collective Night Drawing practice I lead fosters embodied experiences of the night that transcend visual representation. And 'Good Night', the story, weaves together historical facts and fictional imagination.

This study offers a critical-creative reflection on the matter of darkness as it relates to our spatial awareness and aesthetics of the night environment. The analysis is situated at the intersection of theory and practice, a philosophy of atmospheres, and media ecology. It demonstrates how to build darkness with light and what can and cannot be seen in light at night. The result is a framework for visual thinking that responds to urban design and argues that spatial representation requires embodied, practical engagements, and attentive exploration of the visual world.

The bright presence is oft retrospective.  
Yet, this star logic has another side to it:

The bright presence of a star is often the appearance of light  
that has traveled from what, in the present, is a dead star.  
Events and constellations that no longer exist may impact  
our lives, appearing to take place in the present.

(Kenaan 2020:4)

## CONTENTS

Prologue	6
Introduction: <b>Navigating Urban Darkness</b>	10
Glossary	22
Chapter Breakdown	24
1. METHODOLOGY	
<b>I Think in Pictures</b>	<b>26</b>
1.1. Urban Darkness: Framework	
1.2. Photography: Method I	
1.3. Drawing: Method II	
1.4. Fabulation: Method III	
1.5. Practice-Based Work: Guide	
1.6. Ethics: Reflections	
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	
<b>Looking at Darkness</b>	<b>49</b>
2.1. Visual Darkness	
2.2. Spatial Darkness	
2.3. Shaded Darkness	
2.4. Political Darkness	
3. PHOTOGRAPHY	
<b>Through the Lens: Searching for Shadows</b>	<b>89</b>
3.1. Part I — Shapes	
3.2. Part II — Shades	
4. DRAWING	
<b>Night Drawing: Re-writing the Light</b>	<b>133</b>
4.1. Night Drawing as Concept	
4.2. Drawing as Gesture	
4.3. Night Drawing in Action	
4.4. Facts & Figures	
4.5. Marks on Paper	
Epilogue: <b>Good Night</b>	170
Conclusion	196
Acknowledgments	213
Bibliography	215

## PROLOGUE



[1] Meng, C. (2013) *Nightshade*. [Analogue photography].

Hello darkness, my old friend  
I've come to talk with you again ...<sup>1</sup>

About ten years ago, I moved to another country. I arrived in London, a city with a slightly larger population than that of the whole country I grew up in. I came here for a Master's program, Photography and Urban Cultures, in the Sociology department at Goldsmiths, University of London. I grew up in Zimmerwald (a mountain village with roughly 800 inhabitants at the time), which is located across the hilly terrain of the Gantrisch area in the canton of Bern. By 2019, the Gantrisch area was officially certified as the first controlled Dark-Sky Park in Switzerland. Living in London has significantly changed my perception of the night. Especially towards the dark, and not simply that:

---

<sup>1</sup> Simon, Paul, and Garfunkel, Art, 'The Sound of Silence' (1964).

darkness made me uneasy, which was new. This is when and how this journey began, and the following question has stuck with me ever since: to what extent does the environment we build affect our behaviour, ideas, fantasies, and fears—and can it change them?



[11] Night Drawing event, Mile End Park. London. (2018) Photo: © Lucy Parakhina.

Darkness does not simply mean the absence of light: it is also brought about by light's presence. The artificial light at night—which primarily intends to dispel the darkness—also gives darkness a new visual impression. Darkness emerges in urban spaces inasmuch as it is cast in the shadows of artificial light. When I walk, observe, draw, or take photos in the densely built-up environment of a city at night, I do not notice any darkness in the sky. The sky is not dark, but shimmering—sometimes it is milky orange, sometimes soapy blue, sometimes virtual green. The opposite contrasting tones of darkness that I encounter present themselves in the shadows of urban forms, in the trees and buildings that provide shade from artificial lighting.

My interest in the question of nocturnal illumination, and in particular 'the matter of darkness', is driven by my encounters with, and experiences of, living in very contrasting environments. My understanding of and fascination with the urban night and its representation through light is, moreover, a visual understanding informed by my years

of practice as a photographer and my work as a graphic designer in the advertising industry. Dealing with the light at night follows my passion for architectural formations, graffiti painting, and artists who use the urban environment as a visual platform. But it also reflects my concerns about the powers of real estate marketing, city politics and development, and control mechanisms—and therefore equal access to space. These include issues of health and wildlife, as well as our cognitive, kinaesthetic, and aesthetic engagement with the environment.

As an artist, my drive is to renegotiate habits and shift perspectives, all to gain a deeper understanding and a critical view of the impulses, consequences, and manipulative operations of global powers. This project springs from my deep fascination with and concern for the exploration and questioning of architectural epicenters. I'm particularly drawn to influential, high-cost metropolises like London and New York—cities that wield significant influence in shaping human ideas and worldviews. This undertaking has led me to live in major capitals; first on a boat along London's canals and later in a Brooklyn apartment, where I found myself stuck longer than anticipated due to a pandemic. Consequently, these life experiences have profoundly shaped my subsequent work and thinking, offering alternative perspectives that challenged my 'ways of seeing' as much as they revealed new insights.

While residing in these metropolises, traces of photography transformed into echoes of infrastructure: my new environment, coupled with the architectural landscapes surrounding me, merged with memories of postcard images and films portraying these places. Stepping into the visual realms of both New York and London felt like entering a replication of something I had seen but never truly experienced. As I explored these urban landscapes at night, a theatrical and picturesque panorama unfolded before my eyes. This newfound awareness of my perceptual senses compelled me to scrutinize even more closely, intensifying my interest in spatial design and the absence of darkness. It wasn't only the allure of nocturnal light with its captivating and impressionistic qualities that intrigued me, but also the enigmatic influence of political and financial forces and their machinations that occupied my thoughts. Urban lighting remains a central concern propelling my practical work and exploration through photography, drawing, and storytelling to this day. Through these media, I seek to discern the representations encountered within the complex interplay between the visible and the visual.

In the journey that follows, I turn to the night's illumination to explore how darkness and shadow are pivotal in understanding human visual perception and expression. My

primary goal is to foster awareness of artificial light visual phenomena manifested in the visible, constructed environment that surrounds us. As part of my research process, I strive for an ecological perspective on visual perception, one closely tied to our environment. Instead of seeking definitive answers to the complexities of perceiving our surroundings, my intention is to revisit the representation and imagery of darkness mirrored in our urban design, and, not least, to discuss alternative ways of encountering darkness in the urban nightscape.

Photography, drawing, and, as we shall see, storytelling, serve as practical methods and experimental tools in developing a deeper aesthetic understanding of the nocturnal urban environment. I examine nocturnal lights as critical components in the design of environments that profoundly impact our surroundings, intending to uncover alternative perceptions and possibilities to re-evaluate our understanding of 'the matter with darkness.' I turn my attention to the light at night to illustrate how perceptions of darkness and shadow have been and continue to be shaped by the interplay of image expression and artificial lighting methods. In capitalist cities of urban hopes and dreams like London and New York, I observe the multifaceted shades of nighttime light, seeking to investigate the tangible dimensions of darkness and how its atmosphere asserts itself within the cityscape. [Fig. I-I]

## NAVIGATING URBAN DARKNESS

How does artificial light shape our experience and imagination of darkness in the urban night? What role does light play in the pictorial representation and visual perception of (urban) darkness? To what extent does the urban night lightscape create atmospheric impressions, and how are these materially and visually interwoven? And how can we then negotiate traces of light (and also shadow, as the two are inextricably linked) in the visible and visual? These questions of visual understanding demand our attention—the sustainable and imaginable future of our habitats and our society is at stake.

In today's urban environment, where new lighting technologies reshape our experience of the urban night, it has never been more important to understand the socially mediated nature of our nocturnal lives. This also means more closely examining the aesthetic and atmospheric consequences of nocturnal lighting. Artificial light has recently changed our perception of the night, diminishing darkness at a rapid pace. This transformation is particularly noticeable in urban settings, where encounters with darkness are increasingly rare. Countless factors—fear and myth, protection and safety, mobility, and economy—have, over the years, pressured us to make the night ever brighter. But brightening the night also has its complications. In social housing, for example, light can mark an area as a less valuable space for less valuable people, while neighbourhoods where it is dark at night become a luxury and retreat from daily sensory overload (Entwistle and Slater 2019:13; Sloane, Slater, and Entwistle 2016:7).

The city's nighttime lighting infrastructure has a significant impact on the environment and its surrounding landscape, on our encounter with darkness, and on our perception of it. Lighting motivations that aim at 'visibility' and a certain 'look'—the best possible representation in the spotlight—essentially refer to aspects of power as well as to the imprinting of visual impressions as we find them in images. The light of the urban space at night must be seen and examined in this context. My research focuses on the extent to which our perception of darkness in the urban night is shaped by motifs of visual representation that reflect lighting strategies, urban politics, architecture, and design. The questions concern habits of seeing and practices of visual representation that

influence actions and deeds, impressions, and effects of the urban light night environment and its habitat.

The methodological approach of this research project arises from pictorial thinking and navigating darkness through this lens. It is a visual study that employs artistic methods to explore light properties and reinterpret the visual manifestation of darkness in the urban night. This endeavour demonstrates how photography, drawing, and, not least, storytelling crucially contribute to aesthetically comprehending the urban nocturnal environment. These media provide useful practical tools for investigating alternative forms of perception and interactions with the environment.

Ultimately, this research aims to rethink and reimagine visual impulses for representing the world in light. The focus is on observing and exploring the representation of the urban night through light and its impact on spatial and social conditions, as well as recognizing the influential power of the presence or absence of darkness and light alike. This study explores the production of vivid visible contrasts as well as subtle atmospheric effects that result from the lights at night. It is crucial to critically re-examine the influence of urban lighting, as these forces and motivations of the city's lights continue to decisively shape our approach to darkness. Architect Peter Zumthor writes: 'Sensing, smelling, touching, dreaming in the dark—that's just not enough. We want to see. But how much light do people need to live? And how much darkness?' (Zumthor 2006b:90).

### **Research Rationale**

It is urgent to examine what darkness actually means today and how it is, and can be, practised. Darkness has, of course, been analysed extensively, from psychological, religious, racial, and ethnic research to philosophy, art, urban sociology, planning theory, and environmental studies. Much research over time has also focused specifically on the nighttime illumination of urban landscapes (e.g. Isenstadt 2018; McQuire 2005; Norman 2019; Schivelbusch 1995; Schlör 1998; Shaw 2018), while the loss and displacement of darkness through lighting strategies and technology is also widely discussed in numerous research areas (e.g. Bronfen 2013; Edensor 2017; Nye 2010; Tanizaki 2001; Virilio 2009). In recent years researching darkness has gained a certain popularity, not least because it is sometimes seemingly used as a topic to attract attention. However, research that laments the loss of darkness (e.g. Beaumont 2016; Bogard 2013; Dunn 2016; Ekirch 2006) rarely addresses the fact that light can create a

new aesthetic of darkness. The consequences, as well as the possibilities, of artificial darkness caused by artificial light, have so far been underexplored.

Artificial illumination has changed the very landscape of cities at night, shaping our lives as well as our ways of understanding and acting (e.g. Schivelbusch 1995). Various scholars illustrate how human activity has transformed the urban night. Especially since the industrialisation of the West, the appearance of cityscapes such as London, Paris, and New York at night have changed into an aesthetic staging of architecture, revealing a spectacle of modernity (Debord 2005; Isenstadt, Petty, and Neumann 2015; Koslofsky 2011; Nye 2018; Schlör 1998). Today, many metropolitan areas glow at night, largely in response to evolving expectations of a city's economy, tourist attractions, mobility, and safety (e.g., Stone 2018; Straw 2015; Yang, Berry, and Kalms 2022). Urban residents are now subject to round-the-clock activity, affecting their sleep patterns, attitudes to work, and nighttime routines (Crary 2014). At the same time, there is a growing recognition that urban areas have become over-lit (e.g. Bille 2019; Edensor 2017; Entwistle and Slater 2019; Slater 2017; Sumartojo 2022). These shifts within the perception of the nocturnal landscape serve as a background and rationale for this research project.

Nocturnal illumination remains a pressing topic, demanding novel approaches and future research in various fields of study (e.g. Bille 2019; Edensor 2017; Franzen 2015; Schulte-Römer et al. 2018; Sumartojo 2022; Wu et al. 2011). There are currently extensive and controversial debates about public lighting and security, as street lighting does not prevent crime per se and bright light at night can also create a sense of danger, which in turn means that the fear of bright neon light is also a problem (e.g. Bille and Jørgensen 2022; Chalfin et al. 2022; Entwistle and Slater 2019; Kortava 2021; Riggs 2014). While darkness remains an essential condition of human and animal life alike (e.g. Bolton 2015; Brei, Pérez-Barahona, and Strobl 2016; Chepesiuk 2009; Stidsen et al. 2011), we are not nocturnal animals. There is often a fundamental discomfort for humans in the dark, and as Zumthor (2006b:90) states, it is difficult to say how much light and darkness the future night should offer.

Certainly, it would be short-sighted to posit that the darkness holds no dangers, or that walking home in the dark is as safe as going home in a lighted environment. However, light pollution touches on broader climatic and social issues that are closely linked, not only to the night politics of cities, but also to the visual power that influences spatial appearance and representation, and thus human and non-human life.

Designing the night with light requires attention to traces of light, lighting moods, and their effects. Such spatial conditions are highlighted by scholars such as Gernot Böhme (2014, 2017), Tonino Griffero (2016), Tim Ingold (2016), Brian Massumi (1995), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2005), Tim Morton (2007, 2018), Juhani Pallasmaa (2011, 2012), and Jean-Paul Thibaut (2011, 2015). Much of this literature relates to human encounters and experiences with spatial, particularly architectural, situations. It is argued that the environments we encounter and our perception of them, whether through direct physical encounters or at more abstract, conceptual, political, economic, subjective, or imaginative levels, invariably exert an affective influence on our lives and our experience of our surroundings. We not only see but also feel spatial situations; this equally applies to light and its atmospheres (e.g. Stokkermans et al. 2018).

### **Research Questions**

How can we better understand the socially mediated and visually contested nature of light in our nocturnal lives? How can we rethink our behaviour towards light at night and our relationship to darkness?

We have learned to perceive (and render things visible) through light—consider photography or nighttime urban lighting, where exposure plays a crucial role in shaping appearances. Consequently, we partially comprehend our environment through pictorial representations. The question arises: if we find parallels to our life experiences in photographs, can we not argue that life experiences are also inherently photographic? Are they not shaped visually by images? What implications does this hold for the design of urban spaces and their nocturnal imagery? Furthermore, what lies beyond the visual spectrum—that is tactile, olfactory, and more? At what cost do we increase brightness to improve our vision? And what do we sacrifice in our perception as a consequence of this brightness enhancement (e.g., Crary 2001; Jay 1994; Pallasmaa 2011; Simmel 2010)?

What follows does not promise a solution to the manifold complications of nocturnal urban illumination but aims to trigger a change of perspective and see darkness in a new light. What is decisive is how visual forms of expression and representation convey nocturnal sensations and impressions with the help of light. Not least, how brightly lit landscapes also create dark atmospheres and shadow formations. I will call these consequences of artificial lighting that creates artificial darkness ‘urban darkness’.

This research project is designed to examine how city lighting at night affects our notions and experiences of darkness. My questions explore the extent to which our perceptions of darkness (in the real world and in images/art) are intertwined. The following studies examine our current perception of darkness in urban spaces and propose practice-based methods to argue that the 'dark image' and aesthetics of darkness need to be recontextualized. My investigation focuses on nocturnal light in urban space, particularly the high-contrast, artificially lit milieu of the modern city. I am interested in how the urban night, with its light and dark areas, is designed, defined, navigated, and perceived. Crucial to this is how the visual, nocturnal sensations and impressions of brightly lit landscapes also create dark atmospheres and shadow formations.

The purpose of this investigation is to address gaps in the perceptible consequences of urban lighting design at night by expanding our perceptual understanding and aesthetic experience of it. Foregrounding the visual language triggered by light follows the key problem that drives my practice: namely, how to see darkness from a new perspective and review its presence and prejudices in the urban night. What role does our image-centric visual comprehension play, along with the symbolic forms reinforced by nighttime illumination? Light, darkness and their overlapping and interacting shadow formations are closely connected. These forms shape our perception of the world, our sense-making processes, and our interactions within it.

My practice-based approach serves to illustrate and explore how visual features—the way in which nocturnal urban environments are represented by brightness—influence our perception towards the dark in the city. Consequently, this research examines how habits and practices of visual and spatial representation methods can sustainably influence and shape our living space, our ecological system and our coexistence. Following this is a method, a practice of critical pictorial inquiry that demonstrates visual modes of representation connecting the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional, the visual and the visible.

### **Research Objectives**

To explore the mentioned questions, this project aims to reconceive darkness in the nocturnal urban landscape by closely intertwining architectural and pictorial considerations. The investigation strives to review how darkness appears in the urban night on various levels of visual representation and how ideas of 'the brighter, the better' manifest within it. This research is practice-based and driven by a pictorial mode of

thinking. The following study is informed by an innovative methodological approach that encourages the revision and generation of new ideas regarding the conception of darkness and shadows during nighttime. The approach connects socio-political questions with the investigation of urban lighting design methods and their motivations. It explores the borders between mediated and unmediated ‘night-light-scapes’ by analysing ecologies of perception, representation, cognition, and imagination while calling into question the binary distinction between darkness as an ‘unmediated’ space and light as a ‘mediated’ one.

The relationship between the visible and the visual merits further consideration (e.g. Kenaan 2020); namely, that which is often overlooked when it comes to how darkness finds its place in the urban nightscape. While the ‘visible’ pertains to what we perceive in the urban space at night (i.e., architecture, light, darkness), the ‘visual’ refers to its translation into a visual representation, such as drawing or photography. Through my visual explorations, I establish a connection between the two. In other words, the exploration focuses on how images shape our physical surroundings rather than how images represent our physical surroundings. By exploring the potential of light and shadow, as well as their obstacles, from this perspective, we can rethink light and darkness in the urban night. This approach serves as a critical analysis of environmental thinking, urging us to consider media as environments (e.g., Bennett 2010; Peters 2016) and to reflect on how these surroundings relate to ‘different types of spatial and quasi-spatial experience’ (Heise 2002:167).

Artificial light is a dynamic social agent, acting through its relationship to people, places, architecture, colour, contrast, and shadows. This research responds to the current state of our perception of nocturnal lightscapes, spatial notions of darkness, visual and aesthetic patterns, and their impact on the perception of urban luminosity. The project’s goal is to redirect attention and observations toward the aesthetic and atmospheric qualities of light, embracing the positive attributes of darkness while also exploring the implied application of such atmospheric aspects (e.g. Böhme 2017).

Traces of light evolve within shadow scenarios, prompting an exploration of invisible qualities like lightscapes of gloom and shadows. This involves considering embodied perception and fostering the creation of imaginative spaces. The arguments put forth in this research seek to explore alternative ways of perceiving and renegotiating attitudes and practices related to nocturnal light. Visual examinations of the aesthetic atmospheres of light in the urban nightscape are conducted through drawing and

nighttime photography, culminating in a storytelling method that blends experiences, facts, and events with imaginative and speculative elements—what I refer to as fabulation. These three media—photo, drawing, story—have not only played an important role in the past but might also be relevant for the future, collectively contributing to our understanding of how light influences our perception of darkness.

### **Research Framework**

To understand how illuminating darkness influences urban cultures, a critical examination of how visual representations impact spatial atmospheres is essential. This research framework prioritizes aesthetics from key perspectives—philosophical, political, and ethical. It recognizes the equal influence between subjects and objects, individuals and buildings, such as articulated by Guattari (1995) and Massumi (2002). Urban open spaces, including artificial light and shadows, are approached as independent agents with unique characteristics, responsive to events, movements, gestures, and voices (Bennett, 2010). This exploration is particularly relevant in shaping the visual appearance of the urban environment through light.

This foundation serves to broaden our understanding of the process of artificial naturalization of our environment. Its inquiry involves exploring methods to question and, ultimately, letting go of the concept of the ‘nature self’ (Morton 2007:204). In doing so, I challenge attitudes that attempt to separate humans from everything else by assuming that nature occurs elsewhere. Contemporary ecological research, represented by various approaches and perspectives (e.g., Bennett 2010; Böhme 2017; Latour 1993; Morton 2007), converges on the idea that the clear distinction between artificial and natural has become untenable since the Anthropocene, which I trace back to the beginnings of agriculture. Consequently, pristine nature no longer exists; human impacts have significantly shaped our habitat, resulting in substantial geological and ecosystem consequences.

Darkness, especially ‘urban darkness,’ must be examined in this context. The night, often taken for granted as dark and conceived as a lightscape, requires investigation and reflection on the associated presence and absence of darkness in the city. The idea of a dark night has clashed with urban perspectives and needs not only recently. This research examines how artificial light influences or even prompts darkness in the urban night. To show how darkness builds up through light and shadow is not least to question

what can and cannot be seen in the light of night. I use the framework of ‘urban darkness’ to illustrate this dualism.

My drive to critically question the effects of city lights at night is linked to my understanding of the role of visual impressions and the process of their creation. As a visual artist, I start my research by looking. For me, this means not only observing what we see but also how we get to see it and what we do not or cannot see. My concerns about night lighting and visual presentation are not least rooted in my graphic design training on the effectiveness of visual messages and my year-long work as an art director in the industry. These experiences in the field of visual communication and marketing led me to explore the appearance of darkness in the urban night. The industry has shaped my awareness of the manipulation of effects through visual methods, while my work as a curator and artist has strengthened my belief that aesthetic experiences make a crucial contribution to our lives.

The aim of developing the visual-theoretical framework, termed ‘urban darkness,’ is to unveil the visual-spatial interaction, capturing the atmospheric experience and aesthetics of the modern urban night. Examining light effects and consequences—the genesis of what I term ‘urban darkness’—is crucial, revealing that presentation through light not only creates but also shapes traces of perception. It's vital to grasp that darkness in the urban night is not simply a matter of the *absence* of light, but that it is also created by the *presence* of light. Representations of urban night light produce shadows (both visible and invisible), generating tangible atmospheric effects—physically perceptible, although not always as solid as matter.

### **Research Method**

This dissertation builds upon practice-based research into the perception of darkness, employing photography, drawing, and fabulation to embody its visible and invisible aspects. It emphasizes creative, critical, and interdisciplinary thinking, fostering a reciprocal relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical experience. At the intersection of visual culture, phenomenology, aesthetic and atmospheric philosophy, anthropology, and media ecology, the study explores darkness in the urban night within the interactions between built and ‘natural’ environments. These investigations offer insights into the material, aesthetic, sensual, and social dimensions of light atmospheres, extending beyond theoretical and technological frameworks. In this way, the study

establishes a link between epistemological, political, and aesthetic categories within the visual representation of nocturnal light.

I use simple tools—a pen, a camera, and imagination—to observe slowly and closely the visual impulses of urban night light surroundings. Through these research methods, my goal is to challenge preconceived and ingrained modes of perception. Attentiveness to the evolving spatial environment plays a crucial role in this inquiry. My photographic work illustrates how the interplay of shadow and light shapes our comprehension of images. The Night Drawing collective practice I lead fosters embodied experiences of the night beyond mere visual representation. In the cumulative process of storytelling, I critically analyze how narratives are crafted, visualized, and envisioned. Based on this three-part approach, the practice advocates for a speculative exploration of possibilities and boundaries within a creative study of ‘imagery,’ anchored in the development of testing and examining limitations by establishing the concept of ‘urban darkness.’

Building on this concept, I investigate artificial light not only as a medium but also as the medium that creates ‘urban darkness.’ With this approach, I solidify my conceptual link between the *visual*—encompassing pictorial language like photography—and the *visible*, the tangible spatial experience through physical presence and appearance, such as architecture. I strive to shed new light on the hitherto unnoticed occurrences of shadow and darkness in the urban night by calling for innovative ways of dealing with darkness as an active state—one to build with, rather than work against. It is a present condition of light that needs to be treated with care as an enriching source and an integral part of our environment. This research methodology asserts that lighting up the night requires not simply further visual thinking but additional visual exploration. The goal here is also to raise awareness of the limitations of (visual and spatial) representation, challenge conventional lighting methods, and create more space for the imaginary.

### **Research Scope and Its Delimitations**

This research inquiry is to a large extent conceived as a visual study. It is therefore beyond the scope of my investigation to cover the broad field of night safety issues and light pollution, health, discrimination and racism, and the psychological effects of darkness or, more generally, to provide a deeper examination of light poverty and equal access to light. While all these socio-political issues are of critical importance, for now, I focus this research on the question of how the light in the urban nightscape, and its atmosphere of darkness, can and will be perceived in the future. I do this because I firmly

believe that aesthetic experiences, embodied acts, and sensory explorations of the subject of light at night—bright and dark alike—have long-range ethical, environmental, and political implications. For this reason, combining a deeper historical understanding with contemporary visual investigations is essential to further examine the representation of artificial light, its aesthetic legacy, and the creation of ‘urban darkness.’ This approach must include practical and kinaesthetic epistemology (i.e. Alexander 2017); in other words, explorations that also include embodied actions and visual sensory experiences that expand knowledge-making beyond a purely theoretical approach.

It is not the aim of my thesis to ‘canonize’ or maintain darkness in the city, or to criticise urban modernity. Indeed, it would be a misunderstanding to read my work as celebrating natural darkness as some kind of idea for a healthy society. Rather, I seek to expand ideas for future visual thinking, linking with aesthetic environmental experiences and practices related to city lighting at night. I strive to challenge our habits of overexposure to artificial light, as I believe shaking up the habitual can enable the emergence of innovative and sustainable approaches to how we live in the world.

### **Research Outcome and Contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis contributes to knowledge by presenting both a theoretical conceptualization and a practical, inventive methodology (including photography, drawing, and fabulation) for re-evaluating darkness in the urban nightscape. The entire analysis is framed by the concept of ‘urban darkness,’ illustrating different perspectives on and imaginations of dark landscapes through the interplay of light and shadows that shape them. This framework allows for a fresh examination of perceptual patterns related to nighttime illumination, considering it both a vital aspect and a historical feature of urban spaces. The research outcome includes a text accompanied by a body of work that explores nighttime light as a mediator in urban nightscapes, influencing our perception of time, movement, and visual awareness in the city.

*Light at Night: What is the Matter with Darkness?* is an extension of the possibilities inherent in qualitative research. The investigations herein develop through a combination of practice-based research and theoretical approaches situated at the intersection of interdisciplinary methods. With the blended conceptual-theoretical and practical approach I employ, I aim to contribute to innovative research methods, propelling us beyond an analytical focus on the past (see also Bal 2021; Haraway 2016; Hawkins 2015; Marres 2015) towards an active exploration in the present. I firmly

believe that practical, collective, experiential, and speculative approaches are urgently needed to introduce new, alternative forms to the epistemology of knowledge. Rethinking the presence of darkness at night and how we can approach it differently necessitates overturning habits; this, in turn, requires new ways of seeing, thinking, and imagining.

My active journeys through the urban night, solo as well as collectively, coupled with the creation of various visual materials, enable me to supplement theoretical knowledge. These experiences initiate discussions and foster the development of ideas that provide opportunities to challenge and rethink the familiar and seemingly non-negotiable. The outcome of this research not only creates space for a better understanding of the visible and visual impact on our environment but also aims to stimulate creativity, critical thinking, and speculation through the introduction of novel, practice-based methods. Methods enriched by kinaesthetic knowledge acquired through active observation, participation, and on-site experimentation. Behavioural patterns require re-examination, and visualization methods need re-visioning to encourage us to imagine our environment and surroundings differently.

In an era marked by numerous acute issues and rapidly evolving challenges, I underscore, through this work, the urgent need for heightened interdisciplinary and collaborative engagement characterized by practical, speculative, and creative approaches. The three-part method developed for this research project yields access and material output in four formats. First, the printed book 'Shadow Typology' (Meng 2023), crafted in collaboration with Small Edition, serves as a vital, tactile commentary, augmenting the textual analysis. Second, the concept of Night Drawing, established through monthly events, creates space for participatory research with a lasting impact. Third, the 'Good Night' story acts as a foundational play script for further exploration, presenting the research in the format of a narrative. Lastly, the website [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net) serves as the foundational archive, incorporating practical contributions such as photographs and drawings, as well as introducing the 'Good Night' story.

Following this introduction on 'Navigating Urban Darkness,' the subsequent sections of this dissertation will delve deeper into the multifaceted dimensions of what is the matter with darkness in the urban night. The exploration begins by introducing my methodological approach and the overarching framework of 'I Think in Pictures.' Following that, the literature review 'Looking at Darkness' delves into the examination

of visual, spatial, shaded, and political darkness. This foundational work serves as the basis for the subsequent chapters, each dedicated to one aspect of the three-part method developed during this research: 'Through the Lens: Searching for Shadows' (photography), 'Night Drawing: Re-writing the Light' (drawing), and the Epilogue 'Good Night' (fabulation).

Illumination methods, technological progress, urban growth, and politics will continuously shape the way we deal with and live with darkness, while light aesthetics and atmospheres radically influence the way we see, live, and, at the same time, affect other living organisms. Through this research, I seek to decipher the meaning and perception of environmental aesthetics but also to contribute to thoughtful urban lighting in the cities of the future. This involves advocating for more conscious interaction with our surroundings and creating space for awareness as well as imagination that doesn't necessarily depend on spotlight presentations.

## GLOSSARY

**Affect** in this study describes our emotional or physical response in a cultural context. It refers to affect theory, a field of research within cultural studies that is considered a key concept for understanding the way people engage with and make meaning of cultural phenomena, as it relates not only to cognitive understanding but also to emotional, visceral, and sensory engagement. The theory is used as the way these emotions shape our understanding and engagement with the world at large.

**Atmosphere** describes that which is sensed but not visible per se, much like light or shadow—perceptible yet invisible, akin to air. Atmospheres resist easy capture through functional or technical features but are nonetheless perceived by observers. In this research, I employ the term to characterize the overall aesthetic or experiential quality of different light conditions in the urban night.

**Bildsprache** is a German term that translates to ‘visual language.’ It encompasses the use of visual elements, including images, symbols, and signs, to convey meaning or messages. Often utilized as a visual framework in the realm of visual communication, Bildsprache finds application in areas such as graphic design, advertising, and illustration. It denotes a genre of visual elements, representing a specific style of visual expression.

**Fabulation** is an avant-garde methodology, seamlessly intertwining experimentation, speculative storytelling, and critical exploration of narrative construction. It connects to literary criticism, serving as a potent tool for dissecting the art of storytelling. In the Epilogue, I employ fabulation through a bedtime story as my third method and form of ‘story-making’.

**Lightscape** refers to the overall lighting conditions and the distribution of light in a specific area or environment. It can include both natural and artificial light sources that encompass the quantity, quality, and direction of light. In an urban context, artificial light sources consist of various elements like streetlights, buildings, billboards, parks, and trees. Lightscape conditions can be observed during daytime and nighttime, shaping the effects of light on the environment and influencing both human and non-human life.

**Nightscape** is the type of landscape that is characterised by the presence of artificial light during nighttime. Nightscapes have a different visual appearance than landscapes viewed during the day, as artificial light sources can create a unique ambient of shadows and reflections. For example, nightscape photography is a genre of photography that focuses on capturing such aesthetics of nighttime scenes, often found in urban areas.

**Ocularcentrism** is the belief that vision and the ability to see are the most important or primary ways to understand and interpret the world. It is the privileging of the sense of sight above all other senses, and the assumption that visual perception is the most reliable and accurate way to understand reality.

**Pictorial** refers to anything related to pictures or visual representations. It can be used to describe something visually striking or vivid, often in a way that resembles or involves images. In a broader sense, the term is also applicable to the design of visual appearances, for example, in the built environment, and thus extends to architecture.

**Spatial** refers to the character of space, encompassing properties such as size, shape, and location, as well as relationships within that space. It can describe the arrangement or distribution of objects within a given space. In the context of 'spatial experiences,' it relates to how a person perceives and moves through the environment, capturing the essence of spatial characteristics and their impact on individual experiences.

**Urban Darkness** serves as the overarching framework in this thesis, establishing my concept for shadow formations and dark atmospheres generated by artificial lighting in nocturnal urban environments.

**Visible** refers to the appearance of three-dimensional objects or structures with a physical presence, often within a specific space, and is perceptible by the body.

**Visual** refers to two-dimensional representations, such as images, photographs, or paintings, presenting information or content in a format primarily perceived by the eye.

## CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

### **1. Methodology: I Think in Pictures**

This chapter serves as an introduction to both the methodology and rationale for the experimental creative practices in my work. It demonstrates how this approach offers a valuable means of questioning and understanding urban lights in the nighttime environment while inviting a fresh perspective on darkness. The chapter lays the foundation for ‘thinking in pictures,’ by clarifying the connection between spatial and visual representation within my overall framework of ‘urban darkness’. The three-part, practice-based method (photo, drawing, fabulation) outlines the visual and creative thinking behind my photographic work, the practice of Night Drawing practice, and the exploration of fabulation in the story ‘Good Night’. Finally, a guideline for my practice is presented, underscoring its overall significance of this research project, followed by ethical considerations for my work.

### **2. Literature Review: Looking at Darkness**

In this literature review, ‘Looking at Darkness’ is examined from four perspectives: visual darkness (1), spatial darkness (2), shaded darkness (3) and political darkness (4). The four sections begin with an analysis, emphasizing the need for a visual understanding of darkness that demonstrates the complicated relationship between light, the historical representation of darkness, and its communicative power at the intersection of the visual with the visible. The chapter looks at how shadows—the creation of darkness through artificial light—extend beyond mere representation, i.e. presentation in the spotlight. It is emphasized that darkness does not only require a natural or aesthetic contemplation. Its perception is a perception of light that has a historical legacy and needs to be examined as a constructed realm with environmental, political, and social consequences. The overarching aim of this literature review is to examine how lightscapes are created in the urban night and to define the concept of ‘urban darkness’.

### **3. Through the Lens: Searching for Shadows**

This photographic essay centres on shadows as pivotal to our contemporary understanding of darkness. Grounded in my photographic studies, the work explores the formation of shadows at night, their properties, and modes of visual translation. The examination introduces a shadow typology derived from my ongoing photographic practice, arguing that a new aesthetic of darkness, emerging from nocturnal illumination, has been overlooked—specifically, the dark areas surrounded by shadows cast by

artificial light. The chapter is divided into two parts: Shapes (I) and Shades (II). It emphasizes both the visibility of light and darkness at night and the invisible aspects of visual translation through photography, all of which are relevant to our current comprehension of darkness in the urban nightscape.

#### **4. Night Drawing: Re-writing the Light**

This chapter is rooted in my Night Drawing project, an integral part of this research. It explores embodied perception through the act of drawing in nocturnal spaces, where time and space are defined by light. Drawing serves as a method to encourage attentive perception and offers a critical and innovative approach to exploring the visible and invisible aspects of nocturnal lighting. Night Drawing invites us to observe and learn within a specific moment in space and time, where the environment, built infrastructure, and light interact with our bodies at the limits of visibility. It becomes an active gesture for studying and redefining our way of seeing. The chapter provides insights into the development of Night Drawing events, elaborating on ‘Night Drawing as Concept’ (1), ‘Drawing as Gesture’ (2), and ‘Night Drawing in Action’ (3). It offers some ‘Facts & Figures’ (4) and concludes with ‘Marks on Paper’ (5), where some of the sketches are discussed.

#### **Epilogue: Good Night**

In the Epilogue, I reflect on the events that unfolded during the decade spent researching nocturnal darkness. Having initially worked with photography and later transitioned to pen and paper, ‘story-making’ has emerged as my third method to navigate various forms of representation associated with contemporary perceptions of nighttime darkness. Presented through the method of ‘fabulation’ in the style of a bedtime story, the narrative intertwines the journey of an urban fox with a dialogue between the darkness and myself. It looks at encounters with darkness and questions the notion that we are the ultimate subjects on this planet. The story moves seamlessly between historical and political facts, personal encounters, and experiences, interweaving imagination and speculation. It serves as an exploration at the intersection of our perception of the environment, reality, and fiction. The narrative strives to critically question the creation of stories, political forces and the representation and narration of darkness. Ultimately, ‘Good Night’ re-examines the motivations, limits, and creations of our imagination.



picture (*Bild*) and language (*Sprache*). *Bildsprache* is a form of communication whose vocabulary is based on pictures. Moreover, *Bildsprache* was the title of a subject I studied as part of my graphic design training. In the field of visual design, *Bildsprache* translates to ‘visual language’, the form of visual communication that aims to describe the expression of a picture through its visual appeal; the appearance and feelings that pictures are meant to evoke. It is a particular ‘image design’, often referred to as visual branding—a technique of marketing. Sometimes the term is also used to categorise or classify a picture within a framework of uniform, consistent pictures. *Bildsprache*, or the visual language of images, plays a crucial role in this research; it is used to explore how the environment is represented by artificial light at night and how this shapes our perception of darkness. ‘Thinking in pictures’ is therefore the starting point for an investigation into the design and representation of the physical environment of urban light scenes at night.

The distinction between ‘picture’ and ‘image’ can be confusing. In this research, ‘pictures’ refer to concrete, object-related physical entities, such as a framed picture, while ‘images’ encompass complex mental constructs, including economic and political concepts, visions, or fantasies. In this context, ‘images’ extend beyond the confines of a ‘picture’ in a frame.<sup>2</sup> I employ *Bildsprache* to critically and creatively engage with the ‘light’ imagery that unfolds before me during my journeys through the urban night. The research methodology I developed for this project aims to uncover new facets of perception, especially within urban night designs that prioritize visual representation, emphasizing the way things look and appear. Critics such as architect Pallasma (2012, 22-23) use the term ‘ocularcentrism’ to express their concern that a focus on vision can displace other sensory experiences such as touch, haptics, or even dream experiences. The focus of this research is on the dominant aspects of human perception through vision, specifically in representing and perceiving things primarily in light.

My methodology critically engages with the prevailing doctrine of architectural design and its emphasis on creating and presenting buildings as impressionistic images. I believe that the priority of focusing on form and appearance is often uncritically maintained in the environments we build, especially in the capitalist cities of the West. The look of such designs becomes even more apparent when the lines and shapes are

---

<sup>2</sup> See also, Hans Belting (2011) when he emphasises that the terms ‘image’ and ‘picture’ are often conflated, but in fact differ in their usage. Belting writes, the ‘image’ might be best understood as a mental frame which needs to be in contact with its beholder, generated by external and internal influences, whereas a ‘picture’ can be categorised more as a form of an object (Belting 2011:9).

illuminated at night. Many philosophers have critically pointed to the dominance of vision over the other senses and how this affects human biases and cognition (e.g. Bergson 2001; Derrida 1993; Kleinberg-Levin 1993; Merleau-Ponty 2005). Concerning the built environment—architectural culture and its design—Pallasmaa describes the central focus on vision and its consequences for human perception as follows:

The invention of perspective representation made the eye the centre of the world of perception and self-concept. Perspective representation itself became a symbolic form that not only described but also conditioned perception. [...] The ocular bias has never been more apparent in the art of architecture than in the past half century, as a type of architecture, aimed at a striking and memorable visual image, has predominated. Instead of an existentially grounded plastic and spatial experience, architecture has adopted the psychological strategy of advertising and instant persuasion; buildings have turned into image products detached from existential depth and sincerity. (Pallasmaa 2012:18)

Pallasmaa argues that the image of the environment needs careful consideration as it transcends its visual dominance: '[...] instead of being a situational bodily encounter, architecture has become an art of the printed image fixed by the hurried eye of the camera' (Pallasmaa 2012:33). Pallasmaa highlights the need to understand the dominance of vision and the importance of exploring the viewer's subjective perceptions and emotional associations with the environment. Architecture is not only experienced through isolated visual images, but is full of integrated material, embodied and spiritual essence, and thus sensory experience. This sensual experience of the environment merges to a considerable extent with the perception of images and creates a human condition of existence (Pallasmaa 2012).

*Bildsprache*—whether created by a designer, artificial intelligence, the built environment, storytelling, or staging a theatre—has a decisive influence on our living space, and consequently, on how we experience urban spatial lighting situations at night, shaping not only our physical environment but also our social and political life. Light (artificial or not, bright or dark) holds not only technical and practical meaning but also symbolic and moral significance. In the context of the night, light serves as a signifier, shaping the way we move, see, feel, and anticipate events in it. Artificial light is more than just a utilitarian medium; it is a politically, economically, socially, ecologically, and aesthetically perceived aspect of the urban night. The way light is used, or its generated landscape seen as *Bildsprache*, is an important aspect to consider when examining

contemporary ideas, actions, and manipulations of the pictorial and imagined nightscapes of light and darkness.

Forward-looking and novel practice-based research methods for engaging with spatial aesthetic conditions have been central to this project from the outset. My practical approach follows that of others (e.g. Arnold 2019; Brice 2018; Brickell 2015; Ulber 2017) where visual material serves as both analysable evidence and a catalyst for wider conversations. My methods (photography, drawing, fabulation) take a speculative approach throughout, foregrounding the experimental in the form of image-making (both pictorial and textual). Using photography and drawing, I gather impressions of the urban night and further explore these through the practice of narrating the bedtime story ‘Good Night’ in the Epilogue. The primary focus is not on the inherent meanings of the resulting images, but rather on a methodology for examining the symbolic and communicative visibility and invisibility of visual representation, including its sensory components, in the context of the bright, urban nightscape.

In the upcoming sections, I clarify the development of my visual studies and their role as a methodology in this research endeavour. I outline my multi-faceted approach to investigating the perceptual and visual dimensions of light and darkness in the urban night, employing a methodological framework rooted in practice-based research.

Starting with my overarching framework, 'urban darkness' (1), I then elaborate on my first practice-based approach, utilizing photography (2). Subsequently, I discuss the second approach, involving collective explorations through Night Drawing (3). This is followed by the introduction to the third method, fabulation, which employs creative and speculative narratives for critical analysis (4). The methodological outline lastly provides an overview of my practical contribution and guidance on engaging with the material (5). The chapter concludes with ethical reflections on my work (6).

## **1.1 Urban Darkness: Framework**

Today, darkness—especially in the urban context—is mostly seen as an absence or a malfunction of artificial light. When it comes to the presence and absence of darkness in urban space, not only is the cultural but also the visual narrative of the night central. The Western view and approach to darkness are culturally, socially, and technologically rooted in Enlightenment thinking as well as the transition due to the Industrial Revolution (Schivelbusch 1995). The mentality of ‘the brighter the better’ has strongly

influenced visual features, foregrounding light (i.e. progress and knowledge) and relegating darkness to the background (i.e. primitive and ignorant). ‘Urban darkness’ explores such mindsets, focusing on spatial representation, which I will argue requires increased practical visual engagement with considerations of aesthetic experiences of the nocturnal habitat.

As previously emphasized, my methodology is rooted in ‘pictorial thinking and making’ as a response to the nocturnal aesthetics shaped by urban design and policies, particularly artificial light. Artificial light influences—or even causes—darkness, casting shadows and thus paradoxically also creating darkness. As described in the introduction, I call this ‘urban darkness’ and use the term for a new conceptualisation—as well as the overall framework of this research project—to see darkness in the cityscape at night in a new light. The aim is to examine the traces of light and highlight the visible and visual relationships, in particular how bright and dark light have pictorial relevance not only in images but also in spatial environments, with shadow as the unifying element. The framework of ‘urban darkness’ serves as a critical-creative reflection on the aesthetics of nocturnal light with the aim of reworking the bright urban nightscape and rethinking dark atmospheres.

Artificial light at night is necessary to work, to socialize, and quite simply to move from A to B. However, the constant overexposure to bright light in modern cities also often prevents direct access and experience with and to darkness. One of the problems is that accessing truly dark spaces has become an elite experience. The task of providing light for all at night is complex—it is both a privilege to not have to grope in the dark and not have to cover windows with trash bags to sleep.<sup>3</sup> Artificial and natural forces simultaneously adapt to and act upon human life. In *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett calls for giving extra attention to the environment of ‘nonhuman forces’ and stresses: ‘One moral of the story is that we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world’ (Bennett 2010:4). My method interacts with the political and social issues related to urban nightscapes and their lighting needs (e.g. Bille, Bjerregaard and Sørensen 2015; Edensor 2017; Entwistle and Slater 2019). New media theorists concerned with the impact of the physical environment on perception, communication,

---

<sup>3</sup> On topics of light consequences on human life, see the articles on darkness ‘Groping in the Dark: The Scotopic Space of Blackouts’ (Isenstadt 2012) and on over-lighting ‘Making Space for “the Social”: Connecting Sociology and Professional Practices in Urban Lighting Design’ (Entwistle and Slater 2019). Additionally, see also social movements like *Take Back the Night* (2020) that aim to increase safety and end violence against women and marginalized communities through night marches, rallies, community gatherings, and advocacy efforts (e.g. Hubbard and Colosi 2015).

behaviour, and habits are therefore relevant to my study of light as a medium (e.g. Fuller 2005; Peters 2016; Martin 2016; Mattern 2021).

Associations and assumptions about encountering darkness in open spaces have become increasingly complicated questions, and the political implications of light also become murky. Critics from different perspectives have worried that technology has robbed us of experiences in nature (e.g. Ekirch 2006; Latour 1993; Nye 1994, 1994; Shapshay 2013). Paul Virilio referred to city lighting at night as a ‘drama’ arising from the human desire for brightness and the consequences of manipulating the night (Virilio 2009:74). Regardless of its intrinsic value, the nocturnal cityscape—and thus the perception of darkness—has been dramatically redefined over the last century and a half. Darkness has literally faded into the background. I will argue that the modern urban dweller has been ‘weaned’ from the perception of darkness; not only by not experiencing it but also by experiencing it through bright light. Exploring, reimagining, and observing ‘urban darkness’ from a visual-creative, practical point of view offers new insights into this matter. As Donna Haraway (2016) suggests, a different story needs to be told, one that challenges assumptions and habits. For example, those who believe voltage provides safety, allows for better vision, and simply provides better views, greater knowledge, and progress. The narrative of light and dark needs to advocate for new and different possibilities where both dark and light can ultimately benefit each other.

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway 2016:12)

‘Urban darkness’ emphasises that illumination and darkness are interconnected and that understanding one requires understanding the other. My work seeks to break with a trivial representation of the urban night as solely bright and illuminated, and to rethink ‘[...] perception as unfixed, nonlinear, embodied, and mobile’ (Zylinska 2017:37). The primary focus of my concept of ‘urban darkness’ is on the shadows; the light at night that creates nocturnal images through the appearance and disappearance of shadows in physical space, specifically within the built environment and architecture. I believe that if we better understand how light also creates a pictorial world of shadow that uniquely shapes and changes our relationship to darkness, we may re-conceptualise our understanding of darkness not simply through visual but also perceptible qualities. I thus

view my practical approach as a chance to tell a different story, to renegotiate our understanding of darkness by bringing together the ‘phenomenological and the tactile within the optical’ (Zylinska 2017:38).

In sum, my methodological framework, specifically developed for this research project, is rooted in an awareness of *Bildsprache*, which shapes our pictorial world. It is a qualitative approach, encompassing practice-based and collaborative work, drawing on interdisciplinary and multi-layered studies that prioritize process-based learning and discovery (e.g. Bal 2021; Bernard 2006; Haraway 2016; Pink 2012; Rose 2007). Additionally, it incorporates elements of media ecology, the philosophy of atmosphere and affect (e.g. Bertelsen and Murphie 2010; Böhme 2017; Guattari 1995; Massumi 1995), and ultimately inquires what ‘thinking in pictures’ means. This research is encapsulated under the framework of ‘urban darkness,’ which will be consistently used throughout this thesis to reconceptualize our understanding of darkness through visual and perceptual qualities. By examining pictorial forms emerging from artificial light representation, especially shadows, this framework allows for a closer examination of the affective and aesthetic effects of light in the urban night environment. It highlights that darkness, both perceptually and visually, is not solely defined by the absence of light, as shadows can also be created by the subtle presence of light.

## **1.2 Photography: Method I**

Traditional photographic analysis has often focused on two key issues: the similarity between the camera and the human eye, and the mechanical process of capturing an image versus our subjective perception of that image. My photographic approach challenges traditional expectations of accurate reproduction and instead aims to reveal the limitations of both the camera’s ability to capture shadowy conditions and our habits of seeing. By intentionally not showing what we expect to see, I question what we actually perceive and what we tend to overlook. Through this, I aim to offer fresh perspectives on our comprehension and observation of darkness in the urban night. I connect photography to both how we see the urban night and how we experience the changing light. I want to explore visual representation through photography to better understand how the medium relates to the shaping of the urban nightscape through light and darkness.

My understanding of photography contradicts the idea that it is (only) indexical and instead emphasises the current intersection of reality and appearance, and how these

intersections affect our actions and perceptions. I look at photography as Rudolf Arnheim once noted: as a co-production between nature and human creativity (Arnheim 1974:159). Or, as André Bazin put it, 'The photograph as such and the object itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint. Wherefore, photography contributes something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it' (Bazin 1960:8). My approach to photography in this research is to challenge the traditional view of photography as 'technical reflection' for documenting, memorising, and representing the world. I do not follow the view that photographic indexicality is a substitute, a sign of what is no longer there (e.g. Peirce 1992). I strive to use photography as a tool for interpreting and understanding the world, rather than simply documenting it.<sup>4</sup>

By utilising the medium's interpretive capabilities, I aim to reveal new perspectives and explore the relationship between what we see and what is actually there. While I am acknowledging that photography is also a limited tool of translation, my approach aims precisely at expanding and intentionally pushing these boundaries; that is, making them visual and thereby gaining new insights. I employ photography to unveil and render visible what it ultimately fails to fully translate visually. In doing so, I aim to cultivate fresh photographic perspectives and explore the connection between our perceptions and objective reality. Rather than viewing photography solely as a means of reproduction or documentation, I regard it as an interpretive tool for scrutinizing our environment and living space. This perspective underscores the significance of critically engaging with the pursuit of a pictorial environment and recognizing photographic images as integral to our existence, rather than mere objects or replicas of reality.<sup>5</sup>

My approach diverges from Barthes's (2010) theory of photography as a mysterious code with hidden meaning and Sontag's (2008) perspective on the revelation of an ambiguous reality leading to physical alienation. Instead, I emphasize the photographic image as an 'instance' of visual representation, distinct from being a copy of a representation or a miraculous reproduction of artistry. Furthermore, my objective is not to dwell on technical advancements or the rivalry between photography and other visual arts like

---

<sup>4</sup> See also Kaja Silvermann when she states that early viewers and practitioners, like William Fox Talbot and his contemporaries, did not use the divergence between what they saw and what the camera showed to establish one as truth and the other as illusion. Nor did they understand that sensory perception and photography interacted through an epistemological refuge in the realm of mental representations. Their understanding was rather that of image-as-text exploration: open to the same world, "their" world, and not seeking to resolve the similarity and ontological difference with the real world (Silverman 2015:27).

<sup>5</sup> The understanding of reality and media is explored in popular culture and critical discourse. The movie *The Truman Show* (1998) directed by Peter Weir and the essay 'In Defense of the Poor Image' by Hito Steyerl (2009) provide similar perspectives on this topic.

painting or drawing. Rather, I seek to harness the potential of photographic forms of representation, using their inherent limitations as a catalyst for discussing our interaction with both the visible and invisible aspects of the urban night environment.

What drives me to ‘do’ photography is how photography and its history have been, and are, understood, used, and communicated. The way I engage with photography in this research—practically and theoretically—has significantly been influenced by the philosophy of Hagi Kenaan (2020), outlined in his book *Photography and Its Shadow*. Like Kenaan, I believe that photography is both a practice and a form of representation that embraces its ontology not only in the taking and presentation of the image but also in the interpretation and engagement with our world in both physical and mental senses—and is thus ‘existential’ (Kenaan 2020:9). My focus on *Bildsprache* aligns with Kenaan’s emphasis on this power of photography and its co-production of meaning between ‘nature’ and viewer:

The fixed shadow denotes photography’s original sensitivity toward the momentary and ephemeral, but also its strong instrumental determination to transform and control natural appearances by subjugating the fleeting instant. What’s unique [...] about photography’s manner of superseding the shadow is not, however, the durable materiality it lends to the image that it captures. It is, rather, the way in which the “killing” of the shadow radically and irreversibly transforms the relationship between human vision and the image—between the visible and the visual—and consequently brings about a new visual order severed from the claims of nature. (Kenaan 2020:9)

Kenaan examines how photography changes but also imitates our understanding and perception of reality. Its ‘shadow’—past, present, and tomorrow—continuously alters our relationship with the world. This idea of photography, its shadow and history, and its future impact on our lives is what I aim to reflect in my concept of ‘urban darkness’; the rather often overlooked impact of shadow traces in our artificially lit urban environments. This will be further explored in Chapter 3, titled ‘Through the Lens: Searching for Shadows’.

From the very beginning, I have tried to photograph something that cannot be easily represented in image form: darkness. This is the crucial contradiction in my photographic practice: to push the boundaries of visual representation. My photographic search for shadows is not about presenting an image of darkness per se, but rather about capturing its ephemeral state, its atmospheric composition, even if it is invisible. My

endeavour reflects the very rarely discussed phenomenology of visual translation in photography (i.e. Petterson 2011). Moreover, I take inspiration from Ansel Adams, who wrote that ‘Many think my photography falls into the category of “realistic,” but the reality that my images have is in their “optical-image accuracy”; their values clearly deviate from reality. The viewer may accept them as realistic because the visual effect is plausible, but if a direct visual comparison with the subjects were possible, the difference would be startling’ (Adams 1981:v).

When I photograph in the urban night, I search for shadows from artificial light that evoke or make visible some of the properties of darkness. I carefully select dark environments to observe how these light-dark atmospheres are created. I seek out features of the landscape, providing shade of artificial light, that offer a variety of shadows and a play of light and dark. Through photography, I try to figure out how these lightscapes are composed. Often parks or other stretches with greenery are the places where I capture shadows and thus darkness in different ways. These places reveal a lot about the lighting conditions of the night and the city and how darkness is or is not created by artificial lighting. The ‘urban darkness’ I explore in my work is often not constant but, like the weather, changeable. I mostly find this ‘matter’ of darkness in environments that are not made of fixed components. For example, it is trees and their foliage and structures that are less solidly built than others, such as highly lit commercial intersections where the tonalities of a dark atmosphere are created rather than erased in its close proximity to the light. Finally, there is a feeling I have in the moment in space—an impulse—where and when I take the picture. Often, I only discover later what I was looking for, that is when the developed film comes back from the lab. And somehow the epiphany is the shadow that creates a darkness that becomes an image.

I have streamlined my use of photography’s technical aspects, drawing from my personal experiences. Presently, I primarily engage in black and white photography, predominantly employing analogue methods. This allows me to capture the light-dark contrast of lighting situations without the distraction of distortion, temperature, tone, and colour. I work with high-sensitivity 3200-ISO film and two very basic cameras: a ‘point and shoot’ camera with flash and an SLR (single-lens reflex camera). This simple equipment permits handheld shooting, granting me freedom without the need to carry around heavy tripods or larger cameras during nighttime. The speed of the film I use is high enough that it fragments rather than absorbs the light. The grain is strong, and this conveys the contrast of the light. It allows me to reflect on the richness and contrast of light—the grey-tone information—with and through the lens. In addition, the rather

coarse grain of the film creates the airy, atmospheric darkness I am looking for. The result is the language I want to speak about light and darkness at night.

I came to this type of photography after trying all kinds of techniques to capture the atmospheric light trails of the night in both rural and urban areas (colour, digital, medium format, and various homemade pinhole cameras). I intentionally avoid including people in my photographs, as my goal is to shift the focus towards the captivating interplay of space, light, and architecture, allowing the atmosphere to take centre stage. It took me quite a while to figure out which photographic method suited my idea and vision of capturing dark light. This process of figuring out my pictorial-photographic language came about, as it often does, through years of experimentation and failure. Sometimes, in several images, the scenes, the black-and-white ‘gestalt,’ and the strong light-dark contrast of the city’s lightscape and atmosphere only became apparent when I viewed the developed photograph. In others, I took two-hour or longer exposures and thought—blindly—that I could depict a landscape in almost absolute darkness. The result was hardly surprising; empty, blank negatives. This moment, I realised years later, was then also the core of this research.

In sum, my first methodological approach, photography, delves into the medium’s inherent boundaries, prompting a reconsideration of its capacity for visual representation and the very essence of photographic translations. My focus on photography revolves around practical application, allowing me to interpret and dissect images while extending traditional photographic theories. My overarching goal is to blur the lines between reality (visibility) and appearance (visuality) to heighten the viewer’s awareness and stimulate their imagination. This process encourages a deeper exploration of the relationship between nocturnal urban lighting, its perception, and its representation.

In sum, my first method of practice, photography, serves as a potent tool for exploring how the medium has shaped our perception and construction of the urban nightscape, including our understanding of darkness. My aim is not just to capture a ‘mirror image’ of reality but to push the medium’s limits, capturing the intangible yet perceptible elements of the urban nightscape, such as the atmosphere of light and shadows. Consequently, the camera acts as a versatile instrument, allowing interpretation, contemplation, and the construction of visual narratives. Artist Hollis Frampton aptly expressed, “The modern world without the image is as unthinkable as the world without

the word” (Frampton 2015:100). To read images effectively, one must approach them with a degree of detachment, recognizing both accuracy and incompleteness.

### 1.3 Drawing: Method II

I use drawing as practice and method in this research to expand the discussion of photography and its representational ability. In their essay ‘Photography, Vision, and Representation’ (1975), Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen point out that modern criticism of photography begins with the process of photography but says little about how it works, and what it does and does not promise. We must ask ourselves whether the photographic process really guarantees much about the relationship between ‘image and imaged’. In doing so, they ask to what extent photography differs from all other forms of image-making (Snyder and Allen 1975:143, 148). My project Night Drawing starts here; it invites participants to explore and record their experience of the night landscape through drawing and sketching beyond the idea of a photographic representation. The intention of Night Drawing, then, is to create a level of awareness towards visual perception that is not least also a physical experience. The method aims to broaden photographic reproduction. In this context, drawing is not intended as a medium of conquest but evolves into an individual, physical experience beyond the purely visual. Drawing has a kinaesthetic sense; while ‘photography is a taking, drawing is a making’ (Taussig 2011, 18-23).<sup>6</sup>

I initiated Night Drawing specifically as a practical method for this research project and officially set up public events in 2018. Since then, I have been organising guided and collaborative drawing events in London and New York. The events are free, open to everyone, announced on the website [nightdrawing.com](http://nightdrawing.com) and posted on various social media platforms. An event usually lasts an hour and consist of 8–15 participants. The project encourages exploration of the relationship between the built environment and our interaction with nocturnal lighting scenarios, aiming to raise awareness of the interplay between visual and sensory perception. The events focus on how our understanding of night is symbolically, visibly shaped by light. It strives to create a sense of uncertainty and to challenge participants’ perceptions of their surroundings. Night drawing juxtaposes conventional narratives of night with on-site experience. During the event, I ask participants to sketch the environment, focusing on light and shadow. Before,

---

<sup>6</sup> As a photographer, I disagree with Taussig’s notion that photography is solely about ‘taking’ a picture, as there is often an embodied engagement involved in the photographic process, especially when intentionally creating images. However, it is fair to say that the apparatus of photography may seem to require less physical effort, particularly when taking quick snapshots.

during, and after the drawing activity, I discuss with participants the specific lighting and atmospheric conditions of the space. Additional details about Night Drawing's practice and events will be provided in Chapter 4, 'Night Drawing: Re-writing the Light.'

The method is shaped by my photographic practice and my original dissatisfaction with the visual translation of nocturnal light atmospheres. My intention in drawing in the dark is both to challenge the boundaries of representation and to address any preconceived images, notions, or ideas that may arise in the mind. The idea is to delve deeper into the relationship between the physical and the perceptual. Through Night Drawing, my goal is to challenge prevailing assumptions about the typical moods of photographic representation. This aligns with the questions posed by Snyder and Allen, who challenge the notion that photography is the sole and most refined form of representation, thereby prompting a reconsideration of the essential 'documentary' questions we urgently need to address (Snyder and Allen 1975:169). Night Drawing challenges the optical dominance (oculocentrism) and photographic perspective that shape the appearance, design, habits and attitudes in perceiving our surroundings.

Numerous scholars in the field of architecture and urban space have recognized the challenges associated with exploring physical experiences related to the aesthetics of the built environment and the atmospheric constellations of light and shadow, extending beyond the realm of representation and symbolic expression (Böhme 2017; Edensor 2017; Griffero 2016; Pallasmaa 2011, 2012; Tanizaki 2001; Thibaud 2015; Zardini 2005; Zumthor 2006a, 2006b). Still others have recognised the need for developing new methods for studying spatial experiences and atmospheric conditions in various environments (e.g. Braungart and Büttner 2018; Psenner 2014; Rauh 2012; Stokkermans et al. 2018; Stokkermans, Vogels and Heynderickx 2016; Ulber 2017; Vogels 2008). To my knowledge today, drawing in the dark, especially in open spaces at night, is seldom practised or discussed.<sup>7</sup> A few exceptions that I am aware of are experiments in blindfolded drawing in art school, artist Denzil Forrester drawing in nightclubs (see Henriques, 2019), or artist Susan Morris (2012) negotiating logic and subjectivity through involuntary drawing in the dark, as well as artist Ivana Franke's (2018) spatial drawings of ephemeral light installations.

---

<sup>7</sup> For an earlier reference in history, see, for example, the artistic explorations of eighteenth and nineteenth century artists in Europe as described in the short sections 'Night Effects', 'Perspective at Night', 'Painting at Night', and 'Drawing in the Dark' in the museum catalogue *Light!* (Blühm and Lippincott 2000:70, 100, 108, 140).

Drawing allows us to observe, disassemble, and reassemble the environment. This is ultimately the goal of Night Drawing: to re-observe, re-perceive, and ultimately re-write our experience of nocturnal light scenes (again more in Chapter 4). The act of drawing and the bodily perception therein is a process in which both influence each other, which photography cannot do in this manner. Despite my limited drawing skills, I discovered that this method offers me a new way to illustrate what I perceive. In other words, I can draw within the constraints of my abilities and still capture my perception, finding myself in the process. The emphasis of Night Drawing is on the act of drawing itself, rather than the final product, as it seeks for a deeper understanding of embodied perception and experience of the urban nightscape.

Night Drawing aims, on the one hand, to address the phenomenon of different urban lightscapes and, on the other hand, to trigger visual reduction and pictorial imagination; or, as Merleau-Ponty (2005) would put it, a sensual experience that lies beyond pure thought and the usual forms of visual representation. Through the limited visibility at night, the sensory perception of time and space is enhanced, and a different perspective is achieved. The process of Night Drawing explores visual translations that require finding the imaginary 'within' the real. The sketching is an experiment: it explores the connection between the body, architecture, and visual representation and how this connection affects the visual language, imagination, and vision of people. This gesture endorses the poetics of space and seeks visual, aesthetic, and atmospheric reciprocity. The dark environment makes it difficult to see clear shapes and prevents the verification of what is drawn on the paper. Such circumstances force one to guess at connections and abandon the ambition of precise rendering. At the same time, the act can be liberating, as the difficult lighting conditions serve as an excuse to lower one's expectations of the outcome of the drawing.

Drawing after dusk relies on unconventional observational skills and sensitivity as well as a collective imagination. Through the gesture of drawing, I create a method that collectively tests and discusses preconceived 'photographic' notions of visual representation mentioned above. Drawing requires a practice of 'forced' seeing and physical action to translate this perception. It follows the ideology of other scholars who use drawing as a means of active observation, but also as a way to capture information that might otherwise be lost or overlooked (e.g. van Alphen 2013; Berger 2005; Causey 2017; Farthing 2012; Taussig 2011). The event aims to encourage people, whether or not they have drawing skills, to engage in close observation that opens up different perspectives. Drawing at night provokes attention, requires active vision, and connects

the eye with a gesture. In other words, Night Drawing is a way of expanding seeing and reacting to nocturnal light space. It requires a speculative engagement with urban night spaces—to think, invent, and visualise alternatives to the present. It is a way of paying attention: heeding, reflecting, and renegotiating the ordinary or habitual view.

The excursions serve as a field laboratory to gain a deeper understanding of darkness, artificial light at night, and the perceptual challenges and biases associated with metropolitan lifestyles. It is a collective process and an act of taking in various realities. This has not least to do with performativity, in the sense of confronting urban night space as a group, going against the prevailing perceptions and narratives associated with a bright, metropolitan lifestyle and overexposure. Playful exploration, humorous storytelling, and poignant emotional ‘affects’ are important components of these expeditions, but equally important in the events is ‘spatial empathy’ in a broader sense. This means provoking thought and inspiring change that can ultimately lead to social engagement. This again, also includes taking a critical look at the distribution of light at night and not taking it for granted.

The collective aspect of drawing at night is important. My personal experience of drawing alone in a public space at night provided the impetus for the collective project. Ultimately, it was my own experience of discomfort while drawing at night that distracted me from observing and concentrating and gave me the idea to invite other people to draw with me. So, over time, drawing at night transformed into a public event and a collective endeavour. Night Drawing aims to generate an ethical-aesthetic paradigm for responding to something like the seemingly non-negotiable bright light of night. This action recalls Felix Guattari’s reflections on not taking the ‘settings’ of our environment for granted, by creating a collective, with ingenuity and creativity of thought: ‘[...] promoting a new aesthetic paradigm involves overthrowing current forms of art as much as those of social life!’ (Guattari 1995:134).

Drawing at night as a group has proven to be both practical and more delightful. The group activity provides a sense of safety and motivation to venture out at night, and the collective effort allows for exploring spaces and activities that one may not do alone. The enjoyment and feeling of the shared moment as well as being comfortable and safe in the night space is particularly valuable to concentrate on the surroundings and the things perceived when drawing. Drawing at night requires the utmost concentration, it is difficult and exhausting. What over the years has become apparent, and was repeatedly reported by participants, is that the act of drawing, combined with the dynamic of

exploring the night together as a group, creates a special sense of momentum, that is equally important as the sketching itself. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that this experience may not be the same for everyone. While some participants enjoy the adventure of going out at night and exploring the area, others feel unsafe for various reasons or do not participate at all.

While the method primarily focuses on the act and gesture of drawing, it also produces visual traces in the form of drawings. These drawings enable a thought-provoking discourse about elements that aren't inherently visible and are challenging to address through text alone, or even through a conventional image representation alone (see also Rose 2014:33-34). The process of drawing in the urban night and the resulting visual creations serve as both input and output. Some drawings may not be immediately clear, while others are more easily recognizable. However, both types, serve as artifacts of the challenge involved in breaking away from familiar viewpoints, representations, and expectations (further discussed in Chapter 4).

How 'data' can be generated through the sketchy study of the urban night is one goal, and experimenting with how the process of drawing maps, relates, interprets, and influences contemporary perceptions of city dwellers and thus urban visual culture is another (see also Leavy 2009: 227). It is important to note that Night Drawing is not intended to yield an accurate depiction of the surroundings (i.e. achieving 'good' drawing results), but rather to facilitate an attentive process. Accordingly, drawing light atmospheres at night aims to reconceive light (bright and dark) as a material with weight, volume, and texture. It requires a reimagination, which requires finding a visual translation for an embodied experience at the limits of the visible.

In sum, my second method of practice, drawing, stems from my photographic background and aims to cultivate awareness and attentiveness, fostering a more embodied perception. It re-evaluates images of architecture, spatial scenarios, artificial light, and urban darkness. Drawing at night explores the intricacies of nocturnal light phenomena, delving into the elusive nature of nighttime illumination beyond the reach of a camera lens. Night Drawing scrutinizes the distinctions between seeing and looking, capturing tangible aspects of spatial visibility transposed onto paper. Functioning as a laboratory, this method dissects the interplay between modes of representation, experience, and perspectives influencing metropolitan nightlife. Drawing at night prompts an active, performative mode of perception, aiming to stimulate a reconsideration of the brightly illuminated world impacting both our surroundings and

us. Utilizing paper and pen, I engage in active visual perception, provoking a spatial ‘conversation’ through collective on-site sketching.

#### **1.4 Fabulation: Method III**

Lastly, in my methodology, I turn to the practice of fabulation as a form of creative writing, which is explored as a ‘bedtime story’ in the Epilogue of this dissertation. The story called ‘Good Night’ serves as an extension of my practice and the searching and questioning behind my work. This narrative continues the exploration of photographing and drawing after dark, delving further into the limits of visual representation. This method of creative writing falls within the realms of literary anthropology (Clifford, 2010), critical fabulation (Hartman, 2008), and speculation (Dunne and Raby, 2013). These interdisciplinary fields blend literary texts and imagination to critically reflect on and reshape socio-cultural experiences, practices, and embedded beliefs. With the help of this method, I aim to engage in critical reflection to gain a fuller understanding of the issues at stake concerning darkness at night, fostering awareness and challenging existing norms beyond just human concerns.

The urgency for a narrative method that involves the creation of fables or imaginative stories has recently been addressed by various anthropologists and literary scholars (e.g. Pandian and McLean 2017; Warner 2014; Wiles 2020; Wulff 2016). Originally the method grew out of the realisation by scholars, most notably Clifford Geertz (2017), that ethnographic research methods need new, innovative ways of representing cultural experiences. It is argued that the use of fiction and poetry can enable a more nuanced and complex representation of human experiences, such as exploring the power of words and stories (e.g. West 2008) or exploring the politics of representation in ethnographic texts (e.g. Rabinow 2011).

‘Good Night’ aligns with critical fabulation, emphasizing the necessity of this method for unlocking fresh perspectives. The narrative blends empirical observation with speculative exploration, shifting between observing the present and imagining potential futures. Anthropologist Anand Pandian writes: ‘If there’s ever been a time for us to play, to be fearless, it’s now’ (Pandian 2019:3). This bedtime story challenges established social norms, responding to narratives that have evolved and values linked to representing light and darkness. This story-making serves as a method to convey and challenge notions of urban cultural identity and the significance of night and darkness.

Through this ‘fairy tale,’ I explore unorthodox observational skills and sensibilities, employing the juxtaposition and speculation of real facts. The story aims to stimulate collective imagination, encouraging speculative engagement with nocturnal urban spaces inhabited by both humans and non-humans. The goal is to merge creative thinking with critical exploration to inspire alternative urban lighting possibilities beyond current norms.

By thinking about and reflecting on the designed world, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2013) suggest that design should strive for a material method of speculation that investigates existence rather than reality. In *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*, Dunne and Raby (2013) argue for practices that produce non-commercial inventions. Such critical and speculative perspectives, Dunne and Raby (2013: 88) emphasise, are necessary to approach the world of today and shape the world of tomorrow. ‘For us, the purpose of speculation is “to unsettle the present rather than to predict the future”’ (Dunne and Raby 2013: 88).

Although there have always been design speculations (e.g., car shows, future visions, haute couture fashion shows), design has become so absorbed in industry, so familiar with the dreams of industry, that it is almost impossible to dream its own dreams, let alone social ones. We are interested in liberating this story making (not storytelling) potential, this dream materializing ability, from purely commercial applications and redirecting it toward more social ends that address the citizen rather than the consumer or perhaps both at the same time. (Dunne and Raby 2013:88)

Dunne and Raby’s (2013) reflections are reminiscent of Bruno Latour’s work *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), wherein he posits that the design of the world not only serves to solve problems but also plays a role in their creation. Latour’s perspective can be approached from various angles and subject to different points of critique. Nevertheless, the central aim of this research project is to expand our understanding of how human actions contribute to the construction of darkness in the urban night and its social and ecological system. This involves re-evaluating narratives surrounding darkness, to examine the construction of storytelling, and subsequently reinterpreting them in novel ways. In this regard, I consider *Speculative Everything* (Dunne and Raby 2013) as an invaluable framework for developing new methodologies that allow for critical engagement with the contemporary issues of our time.

In many ways, Dunne and Raby’s book has inspired me to see and think differently about ‘what’s the matter with darkness.’ Through my creative practice-based research

approach, I am consciously moving the nocturnal urban lightscape into a context and perspective that is beyond the functional and utilitarian. This is where the overarching framework of ‘urban darkness’ endeavours to catalyse a release and critical reassessment of insights, ideas, beliefs, and perceptual habits associated with darkness in the urban night. I find the method of speculation advocated by Dunne and Raby to be exceptionally valuable. The incorporation of fabulation alongside my visual practice not only aids in addressing societal issues but also facilitates critical reflection on their ethical, cultural, and political ramifications (see also Dunne and Raby 2013:34). In this manner, my three-part methodology repeatedly endeavours to deconstruct, reconfigure, and reimagine assumptions and ideologies concerning light and darkness.

My approach to fabulation is also in alignment with Mieke Bal’s recent book, *Narratology in Practice* (2021), where she delves into consciousness and subjective experiences through various narratives expressed visually. Bal’s perspective on narratology, which emphasizes image-making as both a process of *thinking in images* and a method of *making and thinking about images* within texts, closely aligns with the thematic exploration found in my ‘Good Night’ story. Bal highlights the experiences we encounter when engaging with imaginative texts and images, revealing both their limitations and the reflective use of representative terms. She notes, ‘[...] the logic of the fabula has similarities to other areas of human logic, such as the structure of the sentence, rituals, and more’ (Bal 2021:167).

This perspective prompts us to consider how darkness itself forms part of the narrative of the urban night. It can be examined as a narrative element, as seen in justifications for brightly lit spaces. The ‘fabula method’ I employ in ‘Good Night’ ultimately functions as a practice for deconstructing the construction of stories and exploring alternative presentations. It culminates in a reflective textual exercise rooted in my research explorations and experiences, encompassing both historical and contemporary social and political events in London and New York. Through the lens of the ‘fabula’ I re-evaluate these events in a combination of text and imagination.

In sum, my third method of practice, fabulation, serves as a critical and creative exploration aimed at reimagining and challenging political dynamics and power structures intertwined with light and darkness in the urban night. The narrative interweaves facts and speculative visions to provide a broader context for perspectives on darkness within environmental, political, and social considerations. ‘Good Night’ is not merely a bedtime story; it emphasizes the primacy of imagination over the utilitarian

aspects of physical space, visible control, and appearance. Instead of mere storytelling, it facilitates speculative thinking about ‘night sights’ and encourages discussions on historical contexts and the effects of illuminating urban night space, fostering innovative reflections on light and darkness, also within the dimensions of non-human organisms.

## 1.5 Practice-Based Work: Guide

Rather than outsource my visual work to an appendix, I want to emphasize the significance of the interplay between practice and theory in my research. Therefore, I have strived to make this work accessible in various forms throughout the text presented here: A comprehensive collection of my practice-based materials has been compiled into an archive, which can be explored on the website [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net). Additionally, a tactile exploration of my visual world, in the form of photographic studies, has been published as a limited edition titled *Shadow Typology* (Meng, 2023). Lastly, as previously mentioned, readers can immerse themselves in a semi-fictional world through the bedtime story I have crafted in the Epilogue.

All this work is intended to be explored in parallel with this text, providing constant and easily accessible reference points throughout my dissertation. This approach is less about presenting a linear narrative and more about encouraging exploration and open-ended reading. I firmly believe that spatial-visual scenarios and atmospheres are much more a means of communication in the pictorial sense than a representational text. This is the goal I strive for; therefore, the reader is asked to explore this dissertation along with my ‘visual world’, of which story-making is a part. My work—website, book, story—invites readers to establish new connections and make fresh discoveries with each interaction. All presentations document and stage a visual collection of my search and, ultimately, my appreciation for shadows and darkness—not least their characteristics of visual ‘irrepresentability’. There is no prescribed order; I leave it to the reader’s discretion to immerse themselves in the material and determine their own sequence of engagement.

The material ‘reads’ as follows:

The website [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net) serves as an amalgamation of my practice-based night studies. It offers a collection of my visual explorations of ‘urban darkness’ spanning the past few years, incorporating both drawing and photography, and it provides supplementary visual material related to ‘Good Night’ (the story). In essence, the website

functions as an inventory of observations, serving as a visual archive that showcases how I have engaged with darkness in a critical and creative manner, particularly in the context of nocturnal aesthetics.

The small edition *Shadow Typology* provides as a physical companion and tactile extension to the online archive and bedtime story. Through the physical act of turning the pages and experiencing the images through touch, I invite the reader to engage with my material in an additional, tangible way. The paper/analogue dimension is important here because of the subtle visual aesthetics involved. *Shadow Typology* demonstrates how light, and dark are closely interwoven spatially, using the tactile and spatial properties of the book, and working conceptually with paper, printing, and binding techniques. The form of the book serves as a central, additional haptic commentary to expand the pictorial understanding; that is, not simply built on the textual form. Here, too, the power of visual impressions, visions, and imagination, but also of visual boundaries, is emphasized as a necessary condition for dealing with light and darkness in urban space.

In ‘Good Night,’ the story presented in the Epilogue of this thesis, readers are invited to engage their speculative and critical thinking abilities actively. The story serves as a catalyst and a tool to stimulate readers’ imaginations, prompting them to re-evaluate their assumptions and ideologies related to nighttime urban lighting, the presence of human and non-human entities, and our perceptions and interactions with darkness within the urban night context.

In sum, my practice-based work serves a dual purpose: to both appreciate and challenge the reader’s perception and imagination of darkness. It strives to rethink and question the garish and often superficial representations of the urban nightscape that shape our spatial imagination. I once again urge the reader to explore these diverse materials at different times, as they offer varying perspectives and convey concepts, ideas, and impressions related to light, shadow, and darkness. These contents intend to take you, the reader, on parts of my visual journey, to provide deeper visual insights into the *Bildsprache* of this research, its inquiries, and its concerns.

## **1.6 Ethics: Reflections**

My research is limited to looking at two highly developed urban cities in the West: London and New York. Both cities allow me to think critically about spatial perception,

sociocultural issues of society in time and space, and the impact of urban policy on environmental aesthetics. I am living and working in these capitals with the awareness—and dilemma—of my freedom and status in society that makes this possible. As much as I am enthusiastic about these cities, I am critical of their development. I am eager to examine and observe the urban living space that unfolds around me. Not just to influence it (even if only on a small scale), but because I believe it is important to generate space for different as well as sustainable perspectives.

Exploring the night (and especially the dark) in more privileged urban centres like London and New York is also not without its problems and, understandably, raises questions about First World problems. These cities are considered urban utopias of bright lighting and often serve as romanticised models for the future of urban planning, politics, and design. Investigating urban night spaces in such cities reveals a visual tension between the imaginary and the real. This ambiguity is shaped by the architecture, urban utopias, Hollywood romances, and the influence of a 24/7 environment (e.g. Crary 2014). Therefore, there is an urgent need to study the problems of urban night lighting related to such supercities, since they serve as models for other urban environments at different scales and shapes, as well as for our future thinking about cities.

There is also a practical aspect to the method and locations of my research. I have lived in both cities for extended periods: I know my way around and have undertaken research in each city prior to this doctoral project. In conducting research at night, this knowledge matters, especially when it comes to coordination and safety issues around the night practice work. Working alone in the urban night is not always easy and romantic, particularly for a woman, as I found out at times. Familiarity with the space is important for conducting and examining my work at night, whether I am working solo or in a group. This knowledge has two key benefits: limiting the risk of danger for everyone involved and having some idea of what to look for and observe.

In the context of my responsibility as the organiser of the Night Drawing events, I prioritise inclusiveness and diversity. As mentioned earlier, the events are free, open to the public, posted on various social media platforms, and accessible by public transportation. At the beginning of each gathering, I make participants aware of the purpose of my research project and how the findings will be used. Participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time. By the end, each participant can decide for themselves whether they would like to share their drawings with others and whether they would like to participate in a subsequent group discussion. Each person's confidentiality

and privacy are respected. This is ensured by not requiring any personal information or registration to participate in the events, as well as leaving the participants free to decide how, where, and for how long they want to stay during the event.

All possible measures are taken to ensure that the Night Drawing events do not in any way harm participants. I perform several preliminary site visits to inspect the locations in advance, get an overview of the typical activity on site, and check the accessibility of the location. I further decide on a suitable emergency meeting point, usually a café or bar, which also serves as a gathering spot after the event. During the session, I walk around the group to talk with the participants and monitor the situation. I am also always accompanied by at least one or two assistants (volunteers) who help make these events feel safe. Although it is impossible to completely control the environment and people's actions and reactions in a public space at night, it is possible to create a pleasant, quiet atmosphere with a good choice of location, helpful assistants, and clear communication during the drawing sessions. Night Drawing is committed to a safe, respectful, and positive environment, and I do not tolerate sexist, racist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory language or actions. To date, no such problems have arisen, but if they occurred, my assistant(s) and I would intervene immediately, and permanently exclude the individual(s) in question from the event.

As a concluding remark, I would like to note that my research has explored only a few small parts of the urban night spaces in both cities. I am aware that, given the complex social ecologies of the large urban centres within which I am working, this project cannot include the full range of residents across race, gender, age, class, and ability. It is also clear that urban night in affluent parts of London or New York is very different from that in underprivileged areas, which is in turn different from an urban night in a small rural city, a small industrial city in the north of England, or Shenzhen in China, and so on. Nonetheless, the practice of Night Drawing is far-reaching: it has the potential to include other contexts in the future, deepening intersectional and cross-cultural understanding of the issues involved.

# LOOKING AT DARKNESS

This literature review investigates how ‘urban darkness’ and our perception of it are shaped and mediated by the visual and spatial aspects of light. It explores how darkness and its visual-spatial presence strongly interact with light. The aim is to deepen our understanding of the complexity of darkness perception in relation to the visual realm and its impact on both our ideas and experiences of dark environments. This literature review strives to demonstrate how concepts surrounding shadows, light, and darkness in particular, are shaped by influences from both the visible and visual worlds. These connections are explored historically, encompassing the realms of photography, modernism, and architecture on one hand, and perceptual habits and experience on the other. A comprehensive understanding of darkness within this context is essential for rethinking and reimagining it. Consequently, the investigation focuses on how experiences of darkness in the urban night can unfold through visual representations, specifically delving into the correlation between the image and the built environment.

What follows delves into both the ‘effective’ and ‘affective’ properties of light at night. The objective is to conduct a critical analysis of the presence and absence of darkness in the urban night, drawing connections to visual representations. There is a specific emphasis on the early achievements of photography, highlighting both its strengths and limitations in visual language and translation. Additionally, this literature review pays special attention to architectural designs and lighting techniques that accentuate visual stimuli but often neglect the atmospheric and ambient aspects of urban lightscapes. Lastly, this examination highlights phenomenological and political considerations, prompting inquiries into the reasons behind our occasional disregard or failure to perceive darkness.

The chapter will explore ‘looking at darkness’ from four distinct perspectives: ‘visual darkness’ (1) in relation to the photographic image, ‘spatial darkness’ (2) by the impact of design on nocturnal lightscapes, ‘shaded darkness’ (3) within phenomenological aspects, and finally, ‘political darkness’ (4) in terms of its broader implications for urban life and culture.

## 2.1 Visual Darkness



[2.1] Davis, R. (c 1923) *Doh's Kiva in the Big Room, Carlsbad Caverns*. [Flash powder photography].

In the photograph *Carlsbad Cavern* by Ray V. Davis, the absolutely dark underground landscape and its recognizability are pictorially represented through lighting and the light-dark ratio of the scene. The shedding of artificial light to illuminate the cave casts strong shadows across the space. These stark contrasts define the space and make it apparent. The first steps towards illuminating the underworld and making things like a cave visible through photography are remarkable. Davis's lighting of the cave is just one example of many early photographic adventurers and their attempts to use flash powder and various other diffused lighting methods to conquer with light the inner structure of a landscape so dark that it is neither easily accessible nor visible to everyone. [Fig. 2.1]

The history of underground and flash photography provides excellent examples of the conquest of darkness by man and light and the associated properties of visualisation. In *To Photograph DARKNESS* (1989), Chris Howes traces various early attempts from the 1860s to photograph caves that have no natural light. Photographers developed special techniques, from fire to specially designed electronic flashes and powder burners, to make a dark environment such as a cave recognisable in a photo. They photographed places with limited access and obstructed views, and then proudly displayed these images to the public. These are probably among the earliest examples of an explicit visual translation of spatial darkness presented with artificial light. The images of underground

photography are on the one hand a technical achievement and on the other hand a visual demonstration of the success of man, light, and photography when it comes to 'putting the world in perspective'.<sup>8</sup>

In his photograph, Davis explicitly creates a sense of depth by using separate light sources to illuminate the cave at different points. The result is a visual composition of the sculptural formations in the cave that also conveys a sense of depth. The photographic effort required to overcome the technical challenge of cave lighting at the time is stunning. What is particularly interesting is how cave photography has, for many, created a new access to the unseen and inexperienced through the image. The 'miracle' of making the unknown visible was revolutionary, and ironically Davis had great difficulty promoting his photographs in newspapers and magazines because people thought the images must be faked (Howes 1989:224-25).

What is particularly fascinating about cave photography is not simply the inception of photography as a tool for documenting reality, where the camera evolved early on as an instrument of power, but also the significant efforts made to render the hidden and invisible visually perceptible. By illuminating dark and previously inaccessible spaces, cave photography vividly demonstrates how the deliberate use of photographic technology and artificial light becomes a human performance of visual representation and a manifestation of power over the environment. Unveiling darkness through the lens of the camera is a form of magic that not only exposes the hidden world but also provides the photographer with a sense of satisfaction in their human performance of representation.

To delve deeper into the urban night and the intertwining connection between the visual presence and aesthetic aspects of light and darkness, a comprehensive understanding of representation methods is essential. This involves exploring the nuances of light and dark expressions in visual language and examining their various modes of representation. The desire to visually capture the unseen, unveiling a hidden world, not only captivates photographers' minds but also reflects a broader human ambition. This echoes the sentiments of Martin Heidegger, who declared, 'the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as a picture' (Heidegger 1996:134). Examining

---

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Félix Nadar (Gaspard-Félix Turnachon) is not only considered the first aerial photographer but also the first underground photographer. In 1861, Nadar published an underground photograph that showed the catacombs beneath Paris and amazed viewers at the time with photography's ability to penetrate the darkness of the underground passages (Howes 1989:8-17).

the complex nocturnal lightscape of the city requires a keen observation of the visual and spatial interplay between light and darkness. Consequently, it involves linking the aesthetic appeal and the urban light atmosphere of the city with effective visual representation methods. Thus, it is crucial to understand that images extend into space, creating a collision between the image and the environment.

## The Visual and the Visible



[2.2] Regnault, J. (1785) *The Origin of Painting: Dibutades Tracing the Portrait of a Shepherd*. [Oil on canvas]. Musée National du Château, Versailles.

An ancient legend recounts how an image, formed through the interplay of light and shadow, takes on spatial dimensions. Pliny's tale about the Corinthian maid who draws the shadow of her lover as a silhouette on the wall is considered the birth of image creation. Pliny's story of the shadow not only represents the birth of image-making but also of sculpture. According to the legend, the shadow was later carved out by the maid's father, the potter, transforming the shape drawn by his daughter into a sculpture of her lover and making the shadow tangible, so to speak (see also Belting 2011:118; Kenaan 2020:58–59; Stoichiță 1999:7–8). [Fig. 2.2]

The story highlights both the human inclination to seize and immortalize moments and memories and our proficiency in narrating tales through images. Seeing, as noted from the perspective of Hagi Kenaan (2020), is a narrative that depends on an image. In *Photography and Its Shadow* (2020), Kenaan has raised new questions about the

ontology of photography. He reflects on the origin of the image by distinguishing the ‘visual’ (i.e. two-dimensional like a photograph) and the ‘visible’ (i.e. three-dimensional such as a sculpture) (Kenaan 2020:27–32). He asserts that the image is more of a crucial component of our current present than a part of our past. According to Kenaan, our contemporary seeing depends on photography’s past and requires a closer observation of shadow (Kenaan 2020:177). Visibility, for Kenaan, is when the visible is perceived within an overlap with the visual (Kenaan 2020:32). This leads to his argument about the impossible ontological distinction of the visible as opposed to framed pictures (the visual):

Photography visualizes the visible, and the result of this visualization are photographs that create a “new vision” allowing its viewer to encounter the visible in new ways. The drama of photography unfolds on the stage where the visible and the visual meet as two domains—two forms of vision—that, despite their reciprocity, remain ontologically the same. (Kenaan 2020:169)

The art critic and writer John Berger wrote widely about the way we perceive the pictorial world. His visual analysis in *Ways of Seeing* (2008) introduced the basis of his position on perception: ‘The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. [...] We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves’ (Berger 2008:1). There is the ‘gaze back’ of the picturesque in visual representation (Berger 2008:96–97). Berger illustrates how visual representation shapes the way that we understand things, an understanding that impacts our lives. Consider, for example, how the male gaze has constrained the representation of women, producing a double vision that shapes women’s lives down to the smallest detail. Or how one relates differently to pictures of loved ones depending on their relationship to the person portrayed. Berger was an early proponent of the view that we live in a world with multiple realities and that they are presented to us primarily visually.

What’s pivotal to consider here, in complement to Berger’s (2008) ‘way of seeing,’ is how our perceptions of sight are influenced by the visual world. This extends beyond just affecting beliefs and memories; it shapes language and further influences our actions and perspectives. In his introduction to *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (1993), Jacques Derrida writes:

[...] the difference between believing and seeing, between believing one sees [*croire voir*] and seeing between, catching a glimpse [*entrevoir*]—or not. Before doubt ever becomes a system, *skepsis* has to do with the eyes. The word refers

to a visual perception, to the observation, vigilance, attention of the gaze  
[regard] during an examination. (Derrida 1993:1)

Derrida claims, also referring to Pliny's legend, that the maid traces her lover's shadow without looking at him, fallen away from the thing itself, detached from the presence of perception. Drawing in this context, Derrida notes, originates in blindness (Derrida 1993:51). Kenaan, however, counters that Derrida fails to recognise the 'fundamental dimension of the nature of the shadow', since the shadow is one of the crucial preconditions of the visible: the maid's attention to her lover's shadow rather than to the lover himself is a sign of her 'unique sensitivity toward the visible, of her painterly vision, and not, as Derrida suggests, of her blindness' (Kenaan 2020:79).

Both perspectives have their justifications and may not be as distinct as they initially seem. The negative/positive dichotomy, influential in early photography, finds its basis in the interplay of light and shadow. While Derrida proposes that the shadow's image might act as a diversion from reality, Kenaan's ontology of photography asserts that photography is inherently a 'form of sense-giving within modern life.' The current moment embodies the photographic perceptual stance of 'that-has-been,' as he articulates: 'Photography's essence lies in its ability to present the now to the future as a direct imprint of the past' (Kenaan 2020:176).

As a result, Kenaan might acknowledge photography in a manner akin to Derrida's perspective on the shadow. Specifically, as the fundamental condition of the modern human gaze, the photographic image itself possesses a presence like the actual lover (not just its shadow). This implies that photography, which initially developed as a secondary source (the shadow, the imprint, the mirror), has evolved into a primary source—an active component shaping human visual perception and experience.<sup>9</sup> The inception of photography could only become meaningful retrospectively, and so photography today is not a memory or nostalgic mourning for what once was, as described by Roland Barthes (2010) in a photographic view of his deceased mother. On the contrary, Kenaan writes (echoing James Elkins), photography is a way of representing the sheer 'stuff', the dullness of what our world is made of. The point is that photography simply cannot be articulated in positive terms like 'photography is ABC' or 'photography is XYZ' (Kenaan 2020:9).

---

<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Arnheim makes a similar argument in his analysis of visual thinking in the chapter 'The Past in the Present' when he notes that images of memory are a supplement to perception (Arnheim 1969:84).

Consequently, as per Kenaan, when we consider photography not only in retrospect (i.e., as a memory) but also with a forward-looking (i.e., visionary) approach, we gain a better understanding of how we engage with our physical environment today. The distinction between belief and vision described by Derrida (1993:1) and the new emphasis on sensitivity to the relationship between the visible and the visual proposed by Kenaan (2020:79) are both crucial to exploring aspects of darkness in the urban night. Shadows ultimately play a central role in the visual-spatial unfolding of light and darkness, bridging the gap between what we physically see and what we perceive seemingly ‘blindly.’

### Night Lights in Photographs



[2.3] Stieglitz, A. (1893) *The Glow of Night — New York*. [Photogravure]. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Once the urban night started to glow more and more—as the photographer Alfred Stieglitz illustrates—its landscape manifested the idea of success and progress by its visibility. Just like cave photography, the city lights at night generate a fresh rendition of darkness, particularly through the lens of a camera. Noting that night photography was the novelty of the year, Stieglitz claimed that most of the examples on display at that point were topographical, with no attempt to get ‘real’ images. Stieglitz lamented the shortcomings of these photographs, which do not reflect the physical experience of the nighttime light impressions. Photography as art, he claimed, does not aim to depict the

essence of reality but to transform everyday experience into a more abstract formal language that expresses feelings (Stieglitz 1896).<sup>10</sup> [Fig. 2.3]

In *New York Nocturne* (2008), William Chapman Sharpe points out that artistic representation played a significant role in the revolution of night lighting by educating the urban public about the ways in which this new ‘visible darkness’ could be experienced: ‘Since the mid-nineteenth century, nocturnal art has been teaching people how to inhabit the new night world, even as it asks them to reconsider the relation between the human, the urban and the dark.’ The development of electric lighting changed the ‘image’ of the night. Artworks depicting the illuminated urban night inevitably represented an interface between creation and nature, technology, and society—autonomously, as escapists or activists, they entertained and criticised the new night world (Sharpe 2008:8–9).

Besides Stieglitz, other artists of early nocturnal urban photography, such as Berenice Abbott, Brassai (born Gyula Halász in Brassó), Alvin Langdon Coburn, William A. Fraser, Paul Martin, and Edward Steichen, strove to express the spirit of modernity in their subjective vision. For many of these artists, the photographic challenge was to withstand the central focus of symbolism, to visually express phenomena that are more sensory, poetic, and engaging, and to put such atmospheric scenes on display. Special lenses and particular weather conditions, such as reflection-increasing rain, were used for visual obscuration. The artistic aim at the time was to create a more suggestive and mythical expression of urban miscellany. The expressionist style—artistic rather than realistic—reflects human existence and distances subjective photographers from the rise of commercial, documentary, and journalistic photography.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note that even in the early days of photography, a period when the medium was primarily perceived as a tool for truthful representation, its inherent limitations were apparent. Artists, including those mentioned above, leveraged these limitations to challenge the conventional perception of photography as a purely truthful form of representation, especially in capturing the interplay of light on built structures. What is further surprising is that despite the widespread discussion of photography as a

---

<sup>10</sup> Photographic translation has been debated, with theorists like Jean Baudrillard (1994:48) viewing it as a medium lacking depth and sacrificing myths. Baudelaire (1980:88–89) criticized it as a threat to art and imagination. Debates in the arts, such as J.M.W. Turner’s statement, involve the clash between painting and photography, with Turner stating, “This is the end of art. I am glad I have had my day.” (cited in Frampton 2015:9)

<sup>11</sup> See also the movement Subjective Photography (Tate n.d.) in the late 1940s, which is a manifestation of the artistic dilemma of confronting realistic representation through photography.

‘realist medium’ (i.e. Krauss 1994; Silverman 2015; Sontag 2008) there remains a significant gap in theory regarding the phenomenology of photography.

In ‘Depictive Traces: On the Phenomenology of Photography’ (2017), Mikael Petterson highlights the frequent recognition of the photographic phenomenon but notes the limited exploration of its phenomenological properties (Petterson 2011:185). The discussion on how the photographic image can possess inherent phenomenological properties is notably scarce. Petterson highlights that photos can give a kind of illusion, blending perception and closeness to the subjects. Yet, our preference for familiar cast shadows over atmospheric ones can mislead our visual and spatial imagination (Petterson 2011:193).

Looking at ‘visual darkness’ underscores the need for a pictorial understanding of darkness by its representation and communication through visual means. When revisiting early images’ engagement with darkness, a significant reliance on light and shadow is observed, particularly in the context of the cast shadow (e.g., Pliny’s legend or cave photography). This dependence moreover underscores the limitations of early visual translations, especially in photography, to capture the nuanced atmospheric spectrum of shadow. Photography’s ability to depict darkness, whether in caves or modern urban nights, is fascinating and pivotal to our understanding of urban darkness. Building on Kenaan’s (2020) findings that shadows and photographs inherently possess ontological qualities, this prompts further inquiry into how the representation of urban darkness through light and shadow resembles the creation of a visual impression, akin to a photograph.

## 2.2 Spatial Darkness



[2.4] Edgerton, H. (1944) *Stonehenge at Night*. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

In 1944, photographer Harold Edgerton worked with the UK Army Air Force to develop technology for nighttime photography. Edgerton photographed *Stonehenge at Night* while on the ground, triggering a 50,000-watt-second flash from an aircraft 1,500 feet overhead (Kurtz, Douglas and Kayafas 2018:165). The artificial contrast created by the flash delineates the boundaries of the surfaces of the stones in light, making Stonehenge clearly stand out from the darkness of the surrounding night. The large, dark, empty space of the unlit landscape is visually remarkable. It enhances the perception of depth arising from the shadows artificially created by the intense illumination of the monument. The monument's spatial volume, and the presence of darkness, is made perceptible through the sharp contrast of the artificial lighting against the darkness of night. [Fig. 2.4]

*Stonehenge at Night* serves as an example to illustrate how image, light, and technology meet to make darkness visible. The photo clearly shows how the powerful flash fired at night makes dark space and building structures visible, emphasizing the power of visual impact through contrast. To grasp the link between images and darkness shaping urban lightscapes, it is crucial to analyse how light and darkness coexist visually in physical spaces. Examining the evolving role of light in the nighttime urban scene means exploring how perceptions of darkness change with advancements in artificial lighting and photography—how darkness is depicted and visually presented through its interplay with light.

*Stonehenge at Night* vividly demonstrates how artificial light at night can evoke a strong impression of darkness, making its presence distinctly visible. Acknowledging that artificial illumination shapes our perception of darkness is not a new insight. Historians David E. Nye (2010) and Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1995) have emphasized how industrialization, the invention of electricity, and widespread streetlight use gave rise to an ‘artificial darkness.’ Shaded by electric light; most residents today are only acquainted with this artificial darkness (Nye 2010:9). The ‘design’ of the urban night and lighting methods to preserve darkness have recently attracted a great deal of attention. The realization that ‘natural’ darkness has slipped from our lives is dawning.<sup>12</sup>

## Preserving Dark Landscapes



[2.5] The Aoraki Mackenzie International Dark Sky Reserve. (n.d.)

Available at: <https://newzealandtrails.com/news/new-zealand-stars/> (Accessed 22 February 2023).

Today’s sombre admission that darkness has been taken from us is echoed by Paul Bogard’s pessimistic outlook in *The End of Night* (2013) or the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA), a movement that strongly opposes the ‘excessive’ use of artificial light (darksky.org 2016). IDA (International Dark-Sky Association) was founded in Arizona in 1988 by two astronomers to protect the nighttime environment from skyglow. According to the organization, light pollution worldwide has increased by at least 49

---

<sup>12</sup> See also Melissa Miles’ *The Language of Light and Dark: Light and Place in Australian Photography* (2015) which explores how the portrayal of light and landscapes has historically shaped and influenced identities.

percent in 25 years. IDA certifies communities, parks, and protected areas worldwide that preserve dark landscapes through responsible lighting policies and public education. By 2022, around 200 locations globally are expected to achieve dark sky status. (Adkins 2022). [Fig. 2.5]

Highlighting the regret that darkness has been taken from us, along with our nocturnal inspiration, may not contribute much to alternative ideas. Instead, we could explore innovative approaches, cultivating a new understanding that includes actively thinking about how to construct artificial darkness in open spaces, such as building shadows with light. Nonetheless, lamenting the loss of starry skies—‘Millions of children will never see the Milky Way’ (darksky.org 2016)—is not trivial in terms of climate change or social inequality (Schulte-Römer, Dannemann, and Meier 2018). Light pollution has substantial impacts on ecosystems and severe consequences for our entire habitat, affecting various species. Consider the instances of distressed birds and disoriented turtles (Brei, Pérez-Barahona, and Strobl 2016; Kamrowski et al. 2012; La Sorte et al. 2017). Additionally, there are still poorly researched effects on plants, such as changes in the organisms of tree species (French-Constant et al. 2016; Škvareninová et al. 2017). Moreover, lacking access to the dark has been associated with potential health issues for humans, including mental disorders and cancer (Cao, Xu, and Yin 2023; Chepesiuk 2009; Walker et al. 2020).

In his debut article ‘Reconnecting with Darkness: Gloomy Landscapes, Lightless Places’ (2013), cultural geographer Tim Edensor paved the way for analyses of darkness in the field of social, cultural, and geographic studies. The book *From Light to Dark: Daylight, Illumination and Gloom* (2017) presents us with the extensive research Edensor has conducted over the years. Edensor's work raises awareness of how we experience geographies of light and underscores the limited attention given to studying their qualities. He points to the need to examine configurations of darkness and sensory encounters with light and reflects on how we need to improve our daily lives by designing environments through greater attentiveness and sensitivity to light. Edensor has been working on revisiting darkness long before this field gained recognition as an important area of research. It is noteworthy that night studies sometimes took on a fashionable appeal in the humanities, while also attracting criticism as a privileged and frivolous field of investigation.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Recent works like Nick Dunn's "Dark Matters: A Manifesto for the Nocturnal City" (2016) and Matthew Beaumont's "Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London" (2016) focus on personal and historical discoveries during night walks, mainly portraying the surface of night studies. In contrast, Sukhdev Sandhu's meticulously researched "Night Haunts" (2007) delves into the social and nocturnal lives of

In *Re-envisioning the Nocturnal Sublime: On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Nighttime Lighting* (2018), Taylor Stone insists that the experience of a dark atmosphere in the public sphere calls for a reorientation. He proposes a philosophical and aesthetic take on exploring and envisioning the future of cities at night, encouraging the incorporation of the positive aspects of darkness to re-create ‘a nocturnal sublime’ (Stone 2018:2). The relationship between cities and their inhabitants, he claims, needs an ‘ecological restoration’ not only to allow for efficiency and sustainability but also to reinstate our connection to nature. I agree with Stone’s call for ecological overhaul in terms of efficiency and sustainability, but I am more sceptical and consider his claim that encountering the ‘unique characteristics’ of darkness is ‘not an act of re-creating an aspect of nature via technological means, for the night sky is not actually destroyed; it is only cut off from experience’ (Stone 2018:7) to be somewhat optimistic.

What becomes clear, however, is that dark landscapes and atmospheres seem to be desired today, at least by some urban residents, as shown by the example of darkness in some London neighbourhoods being considered a luxury (Slater 2017:31). ‘Dark retreats’ and sensory deprivation tanks are, moreover, in vogue (Friedman 2018; Kosmály 2011) and environmental designers press for the responsible introduction of LED streetlights, as can be observed in the movement for smart-city lighting technologies (ARUP 2015; Carrington 2013), while architects are reconsidering how to build ‘dark infrastructures’ (e.g. Lowe and Rafael 2014; Narboni 2017).

The recently published book *Lighting Design in Shared Public Spaces* (Sumartojo 2022), featuring contributions from distinguished scholars, provides a contemporary and comprehensive analysis of both sensory and practical aspects of innovative lighting design. Nevertheless, there is currently limited discourse in architecture and urban planning concerning the intentional generation or creation of artificial darkness in public spaces. The explicit production of artificial darkness as a potential contribution to nocturnal urban spaces remains a relatively unexplored concept. Rather than solely focusing on reducing artificial light, I believe it is crucial and pressing to consider not only the preservation of natural darkness but also the intentional cultivation of darkness—an aspect that the visual arts have engaged with for many years.<sup>14</sup> The explicit

---

people in London, providing a more nuanced perspective. Sandhu's work challenges the general critique of urban capitalism and class formation seen in Beaumont and Dunn's explorations, highlighting that boycotting 24/7 availability, and roaming freely at night may not be universally interpreted as a free and individual choice.

<sup>14</sup> Chiaroscuro serves as an illustrative example, showcasing the aesthetic qualities of darkness, such as variation, depth, mystery, and imagination. It facilitates an understanding of how landscapes are mediated through light. Notably, the painter Caravaggio applied the technique in such a remarkable way that light and shadow often take precedence in his paintings over the scenes themselves (Kortava,

production of darkness, orchestrated through artificial light, and exploring the multifaceted nature of darkness unfolding in space has the potential for further examination.

### Creating Artificial Darkness



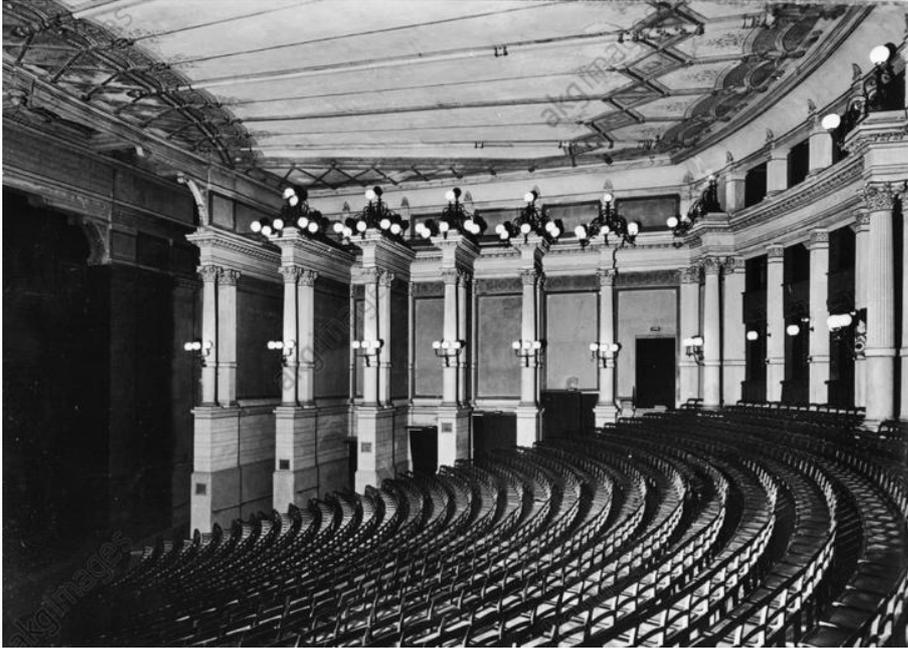
[2.6] Oskar Schlemmer's Schwarz-Weiß-Trio (Black-White-Trio) presented by Manda von Kreibitz, Werner Siedhoff, and Albert Mentzel. (1928) Available at: [https://www.kunstarchive.net/en/wvz/t\\_lux\\_feininger/works/kombinierte\\_gruppe\\_auf\\_der\\_buehne\\_in\\_rein\\_schwarz-weiss/type/all](https://www.kunstarchive.net/en/wvz/t_lux_feininger/works/kombinierte_gruppe_auf_der_buehne_in_rein_schwarz-weiss/type/all) (Accessed 22 February 2023).

In his book *Artificial Darkness* (2016), Noam Elcott offers a wide-ranging examination of the historical use of darkness as a medium of concept and impression. In particular, Elcott analyses a history of mediated darkness that negates space, perception, and reception through the production of images. The methods and ideas of such use of the efficacy of darkness in giving things a certain visibility persist and most likely continue to influence the way we perceive darkness today. Elcott refers to a variety of events with a very directly controlled use of darkness, from science to the entertainment industry and offers numerous illustrations of how darkness not only swallows' information and makes things disappear but promotes visibility and makes things appear. Black-screen

---

2021). The light-dark effect of chiaroscuro has also been adapted as a design tool for high-contrast lighting, as seen in film and photography. For example, observe the cinematic style of film noir or the method of overexposure in the photo series 'Theatres' by Hiroshi Sugimoto (Sugimoto and Matsumoto 2016).

backgrounds, for example, have been used by media entertainers, avant-garde artists, and trick photographers to create famous illusions, while artificial darkness has also been used effectively by scientists to study and make visible things that are invisible to the human eye.<sup>15</sup> [Fig. 2.6]



[2.7] Bayreuth Festival Theatre, auditorium built by Gottfried Semper for the performance of Richard Wagner's music drums). (1871–76) Available at: <https://www.akg-images.co.uk/archive/-2UMDHUWCUIJ7L.html> (Accessed 22 February 2023).

In 1872, Wagner pioneered significant changes to the lighting conditions in the auditorium at the Bayreuth Festival Theatre. Wagner's change was deciding that from then on, the audience would sit in the dark and not in the light. Wagner's regulation of light makes clear how light can change not only our focus on what seems important but also spatial experiences and social habits. This change in light and its perception is interesting in this context, because before Wagner's darkening of the auditorium, the purpose of going to the theatre was to be seen by the audience in the light. Comparable to street lighting, the auditorium was originally intended as a 'space to see and be seen'. Wagner's lighting modification was an increased focus on sensory experience and a theatrical revolution that was not scenic but architectural (Elcott 2016:7, 53–59). [Fig. 2.7]

---

<sup>15</sup> Refer to Étienne-Jules Marey's 'chronophotography,' a technique where he employed absolute blackness as a background to capture rapid movements in multiple exposures on a single plate. This method revealed hidden phases of movement, with dark objects vanishing against the black background and only white objects illuminated by direct light appearing in the visible traces (Elcott 2016:5–6).



[2.8] Apple Event, Steve Jobs Theater. (2017) Available at: <https://www.fastcompany.com/40466597/apple-event-live-stream-how-to-watch-the-keynote-and-iphone-8-reveal> (Accessed 22 February 2023).

The effective, albeit somewhat manipulative, use of light in conjunction with the intentional creation of artificial darkness is noteworthy in the realm of targeted marketing. One person who understood this very well was Steve Jobs. He had a keen understanding of how to evoke a sense of impression and, consequently, emotion through the deliberate use of darkness. Like Wagner, Jobs recognized the power of darkening the auditorium as an immensely effective and affective tool. He strategically employed the play of light to stimulate the audience's senses and enhance their appetite for the product. He often attempted (albeit unsuccessfully) to even turn off all the 'exit' lights during his commercial shows to create complete darkness in front and around the stage (Boyle 2015). The theatrical lighting effect of Apple's keynote presentations has been recognized and copied in countless marketing moments, including interior design settings, and is still effectively practiced in various environments today. [Fig. 2.8]

To comprehend the portrayal of darkness shaped by artificial light, it is crucial to deconstruct and, once again, grasp the effectiveness of forming images through light and shadow. This emphasis on visual effects can be observed throughout the history of art, from the works of artists such as da Vinci, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Turner, and Cézanne to contemporary light installations by Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman, James Turrell, Tracey Emin, Tino Sehgal, and Olafur Eliasson, among others. Surprisingly, such 'visual' aspects are hardly considered in research critical of light pollution.

Looking at ‘spatial darkness’ reveals the interplay between light and architecture within the context of profound visual properties. This interplay not only constructs visual images but also shapes spatial experiences with darkness. Staging methods using darkness to enhance visibility (i.e. Stonehenge) moreover underscores the tendency to centre attention on things illuminated by light. Exemplified from Wagner to Jobs, albeit within interior spaces rather than outdoors the manipulation of light carries critical implications for human behaviour and, therefore, intriguingly applies to ‘urban darkness.’ Lightscapes unveil how visual backdrops evoke sensations, alter scenes, include, or exclude viewers and participants, and provide a canvas for commerce, desire, intimacy, and imagination—ultimately generating and conveying emotions. As Elcott (2016:3) succinctly puts it, ‘Red is a colour. Darkness is a condition.’

## 2.3 Shaded Darkness



[2.9] clockwise: Steichen, E. (1908) *Balzac, The Open Sky—11 P.M.* / *Balzac, Towards the Light, Midnight* / *Balzac, The Silhouette—4 A.M.* [Photographs, direct carbon print]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

In his endeavour to photograph Auguste Rodin's sculpture, *Balzac*, Edward Steichen pushed the boundaries and explored the potential of capturing the impact of nighttime lighting on the sculpture's materiality within a visual image. To photograph the sculpture, Steichen placed *Balzac* outside in the garden, where he experimented with different exposures at night. Steichen argued that the plaster cast of the sculpture looked rough and chalky in daylight, which did not do the sculpture justice. Steichen's exploration of matter and light at night, translated into a series of photographs, is captivating. Particularly notable is how he effectively employs dark ambience as an additional material to illustrate the interconnectedness between tactile and visual sensations under various lighting conditions (see also Johnson 2006:200–203). [Fig. 2.9]

In an illuminated nighttime environment, we perceive elements not merely as the manifestation of luminous objects but also as the outcome of the stark interplay between brightness and darkness. This interplay constructs ambient light that includes not only

shadows cast but also shaded darkness between the two, connecting them. That is, materiality exhibits various nuances—a spectrum of tonalities that gives rise to a particular atmosphere enveloping the tangible structures of the constructed environment. We can refer to these evolving atmospheres as ‘shades of dark light’ that unfold in the interstitial spaces among architectural structures. These ‘shades of dark light’ or light atmospheres are not static; instead, they possess the aesthetic and dynamic qualities of a particular lightscape. Steichen’s depictions of *Balzac* vividly illustrate this perceptual understanding, showing that our perception of the sensuality of the material depends on its interaction with light.

The explicit use of darkness at different times at night in open space, as depicted in *The Open Sky—11 P.M.*, *Towards the Light, Midnight* and *The Silhouette—4 A.M.*, illustrates the ‘painterly’ sensibility and effects of nighttime illumination on concrete objects and, by extension, the broader spatial context in the immediate vicinity. Steichen skilfully uses different nighttime lighting situations to convey insights into the transformative effect of photography, from sculpture to image, from solid mass to overarching material sensation, taking us back to the dominant pictorial representation of urban architecture at night and its design with light. Steichen’s handling of matter, image, and light prompts us to study the light atmospheres of the nocturnal environment more closely in this respect.

The importance of aesthetic experiences in influencing our understanding of urban darkness is crucial. Public lighting design goes beyond creating visually appealing nightscapes or performative spaces. While our encounters with the urban lightscape often lean towards a visually impressionistic interpretation, characterized by prominent features like the bright skyline’s lines, it is essential to delve deeper into the nocturnal portrayal of illumination. This involves moving beyond the realm of symbolic pictorial motifs, black and white, and into the atmospheric dimensions. It entails scrutinizing the obscure terrain shaped by artificial light as it interplays with the tangible elements of the built environment. Shaping images by selectively illuminating specific areas creates an overall lightscape and atmosphere that encompass a spectrum of bright and dark lights. A comprehensive understanding of how artificial lighting creates these settings and influences our perception of darkness is essential.

## Shadows Cast with Light



[2.10] Brassai (1934) *Le pilier du Métro Corvisart*. [Gelatin silver print]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

A shadow world is created in the interaction of building and lighting. The cast shadow, with its symbolic and pictorial impact, is the most familiar among the various types of shadows, notably emphasized by the high contrast of light during the night. Brassai's photograph, *Le pilier du Métro Corvisart*, vividly illustrates the symbolic significance and visually compelling nature of cast shadows at night. [Fig. 2.10]

Concepts of shadows have long been a subject of fascination and research, from Plato's philosophical allegories to contemporary visual art. Our visual perception and comprehension of shadows have been profoundly shaped by Western symbolism prevalent in visual media, art, and architecture (e.g., Baxandall 1995; Gombrich 2014; Stoichiță 1999). These perspectives not only influence our understanding of images but also contribute to shaping our broader worldview and environment. As highlighted in Elcott's analysis of 'Artificial Darkness' (2016), shadows play a dual role in creating not only dark images but also dark spaces and, thus, dark atmospheres, reaffirming darkness as an active condition (Elcott 2016:3).

Observing shadows, however, goes beyond their visual and symbolic aspects; it entails capturing their tonal qualities, a task that poses a significant challenge due to the

intricacies of perception. As James Gibson in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (2015:48, 78) notes, a perplexing issue for any theory of visual sensory perception is how to distinguish between light or shadow and black or white. As a result, capturing the subtlety of intermediate tones is not only a challenge in translating them into photographic images but also a complex problem in terms of human perception.

Gibson emphasises that perception is based on stimulus sources, namely the reflection of light particles from a material structure such as a building (Gibson 2015:48–49). He claims that light cannot be seen as such; thus, seeing the environment cannot simply be based on seeing light. According to Gibson, light as such, without a material surface from which to reflect or through which to refract, is empty, since there is nothing to be perceived; there is no information available:

We do not see the light that is *in* the air, or that *fills* the air. If all this is correct, it becomes quite reasonable to assert that all we ever see is the environment or facts about the environment, never photons or waves or radiant energy. (Gibson 2015:48)

Following Gibson, urban darkness possesses multi-layered tonality, akin to shading or tincture, and must be perceived as an architectural structure creating a light-dark relationship in the environment. This, in turn, results in a constant ambient light that is not simply overlaid with high contrast. Urban darkness should not merely be conceived as a light drawing with endpoints—dark and bright, black and white. It is an infinite light space, and the diversity of layers in the light tonalities themselves needs recognition. This constitutes a significant perceptual challenge:

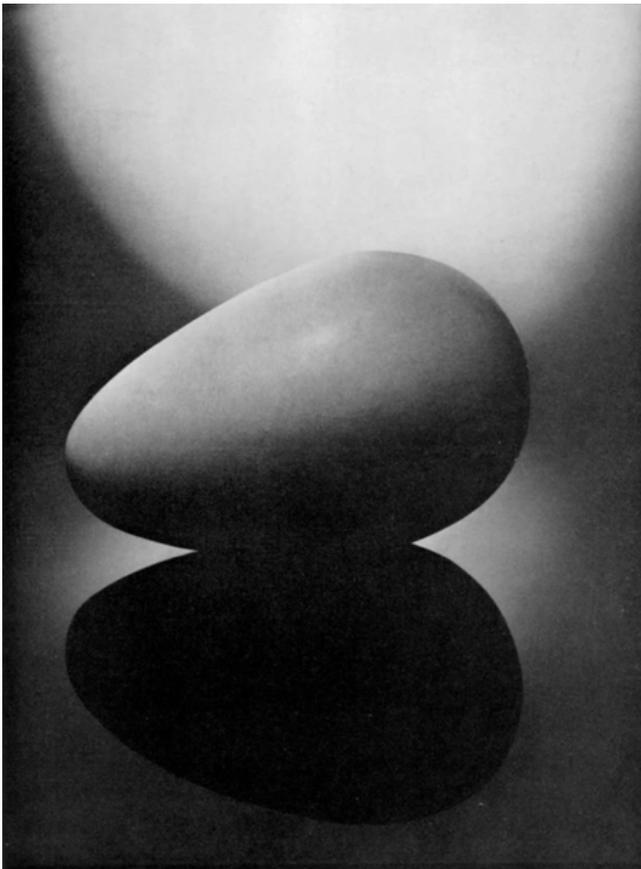
Both lighted or shaded surfaces and black or white surfaces make their separate contributions to the invariant structure of ambient light. And how light or shade can be perceived separately from black or white has long been a puzzling problem for any theory of visual sense perception. (Gibson 2015:78)

Gibson's view that there is little or nothing to see without surface/reflection is crucial, especially in analysing the modes and methods of representation of urban night light, its architecture, and the consequent formation of urban darkness. Gibson's description of ambient light's structure should be considered in the context of solid matter. The appearance and manifestation of darkness in urban nighttime spaces appear to be quite intricate. On one hand, darkness seems to exist as if it's suspended in the air, while on

the other hand, as noted by Gibson (2015:48), it relies on solid matter, such as the surfaces of the built environment.

In the conceptual framework of this research, urban darkness encompasses two primary aspects. First, darkness manifests as a direct impression resulting from the interplay of lighting and architectural elements, somewhat symbolic, like a cast shadow exemplified in Brassai's photograph (fig. 2.10). Second, darkness takes on the form of a spherical volume that fills the space between these elements of solid structure and cast shadow, as demonstrated in Steichen's series of Balzac (fig. 2.9). Examining darkness through the lens of the shadow, we observe that shadows serve a dual role—forming an image on one hand and creating an atmosphere on the other. In his article, 'Phenomenology of the Shadow' (2016), Daniel Brown highlights a frequently overlooked aspect: while acknowledging the physical presence of the shadow, it is equally crucial to immerse ourselves in it, rather than being solely captivated by the surface upon which it falls (Brown 2016:26).

### Tonal Spectrum of Darkness



[2.11] Brâncuși, C. (c. 1920) *The Beginning of the World*. [Photograph of his sculpture].

With his own photograph of his sculpture *The Beginning of the World*, sculptor Constantin Brâncuși gives another example of how spatial lighting effects are negotiated from the visible into the visual. The large dark shape under the egg literally leaves us in the dark. It is difficult to say whether this second egg is a projection of the shadow or a peculiar reflection of the sculptural form. The nearly geometric light-dark separation shows the power of light tonalities that create the volume of the sculpture. As the title of the work suggests, the image evokes the beginning of Creation where the symbolic form of the egg miraculously emerges from the light-shadow conflict and results in the representation to be questioned (Stoichiță 1999a:208–9). [Fig. 2.11]

Many scholars have pointed to the vast field of shadows and their images. Victor Stoichiță's *A Short History of the Shadow* (1999) provides several examples of the effect of shadows in their visual representations. In a parallel attempt to Ernst Gombrich's art-historical catalogue *Shadows: The Depiction of Cast Shadows in Western Art* (2014), Stoichiță focuses on various works of Western art by dismantling the shadow context of ancient magical notions in interplay with optical illusion, reasoning, publicity, and psychological aspects of these perceptions. In *Shadows and Enlightenment*, Michael Baxandall (1995) provides a comprehensive examination of various visual arrangements of shadows. He contends that the central concern is not merely the perception of shadows but the critical assessment of a specific institutionalized framing and representation of this visual realm. Baxandall asserts that both the technical, computational approach and the cognitive science perspective tend to prioritize defining the form of shadows, often overlooking the 'painterly' and 'phenomenological' dimensions emphasized in visual cultural depictions (Baxandall 1995:35–26).<sup>16</sup>

The creation of shadows by light and the development of their various atmospheres cannot be regarded as purely arbitrary; it is also a deliberate design. The sculpture of the egg and the title *The Beginning of the World* itself suggest how Brâncuși navigates the dilemma of photographic representation and its visible, visual transition (fig. 2.11). Brâncuși's visual representation of his sculptures aims less at perfect reproduction and

---

<sup>16</sup> In both visual language and architectural design, there exists a parallel emphasis on light to enhance aesthetics and minimize the presence of shadows. For example, modern cell phone camera technologies have evolved to eliminate shadows, allowing clear nighttime images. The continuous improvement of low-light photography in cell phone cameras enables capturing images in near darkness. This trend not only characterizes recent photographic technology but also influences contemporary urban planning, architectural practices, and nocturnal lighting strategies. In architecture, the increasing use of transparent structures and artificial lighting has diminished the significance of shadows, prompting some architects to advocate their avoidance (Karcher 2009; Schielke 2013). In photography, the evolution of visual style due to technological advancements is exemplified by Petra Stavast (2008) in her 'China/S75' photo series, capturing visual portraits using the older camera technology of a Siemens S75 mobile phone, embracing the aesthetics of dim, low-resolution images.

more at capturing a certain mood (akin to Steichen's approach in photographing the sculpture *Balzac*, fig. 2.9). Throughout his career, Brâncuși insisted on personally photographing his artworks, emphasizing a unique understanding of how a three-dimensional sculpture transforms into an image. His approach to realizing sculpture through photography reflects his distinct attitude toward visual material and the materiality of sculpture in the interplay of image and light. This approach stands somewhat in contrast to Man Ray's statement, 'I paint what I cannot photograph, and I photograph what I cannot paint' (cited by Sontag 1977: 186).<sup>17</sup>

Returning to the visible-visual world (i.e. Kenaan 2020), questions arise about the application of phenomenology to the visual domain. The examination of Brâncuși's depiction of the play of shadows in his egg sculpture and Steichen's attempt to depict *Balzac* under the night sky sheds light on the special sensitivity of the shadow as a form of materiality. Shadows possess a unique quality not only in their visual representation but, more significantly, in their visible manifestation as we perceive materials interacting with light. In *Shadow-Makers: A Cultural History of Shadows in Architecture* (2017), Stephen Kite notes that nature often falls short of 'picturesque expectations and had to be improved by the artist or landscape architect' (Kite 2017:133). Devoting an entire chapter, titled 'The Art of Shadows,' to the Baroque architecture of Nicholas Hawksmoor illustrating the exploration of 'active darkness,' he quotes the protagonist Dyer from Peter Ackroyd's novel *Hawksmoor*:

And now we come to the Heart of our Designe: the art of Shaddowes you must know well, Walter, and you must be instructed how to Cast them with due Care. It is only the Darknesse that can give trew Forme to our Work and trew Perspective to our Fabrick, for there is no Light without Darknesse and no Substance without Shaddowe. (Ackroyd cited by Kite 2017:35)

Kite reaffirms the connection of shadows to constructed reality by exploring how they are inseparable from light, and that light is not all we need.<sup>18</sup> In *Textures of Light* (2002), Cathryn Vasseleu argues that visions shaped by the mediation of light pass through the sense of sight at the expense of the sense of touch (Vasseleu 2002:12). In modern

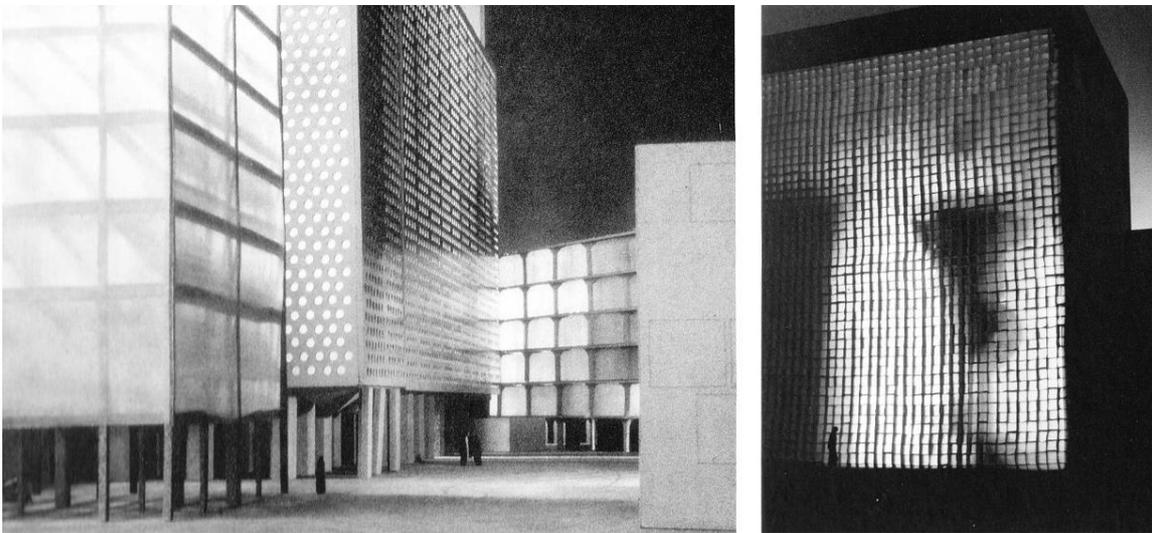
---

<sup>17</sup> Brâncuși refused to have his artwork photographed by anyone other than himself. His understanding of how a sculpture, something three-dimensional, transforms into an image was very particular. The story goes that he asked none other than Man Ray to give him some photography lessons. When he presented one of his first photos to his teacher, Man Ray noticed that the picture was full of scratches and dust. Brâncuși responded that it was exactly how it must be and what he wanted (Stoichiță 1999a:208–9).

<sup>18</sup> Shadows cast by buildings, creating dark atmospheres, are being rediscovered, particularly in regions affected by global warming. As Bloch (2019) illustrates with the example of California, the past architectural ignorance of shading design, leaving streets fully exposed to sunlight, is now a significant issue as temperatures rise.

Enlightenment thinking, she notes, light must withstand its passage through darkness, with the notion that light is the primary source of reason and progress, and infinite darkness must be overcome to reach the truth of a common light (Vasseleu 2002:4). Here, the dual nature of urban darkness becomes evident once more: it is both an idea and a vision, or, as Elcott (2016) suggests, a mental as well as a physical construction shaping the experience. While darkness is represented by light, the complexity of its materiality is often overshadowed. The luminosity and visible qualities mask the richness of the intricate shadow world that unfolds in the darkness itself.

## Phenomenological Properties of Shadows



[2.12] Zumthor, P. (2006) *De Meelfabriek*. [Conversion and Expansion Project Model, Leiden, Netherlands] / *Pavillion Louise Bourgeoise*. [Study Model, DIA Beacon, USA].

The study of perception through a phenomenological lens has frequently delved into understandings of light, but surprisingly little has been written about the variations of shadows within darkness specifically. Architect Peter Zumthor (2006b, 2006a) has long advocated thinking of architecture within atmospheres and its surrounding objects, with a particular emphasis on the importance of ‘composure’ in architecture and the influence of ‘light on things’ (Zumthor 2006a:57-63). He expresses, ‘To plan a building is to think of it as a pure mass of shadow, then, afterwards, to put in light as if you were hollowing out the darkness’ (Zumthor 2006a:59). What distinguishes Zumthor is his conceptualization of the shadow phenomenon as a material for construction. Unlike the traditional view where shadows are seen as consequences, side effects, or underpinnings

(e.g., cast shadows) of representation, Zumthor sees them as a substantive building material. [Fig. 2.12]

Studies on phenomenology towards perception help establish the conceptualization of ‘another darkness’ than the one that has been widespread hitherto: emptiness, blackness, the nothing without information. To expand this understanding, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger’s philosophical approaches serve as a point of departure for a phenomenological exploration of the texture of light atmospheres. Both offer valuable, albeit different, insights into conceptualising darkness as a form that emerges from shadow as an alternative and even potentially positive perceptual phenomenon. Their exploration forms an irreducible link between visual language and materiality, with Merleau-Ponty’s perspective leaning towards the physical and practical, while Heidegger’s is more epistemological.

Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (2005, originally published in 1962) emphasises the challenge and interplay between psychic and physical embodiment, the relationship between perception, embodiment, and the world, and the way our bodies shape our perception of the world around us. Although Merleau-Ponty insists that the body-world relationship is a contact surface rather than a hard boundary and that the structures of our environment merge with our bodily experiences (Merleau-Ponty 2005: 186). To my surprise, in his entire treatise in the book, he does not pay much attention to the world of shadows. Merleau-Ponty only briefly discusses night and darkness, explaining them as a space of nothingness (e.g. without objects): ‘the night is a world of clear and articulated objects that are abolished, our perceptual being cut off from its world’ (Merleau-Ponty 2005:330). In Merleau-Ponty’s account, the night is dark, so the visible world is invisible, the outlines of objects disappear. He writes:

When [...] the world of clear and articulate objects is abolished, our perceptual being, cut off from its world, evolves a spatiality without things. This is what happens in the night. Night is not an object before me; it enwraps me and infiltrates through all my senses, stifling my recollections and almost destroying my personal identity. I am no longer withdrawn into my perceptual look-out from which I watch the outlines of objects moving by at a distance. (Merleau-Ponty 2005:330)

In relation to an absolutely dark room or a pitch-black night, Merleau-Ponty’s view seems plausible. However, when we observe the city night and urban darkness (with or without a camera), it is somewhat different because there is shade at night and there is

no shade in Merleau-Ponty's night. In contrast, Heidegger's phenomenological account, while criticized for not explicitly addressing the human body (Low 2009), prompts a reconsideration of vision and light. His reflections in *The Age of the World Picture* (1996, originally published in 1950) offer a critical examination of human behaviour in relation to shadow perception, particularly how it evolves within new technological conditions:

Everyday opinion sees in the shadow only the lack of light, if not light's complete denial. In truth, however, the shadow is a manifest, though impenetrable, testimony to the concealed emitting of light. In keeping with this concept of shadow, we experience the incalculable as that which, withdrawn from representation, is nevertheless manifest in whatever is, pointing to Being, which remains concealed. (Heidegger 1996:135)

Heidegger connects the visible with the invisible in a similar way to Merleau-Ponty, but he recognises that for anything that seems predictable (i.e. calculable), something must remain incalculable. According to his perspective, invisible shadows exist everywhere in all things, emerging when humanity is transformed into a 'subjectum,' and the world into an image (Heidegger 1996:135). Although Heidegger's discourse on light and shadow is rather metaphorical, it resonates strongly with the literal experience of observing urban night scenarios and the appearance of darkness. His reflection on shadows offers insights into the power of light and the inherently unpredictable nature it introduces. Furthermore, it prompts contemplation on how we perceive and interpret not only the effects of light but also of darkness—highlighting the distinction between idealizing light and finding wisdom and vision in darkness.

The properties of light offer fundamental interpretations with philosophical dimensions, particularly concerning phenomenology and visibility. It is essential to acknowledge that light, darkness, and the resulting spectrum of shadows shape the representation of lightscapes, influencing visible aspects and, consequently, the generated images of the urban night. Plato's neglect of sensory experience in the cave (Ostergaard 2019) and the dominant role of sight and light in modern rationalism allowed Western thought to pay little attention to dark sensory and atmospheric properties (Vasseleu 2002). Hence, various concepts of light presentations and shadow understanding have significantly influenced not only how darkness is perceived but also how it is handled. These concepts have expanded in nighttime urban environments.

Looking at 'shaded darkness' across its tonal spectrum reveals more than a mere representational image or spatial setting. It underscores the presence of ambient light

that is tangible yet largely invisible. As Baxandall (1995) notes, our understanding of shadow, much like light, is often shaped more by theoretical and symbolic concepts than by direct, embodied experience. Although the visual arts have extensively explored the ephemeral qualities of shadow, academic discourse has comparatively overlooked this spectrum (Baxandall 1995:35-36). Consequently, the predominant emphasis on visual appearance during early urban development often disregarded qualities associated with the phenomenal and the imperceptible. These considerations and approaches to illumination not only carry theoretical implications but also practical and current cultural, political, and social implications for our perception of darkness at night.

## 2.4 Political Darkness



[2.13] Omnipresence' strategy in action: NYPD's pre-crime policing with parked trailers and mounted lights in New York City. (2023) Photo: © Chantal Meng

'Omnipresence' is an effort, where the De Blasio administration installed 150 mobile floodlights in the city's public spaces in 2014 as part of a strategy to facilitate the work of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) (Kortava 2021). 'Omnipresence' continues to be in effect to this day. The parked trailers scattered throughout the city are equipped with generators that produce a loud noise to power their bright headlights. These harsh, nocturnal floodlights designate certain areas as 'sketchy' through their intense brightness, exerting spatial 'control' that is not only visible, but also palpable. These lights demarcate zones from afar and illuminate them in vivid detail up close. [Fig. 2.13]

Urban illumination is not simply architectural and infrastructural. Light is a tool not only for shaping space but also for shaping life. How artificial light is used and staged plays an active part in social life and culture. Lighting has become a crucial component of both political and architectural affairs; just think of the staging of public space, be it a hospital or a football pitch.<sup>19</sup> Lighting shapes the reputation and identity of a space and how it reads to different publics (Sloane et al. 2016:20). As Schivelbusch (1995) highlighted,

---

<sup>19</sup> See research on spatial staging with light in hospitals (Stidsen et al. 2011) or sports stadiums (Uhrich and Benkenstein 2010).

artificial light goes far beyond mere utility. Other scholars (Bille and Sørensen 2007; Shaw 2018; Stone 2017) insist that illumination at night cannot be regarded in any way as neutral or transparent but as constitutive of social relations.

How darkness is apparent in the urban night is related to forms of power over the environment. Methods for night lighting motivations often prioritize appearance and control over practical use and benefits for people (e.g. Bille and Sørensen 2007:270). The project *Configuring Light/Staging the Social* (configuringlight.org, n.d.) and related research by Don Slater, Joanne Entwistle, and Mona Sloane emphasizes that an effective approach to public lighting should not favour technical, political, or aesthetic factors over social practices (Entwistle and Slater 2018; Sloane 2021; Sloane, Slater, and Entwistle 2016). Factors behind the use of artificial lighting in urban spaces cannot revolve around how subjects are presented. Night lighting is about much more than just putting things in the spotlight.

### Life with Artificial Light

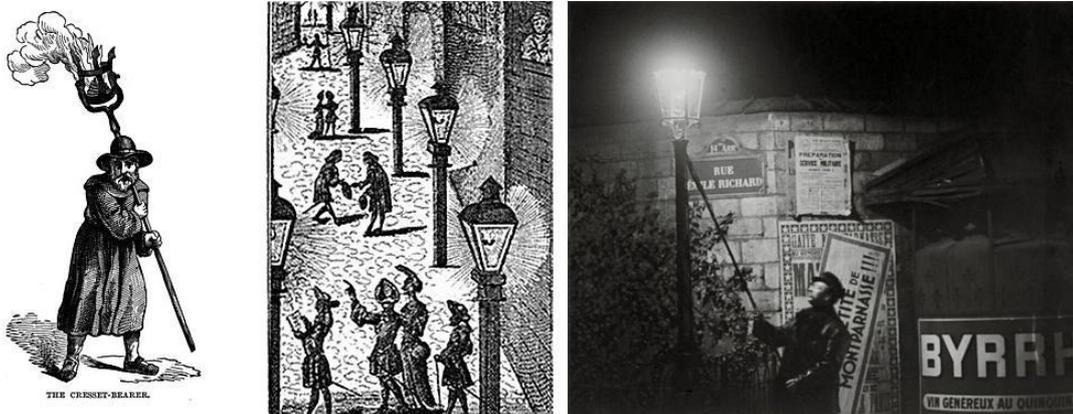


[2.14] London's social housing estates are recognisable by their bright, cold light. (2019)

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2016/may/19/darkness-luxury-britains-council-estates-lighting-cctv> (Accessed 27 February 2023).

Today, the urban nightscape often features harsh, glaring neon lights. These lights serve not only to illuminate iconic landmarks like Times Square but also to define and distinguish various lifestyles and neighbourhoods. Matthew Fuller emphasizes that

streetlighting serves as more than just a functional and decorative element; it is an indicator of socioeconomic status and class (Fuller 2005:90–92). This is evident in cases where bright lighting can label a nighttime area as ‘dangerous’ or ‘problematic,’ as seen with ‘functional’ lighting on housing estates, regardless of whether they are dangerous or not (Slater 2017: 31). Justified in terms of safety and security, a housing estate in Whitecross, London, produces such extremely bright, poor-quality light that tenants stick black trash bags over their windows so they can sleep (Entwistle and Slater 2019:13).<sup>20</sup> Consequently, in a metropolis like London today, darkness in certain wealthy neighbourhoods is understood as a luxury that offers the reprieve of calm and peace from the sensory overload of urban life (Slater 2017: 31). [Fig. 2.14]



[2.15] A watchman carrying a cresset, filled with burning oil or pitch. (c. 1550) Available at: <https://www.fineartstorehouse.com/collections/heritage-images/cresset-bearer-11809530.html> (Accessed 22 February 2023).

[2.16] Leipzig street-lighting scene, etching. Print from *Aufgefangene Briefe, welche Zwischen etzlichen curieusen Personen über den ietzigen Zustand der Staats und gelehrten Welt gewechselt worden* (Wahrenberg [actually Leipzig]. (1701) Available at: <https://erenow.net/modern/evenings-empire-a-history-of-the-night-in-early-modern-europe/16.php> (Accessed 22 February 2023).

[2.17] Brassai (c. 1932) *Extinguishing a Streetlight, rue Émile Richard, Paris*. [Gelatin silver print]. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Improvements to night lighting largely aimed at increasing safety—which also enabled better control over citizens after dark. In *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1995) emphasises the strong influence of the authorities monitoring these nightly events. In the Middle Ages, attempts to control the city at night were made by ‘watchmen’, armed with weapons and torches, who were the only ones allowed to be out on the streets at night. This role evolved into armed night patrols and, later on, the police (Schivelbusch 1995:32, 91–92).

<sup>20</sup> See also Nadia Hallgren’s (2021) film *Omnipresence*, which tells the story of the floodlights on a housing project in the Bronx.

In her book *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (2015), Simone Brown explains the eighteenth-century New York lantern laws, which required enslaved people to carry lit candles in front of their faces at night to be seen. From a modern perspective, light stands for comfort, efficiency, and safety.<sup>21</sup> However, the power to shed light on people and spaces creates conditions of control and maintenance of oppressive power structures that continue to evolve (Sloane 2021). [Fig. 2.15–2.17]

Schivelbusch's (1995) examination, from both political and cultural angles, succinctly encapsulates the profound societal shifts triggered of the newly bright urban night. The rapid expansion of nighttime production in factories, resulting in night shifts, heightened surveillance and ushered in new forms of nocturnal leisure, such as night walks and window shopping. Scholarly perspectives (Isenstadt, Petty, and Neumann 2015; Koslofsky 2011; McQuire 2008; Nye 2018) view the transformation of the urban night via intense artificial lighting as integral to the spectacle and aesthetics of modernity. Applicable to Guy Debord's critique of *The Society of the Spectacle* (2005) the light-driven image of the 'bright night' emerges as a ubiquitous symbol of capitalist-driven mass media, consumer culture, and image-based dominance in contemporary society. Essentially, the introduction of technological lighting enhancements has revolutionized nighttime existence, fuelling an ever-growing 'insatiable appetite for light' (Schivelbusch 1995:54).

The absence of darkness and the overexposure of public spaces must be questioned from this historical perspective. Enlightenment associations of darkness with ignorance and primitiveness need to be challenged and replaced with more positive ones (Edensor 2017:179-82). The question of how much light a city needs at night remains open and is the subject of unending debate. Movements against over-illumination in public spaces are not new. In 1968, Henri Lefebvre proposed 'le droit à la ville' (the right to the city), inspiring global urban social movements (Harvey 2013:xiii, 22). Lefebvre's ideas, influenced perceptions of urban spaces, sparking a broader conversation about life quality and public space governance (see also Sennett 2018). The ensuing discussions and riots questioned the authority over city planning, with activists resisting globalization, commercialization, and privatization. For example, during the May '68 rebellion in Paris, students vehemently demanded their rights to the city, declaring that

---

<sup>21</sup> Although basic discomfort with darkness persists, the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the US reports that 67.5 per cent of violent crimes actually occur in daylight, between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. (Petrusich 2016). It is questionable whether lighting at night prevents accidents and crime; several studies indicate that this is not necessarily the case (Riggs 2014; Slater 2017; Sloane 2021).

the illumination of the streets should be public and that streetlamps should have on/off switches (Bovet-Pavy 2016), a demand that endures to this day.<sup>22</sup>

Edensor emphasises that light is by no means discrete. Yet how we understand and evaluate illuminated landscapes has been almost entirely neglected. The premise has been to read lightscares as a text, full of power, symbolism, cultural significance, and historical context, with artificial light primarily examined as a cultural artifact. Indeed, present-day perceptions of darkness, discomfort with its presence, and encounters with it are rooted in Enlightenment ideals of 'reason' and rationality, promising to enhance human existence through light. These ideologies have defined darkness not only as a failure, inefficiency, and desolation but also as a source of intimidating ignorance or lack of knowledge (Blumenberg 1993). However, one aspect that various disciplines have overlooked is how the changing light falls 'across' the landscape, how darkness is perceived, and how the characteristics of light are interpreted (Edensor 2017:4).

### Familiarity with Darkness



[2.18] Magritte, R. (1954) *The Dominion of Light (L'empire des lumières)*. [Oil on canvas]. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

---

<sup>22</sup> In French cities, parkour athletes physically turn off store lights at night to combat light pollution (Méheut 2022). Roger Narboni proclaims, 'Architectural lighting is dead,' emphasizing the shift toward social functionality over beautification (Lupton and Stammers, 2013). An example of smart city lighting is Chintan Shah's Twilight system, which brightens lights only when it detects people, cars, or bicycles (Carrington 2013).

We note how, over time, nocturnal light practices have brightened not only the night on the ground but also our night skies (i.e. light pollution). Surrealist painter René Magritte played with that very visuality and the contrast of day and night in a way that was ahead of his time. In his series *The Dominion of Light* (1954), the paintings depict scenes of bright skies over nocturnal street scenes. Magritte's nighttime portrayals address how the attempt to 'make the night visible through light' can appear surreal, often exhibiting visually striking features.<sup>23</sup> By modelling the light conditions of day and night, Magritte illustrates, as the title suggests, how 'an empire of light' possesses the pictorial capability to enhance the perception of brightness in illuminated areas and deepen the obscurity of unlit spaces. [Fig. 2.18]

From Magritte's perspective, we can observe pictorially how nighttime illumination has contrasting effects, demonstrating that light not only shapes brightness but also sculpts darkness in its vicinity. Once again, the darkness we encounter in the urban night is both optically and visually 'moulded' by artificial light, leading us back to what I term 'urban darkness.' This novel darkness, originating from industrialization, was conceptually refined, emphasizing it as a unique condition while sometimes overlooking the fact that light and darkness are most effective in relation to each other (i.e. Elcott 2016). The scholar Louis-Sébastien Mercier remarked on how artificial lighting created this new darkness when a new type of lantern was developed in Paris in 1763, as follows:

These lights cast nothing, but darkness made visible.... From a distance they hurt the eyes, from close up they give hardly any light, and standing directly underneath one, one might as well be in the dark.

(Mercier cited by Schivelbusch 1995:95)

'The newer a culture is, the more it fears nightfall' (Schivelbusch 1995:81). Our encounters with darkness in the open urban night have progressively dwindled, rendering it an unusual phenomenon. The lack of familiarity with darkness can invoke a sensation akin to Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (2003). Freud's theory of the 'uncanny' describes how the familiar, such as one's home (the homely), can transform into something alien (the 'unhomely' or unfamiliar), potentially instigating fear in daily life: 'The uncanny is in some way a species of the familiar' (Freud 2003:134). In the dark, the sense of familiarity with a place can quickly dissipate, giving rise to the 'uncanny' effect, resulting in a frightening experience. However, darkness isn't frightening solely

---

<sup>23</sup> In this context, see also Clemens Klopfenstein's (1999) *Story of Night*, a strange and remarkable combination of dream, documentary, and science fiction in a foray through the urban night from Istanbul, Dublin, Helsinki to Rome.

due to its visual obscurity and gloomy ambiance. From the perspective of an urban dweller, a dark public environment becomes unfamiliar not least because of its stark contrast to well-lit surroundings, rendering it strange and potentially perilous.

In her article 'Fear of the light: why we need darkness' (2016), Amanda Petrusich goes even further, noting that while fears of the dark are deeply culturally ingrained, our nocturnal discomforts are becoming more transcendental than pragmatic: 'It's not just darkness we fear, it's the vastness and loneliness of the universe, spreading out from here to God-knows-where' (Petrusich 2016). Elisabeth Bronfen, in her philosophical-literary work titled *Night Passages* (2013), asserts that despite our growing detachment from darkness, it holds significant aesthetic and inspirational value. Night, Bronfen writes, is both archaic and fragile; the associations and meanings of night are at odds with the workings of a busy day, but because night can quasi-erase the day through its light, it also promises possibilities for change—and serves as a necessary point of departure for transcending the constraints of the rational world and its logic. (Bronfen, 2013: 179, 350).

'Sleeping is for losers', John Crary observes tongue-in-cheek, analysing the tendency toward speed and productivity in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Crary 2014:14). The 'round-the-clock' presence of light has increasingly influenced our routines; sleep hours in North America have fallen from an average of 10 hours per night in the early twentieth century to 6.5 hours in 2014 (Crary 2014:11), and the timing of the evening meal has generally been moved further into the night (Straw 2014:2). Darkness and sleep are considered obstacles from the perspective of the economic sector or military operations or the provision of infrastructure for the public enjoyment of nightlife. Crary's analysis is a pessimistic diagnosis, asking whether the increase in wakefulness in the interests of efficiency is an improvement at all.

Living with and experiencing darkness today, especially in the urban night, presents challenges. Darkness appears to be nearly banished everywhere, either non-existent or accessible only cautiously, as dark places often conceal hidden activities.<sup>24</sup> The lighting methods of the modern era further reinforced prevailing religious and moral notions that equate light as 'good' and darkness as 'bad.' Modernist ideologies promoted the idea that lighting combats ignorance and enhances safety, resulting in a heightened and conscious

---

<sup>24</sup> For hidden activities in dark spaces, look to the early twentieth-century cinema, a clandestine meeting place for lovers and prostitutes, prompting the 1917 report 'The Moral Danger of Darkness' by the British National Council of Public Morals, advocating stricter public space regulations (Elcott 2016:67). See also photographer Kohei Yoshiyuki's 'The Park' series, which documents a concealed sexual underworld in Tokyo's night parks (Yoshiyuki and Aletti 2019).

awareness of darkness. Examining the political and economic significance of ‘awake time’ in the Western context, Crary (2014) highlights how consumption and production in the twenty-first century have set a cycle and routine of constant action in motion. When round-the-clock services are available, we lie awake in quasi-darkness, waiting indefinitely for a desired loss of consciousness and unable to recover from visual stimuli (Crary 2014:126).

## Aesthetics of Darkness



[2.19] Berlin at night by ESA astronaut André Kuipers from the International Space Station. (2012)  
Available at: [https://www.esa.int/ESA\\_Multimedia/Images/2012/05/Berlin\\_at\\_night](https://www.esa.int/ESA_Multimedia/Images/2012/05/Berlin_at_night) (Accessed 22 February 2023).

While colour is not the primary focus of this research, it is essential to recognize that light itself has become increasingly brighter over time, consequently intensifying the contrast with darkness.<sup>25</sup> The critical consideration here is that both brightness and darkness encompass a range of shades and nuances, making shading also a politically significant matter. For instance, 20 years after the fall of the Wall in Berlin, an image from space visualizes the nocturnal light dividing the line between East and West Berlin. A dimmer, warm, muted, light-orange tone corresponds to East Berlin, while bright

---

<sup>25</sup> Johan Wolfgang Goethe (2006), originally published in 1810, refers to light as a medium in his *Theory of Colours*. According to his theory, all colors are defined by the broader phenomenon between light and dark, with color itself being a quality of light resulting from the mixture of black and white. Black is ascribed to dark, and white to light (Goethe 2006: 31, 388).

white-green hues from modern LEDs and fluorescent lighting define West Berlin. From personal experience, the brightness of the light at night feels different in these places. The older bulbs in the east produce a peculiar, dim ambient light, while the LED lights in the west are brighter, with more contrasting and less soft transitions from light to dark. [Fig. 2.19]

When studying urban lights at night, it is essential to include the factors that determine the tonalities of light as well as when, how and where they do so. In *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie write:

If you work in advertising or propaganda, you know that Jean-Luc Godard was only half right when he declared ‘it’s not blood, it’s red’. The color red always bleeds. It summons up an unusually wide ranging—but often *open*, *ambiguous*—power to affect and be affected. (Bertelsen & Murphie 2010:138)

The above statement on the power of ‘affect and being affected’ expands upon Elcott’s notion that red is a colour, and darkness is a condition. It emphasizes that the crucial aspect of nighttime lights is not the colour itself—neither black nor white—but rather the ideals associated with light that influence our perception of darkness. Building on the ground-breaking work of Brian Massumi (1995) and Elspeth Probyn (2000), the humanities have increasingly come to consider ‘affect’ as something more than only culturally constructed ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’, substantially divorced from the materiality of the body (Gibbs 2002:337). Massumi makes it clear that affect is more than pathos and sentimentalism. He insists that affect is transversal, and that it is everywhere. It is cultural and political as well as corporeal and even mystical: ‘The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is itself a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late-capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory.’ (Massumi 1995:106–7).

Since the late 1980s, the contemporary philosopher Gernot Böhme (2000, 2014, 2017; 2014) has formulated a theory of ‘ecological aesthetics of nature.’ His philosophy of atmosphere advocates for a new aesthetic understanding of environmental qualities and the human condition. Böhme considers light itself as a vital medium that establishes significant connections between people and their surroundings, asserting that environments are aesthetically experienced irrespective of human presence. Aesthetic experiences are not solely determined by ‘physiological or toxicological factors’ (Böhme

2000:14).<sup>26</sup> In the realm of capitalist, technical civilization, Böhme underscores that every element is choreographed through lighting technology. What we observe in these environmental settings hardly ever looks like it would under natural light:

[...] we have to ask whether light as *lighting* may not be even more important, insofar as it allows us to see the world in a particular way and thereby founds our affective participation in the world. (Böhme, 2017: 156)

Practically nothing of what we see in our daily environment—by which I mean capitalist, technical civilization—is seen simply as it would appear of its own accord, i.e. in the plain light of day. In other words, everything is staged with the aid of lighting technology. (Böhme, 2017: 203)

Atmospheres, Böhme claims, are not a matter of mere taste, preference, or a question of beauty or art (Böhme 2017:32, 124). He emphasizes that in the multicultural landscape of our major cities, universally understood pictograms have replaced universally understood symbolism. Thus, the critical aspect of a city becomes its feel, with the forms of impression taking precedence over any specific message it conveys (Böhme 2017:77). Social scientists Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen (2007) also highlight that the ongoing creation of the ‘sociality of light’ and ‘lightscares’ is an ongoing process of arranging the world, for us, with artificial light: ‘shedding light on objects is about attributing perceptual form to the objects, and hence the social use of light is not as much on the object as it is for the object’ (Bille and Sørensen 2007:270). The way we perceive and experience the world is inherently political and aesthetics play a crucial role in shaping this perception.<sup>27</sup> Also, Edensor notes that the typical design of lighting is a subtle form of power, influencing our perceptions and feelings without our awareness:

Where illumination is deemed to lack aesthetic value, it can be subject to symbolic violence. Less obviously, normative lighting arrangements, through which the sensible is distributed, testify to a dispersed, mundane form of power through which meanings and sensations become unreflexive manifestations of common sense. (Edensor 2017:107)

---

<sup>26</sup> Böhme’s atmospheric concept diverges from the natural sciences, defining atmosphere beyond air and chemical composition. In the social sciences, termed *ambiance* (i.e. Thibaud 2011, 2015), atmosphere, as Böhme posits, includes interstitial spaces influenced by both air and traces of human activity and infrastructure (i.e. Bennett 2010). Böhme extends the concept of ‘Gefühlsraum’ (felt space) by Hermann Schmitz (2005), exploring a phenomenology of atmospheres to understand how the spatial ‘haptics’ of our environment shape perception, predisposing us to the world through aesthetic impressions.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Rancière’s *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (2006) highlights the interconnection between aesthetics, politics, and society, arguing that space, time, and modes of expression play a pivotal role in shaping the organization of social order.

Representational practices, Stuart Hall argues, include the practice of symbolic and visual stereotypes: when a particular practice of representation is practised over and over again, it becomes a powerful trope and appears natural and inevitable (Hall 1997:259). Design, Hall writes, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), is a basic practice of choosing what is shown and how. This means what information is provided, such as what visual methods (panels, labels, fonts, etc.) are used. Such design choices are sometimes ‘repressive’ in the sense that they lead us to certain interpretations and understandings, opening certain doors to meaning but inevitably closing others (Hall 1997:170). Although Hall here refers to exhibition design, it can easily be applied to urban lighting strategies and what is being illuminated.

Light is a crucial aspect of urban design, serving as both a means and an end of presentation. It is instrumental in controlling and defining the quality of the environment, driven by political and economic factors, often carrying symbolic significance, and leaving lasting impressions. The aesthetic qualities of light tonalities and darkness play a pivotal role in shaping perception, influencing how people interact with and react to both lit and unlit spaces. This is evident when reflecting on strategies like ‘omnipresence’ in New York, for example. Examining practices of representation in our perceptions and experiences of darkness in the city at night emphasizes the need to consider both the hierarchical and emotional aspects.

Looking at ‘political darkness’ illustrates that considerations of image, space, and atmospheric factors cannot merely be viewed from purely aesthetic perspectives. Scholars such as Böhme (2017), Edensor (2017), Hall (1997), and Massumi (1995) emphasize how representations and experiences are shaped by cultural and political systems, highlighting the importance of understanding how these systems ‘affect’ the world. Light settings that shape the urban night are powerful political tools with significant corresponding social implications, influencing life beyond human experiences. This prompts a critical inquiry into what, when, and how light is presented and the design of darkness in the urban night.

## **Conclusion**

This literature review, titled ‘Looking at Darkness,’ explores the relationship between light and shade in the visual and visible realm. Through examining various visual examples, especially the overlap of photography with spatial settings and image characteristics in urban light scenarios, it can be concluded that artificial light shapes the

perception of darkness through pictorial representation. Cave photography strove to make darkness visible to the human eye, while *Stonehenge* sought to visually impress with technological advancements, gaining sight and visual power over a dark landscape. Artists like Steichen and Brâncuși endeavoured to photographically capture and preserve the ephemeral, challenging the erasure of shadows by artificial light and appreciating the tangible materiality of shaded darkness. The ‘omnipresence’ of floodlights demonstrated the higher political power of light over public space. These considerations go beyond the presentation, visibility, and safety provided by light at night. They profoundly shape urban darkness, influencing how it is perceived, handled, and acted upon through the intervention of artificial light.

The deliberate use of bright lighting and the subsequent appearance of artificial darkness serve as tools for designing effective and atmospheric light landscapes. Exploring different shades of darkness reveals a tangible ambient light, surpassing mere spotlight presentations. Viewing through a political lens, darkness is not just an aesthetic perspective but a constructed realm of light with powerful motivations and extensive social consequences. Urban darkness surpasses conventional portrayals, revealing not just the absence of natural darkness on city nights but the deliberate creation of darkness through artificial lighting. These perspectives on the ‘visual,’ ‘spatial,’ ‘shaded,’ and ‘political’ aspects of darkness deepen our understanding of its role in the urban night, exposing its intricate connection to images, visual representation, and vision. It extends into spaces, impacting social and ecological dynamics.

Impressions of different light atmospheres carry strong visual and sensory properties, finding a phenomenological place in the nocturnal urban environment. Studying urban darkness from this perspective is crucial, considering constant exposure to artificial light situations in everyday life. Environments with stark contrasts between bright and dark lighting signify abrupt shifts from familiar perspectives, and lights at night can obscure potential information, including shades and tonalities. Shadows, as constant companions of light, are integral by-products of the building infrastructure and demand consideration.

### 3. PHOTOGRAPHY

## THROUGH THE LENS: SEARCHING FOR SHADOWS



[3.1] Meng, C. (2013–2022) *Blank-Nights*. [Film negatives].

In 2013, I attempted to depict darkness without the aid of artificial light in the Galloway Forest Park in Scotland. In 2009, the International Dark-Sky Association officially declared the park as the first Dark Sky Park in the UK (and only the fourth in the world), an area protected from light pollution (Forestry and Land Scotland 2021). Within its deep, dark setting, I was determined to try and fix the ‘natural’ phenomenon and atmosphere of darkness onto a negative with my camera. After several midnight attempts at producing very long exposures, I learned that my own perception of the tonalities of darkness was anything but that of a camera. Although my surroundings were almost pitch black, in a fit of mild optimism I was convinced that if Hiroshi Sugimoto had managed to capture a theatre and an entire film with a long exposure, it must also

somehow be possible to capture traces of this darkness.<sup>28</sup> However faint and tiny these traces may be, if only I make the exposure time long enough. The result was anything but extraordinary: the negatives remained mostly naked and contained hardly any traces of light. I no longer try to translate my sensory perception into a photograph.

I remember my great disappointment when I got my developed roll of negatives from Galloway Forest Park back. The outcome is neither surprising nor new. Nor is it surprising that I, as a photographer, need evidence of the disconnect between the human eye and the lens. To this day, my night excursions end in transparent negatives. Nine years later, however, I have a very different appreciation for this material, and I almost regret that back then I saw many of the negatives as useless and threw some of them into the bin. It was not until much later that I realised that the blank negatives were exactly what I was looking for. That is, the resulting images were not the ‘nothing’ of a completely white or black surface (i.e. a blank negative that blackened or faded) but a representation of the limits of capturing darkness in a visual form. [Fig. 3.1]

These initial beginnings and photographic searching far from the urban environments of London and New York were an important catalyst for my later research and the project described here. Back then, when I pointed my camera at the darkness in parks and woods, mostly away from artificial light, I was not quite sure what I was doing, but I was eager to question photography as a medium and produce other visual material to discuss pictorial perception. Later, when I moved into architectural urban settings, I often continued to focus on trees and green spaces at night. Trees, then, are a point of continuity in this research. The different ways that they cast and capture shadows reveals much about the light conditions of their environment. In the urban night setting, foliage is one of the rare places where the tonalities of a dark atmosphere develop and form.

How does artificial light operate to make ‘the dark’ visible in urban areas? How exactly are light and darkness physically visible, related, and photographically translated? What are the differences between capturing darkness in an image and strategically using and seeing darkness in an environment when both make things perceptible and visible, albeit in different ways? The following investigation takes these questions as a starting point. It traces the atmospheric effects of light representations on darkness by observing them through the lens of my cameras. Inspired by Elcott’s historical analysis of the mediation of *Artificial Darkness* (2016), I follow concomitant tactics and methods of urban night

---

<sup>28</sup> See the photo series ‘Theatres’ by Sugimoto.

lighting which amplify dark light atmospheres, making the darkness appear and disappear through shadows. I search for shadows with my camera, which 'shade' dark atmospheres from artificial light.

This chapter underlines my concept of urban darkness, its artificial creation based on shades of artificial light. The urban darkness, which I explore in my work, is also spherical and ephemeral. I find its 'matter' in surroundings that are not solely made of solid substance. In other words: I encounter shades of darkness in the leaves of trees rather than in the planes of brick and concrete. This spatial encounter of light is a coherent experience; it is the encounter between what is in space (i.e. solid) and its shadow (i.e. fleeting). For example, a nightscape that is darkly shaped (in the city as well as in the countryside) may consist of shaded green spaces. However, this relationship of darkness is particularly complex because it occurs in interaction with environment and material but is never a constant. The nocturnal darkness is momentary, floating, and changing; it appears differently at full moon, in winter when it snows, or in the moment when the garbage collection passes by.

For example, a tree growing along an urban street not only serves as an object that has its place in that space (i.e. the street) but also contributes to its wider environment (i.e. ambient). A tree 'colours' the ambient light, shading the street; a tree provides shade day and night, 'shielding' from bright light (natural or artificial). A tree affects the condition of the environment in which it grows. The presence of atmosphere, such as light, 'tincture' (i.e. atmosphere, Böhme 2017:51) our experience of places in superposition with solid substance (i.e. architecture, Gibson 2015); just as our experience of the street is related to the tree, so, too, we experience the light of the street also through the tree. And this tree can create an atmosphere of darkness at night with its various shadows. It is an atmospheric effect similar to a 'warmth' or 'coolness' that can be produced by things that are not warm or cool per se (as light is): just as the way the tree radiating nature placed in an urban street is not 'natural' (e.g. Brown et al. 2019:6), and nocturnal darkness is not (exclusively) the shadow of the earth. The connection of light with the advent of darkness must be understood in this sense.

In the following, I will critically question to what extent the emphasis on seeing and knowing through the urge to illuminate everything leads to a devaluation of other forms of knowledge. My attention is therefore increasingly focused on physical perception, which is both haptic and imaginative. I will reflect on the ecological and social conditions associated with the effects and perspectives of shadows produced by artificial light. I

argue that alternative forms of visual representation are important in creating more inclusive, democratic ways of thinking that can challenge the seemingly non-negotiable. This chapter invites us to perceive how a shadow world unfolds to show that artificial light and representations leave traces that can neither be calculated nor manipulated but have the potential for multiple visions. From this viewpoint, I attempt to show that a reorientation from light to shadow is fundamentally necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of urban darkness. The chapter goes on to show why the observation of shadows— which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is closely linked to photography and our pictorial understanding—needs to be considered more closely in the illumination of the urban nightscape.

Certainly, shadows at night have received little attention so far, unless they fall into the realm of crime.<sup>29</sup> From the field of art, on the other hand, we know that shadows have been sufficiently used for visual effects because of their dramatic effect; this can be equally observed in paintings, stage sets, or films often related to night scenes. In relation to urban day light, recent studies often highlight two main issues related to the shadow environment: the lack of natural light in residential environments due to shadows cast by larger buildings (Bliss 2016; Francis 2008; Mathiasen, Frandsen and Grønlund 2022) and the lack of shade to protect against sunlight in public spaces, which is particularly relevant due to global warming (Bloch 2019; Kite 2017).<sup>30</sup> Both raise acute and critical questions about the ecological habitat; questions that also concern light and darkness in the urban night. Surprisingly, however, little thought is given to how shadows and shades function at night. How are shadows used, what do they do, what do they mean especially for spatial but also imaginative experiences? Can they be further deployed and deliberately created and used artificially? Baxandall has raised similar critical questions in *Shadows and Enlightenment* (1995:128): How can we deal with shadows? How can we engage with them? And if we can, do we? [emphasis added].

The following investigation is practice-based. My photographs serve as foundations, searches, and annotations. They are not finished works of art but the result of a process. They are the result of a long and intensive study, carried out with different photographic

---

<sup>29</sup> A difficult and heated debate with many different points of view when it comes to night lighting. See, for example: 'Reducing Crime Through Environmental Design: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment of Street Lighting in New York City' (Chalfin et al. 2022), 'Can Street Lighting Reduce Crime?' (UChicago Urban Labs, n.d.), 'The Controversial Floodlights Illuminating New York City's Public-Housing Developments' (Kortava 2021), 'Fear of the light: why we need darkness' (Petrusich 2016) or 'Street Lights and Crime: A Seemingly Endless Debate' (Riggs 2014).

<sup>30</sup> See also laws titled 'Right to Light' by designing buildings (e.g. Campbell-Dollaghan 2013; Great Britain and Law Commission 2014).

techniques and under different nocturnal lighting scenarios in different urban landscapes. The text that follows concerns the key findings of this search. A comprehensive catalogue of my hands-on photographic exploration is available at [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net) and is also presented in *Shadow Typology* (Meng 2023) in book form (physical, tactile, printed). As a reminder, the reader is continuously invited to browse this material while reading this text.

The advent of photography created a deeply rooted understanding of the shadow in visual understanding. This history, I argue, requires re-examination, whose pictorial presentations, representations, and ultimately the phenomenology of shadow need to be further explored. How the image, the way it is represented, and the subsequent perception of shadow have shaped both design practice and our understanding of light and darkness needs to be explored. The goal of my photographic quest is to challenge the dominant mode of visual representation, especially in the Western tradition (i.e. ocularcentrism), by its own means, that is, to photographically counter and critically question that visual representation is the most accurate and objective way of understanding the world. Thereby it is not least my intention to explore qualities of the phenomenal perception of the nocturnal shadow through the photographic image.

The chapter is divided into two main parts: the formal language of dark and light *Shapes* (Part I), and the resulting variety of *Shadows* (Part II). First, I discuss the type of ‘formalism’ evident in both the visible architectural nightscape and the visual properties of light, darkness, and shadow. On this basis, in the second part I examine the various shadows—visible and invisible, material and immaterial—that we can and cannot perceive at night. The chapter deliberately follows a formalistic structure to illustrate that light and darkness are much more than symbolism and shadow casting. The investigation is underpinned by my ‘shadow typology’ and structures the overall analysis accordingly, evident in both main parts: starting with ‘form’ and ‘contrast’ (cast shadow), moving on to surface and tonality (attached shadow), and finally to the more nebulous and atmospheric (overcast shadow).

The ultimate goal of this chapter is to examine how urban darkness is created, seen, and experienced as a circumstance (i.e. condition), and thus visually associated with an urban/social context through the perspective of shadow and the projection of shading in the physical present. I turn my attention to shadows because I believe that their appearance and our conception of them are crucial to further explore our understanding of darkness today.

## PART I — SHAPES

### Contrast: Shapes of Darkness in the Background



[3.2] Meng, C. (2013) *Sky-Light*. [Analogue photography].

[3.3] Meng, C. (2017) *Flash-Light*. [Analogue photography].

The philosopher of colour C.L. Hardin notes: ‘By adding light, not only do whites become whiter, blacks get blacker’ (Hardin 2012:8). This corresponds strikingly with photography, artificial light practices, and the visible finding of urban darkness. City lights at night illustrate Hardin’s (2012) account: a cluster of brightly lit night spaces makes the immediate environment, including the sky, appear brighter while making surrounding darkness at the edges seem to appear even darker. Appearance and impression are crucial to understanding urban darkness and how it is created. The visual effect of artificial light at night caused by contrasts and its consequences for darkness can be easily simplified and understood with the photographic basics—film and camera. This can be seen in the photos above and is explained below.

*Sky-Light* shows a brightly glowing night sky (common in major cities on account of light pollution) that makes the outlines of objects (in this case a hedge) on the ground stand out from the sky. The hedge in the photograph is cast in its shade—rather flat but noticeable through the contrast between the dark shadows and the lit sky. When all variables in the sensor/film and camera mechanism are constant, long exposure increases the amount of light in a photograph. Therefore, it not only increases brightness but also the contrast with darkness. It is, nonetheless, possible that after some time, too

much light reduces details and generates such a sharp contrast that information (e.g. details of shade) is lost. This means that with conventional photographic technology, the film negative is overexposed or ‘burned out’, and the film negative looks dark, leaving only a white area after development.<sup>31</sup> [Fig. 3.2]

*Flash-Light* shows one such fadeout, a reverse loss of information by light compared to the image *Sky-Light* and its lack of perceptible details in the dark areas. The image actively alters the light by using a flash that brightens the foreground. The intervention of adding some extra light removes most shadows in the immediate vicinity while creating new ones elsewhere. The illumination of the flash enhances the contrast and puts parts of the scenery too far away to be touched by the light in complete darkness. The capacity for a flash to create shadows through light illustrates Hardin’s description further: light can make what is illuminated brighter so that the darkness may appear even darker (Hardin 2012:8). [Fig. 3.3]

Both photographs, *Sky-Light* and *Flash-Light*, are a version of a shadow play that emerges through artificial light. The final visual results arise from the same principle, an increase in the contrast between light and dark. Yet darkness can be—as light—an artificial fabrication in both literal and figurative terms. Following my concept of urban darkness, these two photographs once again illustrate not so much the opposing understanding of light and darkness, but their complex relationship. What we can observe and see in these examples is how artificial light makes darkness visible at night in different ways: on the one hand in the immediate environment (flashing light), and on the other hand through indirect lighting (glowing sky).

When studying city lighting at night, it is important to consider the direct and indirect effects of lighting on the impression of darkness. The unifying element of light for the ‘image’ of darkness is contrast. Without light, no darkness; without darkness, no light. Contrast also causes us to quickly divide the environment into light and dark areas in our perception.<sup>32</sup> As in the painting technique *chiaroscuro*, light and darkness serves the reinforcement of the spatial and three-dimensional impression. The resulting shading thus can further be used to enhance and intensify the visual effect of a scene.

---

<sup>31</sup> See the photographic exploration of the effect of long exposure that can be found in Sugimoto’s work ‘Theatres’ (1978-93). In this photo series, he exposes movie theatres (the entire time of the projection of the film) in a single frame. As a result, the screen appears as an absolute white surface in the architectural setting of rows of seats and the projection stage.

<sup>32</sup> See also *Seeing Black and White* (2006), especially the chapter ‘The Contrast Period’ on the history of visual perception by psychologist Alan Gilchrist, and the more recent philosophical and cognitive approach in *Action in Perception* (2004) by Alva Noë, especially Chapter 3, ‘Enacting Content’.

Traditionally, we are also familiar with perceptual studies involving strong contrasts in Gestalt theory, in which black and white surfaces are perceived alternately as a vase or two faces, a rabbit or a duck, and so on.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, these questions of darkness and brightness, figure and ground, are not just formal, painterly questions, but can be related to the cityscape when its architecture is illuminated with light at night.<sup>34</sup>

In his book *The Image of the City* (2015), Kevin Lynch asserts that landmarks are more easily recognised and more likely to be significant if they have a clear shape, stand out from their background, and emphasise their spatial location. In his opinion, the contrast between figure and background is one of the most important factors (Lynch 2005:79). While Lynch proposes categories for urban design, listing them as ‘of direct interest in design since they describe qualities that a designer may operate upon’, he lists ‘singularity’ first, as follows:

1. *Singularity* or figure-background clarity: sharpness of boundary (as an abrupt cessation of city development); closure (as an enclosed square); contrast of surface, form, intensity, complexity, size, use, spatial location (as a single tower, a rich decoration, a glaring sign). The contrast may be to the immediate visible surroundings, or to the observer’s experience. These are the qualities that identify an element, make it remarkable, noticeable, vivid, recognizable. Observers, as their familiarity increases, seem to depend less and less on gross physical continuities to organize the whole, and to delight more and more in contrast and uniqueness which vivify the scene. (Lynch 2005:105)

Although Lynch proposes a design in which buildings stand out visually from their surroundings—a tendency practised by at least a significant number of professionals in the field, particularly modernists, and one that has also brought Lynch criticism<sup>35</sup>—it is crucial to understand that such architectural practices are often visibly enhanced by nighttime lighting. The light-dark contrast of city lighting at night must therefore be viewed critically because it reinforces a doctrine such as that advocated by Lynch. The consequences of such strong visual effects are that the intermediate tones often ‘visibly’

---

<sup>33</sup> See also ‘A Century of Gestalt Psychology in Visual Perception: II. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations’ (Wagemans et al. 2012), a psychological approach to the complexity of the ‘Gestalt visual system’ and why the conceptual and theoretical foundations of the Gestalt approach need to be further reconsidered. Also worth mentioning is the chapter ‘Figure and Ground’ in *On pictures and the words that fail them* by James Elkins (1998).

<sup>34</sup> In *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* (1977), Rudolf Arnheim describes the fundamentals of contrasts in which he explores the formal language of vertical and horizontal, mass and void, order and disorder, the organic and inorganic world.

<sup>35</sup> See also Richard Sennett on the visualisation of the city in *Building and Dwelling: Ethics for the City* (2018), where he points out the problem where ‘habitable’ space is viewed from the perspective of graphic representation, and the city is built into an image of clear and solid forms (2018:238-41).

disappear in the dark as well as in the light, as we have seen in the two photos discussed above [Fig. 3.2–3.3]. The modernist era of urban planning does not consider much the changing nature of urban forms, and these ideas, which focus primarily on the physical form of cities, further, do not take into account the social and economic factors that also shape people's experiences of the urban environment.

Recall that visual representation is not only about the production of images but also about the production of 'worldviews' and the manipulation of subjectivity (i.e. Hall 1997). The concept of 'modernity' in relation to architecture and thus night lighting is also a pictorial construct; namely, when certain scenes are made to glow and others to fade—in order to shape and organise society accordingly (e.g. Entwistle and Slater 2019; Schivelbusch 1995; Sloane, Slater, and Entwistle 2016). The focus on the appearance of the physical forms of cities is further misleading, especially if one thinks that design is only about the design of physical objects, forgetting that it is also about the design of spaces and thus of social and political realities (e.g. Latour 1993). Indeed, as Lynch claims, the physical design of cities has a profound impact on the way people experience and understand them. Thus, the preference for artificial light over darkness and the appearance or even neglect of darkness relates again to the human obsession with 'ocularcentrism', the 'seeing is believing'. Architect Juhani Pallasmaa (2011, 2012, 2016) repeatedly speaks of an 'embodied image of architecture', a modernity that lacks sensory experience rather than appearance: 'Modernist design at large has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination and dreams, homeless' (Pallasmaa 2012:22).

## Tint: Shapes of Darkness on the Surface of the Dark Light



[3.4] Meng C. (2013) *Terra Incognita III*. [Analogue photography].

One of my earliest attempts, and also one of the most satisfying, to capture a multilayered composition of darkness took place in Victoria Park in London in 2013. *Terra Incognita III* is part of a series in which I intended to expose darkness and its shadows, though not technically perfectly. The photo provides more information through a greater range of darkness than I had previously achieved. Within the remit of my larger project, the work explores the limitations and possibilities of photographic representation along with the perception of the dark atmosphere in the city at night. Large trees protect the area from the influence of artificial light. They provide shade from the surrounding light (streetlamps, housing estates, etc.) and the light above (skyglow). *Terra Incognita III* reveals, barely perceptible, traces of light ambience and their shadows in the park. Subtle details come into play, tree trunks stand out, and a bench (at the bottom left of the image) is discernible. The paradox here lies in the sense that this photograph represents invisible qualities of nocturnal atmospheres of darkness in an image precisely by not exactly revealing them. [Fig. 3.4]

Seeing the 'visible' landscape in Victoria Park and its photographic 'visual' translation is less of a technical breakthrough than an exploration of what can be seen on site and what is discernible in the visual approximation in the photo. The range of tonalities in the dark becomes palpable through the material nature of objects (their surface) in space—in this specific case, trees and a bench. The bench and the trees are visible because of their reflections, or in comparison to the lighter surroundings. But these object bodies do not simply become recognisable in that photograph because of their different shades of illumination. Rather, they stand out by contrasting the surrounding light of the night. That the objects themselves present darkness is a matter of opposition. Darkness itself takes 'shape' in the object, mainly in the form of the object's own shadows; these 'attached shadows' leave gradual traces on surfaces. I find they are a further essential factor to make darkness visible, discernible, and finally photographically visual. These shadows form the part of the darkness that becomes haptic in the physical as well as in the pictorial realm.

Urban darkness consists of an infrastructure of solid matter (architecture) and the space in between (air). *Terra Incognita III* shows this relationship between object and space—the interstitial—on a model scale. Dark surfaces and their shadows, like those of a park bench or a tree, create the aesthetic effect of a structure of darkness because they not only reflect the light but also capture the darkness, making its shades visible. Understanding dark surfaces in contrast to their surroundings is a basic prerequisite for perceiving darkness as a layered matter of different shades and tones. Dark surfaces, like those seen above from a park bench or tree, have tints that create an aesthetic visual impact as they reflect 'dark' light and create shadows. Together they create an atmosphere of darkness in the darkness itself, which is formed independently of the contrast with bright lights. Light is atmospheric and, in this sense, does not necessarily mean brightness. The light here describes the state of a spatial situation or environment and is accordingly also to be understood as an ambient 'light of darkness'. I will discuss these in more detail in connection with the 'attached shadows' in the second part.

Since building landscapes with light means building dark surfaces with light, it also requires recognising nuances, that is, shades within this dark light. Even if the tendency towards urbanism prevails to transform the nocturnal environments with light into bright, impressionistic shapes and lines (i.e. Lynch's singularity), it is important to also perceive the immediate darkness as an active state—nor comprehensive, nor homogeneous—that occurs both in unlit architecture and in the interspace. And that

depends on matter, like surfaces, but in its perceptible matter it is not necessarily material but rather an emanation of it. This means that darkness is also a tinted landscape of light, as we explored in the previous section on 'contrast,' always arising as a side effect of lighting. Before we can look at the overarching political, cultural, and social properties of bright light, it is important to understand how urban darkness practically 'evolves' with the artificial light environment. This requires both physical and theoretical conceptions of darkness's atmospheric consistency and not just thinking of dark matter as contrasting surface or background (e.g. Böhme 2017; Gibson 2015; Pallasmaa 2012).

How a solid mass—architecture, its environment and infrastructure—builds and transforms light and darkness can be visually investigated. This material reality of light has a considerable parallel with analogue photography. Beatriz Colomina (2000) reminds us of how light leaves its mark on film and forms permanent shadows, thus creating doubly substantial matter. 'Rather than *represent* reality, it [film negative] *produces* a new reality.' According to Colomina, we recognise photography and cinema as 'transparent', like glass. This transparency becomes apparent at night, for example, when the glass in our window also reflects the interior and overlays our view of the exterior (Colomina 2000:80). What Colomina addresses is the perception of images in relation to their representative effect, as she further shows with examples from architecture and its image advertising in magazines.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, a similar relationship affects how one imagines the night light, how it is represented, and how one experiences it.

Crucial to understanding the relationship between light, its image and space, between the visual and the visible, is the fact that pictorial translation has been based on shadow since the beginnings of photography.<sup>37</sup> Photography emerged as an art form that relied on capturing images through the interplay of light and shadow. This created a challenge in accurately representing information, as the stark contrast between light and dark often resulted in important details being lost or oversimplified. The focus on seeing through/in light and thus on the images developed and habits of seeing shaped by photography

---

<sup>36</sup> Colomina discusses the image manipulation and physical retouching of nineteenth-century photography and how such practices shaped modernity. She references the understanding and skill of the architect Charles-Edouard Jeanneret—better known as Le Corbusier—in dealing with print media. Early on, Corbusier understood the usefulness of media as an additional channel to achieve notoriety beyond the construction of his buildings. His focus on self-promotion in the publication of his launched magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* proves this clearly (Colomina 2006:107).

<sup>37</sup> I refer here in particular to William Henry Fox Talbot (2017 [1844]), who called photography 'nature's pencil' when he invented the method of visually representing an object through its shadow.

already falls short in the medium itself. It is important to understand that what we see does not present itself to us only in the form of cast shadows, nor in real life, nor on negatives. There are traces of tonalities in the scenes themselves (landscapes and images) that are extremely difficult to capture, such as in the darkness itself information is preserved by small shadows that are not easily discernible. Photography quickly reaches its limits when it comes to capturing the gradations of shades.<sup>38</sup> Think of Ansel Adams's (1981:40–50) 'Zone System', where he developed the still very recognised photographic method of how to perfectly expose the variety of shadows in their different hues. The handicap of photography in this respect is probably why Adams's system was so highly praised at the time and is still admired by photography experts in the digital world (e.g. Harmsen 2019).

The darkness shapes the dark light, whereby shadows arise in this darkness itself, representable in a very limited way, as the photograph *Terra Incognita III* shows [3.4]. This tinted darkness is a rather phenomenological image. This tinted landscape of darkness is connected to a more phenomenological image. One reason why I work in analogue and not digital is that, on the one hand, it brings me closer to the origin of the photographic image, but on the other hand, its genre allows more room for something like a phenomenological space due to its limits in depicting with full precision. Colomina makes us aware that translation through photographs literally 'shapes' the way we see. Consequently, the medium, the technique of photography itself, must be questioned as the field of a politically trained gaze; this applies to a certain loss of information in analogue photography as well as to the surplus production of information in digital photography. This is something that the study of visual culture often seems to vehemently overlook when *Vision and Visuality* (Foster 2009) or the 'dialectic of the gaze' (Mirzoeff 2006:55, 57) focus their analyses primarily on seeing through the representations of images. The way we see and interpret images is indeed an extremely important and collective matter (Mirzoeff 2006), but it also needs to be looked at closely in terms of the production and properties of the represented images that become available. What does the apparatus of photography capture and what does it not?

---

<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that I am referring to analogue photography. The technology of today's digital cameras has moved in the other direction and is able to capture things, especially in the dark, that we cannot see with the naked eye. There is also infrared photography, a remarkable technology, but not relevant to this discussion.

## Air: Shapes of Darkness in the Atmosphere



[3.5] Meng, C. (2017) *1 AM*. [Analogue photography; from the series 2x24].

*1 AM* visualises an aesthetic, atmospheric appearance of urban darkness after midnight. Although barely noticeable, the ambient night/light is tangible, visible in the air through a combination of fog and small refractions of artificial streetlights. This makes darkness and light equally visible. We can call it a ‘shady’ environment, closely related to penumbra, the area around the stronger shadows, where the shadows are only partial or imperfect and almost fade.<sup>39</sup> One way to capture the matter of this night ambience is, paradoxically and against any rationale of photography, to add extra light. For *1 AM*, I used my camera flash to interrupt darkness, augmenting the street lighting in illuminating the scene. I physically experienced the dark matter of this landscape before I depicted it in a photo. In the photograph, the atmosphere is translated into an aesthetic image. It takes on a new and different form—it is still visually quite tangible, even if it is not ‘accurate’. The purpose of *1 AM* is to try to hold the visible within the visual field, or to capture some of the difficulties that Gibson (2015:78) points out in visual sense perception: perceiving light or shade separately from black or white. [Fig. 3.5]

---

<sup>39</sup> For a further explanation of the shadow types Umbra, Penumbra and Antumbra, see also *The Visual World of Shadows* (Casati and Cavanagh 2019).

Gibson's comment about considering surfaces is important for better understanding urban darkness as it interacts with architectural practices and their nighttime lighting methods, especially when he emphasises that our environment is not exclusively composed of sharply defined geometric parts or shapes (i.e. Lynch 2005). It is important that the 'natural perspective', as he calls it, does not apply to shadows with partial shade (e.g. penumbra):

Natural perspective, as I conceive it, is the study of an ambient array of solid angles that correspond to certain distinct geometrical parts of a terrestrial environment, those that are separated by edges and corners. [...] But the environment does not wholly consist of sharply differentiated geometrical parts or forms. Natural perspective does not apply to shadows with penumbras and patches of light. It does not apply to sunlit surfaces with varying degrees of illumination. It geometrizes the environment and thus oversimplifies it. (Gibson 2015:63)

While Gibson is not directly concerned with artificial light in relation to darkness, his reference to light and the limitation of 'natural perspective' is significant to my exploration of the atmospheric qualities of urban darkness, precisely because the shadows of artificial lighting also leave nuances in the air, as seen in the image above. Baxandall writes: '[s]hadow has its origin in a first relation between the flow of light and opaque matter' (Baxandall 1995:42). Light (and thus darkness) is surface and atmosphere. My dark photograph *1 AM* gave me further insight into how the atmospherically visible can be composed of light and shadow fractions, creating a kind of additional layer in the space between. [Fig. 3.5]

Visibly speaking, the immaterial is dependent on the material to be seen. But that does not mean that what we do not see is not there. We can view light like wind, explains Elisa Del Prete: light, like the wind, has no body, since there is no body visible to the human eye. We only become aware of the presence of the wind when it acts on something solid. For instance, we cannot see wind as such, but we can see it when we look at a waving tree (Del Prete 2014). In addition, we can feel the wind on the surface of our skin (and the same goes for light). Our skin perceives temperature spaces with precision; the cool and invigorating shade under a tree or the comforting warmth of a sunspot become experiences of space and place (Pallasmaa 2012:63). We therefore also perceive light through its shadow.

Drawing an analogy from the light at night to the action of weather is helpful, even though we hardly perceive the weather as artificially produced (if we put climate change aside for a moment). This is not the case with the architecture atmospheres of Böhme (2017) which are staged. Tim Ingold, echoing Gibson (2015) as well as Böhme (2017), argues that weather is not only a material object of our perception but also a 'medium of our perception' that triggers interactions between humans and nature (cited by Vannini et al. 2012:368). 'Weathering', as used by Ingold as well as Vannini et al. (2012), allows such an analogy to the lighting state between dusk and dawn. 'Weather constantly makes and remakes place' (Vannini et al., 2012: 361). It is crucial that the light at night not only shapes the visual and aesthetic design of the environment but also its atmosphere, thus participation of people in the space, as it also visually shapes people's appearance and movements. Light, darkness, and shadow can 'overcast' space, like a covering of clouds over the sky.

Events of varying magnitude are indirectly determined by weather conditions, from natural disasters to a crowded swimming pool on a hot day. Even if the circumstances of weather and light events (rain showers, thunderstorms, power failure) are visible and noticeable, they also cause inconspicuous, invisible, but nonetheless consequential effects. Timothy Morton notes '[t]he neglect of temporality in thinking about the weather is why it is practically impossible to explain to people that global warming might result in pockets of cooling weather' (Morton, 2007: 166). When it comes to urban lighting at night, the lightscape involves examining the creation of nocturnal atmospheres as affective rather than just a functional element. The design of nocturnal light atmospheres should, therefore, be seen as an affective effect and a part of the overall lighting landscape of the urban night. Exploring darkness from this perspective has the potential to extend intermittent lighting and to question light at night beyond its symbolic, static, and 'singular' aspects.

Light (artificial and natural) gives the night its appearance and thus shapes its surroundings and terrain. It creates the urban night-light landscape. The urban dweller's encounter with light and darkness resembles atmospheres of weather; they are spatial ambiances that are rarely questioned, but accepted, even ignored, as it seems that there is little one can do for or against it.<sup>40</sup> Hermann Schmitz, known for his research on atmospheres and felt/physical resonances, claims that weather and feelings are strongly connected, and both must be understood as atmospheres (Schmitz 2005:255). If we

---

<sup>40</sup> Hallgren's film *Omnipresence* (2021)

remember the difference between the light at night in East and West Berlin, or the lack of shade on a hot summer day in L.A. (Bloch 2019), or simply missing arcades in a city to shelter us on a hot or rainy day, we can see how our surrounding infrastructure affect us on much more than a visual level. Hartmut Rosa (2019) even argues that our perception of phenomena such as weather is more about a general understanding than a modern, culture-specific phenomenon: people from very different cultures and across all historical epochs have similarly established connections between threatening weather such as storms, thunderstorms, droughts, and floods in their own thoughts and actions (Rosa 2019:8). I will not try to explore the human origins of the perception of darkness. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise spatial and spherical constitutions as formative for habitats and life forms, since, for example, the artificial light of the night can equally change the direction of flight of birds as collective behavioural patterns of society.<sup>41</sup>

Although exploring the limits of human perception is far beyond the scope of my analysis, I would like to take both a critical and potential look at atmospheric consequences of artificial light. I believe that we urgently need to recognise that neither the weather nor the light at night can be taken for granted and that we need to become aware of the atmospheres they create, which are not visible per se (e.g. Morton 2007: 166), and approach these atmospheric spaces with attention and care, not only to shape them but also to perceive them. As Böhme notes, lighting technology is used to stage everything in modern society, but this often has the unintended consequence of distorting our perception of reality and the messages that are being communicated or advertised. Even though these traces of distortion are invisible, they still have an atmospheric impact and social relevance. (Böhme, 2017:203).

The second part of this chapter will deal with shadows. As we have seen from the photographs discussed so far, there are different variations of shadows that influence the perception of darkness. What follows is a continuation on the ‘shapes’ of **contrast** (i.e. background), **tint** (i.e. dark light), and **air** (i.e. atmosphere) outlined so far. Based on a shadow world I will further examine the immaterial for the perceptible in urban darkness, to question symbolic forms, their effects and aesthetic atmospheres. I will closely link the phenomenological properties of light with shadow formations in order to rethink the modalities of visible and visual representations. In the words following

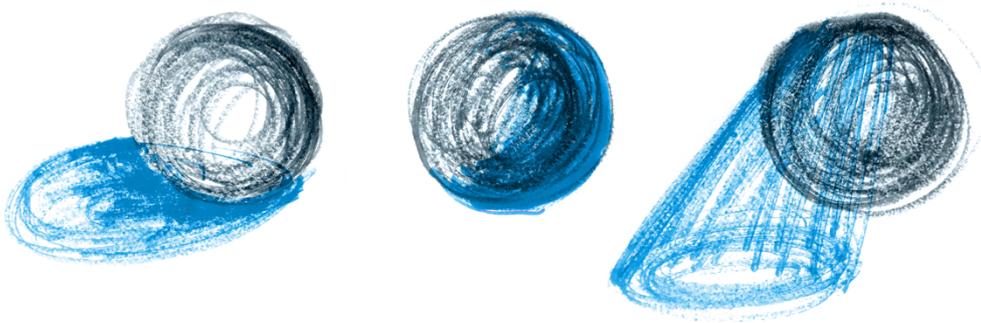
---

<sup>41</sup> There are countless examples of this; see, for example, *Anthropology of the Night: Cross-Disciplinary Investigations* (Galinić et al. 2010), which illustrates human habitats not only at night and with light, in the past and present, but also light pollution as a threat to biodiversity that affects animals and plants at the same time (Adkins 2022; Hölker et al. 2010; Škvareninová et al. 2017).

Pallasmaa (2011b:40), I will explore the visible world to mediate between the physical and the mental, the perceptible and the imaginary, the factual and the affective, to also explore and challenge what emerges outside of the actual image. My main concern is to point out the spectrum of dark tonalities and to challenge strong visual habits that build upon contrast, seemingly dividing black and white. With the interplay of visible and invisible shadow properties, photography allows me to further test light phenomena and what seems to be intangible, ephemeral. My depiction of the 'failure' (e.g. blank nights [Fig. 3.1]) of photographic translation through which we can gain new insights will prove decisive in my following exploration through a shadow typology.

## PART II — SHADOWS

### Shadow Typology



[3.6] Meng, C. (2022) *Shadow Typology: Cast / Attached / Overcast*. [Illustration].

This part of the chapter concerns the way concepts of shadow have shaped ideas and practices over time and need to be (re)thought and (re)constructed. Shadows are not timeless phenomena. Paradoxically, they are ephemeral as well as constructed, present as well as absent. They are key to our understanding and seeing of the darkness. The following discusses shadow views and the ideas they contain using three types of shadows: *cast*, *attached*, and *overcast*.<sup>42</sup> [Fig. 3.6]. This Part II of the chapter is structured accordingly and devotes a separate section to each of the shadow types. I have paired different images, sometimes using the same image twice. The juxtaposition of these images reveals different aspects of this schematic of shadows. It will ‘direct light’ to the three shadow perspectives to examine the visible and visual matter with darkness in more detail.

As noted, urban planning and architecture, and therefore visions and designs of the ‘night image’, affect environments and their spatial appearance. Design motifs, which focus on form and contour, characterise lightscapes and therefore habitat. Widespread design attitudes that emphasise the generation and distribution of light give little thought to the formation of shadows. In fact, academic research and urban planning often seem to overlook the construction, accumulation, and erosion of shadows in the nighttime environment. Light is one thing to build with—darkness is another. So far, I

---

<sup>42</sup> I am borrowing this terminology from Baxandall, whose book *Shadows and Enlightenment* (1995) complicates the categories (1995:4). There are a lot of nuances within these three categories; nevertheless, the structure provides a useful armature for my purposes. This typology is perhaps an oversimplification, but also a useful way of making sense of darkness.

have tried to show how urban darkness emerges from shadows. I will pay special attention to this shadow world next. The following categorisation of shadows into three types seeks to challenge trained, preconceived viewing habits—especially those that seek recognisable shapes in the light but cannot recognise them in the realm of shadow and darkness.

Philosopher Hans Blumenberg claims that the ‘crucial drama’ is not the history of light, but the human conversation about it (1993:43).<sup>43</sup> We have seen how both Western representation in art and theoretical knowledge have their origin in a shadow myth (e.g. Plato and Pliny). From the very beginning, the visual arts have emphasised the darkness caused by the cast shadows (e.g. Baxandall 1995; Gombrich 2014; Sharpe 2017), while some philosophical and psychological discussion has also brought ‘shadow casting’ to the fore as something dark: mirror-images, creation of a blind spot, the uncanny, a contradiction to the persona itself, etc. (e.g. Bollas 1987; Freud 2003; Jung 2019; Sorensen 2011). In Plato’s (2007) allegory of the cave, the emphasis is on turning away from the shadows, detaching oneself from the forced view of the shadows. What Plato addressed early on is a certain artificiality that the cave world creates: one that is based on objects, by means of shadows that appear on the cave wall, created by artificial devices, artistic forms (Blumenberg 1993:37). However, Plato took little interest in sense experience; the obvious similarity between the cave wall and the theatre stage hindered him from realising that in the cave itself sense perception and sense observation could have benefited knowledge (see also Ostergaard 2019).

But what if we first try to understand how the shadow gives the object its shape rather than vice versa? In what follows I will examine how shadows tend to be misconceived since they are neither replicas nor simple images. Today, especially, when we are facing great challenges in our social and climatic environment, I believe shadows need to be reconceived and redesigned as ‘objects’ in their own right.

The light representation of the urban night is not least a representation of optical facts, of solid architectural matter. This, in turn, is a pictorial representation that serves to amplify these optical facts, to represent them. There is no critical thinking without an understanding of the relationship between social tradition and photography, without a sense of what an image is and what it could mean and to what extent the pictorial takes

---

<sup>43</sup> See also Junko Theresa Mikuriya’s *A History of Light: The Idea of Photography* (2018), which examines the complex history of photography from a philosophical perspective and challenges readers to rethink its ontological stability and technological focus.

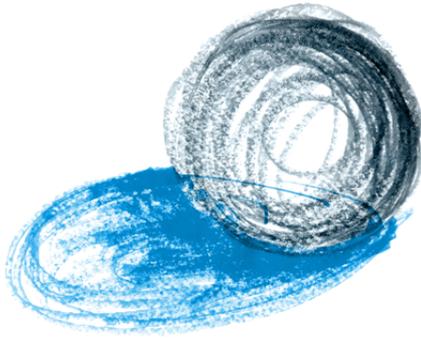
responsibility (Cadava 1998: xxix). Similarly, there is no understanding of light and darkness without shadow. The photographic medium puts light on pause. Capturing light not only fixes shadows but also monitors traces of light in retrospect.<sup>44</sup> The nocturnal light of cities frequently aims at a 'picturesque postcard image'. While this image, based primarily on the appearance of the skyline, seemingly invites us to strengthen our grip on reality, this mode of representation also keeps us away from, indeed distances us from, this pictorial reality. This light image attempts to overshadow the darkness by either erasing its 'floating' unsolid matter or pushing it towards the background. In the obsession of the pictorial representation with light, the dark world of shadows seems almost forgotten. To this end, it is worth going back to the beginning, when photography, as 'nature's pencil' (Talbot 2017 [1844]), first immortalised and fixed the shadow for us.

The following trilogy of photographic notes explores a universe of shadows caused on and by trees, reflecting my own experiences with and observations of lightscapes I encounter in the urban night. My perspective through the lens on aesthetic, phenomenological features of shadows produced by representations of artificial light serves as a visible-visual testimony to my shadow typology. In this way, I try to give agency to the shadow. In a reverse reflection on Plato's allegory, I reconcile the impossibility of seeing with the yearning to see. Nighttime is the shadow of the earth; in order to escape the shadow, we create sources of light, which in turn throw more shadows. Within the tremendous focus on the light, with darkness as its binary opposite, we lose the ability to truly see the darkness, let alone understand how it comes to be.

---

<sup>44</sup> The film *Blow-Up* (Antonioni, 1966) shows an appreciation in and through photography compared to perception in physical reality. The plot describes an example of such an examination when a corpse photographed in a park is subsequently identified on the negative in the darkroom.

## Cast Shadow



[3.7] Meng, C. (2022) *Shadow Typology: Cast*. [Illustration].

Cast shadows belong to objects and form a crisp duplication of the object somewhere else. This happens when the surface of the object blocks light from passing through to fall on a surface that is separate from the object (as when traced, the lover's shadow on the wall in Pliny's tale). The object blocking the light forms the cast shadow as an imprint, a creation of a 'double' image that appears on the ground, wall, or elsewhere. The image and thus the appearance of this shadow usually appears flat; it is rather graphic, even of symbolic character—like the play of light and shadow of children's hands on a wall. The cast shadow is probably the most familiar shadow that we conceptualise, theorise, and perceive, especially because of its silhouette form that has 'symbolic' character. In the sphere example, the cast shadow appears under the sphere, projecting one sharp ellipsis on which the sphere rests. [Fig. 3.7]



[3.8] Meng, C. (2021) *Cast-Tree*. [Analogue photography].

The photograph *Cast-Tree* is central to this research project, since it visualises a deeper insight into the meaning of shadows cast by artificial light at night. The image conceptualises light in a way that goes beyond illumination itself. *Cast-Tree* has a distinct cast shadow that falls across a lit window on the ground floor of a building. The shadow is contrasted with the light emanating from the apartment. It is a simple but powerful contrast that shows twice how darkness increases and recedes from light. First, the shadow cast by the tree—caused by streetlight—is present in space as a carrier of urban darkness. Second, the *Cast-Tree* silhouette is interrupted (hollowed out) by a further light source, namely the backlight of the apartment window. The *Cast-Tree* image gives testimony of the succession of light and shadow creating and dissolving each other. [Fig. 3.8]

Link: The **cast shadow** is the **contrast** that shapes the **background** of darkness.

Baxandall (1995:14) writes that the cast shadow is the darkest of the shadows. Its dark surface, along with its symbolic character, is commonly used to create contrast and emphasise shape. In this sense, this type of shadow is an area-covering (i.e. obscuring) surface that is often also understood as a background image, in Hardin's (2012:8) as well as Elcott's (2016) sense when the addition of light makes not only the white whiter but also the black blacker. Accordingly, the 'light image' of the city at night is also based on an image impression of 'shadow casting'. By interacting with light, the properties of cast shadows correspond to an actual form. This concept of shadow reveals a pictorial echo that manifests itself in the understanding of the image as shadow. A projected shadow, that is, a casting of shadows, is the one that is most commonly identifiable in the application of visual language.<sup>45</sup> Although perhaps not consciously, the urban light-night design and its representation at night works primarily through the contrast of darkness in the background (see again the *Flash-Light* image [Fig. 3.3] and Hardin's (2012: 8) observation that light does not brighten but darkens).

Bright urban night lights build their effect on darkness as a background image, a background that is nothing but shadow. In the visual arts, this shadow effect is often used very deliberately to emphasise the bright and bring out the dark, as it is spatially done in the theatre by Job and Wagner. Recall the early chiaroscuro technique, for example. We have also seen the use of heavy contrast for whimsical perspectives in the photograph *Le pilier du Métro Corvisart* (1934) by Brassai (fig. 2.10). This type of 'darkish shadow' style is also popular as a visual language of cinematography, especially in the genre of film noir, science fiction, and horror films such as German expressionism.<sup>46</sup> In architectural drawings, on the other hand, cast shadows are consistently incorporated into the image at a 45-degree angle, usually from the upper left (Oechslin 2002:79). This convention of a 45-degree angle from the upper left is also the standard in various visual computer programmes. In the visual world, then, the shadow cast is presented to us unmistakably, often even schematically, as normatively sufficient; a symbolic shadow type, subject-object related.

Even though we usually encounter the cast shadow in the first instance in a descriptive sense, we need to rethink this object-related perception both spatially and figuratively.

---

<sup>45</sup> See also the chapter 'The Form of Projection' in *Projecting Spirits* (Väliaho 2022).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, *Warning Shadows : A Nocturnal Hallucination* (1923) directed by Arthur Robison, and the horror film *Vampyr* (1932) directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer, which goes back to the history of shadow play also in the context of Western representation, for example, through Samuel van Hoogstraten's (2021) *Inleyding tot de hooge schoole der schilderkonst, or an Introduction to the Academy of Painting; or, The Visible World*.

In both Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Pliny's story, or even today's computer renderings, the conception of the cast shadow is a single, simple, flat outline of a shape in sharp detail. In these frameworks, in particular the Platonic, the ontological meaning of shadows is determined by the opposition of being and appearance (Kenaan 2020:126–27). Cast shadows form darkness both as emptiness and as an agency. In the sense of its creation, darkness becomes a model of artificial light. This type of 'Platonic reversal'—seen as a paradigm shift<sup>47</sup>—has rarely been addressed in terms of artificial illumination in the urban night. It is where the shadow takes on the role of the figure and the darkness takes on the role of the 'object'. We have already seen such a visual 'reversal' of a light-shadow conflict in the photograph of Brâncuși's sculpture *The Beginning of the World* (fig. 2.11).

Urban night illumination, as Schivelbusch noted, can create such a stark contrast that such 'lights cast nothing but darkness' (1995:95). How urban darkness emerges from the shadows of artificial light and shapes the appearance of the surroundings needs to be closely observed. Shadows cast by artificial light respond to a reality, not a copy (à la Plato); here—once again—the visible as well as the visual world of darkness is active. Kenaan states that what is unique about the way photography works is the overwriting of the shadow, which radically and irrevocably changes the relationship between human vision and the image, between the visible and the visual. This perception shaped by the photographic creates a new visual order that is detached from claims of nature (Kenaan 2020:9).

Contrary to the Platonic tradition, Kenaan (2020) states that the shadow is not ontologically subordinate, but a fundamental component of the photographic image, thus of our environment and modes of seeing. The gaze is the prerequisite for recognising the intermediate presence of the shadow (Kenaan 2020:127)—to free us, in Heidegger's (1996:117-18) words, from the prevailing tendency to focus on the object itself, such as the symbolic representation of architecture in light.

[Photography] absorbs and frames everything; there is nothing, in principle, that it cannot own. But in becoming compatible with the photographic—in turning into photography's potential content—the visible undergoes a critical transformation. It can no longer sustain its primacy for vision. (Kenaan 2020:170)

---

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche's expression on metaphysical projects in *The Gay Science* (1974: 273-4) is also further framed in a photographic understanding by Hagi Kenaan (2020:160-161).

This leads Kenaan to the ‘continuity principle’, which is the reciprocity between the human encounter with the visibility of nature (the visible [i.e. darkness]) and the continuous translation of its expressive power through human pictorial design (the visual [i.e. photography]). The connective tissue that binds the objects contained in the photograph is that of the world itself. Kenaan uses fossils as an analogy to depict the continuum of means by which nature can be photographed. Nature lends its forms and thus itself becomes an image with an afterlife.<sup>48</sup> According to Kenaan, for images to become a part of our world, we first have to recognize the presence of a picture-like form within a material object. This recognition allows us to imbue the object with an imaginary meaning, such as seeing a face in the shape of a tree trunk or a socket.<sup>49</sup> (Kenaan 2020b:39–42). Just as nature leaves an imprint, the light at night transforms the city into a photograph, while the shadows of the lights leave an imprint of darkness.

The darkness in urban space based on shadows unfolds analogously to the birth of photography—that is, visually and pictorially. In other words, it is the emphasis on artificial light that unfolds darkness in urban space. What is literally in the shadow of light, however, cannot simply be understood as an imprint. As in the Platonic framework, the invention of photography was the shadow. In Plato’s cave, the shadow forms the projection of a solid matter (e.g. an object) and defines an image of it. This image references or creates a clear, defined idea vis-à-vis the real. William Henry Fox Talbot (2017, [1844]), based on his photographic experiments with light, counters that shadows have their own unique appearance and that this type of appearance is given in nature, such as by strong sunlight or hazy weather. As nature unfolds through light and its shadows: ‘the directness or obliquity of the illumination causing of course an immense difference in the effect’ (Talbot 2017: 24). That is, according to Talbot, the effect of light and shadow under certain circumstances is sufficient to bring about changes in material bodies, precisely what Plato overlooked in his cave; namely, gaining knowledge by observing the condition of the cave itself. Based on the understanding of the transformation of bodies and matter through light, we cannot see our spatial environment (i.e. the city-nightscape) and its shadows in terms of the binary logic of light (matter) and darkness (nothingness), of being and appearances, of light and dark, that is, reduce them to white and black. Shadows must be understood as part of this whole.

---

<sup>48</sup> Here the ‘index’ collides with its photographic understanding of the medium as a past tense, with an archival or indexical function, the gift of providing pictorial evidence beyond the subjectivity of what was, what happened, etc. The understanding of indexical or representational photography can also be turned around.

<sup>49</sup> See also Instagram accounts such as ‘Faces in Things’ (@facesinthings), which features a variety of images of everyday objects that resemble faces, or ‘Nature is Metal’ (@natureismetal), which frequently shares photos of landscape formations that look like animals or faces (i.e. ‘Elephant Rock’ in Iceland).



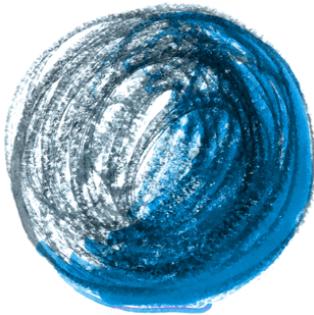
[3.9] Recap: *Sky-Light* / *Flash-Light* / *Cast-Tree*.

What is striking about the light architecture of urban shadows as we observe it—through the shadow of the tree that does not cover the illuminated window—is that light creates shadow images while also transforming them or removing them. Therefore, it is important to note that casting shadows with light at night is also equivalent to ‘killing or fixing the shadow’ in visual reality, to use Kenaan’s (2020:136) term. Approaching and conceptualising artificial light in the urban night is not least a (visual) methodology that overshadows tonality, as I have tried to illustrate. Consequently, we need to recognise two things in relation to shadow casting: firstly, that the shadow universe we encounter does not always have an indicator—that is, a physical feature or mode that leads to a particular fact or conclusion—and secondly, that shadows are not only created by light but also extinguished by light. Consider the images previously discussed in which shadow images are created by contrast, but also dissolve into contrast (e.g. *Sky-Light*, *Flash-Light*, and *Cast-Tree*). [Fig. 3.9]

Ergo, the casting of shadows creates contrasts, and as Casati and Cavanagh (2019) write, every illuminated object casts a shadow. However, that object can NOT always be visible, and it does not imply the opposite, that every shadow-like dark region must have an object that casts it. Think of the visual arts and even ‘forensic literature’ where shadows in pictures are used as clues to indicate the existence of objects or figures that are not there (Casati and Cavanagh 2019:11). In relation to urban darkness, this means we must cautiously observe the dark and how it comes about. To do this, we need to question our use of light and the creation of shadow, and rethink the modalities and functions of

foreground and background lighting. To understand visibility as what constitutes vision also means to see the invisible in it. This is crucial not only for visual understanding but also for broader socio-cultural and socio-political issues related to representation, as our nocturnal environment is drawn in this way. Again, it is important to question and look more closely at the trained eye and the focus on appearance of the form (i.e. the cast shadow).

### Attached Shadow



[3.10] Meng, C. (2022) *Shadow Typology: Attached*. [Illustration].

Attached shadow describes the shadows on the object, not thrown or cast (i.e. detached) onto another surface. These are shadows that form volume and body and are directly connected to the object. They contrast with the cast shadow, which projects its shape onto another surface or body. They appear on the object itself, which draws a cast shadow. Attached shadows add mass and texture. They contrast with the cast shadow, which appears flat. To return to the example of the sphere: the attached shadow is on the sphere, in that area of the sphere that is not directly illuminated. [Fig. 3.10]



[3.11] Meng, C. (2021) *Attached-Leaves*. [Analogue photography].

*Attached-Leaves* is another image of a tree in Brooklyn. It illustrates different depths of field. There is a lit foreground and a dark background. Between the foreground and background, there is the tree. The tree occupies the middle ground, a play of shadows amongst its leaves. The voluminous presence of the tree manifests itself in the illuminated and unilluminated structure of the leaves. Multiple light sources create a field of shadows on the leaves—a textured space in between the binary of light and dark. These belong to the category of attached shadows. These shades differ from cast shadows (seen in the other image of the *Cast-Tree*, fig 3.8) because they trace within the tree's shadows, giving the tree body, volume, weight, and texture. [Fig 3.11]

Link: The **attached shadow** is the **tint** that shapes the **surface** of darkness.

At night, we often pay little attention to shadows unless they appear scary or uncanny, in which case we avoid them. This contrasts with a day when we seek shelter from the sun. In both cases, however, they are cast shadows rather than attached shadows. By mastering lighting effects, manipulating the look, and creating strong contrasts that create strong shadows, the attached shadow is often erased. What helps the good appearance of curves and forms of the architectural sketch, however, has little in common with light and shadow as we experience them spatially (Oechslin 2002:79). Also lighting design practices that focus on appearance alienate us from intermediate tones, hence the lack of detectability of attached shadows as they are virtually outshined.

Baxandall refers to the equations and algorithms used for digitally rendering shadows. Tailored to the pixel grid of the computer screen, the equations have the right amount of respectful simplification of physics and the right amount of bias toward the visually phenomenal (Baxandall 1995:119–20). Baxandall underlines his scepticism about the claim of empirical psychologists or modern cognitive scientists that shadowing and shading techniques have a positive effect on the perception of the world, namely modelling shapes into forms: ‘circles into spheres, or aerial photographs into landscapes’ (Baxandall 1995:120). He challenges the notion that such techniques can enhance the perception of depth and volume in a way that corresponds to the appearance of things in the physical world. Instead, he concludes that shadows and shading are rather a convention of representation that have evolved through artistic tradition and practice. According to Baxandall, modern questions of shadow representation are primarily about establishing principles for shadow appearance, and sometimes this preoccupation with shadows has even less to do with modern cognitive science than with the algorithmic construction of modern representational computer graphics (e.g. the common 45-degree angle shadow from the upper left). The unpredictability and fleetingness of the shadow wants to be calculated and understood and judged in perspective.

The consideration and application of darkness and shadows in images stands in a critical relationship to physical reality and the way we conceive and experience it. In terms of urban darkness and urban lighting methods, this may require a complete reorientation of habitual attention to the perception of shade (i.e. attached shadow). In other words, the trained eye and embedded notions that arise from the early visual modules of brightness need to be ‘undone’ or at least shifted to challenge new ways of seeing and to be attentive to what is happening in the shadow itself and not just by the shadow cast. If we change our perspective, for example, from the wide-angle perspective of *Cast-Tree* to the zoom/macro perspective of *Attached-Leaves*, we see what happens through light and

darkness on surfaces within the ‘texture’ of the shadow world. Texture is a word, Baxandall writes, that includes the sense of touch, but visually consists primarily of pure, very small self-shadows; derived shadows and slant/tilt shadings. He calls this the ‘ambience of microshadow’ and recounts a shadowy experience while sitting at a table between two white walls, describing the changing and diffuse light on the two monochrome walls as a texture of shadow:

Physically such microshadow is identical with any other shadow: perceptually it is likely to be a little different, and one respect in which microshadow differs perceptually from other shadow is the relative weakness of imagery. Experience of the match between certain sorts of microshadow and certain kinds of roughness no doubt plays a part. But there are no mental descriptions of forms (or functions) as specific as tables and trees. (Baxandall 1995:125-126)

This perspective, which recognises more than just clear shapes such as the cast shadow, is another visual insight that contributes to a broader spatial understanding of urban lighting design and darkness, especially the architectural interplay of solid and non-solid entities. More crucially, it allows for a broader phenomenological understanding of the aesthetic experience of darkness in space versus symbolic priorities in dealing with light at night. The architect Keller Easterling (2021) writes: ‘forms orchestrate and interplay between forms. The form is *interplay itself*. The form is an action. The action is the form’ (Easterling 2021:38). Easterling demands a discipline of ‘medium design’ where activist designers do not design a thing (i.e. cast), but ‘engage, unwind, infect, hijack, or review arrangements over time’, getting the modern-administered mind out of the way:

This interplay is not somehow evaporative or unreliable, because it is not quantitative or a visual expression of master plans and buildings—because it is latent, unfolding, indeterminate, and environmental. Quite the opposite. It may be more sturdy and reliable precisely because of these attributes. (Easterling 2021:39)

Modernist design relies predominantly on a process of classification and categorisation to make sense of the world (i.e. singularity, Lynch 2005). This process of categorisation and abstraction can often lead to a reduction in the richness and complexity of the world as it is filtered through the lens of a particular set of categories and measurements. Modernity, with its focus on simplicity and functionality, often prioritises this process of

simplification and reduction over experiencing the world in its full, imaginative, and even speculative complexity.<sup>50</sup>

Baxandall emphasises that we denature the shadow as soon as we aim to classify it, thus immediately becoming something other than the usual shadow of experience. He claims we cannot and do not need to process all sensory information about the physical environment: for an idea of the shadow universe and how it might bring us knowledge, we would need an idea of ‘specifically inattentive perception as a productive complement to attentive perception’, which we do not presently have (Baxandall 1995:145). Baxandall argues that our perception and aesthetics regarding the shadow should heed the ideas of the ‘Rococo-Empiricist Shadow’, a doctrine of artists who worked with the shadow as a ‘phenomenal thing’ in the eighteenth century (Baxandall 1995:76–77). For many purposes, the term ‘attention’ degrades itself by reducing inattention to a negative or the absence of something. However, this inattention can also be understood as constructive in that it has a certain reciprocal relationship to consciousness (Baxandall 1995:145).

In *Attached-Leaves* [Fig. 3.10], the radiance of brightly lit surfaces is figuratively and physically just as important as dark surfaces. Shadow perception must consider the interaction, the ‘micro-shadow ambience’, which consists of multiple shadows and shapes. The shadows of the artificial light not only influence the perceptible shapes of the darkness through contrast but also their reflection surfaces, which create spatial volume and thus its ambience of atmosphere. Both have significant implications for life within the urban night-light landscape—for encounters, movement, equal access to light and dark, and so on. And this is precisely why shadow-based darkness is a crucial optical condition of nighttime city light.

My focus in *Attached-Leaves* is on the ‘shadow image’ within the tree to observe what goes beyond the figurative (i.e. the illuminated object and its cast shadow). It goes beyond the already mentioned ‘singularity’, which is a priority for Lynch (2005:105) or modernity in urbanism, for example. Photography allows one to pause and thus visually realise and assess the light-shadow relationship more accurately. This also offers shifting away from the obvious (i.e. the figure, the object, the ‘index’), to details that unfold in between the dark and bright space. The world of the ‘microshadow’ (Baxandall 1995:126) might not be so micro in the end, especially if we relate it to a darkness that consists of

---

<sup>50</sup> See also Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby’s suggestion in *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (2013) that design should aspire to a material method of speculation that investigates existence rather than reality.

several layers (i.e. dark light). It is the mood of moonlight, artificial light, and shadow that creates a potpourri of dark nightscapes, as is evident in the treescape of *Attached-Leaves* [Fig. 3.10]. Nothing can be singled out, exactly: there are so many sources of light that create dynamic shifts. The phenomenon of tonality by the light, and its relation to the binary opposition of black and white, is also noted by Goethe:

We see on the one side light, brightness; on the other darkness, obscurity: we bring the semi-transparent medium between the two, and from these contrasts and this medium the colours develop themselves, contrasted, in like manner, but soon, through a reciprocal relation, directly tending again to a point of union. (Goethe 2006:72 [175.])

Again colour is not my primary concern, but hue. Goethe's (2006:72 [175.]) assertion that colour arises in the 'medium between' light and dark can equally be applied to attached shadows and thus a texture of darkness. It affects our experience of darkness. The light is not in and of itself decisive. It is also rare to be faced with a single light source, as even that single source will reflect off all surfaces it falls on, creating secondary reflections that combine to create a more diffuse ambient light (Casati and Cavanagh 2019:2). The composition of the attached shadow consists of several layers, just like urban darkness—it is not only based on the darkest of all shadows, the cast shadow—and must therefore be considered in its diversity and intensity.<sup>51</sup>

Turning from light to shadow also means seeing what happens in between, behind, and next to the light. This means focusing not only on the traces that the light casts directly in front of it in the immediate vicinity (i.e. cast shadow). For example, consider the perspective of a streetlight; if we assume that the streetlight is facing its own shadow, we must understand that the streetlight is blind to its own attached shadow. It is the shadow area that the streetlight can neither face itself nor illuminate itself, but which is nevertheless present (i.e. Casati and Cavanagh 2019:1). Our viewing habits in the spotlight are comparable to this streetlight perspective. Surfaces on which light falls, but which are not primarily used for illumination, shape the perception of the lighting mood and thus just as much the perception of darkness.

---

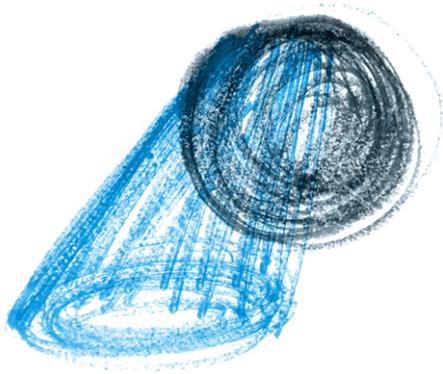
<sup>51</sup> See also Henri Bergson on the 'sensation of light' in *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (Bergson 2001:72–90).



[3.12] Recap: *Terra Incognita III / Attached-Leaves*.

By observing the attached shadows that appear in the dark, we can further explore a phenomenological understanding of aesthetics through light in spatial experience and in the framed picture. It shows me equally the difficulties of visible recognition and the visual realisation of this shadow world. The image of Victoria Park at night shows this in a wide-angle view. Similarly, *Attached-Leaves* examines in a close-up the structure and shape that the light ‘leaves’ in the form of attached shadows within the tree. From this example, and from Baxandall’s description of the shadow play on the white wall, we can further conclude that both light and darkness are formed by shadows via surfaces (e.g. Gibson 2015; Goethe 2006). My intention with the ‘attached’ shadow category is to emphasize the tonalities of shadows—the tinted dark landscape—rather than the light itself. By giving agency to the attached shadows, I would like to address some of the blind spots of artificial light and thus of dark light itself. [Fig. 3.12]

## Overcast Shadow



[3.13] Meng, C. (2022) *Shadow Typology: Overcast*. [Illustration].

Lastly, I use the overcast shadow, the third type of shadow, to describe the volume in the shadow itself. Like the sky on a cloudy day, the overcast shadow defines spatial, atmospheric conditions. If we think of a parasol casting a shadow, the overcast shadow defines the spatial shade between the ground (i.e. the cast shadow) and the parasol (i.e. the object and its attached shadow). The overcast shadow not only literally overcasts the cast shadow but is also the shadow that holds the shadow universe together; it connects the cast shadow with the attached shadow. Overcast shadow links to Leonardo da Vinci's definition of 'derived shadows': they are caused by other shadows. They mix and match places, they stitch together a wider atmosphere, creating effects as varied as the places they are cast (Cubitt 2014:171). In the sphere example, the overcast shadow is the cylindrical shadow body that refers to the unsolid matter of darkness (i.e. air/cone). It seems rather detached from all surfaces, floating and unfolding around and between the sphere. It has its separate environment to that of the shadows of the sphere that are cast and attached. [Fig. 3.13]



[3.14] Meng, C. (2021) *Overcast-Light*. [Analogue photography].

*Overcast-Light*, the third image of a tree in Brooklyn, visualises an urban light atmosphere at night. The photograph combines the three sorts of shadows I have outlined so far. First, the cast shadow here appears on the surface of the house façade. Second, the attached shadows are primarily found in the leaves of the tree. Finally, the overcast shadow is the barely visible but perceptible atmosphere unfolding between the tree, the house, and the lamp. Again, a strong dichotomy of light and dark emerges. Nonetheless, the contrast develops somewhat differently than in the previously discussed examples.

*Overcast-Light* traces the empty space, the air in between light and darkness. It is the shadow that belongs both to the visible and to the apparent space of the streetlamp. The atmosphere within this setting, the variations, and tonal shifts come to the fore when you

really investigate the shadows themselves. The light coming from the streetlight in the left top corner leaves bright, nebulous traces that are spread over the entire image. The traces of light contrast with the dark surroundings. These traces cannot be assigned to an object since they float in space. More important is the clear fading of the leaves—top left—when the light ‘bleaches’ part of the image information. The light falls directly on the leaves’ surface, causing them to fade. [Fig. 3.14]

Link: The **overcast shadow** is the **air** that shapes the **atmosphere** of darkness.

What does it mean when urban night lighting makes darkness visible but difficult to grasp? What do we see when darkness not only functions as contrast, surface, as an image in the background, but somehow invisibly, tangibly hangs in the air? So far we have discussed visible and visual darkness through aspects of cast and attached shadow. We have seen how light at night relates to the discourse of static and active form. Simply put, streetlights are architectural and static, with cast shadows actively removing light and building darkness. Attached shadows are then formed by such lights in the surrounding environment on surfaces. Consequently, different light sources appearing on various surfaces actively shape the lightscape and emit different qualities of dark tones. But what exactly happens to the darkness in the interstices without solid matter?

I would like to draw particular attention to this third ‘cloudy’ shadow, which further (re)presents artificial light by highlighting not only the object itself as a sign, but rather as a form of weather condition. In other words, the overcast shadow acts in superimposition with its other shadows (cast and attached), creating an overlay and correlation with the shadows of the nightlight environment as a whole. The overcast shadow describes tonality, diffusion, and movement, making it the most complicated of the three types of shadows. The crucial factor of the overcast shadow, both in night lighting and in the photographic image, is its play with visible and invisible qualities. This shadow arises as a side effect—an additional coat, so to speak. It can be neither planned nor controlled directly. It unfolds independently and changeably, and yet it can be traced back to the light, the surroundings, and its allies, shadows.

I further associate the overcast shadow with the phenomenology of shadow and darkness as matter. In classical shadow perception, overcast could be assigned to the penumbra shadow, which defines the shadowy imperfection around the *umbra* (i.e. cast shadow) and is often described in science to explain the planetary constellation of sun, Earth, and

moon. Penumbra is a space of partial lighting, the shadow that is contradictory to the cast shadow—an incomplete, rather transparent body of a shadow.<sup>52</sup> The interplay of the overcast shadow with light and darkness, however, is not transparent. It shapes the ambience of the night environment, illustrating how its shadow world is created by shading surrounding light atmospheres. This composition, or rather its appearance, although not malleable compared to the targeted illumination with light, is nevertheless an additional representative ‘shading’ of the urban night environment.

Neither Plato nor Derrida concerns what lies in between the object and the shadow, be it in the cave or between the lover and his trace in Pliny’s tale. Their apprehension considers it in binary terms, missing the depth and non-solid matter of shade, the overcast ‘objectless’ light condition in between. Victor Stoichiță notes that it is Kazimir Malevich’s experiments in *Victory over the Sun* and later *Black Square* that marks the moment in Western history ‘when the shadow, given non-figure status, forms a body with representation’ (Stoichiță 1999:189–90). While Malevich abolishes the surface of a painting, I would like to add or rather regain tonalities to overexposure. The goal is to fill in some of the gaps created by over illumination—white, blank, bleached-out areas like I’ve experienced in my photographic work through various ‘exposures’—to reclaim and revive dark atmospheres. This is the visual confrontation that I explicitly explore on [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net) as well as in the printed publication *Shadow Typology*.

As noted, the translation of a physical experience of phenomenal conditions with the camera is an old challenge. The capture of atmospheric effects, exemplified by the Photo Nocturne movement such as Stieglitz’s night glow (fig. 2.3), was a process in pursuit of such a quest: not to present an image of reality, but to capture an atmospheric sense of time (Sharpe 2008: 120-21). Special lenses and special weather conditions, such as reflections enhanced by rain, or fog for visual obscuration, were used. The artistic goal at that time seemed not only eager to express the spirit of modernity but also a more suggestive and mythical expression of the urban night landscape. And maybe that is exactly what makes the overcast shadow equally a potential and problem for the perception of a dark atmosphere; there is no clear image of it, and therefore—this seems crucial—no fixed idea or reference about its appearance.

Unlike painters, photographers, or filmmakers, the attitude and practice of modernist architects are often surprisingly indifferent to spatial manifestations of ambience. They

---

<sup>52</sup> See Umbra, Penumbra and Antumbra in *The Visual World of Shadows* (Casati and Cavanagh 2019).

are mainly theoretical, far removed from actual life itself, writes Pallasmaa: the rational, constructed, and geometric aesthetics of Western modern architecture prevent the evocation of images of poetised life. Style-conscious architectural minimalism transforms into retinal reduction and corresponds to a superficial, fabricated image of will. The paradox is that architecture, the art of building living space, has become the art that is often most devoid of life. (Pallasmaa 2011: 57). Ideas and designs of lightscares seem to relate to the imagery of light/dark in the visual world (e.g. photographs and movies). And yet, or precisely because of this, as Henri Bergson points out, we tend to mistakenly assume that the way we see, move, think, and express ourselves resembles ‘a kind of cinematograph inside us’, but our consciousness is not limited to the representation of external stimuli:

The whole difficulty of the problem that occupies us comes from the fact that we imagine perception to be a kind of photographic view of things, taken from a fixed point by that special apparatus which is called an organ of perception—a photography which would then be developed in the brain-matter by some unknown chemical and psychical process of elaboration. But is it not obvious that the photograph, if photograph there be, is already taken, already developed in the very heart of things and at all the points of space? No metaphysics, no physics even, can escape this conclusion. (Bergson cited by Cadava 1998:90)

In contrast to prevailing modernist notions of representation and dominant ideas towards our perception, Bergson (2001) points to immaterial spaces, aesthetics, and affective sensations as potential for revising attitudes: ‘It has not perhaps been sufficiently noticed what a large number of different factors co-operate in daily life in giving us information about the nature of the luminous source’ (Bergson 2001:50). He continues, ‘We have grown accustomed, through the combined influence of our past experience and of physical theories, to regard black as the absence, or at least as the minimum, of luminous sensation, and the successive shades of grey as decreasing intensities of white light’ (Bergson 2001:53–54). The perception of light in the urban night and thus of darkness is not just a matter of passively absorbing external impressions and stimuli, such as the representation of skylines or a correctly illuminated photograph. Rather, light requires an active and continuous process of making meaning of darkness, which means an engagement with the atmosphere of darkness and thus its shadows.

There is no question that there is something dazzling and delightful about the light of a city at night, the experience of seeing all the lights, and the hustle and bustle of the ‘city

that never sleeps'. Yet I also believe that urban culture is trapped by nighttime lighting and subjected to representative, repetitive reproductions. These are dull aspects such as modalities and methods of harsh lighting. When assessing the impact of nighttime light on the environment, it is important to carefully evaluate both the images that nighttime light creates and the impressions it evokes. I observe that there is a lack of attention to the present moment and the surroundings, which can lead to a narrow, even uniform perception of reality. To free oneself from such primarily pictorial habits, I believe it is necessary to cultivate a creative, imaginative relationship with the environment that does not strive per se for a visually accurate representation in light. As Bergson's statement above shows, our perception of and engagement with the world cannot be merely pictorial. The aim of this research is to draw attention to the atmospheric components of light and its shadow world, as an active part of an ongoing process of also making meaning of darkness at night. This requires a dynamic, intuitive and alternative understanding of the perception of darkness as well as of unbounded light spaces. To achieve this, the concept of the 'overcast shadow' was developed as a framework for analysis.

Thinking back to the photograph *Overcast-Light*, lighting also means to 'cloud', to 'coat'—to put something in shadow, on the one hand, and to give 'tint' to the environment on the other. As I have shown, light is dependent on darkness. And even though light, darkness, and shadow can create a loss of visual information—both in space and in the image—this 'overcast' shadow must be handled with special care, because it holds things together. With the overcast shadow, I would like to draw attention to the clash of visible and visual perception and give space to phenomenological qualities. I see this shadow as a new obscuration method that can provide additional information. The overcast shadow offers the opportunity to rediscover atmospheric space, question representation, and explore new implications for our perception and experience. I believe that too little attention is paid to invisible elements such as texture and air, especially the conditions that arise from attached or overcast shadows. They provide a unique state of experience and relationship between us and the world around us to create a conscious awareness that I see as fundamental to expanding our understanding of reality.

Overcast shadows create atmosphere, draw shapes into the air, and can interrogate the view towards darkness in urban culture. It is a phenomenologically shaped perception. I intend to reclaim erased information triggered by artificial light, more optimistically than Malevich's outright rejection of representation. Instead of subtraction, I propose a shadowy addition, bearing the potential to give a new appearance to dark qualities and

light atmospheres in the urban night. In an overlit world overflowing with images, ‘adding’ rather than ‘subtracting’ may seem paradoxical at first.<sup>53</sup> But adding shades is exactly what is needed to keep imagination alive and to move away from binary worldviews that manifest in a black and white perspective. This does not necessarily mean turning off the lights or painting them black (like Malevich), but instead to break away from the fixed, the more figurative, detaching oneself from deeply rooted ideas—flat and sharp forms—to think about the fleeting, phenomenological, and sensory dimension of the urban lightscapes.



[3.15] Recap: *1 AM / Overcast-Light*.

Consequently, the overcast shadow is a kind of insulating occlusion with substance. A felty, airy matter, it is important not to consider it a mere covering. As observed in the image *Overcast-Light*, this shadow creates intermediate tones that connect the dark with the light, the ones that we seem to have forgotten to draw. The overcast shadow thus needs to be perceived as an ‘add-on’, an extra coat, an addition of extra layers of urban night lighting. The materiality of light can significantly visually (pictorially) and visibly (physically) alter scenes and settings (e.g. Brâncuși’s *Egg* or Steichen’s *Balzac*). Such ‘dematerialisation’ (i.e. Johnson 2006) occurs through the play of shadows, between the extremes of light and dark. In limited ways photography makes it possible to visualise

---

<sup>53</sup> Keller Easterling (2014) addresses subtraction as a crucial, if unrecognized, discipline of architecture and urbanism. Architecture, according to Easterling, is not just a designed collection of static objects; its objects must be seen as activities, not simply “object forms, but also active forms”. Therefore, designing buildings, cities, and landscapes encompasses not only objects but also activities (Easterling 2014:38).

things that can be felt in space but are difficult to see (i.e. *1 AM*). The photographer's tools and techniques determine how light and darkness transform reality into an image. These imitations of photography also make it possible, contrary to the idea of photography's accuracy, to make things visible that are perceptible in space by not making them visible. This contradiction manifests itself nowhere else than in the medium of photography as a great potential to rethink imagination. If images of lightscapes can be studied differently, it may even enable for new approaches in dealing with the physical 'light-image creation' of the urban night and thus darkness. [Fig. 3.15]

## Conclusion



[3.16] Recap: *Blank-Nights / Sky-Light / Flash-Light / Terra Incognita III / 1 AM / Cast-Tree / Attached-Leaves / Overcast-Light*.

In this chapter I have shown how darkness appears through shadows. Part I focused on darkness through shapes of *contrast*, *tint*, and *atmosphere*. Part II builds on these shapes and presents a shadow typology categorised as three shadow types: *cast*, *attached*, and *overcast*. The main objective was to better understand how light and illumination shape the image of our environment through the resulting shadows of light, visible and visual. Our main understanding of shadows is dominated by the shadow cast and the symbolism of that shadow. We are most familiar with this shadow world and often forget that tint and atmosphere are also an important part of the shadow world and therefore of dark light. It was my aim to show that visual representation is deficient in its concentration on the image in both photography and optical representation. This journey of searching and finding the shadow world came about through my explorations

with the camera. As a reminder, the findings can be discovered in detail on [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net) and in my book *Shadow Typology*.

The streak of lights in *Flash-Light* [Fig. 3.3] represents the opposite of the ‘unsuccessful’ exposures ending in total darkness with which I began this chapter. Where the images *Blank-Nights* [Fig. 3.1] had too much shadow to make an image appear, light also washes out the shadows, as seen in the image *Flash-Light*, for example, resulting in an equal but opposite loss of information. My search for darkness began with *Blank-Nights*, ‘empty’ negatives from which the image never emerged from the shadows. I found similar results in the opposite direction: bright light instead of dark light bleaches the shadows, and thus part of the image. Like the window in the photograph *Cast-Tree* [Fig. 3.8] that erases parts of the cast shadow, the light is in a power struggle with the shadows and darkness. From this point of view, I explored some of the limits and possibilities of the visible-visual relationship in the shadow universe (i.e. cast, attached, overcast) that occur in the urban night and shape urban darkness. [Fig. 3.16]

The invention of photography ushered in a mode of visuality that reshaped our way of being (e.g. Kenaan 2020). Images have become so dominant in our daily lives that we no longer register how they shape our perceptions. The illumination of the urban night takes place parallel to a form of image production. Representative light atmospheres and the associated shades in the urban night (physical and sociocultural) are difficult to grasp. The presence of the shadow—the most ephemeral of all things, as Talbot called it, the proverbial emblem of everything that is fleeting and temporary (cited by Kenaan 2020:6)—also reflects to us a certain inadequacy we experience in the here and now. The shadows of artificial light affect the invisible, yet conceptual and perceptible ‘shades’ of darkness. I focused on the photographic image in conjunction with the shadow world as a framework for a search for the essence of the immaterial, a search for an intangible darkness in the light, for dark visible qualities that are phenomenological rather than optical. From this perceptual perspective, I sought a renegotiation of darkness in the urban nightscape. My aim here was to bring together the visual image and the visibility of darkness to re-examine urban darkness and its atmosphere.

The city lights at night shade and cast over the surrounding environment. My attempt to capture this atmospheric ‘overcast’ of the light is once again to work against the idea of the image as a mirror (much like Pliny’s shadow). It was my intention to turn away from this dominant perception of ‘shadow casting’ and resist blindness to its liveliness. I have argued that there is a multiplicity of shadow perceptions beyond the dominant cast

shadow—a perspective that I believe requires a fundamental re-examination of the history of the shadow, particularly as mediated in visual and design practice in the West. From this point of view, I have developed connections between visual language, photography, light architecture, and urban darkness. My overarching goal was to show a pictorial and spatial revision toward a phenomenology of the shadow. Shadows that create dark environments must be understood holistically—visibly, physically, mentally—to rehabilitate our relationship to the dark.

In sum, the camera lens and its outcome help me to question methods of visual representation, as well as to direct the viewer's gaze to the inconsequential, seemingly unimportant elements of the environment. Darkness in the form of shadows is one of them. Rather than depicting things in the spotlight, as seemed to be a tenet of Enlightenment thought and urban modernism, I strove for a visual language that foregrounds dark atmospheres. In this sense, I was also challenged by the representational limitations of the photographic medium. And that is precisely how I see this limitation as a chance to conceptualise darkness in a different way. Next, I will turn to the gesture of drawing to gain additional perspectives, to narrate atmospheres that I experience and observe and to which I want to add another 'visual texture'—a different kind of presentation, not least through an embodied concept of perception. Because of the representative 'overshadowing' of the atmospheric properties of darkness by bright light, the dominance of visual representation, and the limitations of photographic visual translation, it seems necessary to examine darkness also from a more kinaesthetic (i.e. bodily) perspective, beyond the technical apparatus. The following chapter investigates this focus.

## 4. DRAWING

# NIGHT DRAWING: RE-WRITING THE LIGHT



[4.1] Night Drawing event, Pier 35. New York City. (2019) Photo: © Brandon Perdomo.

What impact does light have on the appearance of the nocturnal land/cityscape? How does artificial light shape and affect our recognition of brightness and darkness? And how can we visually apprehend the differences between the light, the dark, the shadows, and the atmosphere it creates? Night Drawing strives to challenge curated perspectives, such as a city skyline at night depicted as a postcard, emphasizing that alternative ways of perceiving also demand physical comprehension through practice. [Fig. 4.1]

We have observed how the above questions arise in the context of the built environment and its visual representation. The amount of light in the urban night seems unquestionable to many, and as a result, it often risks being taken for granted and left unexplored. Night Drawing takes an active, hands-on approach to perceiving the city lights at night in a fresh manner. It is a method that facilitates close observation using paper and pen, enabling an in-situ study with embodied gestures of how light, darkness,

and shadows come to life within the nighttime landscape. The technique aims to reveal what is right in front of us, yet often goes unnoticed due to our tendency to overlook it.

Night Drawing calls for a fresh approach to explore two crucial aspects: firstly, an active attention to and perception of urban darkness by examining how light influences spatial settings; and secondly, navigating the intricacies of visually representing the aesthetics of light-matter, encompassing the tactile, subtle, and the beyond. Night Drawing has collaboratively embarked on excursions into public nocturnal spaces in London and New York with the goal of re-evaluating methods of representing urban light, sketching translations thereof, and ultimately re-shaping and re-writing our understanding of light. Night Drawing serves as a way of seeing from which photography has partially detached us. It is a method of embodied perception that provides a practical means of evaluating and studying nighttime urban lighting conditions and methods of representation through light.

The following sections delve into the practice and rationale behind Night Drawing, divided into five parts: *Night Drawing as Concept* (1) explains why it serves as a crucial practical perceptual exercise. *Drawing as Gesture* (2) addresses the phenomenological aspects and explores the intricate connection between drawing and perception. *Night Drawing in Action* (3) offers specific guidance on planning, organizing, and executing Night Drawing events, presenting a practical framework for its application. *Facts & Figures* (4) provides details on event numbers, participants, and locations. The chapter concludes with examples of re-writing light through *Marks on Paper* (5), illustrating tangible outcomes of Night Drawing.

## 4.1 Night Drawing as Concept



[4.2] Night Drawing event, Mile End Park. London. (2018) Photo: © Lucy Parakhina.

In 2018, the inaugural invitation ‘Let’s Night Draw!’ marked the start of Night Drawing gatherings, which commenced at Victoria Park with a small group exploring London’s nighttime landscape. After many years of solo night exploration, capturing photographs at night, my motivation to initiate these events stemmed from primary reasons: Initially, I experienced growing frustration with the constraints of representing darkness solely through photography. Subsequently, I sought a participatory approach to broaden my understanding by incorporating the perspectives of others. Lastly, it’s noteworthy that conducting research as part of a group during the nighttime not only enhances a sense of safety but also provides an environment conducive to focused observation. Since then, I have regularly organized Night Drawing events in London and New York, with occasional interruptions due to the pandemic. [Fig. 4.2]

Night Drawing events are free, guided by me and inclusive, welcoming participants of all drawing skill levels and ages. The primary goal of Night Drawing is to review the nighttime lighting effects and explore how light, darkness, and shadows influence the physical environment. This collaborative experiment originates from a desire to establish an interactive platform addressing the challenges of transforming the intangible yet elusive into a visual form. The events are specifically designed to re-evaluate

contemporary concepts of darkness and critically analyse lighting strategies within public spaces through participatory research. At its core, Night Drawing is an initiative that promotes on-site physical exploration and collective engagement, emphasizing active participation over individual desk-bound exploration.

The concept of Night Drawing represents an attempt to develop a tangible, embodied action that enables a more comprehensive examination of often-overlooked aspects of artificial lighting in the urban environment. In this context, paper and pen serve as observation tools that interrupt passive perception and encourage heightened awareness. The primary focus is to actively engage our conscious awareness of the physical spaces within the diverse lightscapes that surround us. Night Drawing places significant emphasis on the process and the experience of moving together at night. The resulting artworks are not the primary goal of Night Drawing, nor is it about lamenting the loss of darkness or idealizing the nature of a dark night. Instead, the method seeks to offer a different way of seeing, a fresh perspective that manifests as an embodied gesture.

The key idea behind Night Drawing is quite simple: it leverages the limited visibility of dusk and nighttime to heighten our awareness of our surroundings and the passage of time, providing alternative perspectives. Bridging the gap between our ordinary perceptions and typical representations, the method prompts participants to explore creative and abstract approaches in depicting both bright lights and dark shades. The project underscores that artificial lighting should be regarded not solely for its functional and visual aspects but necessitates a broader understanding of its sensory dimensions. This involves contemplating the implications of lighting motivations that extend beyond optics, encompassing social and environmental impacts. Consequently, Night Drawing aims to challenge preconceptions about nocturnal lighting conditions and prompts a reconsideration of our connection with darkness in urban spaces.

Night Drawing enables a sort of laboratory to study how dark and artificial light in cities affect the way we see things, how we live in cities, and how we draw what we see. It addresses modern challenges in how we understand the world around us and demonstrates how drawing at night can challenge visual representation while also helping us express what we see and feel in different ways. The main goal of the call 'Let's Night Draw!' is to rethink how we perceive nighttime lighting; not just accepting it as it is but triggering a change in how we think about darkness. Rather than passively acknowledging it, the goal is to stimulate a shift in perspective and redefine our relationship with darkness.

## Examining Light Effects



[4.3] Night Drawing event, Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York City. (2021) Photo: © Brandon Perdomo.

John Berger (2008, 2011, 2020) has extensively explored the ways in which we perceive the world through images. Interestingly, he was also a draughtsman himself. He wrote about how technological innovations have made appearances volatile and disembodied. Urban developments transformed appearances into refractions of light, like mirages: ‘Consequently no experience is communicated. All that is left to share is the spectacle, the game that nobody plays, and everybody can watch’ (Berger 2020:77–78). [Fig. 4.3]

Reviewing urban life in large metropolises in the late 19th and early 20th centuries Georg Simmel described the urban environment as evoking a ‘blasé’ human attitude where city dwellers protect themselves from too much interference and information (Simmel 2010:105–106). Comparatively, Gernot Böhme writes that ‘[t]he noise of the modern world and the occupation of public space by music has led to the habit of not-listening (*Weghören*)’ and asks, ‘[w]hat does [...] listening as such, not listening to something mean?’ (Böhme 2000:17). The notion of unconscious bodily awareness plays a central role in the practice of drawing at night and in our perception of light during nighttime, particularly in how we interact with darkness.

For the city is the most public manifestation of our shared life, the most visible representation of human activity. And if someone were to dig us up in two thousand years, once all knowledge of our written language had disappeared, the cityscape would be the only thing by which we might be judged. (Burckhardt 2012:27)

Urban nocturnal space is the site where the dynamics of artificial light most strongly articulate the visible landscape. The interaction between well-lit and dark areas within a space defines that space. Among other things, these lightscares serve as a form of visual storytelling. Representational methods, often making use of well-lit presentations and relying on common symbols and visual clichés, need to be re-evaluated (e.g. Hall 1997:259). Urban lighting can be compared to the world of theatre. In theatre, the interplay of light and darkness shapes the audience's focus and creates stage settings where actions do and do not take place. We can say the same about the urban night. It is a fabricated light environment where power structures play out to bring things both in and out of sight (i.e. Böhme 2017; Burckhardt 2012; McQuire 2005; Schivelbusch 1995). Recall, that artificial light not only illuminates important urban landmarks but also hides others, and turns 'unattractive' areas into impenetrable darkness (McQuire 2005:133).

We have seen how artificial light at night can be staged, manipulated, and used politically as well as a space-structuring force (i.e. New York Mayor Bill De Blasio's luminous 'omnipresence' strategy). Artificial light is frequently used to draw the contours of architecture, represent its forms, and brand the image of the cityscape. '[T]he functionalism of Modernist architecture makes itself felt at the visual level, which is to say, its "solutions" are above all solutions for the eye' (Burckhardt 2012:27, 64). This design of architecture focused on visual impact is crucially underscored by nighttime lighting, although sometimes little consideration is given to the impact of this approach on interstitial spaces such as public squares. As sociologist Lucius Burkhardt notes, we must ask ourselves why activity in social spheres such as politics, sport, and art must face critical public scrutiny while urban planning can mostly proceed freely. And while the public may hold opinions about the way the urban environment impacts everyday life, there are few avenues for public expressions of this concern. (Burckhardt 2012:27, 64).

As I have argued up to this point, light is material, with weight, volume, and texture. Artificial light expresses its nocturnal landscape emphatically in visible form. Consequently, as we observe, urban planning and its politics have a decisive optic impact on the landscape of the city and thus on the aesthetic and atmospheric experience of its space (e.g. Edensor 2017). The qualities and ambience of lighting are key to shaping the

perception of one's environment, just as light patterns in a painting are key to giving it form. Architects, urbanists, and political operatives are regarded as experts in the design of this environment, while those who experience it have little voice. Our future handling of light at night is of particular importance, not only in functional but also in social and political terms, and thus crucial in terms of embodied perception and experience. As I have argued regarding the ideological aspects of safety through light, public lighting also has its pitfalls, as demonstrated by the contrast between brightly lit social housing environments versus the quiet, dark luxury neighbourhoods in London (e.g. Entwistle and Slater 2019:13).

It is imperative to consider the representation of the city at night through light not only from motivations of function, marketing, safety, and technology but also from the point of view of effective/affective qualities which include embodied aesthetic experiences through the properties of light. The rapid changes of the urban night, the impact on the public space, and the physical experiences it affords us must be included in considerations for the development of urban nighttime illumination.

In this respect, Night Drawing echoes the spirit of urban thinkers who foreground public space for an equal, sustainable living environment, such as Jan Gehl (2011), Jane Jacobs (1992), Reinhold Martin (2016), Shannon Mattern (2021), Saskia Sassen (2001), and William H. White (1988). Light design shapes movements and life in its space, social practices, and interactions. The integration of light at night, be it as infrastructure, technology, or ambience, requires, as the research project *Configuring Light/Staging the Social* stresses, an urgent 'empirically grounded social understanding' from different disciplines ([configuringlight.org](http://configuringlight.org) n.d.). Light influences actions and moods in space, whether indoors or outdoors, and plays a significant role in the perception of its space.

How can Night Drawing help us to better understand the politically, socially mediated and visually contested nature of light in our nocturnal lives? Night Drawing does not promise a solution to the complex complications of nocturnal illumination but rather aims to trigger a shift in perspective and to see darkness in a new light. It establishes an alternative method for the observer: drawing as a method to review the relationships between experience, perception, and representation. 'A line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see' (Berger 1969:23). To draw at night is to look out for the contrasts, shadows, and spotlights that are manufactured by light.

## Navigating Limited Views



[4.4] Night Drawing event, Pier 35. New York City. (2019) Photo: © Brandon Perdomo.

Sitting in a dark corner, I look at the lines I am drawing on paper in my sketchbook. They are barely discernible in the dim light. I think of Berger and his description of the moment of drawing and its crisis. The ‘crisis’, Berger says, is the phase that occurs at one point in every drawing; namely, when what is drawn becomes as interesting as what is yet to be discovered. Berger calls it a crisis because at that moment the decision is made as to the success or failure of the drawing (Berger 1969: 29). Years of drawing practice have given me a good understanding of what Berger describes. I also see it as the point where the drawing aims to faithfully replicate the image, perhaps striving too earnestly for photorealism, which can create a dilemma within the artistic process.<sup>54</sup> [Fig. 4.4]

Recalling, from a snapshot perspective photography is rather a taking, while drawing is a making (i.e. Taussig 2011:21). Michael Taussig states drawing intervenes with reality in ways photography or writing does not; drawing operates its own reality with an imprint of the senses (Taussig 2011:12, 18). Kimon Nicolaïdes explains that learning to

---

<sup>54</sup> In art school, one common drawing exercise involves using a large cardboard box with a small circular hole, roughly the size of a magnifying glass, placed on top of your drawing paper. The purpose is to encourage you to ‘look at what you see, not what you draw.’ This exercise entails moving the cardboard over your drawing, allowing you to observe only a small, magnified detail of your artwork. By isolating specific details rather than focusing on the overall composition, this exercise helps artists enhance their observational drawing skills.

draw ‘is really a matter of learning to see’ and that includes all the senses. The difficulty is not in our ability to draw but in our lack of understanding. (Nicolaides 1975: 2-5). What is interesting about the graphic representation of drawing is how it is on the one hand at odds with photographic representation and on the other hand strongly influenced by it.

In her comprehensive historical analysis of drawing, Ann Bermingham (2020) reveals that the practice of drawing was not exclusive to artists, especially in seventeenth-century England. Drawing was a social phenomenon with profound cultural and societal influence—a ‘polite’ and social art that played a crucial role in visualizing our surroundings. Bermingham explores the broader cultural implications of drawing and its integration into education and socialization. Drawing, even before photography, manifested an understanding that consisted of the representation of objects rather than the objects themselves (Bermingham 2020: 33-73). In other words, drawings capture the makers’ perception or understanding of the subject. Consequently, the act of drawing contributed not only to the development of artistic skills but also to aesthetic sensibilities and cultural norms. As described by Bermingham (2020), drawing was not merely a technical skill, but a cultural and social practice deeply intertwined with the values and norms of its time.

Drawing in the city at night compels us to capture a specific moment in time while encouraging reflection on our perceptions of our surroundings during that period. Night Drawing precisely addresses this by navigating contemporary viewing habits through the sensory experience of urban nighttime illumination. In contrast to the predominant presentation of city lights and our customary perspectives on the environment, drawing captures a particular moment in urban society and culture. It is a practice that questions how representational methods are executed, cultivated, and how they influence ideas and visions. The method aims to initiate a conversation about whether and how drawing can serve as an alternative to prevalent photographic modes of representation. Night Drawing explores the notion that the limits of perception can be viewed not as constraints but as a form of liberation for imagination and creativity, standing in contrast to the original concept of photography.

The photography pioneer Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877) suffered from the ‘inaccuracy’ of the graphic translation of the drawing.<sup>55</sup> Frustration with his Camera Lucida drawings

---

<sup>55</sup> In the history of photography, there is the oft-quoted moment when, during his honeymoon on Lake Como, Talbot was highly frustrated by the ‘inaccuracy’ of the drawings he made to capture the beauty of the landscape, which he felt did not reflect the true experience of the place and eventually led him to invent photography.

led him in no small part to his photographic inventions, which included experimenting with photograms. In the 'art of photogenic drawing', he placed objects directly on sensitised paper in the sun, recording the shadows to create a more accurate copy of nature (e.g. Malcolm 2004). Today we see drawing primarily as artistic expression and skill. While photography took over the depiction of reality, 'learning to draw' transformed from a social practice into an aesthetic act. Through its 'artistification', drawing lost contact not only with everyday life but also with debates about representation and its place in the construction of a social self (Bermingham 2000:33).

One of Night Drawing's primary objectives is to challenge preconceptions about how things should appear when translated visually onto paper. This practice strives to foster a deeper understanding of how our perception of darkness is influenced by the portrayal of urban nighttime lighting. This investigative approach aligns anew with Kenaan's (2020) exploration of the connection between the visible and the visual, where photographic images correspond to the representation of the physical environment, often referred to as 'nature.' As discussed, Pliny's legend centres on the image as a form of memory, while Kenaan's (2020:58-59) exploration, particularly in relation to shadows and photography, further demonstrates how our innate desire to preserve the past continues to shape our present experiences. It appears that our initial urge to capture images that document reality also contributes to shaping approaches to the appearance of the current environment, including the play of light in the urban night. Consequently, such ideas and visions of the environment look, extend to methods of representation that translate from the visual on paper to the visible appearance of urban spaces, thus creating a figurative vision that may influence our perceptions.

Drawing in a dim environment is central to the concept of Night Drawing. Transcribing the urban night environment onto paper requires intense concentration, imagination, and re-imagination. It is crucial to break away from rigid expectations of how something 'should' appear and to resist the urge for photorealism. The darkness and dusky surroundings enhance perception, allowing focus on the visible effects of the environment and reducing the constant need to judge the quality of the drawings. The process of drawing becomes a personal confrontation; the drawing itself, in its fundamental essence as a drawing, is moreover judged quite differently, since it is precisely not a photograph.

## 4.2 Drawing as Gesture



[4.5] Night Drawing event, 68 Richardson St. New York City. (2022) Photo: © Brandon Perdomo.

Night Drawing raises questions: What do the bright lights of the urban night tell us? How do we talk back? While the night is meticulously planned and designed, Night Drawing encourages active engagement with our environment, using our bodies to reshape the light through drawing gestures. If architectural practices are a manifestation of writing with light, then re-writing light with pen and paper becomes a method to challenge conventional notions of urban aesthetics. Drawing in the dark isn't solely an expedition to perceive and depict surroundings anew; it's a critical approach to reassess the experience of dark atmospheres and light aesthetics, aiming to renegotiate the impact of various forms of representation and how they affect our bodies. Night Drawing entails perceiving light in the night, going beyond mere seeing. Through embodied perception and gesture, it strives to recognize the light while acknowledging the darkness it creates. [Fig. 4.5]

Merleau-Ponty insists that the 'body-world relationship' is a 'contact surface' rather than a rigid boundary. The gestures that structure our environment merge with our bodily experiences (Merleau-Ponty 2005:186). The recognition that certain spatial qualities, such as light properties, exist but are not always visually apparent reflects Merleau-

Ponty's (2005) phenomenological insights into perception. It also aligns with Pallasmaa's (2016) call for attention to architecture and its impact on the multisensory perception of space by the human body. Night Drawing requires a more conscious experience of the body and space, starting from an unfamiliar point of view, to create a visual translation that can allow for a transgression of the usual representation. The practice operates through a form of external force that disrupts passive attention and indifference, compelling an active act of reflection through drawing in the dark.

What makes drawing a significant gesture, is the act of doing it. In other words, it is the embodied experience of being present in the urban night. This contemplation demands both thought and bodily attention. The literature on gesture, namely by Carrie Noland (2009), points out how gestures form, embody, but also challenge cultural and social meanings: expression meets experience and vice versa. Adorno saw 'gestures' as possibilities that provide the body with self-awareness and knowledge (Noland and Ness 2008:ix-x).<sup>56</sup> Night Drawing embodies such a gesture, connecting to kinaesthetic knowing (e.g. Alexander 2017). Night Drawing asks participants to enter the luminous spectacle of the urban night—a kind of theatre—as both an actor and a spectator. It represents a critical gesture, an embodied approach to actively engaging with the urban night, challenging established conventions of perception. The aim is to explore an alternative way of knowing linked to feelings, sensations, and impulses.

Night Drawing is an action that serves as an active response to passivity, countering urban light practices by engaging senses beyond vision. In this regard, Night Drawing becomes a gesture within a gesture—a re-gesture that delves into the actions of those responsible for shaping nocturnal illumination. Ethnographer Andrew Causey (2017) proposes drawing as a complementary method for uncovering hidden facets of experiences related to complex cultural and social phenomena, often overlooked by conventional approaches. Causey notes that 'sight may be failing us,' but through drawing exercises, we can challenge the casual gaze of simply perceiving what we already know (Causey 2017:2, 12).

Taussig (2011:22) writes that drawing is like having a conversation with the thing drawn. Drawing, Berger (2005:116) continues, is an activity with a component of corporeality. Drawing has a 'kinaesthetic sense' (Taussig 2011:23). In this sense, Night Drawing is

---

<sup>56</sup> See also the extensive records of historical transformations (human and animal) in *Gesture and Speech* by André Leroi-Gourhan (2018). In particular, the changes in human work practices after 1920 and thoughts of rationalism through cognitive and communicative examples between body and work, manual and technical.

affective, since it is an active gesture to encourage, study, and review how the light makes us feel at night. It is a collective process that takes in various realities and thus different reactions. The gesture of drawing explores how the connection of body, architecture, and visual representation affects people's imaginations and visions.<sup>57</sup>

### **Design vs. Experience**



[4.6] Night Drawing event, Mile End Park. London. (2018) Photo: © Lucy Parakhina.

Night Drawing delves into the diverse forms of representation shaped by artificial light. The practice offers a unique opportunity to immerse ourselves in a distinct experience, where we can discern subtle atmospheric effects and emotional responses that frequently escape our attention. It prompts us to challenge our pre-existing assumptions about urban lighting, particularly the prevailing fixation on the notion that brighter is always better. The impact of a visual light effect can vary significantly depending on your proximity to it. It possesses a transversal quality, simultaneously visible and invisible, becoming an integral part of our daily lives. As Jean-Paul Thibaud asks, '[w]hat about the sensory production of urban territories?' (2015:39). Can a visual vocabulary, along

---

<sup>57</sup> Visual representations in relation to the body, movements, fantasy, and behaviour are not only architecturally authoritative, as discussed for example in 'Body-images and the pornography of representation' (Braidotti 1991). In psychology and the behavioural sciences, there is a growing interest in the still under-researched question of how pornography changes sexual behaviour, e.g. internet pornography among adolescents (Owens et al. 2012) or the role of pornography in men's expectations and behaviour in sexual encounters (Sun et al. 2016).

with the act of drawing itself, contribute to this dialogue? Drawing as a means of perception may lead us to discover new ways of being and review geographic arrangements (Hawkins 2015:264). [Fig. 4.6]

The material world in which things and people exist is one thing, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation effects, affects, and produces meaning are another. The design of the urban night through light and its visual affect is central to its spatial impression. Its lightscares cannot simply be studied as a traditional communication model that focuses on issues of signifier/signified and representation (i.e. Hipfl 2018:8). Rather, we are invited to invert our thinking, to ask what makes certain forms of communication possible. Night Drawing not only offers a source of comprehensibility for unusual findings but also enables a rearrangement of spatial experiences and night views.

Stuart Hall's (1997) work examined widely how perception is influenced by cultural and political systems of representing the world to us. Representative practices include, among other things, the exercise of symbolic and visual stereotypes. When a particular presentation is practiced repeatedly, it becomes a powerful trope and seems natural and inevitable (Hall 1997:259). Urban practices of gleaming light at night, and the cultural associations around the perception of darkness, are good examples of this. In this context, it should be recalled that, contrary to the claims of some psychologists and neuroscientists, the perception of light at night is not simply due to a cognitive process or a neurological mechanism inherent in humans (Howes 2005:322). Again, lighting up the night builds urban darkness; a darkness that we recognise and perceive but do not specifically look for.

Urban planning is an attempt to make 'utopias visibly real' (Burckhardt 2012:38). But it is also an 'invisible design [...] akin to designs, in that they put their stamp on our lives. One product of this invisible design is the night, man-made night: a temporal environment that is opened and closed in accordance with man-made rules' (Burckhardt 2012:188). We may understand how a deeply rooted rationality of light in Western society influences the visual representation of darkness in many ways. However since there are representative limits in dealing with its visible matter and its aesthetic properties, the current understanding of darkness must also be viewed using the frameworks of affect and embodiment (e.g. Bertelsen and Murphie 2010; Gibbs 2002; Massumi 1995; Probyn 2000).

As we have seen, light emanating from built infrastructure not only shapes the environment but also creates shadows and dark spaces in the immediate surroundings. Night Drawing simultaneously tests light representations as taken for granted and serves to examine the sensed aesthetics of light in the urban night space, akin to what Böhme (2017) describes as the atmospheric architecture of 'felt space'. Such an atmosphere can constitute the air between buildings, perceptible but not visible per se. We have also seen how the urban nightscape and its various atmospheric light experiences can appear theatrical and thus staged. Housing estate lighting methods were just one example. If we leave aside the practical purposes of light at night for a moment, we are left with questions of aesthetics as atmospheric. Accordingly, the aestheticization of the urban night intersects with political, economic, and social models. Here again, the public is exposed to the phenomenon that arises from the urban design but not the criteria that led to it (i.e. Burckhardt 2012:27, 64).

Atmospheres are not quantifiable, but they are discernible. Recall how these atmospheric features that occur in the nocturnal landscape are often overlooked in the practice of night lighting especially (e.g. Böhme 2017; Pallasmaa 2012; Zumthor 2006a). Night Drawing is not least about what is spatially sensed: light resonances that are both visible and invisible; views that require seeing through hue and brightness. As Böhme points out, atmospheres are not neglected per se, but components of the built environment that we overlook; capitalist forces that use urban atmospheres to 'colour the field of vision' and see the world in a certain way, grounding our affective participation in the world (Böhme 2017: 156, 202). Night Drawing aims to refract and deconstruct the overall image of a landscape of light to create a new or alternative perspective on the space of darkness. Artist Etel Adnan writes, 'We have to break the absolute into prisms that distort perception into refraction and destruction' (Adnan 2016: 22). In the drawing, the nighttime environment is broken into smaller parts with a pen. This means that both the light reflections and the shadows in their mini landscapes are examined in detail.

Night Drawing is a gesture, that provides an opportunity to raise awareness about what it means to be exposed to the design of light at night. The act of drawing is pivotal in countering the passivity described by Simmel (2010:105-106) as 'blasé.' Through drawing, as opposed to traditional design methods, we can capture the emotional and sensory experience of the urban nightscape. Representational models are something we learn, train, and absorb (e.g. Hall 1997). Rethinking habits necessitates new experiences. I understand Night Drawing as a challenge to rewrite fixed ideas (like a prefabricated image in the mind) as it contests our understanding and visual translation of something

not figurative but noticeable, like the ‘atmospheric affects’ of light. The impact of lit atmospheres on the environment, and the fact that a new aesthetic of urban darkness arises from its practice, are insufficiently addressed. Drawing at night is more than an act of observation; it is a gesture that invites us to reconsider and imagine alternatives to what lies before us and how it comes into being.

### Seeing vs. Looking



[4.7] Night Drawing event, Staten Island Ferry. New York City. (2022) Photo: © Brandon Perdomo.

Our experience of aesthetics through the perceiving body (e.g. Merleau-Ponty 2005) applies not only to lighting methods in the theatre but also to lighting methods in architecture, thus influencing the physical, atmospheric space of the built environment (e.g. Böhme 2017). From this perspective, there exists a fundamental aesthetic interplay between the built landscape, conceived as an image, and the emerging atmosphere that shapes its afterimage. Our experience of nocturnal atmospheres teeters between space and non-space, image and simulacrum, light and dark, the familiar and the experiential, ultimately leading us back to scenography.<sup>58</sup> By actively confronting atmospheres of

---

<sup>58</sup> See also Marc Augé (2008) on ‘non-space’, reflecting on places that we only partially and incoherently perceive.

nocturnal light with a gesture, the practice aims to reconsider certain entrenched attitudes and dogmas associated with urban nighttime illumination. [Fig. 4.7]

Night Drawing corresponds to the practice of ‘deep listening’, a profound method of attention to sound established by the composer Pauline Oliveros (2005). Oliveros used the music school as a critical example, where the educational institution is centred on techniques, the ambition to train the ear. She countered that the ear cannot be trained: an environment such as a music school is more likely to cultivate the skill of listening. The difference between hearing and listening is that the ear hears, the brain listens, and the body senses vibration (Oliveros 2015). There is a similar distinction between seeing and looking at the light and darkness in the urban night. Looking at the dark to see new things is analogous to Oliveros’s practice of encouraging new ways of listening to hear different things. Seeing implies passivity, whereas looking, like looking for someone, is more active.<sup>59</sup> The process of drawing at night demands for active, performative perception. It goes against the habit of only seeing things in the light; a habit that over time has led to little or no attention being paid to the image of urban darkness that emerges in the urban night, a blasé attitude in Simmel’s (2010:105–106) words.

Our frequent failure to notice changes, even when they are fully within view, is telling. Alva Noë (2004) writes that visual attention to detail is an awareness that occurs in the liminal space between conscious and unconscious, an area of cognition about which we still know very little. There has been extensive research into this aspect of vision and attention, termed ‘change blindness’, which impacts perceptual experience. A famous example is Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons’ (2010) study of the ‘Invisible Gorilla’ using a video. Their experiment shows that the appearance of a man in a monkey suit dancing through a sports team can go unnoticed when the viewer of the movie clip is asked to count the number of ball passes going around the team (Noë 2004:51–53). We do not see that which we are not looking for.

We can perceive the urban night and its living spaces, whether in two-dimensional or three-dimensional forms, as a diverse manifestation of human gestures through various modes of representation. The processes of learning and understanding design are not

---

<sup>59</sup> Modes of habitual perception, distinctions between ‘seeing’ and ‘looking’, and active/passive cognition are also discussed by Arnheim (1969), Berger (2008), and Gibson (2015). It is worth noting a further distinction in ways of seeing: Ariella Azoulay, in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), distinguishes between looking and watching, arguing that we have a duty to watch rather than to look at images of violent conflict. While her distinction is instructive for my work, her call to watch applies not only to photography but also to visual representation in general. Azoulay (2008) asks the viewer to reconstruct the scene from which the photo is taken. This refers to the process of Night Drawing, which observes the nocturnal light environment not as a spectator but as a participant.

necessarily without meaning. In Western educational traditions, drawing, as advocated by John Ruskin, places a significant emphasis on maintaining the fidelity of representation to the truths of nature (e.g., Bermingham 2020: 27). This stands in contrast to other practices where the focus lies on the processual engagement of the body. Consider, for example, calligraphy methods that encourage gestures akin to writing in the air or painting with water on the street, leaving no tangible ‘product’ behind (Ingold 2016:138). Taking inspiration from Noland’s ideas, *Night Drawing* argues that kinaesthetic experiences, embedded in gesture, provide opportunities to make marks that allow us to explore new, uncharted terrain by subverting established conventions and capturing unmarked material. ‘Performing gestures can generate sensations that are not-yet-marked, not-yet-meaningful’ (Noland 2009: 17).

Zeynep Çelik Alexander’s book *Kinaesthetic Knowing* (2017) demonstrates how late nineteenth-century Europeans regarded aesthetic experience less as a matter of knowledge and more as a reflection of bodily habits. Aesthetic experience is a bodily experience that manifests itself not least in the world of form, at least this was the tenor of modern art and architecture education at the time (Alexander 2017). Focusing on habits of posture, movement, and touch was seen as crucial in shaping and determining sensory and emotional responses to art and the built environment. This sensory education, particularly in Germany, was formative in the aesthetic understanding of the time. ‘Kinaesthetic knowing’ has been the subject of research dating back to 1906. Although marginalized in the 20th century, it has endured and offers a significant basis for discussing and critiquing the dominant focus on the mind in Western intellectual life. (Alexander 2017: 100, 125-26). Alexander targets the dominant cognitive and intellectual approaches to aesthetics and design that emerged in the twentieth century, arguing that by prioritizing knowledge and reason over embodied experience and sensory awareness, these approaches limited our understanding of aesthetics and practices towards design, downplaying the importance of the body and bodily experience in shaping aesthetic responses.

The way things appear to us also depends ‘[...] on the chromatic properties of surrounding and contrasting objects’ (Noë 2004:125). Bille and Sørensen note, ‘shedding light on objects is about attributing perceptual form to the objects, and hence the social use of light is not as much on the object as it is for the object’ (Bille and Sørensen 2007:270). The idea of the line, building along lines, ‘the straight line’ as Ingold (2016) calls it, can be associated with the visuality of urban lighting practices. This is clearly visible in the presentation of light in nightscapes such as London and New York. Lighting

for the sake of contour, form, and outline—representational and controllable—is a clear echo of a widespread mode of thinking in the Western world that associates the so-called objective and the rational with social and moral consequences. This again is where urban space is misconceived by some architects and planners who pursue a ‘straight’ mindset that strives to get directly from one point to another (Ingold 2016:156–59).

Night Drawing is a gesture that contrasts passive seeing with active looking. It is a practice that enables us to reorder linear space and change our worldview by encouraging a departure from our entrenched perception of the illuminated night. It prompts us to move beyond passive observation and engage actively in the act of an alternate form of perception. This allows us to explore darkness in fresh and abstract ways, revealing new forms of shading and atmospheric qualities that may have previously gone unnoticed. Ingold (2016) writes that we inherited from the Enlightenment the idea that light travels in straight lines. However, in this ‘point-to-point’ connection belief, there is no life or movement, and we, therefore, need to return to lines that are more askew, even crisscross, and spectral (Ingold 2016:155, 157).

Consequently, Night Drawing shifts its focus from illuminated objects and substances derived from urban design. The gesture of drawing aims to reference the unfolding space between the built environment and the changing appearance of light provoking darkness. Its practice leads us to observe and consider how light can move in ways other than a straight line that traces contours. Night Drawing positions itself not least as a critique, striving to bridge the gap between theory and practice in design and aesthetics. It seeks to address the limitations of approaches that have often overlooked sensory and embodied experiences, advocating for an increase in creative research explorations through practical, participatory engagement on the spot. Returning to Oliveros’s (2005, 2015) example of hearing vs. listening supports this effort, underscoring that seeing demands active looking and, thus, practice.

### 4.3 Night Drawing in Action



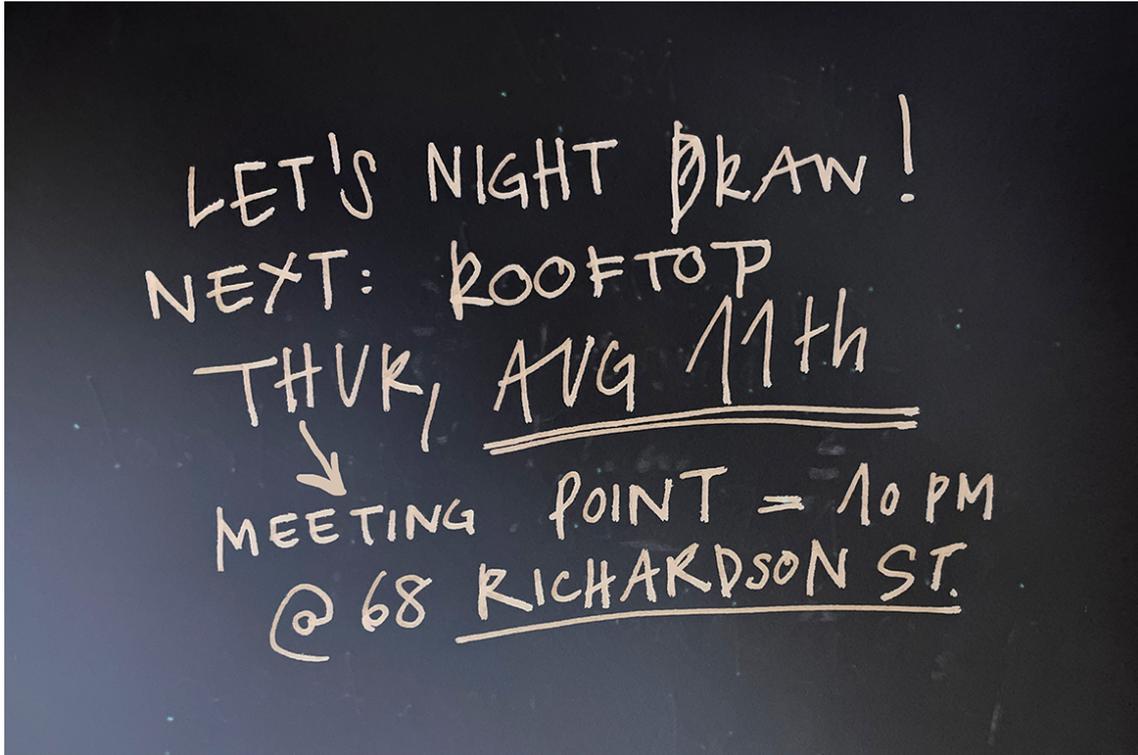
[4.8] Night Drawing event, Mile End Park. London. (2018) Photo: © Lucy Parakhina.

Drawing at night is not easy. It is surprisingly difficult, in my own experience and confirmed by participant feedback. Why? In dimly lit spaces, it is difficult to see volume, depth, and shadow. Visually the precise contours and outlines of city buildings dominate and outshine, creating an image of the surroundings that is both impressionistic and abstract. This contrasts with the views we are used to during the day: entire building structures seem to float in space and disappear in the darkness due to the contrast of the bright lights. The cityscape at night is distinctly characterised by shapes and lines of artificial light that we cannot recognise and perceive with this intensity in daylight. Night Drawing introduces the challenge of discerning what you draw in these dim lighting conditions, where pencil strokes on paper often seem to vanish. This specific challenge is the focal point of Night Drawing, urging participants to transcend the limitations of the visual realm. [Fig. 4.8]

We encounter physical sensations and feelings in a pragmatic sense—dark shadows, blinding lights, temperature changes, and more. These are vibrations, movements, and sensory experiences for which we lack precise visual or linguistic references. Night Drawing is not merely an artistic endeavour but a transformative practice that beckons participants to explore the nocturnal urban landscape through collective drawing. In this

nocturnal laboratory, participants move beyond passive seeing to actively engage with the atmospheric effects, affects, and design aesthetics of the illuminated city after dark. The following guide provides practical insights for planning and executing Night Drawing events, offering a practical framework for this transformative practice.

## Before the Event



[4.9] Flyer for a Night Drawing event. New York City (2022).

In the preparation phase, selecting the right location is crucial for creating a pleasant environment for hosting a Night Drawing event. Several factors play a pivotal role in this decision, including ease of access by public transport and a wide scenic view that enhances the observation and experience of the depth of light. Striking a balance to find a quiet space for observation and drawing is of utmost importance. For instance, quieter places like Mile End or Victoria Park, as well as riverfront areas like the East River, have proven to be ideal for the observational goals of Night Drawing. These locations offer space and tranquillity while a park such as Washington Square Park presents a challenge, partly due to the high number of visitors and partly due to the dense development of the park. Therefore, a location with a wide view and ample space is recommended.

What has further proved useful is the presence of amenities like seating and nearby shelter. Some people feel comfortable having space to sit while drawing. Also, bad

weather does not necessarily mean the event must be cancelled. In the case of sudden weather changes, such as summer rain, having access to nearby shelters will do the job. Overall, based on experience, it is recommended to find a good balance among the factors listed above when choosing the location for the drawing event. Extreme solitude, such as isolated places, should be avoided as it can make participants uncomfortable. On the other hand, overly crowded areas with many people asking questions and disrupting the drawing process are also not ideal.

Before the event, I typically conduct several preliminary site visits to assess the locations in advance, gaining an understanding of their lighting conditions and typical on-site activities. Additionally, it is advised not to inspect the location too far ahead, as settings in a city environment can change rapidly. Ideally, it's best to visit the chosen location once more shortly before the day of the event. I always choose an emergency meeting point, often a café or bar, which serves as a gathering place in case of unexpected events or simply for participants to take a break, or, as in winter times, to warm up. This location usually also serves as the meeting point after the event.

Once the site is chosen, and the meeting point is selected (I make it a point to choose a new location for every session), I proceed to find potential helpers (volunteers) and figure out a date that will work for everyone. The next step is to announce the event to the public. I publish the 'Let's Night Draw!' call on the [nightdrawing.com](http://nightdrawing.com) website, Night Drawing Instagram, and Facebook profiles, and promote it through word of mouth among friends, acquaintances, students, and colleagues. Additionally, I make sure to have an ample supply of drawing materials, including pens and paper. While the event call is to bring your own drawing materials, I am always prepared for people who have not, as well as to help out spontaneous attendees. While rare, there are instances when someone walks by and joins the event. Following these preparations, all that remains to do is to arrive at the designated location with my assistants on time. Typically, we gather approximately half an hour before the event begins. To ensure the visibility of both the event and the meeting point, we hold up a flag at the appointed time displaying the Night Drawing logo.

## During the Event



[4.10] Night Drawing event, Pier 35. New York City. (2019) Photo: © Brandon Perdomo.

At the start of each gathering, I offer a concise introduction outlining the purpose of Night Drawing, apprising participants of the goals of my ongoing research project and elucidating how the findings will be applied. In instances where a photographer is present, participants are encouraged to express their preference regarding documentation. Additionally, I introduce any assistants accompanying me and provide guidelines on the distance to be maintained during drawing exercises, emphasizing the importance of not losing sight of one another. I identify the chosen venue (café or bar), emphasizing its suitability for breaks and as our post-event meeting point. [Fig. 4.10]

Night Drawing consistently provides two or three circulating sketchbooks, which are at the disposal of participants. I actively encourage everyone to contribute a drawing to these sketchbooks. Additionally, upon request, I propose various drawing exercises tailored for the event (further elaboration on this will follow). During this phase, I explain the flow of the event and the duration of active drawing (45-60 min) and discourage the use of any light devices (repeatedly ignored). I underscore the Night Drawing philosophy that champions collective participation and mutual care. To further enhance the experience, I advise maintaining silence during the drawing session and reserving

discussions for post-event interactions. Furthermore, I emphasize the strict adherence to a zero-tolerance policy for any form of discrimination.

Playful exploration and a collective pursuit marked by both humour and poignancy constitute integral elements of these expeditions. Equally crucial in these events is the embodiment of 'spatial empathy'—a profound respect for the environment in which we draw, translating into a commitment to uphold cleanliness and avoid any form of littering. Participants are explicitly informed of their freedom to take breaks or withdraw from the event at any juncture.

Throughout the session, I circulate among the participants to monitor the situation and engage in conversations as needed. My primary focus is on overseeing the event, which includes paying attention to our surroundings and being a point of contact to ensure participants receive the necessary support. Unfortunately, this approach rarely allows me to engage in drawing myself, as my responsibility for ensuring a positive event leaves me with little additional attention for detailed drawings. Nevertheless, I often seize the opportunity to engage in on-site drawing during my pre-inspections of the location.

I would like to note my profound gratitude to the dedicated helpers who have supported me throughout various drawing events over the years. Their role is pivotal in ensuring the smooth and safe execution of these gatherings. While complete control over the night environment and people's actions in a public space is a matter of impossibility, the assistance of dedicated individuals, coupled with clear communication during the drawing sessions, is paramount. In instances where the group size is manageable and the location allows for easy oversight, the volunteer assistants often engage in drawing themselves and may contribute to documenting the event through photography. After each session, I gather the distributed sketchbooks, and participants are invited to contribute some of their drawings to the growing Night Drawing collection. Finally, each participant has the option to decide whether they would like to share their drawings with others, participate in a subsequent group discussion, or simply join our post-event meeting.

## After the Event



[4.11] Post-meeting Night Drawing event, The Palm Tree, Mile End. London. (2018) Photo: © Lucy Parakhina.

After a Night Drawing session, participants often convene at a local café or pub, offering an opportunity for post-event discussions and the exchange of drawings. These post-event meetings serve to facilitate informal yet dynamic conversations on their views of seeing darkness in the city. Participants frequently share their encounters and experiences that happened during the event with enthusiasm. These gatherings intentionally lack any hierarchical leadership from my side nor structured data collection, allowing dialogues to evolve naturally and unforced. This approach often results in profound and spontaneous discussions. Lastly, these post-meetings consistently indicate that participants tend to exhibit a notable degree of fatigue alongside a heightened sense of positive energy. Drawing at night, especially when focused, is not only extremely difficult but also incredibly exhausting. [Fig. 4.11]

Over the years, Night Drawing gatherings have consistently maintained a positive atmosphere, free of negative incidents. The intentionally small group size allows manageability for me, fosters intimacy, and enables participants to form new friendships, connections that also encourage future event attendance. Careful preparation, dedicated hosting, and the presence of a small group of curious active minds, including 1 or 2 helpers, are all key contributors to Night Drawing's success.

### 4.3 Facts + Figures

	LOCATION	DATE	PARTICIPANTS ± REPEAT	LIGHT LEVEL (ESTIMATE)
EVENT 1	MILE END PARK, LONDON, E35BH	2018 (05/12)	10 ± 0	10%
EVENT 2	WAPPING, LONDON, E1W3PA	2019 (06/03)	7 ± 1	20%
EVENT 3	BRICK LANE, LONDON, E15LJ	2019 (05/04)	12 ± 2	25%
EVENT 4	MILE END PARK, LONDON, E35BH	2019 (16/05)	9 ± 2	10%
EVENT 5	PIER 35, LOWER EAST SIDE, NY	2029 (06/11)	10 ± 0	40%
EVENT 6	WATER FRONT PARK, GREENPOINT, NY	2019 (13/06)	8 ± 0	75%
EVENT 7	WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK, NY	2021 (30/06)	13 ± 1	35%
EVENT 8	BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK, NY	2021 (27/08)	15 ± 3	45%
EVENT 9	68 RICHARDSON ST, BROOKLYN, NY	2022 (11/08)	8 ± 1	15%
EVENT 10	STAATEN ISLAND FERRY, NY	2022 (09/12)	5 ± 0	30%

[4.12] Night Drawing Events Overview (2018–2022)

The primary objective of the Night Drawing events was qualitative rather than quantitative. The study’s motivation wasn’t centred on collecting extensive data or achieving a high number of participants. Instead, the focus was on establishing a platform to encourage collective drawing at night and subsequent discussions, significantly enriching my overall research through the collaborative practice of drawing at night as one method within the overall framework of my three-part methodology.

In addition to the initial testing of Night Drawing events, which originated informally with friends as participants, I meticulously planned the Night Drawing study spanning from 2018 to 2022. A total of 10 events were conducted specifically for this research project, held at various locations corresponding to my residence at the time. The participant numbers varied, ranging from 5 to 15 individuals. Notably, Event 8, hosted at Brooklyn Bridge Park in 2021 during a challenging pandemic period, achieved the highest participation with 15 individuals. In contrast, the final and probably the coldest Event 10, designed to test the non-static venue of the Staten Island Ferry, had the smallest participation with 5 attendees. [Fig. 4.12]

While hosting Night Drawing events, several factors influenced insights and turnout, including planning ahead, for instance, the choice of the location, and publishing the event on various media platforms. It has been shown that the place, timing, as well as the season and environmental conditions such as weather, impacted participation. Careful planning and experience gained over time contributed significantly to a positive outcome. The following sections provide more details about the conducted events: locations, timing, and participation (including returning participants), along with reflections on the lighting situations experienced during the events.

## **Locations**

With only one exception—Event 1 and Event 4, both held in Mile End Park in London—I aimed to choose a different location each time. I only returned to the Mile End location again because, at the early stage, I felt I couldn't fully capitalize on the idea and concept behind Night Drawing. Considering the uniqueness of the location with its exceptional darkness, I decided to organize a second event there. Throughout hosting Night Drawing events over the years, my motivation was to strive for various settings because I was eager for the experience of a diverse lightscape, as well as to ensure diversity in attendees; often, locality did matter. Attracting different participants was a key consideration, as not travelling too far from home at night was a decisive factor for participation. For instance, people from Brooklyn were less inclined to travel to Manhattan and vice versa.

The selection of Night Drawing locations was moreover driven by the desire for a setting with a wide view. A spacious scenery not only allows for a broader perspective but also offers a comprehensive view of a variety of light atmospheres unfolding in front of you. This setup provided participants with more possibilities and freedoms; they could choose to focus on the wide-angle perspective as well as concentrate on shadow details in close proximity. In selecting the locations, I aimed to strike a balance between these aspects, ensuring that the settings were not too dense or busy, offering seating and shelter, and being easily accessible by public transport.

Lastly, there has always been a practical aspect to the location choice. I chose places where I live and am familiar with, having undertaken prior research in these spots. This familiarity is crucial, especially when conducting public events at night, as it contributes to coordination and safety. Knowing the location well helps limit the risk of danger for everyone involved and provides a clear understanding of what to look for and observe.

Overall, all the locations were public outdoor areas, with one exception: Event 9, which took place on the rooftop terrace at 68 Richardson Street in Brooklyn.

### **Timing**

In the initial phase, I inclined towards hosting events very late, around midnight, but it proved challenging as people were less inclined to leave their homes at that hour, especially during the week. From experience, I discovered that Fridays or weekends (excluding Sundays) attract more participants. Holding events after sunset was crucial. In winter, when darkness falls earlier, events occur between 7:00 PM and 9:00 PM. In summer, when daylight extends longer into the evening, events take place later, between 9:30 PM and 11:00 PM. The timing and time of year were critical to participation, as was publicizing the events. It was not always easy to publicize the event well intensively and sufficiently in advance just by myself, especially when I had other tasks to do, and this seemed to have an additional effect on the number of participants.

The Night Drawing experiences feel quite different according to the season. While summertime events were often held longer than planned, in wintertime, the drawing sometimes ended earlier than expected. During Event 5 + 10 in winter, the coldness made it challenging to draw, and some participants significantly suffered from the cold. Nonetheless, each season adds fascinating distinct properties to the night and its lightscape; it was often as exciting to draw during winter as it was during summer. Although my research did not specifically focus on weather factors, nor did I pay special attention to the moon phase, I acknowledge that these factors further impact the overall experience. More obvious impacts, challenges like rain or snow, made drawing outdoors difficult, although such weather significantly enhances night light atmospheres. Again, good planning ahead helps minimize the impact of weather, and luckily, I had to cancel an event only once.

### **Participants**

The communal nature of Night Drawing has successfully attracted beginners with minimal drawing experience, eliminating any skill prerequisites and distinguishing the event from more traditional drawing courses, such as life drawing. This deliberate approach aimed to keep the participation barrier low. Consequently, the group composition has consistently been diverse, encompassing passionate hobbyists as well as professional artists, designers, and other professionals with no creative background at all, engaging with paper and pen for the very first time. The group has hosted

individuals from various backgrounds, and the age range is also noteworthy, spanning from the youngest participant at 13 years to the eldest at 74 years. Interestingly, both parties met without knowing one another before on Event 7 in Washington Square Park in New York.

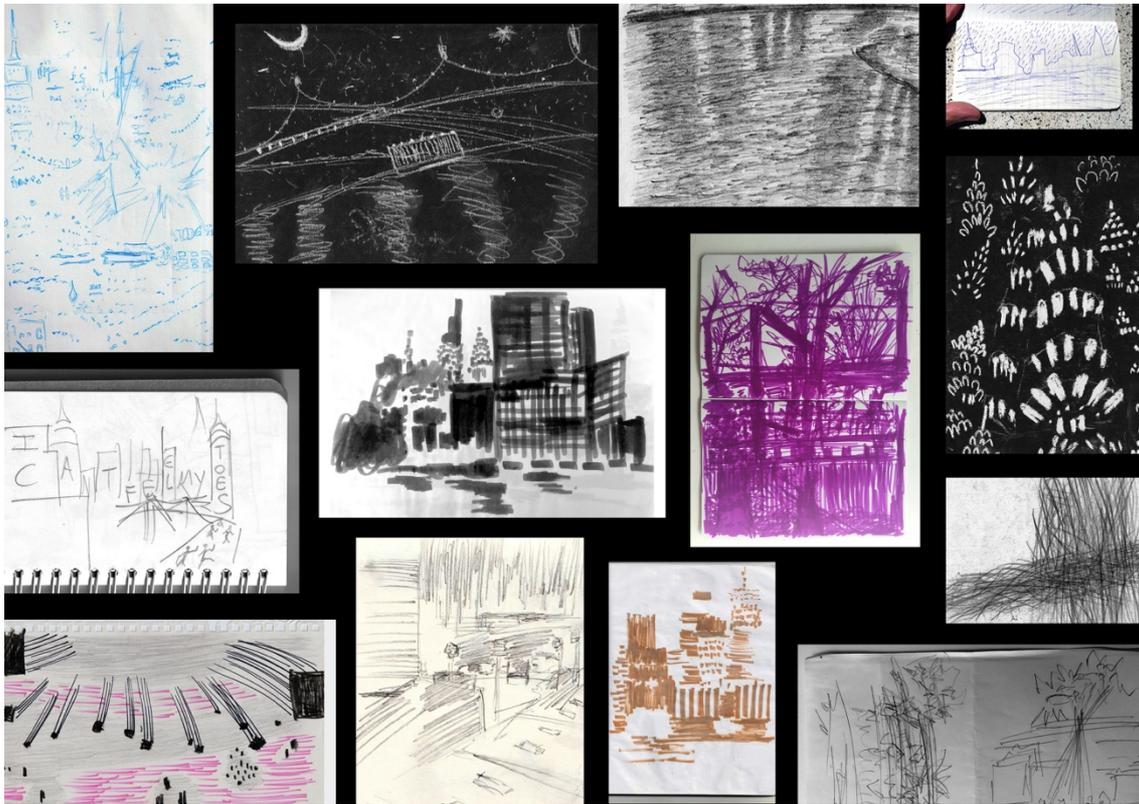
Notably, throughout the study, participants were primarily local, living nearby to the event locations. A proportion of returning attendees has been observed, indicating sustained interest and commitment to the research initiative. Initially stemming from my circle of friends, the participant pool has evolved to attract absolute strangers who don't know anyone. Some have even travelled from afar, such as from Coney Island to Manhattan or visitors from Europe, having apparently learned about the project through social media channels. Upon analysing participant dynamics, it's evident that several factors impact the number of attendees. The turnout has always been somewhat unpredictable, making it uncertain until the last minute of the event. This unpredictability, at times, leaves me with the uneasy feeling that nobody may come. However, surprisingly, people show up.

### **Lighting**

The chosen locations consistently aimed for dim environments. In the beginning, I pushed for very dark settings; for instance, Event 1 + 4 in Mile End Park was likely the darkest setting for a Night Drawing event. Some participants were excited by the challenge and ventured into the strong, abandoned small forest in the park, where there was no public lighting at all. However, others felt noticeably uncomfortable with this extremely dark setting, and for me, keeping track of people and having an overview of all the event happenings was difficult, if not stressful. On the other hand, some settings were very well-lit, as in Event 4 at Greenpoint Waterfront Park. Here, the ambient lighting from skyscrapers and strong path lighting conflicted with the principles of Night Drawing, akin to drawing under pig lights.

The density and crowding levels within spaces significantly influenced the intensity of the light in which Night Drawing was conducted. In Figure 4.12, I provide a rough estimate of the light levels in the environments where Night Drawing events took place. These estimates aim to offer a little further indication of how to frame the locations where the research was carried out. They do not strive to be precise light measurements but provide an idea and are based on my experience and discussions with participants, with 100% representing bright floodlighting and 0% indicating pitch-black conditions.

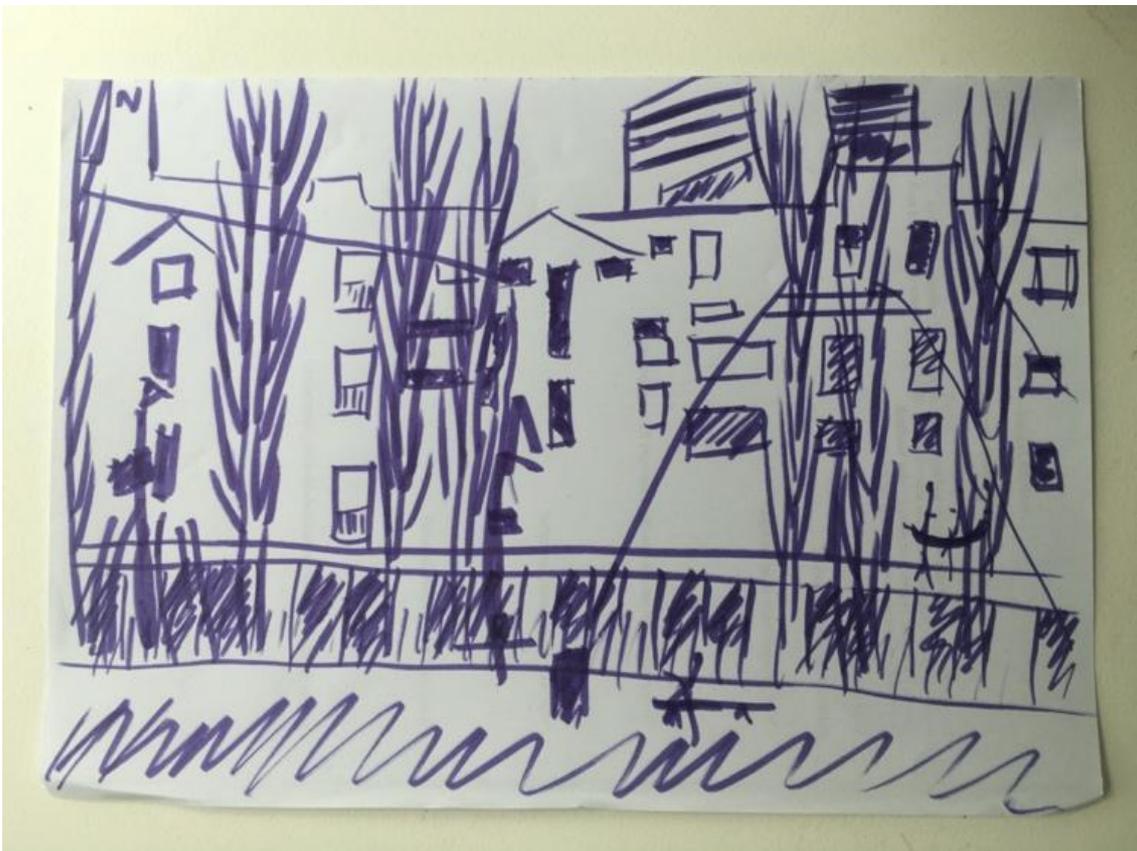
## 4.5 Marks on Paper



[4.13] Sketches, done by various participants at a Night Drawing event. New York City. (2021) Photo: © Chantal Meng.

The emphasis of Night Drawing is on practice, not product, and the drawings are not the primary outputs of my research. As Nicolaïdes (1975) notes, drawing means looking at people and objects to acquire knowledge. I do not view drawing as aestheticization, nor do I focus on technique or attempt to copy the world in an artifact. Night Drawing is an act of physical contact between the internal world and the external world through embodied experience and observation in situ. It allows us to better understand spatial dimensions, navigate space as well as demonstrate the complexity of perception. Next, I will use a few examples to reflect on the interplay between the built world and the participants' marks on paper. I do not aim for a visual analysis of the drawings. Rather, the idea is to link critical reflections and debates about mediated space, visual communication, and social experiences within the framework of some drawings. I aim to further discuss how our eyes are trained, how our visual understandings are formed, and how drawing may or may not result in dis-habituating us from our ordinary perception-conception of the dark. [Fig. 4.13]

As discussed, the difficult circumstances of drawing in an unfamiliar light environment can be beneficial precisely because the sensory perception of time and space is enhanced, offering a new outlook. The making of a drawing is key, as it involves discovering things that usually go unnoticed. It is a method to perceive what is and what is not perceptible in space and to see and look at it in different ways. It creates awareness, sharpens vision, and challenges a familiar viewpoint by exposing oneself to a rather unfamiliar setting. At the same time, however, some drawings clearly show how strongly our visual ideas are cultivated and shaped by external influences (i.e. Hall 1997; Oliveros 2005). In that regard, the perception of night space through drawing acts and re-enacts the form and content. It examines what is and what is not possessable and recognisable.



[4.14] Sketch, done by a participant at a Night Drawing event. London. (2018) Photo: © Chantal Meng

Night Drawing's query is to escape the viewer's prioritisation of the visual outcome. For a long time, I avoided giving the participants any drawing instructions. Over time, I kept noticing almost desperate questions about how-to, mainly caused by the frustration of some participants with their drawings. Often the problem for some is that the drawing appears too abstract and is perceived as not realistic enough. What can be considered a good or bad drawing is another challenge Night Drawing addresses. Berger is of great

help here when he states: ‘To draw is to look, a drawing of a tree shows not a tree, but a tree being looked at’ (Berger 1976: 82). However, even after years of running the public workshops, it’s a challenge to convince some participants that the idea of Night Drawing is not to present the urban night exactly as it appears (whatever that might mean), and, nonetheless, we sketch what we know: drawers often try to reproduce the environment as they experience it in daylight. [Fig. 4.14]



[4.15] Sketch, done by a participant at a Night Drawing event. London. (2018) Photo: © Chantal Meng

One technique assisting a shift in focus is to use a white pen on black paper. It is more difficult to draw the dark (what is in the shadow) than to draw the brightness (what is in the light). What struck me from multiple experiences is that viewing habits seem more biased towards brightness. To make the effort of focusing on the darkness and not on the light demands a negation. Many have expressed that the application of a white pencil on a black page is more satisfactory since the inverted result yields a more accurate representation of what they think they see. They claim that the relationship between dark and light appears less wrong and more nocturnal. [Fig. 4.15]



[4.16] Sketches, done by various participants at a Night Drawing event. New York City. (2021) Photo: © Chantal Meng.

Another exercise instructs the participants to draw everything that appears in variations of black or white. In other words, the instruction is to transfer only bright or dark spots onto paper. It is a simple task that can help investigate the representation of urban night light by observing its source. Light facilitates orientation, for example, by supporting the perception of proximity and distance or separating the background from the foreground. The latter is one of the first things that happens when observing and translating a nightscape into either black or white. It is a simplification through light and dark, a visual orientation that notates the environment on paper. It purposely takes black or white as a reference point to represent space, focusing on form and contrast. This reduction of visual complexity makes the ambient light impressions less overwhelming and helps to ease the creator's dissatisfaction. [Fig. 4.16]



[4.17] Sketches, done by various participants at a Night Drawing event. New York City. (2021) Photo: © Chantal Meng.

Although the exercises attempt to shift the focus from the drawing itself to observation, I still discover some sort of correction occurring in some drawing results. For example, it is not uncommon to add symbolic information to the drawing, such as stars, or drawings that follow the look of a postcard or mimic a poster photograph. This observation is crucial to visual thinking and the design of our living space precisely because it reflects how imagery is somehow formed and copied by what we have seen and taught before. Colomina (2000), as well as Sharpe (2008), write about how images of modern architecture in two-dimensional media (such as magazines or artworks) foreshadow and shape our imagination of the modern built environment. Likewise, our ideological, sociocultural understanding of the night prefigures and forges our experience and the corresponding handling of darkness in the environment. [Fig. 4.17]



[4.18] Sketch, done by a participant at a Night Drawing event. London. (2018) Photo: © Chantal Meng

However, some sketches also express something else, namely the individual perception of light through effect and affect, and in doing so reveal their experience of the atmosphere. In other words, some drawings become more spherical, more abstract, less figurative and representative. In this way, spatial representation, experience, and the participants' visual preconceptions collide. Our vision is ambiguous—as W. J. T. Mitchell reminds us, '[w]hat we see, and the manner in which we come to see it, is not simply part of a natural ability' (Mitchell 2002:170). In sum, Night Drawing intentionally challenges the gap between what the drawing person thinks they see and what they can translate on paper. This possibility of perception challenges the accuracy of the representation and is in fact an advantage: it reveals the unfamiliar at the limits of perception. Here the matter of darkness, its urban presentation, and our perception of it help us further understand how we have come to see and reveal its shortcomings. More views of the drawings made during the events, generously provided by many participants, can be found at [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net) and more images from the events at [nightdrawing.com](http://nightdrawing.com). [Fig 4.18]

## Conclusion



[4.19] Night Drawing event, Pier 35. New York City. (2019) Photo: © Brandon Perdomo.

When photography fell short in capturing the nuances of darkness, I turned to drawing at night. This choice gave rise to Night Drawing as an active, collective undertaking, emerging from the limitations I faced in my photographic pursuits to convey the essence of darkness. This personal journey, intertwined with the act of drawing, sparked the concept of fostering a collective approach. Night Drawing serves as a practice that challenges established notions of visual representation, particularly those rooted in photography, uncovering hidden facets of darkness within urban environments. Fundamentally, Night Drawing prompts a re-evaluation of our interactions with and interpretations of the urban light at night, providing a more engaged and expressive perspective. [Fig. 4.19]

I have shown how a visual representation in the form of a drawing can overlap with an image idea and a spatial experience. Seeing through drawing intersects with changing perspectives; social, political, and practical needs; and, ultimately, with changing notions of individual subjectivity. Observing patterns of light at night through drawing is a technique that helps to investigate how areas of light and darkness mutually form. Night Drawing collectively addresses contemporary perceptual challenges and explores how

drawing in the night environment operates as a form of translation of our perception. The method offers a laboratory for the investigation of natural forces of darkness in conjunction with artificial light, its creation of urban darkness, modes of representation, and views impacting metropolitan night lifestyles. Hence, the approach encourages a rethinking of the brightly lit world that affects space and us.

Questions of what constitutes the doctrine of drawing and how to distinguish between amateur and professional practice invite further discussion.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, there is a need to explore how representational practices are performed and how, through drawing, we can create alternative views for the enrichment, if not liberation, of sensual perception and visual experience. This goes beyond the realist pretensions of our formed visual representation and imagination. Drawing, once a vehicle for the aestheticization of the self and everyday things (Bermingham 2000), becomes a technique to question and regain new perspectives in today's context. Drawing at night can eliminate some perceptual limitations while simultaneously introducing new ones.

In sum, Night Drawing is a gesture that explores how the lights at night speak to us and how we talk back with pen and paper. It adopts a unique visual vocabulary to question established notions of visual representation, questioning both the illuminated and dark images shaped by urban lighting. This practice encourages a reconsideration of certain conventions in urban design that impact how we visually depict the urban environment. For a new conception of darkness, light must be rewritten from the outset—and not in a straight line. To reimagine light at night and renegotiate the understanding of darkness, it seems necessary to break with entrenched ideas and habits. Aesthetic experiences—an embodied act as well as a poetic encounter with the matter of nocturnal light—carry ethical, ecological, and political implications.

Night Drawing manifests a shared action with gestures. It embodies a collective momentum that involves collaborative research and sketching, forging an alternative visual vocabulary with the potential to make a difference. Ultimately, my heartfelt gratitude for this research extends to the collective—to all the participants of Night Drawing events—for their active engagement and generous contributions to this endeavour.

---

<sup>60</sup> I would like to note that my public drawing events have also brought me criticism from artist friends who see themselves as 'professionals' in the field. The criticism was that Night Drawing was an event, arbitrary and entertaining, and not a 'serious' discussion about the craft of drawing. It is an extremely important discussion, which I would like to take up in more detail elsewhere. For now, I would like to note that the aim of Night Drawing was never to create a commercial artistic workshop or mainstream event. Nor is it to downplay the art or skill of drawing.

## EPILOGUE



[III] Meng, C. (2020/23) *Skylights — Kosciuszko Bridge*. [Video, silent, 10 min. continuous loop].

[...] and the people bowed and prayed  
to the neon god they made.<sup>61</sup>

Luminous traces are visible from my kitchen window, especially at night, and when clouds pass by. They create a captivating effect of coloured lights in the sky. This spectacle is a refraction from the illuminated Kosciuszko Bridge—roughly 3 km away. Due to the density of the city, the Bridge is not visible from here, yet it makes its presence felt in the sky. It took me quite some time to realize that these bizarre lights outside my window originated from a bridge that far away. [Fig. III]

Completed in 2017, the Kosciuszko Bridge is a cable-stayed bridge over Newtown Creek, connecting Greenpoint in Brooklyn to Maspeth in Queens. Its illuminated and ever-

---

<sup>61</sup> Simon, Paul, and Garfunkel, Art, 'The Sound of Silence' (1964).

changing flashy light show is part of an initiative spearheaded by former Governor Andrew Mark Cuomo to elevate the aesthetics of New York’s bridges by incorporating a coloured light show accompanied by music, which would enchant the city’s nightscape and serve as an international tourist attraction. Cuomo’s project was only partially realized, but to this day, the Kosciuszko Bridge continues to illuminate the sky, casting coloured streaks of light on passing clouds (see also French 2021; Governor Andrew M. Cuomo 2016; [mariomcuomobridge.ny.gov/lighting](http://mariomcuomobridge.ny.gov/lighting) n.d.).



[IV] Meng, C. (2022) *Kosciuszko*. [Digital photography].

The interplay between the bridge lights and the atmospheric effects they create in the sky serves as the entry point into the bedtime story ‘Good Night’. The video work, ‘Skylights—Kosciuszko Bridge,’ which evolved from my visual studies during this research process, serves as an additional catalyst for a discussion on modes and motifs of presentations in light that affect views on darkness. The Kosciuszko Bridge lights have far-reaching effects and influences on the wider environment—both aesthetically and ecologically—that are not necessarily experienced in proximity. Remember, as Tim Ingold writes in ‘Lighting up the Atmosphere’ (2016), light is often built along lines, but it travels in anything but straight lines. It can be argued that Kosciuszko’s lights are a form of ecological, visible storytelling based on the decisions of a city government.

## Rethinking Perception through the Method of Fabulation

The need for novel and transformative perceptual methods is urgent because, in many ways, we have become blind to our own perceptual capacities. Our current juncture marks a unique intersection where storytelling assumes a central role in our exploration of political, societal, and environmental matters. It mirrors the fragility of our contemporary existence. Amidst an epoch defined by seismic societal and climatic shifts, the relentless march of technological progress, and an inundation of information, the pursuit of visibility and transparency stands as a cornerstone in our quest to make sense of the world. Paradoxically, this very aspiration and the perspective through which we perceive the world have grown increasingly opaque.

Examining the lights of Kosciuszko Bridge and observing how they impact, reveal, and communicate aesthetic and experiential aspects of artificial light; both up close and from a distance ultimately provided the impetus for the exploration of fabulation. Fabulation is a term that encompasses storytelling practices that involve the creation of narratives that may blur the lines between fiction and reality. In this method, elements from the real world are often mixed with fantastical or speculative elements. While fiction typically refers to imaginative works that are entirely invented, fabulation allows for a more fluid and complex relationship with reality. I employ fabulation as a method to incorporate elements from the real world, challenging conventional distinctions between fiction and non-fiction. This serves as a tool to explore deeper insights and perspectives.

In ‘Good Night,’ I weave together such different perspectives on darkness: On the one hand, I reflect on my journey based on personal experiences, observations, and insights from this research process. On the other hand, I bring together ideas that are not solely my own. This involves reviewing both actual political events and fictional concepts related to non-human beings. ‘Good Night’ is fictional but not invented; all events are based on real occurrences that took place during the years of this research. For example, during my nighttime research trips in London, I was often accompanied by urban foxes, and there was an incident involving CCTV cameras—experiences that have been incorporated into the narrative. These include reports of the escalating problem of fox overpopulation in London, Boris Johnson’s initiative for more night lighting to ‘protect women,’ and the increased introduction of surveillance cameras. Other findings from my research are reflected. The narrative extends to Scotland—where white deer are native—to China, where an artificial moon was to be built, and it recounts the bridge lighting scheme in New York.

The method by which this story is ‘made’ is modelled after a bedtime story in which the journey of an urban fox is described and interwoven with a dialogue between darkness and myself. ‘Good Night’ draws on how the things we perceive as ‘natural’ can be closely intertwined with the things we see as artificial. In conversation with the dark, I suggest that we are not the ultimate subjects of this planet.

The story reflects on the power dynamics and influence that man-made symbols, potentially linked to technology and consumerism, exert on individuals and society. ‘Good Night’ is a commentary on how human creations, especially modern symbols like neon signs, acquire significant cultural and symbolic meaning, particularly in relation to darkness.

So, why fabulation at this point? The recent argument brought forth, especially by some anthropologists (Geertz 2017; Pandian 2019; Rabinow 2011; West 2008; Wiles 2020), is that creative writing is a valuable source for understanding reality more profoundly. Clifford Geertz (2017), reflecting on the field of ethnography, asserts the need for new methods, not simply for representing cultural experiences, but for exploring the power of words and storytelling to provide a more nuanced and complex representation of human experience. Ellen Wiles (2020) notes that various methods of ‘literary anthropology’ have been underexplored and little recognized, often finding themselves at the centre of fierce controversy. This approach has been constrained by disciplinary and epistemological assumptions. However, it is likely that forms of creative writing, which understand reality from a ‘horizontal’ perspective as factual events and ‘vertical’ as truth to something deeper, can break free from deception or convention (Wiles, 2020:289).

The ‘Good Night’ story in this Epilogue is an experiment precisely in this way, weaving imaginative ideas and facts into a story. I use this narrative as a method to reflect on how darkness has been told, and on how a story about darkness can be made, eventually helping us to create space for the imaginary and alternative viewpoints. Anthropologist Anand Pandian writes, ‘If ever there was a time for us to play, to be fearless, it is now’ (Pandian 2019:3). I believe that exploring new directions in research methodology is crucial, especially within academia. My work and research in this dissertation have underscored this importance. ‘Good Night’ uses fabulation to further break boundaries. It deconstructs to critically reflect on human motivations, limits, visions, and fantasies, exploring the intersection of phenomenology and imagination in epistemology.

The complexity of the ‘Good Night’ story from three perspectives—dark, fox, and human—requires careful and critical consideration of its application. The story carries multiple points of view and involves the central protagonists in a poignant discourse. In the narrative tapestry, darkness becomes intimately connected to the built environment and the imaginative but also extends to the philosophical, psychological, political, ecological, and social worlds, transcending the boundaries of its physical manifestations.

The use of fabulation places focus on the power of representation on the one hand and the value of imagination on the other. The narrative, therefore, specifically engages with mental images—imaginative visions of scenes not actually present—while simultaneously linking them to archival images as well as my photographs. The technique of this ‘story-making’ (distinct from storytelling, per Dunne and Raby 2013:88) allows me to incorporate meticulous research to further address aesthetic and experiential dimensions of urban night settings, politics, and their culture. In this context, the practice of creative writing serves as the third component of my methodology, prioritizing qualitative attributes over quantitative ones. It allows for the nuanced exploration of the powers of ‘representational’ lightscapes in shaping the environment and delving into the subtleties of darkness and shadow from a novel vantage point.

In the context of fabulation, this Epilogue attempts to close with a bedtime story—a tale rooted in the annals of human history about our interaction with light during the night hours. Ultimately, this final chapter is both an extension and a continuation of my concluding remarks. Rather than ending with a final statement, ‘Good Night’ serves as a ‘bridge’ that traverses the realm of empirical thought and offers speculative reflections on the world of nocturnal lightscapes. The story strives to create a fruitful conversation that can also be directed to a broader audience, allowing for a playful and critical exploration of the various ways in which our environment is shaped and encountered, and not last can be perceived as a realm in which political forces and social implications are intertwined with elements of fiction and fantasy.

‘Good Night’—read as a script and potential play—invites readers and listeners to discover alternative perspectives and encourages more complicated, nuanced considerations of darkness. It gives voice to the non-human element, embodied in the all-encompassing darkness itself and the presence of an urban fox. This third view of my method, ‘fabula,’ pursues the previously discussed notion that artificial lights also unfold shadows and can be much more than a simple utility tied to the lines of a bridge.

# GOOD NIGHT

Once upon a time, a Fox and a Girl set out to explore the night and two men (powerful and strange) kept getting in their way. Once after midnight, while the Fox was on the run, and the Girl had funny pictures in her head, a white deer appeared in a dark park. At the same time, the two strange men made strange plans, both with ambitious agendas: One claimed to protect women and girls with light – the other dreamed of enshrining every bridge in his city with a nightly shroud of colourful, flashing light. Meanwhile, a gigantic artificial moon was being built somewhere in China.

This is a story of true revelations, told as I meet with my old friend, Darkness, for a conversation in the Canary Islands:

**Why are you telling me a bedtime story now,  
at the very end?**

This is not a bedtime story.  
It is a journey of nocturnal exploration and  
contemplation. And encounters between you and me.

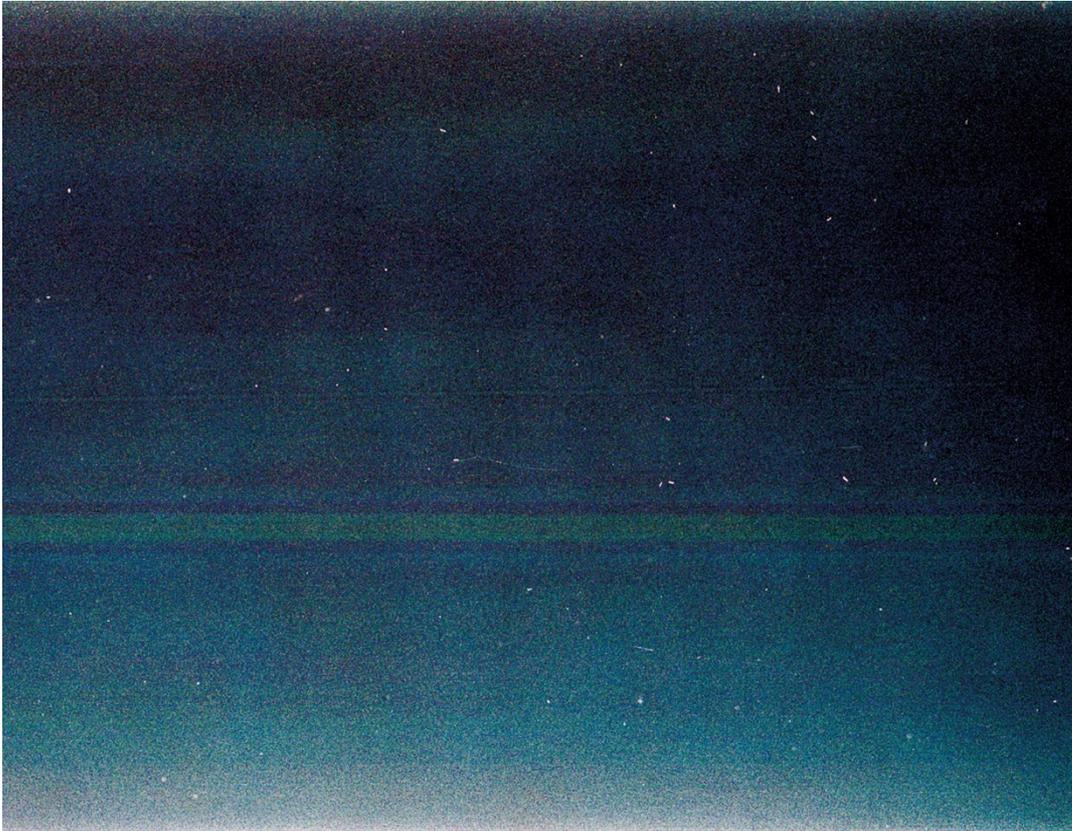
**How much of this is fiction?**

None. The narrative attempts to navigate how you  
are both impressive and challenging from different  
perspectives.

**Impressive, maybe. Challenging?<sup>62</sup>**

---

<sup>62</sup> Bold font signifies darkness speaking; regular font represents the narrator.



[1] Meng, C. (2012) *Galloway II.* [Analogue photography].

Let me start with one of the original challenges I had working with you. This journey began with my determination to take a picture of you. The attempts mostly failed, and so I started sketching you, which I learned was a much better way to picture you anyway. But that is a story I have already told. As it turns out, my initial frustration with trying to capture you with my camera was little more than the frustration of being a photographer. I found the flood of images lifeless, everything looked more or less the same. A real picture of you, I thought at the time, was what I needed.

### **A real picture of me?**

Maybe an absurd aspiration. But listen.

I took a trip to get a real picture of you. Many strange things happened on Earth those nights. I will tell you about some of them. As I said, this is a story about two powerful men — Boris and Andrew (not exactly fans of yours) — a White Deer (figurative, who knows), moons (two to be exact), and a Fox (a new friend).



[2] Meng, C. (2017) *Regent Canal*. [Analogue photography].

## ENGLAND

The urban Fox — a night explorer like me — moves quickly, travels far, and is very smart. “I am the fastest in all the land,” the Fox told me early on. “My speed and agility allow me to survive. I can jump over any lazy dog in my path!”<sup>63</sup> But my spryness is one thing, my dark coat is another altogether. With my tint, I can become one with the night.”

The Fox was my first friend when I moved to the city. Together, we discovered the urban night, and every time the Fox dispensed wisdom before I went to bed. In 2012, its family was murdered by the Urban Fox-Hunter Commandos. Since then, the Fox has been on the run from a man named Boris. Boris was the man who ruled the city at the time, and he saw all the Foxes as pests and a menace to his city. He hired people to hunt down the Fox: The Fox Cullers, as they were called in the capital, killed thousands of its kind every year.<sup>64</sup> Fleeing from home after its kin were killed, the Fox pushed further north and that’s where we met. It was a full moon and as usual, I was photographing some dark landscapes near the river Lea.

---

<sup>63</sup> ‘The quick brown Fox jumps over the lazy dog’ is an English language pangram — a sentence containing all the letters of the alphabet. Graphic designers often use the phrase for design mockups to convey the visual impression of different fonts.

<sup>64</sup> See the chapter ‘Contagion Set Free: The Urban Fox-Hunter’ by Sukhdev Sandhu (2007) and “Boris Johnson calls for urban Fox ‘menace’ to be tackled” (Jones 2013) for additional information on Fox over-population in London.



[3] Znamya-2 (Знамя-2) after the deployment from the Progress M-15 spaceship on 4 February, 1993. The photo is taken from the Russian space station Mir. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Znamya\\_%28satellite%29#/media/File:Znamya-2.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Znamya_%28satellite%29#/media/File:Znamya-2.jpg) (Accessed 8 February 2024).

One of the very first stories the Fox told me was the way it was born. It was 1992. The very same year Russia launched ‘Znamya’, a giant space mirror intended to turn night into day. The magnificent concept was to redirect the sunlight lost in space back to us, Earth. There were sceptics. Some were outraged that the mirror would disrupt biological patterns; others insisted that the night sky is common property. And others vehemently declared that access to the dark (that’s you) and the stars is a basic human right.

The Russian scientists did not care; new techno-logies promised a bright future, they insisted. But in the end, the experiment only lasted a few hours. ‘Znamya’ sent a single beam of light back to Earth before it de-orbited and burned up in the atmosphere.<sup>65</sup> However, for the Fox, that beam was decisive. It grazed the Fox at the very moment it was born and changed its color forever. “At that moment,” the Fox tells me, “My fur was overexposed, developing dark shades distinct from others of my kind — like light leaks into a darkroom.”<sup>66</sup> The Fox assures me that it has managed to survive only thanks to ‘Znamya’: “That is the only reason I haven’t been shot and therefore gotten to live to this

---

<sup>65</sup> In his introduction to *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (Crary, 2014:4–5) draws attention to this experiment.

<sup>66</sup> Unintentional light exposure in analog photography can lead to overexposed or washed-out images. Working in a light-protected environment is crucial to maintain the process integrity.

age — because now my shadowy appearance at night shields me.” “And so”, the Fox continues, “I am not only the oldest but also the shadiest Fox of all Foxes.”

**So, the Fox was invisible at night?**

Not quite. But it may seem that way because the Fox and the night shades are almost the same colour in the dark.

It's a form of camouflage.

**So, the Fox was shadowless?**

Sort of. It's complicated. Wait.

The night, and with it, your presence — darkness, the dark — is highly problematic for people. Perhaps it always has been. However, various issues are associated with you or let's say, with your influence on humans. The problems range from the risk of injury to hindrances in nightly activities such as work, commerce, and social events. Your presence poses challenges not only to personal safety but also to the efficiency of activities like conducting military operations at night or providing infrastructure for the nightlife of joy.

Darkness disturbs; you thwart human plans. For instance, you make round-the-clock access and availability challenging. In doing so, you always arouse the desire to overcome or even destroy the condition you have brought with you. Yet, and this is important, what people on Earth find disturbing is not so much the night, as I am learning over time. What bothers them the most is your presence, manifested through the dusky appearance of your 'state of affairs'.

**And what particular "state of affairs" am I?**

For some you are cold, for others, inspiring.  
Some panic in your presence, others you calm down.

**Intense. I am all this at once?**

Yes, kind of strange. Remember the box in the Little Prince's drawing? There was a sheep inside that no one could see.<sup>67</sup> It's a bit like you; you're both inside and outside the box. You're the picture and the space around you, all mixed up. You're seen and unseen at once.

**Wait, it's getting confusing. I'm not sure I understand.**

We will come back to it later.

Summer in London, and the Fox had a feast; picnic-people in the park waste so much food. Through the many meals, the Fox's energy grew, and it began to travel farther and farther at night. So it was that after that summer, the Fox was overcome with the urge to embark on an even greater adventure. "I'm going to China" the Fox murmured, "some business."

When I asked about the purpose of the trip, the Fox would not tell me more. It sounded shady in the truest sense of the word, but I had other things on my mind. I had to go to Scotland, and so while the Fox schemed his China trip, we set off on separate journeys.

## SCOTLAND

I took the train from London to a youth hostel in Newton Stewart, located just close enough to Galloway Forest Park, the reason for my visit. I first heard about this 'dark landscape project' from Tim<sup>68</sup> (he's the real expert when it comes to your case), and I needed to see it –and photograph it – for myself.

In 2009, the park was officially declared a protected area from light pollution by the International Dark-Sky Association (known as IDA), making it the first dark-sky park in the UK and only the fourth in the world. The IDA is an organization with the ambitious goal of combatting artificial light at night, primarily to preserve stargazing.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> *The Little Prince* (Saint-Exupéry 2010:6) originally published in 1943.

<sup>68</sup> Cultural geographer Tim Edensor (2013, 2017) has significantly influenced the study of darkness in the fields of social, cultural, and geographical studies.

<sup>69</sup> IDA was founded in Arizona in 1988 by two astronomers to protect the nighttime environment from skyglow. According to the organization, light pollution worldwide has increased by at least 49 percent in 25 years. As of 2022, approximately 200 locations around the world will have achieved dark sky status (Adkins 2022).

### **Does IDA want to protect me?**

It's more likely that they are protecting the night sky for kids now and later, who want to look at the stars.

### **And what do I have to do with it?**

You make the stars visible. In IDA-certified dark landscapes, artificial light use is restricted.

You shine in these areas, so to speak.

### **And what about the stars?**

They shine too. But that's mainly up to you.

Your shade.

Like the Fox, I worked at night and slept during the day. Usually, this inverted schedule wasn't a problem. However, the hostel I was staying at closed its doors early in the morning and didn't reopen until dinner was served, kicking me out for most of the day. Since the season was still warm, I slept in the open fields. On my second day, after laying in a meadow away from the village, I opened my eyes. Something lightly kicked my feet. Blinded by the sun's rays, I couldn't see anything at first. The bright light faded, and contours slowly emerged. One by one I deciphered two faces looking down at me.

Where am I? How long have I slept? The two faces become sharper — a man and a woman, both dressed in police uniforms. Someone from the village must have called them. I was first interrogated, my personal details checked, and then kindly informed that I could not sleep on public land. That's when I learned that sleeping in public is prohibited by law, especially when the sun is out, and you and the moon are not exactly visible nearby.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> See also *Cities of Sleep* (2015) directed by Shaunak Sen, a documentary about sleeper communities and the 'sleep mafia' in Delhi, where finding a safe place to sleep becomes a matter of life and death for large numbers of people. It's worth noting that the moon is also visible during daylight. Exceptions include the time just before the new moon when the moon is too close to the sun to be visible, and just before the full moon when it is only visible at night (Talbert 2022).

On my third night in Scotland, I saw a white deer for the first time in my life. I stood on a hillside in the faint moonlight, somewhere in the middle of a clearing in Galloway Forest Park at around 2 a.m. I was surrounded mostly by your darkness, in an atmosphere of pitch-dark night.

I had set up my tripod. The film in my camera is high ISO.<sup>71</sup> I calculated the exposure time for 75 minutes; hopefully, that will do the job. I set the timer and triggered the camera shutter with the release cable. One-click to open the lens, another click – in 75 minutes – to close it again. I waited, waiting for my 6 x 7 cm negative to be exposed. There wasn't much to do meanwhile. 75 minutes is a long time. Halfway through, I decided to stretch my legs and wander away from my gear.

On my way back, I lost sight of my footing. I stumbled. Weak moonlight barely creates any shadows. The night is not exactly colourful, particularly in the forest. Goethe would have agreed: no contrast, no contours, no shapes, no orientation.<sup>72</sup> As usual, your 'state of affairs' got in the way. I was wandering around ... I could have sworn I hadn't strayed that far. Where is my tripod? How many exposure minutes are left? I should have taken my torch. What a beginner.

---

<sup>71</sup> In analogue photography, a high ISO film is sensitive to low-light conditions, enhancing performance in such situations.

<sup>72</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Theory of Colors* (1810) challenges the objectivity of color theory, asserting that colors arise from the interplay of light and darkness, in contrast to Newton's more scientific approach.



[4] Meng, C. (2013) *Galloway I.* [Analogue photography].

The White Deer appeared before me in all its glory, standing tall for a momentary glimpse. Just long enough for it to have been both imagined and real. In a flash, this unknown creature came out of — and disappeared into — nowhere.

I must admit, the White Deer in the moonlight, surrounded by your darkness, took a fantastic picture. Briefly, the idea of a job called ‘white deer photography’ crossed my mind, like a special kind of paparazzi capturing evidence of rare moments.<sup>73</sup>

Later, in the hostel (bewildered and thrilled), I typed the words ‘fata’ and ‘morgana’ into the search box of my computer. I’ve heard the word Fata Morgana (mirage) before — sailors who suddenly saw land or thirsty people in the desert, water. Maybe I overdid it. I had just been groping in the dark for too long.

---

<sup>73</sup> Uncertainty about photography as evidence is highlighted; Susan Sontag, for instance, noted that owning a photograph of Shakespeare is akin to possessing a relic, such as a nail from the True Cross (Sontag 2008:154).

From a website, I learned about Morgan le Fay (meaning Morgan the Fairy). A sorceress. A medieval legend. And the sister of King Arthur. She had the power to shapeshift, “with which she caused a great deal of trouble.” She was credited with, or rather blamed for, creating complex mirages over bodies of water, particularly in the Strait of Messina. Today we know, says the website, that such optical illusions are really caused by atmospheric conditions, but we still sometimes use “fata morgana” as a synonym for “mirage.”<sup>74</sup>

**And what now?**

**Does the White Deer exist, or does it not exist?**

**Do you believe in it?**

Belief and fantasy – how much of it is fiction?

**The White Deer, I asked.**

I didn't take its picture.

A spokesman for Scottish Natural Heritage tells us: “White deer are rare, but actually seeing one is even rarer.” Albino, I knew, were found in several species – squirrels, blackbirds, penguins, foxes, and various marine life, but deer? British deer experts inform us that these white deer are rarely albinos with red eyes. Rather, their ghostly glow is usually the result of underproduction of melanin, which reduces the normal brown coloration of hair and skin.<sup>75</sup> Actually, it's kind of the opposite of what happened to my friend the Fox.

At the time, I knew none of this. I was tired. I hadn't slept much. I would not have been surprised if my mind was playing tricks on me. That same day, but in daylight, I made my way to the village, hoping that someone could give me an answer. I stepped into the Newton Stewart Post Office. I needed to buy stamps anyway.

---

<sup>74</sup> Fata Morgana: Definition and meaning according to Merriam-Webster.

<sup>75</sup> The British Deer Society frequently receives inquiries about white deer, which are widespread across much of the UK (Smith-Jones 2021). In mythology, white deer are often seen as magical and powerful beings. Their ghostly glow is attributed to a recessive gene called leucism, which reduces pigment levels responsible for colouring skin, hair, feathers, etc., excluding the eyes (Dunnett 2017; Reuters 2008).

She pushes the stamps across the counter in front of me. I clear my throat. She looks at me. Is there anything else? I clear my throat again. Is it possible that there are white deer in this area? (If there was one, surely there were others.)

Silence.

Slightly embarrassed, I starred at the floor. The woman behind the counter brightens as she shouts, flapping her hands. Now, everyone in the post looks at me; excitement fills the room, and they start chattering, asking lots of questions. So, it was then that I learned that a single white deer, rarely to be seen, lives nearby in the hills of Newton Stewart.

## ENGLAND

Back in London. The strange man named Boris has new problems with his city. He tweets the following:

We're taking action to make our streets safer, with better lighting and CCTV, tougher sentences and increased police patrols. We must drive out violence against women and girls and make every part of the criminal justice system work better to protect and defend them.<sup>76</sup>

**Protect the women and girls from what?  
From me? Offensive.**

They are convinced that having less of your darkness  
means having fewer problems.

**What exactly is the matter with me?**

It's not just about you. Believe me.  
There's more to it.

Boris' tweet was prompted by the murder of Sarah Everard in London. Following this incident, the government announced a £ 25 m Safer Streets Fund, for measures such as

---

<sup>76</sup> 'Twitter', retrieved September 2, 2022  
(<https://twitter.com/borisjohnson/status/1371595501502660611?lang=de>).

better street lighting and CCTV, and launched StreetSafe, a website where people can anonymously report areas where they feel unsafe. Wayne Couzens, an officer in the Metropolitan Police, was later convicted of the kidnapping, rape, and murder of Everard.<sup>77</sup>

An abuse of authority — darkness, you were not to be blamed for the violence.



[5] Meng, C. (2013) *Stepney*. [Analogue photography].

Boris exploited a woman's death to justify more surveillance, sowing a system of dystopian control. But the people saw what he was doing and were not amused. After a while, the cities' dissent settled somewhat, and the Fox finally returned from China. I clearly remember the night I learned the Fox was back because I found the Fox screaming to the moon in *Stepney Green Park* after midnight. I had never heard my friend make such ugly noises. The Fox was extremely upset.

---

<sup>77</sup> See also the article "What is being done to tackle violence against women in the UK?" (Topping 2021).

It was most likely the visit to Chengdu (capital of southwest China's Sichuan Province) that so upset the Fox. At the time of its visit, there was a serious plan in the capital to set up a dummy moon to light up the night sky. You must know that the relationship between the Fox and the primordial moon was of a special kind, because of the story of its birth.



[6] The first man-made moon will launch from Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in Sichuan. (2018) Available at: <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/rest-of-asia/soon-there-will-be-fake-moons-in-china> (Accessed 22 February 2023).

“Electricity is expensive, and the dusk-like glow of our artificial moon will be eight times brighter than the real moon!” explained the rulers of Chengdu. “The goal is to replace streetlights; it will be unbeatably delightful.”<sup>78</sup>

None of their reports indicated whether the project was feasible or if it was indeed cheaper than electricity. The municipal authorities' marketing was full of contradictions and people were worried about what might go wrong with a second moon.

The Fox travelled to Chengdu to advocate for the right to maintain a one-moon existence on behalf of its species. However, things remained vague, I only know that the proponents of the project assured the Fox that the lighting with their dummy moon will not disrupt the routine of the animals. In a last-ditch effort, the Fox instigated a copyright dispute, claiming that its family still held the complete copyright to the moon.

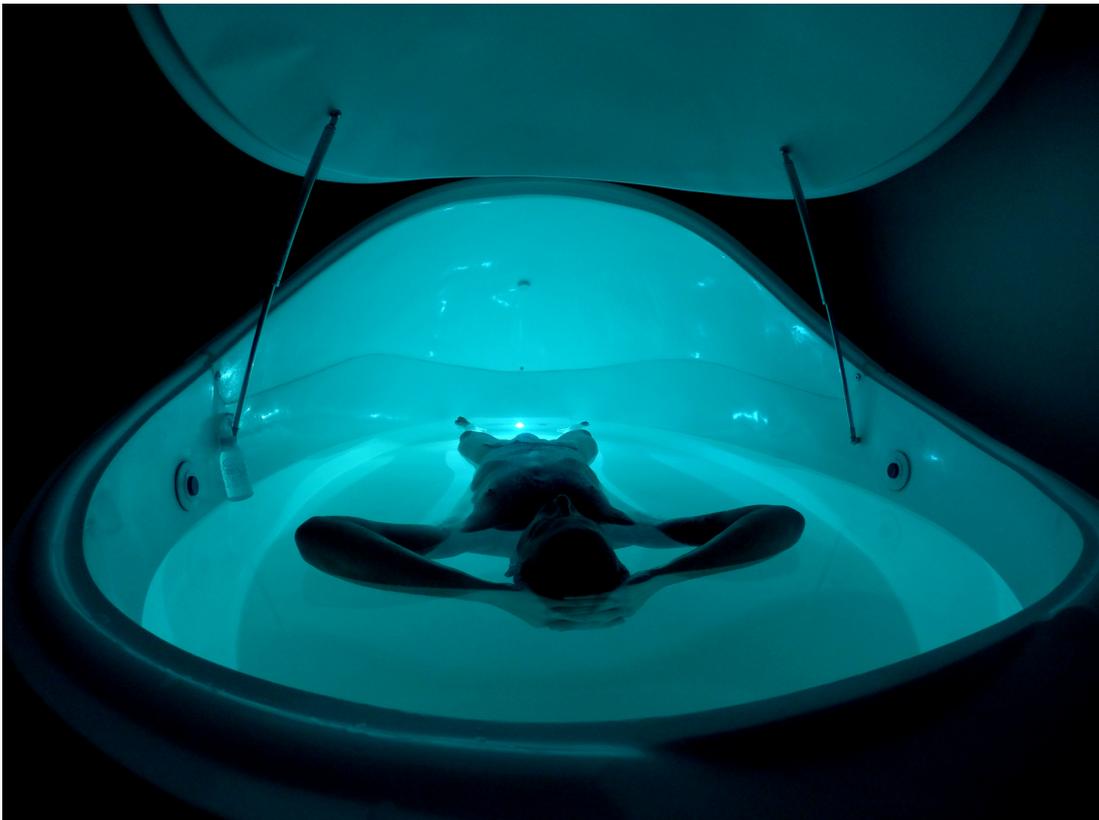
---

<sup>78</sup> See articles from the time, such as 'Fake moon: Could China really light up the night sky?' (BBC News 2018) and 'Chengdu Plans to Launch 'Artificial Moon' to Replace Its Street Lights' (Hitti 2018) for more information. Based on the most recent available information, this project has not been realized.

Apparently, that didn't end well. "But," the Fox snorted at me, "it's none of your business." Obviously, the Fox was in a very bad mood.

From then on, the Fox changed. It was hard to say what it was, but now it seemed to be in a constant state of restlessness — even despair. Perhaps the trip had awakened traumatic memories of its family's demise. The Fox never told me, nor did I ask, but it was clear that its relationship with the moon, and even with lights in general, was strained.

One day I decided to take the Fox on a trip to the deprivation tanks. Since we were both tired from our all-night research and many sleepless days, exploring the sensory deprivation tanks seemed like a great idea. We were able to book a private one-on-one session exclusively with you! It was an expensive venture; turns out darkness is for the wealthy. However, still worth every penny. Like a ticket to a nutshell, it isolates you from everything around. You get into a tank and float naked in the dark, cut off from the world of sensory stimuli. Emerging who-knows-where is quite something.



[7] Sensory Deprivation Tank. (n.d.) Available at: <https://floatfremantle.com.au/> (Accessed 10 April 2020).

**Wait. Is that a thing?  
People pay to see me and spend time with me?  
Didn't you just say that people don't like  
interacting with me?**

Not if they can control you in place and space.

**So, I'm packed in tanks all over the world?**

Yes, you are. It's a thing, really.  
I mean, but that wasn't always the case.

Let's get back to the tank. During my session with you in this tank, many ideas came to me. Surely the Fox had his own momentum in one of the other tanks. But I can't say for sure, because here on this trip we parted ways again. Perhaps, I don't remember exactly, I began to daydream. But around this time the Fox must have snuck off.

### AMERICA

From within the tank, I stared out my kitchen window (I had just moved into this new railroad apartment during the pandemic). From the window, I could look at the night sky and I saw — but could not understand — a strange shifting coloured light in the sky, made visible only when clouds pass by.

Had it not been in the middle of another curfew, I would have assumed I was witnessing a rave in full swing. Or perhaps these lights were some historical commemorative events of which I was unaware; maybe an installation like the 9/11 'Tribute in Light'.

But months later, the lights were still there. The Fox certainly wouldn't have liked that. No wonder it took a French exit. There must have been already too much colour and light once the Fox exited the tanks, and that's why it never came to this new town. Most likely, the Fox recognized this bizarre new environment much earlier than I did and crept away just in time. Smart, I guess.



[8] Meng, C. (2013) *Humboldt*. [Digital photography].

Unlike the Fox, I was intrigued, and the surrealistic lights haunted me. And so it happened that one night in a distant land, still equipped with my camera, I began to follow the lights. After a 20-minute walk, I found the nightly shroud of colourful, flashing lights. The spectacle I observed so many nights from my window had its origin in a bridge.

Completed in 2017, the Kosciuszko Bridge is a cable-stayed bridge over Newtown Creek connecting Brooklyn to Queens.

The man responsible for my nightly ‘enlightenment’ was Andrew. He was the other man I meant to tell you about. Like Boris, Andrew oversaw a city. And he especially liked coloured lights at night. The Kosciuszko Bridge was just one of the city’s landmarks to become part of Andrew’s ‘Harbour of Lights’ project. The project was a grandiose plan for a city-wide, computer-synchronized light shows that would turn each bridge into an “international tourist attraction” and “spectacular light exhibit” with its own “colourful flashlight show”.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> See “Power failure: Cuomo’s \$106M bridge light show fades to black” (French 2021) for information on why the project couldn’t be realized and how the Cuomo administration repeatedly changed financial strategies for the Harbor of Lights project.

Still slightly confused and dazzled by my discovery, I stared at the magical kingdom opening up before my eyes. While my gaze followed the changing light of this disco bridge, not knowing exactly how I should or could photograph this landscape, I once again thought about how light moves in anything but a straight line.<sup>80</sup>



[9] Video still from the promotional clip of Governor Andrew Cuomo's announcement of the New York Crossings Project. (2017) Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0HNzHyE68ek> (Accessed 27 February 2023).

**“ [...] And the vision that was planted in my brain.  
Still remains.”**

**“ [...] Within the sound of silence.”<sup>81</sup>**

**Do you still listen to that song?**

**This song. It's a tribute to you!**

“... when my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light,” the song goes on. On my desk, I have this photograph. Not a photo of you, for once. It was after my trip to Scotland

---

<sup>80</sup> In his book *Lines: A Brief History* (2016), Ingold challenges the concept of the line, particularly the rationality associated with the “straight line” from A to B. This notion can also be connected to the visual aspects of urban lighting practices, including the use of light to highlight the architectural lines and contours of monuments.

<sup>81</sup> Simon, Paul, and Garfunkel, Art, ‘The Sound of Silence’ (1964).

and experimenting with very long exposures that I started using a point-and-shoot camera with a flash. See the overexposed, bright white faces blinded by my flash in the photo?



[11] Meng, C. (2018) *Bright*. [Analogue photography].

Lighting walks a fine line. As a photographer, I know this. The realization that both under- and overexposure obscures things come as no surprise.

For a long time, using a flash in photography was frowned upon. It was considered cheating — not appreciating and using ‘natural’ lighting conditions. That perception has changed. Street photography and photographers such as Tillmans brought the flash back into fashion. Highlighting things beyond recognition was suddenly trendy. And yet, it wasn’t long ago that enslaved people in New York were forced to hold a lantern in front of their faces after dusk in order to be seen.<sup>82</sup> To this day, some believe that light can chase away the darkness, control it, confine it, and make it obey. Thinking they’d shine brighter, living so bright, gaining power over what’s hidden from sight. The irony, the twist in the tale, is in the light: you, darkness, set sail, and others are blinded by its glow.

---

<sup>82</sup> In her book *Dark Matters* (2015), Simone Browne frames the term “black luminosity” using the example of the eighteenth-century New York lantern laws, which required enslaved people to carry lighted candles when moving through the city after dark.

**Are you on my side now, or are you cheering for the light?**

It's not just black or white;  
this overexposure is no joke. It worries me.

**And why? Does the brilliance feel a little scary?**

Brightness has taught me to fear you, after all.

### Canary Islands

The Fox understood the light dilemma all too well. Continuously evading it yet captivated and wounded by it, the Fox repeatedly fell in love with various lights. “Our fear of the light gave it the power to tame my people,” the Fox said seriously. It continued, “By the streetlights, we find la Grande Bouffe. The light guides us to eat,” the Fox stressed, adding, “it harbors great dangers and tasty adventures.” As always, the Fox’s shadow melted into you — the darkness of the night. I could barely see its eyes. I was glad both the Fox and the original moon were back. We finally reunited in Roque de los Muchachos, located in the Canary Islands, considered the darkest place on Earth at present.<sup>83</sup>

We’ve finally made it all the way out here, and I sensed that something very special was about to happen. “Aren’t lights at night remarkable?” the Fox whispered. It was back to its old self, in great spirit — in love, others would say. We sat in the shade of light. Once again, I wondered, when was the time to say goodnight? The night turned on the light as I searched for a spark of dark. The Fox mischievously nodded at the optical illusion of a bright light visible on the horizon. A fata morgana?

---

<sup>83</sup> See “New Study Officially Found the Place with the Least Light Pollution in the World” (Harden 2021) for the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory as the darkest place on Earth, alongside dark spots in Sierra Nevada (US), Montsec commune (France), and Extremadura (Spain).



[12] Meng, C. (2020) *Headlight*. [Analogue photography].

“Both an obsession and a potential danger,” remarked the Fox as the beams of two headlights approached us. The radiance, the glow of light on a dark night is not only effective but affective, I agree.

The rays of light disappeared somewhere in the dark between a path and some trees. The headlights of a taxi. A guiding light, eventually, I thought, and the Fox said: “You never really know what’s behind it.” At that very moment, the Fox (as always, hardly visible, or noticeable) quickly jumped over the light halo and disappeared into your darkness. And it became clear once again: The Fox, just like Morgan the Fairy, really has the power to shapeshift.

I saw the Fox no more. And I never found out which light the Fox was in love with. I also never spoke to any of the moons. But I still saw one moon from time to time and did not doubt that the Fox lived happily ever after in the shadow of its light.

My attention wandered back to follow the taxi’s headlights — bright beams that literally obscured the presence of you, the darkness, for a moment. I looked at the driver, “I won’t come with you right now. But will you pick me up here at 4 a.m., exact same spot?” He nodded, and I had to count on that.

I shouldered all my gear. I can't say the driver looked back at me with concern. Instead, his expression was probably one of bewilderment. I pictured the Fox howling and went on my way. Nobody said it, but the words were out there somewhere: "Good Night, and Good Luck."

**Wait!**

**Before you go, will you finally tell me what's really  
bothering you?**

Why do you always put yourself in the spotlight?

**Didn't you say I was in the shadows?**

Obviously.

You and the night are nothing but shadows.

**Nothing? Shadows are everything!**

Fair. We keep searching for shade.

**So, let's go! What are you waiting for?**

Some other time. It's bedtime now.



## CONCLUSION

In this research project, I set out in search for darkness in the city at night. My goal was a visual investigation into our understanding of and perspectives on. I focused on how past narratives of darkness in the visual realm impact current methods of representing the urban night through illumination. Pictorial and architectural features influence the shadows of the urban night, shaping the overall appearance of darkness in these spaces. I took a practical approach, engaging in hands-on explorations using three methods—photography, drawing, and fabulation—to examine various viewpoints and gain a more nuanced understanding. These methods were guided by the investigation’s central question: What is the matter with darkness in cities at night?

Beginning with the shadow world emerging from artificial light in the expansive urban night, this research provides specific insights into how urban darkness, with its visual and aesthetic attributes, permeates spatial environments, exerting influence on both surroundings and societies. The methods that I have developed in this investigation began by asking how ‘thinking in pictures’ shapes image creations, influencing representations, attitudes, and understandings of dark matter in the urban environment at night. Consequently, the questions formulated for this research have placed the image at its core. The paramount innovation of this dissertation is the examination of darkness in the urban night through both practical and pictorial lenses, presented by a framework I have termed ‘urban darkness.’

The three-part, practice-based methodological approach of this research makes a critical contribution to understanding darkness as a political and social issue. This research studies darkness from an ‘image’ perspective. Instead of concentrating on overt inequalities in the experience with darkness, its focus is on how the dark unfolds and becomes present and perceptible in the urban night. This approach enables a re-evaluation of habitual views of darkness, challenging assumptions and connecting the visual realm with environmental representations. It redefines our understanding of urban darkness by incorporating photography, drawing, and, ultimately, fabulation as crucial media and experimental tools for framing darkness. This approach has the potential to address inequities and promote holistic engagement—both political and social—in addressing urban darkness.

This research and its methodology underscore two key points: First, it illustrates how three media—photography, drawing, and storytelling—affect conceptions of darkness, emphasizing their distinct properties in visual translation and representation. Second, the method in itself actively contributes to questioning these three media in their forms of representation and narration through practical undertakings that subvert their conventions.

This investigation not only shapes perspectives on the challenges posed by darkness but also delves into the transformative influence of bright light, exploring the agency it holds in shaping our perceptions. The evolution of the practical approach and the three-part method in this research leads to a broader and more intricate atmospheric and phenomenological comprehension of the nocturnal urban lightscape. It fosters alternative perceptions and introduces new ways of engaging with the environment. The investigation goes beyond mere considerations of cityscape aesthetics, delving into the broader ecological and democratic implications of the interplay between dark and bright light at night.

### **Key Findings**

The key discoveries and arguments articulated in this thesis have been formulated within the framework of urban darkness and revolve around how different ways of representing images ultimately shape our perception of darkness. The findings highlight the need to explore darkness in contemporary urban environments through diverse representational methods, urging a critical examination of the motivations behind illuminating open spaces. This involves reassessing the primarily optical mode of the urban night, which is the visible motivation for display by light, and acknowledging the pictorial significance of the superimposition of darkness and light, along with the resulting effects on habitats and societies. The research accentuates the importance of closely observing and understanding our optical habits, interpreting images (i.e., *Bildsprache*) of light and its shadows.

The initial phase of this research attends to the intimate link between the ‘visual’ aspects and the ‘visible’ (i.e. Kenaan, 2020). It specifically addresses the correlation of what is ‘visible’ in urban space at night (urban darkness) with the ‘visual’ conveyed through representation, such as photographs. This distinction, introduced in the methodology chapter *I Think in Pictures* (Chapter 1), articulates the foundational thread of my visual

thinking and creative work in this research project, serving as a guiding principle for the entire methodological approach.

The literature review in Chapter 2, *Looking at Darkness*, established a solid foundation by examining darkness through four distinct perspectives (visual, spatial, shaded, and political darkness). The chapter primarily focused on a unique exploration of photographic examples reflecting the representation of darkness through light. Notably, cave photography [fig. 2.1] was a central discussion, emphasizing photography's role as a powerful tool in image production and its early association with visual ideas about darkness. This photographic mastery of the environment is further explored in the depiction of *Stonehenge* [fig. 2.4]. The review then delved into the translation of phenomenological properties into photography, exemplified by Steichen's *Balzac* [fig. 2.9] and Brancusi's egg sculpture [fig. 2.11]. These images, representing visual, spatial, and shaded darkness, laid the groundwork for the subsequent exploration of 'political darkness' in urban nightscapes, particularly discussed in the context of the 'omnipresence' strategy employed by the New York Police Department (NYPD) [fig. 2.13].

The findings discussed in the literature, exploring the design of urban darkness, have profoundly influenced my practical work and, consequently, the two core chapters:

### *Through the Lens: Searching for Shadows* (Chapter 3)

In this chapter, I showed how photography as a practical tool can challenge the creation of familiar and easily interpretable photographic images. Through my camera lens, I aimed to capture the nuanced atmospheres of light and shadow in the urban night, pushing the boundaries of representational capacities and revealing the inherent limitations of photography. The practical experiments and explorations conducted in this chapter unveiled distinct visual modes of representation. The primary findings contribute to an investigation that illustrates not only how the dark translates into the image, with limited abilities through photography, but also how it relates to physical space: shadows manifest in the visible and invisible realms as spatial entities, and these manifestations are defined within the environment through interaction with light. The outcomes of this chapter visualize various studies on shadow formats, presented in the development of a shadow typology (cast, attached, overcast). I have also compiled and presented these visual studies in a printed publication titled *Shadow Typology* (Meng, 2023).

### *Night Drawing: Re-writing the Light* (Chapter 4)

The Night Drawing project, specifically initiated for this research, represents a major finding in the entire project. It emerged as a natural continuation of my photographic endeavours to capture dark atmospheres in images; I invited people to draw with me in public spaces at night, with pen and paper. Together, we explored the limits and possibilities of visual perception and representation in the nocturnal environment. Drawing at night served the purpose of both removing certain perceptual limitations and creating new ones. The central question revolved around embodied perception and kinaesthetic epistemology: How can we gain new insights through drawing? Drawing necessitates close observation; it is an active, embodied process of seeing and perceiving. Night Drawing will remain an ongoing project, challenging preconceived notions about dark atmospheres in open spaces. It argues that for a new idea of darkness, light must first and foremost be rewritten—and that, once again, is not in a straight line.

All the insights gained from my practical work, encompassing photography, and drawing in the core chapters, ultimately laid the ground for my third method of fabulation compiled in the Epilogue:

### *Good Night* (Epilogue)

In the Epilogue, ‘Good Night,’ fabulation transforms into a method of crafting a bedtime story, navigating the elusive boundary between reality and fiction in representation and perception. Faced with limitations in photography and drawing when depicting darkness, fabulation, a non-visual practice, becomes a third way, opening avenues for discussing perspectives on darkness beyond the scope of traditional methods. ‘Good Night’ challenges the assumption of human authority on Earth, adopting an imaginative, speculative approach voiced by darkness and a fox. It weaves historical and political facts with personal nocturnal experiences, exploring the convergence of environmental perceptions and modes of representation. While operating within the realm of story-making, this narrative expands and reflects upon my practical work and research findings. ‘Good Night’ represents a crucial addition in contemplating my triangular practice-based methodology and the concept of urban darkness. It exemplifies the efficacy of imagination in navigating intricate representations of darkness.

The revelation of this research lies in the meticulous, intricate visual representations and explorations of light, shadow, and darkness through practical applications. The studies conducted emphasize the formation of what I term urban darkness; that is, its essence transcends beyond mere visual representations. The crux of examining darkness as

matter is recognizing that artificial lighting in urban areas surpasses mere illumination; it transcends binary perspectives that traditionally categorize darkness and brightness at night. The pivotal outcome of this project, therefore, lies in comprehending how urban darkness can be framed in conjunction with my three-part practice-based method.

### **Methodological Reflections**

Prioritizing a visual investigation in practice-based research over a purely textual analysis has proven particularly valuable in highlighting the critical importance of representations in shaping the appearance of darkness in the spotlight. The methods developed focus on bodily perceptions of qualitative, even invisible light aspects in space and the cultivation of visual habits that influence how we conceive images and understand darkness. The research emphasizes that people's representations and experiences of the city at night, particularly in visual terms like photographs and advertising images, are critical factors that will play a significant role in addressing future issues related to urban lighting.

As I grappled with the ambitious research questions of redefining our perception of darkness, my journey unfolded from a threefold perspective, offering a comprehensive exploration, each aspect of which could have stood alone as a dissertation (i.e. photography, drawing, fabulation). The insights, however, unfolded from this very triangulation. My practice-based approach delved into the often-overlooked dynamics of creating, narrating, and producing images. By supplementing photographic studies with drawings and further extending the method through fabulation, the method allowed me to navigate representations that were physical, kinesthetic, and imaginative—deviating from conventional visual norms closely associated with traditional photography.

The method of nocturnal drawing proved especially useful in tackling contemporary perceptual challenges and investigating how a manual, embodied, physically 'hands-on' exploration in the urban environment serves as a means of observing and translating our perception. Drawing entailed releasing certain visual expectations and the pursuit of perfect representation, resulting in an individual aestheticization where abstract visualization connected the self and everyday things. Lastly, the fabulation in 'Good Night' navigates through some of the issues of how we come to know perceptions and ideas about darkness.

My methodological approach aims to emphasize the necessity of embracing embodied practices and innovative methods that prioritize sensory experiences, extending phenomenological insights and fostering creative-critical thinking. This objective is exemplified through my exploration of photography, drawing, and fabulation. Engaging with light at night necessitates an expanded understanding that blends empirical insights with speculative considerations, bridging the gap between close observation of present realities and imaginative exploration of future possibilities. Embracing practice-based approaches becomes crucial for addressing challenges in our evolving environment and living together. My methodological approach prompts pertinent questions about the conduct of research. I aspire for my work to offer a framework for generating ideas on how to enhance the comprehension of our surroundings, thereby informing future strategies for engaging with darkness in the evolving landscape through practical insights.

Experiences of Night Drawing exemplified how participants' direct engagement with, and active experience of darkness can lead to emancipatory effects. It highlighted the intersection of individual experiences with culturally preconceived notions and how collective engagement can generate a diversity of observations, opening up, rather than closing off, ways of seeing. In the face of pressing social, political, and climatic challenges, it becomes imperative to make space for creativity and imagination, enabling a departure from meanings that may seem rigid and non-negotiable. As Donna Haraway puts it, 'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with [...] it matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories' (Haraway 2016:12). This approach seems essential for finding new and alternative ways of thinking.

In sum, my practice-based methodology advocates for integrating creative critical thinking, practice-based research on-site and revisiting the realm of imagination. The methods used in this research underscore that not only theoretical recognition is needed but also active and practical efforts can help question entrenched narratives, fostering the adoption of new perspectives. The imperative is not merely to see the light at the end of the tunnel but to actively look 'askew' and attempt to reorder linear space and worldviews, encouraging new and different ways of thinking.

### **Social and Political Implications**

This research unveils how a shadow world, cast by urban light fixtures, challenges Enlightenment ideals, the Industrial Revolution's mindset, and modern urbanism.

Beliefs that equate light with progress and knowledge and associate darkness with the 'primitive' and ignorance have ultimately also created urban darkness and shaped our encounter with darkness as something benign. The aesthetic-practical question of lighting in urban nights involves various visual variables influencing our encounters with darkness. The essential issue surrounding 'what is the matter with darkness' lies in the overexposure of both humans and non-humans to artificially lit spaces. From an environmental, aesthetic, and technological perspective, we may or may not have a choice in how we live with darkness. Addressing this overexposure not only necessitates practical solutions but as observed, is also intertwined with economic and political motivations, demanding our active attention and participation.

Darkness holds significance within architectural formations, shaping the built environment as an active state of behaviour, perception, and experience. The deliberate illumination of public spaces, and conversely, the fabrication of artificial darkness, serves as a visual tool for representation. It constitutes an affective, aesthetic, and atmospheric design. To perceive nocturnal light anew, it becomes imperative to break away from ingrained ideas and customs, particularly those strongly influenced by photography and oriented towards the pictorial and the symbolic. Thus, it is crucial to comprehend how light generates atmospheric effects beyond its mere 'shine.' Inhabitants of a city must critically question bright nocturnal displays that present their cityscape like a postcard.

The same applies to city-political ambitions for light and security. To ensure sustainable social life in public space, it is necessary to rethink who has the right to control and design space. This would contribute to a better understanding of the power dynamics in urban planning, architecture, and real estate in terms of their impact on life and action in public space. The habitual emphasis on representing and viewing things primarily in light (i.e. ocular-centric approach) poses far-reaching risks, neglecting phenomenological understandings, sensory and embodied experiences and dismissing kinaesthetic knowledge. So far, intentional deployment of artificial darkness—a targeted utilization of shadows in the urban night—has seldom been considered or designed within the realm of nighttime urban lighting.

As we have seen, the purposeful use of darkness in the world of marketing, entertainment, and visual art is being exploited (i.e. Elcott). It is worth noting that both Edensor and Sharpe, who have written extensively on darkness in geographic landscapes and art history, have recently turned their attention from darkness to shadow (Edensor & Hughes 2021; Sharpe 2017). The paucity of research available today on the

phenomenon of shadows beyond that of the symbolic figure (i.e. cast shadow) is significant. The focus on the symbolic and the under-researched phenomenon of 'fleeting' shadows (i.e. overcast) is significant. Moreover, it is largely overlooked as an active design element in the architectural creation of living space. All of this shows why Modernist approaches towards design such as Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* (2005) caused a problem in approaching urban 'habitable' space from the perspective of symbolic representation (i.e. Baxandall 1995; Ingold 2016, Sennett 2018), constructing the city in terms of an image of clear and solid forms.

While the 24/7 nature of a big city is a big draw, and people enjoy the constant bright lighting, this does not mean that access to darkness is superfluous and can simply be abolished. Taking advantage of darkness (including building artificial, urban darkness) around public spaces is a great challenge and at the same time seems an increasing necessity for city dwellers. Certainly, experiencing the dark outdoors is a pleasure, especially the opportunity to see the night sky. The fact that residents of rural areas consider nighttime darkness an amenity intrinsic to their place of residence is just as compelling as the trend of luxurious, dimly lit neighbourhoods in the city. In the realm of complex ecological challenges, the issue of light at night demands urgent attention; questions about 'use' and 'views' collide, ranging from desires to dream in the dark to concerns about safety and mobility at night. Determining the necessary lightscapes for humans and non-humans and the appropriate amount of darkness necessitates a collision of aesthetic considerations and representational motivations with broader social and political issues.

### **Further Considerations — Scope and Limitations**

Will an encounter with darkness be either a luxury for the privileged or an involuntary circumstance for many—born out of climate crisis? I hope not. Nighttime visibility in cities is a practical issue: How many dead migratory birds are acceptable? Should tall buildings be less bright to save energy? Can we design safe, bright street-level lighting for pedestrians without harsh lights shining into apartments? How comfortable can urban night space be, and how equal is the nighttime experience for women and men, the rich and the poor? The visual representation of the future nocturnal city may seem like a small issue amongst the many and acute challenges we are currently facing, and yet I believe it is an urgent one.

This research did not investigate the intersections of urban light with poverty, equitable access to light and dark spaces, or issues related to visual impairment and blindness. Similarly, it did not delve into the complexities of race, gender, and class in conjunction with perceptions of darkness, including issues of fear, xenophobia, and racism. The Enlightenment notion that darkness is primitive metaphorically entwines racist theories, emphasizing the importance of considering these connections in future research. Additionally, broader issues like nighttime safety, light pollution, and the health and psychological aspects of darkness remain crucial areas for new thinking and action. As a second point, it also did not examine colour perception and the phenomenology thereof. Addressing these topics requires further research and cross-disciplinary collaboration, presenting opportunities for future contributions to our understanding of darkness.

Our future struggles with lighting design, new policy alternatives, and new intellectual challenges to managing the nighttime habitat are critical. I am not suggesting that there should be less activity at night. Rather, I am suggesting that we need to redefine our lives in and with dark atmospheres to challenge habits of overexposure to artificial light. In addition to a simple rediscovery of darkness, there is a need for a re-visioning and reconstruction of dark aesthetics and atmospheres. In this research, I propose that we attend to and engage with darkness rather than attempt to eliminate it by illuminating it. This should not prove to be an impossible task.

### **Personal Reflections**

In navigating the less-familiar waters of creative, practice-based research, I confronted a paradigm that often regarded my method with scepticism. The novelty of this approach within academia posed challenges. My practical work, at times, faced perceptions of being haphazard and lacking relevance, accompanied by an uneasy fear that it seemed under-informed by extensive theoretical frameworks. As a young scholar, I found myself straddling the boundaries between disciplines, facing questions about why I wasn't conducting this research in the art department or rather just being an artist. Conversely, some in the art world saw me as an academic renegade and questioned my authenticity as a creative. My experience urges a pressing need to dispel the entrenched resistance to cross-disciplinary thinking. While the term 'cross-disciplinary' has gained popularity in academia, its actual implementation poses a significant challenge. However, as this research endeavours to demonstrate, the potential richness of linking diverse practices that contribute to various research capacities enables us to transcend the boundaries of

individual disciplines. This approach offers valuable insights into broader social and environmental issues.

When I started my literature review—the often recommended first step in a PhD to explore one’s questions—I immersed myself in a thorough examination of material on the urban night. This approach was likely influenced by my own doubts about my practical focus, accompanied by the fear that my theoretical knowledge as a scholar might not be deemed sufficient. However, I came across a wealth of rich and thoughtful research from various disciplines, and I was particularly fascinated by insights from anthropology, politics, sociology, geography, and philosophy. My interest deepened in understanding the invisible power dynamics and impacts of urban environments on both human and non-human entities. While navigating this diverse literature, I admittedly at times veered off-track, expanding considerably, and touching on topics not precisely aligned with my research questions. Consequently, the literature review transformed into a substantial entity, and I was forced to, as Arthur Quiller-Couch entreated, ‘murder your darlings.’<sup>84</sup> This remained a challenge until the very end. In hindsight, I recognize that a more focused approach to photography, drawing, and storytelling could have enhanced the overall coherence of this thesis.

In the early stages of my research, I came across the recognition that streetlights and façade lighting are often architectural and static. Their counterpoint, shadows, which form the basis for photography and yet cannot be confined to a specific place, began to fascinate me. My investigations started to pay special attention to the shadows that create atmospheres—the darkness of ‘urban night air’. I increasingly found that visual representation has its limitations. Recall my ‘failed’ excursion to the Dark Sky Park in Scotland, where my photographic endeavour, *Blank-Nights* [Fig. 3.1], yielded blank negatives with invisible traces. This early experience in my practical work brought home to me the close connection between artificial light, forms of visual representation, visible darkness, and its atmosphere and ultimately guided this research.

As indicated in this research, photography can only capture the ‘glow’ of light from modern streetlamps or tall buildings to a limited extent. In contrast, the practice of drawing at night introduced an additional layer of representation that doesn’t necessarily align with the pictorial impulse of photography, even though some participants tended

---

<sup>84</sup> The phrase ‘Murder your darlings’ is often attributed to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, a British writer and literary critic, who included it in his 1916 lecture series *On the Art of Writing* (Quiller-Couch 1916).

to fulfil this impulse. These insights prompted the use of fabulation, contributing to the overarching goal of this project: to gain a better understanding of how darkness is conveyed through light and shadow, what information is available, and what may be lost in various modes of representation—both in terms of light and photography but also in the narrative it portrays.

My practice-based methodology not only provided a laboratory for the visible-visual investigation of the natural forces of urban darkness but also addressed visible and invisible aspects of darkness and explored the limits of that visibility. The core of the Night Drawing project was to juxtapose the intersection of the drawing perspective with changing on-site perspectives and photographic viewpoints and ideas. This included rethinking the social, political, and practical lighting needs of the night, addressing changing notions of darkness, and ultimately changing notions of individual subjectivity. This understanding is crucial since the drawing events did not always happen as I had imagined in the first place. My intention for drawing in the dark was to challenge ‘photographic visions’ and escape our mind’s desire for a perfect visual representation. The places I chose, especially at the beginning of the project, were very dark parks in London (Victoria and Mile End Park). These locations, where there is hardly any artificial light, would, I thought, reduce expectations of visual representation. I hoped to eliminate the notion of a ‘good’ drawing by excusing difficult lighting circumstances. That did not always work.

Admittedly, I found it frustrating when people took out their cell phone flashlights and tried to mimic in their drawings what resembled nighttime posters of skylines. And to be fair, it was equally frustrating for certain participants to not be able to see exactly what they were sketching in these dark environments. The frustration, on both sides, turned out, over time, to be anything but a failure, but rather enrichment and food for thought. The method and, accordingly, the deductions of the nocturnal drawings were an iterative process that evolved with experience. Although sometimes some of the drawings seemed to miss the darkness, as many translations were very figurative and not just abstract representations of patches of light and dark, it only seemed to confirm our strong desire for accurate photographic representation.

It was only much later that I realized how the predominant symbolic viewpoints and realistic depictions of the participants confirmed the hypothesis, illustrating the difficulty of detaching oneself from a figurative idea. I did not realise this in the first phase of the Night Drawing project. I could not see or understand the extent to which

our visual representational ideas and motivations are also socially and politically defined. This became clear when, during the events, the participants wished for more light to draw with and drew the sorts of postcard images of scenes that were not exactly visible that way.

Lastly, fabulation came into play. Eager to push the interdisciplinary angle of my research, I incorporated this method into the Epilogue, forming the third part of my triangular methodology. The aim wasn't just to tell a different story but to 'make' one that, upon closer scrutiny, wasn't fundamentally different but transformed precisely due to its format. Emphasizing the significance of embracing imagination as a critical reflection on the influences shaping our perception of the dark seemed essential. Initially, I didn't anticipate employing a creative writing format in this work (as crafting a thesis in a foreign language was challenging enough), but within the scope of this research, it almost became imperative to translate my findings and experiences into a bedtime story titled 'Good Night'.

Despite the story posing considerable challenges and uncertainties about its inclusion in this thesis, it seems to me, at least today, like the culmination and encapsulation of my broader concerns regarding the dominant optical representation within the practical methodology I aimed to convey. I am aware that the story itself has considerable room for improvement, as does the connection of this research methodology to the complexity of epistemological knowledge. For now, however, I see the fabulation approach as a current avenue for innovative research as well as a potential way to engage academic content with a broader audience.

### **Contribution to Research**

This project has significantly propelled the methods of practice-based research, contributing a critical perspective on epistemological knowledge through its three-part methodology. The results are discernible in both the evolution of practice and the framework presented for urban darkness. The employed methods are innovative, existing both in the process of creation and in how the resulting work incorporates it. My photographic night excursions, visual studies, including the collective activity of Night Drawing, and the visual outcomes of these efforts, alongside the interweaving of facts and visions through fabulation into a bedtime story, address different realities by negotiating habitual, stereotypical perspectives. Overall, this research claims the visual relationship to political and social implications of the interplay between light and

darkness in the urban night and introduces new perspectives that have not yet been explored.

I have consolidated the outcomes of this research under a concept I have termed ‘urban darkness’ to denote that which emerges from the shadows of artificial light in the open expanse of the urban night. This framework illustrates the profound impact on how we perceive and experience light phenomena, including darkness, how we interact with their atmospheres, and how we design and shape such illuminated environments and surroundings. In addition to the textual analysis and experimental methodological approach presented in this dissertation, I have created a rich body of visual work. This compilation includes a series of photographs and drawings, complemented with the narration of the ‘Good Night’ story. A subset documenting these explorations of shadows and dark atmospheres in the city at night is available on the website [urbandarkness.net](http://urbandarkness.net). The resulting archive on the website serves as an inventory of observations and encounters with urban darkness. It reflects critically and creatively on darkness in relation to the aesthetics of the night, inviting readers to browse through the material.

My photographs and the shadow typology have been expanded into a visual monograph, available in a small-edition printed book. Access to the paper/analogue dimension is crucial here, considering the nuanced visual aesthetics involved. This implementation, as showcased in *Shadow Typology* (Meng, 2023), further illustrates the spatial interweaving of light and dark. Leveraging the haptic and spatial characteristics of the book form, and conceptually working with paper, printing, and binding techniques, the book serves as a central and additional haptic commentary to enrich the pictorial understanding, going beyond the textual form alone. Once again, it underscores the importance of visual impressions, visions, and imagination, as well as the constraints of visual limitations, as a necessary condition for engaging with light and darkness in urban space.

### **Avenues for Future Research**

My practice-based methodology and the generation of visual material for this research underscore the often-overlooked aspect of how images are created and produced, a dimension that is insufficiently discussed or even neglected in the analysis of visual culture studies. As our visual understanding progresses, there’s a risk of reverting to the habit of merely explaining and analysing images, a predominant concern, particularly in the field of visual studies. I emphasize the crucial necessity of conducting research

meticulously, involving the precise application and critical deconstruction of the methods that are employed. This entails immersing oneself within these methods to gain a comprehensive understanding, as they profoundly shape perspectives—examples being photography, drawing, and storytelling. A promising avenue for future research involves learning to read images based on their practice, creation, and performance. In an era where information is predominantly conveyed through images rather than text, it's striking that photography as a practice and performance is little discussed in academia, notably impacting literature on photo theory and visual culture.

My practice-based research engagement highlights the inseparability of performative practice, the creation of images—visual and visible—from our environment and habitat. Consequently, it shows that technology cannot be isolated from practice, as practice also influences technology (e.g., shadow representations in architectural renderings). Photography also encompasses more than just taking pictures; it includes staging poses, posting, and liking images, framing one's life, and conveying presence—all of which fall under the umbrella of 'image making.' Here, I view drawing as a method with significant potential for further exploration and discussion. How drawing creates a space in which the representable and the non-representable can be critically examined. Within the limits of paper and pen, I can draw and place myself in experience with space and body. This is embodied photographically in a different way. Drawing as a method may offer a crucial and contemporary way to address experiences of perceptions and representations that differ from the photographic image outside any technological sphere.

I believe that poetic investigations, particularly in academia, are often neglected and under-examined. Spatial experiences and phenomenological connections to the visual realm are frequently overlooked and undervalued, dismissed as trivialities in a world dominated by symbolic capitalism. My exploration of contrasts, tints, atmospheres, and their aesthetic and phenomenal aspects, especially concerning the world of shadows, has revealed the significant influence these properties can have on our actions, design, and imagination. These questions are closely tied to the prevalence of the figurative, leaving lasting visual imprints and shaping our habits of seeing. The profound impact of our visual preconceptions raises issues that merit further exploration. In a postdoc, I aim to delve into these phenomenological properties and further explore their visual translations within different contexts, extending the practice of drawing. I can envision continuing research on variations of shadows influenced by atmospheric conditions or investigating the aesthetic of snow as a crucial environmental element.

A further outcome of this research will be an essay on my practice methodology and the innovative use of visual thinking and making. This will be an original contribution to theory and literature, as a comparative treatment is lacking in mainstream scholarly research. More of my work is forthcoming, including an article on Night Drawing in a special issue of *Ethnologies* titled ‘Nocturnal Ethnographies: Aesthetics and Imaginary of the Night.’ Additionally, a chapter on nocturnal drawing will be part of the book ‘Cities After Dusk,’ to be published in 2024 by Amsterdam University Press as part of the Cities and Cultures series. I’m also working on a visual essay on ‘Urban Darkness.’ My ultimate goal is to present this research as an exhibition in London and New York. Finally, I plan to direct and stage the ‘Good Night’ story as a play, potentially at the *International Human Rights Art Festival* in New York at the end of this year.

Night Drawing will not end with this research project. The overwhelmingly positive response and demand for the events have surprised me continually. The project, propelled by its own momentum, might organically develop in other cities worldwide, which would be great. My primary motivation remains to continue these events, drawing attention to ‘the light in the night that speaks to us’ through visual communication, challenging notions of darkness and the conventions of urban design in its representation. In the future, I strive for my work to contribute to research through practical methods and foster creative thinking and creation. I plan to nurture this passion in my classroom, aspiring to motivate students and other scholars to explore methods that may not have yet gained ‘official’ recognition. I will champion new forms of critical practice and pedagogy. I am dedicated to contributing to the development of a vibrant culture of design scholarship, research, and innovation, and to fostering interdisciplinary collaborations both within and outside of academia.

### **Final Thoughts**

Answering questions on how we can and will engage with darkness in the future is not my concern alone; it is inspiring to see how much thoughtful research, ideas, and practices already exist across various disciplines—especially those advocating for engaging with our environment and society in a more sustainable and democratic way. As time went on, the method of this investigation—looking at darkness in a new way from my perspective as an artist and designer—made more and more sense. Even though academia initially intimidated me, ultimately, my work encouraged me to advocate for more collaboration and interdisciplinary thinking.

I firmly believe that we must continue to unpack the fear, sense of danger, and other biases that have made us averse to urban darkness. Additionally, it's crucial to recognize that lighting is both a climate change and social issue, involving global distribution and equal access to resources. Solar lights for the developing world are a focus of NGOs and building shade to counteract increasing heat waves are essential strategies. Just as we need a 'right to light' (e.g. Campbell-Dollaghan 2013; Great Britain and Law Commission 2014) we also have a right to darkness. Incorporating creative thinking and artistic practices into these developments can play a valuable role in addressing and advancing these issues.

Thinking through visual collaborative actions, I am driven to engage practically with the visuality of the world. My goal is to foster an alternative visual vocabulary that is collective, collaborative, and serves the vision of making a difference. I find it startling, for example, that light pollution—a topic that has received an extraordinary amount of attention in the last decade—seldom, if ever, discusses the pictorial.

Earlier this year, several AI systems capable of creating realistic images and artwork from a linguistic description were introduced. The emergence of this new technology has led to the creation of images that closely resemble professionally made artwork and are often challenging to distinguish from human-created images. The fact that these images are generated by language is just another indication of how strongly our visual world is defined and read. The impact of this development on creative work remains uncertain, but it underscores the need for further scholarly exploration of images and visual culture. It is crucial not only to examine how images are represented in various contexts but also to understand how they are originally constructed and constituted. This involves, much like analysing language in the form of words and letters, scrutinizing images in the form of pixels and scribbles.

The findings from my exploration of shadows, the feedback and outcomes of Night Drawing, and the concluding bedtime story underscore the imperative not to neglect the aesthetics of light, the poetics of space, imagination, and fantasy. There is a pressing need for a more profound understanding of contemporary aesthetics and speculative discussions. The prevailing focus on results and end products has hindered an approach that values imagination, poetry, aesthetics, and beauty, and this should be actively challenged. The immaterial aspects deserve more attention precisely because visual phenomena play a significant role in shaping the contemporary (political) imaginary. In a world dominated by the visual and the virtual, representations and their consequences

have enduring impacts on physical spaces, influencing our environment, democracy, and ourselves.

In sum, approaches to research that go beyond simple textual analysis, data collection, and algorithms, and instead foster conversations and productive collaboration across disciplines, offer important opportunities. They may lead to deeper and more critical understanding and allow for nuanced attention to various subjects. The questions of what will be pictured, how, where, and when remain relevant and fraught. The impact of visual representation methods and the narratives they convey on our environment and social context is subject to uncertainty regarding their form and significance. What seems less questionable, however, is that the visual will continue to play a crucial role in our lives. The nature of the reality we portray and what we choose to capture and reveal remain both daunting and fascinating questions. What kind of reality will we have pictures of? What will we expose next?

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is true when people say that a PhD is a long and lonely journey. But it is also true that on this journey, one encounters an infinite number of individuals committed to improving the world. They engage in critical analysis, contribute to knowledge creation, explore creative ideas, break down boundaries, and, not least, show interest in what you do and think. On this journey, I had the chance and privilege to meet many of these remarkable individuals. Not only were they incredibly generous, encouraging, and continuously made time for my ideas, but they also listened carefully, asked incredibly good questions, supported, and carried me along the way.

First, a big thank you goes to my two supervisors Pasi Väliäho and Joanna Zylinska. Thank you both for never giving up on me and this project, for your patience and generosity over the years. You both sincerely helped me to learn and grow.

This project, like so many, was a financial challenge and none of it would have been possible without the generous support of the Stuart Hall Foundation, the Swiss National Science Foundation and Graduate School of Goldsmiths, without which the completion of this project would have been unthinkable.

I would like to thank Goldsmiths for its progressive spirit in education and its entire community for its continued inspiration and for undertaking countless, diligent, and relevant research projects. I also thank Gareth Stanton for his unwavering support in the background. My gratitude further goes to all the kind people who welcomed and hosted me as a visiting scholar at the New School. A very special thank you goes to Victoria Hattam, Shannon Mattern, and Hugh Raffles who have been incredibly supportive during the unexpected and difficult time of the pandemic. I also like to thank the entire AvPhD group and the NYLON network who have always patiently listened to me and advised me on my work over the years. Among the many people involved, special thanks go to Jérémie, Lennaart, Sam, Sanjita, Rachel and Roshini.

Furthermore, I extend a profound and heartfelt thank you to those who believed in me from the very beginning, especially Bobby, Carmen, Christoph, Léo, Irma, Tatjana, Vicky, and Vincenzo. Without you, I wouldn't have had the courage or started at all! My deep gratitude goes further to my dear proofreaders and editors, who have patiently dealt with my often rather nebulous writing style. I appreciate their thoughtful comments and

constant support throughout this journey: Lucy, Macushla, Michael and Tom, you are just the best! I also like to thank my former business partners who significantly influenced my thinking and work in the years leading up to this and ultimately inspired this research: Merci, Jule and Sven, for so much and more!

Finally, an infinite thank you goes to all the wonderful people who accompanied me through so many nights, shared my visions and my despair and simply made everything better. A special gratitude and big hooray go to my dear cheerleaders, who were especially present during this last stretch: Antje, Brandon, Fränzi, Ilir, Julia, Mama, Maria, Marta, Melisa, Rebeca, Steve, and Taylor. Last but not least, I would like to thank everyone who was involved in this research, who loved this project, believed in it and supported it at some point along the way.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, A. (1981). *The negative* (1st ed). New York Graphic Society.
- Adkins, F. (2022, June 14). *The race to reclaim the dark*. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20220614-the-crusade-for-darker-night-skies>
- Adnan, E. (2016). *Night*. Nightboat Books.
- Alexander, Z. Ç. (2017). *Kinaesthetic knowing: Aesthetics, epistemology, modern design*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Antonioni, M. (Director). (1966). *Blow-Up* [Drama, Mystery, Thriller]. Premier Productions.
- Arnheim, R. (1969). *Visual thinking* (35. anniversary print., [5. print.]). Univ. of California Press.
- Arnheim, R. (1974). On the Nature of Photography. *Critical Inquiry*, 1(1), 149–161.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1342924>
- Arnheim, R. (1977). *The dynamics of architectural form: Based on the 1975 Mary Duke Biddle lectures at the Cooper Union*. University of California Press.
- Arnold, E. (2019). Aesthetic practices of psychogeography and photography. *Geography Compass*, 13(2), e12419. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12419>
- ARUP. (2015). *Cities Alive: Rethinking the Shades of Night*.  
<http://www.arup.com/en/publications/research/section/cities-alive-rethinking-the-shades-of-night>
- Augé, M. (2008). *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (2nd English language ed). Verso.
- Azoulay, A. (2008). *The civil contract of photography* (1st pbk. ed). Zone Books ; Distributed by The MIT Press.
- Bal, M. (2021). *Narratology in practice*. University of Toronto Press.
- Barthes, R. (2010). *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography* (Pbk. ed). Hill and Wang.
- Baudelaire, C. (1980). The modern public and photography. *Classic Essays on Photography*, 83–89.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. University of Michigan Press.
- Baxandall, M. (1995). *Shadows and enlightenment*. Yale University Press.
- Bazin, A. (1960). The Ontology of the Photographic Image (H. Gray, Trans.). *Film Quarterly*, 13(4), 4–9.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1210183>
- Beaumont, M. (2016). *Nightwalking: A nocturnal history of London*. Verso.
- Belting, H. (2011). *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton University Press.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Duke University Press.

- Berger, A. A. (2011). *Seeing is believing: An introduction to visual communication* (4th ed). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Berger, J. (1969). Drawing. In *Permanent red; essays in seeing*. (pp. 23–30). Methuen.
- Berger, J. (2005). *Berger on drawing*. Occasional Press.
- Berger, J. (2008). *Ways of seeing*. Penguin Books.
- Berger, J. (2020). *Steps towards a small theory of the visible*. Penguin Books.
- Bergson, H. (2001). *Time and free will: An essay on the immediate data of consciousness*. Dover Publications.
- Bermingham, A. (2000). *Learning to draw: Studies in the cultural history of a polite and useful art*. Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press.
- Bernard, H. R. (2006). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed). AltaMira Press.
- Bertelsen, L., & Murphie, A. (2010). An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers: Félix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain. In M. Gregg & G. J. Seigworth (Eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader* (pp. 138–157). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822393047-006>
- Bille, M. (2019). *Homely atmospheres and lighting technologies in Denmark: Living with light*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bille, M., Bjerregaard, P., & Sørensen, T. F. (2015). Staging atmospheres: Materiality, culture, and the texture of the in-between. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 15, 31–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2014.11.002>
- Bille, M., & Jørgensen, O. N. (2022). At the margins of attention: Security lighting and luminous art interventions in Copenhagen. In S. Sumartojo (Ed.), *Lighting design in shared public spaces*. Routledge.
- Bille, M., & Sørensen, T. F. (2007). An Anthropology of Luminosity: The Agency of Light. *Journal of Material Culture*, 12(3), 263–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183507081894>
- Bliss, L. (2016, December 18). 5 Key Battles in Manhattan’s Sunlight Wars. *Bloomberg.Com*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-12-18/new-york-city-zoning-and-the-fight-for-sunlight>
- Bloch, S. (2019). Shade. *Places Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.22269/190423>
- Blühm, A., & Lippincott, L. (2000). *Light!* Thames & Hudson.
- Blumenberg, H. (1993). Light as a Metaphor for Truth. In D. M. Kleinberg-Levin (Ed.), *Modernity and the hegemony of vision* (pp. 30–62). University of California Press.
- Bogard, P. (2013). *The end of night: Searching for natural darkness in an age of artificial light*. Little, Brown, and Company.

- Böhme, G. (2000). Acoustic atmospheres: A contribution to the study of ecological aesthetics. *Soundscape*, 1, 14–18.
- Böhme, G. (2014). *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*. Suhrkamp.
- Böhme, G. (2017). *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Böhme, Gernot, Ólafur Elíasson, and Juhani Pallasmaa. 2014. *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture*. edited by C. Borch. Basel: Birkhäuser.
- Bollas, C. (1987). *The shadow of the object: Psychoanalysis of the unthought known*. Columbia University Press.
- Bolton, D. (2015, November 17). *Your smartphone and laptop are ruining your sleep—Here's how to improve it* | *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/laptop-phone-sleep-bright-screen-flux-twilight-a6737696.html>
- Bovet-Pavy, A. (Director). (2016). *Von der Dunkelheit ins Licht* [Film]. ARTE France.
- Boyle, D. (Director). (2015). *Steve Jobs* [Film]. Universal Pictures USA.
- Braidotti, R. (1991). Body-images and the pornography of representation. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1(2), 137–151. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.1991.9960486>
- Braungart, G., & Büttner, U. (Eds.). (2018). *Wind und Wetter: Kultur, Wissen, Ästhetik*. Wilhelm Fink.
- Brei, M., Pérez-Barahona, A., & Strobl, E. (2016). Environmental pollution and biodiversity: Light pollution and sea turtles in the Caribbean. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, 77, 95–116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeem.2016.02.003>
- Brice, S. (2018). Situating skill: Contemporary observational drawing as a spatial method in geographical research. *Cultural Geographies*, 25(1), 135–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474017702513>
- Brickell, K. (2015). Participatory video drama research in transitional Vietnam: Post-production narratives on marriage, parenting and social evils. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 22(4), 510–525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2014.885889>
- Bronfen, E. (2013). *Night passages: Philosophy, literature, and film*. Columbia University Press.
- Brown, D. (2016). *Phenomenology Of Shadow*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.207269>
- Brown, S. D., Kanyeredzi, A., McGrath, L., Reavey, P., & Tucker, I. (2019). Affect theory and the concept of atmosphere. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 20(1), 5–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1600910X.2019.1586740>
- Browne, S. (2015). *Dark matters: On the surveillance of blackness*. Duke University Press.
- Burckhardt, L. (2012). *Rethinking Man-made Environments: Politics, Landscapes & Design*. Springer.
- Cadava, E. (1998). *Words of light: Theses on the photography of history* (2. printing, 1. paperback printing). Princeton Univ. Press.

- Campbell-Dollaghan, K. (2013, October 31). *Do We Have a Legal Right to Light?* Gizmodo.  
<https://gizmodo.com/do-we-have-a-legal-right-to-light-1455302177>
- Cao, M., Xu, T., & Yin, D. (2023). Understanding light pollution: Recent advances on its health threats and regulations. *Journal of Environmental Sciences*, *127*, 589–602.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jes.2022.06.020>
- Carrington, D. (2013). *Twilight: The “talking” streetlamps that will lighten your heart (but not your wallet)*. CNN. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/07/18/tech/innovation/twilight-street-lamps-roosegarde/>
- Casati, R., & Cavanagh, P. (2019). *The visual world of shadows*. The MIT Press.
- Causey, A. (2017). *Drawn to see: Drawing as an ethnographic method*. University of Toronto Press.
- Chabris, C., & Simons, D. (2010). *The Invisible Gorilla: And Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us*.  
<http://www.theinvisiblegorilla.com/>
- Chalfin, A., Hansen, B., Lerner, J., & Parker, L. (2022). Reducing Crime Through Environmental Design: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment of Street Lighting in New York City. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, *38*(1), 127–157. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-020-09490-6>
- Chepesiuk, R. (2009). Missing the Dark: Health Effects of Light Pollution. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, *117*(1), 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.117-a20>
- Colomina, B. (2000). *Privacy and publicity: Modern architecture as mass media*. MIT Press.
- configuringlight.org. (n.d.). *Configuring Light*. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from  
<http://www.configuringlight.org/>
- Crary, J. (2001). *Suspensions of perception: Attention, spectacle, and modern culture* (1. MIT Press paperback ed). MIT Press.
- Crary, J. (2005). *Techniques of the observer: On vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Nachdr.). MIT Press.
- Crary, J. (2014). *24/7: Late capitalism and the ends of sleep*. Verso.
- Cubitt, S. (2014). *The practice of light: A genealogy of visual technologies from prints to pixels*. The MIT Press.
- darksky.org. (2016). *IDA. IDA Light Pollution*. <http://www.darksky.org/light-pollution/>
- Debord, G. (2005). *The society of the spectacle*. Rebel Press.
- Del Prete, E. (2014). Elisa del Prete. In S. Praun & A. Stratimirović (Eds.), *You say light, I think shadow* (p. 064)). Art and Theory Stockholm AB.
- Derrida, J. (1993). *Memoirs of the blind: The self-portrait and other ruins*. University of Chicago Press.
- Dreyer, C. T. (Director). (1932, May 6). *Vampyr*. Vereinigte Star-Film GmbH.
- Dunn, N. (2016). *Dark matters: A manifesto for the nocturnal city*. Zero Books.

- Dunne, A., & Raby, F. (2013). *Speculative everything: Design, fiction, and social dreaming*. The MIT Press.
- Dunnett, J. (2017, January 13). *Mythical Scottish white deer spotted grazing near offices*. Daily Record. <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/mythical-scottish-white-deer-spotted-9618397>
- Easterling, K. (2014). *Subtraction* (N. Hirsch & M. Miessen, Eds.). Sternberg Press.
- Easterling, K. (2021). *Medium design: Knowing how to work on the world*. Verso.
- Edensor, T. (2013). Reconnecting with darkness: Gloomy landscapes, lightless places. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 14(4), 446–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2013.790992>
- Edensor, T. (2017). *From light to dark: Daylight, illumination, and gloom*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Edensor, T., & Hughes, R. (2021). Moving through a dappled world: The aesthetics of shade and shadow in place. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 22(9), 1307–1325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2019.1705994>
- Edgerton, H. E. (2018). *Harold Edgerton: Seeing the unseen* (R. Kurtz, D. G. Douglas, & G. Kayafas, Eds.; First edition). Steidl.
- Ekirch, A. R. (2006). *At days close—A history of nighttime*. Phoenix.
- Elcott, N. M. (2016). *Artificial darkness: An obscure history of modern art and media*. University of Chicago Press.
- Elkins, J. (1998). *On pictures and the words that fail them*. Cambridge University Press.
- Entwistle, J., & Slater, D. (2018). Light as material/lighting as practice: Urban lighting and energy. *Science Museum Group Journal*, 9(9). <https://doi.org/10.15180/180906>
- Entwistle, J., & Slater, D. (2019). Making space for ‘the social’: Connecting sociology and professional practices in urban lighting design. *The British Journal of Sociology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12657>
- Farthing, S. (2012). Recording: And Questions of Accuracy. In S. Garner (Ed.), *Writing on drawing: Essays on drawing practice and research*. Intellect.
- French-Constant, R. H., Somers-Yeates, R., Bennie, J., Economou, T., Hodgson, D., Spalding, A., & McGregor, P. K. (2016). Light pollution is associated with earlier tree budburst across the United Kingdom. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 283(1833), 20160813. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2016.0813>
- Focillon, H. (1989). *The life of forms in art*. Zone Books.
- Forestry and Land Scotland. (2021). *Galloway International Dark Sky Park*. Forestry and Land Scotland. <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/visit/forest-parks/galloway-forest-park/dark-skies>
- Foster, H. (Ed.). (2009). *Vision and visuality* (Nachdr.). Bay Press.

- Frampton, H. (2015). *On the camera arts and consecutive matters: The writings of Hollis Frampton* (B. Jenkins, Ed.). MIT Press.
- Francis, A. (2008). Right of lights ahead! *Journal of Building Appraisal*, 4(1), 5–13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1057/jba.2008.18>
- Franke, I. (2018). *Retreat into darkness - Ivana Franke: Towards a phenomenology of the unknown* (H. C. Mertens & K. Naie, Eds.). Spector Books.
- Franzen, J. (2015, March 30). Climate Change vs. Conservation. *The New Yorker*.  
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/carbon-capture>
- French, M. J. (2021). *Power failure: Cuomo's \$106M bridge light show fades to black*. POLITICO.  
<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/08/02/cuomo-bridge-new-york-lights-501842>
- Freud, S. (2003). *The uncanny*. Penguin Books.
- Friedman, R. A. (2018, January 20). What a Sensory Isolation Tank Taught Me About My Brain. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/29/opinion/sunday/whos-in-charge-the-body-or-the-brain.html>
- Fuller, M. (2005). *Media ecologies: Materialist energies in art and technoculture*. MIT Press.
- Galinier, J., Monod Becquelin, A., Bordin, G., Fontaine, L., Fourmaux, F., Rouillet Ponce, J., Salzarulo, P., Simonnot, P., Therrien, M., & Zilli, I. (2010). Anthropology of the Night: Cross-Disciplinary Investigations. *Current Anthropology*, 51(6), 819–847. <https://doi.org/10.1086/653691>
- Geertz, C. (2007). *Works and lives: The anthropologist as author* (Nachdr.). Stanford Univ. Press.
- Gehl, J. (2011). *Life between buildings: Using public space*. Island Press.
- Gibbs, A. (2002). Disaffected. *Continuum*, 16(3), 335–341.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1030431022000018690>
- Gibson, J. J. (2015). *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Psychology Press.
- Gilchrist, A. L. (2006). *Seeing black and white*. Oxford University Press.
- Goethe, J. W. von. (2006). *Theory of colours*. Dover Publications.
- Goldhagen, S. W. (2017). *Welcome to your world: How the built environment shapes our lives* (First edition). Harper, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers.
- Gombrich, E. H. (2014). *Shadows: The depiction of cast shadows in Western art* (New edition). Yale University Press.
- Great Britain & Law Commission. (2014). *Rights to light*. [http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/lc356\\_rights\\_to\\_light.pdf](http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/lc356_rights_to_light.pdf)
- Griffero, T. (2016). *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of emotional spaces*. Routledge.
- Guattari, F. (1995). *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. Indiana University Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. SAGE.

- Hallgren, N. (Director). (2021). *Omnipresence* [Documentary]. The New Yorker.  
<https://www.newyorker.com/video/watch/omnipresence-film>
- Haraway, D. J. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press.
- Harden, O. (2021, May 12). *New Study Officially Found the Place With the Least Light Pollution in the World*. Matador Network. <https://matadornetwork.com/read/new-study-officially-found-place-least-light-pollution-world/>
- Hardin, C. L. (2012). Introduction. In H. Arnkil, K. Fridell Anter, & U. Karén, *Colour and light: Concepts and confusions*.
- Harmsen, N. (2019, October 16). *How to Use the Ansel Adams Zone System in the Digital World*. Fstoppers. <https://fstoppers.com/education/how-use-ansel-adams-zone-system-digital-world-417047>
- Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12(2):1–14. doi: [10.1215/-12-2-1](https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1).
- Harvey, D. (2013). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution* (Paperback ed). Verso.
- Hawkins, H. (2015). Creative geographic methods: Knowing, representing, intervening. On composing place and page. *Cultural Geographies*, 22(2), 247–268.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474015569995>
- Heidegger, M. (1996). The Age of the World Picture. In W. Lovitt (Trans.), *The question concerning technology and other essays* (pp. 115–154). Harper and Row.
- Heise, U. K. (2002). Unnatural Ecologies: The Metaphor of the Environment in Media Theory. *Configurations*, 10(1), 149–168. <https://doi.org/10.1353/con.2003.0006>
- Henriques, J. (Director). (2019). *Denzil's Dance* [HD Video, color, sound]. <https://vimeo.com/343600425>
- Hipfl, B. (2018). Affect in Media and Communication Studies: Potentials and Assemblages. *Media and Communication*, 6(3), 5. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i3.1470>
- Hölker, F., Wolter, C., Perkin, E. K., & Tockner, K. (2010). Light pollution as a biodiversity threat. *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, 25(12), 681–682. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2010.09.007>
- Hoogstraten, S. van. (2021). *Samuel van Hoogstraten's Introduction to the academy of painting, or, The visible world*. Getty Research Institute.
- Howes, C. (1989). *To photograph darkness: The history of underground and flash photography*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Howes, D. (2005). Architecture of the Senses. In M. Zardini (Ed.), *Sense of the city: An alternate approach to urbanism* (pp. 322–331). Canadian Centre for Architecture = Centre canadien d'architecture.

- Hubbard, P., & Colosi, R. (2015). Taking back the night? Gender and the contestation of sexual entertainment in England and Wales. *Urban Studies*, 52(3), 589–605.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098013504006>
- Ingold, T. (2007). Earth, sky, wind, and weather. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 13(s1), S19–S38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00401.x>
- Ingold, T. (2016). *Lines: A brief history*. Routledge.
- International Dark-Sky Association. (2008). *IDA Light Pollution and Safety Brochure*. [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org).  
<https://www.globeatnight.org/dsr/dsee/IDA%20Resources/IDA%20Light%20Pollution%20Brochures/IDA%20Light%20Pollution%20and%20Safety%20Brochure.pdf>
- Isenstadt, S. (2012). Groping in the Dark: The Scotopic Space of Blackouts. *The Senses and Society*, 7(3), 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.2752/174589312X13394219653680>
- Isenstadt, S. (2018). *Electric light: An architectural history*. The MIT Press.
- Isenstadt, S., Petty, M. M., & Neumann, D. (Eds.). (2015). *Cities of light: Two centuries of urban illumination*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Jacobs, J. (1992). *The death and life of great American cities*. Vintage Books.
- Jay, M. (1994). *Downcast eyes: The denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*. University of California Press.
- Johnson, G. A. (Ed.). (1998). *Sculpture and photography: Envisioning the third dimension*. Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, G. A. (2006). “All concrete shapes dissolve in light”: Photographing sculpture from Rodin to Brancusi. *The Sculpture Journal*, 15(2), 199–222. Arts Premium Collection; ProQuest Central.  
<https://login.libproxy.newschool.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/all-concrete-shapes-dissolve-light-photographing/docview/229429806/se-2?accountid=12261>
- Jones, S. (2013, February 10). Boris Johnson calls for urban fox “menace” to be tackled. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/feb/10/boris-johnson-urban-foxes-menace>
- Jung, C. G. (2019). *Dream symbols of the individuation process: Notes of C.G. Jung’s seminars on Wolfgang Pauli’s dreams* (S. Gieser, Ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Kamrowski, R., Limpus, C., Moloney, J., & Hamann, M. (2012). Coastal light pollution and marine turtles: Assessing the magnitude of the problem. *Endangered Species Research*, 19(1), 85–98.  
<https://doi.org/10.3354/esr00462>
- Kenaan, H. (2020). *Photography and its shadow*. Stanford University Press.
- Kite, S. (2017). *Shadow-makers: A cultural history of shadows in architecture*. Bloomsbury Academic.

- Kleinberg-Levin, D. M. (Ed.). (1993). *Modernity and the hegemony of vision*. University of California Press.
- Klopfenstein, C. (Director). (1979). *Story of Night* [Film]. Edition Grumbach Bern.
- Kopec, D. (2018). *Environmental psychology for design* (Third edition). Fairchild Books, An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.
- Kortava, D. (2021, June 30). The Controversial Floodlights Illuminating New York City's Public-Housing Developments. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-documentary/the-controversial-floodlights-illuminating-new-york-citys-public-housing-developments>
- Koslofsky, C. (2011). *Evening's empire: A history of the night in early modern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kosmály, P. (2011). Multisensory Environment and Sensory Deprivation in the Treatment of Reception Defects. *Creative and Knowledge Society*, 1(2), 96–109. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10212-011-0011-7>
- La Sorte, F. A., Fink, D., Buler, J. J., Farnsworth, A., & Cabrera-Cruz, S. A. (2017). Seasonal associations with urban light pollution for nocturnally migrating bird populations. *Global Change Biology*, 23(11), 4609–4619. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.13792>
- Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Harvard University Press.
- Leavy, P. (2009). *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice*. Guilford Press.
- Lefebvre. (1968). *Le droit à la ville*. Anthropos.
- Leroi-Gourhan, A. (2018). *Gesture and Speech*. MIT Press.
- Levine, C. (2017). *Forms: Whole, rhythm, hierarchy, network*. Princeton University Press.
- Low, D. (2009). Merleau-Ponty's Criticism of Heidegger: [Review of *Merleau-Ponty's Criticism of Heidegger*., by DePaul University]. *Philosophy Today*, 53(3), 273–293. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtoday200953316>
- Lowe, C., & Rafael, P. (2014). The Dark Art Manifesto. *Professional Lighting Design* 91. [http://www.thedarkart.org/PLD%2091\\_E\\_Dark%20Art\\_web.pdf](http://www.thedarkart.org/PLD%2091_E_Dark%20Art_web.pdf)
- Lupton, M., & Stammers, S. (2013). *Social Light Revolution*. Social Light Movement. [https://sociallightmovement.com/images/uploads/press/CIBSE\\_article.pdf](https://sociallightmovement.com/images/uploads/press/CIBSE_article.pdf)
- Lynch, K. (2005). *The image of the city*. MIT PRESS.
- Malcolm, D. (2004). *William Henry Fox Talbot (1800–1877) and the Invention of Photography*. The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tlbt/hd\\_tlbt.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tlbt/hd_tlbt.htm)

- Mareis, C. (2016). *Theorien des Designs zur Einführung* (2., korrigierte Auflage). Junius.
- mariomcuomobridge.ny.gov/lighting. n.d. "Lighting | Governor Mario M. Cuomo Bridge." Retrieved October 2, 2023 (<https://mariomcuomobridge.ny.gov/lighting>).
- Marres, N. (2015). *Material participation: Technology, the environment, and everyday publics*.
- Martin, R. (2016). *The urban apparatus: Mediapolitics and the city*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Massumi, B. (1995). The Autonomy of Affect. *Cultural Critique*, 31, 83. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354446>
- Mathiasen, N., Frandsen, A. K., & Grønlund, L. (2022). Daylight conditions in housing—Its role and priority in Danish building regulations. *Architecture, Structures and Construction*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44150-022-00036-x>
- Mattern, S. (2021). *A city is not a computer: Other urban intelligences* (1st ed.). Princeton University Press.
- McQuire, S. (2005). Immaterial Architectures: Urban Space and Electric Light. *Space and Culture*, 8(2), 126–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331204266372>
- McQuire, S. (2008). *The media city: Media, architecture and urban space*. Sage.
- Méheut, C. (2022, October 13). With Leaps and Bounds, Parkour Athletes Turn Off the Lights in Paris. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/13/world/europe/paris-energy-conservation-parkour.html>
- Meng, C. (2022). Night Drawing: Re-writing Darkness in the Nocturnal Land/Cityscape. *Ethnologies*, 44(1), 153. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1096061ar>
- Meng, C. (2023). *Shadow Typology*. Limited Edition of 100 Ex. Brooklyn, New York: Self-published in collaboration with Small Editions.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2005). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). Routledge.
- Mikuriya, J. T. (2018). *A history of light: The idea of photography*. <http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781474254199>
- Miles, M. (2015). *The language of light and dark: Light and place in Australian photography*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Mirzoeff, N. (2006). On Visuality. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5(1), 53–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412906062285>
- Mirzoeff, N. (2014). Visualizing the Anthropocene. *Public Culture*, 26(2), 213–232. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2392039>
- Mirzoeff, N. (2015). *How to see the world*. Penguin Random House.
- Mitchell, W. J. T. (2002). *Landscape and power*. University of Chicago Press.
- Morris, S. (2012). *Drawing in the Dark: Involuntary Drawing*. Tate Papers No.18. <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/18/drawing-in-the-dark>

- Morton, T. (2007). *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Harvard University Press.
- Narboni, R. (2017, February 15). *Imagining The Future of the City At Night*. Architectural Lighting. [http://www.archlighting.com/projects/imagining-the-future-of-the-city-at-night\\_o](http://www.archlighting.com/projects/imagining-the-future-of-the-city-at-night_o)
- Nicolaïdes, K. (1975). *The natural way to draw: A working plan for art study*. Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Nietzsche, F. W. (1974). *The gay science: With a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs* (W. A. Kaufmann, Trans.; 1st ed.). Vintage Books.
- Noë, A. (2004). *Action in perception*. MIT Press.
- Noland, C. (2009). *Agency and embodiment: Performing gestures/producing culture*. Harvard University Press.
- Noland, C., & Ness, S. A. (Eds.). (2008). *Migrations of gesture*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Norman, D. M. (2019, December 26). Why Is New York City's Skyline Always Lit Up? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/26/nyregion/nyc-skyline-lights.html>
- Nye, D. E. (1994). *American technological sublime*. MIT Press.
- Nye, D. E. (2010). *When the lights went out: A history of blackouts in America*. MIT Press.
- Nye, D. E. (2018). *American illuminations: Urban lighting, 1800-1920*. The MIT Press.
- Oechslin, W. (2002). "Je fais la lumière": Wie der Architekt aus dem Schatten des Malers tritt. In Deutsches Architekturmuseum (Ed.), *Das Geheimnis des Schattens: Licht und Schatten on der Architektur* (pp. 78–83). Deutsches architektur museum.
- Oliveros, P. (2005). *Deep listening: A composers's sound practice*. iUniverse.
- Oliveros, P. (2015, December 11). *The difference between hearing and listening* [TEDx Talks]. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_QHfOuRrJB8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QHfOuRrJB8)
- Ostergaard, E. (2019). Echoes and Shadows: A Phenomenological Reconsideration of Plato's Cave Allegory. *Phenomenology & Practice*, 13(1), 20–33. <https://doi.org/10.29173/pandpr29372>
- Owens, E. W., Behun, R. J., Manning, J. C., & Reid, R. C. (2012). The Impact of Internet Pornography on Adolescents: A Review of the Research. *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 19(1–2), 99–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2012.660431>
- Pallasmaa, J. (2011). *The embodied image: Imagination and imagery in architecture*. John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Pallasmaa, J. (2012). *The eyes of the skin: Architecture and the senses*. Wiley.
- Pallasmaa, J. (2016). The Sixth Sense: The Meaning of Atmosphere and Mood. *Architectural Design*, 86(6), 126–133. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.2121>
- Pandian, A. (2019). *A possible anthropology: Methods for uneasy times*. Duke University Press.

- Pandian, A., & McLean, S. (Eds.). (2017). *Crumpled Paper Boat: Experiments in Ethnographic Writing*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1168bd2>
- Peirce, C. S. (1992). What Is a Sign. In *The essential Peirce: Selected philosophical writings*. Indiana University Press.
- Peters, J. D. (2016). *The marvelous clouds: Toward a philosophy of elemental media*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Petrusich, A. (2016, August 23). Fear of the light: Why we need darkness. *The Guardian*.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/23/why-we-need-darkness-light-pollution-stars>
- Petterson, M. (2011). Depictive Traces: On the Phenomenology of Photography. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 69(2), 185–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6245.2011.01460.x>
- Pink, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Advances in visual methodology*. Sage Publications.
- Plato. (2007). *The Republic*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Probyn, E. (2000). *Carnal appetites: Foodsexidentities*. Routledge.
- Psenner, A. (2014). Visualität der Stadt als Wahrnehmungs- und Bewertungsressource. In I. Warnke & B. Busse (Eds.), *Place-Making in urbanen Diskursen* (pp. 101–130). De Gruyter.
- Quiller-Couch, Arthur. 1916. *On the Art of Writing: Lectures Delivered in the University of Cambridge, 1913-1914*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Rabinow, P. (2011). *Reflections on fieldwork in Morocco* (30th anniversary ed., [Nachdr.]). University of California Press.
- Rancière, J. (2006). *The politics of aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible* (Pbk. ed). Continuum.
- Rauh, A. (2012). *Die besondere Atmosphäre: Ästhetische Feldforschungen*. Transcript.
- Reuters, S. (2008, February 12). Ghost-like white stag spotted in Scotland. *Reuters*.  
<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-stag-idUKKIM25136920080212>
- Riggs, M. (2014, February 12). Street Lights and Crime: A Seemingly Endless Debate. *Bloomberg.Com*.  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-02-12/street-lights-and-crime-a-seemingly-endless-debate>
- Rosa, H. (2019). *Resonance: A sociology of the relationship to the world*. Polity Press.
- Rose, G. (2007). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (2nd ed). SAGE Publications.
- Rose, G. (2014). On the Relation between ‘Visual Research Methods’ and Contemporary Visual Culture. *The Sociological Review*, 62(1), 24–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12109>
- Saint-Exupéry, A. de. (2000). *The little prince* (R. Howard, Trans.; 1st ed). Harcourt.
- Sandhu, S. (2007). *Night haunts*. Artangel ; Verso.

- Sassen, S. (2001). *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo* (2nd ed). Princeton University Press.
- Schielke. (2013, April 23). *Light Matters: Louis Kahn and the Power of Shadow*. ArchDaily.  
<https://www.archdaily.com/362554/light-matters-louis-kahn-and-the-power-of-shadow>
- Schivelbusch, W. (1995). *Disenchanted night: The industrialization of light in the nineteenth century*. University of California Press.
- Schlör, J. (1998). *Nights in the big city: Paris, Berlin, London 1840-1930*. Reaktion Books.
- Schmitz, H. (2005). *Der Gefühlsraum*. Bouvier.
- Schulte-Römer, N., Dannemann, E., & Meier, J. (2018). *Light Pollution—A Global Discussion*.  
<https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bsz:14-qucosa2-356415>
- Sen, S. (Director). (2015). *Cities of Sleep* [Documentary]. Films Division of India.
- Sennett, R. (2018). *Building and dwelling: Ethics for the city*. Penguin.
- Shapshay, S. (2013). Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Neglect of the Sublime. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 53(2), 181–198. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayso67>
- Sharpe, W. (2008). *New York nocturne: The city after dark in literature, painting, and photography, 1850 - 1950*. Princeton Univ. Press.
- Sharpe, W. (2017). *Grasping shadows: The dark side of literature, painting, photography, and film*. Oxford University Press.
- Shaw, R. (2018). *The nocturnal city*. Routledge.
- Shirreff, E. (Director). (2006, 2013). *Sculpture Park (Tony Smith, Amaryllis)* [16mm film, color, no sound 8'43", looped]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyGY-oRn2ws>
- Shirreff, E. (2013). *Erin Shirreff* (J. Allen, J. Pappararo, S. Dyck, Carleton University, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, & Contemporary Art Gallery, Eds.). Carleton University Art Gallery [u.a.].
- Shirreff, E. (2015, November 13). *Erin Shirreff on UN 2010, 2010*.  
<https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/erin-shirreff-on-un-2010-2010>
- Silverman, K. (2015). *The miracle of analogy, or, The history of photography*. Stanford University Press.
- Simmel, G. (2010). The Metropolis and Mental Life. In *The Blackwell City Reader* (pp. 103–110). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Simon, P., & Garfunkel, A. (1964). *The Sound of Silence*. Columbia.
- Sinclair, I. (2018). *Living with buildings and walking with ghosts: On health and architecture*. Wellcome Collection.
- Škvareninová, J., Tuhárska, M., Škvarenina, J., Babálová, D., Slobodníková, L., Slobodník, B., Středová, H., & Mindřaš, J. (2017). Effects of light pollution on tree phenology in the urban environment. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 25(4), 282–290. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mgr-2017-0024>

- Slater, D. (2017). How lighting affects the way we perceive, use and live in our communities is at the heart of the Configuring Light research programme. *The Lighting Journal*, 82(2), 30–33.
- Slater, D., Entwistle, J., & Sloane, M. (2015). Derby. In S. Isenstadt, M. M. Petty, & D. Neumann (Eds.), *Cities of light: Two centuries of urban illumination* (pp. 159–164). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Sloane, M. (2021, September 15). Surveillance society: Artificial lighting for a policed public. *Architectural Review*. <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/technology/surveillance-society-artificial-lighting-for-a-policed-public>
- Sloane, M., Slater, D., & Entwistle, J. (2016). Tackling Social Inequalities in Public Lighting. *Configuring Light/Staging the Social*.
- Smith-Jones, C. (2021, August 13). How Rare Are White Deer? *The British Deer Society*. <https://bds.org.uk/blog/2021/08/13/how-rare-are-white-deer/>
- Snyder, J., & Allen, N. W. (1975). Photography, Vision, and Representation. *Critical Inquiry*, 2(1), 143–169. <https://doi.org/10.1086/447832>
- Sontag, S. (2008). *On photography*. Penguin Books.
- Stavast, P. (2008). *China/S75*. Roma Publications.
- Steyerl, H. (2009). In Defense of the Poor Image. *E-Flux Journal*, 10. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>
- Stidsen, L., Bjerrum, H. S., Kirkegaard, P. H., Thuesen, N., & Fisker, A. M. (2011). *Patients' light preferences in hospital wards: Related to light atmosphere in Danish homes*. 211–222. <https://doi.org/10.2495/LIGHT110181>
- Stoichiță, V. I. (1999). *A short history of the shadow*. Reakzion Books.
- Stokkermans, M. G. M., Vogels, I. M. L. C., & Heynderickx, I. E. J. (2016). The effect of spatial luminance distribution on dark adaptation. *Journal of Vision*, 16(8), 11. <https://doi.org/10.1167/16.8.11>
- Stokkermans, M., Vogels, I., Kort, Y. de, & Heynderickx, I. (2018). A Comparison of Methodologies to Investigate the Influence of Light on the Atmosphere of a Space. *LEUKOS*, 14(3), 167–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15502724.2017.1385399>
- Stone, T. (2018). Re-envisioning the Nocturnal Sublime: On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Nighttime Lighting. *Topoi*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-018-9562-4>
- Straw, W. (2015). Media and the Urban Night. *Articulo*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.4000/articulo.3098>
- Sugimoto, Hiroshi, and Takaaki Matsumoto. 2016. *Hiroshi Sugimoto: Theaters*. Bologna: Damiani.
- Sumartojo, S. (Ed.). (2022). *Lighting design in shared public spaces*. Routledge.

- Sun, C., Bridges, A., Johnson, J. A., & Ezzell, M. B. (2016). Pornography and the Male Sexual Script: An Analysis of Consumption and Sexual Relations. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45(4), 983–994. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-014-0391-2>
- takebackthenight.org. (2020, July 9). *Take Back the Night | Action Against Sexual Violence*. <https://takebackthenight.org/>
- Talbert, T. (2022, January 5). *Why Can You See the Moon During the Day? We Asked a NASA Scientist* [Text]. NASA. <http://www.nasa.gov/feature/why-can-you-see-the-moon-during-the-day-we-asked-a-nasa-scientist-episode-19>
- Talbot, W. H. F. (2017). *The Pencil of Nature*.
- Tanizaki, J. (2001). *In praise of shadows*. Vintage Books.
- Tate. (n.d.). *Subjective photography*. Tate. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/subjective-photography>
- Taussig, M. T. (2011). *I swear I saw this: Drawings in fieldwork notebooks, namely my own*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Thibaud, J.-P. (2011). The Sensory Fabric of Urban Ambiances. *The Senses and Society*, 6(2), 203–215. <https://doi.org/10.2752/174589311X12961584845846>
- Thibaud, J.-P. (2015). The backstage of urban ambiances: When atmospheres pervade everyday experience. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 15, 39–46. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2014.07.001>
- Topping, A. (2021, October 1). What is being done to tackle violence against women in the UK? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/01/what-is-being-done-to-tackle-violence-against-women-in-the-uk>
- Uhrich, S., & Benkenstein, M. (2010). Sport Stadium Atmosphere: Formative and Reflective Indicators for Operationalizing the Construct. *Journal of Sport Management*, 24(2), 211–237. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.24.2.211>
- Ulber, M. (2017). *Landschaft und Atmosphäre: Künstlerische Übersetzungen*. transcript.
- Väliaho, P. (2022). *Projecting spirits: Speculation, providence, and early modern optical media*. Stanford University Press.
- van Alphen, E. (2013). Looking at Drawing: Theoretical Distinctions and their Usefulness. In *Image studies: Theory and practice*. Routledge. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10632506>
- Vannini, P., Waskul, D., Gottschalk, S., & Ellis-Newstead, T. (2012). Making Sense of the Weather: Dwelling and Weathering on Canada's Rain Coast. *Space and Culture*, 15(4), 361–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331211412269>

- Vasseleu, C. (2002). *Textures of light: Vision and touch in Irigaray, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty*. Routledge. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10070610>
- Virilio, P. (2009). *The aesthetics of disappearance* (P. Beitchman, Ed.). Semiotext.
- Vogels, I. (2008). Atmosphere Metrics. In J. H. D. M. Westerink, M. Ouwerkerk, T. J. M. Overbeek, W. F. Pasveer, & B. de Ruyter (Eds.), *Probing Experience* (Vol. 8, pp. 25–41). Springer Netherlands. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6593-4\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6593-4_3)
- Wagemans, J., Elder, J. H., Kubovy, M., Palmer, S. E., Peterson, M. A., Singh, M., & von der Heydt, R. (2012). A century of Gestalt psychology in visual perception: I. Perceptual grouping and figure–ground organization. *Psychological Bulletin*, *138*(6), 1172–1217. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029333>
- Walker, W. H., Bumgarner, J. R., Walton, J. C., Liu, J. A., Meléndez-Fernández, O. H., Nelson, R. J., & DeVries, A. C. (2020). Light Pollution and Cancer. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*, *21*(24), 9360. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms21249360>
- Wang, Z. (2014, January 29). *An Interview with Gernot Böhme*. <https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=713>
- Warner, M. (2014). *Once upon a time: A short history of fairy tale* (First edition). Oxford University Press.
- West, H. G. (2008). *Ethnographic Sorcery*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Whyte, W. H. (Director). (1988). *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* [Film]. Direct Cinema Limited.
- Wiles, E. (2020). Three branches of literary anthropology: Sources, styles, subject matter. *Ethnography*, *21*(2), 280–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138118762958>
- Wu, J., Dauchy, R. T., Tirrell, P. C., Wu, S. S., Lynch, D. T., Jitawatanarat, P., Burrington, C. M., Dauchy, E. M., Blask, D. E., & Greene, M. W. (2011). Light at Night Activates IGF-1R/PDK1 Signaling and Accelerates Tumor Growth in Human Breast Cancer Xenografts. *Cancer Research*, *71*(7), 2622–2631. <https://doi.org/10.1158/0008-5472.CAN-10-3837>
- Wulff, H. (Ed.). (2016). *The anthropologist as writer: Genres and contexts in the twenty-first century*. Berghahn Books.
- Yang, H., Berry, J., & Kalms, N. (2022). Perceptions of safety in cities after dark. In S. Sumartojo, *Lighting Design in Shared Public Spaces* (1st ed., pp. 83–103). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003182610-5>
- Zardini, M. (2005). *Sense of the city: An alternate approach to urbanism*. Canadian Centre for Architecture = Centre canadien d'architecture.
- Zumthor, P. (2006a). *Atmospheres: Architectural environments - surrounding objects*. Birkhäuser.
- Zumthor, P. (2006b). *Thinking architecture*. Birkhäuser.
- Zylinska, J. (2017). *Nonhuman photography*. MIT Press.