Accepted: 16 November 2020

DOI: 10.1111/tran.12424

REGULAR PAPER

WILEY IBG Royal Geographical Society with IBG

Walking with light and the discontinuous experience of urban change

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Funding information
Leverhulme Trust – ECF-2017-389.

This paper is concerned with the affective power of light, darkness, and illumination and their role in exposing and obscuring processes of rapid urban change. Little academic attention has focused on how lighting informs multiple, overlapping, and intersecting urban temporalities and mediates our experience of an ever-changing city. This paper foregrounds a walk through the illuminated city at night as an epistemic opportunity to develop an embodied account of material and temporal change in ways that disrupt the aesthetic organisation of the sensible world at night. By detailing the discontinuous experience of walking through differently lit spaces, the paper develops novel ways of conceptualising the experience of urban change that unsettle common understandings of subjectivity, temporality, and the city. The paper draws on a single night's walk from Canning Town to Canary Wharf in east London – an area that has recently undergone rapid change, including the erection of enclaves of high-rise development. By accentuating the shared experiences of walking with light, we reveal the affective capacities of light and dark to conceal and expose wider material, embodied, and temporal urban changes but also how we might challenge the organisation of the nocturnal field of the sensible.

KEYWORDS
lighting, night, temporality, urban change, verticality, walking

1 | INTRODUCTION

In many cities, residents are accustomed to living with the uncertainties of large-scale and long-term regeneration projects (Lewis, 2017), employing different ways of coping with urban change (Koch & Latham, 2012), not simply by enduring the passing of time but through the "living of time" (Blunt et al., 2020). Such practices reveal "an urban capacity to negotiate complexity" (Amin, 2008, p. 12), foregrounding "urban regeneration as a fragile and dynamic process rather than a linear chronological continuum" (Degen, 2018, p. 16). Our approach extends this work by focusing on the mundane practice of walking through urban spaces undergoing rapid, disruptive change. Yet, diverging from dominant tendencies to focus on the day, we turn our attention to the night-time, exploring how experiences of urban change are mediated by artificial lighting and darkness. We follow in a longstanding tradition of writing and walking through nocturnal London and other cities – from Dickens' (2010) *Night Walks* to Sandhu's (2010) *Night Haunts* (see also Beaumont, 2015; Dunn, 2016; Miéville, 2012) – to explore how temporal, embodied, and material urban changes are marked by the uneven distribution of light and darkness.

At night, a plethora of competing light sources reveal how successive waves of urban change and infrastructural upgrades have been introduced (Cubitt, 2013; Jakle, 2001; Otter, 2008). Recently, geographers have warned of the potentially homogenising and sensorially sterilising effects of contemporary lighting practices (Edensor & Millington, 2018) and shown how such effects can be ameliorated throughout the design process (Ebbensgaard, 2019b). Scholars have also discussed moral and aesthetic landscapes of darkness and illumination (Dunnett, 2015; Edensor, 2012; Edensor & Millington, 2009) and explored how residents make sense of changes in lighting, as with the widespread introduction of LEDs (Ebbensgaard, 2019a; Pink & Sumartojo, 2017). This paper expands such concerns by investigating how urban lightscapes mediate our experiences of urban change and manifest different forms of power. Yet by foregrounding the discontinuities experienced while walking through differently lit spaces, we unsettle notions that urban illumination is bound within discrete spaces and times. In seeking to articulate more diverse accounts of the experience of urban change, we foreground the night walk as a method for disrupting dominant forms of aesthetic nocturnal organisation through disclosing embodied, affective experiences of lightscapes.

Our walk takes us from Canning Town in the borough of Newham to Canary Wharf in the neighbouring borough of Tower Hamlets, through an area of great ethnic diversity generated by successive waves of migration over two centuries. This former heartland of empire on the north bank of the River Thames was once lined with docks named after their connections with colonial destinations. Replete with swathes of dense, working-class housing, markets, power stations, and factories, the area has been transformed by post-war public housing developments that gradually filled in extensive areas of bomb damage and, subsequently, by vast regeneration projects initiated in the 1980s. In tandem with this process of discontinuous urban renewal, the area has been illuminated in piecemeal fashion by a host of agents – local authorities, Transport for London, independent housing associations, and private landowners – with little attention to coordination. According to lighting designer Mark Major (2015, p. 153), London's incongruous illumination and the lack of borough and city-wide coordination have "broken" the city's architectural hierarchy and "diminished" its experiential qualities. Without a concerted lighting strategy for the city, in 2020 current Mayor Sadiq Khan commissioned the think tank Centre for London to scrutinise London's lighting and to inform future Mayoral and borough policies. Similarly, flagship projects like the Illuminated River (n.d.), which illuminates 14 bridges along the city's River Thames, exemplifies attempts to achieve greater coordination in London's illumination. Yet currently the city is undergoing an unprecedented period of privately funded, high-rise development that is further diversifying the night time environment in new ways: Of the 541 towers above 20 stories that were planned in 2018, 45% are located in east London and 20% in Tower Hamlets alone, joining London's first consolidated cluster of "iconic" high-rise buildings on Canary Wharf. On our walk, we pass through areas where recent massive, mixed-use, high-rise developments are bringing dramatic transformation.

Geographers argue that the surge in financialised forms of private territorialisation (Appert & Montes, 2015; Kaika, 2010) are turning parts of London into archipelagos of secluded, luxury enclaves (Atkinson, 2016; Graham, 2015). Across social and public media, these developments have received further critical attention, not for their obtrusive presence on the nocturnal skyline but paradoxically for their invisibility. Shrouded in darkness, residential towers appear with what Graham terms "dead windows" (2015, p. 633), prompting critics to question the wider impacts of these "'zombie' estates of absentees" (Jenkins, 2017, n.p.). Here, light and darkness emerge as powerful agencies in mediating urban change, exposing socio-economic inequality. By drawing critical attention to how urban lighting bestows regularity, aesthetic conformity, and selectivity in these development schemes, we follow Rancière's (2009) approach to regimes of the sensible in questioning lighting's role in distributing the visible and invisible in ways that come to appear as "natural." By walking across developments lit according to different schemes and also experiencing illumination outside these schemes, we foreground both how power is manifest through lighting and the discontinuities of the changing city. Critically, we suggest that neither nocturnal design nor the ways in which we inhabit it are wholly determined by dominant aesthetics of urban regeneration.

In developing a critical framework for conceptualising how light and darkness mediate the experience of urban change, we situate the study within key geographical debates about urban illumination and power, the night-time, and walking. Subsequently, we describe and reflect on different sequential stages of our nocturnal journey through a succession of vignettes, drawing on auto-ethnographic and dialogical accounts of walking together. By foregrounding our embodied experiences of moving through the changing landscape, we argue that walking with light challenges the dominant organisation of the nocturnal field of the sensible.

2 | URBAN ILLUMINATION, POWER, AND THE SENSIBLE

Illumination is invariably a means to control bodies, transmit values, shape identities, assert values, manipulate meanings, and inspire feelings. Since the earliest attempts to systematically illuminate spaces, monarchs, commercial enterprises,

advertisers, state authorities, place-makers, civic bodies, and bureaucrats have sought to produce nocturnal urban environments that attract, control, and organise inhabitants.

First, lighting practices create "new centres of power and new margins of exclusion" (Koslofsky, 2011, p. 280), wherein certain areas and buildings are conspicuously illuminated whereas others are shrouded in gloom. Political authority, corporate presence, and class status can clearly be traced in the organisation of lighting across the urban nightscape, signifying the unequal distribution of financial, social, and political power. Especially overt expressions of power stage nocturnal spectacles, as with the notorious Nazi rallies at Nuremberg for which Albert Speer designed "cathedrals of light" that evoked immense classical columns fashioned by 130 giant searchlights. In London, however, light was introduced gradually, in piecemeal fashion, producing a geography in which artificial illumination became "a symbol and a determinant of urban differentiation" (Otter, 2008, p. 335). New regimes of spatial ordering implemented a calculated invisibility, illuminating that which was esteemed but consigning to darkness features and districts conceived as less deserving of visual attention. State institutions, heritage buildings, monuments, and wealthy areas continue to be highlighted against the contrastingly dark backcloth of less venerated realms, inscribing particular identities and values on urban space. In marking wealth and power, such topographies have inscribed massive distinctions between different realms of class and race, as in 19th-century American cities (Baldwin, 2004). In contemporary times, while a selective aesthetic ordering persists in the glaring illumination of high-rise corporate buildings and iconic structures, the nocturnal design of upmarket residential buildings is increasingly embracing darkness and softer, integrated, and indirect illumination (Ebbensgaard, 2019b). Such crepuscular designs contrast with the city's "rougher" quarters, with the harsh floodlighting and poorer quality lighting of lowlier housing estates (Sloane, 2016). While, as Nye suggests, light and darkness historically expose the competition "between public and private lighting, and between collective and individualistic visions of the urban night landscape" (2015, p. 31), recent changes in lighting design complicate these established binaries. Large parts of London's "public" lighting – street lighting, traffic lights, the illumination of public housing – are managed by private consultants through private finance initiatives (PFIs). As the marginalisation of local expertise diminishes the capacities of local authorities to shape the night, the recent Mayoral initiative cited above with Centre for London seems welcome if somewhat cosmetic. On our walk through a range of developments across east London, we explore how the shifting terrains of aesthetic organisation are reshaping the attentional orientation of our senses.

Second, and relatedly, lighting is commonly deployed to competitively assert status by aestheticising individual homes and neighbourhoods, manifesting cultural capital through the expression of "good taste." Both domestic and commercial illumination have become swept up in taste-making strategies, practices entangled with intensified consumption and lifestyle promotion, and are reconfiguring class identities. Light is increasingly adopted in design-led regeneration, where serialised "designscapes" – an agglomeration of "brand design, architecture, urban planning, events and exhibitions" – articulate shared tastes, motivations and connections to produce "aesthetic consent" (Julier, 2005, p. 874). Such illuminated expressions of distinction commonly vilify older technologies and vernacular styles as outmoded or lacking taste (Edensor & Millington, 2009). These recent trends to impose serialised lighting echo the ethos of outsourcing expertise through PFI contracting and technocratic solutions to uniform application. Yet while the promise of a "technological fix" has been central in driving the replacement of sodium vapour lighting with LEDs (Bille, 2019; Ebbensgaard, 2019a), as we emphasise, London's lightscape is currently typified by multiplicity and discontinuity in which no wholly dominant approach to light design prevails, and our nocturnal walk seeks to experience these divergent regimes and styles.

Third, illumination has long been deployed to control movement and presence in nocturnal space. In Victorian London, Otter (2008) discusses how illumination belonged to an array of technological applications that drastically enhanced urban safety, mobility, and health as part of a moral, political, and sensory bourgeois refashioning of the city. This biopolitical reordering normalised surveillance practices and technologies, making the disciplining and policing of social order operate more directly through the site of bodily perception. Such technological applications have been extended, with searchlights used to regulate bodies in dark spaces, domestic and industrial security lighting widespread, and bright lighting deployed to render images recorded by CCTV legally admissible. Nonetheless, as Williams declares, darkness provides a cloak for alternative and oppositional practices that contest these ordering impulses: "[B]ecause of its transgressive meanings and societally harmful uses, darkness threatens to deterritorialize the rationalizing order of society … when it obscures, obstructs, or otherwise hinders the deployment of the strategies, techniques, and technologies" of regulation (2008, p. 518). The nighttime city thus remains subject to a shifting spatial politics wherein certain spaces are contingently commodified, regulated, contested, claimed, and abandoned by different parties.

Fourth, Otter's (2008) observation that the reconfiguration of Victorian London's nightscape was concerned with ordering the senses prefigures how lighting has become integral to producing, perceiving and sensing bodies. This importantly foregrounds how a politics of light must therefore, as Rancière suggests, revolve "around what is seen and what can be said

about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (2009, p. 13). Lighting is a key element in how the sensible is distributed through "the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common" (Rancière, 2009, p. 24). Lighting orchestrates what is seen and unseen, which things and places glow, and which styles of illumination are prevalent. Existing before we enter space and without our participation in their design or installation, illumination influences how we become habituated to nocturnal space, unreflexively performing sensory and practical habits. Tolia-Kelly insists that "the sphere of the senses is not a reified sphere that operates beyond the economic or political" for "aesthetic practices are co-opted into the expressive infrastructure" (2019, p. 137). Importantly, she contends that such practices instantiate structures of feeling that are "sanctioned, reproduced and maintained" (2019, p. 127). Relatedly, Hudson argues that our sensual realm has become entangled with "the material life of capital" (2020, p. 2) in ways that obscure its mode of operation. The senses are also imbricated in how illumination expresses the spatial inequality, stylistic claims of distinction, surveillant technologies, and standardisation discussed above. Yet this is not to infer that dominant regimes of sensibility invariably prevail, for possibilities for revealing the power behind sensory arrangements and offering alternative modes of organisation and new bodily capacities through what Rancière calls "dissensus" may emerge (Kullman, 2019).

Political and creative acts of dissensus by subaltern, oppositional, and radical groups – for instance, light artists, guerrilla light groups, and social lighting designers (Edensor, 2017) – create possibilities for producing "new taxonomies, paradigms, and palettes of sensibilities" (Tolia-Kelly, 2019, p. 124). In addition, dissensus may emerge in encounters with outmoded or unorthodox designs, or by involuntary memories triggered by unanticipated sensations. This underlines how the impacts of lighting do not merely accord with those intended by designers but are configured by people into their everyday lives, their tastes, memories, and predilections to shape apprehension and interpretation. This is especially salient for light, which is always more than symbolic and representational, for illuminations "radiate presence, projecting their qualities outwards and colouring the environs, seeping into neighbouring spaces, colouring and shedding light on surfaces, bodies and things, mixing with other lights and being reflected in clouds, water and glass" (Thibaud, 2011, p. 211). Light's powerful propensity to tincture surroundings provokes affective and emotional resonances in the sensing body, activating passions, instigating sensual pleasures and discomforts, and attuning us to the tone of place (Bille, 2017).

In exploring a sensory politics of light, we seek to understand how *our* bodies register the changes in the urban nightscape through which *we* walk, exploring how forms of light might redistribute our sensory and affective capacities, as we now detail.

3 | WALKING…

As we move through the nocturnal city, our perceptive registers constantly adjust to shifting, contrasting, and overlapping lighting regimes and the insurgent contingencies of temporary and transient illuminations. The analytical attention we pay to these transitory moments is inspired by Rancière's (2009) aforementioned notion of dissensus: the gap that appears in the existing power relations that orient us towards moments "when politics appears and disappears again" (Kullman, 2019, p. 285). The night walk, we argue, holds the promise of attuning our senses to disturbances in the consensual distribution of the sensible, for walking is an embodied engagement through which attention is drawn to distinctive affordances – "the textures, forms and materials that combine and make up the urban landscapes in which we participate" (Hunter, 2017, p. 30). As Benediktsson and Lund contend, "the lives of human beings are tangled up with the temporalities of constantly unfolding landscapes, in a never-ending journey" (2010, p. 6). Walking also exemplifies how much of our experience is "configured ongoingly" (Sumartojo & Pink, 2018, p. 129). As Wylie contends, affective and sensory experiences change in response to the "shifting mood, tenor, colour or intensity of place and situation" (2005, p. 236) as the walker continuously makes connections with and away from the landscape (Lund, 2012). This aligns with Ingold's assertion that humans "make their way *through* a world-in-formation rather than *across* its pre-formed surface" (2007, p. 32). While place and subjectivity are constantly unfolding in relation, our capacities to negotiate these changing percepts are continuously made and remade.

Accordingly, we explore how walking methods may "capitalise on the environment as a prompt to discussion" (Macpherson, 2016, p. 426), following Brigstocke and Noorani's foregrounding of attunement, to explore how "[t]o attune is to tune in or to tune out; it is to calibrate our bodies as instruments" (2016, p. 2). Yet an "invitation to attune" designates a situation that will often be punctuated by "moments when … we resist, ignore or undermine [the invitation]" (Sumartojo & Pink, 2018, p. 121). For this depends on our capacities, desires, and willingness to "go along" or not, suggesting that attentional forms of orientation are not only highly subjective and unpredictable but also subtly chart amorphous and indistinct boundaries of sensory inclusion and exclusion.

Accordingly, we recognise the dangers of reproducing universalist accounts of experience that reduce bodies to a singular plane. The diverse and situated understandings of our experience of light and walking are shaped by the historical and socio-cultural conditions that reminds us how "through their racialized, gendered and sexualized markedness, [bodies] magnetize various capacities for being affected" (Tolia-Kelly, 2006, p. 215). Recognising how experiences at night are scripted through gendered (Valentine, 1989), cultured (Bille, 2019), classed (Edensor & Millington, 2009), sexualised (Williams, 2008), and racialised (Henery, 2019) differences, we acknowledge the limitations of our night walk as a method. For instance, as we will describe, we walked beneath an underpass, alongside a busy road, and in areas of minimal lighting, but were not unduly concerned with safety and encountered no threatening or physically discomforting episodes. Others may have experienced the walk very differently, emotionally and physically, and in terms of that to which they attended or became attuned. We do not wish to elevate our subjective experiences to a universal truth; rather, we seek to ground the often-abstract discussion of how urban change shapes experience through our embodied, personalised, and dialogical accounts (Lewis, 2017). Often, our cultural differences (one Danish, the other British) emerged through discussions of our immediate aesthetic judgements towards the transitions between bounded lighting schemes, providing an opportunity to situate our discussions about site-specific lighting in relation to wider socio-cultural concerns and our own prior extensive studies that have attuned us to attend to lighting. By paying attention to the edges of these schemes, we tried to discern how regimes of sensibility were established through dominant lighting schemes within bounded sites and where they blended or clashed with other forms of lighting we sought out gaps or "disruptions to dominant orders" (Kullman, 2019, p. 287).

Finally, the continuous movement of our night walk provided a method for "grounding" the abstract experience of urban change and the bedazzling experience of rapid verticalisation. As Brown suggests, horizontal movement through the city's skyscrapers symbolically "reengraves the city's grid with [our] physical bodies" (2017, p. 137) offering the potential for sensing otherwise and "[re]writing a relation to modern architecture by way of [our] urban navigation" (2017, p. 156). Our walk modestly seeks to rewrite our relation to the vertical emblems of urban change through partial, personalised accounts of how light and darkness mediated our experiences of movement and mobility across east London.

4 | ... AND TALKING

Acknowledging that there are many ways to walk – ambling, cruising, or purposefully striding – Hickey et al. envisage how "walking affords a shared sense of the experience of being together in place, played-out as this is through the shared … traversal of the terrain of the field, and traversal of the terrain of experience" (2018, p. 40). Walking together was therefore critical in registering our shifting sensory, affective, and intellectual responses to the lit environments we encountered and reflecting on the dominant regimes of the sensible. While most "academic" walking is either undertaken by the solitary walker (Wylie, 2005) or with researcher participants (Degen et al., 2008), we consider that by walking together we could focus more acutely on the urban nocturnal landscape. We came together to register our impressions when lights solicited our curiosity, pleasure, or repulsion in episodes of thinking-together along the route and to take photographs of the scene under discussion (Sumartojo et al., 2019).

Conversation was thus an integral part of our journey, emerging in response to the light we encountered, and initiating "thick descriptions" of the qualities of different illuminated spaces that extended beyond the walk, as we shared ideas and impressions in pubs and from our offices and homes via email. The dialogical method of talking *in* and *ex situ* encouraged reflection on the significance of *our* experiences in exploring how light and darkness mediates experiences of urban change.

5 | THE WALK: FROM CANNING TOWN TO CITY ISLAND

5.1 | The Canning Town underpass

On exiting Canning Town tube station, we are confronted by high-rise developments comprising mixed-tenure housing, shops, and a hotel. We stand before the once dominant concrete structure, the A13 flyover, now diminished by the lofty towers of Rathbone Market to its north (delivering 652 homes of mixed tenure) and the Hallsville Quarter to its south (delivering 1,100 mixed tenure homes). The sodium vapour lights that (still) extend along the elevated road are outshone by more recent lighting surrounding the massive vertical structures that reflects in their polished stone, brushed steel, and glass surfaces.

Walking through Canning Town requires navigation through diverse built forms; it feels like a place littered with residues from years of planning "from above." From the large post-war redevelopments of bomb sites and deteriorating terraced housing to modernist architectural schemes and traffic planning projects, successive waves of urban redevelopment have shaped the area in seemingly conflictual ways. After the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation and the arrival of the Docklands Light Railway spurred redevelopment in the 1980s and 1990s, preparation for the London 2012 Olympics provided the impetus for large-scale master-planned regeneration.

A team of architects and landscape architects were commissioned "to create a more pleasant environment for pedestrians and other road users" (London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, 2009, p. 4) and facilitate easier movement for pedestrians "faced by cul-de-sacs, dead ends and a confusing street layout" (London Borough of Newham, 2007, p. 4). The space underneath the A13 flyover was identified as a key site to connect the various stages of the development. The Council opened up the underpass as a key route for pedestrians and commissioned artistic events to "animate" the space. Event makers "The Brick Box" proposed an eight-week-long festival underneath the flyover and a one-night lighting festival, "Light Night Canning Town," to "entertain and illuminate, inspire and celebrate" (The Brick Box, 2013). Both projects ran from 2013 to 2015, and were enthusiastically welcomed by local residents, who commended the possibilities for socialising that had otherwise been scarce in a neighbourhood characterised by pub closures. Subsequently, the council commissioned lighting designers to develop a permanent design for the underpass to deliver a public realm that would attract residents by day and night.

When we entered the underpass, we were startled by the contrast with the lightscape of the surrounding area, immediately concurring that this illuminated space felt warm and inclusive, with stimulating visual elements. Designed in 2018 by social lighting group, "Light Follows Behaviour," linked to the socially conscious design collective "Social Light Movement" (Edensor, 2017), extensive local consultation informed the transformation of the forbidding environment into a multi-functional space that encourages people to linger, play, sit, and meet. Christened "Terry Spinks Place" after renowned local boxer, the hard textures of the brutalist pillars and ceiling have been softened by embedding LEDs into the concrete floor. They continuously change colour, radiating a soft glow on the concrete ceiling above, toning the ambience of the underpass and fostering a renewed appreciation of its brutalist geometric elements.

As we walk amid these playful lights, we linger among different people dispersed throughout the underpass's darker and more illuminated passages, socialising in small groups. Through an extensive period of experimentation, light art and design have enabled a local public realm to slowly emerge that transcends the commercial, security, or engineering imperatives that so often dominate design principles in public and pseudo-public spaces. Moreover, the public engagement process exemplifies how negotiation over the meanings of space has the potential to challenge normative understandings of design (Ebbensgaard, 2015) – an approach that dramatically contrasts with the illuminated realms that we subsequently walked through (Figure 1).

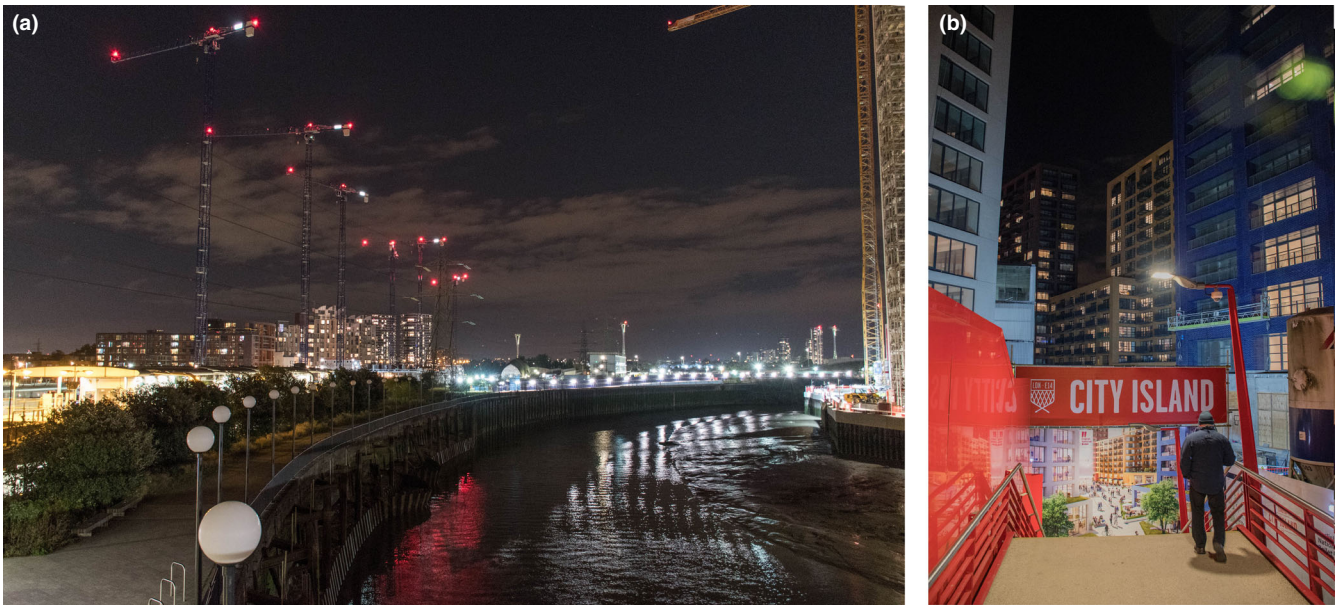

FIGURE 1 (a) The River Lea running past the Brunel Streetworks construction site. (b) Entering London City Island via the red bridge.

5.2 | Invisible cranes

Leaving the underpass, we look south down Silvertown Way, our attention suddenly subsumed by a ribbon of red lights hanging high above the ground. After brief bewilderment, we realise that they are situated to alert incoming aircraft to nearby London City Airport to the presence of construction cranes; they also caution pedestrians below of the gradual but relentless redevelopment of the area. In many cities, cranes have become a spectacular ingredient of the nightscape, illuminated in various colours to bequeath a heightened appreciation of their sculptural beauty while affectively broadcasting an image of dynamism and regeneration. Here, though, they are cloaked in darkness, the invisible cranes making the darkened space in between lights and ground feel somewhat uncanny; a seeming empty realm but one colonised by an overarching power. Indeed, the glowing lights high in the night sky do signify an alien intrusion: a property developer that has purchased another swathe of land to build the Brunel Street Works – 975 homes of mixed tenure across buildings ranging from nine to 26 stories as well as commercial and leisure spaces. Evidently these cranes bring a promise – or a forewarning – of the inexorable territorialisation of land for private development.

5.3 | The red bridge and the River Lea

Next, we walk across the 80-metre footbridge crossing the River Lea at Bow Creek, installed in 2014 to connect Canning Town to London City Island, another high-rise development delivering 1,700 apartments across 10 towers, varying between seven and 23 stories. The bridge connects future residents to Canning Town station and town centre, and is supported by a 20-foot-high steel beam and vertical struts, painted in bright red. We remark on how it is endowed with a special magic at night as its brilliant illumination dramatically contrasts with the muted, monochrome hues of the surrounding nocturnal landscape. The luminous structure provides an indirect glow that lights up our bodies and those of others, producing a linear stage in which pedestrians are an integral part of its nocturnal appearance, inducing an awareness of ourselves as part of the landscape. Though it signifies the instrumental, design-led, place-making transformation of the neighbourhood into a patchwork of semi-public spaces, the bridge is also a public amenity that enchants the nightscape. It exemplifies how the commercial imperatives that drive the redesign of many public spaces do not prevent residents from incorporating them into everyday socialising or playing (Degen et al., 2008). As we walk across the alluring bridge and appreciate the skilled engineering and lighting design invested in staging the passage between two different boroughs, we are conscious of contributing to its performative role in staging the surrounding environment.

The bridge also offers an encounter with the non-human elements of this landscape, agencies that are unamenable to regeneration and gentrification and resist its orderly shaping (see Miéville, 2012), highlighting its artifice (Kullman, 2019). Looking down we see the flowing, rippling River Lea, nearing its entry into the Thames estuary from the Chiltern Hills, silver in reflecting the surrounding lights. The sloping banks of thick estuarine mud glisten either side of the murky waters, an implacable intrusion into this highly regulated realm of luminous towers and a tube station. We delight in the luscious, untamed viscosity that rebukes the smooth steel of the bridge and the sleek towers of London City Island, an inhuman, clammy substance that is as perilous and inconvenient as it always was.

5.4 | Entering City Island

The bridge telescopes us onto London City Island along a temporary wooden walkway and stairs around the building in progress. As we descend from the bridge, a dazzling visualisation of the future development is situated under a luminaire. The glossy CGI chimes with Degen *et al.*'s discussion of how such images are typically toned with a "visual luminescence" (2017, p. 8) that bathes not-yet-actualised urban scenes in a lively, convivial atmosphere. Such images, they contend, work "to depict and present specific embodied regimes and affective sensory experiences to appeal to clients and consumers" (2017, p. 8). This lambent image of London City Island sharply visualises the crystalline interiors of apartments, populated with busy or relaxing inhabitants, and a square packed with diners, pedestrians, and cyclists, socialising and hanging out. A vision of cosmopolitan, stylish urban living is orchestrated to suffuse the imaginary atmosphere, soliciting the attention of would-be-purchasers, and underpinning Kaika's suggestion that the symbolic authority of London's iconic architecture teaches "society *what* to desire and *how* to desire it" (2010, p. 458). We both admit that we are ineluctably lured by this fantastical vision.

This anticipatory suggestion is augmented by a window in a temporary hoarding that reveals an unpopulated construction site, a still life composition of tools, machines, and construction materials, seemingly left midway through busy work, but soon to be sparked into motion the following morning. The site is glaringly floodlit to ward off intruders and enable

CCTV footage to identify potential interlopers. This almost theatrical illumination stages the construction process like a public display of surgery in an operating theatre. We are temporarily mesmerised by the sight of illuminated interior spaces where metal beams provide support for grey plaster walls perforated with holes from which extrude spaghetti like bundles of cables. Like the Berlin construction sites that briefly served as tourist attractions (Till, 2005), this vivid spectacle honours and demystifies the labour required to build such a development while cultivating anticipation about the promise of an emerging place.

5.5 | London City Island

London City Island, in reality a 12-acre peninsula, was formerly a poor, working-class community known as Orchard Place. In the late 1930s, following frequent flooding, the remaining inhabitants were rehoused, and the peninsula housed ironworks and a vegetable oil refinery until the turn of the millennium. Promotional material indicates that the island is being reinvented as a "new exclusive island neighbourhood": "rising up at the point where the Thames meets the River Lea, London City Island – set against big river skies and stunning views – is a cooler sibling to the mighty skyscrapers of Canary Wharf" (London City Island, 2017, p. 39). With a "nod to the area's artisan past," this development mimics the industrial warehouse aesthetic and loft apartment style described by Sharon Zukin (2010) in her critique of New York's gentrification. Indeed, the vertiginous design sought to create a "micro-Manhattan," yet with its own aesthetic identity "designed to be clearly, unmistakably that of London City Island" (London City Island, 2017, p. 62). Each of the 10 towering buildings have a distinctive colour – blue, red, white, orange, black – to pay homage to the pigments deployed throughout the "history of artisan and maritime production" (2017, p. 61). Capitalising on the island's relative seclusion, the developer has been granted an ideal topography for recreating a self-sufficient environment replete with al fresco spaces, waterside parks, bars and restaurants, artist studios, boutique shops, a school, and a private residents' club, culturally augmented by the presence of the London Film School and the English National Ballet's headquarters. Echoing Florida's (2005) mantra that the so-called "creative class" are the drivers of urban development, London City Island is marketed as the ideal home for "creatives"; online you can meet four such creative "islanders": a photographer, a film maker, a ceramics artist, and an animator.

Like most residential towers, the island's skyline is not illuminated by extensive exterior lighting but gains luminescence through interior, domestic lighting, looming subtly against the black backcloth of the sky. The soft light spilling from these interiors and glowing lower ground floors complements the prevailing aesthetic of indirect lighting, carefully integrated into furniture and buildings (Ebbensgaard, 2019b). The lighting scheme's soft glow produces an intimate, ambient atmosphere that extends the domestic intimacy of a cosily lit home to create a sense of communal domesticity in shared living space: people arrive "home" to a realm in which to enjoy "boutiques, delis and restaurants spilling out into the night air" (London City Island, 2017, p. 93). Here, the nocturnal field of the visible solicits a sense of shared economic and cultural privilege. Walking through this not-yet-populated space, we cannot help but feel beguiled by the ambient glow and reflect in discussion that this "invitation to attune" (Sumartojo & Pink, 2018, p. 121) fosters a powerfully consensual distribution of the sensible. The affective allure elicits the kind of "seductive logic" that, as Allen (2006) suggests, exercises its power not through exclusion but by conveying an illusory impression of inclusiveness; we feel invited inside the sensory boundaries of this regime where dissensus has been smoothed away by aesthetic consent (cf. Julier, 2005). But before long, this aesthetic regime starts to crumble.

5.6 | Walking along the Aspen Way

Leaving London City Island behind, we find our way to the Aspen Way. Like the A13 flyover, this elevated concrete structure epitomises a singular modernist functionality: walking is a strictly subsidiary activity, and this stretch of road is defined by automotive servitude rather than "noctambulation." Bathed in sodium lights, the structure forms a golden river that cuts through towering developments typically illuminated in blue and white. Replete with "light clutter," the disparate lighting includes orange streetlights, illuminated tower "crowns," lurid advertising hoardings, neon shop signs, domestic illumination, and residential garlands, while the head and tail lights of vehicles and the internal glow of the DLR surge and fade. Light clutter is commonly decried by dark sky campaigners as a form of light pollution and by light designers, who contend that it reduces legibility and diminishes a clear sense of place (Major, 2015). Yet for us, in spilling from interior realms, signage, and moving vehicles, this illuminated excess bestows public space with vitality and signs of life (Ebbensgaard, 2019a). Indeed, this cluttered scene avoids the distinctive master planning aesthetic that informs the design of London City Island and persists in other sterile, homogeneous nocturnal environments (Edensor & Millington, 2018).

Moreover, it reveals that some areas of this part of east London have not succumbed to the intense pressures of property development. The diversity of the lighting technologies and aesthetics we behold discloses the contingency of urban planning and development processes, contributing to the production of time-deepened, complex lightscapes (Figure 2).

More specifically, the predominance of the increasingly obsolete high-pressure sodium lights adds texture to the air and grain to the street, enchanting the regimented roadscape with an orange wash. While these serialised, standardised, and uniformly installed streetlights evoke a pure functionality, we suddenly sense that we are walking through multiple histories and an ever-emerging nightscape that is once more being reconfigured. Being bathed in the sodium luminosity is charged with a familiarity borne of its former ubiquity, as it suffuses embodied perception, generating a haze before the eyes and draining the colour from faces. Immersed in the orange glow, we discuss how we both feel subsumed by a curious nostalgia, situated amid the familiar sensations of the past and the emerging lightscape of the present. The complex layering of overlapping and intersecting temporalities becomes especially evident when walking through illuminated nightscapes, reminding us that we too are part of the histories of diversely illuminated cities.

5.7 | Poplar Dock

Disoriented by the heavy flow of traffic on the Aspen Way, we take a path away from a large roundabout and find ourselves in a wholly different illuminated realm: a vast, much darker space surrounding an inner dock – the fashionable Poplar Dock Marina. As we approach the marina, couched by willow trees to the north, a cluster of high-rise buildings descending southwards on the east side, and low-rise residential buildings on the opposite side, the hum from traffic fades. Striking vernacular and fashionably designed forms of lighting jostle for attention. A billowing landscape of inhabited narrowboats, tugboats, sailing boats, and rowboats connected by a floating network of pedestrian platforms furnished with informal light chains, interior lighting, and moving lights. Their homespun appearance contrasts with the minimalist street lighting and illuminated windows of the adjacent residences that are reflected in the still waters, a medley of white, yellow, and red smears supplemented by two vertical, cobalt blue lines of light that vividly outline the sides of a building. Reflections of the rippling water play in the glass facades of the residential building balconies, while the soft yellow glow streaming through the drawn curtains of the windows of a narrow boat, also reflected in the water, offer a sense of intimacy within this somewhat secluded oasis. As we slow down and chat in whispers, we are reminded of the "invitation to attune" to this quieter and calmer realm.

Yet far away, high in the Horizons Tower, a wholly more animated scene emerges: the flashing, changing colours of a party, pulsing illuminated signs of human activity made strange by the lack of any discernible musical sounds. Initially we feel as if we are missing out on what might be a joyous, riotous occasion. In the calm, hushed atmosphere of the dock, the flashing lights accentuate the vertical stratification of populations (Graham, 2015), spawning an imaginary of the secluded, luxury lifestyles of glamorous Londoners (Atkinson, 2016). For us, popular cultural representations continuously swarm

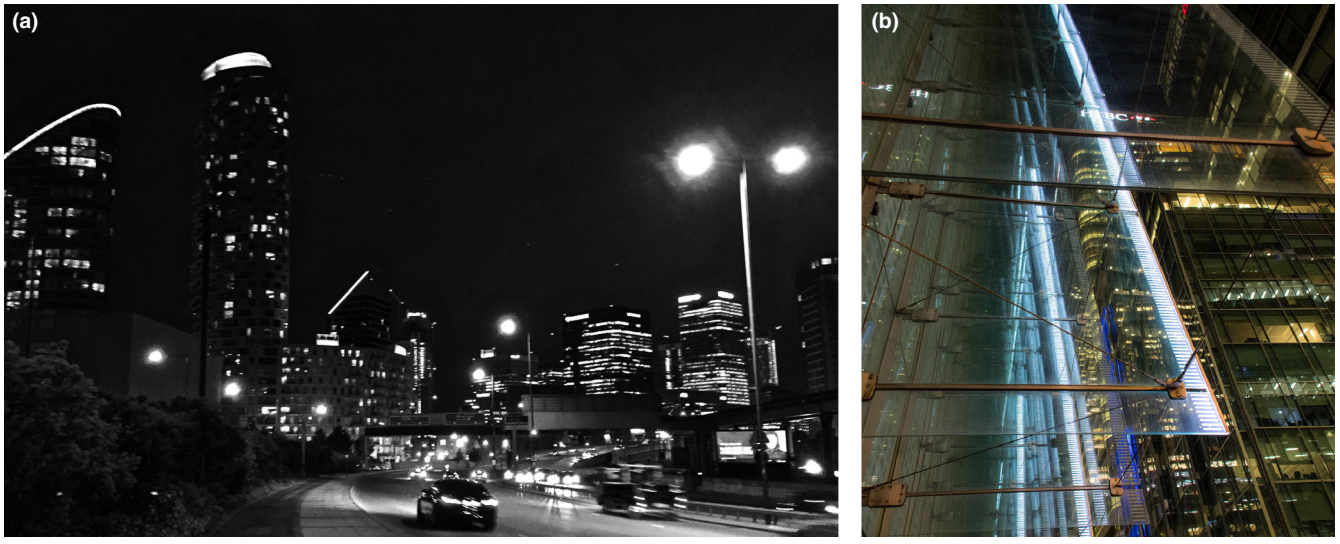

FIGURE 2 (a) Aspen Way looking towards Canary Wharf. (b) Light reflections and refraction on Canary Wharf.

through our apprehension of the world, and as Macpherson asserts, we never simply perceive an unmediated reality for "seeing involves movement, intention, memory, and imagination" (2009, p. 1049). The animated lights in the tower provoke us into making sense of this nocturnal scene; following Mitch Rose, it transformed "the vagaries and ramblings of meaning, attachment, and desire circulating in the landscape into sense – that is, into something that can be envisioned, set before our mind's eye, or imagined in a mental tableau" (2006, p. 537).

Further away, a cluster of half-built towers that protrude from Wood Wharf signify another massive residential and mixed-use development. The estate will deliver 3,300 homes distributed across a range of high-rise towers, but critically, their nocturnal presence will be muted: the developer has made it a condition that the light design of each tower is subdued in order to retain the nocturnal dominance of the commercial towers on Canary Wharf to which we are drawing closer.

5.8 | Billingsgate market

The subtle gleamings, glints, and reflections of the lambent dock environments are brusquely shattered by the onslaught of light that greets us when we gaze down from the road to overlook the 13-acre site on the Isle of Dogs, on which since 1982 the UK's largest inland market, Billingsgate fish market, has been located. As Lyon discusses, the site is "a tightly defined temporal and spatial frame for the exchange and physical redistribution of goods" (2016, p. 2), bordered with high walls and railings. The huge, low, rectangular market building is surrounded by a tarmac expanse of parking spaces and loading bays, large trucks and corrugated iron sheds. At Billingsgate, trade commences at 4 am and finishes at 8:30 am. Lyon (2016) writes evocatively about the phases of business within the brightly lit interior of the market, a bustling scene that is difficult to imagine from outside. In the quiescence of the late evening, imposing halogen floodlights evenly cast their brilliant white light across the asphalt, functional lighting that makes no concessions to aesthetic considerations. It ensures that unloading and loading produce, stacking and storing, and driving and parking large vehicles can be carried out efficiently and safely during the very busy hours of darkness. The pragmatic luminosity of this floodlit nocturnal hive facilitates the work of those who supply London's food, and prompts our memories of working on the factory night shift when younger. The deep industrial history of this east London setting has not yet succumbed to pervasive surrounding development processes. This is another stretch of land that has resisted the aesthetic nocturnal uniformity that such schemes would extend (Degen, 2018), as amply demonstrated after dark.

5.9 | Canary Wharf

As we enter the semi-private estate of Canary Wharf, we have become familiar with its iconic architecture, guided by the cluster of gleaming giants in the distance since setting off, and informed by their reproduction in popular film, television, and photography as potent signifiers of cosmopolitan modernity. The tall commercial towers here distinguish themselves from residential towers by announcing their presence against the backdrop of the night-time sky, luminous business names gleaming from their crowns: HSBC, Citi Group, Bank of America, KPMG, Barclays, JP Morgan. While local planning prevents any advertising of products, company names are allowed to radiate power across the city, selling the vertical fantasy of power invested in global finance (Hayden, 1977).

We are spellbound by the spectacular architectural forms: at ground level the towering glass and steel structures meet the street with luminous shine, reflection, and glare. Opulent, well-lit, spacious, and largely empty lobbies provide a transparent entrance that leads past security gates to rows of lift doors that lead upwards. While sterile, serialised, and subscribing to a global aesthetic characteristic of similar financial districts in New York or Shanghai, walking through these streets nonetheless captivates us. Gazing inwards and upwards at the luminous towers that encroach on the sky and loom over the streets, the "invitation to attune" makes us aware that our physical exclusion from the world of corporate power and global finance is strangely supplemented by an affective attraction that, similar to our experience of London City Island, gives an illusory impression of inclusiveness; we feel invited inside the sensory boundaries of this regime.

Upmarket retail outlets, restaurants, bars, and gardens suffuse this quasi-public realm with indirect, muted lighting, the soft trickle of fountains, and diffuse music, puncturing the corporate landscape and further enhancing our sense of sensory inclusion. These soothing, sociable elements surely provide respite from the stressful, high-intensity work played out above. In this alluringly toned realm of upscale dining, shopping, and drinking, modish street-level illumination produces a more diverse, glitzy aesthetic than the incipient lighting of the residential developments we have visited. The predictable presence of public art installations populates the area's squares; in Canada Square Park a curved row of luminous benches designed by German artist Bernd Spieker remain from the annual light festival, "Winter Lights" (2018). While the benches attract

attention from pedestrians, they feel as if they have been parachuted into the location with little regard for place-identity, unlike the redesigned benches installed under the A13 flyover in Canning Town.

An illuminated news feed runs along and around the corner of the Reuters building, ceaselessly reporting selective world events in real time. In addition, a large screen delivers up-to-the-minute news reports and advertisements, in front of which are six, glowing clocks on chrome poles, all showing the same time. These illuminated signifiers broadcast the exciting impression of a place continuously connected to global finance, politics, and business. The illumination of Canary Wharf is thus a seductive blend of light that signifies commercial power, sophisticated design, and the promises of leisure and consumption. For us, while it concocts an impression of a vibrant public nocturnal realm, the overwhelming, illuminated corporate architecture dominates the landscape, ultimately generating a sense of exclusion rather than inclusion.

6 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we focus on an east London urban landscape that has been undergoing dramatic rapid change for many decades and is currently experiencing an especially intense wave of regeneration. We have sought to investigate how experiences of such transformations are mediated by lighting and darkness, foregrounding the night walk as a method for disrupting emergent and dominant forms of aesthetic organisation. Accordingly, we demonstrate that walking through differently lit spaces can unsettle conventional experiences of urban illumination, for walking constitutes an embodied practice through which we can become attuned to distinctive affordances, prompting affective and sensory experiences that change in response to shifting moods and intensities. Walking and thinking together, we paused to discuss the diverse impressions of the light and darkness that we encountered. Based on these experiences, and following the insights of Rancière (2009), we suggest that the night walk can potentially facilitate a redistribution of the nocturnal field of the sensible.

While walking, we certainly became attuned to the considerable affective and sensory impact of the power that inheres in particular contemporary styles of illumination. A selective aesthetic ordering was especially evident in certain illuminated elements of the landscape. The continuous sight of Canary Wharf's corporate towers and their brightly lit logos shaped our spatial orientation in space, as did the more subtle illumination of the upmarket residential developments through which we passed. In different ways, these lighting designs mark out new centres of power and exclusion. Backed by financial institutions, private developers are increasingly taking charge of urban spaces, razing the ground to make space for vertical, self-enclosing mixed-use developments that give citizens an illusion of public inclusiveness. Certain forms of light we experienced exposed us to the emergence of an archipelago of vertical secluded enclaves, with cranes and building sites signifying schemes in process, with others already inhabited. Such lighting schemes simultaneously assert cultural capital, mobilising a taste-making strategy that underpins the increasing centrality of lifestyle, consumption, and design to middle-class identities, and reiterate an aesthetic consent that echoes globally across similar upmarket projects, bestowing regularity, uniformity, and continuity on nocturnal cities.

These powerful and stylish illuminated designs have been co-opted into an urban infrastructure that expresses political and economic power and solicits a pervasive structure of feeling. This entangling of sensation with capitalist aesthetics has, for us, produced a highly seductive nocturnal realm in which we have been bedazzled by vertical spectacle, felt inclusively invited into ersatz public spaces, and been mesmerised by shimmer, glow, and colour. City Island, Poplar Dock, and Canary Wharf possess potent lighting schemes that temporarily distracted us from the expressions of power that inhere in such strategic designs, impacts that underpin how effectively illumination can be deployed in distributing the sensible. As we have emphasised, light's non-representational qualities, its capacity to tincture spaces and bodies, generate affective and sensory responses and shape attunement, all render it a critical tool in producing an aesthetic consensus.

Yet our walk also exposes the incoherence of the wider urban lightscape, for the city rarely wholly succumbs to these homogenising tendencies. As Sumartojo and Pink (2018) emphasise, invitations to attune can be ignored, resisted, or sidetracked by other invitations. We came across the inclusive, inventive design of the alluring Terry Spinks Place in Canning Town, its aesthetics motivated by social rather than economic imperatives. Here, a creative act of dissensus has produced an alternative realm of the sensible. In addition to the potential redistribution of the senses produced by such deliberate interventions, dissensus may emerge in encounters with outmoded or unorthodox designs in the interstitial spaces that connect discrete areas of high-end development and reveal tensions between private and public lighting schemes. Our walk along the sodium-lit Aspen Way provoked a deeply embodied nostalgia for nocturnal urban sensations that are disappearing, while the harsh, industrial, functional lighting of Billingsgate Market conjured up involuntary memories of working on the factory nightshift. These dissonant forms of illumination were part of an extensive light clutter that vanquished desires for a more expansive, seamless stretch of modish lighting installed by gentrifiers and corporations. Equally disruptive were thick riverine mud, glistening water and impassive concrete, materialities that reflected, absorbed, and deflected light in

distinctive ways, soliciting very different attunements and moods to those provoked by the smooth designs of regeneration. Such features reveal that desires to achieve aesthetic consent are unlikely to succeed, for it seems that there must always be spatial, material, and sensory gaps to the dominant orchestration of the sensible. We have explored how light can foreground such dissensus in this part of London, but across all parts of the city non-human intrusions, incongruities, remnants, and oppositional designs attract attention and sensorially reattune us. Without unending surveillance, policing, repair, and maintenance, all urban design schemes are destined to fail; in any case, the production of a seamless, eternal realm of the sensible is a chimera.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work for this paper was completed in connection with Tim Edensor's Research Seminar given at the Space, Culture Power Research Group in the School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London. We would like to thank the research group for their support, Mikkel Bille and Siri Schwabe for comments provided on an earlier version of the paper, and the three anonymous reviewers' and editor's constructive critique and engaging comments. Any errors remain our own.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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How to cite this article: Laing Ebbensgaard C, Edensor T. Walking with light and the discontinuous experience of urban change. *Trans Inst Br Geogr*. 2020;00:1–14. https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12424