

Title

Light infrastructures and intimate publics in the vertical city

Abstract

This paper explores how the uneven distribution of and access to light and darkness in the vertical city conditions residents' capacities to form meaningful attachments to the places in which they dwell. Drawing on ethnographic material collected between 2018 and 2019 on a recent high-rise development in Aldgate, east London, the paper explores how residents of varying tenure illuminate their homes in improvisatory engagement with the basic infrastructures that support their domestic lives and with the wider urban context that surrounds their home at night. Four biographic vignettes reveal the mundane ways people alter, adapt to or overturn the inadequacies of domestic infrastructures to carve out intimate spaces of inhabitation in the vertical night. The paper engages with the burgeoning literature on social infrastructure to advance the idea of 'light infrastructure' as a conceptual proposition for attending to the affective, aesthetic and performative compositions of infrastructures in the night, and as an analytical proposition for developing a more hopeful and inclusive outlook on the ways people come to dwell, inhabit and feel at home in the vertical city at night.

Keywords

night, lighting, domesticity, publicness, social infrastructure, high-rise, verticality

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Prologue

Every time they step into the elevator, they have to pretend that the buttons indicating floors one-to-five do not exist. At least to *them* they do not—they can push them all they want, but the elevator will not move. These floors are out of bounds to any of the residents who like Raahil and Aishah are council tenants and live on floors six-to-21. When on occasion, the bell goes and the doors slide open on one of floors one-to-five, Raahil and Aishah sense the difference.

The heavy mahogany doors that sit slightly withdrawn from the walkway in deep, dark, wooden frames, glisten ever so softly in the subdued, warm lighting. Distributed at an almost nonchalant interval the soft glowing spots make darkness, and not lighting, the dominant feature of these exclusive corridors. As this scene of corridor cosiness recedes behind the sliding doors and the elevator bumbles on up and stops at anyone of the floors above, their eyes are met by an intense burst of brightness that would make any surgeon green with envy. *Here*, white painted walls, doors and doorframes reflect the harsh light that floods from large, powerful lamps placed at regular intervals in the ceiling above. The contractor adheres to conventional lighting standards and best practice guidelines for interior lighting, but in this case exceed them threefold; the social stratification of the residential population according to floor access, corridor décor and lighting design are—like most of the “structures” that reproduce social forms of subjugation—visible markers of difference. It’s a cynical logic that reproduces past tropes and tales of two cities; a vertical stratification of the population that naturalises the role of the high-rise in devising the population not just horizontally, but vertically according to tenure and class.

Yet, after two years of making their daily commute up and down the building’s core, Raahil has gotten used to and even grown fond of this stinging brightness. He welcomes the refreshing wash of celestial shine as the perfect antidote to the numbing dullness of the slow-moving lift: ‘it’s quite awakening; it gives a bright welcome; a welcoming light’. The sharp transition between light and dark accentuates movement from the communal spaces, such as lift and corridor spaces, and into the private space of their home. The contrast works to doubly effect: as an antidote and a primer. As they close their front door and shut out the last rays of corridor brilliance behind them, they appreciate the sparse lighting inside their home to a different effect; a lamp, a candle, the occasional glow from a TV or an opening fridge door stand out more clearly. They experience domestic darkness more intensely against a backdrop of bright, functional lighting in the corridor to one side, and the city of London to the other. ‘Having dimmed lights indoors kind of complements’ the bright lights ‘outside’ their home, not in the sense that it replicates them, but that it compensates or equalizes its glare. It ‘gives it *that* balance’ Raahil and Aishah need to feel composed in their lives, to relax and feel at ease in their home at night.

Living anywhere in London is an exercise in reckoning with the overpowering sensuousness of a city that over more than a century, has been lit according to functional measure and an ethos of ‘safety and security’, rather than ‘livability’. Raahil and Aishah make sense of the everyday lightscapes in which they dwell, not just to build a meaningful world for

themselves, but one which allows them to lead fulfilling lives. This article is concerned with these kinds of stories that so many residents who live in high-rises in London could tell about the ways they reckon with the infrastructures that make vertical living possible at night.

<<insert Figure 1. Corridor on 21st floor in Blakeney Tower >>

Introduction: Infrastructures of night

This paper explores how the uneven distribution of and access to light and darkness in the vertical city conditions everyday domestic life and shapes the capacities of high-rise residents to form attachments to places in meaningful ways. To do this, the paper draws on emerging literature across geography and urban studies that engages with notions of social infrastructure (Lancione, 2019b; Latham & Layton, 2019; Simone, 2014b, 2014a) and infrastructures that support everyday life at night (Ebbensgaard, 2019; Shaw, 2018; Silver, 2014). Light's ability to transgress spatial boundaries brings places and practices that during the day seem separated along private/public, interior/exterior, intimate/distant divides, into new connections and constellations (Bille, 2019). While these transgressions can be explored through other sensory registers—like sound or touch which also become more prominent in dark (Edensor, 2013)—light is a useful medium, because of its ubiquity in cities and throughout the intimate spaces of the home, proving essential to residents who seek to create and ensure domestic well-being (Vannini & Taggart, 2013). By attending to the 'poetic' (Larkin, 2013), 'affective' (Berlant, 2015), 'aesthetic' (Yusoff, 2017) and 'performative' (Simone, 2014a) compositions of infrastructures at night, the paper foregrounds the capacities of high-rise residents to recompose urban and domestic light into meaningful and supportive structures—what I refer to as 'light infrastructures'. Drawing on work that explores intimacy (Berlant, 1998; Holmes & Wilding, 2019; Rouhani, 2019) and nocturnal domesticity (Bille, 2014; Shaw, 2015) I further propose that light infrastructures expose the often mundane ways that high-rise residents participate in the 'socially charged negotiation over power' (Jensen & Morita, 2017, p. 616) in *everynight* life.

The article critically assesses London's recent and unprecedented surge in the construction of residential high-rise buildings. As scholars have noted, the rise of London's serialised, iconic skyscrapers and the financialised forms of private territorialization that result (Appert & Montes, 2015; Kaika, 2010) are turning the city into an archipelago of secluded, self-sufficient enclaves of luxury living (Atkinson, 2016; Graham, 2015). In public media, these developments have become infamously critiqued for stratifying populations – through 'poor doors' and separate lifts (BBC, 2019; Osborne, 2015) – and for bequeathing the capital with "'zombie" estates of absentees' (Jenkins, 2017) as they are left underused by their off-shore owners (Booth & Bengtsson, 2016). The paper challenges this work by offering a more hopeful and inclusive outlook on life in the vertical night; through four biographical vignettes I explore in ethnographic detail how residents living on the same estate in Aldgate—a former industrial and working-class neighbourhood located in the east London Borough of Tower Hamlets on the edge of the tall-building cluster in the financial centre of

the City of London—recompose urban and domestic light into meaningful and supportive structures for dwelling in the vertical night. The material was collected between 2018 and 2019, through a series of home- and walk-along interviews with residents. In the following, I situate the study within the wider literature on verticality before developing the notion of ‘light infrastructure,’ through engagement with recent works on infrastructure, intimacy and domesticity. The framework informs the reading of the three following vignettes that demonstrate how residents carve out a home in the vertical night.

Vertical London

The recent surge in the construction of residential high-rise buildings across London not only advances at an unprecedented rate—in 2019, 525 high-rise buildings proposed or under construction—but it charts a new course for vertical living that departs quite radically from the city’s history of high-rise housing (Graham, 2015; Woodcraft, 2020). Critics have suggested this trend results from a broader shift in recent governance structures where the diminishing of the regulatory capacities of local authorities (Appert & Montes, 2015; Kaika, 2010; Nethercote, 2018, 2019; Woodcraft, 2020) has paved the way for private equity and speculative investment to shape vertical development for an emerging transnational class of super-rich (Atkinson et al., 2017; Burrows et al., 2017; Kaika, 2010; Webber & Burrows, 2016).

The rapid verticalization of London’s housing infrastructure, critics suggest, mirrors a wider global trend of ‘vertical sprawl’: the formation of archipelagos of super-dense, capsular communities (Graham & Hewitt, 2013, p. 80) that with a semblance of openness and inclusiveness, legitimize technocratic forms of governance (Guan, 2020) and authoritarian processes of State-formation (Koch, 2018). By diverting attention away from the inequalities on which they are built towards their ‘contributions’ as public ‘amenities’, vertical developments become seductive objects (Kaika, 2011) that naturalise the externalization of an urban poor (Sassen, 2014). Smith demonstrates how the vision for developing Nairobi into a “world class” city of spectacular infrastructure and gleaming high-rises’ (2020, pp. 11–12) has been corrupted by unregulated construction of poor quality housing prone to collapse. Similar work on high-rise failures, have exposed the social consequences of questionable governance practices and lacking upkeep (Smith & Woodcraft, 2020; Tamburo, 2020).

Relatedly, scholars have explored how high-rise residents overcome the failures of the high-rise and the subsequent processes of unmaking of the high-rise as home through a range of ‘vertical practices’ (Baxter, 2017). Fernández-Arrigoitia shows how the breaking down of lifts in public housing blocks in Puerto Rico, are negotiated by the local residents in ways that ‘co-fabricated new and old senses of home’ (2014, p. 188). Similarly, in Vancouver, Ghosh shows how Bangladeshi residents collectively transform the semi-public spaces from ‘regimented functional spaces into their own social, sacred and economic spaces’ (2014, p. 2015) that support them in establishing a sense of community. This article extends this work by considering how residents carve our living spaces in the vertical night through their engagements with light and dark in ways that form supportive infrastructures of the night.

Light infrastructures

Following Berlant, infrastructures are 'affective' in the ways they '[bind] us to the world in movement and [keep] the world practically bound to itself' (2015, p. 394). Her idea connects with wider strands of work across spatial disciplines that foreground the 'relational' (Simone, 2014c), 'affectual' (Yusoff, 2017), 'poetic' (Larkin, 2013), or 'social' (Latham & Layton, 2019) configurations of infrastructures. By appreciating how affective forces can bind people in ways that are oppressive and potentially generative of new more hopeful and contestatory futures, Berlant reaches 'down below the surface into the substratum to see how those forces both maintain and disrupt edifices of intention on the surface.' (Yusoff, 2017, para. 3) Whether this 'surface' refers to the metaphoric appearance of 'structure,' the architectural fossilization of the topsoil, or the immaterial architectures powered by electric and electronic currents, Berlant offers a proposition for thinking critically about the ways that such patterning of the world conditions people's capacities to form attachments to places in meaningful ways.

As Shaw rightly argues, wiring of every habitable space of the city into national and regional networks of power supply enables human life to run 24/7, but in ways that have 'destroyed the conditions of possibility for the night lives of many other creatures.' (2018, p. 51) Whether such severance of 'conditions of possibility' pertain to psychological stress from sleep deprivation (Crary, 2013), the uneven distribution of and access to power and light across urban populations (Luke, 2010; Petrova, 2018; Silver, 2015), the disruption of animal hunting and mating patterns (Bogard, 2013; Rich & Longcore, 2006), or the contamination of grounds at extraction sites (Gandy, 2017), Shaw's point is an ethical one. Light infrastructures are key in obscuring the moral and ethical dilemmas we face when inhabiting the night and in forming attachments to the world.

Yet, as others have argued, an infrastructural analysis is not duly concerned with the 'hidden' socio-economic structure 'below' the surface, but rather with 'the movement or patterning of social form' (Berlant, 2015, p. 393) that becomes visible through incremental, provisional, and improvisatory socio-technical entanglements (Lancione, 2019). By extending 'the notion of infrastructure directly to people's activities in the city' (Simone, 2014b, p. 407) Simone demonstrates 'the ways in which relationships themselves constitute an infrastructure for inhabitation.' (Simone, 2014c, p. 18) His point of recognising that infrastructure is not some pre-given techno-totality, but rather emerges 'relationally' through the daily actions and enactments of 'people', is to force a wider conceptual shift away from the 'provisionary' to the 'provisory', from the durable and permanent to the temporary and fleeting. This move draws attention towards 'anticipatory relations' that involve forms of speculation and risk taking (Latham & Wood, 2015) which forestall 'what is next' or how to make the next move (Simone, 2014a). In his study of how residents in Accra, Nigeria, form 'incremental infrastructures' in response to unreliable and uneven access to power, Silver demonstrates how residents 'connect to energy networks or carve out informal living spaces' (2014, p. 788). Similarly, Lancione (2019b, p. 545) shows how 'homeless' people repurpose

‘otherwise bleak’ infrastructures of heating and electricity to establish informal systems of care in Bucharest’s underground tunnels. Together this work foregrounds the practical manoeuvres of people who do not just endure infrastructural forms of breakdown or disruption. Instead, they create new, insurgent and subversive networks that carry with them affective registers of care and support, which enable people to form meaningful attachments to the places they dwell (Arrigoitia, 2014; see also Baxter, 2017; Ghosh, 2014). In other words, it brings attention to the collective forms of sociality that emerge as residents overturn obdurate and insufficient infrastructural provisions in everyday life. Conceptually, this work proposes, as Simone suggests that

“the jumbled nature of much of the present urban core—its discontinuities and interruptions, breakages, and discrepant speeds—is not an entirely negative condition, for it does compel different kinds of actors and materials to stitch themselves together in various ways to assure continuities that may have few guarantees except for the memory that people were once able to deal with almost anything that came their way.” (Simone, 2014a, p. 200)

In recognition of the temporal extension of such everyday practices of ‘stitching together’ into the night, scholars have explored the role of light to the formation of public life at night. Ebbensgaard (2019) demonstrates how provisory forms of lighting—streaming from shops, moving vehicles, and homes—are crucial in shaping nocturnal atmospheres that people feel included into, part of and safe and secure to inhabit. This point resonates with Bille (2019), who shows how domestic lighting practices in Copenhagen form ethnically distinct sensory and ‘atmospheric communities’ of inclusion and exclusion in the public night. Similarly, Pink and Sumartojo (2017) foreground how forms of lighting that cause residents irritation are configured into their everyday life routines in meaningful ways beyond simply enduring their effects.

This work suggests that not only do light infrastructures ‘bind us to the worldly night’ but they are continuously stitched together through everyday practices that give shape to the worlds we come to inhabit. That does not, however, make the social forms in inequality that result from uneven distribution of ‘good’ light and darkness unproblematic or eliminate our ethical concerns about infrastructural injustice. By drawing attention towards the improvisatory engagements through which residents overturn the inequalities of the night, I want to resist the temptation of simply suggesting to redistribute light and dark in equal measures, and instead draw attention to the messy and contradictory ways that people often relate to the spaces in which they dwell; these are the forms of intimate attachment that result from inhabitation.

Intimate publics

For public life to emerge and function successfully in cities, Latham and Layton (2019) foreground the importance of social infrastructures in facilitating the often-intimate meetings between strangers. With an interest in exploring how people establish intimate ties to ‘other’ people, things and places *at home*, an infrastructural analysis draws attention to

the range of domestic technologies, routines and resources that are crucial to how people establish intimate attachments at night (Shaw, 2015; Vannini & Taggart, 2013).

According to Berlant, intimacy should be thought of as an 'aesthetic of attachment' (1998, p. 285) that reveals how conventional institutions of intimacy—the heterosexual couple, the family, love, home ownership, and so on—dominate discourses around intimacy in the public (and private) sphere. People that do not form intimate relations through these conventional institutions, and therefore fall outside the dominant aesthetics of belonging, often mobilise alternate collectivities—what Berlant (2011) labels intimate publics. Intimate publics are gatherings where people *make* intimate life and find recognition or support that might help them overcome that which is overwhelming. But Berlant warns that that intimate publics also tend to 'confirm our attachment to the system... and the legitimacy of the affects that make one feel bound to it, even if the manifest context of the binding has the negative force of cynicism or the dark attenuation of political depression.' (Berlant, 2011, p. 227) In other words, attempts at 'dealing' with that which comes our way—as Simone suggests above—remain for Berlant suspicious. She remains critical of the forms of attachment that 'encourage people to identify having a life with having an intimate life' (1998, p. 282), because not all stories of survival will bring about the social or aesthetic kinds of fulfilment we might desire.

By turning to the role of light and darkness in shaping intimate publics and people's ability to form attachments to the spaces in which they dwell, geographers and anthropologists have been instrumental in foregrounding the role of domestic lighting technologies in everyday life (Bille, 2019; Shaw, 2018; Vannini & Taggart, 2013). Some of this work draws on Minkowski (1970) who argues that darkness reduces our capacity to distinguish ourselves from our surroundings, and by extension, unsettles our sense of self and certainty of our place in the world. When people lose control over their ability to distribute light and darkness in their home, they simultaneously become incapable of managing 'when and how [their] bodies are opened up towards the affectivity of the world' (Shaw, 2015, p. 592). In addition to the affective vulnerability that results from domestic darkness, Petrova (2018) argues that the threat of darkness in Greek cities, where residents struggle to pay their energy bills, creates anxieties and fears of being disconnected from society at large. The implications of 'lighting poverty,' as she coins it, extend from the loss of control over the self to the in/ability to form and sustain durable family ties, gender relations, and express hospitality towards family and friends.

While Petrova laments the implications of failing infrastructures of energy and light on intimate life, Shaw (2015) follows in the footsteps of recent scholarship that foregrounds the experiential qualities of darkness (Edensor, 2013; Morris, 2011). In addition to providing a crucial element in supporting forms of sexual, familial or hospitable intimacy in the home at night, darkness is argued to offer entirely new possibilities for (re)connecting with the world (Edensor, 2013; Nye, 2013). Domestic darkness should therefore not be equated with the limited capacity to form meaningful attachments to places at night, alone, but also recognised for opening up towards a host of *potential* intimacies. Pink and Leder Mackley

(2016) demonstrate how residents exploit excess lighting streaming from the street into their homes to move around without disturbing sleeping co-habitants, revealing productive forms of engagement with light and dark to constitute an *urban* home in the public night (Ebbensgaard, 2019). In this paper, I want to extend this work by exploring how residents forge 'weak ties' to light and dark spaces in their homes, forming a light infrastructure that supports intimate life in the vertical night.

Inhabiting the vertical night

In the heart of London's East End, towering structures have come to define the architectural norm. The cluster of iconic skyscrapers that since the turn of the 21st century have consolidated the City of London's vertical prominence on the sky has rubbed off with contagious effect on its neighbouring boroughs. Aldgate, which occupies the border the City and Tower Hamlets, has attracted attention from developers with its proximity to the financial powerhouse of the City.

On the development known as 'Aldgate Place', the office developer, British Land, joined forces with the housing developer, Barratt Homes Plc. to deliver a mixed-use development, comprising three residential towers rising 26, 25 and 22 storeys respectively. The scheme proposed 463 residential 'units'—313 market housing, 45 intermediary and 105 social ('affordable') rented units.¹ As phase one neared completion in 2015 and the 22 storey Blakeney, containing all social rented homes and some intermediate homes and 25 storey Wiverton Tower, containing the remaining intermediate and market housing, were completed, the property market shifted. Dissatisfaction among residents gained public attention, as images on social media showed a banner stretched out along the 8th floor of Wiverton Tower reading 'REGRET BUY'. The developer stalled the second phase of the development and in 2018 Barratt Homes sold their share to British Land, who in 2019 submitted plans to build and manage a 26 storey apartment hotel.

During 2019, I visited residents living in Blakeney and Wiverton Towers. Methodologically, I drew inspiration from biographical approaches to investigating domesticity in urban settings (Blunt et al., 2020) and employed a mobile and visual method to explore how residents move through and light their homes (Bille, 2019; Pink & Leder Mackley, 2014). Out of the eight households I interviewed, three are social housing tenants in Blakeney Tower, two live in shared ownership flats, one in private rent and two are owner-occupiers in Wiverton Tower. The shortcomings or failures of the basic infrastructures of the building—ranging from lift failures, leakages, and utility spaces to preinstalled lighting and power outlets in flats—were common themes across each household, and conversations centred around how the residents managed those interruptions in their day-to-day lives. Specific attention was given to how residents used, or did not use, light in the home in continuous dialogue with the changing lightscapes of the surrounding city. In the vignettes that follow, I draw attention to these emergent themes, drawing out how light can be understood as a social infrastructure in the vertical city.

Raahil and Aishah

Their preference for dim lighting in their home, Raahil explains, stems from his childhood and memories of growing up in a mutely lit home. He grew up in a three-bedroom council flat in Bethnal Green, sharing bedroom with his younger brother, and on weekends, with his

¹ While the unit calculation clearly demonstrates that the scheme only offers 31.8% 'affordable housing', the calculation of the habitable rooms split reveals that the scheme meets the council's minimum target at 35%—'affordable homes' have more rooms to accommodate an assumed greater relative proportion of families.

mother, who worked evenings as a seamstress to earn a little extra cash. As they were tucked in, his mum rolled out her sewing machine and a rack full of dresses, suits and all kinds of workwear, awaiting their alteration and re-stitching. In the darkened room, Raahil and his brother fell asleep to the regular thuds of the sewing machine and the soft glow of the spotlight, carving out his mother's silhouette crouched over the machine. This soft night light provided an intimate space of comfort, which he strives to emulate in his current home, by recreating similar forms of indirect and vernacular lighting.

<< insert Figure 2. Sparse light in Raahil and Aishah's living room.>>

In their main living space, the open plan kitchen blends into a sofa seating and dining space that extends onto an enclosed balcony. The main living space is equipped with four ceiling lamps, one in each corner, but Raahil and Aishah only use the one in the kitchen, when they are cooking, and the one above the dining table when they are eating. Instead, they light the space through a collection of sources, such as the television when it's on, the fridge when it's opened, a cupboard in the corner when they leave the door open, and of course the surrounding city, which 'enters' their home through their large balcony windows. 'There is so much glass' in this room, he explains that the 'light from buildings' surrounding them, which at night are 'completely lit up,' provide enough light for them to see. It's not direct light streaming from 'streetlights and shop signs'—they are elevated above that and instead enjoy a soft glow from the sky: 'It gives a nice type of light, slightly dimmed' which 'gives your home a kind of relaxed atmosphere.' Their self-conscious approach to piecing together incidental forms of lighting in the home and the wider city, resonates with the Spartan lifestyles Vannini and Taggart (2013) explore in their studies of off-grid homes in North America. 'Off-gridders', they suggest, demonstrate a heightened aesthetic sensibility towards objects that people conventionally find obsolete or inferior, and find comfort in the labour required to make them work. While Raahil and Aishah can be considered the direct opposites to 'off-gridders' their appreciation of these incidental light sources—the fridge, television, cupboard and neighboring towers—demonstrates a similar aesthetic sensibility towards domestic darkness and appreciation of incidental lighting.

As natural light subsides and evenings turn into night, city lights gain prominence and slowly fill their home with the characteristic warm glow of the urban night. The indirect, soft lighting 'has that very cozy, comfy feel to it' which, Raahil explains 'adds to the atmosphere of feeling peaceful and being at peace.' Their reluctance to use the preinstalled lights is as much an expression of a particular lighting preference as it is an embrace of domestic darkness. They open up their bodies to the 'affectivity of the world' (Shaw, 2015) and demonstrate new possibilities for (re)connecting with their darkened, domestic world (Edensor, 2013; Nye, 2013). Their embrace of domestic darkness softens the harsh world that is waiting on their doorstep, and by controlling the levels of light and dark streaming between the city and the home, they domesticate the public infrastructures of the vertical night creating a 'cosy' and 'peaceful' atmosphere in the home that allows them to feel and be 'at peace'.

On their balcony, they have placed a set of armchairs around a coffee table where they often spend their evenings relaxed in conversation over tea and tobacco. Sitting in the soft, sodium glow from city, Raahil concedes that 'It's very therapeutic' sitting here together. When they moved in, in 2017, Aishah wanted to place a standard lamp by the table but discovered there was no power outlet and that drawing a cable would prevent them from closing the double-glazed windows, keeping out the cold. The pre-fitted lamp on the wall is too harsh and too bright and therefore used as often as the unplugged lamp standing below—an ornament of infrastructural misalignment. Yet, rather than framing these infrastructural inadequacies as 'negative', we might follow Simone in arguing that they compel Raahil and Aishah to stitch their domestic lightscape together in ways that 'assure continuities' in their everyday. The point is not that their makeshift lighting somehow renders the adversities they encounter unproblematic or no longer concerning, but their productive engagement with the lit vertical world reveals how they manage to sustain their '*lives the way they wanted to sustain themselves*' (Lancione, 2019a, p. 10).

Kaarina

Working as a corporate treasurer in a housing association, Kaarina knows the ins and outs of London's property market and is well-aware of her own limitations of operating within it: she is a single woman with no children and earns a 'fairly decent salary,' thus falling behind 'basically everyone on the planet' who bids for shared-ownership properties. With priority given to people 'with needs,' Kaarina applied for over 60 flats before her bid for a one-bedroom flat in Wiverton Tower got accepted in 2017.

Like Raahil, childhood memories of domestic darkness play a central role to Kaarina as she explains her preference for domestic lighting. Growing up in rural Finland, Kaarina felt isolated as her 'nearest neighbour' lived 'half a mile away', and sunset came with a deep, pervasive darkness that made it impossible to see anyone else around. It made her feel like 'the only person on the planet', and during winter-months where 'the sun doesn't rise for a month', she explains that the darkness 'just gets so depressing'. Suffering from SAD-syndrome, the lack of light has clear biological impacts on her physical and psychic state, and in addition, social implications by exacerbating the lack of contact—visual or visceral—with other human beings (not dissimilar to the conditions explored in Greece by Petrova, 2018). Natural and artificial light are therefore crucial sources for Kaarina's ability to feel at ease in the world, and to feel as a social being that is part of a social world. Moving to the United Kingdom at the age of 19 was a deliberate attempt to pursue these basic needs.

During her 18 years in London she stayed in 13 different places and Wiverton Tower provided the ideal setting for her to settle but ironically, the building décor did not: Kaarina is 'not interested in the dimmed lighting and heavy doors' that characterise its shared spaces. 'The first thing I did when I moved in' she explains, was to take 'out all the carpets' and then 'I just painted everything white': doors, door frames, cupboard doors (which all came in a dark wood finish) and the entire concrete floor she had exposed. The free-hanging ceiling

lamps fitted with energy-saving bulbs in the hallway and bedroom were replaced and covered with lampshades—to add a little bit of ‘interest’ and focus to the light—and the two in the living room, she replaced entirely with exposed filament bulbs, hanging from decorative cables. Making her home ‘look as light and bright’ as possible made her ‘feel happier about being at home’ in a way that allowed her control over the levels of light, its distribution across the flat and therefore manage the affective components of her home (Shaw, 2015).

Sitting in the middle of the block with a view looking west onto the City, her flat is surrounded by newly constructed office towers. When she comes home at night and opens her front door, she can peer through her hallway, living room and the large floor-to-ceiling windows that open onto her balcony to see the most recent addition to this vertical backdrop: an 18-storey office block and retail space halfway under construction. As she explains, ‘because I don’t have any curtains, the lights outside are bright enough for me to walk in and then turn on the light in the living room.’ And while many of her neighbouring residents with identical views of the building site express irritation at the light spill from the building site, glaring into their flats, Kaarina enjoys this light trespass as she can see in ‘dark’ and feels connected to the outside: ‘It’s quite interesting to follow,’ she exclaims with reference to the construction work; ‘it is changing literally every week...from the old and grotty to the new and shiny’. And while she is conflicted about ‘gentrification’ at large and the erasure of the neighbourhood’s ‘gritty character’, she appreciates and greatly values the arrival of new ‘amenities’ such as shops, cafes, and restaurants, but mostly she appreciates the opportunity to witness the constant changing city; there is ‘always something new, exciting, just around the corner... It is quite magical’.

While she recognises that light pollution should be avoided and that the construction lights streaming into her flat will be harmful to others, the magical quality she ascribes to the illuminated city is intimately tied to being connected to a world beyond the confines of the private sphere (cf. Petrova, 2018). ‘Maybe because I never had it, growing up’, she reflects, it makes her feel embraced with vitality. Looking out upon the city at night ‘just creates more life around the place’, reminding her that ‘I am not the only person on the planet, there are other people around as well, although I can’t see them.’ This resonates with Shaw’s (2015) point that seeing other buildings and homes lit up at night can contribute to the ‘well-being factor’ of urban living. Kaarina’s home is opened up to ‘the possibilities, the endless possibilities’ that lie beyond the domestic setting. This aspirational aesthetic of attachment to an unknown potentiality beyond the home, profoundly shapes how Kaarina makes a home in the vertical night. As the affective infrastructures that permeate the surfaces of our inhabited world (Yusoff, 2017) Kaarina’s attachment to the world beyond her home expresses a form of surface-affect that lures her into negotiating the meanings of things.

Since moving in, she was fascinated by the ‘trading company’, occupying three floors in the office block across the street. ‘I had serious screen envy’ of the traders, she explains, who did not just have two or three screens, but *six!* Each! With only 12 meters between the buildings ‘I could actually see what they were doing on their screens’, adding to the allure of

trading, as some kind of technospheric alchemy, that in a *Matrix*-inspired imaginary offers a portal into ‘another dimension’. Kaarina quite enjoys dreaming up stories about the people working in the city; a natural extension of her interest in crime. ‘Take any room or any building or any person’, she suggests, pointing out at the office block across the street ‘and you could completely make up different stories’. For instance, a man in black trousers and a white shirt who sits alone at a desk could be ‘an international spy’. While this momentary suspension of reality might seem far removed from her ‘reality’, it fills her with excitement and joy, which points towards the importance of ‘individual desires, tastes and inclinations’ when seeking self-fulfilment (Hartman, 2019), when establishing an intimate public in the vertical night.

<< insert Figure 3. Kaarina’s replica Barcelona chair and the view of the office block across the street.>>

When looking through the windows into their lobby at night, she notes that ‘they have got the same chairs’ as ‘my fake Barcelona chair’. While she concedes that their chairs most likely are not fake, she remains content by their shared taste in furniture—it makes her feel equal to this world that somehow seems closer, within reach. The distinction between ‘fake’ and ‘not fake’ resonates with Smith’s work on ‘fake’ towers in Nairobi, which should not be opposed to ‘real’ towers, but rather to poorer quality products consumed at lower cost for convenience. Poor quality, however, is not how Kaarina feels about her ‘fake’ chair, as she explains: ‘Instead of paying five grand for a real one...I paid a couple of hundred for a fake one—just as good!’ While a ‘fake’ building to Smith reveals the ‘infrastructural inadequacies’ of high-rise development, to Kaarina, it becomes part of a nightly excess that she incorporates into her life—that she domesticates to assert herself in the vertical night. She establishes an intimate public that enables her control over the affective vulnerability of her body and the domestic setting inhabiting the vertical night on her own terms.

Baahir and Naadir

On the 21st floor of Blakeney Tower, Baahir and Naadir have the same view as Kaarina, looking west towards the City. Since construction began on several sites they have noticed that the construction lights shine more intensely and seem more carelessly directed towards their flat. Together with ‘noise,’ they classify glaring lights as a form of nuisance that ‘doesn’t make you feel comfortable at night’ and force them to routinely draw curtains to shut out the glare. Being 11 floors above Kaarina, they have an almost unobstructed view of the city, which includes London landmarks such as the Gherkin, the Walkie Talkie, the London Eye, the Shard and London Bridge. While Baahir concedes that ‘it’s nice to look at’, Naadir finds it ‘stressful’ and he adds that ‘when you are trying to relax it doesn’t make you relax’. Looking out at the towering City, which ‘represents capitalism’ and reminds Baahir of having the ‘corporate world just on your doorstep... is not really comforting’. Their view of the spectacular skyline is a constant reminder of the fast-paced world of financial wealth and power—so exhilarating to Kaarina, but—to which *they* do not belong. The affective excess of

the gleaming night-time city hampers Baahir and Naadir's ability to identify with the place in which they dwell. It is not the lack of domestic lighting that engenders a sense disconnection from wider society (as argued by Petrova, 2018) but the symbolic excess of an elite form of urbanism that makes its entry into their home at night. Despite growing up and living their entire lives in the area, Baahir and Naadir struggle to call Blakeney Tower and Aldgate Place home.

<<insert Figure 4. View of The City of London from Baahir and Naadir's winter garden. >>

Yet, when standing in their living room overlooking the skyline beyond, Baahir concedes that he also feels inspired to challenge and conquer this world on his doorstep: 'there is obviously opportunities there, especially with the stuff I am doing'. At the time of interview, Baahir was undertaking his PhD in computer science and researched cloud data storage and processing of meta-data, which is broadly applicable in finance securitization. According to Smith (2020), the allure of spectacular skylines and the aspirational economies that iconic high-rise architecture often engenders in populations, are indicative of the seductive power of urban imaginaries in creating a slippage between fantasy and reality (see also Hayden, 1977). In similar ways to Kaarina, the luminous allure of the city primes Baahir to pursue one of the many 'jobs to be taken', demonstrating how the seductive glow of this 'global city'-image creates a fantasy of inclusion into a vision of growth and prosperity (Smith, 2020). Yet, Baahir's aspiration is not rooted in a desire to 'take on the town' (Hayden, 1977) and should not be narrowly framed as a direct effect of wider neoliberal pressures to seek self-improvement, but rather, reveals an insistence on the right to lead a fulfilling life. . As Harris and Wolesley (n.d.) suggest, the contradictory and ambivalent ways that people feel about iconic forms of architecture like the Shard in London, is evidence of how they appropriate its symbolic excess in everyday life. The recognition of such ambiguity resonates with work that subverts relations between verticality and power in film (Vidler, 2011) and architectural representations (Murawski, 2020), and would therefore suggest that Baahir's aspirations are not (just) elevated fantasies, but anchored in his struggles to define the conditions of living. The point is not to judge whether what Baahir and Naadir experience is real realistic or fantasy, but rather that the relations between rejection and aspiration animate new practices; as they negotiate the meanings of excess lights that stream into their flat they are managing a slippage between the 'real' and 'imaginary' in ways that engenders a meaningful future which they can inhabit.

Despite their efforts to carve out a meaningful living space in the vertical night, however, Baahir and Naadir are constantly reminded of the socio-economic differences that shape life on their estate. With a view of the flats illuminated in Wiverton Tower, Baahir exclaims that 'there is some sort of difference': they have 'special lighting' that make their flats look and presumably 'feel richer'. 'Here it is just basic lighting', the 'generic lighting' that is used in the hallways and corridors, as described in the prologue. Rather than an issue of unequal access to basic infrastructures, particular forms of lighting are experienced as markers that socially stratify the estate, hampering residents' ability connect to and identify

with their neighbours. In his study of diverse lighting practices across different housing estates in Copenhagen, Bille (2019) explores how residents—in quite similar ways to Baahir—identify people’s varied domestic lighting preferences as markers of inclusion and exclusion from the sensory and ‘atmospheric community’ of the Danish night. The exclusion that Baahir and Naadir experience is, however, not related to individual lighting preferences, but instead to the inscription of difference through architectural design.

The lighting in their flat is, similar to Raahil, Aishah and Kaarina, primarily provided by free hanging ceiling lamps with energy-saving light bulbs. They dislike ‘bright lights’ in their home and find the energy saving light bulbs too bright and harsh to create the home they desire. They prefer it ‘a bit darker’ and wanted to replace the lamps with dimmable spotlights: the flat has ‘quite low ceilings’ and the ceiling lamps encroach on their space, making it feel even smaller. When they moved in, the lamp in the hallway was hanging ‘so low that every time you opened the bathroom door, it would knock into it’. With two boys aged three and five respectively, Naadir explains that ‘the way children open doors, sooner or later they would have smashed that bulb and glass would have been raining down.’ Understandably, they wanted to change it immediately, but due to a ‘defects insurance’ protection policy that the landlord enforced during the first year of tenancy, they were not allowed to make any changes to the flat, and had to wait four months for an electrician to cut an inch of the cord. When they moved in, the fire sprinklers in the bedrooms ‘weren’t even fitted properly’ and the hood kept coming loose and falling on the floor and again, it took ‘numerous’ calls for repairs to be done. Two years after moving in their boiler set out, leaving them with no heating in January, and while ‘the house is not too cold’ in the day ‘it can get cold at night’. Waiting for maintenance and repair has forced them to ‘make do with what you have’, making them feel neglected—as if their ‘lives don’t really count for much’—and realising, that if ‘anything happens to us we are replaceable’. When they moved in, they wanted to decorate walls after the defects period ended, ‘but now we have stuff everywhere, which makes it difficult to try and make changes’ and ‘difficult to get a homely feel, I don’t really feel like I have a proper home’.

Making a home in the vertical night is predicated on the capacity to build civic structures that enable people to pursue dreams about the life they want. Baahir and Naadir’s struggles to overcome the limitations of the basic infrastructures that support everyday life in the vertical city leave them with few guarantees except the knowledge that people have always been able to ‘deal with what comes their way’ (Simone, 2014). Rather than adopting a defeatist attitude, their hopes for a better future are anchored in their struggles to define the terms under which their lives should be defined. While Kaarina’s speculative fictions of extended life in the vertical night liberates and empowers her, Baahir and Naadir’s negotiation over the meanings of urban lighting provides a reminder of the structural limitations of vertical living and the importance of light to the formation of affective infrastructures that can make life in the vertical night durable.

Conclusions

This article demonstrates how residents repurpose domestic and urban lighting and stitch together light infrastructures that support *everynight* life. The vignettes expose how light infrastructures are affectively binding people to the vertical night in ways that are both restrictive and potentially generative of new more hopeful futures where residents can participate in the social negotiation over power in their high-rise homes (see Ghosh, 2014; Jensen & Morita, 2017).

The excessive brightness in the corridor that extends into the most intimate spaces of Raahil and Aishah's home, does not limit their ability to carve out a space for them to feel at home. Their embrace of the glow emanating from the illuminated city is an improvisation of what it means to dwell in the vertical night. By stitching together various luminosities to form supportive light infrastructures, they carve out meaningful living spaces in the excessively lit city. Similarly, Baahir and Naadir might feel excluded from the world of finance occupying the iconic skyline that gleams at them every night, but its excessive symbolism also entralls them in an economy of aspiration that provides them with a hopeful outlook on their future. The point is not whether this hope is realistic or even valid, but that the slippage between real and imaginary worlds animates new practices and a capacity to 'deal with' the infrastructural failures, poor maintenance and regulatory restrictions that limit their everyday (Simone, 2014a). And while Kaarina's ability to overcome the limitations of domestic infrastructures, is powered by financial and professional forms of security that are incomparable to the levels of the other residents, her stitching together of domestic and urban lighting forms a similar kind of supportive light infrastructure, which binds her to the world in ways that are mentally and 'socially' productive. The glaring floodlights on the construction site and the glow emanating from the office blocks next door—partly occupied by her fantasies and imaginary fictions at night—are not reduced to nuisance or experienced as exclusive, but repurposed to form an intimate public in which she comes to inhabit the vertical night on her own terms.

Yet, as Berlant warns, the forms of attachment that constitute intimate publics should not be confused with having an intimate life, because these affective forms of binding also legitimize the systems that keep us bound to the world—even when the system is charged with negative and oppressive forms of cynicism. And while each of the vignettes exposes how residents 'deal with' the adverse and potentially obstructive effects of unevenly distributed light and dark it would seem harsh to reduce these stories to mere 'survival' stories of enduring hardship. Instead, they demonstrate how domestic light and darkness are, as Bille (2019) suggests, 'atmospheric technologies' that enable people to manage how their bodies open up towards the affectivity of the world (see also Shaw, 2015) and support them in forming attachments to people, places and things not just in ways that are meaningful to them, but in ways that enable them to participate in the socially charged negotiations of power in *everynight* life (Jensen & Morita, 2017). This does of course not make the social forms in inequality that result from uneven distribution of 'good' light and darkness unproblematic or eliminate our ethical concerns about insufficient infrastructural provision.

By drawing attention towards the intimate publics that are established through improvisatory engagements with domestic and urban lighting, I want to resist the temptation of suggesting a simplistic solution by redistributing light and dark in equal measures. Instead, by foregrounding the light infrastructures that people stitch together and assemble across private and public space, I draw attention to the often-contradictory ways that people relate to the spaces in which they dwell and foreground the political potential of light infrastructures political for challenging and contesting power relations in everyday life.

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