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After Dark

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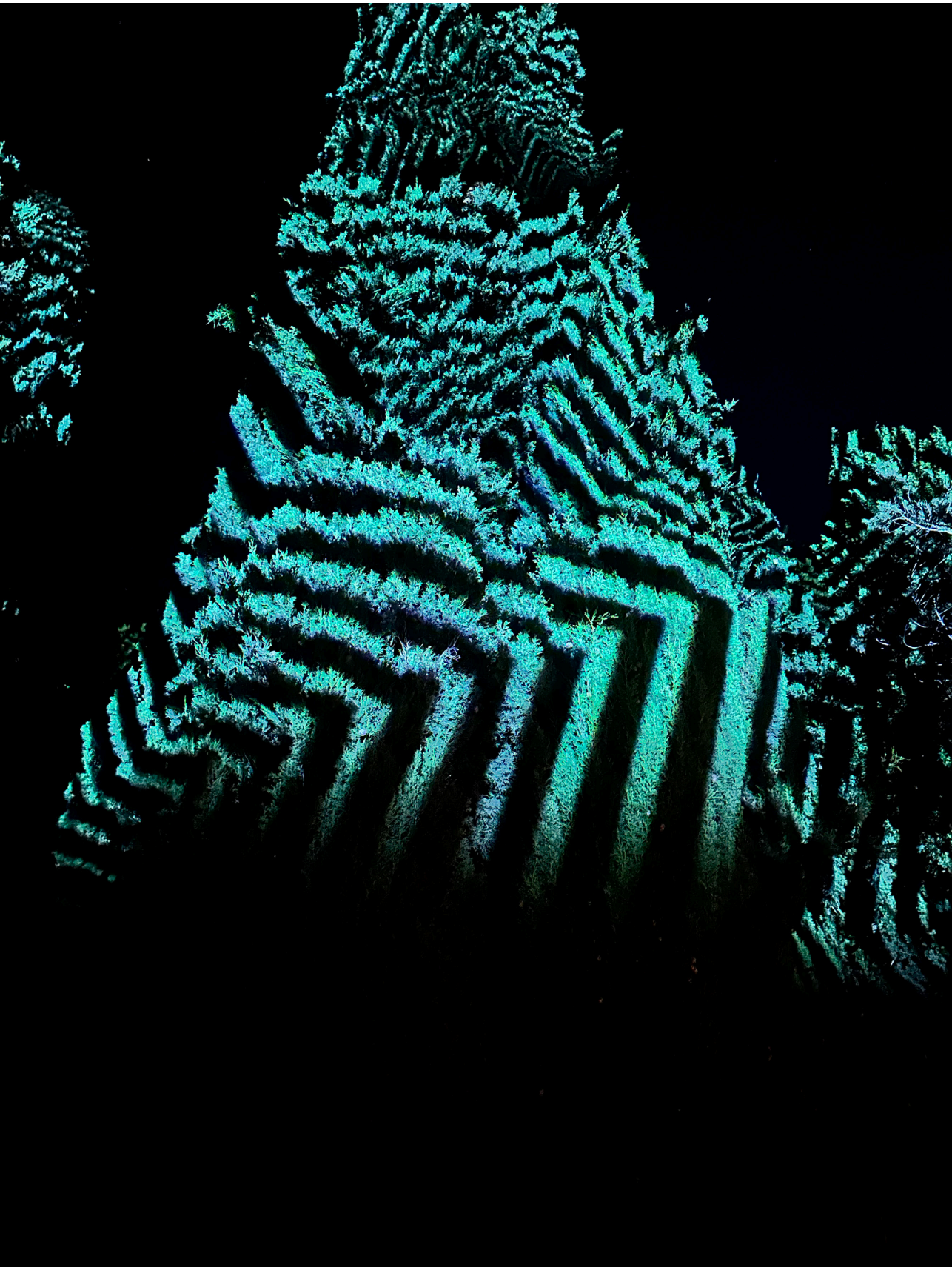

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After Dark

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EDITORIAL

Darkness is not simply the absence of light. It is a rich and contested medium that exceeds the rigid categorisations through which modernity has sought to contain it. This issue of *lo Squaderno* thus ventures after dark not only as a spatial and temporal condition, but as a radical conceptual provocation: an invitation to let go of illumination as the default horizon of knowing. For too long, the equation *visibility = truth* has dominated our epistemologies. By asking the reader to sit, however uneasily, with what darkness does, we invite a sensory and intellectual reformulation of darkness. This requires learning its specific habits, tracing its obscure textures, and relinquishing the manufactured comforts of illumination to discover what emerges in the shadows.

After Dark points to the uncertain, shifting domains that emerge when light dims and vision loses its primacy. It prompts a sustained exploration of the vast land of the nocturnal, looking at the way darkness is specifically inhabited, sensed, and navigated, and how it shapes bodies, cities, ecologies, and relations. Our pursuit, at the same time, gestures toward a more speculative, philosophical horizon: going after darkness itself. Long treated in Western modernity as light's negative other – an unknown, hostile continent to be conquered by reason, scientific knowledge, or brute infrastructural force – darkness intrinsically resists recognition, or clarification. It absorbs rather than reflects, swallowing the probing beams of inquiry.

Engaging with darkness authentically may therefore require abandoning vision and exposure as our primary epistemic tools. It necessitates reconsidering light not as an inherent good, but as a potential form of violence, surveillance, extraction, and colonial desire, a forced visibility that demands everything be categorised and policed. In this respect, darkness calls for radical reinvention and alternate ways of being. From lithoautotrophs and other microorganisms to deep-sea creatures and bats navigating by echo system, the natural world offers plenty of examples of dark individuation.

Likewise, darkness infuses critical theory, contemporary art, subversive politics, and the collective imagination. It aesthetically infects subcultural practices that deliberately evade legibility through a strategic embrace of opacity, refusal, and disavowal. Here, darkness transcends mere absence to become a material resistance, an unruly, viscous excess that permanently stains the myth of transparency. It offers a protective, shadowy zone where alternative imaginaries and suppressed modes of existence might obscurely emerge and flourish entirely out of sight.

The contributions gathered here approach this provocation from different directions – philosophical inquiries, geographical mapping, architectural interventions, immersive ethnographic studies, and visual essays. In doing so, they deliberately refuse any single, totalising account of what darkness might be and what it, ultimately, demands of us. If a common thread could be identified amongst this disparate range of contribution, it is perhaps the vital realisation that darkness is never a space of emptiness. It is always a space of habitation. It is dynamically shaped by the human and more-than-human bodies that have learned and negotiated multiple ways of surviving in the dark. Bodies that have learned to move intuitively, to resist the imposition of the spotlight, to exploit its cover for illicit or intimate acts, or to be disciplined by its pervasive chill. Ultimately, to venture after dark is to encounter a world vibrating with frequencies that can only be felt when the lights finally go out.

In the first contribution, Giuseppe Tomasella lays the methodological ground for the issue as a whole. It is the profound, pre-cultural, embodied relation between darkness and

lived experience that Giuseppe is interested in reactivating through what he terms dark literacy. Proposing to understand darkness as an embodied medium overflowing the nocturnal, through a series of Venetian night walks Tomasella sketches the contours of a dark literacy, a way to (re)learn how to sense and inhabit darkness through immersion, dialogue and attunement, in the attempt to develop a paradoxical mastery of what mastered cannot be.1

Dark literacy surely comes in handy in the dark forest at the Serbia-Hungary border that Giulio Gonella explores reading Federico Cammarata and Filippo Foscarini's documentary *Waking Hours* alongside Glissant's concept of opacity. Here, going dark is a strategy both of oppression and resistance, as reading, traversing and inhabiting darkness is an existential necessity for the migrant, the passeur, and the hunter alike. Everything in this forest-threshold, shot through the in-visibility of thermal camera, suggests the in-between – life and death, freedom and capture, inside and outside, entre le chien et le loup, a permanently crepuscular blur where the border of Fortress Europe expands and shrinks, threatening violence and promising respite at every shadow.

This ambivalent dialectics of capture and evasion is also reproduced in the urban night, especially for those, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, who have to endure it in full exposure. Drawing on GPS temperature data and interviews, Jeff Rose and Atefeh Dorostkar engage with darkness as a lived, embodied, political condition that is shaped by infrastructures, regulations, policing, and climate change. After dark, as the daily heat is released, cities become hot. Increasingly exposed by intensified lighting, surveillance and the law, with nighttime policing aggressively preventing from using cooler places such as parks, waterfronts, and plazas, darkness becomes a deeply uncomfortable experience, one that raises the crucial political question of how to guarantee an equal right to rest and cool after dark.

Miriam Tedeschi looks at the other side of that dialectics, exploring darkness as a place of intimacy, protection and resistance to analogue and digital hypervisibility. Navigating four interwoven movements, from dark streets to the dark web, Miriam reflects: on the complicated relation between darkness and (gendered) fear in the urban space; on the possibility of going dark in the digital space, as in the case of 'dark sousveillance' practices, occurring at the ambiguous threshold between illegality and resistance, right and crime; and, finally, on the quiet resistance of going analogue, where withdrawing is a movement towards an offline darkness which, however, is never clear-cut, always occurring through a negotiation between various shades, possibilities, and compromises.

From the urban dark, Lauren Chang brings us into the photographer's darkroom and the animal research lab, both bathed in dim red light. Moving between the chemistry of photographic development and the ethics of studying nocturnal creatures, Lauren explores the affective and epistemic dimensions of a visibility that is simultaneously enabled and withheld. 'Red lighting – she observes – is a reminder of the partial and situated nature of knowledge', which implies another way – 'a red attempt' – at engaging with what is not clarified by an illumination but rather emerges as the production of a tentative threshold that remains partial, provisional, and always leaking.

Back in the open, Loretta Sio Man Chang takes us on a night walk in Macau, a place where, it seems, darkness has been expelled. The buildings of the most famous gaming destination of the East glow with a golden hue, spotlighting the town's prosperity well after dark – in fact, seeking to push darkness further and further into the dawn. 'Light-after-dark in Macau is a measure of worth concealed by night', Loretta writes, interspersing her nighttime perambulations, and related pictures, with her own hybrid history, as the undarkened night of Macau obliquely suggests a liminal condition where alternative forms of knowledge might emerge.

If Macau offers a particularly emblematic context, light pollution is growing everywhere in world cities, as darkness is increasingly diminished, demonised, eliminated. Even sustainable technologies such as energy-efficient LED lighting reveals that dark literacy, understood in this case as an appreciation of darkness is lacking at the institutional level as well. Engaging with this

1 Michael Taussig. T*he Mastery of Non-mastery in the Age of Meltdown*. The University of Chicago Press, 2020.

condition, Nick Dunn argues for the promise that nocturnal cities actually offer, as a way to re-attune, empower, reinvent. Hence his nocturnal praxis, developed through nightwalking and various data recording tools, as a way to explore darkness by embodying it, while at the same time prompting an imagination of alternative, dark futures to come.

Certainly, the dark sky movement needs no convincing about the potentiality of darkness. And yet, Rob Shaw argues, their tendency to frame the dark sky experience through the category of awe is problematic. Framing the dark sky experience through awe tends to produce encounters shaped by privilege, accessible only to those with the right dispositions and resources. Other institutional politics, Rob argues, would be able to make skies darker and favour easier access and everyday experience that would not be reduced to awe, learning from everyday encounters with darkness in urban spaces, and bringing darker skies to a wider range of people and places, as in the case of Urban Night Sky places and social lighting design movement he describes.

A similar concern with institutional approaches to darkness, and their capacity to counter light pollution and favour urban dark conviviality is explored by Eleonora Nicoletti, who approaches the issue from the standpoint of architectural and environmental design, particularly exploring how nature, from bioluminescence to ultrablack coatings, might inspire human adaptation to darkness. Darkness here is presented as a resource to be designed with rather than eliminated, with a view to improving urban dark experience, sharpening other senses and embodied immersion, both for humans and the wider ecosystem.

Irina Shirobokova takes us to the Arctic. Here, in and through the polar nights, an uncanny perspective can be found, to question the way Enlightenment has shaped the politics of darkness for a long time, and to inhabit darkness otherwise. For the Indigenous Sámi communities, in fact, darkness is not merely absence or danger. It is instead filled with spirits, animals, ancestral presence – a zone that needs to be constantly negotiated. Drawing on her ethnographic research in the borderlands of Norwegian and Russian Arctic, Irina reimagines darkness as a relational and generative condition, one that 'has the power to enhance what is already going on', as a collaborator told her, and that can be approached in and through writing.

Similarly challenging the common assumption that darkness is simply the absence of light, and yet willing to bring the equation of light and understanding to its paradoxical consequences, Suki Finn reflects on what it might mean to know darkness without illuminating it. Sure, as long as we understand understanding as illumination, darkness will remain in the dark. And yet, what if the contradictory nature of darkness itself vis-à-vis understanding qua illumination ultimately proves to be generative? As Suki writes, 'The radical power of darkness manifests in how it confronts our understanding of understanding itself, and the methods and processes by which we acquire knowledge'. There is a kind of dark illumination that results from this, something that can be embraced to rethink fundamental assumptions about truth, reality, and knowledge.

Binary understandings of darkness vs light are no longer at work in Paul Kaletsch's closing essay, where darkness is not determined by light, not even different from light, insofar as belonging to the pre-visible dimension out of which the very difference between light and dark emerges. If darkness as such cannot be encountered, its obscure signs can. Through a dense philosophical engagement with Deleuze, Paul operationalises in this direction the concept of 'dark precursor', with a view to developing another sort of engagement with darkness, a dark literacy which invites us to stop trying, embrace the uncontrollable ways in which darkness might become generative and transformative, and allow dark affects redefine how we might live.

AP, CN

Recovering Dark Literacy
Embodied Ways of Knowing with Darkness

Giuseppe Tomasella

Introduction: Darkness as a Misunderstood Medium

Darkness has been increasingly conflated with night, itself defined merely as a temporal interval between periods of illumination. Even though most of us nowadays rarely experience darkness beyond the domesticated and bright dimension of urban night, this association remains undisputed in common sense. Notably, urban and night studies have mapped the erosion of darkness through light pollution and surveillance (Edensor, 2015; Williams, 2008), and cultural histories have traced its symbolic weight across myth, religion and ideology (Palmer, 2000). Yet these accounts, however rich, tend to position darkness as an object of inquiry to be observed, even protected, from within light-centric epistemologies.

This article proposes a different starting point. Where night studies acknowledge darkness as a key component of nocturnality, dark literacy centres darkness itself. This shift recognises darkness as an embodied medium that precedes and exceeds the nocturnal. From prenatal immersion to nightly sleep and circadian rhythms, human life is structured by forms of darkness that are sensed and navigated from within.

Yet Western epistemology has largely repressed this experiential dimension. From Plato's cave myth up to modern scientific thought, knowledge has been aligned with light and visibility, framing darkness as ignorance. When knowing is equated with seeing, other sensory modes of orientation recede. Practices of listening, attuning, waiting or moving within obscurity are reconfigured as eccentricities or vestiges rather than skills.

What is missing, then, is not more theory that seeks to clarify darkness but a renewed competence with it: an embodied literacy for re-engaging darkness through lived experience. Grounded in nightwalking research I conducted in Venice (Tomasella, 2025), this article develops 'dark literacy' as a methodological orientation for re-engaging darkness through practice. By recovering embodied competence within Western frameworks, dark literacy offers a non-extractive route towards recognising epistemologies that have never abandoned these capacities.

The argument proceeds in five movements. First, it situates darkness in lived experience. Second, it traces the epistemic repression of dark literacy in Western thought. Third, it introduces dark literacy as method, operationalising it through fieldwork. Fourth, it discusses the ethical stakes of engaging non-Western epistemologies. A final section reorganises the argument positioning dark literacy as a situated recovery that enables recognition without extraction.

Lived Darkness

Darkness is not an external phenomenon we occasionally encounter. It structures restoration, repair

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and temporal orientation (Dunn, 2025), functioning as an embodied medium woven into everyday existence and encountered as lived darkness. Our first consciousness forms in prenatal immersion, a non-visual mode of knowing where self and world are negotiated through pressure, sound and touch. This orientation recurs in sleep, when the visual field recedes and perception shifts towards haptic, auditory and mnemonic registers. Both express the circadian rhythm, through which bodies synchronise to cycles of light and darkness.

These are not incidental states but forms of lived darkness, demonstrating that the body already inhabits and navigates obscurity before culture intervenes. We close our eyes to recall memories, and we move through familiar spaces without light, relying on spatial memory and touch. Darkness, in this sense, is an embodied medium we continuously negotiate rather than an absence we endure. If darkness is already lived, why has it become so unfamiliar? The answer lies not in the body but in the symbolic and material systems that have taught us to fear, ignore or overcome it. This repression has an epistemic history.

The Repression of Dark Literacy

Western thought has long aligned light with knowledge and darkness with danger (Edensor, 2015). From medieval fears of nocturnal peril (Ekirch, 2006) to Enlightenment metaphors of illumination as reason and progress (Bille & Sørensen, 2007), darkness has been cast as ignorance, disorder or threat (Palmer, 2000). Modern illumination extended these associations materially (Koslofsky, 2011): light organised space, enabled surveillance and disciplined behaviour. To know became to expose and to govern became to make visible.

The consequence is epistemic as much as spatial. When knowledge is equated with visibility, other modes of orientation recede. Practices of listening, attuning, waiting or moving within obscurity, such as navigation by moonlight and starlight (Attlee, 2011), are rendered obsolete. What is lost, then, is not darkness itself but the embodied capacity to inhabit obscurity rather than eliminate it. This logic persists. Contemporary anxieties about urban safety and legibility continue to frame darkness as a problem requiring correction (Williams, 2008). The reflex to illuminate reflects an inability to recognise darkness as an embodied medium that might sustain other modes of relation, perception and care. The task, then, is not to define darkness anew but to recover the practices through which it can again be sensed and navigated.

Dark Literacy as Method: Immersion, Attunement and Dialogue

Dark literacy names this recovery. Conceived as practice rather than theory, it is a methodological orientation for re-engaging with darkness in lived experience through three intertwined modes: immersion, attunement and dialogue. Immersion suspends visual mastery. Rather than treating darkness as empty space, it engages darkness as a medium with texture, pressure and density. Edges blur and distances become uncertain. Hearing, touch and proprioception intensify as movement slows. By immersing in darkness, one proceeds within space rather than surveying it from a distance.

Attunement develops rhythmic sensitivity. Once vision diminishes, rhythms become perceptible: the waxing and waning of activity, alternations between noise and quiet and cyclical patterns of movement and rest.

Dialogue recognises that darkness, as medium, manifests differently across contexts and each darkness afford different bodily responses. Some invite lingering, others demand caution. The body adjusts – gait, posture, attention – in continuous exchange with what darkness affords. Dialogue names this reciprocal relation between darkness as medium and body as participant. Geographical fieldwork in Venice nightscapes (Tomasella, 2025) revealed these practices of embodied attention to

darkness as the common foundation beneath seemingly diverse methodological approaches. An exceptional moment during an *acqua alta* nightwalk made them particularly evident. Walking through flooded *calli*, visual navigation collapsed. Water obscured depths, reflections confused distances and everyday landmarks disappeared. Movement became increasingly haptic and auditory: the slosh of water, the scrape of a wall and voices echoing. This was immersion.

Water altered mobility patterns, sharpening perception of rhythms ordinarily taken for granted. Whilst the ebbs and flows of the lagoon encroached upon urban space, gait slowed, affecting customary early evening movement towards lit areas and later retreat. Navigation of nightscapes became as much rhythmic as spatial, training perception. This was attunement. Finally, the flood revealed how different darknesses afford different movements. Water-filled *calli* demanded tentative steps; dry passages permitted confident stride. Attuning to what each specific darkness permits or constrains was dialogue.

What emerged from this research were contextual findings: data, ideas and concepts about Venice nightscapes. Yet the research experience also cultivated something more portable: a practice of dark literacy transferable beyond that context. This literacy, the capacity to engage with darkness as medium rather than obstacle, applies to other darknesses precisely because it is grounded in renewed modes of attention rather than fixed knowledge about a particular site. This portability does not impose uniformity. As Morris (2011, p. 316) observes, 'darkness is situated, partial and relational'. In the deep sea, darkness is pressure and saturation. A citywide blackout produces infrastructural darkness, replacing visual coordination with acoustic negotiation. An eclipse offers darkness as event, gathering bodies into collective awe. A shadow is relational darkness, partial, contingent and intimate. From abyssal depths to passing shadows, each darkness is specific and not necessarily nocturnal. Yet the mode of engagement, immersion, attunement and dialogue, remains constant, allowing each darkness to be encountered on its own terms. If darkness demands situated attention rather than universal categories, how might this orientation relate to epistemologies that have never abandoned it?

Recognition without Appropriation

Dark literacy, as articulated here, emerges from a Western context that has systematically repressed embodied engagement with darkness. It is a situated recovery, not a universal framework. Other epistemologies have never needed such recovery. Traditional Japanese aesthetics, as Tanizaki (1933/2001) articulates in *In Praise of Shadows*, celebrate the depth and beauty revealed in gloom: the play of lacquerware in candlelight, the subtle gradations between heavy and light shadows and the way darkness enhances rather than obscures perception. Tanizaki's account is one among many. A fuller engagement with how darkness is cultivated across Indigenous, non-Western, counter-hegemonic and more-than-human cosmologies, from navigational practices to contemplative traditions to ecological relations, lies beyond the scope of this article and requires expertise this author does not claim.

By recovering embodied practices within Western contexts, dark literacy seeks to dismantle the epistemological barrier that has rendered these ways of knowing invisible or illegible thereby creating the conditions for recognition. But recognition is not mastery. By learning again to inhabit darkness, Western thought may finally become capable of listening.

Conclusion: After Dark, Before Light

This article has argued that darkness is not light's absence but a medium we already know how to inhabit and have largely forgotten how to recognise. From prenatal immersion to nightly sleep, darkness structures perception, relation and temporality in ways Western epistemology has systematically

marginalised. The equation of knowledge with visibility has rendered other modes of orientation irrelevant, treating capacities for listening, attuning and moving within obscurity as eccentricities or vestiges rather than skills.

Recovering dark literacy means reconnecting with these practices. Through immersion, attunement and dialogue, darkness becomes not a problem to solve but a medium to inhabit, one that reorganises the senses, reveals rhythms and demands situated negotiation. The Venetian nightwalks grounding this inquiry demonstrated dark literacy as transferable competence cultivated through patient attention to what darkness does (Dunn, 2025). Yet darkness is never uniform. It manifests as medium and is experienced as lived darkness differently: thick in the abyss, disruptive in blackouts, punctuating in eclipses and sheltering in shadows. What remains constant is the practice of attending: allowing darkness to act upon the body, sensing its rhythms and responding to its affordances. Dark literacy names the recovery of this embodied competence to navigate darkness. As such, dark literacy is not a specialist skill but a human capacity, one relevant to urban dwellers navigating blackouts, educators rethinking sensory pedagogy, designers creating inclusive spaces, ethnographers attuning to nocturnal practices and anyone seeking genuine engagement with darkness.

Moreover, it opens a careful, non-extractive route towards epistemologies that have not lost their dark literacy. Indigenous, non-Western, counter-hegemonic and more-than-human ways of knowing have long cultivated embodied ways of knowing with darkness. By recovering embodied practices within Western contexts, dark literacy dismantles the barrier that has rendered these ways of knowing obsolete. It creates the conditions for recognition without appropriation. Shared experience becomes ethical contact, not extraction. Finally, if dark literacy challenges visibility's primacy, it reconfigures what counts as care, vulnerability and solidarity. In darkness, exposure is not transparency but risk and legibility is not clarity but control. To go after dark is to relinquish mastery, to proceed in mutual opacity and to recognise that not everything need be, or should be, seen. Darkness is not illumination's failure but a medium through which other relations emerge.

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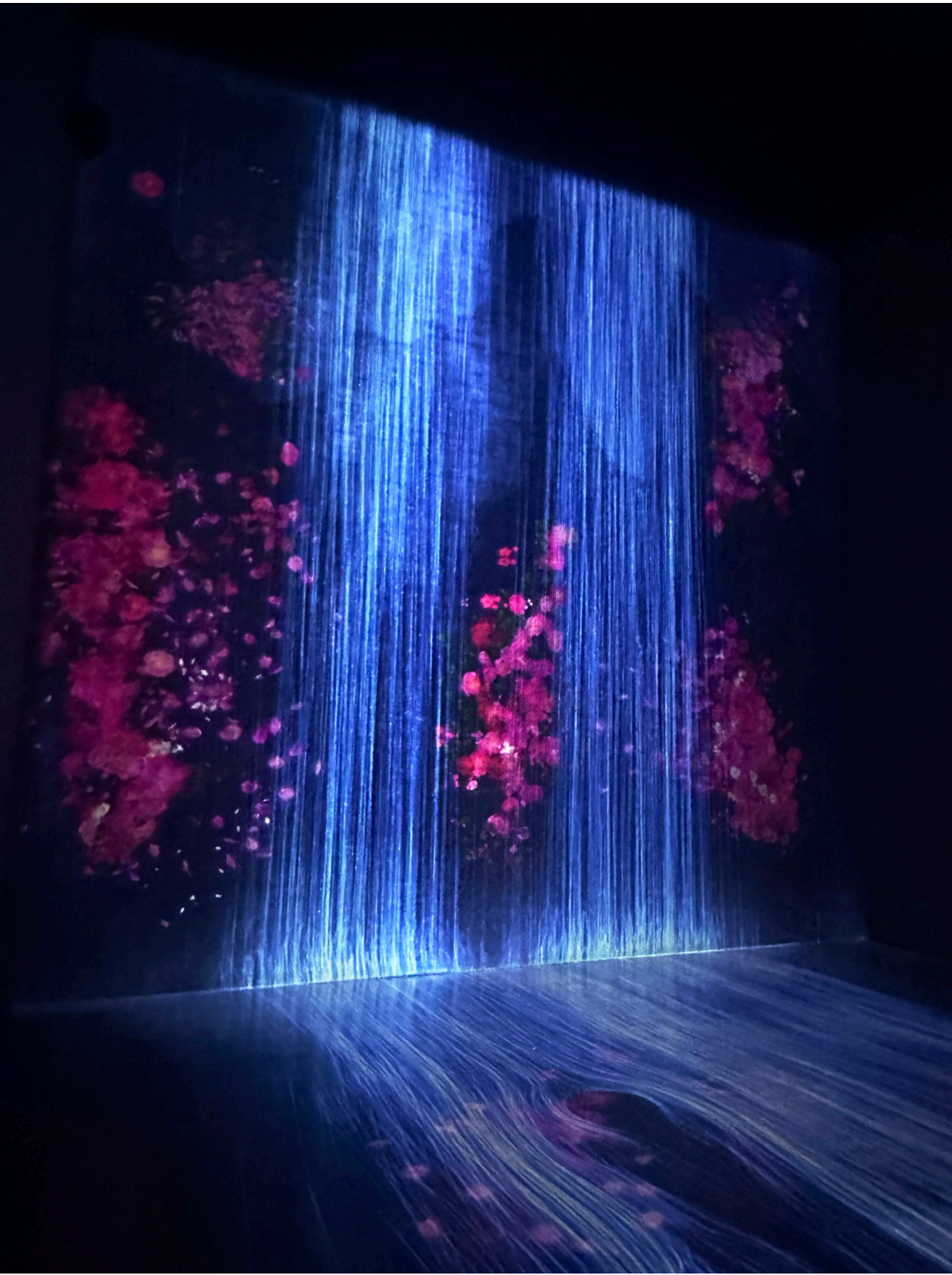

Out through the dark night
Darkness and opacity at the borders of Europe

Giulio Gonella

Thermal ghosts

In the last scene of *Waking Hours*[1], the recent documentary about the Serbia–Hungary border by Federico Cammarata and Filippo Foscarini, a horde of white ghosts attempts to cross the wall separating Fortress Europe from its outside. In the inverted colours of the thermal camera, the bodies of the assaulting group are small white flares against an indistinct background. Only some forest topographies can be made out, tentatively, as they are being traversed in the approach to the wall. The whole film is set in different shades of darkness; the last sequence is the only moment within its 78 minutes when a form of forced visibility comes across the screen.

The all-encompassing darkness of the film translates in aesthetic terms the perduring invisibility of people on the move amassing on one of the many strands of the Balkan route. Nighttime in the 'jungle'[2], as elsewhere along the dispersed frontiers of the EU, is not (only) a strategy of concealment, but a material condition that sustains survival and the tentative practices of border crossing. The blurred images of the assault echo the footage featured in another film set in another European liminal zone. In *Les Sauteurs* [*Those Who Jump*] (2016)[3], night vision recordings deployed by Frontex show hundreds of tiny figures walking in line across the steep mediterranean hillsides, as they move to jump the heavily guarded metal fence separating the Spanish enclave of Melilla, north of Morocco. As with the Serbian forest, foothills woods of the nearby Mount Gurugu host encampments where people temporarily dwell before attempting the crossing.

While footage featured in *Les Sauteurs* was obtained from police authorities, figuring as 'operational images' (Farocki, 2004) not made to represent the landscape but to serve the routine practices of pushbacks and border enforcement, Waking Hours' thermal ghosts were instead recorded via the trap camera of a hunter that the authors met in the forest[4]. Although the visual language converges,

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1 *Waking Hours*, dir. Federico Cammarata and Filippo Foscarini, Italy, 2025, 78 min. Produced by Volos Films in co-production with Italia Pulpa Film, in collaboration with Rai Cinema. It premiered at Venice Critics' Week, where it won the Mario Serandrei & Hotel Saturnia Award for Best Technical Contribution.

2 There are many 'jungles' within EU borders. The most famous was probably the Jungle in Calais, in the north of France. From 2015, tens of thousands of people lived in encampments on an abandoned landfill site adjacent to the port, attempting to cross the English Channel and reach the UK. By the summer of 2016 the camp had reached an estimated 10,000 residents – with shops, restaurants, schools and places of worship. In October 2016, a massive eviction operation dispersed people, while bulldozers and fires razed what remained. Now, only some occasional encampment can be seen.

3 *Les Sauteurs*, dir. Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner, and Abou Bakar Sidibé, Denmark, 2016, 80 min. The film combines footage shot by Sidibé – a Malian migrant who spent fourteen months in the encampment on Mount Gurugu – with surveillance camera footage deployed by Frontex along the Melilla fence. It premiered at the Berlinale Forum.

4 Private conversation with the directors, 23rd April 2026.

the images are far apart: technologies of vision employed for surveillance contrast with images born from (unexpected) forest encounters at the Serbian border. As such, the stories behind each piece of footage speak of relations that remain specific to conditions and places. Following Marshall McLuhan (1964), the way an image is made tells us about its maker and the relations that produced it as much as about the subject it appears to show. Blurriness serves here two contrasting agendas; Waking Hours' last scene borrows the language of surveillance without inheriting its intentions.

Degrees of opacity

Writer and poet Eduard Glissant's concept of opacity, as elaborated in his *Poetics of Relation* (2009 [1990]), is all-too-often referred to as either predicating caution about or outright refusing to be available to the ever-expanding eye of the state. His 'right to opacity' has been invoked as a strategy of resistance to the surveillance apparati employed against people on the move and, more broadly, against the state- and capitalist-inflected control and sanctioning of social and political bodies – one that demands hypervisibility obtained through constant visual monitoring, in any environmental or weather condition. "Alongside the need for representation", Irene de Craen writes, "exists a prerequisite to remain opaque in the eyes of hegemonic powers as a strategy of resistance". It is from and through the dark that resistance becomes thinkable and possible as a form of counter-insurgency, or as an atmospheric condition that can host and foster clandestinity, sabotage, and guerrilla (Djerbal, 2024).

But the same apparatus also produces and maintains the dark. On one hand, the purposeful concealment of documents and 'confidential' records remains an urgent problem for activist networks that attempt to fight systematic border violence and tackle the inhumane practices of police patrolling and recurrent deaths. The disobedient gaze of researchers investigating violence at the border attempts in some cases to flip the perspective and arguably employs 'the master's tools to dismantle the master's house', tentatively making visible what authorities sought not to be (Stavinoha, n.d.; Pezzani and Heller, 2013). As such, while opacity names a strategy of counter-power employed by people on the move or activists to resist the oppression of the border regime, it also emerges as a practice deployed by governmental bodies and police forces to purposely conceal their vicious operations. On the other hand, more frequently than not, police operations hide in the shadows, further "obscur[ing] or blur[ring] legible information" in order to evade institutional accountability (Tagle, 2020). Likewise, darkness is forcibly imposed when countries are at war, as a form of negation of their citizens' political agency; during raids in the West Bank, for instance, Israeli forces regularly shot out streetlights and cut off electricity to Palestinian neighbourhoods so that, when the night fell, they could operate under the cover of darkness (Cuyler, 2025). To be kept in the dark is the incapacitating condition par excellence, under the bombs, among improvised shelters, or in the belly of the ship, across the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean sea alike.[5]

As much as Western thought has historically predicated transparency in order to build the nation-state and its mandated subjects, the opposite is also more and more emerging as true: opacity has always been produced to conceal what is not needed, and what interferes with institutional power. "Opposite of opacity is not visibility, it is transparency" (de Craen, 2025): both directions (re)produce a spectrum of visibility: transparency and opacity build the visible subject along the invisible one.

A night that never ends

Nights in the Serbian forest are not opaque; they are utterly dark. In one of the sequences of Waking Hours, the edges of some trees' branches in the foreground, cut against the night sky, dissolve from indeterminate contours into an uncertain vision of their jagged limits. It takes some time for

5 Teenagers arriving in the Italian port of Lampedusa told workers from Save the Children how migrants from sub-Saharan African countries were often kept below the deck, deprived of water and sunlight". Dearden (2015), quoted in Sharpe (2016).

the viewer to grasp the silhouettes she is looking at. Throughout the film, this discomfort of vision constantly surfaces in the forms of overlapping shadows and blurry lights, as well as field sounds that never fully come into a spectre of familiarity. Technically speaking, images and sounds of Waking Hours are not in low res; and yet, much like Hito Steyerl's *Poor images* (2009), they "operate against the fetish value of high resolution".

The night, Leopold Lambert (2024) writes, is not only a time but also a place – while half of the Earth is in daylight, the other half dives into darkness. While minimal variations occur at the Equator, far south and far northern places can experience very different conditions of luminance across the seasons. At the latitude of the Serbia–Hungary border, the night never ends; much of people's life takes place in the dark forest: the clan organises passages, manages contacts between migrants so that tentative crossings can be attempted. A broader ecology of relations is set in motion through the dark: food delivery, negotiations with taxi drivers and passeurs, clandestine arms exchanges. A community precariously thrives within the woods. As such, the dark shapes the conditions of political agency within the liminal space crafted by the border regime. Night in the forest is also the tranquil spacetime for one's own story, and for recursive storytelling. The film, as the authors reveal, was born from a nocturnal encounter: some people invited them to join their group in the forest. Occasionally, drones were sent out by the police at night to map the place where people hid, so that eviction operations could then be carried out in daylight – included the one that cleared out the forest at last, severing the contacts between the directors and the people on the move.

Darkness fosters protection. As much as the dark of the night allows one not to be seen, its opaqueness turns it into an intimate atmosphere, a protective barrier[6]. Rethinking the forest as a safe space contrasts with its representations as a space of fear. The forest is frightening within cultural imaginaries of films and fairytales; instead, in the Serbian forest, nighttime was the moment of gathering, intimacy and sharing – and the privileged time for filming.

Entre chien et loup

Who inhabits the forest? Half-way through the documentary, the only spoken sequence in the film takes the form of a long monologue delivered by a young man to someone off-scene. He tells stories of encounters, movements and returns, from Afghanistan through the Balkans and then into Europe, and back into the woods. Moving counter-way to the flow, he troubled the linearity of crossing as a one-way trip. His face is softly lit and shadowed by the unruly flames of a bonfire; at some point, he confesses that he came back to this liminal space to help others attempting to cross. Bits of the monologue stop at such a candid disclosure of his role as a *passeur*, or a smuggler, at the border. In the attempt to singularise responsibility for the structural violence of border regimes, securitarian discourses highlight smuggling as the practice that produces death at the border. Deflecting accountability away from institutional grounds and police operations, the smuggler becomes the perfect figure to persecute (Zampano, 2023).

Within the Serbian forest, as Foscarini reminds us, passeurs are not quite fully in focus; they act as helpers, at times as exploiters, while remaining on the move themselves. Without smugglers, he says, some of the routes to Europe could not exist[7]. Contrary to other bordering zones where tragic dynamics are clearer, such as Libya, the forest forecloses easy distinctions. Foscarini further refers to the French expression 'entre le chien et le loup' [between the dog and the wolf], as apt for describing the blurring figure of the migrant / passeur. The expression names the moment where light is so low that the domesticated ground cannot be told apart from the threat. To tell the migrant from the smuggler would arguably determine who must be persecuted, and who instead might be considered apt for a

6 Conversation with the directors, 23rd April 2026.
7 Filippo Foscarini, private conversation with the directors. 23rd April 2026.

form of increasingly weak humanitarian protection.

Will the day come?

To be opaque is to helplessly and yet stubbornly be out of focus, whereas 'focus' is the rationale of a state of constant presentness, ruthlessly determined in bringing into focus a clear distinction between who is to be granted care, agency, rights, and who is not. Being out of focus, Hito Steyerl (2009) reminds referring to Woody Allen's *Deconstructing Harry* (1997), is a metonym for outcastness. In Waking Hours, the night that never ends constantly blurs the borders, unfolding as a sustained, inescapable condition.

The Afghan man, far from an either/or figure, inhabits a form of purposed indistinction within darkness. So do the bodies in the film's last sequence. Through the clear visibility promised by the thermal camera, or the proxy of its operational language, the contours of some hundred bodies can be grasped against the forested background – but these figures, as Foscarini remarks, can hardly be read as humans. The spectrality of the thermal ghosts enacts this purposed form of enforced invisibility in aesthetic terms. Forced vision dehumanises them as much as it tries to bring across their sharp contours; through the attempt at individualisation, it blurs their boundaries. "Regardless of its scale, the border takes the self as its subject, defining it in relation to an other" (Axel et al., 2020). Both senses of self and otherness are indistinct within the blurred reality of life at the border; the dark of the forest contains the violence of merging and the tentative promise of potentiality.

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The Heat of Darkness

Unsheltered Homelessness and the Politics of Nighttime Cooling

Jeff Rose, Atefeh Dorostkar

For people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (PEUH), darkness is not merely the absence of light. It is a thermally and politically charged condition in which exposure is reorganized rather than alleviated. If daylight renders bodies visible to the disciplining gaze of the state and the public, night might appear to offer a reprieve: a cooling interval, a loosening of surveillance, a temporal refuge. However, in the contemporary warming city, this expectation falters. Darkness no longer guarantees thermal recovery, nor does it secure visual opacity. Instead, the dark becomes saturated with heat, with regulation, and with a reconfigured intensity of uneven and unjust scrutiny.

To examine and unpack darkness in this context is to confront a paradoxical situation in that the very conditions once associated with concealment and relief now reproduce new forms of exposure. For PEUH, who live almost entirely within the public domain, night is not a withdrawal from urban systems of control and climate, but a different modality of inhabiting them.

Unsheltered life is structured by the absence of consistent access to private, climate-controlled space. As a result, everyday survival unfolds across streets, parks, sidewalks, and infrastructural margins. This spatial condition entails a near-constant visibility. Bodies are subject to what might be understood as a diffuse but ever-present form of panopticism. The seemingly all-seeing eyes are perhaps most obviously evident in the form of formal policing, but also the watchful presence of property owners, passersby, and private security. Public space is never simply open; rather, it is actively produced through exclusionary practices that determine who can remain, rest, or dwell within it (Mitchell, 2020). For PEUH, this heightened scrutiny and regulation means that to exist in public is to be perpetually at risk of displacement, citation, or banishment.

At the same time, these bodies are exposed to increasingly extreme urban climates. Rising temperatures, intensified by the urban heat island effect and broader climatic shifts, render cities increasingly environmentally dangerous, particularly during summer months. Much of the discourse on urban heat, however, remains resolutely diurnal. Heat is made legible through satellite imagery, daytime maximums, and visual cartographies of sun exposure. The city at high noon becomes a primary site of analysis and intervention. As a result, vulnerability is often framed through the spectacular intensity of the "high high": the peak daytime (afternoon) temperature that threatens immediate bodily harm.

Yet, it is often the "high lows" – elevated nighttime low temperatures – that ultimately become more insidious physiologically, and perhaps psychologically as well (Goodell, 2023). When the body cannot cool during the night, physiological stress accumulates, with growing evidence that nighttime heat independently increases mortality risk (He et al., 2022). Necessary nighttime cooling may be harder to achieve for unsheltered folks in dense urban areas. Sleep is disrupted, recovery is impaired, and

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vulnerability compounds over successive days. For those without shelter, this nocturnal dimension is not secondary; it is central. Night is when the body must attempt to discharge the heat absorbed during the day. When that process fails, the consequences are cumulative and often severe.

Darkness, then, might initially appear as a critical resource. As sunlight recedes, surfaces release stored heat, and temperatures typically decline toward a daily minimum just before dawn. Public spaces, like shaded parks, riverbanks, plazas, and other socionatural areas, become marginally more habitable. For unsheltered residents, night has long offered a precarious interval of cooling and mobility. Night is often a time to rest, to relocate, to access water or services with slightly reduced exposure.

In this sense, darkness has functioned as both a thermal and a surveillance refuge. Reduced light can complicate visual monitoring, offering fleeting moments of opacity within an otherwise overexposed existence. Night walking, resting, or gathering may evade some forms of daytime scrutiny. The city's rhythms shift, and with them, the possibilities for inhabitation and basic survival.

However, this refuge is increasingly unstable. The first disruption is atmospheric. In a warming climate, nighttime temperatures are rising at a faster rate than daytime highs in many urban regions, accompanying the associated increased mortality risk (He et al., 2022). The expected cooling of darkness is diminished or, in some cases, effectively absent. What remains is a kind of thermal persistence, where heat tends to linger and saturate, refusing to dissipate. Drawing on urban political ecology, this condition can be understood not as a neutral climatic shift, but as power-laden and therefore unevenly distributed. Urban heat is shaped by infrastructures, land use patterns, and socio-political decisions that concentrate vulnerability in already marginalized populations (Kaika et al., 2023). For PEUH, who cannot reasonably expect to retreat into air-conditioned interiors, the failure of nighttime cooling is not an inconvenience; rather, it is a direct threat to survival.

The second disruption is political. Darkness does not simply reduce visibility; it reorganizes it. As Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (2023) argues in *Law by Night*, the nocturnal is historically and juridically coded as a space of potential disorder. Night is associated with suspicion, deviance, and the imagined breakdown of social norms. This association authorizes intensified forms of regulation. Law adapts, changes, and responds to these situations, extending its reach through curfews, policing practices, and the selective enforcement of ordinances that govern presence in public space.

For PEUH, this ongoing reorganization of public space norms means that nighttime presence is often read as increasingly threatening and suspect, and thus more actionable. The same bodies that are policed during the day become, after dark, objects of heightened scrutiny. The ambiguity of darkness, in that it partially visibly conceals, does not produce or enable freedoms. Rather, it produces suspicion and the potential for increased interdiction on the part of the state. As a result, movement undertaken for survival (e.g., seeking cooler spaces, accessing water, relocating to marginally safer sites) coincides with an increased likelihood of encounter with law enforcement or security personnel.

Simultaneously, the very spaces that might offer thermal relief are increasingly regulated. Parks, waterfronts, and plazas, areas that cool more effectively due to vegetation, airflow, or proximity to water, are often subject to nighttime closures, intensified lighting, surveillance cameras, and private security patrols. Anti-homeless ordinances, including bans on sleeping, loitering, or camping, are frequently enforced more aggressively after sunset. Illumination itself becomes a tool of governance: not merely enabling visibility, but producing it in targeted ways that facilitate monitoring and control.

In this sense, darkness is not an absence of light, but a contested field in which light is strategically deployed. Brightly lit zones coexist with shadowed margins, creating and maintaining an increasingly fragmented nocturnal landscape. For those with access to private space, this landscape may be

navigable or even pleasurable. For PEUH, it is a terrain of constraint, where the need to cool the body collides with regimes that manage and discipline nocturnal presence.

This convergence of atmospheric and political conditions produces what might be called the heat of darkness. The heat of darkness is not simply a metaphor. It names an atmospheric persistence in which thermal excess saturates nocturnal space, while regulatory practices intensify the exposure of already vulnerable bodies. Darkness, in this sense, is not a refuge from the immediacy and intensity of light, whether understood as surveillance, extraction, or epistemic dominance, but a medium through which those seemingly slow violences are reconfigured and differentially deployed.

Beyond thermal exposure, the heat of darkness challenges the assumption that visibility is the primary condition through which urban inequalities are produced and understood. Critical scholarship has focused on making systems, politics, and relationships visible, through processes like exposing hidden injustices, illuminating neglected spaces, rendering legible what has been obscured. While these processes remain crucial, the case of nocturnal heat and unsheltered life suggests that exposure operates beyond the visual. Thermal stress, for instance, is not always immediately perceptible, yet it profoundly shapes bodily experience and survival. Similarly, surveillance does not depend solely on sight, as it is also enacted through laws, norms, and anticipatory behaviors that structure how space can be used.

The nocturnal city is not simply what cannot be seen; it is also what is differently felt, regulated, and endured. For PEUH, this reconceptualization and changing corporeal materiality means that the ability to rest, cool, and remain after dark is unevenly distributed. Some bodies can withdraw into insulated interiors, modulating temperature and controlling direct environmental exposure. Others must navigate an environment where cooling is partial, temporary, or actively obstructed. The right to the night, a concept often invoked in urban theory as a claim to leisure, creativity, or alternative sociality (Goldberg-Hiller, 2023), appears here in a starkly different light, becoming a question of survival. Who can access the minimal conditions necessary for bodily recovery, and under what constraints?

At the same time, darkness retains an ambivalent potential. It is not reducible to domination. The same qualities that generate suspicion, like opacity, partial concealment, and indeterminacy, can also enable forms of evasion and collective practice that resist total capture. Subcultural uses of darkness, as the call for this issue suggests, often exploit its capacity to disrupt legibility. PEUH often engage small acts of nocturnal movement, like choosing less illuminated routes, occupying seemingly overlooked and undermanaged urban spaces, and forming temporary assemblages. These resistant practices may carve out fleeting intervals of relative autonomy (Lancione, 2023).

However, these possibilities are fragile. As surveillance technologies proliferate and climatic conditions intensify, the margins of maneuverability narrow. Darkness is increasingly engineered: illuminated, monitored, and regulated in ways that limit its capacity to shelter alternative forms of inhabitation.

What, then, does darkness reveal? In the warming city, it exposes a temporal dimension of inequality that is often overlooked. Vulnerability does not end with the setting sun; it is extended, and in some cases exacerbated, through the night. The inability to cool becomes a cumulative burden, one that disproportionately affects those already excluded from stable housing. Simultaneously, the persistence of nocturnal policing underscores the extent to which public space is governed not only through visibility, but through anticipatory control of what might occur in the dark.

To think with darkness, rather than simply about darkness, is to recognize it as a material and political condition, one that is produced through the intersection of climate, infrastructure, governance, and daily community practices, among others. The heat of darkness is one such condition, in that it is a

climatological and regulatory convergence that reconfigures how bodies inhabit, behave, and most basically just exist in the city after sunset.

If light has long been associated with knowledge, clarity, and order, then attending to darkness may require relinquishing the desire to fully illuminate (Goldberg-Hiller, 2023). Instead, it calls for a different kind of attention, one that lingers with opacity, with uneven sensation, with the limits of what can be made visible. In doing so, it becomes possible to trace how power operates through both exposure and the very conditions that shape when and how relief is possible, for all people, regardless of one's housing status. For PEUH, the stakes are immediate. Darkness is not an abstract concept but a lived environment that no longer reliably cools, but still remains persistently governed. To engage it critically is to confront the ways in which climate change and urban regulation converge, producing a city where even the night offers no easy refuge.

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Anna Palmer's Darkness does not approach its subject from the outside. The photographs do not document low light, rather they inhabit it, remaining long enough inside shadow to register what ordinary seeing skips over: the thing that will not come forward, the detail that resists being found. Illumination, when it appears at all, arrives already partial, already broken by whatever it has passed through.

For this issue, Palmer contributes a selection of pictures made in the spaces between interior and open air, where light has already given up some of itself before it arrives.

Their logic is one of sustained attention rather than revelation: the camera stays, and staying is the method. What emerges is not hidden so much as habitually unseen, available only to the eye that has stopped expecting to find something.

Anna Palmer is a photographer whose work moves between landscape and interior, tracing the conditions under which visibility becomes unreliable. Darkness extends that inquiry into the threshold where sight begins to fail and chooses to remain there.

Physical and digital spaces of expanding darkness

Sociospatial (counter)practices

Miriam Tedeschi

Darkness is often associated with criminal or shady activities, and with the need to hide something that is prohibited by laws or social norms.[1] Yet, darkness may also be metaphor for sought spaces of intimacy, recovery, refuge, protection, resistance to sociospatial (hyper)visibility as well as to pervasive surveillance and dataveillance. Below we will navigate four overlapping movements towards and away from darkness, looking at how they intersect and negotiate their presence with sociospatial practices of visibility and light: darkness and gendered fear of crime; darkness and the need for physical / digital sociospatial (in)visibility; dark sousveillance vs datafied norm; expanding analogue spaces of darkness.

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I. Darkness and gendered fear of crime

I am walking on a street. It's dark, and the street is poorly lit. The street appears to be empty, even though I can see shadows in a distance; someone is also walking somewhere, slowly, being careful not to slip on ice. This is a very common scenario in middle-size urban areas from where I live, in the southern part of Finland, in the dark winter times, where the sun would show itself only for few hours during the day. Even though Finland is considered a safe country, especially when it comes to street crime, the feeling of uneasiness that I get when walking on a dark, poorly lit street, does not really fade away, as a foreign woman used to live in reportedly not-so-safe big cities in the southern part of Europe. My own imaginaries, intersecting with collective ones on poorly lit streets in urban areas at night, tend to be ones of higher risk of crime: they thus translate into fear of assaults, anti-social behaviour, drug dealing, theft, happening in those spaces. In short, into fear of crime.

When investigating fear of crime in dark or poorly lit public spaces, critical and feminist geographical scholarships emphasise its being highly gendered, relational, spatiotemporal, and frequently connected with territorial stigma (Roy, 2026). These nuances identify the processual making of the fear of crime itself as intertwined with multiple factors. In this view, my example, of me carrying the inherent 'sociospatial condition' of being a foreign woman in Finland, may have subtly modulated and gendered my own fear of the dark, and thus, my fear of crime, resulting in higher imagined and perceived sense of risk and vulnerability. My fear of crime may thus result from a complex intersection of the actual space I am walking in, with its own unique affordances, its known 'reputation' (does this space carry a territorial stigma?), my personal recollection of previous experiences and memories of dark urban spaces, as well as personal and collective imaginaries related to what may have happened to other women walking across such spaces. Such nuanced understanding of the fear of crime may

1 *Acknowledgements*. This work was supported by the Research Council of Finland under decision no. 368166 (project 'Agency in everyday Datafication' – *AgenDa*).

for example call for a right to more gendered spaces, or gendered-sensitive urban design, where spaces may be co-designed with women so that, for example, the latter could comfortably 'sit, lay down, alone or in a group, see, be seen and be near an exit point' (De Muret, 2019). Being away from darkness thus seems to be a characteristic of gendered-sensitive design – but is this desire to escape dark spaces always shared, and is darkness always associated with perceived unsafety?

II. Darkness and the need for physical / digital sociospatial (in) visibility

The apparently dichotomous and clear-cut distinction between light/safe and dark/unsafe has however many shades in between. Relationally, darkness may also be positively connected with the need to be less sociospatially visible. Here, darkness and the invisibility that it carries increases, rather than diminishing, the sense of safety. This may be valid for certain groups of people, such as undocumented migrants or other vulnerable groups, who do not wish to attract unwanted attention, especially in public spaces (Tedeschi, 2022). In this other interpretation, claiming a right to be sociospatially invisible, or less visible, dissociates darkness from unsafety and fear of crime, and instead shifts its meaning towards a right to spaces where one can hide and feel protected, without being constantly subjected to the scrutinizing glance of others.

Similarly to physical spaces, digital dark spaces also tend to be associated with unsafety and criminal activities: in the dark web, illicit material may be shared, fake IDs sold, humans trafficked. Yet again similarly to physical spaces, 'going digitally dark' may indicate the need to remain sociospatially hidden and protected from constant surveillance (e.g. CCTV cameras on the streets) and dataveillance (e.g. seamless and unwanted data extraction from own digital tech devices). It may be thus associated with sociospatial practices such as disabling geolocation on the smartphone when not needed, or using the dark web Tor browser to avoid being tracked online. These everyday actions are not necessarily signs of moral or legal transgression, but they may rather be attempts to resist datafication, where dark web is sought to gain digital invisibility, and, thus, in this context, sense of increased safety and protection of privacy. A right to opacity (Birchall, 2016) can be thus pursued through such data obfuscation.

Talvitie-Lamberg, Lehtinen and Valtonen (2024) have scrutinised such tactics of digital invisibility: for example, what strategies vulnerable individuals use to 'go dark' and escape digital spaces', and especially social media's, unwanted hypervisibilisation. They include for example: avoiding sharing content (or anyway anything too personal) online; or routinely changing apps/SIM/names/profiles; or using browsers' incognito windows. Other strategies are e.g. trying to trick the algorithms so as to mislead them and/or resist data collection and profiling (Sander, 2024), or, as one of Ruckenstein's (2023) research participants shared, writing on paper instead of online their own intimate thoughts, without the worry of them being (mis)used online.

III. Dark sousveillance vs datafied norm

Arnett (2020) defines dark sousveillance these resistance practices of remaining out of sight, and, thus, becoming, data-wise, as invisible as possible. Yet, just as the fear of dark physical spaces exists on a spectrum intersectionally shaped by e.g. gender and personal history and characteristics, so too does digital sociospatial (in)visibility engage with multiple shades of light and darkness. Some people choose digital half-light or semi-darkness, for example trying to negotiate their everyday life with the algorithms, by giving up some data, when they feel it is not too compromising, or it is anyway useful in terms of being able to access and use key services in return. However, others pursue full darkness and use radical forms of data resistance, such as deleting all their social media profiles, or exclusively using Private Virtual Networks (VPN) for online navigation. Yet, it may still be hard to live an entirely non-datafied, digitally dark life, when for instance walking in public spaces, where

surveillance cameras record movements, or one may be caught in a picture taken by others, and then published in social media.

This move towards radical data resistance sits at one end of a spectrum. At the other end lies its mirror image: not the refusal of datafication, but its wholehearted embrace. Here, someone may choose to 'become-data': to follow the datafied norms and give full light and visibility to their digital self, or double, while the physical self is the mirror, the copy of the double. The latter is thus fully nurtured and visibilised, but not without constraint: aesthetic standards must be followed to increase chances of being included and accepted online. For example, some social media promote 'filters, which can allow users to alter their appearances in either subtle or substantial ways . . . can provide smooth and even skin tones, larger eyes, fuller lips, more angled jawlines, whiter teeth, and thinner faces' (Wang et al., 2020: 1129). People would thus adjust their own physical bodies to better match these online filters. As a consequence, medical interventions are sought to become more similar to the online filtered image (Wang et al. 2020). Here, interestingly, the body pushed towards darkness or half-light is at times the original, unfiltered, 'physical' one: the one that deviates from the datafied norm (Tedeschi & Verdu Sanmartin, 2026).

IV. Expanding analogue spaces of darkness

While datafied, digital life remains largely prevalent, to the extent that in some cases it may even become a key way in which specific aspects of selfhood and persona are visibilised, a desire to move from such sociospatial hypervisibility to reduced visibility or increased 'analogue darkness' is emerging. There are aspects of the self that, some critical data studies reveal, people wish to protect and keep in such 'analogue darkness': 'Emotions, mood and feelings, thoughts, secrets, bodily sensations and sensory responses, spirituality, moral beliefs, personality, irrationalities, hopes, dreams and aspirations' (Lupton, 2021: 12). Simultaneously, non-datafied or less datafied spaces are sought. Places such as urban parks or forests – or libraries even. Places where surveillance and dataveillance are perceived as being less pervasive and invasive, especially if one remembers to deactivate the GPS function, or switches the phone off entirely (Tedeschi, Hautala, & Resmini, 2025). Just as one may seek physical spaces of increased darkness for protection, so too does the digitally fatigued person seek spaces where datafication's reach is weakened.

Here, a movement can be felt, of withdrawing. It is a movement towards darkness: towards a sense of self that remains intimate and is not shared online, with the risk of being misused. The darkness is never complete, though. There are various degrees of half-lights and semi-darkness that people encounter and negotiate their everyday life with, in the same way that the spectrum of fear of crime and the spectrum of data resistance admit no simple binary. So, every daily sociospatial micro-decision, micro-action, and micro-practice are a negotiation, of how dark one decides to go. There are things that one wants to keep completely dark. Others may come to light, as long as harm is not generated from them, or can be as much as possible prevented. In navigating these degrees of darkness (choosing what to keep hidden, what to allow into the light, and on whose terms) people may enact a quiet but persistent claim to a sense of selves and spaces that exceeds what being sociospatially visible can capture.

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Darkredroom

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1. I am interested in the meaning and sight of red light in darkrooms. I focus on the colour of darkrooms, these darkredrooms that make visible life in its many forms. Darkredrooms have remained in the shadows of photography and research, integral and invisible segments of wider processes. Here, red light is used deliberately for its ability to simultaneously light and hide. It reveals the edges and shapes of things while hiding colour and detail. It holds developed photographic film in limbo before their images are permanently fixed. It allows animals to continue their nocturnal activities, ignorant of the scientists' gaze. This red light opens up new abilities and spaces, new kinds of confined dark and night times that are dislocated from earthly rhythms of light and dark, day and night. I am interested in what this particular red does, and I am interested in what this red is.

2. Humans generally have three kinds of cone cells that are sensitive to different wavelengths that correspond to different colours. In red light, only our red light cones are active, revealing the world in a red tinged grayscale. If objects are red, they absorb the light appearing as black.

3. Red light is characterised by low frequency and long wavelengths. Blue light has higher frequency and shorter waves. Many animals and certain kinds of photography paper are less sensitive to red wavelengths. Less sensitive is not the same as not sensitive. But less sensitive provides an opening, a pathway to nighttime lives.

4. Silver halide crystals are chemical compounds that contain silver and a halogen, typically chlorine or bromine. When combined and coated onto paper or film, these crystals transform into metallic silver and are fixed into place by gelatin. They must be further processed to create prints, but crucially, must not be exposed to any more light before processing. Analog photography is a process of managing light – exposing when desired, and hiding until silver can be fixed.

5. Following the collodion wet-plate process, a photographer needs a collodion solution of nitrocellulose in ether and alcohol, a metal plate, silver nitrate, and light-sensitive photographic paper. Invented in the mid 1800s, this photography process had to be completed before the plate dried, giving a photographer only 10-15 minutes to complete their photographs. Photographers had to find ways of making dark spaces portable to fit in the confines of their wet chemical processes. Some used carts or wagons, small tents, or even specially designed wooden boxes (McNary 2018).

6. Several decades later, dry plate processes using gelatin were developed, and dark spaces evolved into dark rooms. Untethered from the field, these dark rooms were unsanitary and improperly ventilated spaces, poorly lit by lanterns and filled with toxic chemicals (Mitra 2025). Initially, these dark rooms would have relied on yellow lights, but as photographic plates and films became more and more sensitive, they shifted to red. These lights were used only for black and white film as colour

film is processed entirely in the dark.

7. Many modern guides give advice on how to convert basements and kitchens into darkrooms. They emphasise the importance of keeping out any light (including light from the bottom of doors), nearby access to running water, keeping low humidity, avoiding dust, trays for processing, requisite chemicals, and a dry area. With easy access and availability of digital photography, dark rooms have become rare spaces only found in artists' spaces, galleries, and schools.

8. These red or yellow lights in darkrooms are called safelights. Safelights vary in colour depending on the sensitivity of the photography material. However, guides are clear that the 'safety' of safelights are relative. A publication from Kodak (2006) states, "No safelight provides completely safe exposure for an indefinite period of time." The visibility afforded by the safelight is temporary. This red space is not a place of rest, but a temporary transitionary period before photographs may be revealed.

9. The management of light and sight is always marked by uncertainty due to the mismatch in light sensitivities between humans and Others.

10. Analog photographers work in darkredrooms to work with light sensitive materials. Animal researchers work in darkredrooms to watch animal lives in the dark.

11. Do animals have colour vision? Research on colour is bound to our human perception and cultural conceptions of colour. There is much debate among scientists interested in colour about the connection and difference between colour sensitivity and the sensory experience of colour among species (Kelber and Osorio 2010). An organisms neural cells may be sensitive to red, but this sensitivity does not get at the experience of red. Furthermore, the relationship between colour vision ability and the apparent 'complexity' of a species is not linear. For instance, the small crustacean Daphnia magna whose adult size ranges from 1.5 to 5mm has four colour photoreceptors, one more receptor than us humans. The famous mantis shrimp has twelve photoreceptors, yet they also worse at discriminating between colour than humans. Thoen et al. (2014) find that they use these photoreceptors in a fundamentally different way, scanning across each photoreceptor to recognise colour without having to discriminate between wavelengths.

12. In an early example of using red light to study animals, Finley (1959) describes his observations of wood rats and other mammals under a pocket light coated in red nail polish at the University of Kansas Natural History Reservation. He writes "The mouse seemed unaware of the red light for several minutes. . . The mouse stared into the beam toward me for a few moments, then turned and scampered back towards the trap" (Finley 1959:593). He explains that strongly nocturnal animals predominately rely on rod cells making them less sensitive, proposing that red light may be a unique way of getting access to animal life.

13. Scientists working in darkrooms are generally more interested in what their target species cannot see: namely, red light. Working with nocturnal species under red light has become a common technique in both lab and field conditions. Often, lab animals are reared on a reversed light cycle (dark during the day, light at night) to allow scientists to study these species on human time. They construct an altered spacetime that aligns wakefulness, allowing both researcher and subject to be active at the same time. In the lab, both are displaced: the researcher must operate in partial red sight, while the subject explores its life in the artificial lab space.

14. Research on various species has shown that certain animals may be more sensitive to red light than previously expected, species that are commonly studied in darkredrooms (Niklaus et al 2020). Like safelights, these red lights are a temporary way to create a kind of artificial nighttime that may produce unknown effects in our work with animals. Although they strive for the impossible omniscient perspective, their presence has a way of leaking light into the room.

15. Sight promises knowledge. In Ancient Greek, the word *eidenai* (to know) derives from the word *eidein* (to see) (Zilioli 2004). Thus, to know something is to have seen something. In modern English, much of our language around knowing is also associated with sight. I see can mean I understand. To be blind to something means to not know.

16. Red lighting is a reminder of the partial and situated nature of knowledge. Both photographers and researchers must give up a level of control to work with the more-than-human Other whether it be animal or chemical, machine or hybrid. Photographers working in darkredrooms practice the delicate art of managing light to produce a perfect snapshot of one lit moment, bringing the past into the present. Scientists manage light to coax their animals to produce a kind of activity, a red attempt to see what lies beyond sight.

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Controlled
ZONE
Mon-Sat
At any time
Sunday
Midnight - 8 am

MACAU_Nights

Loretta Sio Man Chang

NIGHTS

First, a mapping. . .Here with a colour ethnography of Macau after dark, minted in visual tokens of ambiences and materialities to invite a reflexive unknowing of Macau and its spectacles at night.[1]

Maps 1 and 2, Large districts map of Macau Large, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

And now, the visual tokens. . .

Halo	Depot	Emperor	Praça
Grand Lisboa	Jardim	Alley	Dreams

Fig 1. MACAU_Night CON01220226_Halo. Picture taken from Jardim do Lago at the foot of Colina da Taipa Grande. The crowning lights of One Grantai, one of the most expensive residential properties in Macau on the other side of the Colina, can be seen hovering in the night skies over the dwarfed Colina in the dark.

Surreal. There is no other word for Macau, the once sleepy heritage town which balloons into Las Vegas everywhere one looks. With one of the world's highest GDP per capita[2] and tens of millions of tourists[3], Macau is full of material extravaganza. This is a city whose desires have so much outgrown her tiny body of inhabitants and their way of life, that living is more like drowning.

While night time is usually a time of rest in most parts of the world, Macau comes alive after dark with its mega gaming businesses. And this is not restricted to casinos and their sprawling collaterals. In a place ruled by the values and aesthetics of speculative riches, everyday materiality is a mirror of extrovert asset.

It is now quite impossible to pinpoint at the exact moment when this all started - newly-built

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Loretta is also a writer of children's stories, a film critic and a beekeeper. She is at home in Macau, Hong Kong, India and Portugal, and spends her time mostly in the Azores in the mid-Atlantics.

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1 This text is a continuation of *MACAU_Days: a Colour Ethnography*, originally developed during a Workshop on Visual Research held in Macau, November 2025, where I took several hundreds of photos over three days of fieldwork. As a native of Macau, I intuitively realised that I had to include a night theme to do justice to the colours of Macau after dark. Unlike the original vignette, the night-themed vignette applies a token template which frames the colour under question in a wider picture, prompted by design aesthetics to accentuate the main images against a dark background. This situates the image in the greater spatial and cultural context of Macau. The format and style of deep description subsequently reflect this direction of exploration. The emerging texts begin to point towards a strategy of knowledge (re)configured by darkness, commonly taken as the antithesis of light/knowledge.

2 See "Macau ranks among world's wealthiest by GDP per capita in 2025", *Macau Daily Times*, 17 June 2025 and "Macau poised to become richest place on the planet by 2020", *South China Morning Post*, 8 August, 2018.

3 More than 40 M, according to *Total Visitors Arrivals 2025*, Macau Tourism Data Plus, Macau Government Tourism Office.

residential buildings in Macau worthy of the *nouveau riche* must all be furnished with awe-inspiring lightings as back-up to their elaborate facade once night falls and obscures its opulence. The competition has raised the bar so much that some upmarket residential complexes now own light installations that can bring smaller casinos to their knees.

With all due respect, One Grantai has low-key lightings in comparison. But still one can see its halo from the other side of the tallest hill on the island of Taipa.

Currently a typical three-bedroom apartment of One Grantai is selling at slightly under MOP 30 million (around USD 3.6 million), a steep drop from its heyday. Even at its much depreciated value, the residential complex remains the cathedral of prestige in Macau's property market. Seated on Colina da Taipa Grande, it has sweeping views of the Cotai Strip, Macau's equivalent of Las Vegas Strip. Yes, hence the name one and only Grantai.

As halo marks the divinity among humans in religious iconography, light-after-dark in Macau is a measure of worth concealed by night, and a defiance of the day light sovereign to illuminate possession.

Fig. 2 MACAU_Night CON08220226_Jardim. The luxuriant foliage of the Jardim do São Francisco at twilight unveiling the signature headgear of Lisboa Hotel located nearby. The three-tiered public garden sits between Avenida da Praia Grande below and Rua Nova à Guia at the foot of the Colina da Guia where the historic Guia Lighthouse of Macau is situated. It is open 24 hours a day and well-lit after dark. (Picture taken 30 November 2023)

Jardim do São Francisco is the first public garden of Macau. Built in 1580 as the green areas of the São Francisco Convent, it was transformed into a garden for public enjoyment after the abandoned convent was torn down to give way to barracks in 1861.

Because of its central location and proximity to a number of schools, the garden is a very popular hang-out for students and parents or their domestic helpers after school. The children's facilities are therefore a place of contention. One can observe the unspoken tiers of rules circulating among the little ones, the very little ones and the not so little ones. Fortunately, the labyrinthine layout of the garden gives ample space for children to flex their imagination and invent alternative games. In any case, it is already such a joy to run up and down the garden, following a different path every time, discover new trees, pick up fallen petals, steer a fresh turn, collide into another little fellow and land onto the laps of mama, or *jiejie* (the name domestic helpers are fondly known by, meaning sister in Cantonese).

As the sun sinks into the horizon, the traffic at the children's facilities thins out. People leaving their offices after work dropped by the garden to have a breather to catch up on their mobiles before heading home.

The floodlights and spotlights of the garden switch on at the cue.

In a quiet corner of the garden facing the barracks, two school girls do exercises on the fitness facilities while conversing in fluent Putonghua. One may hear an occasional Cantonese term thrown in[4].

The sun lowers further in altitude and the golden hour transits into the blue hour, softening into a dreamy ambience. The magic hour manages to escape everyone's attention, once again.

Fig. 3. MACAU_Night CON09220226_Alley. Beco da Felicidade is one of the narrow alleys converging into the Pedestrian Zone of Rua da Felicidade, lined by brandname confectionaries and eateries targeting visitors. In sharp contrast to the powdered-up and lantern-padded facades of Rua da Felicidade, the neglected

4 Putonghua/Mandarin is dominated by 45% of the Macau population, having grown by 3.6 between the census in 2011 and 2021. Use of Cantonese dropped 3.8% in 2021 from 90% in 2011. "What Languages are Spoken in Macau?", *Plataforma*, 17 June, 2022.

Beco retains the traces of time passed. (Picture taken 19 January 2024)

Guided tours to the Rua da Felicidade usually include the intelligence of why the street was so named, followed by a smile loaded with meanings. It used to be the red-light district of Macau in the 19th Century, offering a turnkey solution to all sensory pleasures with brothels, opium dens, tea houses, gambling houses and restaurants. After WWII, prostitution and opium was banned in Macau and the street declined in popularity.

In 1996, the Macau administration took over the situation and restored all the two-storey houses lining the street. The Chinese-style shuttered terraces were revamped and painted bright red. Rua da Felicidade moved on to live a reformed life and became the must-visit for all tourists looking for good food and souvenirs in Macau.

Beco da Felicidade was happily forgotten and left to its own devices.

Venturing into the Beco after dark was like taking a trip into the neighbourhood's seedy past. The Beco seems almost dodgy, ill-lit by a solitary light. Layers of plaster were peeling off the shabby walls, revealing the antique brickworks. Wiring criss-crossed the alley and laid exposed without any sense of shame.

One dared to go deeper into the darkness.

The vague outline of a curly apparition grew more distinct as one approached.

It was a bouquet of weed flowers growing out of the earthy bricks.

The arrangement was so beautiful, full of life and resilience.

A spotlight entered the enchanted scene.

A moped stopped below the pink and white blossoms.

One woke up to the present, as the helmeted rider parked and locked his chariot.

The ring of dangling keys resounding through the alley.

EPILOGUE - Involving

I'm a stranger in my own home.

I was born in Macau, grew up in Macau and left home when I was 16. In 2017, I returned to Macau on a regular basis to start a project related to children, which abruptly ended in 2020 when the pandemic hit the world. I found a new base in the mid-Atlantics to continue my work with children and didn't visit the town again until 2024.

To go on field study with the innocent lens of a visual researcher allowed me to drape myself in yet another layer of identity. I was at once a local, a visitor, a storyteller, a critic and a researcher. Every moment was a deeply-felt alchemy of rediscovery, hurt and yet inspiration.

Hurt? Most natives of Macau would probably choose the word "pain" instead. Indeed, it is painful to see Macau being swallowed and absorbed into a grander narrative. It is typical of Macanese philosophy to passively go along. After all, we had been a colony for a few hundred years previously.

Why "hurt" then? I reckon that it is an even more grating and in-your-bones feeling which leaves you no option but to react, instead of patiently bearing the pain. Research may not scream but it illuminates the dark corners and unseen layers of our reality.

Which brings us to the night theme of Macau.

On a typical day, the tiny town is swarmed with tourists, the number of which exceeds the local

population by more than twenty fold[5]. So night time is the only solace if one is hoping to walk the streets without being pushed, shoved or run over.

The streets of Macau may be quieter after dark, but they are certainly not unlit. In fact, "well-lit" may be too mild a term for Macau after dark. The town practically comes alive after dark. Casinos, hotels, event halls, shopping centres show their true form at night, blinding mortals with glitz and extravagance.

Avoiding darkness like the plague, high-end commercial buildings and posh residential complexes vie with one another for ornamental lighting which quickly spiral down into a show-off of excessive aesthetics.

No, they don't leave you alone in Macau. Retails and dining businesses big and small splash first on their gaudy lights, and then their honest trade.

On top of that, the administration of Macau celebrates all festive occasions by bundling the town up with decorative lightings and dazzling installations. There is also the International Light Festival and Fireworks Display Contest every year.

It is official, darkness does not exist in Macau.

Or rather, darkness is not acknowledged here. It is not legit.

As I went through the night scene images of Macau taken during my field study in November 2025, supplemented by photos previously shot on my visit between late 2023 and early 2024, I realised that I was diving into a place unknown even to myself. Except for Grand Lisboa (CON07220226), the other night-themed images were random pictures, taken without the remotest intention of doing anything out of it. Those were scenes I just had to capture at specific moments in space and time. And yet, they fitted so naturally into this vignette as a body of work as if I was simply collecting them all over town, consulting a shooting script complete with GPS coordinates and timecodes.

After two and a half years of collecting visual tokens of the town, I finally learnt to make sense of the mystery that is Macau by surrendering to its myriad of paradoxes and ambiguities. It has always been a process of unfolding and revealing. We have been trying so hard to look at the revealed and explain them away, all the time missing what's hidden in the dark by naming it invisible and therefore not to be known.

In eastern philosophy (read here the ancient *Upanishads* made easy for English readers by Sri Aurobindo, 1919), the path to enlightenment is to understand the cosmic process which begins with involution and unfolds into evolution. The *I-Ching* explains it so elegantly.

If darkness and light could be seen as the binary codes for knowledge, then perhaps true self-knowledge just may reside in that liminal space between.

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5 Macau ranks fourth as the world's most over-touristed city (26 tourists : 1 inhabitant) and tops the list in terms of tourist density, recording 547,112 tourists per km^2. "Overtourism Statistics and Rankings on the World's Top 40 Cities", *Tourism Analytics*, 23 April 2025.

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Alternatives After Dark

Nick Dunn

Cities are increasingly flooded with artificial light at night. Day and night in many urban environments have become ambiguous as their boundaries are blurred. However, this transformation has primarily been one-way as the night has become colonized by the expansion of daytime activities. Many contemporary societies have become so obsessed with conquering darkness that it has been chased out of sight by light. Indeed, our preoccupation with light has relegated darkness to the margins of our thinking and lived experience. It has been diminished, demonised, and destroyed. As a result, darkness lies in the conceptual gutter, over-burdened with many negative associations and meanings. This has implications for how we frame and perceive other things. When we think about what futures are possible, for example, we have a tendency towards visions of a bright, shiny, and frictionless world. Where darkness is present in such expressions it is usually deployed to evoke a fearsome, shadowy dystopia of danger and decay. This essay argues that there is significant potential in embracing the dark to think differently and find alternatives to the business-as-usual pathways that have led us to shape an uncertain and volatile world. As a form of material resistance in cities, it is tempting to believe there is little darkness left. Yet despite the challenges it faces, darkness remains. Around a corner, behind a wall, nestled in the deep pockets of urban fabric. This essay explores the nocturnal city as an arena of alternatives after dark. It examines the ongoing entanglements between the real and imaginary, body and landscape, space and time in those hours where our identities, senses, and potential futures are profoundly reconfigured.

The application of artificial light at night to simply facilitate the night to operate like the daytime is to reduce the former's distinctive qualities. There is a common assumption that electric light simply illuminates spaces and things rather than altering them through its deployment. This view, however, seriously underestimates the transformative potential of electric light as a form of building material that has profoundly reshaped our perception, behaviour, and organization of cities. The recent adoption of LED lighting represents a major upheaval in the character of luminosity in places after dark because of the quality and quantity of artificial light it provides. Although LEDs offer a more efficient means of producing artificial light than sodium lamps, the potential economic savings have not been joined by a reduction of light levels. In fact, the opposite has occurred since the introduction of LEDs thus far has led to increased brightness and energy use. In the context of street lighting this has meant that nocturnal atmospheres have been transformed instantly and seemingly irreversibly. As a growing number of cities globally have been subject to this intervention, previous darknesses across different contexts have become lost. While this loss is not absolute it is difficult to overcome. This is because over time it is harder for us to remember how things were before and so we undergo an extinction of experience (Pyle 1978). Future generations thus accept an ever-diminishing environment

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as the new normal and this includes the loss of darkness. Given the negative impacts of too much artificial light at night on human and non-human lives, the use of LEDs has significant consequences. The disappearance of darkness has led to recent inquiries (Eaves-Egenes 2026, Robertson 2023, Yallop 2023) as well as accounts of our entanglements with the contemporary night (Akbar 2025, Richards 2025, Sprackland 2025).

It is clear something needs to change given our bleached, over-illuminated world. What does *going after darkness* mean? I was faced with this question when, at the beginning of 2014, the city council in my home city of Manchester announced its intention to replace 56,000 streetlamps with LED ones. The diverse coexistences of light and dark that had characterised this familiar city were about to be profoundly changed. I developed a 'nocturnal praxis' (Dunn 2023) to document the various qualities of the city after dark. This approach used nightwalking through different urban conditions between sunset and sunrise to facilitate the production of an archive of photographs, maps, sound recordings, semi-structured interviews, and autoethnographic notes. I compiled this living archive, which remains an ongoing concern, to document the different atmospheres across the city after dark and how they are being altered. In addition, by bringing together these different methods to form a nocturnal praxis, the methodology enabled me to record and comprehend the patterns, rhythms, and confrontations that co-produce the city after dark. Walking is well established as a methodology for creative practice since it brings together the body and landscape, their rhythms and multisensory interplay (Middleton 2010, O'Neill and Roberts 2020). Nightwalking, therefore, offers a mobile method that can reveal empirical sensitivities and new avenues for critique since our perception of spaces crucially alters at nighttime as darkness is not merely the absence of light. It has positive qualities and acts as a material resistance that shapes our encounters. In a related manner, it is important to acknowledge that space in cities is also not empty. It is animated. Sanford Kwinter (2010, 74) describes space as "a participant, an unstable and unpredictable process that both harvests and produces reality on the run." The combination of darkness and urban space, therefore, offers a rich and dynamic situation where contingency and obscurity challenge traditional conditions for knowledge and within which alternative imaginaries might unfurl.

Many aspects of the city that seem preordained during the day are open to interpretation at night – we become our own cartographers, forging maps from fused and complex sensory experiences rebalanced from daylight's prejudices. Being present and directly experiencing the nocturnal city through the spatial practice of walking is essential to uncovering a different understanding of our built environment that contradicts such manufactured smoothness. Considered in this manner, nightwalking can be understood as an inscriptive practice that enables creativity to flourish and through which we can imagine how alternative futures might emerge. As the nocturnal city is in a process of becoming that is less defined and more porous than in the daytime, the role of urban environments at night as sites of resistance to late capitalism is not to be overlooked (Dunn 2016). How might things be different? It is an important part of the human condition that we long to know what will happen next. Yet at present, it would be reasonable to say that a significant number of people have limited ability to envision alternative futures. The core challenge, therefore, is how to engage as many people as possible with the various possible worlds we might find ourselves in later, not as an intellectual and abstract thought experiment but as rich potential lived realities.

Being in the city after dark opens avenues for questioning prevailing ideas and pathways to the future. Boundaries that appear more defined during the daytime lose their certainty at night as the city becomes more porous, its limits blurred and fuzzy. Identities shift and structures disassemble. Moving through time and space in the nocturnal city allows alternatives to emerge. Places that might be easily missed during the daytime can become sites of incredible beauty and deep sensorial encounter. We move within the city after dark and, in turn, it moves within us. Nightwalking thus supports

reflection and speculation on the future city. It offers a process of becoming that is co-created by the body and the nighttime urban environment. Through this process it gives us a method for understanding ourselves, our places, our relationships, and our societies both as they are currently and how they might be. In this way the dark is generative. It unlocks potentiality in the most mundane situations and compels us to engage with the world on different terms. Counterpoints, struggles, and new common dreams require space and time to both percolate and consolidate. The city after dark is an ideal place where different forms of care, conviviality, and vulnerability can coexist and combine towards new solidarities.

I believe an approach such as this can make a valuable contribution to our ways of being in the world as it enables us to glimpse 'dark futures' (Dunn 2025). So far, future studies has been effective in creating frameworks for organising thinking but far less successful in translating such anticipations into embodied insights. This raises a critical question—is thinking about the future a right or a privilege? All human beings should have the capacity to wander freely in their imagination. To dream, to hope, and to create alternatives is central to us and how we are in the world. Future studies is most useful when being radically imaginative, critical, inclusive, and democratic. The notion that we are all moving toward a common, singular future has been contested. Instead, there has been a significant shift from this positivism to pluralism where multiple futures coexist. If we reflect on how darkness has typically been viewed and discredited, we can detect the potential to change such thinking by reframing and reconfiguring its role in our lives. It makes sense to consider dark futures in their multiplicity since they are and will be diverse. Just as darkness is not uniform nor are the perceptions of it. The nocturnal praxis I have described in this essay can be adopted and adapted to enable us to identify and better understand how and why the city after dark is constituted and by whom. The 'who' in such processes is crucial and nocturnal praxis provides one way in which we can account for the remarkable qualities and capacities that darkness presents and within which we might find the clues and cues to question existing conventions in the world and explore what it could mean to live differently. I suggest that by rebalancing human needs within our more-than-human world, dark futures are convivial, healthy, just, sustainable, and regenerative.

Places at night are powerful evocations of a future that is partially present and in the process of becoming. They are open and provisional, generous to reinterpretation while providing enough elements to shape them. The city after dark is alive with potentialities. Yet darkness in all its forms is currently under threat. We need a different overview that recognises embracing the dark as a form of conceptual progress and practical resistance to the ongoing damage caused by the obsession with light. Given how much of the global population now lives in urban environments, the nocturnal city offers an accessible space and time to re-attune our senses and empower alternative voices so that we can reconstruct and reinvent ourselves, our relationships, our places, and our societies. Understanding the spectrum of darkness, its diversity and nuances is critical to our collective life going forward and for the generations that will follow. To achieve this, it is vital to embrace darkness as progressive rather than regressive, generative rather than unproductive, and protean rather than limited. Perhaps a new question emerges for us to consider alternatives – how do we want our world to be *after* light?

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Against Awe
Towards Everynight Darkness

Robert Shaw

Against Awe: Towards Everynight Darkness

In the introduction to an anthology of essays called *Let There Be Night*, Paul Bogard argues that darkness and dark skies should be understood as sacred, holy or beautiful. Across the collection, Bogard and others from the dark sky advocacy movement argue primarily that night should be preserved in order to maintain access to awe, although most do not use that phrase. Psychologists define awe as an emotion experienced following an encounter with something that produces a reflection on the smallness of the self, in relation both to the vastness of existence, and the many connections we have with others. As a recent review put it: "the experience of awe is self-transcendental, marked as a decreased sense of awareness of oneself as separate from others (decreased self-salience) and an increased sense of connectedness between the self, humanity and the environment" (Jiang et al., 2024, p.1). The philosopher Casey argues that awe is an example of an emotion which is primarily "out there", exemplary of emotions that are given to us, not experienced from a self-first perspective (Casey, 2024, p.318). We see this in Bogard's exhortation to: "a sky so free of pollution that you feel as though you might fall into its three dimensions. . . a sky so brilliant you can't help but wonder about a force greater than yourself" (Bogard, 2011, p.4). The entries in that anthology regularly come back to such themes – of the vastness of the night sky, the permeating yet obliterating experience of darkness, and their connections to deep histories, both on Earth and far away, as valuable, transcendent, quasi-religious, experiences of awe that might resolve the error of separating out self from environment (Casey, 2024).

It is easy to be sympathetic to such views, both because they draw from real, meaningful experiences of awe and because the goals, of increasing engagement with darkness and reducing environmental alienation, are laudable. Furthermore, an emphasis on externalized, relational awe fits with how many contemporary social scientists conceptualize the self as best understood as emergent from multiple interpersonal relations. However, I am sceptical of awe as a route to any of the goals of dark skies advocacy. The dark skies movement emerged first out of astronomy in the 1970s and today is an alliance of astronomers and environmentalists who argue for measures to reduce light pollution, increasing the number of stars that can be seen in the night sky. The movement is diverse but has three core goals: to increase human encounters with and experiences of darkness; to reduce the harms (ecological, scientific, socio-cultural, biological) of light pollution; and to increase knowledge of the cosmos. Beyond scepticism in using awe to advance these aims, I have become increasingly convinced that a reliance on awe risks reinforcing existing divisions as to who can and cannot access darkness, being at the heart of strategies that misdirect resources towards elite-focused astrotourism whilst overlooking the value of projects that instil everyday darkness. This position fits with a growing

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body of academic research that has questioned the reliance of dark sky advocacy on the nocturnal sublime, but that research has centred on the sublime as a representative technique, and not on awe as the emotional encounter with that sublime (Stone, 2021; Avery, 2023). This essay expands this argument by positing that increasing everyday, urban encounters with darkness, rather than occasional awe-full experiences in rural areas, is likely to be a more successful approach to engaging populations around dark skies.

Privilege and Awe

I check the website of Kielder Observatory, a public outreach observatory around 90-minute drive from my home, located in the Northumberland and Kielder Dark Sky Park. It's a popular site: it's currently March 25th, and the website warns that there are only fourteen tickets left across the ten events for the rest of the month, several of which are already sold out. I select their event on Saturday, a 'Spacekids' event from 16:30-18:30 targeted at families. There are four spaces left at the event, and if a family of four wanted those tickets it would cost them £72. There is no public transport appropriate for an evening event, so anyone needing to visit will need a car, and at current fuel prices, that's at least another £15 in fuel for the return journey from the nearest cities. Then there is the requirement to have access to leisure time, and not just any leisure time but time that can be planned early enough to get tickets – not possible for people on many forms of shift work. To go to Kielder Observatory, you need confidence in accessing rural spaces at night, which is lower among many minority groups (Askins, 2009). In other words, you need to know that Kielder is there and that it is for you. Effectively, to access the potentially awe-inducing experience of seeing Kielder's dark skies, you need access both to at least £100 to spend on an evening's leisure, and to what Bourdieusian scholars would call cultural capital. As Shildrick et al. put it, "'lack of resources in itself does not prevent active and reflexive choice and decision-making but it surely serves to limit the options for such" (2009, p.458).

I am not arguing here that Kielder is a case of bad practice. Their prices are good value: I have been to the observatory before and know that they put on a good show with knowledgeable and engaging astronomers. They also do substantial outreach work in schools and communities, identifying schools with more children from disadvantaged backgrounds as a target audience. I have experienced these workshops, and Kielder does a good job of engaging children in stargazing activities. It is well established beyond this one case that dark sky tourism tends to be difficult for many to access (Avery, 2023; MacMillan et al., 2023). The barriers to accessing Kielder for residents of North East England, then, are repeated by urban populations across the Global North.

My argument against awe, however, goes beyond access. Rather, I want to say that there is something particular about awe which connects it specifically to privilege. Here, I understand privilege as describing advantage that can be accrued across multiple, intersecting forms of social identity (Black and Stone, 2005). Keltner and Haidt's influential review of awe across disciplines identified two common components: vastness, which "refers to anything that is experienced as being much larger than the self, or the self's ordinary level of experience or frame of reference" (Keltner and Haidt, 2003, p.303); and accommodation, which is the "process of adjusting mental structures that cannot assimilate a new experience" (Keltner and Haidt, 2003, p.304). At the core of both of these is a pre-existing "self" or "mental structures". In other words, an experience of awe is heavily reliant upon the subjectivity of the person who encounters the 'awe-full' encounter, perhaps more so than the stimulus being experienced itself.

It is worth making a note on the relationship between awe and the sublime. The relationship between the two terms is contested and complex. Some scholars argue that awe is a version of the sublime, some that the sublime is a version of awe, others that the terms are interchangeable and

others yet that the connection between the terms is at best loose (Acrangeli et al., 2020; Clewis, 2021). If the terms are connected, it is through their appeal to a sense of transcendence of the self that comes from encounters with something that is bigger or larger than the self. If they differ, it is first in the importance of aesthetics to the experience of the sublime, which is not always present in awe (Clewis, 2021); and second, in that the sublime, particularly as evoked by Kant, is more likely to incorporate feelings of terror as well as enjoyment (Battersby, 2007). For its part, many have also written in the past that the sublime is a concept that is strongly shaped by subject positions, particularly around gender and race (Mann, 2005; Battersby, 2007), and so the claims I make here about awe are likely to be translatable to the sublime. However, in this paper I prefer to talk about awe because this focuses more directly on the intended positive emotional response that dark sky advocates hope to elicit among people who encounter dark skies.

In that context, dark sky advocates can be seen as making an appeal to awe which speaks more to certain subject positions, namely those which are more open to the awing encounter (Avery, 2023). Experiencing awe through dark sky encounters is not just a matter of physical access but is also contingent on the 'self' doing that encountering. There are several reasons to believe that privileged subjectivities are far more likely to be open to the encounter with awe. First, there is the question of knowledge and understanding of the depths of what is being seen. In other words, to encounter the night sky as vast requires at least some understanding of its vastness. It is well established that scientific knowledge is correlated with class-based privilege (Anyon, 1981), making the experience of awe more typically available to those with more resources. Second, the act of experiencing awe is an act of making oneself vulnerable; it requires an openness to the vast other. To be able to make oneself vulnerable is itself an act of privilege, grounded in the capacity to then return to a place of relative safety (Kern, 2005). Third, to encounter awe in darkness requires a subject position that is either willing or capable of setting aside the fear and uncertainty of darkness. Again, psychological safety comes in here, but this is also connected to socialized fear of the dark which is higher among women, the elderly, and people with other vulnerabilities (Pain, 2001).

In sum, there are many reasons to believe that an experience of awe via encountering dark skies is much more likely to happen among people with more privileged subjectivities, than among disadvantaged groups. I therefore argue that relying on encounters with awe is both a limited strategy for reducing light pollution or growing knowledge of darkness, and it risks reinforcing existing structural barriers to encountering the dark.

Dark Sky Alternatives: Engagement and the Everyday

Human encounters with the night sky were once much more mundane. The names of commonly visible constellations and other features of the night sky suggest this, providing evidence that our ancestors located the movements of stars and other bodies in relation to the land, culture, flora and fauna (Aveni, 2019). In other words, rather than experiencing the night sky as a barely comprehensible other beyond existing mental frameworks, humans incorporated it into understandings of humanity, environment, and the surrounding world. They saw the constellations change slowly over the seasons and connected these changes to phenomena around them such as the migration of animals or seasonal weather patterns, and to cultural stories about gods and power. What would it mean for dark sky advocacy to focus on reintroducing such everyday encounters with darkness?

One answer can be found in 'Urban Night Sky' places, a designation first given by International Dark Sky to Flagstaff, Arizona, in 2021. Such sites have no minimum lighting requirements, but must be readily accessible to the public at night and provide "a quality nighttime experience to their visitors". Many of the locations accredited are sites on the edge of urban areas, but in 2025 ARTIS Zoo in Amsterdam became the first place at the heart of a large urban area to be labelled an Urban Night

Sky place, albeit with an entrance charge. Both peripheral locations and pay-to-access sites remain problematic in terms of access, but these examples point to possibilities for making urban skies darker, in turn improving nocturnal ecology and human access to darkness. Continued development of urban dark sky places would make it easier to bring such designations to streets, small parks, woodlands and other areas that are more easily accessible to the public at night. Such sites would not even require that people know they are accessing a dark-sky protected area; rather, they would bring darker skies to where people already are, returning mundane encounters with darkness to urban dwellers.

Urban dark sky designations might be supported by lighting designers who have been working in communities of various sizes for several years to improve lighting to be both better for human use, while reducing light pollution. The social lighting design movement dates back to the early 2010s (Ebbensgaard, 2015). It has grown as LED lights make better quality lighting possible, even if most local authorities have implemented LED lighting poorly, increasing light pollution (Kyba et al., 2017) by over-lighting with bright white lighting which has worse impacts on animal life than the sodium lighting it has replaced (Boyes et al., 2021). Lighting designers, however, have shown that "designing with the dark" is possible, producing lighting which is both better for human use and which produces less light pollution, without relying on 'smart' technologies (Asfuroglu, 2023; Martinez and Bordonaro, 2022). Such approaches have emphasized the need for community engagement and localized lighting solutions, which identify the lighting needs in local areas while drawing on best principles of lighting design to reduce light spill and glare. The outcome of this is not only better lighting, but also better darkness.

The appeal to awe on behalf of those advocating for dark skies is understandable. Many of those involved in dark sky advocacy have experienced awe-some encounters with dark skies which they wish to share with others. But these experiences both have poor accessibility, and require a subjective alignment with dispositions that themselves typically come only with social privilege. Awe becomes not just a limited way of reaching people, it can be inherently exclusionary. By contrast, steps towards increasing everyday darkness in cities show more promise in reaching a wider range of people. This can both reduce nature alienation, and bring conservation benefits by increasing urban darkness. To date, attempts to facilitate better urban darkness have been isolated and small-scale, not helped by a fetishisation of pristine Dark Sky Park locations that might bring awe to an elite of dark sky tourists. Nonetheless, the urban dark sky places and the social lighting movement together show how a more equitable and potentially successful dark sky programme could look, once it has ditched its appeal to awe.

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Rethinking Darkness

Eleonora Nicoletti

Adapting to Darkness

Having limited abilities to see in the dark compared to other species (Reeves, Grayhem and Hwang, 2018), humans often respond to darkness by fearing and eluding it.[1] Through a critical review, as described by Grant and Booth (2009), based on an interdisciplinary sample of studies from the past decade, this essay explores diverse forms of responses to darkness, seeking to reassess its understanding and uncover new conceptual insights.

Humans' responses to darkness are shaped by interacting physiological, environmental, and cultural influences. As Himschoot *et al.* (2024) show, physiologically, low light affects visual performance and spatial awareness, impacting feelings of safety and comfort. Environmentally, lighting intensity, colour, and spatial distribution alter visibility, prospects for refuge, and perceptions of risk. Culturally and experientially, prior exposure to night-time environments and upbringing affect expectations of darkness and acceptable lighting. Accordingly, darkness may evoke fear, but also reassurance or pleasure depending on context and experience (Himschoot *et al.*, 2024). Thus, while darkness may have a negative connotation due to humans' lack of physiological adaptation to it, its perception may vary.

Other species have adapted with a variety of responses to darkness. As highlighted by O'Carroll and Warrant (2017), many non-human organisms can function effectively in near darkness through specialised visual strategies. Nocturnal and deep-sea animals possess optical and neural adaptations to living in extremely low light levels, maximising photon capture, reducing noise, and pooling visual information over space and time, which enables navigation using landmarks or celestial cues. Many species retain colour vision and spatial awareness in dim light, allowing them to orient, interact, and survive in dark environments (O'Carroll and Warrant, 2017). Some organisms have adapted to darkness through bioluminescence, or the capacity to glow in the dark (Syed and Anderson, 2021). Given humans' physiological constraints in low-light conditions compared to other organisms, such as nocturnal species, including slow vision adjustments and loss of acuity in perceiving details and colours (Reeves, Grayhem and Hwang, 2018), looking at adaptation strategies found in nature may inspire humans to improve theirs.

Humans have extended their limited night-time sensory capacities through technological spatial, behavioural, and cultural adaptations that enable activities after sunset, from spatial navigation to

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social and economic interactions. As shown by Vélez González *et al.* (2026), electric lighting, including energy-efficient LED technologies, along with adaptive control and reflective interior surfaces, has transformed building interiors of diverse uses, the benefits of which need to be weighed with energy efficiency and human health considerations (Vélez González *et al.*, 2026). Regarding street illumination, Dimitrakis *et al.* (2025) note how the transition to energy-efficient LED lighting has been driven by advances in precisely engineered optical devices such as lenses and reflectors. According to Pérez Vega, Zielinska-Dabkowska and Hölker (2021), the nightscapes created by electric street lighting, illuminated façades serving as media screens, reflective surfaces and signage support safe pedestrian and vehicular movement, wayfinding, and extended social and economic activity, to be balanced with safety and environmental impact through careful design. Through the example of Tehran, Khazaei, Ranjbar and Reza Pourjafar (2026) stress the role of urban design offering large, multifunctional open spaces that integrate natural and man-made elements in facilitating night-time outdoor activities constrained in the daytime by heat, work and local norms. This suggests that whether darkness is perceived as a negative or positive condition can vary with the geographic context.

While artificial lighting can increase perceived safety and enable night-time recreation in urban areas such as parks (Himschoot *et al.*, 2024), it alters natural light-dark cycles, contributing to circadian disruption, sleep disturbance, and long-term health risks in humans (Vélez González *et al.*, 2026). As an environmental pollutant, it harms insects, birds, aquatic species, and plants (Pérez Vega, Zielinska-Dabkowska and Hölker, 2021). It modifies darkness across environments as blue-rich LED light emissions grow and scatter beyond cities (Bará and Falchi, 2023). Hence, the detrimental effects of artificial lighting on human wellbeing and natural ecosystems call for more sensitive human adaptations to darkness.

Bioluminescence may offer design inspiration to address problems associated with artificial lighting. Syed and Anderson (2021) explain how bioluminescence, which is the natural capacity of certain organisms to emit light thanks to particular molecules, such as luciferin, has evolved in marine organisms, insects, bacteria, and fungi, enabling communication, predation, defence, and mate attraction in low-light environments. It has already inspired a range of man-made technologies, proving its relevance to applications in various sectors, from physics and biology to engineering and medicine, as well as its potential for architecture. Examples are found in the healthcare and food industries, among others, where bioluminescence-based technologies have been used to control the hygiene of equipment and processes. Attempts to bring bioluminescent systems into architectural and urban lighting have faced the issue of their short lifespans. Additional challenges for expanding applications of bioluminescence include the fact that the emitted light is of a wavelength which makes it unsuitable for some desired purposes (Syed and Anderson, 2021). While the glow from bioluminescent systems can be inadequate to enable certain activities at night, it may offer promising potential to reduce light pollution and restore biological rhythms. As bioluminescence is thought to have major limitations for large-scale deployment, Abdallah *et al.* (2025) propose a design for bioluminescent urban tiles created through 3D-printing, directed at overcoming operational drawbacks such as maintenance and cost issues, offering a passive, low-impact alternative to conventional lighting. The 3D-printed tiles serve as the substrate for sprayed bioluminescent ink and retain it thanks to their geometry based on a 'field-diffusion pattern', which results in a 10-day lasting glow achieved through a relatively inexpensive system (Abdallah *et al.*, 2025). Thus, it can be evinced that bioluminescence may provide opportunities for developing low-intensity adaptive lighting that can support visibility while reducing light pollution and its negative impacts. As a passive light source, going beyond the energy efficiency of LED lighting, it could further lower reliance on energy generated from fossil fuels.

By exploring the topic of 'animal coloration', Caro, Stoddard and Stuart-Fox (2017) consider the role of colour in animal organisms, including how it is produced or perceived, and further highlight how

nature can be a source of inspiration for technology development. Corneal nanostructures found in the eyes of moths and butterflies reduce reflection, improving night vision and inspiring anti-reflective devices that serve as optical enhancements to improve light emission in LED lights as well as light absorption and conversion in photovoltaics. Similar anti-reflective surfaces on insect wings and crustaceans' shells reduce their visibility and improve camouflage, while light scattering properties typical of butterfly wings make their colours distinguishable from various angles. Arthropods' compound eyes have inspired compact, wide-field imaging and sensing systems. In low light, insects use 'neural summation', a process adding up light signals received across their compound eye structures. This improves the overall perceived clarity of visual stimuli and has been mimicked computationally to enhance night-time videos. Crystalline microstructures in fish retinas inspire solutions to improve imaging under extremely low-light conditions (Caro, Stoddard and Stuart-Fox, 2017). Hence, nature seems to offer a relatively unexplored wealth of optical structures for interacting with light and its scarcity, which may serve as sources of inspiration for developing enhanced forms of human adaptation to darkness.

Dissecting Darkness

Darkness is commonly, but misleadingly, understood as the absence of light. Aulsebrook *et al.* (2022) highlight how in biological research 'darkness' is often reported as '0 lux,' even though true absence of photons is unrealistic and biologically meaningless. Natural nocturnal environments always include some light from the moon, stars, and airglow. Even extremely low light levels, below 1 lux, can strongly affect organisms' behaviour, physiology, circadian rhythms, and melatonin production (Aulsebrook *et al.*, 2022). Instead, darkness may be thought of as fullness of light. Gopal and Sudarshan (2023) note how certain objects appear dark because they absorb, rather than reflect, most incoming light, a property which is increasingly sought after in advanced materials. Nature provides key sources of inspiration: deep-sea fishes, butterflies, and birds of paradise achieve ultra-black appearance through micro- and nanostructures that absorb light efficiently. These biological strategies have informed engineered ultra-black coatings such as carbon-nanotube arrays (e.g., Vantablack), which absorb about 99% of incident light. Such materials are highly valuable in technologies requiring minimal reflectance, including optical instruments and solar energy systems, the performance of which is improved by maximising light absorption (Gopal and Sudarshan, 2023). This is particularly crucial to the success of solar energy technologies. Liu *et al.* (2022) stress how micro- and nanostructures enhance light trapping in monocrystalline silicon solar cells to improve power-conversion efficiency. Inspired by natural anti-reflective surfaces, such as moth eyes, these structures reduce reflection and increase the optical path length of incident sunlight, preventing it from escaping. This has the potential to greatly increase solar cells' light absorption and energy conversion efficiency (Liu *et al.*, 2022). More than a mere technical innovation, the Vantablack nanomaterial, which, through extreme light absorption, produces disorienting visual experiences, can be thought of as a cultural artefact serving as an exclusive art material (used by Anish Kapoor), as a commercial novelty, and as a tool for science communication (Michael, 2018).

By further reflecting on sensory experience, it can be observed that, in the dark, human perception becomes less dependent on the visual sense. Papale *et al.* (2016) note how reducing reliance on vision can intensify non-visual perception, especially touch, which emerges as crucial for more embodied engagement with environments, supporting emotional and social connection as well as spatial understanding through physical proximity and contact (Papale *et al.*, 2016). Darkness experienced by people with visual impairments, i.e., with limited or absent vision, leads individuals to rely more on non-visual cues, especially tactile and auditory information, to perceive spatial boundaries, sequences, and safety (Zou and Zhou, 2023). While temporary darkness due to visual deprivation was found to enhance auditory perception in adult mice (Jendrichovsky, Lee and Kanold, 2024),

further evidence from a study with human participants suggests that, without vision, continuous haptic stimulation can improve the processing of auditory information, with sharpened non-visual perception resulting from the synergy of touch and hearing (Fu, Smulders and Riecke, 2025). Thus, in the dark, limited reliance on vision allows non-visual senses, such as the haptic and auditory senses, to play a stronger role in the human perception of spaces.

Non-visual senses rely on physical proximity. Hence, experiencing environments through those senses may encourage people to meet and spend time together. It may also increase people's awareness of the many features of the spaces they inhabit, and stimulate them to interact with them in a variety of ways. These may include checking how the diverse textures and temperatures of building surfaces feel to touch, or listening to the shapes the sound of human voice takes by bouncing through architectural spaces. Therefore, by promoting proximity, darkness can facilitate closer inter-human and human-environment interactions.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this essay exposes diverse facets of darkness, towards demystifying it and stripping it of negative connotations it may have been loaded with due to being poorly understood, accepted and adapted to. Darkness emerges as an asset that can enrich the human experience of spaces, and as such, is worth respecting and cherishing, rather than fearing and suppressing. It can also propel the development of innovative architectural design and technology solutions as forms of adaptation to it. As multiple of the reviewed studies show, seeking inspiration from nature may benefit the human exploration of alternative forms of adaptation to darkness, which may improve the experience of it, the balance of ecosystems, and the utilisation of energy resources.

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Darkness Negotiations in the Arctic
Writing and an(other) Politics of Darkness and Light

Irina Shirobokova

The project investigates what the politics of darkness might look like today. By doing so, it aspires to undo the myth associated with darkness as the 'other' of light—absence, lack, and negativity. How to negotiate but not negate darkness? Connecting feminist geography with psychoanalytical theory, averse to the standpoint of the Enlightenment, I am trying to find out how to negotiate and inhabit darkness without shedding light or illuminating.

To answer this question, the project builds on long-term fieldwork in the Arctic, a place of polar night, a period when the sun does not rise and it is dark 24 hours a day for 2-3 months, and a place of Aurora Borealis, an atmospheric phenomenon where charged solar particles interact with the Earth's magnetic field to produce shifting bands of colorful light in the dark sky. Following this profoundly relational environmental ontology, in my fieldwork, darkness departs from Western notions of obscurity, danger, or lack (Edensor & Dunn, 2021), instead opening space for alternative relations and possibilities beyond negativity. Feminist and queer scholarship has similarly approached darkness not as absence, but as a site of potentiality and resistance (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lorde, 1985).

In relation to that, the project intervenes in regimes that position light since Plato's allegory of the cave (Plato, 2007, 514a–517a), as a condition tied to truth and authority. This logic was applied throughout centers of geographical conquest and extends into gendered, colonial, and racialized violence, where light continued to approach multiple spaces (from the body to the global) in the form of discovery, exposure, and domination. Darkness was assigned as a strategy of erasure (Khanna, 2005, p. 11) aimed at negating, conquering, or controlling 'the other' as dark and dangerous, and therefore unknown and ungeographical (McKittrick, 2006). Darkness operates to negate these others in a very material reality, in everyday life, though positioned as purely metaphorical. In my work, I trace the spatial grounds of such light/dark politics to unsettle its structure not simply through redefining concepts or categories, but by finding myself over and over again in the remote Arctic places during the polar night and writing together with other women and non-binary people. In these gestures, I combine feminist geography with psychoanalysis, acknowledging centuries of multiscalar negation and repression of the dark. I argue that it is not enough to bring about political consciousness; there is a necessity to engage with the unconscious to liberate the matter. I attempt to do so, through groping in the dark, engaging with places mediately through the textuality of women's and other marginalized subjectivities' writings. Analyzing written materials, I go beyond content, discourse, or narrative analysis, being driven rather by a psychoanalytical perspective to allow the impossible to slip into, through errors, repetitions, and rhythms. I keep a spatial perspective while analyzing how bodies-places-texts are negotiated.

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Arctic Geographies of darkness: 'The other' as 'dark.'

The Arctic was one of the last colonization frontiers administered by the Soviet Union, the USA, Canada, Norway, and Denmark. It is a point of departure for recognizing that light and dark are far from mere metaphors, and how deeply colonial and patriarchal structures are rooted there. Today, the Arctic's strategic importance amid accelerating climate change, glacier melt, and a shifting geopolitical order attracts global attention as a space for renewed resource extraction and transportation routes. From the heroic age of exploration to more recent mining and infrastructural efforts, the Arctic is filled with images and figures of men overshadowing women's work, lives, and contributions to creating life in remote, extreme environments. Simultaneously, indigenous Sami ecosystems have been continuously disrupted by this extractivist logic. The Sámi had to fight to protect their lands, which were gradually taken over for the development of ore deposits. Their language, culture, and beliefs were violently erased by the 'enlightening' 'civilizing mission' (Slezkine, 1994). "They told me in school: your mother is a half-reindeer," shares one of the interlocutors, referring to the day she learned that she belongs to Sámi/animal/nature, despite her mom's attempts to hide it.

The project aimed to unravel the layers of embedded violence of this 'metaphysics of the West' (Khanna, 2003). Averse to the cruelty of 'enlightening' it approaches darkness and light as spatial conditions and attempts to negotiate, but not negate, darkness. Despite the construal of darkness as overwhelmingly negative, such notions are neither historically nor geographically universal (Edensor & Dunn, 2021). The Arctic suggests a critical site that does not try to 'shed light' on local life but rather treats it as a material-theoretical place that complicates the production of the light/dark binary. Here, with prolonged polar night or the Aurora Borealis, this regime encounters its limits not only through environmental conditions but also through something that emerged in conversations with my interlocutors. It was a reference to darkness that has more qualifications, that is not just an affect of the polar night, but a deeper phenomenological experience; something shared and empowering for women and other marginalized subjectivities:

At first, I was sure that the darkness struck me for the peculiarities of its rhythms; for how the night becomes a fluid abyss, with the infinity of a seabed. "It envelops, it immerses, it frightens, it gives hope that the dazzling polar day will end, bringing a release. But it doesn't come; instead, in the polar night, everyone becomes a little delirious, and then loneliness is no longer so pervasive," as Lena Buranza writes. For Sami people, "people of 8 seasons", darkness is a place of gathering and socializing, it's also a part of the 8 seasons cycle. Following this more complex understanding of darkness, my engagement with Arctic places has evolved into a grounded theory.

Darkness Negotiations: Methodology and Empirical Research

Empirically, I continued exploring gendered and colonial logics of the omnipotence of light and its' organizing power in the case of a bordering region of Norwegian and Russian Arctic, where darkness is not an outcome of this power but grounds of alternative politics. I conducted a two-stage fieldwork that included a winter field trip during the polar night (December-February, 2021, 2025, and 2026) and a summer field trip (around midsummer, the period of polar day, 2025). Along with classical ethnography, this fieldwork included *Darkness Negotiations* in collaboration with art and social institution *Pikene Pa Broen*, which has worked in the region since 1996. Here, I will focus more on this method and the writings produced during these field trips.

Darkness negotiations consisted of collaborative writing residences and workshops, and correspondence. This mediation with research participants through writing enabled the creation of forms of proximity and affinity distinct from the interview process or participant observation. It gave me a perspective on methodology that is prior to applying any method or straightforward theory-making, and attuned to the fieldwork in a more intimate way.

The project is inspired by feminist scholarship that shifted the analysis from infantilizing 'voicing' towards more complex engagement with research participants' textual authority' (Barros-del Río & Terrazas Gallego, 2023). A crucial part of this methodology is that it aimed not just to represent or make visible but to co-produce practices and knowledge about darkness.

I follow Anzaldúa's ontology where language does not simply refer to or represent reality (Anzaldua, ed. Keating, 2015: 3). She argues that "writing is a gesture of the body... The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text" (Anzaldua, ed. Keating, 2015: 5). I combine Anzaldua's approach with method of l'ecriture feminine or female writing developed by Helene Cixous. It is linked to "returning to the body which has been more than confiscated from woman, the undoing the work of death . . ." (Cixous, 1976, p. 885). For her, "writing is the very possibility of change" (1976: 879). L'ecriture feminine, though, does not belong exclusively to women. She argues that anyone can occupy this marginalized position to undermine the stability of the dominant order, even men unafraid of their femininity, such as Jean Genet, she adds.

I also follow Cixous (1990) *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, who "strives toward a mode of reading, writing, and speaking nonexclusive differences so that the other is other without being thought of in merely negative or positional terms such as that of the nonself" (xi). I approach writing as an 'encounter with another'. In studying darkness and otherness in the Arctic, I advocate for writing that is embodied, located, and engaged with places, considering it 'beyond evidence' or representation. Following Stephenson and Spence (2013: 221,226), I emphasize writing as a material contribution, not just the production of text, but also space.

Writing and An(other)

For Indigenous Sami who grew up in the condition of polar night, perception of darkness (*skábma* in Northern Sámi) is not limited to a negative or frightening category; it's filled with spirits, ancestral presence, relation to animals, and is constantly negotiated. Darkness is not the absence of light, but an ontological and temporal condition embedded within the cyclical rhythms of nature, corporeality, and memory, in which stories are held until they are summoned through a specific form of breath-based throat singing known as *yoik*. Yoik insists on fundamentally different relationality between oneself, nature, or phenomena.

We met for several years, every polar winter, and wrote together darkness, and we met darkness. One Sámi told me he had a yoik that his grandfather passed down to him. He insisted: "This yoik isn't about the grandfather, the yoik is the grandfather". On that polar day, he also sang the yoik seagull. Can a yoik be darkness? How can one sing darkness? Can one learn to yoik darkness? And to write it? What if my writing isn't about darkness, but it is darkness?

She wrote, "I was possessed, inhabited maybe . . . by this darkness". And added: "to be a writing person is to allow to be". As if writing is inseparable from being, from being in the darkness, from being darkness. It refuses both the negation and the inversion of darkness; it prevents darkness from being the absence of light or from becoming a new essence, a superior.

In a sense, writing and yoik are close to one another. They are distant from speech (Derrida, 1976/1967). They are closer to places, to mountains and water. How can one write about these mountains, erupting from the ocean in a whirl, scattered like splashes held level with one another? Any attempt to describe or symbolize them would encounter resistance.

This Sámi man also told me that when he is alone in nature, for example, sitting by a lake deep in the forest, and his breath is taken away by the surrounding beauty, there are no words capable of describing it. He begins to yoik on the exhale. Yoik is rhythmic and consists of repeating sounds and elements. They appear similar, yet they are never identical.

Cold. Maybe it all began there?

Maybe I am returning to the cold?

To the melting of streams.

Repetition, repetition.

Yesterday, you said the river was so angry that it washed away the bridge.

How do these forces arise, in you and in me?

Impossible tales, faces without faces,

Neither you nor I had a face.

Our lives became tall tales,

Whether they were or weren't.

Whether they were or floated away.

Departed, sailed off, disappeared.

Never returned.

We stood one by another,

And even without holding hands,

We wove ourselves into words.

He said, "You are not from here."

Not from the North.

Yes, I am not from here.

But not from there either.

I am from nowhere.

Me too.

And I (March, 8, 2025).

To repeat. To write, write not in order to differentiate, to capture, or move beyond darkness as an unknown, but to settle within it. Any attempt to explain darkness would mean a claim of authority. Leaving darkness in the realm of metaphor while inhabiting the polar night is simply impossible. Writing allows us to stay with darkness without exposure, transparency, and, therefore, control. As one of the collaborators writes, "Darkness has the power to enhance what is already going on."

According to Derrida (1976), writing produces both difference and deferral. In his seminar, Littérature (1971), Jacques Lacan introduces the notion of the littoral (from the French littoral, meaning "shore-line") as a way of explaining the work of the boundary between two orders: the Symbolic and the Real. Like the shoreline between land and sea, it is a zone of rupture and contact, where the symbolic and social structures encounter the resistance of the Real, which continually escapes symbolization (Lacan, 1971). Lacan suggests that writing and psychoanalysis meet on this shore, where knowledge and *jouissance* touch. Such encounters open a space for new forms of understanding and experience. This kind of writing does not submit to narrativity or storytelling. It's a place where *jouissance* reaches limits that exceed what can be represented. In this tension, something emerges precisely in the impossibility of telling it.

Sliding along the border.

The border of a seven-hundred-year-old forest.

The border between ice and the water beneath it.

The border of three countries.

The border between night and day, that dissolved into the blue hour.

A way of making a difference through writing.

A way of making a difference that creates not the other, but another.

Difference not through a cut, but through touch and sliding.

To write from darkness and to write darkness, that is, to make a difference without negating the other as threatening or frightening, but by touching each other's Real, creating a space that unsettles the structure of the light's sovereignty (December 22, 2025).

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The paradox of illuminating darkness

Suki Finn

Illuminating darkness is paradoxical. For as long as darkness is a metaphor for mystery, and light a metaphor for (and means of) understanding, the dark will remain *in the dark*. Any attempt to illuminate what is identified as unilluminated and defined as un-illuminable inevitably results in self-refutation and contradiction. This paper outlines this process through the drawing of limits of thought and the placement of darkness at and beyond that limit. The radical nature of darkness manifests in its boundary pushing and in its refusal of characterisation, leading us to confront some of our most basic logical assumptions about contradictions and methods of knowing.

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Roy Sorensen, in his book *Seeing Dark Things*, argues that we see dark things, and can see in the dark, where what we see in the dark is the darkness itself. Seeing complete darkness has a phenomenal and metaphorical character somewhat analogous to hearing silence. To perceive these absences (of light and of sound) one needs to positively attend to something negative, which is distinct from not attending to something positive. To understand this, the presence of absence must be distinguished from the absence of presence. The positive experience of negative entities (or lack of entities) is distinct from the negative experience (or lack of experience) of positive entities. Not attending to something is different from attending to nothingness, and the differences in perception exist across a spectrum between and beyond this simplistic binary. I limit the scope in this paper to articulating the paradoxical nature of positively attending to negativity, when the means and success of that positive attention is in tension with preserving the negative lack of something to attend to – as is the case in illuminating darkness.

Much of our language, perception, and thoughts are understood as being directed towards or referring to things, and so the question regarding darkness is what it is our language, perception, and thoughts are about. The question arises when we consider darkness as a negative entity, like an absence or a lack, which is in tension with our theoretical bias towards the positive. The very concept of an absence or lack is dialectically (and some would argue, parasitically) connected to the positive, where the absence or lack is understood in terms of some positive thing being missing. The negative is conceptualised within a positive framework, such that it is only indirectly referred to via what is (not) there. In line with this positivity bias, negative absences are (re)interpreted as just placeholders or disguised instances of positive presences. If all examples of negative entities can be paraphrased away by reference only to the positive, then reality and all truths stated about reality can be reduced to this positive framework, thus making the negative redundant. With respect to darkness, it could be reinterpreted as the absence of light where light simply is not, rather than an object of perception in and of itself; the very name 'dark' just becomes the noun (via a process like nominalisation) given to the lack of something else, namely, light, and does not otherwise have a referent – 'dark', on that

account, specifies the absence of a positive referent.

If darkness must be given this treatment then there needs to be justification for the general bias against negativity. Many attempts to eliminate or reduce negative truths to positive truths just seem to relocate, embed, and hide the negation elsewhere, thus leading us to question the priority, primitivity, and fundamentality of negation. Try as we might to rid ourselves of all negativity, we will fail, even if we succeed in paraphrasing away references to particular examples. So, without universal reducibility requiring the elimination of all negative entities, what is to be said of darkness specifically? Is darkness reducible to an absence of light, or is darkness a thing in itself (and if so, what sort of 'thing' is it)? There are a few options to understand what is going on when our language, thoughts, and perceptual experiences seem to be about and directed towards darkness, including but not limited to the following: (i) 'dark' fails to refer to an existent entity but successfully refers to a non-existent entity which serves as the referent for our reference; (ii) 'dark' fails to refer to any 'thing' at all (existent or non-existent) and our understandings of darkness are deemed meaningless or false; (iii) 'dark' is a reference without referent, yet having a referent is not a necessary determinant of meaning or truth. Much of how we address this paradox of illuminating darkness, then, is tied up with its ontological status of existence.

This leads us very quickly into a similar riddle of non-being, which describes the problem of true negative existentials – i.e., the problem of stating truthfully that something does not exist. If an existent referent is required to give a statement meaning then it is impossible to speak meaningfully and truthfully of what there is not. Any such attempt to deny the existence of something will be self-refuting, because its meaning and truth would be problematically reliant upon its existence. If understanding requires illumination (or existence), then darkness (like the non-existent) as the unilluminated cannot be understood, and as such is un-illuminable. The very act of attending to or referring to a thing illuminates it and brings it into existence, which is self-refuting for the purposes of acknowledging a negative entity. To make a loose analogy with the quantum level, our gaze fixes and determines via light, so there is no gazing at the unilluminated – we cannot 'see' the superposition, nor the darkness, because our observation is at odds with the state of what we are attempting to observe. Observation, or attention, via illumination, is where the problem lies, as these processes destroy what they are directed towards. Shedding light on darkness destroys it by turning it into that which it is not – namely, from dark to light. Any attempt to understand darkness by bringing it to light therefore falls prey to this self-refutation paradox. When we turn towards darkness, it turns away from us, like the dark side of the moon – even as our relative position changes, what remains is that there will be a side that is out of sight. Darkness evades us, and so the dark side will continue to be a mystery so long as illumination is the process we rely upon for understanding.

One response to this paradoxical setup is to concede that any statement about darkness will be false because its truth is unilluminated and un-illuminable. This would be an error-theory of darkness, where all theorising about darkness will be in error, by virtue of illuminating darkness in a self-refuting fashion. But this too faces self-refutation. Consider a statement that motivates such an approach, like 'darkness is unilluminated', which the error-theorist would want to be true in order for all (other) statements about darkness to be false (due to being unilluminated). This recurring self-refutation reflects issues of ineffability (where to say something is effable is to be able to characterise it in some way, whereas something is ineffable if it cannot be characterised in any way). Can anything be predicated of darkness? Can darkness be characterised? If doing so requires or results in illumination, then darkness is ineffable. Yet self-refutation reappears, as the statement 'darkness is ineffable' precisely predicates ineffability of darkness, characterising it, and thus illuminating it, in tension with its supposed ineffable and un-illuminable nature. Much like with the statement 'darkness is unilluminated', we find ourselves again in paradoxes at the limits of language in trying to understand and articulate

negative entities.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* is an exploration of these limits of language, and attempts to show, rather than say, something of the ineffable. Yet what he does say, and seemingly intends to do so meaningfully and truthfully, is that "in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable." The limit of thinkability, then, cannot be drawn without self-refutation, since in doing so one has thought about what lies beyond that limit. The drawing of a limit occurs within a thinkable space, thus making the limit of thinkability somewhat undrawable, or even unthinkable, given that the act of thinking of the limit brings the limit itself into the realms of the thinkable. Similarly, with respect to darkness, to say (or show!) that it lies beyond the limits of illumination, we have already illuminated that dark side. Yet however far we extend the boundary of the knowable (and with it, the illuminated, observed, and identified), we can always ask again what is on the other side, leaving something perpetually beyond us. In any attempt to peer over the edge of a limit we simply push the limit outwards to bring its content into our purview of illumination. The very drawing of the limit therefore presupposes some understanding of both sides and has the effect of displacing that limit in ways that otherwise refute what the limit was meant to be demarcating and where it was being drawn.

Graham Priest, in *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, shows a necessary connection between limits and contradictions. He argues that limits of thought are boundaries beyond which certain conceptual processes cannot go, and are subject to true contradictions by simultaneously going beyond that boundary. Limits, or boundaries, are what he describes as the sites of dialetheias (true contradictions) which motivate his dialetheist position (whereby some contradictions are true). As Priest demonstrates, with limits come paradoxes, and with paradoxes come contradictions. The drawing of the limit is paradoxical due to the self-reference and self-refutation that occurs when the limit itself is both within and outside of what it is attempting to demarcate. Anything at the limit, including the limit itself, is both inside and beyond the limit, resulting in a contradiction. This is the inevitable consequence of attempting to transcend boundaries, as we do when we illuminate darkness. In drawing a limit of illumination, we simultaneously place darkness beyond the boundary and illuminate it as such. As Priest says, "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one has just contradicted oneself." Likewise, whereof one sees that/what one cannot see, thereof one has just contradicted oneself. For Priest, contradictions that arise at the limits of thought each instantiate the 'Inclosure Schema', and it is my contention that the paradox of illuminating darkness does too. According to the Inclosure Schema, "an immovable force meets an irresistible object" which creates a contradiction at their intersection – at the limit of a totality. In this case, illumination is that force which chases darkness to the limits of the totality of the illuminable – darkness is illuminated in a contradictory way that destroys its darkness by virtue of being illuminated, placing it both inside and outside the limit.

Usually, when a contradiction is derived from a theory it is taken as a *reductio ad absurdum*, and utilised only to reject what led to its derivation (its very own self-refutation strategy!). Yet the attempt to escape contradiction only misplaces it for it to reemerge in some other location. As Priest shows, a contradiction from one limit of thought simply reappears as a contradiction at another limit of thought (as we saw with the recurrence of ineffability), and thus the *reductio* is futile, or itself absurd, by repeating a process of denial that only generates the same contradictory results elsewhere. Some also attempt to escape contradiction by rejecting the existence of the limit or the totality the limit is binding – but this also is no fail-safe exit strategy. We draw boundaries around objects for their identification, around concepts for our understanding, and around groups of objects that fall under those concepts – these practices seem to be central to human experience. If limits and their contradictions once found are inescapable, then we may be better served by taking the contradiction at face value and incorporating it into our understanding. This is aptly demonstrated by attending to

darkness and the paradoxes its illumination illuminates. The radical power of darkness manifests in how it confronts our understanding of understanding itself, and the methods and processes by which we acquire knowledge. Illumination is at odds with darkness in ways that expose paradoxes at the limits of thought, and rather than rejecting the contradictions off-hand, we would do well to learn what they teach us. Taking the dark side on its own terms provides us with an opportunity to confront our positivity bias and some of our deepest assumptions about the nature of truth, knowledge, and reality – an opportunity that this special issue on darkness heeds.

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There's No After Dark

Paul Kaletsch

The archaic meaning of enlightenment is illumination: to shine light on something.[1] Such enlightenment requires something on which (its) light is to be shone. That can't be something that's already been illuminated because when you shine a light on something bright, nothing changes. So, for enlightenment to happen, there must be something dark, something lacking light, that can be illuminated. Enlightenment implies darkness or that which is to be illuminated.

Darkness, accordingly, is simply that which one can't see (or rather, one can 'see' that one can't see it), that which, as of now, lacks light. Thus, darkness isn't the opposite of light but is negatively determined by the absence of light. However, once illuminated darkness is just the same as the illuminated: of the former darkness only the visible remains. That's one answer to the question of what comes after darkness. From a Deleuzian perspective on difference, though, it's an unsatisfying answer because there's no real difference between darkness and light.[2] Already pre-enlightenment, darkness was identical with the illuminated; it's just that no one could see that. They're the same, but there's a relative difference between their attributes, one being dark which can't be seen, one being enlightened which one can see. Yet even that relative difference is only temporal because when darkness is enlightened it becomes identical with that which has already been illuminated: Both are now visible.

Following the Deleuzian concept of difference that's not subordinated to pre-existing identities, the question arises how one can think of darkness as something that's truly different from light. In the first chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, "Difference in Itself," Deleuze illustrates difference as such with lightning: "Lightning, for example, distinguishes itself from the black sky but must also trail it behind, as though it were distinguishing itself from that which does not distinguish itself from it." (2021, p. 37) In the chapter "A System of Heterogenesis: Deleuze on Plurality" of the edited volume *Phenomenological Perspectives on Plurality*, Martijn Boven provides an important clarification to this rather obscure passage: "In this example difference should not be understood as a difference between the lightning bolt (the figure) and the black sky (the background)." (2014, p. 180) For this secondary difference emerges between the lightning bolt and the black sky on basis of their primary identities: their stable and determined being. *This* lightning is *this* lightning because it happened at this time in this place with these characteristics.

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1 According to Google's English dictionary by Oxford languages.

2 Gilles Deleuze was a French poststructuralist philosopher. Deleuze (2021, pp. 37–92) develops his concept of difference, for instance, in the first chapter of the book *Difference and Repetition*. This submission largely emerged from my engagement with Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* in Professor Nathan Widder's weekly online Deleuze and Guattari reading group. I would like to thank Professor Widder and the group for the stimulating discussions. Any inaccuracies and flaws in this article are entirely my own.

So, what's difference in itself in this example? In the introduction of their *Gilles Deleuze's Luminous Philosophy*, Hanjo Berressem puts it like this: "Sometimes, . . ., the charged elements create a field with immense differences in intensity that somewhere and at some moment can no longer keep itself in balance." (Berressem, 2020, p. 3) This is an apt description of the cause that temporally trailed behind lightning in that dark sky before lightning struck. Since every atmospheric situation features electric charge, the point isn't that there's electric intensity before lightning, but that there's too much of it. As Berressem puts it shortly after: "Lightning is the figure of such an electric tension that has become unbearable within a specific meteorological situation and that discharges itself" (ibid.). Electric intensity may express itself in lightning because lightning has a function; it "resolves the tension between the differently charged electric fields." (ibid.)

According to Henry Somers-Hall's (2013, pp. 183–184) guide to *Difference and Repetition*, the difference that Boven (2014) referred to earlier is the difference between extensity and intensity. Extensity refers to how much space something occupies, or, as Henry Somers-Hall explains: "This pencil is not this piece of paper to the extent that they occupy different positions within the same space." (2013, p. 50) In our example, *this* dark sky isn't *that* lightning because they occupy different positions within the same space (at the same time). Somers-Hall also refers to the lightning distinguishing itself from the dark sky as the "visible phenomenon" (2013, p. 183). There's a crucial difference between the visible lightning and intensity (difference in itself), that is, the invisible electrical tension that constituted the lightning without, however, distinguishing itself from the visible as something visible and relatively different (the identity of *this* dark sky does not represent the electrical tension) that occupies a different position in the same space.

Darkness as something different, therefore, is generative. It's the pre-visible process that constitutes something visible but that itself can't be brought into the light and, therefore, forever remains beyond light.[3] This is because it can't be represented as one visible entity that differs spatially and qualitatively from other things. What follows after darkness (is over)? From such a Deleuzian perspective, there's no after darkness because the determined and visible lightning in the dark sky at time X in place Y only reinforces the difference between the visible and that which constituted it but can't be seen.

With regard to the example of lightning in Deleuze, Berressem (2020, pp. 4–7) points to another Deleuzian concept: the dark precursor.[4] The dark precursor is that which enables the communication between the "differently charged electric fields" (Berressem, 2020, p. 3), thus, causing lightning.[5] It's characterized by invisibility, imperceptibility, and belatedness (Berressem, 2020, pp. 4–7).

Even though you can't see it, different darkness isn't transcendent. While you can't seek it out, if it happens to you, you can encounter 'it' either belatedly or precursively. First, when you consciously see lightning, it's already too late: Lightning discloses to you that there was an electrical imbalance that lightning only visualizes after its discharge resolved it. The dark precursor discloses itself belatedly in lightning. In other words, the dark precursor can only be deduced from lightning after lightning struck: "In relation to the phenomenon of lightning, it [the dark precursor] is the name for the small, imperceptible degrees of tension from which the perceptible lightning develops, or from which it emerges." (Berressem, 2020, pp. 5–6) Since you can't perceive these tensions consciously, you can't encounter darkness itself. However, you can see lightning and encounter darkness through what you

3 I would like to thank Andrea Pavoni for bringing up the notion of pre-visibility and him and Caterina Nirta for their detailed feedback and helpful email communication.

4 I would like to thank Andrea Pavoni for mentioning Deleuze's concept of the dark precursor and its discussion in Deleuze's essay on Spinoza in *Essays Critical and Clinical*.

5 According to the definition of precursor from the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) online dictionary, a precursor both precedes and announces the approach of its successor, but, more importantly, the successor emerges from the substance of the precursor (ibid.); and it does so by following the route that the precursor prepared.

deduce from lightning. For instance, before the example of lightning, Berressem (2020, p. 3) mentions the conscious perception of static on skin as an effect of electrical tension in the atmosphere. After lightning struck, you could translate this into evidence for the electrical tension that caused lightning.

Second, the translator of the essay "Spinoza and the Three 'Ethics'" from Deleuze's edited volume *Essays Critical and Clinical* comments in a footnote on the French term for dark precursor: "(*Les sombres précurseurs* [emphasis in original]. The French phrase *signes précurseurs* [emphasis in original] 'precursory signs' usually refers to the ominous meteorological signs that portend a coming storm." (Deleuze, 1997, p. 201n6) With respect to the kind of air before lightning strikes, Berressem's description of static fits well: "There is something in the air. You say this when you feel an electric charge in the atmosphere that affects your skin. Something makes the hairs on your arm stand up." (2020, p. 3) Deleuze, in his engagement with the early modern philosopher Baruch Spinoza, calls this "the first kind of knowledge" (1997, p. 144), or first sort of idea, that is, an affection-idea. In a lecture on Spinoza, he illustrates why such knowledge is inferior to proper concepts with this example: "I feel the affection of the sun on me, the trace of the sun on me. It's the effect of the sun on my body." (Deleuze, 1978). You know the sun solely through your perception of the effect that it has on you. Yet you don't know why, that is, what it is in the sun and in your body that makes you feel warm, and how this is, i.e., how these bodies relate to cause warmth in you: You lack knowledge of causes. That's exactly what's going on in Berressem's (2020, p. 3) example of static: You notice that this kind of air, this atmospheric situation, raises the hair on your arms. You know *this* air merely through your perception of the effect it has on your skin: static.

At the same time, you notice how *this air* makes you feel. As Deleuze says with regard to the sun, "the heat of the sun fills me or, on the contrary, its burning repulses me." (1997, p. 139) The feeling of static on your skin might please you or disagree with you: It produces an affect of joy or sadness, pain or pleasure. This means that you either like how this kind of air mixes with your body or you don't. Deleuze (1997, pp. 138–139) discusses these effects (that the air has on your body) as signs: signs of affection (static) and affect (your pleasure or dislike).

Let's quote from Deleuze's Spinoza essay: "The signs of augmentation remain passions and the ideas that they presuppose remain inadequate [since they lack knowledge of causes]; yet they are the precursor of the notions, the dark precursors." (1997, p. 144) A notion follows not from what *this one particular* body does to you but from your knowledge about your own body and this other body: For example, "arsenic, under its characteristic relation, destroys the characteristic relation of my body. I am poisoned, I die." (Deleuze, 1978) Following the quote from Deleuze's Spinoza essay, a certain number of joyful encounters are a condition for concept formation because they raise a body to such a degree of power, so it can start to distinguish between good and bad encounters and then, on that basis, conceptualize notions. Thus, signs of joy function as dark precursors of concepts. Let's say you like the feeling of static on your skin that this air causes in contact with your body. Then, you encounter darkness precursory through this sign of joy.

These encounters with darkness pose the ethical question of how to conduct oneself in them.[6] Illumination as a response doesn't work because darkness isn't just one dark thing that becomes something visible once enlightened. But one could also read the overused aphorism §146 by Friedrich Nietzsche (2002, p. 69), a German 19th century philosopher, from part four of *Beyond Good and Evil* – "Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself" – as a warning that

6 Todd May (2005) discusses encounters with Deleuzian difference as experiments that can lead to new answers to the questions of how one might live. My ethical take on darkness is inspired by May's formulation of a Deleuzian ethics.

relating to darkness comes at a price.[7] Both the intolerance toward darkness as something different and invisible as well as the effort of fighting darkness transform the crusaders of enlightenment into something monstrous. The attempt to understand darkness as something different (without illuminating or destroying it) seems more innocuous. However, this confuses the intensity of darkness with the definite measures of its epiphenomena (the where, when, and what of *that* dark sky). Such false knowledge veils the fact that darkness simply can't be known and, therefore, requires a different kind of engagement.

Instead of controlling darkness, one can also surrender to these belated or precursory encounters. First, you could try to deduce what lightning says about electrical charge and your unconscious micro-perceptions of it. Since you can only experience the latter qua their effects, you can't choose to tap into them. However, you can think about, as Todd May (2005) proposes, in his *Gilles Deleuze: an Introduction*, how one might live. How might one live if, as Berressem (2020, p. 6) puts it, the micro-thoughts and micro-perceptions of our unconscious manufacture our conscious thoughts; that is, we're not in charge of our interior: our inclinations, feelings, thoughts, ideas, and opinions? Just supposedly, if that were the case, how could one think, create, write, love? The question here isn't if that's really the case. Rather, does it provide you with different ways of living? And do these increase or decrease what you can do?

Second, while static on your skin might feel pleasant, this increase in your power isn't yours. It's contingent on a chance encounter with a certain type of weather. Engaging ethically, according to Deleuze's (1978) Spinozist ethics, with the pleasure of static means taking this joy seriously, directing it into thought to think, on the one hand, of your joy as nothing you own but something which you are only capable of because of your power of being affected by other bodies, and, on the other hand, of what this joy says about your appetite and the air you're exposed to. Use your pleasure to fuel desire and not vice versa.

What follows from darkness are the unpredictable subjective transformations that result from such experiments with encounters of pre-visible darkness as well as from the conduct of accepting that darkness is different, will remain so, and you can't control, change, or experience it, and from nevertheless deciding to engage with it. Who you are after darkness, however, shouldn't be confused with darkness. That new *you* isn't darkness, it's just what darkness carved into you.

7 This is my superficial reading of that aphorism without any consideration of its context and the existing (Deleuzian) Nietzsche scholarship. Deleuze with other French thinkers (Bataille, Klossowski, . . .) rehabilitated Nietzsche in France through a reinterpretation that differed strongly from the Nazi (mis-)reading of the concept of the will to power. That being said, even in these re-readings of Nietzsche that emphasize his pluralism, Nietzsche's thought remains fundamentally anti-egalitarian.

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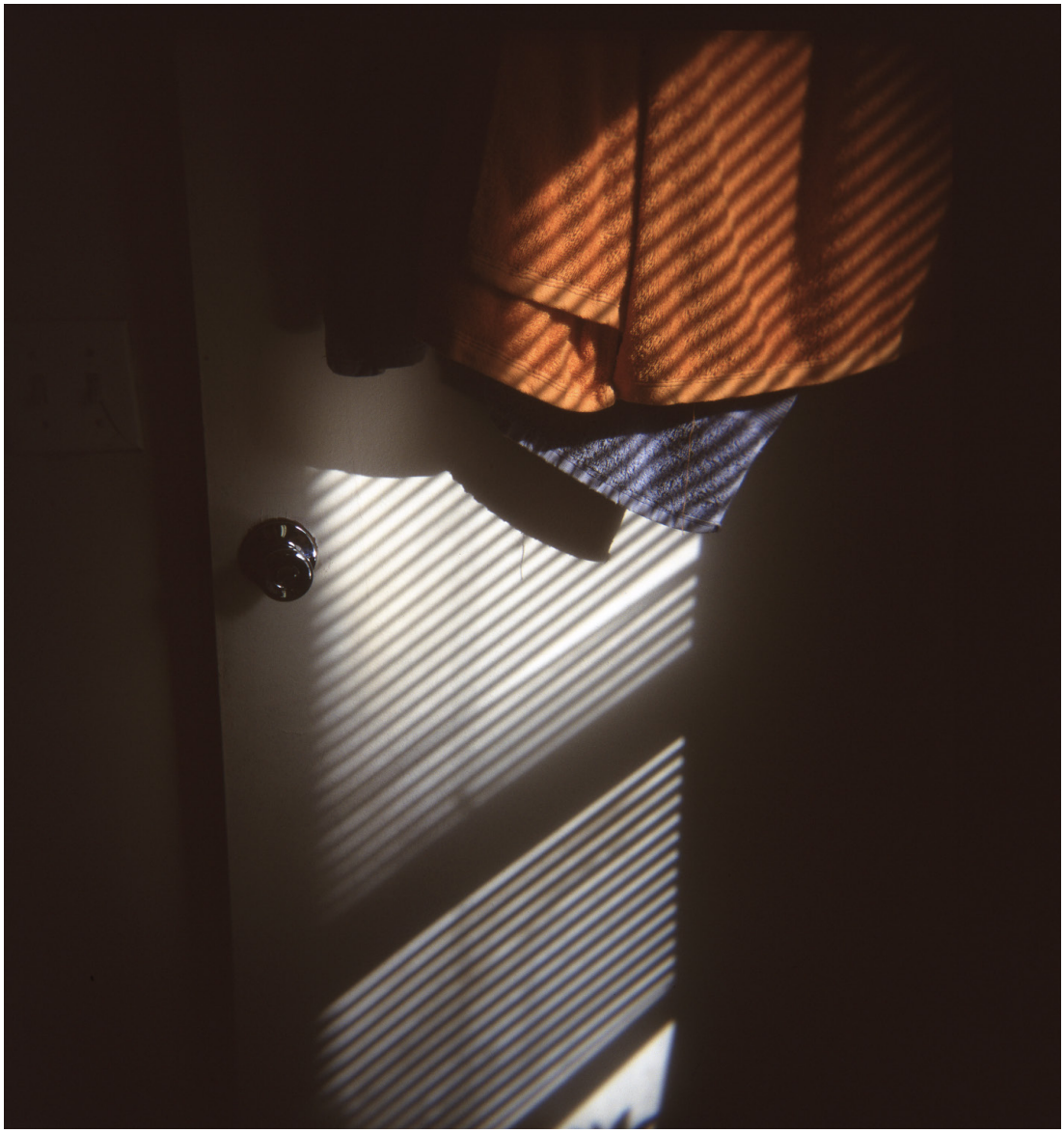

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