

Robert Shaw, *The Nocturnal City*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018; 126 pp.: 978-1-1386-7640-4 £84.00 (hbk)

The drive for increasing economic productivity and prosperity has steered humankind, spatially, into unknown territories and frontiers on the continents, and according to Murray Melbin (1987), temporally, into the frontier of the night. The night is under threat and night-time a scarce resource. Nocturnal satellite images of the Earth illustrate how the ever-expanding web of artificial lighting is instilled to overcome the limits of the night and darkness, suggesting a correlation between the planet's colonisation and its urbanisation. While recent urban scholarship has addressed the urban question through discussions on planetary urbanisation or comparative urbanism, the temporality of the night, however, remains peculiarly absent from any substantive theorisation in urban studies.

What does a conceptualisation of the city and urban life forms look like if the night-time is taken as front and centre of urban research? And, how does a focus on the temporality of the urban night challenge understandings of urbanism as a planetary phenomenon? These questions are at the core of the recent book *The Nocturnal City*, in which its author, Robert Shaw, sets out to develop a 'nightology', to rethink the ongoing changes to the relationships between urban subjectivities, their social and urban environments, and the wider planetary environment of our globe.

The Nocturnal City is a much needed and timely appeal to take seriously those darkened and dimly lit hours that play a huge but somewhat unrecognised importance to planetary life. Running against much recent scholarship and popular debate which bemoans the loss of the night, the night sky and laments the supposed homogenisation of urban nightlife, *The Nocturnal City* strives to go beyond an understanding of the night as a frontier that is continuously colonised by the forces of a globalised political economy. Instead it considers the "borderlands", "contact zones" and "edge-lands" (pp. 44-45) that aren't as easily conquered. By turning towards a diversity of nocturnal cultures that are invested in servicing, sustaining, consuming, and disrupting the urban night, Shaw's nightology aims to "grasp the multiple dimensions of urban life that become increasingly interconnected as urban systems expand and diversify" (p. 117).

This is an interesting proposition and Shaw delivers a compelling case. He sets out with two chapters that introduce the conceptual underpinning for his argument. The unlikely introduction of Guattari's ecosophy as a provocateur for urban thought provides Shaw with the 'aiming scope' for "hunting down the boundaries of the urban world" (p. 50)—pitched between the Marxist world systems theory 'planetary urbanism' (Brenner & Schmid, 2015) and the practice based and assemblage theory approaches in post-colonial traditions (Mcfarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2006). As he contends, it offers a framework for understanding the city as a 'subjectivity machine' that pulls together Guattari's three ecologies – the environment, social relations and human subjectivity – in the production of urban subjectivities. Through four empirical chapters, Shaw maps examples from the urban night onto Guattari's three ecologies, taking us through the global infrastructures of electricity and artificial lighting, over street markets and nightlife in the public realm, to the interior spaces of the home, where we encounter the nocturnal self.

In these chapters, Shaw demonstrates that despite the seemingly solipsistic spread of lighting technologies, their homogenising effects on urban landscapes, the commodification of experiences as part of the expanding Night-Time Economy, and the reproduction of stereotypes of the night in (popular) cultural representations and architectural visualisations the urban night is rife with difference and alterity. The nocturnal city plays host to struggles over the implementation of LED lights, practices of maintenance such as street cleaning, and a variety of nocturnal markets, festivals and celebrations that disrupt and splinter the night; some in conformity with and clearly subsumed by global processes of capital accumulation, but others operating through their struggle against oppressive regulation. Examples are drawn, somewhat eclectically, from as diverse sources as night markets in Taipei, karaoke bars in Kampala and urban exploration in London, which all exploit the night for practicing conviviality, pleasure and rebellion. While these cases are illustrative and well researched, it is unclear why Shaw has chosen *them* over others, and how the selection of cases works for the wider argument he is putting forward. Still, the cases do serve to recognise urban nights as the domain of 'potentiality', which clearly resonates with Tim Edensor's (2017) recent work on the geographies of light and darkness. However, Shaw distinguishes himself from Edensor's work as he delves deeper into the interiority of the third, of the three ecologies.

The most compelling argument, as I read it is drawn from his consideration of the nocturnal urban home, which he posits as the nexus of the intersection between intimate domestic practices and the (urban) infrastructures such as central heating, electricity and telecommunication, blurring the distinctions between public and private domains. By bringing studies of home into dialogue with urban scholarship Shaw brings attention to the material and affective constituents of 'home' that both connect and separate it from its surrounding city. Domestic violence and loneliness illustrate the domestic isolation and separation from the city (and the self), while silence and intimacy are used as examples to underline how domestic practices evade wider urban processes of change. As he argues the "domestic night appears to reside on the very edge of – or even outside – the conditions of living in the city, and as such remains outside the process of planetary urbanization" (p. 107). This is an interesting proposition that raises important questions for urban studies about the spatial and conceptual limits of its practice that for (too) long has evaded the importance of the domestic interior to urban life: where does domestic life end and begin in the city?

If we are to follow Shaw in answering this question, the ecosophical approach offers a framework for considering how the stable boundaries and conceptual theorisations of planetary life are dissolving and are under constant negotiation. Yet, as the book reaches its apex in the final chapter where Shaw brings together the wider contributions of the volume and more elaborately develops a framework for a 'nightology', the reader will find a mere two pages describing what such a nightology might look like. I do not mean to be greedy and there is no need to lecture Shaw on time and space constraints (pun intended), but *this* discussion is the most important of the book, and could well have been awarded a distinct chapter for further elaboration. For example, I was left wondering what "focussing on the production of subjectivity, environment and society *together*" (p. 117, emphasis added) looks like in practice, and what kinds of implications it poses for theorising subject-city-planet relations. One suggestion lies in the previous chapters' foci on the spatio-temporal

frontier's of the night and the work that is invested in maintaining them. Yet, the contribution of this work could be further elaborated, and strengthened by engaging with writing on boundaries and thresholds in urban scholarship (Kaika, 2004; Koch and Latham, 2013; Sheller and Urry, 2003) and studies of home (Burrell, 2014; and see special issue in *Home Cultures Negotiating the Boundaries of the Home*, 2017). By taking its temporal and spatial frontiers as a starting point, *The Nocturnal City* therefore pushes the boundaries for urban theorisation, yet it also points towards the limits of this work and thus raises important questions for future urban scholarship.

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