

## CHAPTER 6

# Vertical City Tourism: Heightened Aesthetic and Kinaesthetic Experiences

Andrew Smith

### Introduction

Urban areas have traditionally been analysed as two-dimensional phenomena, with emphasis placed on the spatial distribution of features, connectivity at ground level and horizontal urban expansion. This neglects the verticality of cities – arguably their defining feature – which has become even more significant as more and more tall buildings are constructed (Graham and Hewitt 2012). In 2000 there were 265 buildings in the world that were over 200 metres tall (CTBUH 2016). By 2010 this had risen to 612 and the latest figures suggest there are now 1,169 buildings that exceed this height – a 441 per cent increase since the Millennium (CTBUH 2016). This growth has been accompanied by calls for more recognition of the verticality of urban space (Graham and Hewitt 2012; McNeill 2005), and, in recent years, academics from various disciplines have responded to these calls (Deriu 2018). Much of this emerging body of work is linked to urban militarisation, securitisation and surveillance but, as Harris (2015, 604) notes, it is important to recognise other types of ‘vertical forms, landscapes and experiences’, including those that involve the ‘production, marketing and commodification of urban views’.

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Published research on city tourism also tends to neglect the verticality of urban destinations. Even in the rare instances where the tourism implications of tall buildings have been analysed, the focus has been on their role as traditional attractions or their contribution to the general urban milieu (Leiper and Park 2010). By focusing on these aspects, accounts tend to be overly negative with Leiper and Park (2010, 347) arguing that ‘skyscrapers are not merely deficient as attractions, they reduce the attractiveness of cities for many tourists’. This restricted perspective ignores the sights and feelings tourists can experience by ‘getting high’. Tall urban structures do not merely provide things to be seen: they are ‘machines for seeing’ (Wigoder 2002), and they provide opportunities to descend, ascend and traverse the built environment. These neglected aspects of vertical urban tourism are discussed here.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the increasing amount of opportunities to experience London from up high. This trend is driven by the increased number of high rise towers that have been built in London since the Millennium (Charney 2007; Clark 2015), but also by the growth of purpose-built attractions which trade on the value of London’s cityscape (e.g. The London Eye and Ancelcor Mittal Orbit). Tourists visiting London have always been attracted to high points from which the city can be viewed, but this chapter analyses new opportunities and more diverse ways that London’s tourists can ‘hit the heights’. The chapter also explores how passive forms of consumption have been supplemented by new attractions that facilitate active engagement. In the twenty-first century tourists are not merely able to access great views, they are now able to experience height in a more embodied sense by climbing up, riding on, and sliding down, tall structures. This trend is linked to increased demand for more active forms of tourism; and the ways that adventure tourism – normally something associated with rural contexts – is increasingly being offered in city centres (Beedie 2005). New high rise attractions extend the types of experiences offered by London and expand the city’s tourism territory vertically.

This chapter is based on, and builds on, the work of Davide Deriu, a Reader in Architectural History and Theory at the University of Westminster, who has written extensively about the significance of aerial views and the development of new experiential forms of high-rise architecture. Davide led the innovative, multidisciplinary Vertigo research project which provided the inspiration for this chapter and his conceptualisation of the shift from ‘architectures of vision’ to ‘architectures of experience’ (Deriu, 2018) is adopted as one of the key ideas used to frame the text.

### **A Short History of Vertical Urban Tourism**

In his comprehensive review of vertical urbanism(s) Harris (2015) highlights four models which reflect different periods of high rise construction. Early projects were based on spiritual ambitions – elevated churches and temples were constructed, not merely to assert the power of religious institutions, but

to connect urban populations to the heavenly sky. The late nineteenth century spawned a second model involving the construction of monuments to corporate capitalism – i.e. skyscrapers. This was followed in the mid-twentieth century by modernist landscapes of high rise housing introduced by Le Corbusier and other proponents of building ‘streets in the sky’. More recently we have seen the rise of a new breed of high rise urbanism in global Asia, a trend which has shifted the focus of verticality eastwards. Each of these models has contributed to the verticality of contemporary urbanism, particularly in global cities like London. Indeed, Harris (2015) notes that all four models are evident in London’s contemporary cityscape, citing St Paul’s Cathedral, Adelaide House, The Barbican, and the plethora of new towers funded by Asian investors, as examples.

Recognising the historical evolution of vertical urbanism allows us to better understand the allure of the city panorama; a view that is extensive, unbroken and multi-directional. People have long wanted to consume cities as holistic landscapes via high points located either inside or outside the city boundaries. The contemporary popularity of these urban panoramas is usually traced back to renaissance cities and the production of town views from elevated vantage points (Balm and Holcomb 2003). As Hinchcliffe and Deriu (2010, 221) remind us, ‘once you could climb the cathedral towers of any European city and view its whole extent’. This tradition inspired a whole range of artistic outputs – including paintings, photographs, poems and novels – reimagining the city as ‘a work of art’ (Olsen 1988; Boyer 1994), and whetting the appetite for elevated views in the contemporary era.

Various new technologies facilitated the rise of the panoramic views in modern cities (i.e. post 1851). In her wonderful account of the growth of tourism in US cities, Cocks (2001) highlights how emerging forms of urban transportation allowed cities to be consumed panoramically. Initially, this experience was facilitated by the streetcar or trolley bus, vehicles which offered an elevated view of the city. These experiences were assisted by guides and guidebooks, media that ‘directed the attention of the car’s riders to the historical and aesthetic features of the landscape’ (Cocks 2001, 167). Tourists were thus taught what to see, and how to see it, an education which helped to reinforce the significance of the urban panorama. In what would become a familiar explanation for the popularity of viewing platforms, transport vehicles offered visitors the chance to consume the city as a spectacle, rather than as a direct experience. The elevated position not only provided a better view, it differentiated tourists from citizens – ensuring leisure visitors were not mistaken for the leisured poor (Cocks 2001).

The other new technologies that allowed tourists to consume cities from above were the elevator, the steel frame, and the related rise of the modern skyscraper. Although the first skyscraper and the first Ferris wheel were built in Chicago, high rise tourism first flourished in New York. In the period 1870–1910 New York’s skyline was transformed into ‘a spectacle of skyscrapers’ – making this rapidly developing city ‘one of the modern wonders of the touristic world’ (Gilbert and Hancock 2006, 90). Spending time on the rooftops of New York became a popular pastime in this period, with high rise buildings not

merely offering spectacular views, but a welcome chance to escape the pollution and the crowds of the streets below. For the first time, people didn't need to undertake a lengthy journey to exit the city, they could achieve a vertical escape simply by pressing an elevator button (Wigoder 2002).

People had to be trained to see the urban beauty of the modern city (Cocks 2001) and links to natural landscapes were made to convince people that urban panoramas were worth seeing. In the 18th and 19th Centuries, the rise of romanticism encouraged scenic tourism and the appreciation of impressive natural scenery (Urry 1990). This was translated into an urban context via the provision of spectacular views. According to Wigoder (2002, 159) new skyscrapers 'offered the possibility of standing at the edge of the roof and looking down at the city as if it were a sublime, romantic view enjoyed from a mountain crag'. Tourists were still uncertain about the aesthetic value of modern buildings, but viewed from above these merged together to form a spectacular cityscape. The way panoramas naturalise the city by turning it into a landscape is noted by Barthes (1983) in his famous account of the view from atop the Eiffel Tower. It is also reaffirmed in contemporary accounts which suggest that aerial perspectives transform streets into canyons (Deriu 2016).

The construction of the Empire State Building in the 1930s marked a new phase of high rise tourism. As Gilbert and Hancock (2006, 93) identify: 'unlike earlier skyscrapers that had become tourist attractions, the Empire State Building was consciously designed with tourism in mind'. Purpose built 'observatories' were constructed on the 86th and 102nd floors with dedicated lifts for the visitors who wanted to enjoy the view (MacCannell 1999). The Empire State Building tends to be cited as an iconic structure to look *at*; but this was a pioneering example of a place to look *from*. Two years after the Empire State Building's observatories opened in 1931, tourists could also enjoy the view from the newly constructed Rockefeller Centre observation deck on the 70th floor of the RCA Tower. Even though visitors had to pay to enter, 1,300 people a day were visiting by 1935 making it the top New York destination for 33 per cent of all visitors (London 2013). This space was designed to evoke the deck of an ocean liner (hence it was called an observation deck), connoting this was a luxury experience and one that transformed the city below into an undifferentiated sea. These pioneering examples have inspired a high range of observation decks and observatories throughout the world, including others built atop skyscrapers, but also observation towers featuring revolving restaurants.

### The Allure of the Panoramic View

Various authors have explored the appeal of the city viewed as a panorama from on high. As Dorrian (2009) notes, to go up is to see more, but it is also to see in a different way. Many accounts use religious analogies to explain the appeal of this alternative perspective, with aerial views associated with transcendence, levitation, omnipotence and the scopic power of a god's-eye view

(Dorrian 2009). Humans seem to have an insatiable urge to encapsulate the city as a whole 'unit' (Wigoder 2002), or to read the city like a text (De Certeau 1984), and these interpretations also help to explain the enduring appeal of panoramic views. Through abstraction the city becomes more comprehensible (Jansson and Lagerkvist 2009), something that provides reassurance and comfort. An elevated vantage point allows people to appropriate the city as an object and this is further enabled by photographing the view – an activity that dominates the contemporary experience of panoramic viewpoints. A slightly contradictory interpretation is that people are awed by the spectacle of infinity and immensity that aerial views provide (Dorrian 2009). This suggests urban panoramas can also be understood via reference to Kant's interpretation of the sublime – the experience of something beyond conceptualisation which makes us realise our physical impotence.

Being high up in the city is associated with authority, status and exclusivity and these connotations also help to explain the allure, but also the wider implications, of views from above. The skyscraper is regarded by some as a metaphor for the stratification of the contemporary city, with the most affluent living at the top and the poor living at the bottom (the underclass presumably resides in the basement). Just as citizens seek upward mobility, tourists welcome the chance to rise above the chaos and poverty of the city and experience it from on high. Tourists are attracted to cities but they also want to escape from them. They want the best of both worlds – to exist simultaneously within and outside cities – and high rise buildings (and urban parks) provide such opportunities. This interpretation is particularly relevant to tourists visiting developing world cities, where verticality is coveted as it provides security from the perceived insecurities below. For example, Wharton's (2001) history of the Hilton Group shows how this company's high rise hotels allowed tourists to consume foreign territories from safe sites.

If 'getting high' is a vehicle through which to achieve control, abstraction and exclusivity, then it is about power. This is a key theme in much of the literature on city panoramas and it is particularly relevant to the tourism-focused discussion here. Thanks to John Urry's acclaimed work, the tourist gaze is understood as an expression of power. By consuming and prioritising signs, tourists exert influence over the people, cultures, sites and objects that are gazed upon. The powerful objectification of the tourist gaze is a function of the distance and detachment of the tourist from the objects they are consuming – and by ascending tall structures the tourist is able to achieve distance and separation. Therefore, the view from high above the city provides a particularly potent form of the tourist gaze.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge the interpretation of the panoramic view as an expression of power, it is also worth noting the counter arguments to this established position. Jansson and Lagerkvist (2009) challenge the idea that panoramas are inherently vehicles for promoting encapsulation and detachment. These authors argue that attempts to encapsulate cities need to be considered alongside the inevitability of decapsulation – where the magic of

the spectacle is broken and replaced with fear and boredom. This interpretation reflects other critical accounts which also challenge the idea that people gain reassuring control over cities via aerial views. Dorrian (2009) suggests that being above things can be disconcerting, because of the way the ground appears to dissolve and because urban features seem to merge into each other. In such instances people may suffer the despair of not knowing what is significant and what is not (Dorrian 2009). Contemplating the immensity of the contemporary city can also involve a crushing and decentering diminishment of ourselves (Dorrian 2009). These negative aspects of consuming cities do not necessarily reduce their appeal as attractions: the enduring popularity of theme parks, adventure tourism and dark attractions highlight that some tourists are attracted to disorienting, scary and disturbing experiences.

The unsettling effect of viewing a city from above can be better understood by exploring the notion of vertigo. This is a physical and psychological condition, but the term is now also deployed metaphorically to refer to the nervous instability people feel in the modern city (James 2013; Deriu 2018). Vertigo is used colloquially to refer to the unease felt when looking down from great heights, but as a medical condition it is defined as dizziness – a sensation of giddiness and disorientation caused by problems with balance mechanisms in the inner ear. The derivation of the word comes from the Latin *vertere* – to turn – and there are etymological links to the words whirl, whirlpool and vortex. Recognising the physical condition of vertigo is important in the context of this chapter, as it reminds us that experiences atop high rise structures stimulate physical sensations, rather than merely visual ones (Deriu 2018). This helps us to understand the recent changes made to traditional observation decks and viewing platforms – such as adding slides and transparent floors (Deriu 2018). As Deriu (2018) notes, these can be understood as attempts to develop the physical dimension of these attractions, shifting the focus from aesthetics to kinaesthetics.

### Seeing London Differently

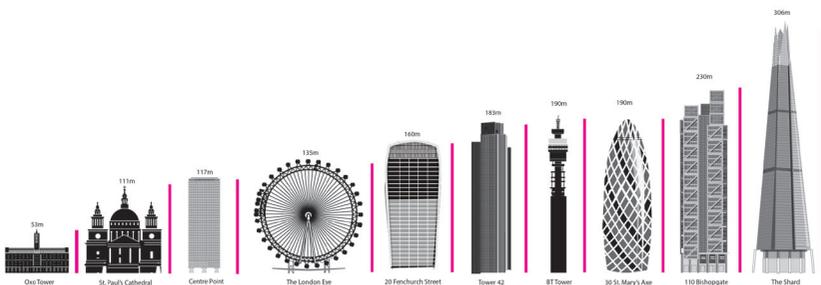
The extended introduction above provides the historical and conceptual context for this chapter. Subsequent sections focus on opportunities to consume London from above: by examining the development of new viewing platforms; and then by exploring the way these attractions have been supplemented by more dynamic experiences. These allow tourists to enjoy panoramic views whilst ascending, descending or traversing high rise structures.

#### *New Opportunities to Consume London Passively from Above*

London has always attracted tourists wishing to view the city from above. The physical geography of the city allows views of central areas: for example, from

Forest Hill and Greenwich Park in the south, and from Parliament Hill and Alexandra Palace in the north. Tourists and residents can still enjoy these views today – something which has been achieved through innovative planning controls introduced in 1991. London now has a list of ‘protected vistas’ which prevents new development blocking visual corridors – mostly views from peripheral parks to St Paul’s Cathedral and/or the Houses of Parliament. This means visitors can view panoramas of London from its elevated suburbs, as well as from tall buildings in the city centre. However, these protected vistas are currently being challenged by the large volume of high rise building planned for and already built in central London. For over 250 years (1710–1964), the city’s tallest building was St Paul’s Cathedral, and visitors have long climbed the stairs to view the city from the roof. However, the construction of the BT Tower, CentrePoint and the NatWest Tower in the 1960s and 1970s started a trend of verticalisation, and this has intensified in recent years. Since 2000, multiple tall buildings have been constructed, particularly in East London (at Canary Wharf) and in the City of London itself. Care has been taken to ensure historic buildings are not crowded out by these new towers, but London’s character as a relatively low rise city compared to other World Cities is beginning to disappear. This trend is set to continue: London’s housing shortage has inspired a new phase of vertical development and, at the time of writing, 455 new buildings of over 20 storeys are planned (NLA 2017).

Alongside housing London’s growing population, the main justification cited for developing new tall buildings in London is the need to provide new office space to ensure London remains one of the world’s most significant centres for financial services (Clark 2015). In the period 2000–2008 a powerful coalition involving The Mayor of London, the National Government (more specifically the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) and various property interests used this rationale to push through a number of controversial projects. Companies were threatening to leave London unless they were permitted to build new high spec office space (Charney 2007) and London’s first elected Mayor



**Figure 6.1:** Hitting the Heights – A Height Chart illustrating London’s Notable Tall Buildings (© Mason Edwards).

(Ken Livingstone) was eager to ensure this did not happen. Resistance was diluted by using high quality designs that were both eye-catching and more environmentally sustainable (Charney 2007). The popular and critical acclaim attained by early examples – such as Norman Foster’s ‘Gherkin’ (30 St Mary’s Axe) – provided a convenient justification to build more towers. Many of these later projects have been less well received: for example, the ‘Walkie Talkie’ (20 Fenchurch Street) designed by Rafael Vinoly is an ugly and imposing structure which has upper floors that are more voluminous than the lower ones. The zenith of London’s post-2000 shift upwards was the construction of The Shard just outside the City of London (32 London Bridge Street). This structure was designed by Renzo Piano as ‘a vertical city’ and it hosts residential apartments, office space and a hotel. Standing over 1,000 feet tall, this is the tallest building in Europe.

London’s new generation of high rise towers have provided opportunities for new visitor experiences. In several instances (e.g. The Shard, and 20 Fenchurch Street), viewing platforms were included in the designs that allow the public to experience open air views from the upper floors. In the case of The Shard, tickets are expensive, with adults currently charged over £30 to access an attraction branded ‘The View from The Shard’ on the 69<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> Floors. Various events are staged to encourage additional demand and repeat visits, including several that capitalise on the spiritual and romantic connotations of panoramic views. For example, an all-night music event is staged on the eve of the summer solstice which allows revellers to watch the sunrise over the city. The View from the Shard has also become a place associated with love and romance; on Valentine’s Day 2015 over six thousand people visited, the highest amount ever recorded on a single day (The Shard 2016).

The viewing area which opened in January 2015 at 20 Fenchurch Street is a different type of attraction than The View from the Shard. Here, developers were required to provide an accessible public space at the top of their building in order to gain planning permission. This means access is free, although visitors have to book in advance and endure arduous security checks to enter. These are not the only criticisms of the project: the space is promoted as ‘The SkyGarden’ and is meant to be a public garden, but it feels more like a hotel lobby than a public space. The limited dimensions mean it has been dubbed The SkyRockery by critics (Wainwright 2015). Nevertheless, The SkyGarden has proved to be extremely popular: 1,210,049 people visited in the first two years it was open (2015–2017) (Gillespies 2017).

Although formal viewing platforms are not provided in London’s other high rise office developments, there is public access of sorts via the provision of hotels, bars and restaurants. For example, the general public are permitted to access the restaurants on the 38<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> floors of the new tower built at 110 Bishopsgate (formerly the Heron Tower, now rather depressingly called the Salesforce Tower). Fine dining with panoramic views has become an important part of the skyscraper experience, and is something that reflects and reinforces



**Figure 6.2:** The View from the SkyGarden – 20 Fenchurch Street (Photo: Tristan Luker).

the reputation of high rise buildings as exclusive territories. A viewing platform is clearly tourist terrain, but by eating in a restaurant or drinking champagne in a bar visitors get a chance to mix with city professionals and sample the ‘high life’ enjoyed by urban elites.

The penthouse epitomises exclusive urban living, and tourists can also experience what it would be like to wake up with panoramic views of London by staying in one of London’s new high rise hotels. For over 50 years The Park Lane Hilton, was London’s tallest hotel (101 metres), but this accolade is now held by the Novotel Canary Wharf which opened in in 2017 (127 metres). Other mixed use towers also offer hotel accommodation. Affluent visitors can experience ‘a new level of luxury’ by staying in the Shangri-La Hotel – located on floors 34 to 52 of The Shard – where prices for ‘rooms with a view’ start at £496 a night. One review of the Shangri-La which features prominently on the Hotel’s website reaffirms why people want stay in such accommodation: ‘From up here the frantic city seems so serene’ (Financial Times 2014). Alongside the panoramic views, this desire to escape the street and access elevated sanctuary helps us to explain the appeal of high rise structures.

The appearance of new viewing platforms in London has been driven by the construction of new high rise office towers, but it also results from the regeneration of historic structures and the provision of new tourist attractions. Amongst the most popular elevated viewing points along the River Thames are Tate Modern and The Oxo Tower. These buildings were originally built in

the 1930s/1940s as industrial installations and both were regenerated in the 1990s as part of the transformation of the South Bank of the Thames. They are now open to the public and provide opportunities to view London from the upper floors. Whilst 8–10 storey structures may not provide the spectacular panoramas offered by skyscrapers, they offer elevated views where observers can engage with people below (Deriu 2018). Tate Modern has recently been extended by adding a 200-ft high pyramid at the back of the original building. Switch House offers views of the city via a roof terrace, but its proximity to new high rise residential development next door has caused some unexpected problems. Instead of admiring the views across the river and the rooftops, visitors have been staring into the new glass-walled apartments opposite. This adds a whole new dimension to the argument that elevation turns viewers into distanced voyeurs (Wigoder 2002). Conflict between different users of high structures also reminds us that we need to understand the relationship *between* high rise buildings rather than analysing them as stand-alone structures.

Perhaps the most famous way of seeing London from above is by riding the London Eye, the enormous Ferris wheel installed on the South Bank of the Thames close to Westminster Bridge. The London Eye opened in 2000 and was initially sanctioned as a temporary attraction but its success meant it was retained as a permanent structure. The Eye's popularity has endured and it remains the most popular paid-for visitor attraction in the UK, encouraging other cities to construct similar structures. The attraction was originally sponsored by British Airways and experiences were promoted as 'flights', emphasising the dynamic aerial views offered. Ferris wheels provide a different type of high rise experience as they provide panoramic views that change as passengers are transported around the circumference of the wheel. The design of the cabins means that views are framed into pictorial compositions, turning the city panorama into a series of artworks (Borden 2014). Borden (2014) also suggests that Ferris wheels act as time machines, not just because of their clock-like circular movement, but because of their historic significance. The view from above is often regarded as an opportunity to glimpse into the future, but the appeal of Ferris wheels is very different – they stimulate feelings of nostalgia and reconnect us to the technologies of the past (Borden 2014).

Like other high rise structures, The London Eye consciously separates people from the surrounding city. Transportation via sealed capsules disconnects the observer from their external environment, with the sounds of the city silenced and the possibility of encountering strangers removed. For 30 minutes tourists are able to enjoy views of the city without having to encounter the city itself. Passengers on the London Eye are thus 'lifted out of the city's grasp' (De Certeau 1984, 92), allowing them to simultaneously escape the city whilst giving them more power and control over it. As Barthes (1983, 250) notes, when you ascend a structure like the London Eye or the Eiffel Tower 'one can feel cut off from the world and yet the owner of a world'. By abstracting the city into a map,



**Figure 6.3:** The London Eye (Photo: Tristan Luker).

miniature and model, the London Eye experience allows passengers to own London (Borden 2014; Dorrian 2009).

In the early days of modern tourism, people visiting London were keen to view the city panoramically from vehicles that offered physical separation and elevation. For example Barton (1996) notes that omnibuses were the transport of choice for Indian travellers to London in the nineteenth century because they offered a bird's-eye view. Open top, double decker buses remain a popular way of consuming London today – like other viewpoints they offer the elevation and protection sought by less adventurous tourists. Panoramic views from vehicles are also provided by new additions to London's transport infrastructure. In 2012, a new cable car over the River Thames opened connecting North Greenwich and Canning Town. Cable cars are normally associated with mountainous landscapes, so their introduction to London represents a further example of the way rural attractions and adventure tourism are increasingly urbanised. This new way of crossing the river is an integrated part of London's transport network but it is sponsored by Emirates and promoted as an 'airline' – emphasising the way it offers tourists elevated views of the city. Despite the generous sponsorship deal, it is still subsidised by Transport for London and there are ongoing concerns about its long term viability. The peripheral location means it struggles to attract many commuters or tourists and, despite the very reasonable prices, the cable car is only used by approximately 1.5 million people every year (Transport for London 2017). However, the Emirates Airline improves accessibility to and from one of London's most deprived Boroughs (Newham) which suggests subsidies might be justified. Examples from further afield (e.g. Medellin) show that cable car technologies can improve mobility opportunities for some of the poorest citizens – a useful reminder that the vertical expansion of the city doesn't have to favour the rich and powerful (Brand and Davila 2011).

To comprehend the contemporary urban landscape, ascending tall structures is not enough – we need to fly (Hinchcliffe and Deriu 2010), and alongside simulated flight experiences – e.g. the London Eye or the Emirates Airline – real flight across London is an increasingly common way of experiencing the city from above. Millions of international tourists every year experience London vistas when they fly into one of the city's airports (especially London City Airport) see Chapter 5; and a more intimate version of this experience is now offered through helicopter tours. Prices in London start at £150 for flights lasting a mere 18 minutes, so this is an expensive experience and one that reaffirms the established link between urban elevation and exclusivity. These tours are linked to the rise of new residential towers in London as a new high rise tower in Battersea provides a convenient place to take off and land. Again, this highlights the relationships that exist between the different aspects of verticality emerging in contemporary London. In the future there are likely to be more opportunities to move between tall buildings without engaging with the street. The idea of urban elites travelling between high rise residences, hotels



**Figure 6.4:** The Emirates Air Line – London’s New Aerial River Crossing (Photo: Eman Mustafa).

and offices via helicopters and never touching the ground seems like a dystopic vision from a J.G. Ballard novel, but it is already a reality in some South American cities (Graham and Hewitt 2012; Harris 2015).

### New Ways of Consuming London Actively from Above

The previous section demonstrates the range of new opportunities to view London from above that have accompanied the city’s recent verticalisation. Elevated positions provide great views, but attractions in London have also begun to offer more adventurous experiences which capitalise on the thrills of ascending, descending and traversing high places. As McKay (2013) identifies, tourists are no longer content with sightseeing or exploring passively; they want to experience urban areas whilst engaged in adrenalin rush activities. Several authors (Swarbrooke et al. 2003; Beedie 2005) also note that urban areas provide a new frontier for adventure tourism – something traditionally associated with natural landscapes. Adventure tourism is moving into cities and city tourism is moving into adventure, and the result is more adventurous urban destinations. Over the past few decades various adventure tourism activities, e.g. climbing and skiing, have been commodified and urbanised by the introduction of indoor facilities (Beedie 2005). But, more recently there has been an expansion in the number of adventure sports offered outside in less

contrived settings, where the city is reimagined as an active landscape. A pioneering example was the bungee jump performed by members of Oxford University's Dangerous Sports Club from the Clifton Suspension Bridge in 1979. In the contemporary city, vertiginous adventure tourism is not merely confined to bungee jumping: climbing, abseiling, urbex (urban exploring) and free running are also examples of activities that make use of the vertical built environment. Participants are seeking various thrills, but are also looking to experience 'flow' – an ecstatic feeling linked to immersion in the moment where a person achieves a state of detachment from material reality (McKay 2013).

One way that city destinations have catered for the demand for more adventurous experiences is by adapting existing attractions, and Deriu (2018) examines the way viewing platforms have been updated to encourage more physical experiences. Following the example of Toronto's CN Tower, many observation decks have been fitted with transparent floors to add an element of excitement and danger. This type of attraction – which is a natural extension of the installation of glass lifts, glass staircases and other transparent ways of ascending built structures – has also been introduced in London. In 2014, the walkway that connects Tower Bridge's famous towers was fitted with a glass floor which allows people to look down at the vehicles and people crossing below. Most elevated viewpoints offer panoramas across the city, but Tower Bridge now offers a downwards view where urban features are seen directly from above. The introduction of a more experiential dimension means this heritage attraction is now promoted as the Tower Bridge *Experience*, refreshing its image and attracting a different audience. Nevertheless, this is relatively tame fare compared to other examples where the thrill of looking down from a tall building is exaggerated by structural transparency. For example, at the John Hancock Tower in Chicago visitors are invited to enter glass boxes that are tilted 30 degrees over a 300m drop. Deriu (2018) suggests these types of features exemplify the shift toward experience design in architecture, highlighting a shift from 'architectures of vision' to 'architectures of vertigo'.

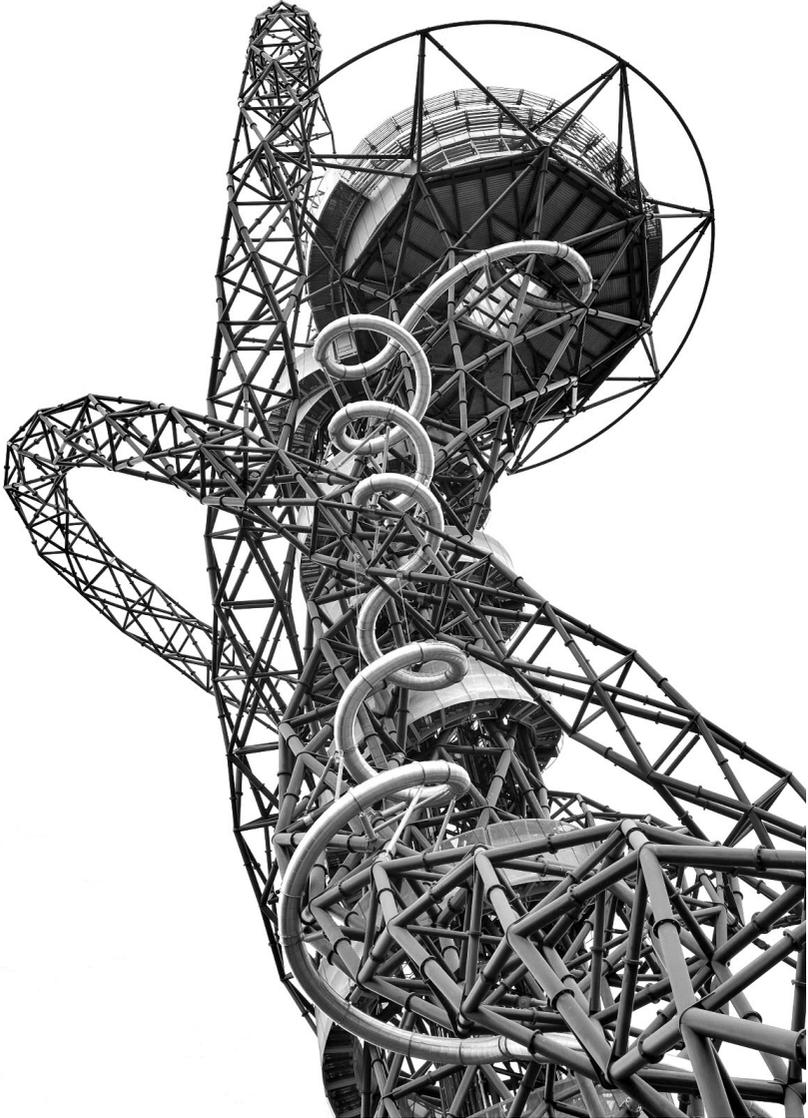
Visitors usually ascend high rise attractions by taking lifts to upper floors. However, following the trend for more participatory and active experiences, there are now opportunities to climb London's vertical landscape. For example, an observation platform and a climbing route were recently installed on top of the O2 – one of London's most famous new buildings which now hosts the world's most popular indoor music venue. 'Up at the O2' opened in 2012 and it allows visitors to climb a tensile walkway to reach the top of this dome shaped structure 52 metres above ground. The notion of urban adventure tourism is explicitly acknowledged at this new attraction which is positioned as a 'mountaineering expedition' with visitors invited to start their journey at 'Base Camp' and then 'Conquer the Summit of London.' This attraction illustrates the trend for more physical experiences, and a desire for attractions that offer the excitement and spontaneity that is missing from quotidian life (Beedie 2005). The potential to 'climb an icon' at the O2 also highlights new demand

for architecture that engages the public beyond the stimulation of their visual senses. Allowing people to climb buildings can create feelings of attachment and ownership – making architecture feel more public (Smith and Strand 2011). This is also part of the rationale for ‘rooftopping’ – where urban adventurers climb the vertical city not merely for the thrill of it, but in order to appropriate buildings, sabotaging ‘the culture of passive consumption that underlies the society of the spectacle’ (Deriu 2016, 1044).

Providing spectacular descents is an obvious way that high rise structures can cater for tourists seeking thrilling experiences. In 2007 the artist Carsten Holler caused a stir in London with his Tate Modern exhibition featuring a series of slides which transported people from upper levels to the floor of the Turbine Hall. This exhibition was called Test Site and Holler felt that his structures were prototypes for slides that could be introduced as permanent features of London’s cityscape. Nine years later, this futuristic vision came a step closer when a slide he designed was installed on the Arcelor Mittal Orbit. The Orbit is a sculpture which was designed by the sculptor Anish Kapoor to provide London’s Olympic Park with the iconic structure that Boris Johnson (Mayor of London 2008–2016) felt it lacked. An observation deck and lift had already been installed near the top to encourage people to ascend, but when The Orbit opened to the public visitor numbers were disappointing. Rather than closing the attraction, officials decided to reinvent it by adding an experiential



**Figure 6.5:** Up at the O2 – Greenwich Peninsula (Photo: Andrew Smith).



**Figure 6.6:** The Anceor Mittal Orbit featuring a New Slide (Photo: Tristan Luker).

dimension and the structure that was installed means people can now descend the UK's tallest sculpture by travelling down the world's longest tunnel slide. Even though the slide is enclosed, several transparent sections mean that visitors can see London as they descend – producing an accelerated panoramic view. The overall effect is one of 'delightful terror,' a defining characteristic of commodified adventure where the hint of danger is combined with the knowledge that no harm will come (Beedie 2005).

The slide has stimulated new interest in visiting The Orbit. This attraction made a loss of £500,000 in 2015/6, but after the slide opened in June 2016 it returned a profit of over £100,000 during the rest of that year (The Wharf 2016). The Orbit's revised design and new-found popularity provides a clear demonstration of the need for twenty-first century viewing platforms to offer more than just views. Competition from other high rise structures and the appetite for more physical experiences is now forcing rival commercial viewing platforms to reinvent their attractions. In a direct response to the new threat posed by The Orbit, The View from The Shard is now augmented with virtual reality experiences that allow visitors to feel like they are sliding down from the top of the building or balancing along elevated steel frames.

Several authors, most notably Stevens (2007), have noted recent efforts to make our cities more playful. This does not just mean providing more opportunities for children, as playfulness is also something that is increasingly attractive to adults too. The introduction of The Orbit's slide is one example of this trend, but there are others too, with several other attractions trying to combine playfulness, adventure and panoramic views. For example, in 2017 a very long, very fast and very high zip wire was installed in Archbishop's Park in South London by Zip World, a company which normally operates in the Welsh countryside. This park was deliberately chosen to host the wire as it offered views of the Houses of Parliament, The London Eye and the River Thames. The essential appeal of the attraction is based on the way it combines speed, height and views:

Get ready for the ride of your life on the fastest city zipwire! You will be taking off from a height of 35 meters (100 feet), that's more than 9 double decker buses! Catch never-before-seen views of the London's iconic skyline including Big Ben!

(Zip World London 2017)

This attraction is temporary but it provides another example of the way adventure tourism is increasingly offered in urban contexts. For the companies involved, locating these installations in cities opens up larger markets – with demand from tourists and residential populations. For the same reasons, bungee jumping has become a predominantly urban phenomenon because it is more accessible to large numbers of people (Beedie 2005). This trend is also changing the geography of adventure attractions, with established adventure tourism operators like Zip World opening new facilities in urban locations. In 2015,



**Figure 6.7:** 110 Bishopsgate – Formerly Heron Tower, now called the Salesforce Tower (Photo: Tristan Luker).

Go Ape followed this trend by opening their first city centre site in London's Battersea Park. This company installs ladders, ropes, platforms and zip wires in trees creating an elevated playground. Go Ape in Battersea Park caused a lot of controversy because it meant an expensive attraction was installed in a public park. When a similar attraction opened in Glasgow, the urbanist Ronan Paddison (2010) was one of the people who campaigned against it – arguing that Go

Ape meant the privatisation of public space. In the era of neoliberalism, we are used to private incursions in the public realm, but Go Ape attractions are unusual examples because their installations are mainly above ground. In Battersea Park the playground beneath Go Ape remains free to use, but the playground in the trees costs £18–33 – creating a two tier park where: ‘those who can afford it get to swing through the heavens and look down on those whose lack of cash leaves them scurrying about below’ (Mangan 2015). Go Ape in Battersea Park means the commercialisation and privatisation of the vertical space in it; and it provides a further example of the way London’s visitor economy is expanding vertically.

### *Out of View*

Before concluding this chapter, it is important to mention some of the aspects of vertical city tourism that have not been discussed. The analysis here has consciously tried to focus on experiences from above – a perspective that ignores the importance of looking up – e.g. at tall buildings, suspended installations and airborne events. A ground floor perspective is not addressed but neither is an underground one – and this aspect is particularly relevant to London given its pioneering role in the construction of underground railways and river tunnels. As the discussion focuses on direct (i.e. non-representational) experiences, the significant use of panoramic views in marketing materials has also been neglected. Critics might also suggest the discussion has been overly positive – ignoring some of the darker aspects of towers and tourism. For example, urban towers and bridges have always provided opportunities for suicidal people wanting to end their lives. The tragedies at the World Trade Center in New York and, more recently, at Grenfell Tower in London, also highlight the potential for disaster that permeates tall buildings. These tragedies – both of which created disturbing icons which people wanted to visit – have not dulled the appetite for high rise urbanism. This suggests we have now entered an age where the growth of vertical urban space – and vertical tourism territory – is inevitable.

### **Conclusions: Urban Tourism in 3D**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the new ways that tourists are now able to consume London from above. These include traditional observation decks installed in new skyscrapers (SkyGarden, The View from the Shard), viewing platforms incorporated into regenerated industrial structures (The Oxo Tower, Tate Modern) and moving attractions that simulate flight (The London Eye, The Emirates Airline). All these attractions have been opened in the last 20 years, with the Millennium celebrations and the London

2012 Olympic Games providing excuses to use public funds. The chapter has also reviewed a new breed of attractions which facilitate more physical experiences, including ways of climbing (Up at the O2), descending (The Slide, Zip World London) and traversing (Go Ape, The Tower Bridge Experience) the city. These experiences are based on the quirky appeal of consuming adventure tourism in an urban setting. Such attractions, alongside the plethora of bars, restaurants and hotels that have been opened in London's new high rise buildings, exemplify how London's visitor economy is expanding vertically. Over a century after New York developed elevated tourism and leisure spaces, London is following suit.

It is important to develop a critical understanding of the new vertical territories that are emerging in London, including an appreciation of the spatial politics through which socio-economic elites rise upwards (Graham and Hewitt 2012). These elites include tourists and the territories created are inextricably linked to tourism. Many of the attractions explored in this chapter have been co-produced by London's most lucrative industries – property, finance and tourism – which have combined forces to produce and commodify panoramic views of London. The tourism sector in London has been one of the beneficiaries of new high rise developments in the city, but it has also been one of the driving forces behind the city's vertical expansion. New office blocks are made more economically viable and socially justifiable by the introduction of viewing areas, hotels, and restaurants. These amenities generate rent, revenue and publicity and make high rise towers seem more public. London's new verticality has reinforced the increased socio-economic polarisation of the city and this is also linked to tourism. Affluent elites are keen to occupy central areas that are distanced vertically from the streets below and these elites include tourists who are keen to gaze on London from a range of exclusive vantage points without having to engage with the reality of this global city. Just as not everyone gets the chance to live or work in London's elevated territories, not everyone gets the chance to visit. Indeed, one of the recurring themes in the discussion here is the expense of the new attractions installed above London. These financial obstacles remind us that London's panoramic aspect is very much a privileged view and one that has been ruthlessly commodified.

The conclusions above suggest that many of the original explanations for the rise of elevated tourism attractions still apply in contemporary London. The popularity of new elevated viewpoints is based on the aesthetic appeal of urban panoramas and the attraction of being safely encapsulated high above the city. At one level these are innocuous attempts to access spectacular views, but they are also efforts to gain security in – and control of – the unruly city; thus, reinforcing the power dynamics of contemporary urbanism. The second half of the chapter explores the rise of different types of elevated experiences which are linked to the rise of the playful or ludic city (Stevens 2007), the desire for more active experiences, and the rise of urban adventure tourism. The observation deck has seemingly become a little old fashioned, and the ways in which this

attraction has been reinvented (e.g. through the introduction of transparent floors, slides and virtual reality) demonstrates the rise of architecture designed to facilitate playful experiences (Deriu 2016). However, it would be a mistake to regard the new breed of high rise tourism as essentially different from traditional modes. Promotional materials produced by The Slide, Zip World London or Up at the O2 still emphasise that these are opportunities to consume London's panorama. The view is still very much central to their attractiveness. These attractions obviously involve exaggerated sensations of vertigo, but they are also used as vehicles to comprehend, control and own the city below. Visitors are still encapsulated by structures that separate them from the city, and whilst they involve more dynamic experiences, those consuming London's new breed of vertical attractions are distanced emotional and physically from urban reality.

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