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Light in the city The social and ethnic function of the nocturnal aesthetic light of Italian cities artistic luminous installations

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Resumen

Desde hace algunos años en Turín, Nápoles, Salerno, Lecce hay instalaciones de iluminación para que los artistas se apropien del espacio público del centro de la ciudad por la noche. A través del arte público, las nuevas funciones invierten los lugares urbanos que favorecen el encuentro y la interacción entre los diferentes componentes de la compleja sociedad de nuestros centros urbanos, cada vez más multiétnica. La luz, a través de los muchos idiomas específicos del arte contemporáneo, se las arregla para ser elemento dinamizador compartido con el público, para el fomento y el fortalecimiento de la identidad étnica, al mismo tiempo. El hecho de experiencia que la atmósfera como el arte urbano nocturnal, uniformes a los migrantes, de la ciudad, el turista, el pasante ocasional: todos reconocemos que pertenecen al valor universal de la belleza, dejando a la superestructura generacional y cultural. La investigación muestra la experiencia completa de muchos años de "Luci d'Artista" de Turín, "Illuminando" de Lecce, "Luminaria" de Nápoles, y termina con la experiencia artística significativa "Re Place" en la ciudad de L'Aquila, donde el arte contemporáneo ha intervenido insistiendo en que el patrimonio histórico y cultural de la ciudad es un bien común no se puede olvidar.

Summary

Happens a few years in Turin, Naples, Salerno, and in Lecce, that lighting installations of a group of artists take possession of city centres public space during night hours. Through public art new roles invest urban places favouring the encounter and interaction among different components of the complex social context of contemporary cities, increasingly multi-ethnic places. Light, through its many contemporary and artistic styles, manages to be dynamic element shared with the audience, encouraging an ethnic and identity strengthening at the same time. The experiential atmosphere of the artistic nocturnal artificial lights uniforms the migrant, the inhabitant, the tourist, the unexpected: all of them recognize the same universal value of beauty, leaving generational and cultural superstructure. The research presents the longstanding experience of *Luci d'Artista* in Turin, the projects *Illuminando* and *Luminaria* of Lecce and Naples, ending with the significant artistic experiment *Re Place* in the city of L'Aquila, where contemporary art has intervened insisting that the historical and cultural heritage of the city is a common good not to be forgotten.

Warped spaces and luminescent nocturnal art

The evocative power of the city, its architecture, its urban areas, is mainly due to the participation of all citizens in the process of formation and representation of culture

and collective memory (Rossi 1966). Participation is thus one of the best forms of expression of collective freedom and most often is based on awareness and sense of security. In a "safe" city you can carefully participate, not only to everyday life, but also to all those forms of recreation and leisure in the city are to be implemented. If today the thematic of anxiety and social risk constitute an emergency in the urban reality and perception of the city and its public places, especially when associated with immigration issue, then it is important for local governments and planners, architects or engineers, to organize through new forms of sharing, a common and innovative collective sentiment, organizing space and rules of action, based on demand expressed by the community; a community which all individuals must express their needs and their desires and must have a fair chance. All this can be done through public art, that transforms spaces into places of vital aggregation (Visentin 2007) and no more spaces of fear (Vidler 2000). The usual use of public art in the cities is now known, the artistic use of artificial lighting at night in cities take several years more and more interesting findings.



Fig. 1. artist Giulio Paolini, *Palomar*, Via Roma, *Luci d'Artista*, Turin, 2009-2010-2011

Since some years in the Italian city of Turin, Naples, Salerno and Lecce, but also in many others, artists' lighting installations are appropriating public space of urban centers at night. Through public art, new roles invest urban places favoring the encounter and interaction between different components of the complex social structure of our city centers, increasingly multiethnic. Light, through its many styles of contemporary art, manages to be dynamic element shared with the audience, encouraging identity and ethnic strengthening at the same time.

The empirical atmosphere turns urban nights with art light and thus smooths the migrant, the inhabitants, the tourist, the unexpected: all of them recognize that they belong to the universal value of beauty, leaving the cultural and generational superstructures to a unique aesthetic experience.

The aesthetically successful result, according to a multicultural logic, allows the realisation of a "all new" forms, as without preconceived linguistic structures.



Fig. 2. artist Luigi Stoisa, *Noi*, Via Garibaldi, *Luci d'Artista*, Turin 2009-2011.

Fig. 3. artist Carlo Bernardini, *Disegno del vuoto*, Via dei Mille, *Luminaria*, Napoli 2011.

Fig. 4. artist Emanuele Saracino, *Bubbles*, Porta Napoli, *Illuminando*, Lecce 2011.

The practice of urban art embellishment is centuries old. Otherwise, it features modern and contemporary, distinctive of Twentieth century, the use of artificial light in urban spaces (Visentin 2012). Italy, compared to many other countries, enjoys a comparative advantage linked to the availability of historical monuments and frames within which public space can have connotations of uniqueness, for an even greater enhancement of urban centers.

A custom that has become transnational in recent years, with interesting relationships with historic Italian cities, offering the ideal ground for the meeting and confrontation between cultures and identities, to trigger a new and comprehensive interest in the semantic values, towards a collective memory of the city's artifacts, towards a *genius loci*, in opposition, through art, to the "non lieux" (Augé 2005) to facilitate the integration of cultures. The urban environment is in fact useful to develop and host "higher and complex associative life" systems, and represents the most favourable "frame material" to the "social drama", which can only exist in a reality of "concentration and intensification of collective groups", and in this sense, the city offers "different possibilities of community life" (Mumford 1938).

The perception then, where the citizen "there for generations" finds himself in a specific city, is identical to that felt by the immigrant, who recently residing (legally or illegally) in the same place. The public space becomes the privileged site of artistic intervention, as space of collective use. Even more at night, which already there are theatrical characteristics and charm contrived. Here art aims to establish a direct communication between artist and audience, beyond any mediation, for a perspective that extends the stage and public art. Public space is therefore an important element of urban quality that directly affects the livability of the city. One of the levers for improvement of urban quality is artificial illumination, not only as street lighting, public or architectural, but rather as luminescent art, to be proposed to the vast and diverse audience that perceives.

Perceptual elements

How then the light in its composition between nature and artifice, in dialogue with monuments, with works of art, with landscapes and cities, influences the quality of life, perception of reality and human emotions?

It is clear, considering both metropolitan areas and small towns, the importance of acting in urban areas on the individual aspects to transform what is now a potential source, especially in Italy, in welcoming places.



Fig. 5. artist Daniel Buren, *Tappeto Volante*, Piazza Palazzo, *Luci d'Artista*, Turin, 2011.

The lengthening of the time spent away from home is a need to use the city to carry out even pleasurable activities that normally took place inside the house or condominium areas. Meeting places become points of contact for new multi-ethnic city different aspects. These may be the place where the negative stereotype of the *immigrant* is replaced by a "positive" stereotype of migrant, who resides in a space where can happen something fun for the whole community. The task of the designer and artist is to make this places recognizable and remarkable points of contact between different realities. In this sense, the language of any intervention must interpret the features of both worlds. In the absence of that, a road or an urban space in general, are simply places of passage and crossing, unless sites of perception of danger.

The artistic luminescent of public places can wisely to homogenize all users by standardizing on specific elements, and the nocturnal realities in Turin and Naples are conspicuous examples:

- The surprise of the uniqueness of using, as places of contemporary art, an urban space or architecture of the historic center, ever seen in any other way;
- The feeling of grandeur, enchanting and theatrics of the event occurring at night;

- The effect of a suggestive atmosphere that unifies in same way the perception of each. All are equal and can be recognized in the sense of belonging to the value of beauty and magic of an experience lived together;
- The artistic light shows other faces of the city, those new faces lived for the first time by all and then become belonging to each one for the first time;
- There is a fragmentation of cultural, generational, ethnic superstructures: all before the artistic representation of light are involved in a similar way;
- Contemporary art, with the meaning often inexplicable, emotionally involving different social and cultural contexts.

Meeting and public places of the city become the neutral points of contact, shared with all participating, in the artistic *mise en scene* with high aesthetic experiences.



Fig. 6. artist Sandro Marasco, *Chiudi gli occhi e manda un saluto al mondo*, Piazzetta Brizio de Santis, *Illuminando*, Lecce, 2011

Turin, Naples, Lecce

Projects of urban nocturnal lighting in Turin, Naples, Lecce and finally L'Aquila were used to sew parts of the city and return tourism suggest for urban areas less known than others. A street/square lighting of art, also taking into account the behavior patterns of who uses the city and wants to ensure visibility, and safety. This brings us to turn in a positive way, what our city become (at night) and what Italo Calvino's literary has transposed, in an exemplary way, in *Invisible Cities*, speaking of Chloe (*In Chloe, a great city, the people who move through the streets are all strangers. At each encounter, they imagine a thousand things about one another; meetings which could take place between them, conversations, surprises, caresses, bites. But no one greets anyone; eyes lock for a second, then dart away, seeking other eyes, never stopping*).



Fig. 7. the Turin city map of *Luci d'Artista*, Turin, 2011.

Luci d'Artista in Turin is the main example for the strong aesthetic outcome, in a way which could be defined as multiethnic, that allowed to create forms "all new", as without preconceived linguistic structures. We want to remember in Turin on 50% is an immigrant or child of recent immigrants (since 1962).

A more phenomenological sense of space of the vast city center, sharing the architecture of the past, whether medieval or nineteenth-century, or Savoy, with the highest forms of contemporary art. Cultural heritage of Turin is first of all society, living day by day and transforms the city; an urban landscape that lives not only of its trading mechanisms, but also of the multi ethnicity of the people: the event in Turin never forgotten these references. Fourteen years have passed since the first edition and the *Luci d'Artista* of Turin continues to illuminate squares, streets and roads, a landmark of contemporary art and symbol of a concept of "universal" art, that put it in direct contact with the public. In 2011 seven lighting installations have been running throughout the year to celebrate the 150 anniversary of the unification of Italy, a sort of artistic homage of Turin to the particular birthday of national unification. Fusing all citizens through the light to share a place and, in this case, a Nation.

The art of night light helps the conservation and enhancement of cultural heritage that is the community of persons, public spaces, the identity of a city. But the light does more, gives rise to little known and used areas of the city, tells stories, builds new routes and creates full of atmosphere settings.

If you look at France, its cities, from Paris to Lyon, but also to smaller towns and medium-sized cities such as Nantes, can be noticed how urban lighting is used to create cities at night dressed to show other faces. We speak today of "urbanisme lumière" to define a philosophy of approach to the issue of artificial lighting of the city, as well as tools and techniques so that light becomes an element of regeneration and urban renewal.



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Fig. 8. artist Carmelo Giammello, *Planetario*, Via Micca, *Luci d'Artista*, Turin, 2010-2011.

Fig. 9. artist Mario Merz, *il volo dei numeri*, Mole Antonelliana, *Luci d'Artista*, Turin, 2009-2011.

Light is not just entertainment, which the citizen passively assists, but re-creates an environment where you can move to enjoy the space and following the changes in evolving with the city. This involves putting the inhabitant and the community at the center of the project with all its features, to draw, through the lights, a sort of *urban sensory experience* (Zardini 2005). This was done for years in Turin and is in place since three years in Naples.



Fig. 10.-11.-12. artist AV Ascolti Visivi, *Tonestone*, Piazza del Gesù Nuovo, *Luminaria*, Napoli 2010.

The *en plein air* Neapolitan festival of contemporary art *Luminaria* is born from the idea of turning artists and designers installations in tools of rehabilitation of the urban areas, even the most degraded of the Neapolitans districts, as a subject of theatrical scene. Ten site-specific art interventions, like suspended luminaires and video installations, suggest a contemporary visual contrast. Bringing to light, revealing, emphasize architectural forms of the culture of the city, dressing up, masking with colours and distortions, to rediscover them, to find them in the eyes of population, to

suggest a more complex reality, deeper, to feel a sense of aesthetics finding support in contemporary ornamental decoration. Like in the installation "mapped" on the facade of the church of Gesù Nuovo. Each stone takes on a colour, a form precarious. In the assembly the colours play, transforming and realizing an emotional palette, where the urban context is an *open-air* experimental location for contemporary creativity. Only a year Lecce has its *site-specific* luminescent contemporary art. *Illuminando* was invented instead of traditional Christmas illumination: this art installations of great scenographic impact gives the city its splendour inviting citizens and tourists to stroll along unexpected artistic/cultural roads. The luminous works are made from eco-friendly materials and energy saving lamps. A cultural bridge between a northern city like Turin that distinguishes itself on a nationally cultural level, and a southern one as Lecce that keeps to events at a smaller scale, needing more confidence and trust.



Fig. 13. artist Francesco Cururachi, *La serratura*, Porta San Biagio, *Illuminando*, Lecce 2011

L'Aquila and *Re Place*

The significant artistic experiment *Re Place* in the city of L'Aquila uses contemporary art to emphasize that the historical and cultural heritage of the city is a common good not to be forgotten. Contemporary nocturnal art unites all citizens, to intervene and ask for "light" on the responsibilities of more than 300 deaths from the earthquake, and for the future of the city. An earthquake that should not be forgotten by the public and to continue to seek new light on future projects. What is the role of art in an existential and material crisis together, social and economic? Illuminate. Attracting light. Heat. Attract heat. Revitalize, at least tried. It is an attempt to "conquest" the present time of this part of community: the rejection of the present and of a bleak future seems the assimilation of legitimate collective identity that coincides with a site, with the places of their lives. The occupation of a horizon. The places chosen for the light installations are within the city center, which no longer knows from the earthquake a bright vitality, being completely deserted. The power of art is called not only to keep alive the memory but also to bring new light. With this goal, the first edition of *Re Place* was held in 2010 on the anniversary of the quake, at the same hour of the main shock, with a work light of Mario Airò, again calling the art to speak, with its generosity, but also its ability to report, to resume the thread of an interrupted narrative. A city broken into its structures, supported by buttresses covering walls, columns and roofs in an cold and lifeless embrace, waiting for a reconstruction, already late to revive.



Fig. 14. artist Fabrizio Corneli, *Le luci e le ombre dell'amore*, Piazza Duomo, *Re Place* L'Aquila 2011

Finally, illuminating the cities with the artificial light of art may now be a different way of life for urban spaces, can be an unexpected source, an unexpected contribution to the reinvention of some areas of the city, or at least a useful starting point for reflection on the role that these sites may assume in the near future for citizens, tourists, immigrants, anyone who benefit them. It does not escape the direct link with aspects in key tourist attraction of development, with the use of artificial light applied to monumental areas and inadequately known locations.

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