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Luc Gwiazdzinski (*)

«C'est la nuit qu'il est bon de croire en la lumière»

Edmond Rostand

Abstract

Lost dimension of the city, the night has been for long this space and time completely left to fears and fantasies. Times are changing. The former nocturnal border is now a heart. European nights light up. Conflicts increase between individuals, groups and districts of the multiple-times city. Within insecurity and freedom, these transformations require people and organizations to adapt themselves in new forms. As a fleeting and cyclic territory, the night has become a great field of experimentation and exploration for researchers, artists and authorities, and a place for renewal, innovation and creativity for the community.

Perpetually trying to emancipate from natural rhythms, man has gradually artificialised the urban life and colonized the night. Having turned into a forgotten dimension of the city, urban night should no longer be seen as a foil given to representations and fantasies but as a space for projects, the last border between the city and the XXIst century man, an adventure playground for art and artists.

Colonization. Not long time ago, the urban night, symbolized by the curfew, was still the time of darkness, sleep and social rest. It inspired poets looking for freedom, it was a refuge for criminals and a threat for power, who tried to control it. Contrary to claims made by nocturnal people jealous of their prerogatives, the conquest of the night has begun. Beyond dreams, fears and fantasies, henceforth there is a life after daytime. Gradually, human activities colonize this space-time which crystallizes the needs and tensions of a changing society. The other side of the city is starting to take part in our current events. Our cities are being transformed, for better or for worse. Emancipating from natural constraints, our metropolises come alive under the influence of lifestyles increasingly out of sync, of the reduction of working hours and new lighting and communication technologies. The light has gradually dominated the urban space, erasing part of the threatening darkness of our nights, allowing daytime activities to go on. The mediatic curfew is over: radios and televisions are working 24h/24, 7 days out of 7, and allow communication though the Internet with some regions where it's daylight. The "people of the night" is thriving. Industrial enterprises operate

continuously to make profits on their equipment and, in most fields, night work is becoming commonplace.

Service companies practice the “24h/24, 7/7.” Everywhere, the trend is to enlarge the periodicity, the amplitude and frequency of transports. Numerous activities and businesses are adapting their schedules to evening and nighttimes, experiencing a large influx. Between Before and After, parties begin later. Even our biological rhythms are disrupted: as diurnal animals, we sleep one hour less than our grandparents. There are increasing pressures on the night that crystallize economic, political and social rights stakes. The non-stop activity of the economy and networks goes against the circadian rhythm of our bodies and our cities. The global time is in conflict with the local time. The conflict is growing between individuals, groups and neighbourhoods of the sleeping city, the working city and the city who has fun.

Invention. Caricature of the day, space-time that highlights the contradictions and potentials, place where differences between areas, activities, populations and territories are emphasized, urban night is an observatory of the evolution of our lifestyles and our abilities to live together in the metropolises. The Night is a wonderful area of investigation, a border for invention and creativity we need to explore, understand, think and delight. Source of tensions for society, the city at night asks each of us - researcher elected, technician, artist-citizen-, to consider differently the city and the society by adopting a more holistic view of the Cité. It integrates time aspects which are essential to its understanding and its governance. Explored and under debate, the night can recharge day's batteries.

Experimentation and debate. The night can bring the watertight boundaries down between research and experimentation, between citizen makers, artists and technicians. Solutions in terms of sustainable urban development are not only to be found in infrastructures ; they can also be found on the side of the sensible, game, pleasure and artists from every step of the metropolitan factory. Why for? To cross, design, reveal, provoke, mobilize, represent, simulate, delight and co-produce in situ nocturnal metamorphosis irrigating the day. In a society which is rethinking its nycthemeres, night has definitely its word to day. Artistic approaches become the occasion to give birth to a wider discussion about the city at night. Do we want to maintain our traditional rhythms or to switch to a continuously society, a city at our choice 24h/24, 7/7, meaning comfort for some, yet hell for others? If we hide these issues, or we let them be arbitrated in private spheres, we allow the economy to dictate its laws and we take the risk to let isolated decisions generate new conflicts and new inequalities. Provocative, watchmen and guard crazy, all in one, “geo-artists“ who invest nocturnal space in our cities, whiten our nights and encourage us to let go, to live and “ex-ist“. In the meaning and experience of the city, they know how to reveal our contradictions and our post-modern paradoxes, and how to open new possibilities and the public space to debate. Without light, there is no city at night. But too much light kills night. Should we put more ‘day’ inside the ‘night’ or protect it? Is the result worth the effort? It is up to us to decide. On the other side of the day, artists open up our eyes.

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