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Editoria

In the last issue, we enquired about darkness in our architecture and our cities. In contrast, light might seem a more well-known and studied subject, more evident. However, as usually happens to most of the fundamental aspects of our existence, we tend to be indifferent due to its unmistakable presence.

We live in a world where sight is pondered, possible only thanks to light, over the other senses. In the most natural way, the world is presented to us bathed in subtle changes of light nuances. Daylight gives us shelter as it provides heat and energy. Light means life.

The architect's, industrial designer's or the city planner's presumptuous job to transform the world and display it before the public eye –either consciously or not–, implies the creation and modification of the different lighting that comes along with these changes. The outcome becomes more relevant in perception rather than the traditional concepts with which our scientific mind associates design as matter, composition or layout.

Light is an intangible being that acquires more sense than some other abstractions that the designer works with every day, such as space, void, and even functionality, rhythm or balance. Light also has had the greatest responsibility of representing architecture and its related fields both through the management of shadows and chiaroscuros in façades or perspectives, and through the modern mechanical and electronic media such as photography or renders, unthinkable without light. Despite the famous definition of architecture by Le Corbusier, in addition to other phrases that verge on the poetic, in practice and experience, light has a proclivity to be overlooked.

Natural light has been the object in which some architects have developed their mastery and talent. Luis Barragán's, Peter Zumthor's, Tadao Ando's works are proposals in the matters of light much more than in any other aspect that are often considered to rule architecture. No design material affects our emotion as an exact and calculated play of light, natural or artificial likewise.

Few events have had such a great impact in human history as the invention of artificial light. This was somehow outrageous, rule-breaking: human kind defied the natural law that betook that work must be done in daylight and rest at night. We have lighted spaces that fundamentally ought to be dark, so strong has been our will to control and elucidate the world we live in. The buildings' interior and the appearance of our cities have changed and so our daily activities.

We have created other worlds that are as variable as the nuance or the type of lighting that accopanies them. It is obvious for us that a public space is a different one when its lighting technology has changed. Night was not the same wher lighting was made of small crystal balls with gas light that projected upon us a green hue, an atmosphere that can only be evoked through the observation of paintings from Paris in the 19th century, such as the ones by Toulouse Lautrec.

From the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1889, whose tower was built to light all the capital, and the on of the electric industries in Barcelona 1929, to the glorifying of the lamp design in art decó or the fascination of the Italian Futurism for electric energy, artificial lighting has been the most important agent that stands for modernity in daily life. The conquest of darkness ushered in Modernity. The unknown, the magical and fear were transformed into security and certainty, the know-it-al feeling —to see does not necessarily means to know, nonetheless. Such is the importance that human kind, a specie like any other in the world dependent of light to survive, has placed upon a simple light bulb, that for as small as it is, in the middle of a dark room or in the forest in a night without moonlight the difference made in our confidence turns substantial.

Light means progress, modernity, subduing darkness, night, the magical and the unknown. However, the magical, now hand-in-hand with the woderful and sublime, is found in the night lighting shows. A cultural image of the modern city without the night lighting of its billboards or its automobiles running by is unimaginable. Lighting has brighten up our lives, lives embedded in the monotony of a metropolis, it has returned a certain amount of illusion and fascination for the magic-like things. The current night urban experience is based on a lighting show.

On the other hand, the prominence and spectacular bi-dimensionality of the modern buildings and their media façades seem to transgress the three-dimensional laws of traditional architecture. They epitomize the concept and design challenge since they are really plain during day time.

For the future of our disciplines, it must be taken into account that light, natural and artificial, and its different shades allows us to see the same object from different perspectives. This means that an object created in space is simultaneously as many others, as the various forms in which light is imprinted upon it. This experience provokes in us a wide range of emotions that continuously modify our material world: our subjects of study are never static and unchangeable.

Cristina López Uribe

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