

# Fulgurar bestiarius

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## Abstract

In the realm of design for sustainability, new and more efficient efforts to convey its significance are continuously being created; nonetheless the effect in the actual everyday life and behaviors of citizens is vague. Having that communication concern in mind, the paper moves along two ideas: one starting from attainableutopias.uk<sup>1</sup> project, vis-à-vis sustainability: *'a new kind of metadesign that integrates whatever makes people 'happy' with processes that also nurture the environment'*<sup>2</sup>. Second, that public design is able not only to convey the "green" message but also to make people experience "well-being" through and beyond the interventions that it sets into motion, leaving in the public a *feeling*, and more important a *"reflection"* that can last on the long term run. In those lines, it is necessary to look at the intermittent signals that crop up from a merge of creativity: a *top down* one coming from "professional" creatives mixed with a *bottom up* one, coming from people themselves. To assess these premises some study cases are reviewed.

## Keywords

Cities, quality of life, public design, intermittency, light

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<sup>1</sup> Attainable Utopias UK is a metadesign networked Think Tank involving innovators, experts, and thinkers that encourages innovation for sustainable futures.

<sup>2</sup> <http://attainable-utopias.org/tiki/VisionStatement>

## Introduction

*“Deep in the Garden, as dusk falls, old gramophones spin glittering sounds whilst clicking insects cast vast moving shadows. Haunting whistles rise and fall and sparkling flowers dance to their own tune...”*

*Take a journey through a magical world as the Botanic Garden’s famous Glasshouses are transformed into a fascinating nocturnal trail of unusual and immersive installations.”*

Power Plant in Edingburg press release  
GroundWork Agency<sup>3</sup>

In its last presentation Power Plant<sup>4</sup> a UK based group of “*progettisti*” (in its best Italian sense, including architects, designers and artists) exhibited, among others, a piece developed by Mark Anderson’s called: Fulgurar Bestiarius. A breathtaking installation in which people visiting the gardens of Liverpool could witness the strange movements of glowworms and fireflies. But what was remarkable and the point we would like to highlight along this text, was the sense of silence and intimacy that the piece aroused.

Now, what does it has to do with design and more precisely with design for sustainability?

Before getting ourselves toward the inside of this complex topic, sustainability, it is important to state that for the purpose of this paper designing for sustainability is understood as designing for well-being which includes cheerfulness, pleasure, enjoyment and optimism; states of mind, body and soul that somehow we do not reach to see by being immersed in too technical or scientific definitions and that leave the common citizen thinking that “sustainability” as such only regards the production and consumption of eco-artifacts or the development of purely “green” initiatives and marketing.

Anderson’s Fulgurar Bestiarius, prompted moments of reflection. That was the key issue and the point that on a way or another the world is missing: to stop and think.

Rushing cities and people’s lifestyles saturated with products (even if those are “eco”) need a hint of light, being it sparked by top down designers, by people themselves or, as in this case, by “insects”. The little insects moving in those dark and vast spaces shaped by Power Plant, reminded somehow Carl Sagan’s description of cities, when in the fifth chapter of his book a *Blue Pale*<sup>5</sup> Dot he introduces the hypothesis of having aliens visiting us and asking themselves if “***is there intelligent life on planet Earth?***”.

**Sagan:**

*‘... When we [aliens] take images with a meter of resolution, or larger, we discover that there are lines that intersect what seem to be inhabited centres [...] longer lines intersect other urban centres which are dwelled by small, aerodynamic and multicolor beings that graciously walk one behind the other on a slow, long and orderly procession. They are very patient. A current of these beings stop on the rectangular angles to allow the other current to continue. Periodically they return the favour. Some, a privileged minority go to their houses to spend the night [...] others spend the night outside and sleep on the streets.*

*Finally!, we have found the source of all this technology of prevailing life on the surface of the planet!. Evidently the streets of the cities, the road ways in the villages, everything has been*

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.powerplant.org.uk/download/pdf/Power\\_Plant\\_press\\_release.pdf](http://www.powerplant.org.uk/download/pdf/Power_Plant_press_release.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> “Power Plant is the creation of a group of artists led by Mark Anderson who have [produced] a experience full of sights and sounds.

Originally commissioned by Oxford Contemporary Music, the artists took their inspiration from the University of Oxford botanic Garden to create a collection of strange and wonderful art installations.

The installations work together, using video and electronic sound, modified gramophones, moving speakers, sound sources hidden the undergrowth, circular saw blades played like gongs and balloons filled with tuned harmonicas to whisper an eerie melancholic requiem.

Along with Mark Anderson, other artists include Kirsten Reynolds, known for her radical uses of vinyl an spark generation noise sculptures; Hony Easterby who specializes in environmental work using a range of technologies, Anne Bean, an installation and performance artist who has crated ground-breaking work since the 1970s and musician and artist Philip Jeck. Members of North West based sound art group Rogue Wave also present a special installation as part of Power Plant”. <http://www.powerplant.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> Sagan Carl. 1995. A Blue Pale Dot. Traducido por Editorial Planeta 2006. Barcelona. Pgs 71 - 72

*constructed to benefit this aerodynamic beings [...] if only we could improve our zoom, we could discover that there are some tiny parasites that get in and out the dominant organisms. Apparently, they play a great role in all this, hence the immobile dominant organism starts moving only after the parasite has re-infected it and stops again before the parasite is expelled.... This is really an enigma... but nobody said that life on Earth was easy to understand.'*

Sagan enlighten us as to the pertinence of reviewing our ordinary condition, by taking other perspectives, not so "human" centred. Along his career he brought about a light to *the common citizen* by translating very complex concepts with simple examples and in this way, shone a light on the everyday life of the planet. Now, there are the no-scientist interventions that just as Power Plant do, are able to enlighten, at least for a bit, the scenery of a city, which in its case was Liverpool *finale* as Europe's Capital of Culture.

Just like Power Plant there are many other little lights shining in parades, summer or autumn festivals, commemorations, anniversaries, exhibitions, openings, closings or simply public interventions without apparent reason to be any given day of the year everywhere, moments which core, besides marketing purposes, is to ease a bit the hectic live of cities and their inhabitants. There is, for instance, the Liverpool Lantern Company<sup>6</sup> which in collaboration with LUXe and Liverpool City Council, and 20 diverse child, youth and community organizations from around the city use to create costumes, music, choreographed dance and large scale puppets/ floats to bring themes such as 'Children and the Environment' to life on the streets of Liverpool. In 2009 no petrol or diesel vehicles were permitted in its June parade; all participants were on foot, pedaling, wheeling or pushing their floats and structures. The five themed parade sections focus on Environmental Issues and endangered species: The Sun, The Rainforest, The Ocean, The Antarctic and The Cosmos..., on a very Sagan's way.

Power plant and the Lantern Company are two playful arrays of arts and crafts, electronic stunts, kinetic sculptures sound effects and musical sound effects<sup>7</sup> bringing people a moment of joy that at the end of the day, when the noise is gone, leave in visitors the feeling that life in the city can be more than tolerable. Now, what we would like to highlight here taking one or another example is the relevance of public design as a prompter of well being in cities. There are thousand of cases world wide from light painting in the streets of Warsaw, Poland<sup>8</sup> to unofficially gatherings to paint zebra crossings in Tallin, Estonia<sup>9</sup>. Now, we would like to focus on two initiatives which put together progettisti, scientifics, politicians but specially: people. These cases are UK's Young Foundation and Milan based Esterni.

## Urban fireflies

As said, we are taking sustainability as the milieu and related conditions needed not only to fit world-wide definitions that embrace issues such as resources or future generations for the sake of the planet and its inhabitants, but the milieu and related conditions that prompt happiness in people. Knowing that happiness is a very tricky "word" to assess, we will start or back up on a suggestion that can be found in attainableutopias.uk envisioning statement, related to the improvement of more sustainable cities, which they situate as: "*a new kind of metadesign that will integrate whatever makes people 'happy' with processes that also nurture the environment*"<sup>10</sup>. An environment that in our case regards the *fulgurar* contemporary cityscape and that

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<sup>6</sup> Liverpool Lantern Company is an artist led organisation, originally set up to establish a spectacular community based Lantern Carnival in Liverpool and to promote creativity, celebration and unity within and across local communities. They also undertake commissions and offer training at all levels and in many art forms such as Lantern making, carnival costume, processional puppets and large scale processional imagery, as well as directing and producing art installations, site specific events and processions.

<http://www.liverpoollanterncompany.co.uk/work.htm>

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.assemblyfestival.com/webpages/whatson\\_moreinfobooknow.php?id=3:3&date=all&genre=Theatre&#title](http://www.assemblyfestival.com/webpages/whatson_moreinfobooknow.php?id=3:3&date=all&genre=Theatre&#title)

<sup>8</sup> [http://bc-cc.zabec.net/video\\_gallery.php?id=1763](http://bc-cc.zabec.net/video_gallery.php?id=1763) done by Maciej Ostaszewski

<sup>9</sup> by artist Martin Sookael

<sup>10</sup> <http://attainable-utopias.org/tiki/VisionStatement>

fits pretty much with the definition of what design for sustainability, for our purposes could be.

Two clarifications more:

*\_fulgurar* is taken here as:

- a. strobe and flashing lights that thanks to advertising campaigns pollute our daily landscape
- b. -the other side of the coin-: an intermittent, not steady but still existing light that lays latent inside each citizen.

*\_bestiarius* is taken here as a metaphor for city, a place where wild beings co-exist.

Our focus now is to illustrate how we as designers can shape environments (or as will be explained below: habitats) that at the interior of cities insert part b. of *fulgurar* within the *bestiarius* ground; meaning the idea is not only to help people “reflect” on their daily habits and rushes but also help bringing to light the inner firefly that any citizen given his/her human condition and creativity has. This to deal with the daily *Bestiarius* of the contemporary.

Having said this, hereunder our highlights. Two examples of those other ways in which to approach sustainability that hopefully will justify the fact that changing the mainstream life conditions and moods in cities is possible.

## 1. Young Foundation

In their words<sup>11</sup>, the YF is:

*‘...a centre for social innovation [...] creating new organisations - public, private and non-profit - as well as influencing ideas and policies. Our local innovation work includes practical projects involving neighbourhoods, wellbeing and the future of cities [...] Our research covers changing needs, crime, social innovation, civility and belonging. We work locally around our base in east London, throughout the UK, as well as internationally’.*

On their publication *Transforming Public Spaces, some ideas from the UK*, the British Council in association with the Young Foundation, work on a project called Creative Cities<sup>12</sup>, where the relevance of enlighten the city for, by and with, the people (as Charles Landry, city expert, might say) is emphasized.

Here some of the highlights extracted from the above-mentioned publication:

### Campaign for drawing<sup>13</sup>

*‘Every October in the UK over 1000 venues host drawing activities for people of all abilities. These include galleries, museums, science centres, heritage and environmental sites, libraries, archives, community and shopping centres, colleges, schools and art clubs. The activities explore technical, scientific, architectural, archaeological or fine art drawing. Participants of all ages are invited to help expand the definitions and uses of drawing -experimenting with pencils, crayons, charcoal, sand, clay, digital imagery, choreographed movement, vapour trails and fire drawings!’.*

### The tree installation

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<sup>11</sup> [www.youngfoundation.org](http://www.youngfoundation.org)

<sup>12</sup> Creative Cities was an international programme designed by the British Council to raise awareness about the contribution that creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation can make to improving the quality of life in cities. The programme was launched in spring 2008 and run in the UK, Central Europe, the Nordic and Baltic countries, Russia and Ukraine. [http://creativecities.britishcouncil.org/creativity\\_in\\_the\\_city](http://creativecities.britishcouncil.org/creativity_in_the_city)  
<http://creativecities.britishcouncil.org/>

<sup>13</sup> [www.campaignfordrawing.org](http://www.campaignfordrawing.org)

*\_Interactive digital installations come to life at night in Simon Heijdens' work. The Tree installation is design to be projected on to the side of a building where the luminous shadow of a tree is projected and moves according to wind sensors on the roof of the building. The leaves digitally fall from the tree, and passers by kick their feet through the leaves on the floor, disperse them down the street.*

### **Silent Disco (Fig. 1)**

*\_Silent Disco is a phenomenon that can create a fascinating public spectacle. Each member of the audience is given a set of headphones, which receives two simultaneous DJ sets, and chooses the track they wish to dance to. They can alternate between tracks and join in with different dance groups. Even the DJs and bar staff wear the headphones, so there is no excuse for dancing to your own tune! Silent Disco can be held indoors or outdoors, in a huge variety of spaces.*

Fig: 1. Public use of headphones. Festival. Milan 2007.



### **The Future City Game**

*\_FCG enables people to find solutions to the long-term challenges facing cities. It is played during a two-day event by city inhabitants from diverse backgrounds, representing various disciplines and led by a trained games-master. The aim of the game is to generate the best idea on how to improve the quality of life either in a specific area within a city, the city as a whole, or in response to the common challenges facing cities around the world. Players compete in teams to design, test and present their ideas to a group of city stakeholders, professionals, residents, and each other. The games-master leads the players through three stages - envisioning, testing and presenting - giving the players a set of tools to help them to work together and with stakeholders, develop ideas, and present their findings. At the end of the game, the ideas are presented to the local stakeholders. Everyone involved votes on the best ideas and thinks about how they can be taken forward in the city once the game has ended.*

*The Future City Game stimulates new thinking in cities about ways to address the global changes resulting from globalisation, migration, climate change, security, and social needs, encourages wider participation, and facilitates partnerships between organisations and individuals to make cities better, happier, healthier and more prosperous; and it creates a dialogue between the public sector and the inhabitants of the city. To date, the Future City Game has been 'played' all across Europe, from Glasgow to Ljubljana. The unique and innovative methodology for the Future City game was developed by the British Council and our UK partners (CLES – Centre for Local Economic Strategies; URBIS – Manchester's Centre of Urban Life), and examines, explains and celebrates city life.*

*[as seen], there are many ways to interpret the Transforming Public Spaces strand, and this is just to give you some inspiration on ways to approach the subject when talking to colleagues, partners and artists [...] City-wide festivals, interactive theatre and dance performances, script and book readings, live music gigs, outdoor film*

screenings, lighting design, sound works, listening posts, exhibitions, site-specific artworks and online programmes are all possible'<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Esterni.

According to its creators (Beniamino Saibene<sup>15</sup> ed. al.):

*'Esterni develops cultural projects in the fields of film, design, art, and music, always keeping a keen eye on the upgrading and transformation of urban spaces, and on the city as a place where people meet and get to know each other [...] it is a new concept of design aimed at public spaces places where people meet, live, experiment, and share experiences.*

*Urban furniture like socialization signs, services for citizens like special transports, or events in community places like the urban survival game are just few examples of public design interventions contributing to redesign cities [...] The upgrading of public areas and the centrality of people are the driving force of all Esterni activities; socialization, cultural exchange, the city as a place where people meet and get together, social responsibility and broadened participation are the motive behind each and every project.*

*Esterni has been active in Milan and other cities in Italy and the world since 1995 [...] our headquarters are a multifunctional three-storey building in Milan's città studi area [...] it contains a film room, a bar trattoria, a bed and breakfast, an outlet, and an area for exhibitions.*

*15 people work full time in the different sectors involved in the designing and development of projects and events. Every phase of the projects, from their planning to the very end, is entirely carried out by Esterni, in collaboration with its international network of professionals and advisors (artists, musicians, handicraftsmen, critics, journalists, intellectuals, graphic designers, technicians).*

Their interventions include:

**– Milano Film Festival.** (Fig. 2 and 3)

The key word there is *independent cinema* and how to give to it not only visibility, but a new kind of distribution. Along the festival, usually held in Autumn, the city starts witnessing how its main theaters and cultural spaces fill up with thousands of people paying for viewing the best productions but not only because a little orange truck goes around the city bringing huge screens that land in the main parks of the city and to open spaces like piazzas, so that people can FOR FREE enjoy the latest indi-productions from East -West Europe and in recent years from Asia and Latin America.

Fig: 2. Ambience at the Milano Film Festival behind the Castello Sforzesco. Milan. 2008



Fig: 3

<sup>14</sup> [http://creativecities.britishcouncil.org/future\\_city\\_game/about](http://creativecities.britishcouncil.org/future_city_game/about)

<sup>15</sup> Mendoza Andrea. Interview. As part of the on-field-work towards the writing of PhD dissertation SOLOS Self-Organized-Livelihood-Subjects, primal creativity *primal creativity in the liveable cities' discourse*. Milan Polytechnic 2005.



### **\_Allariscossa.**

An experience consisting in having people re-knowing the city, re-visiting, re-appropriating it and re-acknowledging its history by means of riddles, picture challenges and test of “urban logic”, among which: playing violins and sing arias at 6:00 o'clock in the morning at the Centrale train station, gather to sweep the Duomo piazza or crossing the zebras of the city but having people's legs inside a bag, like a bag race.

### **\_Public Design Festival**

A festival gathering the efforts of designers and architects, but also of public administrators, companies, citizens, students, interested and creatives around the issue of public space regarding the way in which it is planned and projected, or on the contrary neither planned nor projected. A nine days festival which includes an international contest for an intervention on a parking lot (2 x 5 smt) installations and projects for the open spaces in the city, and also meetings with the most important representatives of design public festivals world-wide. The project included also for 2009, an alternative hospitality system, which involve common citizens that may open their homes to design pilgrims. According to Esterni<sup>16</sup> *The Public Design Festival* is the celebration of: “*Public Spaces for a City Belonging to Everyone [...] An international competition, the transformation of a square, theoretical and practical workshops on public space, international guests, the Esterni design projects, services for citizens, happy hour, lunches and dinner with high-quality food, music, an alternative hospitality project - bedsharing.org. Nine days to experience the city and its shared spaces in a different way, to re-discover the importance of public spaces, to meet designers and architects from all over the world, and to imagine a different city.*”

### **\_Bed sharing**

During the busy Milan Design Week, and from there extended to other events, Esterni has managed to motivate and organize a large number of citizens to on volunteer basis opening their doors to host designers coming from all over the world. People share their space and Esterni provides blankets, towels and even mattresses. Additionally, the project includes the setting of a provisional hotel for designers organized at the interior of a conference hall at the Politecnico di Milano design school.

In Esterni's words: “*A broadened, alternative, and participatory hospitality project [...] During big events, when thousands of visitors come to Milan from all over the world, bed sharing invites all citizens to open their homes to those who couldn't find a traditional accommodation. A website brings into contact people looking for a place and people offering one. A new way to travel, experience a city, meet new people and get to know them.*”

### **Sorridi, ti stanno filmando!**

*A public art intervention to reflect upon the issue of social control.*

*‘Everyday hundreds of electronic eyes observe parks, stations, streets, squares and other public places 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Every year the investment on video-surveillance systems grows up with the illusion that tele-camereas will bring more security to cities.*

*Which sensation rise up in people by knowing that there is someone watching out our movements? (Fig. 4)*

Fig: 4. A critic on the topic of surveillance. Tel Aviv. 2006.



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<sup>16</sup> [www.publicdesignfestival.org](http://www.publicdesignfestival.org)

*In January 2009, Esterni installed in some critical points of the city, those having high concentrations of video cameras, small signals, such as those of traffic, which read: "Smile, they are filming you!". A provocative act, no doubt, but also an invitation to think upon the fact that we are constantly under control, but barely notice it'.*

Besides the few examples brought above, Esterni has around 40 more initiatives including: Fuori Target, Questa è una Città, TIPI Festival, Cantieri Aperti, Movimento Centrifugo, China Film Festival - made in Milan, i Piscinella, Upside Town, Recapito provvisorio, Open source, Archivio delle voci contemporanee, Fashion Weak, etc., but we stop the description at the *Sorridi Ti Stanno Filmando* one because at that point, in order to give space to the above introduced concept of urban hubs, and habitats.

## The lighthouse

The Colossus of Rhodes or the Alexandria pharos, those could enter the category of public design given that at their times, those were "hubs" of interaction, collaboration, communication for the inhabitants of those regions, and beyond; hubs where the public attention was not just called, but impelled to act, to be alert, to get involved and communicate even if not "tangibly" with those who were out there in the sea needed to get oriented and aware of the waters (and under-waters) they were crossing.

Nowadays, in our *fulgurar bestiarius* there is need of shinning a light, just like pharos, help changing the direction of mainstream "consumption", advertising, eco-deviations etc; we need not only to create spot lights that can enlighten the darkness of an age, but, as said before, we need to also look for ways to make people find that "inner light" that, as fireflies, we all have. And there the discourse of public design is instrumental given that, as says Design Theoretician Andrea Branzi<sup>17</sup> states: *'it is art what can really penetrate the social tissue'*. By being so close to the worlds of art and architecture, public design can not only call the passerby's attention or getting her/him involved in the interventions, but it leaves a "post-visual" effect on the public, so that when people go home, they carry with them a bit of the design concept of what they saw. There, at that stage we could be talking of "mental design".

But, it is Italian Designer and Artist Paolo Rosa who can give the pillars to explore this topic. Hereunder we recall a conversation in which he reminds us of an African practice<sup>18</sup> while talking about the making up of an interactive opera in a gallery, a museum or an urban open space:

*'...there are those African representations of primitive art, where someone has done a statue of maternity, a face, etc., and this statue has turned to be the gravitational centre of a community that by means of ritual has re-invented it, and therefore has put a nail on it, a piece of intestine, has spread some wax on it, has put some pearls, has added things!!!!... !, this is the idea that I have, that is why I create the conditions with the intention that this actually happens and is not more a waiting of a child, is not more the figure of a maternity but a habitat, into which certain things have place and this ritualy makes the traces sediment, so that those can be not only material, but also virtual; now it is not that you spread animal grease on it, but you leave a trace of the trek that you have done in the path of your visit across certain images.*

*The opera has to get memory on its own which is full of this participation, is not easy this process, is a very complicated process from the conceptual but also form the technical view point of how to elaborate the data, the problem exists.*

*Interactivity then, is a very important social scenario at this moment because we are all becoming information producers, which is the primal merchandise of this globalized era, so you go to the supermarket and leave 20 traces of what you have*

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<sup>17</sup> Mendoza Andrea. Interview. As part of the on-field-work towards the writing of PhD dissertation SOLOS Self-Organized-Livelihood-Subjects, primal creativity *primal creativity in the liveable cities' discourse*. Milan Polytechnic 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Idem

*done, because this will be useful, you go here and there pass three or five tele-camera and leave traces, so, it has been estimated that each one of us in the western world leaves c.a. 350 traces of data everyday, that go to someone and we don't even know who is that someone that can govern those at will. So that is the danger because at present, is the economy that rules us, the marketing and on the other hand security, surveillance, control devices, we can not leave this scenario in the hands of these two things and that's it..., we have to find the virtuous element and then ask ourselves how can we leave virtuous traces there?*

Now, even if inhabitants of Rhodes or Alexandria did not “intervene” their pharos, it was part of their collective imaginary, and thus, citizens were crossed by the concealed meaning of the avert. Now, hubs like the one described by P. Rosa, talk about the necessity to set in the urban public realm, hubs of encounter in order to prompt the appropriation of the cityscape. Hubs just like the ones we intended to discern by bringing the examples of Power Plant, Liverpool Lantern Company, the Young Foundation and Esterni.

How feasible then would it be to set alike initiatives in other contexts?, for instance, in developing countries where many detractors use to say that due security factors it is not possible to set the kind of habitats we are talking about? How could we, for instance, install the gathering points make out of hammocks that Esterni uses to do if, as detractors say, in any developing country the hammocks get stolen....? (Fig. 5)

Fig: 5. Esterni Hammocks. Milan. 2008



Those are critical but not impossible or unsolvable issues that we have to address, not in this paper but indeed as part of research and actions moving in this direction). Which tools could we use? How day-to-day technology used by common people could help in all this? Which could be those gleaming hubs, those lighthouses that could prompt this sense of togetherness even if from a very personal and individualistic gadget?

We have the cell phones, for instance. During their world tour “Vertigo”, Irish rock band U2 used to ask people to send an SMS to a given number (blinking on the concert’s screen), the message should say something in order to support one of the humanitarian campaigns that the group runs in Africa. By means of U2’s media power, the message was also sent to those politically concerned, but the virtuosity there, was making people beat at unison.

Coldplay, a British rock band, has also witness these *fulgurar* signs when during concerts public perform the “wave” (using their cell-phones) something what used to be done with people’s arms moving them on the set of steps of stadiums. As seen, just like little fireflies blinking at night, they all created a habitat.

Now, hubs of interaction can be seen in every summer concert, especially in those events involving electronic music. In such ambiances huge rectangles of light are set not just to illuminate but to be used as tables, seats, hammocks, post-it messages, lounge spaces or playgrounds; the skills and creativity of light designers there is

considerable, but what is noteworthy is the way in which people use such devices, such hubs. (Fig. 6)

And, that is design? Is that design for sustainability?

Going very Papanek, nowadays, *everyone designs* but, as “progettisti” we have to assume and understand that the blinking lights in the “darkness” of our cities could be moving in that direction.

Those who have already understood it, such as Esterni (Fig. 7) are somehow a hub amidst our contemporary *bestiarium*, being their aim not to shine with their own lights but to look at the beauty of the lights, that, as U2 Irish Rock band would say in their song, *City of Blinding lights*<sup>19</sup>, we all have inside. They are able to not only to produce, but to detect the small sprinkling lights that crop up in the surface of cities quotidian.

Fig. 7. Esterni. Intervention at Cadorna Train Station. Milan 2008



To see the beauty inside of citizens and bring it to light, to see the solutions they bring (tailor or wear) on their everyday, to prompt security, a sense of appropriation, inspiration, joy... those are many of the tasks that design, especially under its “modality” of public design could be budding; giving visibility to those shiny lights and smiles that people usually hide while walking our *fulgurar* megalopolis.

### **Intermittency: from the bottom to the top**

Here we are not stating that public design is the only way to walk towards more sustainable cities, and it is so precisely because the lights we are talking about do not “sustain” along time and space. Are mere blinking, flashing, strobe lights in the surface of cities, but its “*intermittency*” has to be addressed in order to see if in the long term run its glow can stabilize.

When we talk about intermittency, we give space to those who may not be very scientific, may not have all the means that include, for instance, to adopt clean technologies or LCAs into their daily processes (or lives) but that at their small scale give account of the fact that other ways of doing and being in order to reach life quality are possible.

Our purpose at this final stage is not to set a semantic discussion on which “label” or word is the most appropriate to deal with issues such as well-being, quality of life, solidarity, ecology or future generations, our purpose instead, is to give visibility to those efforts, those small and intermittent lights that are, or could, illuminate our cityscapes everyday. Those lights can be briefly (hence we will not develop these levels on this paper) divided into three:

A. The unseen anonymous and disdained small efforts performed by those who make a living and a life on the streets. People that by working from the bottom-up organize a

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<sup>19</sup> Irish rock band U2 *City of Blinding Lights* lyrics reads: “I’ve seen you walk unafraid \_I’ve seen you in the clothes you made \_Can you see the beauty inside of me?” Island Records. 2005.

certain system of trade from where not only earn a living but activate the social tissue at a very small scale.

B. People who, from the bottom-up, organize themselves in order to give solutions to their everyday needs on a non harmful, joyful and cooperative way. For instance all that has been mapped by project DESIS<sup>20</sup>, an international design network working on the issue of design for social innovation and sustainability.

C. The top-down, although not hierarchic or authoritarian oriented efforts done by artists, architects and designers practitioners and researchers by means of, for instance, public design. All these efforts that can be made, and/or are currently done, with the aim of enhancing the appropriation of common spaces (and the commons, namely: water, air, time, etc).

On this paper we have focused on the third ones. Efforts that even if do not come from the virtuous bottom-up (from where a long, active and fruitful discussion is being encouraged e.g. Desis<sup>21</sup>), prompt a co-design of time and space with citizens themselves and thus help to construct a more bearable everyday. Efforts that by having to do with people's well-being, with their curiosity, surprising capacity, cooperation, will, etc. do enter the discourse of "sustainability". Many of these efforts are not continuous; those do not endure along months or years, but are able to leave a long lasting flavor in the people involved in, or touched by, them.

Like happens with light messages, what we ultimately need, and is the call that is being raised here, is the necessity of re-dimensioning the role of design for sustainability given that as shown above, at times those not "sustained" but "intermittent" lights, those non complete and still in-build-process efforts need to be mapped in the radar of our interest. Like that, if we sum up all the small lights that emerge in different points by different actors of a city, maybe, a continuous light will in the long-term-run be enlighten.

Now, How do all the above described interventions relate to the definition of design for sustainability that we have pointed above?. It must be said that more study cases are needed to feed and consolidate the ideas that lay underneath them all, but so far, we can state that there are some transversal points, common to all the examples. Those are: the element of surprise, the sense of solidarity, the need for a sense of justice, the co-existence capacity, the daring faculty and the need for celebration (celebrating life), from all those, a design role is keen to emerge.

To conclude it is important to state that by means of public interventions design can prompt other ways of thinking in citizens enhancing them to not being afraid of the limits that streets usually set and that threaten our human condition everyday, and in this way help to reach a certain sense of "progress" understanding it as an overcome of dependency (from habits but also from official instances who, according to a big part of the population, are the ones having to solve the everyday needs including sustainability issues for cities and their inhabitants). It is also important to note that public design leads to a self-regulation processes that gives account of the possibility of a mutual regulation, which is key when building citizenship culture<sup>22</sup>, belonging and care based in Ernest Fehr's<sup>23</sup> strong reciprocators.

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<sup>20</sup> DESIS is a network of schools of design and other schools, institutions, companies and non-profit organizations interested in promoting and supporting design for social innovation and sustainability. It is a light, no-profit organization, conceived as a network of partners collaborating in a peer-to-peer spirit. It is articulated in several DESIS-Local (that are sub-networks within a specified local area). DESIS-International is therefore the framework where the different DESIS-local coordinate themselves and where some global initiatives are taken.

<sup>21</sup> [www.desis-network.org](http://www.desis-network.org)

<sup>22</sup> Citizenship culture: a didactic program to enhance citizens' sense of belonging and care for the city by means of strong reciprocators (Fehr's definition for those people willing to socially sanction their fellow citizens when are not obeying a social norm even if from it there is any derived benefit for him/her). For the program Mockus engaged theatre, mimes and informal games among citizens.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Bowles, Ernst Fehr, and Herbert Gintis. 2003. "Strong Reciprocity May Evolve With or Without Group Selection". pp. 1. Found in: <http://www.iew.uzh.ch/chairs/fehr/team/fehr/publications/TheoreticalPrimatology.pdf>

So far this exploration can be considered as a blueprint for research and communication strategies but in the meantime it aims at opening questions vis-à-vis the role of design in helping addressing issues concerning quality of life.

To finish up, we can just enquire if just as ethologists have proven it fireflies use their little lights to attract their species and gather for “happy” purposes, we as designers, are able to light up our little lanterns, exert a pull on lazy citizens and make of our modern *bestiarius* more “enlightened” world-wide places to inhabit.

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