

MEET EL PRESIDENTE ... (PT5)

In the last of our series of interviews with lighting association presidents, Paul James talks to Georgios Paisidis, newly installed president of the Professional Lighting Designers Association (PLDA) following the early resignation of Martin Lupton

“IT IS MY DUTY TO ALSO REPRESENT LIGHTING DESIGNERS WHO ARE NOT YET MEMBERS OF PLDA. THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO BECOME LARGER, STRONGER AND FIRST AND FOREMOST DEMOCRATIC IN OUR ATTEMPT TO REPRESENT LIGHTING DESIGNERS ALL OVER THE WORLD.”

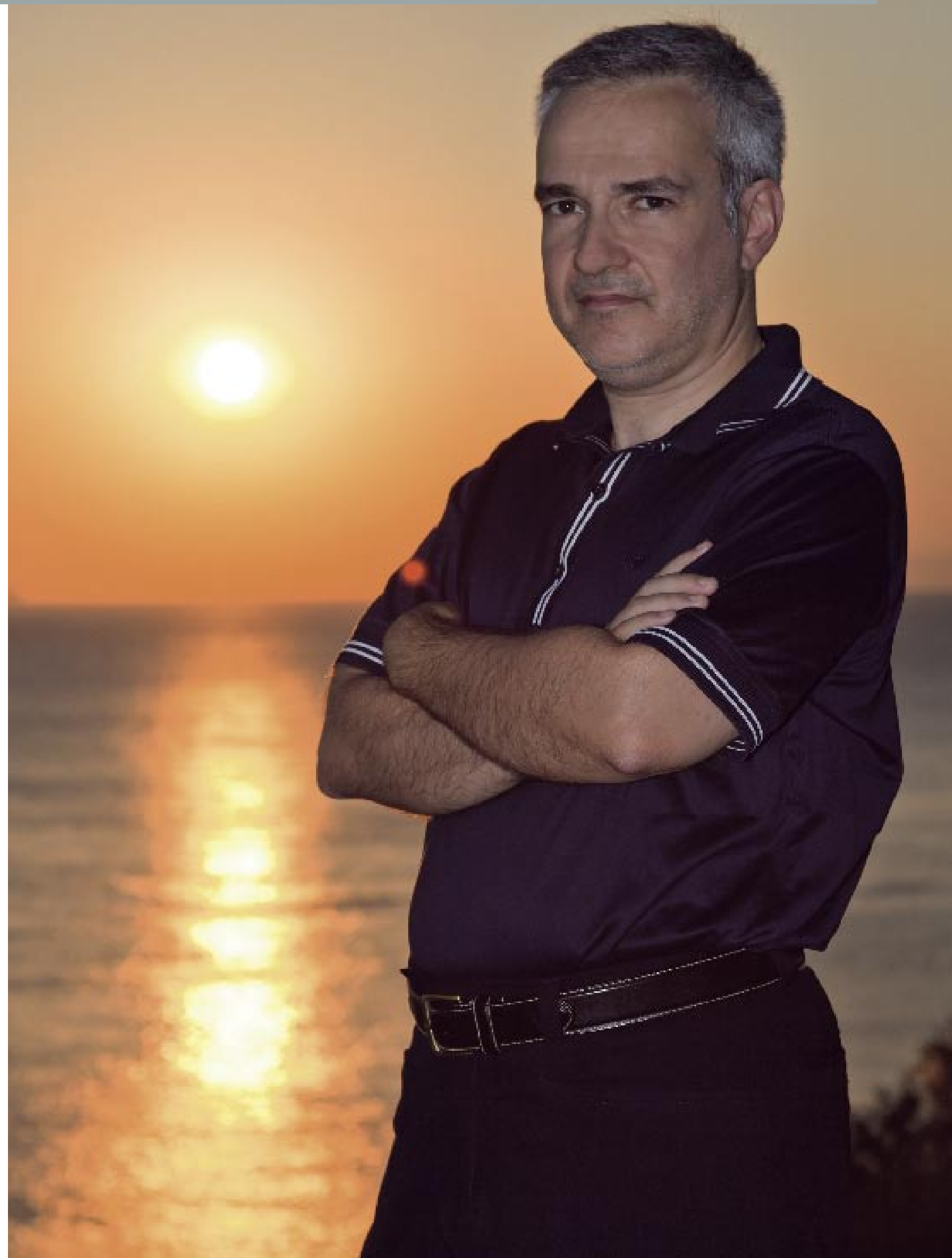
The president of the PLDA was due to be third in our series of interviews with the heads of the lighting associations. But that was in June and our subject was to be Martin Lupton who was tending his resignation a year early to concentrate on his new venture, the Light Collective, with PLDA UK coordinator Sharon Stammers. While the association has been in a state of flux with such high profile resignations (plus the retirement of Alison Ritter as director, replaced by Wim Aalders, Export Manager at We-ef) and criticism from within the organisation for a lack of transparency, a steady hand has quietly come in to steer the ship through choppy waters. His name is Georgios Paisidis, a Greek lighting designer

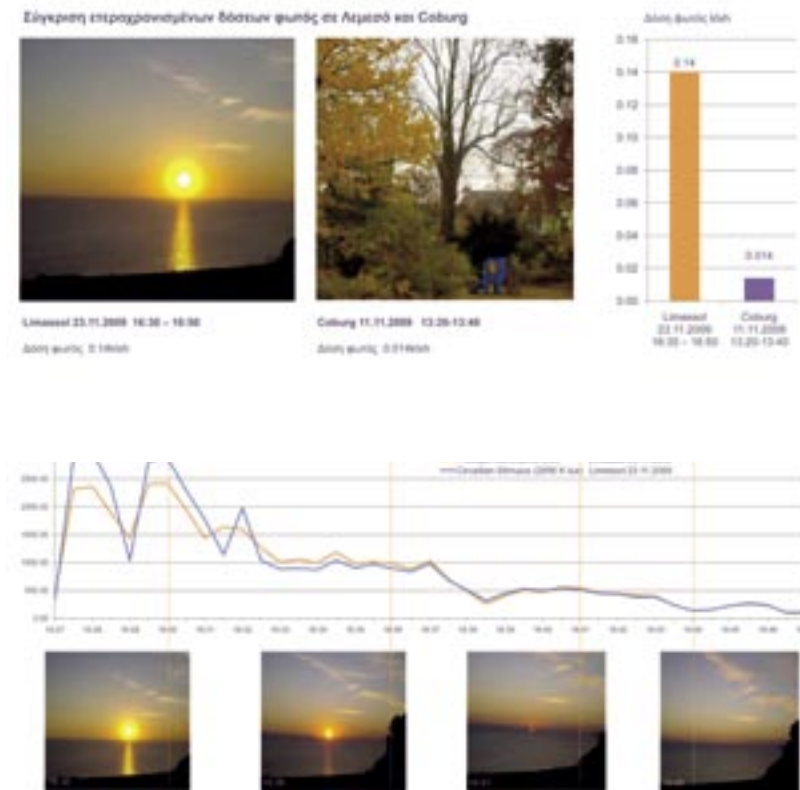
and scholar who, whilst not being the most high profile of presidents, believes he can be a vanguard of revolution for the organisation.

“The growth of PLDA from a small European family to the current state of some 800 members within only fifteen years was surprisingly fast,” comments Paisidis. “On the one hand it was a successful growth but on the other hand this stochastic growth resulted in an obvious representation asymmetry. Italy, with a population of some 60 million, is represented in the PLDA General Assembly by only eleven professional members, while Germany with a population of some 80 millions by 30 professional members. In other words Germany possesses a

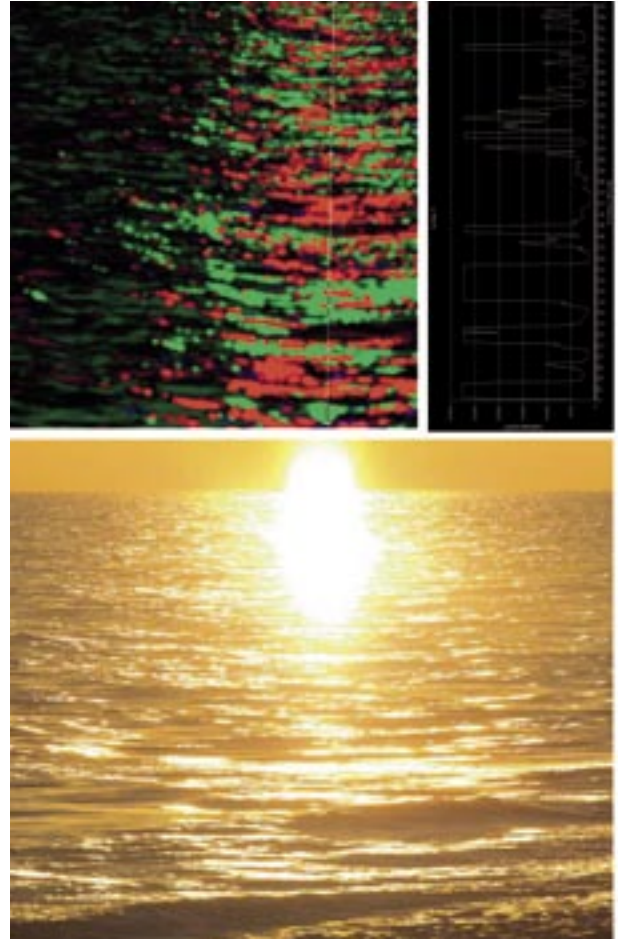
threefold representation while its population is only 30% higher than that of Italy. “France, with a population of some five million higher than that of Italy, is represented by half of the number of members. Finland, with only 8% of France’s population, is represented with the same number of voting members.

“This asymmetry in the representation of different countries doesn’t mean that France or Italy have less renowned professional lighting designers. I also can’t believe that Spain has only one professional lighting designer for every twelve million people because it is represented by only four voting members in the General Assembly. The same thing happens with Greece, where I come





Pailidis' research project about the healing effects of natural light on SAD treatment explored non-visual effects of lighting that can make us differentiate our view of visual environment. His last research project about the evaluation of the healing potential of sunsets on SAD patients in November focuses on this particularity of our perception



from. There is still a lot of work to be done in order to correct this asymmetry.”

So how will he right this imbalance?

“It makes my job difficult as I feel it’s my duty to also represent lighting designers who are not yet members of PLDA. This is the only way to become larger, stronger and first and foremost democratic in our attempt to represent lighting designers all over the world. My purpose is not to belong to a self confident majority but rather to assimilate idle dispersed minorities, which I understand as our potential force and the potential majority of tomorrow. My origin helps me at this point as I don’t have a problem being part of a minority. What else are Greeks if not a minority in this world? The majority is a threat to democracy and equally to success, which is always an enemy to talent. Majorities want to express themselves by means of power, while democracy thrives on unbiased dialogue among minorities. The result of democracy should be a composition of opinions not the victory of a violent majority over suppressed minorities.”

When asked about the current situation of the PLDA and the hole left by the sudden resignation of Martin Lupton, Pailidis is equally philosophical.

“Every resignation on earth is a surprise as it constitutes an unexpected development compared to what was initially planned. I couldn’t be happy with such an unex-

pected development. And I haven’t met anybody who was happy with this development either.

“On the other hand I was well prepared as I was confronted with my first surprise in PLDA very early on: I was the only candidate for President! Some members nominated me and I was asked if I would accept the nomination. I responded positively just to enhance democracy by offering an additional election choice among others in the relevant process. I never expected to be the only candidate and to become President of PLDA as I failed in being elected Director of Education one year ago.”

If he sees his new position as a poisoned chalice following the criticisms by Past President Gad Giladi who lambasts the association for ‘a total lack of transparency’, he is not showing it.

“These comments wouldn’t be so important if they were said by anybody else other than a Past President of PLDA like Gad Giladi. I prefer to distinguish what is said from who is saying it. It is much better to focus on the question if PLDA lacks or possesses full transparency. If I answer with a yes or no as President I am violating the major duty of a President, which is to represent all members of our Association if not potential members, who are still reluctant to join us. I don’t know if our members know everything about PLDA governmental structures and their historical background and I also

don’t know if members are interested to know everything. However *mondo*arc* serves the purpose of transparency at this moment with this interview by giving me the opportunity of talking about collective responsibility.”

So he does concede that there is a problem of transparency within PLDA...

“Problems of transparency always emerge in large governmental structures like Russia, where Gorbachev introduced Glasnost policy against corruption. In my view PLDA can’t be compared with Russia or Liechtenstein. We have some 170 voting members. This is not such a large community. Since this community participates in PLDA governmental activities, sharing relevant collective responsibility, transparency is immediately achieved. There is no need to inform members about their own activities in such a case. Even if all these voting members participate in an AGM and decide for some 200 Design Members without a voting right the result will not be representative. And as members come from all over the world and have to finance their trip to Milan or Frankfurt to attend an AGM they are not encouraged to do so, in particular when they are not allowed to vote.

“A first measure to rectify things would be to allow Design Members to vote. This is not easy. According to the Statutes they can’t vote and they can’t demand their rights. Anyway, participation remains the only key

to transparency for PLDA. I am wondering how many Professional or Design Members visit Milan or Frankfurt (during EuroLuce and Light+Building) and how many of them are absent from the AGM. I can conceive more than 50% of members abstaining from decision making in an innovative way outside the hall of the AGM without being registered as abstaining members. This is also a form of intransparency but not intentional.

"In this regard a transparency deficit shouldn't be handled as a crime. It is only a flaw of a governmental system, which makes it less efficient because it deprives it of faith. I will be open to any proposal how we can enhance transparency, if not participation, as nobody is against both. To creative proposals, not to criticism. From members and not from journalists."

But there is life other than the PLDA and Paisidis is particularly active in research exploring the affects of lighting on health. His company, Stilvi founded in 1995, is the leading organisation in Greece in this sector carried out through its participation in international consortia. Combining highly technical and scientific knowledge of illuminating engineering with a creative and artistic approach to lighting design, Stilvi is capable of working out unique and original lighting concepts for a very wide range of lighting design, light art and research projects.

His research activity is orientated to the fields of daylight, light guiding systems and optimisation of light propagation which, for him, is an indispensable tool for the development of truly modern and innovative lighting applications and, at the same time, the basis for a longlasting and sustainable superiority. This has led him to a particular field of research relating to the perception of light.

"My lighting heroes are blind people. Their imagination makes the world emerge from the darkness. Their inspirations are relieved of visual illusions and allow them an immediate relation to truth. They are completely blind, while we are only partially blind, as we can't perceive bacteria and microbes floating in the air due to certain limits of our visual acuity and we can't perceive infrared or ultraviolet radiation. Nevertheless we have the illusory impression that we can see everything. This is a sort of arrogance. Conversely, blind people are not exposed to such an extent to this form of arrogance." So how do those of us who are fully sighted overcome this 'arrogance'?

"By exploring our underestimated and possibly disdained blindness resources. The eye isn't necessarily the most important and surely not the sole part of our body. There-



Above This concept of Light Art in Heraklion, Crete during the Olympics in Athens 2004, is a contemporary expression of the icosahedron invented by Archimedes and determines the way the soccer ball is put together **Below** Paisidis also lit the Venetian Fortress at the Harbour of Heraklion during the Olympics, which welcomes the incoming ships, and has now also become a nighttime orientation spot for residents, visitors and seamen



CURRICULUM VITAE

Education

- 1989-1991 Ph.D. on light measurement problems, Faculty of Architecture, Technical University of Athens; Subject: "Development of a photometrical measurement method of practical value in Lighting Design"
- 1985-1988 First degree, Electrical Engineering, Technical University of Berlin, specialised in Lighting Design in the Faculty of Environmental Engineering
- 1983-1985 Vordiplom degree, Electrical Engineering, Technical University of Stuttgart

Positions

- 1993 - present: Managing Director of Stilvi Ltd., active in Lighting Design and light and colorimetric documentation for certification and development purposes

Research

- October - November 2009: Investigation of the healing potential of natural light in Cyprus / Limassol for SAD treatment
- November 2009: On the biological impact of primary not accordingly weighted visible radiation, in collaboration with psychiatric clinic of the University of Vienna, University of Veszprem, Multimedia Institute, Agricultural University of Athens, Institute for Molecular Biology
- Ongoing: On the light potential of building materials performance of spectroradiometric measurements on building materials and determination of lighting quality of highest colour purity (till present), financed by Stilvi Ltd;
- 2004 - present: Production of sun shading blinds in transparent water container of prismatic shape, financed by Stilvi Ltd. First results were presented in Lux Europa in Berlin In September 2005
- 2001-2004: Participation on the European Union Research project NNE5-2000-00326, Subject: Holographical Optical Elements for High Efficiency Illumination and

Solar Control, financed by the European Union

- 1997: Production of hollow light guide for directing sunlight in a windowless room in collaboration with the Institute for Actinometry of NOA(National Observatory of Athens), financed by the Ministry of Development, Secretariat für Research and Technology
- 1992-1993: Research management in army centre for research and technology, colorimetric evaluation of camouflage colours in diverse backgrounds
- 1991: Production of a Goniophotometer with fixed detectors
- 1987-1988: participation as student assistant in research project at the Technical University of Berlin financed by AEG/Daimler Benz Subject: Development of criteria for the lighting of workplaces for visual control of assembly line

Professional Bodies / Committees

- Present: President of PLDA
- Present: Member of IENE (Institute of Energy for South and East Europe) Technical Committee on Optimisation of Energy Efficiency Measures
- 2006: Member of scientific committee of Urban Nightscape Conference, Athens
- 2004 - present: Member of TC 5-21 Subject: Urban Nightscape of the International Commission on Illumination CIE
- 2004 - present: Scientific Committee Member of the International Conference for Urban Nightscape
- October 2004: Delegate on behalf of Hellenic Organization for Standards (ELOT) in ISO/IEC 19839 Subject: Colour Rendering in Office Devices
- 2002 - present: Chairman of TC 5-1/EFE of National Commission on Illumination, Subject: Urban Nightscape
- November 1991: Delegate on behalf of CIE in ISO/TC 180 Subject: Solar Energy

fore it's wrong to say that we can't perceive infrared or ultraviolet radiation. While our eye can't notice everything, our body feels the heat of IR radiation and reacts to UV with vitamin D synthesis. Similarly our body reacts to visible radiation. The only difference is that research about the non visual biological effects of visible radiation on human organisms has a short history compared to respective research about the effects of the invisible part of spectrum.

"As our disposition is tightly associated with our body condition, non-visual effects of lighting can make us differentiate our view of visual environment. Human Perception is not only cognitive and biased by our personal history of vision but also prone to mood differentiation. My last research project about the evaluation of the healing potential of sunsets on SAD patients in November focuses on this particularity of our perception."

A religious man, Paisidis has room in his scientific reasoning for the presence of spiritual consequences. How does this square with his scientific approach to lighting?

"Your question makes me remember the truth, plainly expressed in the Psalm: O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all: the earth is full of your riches. (Psalm 104:24)

"It's not only me but a lot of well known lighting designers, who notice the divine wisdom behind the diversity of natural light manifestations.

"One day I decided to carry my photometrical equipment to the beach just to explore the secrets of this wise light composition, when the sun is mirrored on sea water. I couldn't imagine that the shifting of our brightness sensitivity to the range of 30 Kcd/m² would make luminances below 1000 cd/m² appear black, practically invisible. Just water surface orientation helps glare reduction. Wasn't it the recipe for diverse secondary reflectors' patterns?

"From this point of view I do admire Christian Bartenbach. But not for his 'invention' and development of secondary reflectors' technique. I admire his virtue to pay attention to details of our visual environment. This is why he could acquire, evaluate, use and transmit knowledge."

HIGHLIGHTS

Memorable projects...

Electrification made light accessible to almost everybody on earth. This historical event led to its evolution from a tool enabling the elementary and neutral visual contact with our environment to the contemporary form of Light Art. We can talk about light as a new emancipated international language. I had the opportunity of speaking this language on the occasion of Olympic Games in 2004. In the heart of a hollow soccer ball made of hexagons and pentagons according to the recipe of truncated icosahedron invented by Archimedes were placed immaterial circles of light. The prismatic polygons distorted light points of LEDs forming fine circle contours, moving within the ball according to a soccer minded sound composition. Olympic Games is the symbol and sign for peace in the world. Archimedes defended exactly this right of living in peace when he said "Don't disturb my circles!". I attempted to express this right to develop our creativity in peace as one of the most essential human rights. Those days there were more tourists making photos in front of my Light Art piece than in front of adjacent lit monuments.

Current projects...

Dynamic light is the focus of my current projects: light-lines along the edges of a pyramidal canopy have to rotate as fast as the wind speed to be measured by a respective weather sensor, in another project the lighting level in a living room will oscillate according to the leisured movement of grass within the adjacent dominant aquarium as measured by means of a hydrophone transmitting recorded water sound to the speakers installed into ceiling of the living room and making water a synaesthetic experience. Nevertheless light is not always an important component of room ambience. It depends on the phase. A lighting control system is the way to seamlessly integrate lighting into the room ambience. And not only. Nowadays the value of lighting quality varies according to temporal aspects and our awareness of its capability to trigger our biorhythm. In other words according to the chronobiological demands of human organism. This is why LON/DALI technology will definitely become an indispensable part of interactive lighting very soon.

Any projects you would like to change...

I am still not sure what I should do against violence. At the beginning of my career I never specified vandal proof fixtures even when I was warned of possible attacks. I thought that a peaceful nightscape might tame aggressive people. Today I know that humans can become the wildest animals on earth. This is why I envy lighting designers working for ephemeral projects or light artists, who have the opportunity of presenting their work in protected museum like spaces. They can preserve lighting quality. I believe that only when lighting designers care for the sustainability of their work we can conceive that UNESCO declares valuable lighting design or light art world's cul-

tural heritage many years later. For the time being I am seriously questioning the durability of a lot of impressive lighting design approaches apart from mines.

I am wondering what is going to happen with Dan Flavin works when T8 fluorescent lamps will be discontinued. I can imagine that photometric documentation of lighting effects will help restoration of valuable light art pieces. Anyway, I am not sure that next generations will have the opportunity of experiencing past lighting design work. Lighting branch seems to grow without caring about its historical consciousness.

The Plato's cave legend is part of the history of light to the same extent as sunlight, candles and the first Edison Light Bulb. Immaterial visual effects shouldn't be less important than lighting technology behind them. They deserve our retrospective view to the same extent.

Projects you like...

I appreciate resourcefulness. In particular when I see it in prosperous countries like Switzerland. I know that poverty is the mother of invention as first Theokrit taught us 23 centuries ago, but I never expected to meet with resourcefulness in a serious museum as Lausanne-Vidy Roman Museum. When I bought my ticket at the reception desk I was given a torch. I entered a labyrinth made of black walls arranged in a way which utilized both wall elevations. The dark adventuresome and intricate route didn't allow me to see the next exhibit before having explored the closest to me by means of this torch. Light assigned to me the role of a curious explorer and made me immediately active. I could light exhibits according to my thirst for knowledge. The concept enhanced interest for the exhibits through the element of surprise as they emerged from the darkness just when they were approached by visitors aiming at them with a torch and at the same time energy efficient and pertinent for the conservation of exhibits and their protection from damages due to exposure to hazardous radiation. Anyway, such concepts require braveness, while a lot of people are afraid of simplicity. This is why people are still so much terrified of euro crisis. Subconsciously they hate simplicity. It's a shame.

Projects you dislike...

Very often when I look at a project I am surprised as I realise how different would be my approach to lighting design. This doesn't entail any dislike. Conversely I am really disappointed when nice projects get lost in a confusion of visual stimuli in an urban nightscape lacking elementary order. Background is equally important to a lit monument and has to be quiet. The typical phenomenon of the lighting palimpsest in congested nightscapes burdened with densely arranged lit monuments and arbitrarily arranged luminous signs is the only unhistorical I know. Everything on this accidental palimpsest is inconsistently simultaneous. Thus it becomes extremely difficult to prioritize what to look at first.