

Darkness Shade & Shadow

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This is a book of light and shadow. Shadows are important too, because a shadow cannot form without light and vice versa – there is no light without shadow. It seems somehow controversial but it is very true. You cannot appreciate light enough if you've never been deprived of it. Darkness has a positive role in the perception of light; it represents a kind of "counterweight" because human spatial perception operates on the basis of bright/dark contrast. This contrast enables us to distinguish and understand bodies although they are composed of flat surfaces, with some of the surfaces being very small and some much bigger.

Shade, and shadow in particular, are phenomena that describe darkness architecturally; to a certain degree they can be controlled, thus enabling them to be used as an important element of architectural creation. From a spatial point of view, shadow determines the position of an object in space. It links the object to its surroundings, to its ground. Shadow also puts an object into the context of daytime and season. There are ancient and modern sundials all over the world, devices that project shadow's relationship to time. A shadow creates a rhythm and evokes dynamics. The living room in Tadao Ando's Kushino House is never the same because of the large diagonal stripe of shadow daily crossing its bare concrete wall. The "undulatory glass surface" of Le Corbusier's Convent de La Tourette has similar qualities, yet in a more filigreed manner.

Shifting from a two-dimensional object to a three-dimensional one: a shaded floor plan on a blueprint literally "pops up" into the third dimension. The shade "gives" it a feeling of thickness. Articulation is also an important architectural process within a composition that can be improved and emphasized by adroit use of shadow. Cafés, restaurants, bars, and brasseries protected by large umbrellas and pergolas on many streets in Mediterranean towns merge into one long stripe of shadow offering shelter from the summer heat. A distant dark place of the building makes us inquisitive and sometimes evokes irrational questions: what is hidden in that shadow. Again, La Tourette: two shadowed walls and a concrete beam frame a beautiful view of the landscape. A dark background behind white statues under the dome of Berlin's Altes Museum makes the statues appear even whiter and vice versa, the whiteness of these statues emphasizes the darkness of the green wall behind; here there is a symbiosis of opposite poles!