

On the Theme of Light: 'Shadow Catcher'

*'The sun never knew
how wonderful it was
until it fell on the wall
of a building.'*

Louis Kahn

Introduction

It has already been suggested that a building is not an object, but a setting for dramatic action, and as such, is an active participant in ongoing, changing situations. The discussion concerning the movement and interaction of the human body in relation to built works of architecture has begun. This assignment focuses on the dynamic medium of 'light' as another primary influence on the experience of architecture; light understood as a living medium, as an almost tangible, organic phenomenon with movement, with continually changing character, and with a multitude of possible qualities that will always influence the mood, ambiance and perception of a space. Light caresses material and both benefit from the encounter by the creation of original luminosity.

Though light directly stimulates our visual sense, it by no means follows that it is only a matter of sight. Light has qualities that have been understood metaphorically for centuries, where it becomes the embodiment or symbol of profound cultural ideas; divinity, knowledge (enlightenment), revelation, purity, peace and so on.

Light, in its most powerful natural forms (sun light, moon light, star light, fire light) is also dynamic; it never stays still (though it may seem to); its nuances are infinite. It also comes with its complement, literally, its dark side, 'shadow'. Darkness and shade also have culturally embedded metaphoric significance in association with evil, fear, foreboding, ignorance, solitude and so on.

The intention of this section of the class is to encourage you to touch, hear, smell, taste and rejuvenate the manner in which you see light, whilst thinking light.

Tasks

In allocated groups of 3 or 4, you are to work as a team to create a device for catching a specific quality or qualities of light, tentatively entitled a 'Shadow Catcher'.

The device must be built full-size and placed, unaided, in a found / claimed location in the circulation or studio spaces of Shattuck Hall; location to be chosen by each team. **(Numerous and serious restrictions apply to student work placed in hallways and stairwells of Shattuck Hall, they will be discussed in detail at the first studio session.)** The device must respond in a particular way to light; each team will decide what special quality or qualities it wishes to address and bring to potent and renewed expression through the action of the Shadow Catcher. Additionally, the device responds to the found / claimed environment of Shattuck Hall: proportionally, tectonically, structurally and other ways deciphered and proposed upon close observation and interpretation of the existing setting.

The device must have *no* moving built parts. It must be viewed from a minimum of 4 feet away, and should not need to be touched or manually operated in order to enjoy its effects. This, of course does not imply that the perception or the experience is gained from a stationary position or that the entire effect is perceived from a single position or that the effect is static.

For the Submission and Crit you are to present:

1. 1 Shadow Catcher per team of three, installed for the crit. The work will be built entirely in your studio spaces and installed in location no more than one hour prior to review and dismantled immediately after the review. The same applies to the interim review of the mock-up.
2. photocopied extracts from your journals showing the creative journey/design process that led to your final team proposal.
3. a sheet of paper signed by each member of the team stating the proportion of time and effort contributed by each individual to the creation of the device, expressed as a percentage. (obviously we would expect 33 1/3% next to each name).

Note:

Strictly temporary nature of this assignment necessitates that your work be photographed immediately prior to or during the review. Please secure necessary photographic equipment in a timely fashion.

Issue: Monday 31st March

Mock-up and location review: Wednesday 2nd April

Submission and Crit: Monday 7th April, 1.00pm

Reading: *In Praise of Shadows* by Jun'ichiro Tanizaki (New Haven 1977)