



## LIGHT REVEALING ARCHITECTURE

MILLET, MARIETTA S. NOVA YORK: JOHN  
WILEY & SONS, 1996. 183 P.

ISBN: 0-471-28644-3 978-0-471-28644-8

Jéssica Cristine da Silva Fonseca Matos  
Paulo Sergio Scarazzato

In the year that commemorates the twentieth anniversary of the release of the book *Light Revealing Architecture*, is more than appropriate to revisit that seminal work that, born classical, has served as inspiration for students and architects to this day. Sensitive, captivates with the rigorous text, although simple, and the beautiful images – more than 400, including photos and drawings.

Millet invites the reader to share with her, her questions analysis method of light applied to architecture, grouping them into four chapters which describe light as element that shows experience, form, space and meaning. Each of these qualities of light is discussed in a chapter.

In the chapter “Lighting Revealing Experience” she explores the insolvable association between knowledge and experience. The knowledge is cumulative, and from an early age we learn how shapes are revealed by the light, in an unconscious mode, though.

One who experiences, notes, discovers, learns. Experience is a necessity inherent in the human being. Experience sharpens the intuition and is the raw material of scholarship. In architecture, erudition implies the knowledge of the “spirit” of the place, or “*genius loci*” in Latin.

Among other examples mentioned in the chapter the Villa Mairea, one reveals so subtle and charming the erudition and sensitivity of Alvar Aalto in reading where the project would be implemented. By engaging a ladder with plump and slender pieces of wood creating a nice visual effect, he was actually mimicking the pine woods around, observed by the ones transiting that piece.

The light suggests places and memories to recreate specific standards which refer to spaces and memories. If used in poetic form, adds new qualities to a certain place. Light and shadow, light and darkness are present in the

human subconscious, in their cultural, social, and personal experiences. And experience can make a difference. The lighting designed to meet requirements of Visual tasks can and should go beyond compliance to standards or regulations without, however, denying them. It can and should thrill. It is always possible to leave the “sterility” of a solution “technically correct” toward the poetic.

The architectural forms are exalted by the light and can be constantly modified by it. With respect to natural lighting, this dynamic is with the qualitative and quantitative variation over the days and seasons. Already the artificial lighting, constant in nature, can vary according to different drives or circuits for control of light emission, by dimerization.

“Lighting Revealing Form” is the title of Chapter 2. In it, Millet talks about the many possibilities that light offers, both to reveal the architecture, how to “dematerialize” its forms, depending on the play of chiaroscuro, of light and shadow.

Form and light are juxtaposed in such a way as to look like the first was created by and for the second, more than by and to the forces of gravity. With the light, the shadow, the idea of dematerialization which was used in different periods is found in several copies of contemporary architecture. In the Church of Myymäki, Finland, Juha Leiviska (1984), there are periods when strong diagonals of light and shadow create a Symphony of shapes with the light in a multicolored composition of light and shadow. A fine example of “dematerialization” of way in favor of light.

When apparent, the structural elements of buildings can be recovered or hidden by the light. If taken into account, these possibilities will help in making decisions on the way. Similarly, the choice of materials also has great weight in the revelation of the forms by the light. The same architectural space will prove differently, as many as are the alternatives concerning their materials.

Chapter 3, “Lighting Revealing Space” emphasizes the fact that the meaning and the importance of an architectural space to the user depend on how the light reveals that space and Visual hierarchies which they provide. And they also depend on the experiences accumulated by the user concerning the illumination of buildings, experience that we all have, still in an unconscious mode. This fact reinforces the need for erudition, already referred to.

The light is a powerful resource to provide guidance on a building, while generating visual hierarchies or suggesting movement. The light can also be used to organize the space, to create clear boundaries for the user, define spaces and circulation, and attract attention for a focus - human beings are phototropic. The most luminous objects or points of light attract a lot, the brightness is important, within certain limits.

It is the light that shows us the difference between exterior and interior. Unlike other elements, such as heat, cold, rain, snow and wind, which need to be excluded from the interior of the environments to ensure comfort, the light is desired inside. Depending on the climate of the place and the intentions of the project, the interior can be presented as an extension of the exterior, or its contrast. In this way, the openings are core components

of built space, its size, shape and location determine the transition between the constructed space and the landscape.

Light contributes to the definition of space. As well as early human species the presence of fire in the interiors characterized the spaces, even today the light models the architectural space, be it the available in nature, or produced by human ingenuity.

The last chapter is dedicated to the symbolism of light, and is entitled "Lighting Revealing Meaning". The symbolisms of light are many. The light has special meanings, interpreted in many different ways. The Sunrise, the colorful mosaic of light from surfaces of the Gothic Cathedral, the darkness of a ladder in the Nordic churches or the bright light of a disco – all leading to a meaning which differs according to our State of mind.

When you want to give a symbolic connotation in light, its absence gets relevance. The darkness is part of our experience with the light; as black is necessary to complement the white, darkness is required to complete the experience of light. The light reveals or hides. The darkness, a symbol of unknown causes strong reactions. Thin light, which is light "grayed out" by the darkness, can induce to contemplation.

The light can still be festive, to celebrate a date or place, theatrical, which dramatizes a scene or event, metaphoric, that suggests a comparison with another place or concept, and symbolic, representing something more ethereal than itself, as the abstraction of infinity, or the divine.

*Lighting Revealing Architecture* deserves to be read and re-read many times. Now, if the speed of the present day do not allow this "privilege", a single careful reading, or even a veneered with calmness, certainly will help the reader to have a new look about the importance of the role of light and lighting in architecture.

---

**Jessica Cristine da Silva Fonseca Matos**

Master student in Lighting in the graduate program in Architecture, Technology and City at the School of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Urban Design of the University of Campinas (FEC-Unicamp).

CV: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3073669866545116>

[jessica@jfm.arq.br](mailto:jessica@jfm.arq.br)

**Paulo Sergio Scarazzato**

Professor at the School of Architecture and Urban Studies of the University of São Paulo (FAUSP) and the School of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Urban Design of the University of Campinas (FEC-Unicamp).

CV: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/2016980574229654>

[pasezato@usp.br](mailto:pasezato@usp.br)