

J JACQUES  
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## My theory on the relativity of light

Light is, of course, an essential element of any project, but exactly what light are we talking about? Conventional architectural production is bathed in an ideal light that reveals surfaces and volumes through the interplay of crisp shadows and sharply defined areas of brightness. It is this light that architects ask photographers to reproduce in the images of their works destined for publication, immortalizing buildings in a state where they are forever protected from the dangers of real lighting that are much more complex and uncertain.

Light can be dated and located. Light today is not perceived as it was during the Renaissance, and light in Asia is not experienced in the same way as it is in Europe. This is a fundamental, but largely unknown, fact in the production of any project. There have, however, been periods when this relativity of light has led to a cultural shift, as in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when physicists and the Impressionist painters profoundly changed everyone's vision of light and color.

In architecture today, we have to work with contemporary light: an urban light where movement is constant, where night is as important as day, and where interiors and exteriors merge in multiple continuities and transparencies. It is also important to appreciate the local aspects of light, just as travelers are struck by how, from one city to another, each latitude creates its own sky and thus its own light; painters, photographers and writers encapsulate this in their work. The locational aspect of light is especially relevant today as it is dominated by the light of cities, always characterized by areas of shadow spotted with reflections from façades, in a state of continuous motion around the silhouettes of passersby and the bodywork of cars. Today, it is no longer possible to imagine the urban night without the city's illuminated windows, speeding headlights and brightly colored storefronts.

One of the ways in which I "stage" the presence of light in my projects is by seeking to capture it via double façades, by creating filters that both block and let through light in order to create a certain depth of field. Metal openwork panels and photovoltaic panels in Grenoble, gilded latticework for Piper-Heidsieck, colored translucent laths that evoke reflections in the River Loire in Nantes with FGP, screens of wood and vegetation in Soissons, mineral mantilla veils in the Mediterranean light of Marseille and Montpellier...

Light can be used to play multiple roles. I particularly like the way that Alvar Aalto made use of external light sources placed above

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skylights so that, at night, light still enters via the same points;  
and, above all, the fact that the heat of the lamps melts the layer  
of snow deposited on the windows by the Scandinavian winter.

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