
In Praise of Shadows

Light does not become visible until it is refracted or reflected or strikes objects that create shadows. The simple realization that light is closely intertwined with the absence of light, i.e. shadow, is incorporated in the work of Gabu Heindl. She asks for a “science of shadows” and argues in favor of designing shadows dynamically in the same way in which light is manipulated for a variety of purposes. She sees analogies between lighting and our everyday work, in that we become consciously aware of and are able to improve our work only when it is interrupted in some way.

Light and shadow

In his book “In Praise of Shadows”, Jun’ichiro Tanizaki describes the aesthetics of traditional Japanese architecture in how it structures shadows. Instead of talking about the materiality of buildings he directs his attention towards the atmospheric effect which appears when light is broken. This idea is similar to the conceptions of light artist Nan Hoover in that shadows make us aware of light. Shadows reveal the intensity, direction and quality of the light source. It is only by breaking the light, by holding something against it, that light is rendered visible, given structure and rhythm by creating shadows.

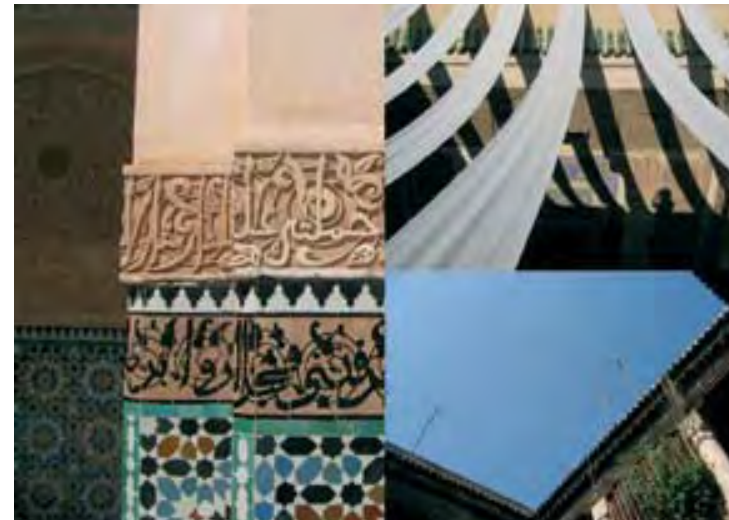
Light and work

Work environments and working hours have always been linked to lighting conditions: work was qualified differently per season, sunlight rhythms defined work rhythms in traditional cultu-

res of labor. Throughout the day, sunlight changes direction and quality, and its shadow makes working people aware of the passing of time.

Today’s “work around the clock” mentality is related to the possibility of 24 hour illumination. A lot of jobs are based on a constant (24/7) alertness; this condition is like a greyzone with neither breaks nor clear schedules. My attempt is to take the Philips Dynamic Lighting project of introducing the quality of dynamic daylight temperature and colour into workspaces, conceptually a bit further. Leaving aside the problematic aspects of artificial daylight – issues that were raised during our discussions in Marrakech –, I suggest focusing on the “light pauses”, i.e. shadows and their relation to pauses of work. Shadows and breaks are thus not registered as the sheer negative or mere absence, but rather as the essence of light and of work, respectively.

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Light and shadows of Marrakech.

The break

In his volume on the “movement-images” of cinema, philosopher Gilles Deleuze, drawing on Bergson, suggests thinking of man not exclusively in terms of consciousness, of emitting light into darkness (the “enlightenment” perspective), but to instead acknowledge that light is already there in the world and that we are the “photographic screen” that keeps light from spreading endlessly. Our subjectivity, thus also our creativity, depends on how light is being received and reflected, i.e. on the break or intermission.

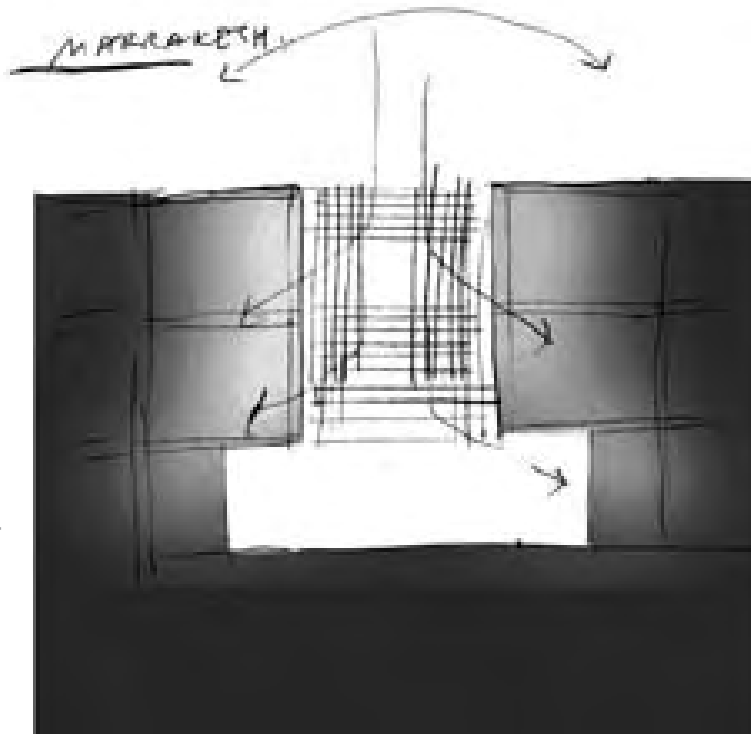
The break is what creates difference, variation within homogeneity. In globalized cultures and economies of flexibility, we are learning to live and deal with differences, to manage diversity, to design and create and inhabit breaks. Aside from our present historical moment, the break

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also highlights something essential about architecture in general: Producing variations in space and time, is what architecture does – by setting up intervals in the extended presence of space, by offering rhythms to the durations of movement, and, seen in the light of our topic, by screening, filtering, emphasizing and texturing the dispersal of light.

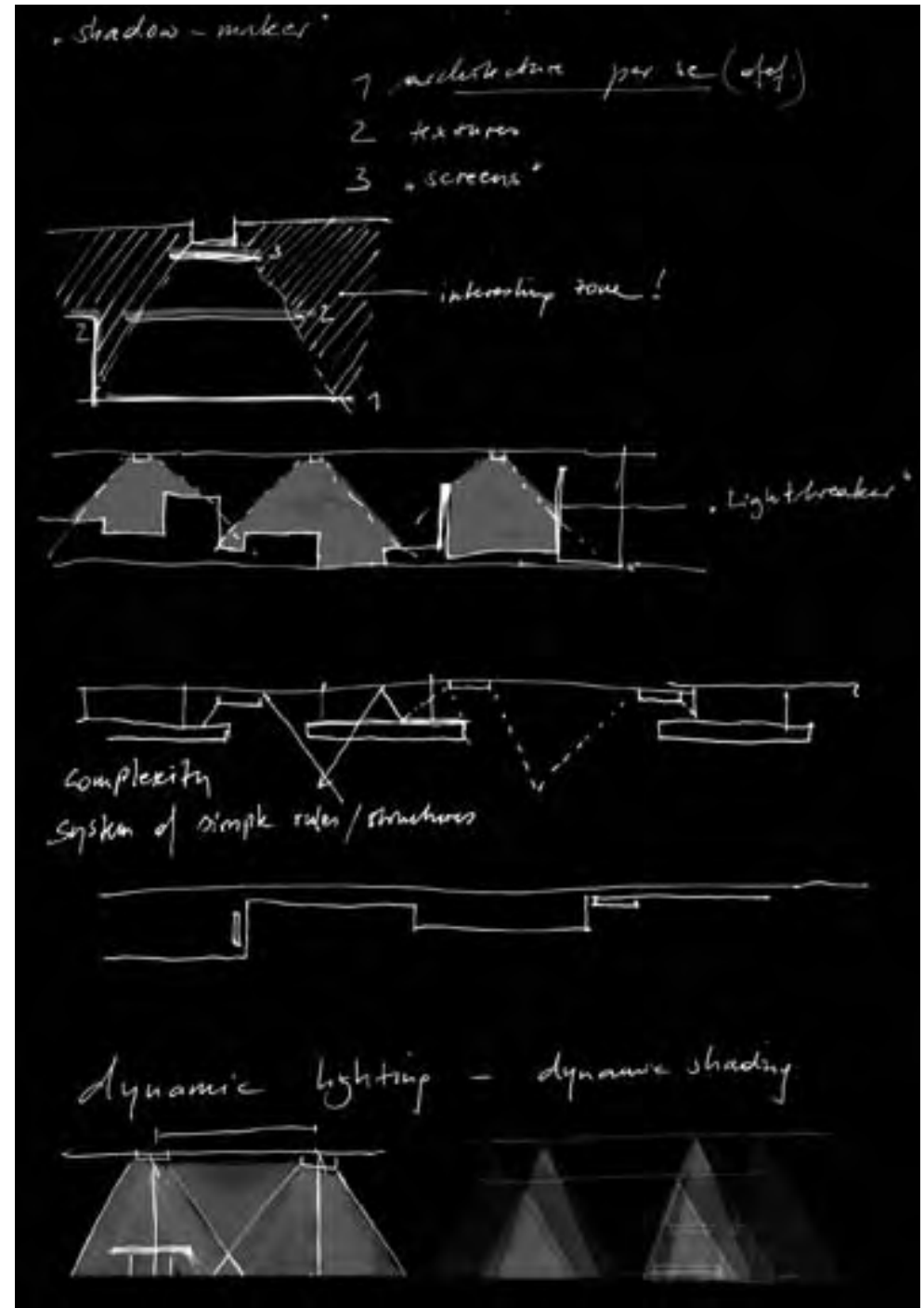
Shadow and break

Just as I have shifted the perspective from light to light pauses, I propose doing the same with respect to work: to see production and work also from the point of view of the break. As a consequence of what many call “postfordist” (i.e. informal and transitory rather than standardized) working conditions, it is becoming more and more important in order to assure the quality and output of office work to invest



By the nature of its traditional city structure, Marrakech is an ideal place to study “ceiling light”, light from above. Within the Medina, almost all houses are lit by the fifth facade, an opening to the sky above via an inner courtyard.

Opposite page:
Depending on the strength of the light source and the spatial dimensions different layers of surfaces can break light. Transparent, translucent or opaque planes such as textures, screens or filters can either be built into or placed closely around the light source.



into the creating spaces for relaxation. In office development or management theories we read about indispensable office accessories such as fitness rooms, sleeping places, opportunities for resting, etc.

Francis Duffy propagates cave and club structures for communicative and creative work, and we hear about how productive after-work parties and their dimmed lighting conditions are. Dutch companies install programs which regularly stop any possible activity on the computer reminding/forcing their employees to take a break.

We should also not forget an increasingly important "office system": the "home office". There the easiest way to achieve a break would be to switch off the light. However, this seems not appropriate in times of constantly alert and productive "home-workers". The 24 hour work availability lends a new importance to the quality of the break.

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Just as Nan Hoover, the light artist who should rather be seen as a "shadow artist", claims that "it is not the light, but the shadow which makes us aware of light", I suggest that it is the breaks which make us aware of (and thus improve) our work.

Perspectives – Dynamic shading

My proposal is a shift in perspective: the study of shadows and "dynamic shading" systems. My images from Marrakech and my sketches are just the beginnings of exploration of shadows. In innovative office developments, architects and designers think of individualisation, working atmospheres to choose from or to actively modify. From the point of view of office lighting, I propose to invest in possibilities of choosing between places of different shadow nuances or of creating your own personal shadow with interactive shading devices. This is of course

intensely linked with the architecture of the office itself. Thus my statement is also a plea for interactive cooperation between light (shadow) designers and space (break) designers, i.e. architects, very early in the design process of workspheres. My call here would thus be yet another aspect of valuing the "inter-", the inbetween times, spaces and shadings, in short: the break.

Shadows and work interruptions are inextricably related to each other. "Shadows" interrupt work and create space for relaxation. It is only through these breaks that we become aware of our work and provide us with the possibility of improving it.



"Dynamic shading" can be fun and colourful: light / shadow tests for a shop with representational functions as well as consultancy workplaces.

The individual workspace should be easy to adjust, to change, to interact with, to have a break. Hence the dynamic lighting luminaires should not only be adjustable in terms of light temperature but also in shaping the light by (interactive) dynamic shading nuances.

Opposite page:
Atmospheric differences gain importance in today's offices: In office layouts we find descriptions such as "main street", "market places", niches and cafes, just like in a city map or the map of Marrakech's Medina.

