

## that quality of light - as a first step

*Perhaps only Greek has a verb expressing that fusion of perception and imagination (which is essential). On the surface, this verb means only "to notice"; but it carries with it overtones of "white," "bright," "radiance," "glitter," "shimmer." Within me there was an outright longing for this radiance, which is more than any sort of viewing. I shall always long for that kind of seeing, which in Greek is called leukein.*

—Peter Handke[1]

*All material in nature, the mountains and the streams and the air and we, are made of Light which has been spent, and this crumpled mass called material casts a shadow, and the shadow belongs to Light.*

—Louis Kahn[2]

We cannot discuss vision without an awareness of light. Sensitivity to light is what allows us to see.

Visual perception depends on illumination. Things are brought to life and into visibility because of this core natural phenomenon. Shifts and chromatic nuances created by light can be a source of wonder and inspiration. They can be powerful transmitters of energy, space, movement, mood, memory, color or spiritual phenomena.

An event of sunlight is a living element in space. Each physical space changes depending on how much light is let in. Light has different qualities or densities. Clear, intense, blasted light has one effect while dimmed light has another. For example, there is a special radiance to high autumn noon light concentrated on an object and an eerie ambience to the blueness of television emissions in a darkened room.

Light is also connected to material attributes. Translucent or transparent materials will hold light in a work.

Think of the way light rushes into a transparent object.

When closely observing light, it cannot be experienced without tracing the movement of its complementary dance partner, shadow. There is always the fact of shade or almost

shade, penumbra caught in the underside, the folds. The Italians have a word for the arrangement of light and dark elements. Both aspects are collapsed into one concept—Chiaroscuro [Italian: *chirao*, bright, light from the Latin *clarus*, clear + *oscuros*, from the Latin, *obscurus*, dark].

In this wheel of words, we see a rich array of words that capture different qualities and densities of light. Use this wheel to map the sense and quality of light in your work.

**Take a photograph of light and write a paragraph reflecting on the events, sounds, actors, and narratives alive in your work/world now. Edit/enhance this photography using Photoshop.**

I worked with the leaves and light that changed dramatically each day – from dark overcast to an intense autumn brightness that only came on a clear day after heavy rain.

—Andy Goldsworthy[3]

And so it has come to be that the beauty of a Japanese room depends on a variation of shadows, heavy shadows against light shadows—it has nothing else.

—Jun'ichiro Tanizaki[4]

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[1] Peter Handke, *Across*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 96.

[2] *Louis Kahn: Essential Texts*, ed. Robert Twombly (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 275.

[3] Andy Goldsworthy, *Hand to Earth: Andy Goldsworthy Sculpture 1974–1990*, eds. Terry Friedman and Andy Goldsworthy (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 64–65.

[4] Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (Sedgwick, ME: Leete's Island Books, 1977), 19.