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Reconsidering Black and Light: Black and Light Projects that Challenge Perception

Chen-Yang Chang

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INTRODUCTION

In nowadays society, we spent a lot of time to check the websites, such as ArchDaily, Instagram, and even the shared post of Facebook, only to search for architecture projects and photos. As a result, we indeed have few chances to see and experience architecture that we know in person. However, in my opinion, it is human perception that plays a vital role in building our understanding of space, especially when sensing the various changes of light in space. In addition, with different lightness, spaces change into completely different conditions that are capable of influencing human's impression as well as emotion. Hence, I want to analyze the use of light and black in art installations to reconsider the possibilities in architecture and will focus on the expression of light and dark in space individually.

1.1 BLACK SIDE_The Serpentine Gallery



Figure 1_The Serpentine Gallery, 2011
<https://www.designboom.com/architecture/peter-zumthor-serpentine-pavilion-now-complete/>

The Serpentine Gallery¹², 2011

Contrary to the previous architects' lightweight open-air pavilions, in 2011, Peter Zumthor designed a totally different project which looks like a "black box"(Figure 1) , providing the visitors not only with a peaceful place for contemplation inside, but also with a unique spatial experience generated predominantly by the color "black". Peter Zumthor responds, moreover, to the busy hustle and bustle of London. He uses a black box with a double solid wall to cut out the noises from outside and creates a soundless garden inside the box, making a great contrast between two sides.

How black is featured in The Serpentine Gallery

In this project, "Black" affects our perception in two different ways. First of all, the inner garden looks more distinct and more vivid due to the black exterior and the dim passage in the black box. That is, the blackness becomes a background and brings out the brightness of the interior space. Second, the vision of visitors will be re-awakened as the light alters from bright outside, dark in the middle, and light again in the core part. With "black", a blank space is created to separate the experience of two sides, and our sensation is hence enhanced.

1.2 BLACK SIDE_Minamidera Art House Project



Figure 2_Minamidera Art House Project
<https://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art1arthouse.html> <https://i-nuts.jp/2014/04/508-2014-04-naoshimal>

Minamidera Art House Project

Minamidera Art House Project.(Figure 2)which is in Naoshima, Japan,³ is another project to express the perception of black. The project is designed by the architect Tadao Ando⁴ and the artist James Turrell.⁵ With the visual effect in the darkness, the visitors enter into a dark space and look ahead until the eyes get used to the dark condition after a while.

How black is featured in Minamidera Art House Project

By emphasizing the power of "black" itself, the designers attempt to challenge our limitation of human perception in the enclosed space. Due to the unfamiliarity with the darkness, the visitors all have to wait for a while without seeing anything until their eyes get used to black, and thus the faint light appears. In the process, the appearance of light is enhanced because of expectation while waiting. To sum up, the artist arouses our awareness of black through the adaptation to darkness in a situation that we never thought about.

1.3 How are the projects connected

If comparing these two project, we can see that the first project articulates the inner courtyard by defining it as the dark, black, and enclosed corridor. The second one represents "black" itself to our perception in an unfamiliar way which provides a space with extreme darkness to stay in. The similarity of these two cases is that the visitors are able to re-awaken their perception of dark space. On the other hand, the difference of these two projects is the role of blackness in space. Zumthor uses the blackness as a background to bring out the garden, while black plays the main role in the Art House Project.

2.1 WHITE SIDE_The Weather Project



Figure 3_The Weather Project
<https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK101003/the-weather-project>

The Weather Project

In "A new question about color," Cynthia A. Freeland⁶ shows how different artists and their installations could affect our perception and emotion. From page 239 to the end of article, the author focuses on some artists to explain their philosophy behind the art installations. The Weather Project.(Figure 3) which was built by Olafur Eliasson,⁷ expressed the project as in a surreal condition in Tate Museum in winter, 2003. In this project, Eliasson puts the super-dimensioned sun with the warm, saffron yellow light in a spacious lobby. Due to the cold rainy weather in London, the artist attempted to create a warm space by simulating sunlight to attract people to congregate. Besides, while lying down on the floor, people can see themselves due to the mirror set up in the ceiling. The purpose of this project, as the artist said in the TED talk,⁸ is the redefinition of our body and space by "seeing ourselves sensing".⁹

How light is used in The Weather Project

In this project, the artist makes the space tangible with some natural elements, including the sun-like warm light, a giant round illumination like sunset, and fog. The role of light is associated to our memories of the sun and arouses our imagination of the weather. Furthermore, the imitated sunlight is associated to those memory when we relaxed on the beach enjoying the sunset, creating a gathering space to unwind. The visitors can enjoy the surreal outdoor scene in the interior space with comfort.

2.2 WHITE SIDE_Your Blind Passenger Project



Figure 4_Your Blind Passenger
<https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK100196/din-blinde-passager>

Your Blind Passenger Project

"Your Blind Passenger" is another project by Olafur Eliasson, which is also related to the light and human perception. "People were invited to traverse a 295-foot tunnel filled with a dense mist. The change of light in color from yellows to bright white to different shades of blue, replicates illumination effects of daylight."⁶ During the period of time, "the visitors cannot see anything but the shades of others at first. After accommodating to the foggy environment, they are reoriented by the colorful light until the end of the tunnel."⁶

How light is used in Your Blind Passenger Project

In this project,¹⁰ light changes in detail as the visitor goes by. We can sense the mixture of light and mist while getting into the tunnel at first.(Figure 4) Furthermore, we have to take tentative steps with other modalities, such as the sense of time due to the various colored light. Hence, the light becomes a recognizable sign as we are moving forward.

2.3 How are the projects connected

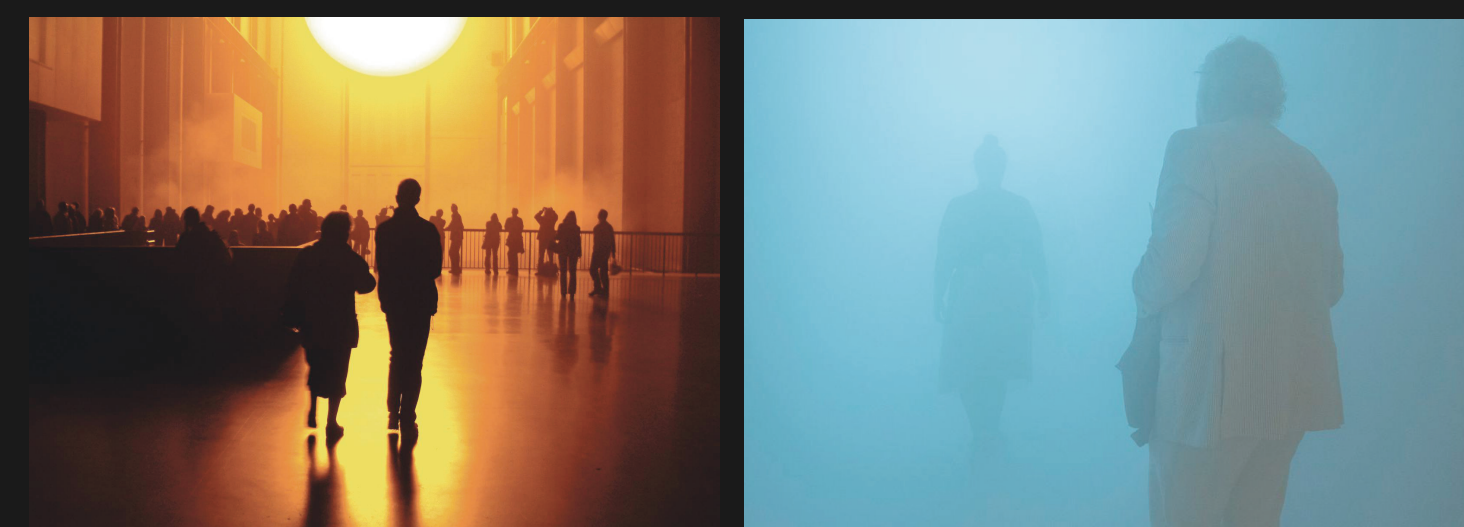


Figure 5_The Weather Project and Your Blind Passenger
<https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK101003/the-weather-project>
<https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK100196/din-blinde-passager>

Human perception is the similarity of both cases, (Figure 5)especially the vision. The first case focuses a clear and specific example to make a connection between the memory of sun and the warm light. In addition, when we entering this project in Tate Museum, the imagination related to the natural elements bring to attention the differentiation of "scale". The real sun, which is at outside contrary to the sun-like warm light, which is at inside and enclosed space. For the other project, the visitors fail to move forward in the usual way due to the blurring colored light. Hence, we need to pay attention to the changes of colored light in detailed way and have an exclusive experience during the time in the tunnel.

3 CONCLUSION

In the black projects, the effect of black is evident in the two cases: due to the unfamiliarity of extreme darkness, it is easier to have a more impressive experience within contrast. On the other hand, the light projects both focus on the sense of sight. Differing from normal visual experience we have, the two artists attempt to create an unusual experience that we've never seen. These two projects challenge our exquisite perception with the use of light in space, exploring the limits of changing one space with only light. In terms of architecture, we rarely discussed the perception of light or black spaces but care only about the function in the buildings rather than the feelings and perceptions in space. From my point of view, the architects pay more attention to the physical issues of buildings but sacrifice the mental elements in space. So, we gradually lose the chance to sense in space. That is, we are living in a space without feelings. Hence, by analyzing these art installations related to the light and black space, we can find another way to engage human perception and to arouse our emotion or imagination. In conclusion, the change of light and black in space can enrich spaces in architecture, making it with more emotion as well as stimulating the viewer's perception.

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