



Architectural Shades and Shadows

Henry McGoodwin

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ARTICLE I The Point of View

THE student should realize at the outset that in casting shadows on architectural drawings he is dealing with materials of art rather than with materials of mathematics. The shades and shadows of architectural objects are architectural things, not mathematical things. They are architectural entities, having form, mass and proportion just as have other architectural entities. Consequently these masses and shapes of dark must be as carefully considered in the study of design as are columns or entablatures, or other masses. It is, therefore, of great importance to the draftsman or designer that he should be familiar with the forms of those shadows which are most common in architectural work, and with the methods most convenient for determining these and shadows in general.

The student is urged, then, to regard the mathematical part of the study of architectural shadows not as its object or its essence, but merely as its means, — having no greater architectural importance than the scale or triangle or other tools used in making drawings. Therefore the use of mathematical terminology has been, as far as possible, avoided in the following discussions.

It has also been thought best to avoid presenting more than one method of solving any given problem, the purpose being to give that one which appears most likely to be convenient in practice and comprehensible to the student.

It has been common in the schools to teach the orders carefully as to form and proportion, with no mention of the shadows which invariably accompany those orders and modify their proportions wherever they are lighted by the sun. The student has been encouraged to spend weeks or perhaps months in learning to draw the architectural elements with great precision, yet without consideration of those masses and shapes of dark which have largely influenced the development and must always influence the use of these elements. Now, if it is of importance that he should become thoroughly familiar with the orders and other elements of architectural compositions, it is equally important that he should become quite as familiar with the shadows of those elements. If, moreover, it is important that he should be able to draw the orders and other elements readily, accurately, and with a sure, precise, artistically expressive "touch" or technique, is it not quite as important that he should draw their shadows with an equal ease, precision and expressiveness ?

This last, it may be objected, is an affair of drawing and rendering, not involved in the knowledge of the principles of casting shadows. But, as before suggested, these "principles" have no final value in architectural work, and are useful only as means to expression. It is impossible, therefore, to separate the right study of elements of architecture from the expression, that is, the drawing and rendering of them. All architectural drawings — if they be really architectural — will have for their purpose and result the expression of an artistic conception. It is as impossible to separate the expression of the architect's idea from the technique of his drawings as to separate the technique of a musician from the expression of the composer's idea.

These things have not been clearly and generally put to the student of architectural shades and shadows, if they have been put at all. He has been asked to study shades and shadows and perspective as parts of descriptive geometry. It is little wonder that his results have often been mistaken and useless, and his study of these subjects spiritless, disinterested and perfunctory. He is usually keenly alive to and interested in

whatever vitally concerns his art, and if once convinced that the subject of shadows does so concern his art, he will bring to the study of it an interest and enthusiasm that will produce results of artistic value.

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