Light travels in straight lines relative to us, with the fewest bounces resulting in the brightest light. ‘Properly speaking even the surface eludes our grasp as we can only see the light reflecting upon it.’

While we perceive light precisely because of darkness, light travelling through the blackness of outer space was imperceptible to the eye; only once light hit the atmosphere and reflected upon airborne dust did we see a blue sky. Seeing the darkness tint ultramarine each dawn as I sighted the morning star, I really got a sense of what Goethe wrote in his preface: “Die Farben sind Taten des Lichts, Taten und Leiden.” (Colours are acts of light, acts and sufferings.) I interpret this to mean colour occurs when light strikes some obstruction, suffering the impact.

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1 KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Secret Surface: Where Meaning Materializes, exhibition, 14 February – 1 May 2016

2 Hiroshi Sugimoto, Polarized Color, online text

Mapping sunrays

As much as the surfaces it illuminates, light is a material itself, tracked through space to reveal its manipulation and exploitation by human hands, writes Rae Fior Lowe
"There's always this ancient connection between earth and sky and the human body trying to fly, which is a god in our attitude. The change is the sky was controlling you, now you want to control the sky."5

The north-facing lights in factories and warehouses most commonly occur with a south-facing window, where the slanted windows in the ceiling face away from the equator, keeping out direct sunlight and letting in only diffused light. The light reflected from the outer roof facing the equator lights the interior slope. ‘This keeps light as consistent as possible throughout the day, essential in the Industrial Revolution and during the World Wars when electric light was not regularly available.

There is a form of easement in English law, based upon the ‘Ancient Lights’ law, that gives the long-standing owner of a building with windows the right to maintain the levels of illumination: the ‘Light to Light’. The exact amount of what is seen as an acceptable level of illumination varies from case to case. The easement is put in place so that if a new development obstructs the natural light entering your property, you have a legal standing to oppose it. You the landowner) effectively own the sunlight and section of air that it travels through to enter your property.

The Gothic Cathedral teaches us a sacred place, object, or occasion.’10), the divine or the sacred, especially in hierophanies (‘The manifestation of the divine or the sacred, especially in sacred space, object, or occasion.’10), but also that they acted as a calendar, illuminating, by marking and recording where sunlight falls through, or is manipulated by, architecture and its duration is the Earth’s orbit of the Sun, which is altered or destroyed.

Examples of Neolithic light architecture are scattered across the world, mainly thought to be tombs and ritual spaces, designed to align with the sun at a specific time of day on specific days of the year, mainly solstices and equinoxes. At certain times (usually sunrise or sunset), sunlight streams into the dark, earth-covered stone rooms, reaching deep into them and filling them with the warm, golden light that is particular to those times of day. It is likely that these monuments were built as hieroglyphics (‘The manifestation of the divine or the sacred, especially in sacred space, object, or occasion.’10), but also that they acted as a calendar, by marking the equinoxes and solstices, specific times of year that represent seasons and so were hugely important for farming.

These days the relationship between buildings and the sun contrasts with Neolithic architectural spaces.

5 Christoph Keller, Heliotrope Solar Reflector with Solar Age, 2013
6 Louis Kahn, quoted in World Religions, 1997, 10, 401. 7 Kevin van den Architect, 2016
8 BRE Group, Site Planning for Natural Light: Access to Daylight and Sunlight is a vital part of a healthy environment.Sensitive design should provide sufficient daylight and sunlight to new housing while not obstructing light to existing homes nearby. The BRE report, Site Planning for Natural Light: A Guide to Good Practice (BR209), advises on planning developments for good access to daylight and sunlight, and is widely used by local authorities during planning permission to help determine the impacts of new developments.

The Borrowers by Mary Norton, tells the story of tiny people who live under the floors and in the walls of houses, surviving by ‘borrowing’ everything from bread crumbs to emerald-wristwatches from the human beings. Although they occasionally make trips out into the open to ‘borrow’, the majority of their lives are spent inhabiting spaces where sunlight falls through, or is manipulated by, architecture. Here, light can illuminate, by marking and recording, where sunlight falls through, or in manipulated by, architecture and urban landscapes. Sunlight creates time-based forms of measurement whose division is the Earth’s orbit of the Sun, and which will continue even after the architecture that holds them is altered or destroyed.