



THE STRUCTURE OF LIGHT:
RICHARD KELLY AND THE
ILLUMINATION OF MODERN
ARCHITECTURE

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RICHARD KELLY: PIONEERING IN THE
ILLUMINATION OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE

In the year of Richard Kelly's centenary of birth, the Yale School of Architecture organized an exhibition and published a book in honor of that great pioneer of lighting design. Kelly had the opportunity to illuminate works of the most important modern or modernist architects of his time in the USA, among them Mies van der Rohe, Louis Khan and Philip Johnson, who called him "man of the light". The book titled *The structure of light: Richard Kelly and the illumination of modern architecture* has rare beauty and is richly illustrated, enables the reader to delve into the fantastic universe of Kelly's genius.

Both the exhibition and the the book were only made possible by the donation of documents to the Yale University Library by Addison Kelly, Kelly's daughter. There were 765 project files in 92 boxes, 145 drawings and 25 boxes with calendars filled with personal and professional information, and meticulous notes that constitute a true journal between 1948 and 1977, the year of his death. From the beginning of his career, Kelly valued the registration of his ideas and concepts, which are represented by numerous essays. The organization of the text and care in the selection of illustrations, allows the reader to become familiar with the life and work of Kelly, an architect who in the mid-1930s, dared to inaugurate a new field of professional activity that had never existed before.

The publication presents the portrait of an era, with emphasis on the emergence of lighting design and its role in valuing modern architecture. For this reason, the Brazilian reader must be captivated by his affinity with that movement, which is so significant from the legacies of Oscar Niemeyer, Lúcio Costa, MMM Roberto, Affonso Eduardo Reidy and others.

Grateful surprise to some, or many, is the revelation that Kelly also made a presence in Brazil in the mid-1960s, when he was hired by the Guanabara State government to develop lighting projects for the Sugar Loaf Mountain, Corcovado

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Statue of Christ and Flamengo Park, at the time of implementation. For the illumination of what would become the largest urban park in the world, he designed poles over 45 m. of height, with lamps with discharge lamps in high intensity that produced an extremely white and bright light, a novelty at the time. His intention was to mimic the light of the moon on tropical nights, which was achieved with mastery and great sensitivity. Even today, more than fifty years later, the great poles still stand out in the landscape

Kelly's pioneering spirit has also revealed itself in the conceptual field. His understanding of enlightenment as a three-dimensional reality was translated into a triad stemming from what he learned from theater while still studying architecture at Columbia University, at which time, as well as assiduous Broadway goers – fascinated more by enlightenment than by spectacles themselves – joined the theater group of his university, where he acted as both director and enlightener. In his view, enlightenment could present itself as a "focal glow" a result of the light cannon of contemporary theater, "ambient luminescence" represented by the light of the cyclorama and "play of brilliants" which can be interpreted as Times Square at night, with its faerie lighting. To these concepts, he attributed six important qualities: intensity, brightness, diffusion, spectral color, direction, and movement. Moreover, in a later review, he included natural lighting issues, and his possible dialogue with artificial lighting. Thus, for example, "focal glow" may be the window light on a preferred reading chair, or a spotlight of a task lighting. "Ambient luminescence" can be represented by the bare wall of an art gallery or a translucent ceiling. In addition, as "play of brilliants" the sunlight reflected in the waters that move in a stream.

Kelly knew how to take advantage of the thriving moment in the United States after the Great Depression and the growing acceptance of modern architecture in the country which he identified with himself. Competence, sensitivity and full knowledge of the technological advances of his time, made his name inseparable from the history of lighting technology between the 1930s and 1970s.

The book, which was organized by Dietrich Neumann and had five other collaborators from the academic and professional backgrounds, includes Kelly's list of 125 most important projects, a selection made by himself in the 1970s. The book is composed of six sections, offers to the reader more than 200 images and the catalog of the exhibition.

The first of the sections is "Theater, Lights and Architecture: The Career of Richard Kelly", is authored by Dietrich Neumann. He introduces Kelly, his career, and people who influenced him. Neumann claims that many of the breakthroughs of that period resulted in his experimenting with the lighting of movie sets or Broadway plays. Not by accident, dramatization is one of the tools of lighting designers.

The second, third and fourth sections – "The Invention of Modern Light: Richard Kelly and Home Lighting", "Corporate America and the New Luminous Environment: Kelly's Work with Johnson, Mies and Noyes" and "Light Changes: Philip Johnson, Richard Kelly, and Stimmung at Seagram", respectively – refer to the great names of American architecture of the time, whose works were illuminated by Kelly, and make it possible to better comprehend two of the most important typologies for Kelly's career: residential and corporate governance.

In "Evolving Technology, Devolving Lighting", part five, D. Michelle Addington, presents the technological advances that have supported Kelly's work.

Saved towards the end the "Two Skylights", section by Matthew Tanteri, presents Kelly's preciosity in the natural lighting projects for the Kimbell Art museums in Fort Worth, Texas (1966-1972) and the Yale Center for British Art, in New Haven, Connecticut (1969-1974), both designed by Louis Kahn. In these works, Kelly applied masterly qualities of light preached by himself: intensity, brightness, diffusion, spectral color, direction and movement, with diffused light being the most prominent. They are works that attest his genius.

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