





PARSONS  
LIGHT SPACE ART CLASS



PHENOMENOLOGY



IDEATION



INSPIRATION



PROCESS



IMPLEMENTATION  
/ ASSEMBLY




EXPERIENCE



TEAM

Dissolve is a temporary art installation conducted by students in the Light Space Art elective, within the Master of Fine Arts Lighting Design program at Parsons School of Design. It looks at the point of confluence between interior and exterior, artificial light and natural light, as each dissolves into the other over time. The installation served as a feature and back-drop for the Natural Light and Architecture conference that took place at Arnhold Hall, The New School on 26th October, 2017.



*"Each day is a different length of time and that gives a different length to the cusp between light and darkness or darkness and light."  
- James Turrell*



PARSONS MFALD  
LIGHT SPACE ART CLASS





## **CLASS FRAMEWORK**

### **Parsons MFALD**

The Master of Fine Arts Lighting Design program is housed within the School of Constructed Environments along with cognate disciplines of Architecture, Interior Design and Industrial Design. Here all scales of the designed and constructed world - from that of a hand-held object to urban planning - are studied in relation to human inhabitation and social value. The Lighting Design curriculum at Parsons is unique amongst its peers as it is the only academic program to offer an interdisciplinary curriculum that focuses on the intellectual, aesthetic and technical dimensions of light.

The Light Space Art elective includes students from multiple disciplines and schools across Parsons. Here students explore the phenomenal relationship between light and material and the effect on human perception. Experiments are conducted empirically through physical constructs so that the students experience first-hand the perceptual dynamics at play. Many of the spatial, theoretical and material experiments conducted early in the semester converged in the final installation. Response to the unique attributes of the installation site, light relationships and the conceptual intent were considered in relation to the physicality of the work and construction details. Thus, fabrication, prototyping and construction of the intervention were significant pedagogical foci in the class.





PHENOMENOLOGY

*"In the realm of the phenomenal, "less is more" only when less is the sum total of more."*  
- Robert Irwin



### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a division of philosophy that interrogates the relationship between the world and one's experience of that world, as being a holistic, interdependent 'reality'. Phenomenology in architecture applies these philosophies as they pertain to the built environment, looking at the sensuous experience of constructed space and, in the case of light, the subtle and dynamic qualities of time and affect on human perception. The topic of phenomenology was core to the teachings and explorations of the Light Space Art class.



“The ambiguity of the term ‘sense’ - referring to specific sense organs (sensation) and broader mental constructs (meaning) - is also a relationship between the immediate experience and metaphorical extrapolation.”

- Excerpt from “Sensuous Geographies - Paul Rodaway’.

This and similar phenomenology readings were resources for students to draw on and delve deeper into the philosophical meaning of the artistic explorations of the course.





### **Dia: Beacon**

Early in the semester students visited Dia:Beacon where careful consideration was given to both small scale construction details such as the organization and rhythmic placement of exposed fasteners that have relevance to the spirit of the work and a declared honesty toward the exposed means of construction and, likewise, concealing less meaningful requirements of construction to prevent unwanted visual focus. As well, larger phenomenological and experiential aspects of works by artists such as Robert Irvin, Dan Flavin, Michael Heizer and Richard Serra were explored and critiqued. It was within this larger art historical context that students developed initial explorations and approaches which influenced the ideation process for the final installation.





IDEATION

### Ideation

The final intervention evolved out of a series of convergent exercises. Each week students, working individually and later in teams, fabricated and presented maquettes, notions and sketches exploring the phenomenal and experiential aspects of light and material. Students presented and critiqued each other's work in an attempt to distill common approaches and ideas. New teams converged around these commonalities and increasingly larger teams developed and tested the ideas with the aim of producing tangible perceptual experiences grounded both in clearly articulated theoretical concerns and in the context of the proposed site, to its opportunities and limitations, and project schedule.

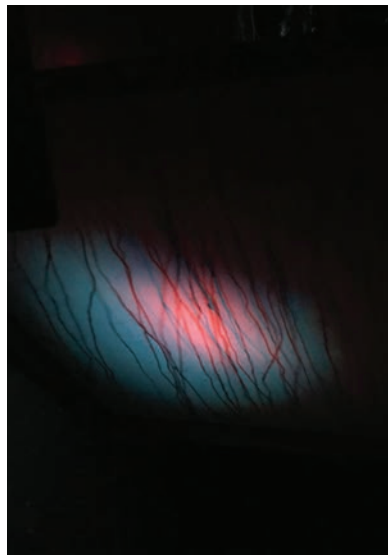
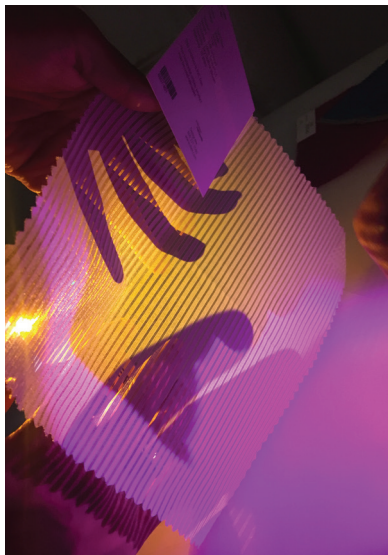
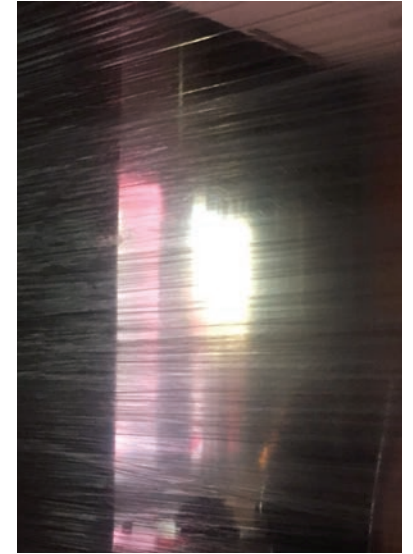
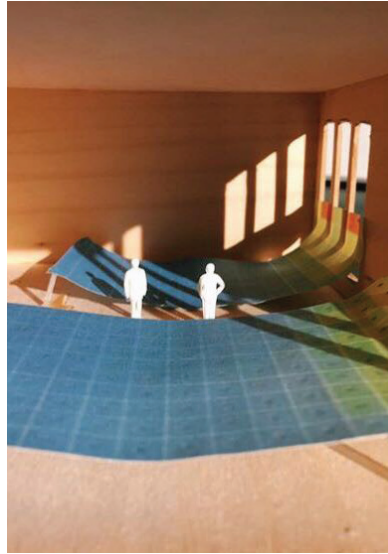
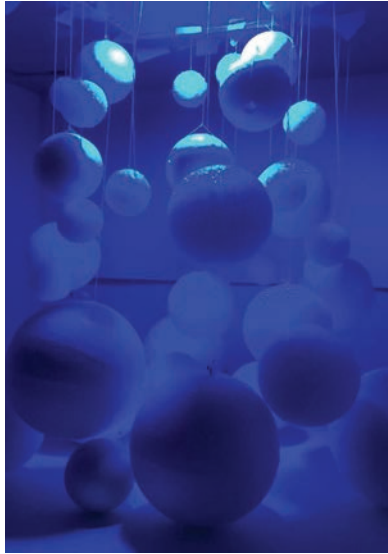


*"I hope that when you see my work, you are looking at yourself looking."*  
- James Turrell





Many class discussions explored the idea of 'seeing oneself seeing' and the power of light to expose spatial and temporal relationships in a way which reveals truths about not only the environment, but the perception of the environment. Its dynamic combination of ubiquity, ubiety and ephemerality make it a multi-dimensional medium from which to elicit experiences of revelation and reflection. With this in mind, the class pursued an installation that responded to the place and time of the event.





INSPIRATION



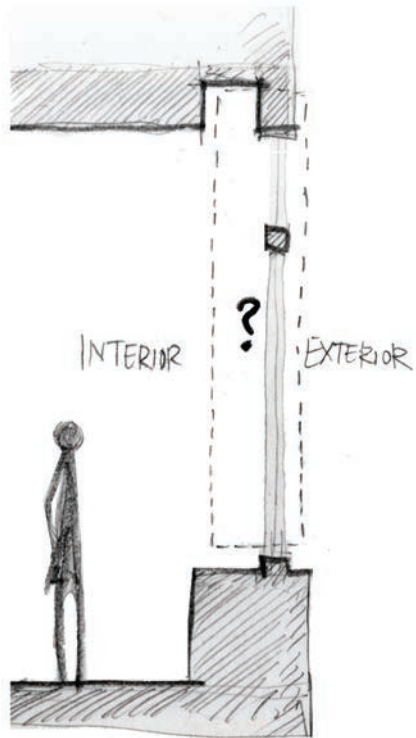
## Inspiration

The inspiration for Dissolve was not of singular origin, but from a number of motivating factors. Our discussions and examination of the Light and Space movement - a loosely defined movement in the 1970's in reference to a group of California based artists who developed works that primarily focused on human perception and the dismissal of the physicality of the work - set the tone and mind-set for the ideation process. However, the site location used for the installation itself informed much of our approach to the final concept and physical design, along with the subject matter of the event (Natural Light & Architecture) to which the installation was a back-drop.



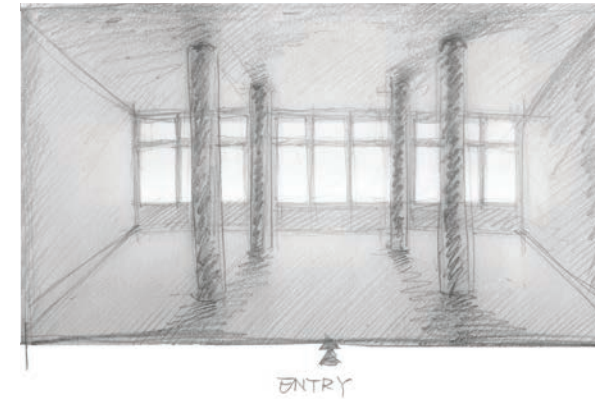
*"We must therefore rediscover, after the natural world, the social world, not as an object or sum of objects, but as a permanent field or dimension of existence."  
-Maurice Merleau-Ponty*





The event's emphasis on natural light led the group to consider relationships between daylight, spatial and temporal perception and artificial light. The large room in which the event was held comprised one side of expansive windows, spanning the length of the room and looking out to the streetscape. The scale of the windows to the space and to human proportionality makes the threshold between interior and exterior a prominent feature of the room, that helped to hone the installation's concept and drive its expression.

In unison with this, logistical constraints such as expected attendance and safety considerations guided our energies towards this threshold as a suitable stage for articulating the concept.

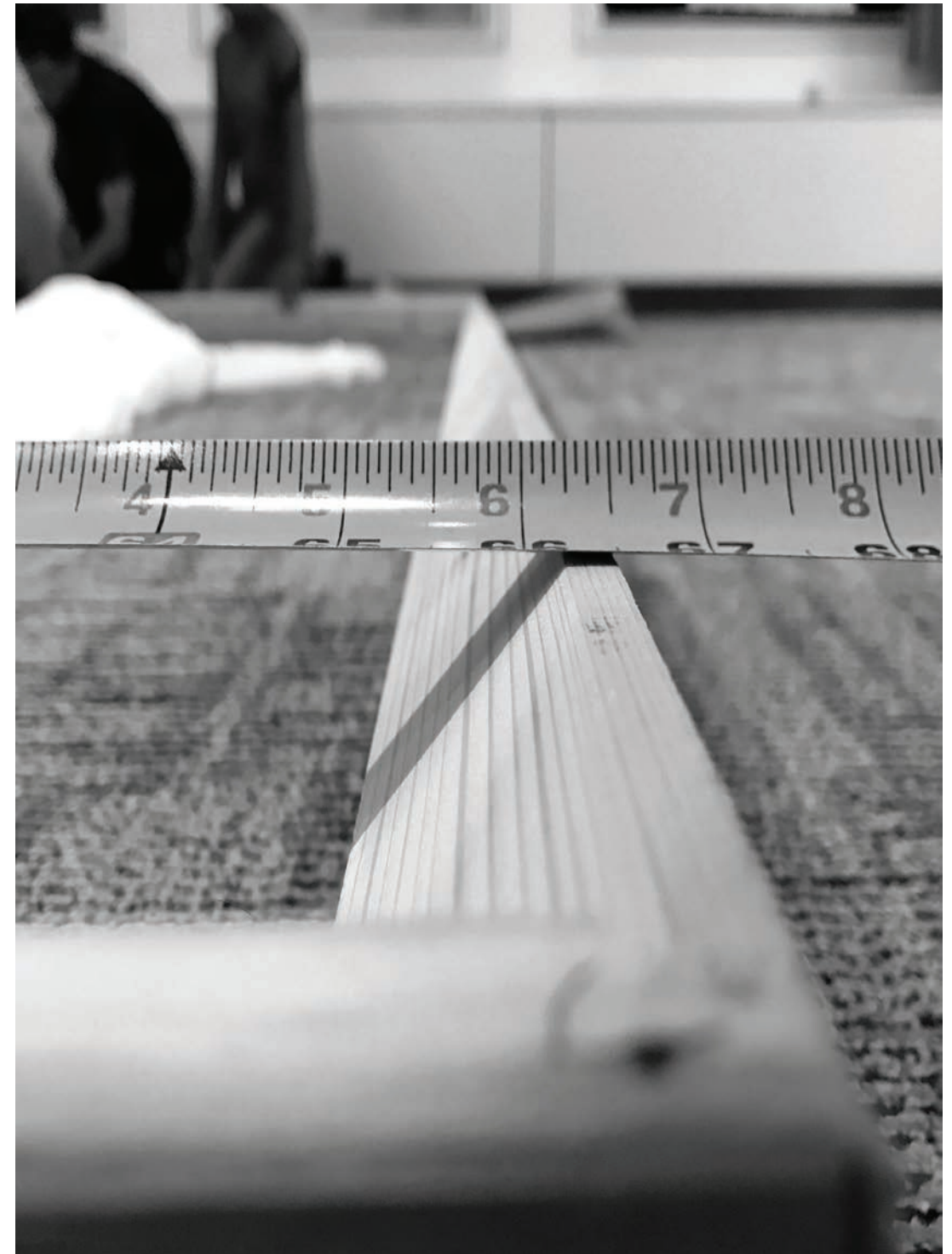
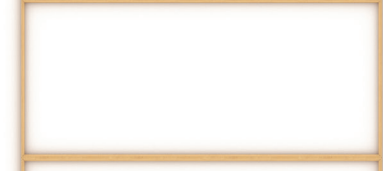
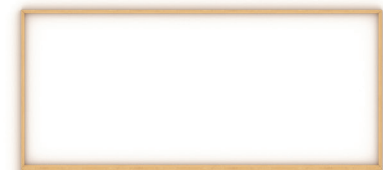
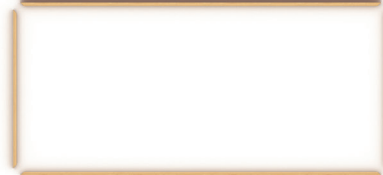
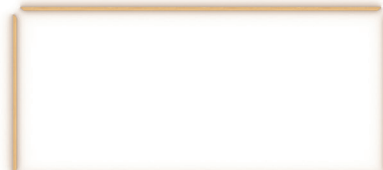


First impression: Before we saw the opportunities we saw the challenges of the space - in particular the cluster of supporting columns loomed very large in our recollections of that first visit. We felt there was a high degree of architectural rigidity and symmetry that began to dissolve on closer inspection - what seemed aligned was not, what seemed balanced was actually out of balance, if only slightly. The three massive bays of windows registered for us as architecturally interesting but as we began to reflect and iterate the window bays began to seem like both a key datum and a possible site for our intervention.





PROCESS

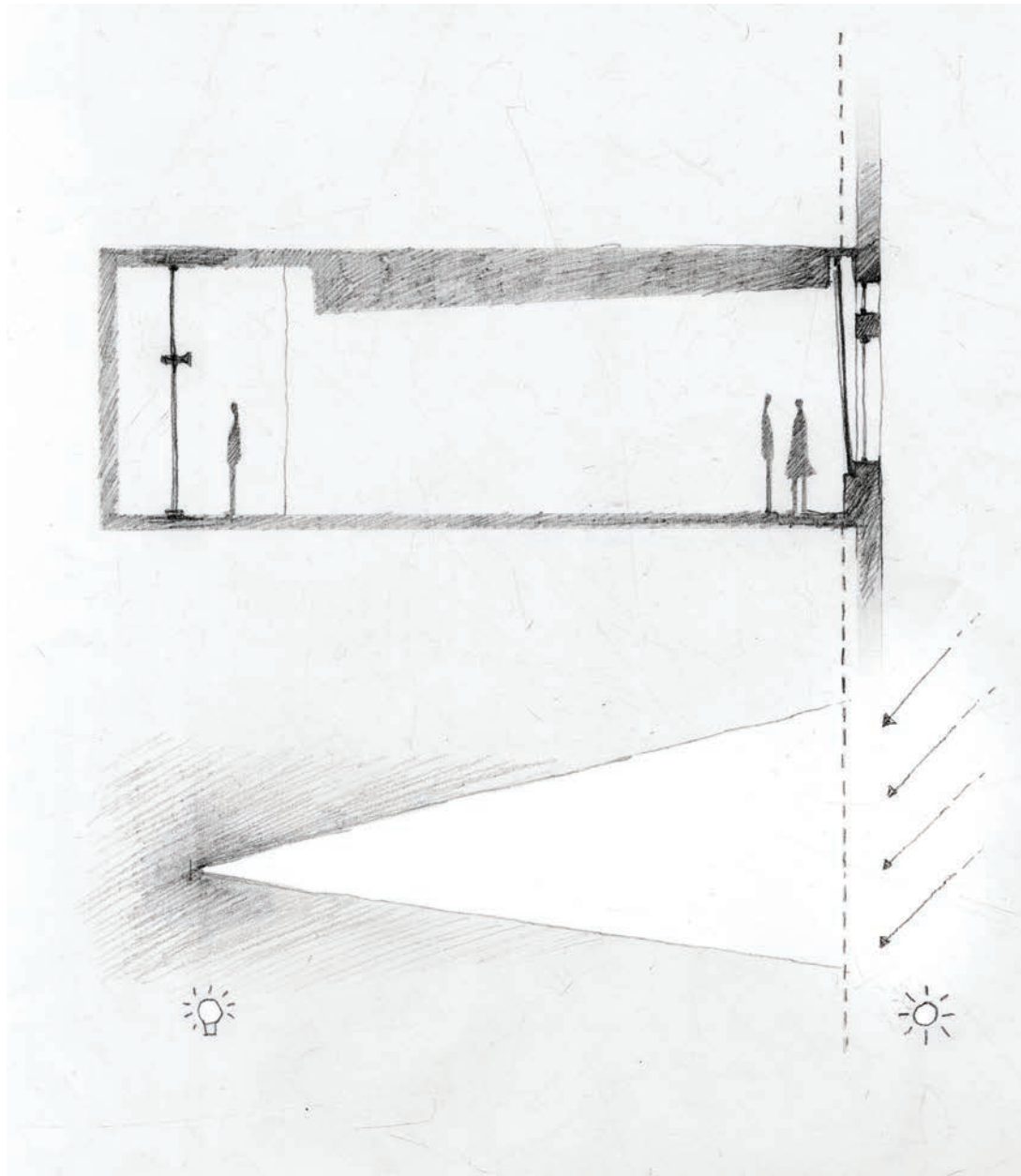


*"The materials of architecture communicate through resonance and dissonance, just as instruments in musical composition, producing thought and sense-provoking qualities in the experience of a place."*  
- Steven Holl

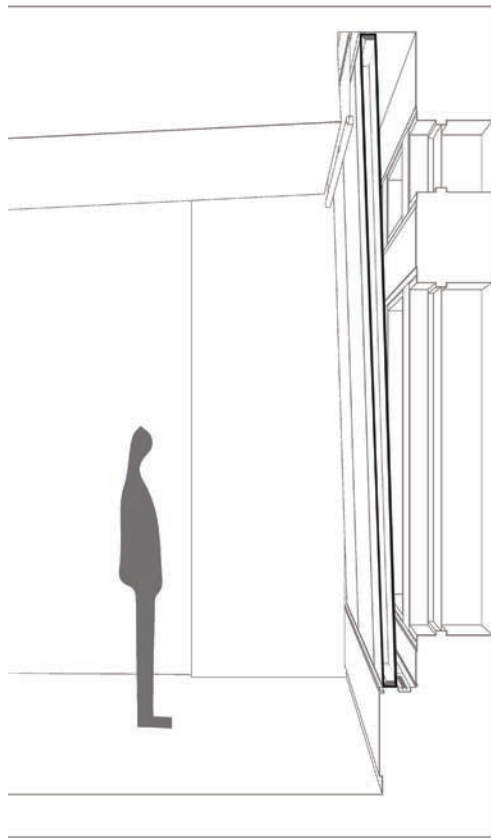




During the ideation process, the relationship between light and materiality was investigated in the context of the space, with specific focus on materials with distinct characteristics of transparency and reflection as means to expose this relationship. It was through this investigation that the point of confluence of natural and artificial light became a clear characteristic of interest for the installation space and the class became compelled to interrogate this threshold further.



Firstly, it was determined that the scale of the windows offered an opportunity to draw attention to the fusion between natural and artificial light in a quiet but powerful way, without demanding constant attention to dazzling effects, so as to not detract from the event presentations. The scale and number of windows helped to guide the material choice towards rudimentary fabrics that could be accessible en masse, whilst the concept demanded a fabric that could act as a luminous 'canvas' for the interplay between interior and exterior light, allowing both sides to be seen in the same plane.



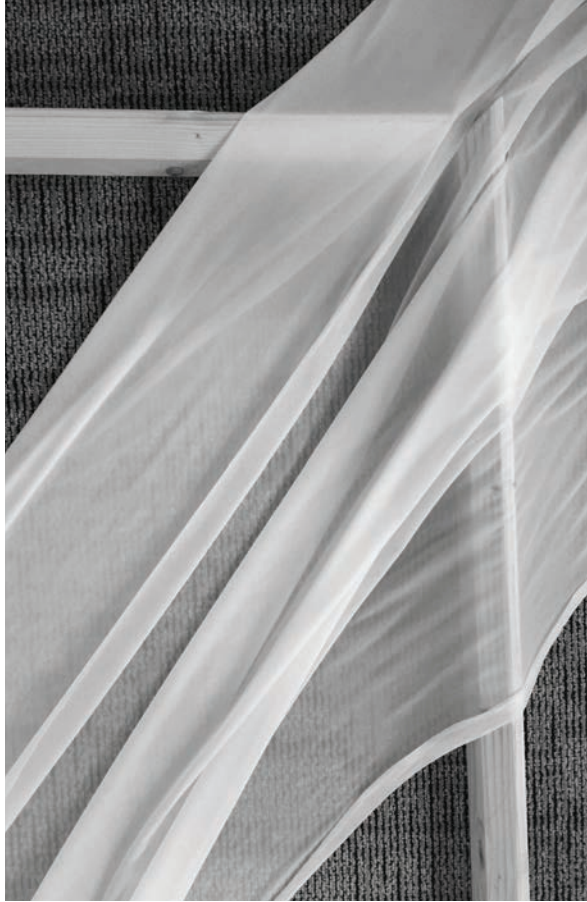
Stretched plastic wrap was manipulated to intercept and redirect daylight as it entered the space, notions of visibility and obscurity were studied through configurations of two-way mirror, and observability of lighting phenomena was tested with different types of cloth. Whilst many other materials were explored during the process, it was decided that the stretched scrim material most successfully acted as a transmitter and receiver of both light entities, as well as a visual arena in which their interaction would manifest as a performance.





IMPLEMENTATION  
/ ASSEMBLY





The implementation of the final installation was a true team-building exercise. Teams drew on individual strengths to tackle different target areas - Construction, Assembly, Lighting and Photography.

With a project of this scale and simplicity of design, attention to detail in all areas was key. The wood panel edges were chamfered to minimize view of the frame and maximize visual attention and surface area of the blank scape of the scrim.

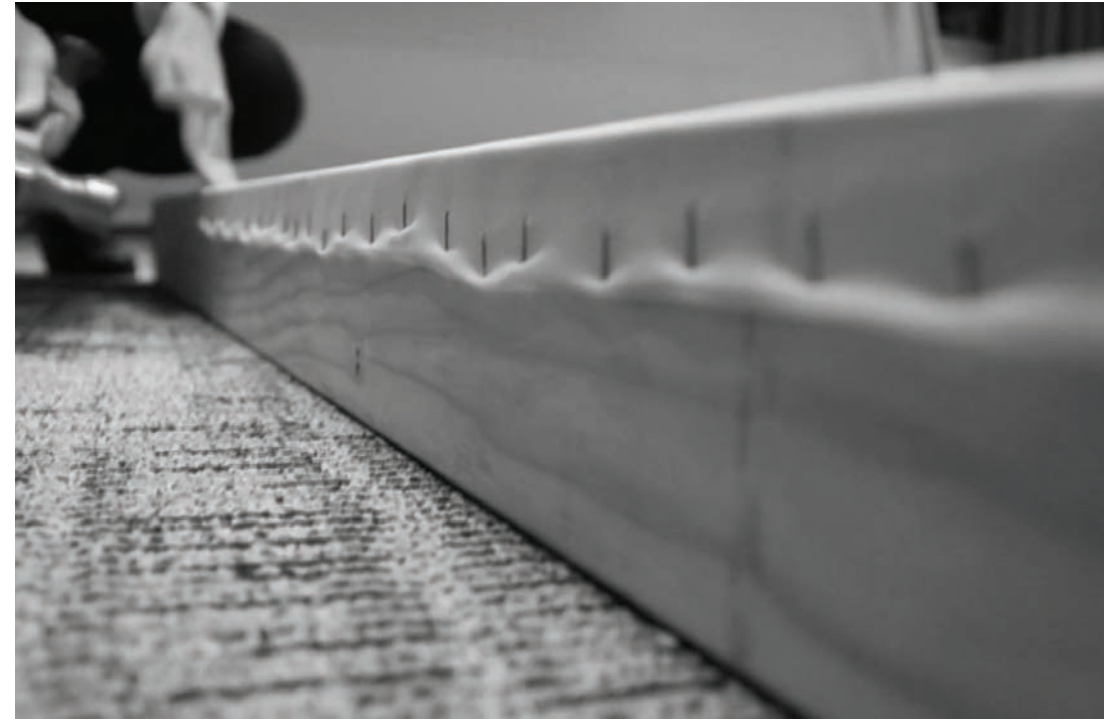




Staples were spaced such that the scrim was evenly stretched. Light beams of the electric lighting were carefully shuttered and cross-shot, using two luminaires per window assembly, to evenly wash the scrim canvas and mounted precisely to avoid distracting shadows. As an added layer of visual depth and dynamism after the completion of sunset and loss of natural light, the two electric luminaires illuminating each window assembly utilized opposing gel colors (blue and magenta) so that shadows cast during the reception would better reveal the layered effect of multiple light washes and the origin of each source.

A thorough understanding of the room configuration for the public event and the unique elements within it was developed throughout the preceding weeks such that the installation's assembly was strategic and well-coordinated, with all students involved. The structural frames were prefabricated to be assembled on site, lighting effects and mounting methods were tested in advance to expose any unforeseen factors of concern, and the process was documented every step of the way to keep all students abreast of the project state.









EXPERIENCE



*"The phenomena of the space of a room, the sunlight entering through a window, and the color and reflection of materials on a wall and floor all have integral relationships."*

- Steven Holl

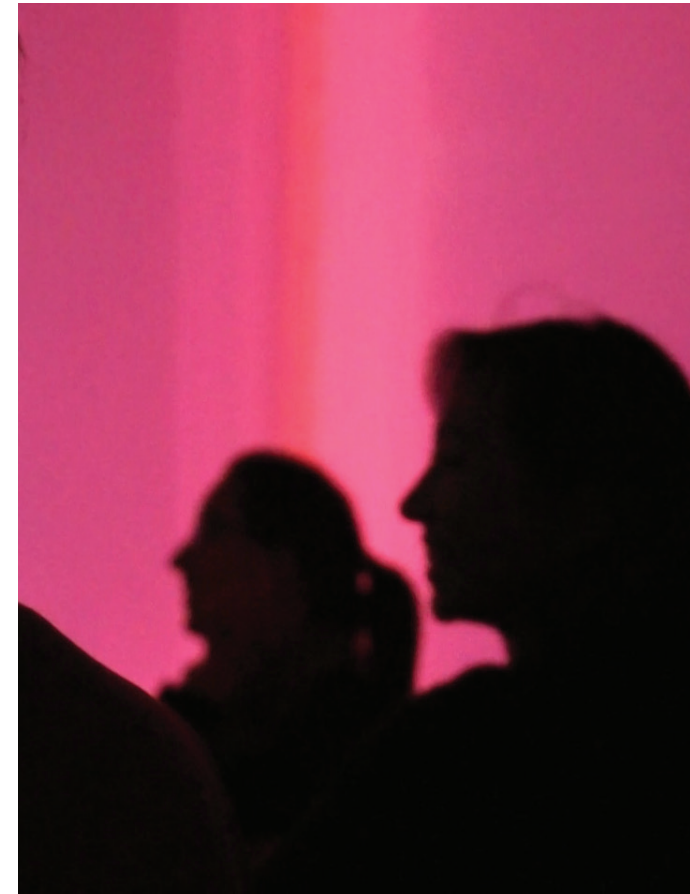
### **Experience**

On the evening of the event, the installation transformed before the audience. The power of the natural light against the saturated artificial light during the early evening was undeniable, evidenced clearly on the scrim screens. Subtle changes in daylight conditions, that would normally go unnoticed by most, were seemingly amplified by the installation's simple planar interception of natural light and contrast to the less-familiar hue of electric light. The magenta electric light, purposely chosen as an opposition to the cool natural light, appeared to dissolve into the natural light towards the center of the scrim, producing a wash of pink and blue.





As the night went on, an exchange of power played out between these natural and artificial forces, as the saturated electric light overcame the falling daylight. The scrim's hue became more saturated with the electric magenta, however the once bright center turned much darker as night arrived. The large-scale installation served as a dynamic backdrop for the event; adding meaning and context to the attendees' perceptual understanding of light and its phenomenal presence in architecture.













TEAM

## **LIGHT SPACE ART PROFESSOR**

Derek Porter

## **'NATURAL LIGHT & ARCHITECTURE' EVENT SPEAKERS**

Glenn Shrum - Flux Studio, and The New School  
Star Davis - Arup, and The New School  
Davidson Norris - Carpenter Norris Consulting, and The New School  
Aki Ishida - Virginia Tech School of Architecture and Design

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Jayati Gupta, MFA Interior Design  
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Jordan Benaderet, MFA Double Major (Interior Design & Lighting Design)  
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Yiming Liu, MFA Interior Design  
Yishan Zhuang, MFA Lighting Design





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