

Some Thoughts on Light

X's film, open on all sides. Dispersion.

Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography* trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Books Inc., 1977), 22.

Plenty of people will try to give the masses, as they call them, an intellectual food prepared and adapted in the way they think proper for the actual condition of the masses. The ordinary popular literature is an example of this way of working on the masses. Plenty of people will try to indoctrinate the masses with the set of ideas and judgements constituting the creed of their own profession or party....culture works differently. It does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgements and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely--nourished and not bound by them.

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy (1869)*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 23.

He was lame
as a 3 legged dog
screamed as he came
through the fog

If you are the Light
give me a light
buddy

Leonard Cohen, "He Was Lame," *Selected Poems: 1956-68* (New York: Viking Press, 1968).

Since electric energy is independent of the place or kind of work-operation, it creates patterns of decentralism and diversity in the work to be done. This is a logic that appears plainly enough in the difference between firelight and electric light, for example. Persons grouped around a fire or candle for warmth or light are less able to pursue

independent thoughts, or even tasks, than people supplied with electric light. In the same way, the social and educational patterns latent in automation are those of self-employment and artistic autonomy.

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1964), 359.

The nocturnal wanderers with their torches are in the service of the police and see everything that happens; thieves who want to force open locks in the back streets can never be sure that their unexpected lights will not turn up...The torch-bearer goes to bed very late and the next day reports everything he noticed to the police. Nothing is more effective in maintaining order and preventing various mishaps than these torches, which are carried around here and there; their sudden appearance forestalls many a nocturnal crime.

Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Light: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Angela Davies (Berkeley, Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1995)

But that the public should enlighten itself is more possible; indeed, if only freedom is granted, enlightenment is almost sure to follow.

Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (1784), trans. Lewis White Beck, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1986), 264.

I knew that pleasure gathers only in freedom. For I was soaring through the sky, my huge white and grey wings stretched out to the horizontal limits of my vision. I was alone. In the sky. I was almost white.

I flew downwards, hollering with pleasure, swoop as if into the slate of water. But I didn't. Then swooped directly into the cold of that ocean, it was the light of morning, as directly as if I was going for food. Out of the tunnel my body had carved in the water, a fountain of light burst upward.

Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless* (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 12-13.

Tokowaly, uncle, do you remember the nights gone by
 When my head weighed heavy on the back of your patience
 or
 Holding my hand your hand led me by shadows and signs
 The fields are flowers of glowworms, stars hang on the
 bushes, on the trees

Silence is everywhere
 Only the scents of the jungle hum, swarms of reddish
 bees that overwhelm the crickets' shrill sounds,
 And covered tom-tom, breathing in the distance of the night.
 You, Tokowaly, you listen to what cannot be heard, and
 you explain to me what the ancestors are saying in the
 liquid calm of the constellations,
 The bull, the scorpion, the leopard, the elephant,
 and the fish we know,
 And the white pomp of Spirits in the heavenly shell
 that has no end,
 But now comes the radiance of the goddess Moon
 and the veils of the shadows fall.
 Night of Africa, my black night, mystical and bright, black
 and shining.

Léopold Senghor, *Chants d'ombre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1945).

Yes, one feels, I should never have thought that this could be so; I have never known people behaving like that. But you have convinced me that so it is, so it happens. One holds every phrase, every scene to the light as one reads -- for Nature seems, very oddly, to have provided us with an inner light by which to judge of the novelist's integrity or disintegrity. Or perhaps it is rather that Nature, in her most irrational mood, has traced in invisible ink on the walls of the mind a premonition which these great artists confirm; a sketch which needs to be held to the fire of genius to become visible.

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) (London: Grafton Books, 1977) 69.

The very next time Eeny went out, she didn't burrow to the right or to the left of the hole; she didn't burrow under or behind. She burrowed up and up, thinking astonishing and frightening thoughts, until she broke through the crumbly top and right into Up Above...Light did spread from corner to corner like a blanket above her. But it also touched in and out of tall trees like a thread. Day was sharp, but shadows were soft, and she liked the way they curved around into night.

Jane Yolen, *Eeny, Meeny, Miney Mole* (New York, London: Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1992).

The spirit of a great scholar or great writer lights up the sky above, bright as the moon and the stars. Lesser talents send up light several tens of feet, others several feet

or less; even the worst will sparkle like lamplight seen through a window or a door. This is invisible to mortals; only gods and ghosts can see it. As the light above this roof is seven or eight feet high, I know a scholar lives here.

Ji Yun, "Selections from Notes of Yüwei Hermitage," Poetry and Prose of the Ming and Qing, trans. Yang Xianyi (Beijing: Panda Books, 1986), 202.

Tuesday, 5 o'clock

Still in the oasis. A gentle glow, so pale that the light already seems shadow and the shadow darkness. A morning moonlight in which the dawn will dissolve.

André Gide, *Amyntas*, 1906, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Ecco Press, 1988), 47.

Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that showeth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle, that showeth best in varied lights.... The first creature of God, in the works of the days, was the light of the sense, the last was the light of reason; and his sabbath work ever since is the illumination of His Spirit. First he breathed light into the face of the matter or chaos; then He breathed light into the face of man; and still He breatheth and inspireth light into the face of his chosen.

Francis Bacon, "Of Truth," from *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, 1625 in *Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works*, ed. Sidney Warhaft (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1965), 47.

Trembling with the sickness of supernatural fear, yet strong of will, Margaret Calderwood crept forward within the lurid light, and was drawn into its influence. It grew and intensified upon her, it dazzled and blinded her at first; but presently, by a daring effort of will, she raised her eyes, and beheld Lisa's face convulsed with torture in the burning glare, and bending over her the figure and the features of Lewis Hurly!

Rosa Mulholland, "The Haunted Organist of Hurly Burly," 1891, *Victorian Ghost Stories*, ed. Michael Cox & R. A. Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 376.

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relation with his kind.

Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954), 20.