

# The Beauty of Shadows

Professor Nancy Yen-wen Cheng

**\* DRAFT Jan 7, 2008**

Workshop: Jan 17, 24 & 27 in 278 Lawrence Hall

"We find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness that one thing against another creates." --*Jun'ichiro Tanizaki, In Praise of Shadows*



*image by Kevin Hoelscher*

With lighting, we can use simple means to create sophisticated effects. We will investigate light & shadow possibilities through creating, observing, and analyzing.

First we will examine types of shadow phenomena and create shadow effects in an atmosphere of play. To enrich our ideas, we will have a scavenger hunt to capture compelling shadows in natural and built environments as digital images. We will share these images and relate them to relevant readings. Finally, we will use the exercises as a seed for developing light & shadow scenes for a storefront bay window.

## *objectives*

- To understand how to manipulate shadow for emotional impact
- To cultivate a group discovery process for design
- To tell a story through visual imagery

## *i. hunt*

Using digital cameras, pairs will seek and record at least 3 of the following phenomena:

- Shadow revealing form
- Shadow patterns
- Sharpness against softness
- Light shapes in shadow
- Changing shadows
- Unexpected shadows



*Nancy Cheng with bicycle*

Identify promising outdoor or indoor locations, alternate being the lead hunter. If you are having trouble finding something of interest, keep moving or create shadow in place. If possible, shoot images at 3megapixels (2048 pixels x 1536). Take multiple images of the same subject, include both recognizable and abstract images. Look at how the framing changes the image's center of interest, emotional tone and memories evoked.

Together with your partner, examine your captures and select 3 for printing. Print images on 8.5" x 11" horizontal sheets at 200 pixels/inch. Be ready to talk about your favorite image.

## *ii. dissect*

Bring back photos and examples from the readings. As a group, share stories and sort photos according to associations.

- Which images tell the most resonant stories?
- What factors contribute to the most successful images?
- Can you diagram the optics causing the visual effects?
- How much does recognition play into our interest?

### *iii. create*

Design a shop display bay window that uses shadows in an evocative way to sell a product of your choice. Develop ideas for the window (12' wide by 9' high by 3' deep) by working in physical model or digital simulation.

Each group will be responsible telling the story EITHER

- a 24" x 36" vertical poster that includes an evocative title, 5 images minimum (including a sequence), and several bullet points of text. OR
- a video documenting the experience of seeing the window.

Begin with a cherished object, a shadow effect OR a piece of music. Consider intrigues you, and think about how the object and its shadow can be characters on a stage. Experiment to create subtle variations and wild inversions to shape your understanding of the optics. Invite your sense of play to allow new possibilities beyond what is known. Have fun with discovery!

### *iv. study*

To develop your design ideas, browse through the readings to see how others have explored light, shadow and perception. Then, research in depth one inspiring artist, designer or group whose work has a kinship to your window. Write about:

- How does the work use light and shadow to engage the viewer? (or shape an interactive experience?)
- How would you define the subject of the work? How does the viewer relate to the work? (i.e. identifiable imagery, typology, symbolism, sensory input)
- How are viewpoint, light source, casting object, and catching surface manipulated in the work? (do you see reflection, refraction, surface texture)
- How can you use the ideas from your inspiration?



*Candlestick by Nick Rich, [www.lightmodulator.org](http://www.lightmodulator.org)*

### *v. share*

**Write** ~800 words (2-3 pages) in an illustrated paper about how your inspiration relates to your project. Include citations.

**Discuss** the ideas in class and in a private conference.

**Present** your show display window poster or video to the class and visitors.

**Document** your project by submitting a revised poster or video along with the inspiration paper.

## *evaluation criteria:*

- **Quality of inquiry** (40%) How thoroughly is the specific visual phenomenon explored?
- **Teamwork** (20%): How well did the project build on contributions from others?
- **Visual composition / craft** (15%) Do the resulting images have aesthetic appeal?
- **Research** (15%): How much does the project reflect an aesthetic and intellectual context?
- **Evocative narrative** (10%): How well does the work evoke memories or tell a story?
- **Completeness:** (multiplier 0 to 1) Did the students complete the scope of work and submit per instructions?

## *references*

- *The Art of Light and Space by Jan Butterfield* N7430.5 .B88 1993
- *Light Art from Artificial Light: Light as medium in 20th and 21st Century Art, Peter Weibel & Gregor Jansen, Editors* N6494.L54 L54 2006
- *Made of Light: The art of light & architecture, NA2794 .M35 2005*
- *In Praise of Shadows by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki* PL839.A7 A25 2001
- *James Carpenter: Environmental Refractions, NA737.C267 M37 2006*

Add your sources to: <http://archgraphics.pbwiki.com/light+and+shadow+resources>

## *schedule* (subject to change)

**DAY 1** Saturday Jan 17 at 9:30-5:30

9:30 –10:15 **introduction**  
10:15 – 11:15 play with light and shadow  
11:15 – 11:45 **introduce scavenger hunt**

[11:45 - 2:30 break for scavenger hunt and lunch]  
[2:30 – 3:00 edit and print]

3:00-4:00 **share photos, develop themes**  
4:00-5:30 start lighting models

**DAY 2** Saturday Jan 24 at 9:30-5:30

9:30-11:00 discuss readings and examples  
11:00-4:00 Collaborative work in 278 LA with input: small group crits  
4:00-5:30 Share work in progress

**DAY 3** Tues Jan 27 @4:00-7:00

**review of student presentations**

[Optional conferences]

**FINAL** Friday Feb 6, 5:30pm (optional potluck)  
Digital Submission of revised work