The Beauty of Shadows
Nancy Yen-wen Cheng
University of Oregon

"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

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 look at some kinds of shadow phenomena. Then we will experiment with making shadow effects in an atmosphere of play. To get more ideas, we will break to have a scavenger hunt to look for compelling shadows in nature and the built environments. Each pair of students will explore and capture digital images. We will share these images and use them as a seed for developing light & shadow scenes for a shopfront bay window.

objectives
— To learn how to manipulate shadow for emotional impact
— To cultivate a group discovery process for design
— To tell the a story through a sequence of images

i. hunt
Using digital cameras, pairs will seek and record at least 3 of the following shadow phenomena:
— Shadow revealing form
— Shadow patterns
— Sharpness against softness
— Light shapes in shadow
— Changing shadows
— Unexpected shadows

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 A4 horizontal sheets at 200 pixels/inch. Be ready to talk about your favorite image.

ii. dissect
Bring back photos. share stories. Sort photos according to associations as a group.
— What factors contribute to the most successful images?
— Which images tell the most resonant stories?
— How much must be recognizable to make an interesting image?
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 (4 m wide by 3 m high by 1 m deep) by working in physical model or digital simulation. Each group will be responsible making a 5 image sequence or video documenting the window and a 5 minute presentation or performance of the design. Final presentation should be A1 horizontal.

To begin, either identify a type of shadow effect to investigate OR start with a piece of music or a product. 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!

evaluation criteria:
- Quality of inquiry (40%) How thoroughly do the students experiment with a specific visual phenomenon?
- Evocative narrative (20%): How well does the work evoke memories or tell a story?
- Teamwork (20%): How well did the project build on contributions from others?
- Visual composition / craft (20%) Do the resulting images have aesthetic appeal?
- Completeness: (multiplier 0 to 1) Did the students complete the scope of work and submit per instructions?


schedule (subject to change)
MONDAY
9:45 introduction
10:15 – 11:00 play with light and shadow
11:15 – 11:30 introduce scavenger hunt

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

3:00-4:30 share photos, develop themes
4:30-6:00 develop lighting models

TUESDAY
Open work day with input: small group crits
approx. 3:00 presentations