Vision in Art and Neuroscience 2020
Recipes for Seeing

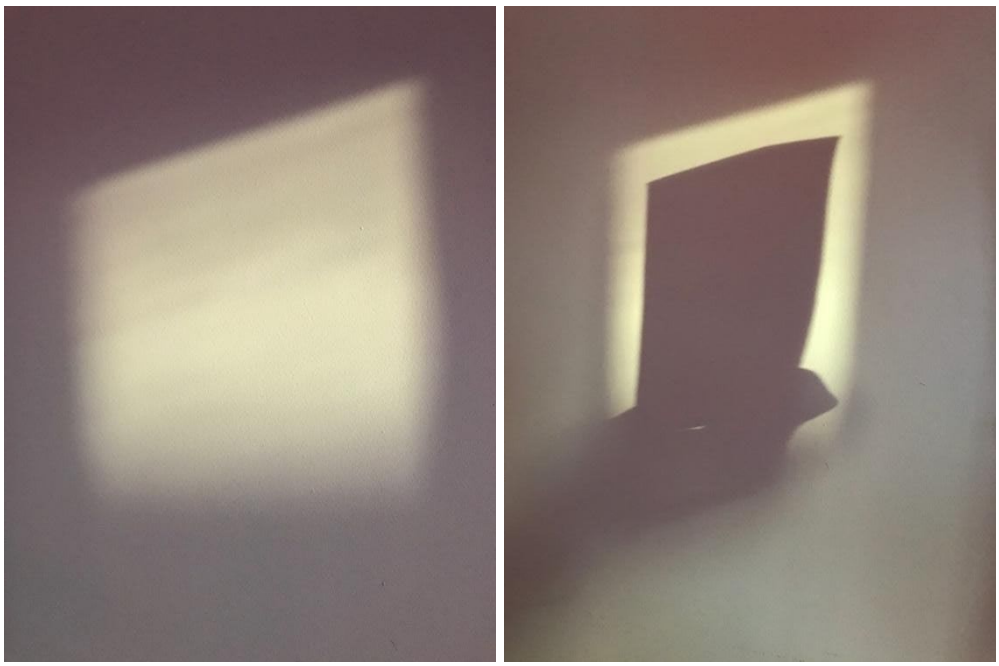
The “recipes” are prompts for learning to see anew. Like those for cooking, the vision recipes reference raw ingredients and goals, but require creative attention and practice to produce delectable results. Following the progression of the course modules, the vision recipes cultivate ability for seeing our own seeing.

Recipe and example execution
Each recipe begins with a title that frames a charge or challenge:

Whole hole
Find or create an edge that is both precipitous and flat

The charge is intentionally inexact, and specifies creation at the level of experience. It prompts visual exploration and focuses visual attention on a certain type of visual ambiguity: the boundary can look like a fall-off or flat depending on how you look at it.

Begin the exploration by looking at surfaces and edges around you and/or experimenting with the flashlight and materials in the vision package. For example, I was greeted by this patch of sunlight on the wall as I wrote.



Give your full attention to what you see. Prompt yourself to notice details and what they mean to your perceptual experience. For example, notice how the edges of the patch of light show different degrees of sharpness, from the clean edge at top, to the light-to-dark gradient at bottom. How do these read to your eye? Does the patch look flat, or 3D, or a combination? How do the varied brightness values across the patch and the edge qualities contribute to this? Play with what

you see. My play-impulse was to hold a book in the path of light on its way to the wall, producing a sharp-edged shadow. I then aligned the shadow-shape with the patch. How does this change the perception of the patch? Does it add a sense of depth or spatial layers? Does it flatten it out?

You could do something similar using materials from the vision package, e.g., by casting light from the flashlight onto white paper on a desk surface. As you hold materials, e.g., paper corner or cutout, in the path of the light, you'll find that controlling the distance relationships (light to desktop and the cutouts in-between) produces a range of shadow edges, fuzzy to clear. In turn, these edges shape our perception, and by manipulating them and observing the perceptual effects, we can hone in on specific perceptual structures and their changes.

Learning approach and objectives

There are no right methods or answers to the recipes. They are about clearing away everyday cues and habits of seeing and becoming conscious of perceptual mechanisms and dynamics. Through them, we'll learn to see how differences in brightness (edges or gradients) shapes, colors, etc. activate perceptual construction scaffolding a world in experience.

The eye of the camera will help you see. Under ordinary conditions, perception is invisible. Taking the monocular view of the camera can flatten the scene, accentuate contrast, etc. helping us to see the "raw data" instead of the unconsciously inferred objects and depth. Look through the camera to see afresh and create for the camera to show others. The camera is the shared eye of the class.

The recipes are intended to involve play, exploration and discovery. They can be interpreted and "cooked" countless ways. Whether you take a walk with your camera, set up a table-top studio for snapshots and video clips, or computer-animate lines and shapes, the choice of approach is up to you, changeable in response to each recipe. Experience rules. Experience is the core learning vehicle. You need to have and know the experience to be able to create it for others; this is the connection of the recipes to art, and the principle goal of the recipe assignments.