

PHOTOGRAPHIC PSYCHOLOGY

JOHN SULER, PH.D.

FORCES THAT SHAPE THE PSYCHE

Photographic Psychology

Forces that Shape the Psyche

A photography exhibition at the Rider University Art Gallery

Harry Narr, Director

Photography by John Suler

True Center Publishing

The contents of this book first appeared online at Rider University in 2013 and later at True Center Publishing. This pdf edition was published at johnsuler.com in 2024. The research findings on the 2012 exhibition Photographic Psychology: Forces that Shape the Psyche were presented in the article "Up close and personal: Photographic displays in a physical space" in the International Journal of Applied Psychoanalysis, 10, 181-187 (2013).



For Anne Law

Photography Displays in the Real World

The Forces that Shape the Psyche

Creating the Exhibition

Image Groupings

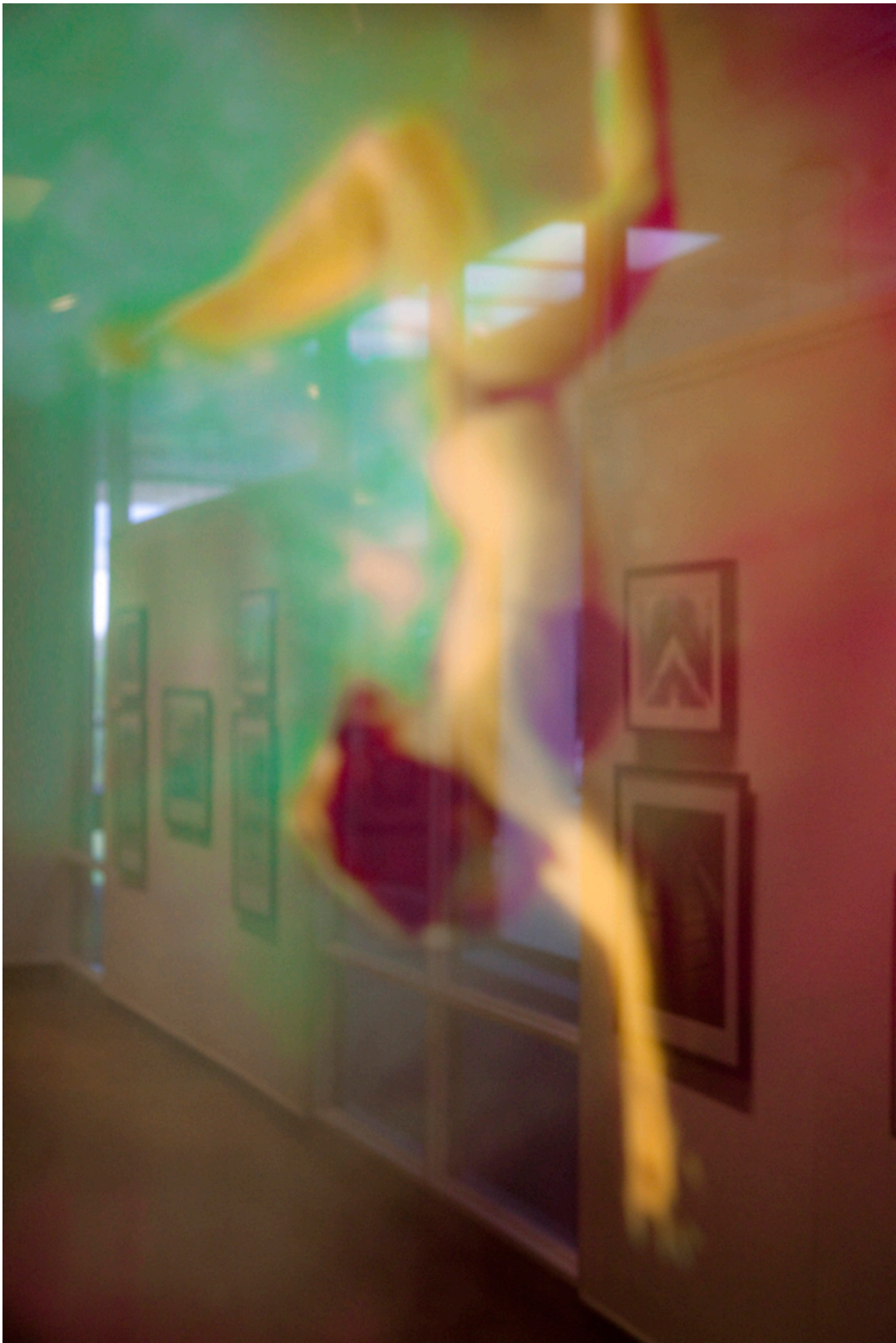
The Opening of the Exhibition

The Group Dynamics Study

Up Close and Personal

References

The Exhibition Catalog



Photography Displays in the Real World

Thanks to digital photography and social networks, more people are taking and sharing their photographs than ever before. Despite the wonderful marvels offered by such technologies, let's not overlook the tradition of displaying photos in the real physical world. After all, again thanks to the digital revolution, printing one's own photos has become easier and more affordable than in the past, including large and high quality prints.

For my research in photographic psychology - which is the study of how people create, share, and react to images in the age of digital photography - I decided to turn my attention back to this tradition by designing an exhibition for the Rider University Art Gallery. It was entitled *Photographic Psychology: Forces that Shape the Psyche*.

The exhibition consisted of 60 images with titles and short descriptions for each one. Each image represented a different force that shapes our sense of self and identity.

The purpose of the exhibition was three-fold:

- to provide an educational event about ideas related to psychology, especially psychoanalytic concepts
- to offer a type of personal growth experience in which people could learn about themselves
- to serve a vehicle for conducting research on the use of in-person displays of images, including the interpersonal dynamics that occur when people view the images in this physical environment.

Because some people question the practicality of photography prints, when sharing images digitally is so easy and widespread, I found this third aspect of the exhibition particularly interesting. What are the advantages of a real-world display?

As a type of conceptual photography, the exhibition included titles as well as short descriptions of the various forces that shape the psyche, which offered a complex interaction of image and text, more so than the type of display that involves only photographs, or photographs with generic titles and descriptions.

Although it is well known in psychology that people interpret images according to their own personality, beliefs, and backgrounds (Zakia, 2007), much less is known about how they react to images when titles and descriptions guide people towards specific realms of meaning about the forces that shape the human psyche, including their own.

Among the various interactive features of the exhibition was one large untitled photo. It was a street photography shot, post-processed to look like an impressionist painting, of a woman and her dog crossing a busy street. Below the photo was a cartoon drawing of an analyst sitting behind his patient, saying within a bubble extending from his head, "Create a title." Using black markers, tacks, and small colored squares of paper from a table below the street scene, people could write out a title and tack it next to the photo.

On another nearby table, people could pick up various colored markers to write or draw on three matted photos, even though there were no specific instructions telling them to do so. However, before the opening night of the exhibition, several of my psychology students had "seeded" the photos with their own writings and drawings, making it apparent to the exhibition visitors that other people had added something of their own to the photos. These kinds of interactive ways of experiencing images can be valuable expressive and insight-inducing activities for people, and in fact are techniques often used in psychodynamic approaches to art therapy and phototherapy (Weiser, 1993).

The Forces that Shape the Psyche

Addiction	Need for
Adversity	Achievement
Altered States	Oceanic Experiences
Ancestors	Paranoia
Art	Persona
Childhood	Play
Childhood Trauma	Polarities
Collective Unconscious	Positive Thinking
Communication	Intelligence
Death	Relaxation
Deindividuation	Remembrance
Destiny	Rhythms
Dissociation	Romance
Emotions	Secrets
Empathy	Self Actualization
Environments	Self Consciousness
Evolution	Self Multiplicity
Exploration	Self Objects
Family	Separation
Gender	Simplicity
Group Dynamics	Social Media
Home	Spaces
Hope	The Unconscious
Humor	The Unexpected
Id, Ego, Superego	Touch
Images	Transitions
Immersion	Travel
Intimacy	Unknowing
Life Stages	Unconditional Love
Mind/Body	Wonder

Clicking on a photo will take you to a page showing how it was placed in a grouping



ADDICTION

When people become addicted to a substance, behavior, or idea, it thwarts the development of their identity.



ADVERSITY

We are defined by how we handle the challenges of life.



ALTERED STATES

Whether induced by substances, meditative practices, or physical activities, humans have an intrinsic need to alter their consciousness, to perceive themselves, others, and reality in new ways

(Photo by Asia Suler; post-processing by John Suler)



ANCESTORS

The genetics and experiences of our ancestors affect who we are in both subtle and obvious ways.



ART

Whether young or old, talented or not, we reveal and find ourselves through art.

CHILDHOOD

The basic building blocks of identity form during our early years.



CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

The grave residual effects of childhood trauma can sometimes last a lifetime.



COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

On some deep level of the mind, humans from all cultures and eras think and feel alike.



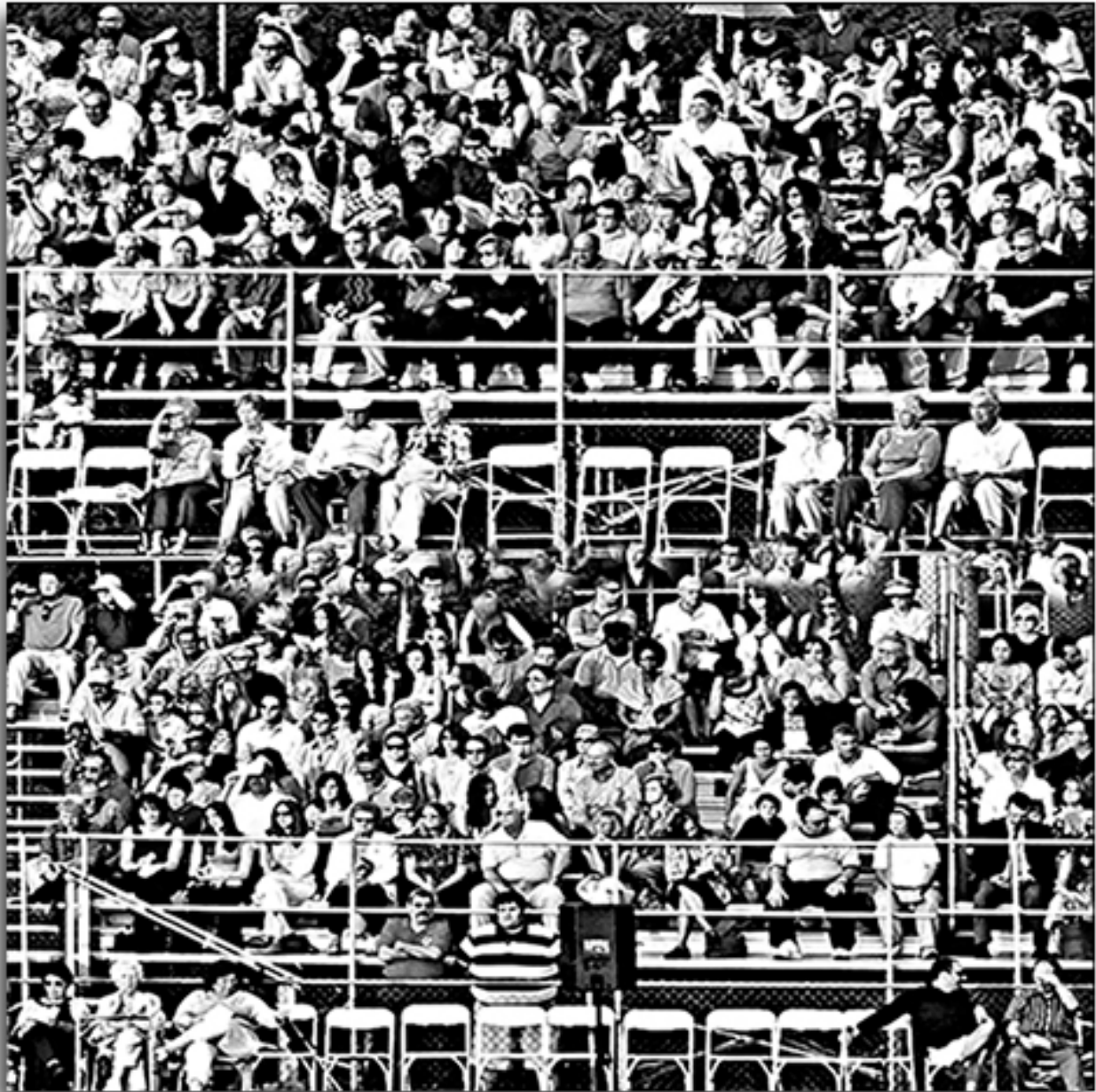
COMMUNICATION

How well do we express ourselves and listen to others in this modern technological age?



DEATH

Our attitudes about death reflect how we live and who we are.



DEINDIVIDUATION

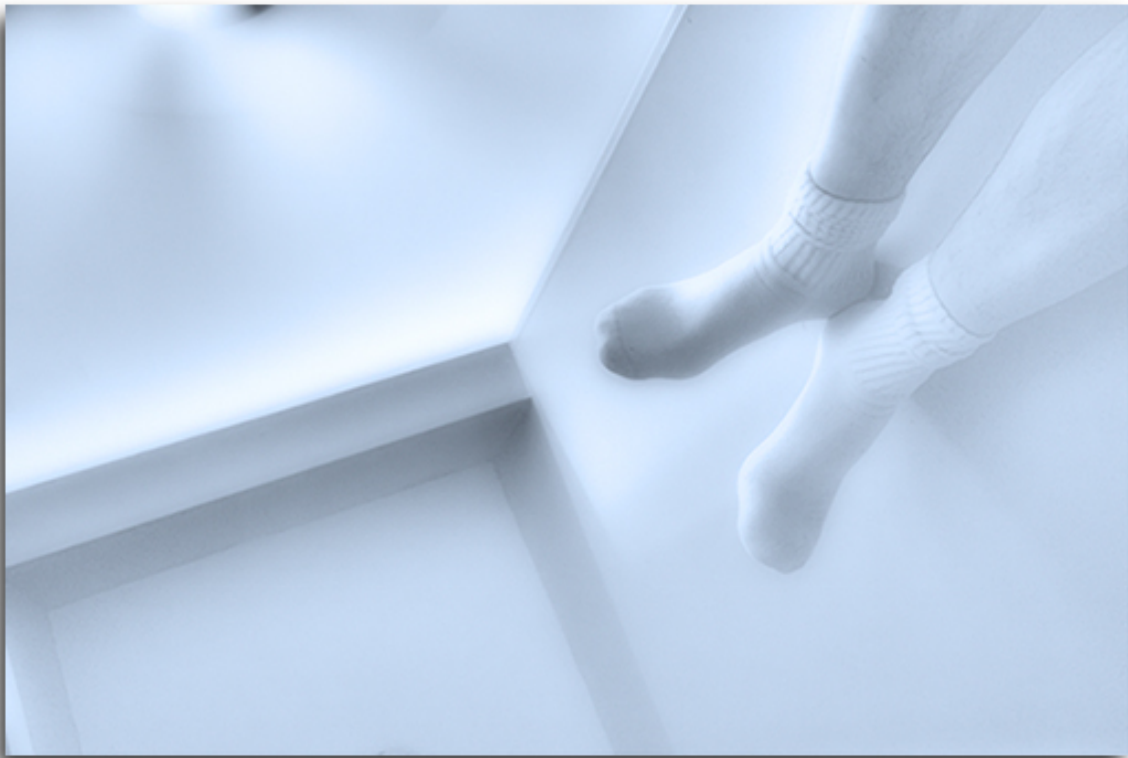
What happens when you lose yourself in the crowd?



DESTINY

The belief in free will or fate dictates how we shape our lives

(Photo by Asia Suler;
post-processing by John Suler)



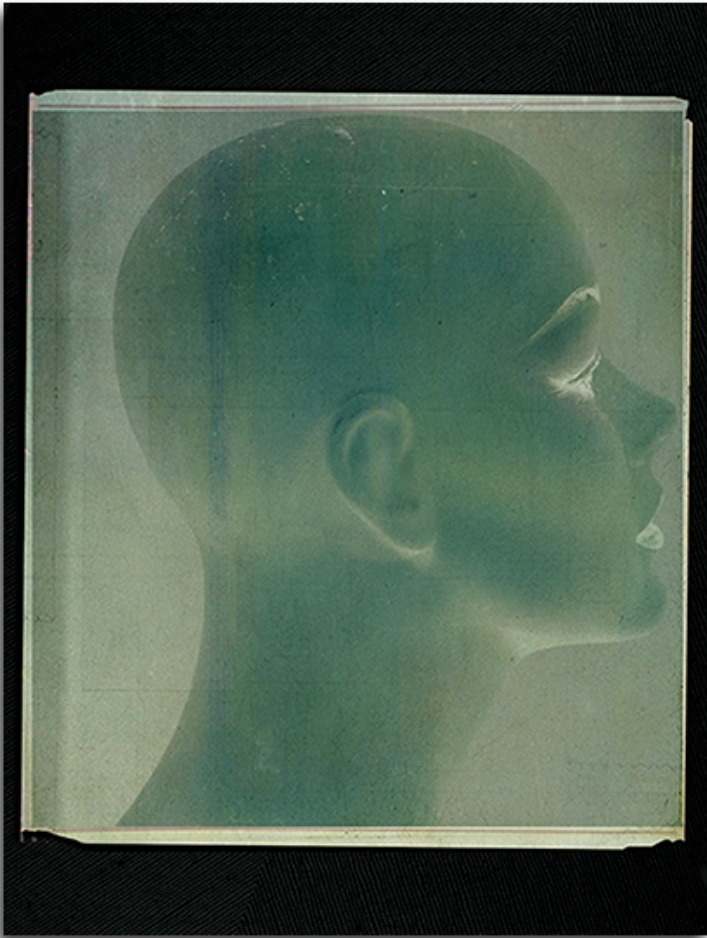
DISSOCIATION

During severe stress, drug use, and hypnotic states of consciousness, we might feel disconnected from ourselves, our bodies, and from reality itself.



EMOTIONS

Although there are several basic emotions – anger, disgust, fear, shame, joy, sadness, surprise –the variations on them are endless.



EMPATHY

The ability to sense what other people are thinking and feeling serves as the root of compassion.

ENVIRONMENTS

Based on what we need, we try to shape our natural and human-made environments. The environment in turn shapes us, often in hidden and unpredictable ways.





EVOLUTION

Over millions of years the human psyche has changed in many ways, but in other ways it remains the same.

EXPLORATION

The deeper we go into new realms of ideas and experiences, the deeper we go into ourselves.





FAMILY

Whether it's our family of origin or the family we create, the relationships with our relatives sets the stage for how we think and feel about all our relationships.



GENDER

Our changing concepts about gender reflect the evolution of how we can define ourselves.



GROUP DYNAMICS

We express different facets of ourselves in the different groups to which we belong. Those groups in turn shape how we think, feel, and behave.



HOME

There's no place like it. It created and grounds our sense of self. We take it with us wherever we go.

HOPE

Our optimistic expectations for the future pull our identities forward.



HUMOR

We need it for our mental health, even under dire circumstances.





ID, EGO, AND SUPEREGO

Freud believed that the psyche consists of three parts:
the primitive impulses of the id,
the social moralities embedded in the superego,
and the ego that tries to mediate between the other two.



IMAGES

Photos, movies, and visuals of all types,
whether our own or created by others,
show us who we were, are, and can be.



IMMERSION

When we delve into media of any type,
we forget our usual reality and sense of self
in order to explore other realities and other selves.



INTIMACY

Sharing your reality with someone bridges the boundary between self and other.



LIFE STAGES

We pass through distinct stages in life, each one challenging us with new questions about who we are, who we are becoming.



MIND / BODY

Are they separate aspects of who we are, or two sides of the same coin?



NEED FOR ACHIEVEMENT

What we strive to become, and how we do it, forges how we define ourselves.



OCEANIC EXPERIENCES

In what has also been called the mystical Grand Canyon Effect, we experience ourselves as a small part of the vast grandeur of nature and the cosmos.



PARANOIA

At times we feel we have to hide, set up barriers, protect ourselves from a real or imaginary fear of things that threaten to destroy who we are.



PERSONA

We use our social masks to express how we want to be seen, and also to hide the sensitive parts of ourselves.



PLAY

As both children and adults,
we experiment with our identities
through play.



POLARITIES

Polarities of opposite feelings,
needs, and personality traits
operate within our psyche.
When healthy our polarities
are expressed and balanced.



POSITIVE THINKING

Can you remain optimistic even when things in life go wrong?
Positive thinking promotes mental health and a long life.



RATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Understanding emotions is as important as rationality and logic



RELAXATION

Never underestimate the power of simply relaxing as a way to restore ourselves.



REMEMBRANCE

What do and don't you remember about your past?
Is it true that those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it?



RHYTHMS

Across the hours, days, and years, our
moods, thoughts and behaviors follow patterns.



ROMANCE

The love relationship is one of the most powerful experiences that shapes our understanding of intimacy, support, and trust.



SELF CONSCIOUSNESS

What do others think of you?
 What do you think others think of you?
 What do you think of you?

SELF MULTIPLICITY

Is there any
 one self that
 is you,
 or are there
 multiple “you’s?”
 How can you
 become aware of
 and capture who
 you truly are?



SELF OBJECT

Whether they are material things, pets, or people, we need “objects” to express who we are, help keep our identity intact, and soothe us.

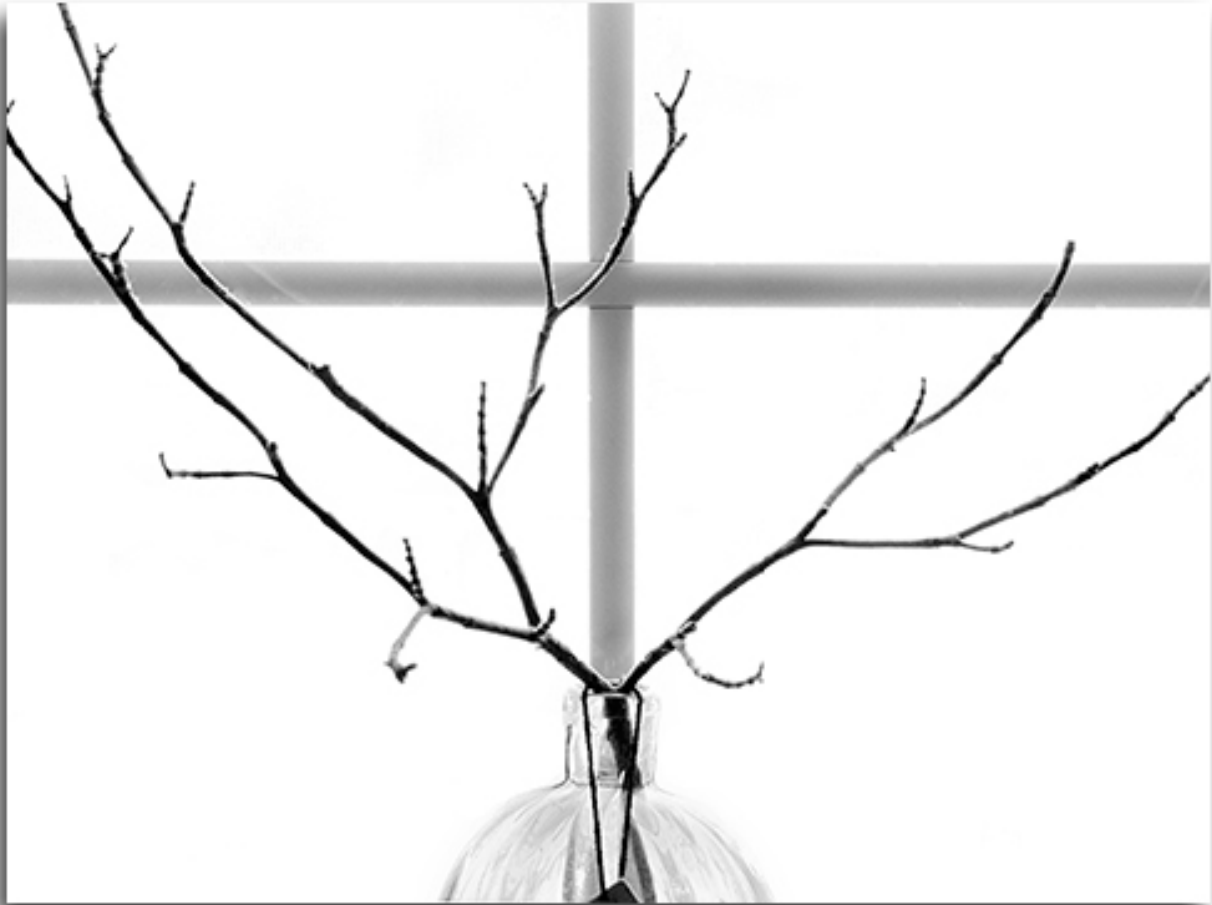


SEPARATION

We need our attachments to others to support our sense of self.

We also need to be autonomous.

What happens when we are separated from our loved ones, or from people in general?



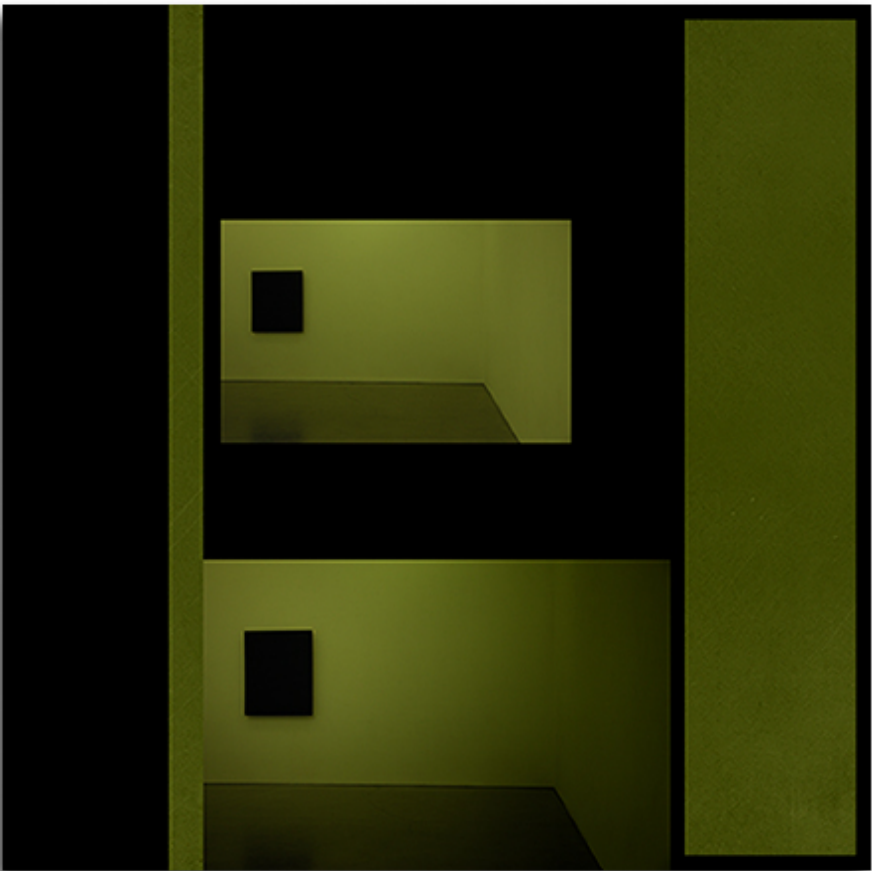
SIMPLICITY

Can simplicity bring you closer to an understanding of your true nature?



SOCIAL MEDIA

When online we multitask our relationships and activities, including our identities that we convey through them.



SPACES

Both internally and externally, we need spaces to fill and empty.



THE UNCONSCIOUS

Forgotten
memories,
thoughts,
feelings,
express themselves
in unanticipated ways



THE UNEXPECTED

How do we change
from the surprises
that life brings us.

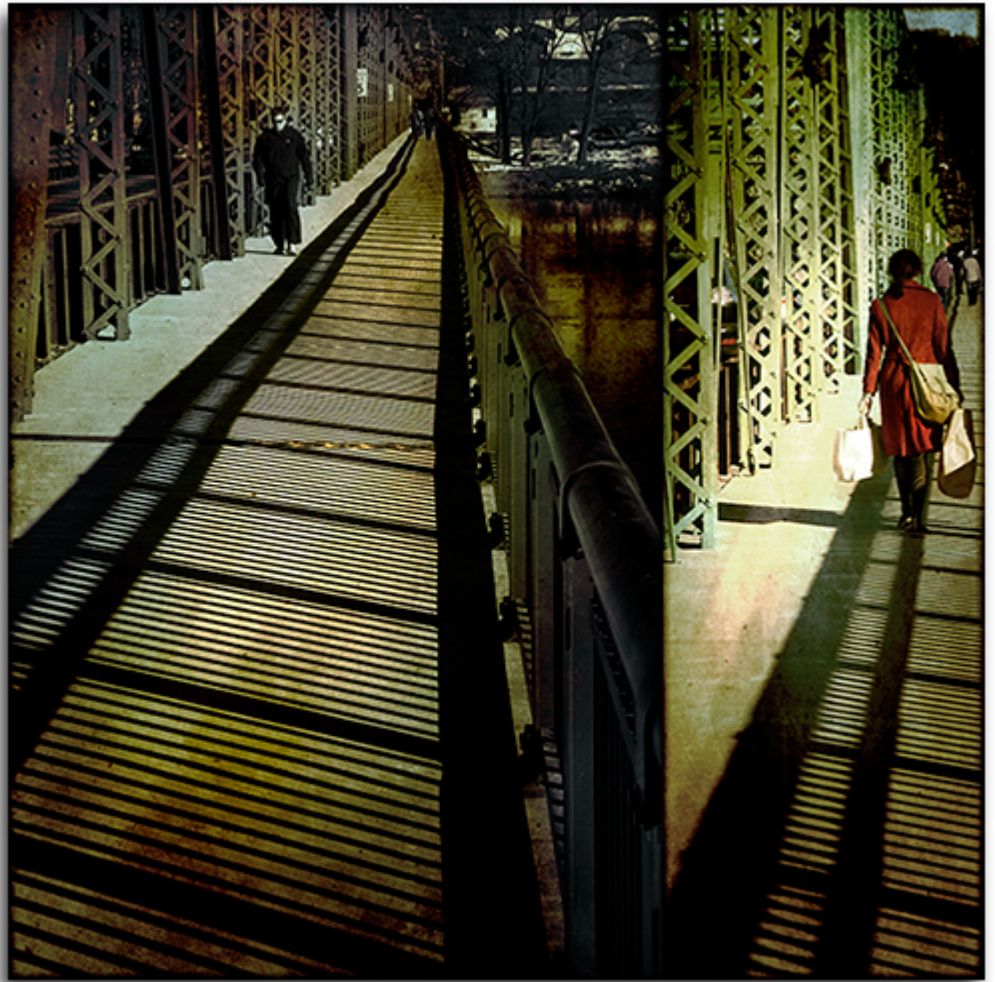


TOUCH

We are tactile beings who need physical contact with others in order to thrive.

TRANSITIONS

We change,
the world changes,
whether we like it or not.



TRAVEL

Exploring different
cultures and peoples
prevents psychological
stagnation by enriching
our awareness of the
world and our place
within it.





UNKNOWNING

We all have our cherished beliefs, but sometimes the highest form of knowing is to un-learn.



UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

It's necessary, especially from caretakers, for our healthy development.



WONDER

“Wisdom begins in wonder” - Socrates



THE UNTITLED IMAGE

sheppard's view
a day just like any other day
techno blind
pastoral nostalgia
urban herders
warm perceptions
days go by
walk with me!
burned spy in blue
sit, ubu, sit
woman's best friend
the walk
infinity rogue dog walk
hustle and bustle
a well-trained composition
city living
the dog walker
leading the way
muddy city
5625N
lost
my own way
dog daze
crossroads
red light green light
city life
a day in the city
intersect
trust
STOP infinity
be free
why did the dog cross the road?
Post - I am Legend
woof
watch the car
Quade the watch dog
a pause in city action
don't watch out for cross roads
blind_aware_prepared
texting unaware lost

don't step on the crack
tackle winter
red lights
when time stops
Shelby
haze
dog day afternoon
city shepherd
shepard's crossing
a man's best friend
can you say New York? Or
what?
just another walk in the park
strolling in the city
just an ordinary day
dance in the city
living just enough
same old city
sandy city
can you say?
small dog, big city
Selby Av
best friends
crosswalk
the ransomote
crossing
red light
focus
attention to surroundings
untitled
the passage
city living
don't tell my secrets
down to town
dog's day
grainy day
city without consequence
stop light stop life
wandering Selby Ave.
a dog's life

Creating the Exhibition

Given the very “stop and go” nature of online living, especially when viewing pictures, many people do not devote much attention to the overarching concept, organization, integration, and flow among a group of images. Displays, and therefore the experience of them, tend to be somewhat random.

However, these aspects of a photo presentation can have a powerful effect on the unconscious impact of the entire display as well as the individual images. So too there is a tendency towards overlooking the importance of how text and image interact with each other – an interaction that reflects the interplay between the conscious and unconscious (Suler, 2013a, 2013b).

I wanted the exhibition to convey the feeling of an “intrapsychic world.” When a person entered the gallery, they would be delving into the human mind with all of its many sectors, layers, and complexities.

The photos varied in size from large 40x60 gator board mounted prints to smaller prints in simple black or chrome frames, with this variety in sizes suggesting that some forces shaping the psyche are powerful or conscious, while others are more subtle or unconscious.

A variety of visual styles for the photos contributed to the expression of the concepts depicted in them: very colorful, subdued in colors, monotone, black-and-white, composites, diptychs, realistic, and surreal, with an emphasis towards imaginative images as a way to activate the fantasy-driven thinking of unconscious primary process (Holt, 2008).

One prominent feature in several images was my use of “clones,” which entailed several versions of myself interacting with each other, as in “Id, Ego, and Superego.” In general, the use of clones in images points to the topographic layering, dissociation, and multiplicities of self and identity (Suler, 2013c).

Some artists prefer to decide themselves how to hang their show. Following the intended interactive spirit of my exhibition, I instead welcomed a group effort that including myself, the art gallery director Harry Naar, three design consultants, and several students from the psychology and fine arts departments.

A group endeavor helped insure that the display of images reflected a more collective and diverse set of conscious and unconscious influences rather than the motivations of any one or two people. We talked about various strategies and made deliberate decisions, but I also encouraged people to allow some aspects of hanging the photos to evolve organically from intuition. This process led to some interesting results.

One always pays attention to what photos fit well into what parts of the room, given the qualities of that physical area and of the images – e.g., we placed the largest images on the largest wall, which became the center stage of the intrapsychic world.

However, the photos that were the last to be hung, which perhaps not surprisingly were all somewhat strange and disturbing images, ended up in the smallest, most difficult to access corner of the gallery. I thought of that area as an effective symbolic expression of potentially anxiety-provoking and repressed unconscious ideation. One of my students simply referred to it as “creep corner.”







Image Groupings

Some strategies for hanging a display of photographs are considered best practice. The works should be placed at eye level, which is approximately 60 inches from the floor to the center of the image, as well as positioned in a linear flow so that viewers can move easily from one photo to another.

However, breaking such conventions can be an effective way of activating unconscious physical sensations that enhance the meaning of the image. As shown in the grouping of images that depict clones (duplicates of me), “The Unconscious” appears at the bottom of the group, forcing viewers to symbolically look down, while “Need for Achievement” appeared at the top of a set of three.

Rather than arranged in a strictly linear fashion, many photos were instead hung, based on their compatibility in colors and visual design, as clusters in order to represent the conscious and unconscious constellations of mental associations that comprise the intrapsychic world.

Although groupings could have been based on conceptual similarities concerning the forces shaping the psyche as represented in those photos, we felt that clusters based on visual style would have a more immediate, sensory, and possibly unconscious impact on viewers.

Hanging the photos in clusters also encouraged us to “activate negative space” – i.e., to delineate the spaces between clusters as a depiction of things unseen and supposedly absent, which is yet another possible symbol of the unconscious.

Clicking on an photo in a grouping will take you to a page that features that image



Photographic Psychology Self Actualization Deindividuation Intimacy Collective Unconscious Wonder



Emotions

Addiction

Mind / Body



Exploration

Empathy

Social Media

Spaces



Home

Unknowing

Need for Achievement

Immersion

Images

Transitions



Humor

Separation

Oceanic Experiences

Death

Environment



Childhood

Rational and Emotional Intelligence

Travel

Destiny



Self Consciousness



Paranoia



Persona



Evolution



Gender



Remembrance

The Unexpected

Touch

Hope

Group Dynamics

Unconditional Love



Communication
Childhood Trauma
Positive Thinking

Id, Ego, Superego
Self Multiplicity
The Unconscious



Drawing by Alex Johnson and Kira Suler



Self Objects

Life Stages

Rhythms

Polarities

Art



Dissociation



Family



Relaxation



Simplicity



Adversity



Self Objects

Life Stages

Rhythms

Polarities

Art

Dissociation

Family

Relaxation

Simplicity

Adversity



Ancestors

Secrets

Altered States

Play

Romance

The Opening of the Exhibition

At the opening night of the exhibition, everyone - including the research subjects - received a pamphlet containing the titles and descriptions for all the images, as well as a summary of purpose of the exhibit, with the most basic assumption being that everyone has their own unique reaction to the images, despite my titles and descriptions:

“You might see things differently. You might see some of these images as saying something else about the factors that determine your sense of self. There is no right or wrong interpretation. Accepting that we all perceive an image differently is recognizing the fact that we’re all unique people with different personalities, interests, and backgrounds. This is the essence of photographic psychology.”

This pamphlet indicated that anyone attending the opening of the exhibition was welcome to formally participate in the research project that was taking place that night, although most research subjects were students from psychology classes who volunteered for the study (over 200). The subjects received the same pamphlet as other attenders, as well as another instruction sheet for participating in the research. The instruction sheet informed them to first walk through the whole exhibition to look at all the images, then return to one image that they found particularly interesting or meaningful. For that image, they wrote out their replies to a questionnaire containing the following set of items that I developed for previous research projects:

- What thoughts and feelings immediately come to your mind?
- Describe to yourself or someone else exactly what you see.
- Does this image remind you of anything in your life?
- If you could go into this picture, what would you think, feel, and do?
- What would you change about the image?
- What message might this picture be giving you?
- If you gave a title to this image, to capture what it means to you, what would it be?
- How did being at this exhibition affect you and your reactions to the images.

The pamphlet for everyone at the exhibition also encouraged people to think about these questions. Everyone was encouraged to share with other people their personal reactions to the photographs, the titles people created for the large untitled image, the drawings people added to the matted photos, and the exhibition in general.

PHOTOGRAPHIC PSYCHOLOGY: FORCES THAT SHAPE THE PSYCHE

EXHIBITION AT THE RIDER UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, SEPTEMBER 2012

JOHN SULER, PHD

Photographic Psychology is the study of how people create, share, and react to images that portray ideas about human psychology. In this exhibition, I apply this research to one of our most fundamental and complex questions:

WHAT FORCES, BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF
YOU, SHAPE YOUR SENSE OF IDENTITY AND SELF?

TALK TO THE RESEARCH SUBJECTS AROUND YOU

During this opening of the exhibition, my research is occurring around you. Volunteer students attending the exhibition are recording their personal reactions to the questions described above, including how being at the exhibition itself affects their reactions to the images. Feel free to talk to them.

Share your experiences. As part of the research, they were encouraged to interact with other people attending the exhibition.

You can volunteer to be a subject in this research, if you're interested. Talk to one of the research assistants.

CREATE TITLES FOR AN IMAGE

On one of the walls in the gallery is a large untitled image. Examine the ones that interest you. Ask yourself the questions listed above. If you wish, create a title for the photo on the papers provided and attach it next to the photo. How do the other titles compare to yours?

The photographs in this exhibition portray a variety of these forces. For each one, I created a title along with a short description. I also used a variety of visual styles for the images that, for me, capture the meaning of these forces that shape the psyche.

You might see things differently. You might see some of these images as saying something else about the factors that determine your sense of self. There is no right or wrong interpretation. Accepting that we all perceive an image differently is recognizing the fact that we're all unique people with different personalities, interests, and backgrounds. This is the essence of photographic psychology

THE CONCEPTS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PSYCHOLOGY

On the front desk you'll also find iPads displaying my digital book *Photographic Psychology: Image and Psyche*. Feel free to browse the book. The research assistants will be happy to help and discuss the book with you.

TO EXPLORE YOUR OWN REACTIONS TO THE IMAGES, ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What thoughts and feelings immediately come to your mind?
2. Describe to yourself or someone else exactly what you see.
3. Does this image remind you of anything in your life?
4. If you could go into this picture, what would you think, feel, and do?
5. What would you change about the image?
6. What message might this picture be giving you?
7. If you gave a title to this image, to capture what it means to you, what would it be?
8. How did being at this exhibition affect you and your reactions to the images.

ADDICTION

When people become addicted to a substance, behavior, or idea, it thwarts the development of their identity.

ADVERSITY

We are defined by how we handle the challenges of life.

ALTERED STATES

Whether induced by substances, meditative practices, or physical activities, humans have an intrinsic need to alter their consciousness - to perceive themselves, others, and reality in new ways
(Photo by Asia Suler; post-processing by John Suler)

ANCESTORS

The genetics and experiences of our ancestors affect who we are in both subtle and obvious ways.

ART

Whether young or old, talented or not, we reveal and find ourselves through art.

CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

The grave residual effects of childhood trauma can sometimes last a lifetime.

COMMUNICATION

How well do we express ourselves as well as listen to others in this modern technological age?
(Photo by Kira Suler; post-processing by John Suler)

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

We pass through distinct stages in our lives, each one challenging us with new questions about who we are and who we are becoming.

COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

On some deep level of the mind, humans from all cultures and eras think and feel alike.

DEATH

Our attitudes about death reflect how we live and who we are.

DEINDIVIDUATION

What happens when you lose yourself in the crowd?

DESTINY

The belief in free will or fate dictates how we shape our lives.
(Photo by Asia Suler; post-processing by John Suler)

DISSOCIATION

During severe stress, drug use, and hypnotic states of consciousness, we might feel disconnected from ourselves, our bodies, and from reality itself.

EMOTIONS

Although there are several basic emotions – such as anger, disgust, fear, shame, joy, sadness, surprise – the variations on them are endless.

EMPATHY

The ability to sense what other people are thinking and feeling serves as the root of compassion.

ENVIRONMENT

Based on what we need, we try to shape our natural and human-made environment. The environment in turn shapes us, sometimes in hidden and unpredictable ways.

EXPLORATION

The deeper we go into new realms of ideas and experiences, the deeper we go into ourselves.

FAMILY

Whether it's our family of origin or the family we create, the relationship with our relatives sets the stage for how we think and feel about all our relationships, and about ourselves.

GROUP DYNAMICS

We express different facets of ourselves in the different groups to which we belong. Those groups in turn shape how we think, feel, and behave.

HOME

There's no place like it. It created and grounds our sense of self. We take it with us wherever we go.

HOPE

Our optimistic expectations for the future pull our identities forward.

ID, EGO, AND SUPEREGO

Freud believed that the psyche consists of three parts: the primitive impulses of the id, the social moralities embedded in the superego, and the ego that tries to mediate between the other two.

IMAGES

Photos and movies, whether our own or by others, show us who we were, are, and can be.

INTIMACY

Sharing your reality with someone else allows two to become one.

IMMERSION

When we delve into media of any type, we temporarily forget our usual reality and sense of self in order to explore other realities and other selves.

MIND/BODY

Are they separate aspects of our psyche, or two sides of the same coin?

NEED FOR ACHIEVEMENT

What we strive to become, and how hard we do it, forges our psyche.

OCEANIC EXPERIENCES

In what some also call the mystical "Grand Canyon Effect," we experience ourselves as a small part of the vast grandeur of nature and the cosmos.

PARANOIA

Sometimes we feel we have to hide, set up barriers, protect ourselves from real and imaginary fear – a fear of things that threaten to destroy who we are.

PERSONA

We use our social masks to express how we want to be seen, and also to hide the sensitive parts of ourselves.

PLAY

As both children and adults, we experiment with our identity through play.

POLARITIES

Some theories state that polarities of opposite feelings, needs, and personality traits operate within our psyche. In a healthy person, the polarities are expressed and balanced.

POSITIVE THINKING

Can you remain optimistic even when things in life go wrong? Research suggests that positive thinking leads to mental health and a long life.

RATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

To understand emotions is as important as rationality and logic.

RELAXATION

"Never underestimate the power of simply relaxing" - Edward Katkin

REMEMBRANCE

What do and don't you remember about your past? Is it true that those who not remember the past are doomed to repeat it?

ROMANCE

The love relationship is one of the most powerful experiences that shapes our understanding of intimacy, support, and vulnerability.

SECRETS

What we hide, reveals.
(Photo by Debra Finnegan-Suler; post-processing by John Suler)

SELF ACTUALIZATION

To become everything we are capable of becoming is one of our highest needs.

SELF MULTIPLICITY

Is there any one self that is you, or are there multiple "you's?" How can you become aware of and capture who you truly are?

SELF-OBJECTS

Whether they are material things, pets, or people, we need "objects" to express who we are, help keep our identity intact, and soothe us.

SEPARATION

We need our attachments to others to support our sense of self, and yet we also need to be autonomous. What happens when we are separated from our loved ones, or from people in general?

SIMPLICITY

Can simplicity bring you closer to an understanding of your true nature?

SOCIAL MEDIA

When online we multitask our relationships and activities, including our identities we convey through them.

SPACES

Both internally and externally, we need spaces to fill and empty.

THE UNCONSCIOUS

Beneath our conscious mind dwells a world of forgotten memories, thoughts, and feelings that sometimes expresses itself in unexpected ways.

TOUCH

We are tactile beings who need physical contact with others in order to thrive.

TRANSITIONS

We change, the world changes, whether we like it or not.

TRAVEL

Exploring different cultures and peoples prevents psychological stagnation by enriching your awareness of the world and your place within it.

UN-KNOWING

We all have our cherished beliefs, but sometimes the highest form of knowing is to un-learn.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

It's necessary, especially from parents, for our healthy development.

WONDER

"Wisdom begins in wonder." – Socrates



Photos by William Hock











REVOLUTION
of the
NEW GENERATION~

"DON'T GO INTO THE LIGHT!"

Lost in the Crowd
-V.P

Going towards the light,
and you are not alone!

"Hexans
opening"

LOSS OF
identity

Confused
yet
amused

Fear.

Look into
the light
disappearing
act

Trans

Look
over
HERE

Followers

Walk

LOST IN
THE
CROWD

CROWD

Haze

So Who's
Talking?

Unity

Surrounded

Random

The
Crowd

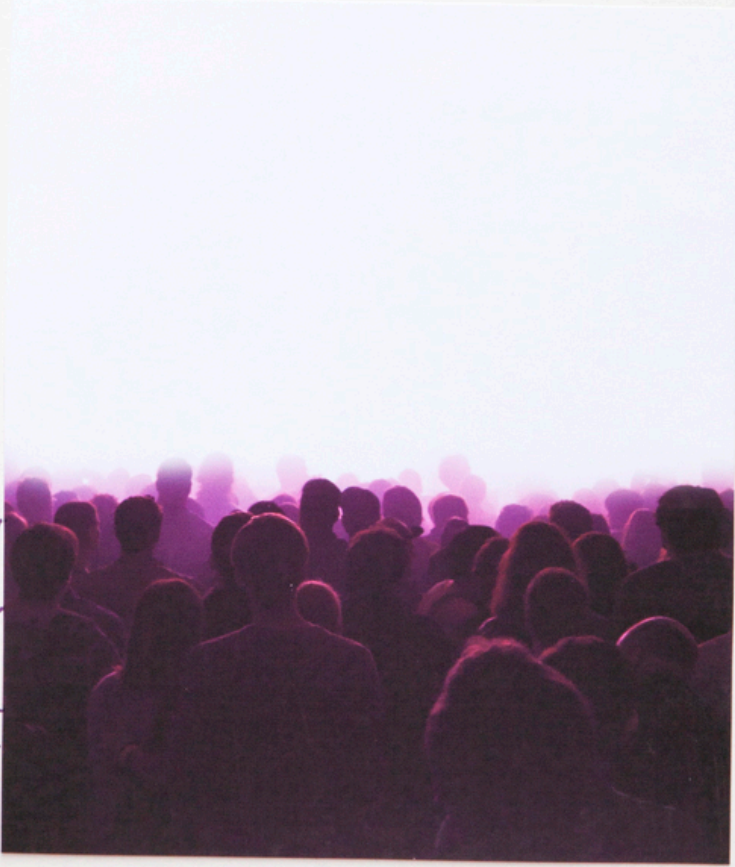
Fading Away

performance

ZOMBIE
NATION

Atomic
Media Bomb

"express
yourself"

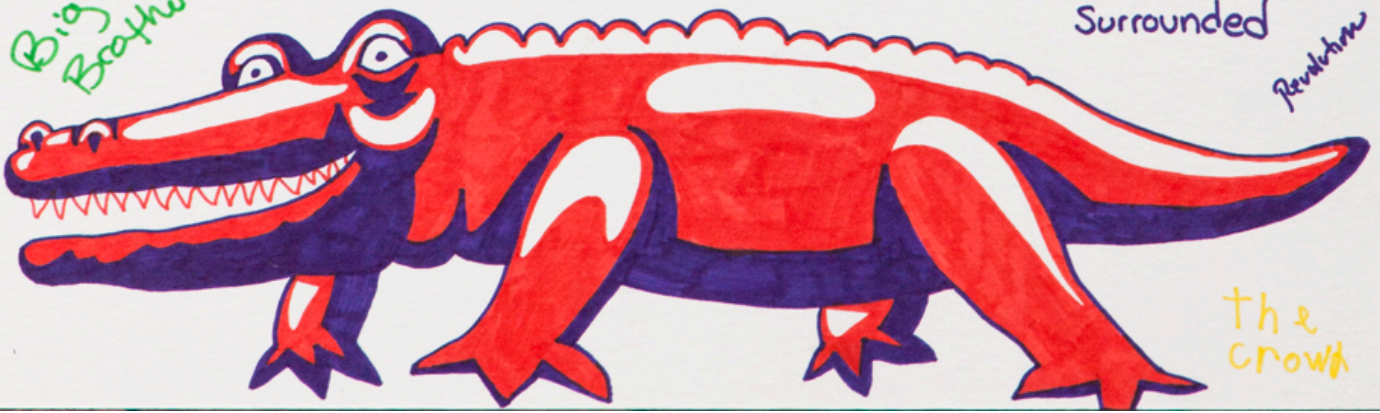


Lemmings

Lost in the Crowd

Find A Rod

Big
Brother





Desire
Had Enough

Have over!!



SLEEP

Not Again

Young A-typical
ROM-COM breakup

~~Princess~~ bababab

red & white

Lazy
Sunday

Dis
comfy

Fogged
Reminds me
of my depression...

Black, White & Red all over

snuggling

lazy

More than
needed



Is it taboo to mark the image?

alone
time

This is your
brain on drugs....

HUNG
OVER

"Pillow
Talk"

Eaten by
a couch, oh no!

"Leave me alone"

Go Away
World

Alone
-V.P

"Me" Time

tired

Peace

Struggle
within

Drained

MONTHLY
VISITOR

Escape

PAIN after LOSS

Jim Morrison's
REMAINS

Bringing
Back
Panygea

Something deeply lost,
Can never be found.
- V.P

L'idor v'idor

Alone time



Searching
Lost

Soul
searching



Time to be...

Portal

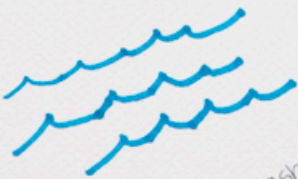
Ship
wrecked

the Big fish

PORTAL



Fishing



washed
ashore

Redecorator's
Lucky day

A secret
passage

the Dark I knew

Just Ring
... need it
back

Lost...

Him
well

Dredging
up The Past

Alone

Tomorrow's
Journey

The River
Story

WHEN UP IS DOWN

The fear of Home
-V.P

serenity

vivid
memories

the view from
within
is special in its
own way

Twittepatted

The Flood

Cold



Deferred Vision

Lakehouse

A tree's Photobomb

So close
yet
so far

A Fall day

Firelight

Unblindness

Life of a transcendentalist
Submerged

Home Sick for a home that
doesn't exist...
E.T

Winter breeze.

Autumn
day



The Group Dynamics Study

Two weeks after the opening, I conducted the second part of my research project by inviting to the art gallery the 20 students from my Group Dynamics class, which is an experiential course that emphasizes the development of insights into one's own personality as well as into the interpersonal relationships within the class. We were the only ones in the gallery on that day. I instructed the students to:

- Examine all of the photos, then select one in which both the image and its title captured something important about a force that has shaped their psyche. They were encouraged to think and write about how that particular image fits them both visually by how the image was designed, as well as in its concept about a force that has influenced their sense of self
- Select and write about another image and its title that they believed described something important about one of their peers in the class
- Observe and write about the group dynamics during this exercise – i.e., about the behaviors of individual people, subgroups of people, and the class as a whole.

As unobtrusively as possible, I took photos of them (without flash) for a visual record of what happened.

As revealed in the responses of the subjects to the questionnaire on the opening night, there was a wide range of emotions, memories, wishes, needs, and fantasies activated by the photos. The students often made such comments as, "The pictures evoked emotions that I wasn't expecting," "They allowed me to look inside myself more," "I discovered feelings I had forgotten," and "I thought a lot about my life."

These results confirm what phototherapists and researchers have long known about the power of visual images to stimulate personal insight. The students also frequently commented on how the exhibit helped them to be more aware, to stop and focus, to become emotionally connected to the photos, to think more, and to look past the concrete image towards its deeper psychological meanings. Even though my titles and descriptions for the photos helped activate such experiences, students also felt free to interpret the images in their own way. As one student said, "The exhibit made me feel as if my opinion is important."

Such reactions could very well occur online when viewing photos, either by oneself or in photo-sharing communities in which images are discussed among people. However, several students offered comments indicating the impact of the exhibit as a physical social space. "I really felt connected to those pictures," one student said, "much more so than being in front of a computer." The educational and personal atmosphere that I encouraged in the exhibition also might have played an important role in how people reacted to the photos. As one student remarked, "I thought more deeply than if I was somewhere else."

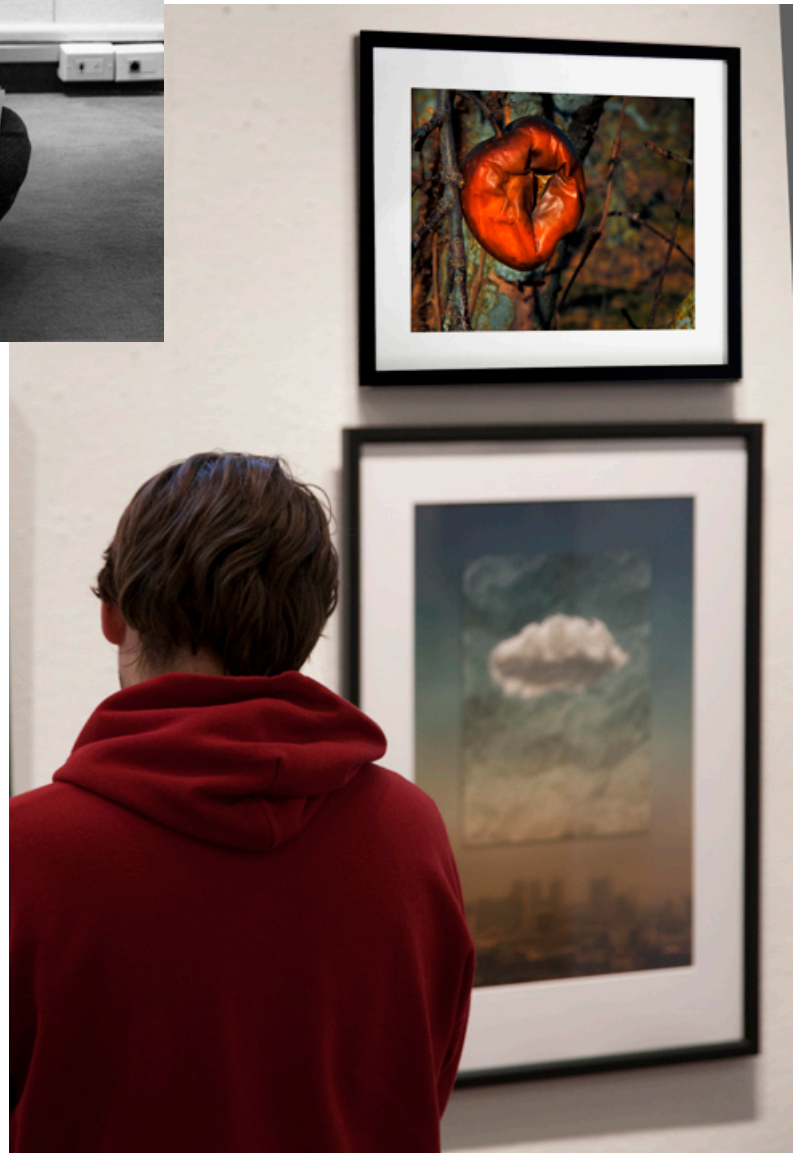
Given the long history of psychoanalytic theory that emphasizes the connection between the psyche and the physical self (Perrin, 2010; Muller, 2007), I find myself wondering how viewing images in a physical space - where we move about freely, thereby mobilizing our own bodily expressions as well as witnessing and interacting with the body language of others - might have a significant conscious and unconscious influence on the personal experience of those images. We might even speculate on how the personal or “transitional” space created by one person’s subjective immersion into the viewing of an image in a physical environment interacts in subtle ways with the personal or transitional space of other people in that environment (Winnicott, 1971).

The students from my group dynamics class, who visited the art gallery several weeks after the opening night, offered additional feedback that confirmed the personal as well as educational effects of the images. Having been trained in methods for observing interpersonal behavior, they also had specific comments about the physical aspects of their experience in the gallery. They noticed the formation and dissolving of subgroups around particular photos, how some people were “loners” while others socialized, differences in the body language of their peers, changes in levels of conversation and emotional expression, and variations in how quickly people chose a particular photo to examine and how immersed into it they seemed.

I was also curious to discover that the images students picked as a representation of themselves often revolved around feelings of anxiety, stress, and negative emotions in general, while the images they picked as a representation of one of their classmates almost always depicted something they admired about that person (empathy, courage, perseverance, etc), as if that trait of the other person provided the vehicle for an idealizing transference that could remedy their own negative affect.

Clearly, the physical space of the exhibition stimulated many rich levels of experience for understanding oneself as well as one’s relationship to the others who were present. Given the importance of temporality in the experience of self cohesion (Kohut, 1977), we might also speculate on how the viewing of images in an synchronous time frame, along with other people, is quite different than the asynchronous experience of images in online photosharing communities. Very few people are really “there” at the same time.





Up Close and Personal

Over the last decade we have seen a growing idealization of what we can do in computer-mediated environments. Given those beliefs, it's very easy to overlook the millions of years of evolution leading to who we are as bodily beings living in a physical space. Even though visualization is a sensory experience that functions at a distance - and one that can also operate inside our memory, imagination, and dreams while receiving no input from the external world at all - the development of human vision was intimately intertwined with our physical evolution and physical environment, especially when we finally stood up to erectly walk around our habitat (Ornstein, 1992).

Although we now have the ability to witness images through the computer screen that carries us into the intangible realm of cyberspace, which is indeed a marvelous supplement to other aspects of our visual life, we should learn to balance and integrate those experiences with the up close and personal experience of sharing images in a physical space with other people, and to use digital visualizations as a supplement to enhance our visual interactions with the "real" world.

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JOHN SULER

Photographic Psychology: Forces That Shape the Psyche





Harry I. Naar with John Suler. Photo by John Suler.

JOHN SULER

Photographic Psychology: Forces That Shape the Psyche

RIDER UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY

September 13 – October 14, 2012

OPENING RECEPTION

September 13 • 5-7 p.m.

ARTIST'S TALK

September 20 • 7 p.m.

GALLERY INFORMATION:

Tuesday to Thursday • 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Sunday • noon – 4 p.m.

Professor Harry I. Naar, director

Front Cover: Id, Ego, Superego

This exhibition is funded in part by a grant from the Mercer County Cultural and Heritage Commission,
New Jersey State Council on the Arts, Department of State.





PLAY

A Conversation with John Suler and Harry I. Naar, Professor of Fine Arts & Gallery Director, Rider University

Harry I. Naar - Can you tell me a little about your family background and your childhood? Was there anyone in particular who played a role in directing your interests in psychology and also in photography?

John Suler - I grew up in what used to be the potato fields of Long Island, before the suburbs sprang up after World War II. My mother and father had met in the city when he returned from the war. He had fought in both the Air Force and Army. After they married, they moved to Long Island where they raised me, my two sisters and my brother in a Cape Cod development. True to the spirit of the 1950s, my parents gave us kids everything they could. Some might say our generation was spoiled. Psychologists might instead describe it as our parents giving us the opportunity to “self actualize,” which is a psychological term for the process of fulfilling one’s individual potential.



WONDER



DESTINY

I became interested in photography and visual design at a very early age. As a young kid I'd be fascinated by looking at scenes around me with one eye, trying different ways to arrange the shapes at various distances, then switching to the other eye for a slightly different effect. I liked symmetry, balance and repetitions. When I turned 10 my parents bought me a Brownie Instamatic. They might have recognized my fascination for the old Foldex camera that I inherited from my grandfather, who was an avid photographer. On Thanksgivings, we would all gather in my grandparents' living room to watch slide shows of their vacation trips and family events. I also remember spending a lot of time playing with my many toy soldiers. Unlike other boys my age who quickly set up battle scenes so they could begin blasting the combatants against each other, I was more interested in the visual design of the scenario - in how to create different patterns of the soldiers and their equipment. In reports I wrote for school, I always went out of my way to include pictures from books, which was only possible because my Dad had a Xerox machine at work. He kindly took the time to copy images from the stack of dog-eared books I gave him. I enjoyed the pictures more than I did writing the reports. I also enjoyed the visual aspects of comic books and movies, especially science fiction and fantasy.

All through my school years, I did very well in math and science. So I assumed I would become a natural scientist, maybe a biologist or an engineer. But in my senior year I took a course in psychology and fell in love with it. My parents were quite surprised, because they had no idea what psychology was and were hoping I would go to the Air Force Academy. Instead I made a B line for an undergraduate psychology major at SUNY Stony Brook, where I also enjoyed courses in philosophy and religion. Impressed by a paper I wrote comparing Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, my religion professor Thomas Altizer once took me out to lunch. He was well known for his work on these existentialists. When I told him I was headed for graduate school in clinical psychology, he said, "You'll be a fish out of water."

HIN - What did he mean by that?

JS - I think he saw me as someone who had a philosophical mind rather than a penchant for hardcore science, which most of contemporary psychology emphasizes. I enjoy exploring ideas through "thought experiments" rather than laboratory experiments. Currently I do that through conceptual photography.



DEATH

HIN - You received a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. What experiences directed you toward your present interest and study regarding visual imagery?

JS - As a visual thinker, I was naturally drawn to topics about the role of mental imagery in how we humans think and feel. I was especially fascinated by the psychoanalytic approach to these topics. Psychoanalytic theory is all about the unconscious mind. The unconscious thinks via images, as in dreams. For one of my prelims, I wrote an extensive review of the literature on how unconscious thinking affects creativity. My advisor, Joe Masling, encouraged me to submit the paper to the journal *Psychological Bulletin*, one of the most prestigious in psychology. To my delight, it was accepted. Later, for my dissertation, I did an experimental study on how anxiety might disrupt mental imagery. I had snake-phobic subjects look at realistic drawings of snakes wrapped around block letters and then afterward instructed them to imagine the letter to see if they could count the number of corners that weren't obstructed by the snakes' bodies... I've always been a bit of an oddball in my scholarly activity, even in graduate school. Fortunately, my advisor and mentor, Ed Katkin, encouraged me to follow those interests.

HIN - Can you give some examples of how you have been an oddball in your scholarly work?

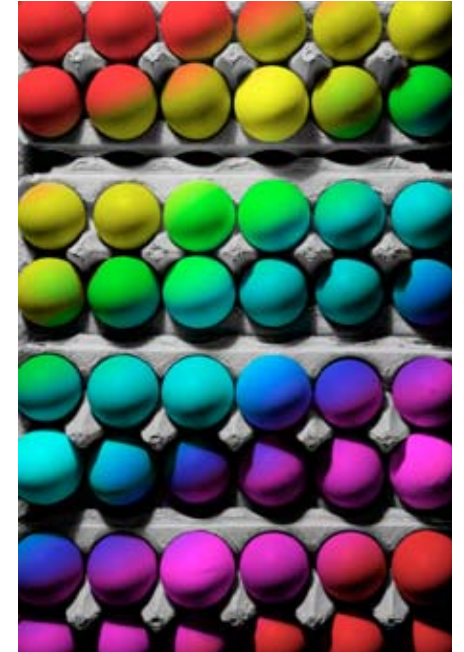
JS - Oddball in a good way, I hope! Throughout my career I applied psychology to an analysis of topic areas that were outside the range of conventional psychology. Early in my career I published a book that integrated psychology with Zen and Taoism. Back when the general public didn't know much about the Internet, I applied psychological principles to an analysis of how people behave in cyberspace. Now, in photographic psychology, I'm studying how psychology and photography overlap.

HIN - What role has teaching played in your development as a psychologist?

JS - I love teaching. I firmly believe that the best way to truly understand a concept or theory, even the very complex ones, is learning how to explain it in simple terms to people who know very little about the subject. I've also learned a lot about psychology from my students. I take a very experiential approach to my teaching, encouraging students to apply psychological concepts to themselves and their lives. In doing so, they teach me by way of example. Visual exercises have been particularly successful in this respect. In my classes we do such things as dream interpretation, imagining yourself exploring a house (which symbolically represents the self), visualizing a childhood memory and watching a rapid slideshow of images to see, after the show has ended, which image sticks in your mind and why.



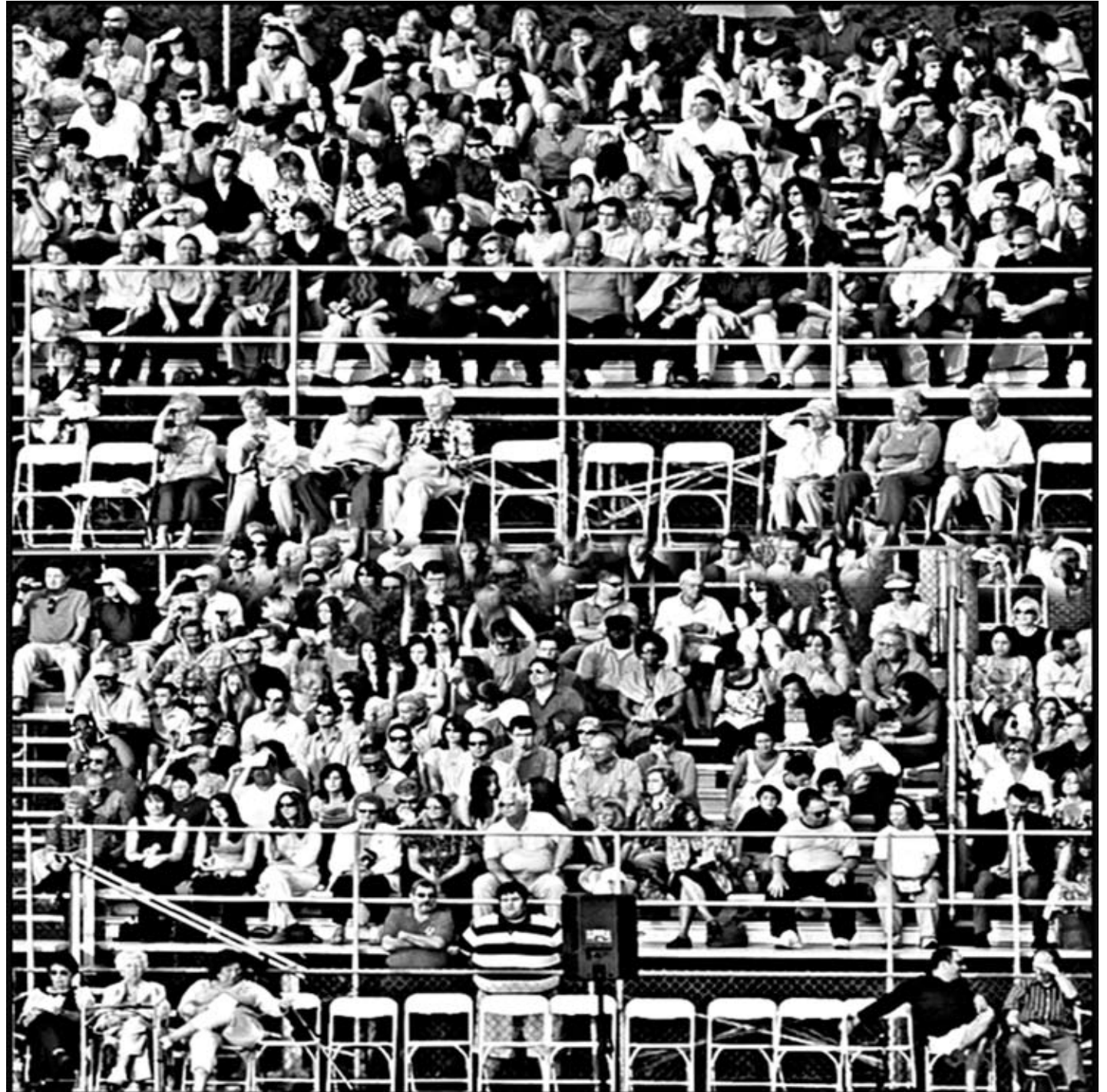
MIND-BODY



EMOTIONS

HIN - Your research and your teaching have focused on the way visual images can evoke a variety of responses that relate to emotions, creativity and dreams. Can you explain this further?

JS - There's a great deal of research on the powerful role images play in the life of the human mind. Many great artists and scientists are visual thinkers. Many different types of psychotherapists use a wide variety of imagery techniques in their work. Because a picture is worth a thousand words, a great deal of information can be packed into it. Freud thought that you could work for years on a single dream and still harvest more and more unconscious thoughts, feelings, and memories from it. If you ask a person to imagine something – say in response to the word “anger” – you’ll see physiological changes in such things as heart rate, GSR and brain activity similar to actual situations involving that emotion. As all artists know, images are a special type of language – a language that activates emotion, memory and creativity. It links mind, body and perhaps even soul. We need to learn that language. It isn't emphasized enough in our educational system.





ALTERED STATES

HIN - You have also stated that understanding a particular image beyond the obvious can lead to personal growth. What do you mean by this?

JS - I like to think of it in terms of the iceberg model. The conscious aspects of creating an image - or looking at and reacting to it - is the tip popping up above the water. But the biggest part - the unconscious memories, ideas and feelings that form the foundation - lies hidden below the surface. When you explore those unconscious aspects of what an image means to you, you learn about yourself. It's very similar to interpreting dreams, which are complex images.

HIN - You are considered a founder of cyberpsychology. Can you explain this and why do you think this is an important field of study.

JS - The Internet was around for at least a decade before people even knew what that word meant. It was only when it went VISUAL - with websites containing pictures, icons and graphic designs - that it exploded into worldwide popularity. That says something important about how the human mind operates - something Apple fully understood. In the early 1990s I became fascinated by how people behave online, especially in visual environments. I did an intensive ethnographic study of The Palace - one of the first online communities in which people socialize with each other in a variety of visual environments using avatars to represent their bodies. I came to realize that how we express ourselves in cyberspace might be different than in the face-to-face world. In my continually expanding online book *The Psychology of Cyberspace*, I write about such topics as personal identity in cyberspace, internet addiction, online psychotherapy and, of course, the psychological impact of images on the Internet. It was the first book ever written about cyberpsychology and is widely cited. In more recent years, I developed what is the basis of this exhibition: *Photographic Psychology* - the psychological study of how people create, share and react to visual images, especially using digital photography and in online photosharing communities.

HIN - What influences you to take a particular photo? Are you thinking about a particular psychological situation before you photograph an image or do you take a photo and then impose a psychological reading?

JS - As a conceptual photographer, I'll sometimes set out to take a photo that illustrates a specific idea I have in mind, often an idea from psychology. Usually I'll think about the design of the image first, then set up that scenario in order to take the shot. My "multiple me" images are a good example of that. Usually, though, I like to do walk-about photography. In vacation spots, in areas near where I live or even inside my own house, I'll simply wander around looking for things that capture my attention. I firmly believe in applying "mindfulness" to photography, which means



OCEANIC EXPERIENCES

I try to let go of planning, evaluating, expecting or thinking about anything. There is no intention, just looking, seeing, noticing and shooting. I let my unconscious do the walking. It's only afterwards, when I'm reviewing the images on my computer, that I might try to determine the underlying psychological factors that motivated me to take those shots.

If I upload the image to Flickr, the online photosharing community where I present much of my work, I have to decide on a title and perhaps also a description for it. I take that challenge very seriously. In fact, I won't upload an image until I feel satisfied that I've created an interesting title, or that no title is the best choice. It's during that stage, after and even during the post-processing of an image, that I free-associate to it in order to discover the various possible psychological meanings I might see in it. Sometimes it takes considerable mental effort for me to figure out what the title should be, and sometimes it pops into my mind all on its own. Most often, those are the best titles. They're coming from my unconscious, which probably inspired the shot in the first place. Other people don't always understand my titles, or they see it differently. That's okay. In fact, that's good. If given the chance to compare our reactions, we learn about the image, the concept and ourselves. That's what this exhibition is all about.

HIN - In creating a photograph, what role do design and composition play? Do you work intuitively?

JS - I guess it says something about me that I've studied visual composition and design far more than the technical aspects of cameras. I find this topic fascinating. On the one hand, some of the traditional rules of composition are based on the principles of Gestalt Psychology that reveal how the mind seeks balance, order, simplicity and unity. On the other hand, our human mind is intrigued by bits of ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty. If there's too much order, we're bored. For me, interesting compositions are all about that interplay between chaos and order. When do we follow the traditional rules about composition? When and how do we break those rules? There are no simple answers to those questions, which creates the potential for every photographer's work to be unique. But whatever answer one chooses, it must address one important issue: how does the composition serve the intention of the photo? The best images are those in which the composition supports, enhances and sometimes even deliberately seems to contradict the emotional or conceptual message being conveyed. We can construct composition by consciously making use of the well-known standards, but sometimes, like you're suggesting, we have to rely on our intuition - on the unconscious forces within us - to design the image. Quite often I'll compose a shot in a particular way or alter the visual design using Photoshop and not know exactly why I'm doing it or why I like it. It just feels right.



SELF MULTIPLICITY



ADDICTION

HIN - Many of your photographs are manipulated; can you explain what inspires you to do this?

JS - Although I love paintings and drawings, I'm not naturally talented in these art forms. Maybe if I had received some serious training I could have developed those skills. Also, I never particularly liked working in a darkroom. So I could take photos, but someone else always processed the film for me. Then when digital photography and Photoshop came along, I was instantly hooked. I could actually control the whole process of creating the final image. For me, manipulating a photo in Photoshop is like painting and drawing. I could spend hours doing it, which, unfortunately, is one of the reasons why I now have some problems with chronic pain in my legs - too much sitting. Experimenting with colors, tones, contrasts, collages and composites is another way to make the image mine - to make it say what I want it to say, to enhance the concept being portrayed.

Sometimes I've been criticized for manipulating photos too much. They no longer look like real photographs, people say, because they don't depict reality accurately. My reply is "So what?" Or, if I really want to challenge the skeptics, I'll invite them into a debate about what a

"real" photograph is, or what "reality" is. Very few people see the world in black and white, and yet we all accept black and white photos as a depiction of reality. Given my interest in the unconscious mind, I experiment with images that portray the hidden reality revealed by fantasy, dreams and the surreal. We start with the photo that comes out of the camera, the "objective" depiction of reality, and then we use post-processing techniques to shape it according to our subjective, unconscious reality. Sometimes the surreal is more real than the real. I designed many of the images in this exhibition with these ideas in mind.

A few weeks before he unexpectedly died, I had some wonderful discussions with Richard Zakia, a professor emeritus of photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology. He was interested in using some of my essays and photos in the new edition of his book *Perception and Imagining*. I told him that I like all kinds of photography and images but that maybe I should refine my tastes to focus on something in particular. He said, "Please don't do that. Everything is connected."

HIN - How do you determine the success of a particular image?



ROMANCE



GENDER

JS - On an interpersonal level, an image succeeds at the highest level when it encourages people to think about and maybe even gain new insights into themselves, their relationships and their lives – when it helps them become aware of some idea or feeling that is important to them. If I have the opportunity to talk to people about their reactions to my images, I can usually facilitate that process. Only occasionally does it happen for people spontaneously, during their solitary viewing of an image. The sophisticated technological media of our modern times seem marvelous, but a price we pay is being so bombarded with images all day long that we run the risk of going numb. We forget to look, see and reflect.

On a personal level, an image succeeds when it expresses something important about my life and the human condition FOR ME, regardless of what others might think about the photo. In fact, when an image conveys a very powerful meaning for me personally, I might not post it to Flickr. It's not about other people's reactions.

HIN - In his book *Ways of Seeing*, the British writer John Berger writes... “The way we see things are affected by what we know or what we believe... Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights.” What are

your feelings regarding Berger's ideas? How do you think your photographs and your ability to select particular images controls viewer's responses?

JS - That quote perfectly summarizes both sides of photography. On the one hand, we always bring ourselves to the experience of an image. We see it in our own unique way, according to our own history, needs and expectations. On the other hand, the photographer often creates a specific image with the intention to convey a particular meaning. I think of this interaction of the photographer's and viewer's perception as intersecting circles. The area where those circles overlap is the mutually shared perception of meaning. The areas that don't overlap represent each one's unique perception. The interesting question is then how much and where the circles overlap, whether this is what the photographer intended and how the photographer created the image to actualize this intention.

In my work I often shoot for a wide overlap by processing an image in a specific way, along with a specific title and sometimes a description, in order to guide viewers into the ballpark of meaning I intended. However, I also want to invite people to interpret the concept in their own unique way – and so I'll include some ambiguous elements into the image, or offer a title that could be interpreted in various ways. Quite often my titles include double-entendre expressions.



IMMERSION

HIN - In this exhibition you are inviting the viewer to interact with some images by asking them to create a specific title. What do you hope to learn from this interaction? What do you think the viewer will recognize and learn?

JS - A person's immediate, intuitive reaction to an image – as in a title that pops into mind – might say a lot about them. It's like handing a Rorschach inkblot to someone and asking, "What might this be?" We tend to project our own ideas, feelings and memories into an image – especially when it's rather ambiguous, as are many of the images in this exhibition. But even in the case of an image that isn't very ambiguous, we will still all see it differently because we are all different people. The title people create for an image often sums up their reaction and how their mind works, in a nutshell. Is your title straightforward, complex, mysterious, abstract, concrete, emotional, realistic, creative, wordy, succinct, factual, personal, imaginative? By comparing the other titles to our own, we come to realize how we are the same and different. Again, it's the intersecting circles. If we realize there is no right or wrong title, we come to accept others for who they are.

Asking people to create titles for images is one technique I use in my research. It's one of several questions in a set I use to interview subjects after they have picked out an image that interests them. At this opening exhibition, undergraduate volunteers are doing just that. Feel free to talk with them. I've encouraged them to discuss their reactions as part of the research. I'll describe the results of this study during my talk in the gallery.

- What thoughts and feelings immediately come to your mind?
- Describe to yourself or someone else exactly what you see.
- Does this image remind you of anything in your life?
- If you could go into this picture, what would you think, feel, and do?
- What would you change about the image?
- What message might this picture be giving you?
- If you gave a title to this image, to capture what it means to you, what would it be?

HIN - What do you want the viewer of this exhibition at Rider to recognize or come away with?

JS - I'd like them to appreciate the mysteriously beautiful complexity of human nature – how our identities are shaped by many forces, both obvious and subtle. I hope that the images succeed in the way I described earlier: that by looking at them, reflecting on what the images say to them personally and by sharing their reactions with other people at the exhibition, they might better understand themselves and others.



ENVIRONMENTS

Photographic Psychology: Forces That Shape the Psyche

Addiction	Group Dynamics	Rhythms
Adversity	Home	Romance
Altered States	Hope	Secrets
Ancestors	Humor	Self Actualization
Art	Id, Ego, Superego	Self Consciousness
Childhood	Images	Self Multiplicity
Childhood Trauma	Immersion	Self-Objects
Collective Unconscious	Intimacy	Separation
Communication	Life Stages	Simplicity
Death	Mind/Body	Social Media
Deindividuation	Need for Achievement	Spaces
Destiny	Oceanic Experiences	The Unconscious
Dissociation	Paranoia	The Unexpected
Emotions	Persona	Touch
Empathy	Play	Transitions
Environments	Polarities	Travel
Evolution	Positive Thinking	Un-Knowing
Exploration	Rational & Emotional Intelligence	Unconditional Love
Family	Relaxation	Wonder
Gender	Remembrance	





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