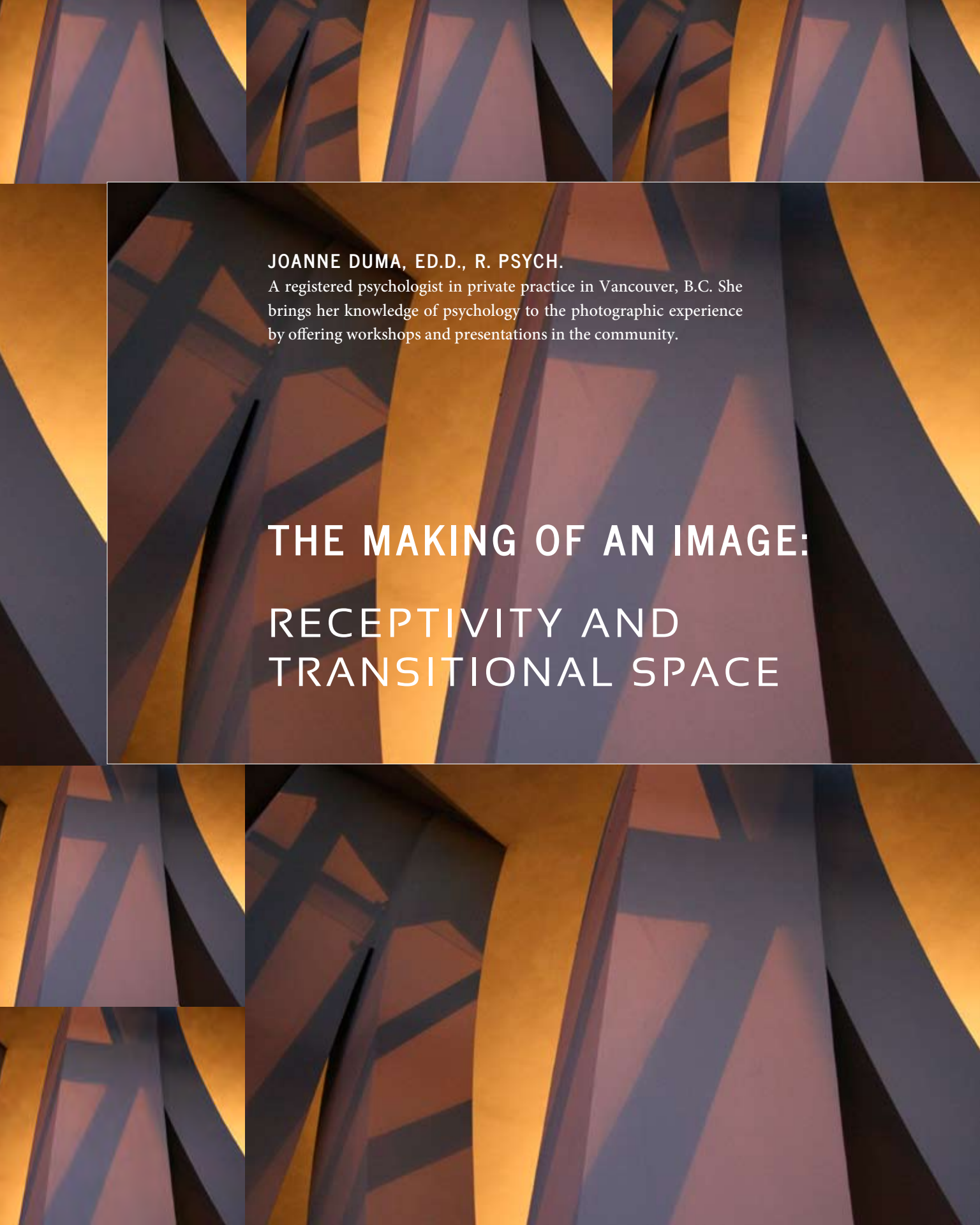




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THE MAKING OF AN IMAGE: RECEPTIVITY AND TRANSITIONAL SPACE

A picture may be worth a thousand words; however, the richness and power that an image holds originate in the psychic space within which the image is made. That space, where everything is possible, captures my interest as a photographer.

I began wandering with my camera in my early 20's. Often aimless in my ventures, I captured only those images that called out to me. At times, it was the strength of lines or the familiarity found in a repetitive pattern that drew me in. Other times, it was the way the light brushed against form. With no audience in mind, I sought only direct contact with the image. I found myself in a space where time lost all meaning, where the ordinary became wondrous. In the spirit of play, I saw the overlapping arches of a familiar building unfold before me, while the warmth of their colours invited me in. I was seeing it for the first time.

In paying close attention to this inner experience, I noted in me an attitude of receptivity, a relaxed but alert awareness and a lack of judgment. This inner space became a place for curiosity and wonder. Minor White (1952), a prominent figure in modern photography, identified the attitude of openness as critical to the art of photography:

The state of mind of the photographer while creating is blank. ...a special kind of blank. It is a very active state of mind really, a very receptive state of mind, ready at an instant to grasp an image, yet with no image, pre-formed pattern or preconceived idea of how anything ought to look is essential to this blank condition. (Minor White, "A Living Remembrance", 1984, p.36)

The openness expressed by White is reflected in the practice of mindfulness: "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p.4). By being mindfully aware, I was more present to the image as well as to what was to be found inside my experience of attending to it. Looking outward was

closely linked to turning back toward myself, for what felt real in me. I would begin to have a feeling about the image as I held an awareness of what it did to my senses. The vital role of the inner or sensory response in photography was illustrated in both the work and words of the influential photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson (1999). Well known for the concept of the "decisive moment" (p. 33), he believed that good images resonate at the core of our being.

The primary role that the senses play in aesthetic experience is understandable given that our earliest impressions in life were formed through our bodily senses — sight, sound, smell, taste, movement through space. Marion Milner (1957), a psychoanalyst who closely studied her internal experience in her attempts to paint, observed that the awareness of bodily sensations and movement is essential in the process of making art. The act of creating, according to Milner, requires an "enhanced body awareness" (p.107) that is free from intention and follows from silencing the mind's discursive thinking. She further suggested that this kind of directed attentiveness promotes a more fluid sense of boundaries between the self and world, even a temporary sense of unity. Consequent to this self-loss is an expanded sense of consciousness with a feeling of renewed perception. The description of the quality of awareness as well as the expansive perception appears comparable to the ideas of mindfulness and mindful meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

D. W. Winnicott (1971; 1953) a close associate who shared similar ideas with Milner, conceived of creativity as belonging to an intermediate area of experiencing, a psychological space between fantasy and reality that involved the interplay between the inner and external worlds. This transitional or potential space emerges as the child, coming out from merger with mother, first begins to experience a sense of separation. The transitional object (not limited to a teddy bear or blanket) is adopted by the child to provide a needed sense of continuity in order to lessen the anxiety of the separation. In representing the mother, but more importantly the mother-child

relationship, the transitional object is neither just a mental concept nor the mother herself. Rather, it is experienced by the child as being both within her and also a part of the world, allowing for both a sense of fusion and separateness. The potential space, then, permits the child both the experience of "me" and "not-me" as well as the interchange between these two states of being. Out of the developing inner self (as separate), and through the use of a transitional object, the child creates, for the first time, something imaginative. According to Winnicott, that creation is the forerunner of artistic creations while the "capacity to create" is part of being alive.

In mediating between the inner and outer worlds, the psychic space of potential extends itself to the realm of image-making, where the transition from object to symbol is made and visual metaphors are created. In light of Winnicott, I reflect now on how my camera can serve as a portal to potential space. How, within the frame of the viewfinder, the intermediary area between my imagination and reality can come together in play. The once familiar building with arching lines and space is the "found" object of my imagination. I see, in the image of its gentle curves, the arms of a loved one lost, the arms holding me in the moment. I rest my aloneness in the spaces between. And in them, I feel the missed presence within me. It is all of this at once. The freedom in which I experience my transitional object comes only with the receptivity and non-judgment that I allow, in the way that the child's use of the teddy bear needs to go unchallenged. In holding the image, I feel held. Perhaps like a child feels held by a "good-enough mother". It is a good-enough image. In this space of potential, I experience myself as separate yet connected, and bridge the gap between what is lost and what is being found. It is a space for creativity both in my art and in my living.

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