MASS PHOTOGRAPHY

COLLECTIVE HISTORIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE

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Routledge

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With increasingly accessible camera technology, crowdsourced public media projects abound like never before. These projects often seek to secure a snapshot of a single day as a means to create a global community and as a visual time capsule for an unspecifi ed future. *Mass Photography* assesses the potential of these popular moment-in-time projects by examining their historical predecessors. Through close engagement with the vast photographic collections resulting from such ventures, the book analyses their structures and systems, their aims and objectives, and their claims and promises. With a central case study of the 55,000 photographs submitted to *One Day for Life* in 1987 – which aimed, in its own time, to be 'the biggest photographic event the world had ever seen' – the book provides historical context for the emergence of these seemingly new projects, enriched with material generated through interviews with hundreds of participants, organisers, judges, publishers and archivists.

Mass Photography examines the particular cultural role that amateur photography offers, demonstrating how it has come to be embraced as a privileged authentic form, capable of communicating identity, capturing history and touching places that other images cannot reach. It also reveals previously uncharted histories of participatory media and user-generated content, thus challenging networked digital photography's seemingly unique and unparalleled capacity and potential. As the fi rst full examination of these ambitious photographic phenomena, *Mass Photography* makes a valuable contribution to photographic history and theory by taking a fresh look at amateur practice on an unprecedented scale.

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COVER IMAGE: Erik Kessels, *24 Hrs in Photos*, installation, 2014,
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References to websites were correct at the time of writing.

For Poppy and Paul

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Illustrations

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PLATES

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Introduction

Approaching Mass Photography:
Methods, Models and Debates

On Saturday 12 November 2011, a BBC TV and YouTube-sponsored project enti-tled *Britain in a Day* asked the nation to "pick up a camera", to "record your thoughts, hopes and aspirations", to create a "definitive self-portrait of the UK" and to leave behind "an amazing archive". Soliciting source material for a 2012 edited moving image documentary to be shown as part of the Cultural Olympiad, and afterwards to be kept online as a historical resource "for future generations", the organisers claimed that such a project would never have been possible before, and that the capacity to make history in this way was unprecedented. They mused: "Think how fascinating it would have been if our grandparents and great-grandparents had recorded their day and told us what they thought of Britain, their hopes, their dreams and their fears?" (C. Moore, 2011).

Britain in a Day was directly inspired by the 2011 *Life in a Day* feature film, directed by Kevin Macdonald and produced by Ridley Scott, which asked for moving image submissions taken on 24 July 2010. This YouTube and LG Electronics-sponsored and *National Geographic* magazine-distributed film made very similar claims for its ground-breaking character. Again, seeking definitive and superlative status, *Life in a Day* was promoted as "the largest crowd-sourced art project in history" (Ross, 2011) and enormous statistics were touted: 80,000 submissions came from 192 countries totalling 45,000 hours of footage. Described by critics as "the first social media movie ever made" (Benigno, 2011), the directors themselves stated: "The idea that you can ask thousands, tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of people all to contribute to a project and all to communicate about it and learn about it at the same time belongs essentially to this age that we live in. *Life in a Day* couldn't have existed 100 years ago, 20 years ago, even 6 years ago" ("Life in a Day: About the Production", 2011).

On Tuesday 15 May 2012, an organisation called Aday.org launched a strikingly similar mass photographic project, *A Day in the World*. With ambitions of creating global connections between the everyday lives of people across the planet, the project was described by entrepreneur Richard Branson, a member of Aday's Global Advisory Committee, as an attempt to "tear down a few barriers". In his Foreword to the published book of a thousand selected submissions, Branson described its macro vision as akin to the aerial view achieved by plane or balloon travel: "from that perspective", he said, "I can't see any boundaries; all the walls, fences and barbed wire that separate us fade and disappear" (2012, p. 7). His fellow committee member, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, also saw the project in terms of global relations, stating that the photograph is "a tool for seeing each other, understanding each other, and thereby creating the potential for a better world". For Tutu, the proliferation of images in mass media, and the fact that "cameras are everywhere" intensified the need for photographic communication. "Air travel, the Internet and global TV have shrunk the world", he observed.

> Conversely, our need to see and understand each other is greater than ever before. A hundred years ago, it was enough to relate to our immediate sphere: the village, town or country. We knew the people in our immediate circle, or at least knew of their lives. Now we need to relate to an entire world.
>
> (2012, pp. 11–12)

Each of these projects – and many other similar examples – revel in their newness as technological innovations and as responses to an apparently unique and pressing need to communicate collectively via new media forms in the age of Web 2.0. One of the purposes of *Mass Photography: Collective Histories of Everyday Life* is to assess and ultimately to challenge the apparent novelty and originality of such projects, by showing how impulses to record and image mass experiences of everyday life, clustered around a single day have, in fact, a long pre-history, and one that is characterised by a remarkable continuity rather than by radical change. Despite the utopian expectations routinely made of digital and internet technologies, the aspirations these projects express – in pursuit of visual history, democracy, communication and participation – are enduring and not determined by the technology that may enable them to come into being.

Over the course of its chapters, this book examines examples of mass-participation projects in more detail, looking at how they are structured, their aims and objectives, their claims and promises, and provides historical context for their emergence. To try and understand their historiographical condition as

potentially invaluable time capsules, apparently by the people, for the people, this book surveys previous projects that have had similar aims in different media landscapes, looking in particular at one mass photographic event – *One Day for Life* – which had very similar ambitions and made precisely the same claims, back in pre-digital 1987. As the 55,000 photographic prints resulting from *One Day for Life* pass their twenty-fifth birthday, this research assesses the historical value that such a large-scale mass-participation photography event might hold, through close engagement with the archive and research into the project's origins and afterlife. As overarching questions, it asks: how can the vast breadth of popular photographic practices and outputs be adequately described, historicised and evaluated? What can mass-participation photographic events, and the discourses surrounding them, tell us about the meanings of mass photography? What can the study of mass photography in the 1980s reveal about larger and more enduring cultural performances, about charity, identity, memory, emotion and competition? Through its historical case study, this book shows how a retrospective view can help us to understand the continuing fascination with mass photographic projects, and understand their future potential. Ultimately, in examining photographic practice on a large scale, this book suggests ways of interpreting mass photography more broadly, at a time when it proliferates like never before.

Searching for mass photography: names and terms

Mass photography, as a form and a practice, is both familiar and elusive as a research subject. It has become a commonplace to observe that we live in an image-saturated world and one where the visual penetrates all aspects of our public and private lives. Photography has been particularly implicated in this spread of imagery because of the ready accessibility and booming growth of camera technology and products since the late nineteenth century. In the Western world, in the present day, most people own cameras, and almost all own photographs. We have all been photographed and, as camera users, we are all photographers. Numbers of photographs taken and circulated escalate dramatically year on year. For a sense of scale, 1.4 million photos are uploaded per day to Flickr (Heikka & Rastenberger, 2014); photographic uploads to Facebook now exceed 4 billion a month (Hand, 2012). This covers only two image-sharing platforms and, in any case, is likely to represent only a tiny fraction of images taken in the same period. The numbers are dizzying and show no signs of slowing down.

The practice of non-professional photographers – who have long made up by far the largest mass of producers and consumers of photography – has nonetheless suffered significant analytical neglect. Recent work has attempted to correct this lacuna from a range of different disciplinary positions across the arts, humanities and social sciences, although not all research emerges from a firm empirical grounding. What may be profitably described as "majority photography" – in reference to the corrective term "majority world", to emphasise that which is dominant and yet overlooked – has also been given a range of prefixes in this work, from untrained, snapshot, vernacular, popular and folk to personal, home-made, domestic, family, ordinary and everyday, depending on the material examined and the agenda of the analysis. What characterises these forms of photography, taken together, is their vast scale, simultaneously ubiquitous and yet paradoxically hard to grasp, rendered almost formless by their unmanageable quantity.

Despite the diversity of names, practices outside the realm of art or professional photography are frequently homogenised in analysis. *Mass Photography: Collective Histories of Everyday Life* seeks to redress this approach, and examine singularities as well as patterns within mass practice, and explore the fine detail beneath the enormous numbers. Closely attentive to particularities, this ethnographic investigation extrapolates findings about popular practice from a much larger evidential base than most research in analogue photographic history. Before the advent of digital photography, there were few opportunities to capture large overviews of popular photography; most case studies necessarily focused on the small and highly particular content of family albums. This historical study engages with the breadth and detail of pre-digital popular practice not just through the investigation of a very large archive of original prints, but also in the production and analysis of a range of new twenty-first century data, generated through around 150 questionnaires and interviews with photographers and photography project organisers, judges, editors and archivists.

Mass photography projects, with their large numbers of participants, their democratic appeal to *all* photographers – not just the technically accomplished or aesthetically ambitious – and their abundant results, offer a privileged cross-section view into mass photography, visible on a vast scale. Described throughout this book as projects to capture the widest range of their diverse aims and outcomes, the mass-participation practices and resulting products examined here are sometimes also framed as events or initiatives, experiments or endeavours, competitions or collaborations. As mixed-character forms, they are entangled in a wide range of intersecting cultural values from charitable participation to aesthetic judgement.

Through their cultural complexities, enormous scale and rich resources, such projects provide unparalleled opportunities for a fine-grained historical analysis of a photographic practice both eulogised and criticised but rarely investigated at such breadth. This book, then, explores the uses and expectations made of mass photography, asks key questions of its contribution to public history, collective identity and social memory, and tests theoretical assumptions about the form. Ultimately, *Mass Photography: Collective Histories of Everyday Life* argues for a fresh appraisal of the complex personal significance and social value of a practice frequently dismissed as lacking in intention, ambition and consequence.

Searching for mass photography: debates and issues

As projects that aim for universal participation and largely operate outside narrow professional boundaries, the material at the heart of this research could be broadly classified as amateur, or more commonly, as vernacular photography, by theorists who have sought to define an other to professional and/or artistic photography. As a term with increasingly respectable currency yet without clear meaning, vernacular, in particular, has become an inclusive umbrella label under which several more specific categories of photography – from as casual "snapshooter" to "dedicated amateur" – might shelter. The limits of this overarching category have been noted; Elizabeth Hutchinson, for example, has asked a key question of the term and the practice. If, she says, expressions that are not "artistic" in intention encompass more than 95 per cent of the world's photographs, "How can we make sense of such a wealth of imagery?" (2000, p. 230) This book offers a response to this challenge.

Histories that prioritise aesthetic readings of the image-content of photographs rather than exploring their social function have necessarily excluded the majority of photographic practice from their privileged lists of celebrated names and examples. Photographs that have not aimed to become art have tended, nevertheless, to be judged aesthetically. Variously described as banal, trite, stultifying and even indefensible, some commentators have dismissed them in the most vehement terms (J. Evans, 1999; Slater, 1999). Geoffrey Batchen – in trying to find new methodologies by which to understand them – has argued that such photographs are "art history's worst nightmare" (2008, p. 121). He says that there is an "obvious" reason why they barely appear in standard histories of photography: "most snapshots are cloyingly sentimental in content and repetitively uncreative as pictures" (2008, p. 123).

Mass practice makes little appearance in the established histories of photography and despite its vigorous presence in arts practice in the form of appropriated found photographs, it still holds an uncertain status in analysis, often appearing as an almost exotic photographic sub-genre, or as a style, despite its self-evident majority as a form and a practice. Despite the emergence of many exhibitions and popular illustrated works dedicated to vernacular and snapshot photographs, mass practice nevertheless remains – as a recent overview text stated – an "under-theorised (yet absolutely central) area" (Bull, 2010, p. 192). By way of example, a publication that aimed to draw together the state of photographic theory in the twenty-first century, bringing forty scholars into a seminar format, barely mentioned it. Within the discussions, Diarmuid Costello observed, "Whenever we talk about photography outside of the art historical frame of reference, it's as if the conversation just dies. We don't know what to say or how to proceed" (Elkins, 2007, p. 199).

Much of what has been displayed in exhibitions and appropriated in artistic practice as vernacular photography has been the apparently hapless and aesthetically naïve output of what is known, rather pejoratively, as "the snap-shooter" rather than the products of those who might be seen as more "keen" or "serious" amateurs. This latter group, who are well-represented in mass photography projects, are supported by their own literature, institutions and training, and tend to have a more specific demography than popular practice more generally. This kind of photography has not been a popular subject for either scholarly consideration or artistic rehabilitation (Pollen & Baillie, 2012). Knowing rather than innocent, calculated rather than casual, it is perhaps aspirational amateur photography that more obviously inhabits the position of photography's marginal "parergon" that Batchen attributes to the snapshot (2000, p. 262).

Hierarchies have been a central part of photography's self-identity, perhaps because of its own long-standing ambiguous status as a hybrid of the technological, scientific and aesthetic. Consideration of institutionalised stratification, even elitism, within photography is a central feature in this research, not least because so many mass photography projects are styled as democratic participatory events for amateurs that aim to access an alternative, unmediated real-world vision and experience. Despite this, they usually involve either a competition or an editorial element where quality and value would be judged by photographic professionals, celebrities or editors. The aims, expectations and uses made of mass photography by a range of different cultural groups with differing cultural agendas are thus central to this study.

Searching for mass photography: an archival journey

As an unprofessional photographer myself, all too frequently cutting the heads off my subjects and finding that my fingers have protruded in front of the lens, this study is informed by my own autobiographical experiences as a camera owner. From an academic point of view, however, my research interests in popular photographic practices and their histories were first stimulated by looking at other people's photographs rather than through making my own. My partner buys and sells bric-a-brac for a living, and through this connection I became fascinated by the curious but thriving market for orphaned and anonymous old photographs and family albums, no longer wanted in their original context but valued in another. As such, I began researching so-called found photographs with the aim of restoring origins and positioning these lost objects back into their social and historical content. My research in the pages of historic advice literature for amateur photographers explored the separate, hierarchical territories of photographic practice and the differing ways that different strata are valued and understood. I have developed this work in a range of publications and projects that examine the evaluation and marketing of mass photography in a range of locations, as well as developing studies of overlooked categories (Pollen, 2006, 2012, 2013a, 2013c, 2016; Pollen & Baillie, 2012).

Research interests in the pioneering social research organisation Mass Observation, founded in 1937 in Britain as a means of accessing the opinions and experiences of the overlooked "ordinary" person, intersected with my interest in mass photographic practice in the reading rooms of the Mass Observation Archive (Pollen, 2013b, 2014). I had first heard of Mass Observation's continuing project to survey everyday life in the early 1990s and had briefly signed up as a contributing writer. In 2005, as a postgraduate researcher at the University of Brighton, I examined its written documents from the other side of the counter and discovered the vast, fascinating, disorganised and largely unseen *One Day for Life* photographic holdings. Somewhat overwhelmed by the collection's uncatalogued state – where thousands upon thousands of photographs lack classification and any substantial accompanying information – I was nonetheless irresistibly charmed by the material.

As will be discussed in later chapters, the emotional content and effects of the photographs submitted to mass photography projects are immediately apparent. This is equally the case with the prints in the *One Day for Life* archive, where submissions could be very playful. Pets perform for the camera, babies appear to drive cars and grandmothers behave without dignity; such is the kind of humour that

populates the boxes. As well as the knowing comedy of photographs containing visual puns and amusing captions, there is a strongly ludic aspect to the material when loosened from its original location. A sense of absurdity and the surreal permeates the archive, especially in the unsorted boxes, where the heterogeneity of subjects means that incongruous juxtapositions abound. Additionally, the peculiarities and typicalities of everyday life are readily recognisable, and give the photographs a familial warmth. A sense of generosity is also evident in the archive; not least as the photographs themselves can be read as charitable donations for a project that sought to raise money through submission fees for cancer research. The underlying purpose of *One Day for Life* as a fundraiser for cancer also means that a number of intensely touching photographs and letters connected to personal experiences of illness, suffering and grief reach out to the archive visitor.

The "ordinariness" of the archive (Osborne, 1999) – in its recognisable format, familiar subjects and stylistic conventions, reminiscent of the tropes of the family album and the picture postcard – mean that it is easy to identify with. It appears known. The emotions stimulated by encounters with material so similar to one's own photographs – similar to those that I have taken and those that I appear in – have been described as "affiliatory and identificatory" (Noble, 2009, p. 73). Martha Langford has warned that the combination of feelings stimulated by looking at other people's personal photographs "is not very propitious for scholarly research: a balmy sense of delight and recognition met by the strong, countervailing winds of individual encryption" (2001, p. 22). The sense of recognition precipitated by my encounters with the *One Day for Life* archive was hastened by the closeness of a historical period that is within living memory. These are photographs that are viewed from only a short distance. Even if I do not remember the project itself, I remember where I was at the time: 14 August 1987 was just before my fourteenth birthday and I spent most of my school holidays with the goths and punks on the wall outside Virgin Records in Plymouth. The popularity of city scenes (and of subcultures) as photographable subjects in the archive means that places and even faces that I literally remember are included. As will be discussed, memory inflects new and old mass photography projects in many ways, even at the point of encounter by someone who was not a part: a kind of projected or "post-memory" can stimulate heteropathic identification and recollection (M. Hirsch, 1999, 2002; Silverman, 1996).

When my investigation into this archive began in 2005, it had not been used or consulted in any substantial way for more than a decade, and it had never been the subject of close analysis. In the four-year duration of my PhD on the topic (Pollen, 2010), it was scrutinised like never before. The entire body of photographs were

closely examined (and counted) for the first time, and participants, organisers, judges, publishers, archivists and curators – who each shaped the meanings of the photographs at the various stages of their journey – provided their opinions on and experience of the material through questionnaires and interviews.

In order to ascertain the shape of the largely unsorted and unclassified archive of photographs, my first undertaking necessitated viewing the material in its entirety. As the archive includes the total photographs submitted to the project, as well as some accompanying correspondence, promotional material and administrative documentation, it was essential for me to consider it as a cohesive entity. As has been observed of another analogue archive of vast magnitude – the million-plus negatives of street vendor photography in The Joseph Selle Collection – the truth of such material becomes "only visible in the archive taken as a whole". Christopher Burnett asserts that characteristics will "only reveal themselves when the archive is apprehended systematically as within the current of many images rather than the single outstanding one" (2007, p. 29); such was the approach taken with *One Day for Life*.

Regular research visits enabled me to examine and count the full corpus of prints for the first time in the archive's existence. As well as making observational notes about the photographs, close scrutiny of the organisation, description, location and condition of the material enabled me to map traces of its uses, and to detail any ordering – or otherwise – of the material. As is discussed in more detail in the Appendix at the end of the book, most of the prints are unsorted; the original stratification of the selection process remains the archive's predominant structure, where the shortlisted and finalist photographs are filed separately from the rejected majority. The partial attempts at classification included only the c.4000 shortlisted photographs and a small subsection of the rejected material. This endeavour remains evident, in the form of labelled document wallets by subject theme, within a small number of the storage boxes. The limitation of these attempts underlined the need to approach photographic archives of potentially unmanageable size by alternative analytical methods.

Searching for mass photography: approaches and tools I

Subject-based analytical methods: what photographs show

Simple quantification of type may seem to be the most logical research method to utilise when faced with the interpretation of large amounts of unsorted data, but this method proves superficial and ultimately unworkable for uncovering photographic

meaning. What might be best described as a denotative method has been critiqued as ineffective by commentators; as Mary Price outlines, quoting Rosalind Krauss, "the enumerative description of photographs … [is] useless because such a description can only be 'a potentially endless list of possible subjects'" (Krauss, 1984; Price, 1994, p.13). Any photograph may potentially include any number of subjects within its frame, and indeed, the indiscrimination, or "inclusive randomness" of the photographic gaze has frequently been observed as characteristic of the medium (see, for example, E. Edwards, 2001, p. 6). The most significant of shaping factors on the content of the archive is the project's submission brief – where photographs of everyday life in Britain competed for publication in a charity fundraiser – but the rudimentary classification applied to some of the prints considers them as individual self-contained images without context as the function of filing was to render them usable for the practical purposes of researchers who might wish for illustrations of everyday life in the 1980s (Sheridan, 1993a).

The poverty of subject-centred approaches to image archives has been observed by several photography scholars, particularly among those who prioritise function, use and context as more fruitful locations for accessing meaning. Joan Schwartz has declared that "content must not be conflated with message" (2004, p. 4) and argues that archivists have "perpetuated [a] kind of visual illiteracy" by promoting a conception of photographs as "'pictures of something' – architectural details, building materials, costume, street signs, fence styles, geological formations". She complains, "Seen only in terms of their informational value, made accessible by name or place, archival photographs are robbed of their functional context and communicative power." When photographs are used by researchers simply to illustrate written narratives, this further reinforces the idea that "visual materials occupy a lower level in the hierarchy of archival documentation". She quotes Svetlana Alpers, who argues that photographs are not "pictures illustrating history … but rather pictures themselves constituting social fact" (in Schwartz, 2004, p. 58).

Discussing photographs in terms of what they are "of" has also been criticised by sociologist Erving Goffman, who describes this conceptualisation as among the "systematic ambiguities that characterise our everyday talk about pictures" (1986, p. 41). The unique and complex intention of the photographer and the sometimes counter-narration of the accompanying textual support means that even photographs with superficially similar image content may embody divergent meanings, and therefore be "of" different subjects or, as Goffman would have it, "conditions". Price describes the "of" of photography as "the most ambiguous or confusing locution", and warns against the interpretation of photographs without considering the use in which they are deployed, and the language of description "that may reveal,

impose or limit [their] use" (1994, p. 1). She uses an example formulated by Arthur Danto in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, describing a hypothetical situation with "two identical photographic negatives with different relations to their subjects". As Price says, "His photographs look the same but, according to Danto, are actually 'of' different subjects." The differing descriptions and relationships embodied in the photographs could thus be argued to effectively "constitute separate entities" (1994, p. 4). While this research aims to identify and explore the central and recurrent themes that mass photography projects address, the numerous photographs of, say, sunsets as a popular subject, cannot be simply grouped as one-of-a-kind and thus be dealt with quantitatively, in pursuit of a typological measure of "the popular photograph". It might be more fruitful to consider repetitive photographic subjects as forms of antanaclasis – a rhetorical form that has been linked to photography by Burgin – signalling "repetition with different significations, or one repeated picture with different captions" (Burgin, 1982; Price, 1994, p. 12).

The limitations of subject-based approaches to visual image collections has also been reflected on extensively by those concerned with indexing within library and computer science communities, notably by Peter Enser, who oversaw one of the early classification schemes for *One Day for Life*. Enser's research since the 1990s has focused on ways to further the technology of image retrieval. As part of this, he has researched picture library users' requests as well as libraries' classification methods, and has drawn the conclusion that, ultimately, for images, "subject indexing is of low utility" (2007, p. 4). He notes, "In general, users' interest in images lies with their inferred semantic content" (Enser, Sandom, Hare & Lewis, 2007, p. 468). Drawing on the work of Sara Shatford (1994, 1986), among others, Enser notes that what an image is "of", let alone "about", is still unreachable by indexing methods, even at their most sophisticated, not least because the concept of "aboutness" – in terms of the symbolic or affective quantities of the image – is notoriously elusive to capture, being largely beyond the frame. Even recent advances in "computational procedures on the pixel domain", for example, are never going to be able to capture non-visible issues in photographs, such as significance (Enser et al., 2007, p. 473).

Searching for mass photography: approaches and tools II
Meaning-based analytical methods: what photographs do

Visual analytical approaches that investigate what photographs are "for" and what they "do", or are expected to do, provide a more productive means to access

meaning in mass photography projects. Mary Warner Marien has defined photography as "both a visual language and a cluster of expectations and ideas" (2006, p. xiv). Photographs resulting from mass-participation projects, in their numerous manifestations and locations, might best be characterised as such a cluster, that is, as a meeting point of the various desires and determinations of organisers, participants, judges, editors, publishers, archivists and curators of the material. Anthropologist Christopher Pinney has described photographs as "supple", that is, "subject to multiple determinations in different places and times" (2003, p. 14) and it has become a commonplace to observe photography's status as marked by mutability, volatility, mobility and even morphology (see, for example, Batchen, 2002; J. Schwartz, 2004; Sekula, 2003; Sontag, 1979). Taking this as a given, then, the photographs under scrutiny are not to be considered principally for their evidential or indexical content, but, to paraphrase Pinney, as spatially and temporally contingent "textured artefacts" whose context and use is central to their meaning (2003, p. 5). As Schwartz has argued:

> The value of the photographic image and its role in the action in which it participated is not inherent in the content of the image or embedded in the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of form. Rather, it is anchored to the functional context of creation and cannot be teased from the image itself.
>
> (1995, p. 51)

Pinney concurs:

> That the formal qualities of images themselves may be in large part irrelevant is suggested by their historical trajectories and the radical re-valuations that they undergo. If an image that appears to do a particular kind of work in one episteme is able to perform radically different work in another, it appears inappropriate to propose inflexible links between formal qualities and effect.
>
> (2003, p. 3)

Rejecting dominant formal readings of photographs, then, this research is led by methodological approaches that might be broadly described as anthropological or ethnographic. In one of the most important texts to utilise this approach, Richard Chalfen's *Snapshot Versions of Life*, these methods provide a non-traditional means of considering photographs produced outside canonical or disciplinary boundaries. He notes, "Few people have been conditioned to think of amateur photographs as claims about life, as attempts to make sense of human existence, as interpretations, or as constructions of reality" (1987, pp. 6–7). As one among a group of