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Koos Breukel, *Casper, Alkmaar* (2000)

A photograph shared on social media of a new father cradling his baby with his top off is deemed acceptable, while a mother breastfeeding the same baby is not. The reactions to these images, and the images themselves, reflect how attitudes to intimacy and photography have changed, and how partisan and biased they can be. Historically, pregnancy and the very early months of motherhood were not photographed at all, and, if they were, they were for very private consumption only. Now, however, these experiences are shared as a badge of pride, and even scans of foetuses are widely shared within networks.

It is not just what the photograph shows in terms of content, but also how it is tagged, viewed, liked, geotagged and commented upon which determines how we understand it in terms of its nature as public or private. Photography has always been an excellent medium for making the private public, especially in documentary photography. It has the ability to take a viewer into another world that is not theirs. The more private, distant, different or confrontational this is, generally the more affecting and arresting the work.

Take, for instance, this work (left) by the Dutch photographer Koos Breukel (born 1962). It is rare to see the reality of a baby being born. If we have not given birth ourselves or been witness to a birth, our experience of it is usually a sanitised Hollywood version. A question that a photograph like this might provoke is: Why would anyone else be interested in seeing a picture of the photographer's baby being born? It is a valid question, but it is worth considering that it is not one that is often asked of literature – biographies and autobiographies are big sellers, but personal photography is often seen as self-indulgent.

For Breukel, the ruthlessness of life and death is essential to his work. As a young photographer he took portraits of politicians and pop stars, but the performative aspect of public personas and the portraiture genre made him long for more genuine content. Boiling down human existence to essential components became a major driving force for Breukel, and is indeed an important narrative thread for many photographers. Like personal stories in literature, the best autobiographical photography also taps into something universal that many people can relate to. The sharing of traditionally very private moments seeks a similar set of goals: to record, to reveal, to interpret and, possibly, to influence – perhaps even to change – the social world or at least the viewer's understanding of it.

Another question that arises is what the notions of private and public really mean. Is the distinction dissolving in our media-driven world, when people are filmed constantly in streets, squares and shops, often

without realising is happening? Meanwhile, people photograph and film themselves in the most banal situations and put the results online. As photography, social attitudes and technology struggle to keep up with one another, new lines are drawn daily in terms of what is acceptable, to whom and in which cultures.

Recently, the Dutch documentary makers Tim den Besten and Nicolaas Veul conducted research into the effects of being online 24/7 in an experiment called 'Super Stream Me'. They attempted to stream their lives continuously for three weeks. During the study, they experienced the well-documented phenomenon of the performative online identity, in which a version of the self deemed most appropriate for the assumed audience is created. The constraints they imposed upon themselves caused so much stress that they had to end the experiment prematurely. In real life, expectations are different and depend on the platform on which you share your life (for example Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Snapchat). José van Dijck, author of *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, claims: 'On Instagram, you don't portray yourself; you paint a desirable persona … so each selfie peculiarly reflects the flair and function of the platform through which it is posted, perhaps even more so than its sender's taste. The medium is a big part of the message.' One can reasonably ask, then, if the act of sharing a photograph today is not 'making the private public', but a denial of the possibility of genuinely private moments, as determined by the platform of your choice.

Aside from the autobiographical narratives so dominant now, there are many other ways in which photographers grapple with what is truly private and how it becomes public. For example, the portraits of Berber Muslim women taken in 1960 by the French photographer Marc Garanger (born 1935) in colonial Algeria give rise to ethical questions of privacy. While working for the French Army in the Algerian War (1954–62) he was commissioned to make identity cards for detained women. This woman (right) stares into the lens with a silent but unmistakable anger. It is part of a series of unveiled women – one of 2,000 portraits taken by the photographer. These portraits have been called images of violation: not only was the women's right to privacy taken from them, but the subsequent display of the images (initially created for administrative purposes) decades later within a gallery context, as well as their inclusion in this book, could be interpreted as further violations. However, when Garanger returned to Algeria in 2004, he met many of the women again, and discovered that in a lot of cases his portraits were the only photographs they had of themselves, and were treasured private documents.

The lines between private and public are complex. Different contexts result in ever-changing attitudes and circumstances. Returning to the theme of birth, imagine, for example, a mother sharing a photo of herself breastfeeding her baby on a social media profile open only to those she has invited. This mother will probably find that commercials for formula milk start to dominate her sidebars shortly after she posted. This is because the platform has effectively sold her private picture to advertisers. So a loving moment shared in good faith with close family members turns out to be not very private after all.

This makes it worth considering, before we post any image, why it seems worth sharing, who might be looking at it and who has access to it. Private moments are sometimes best kept private – especially with photographs of those who are not yet in charge of their digital identity.

Marc Garanger, from *Algerian Women* (1960)

Susan Meiselas (born 1948)
Ginger, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (1975)

Photographed over a period of three summers during the time of debates around women's liberation, American photographer Susan Meiselas's 1972–75 *Carnival Strippers* series documents backstage moments with women who stripped in itinerant carnivals around the USA. Working with a handheld camera, travelling with the women and enduring the long nights with them, Meiselas was able to gain their trust, leading to them giving her intimate portraits and interviews. Portraits like this one of Ginger were done at the request of the young women, as many did not find the pictures of the actual show to be of any interest.

Working closely and hearing the stories of the women, Meiselas learned that many of the women came from poor backgrounds, but quickly had to shift her assumptions and judgments about them as victims. She has spoken about how she was struck by their ease and self-assuredness with regards to their bodies. The interviews that accompany the portraits give the women a voice and negate any judgments that might occur in reaction to the photographs. In the case of Ginger, she saw her profession as a trade-off, acknowledging that she was being exploited, but only in the service of a larger purpose – to save up for college.

The final project resulted in a book and an installation for an ongoing exhibition consisting of photographs, sound (made from 150 hours of tape) and moving images. The shift from the public shows, where the women are on display, to the more relaxed moments occurring backstage, and these personal portraits, highlights the stark contrast in the ways in which people behave in public and in private, and how everyone is complicit in shaping the difference.

SIGNIFIERS FOR A MALE RESPONSE
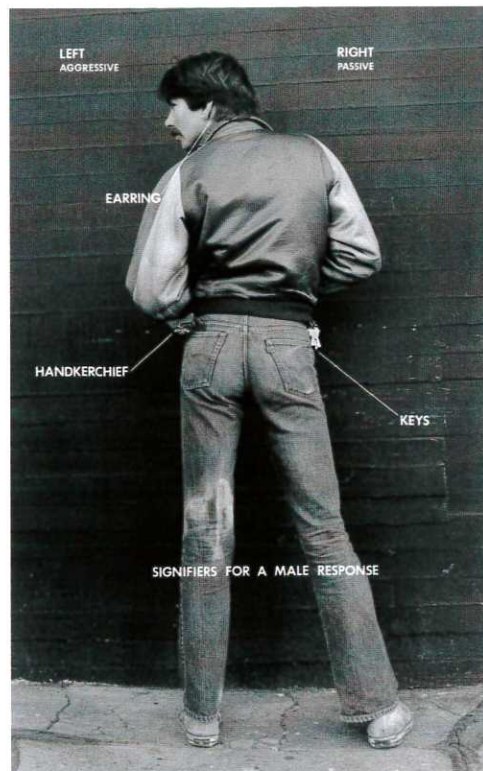
John Wickens (1865–1936)
Henry Cyril Paget, 5th Marquess of Anglesey (c.1900)

Hal Fischer (born 1950)
Signifiers for a Male Response (1977)

Since the invention of photography, the portrait genre developed fast. By the end of the 19th century, everyone who was anyone had had their picture taken. The commercial side of the medium – in the form of *cartes de visite* and, later, postcards – was thriving, and did much to promote the celebrities of the day, giving them national (and international) presence. Those who were formerly known only through visits to the theatre or rare public sightings became public property.

An example of this is provided by this photographic postcard (opposite) of the so called 'Dancing Marquess', so named for his semi-private performances of eroticised 'Butterfly Dances'. Henry Cyril Paget was an eccentric, extravagant and short-lived British aristocrat who frittered away much of the vast family fortune on furs and jewels. Embracing the performative joys of photography to construct his dazzling, transgressive public persona, Paget posed regularly in elaborate costumes that he had made especially for him and his troupe of actors who performed in the converted chapel of his ancestral home.

Photography made Paget a public character that his family would have rather kept private. After his early death at the age of 29 in 1905, his family destroyed all other records of him and sold his belongings. His *Bystander* magazine obituary stated, 'His example will remain one of the strongest arguments against our hereditary system that the most ardent revolutionist would wish for.'

Although his sexuality was never openly discussed, Paget's identity as a gay man was signalled through his clothing. To be able to do so betrays a position of privilege that is not afforded to everyone. Hal Fischer's project *Gay Semiotics*, in which the photo above was published, took this idea and (with tongue in cheek) showed the subtle methods of communication and identification that gay men in the Castro neighbourhood of San Francisco used to signal to others their sexuality. Fischer has said, 'The whole series and my subsequent work in that period, was about me, and my place in time, and the community I was in.' It was about coding sexuality in order to be understood when it was not possible to speak openly about it.

In the culture of apps like Grindr and Scruff, with their own coded queer languages, Paget's and Fischer's examples can both be seen as early methods of making private information public to those who know how to access it.

Lady Clementina Hawarden (1822–1865)
The Return From the Ball (c.1863)

This mysterious photograph comes from an album by the Victorian photographer Lady Clementina Hawarden and shows her two daughters, Clementina Maude and Isabella Grace. Like many early pioneers of photography, Lady Hawarden was wealthy and privileged – photography was an expensive and time-consuming pursuit. Little is known about her, but her photographs show remarkable skill and a striking aesthetic. She was a skilful manipulator of natural light, and her photographs often utilise windows, sunshine and shadows to arresting effect.

In Hawarden's scenes, the rooms of her house become a stage on which her daughters pose enigmatically to create mysterious tableaux. One of her characteristic devices is the use of twinning – either by the mirrored shapes formed by the poses of her daughters, or more literally via the use of mirrors. Clementina Maude and Isabella Grace are often dressed in their own clothes, but also sometimes wear elaborate costumes, as was common in aristocratic circles at the time. The photographs are private glimpses into a convivial female world from another era. They are dreamy and atmospheric – an effect that is exaggerated by the albumen process used to develop them, which over time has washed the photographic paper with a yellowish glow due to the egg white used in the emulsion.

Making these photographs would have been a slow and painstaking process, and the fact that so many of Hawarden's photographs have survived is a testament to the shared commitment of the women in the family to creating this intimate photographic world. At the time of their creation, the images were pasted into albums to be enjoyed privately, but they became public in 1939 when Hawarden's granddaughter Lady Clementina Tottenham donated 775 photographs to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. They have become an important marker in the history of photography, and have since influenced many contemporary artists using the medium.

Robbie Cooper (born 1969)
Drew Hugh, 7, Playing 'Hulk', New York, USA, 2008
from *Immersion* **(2008)**

Amazed by the amount of time children spend in front of the screen, British artist Robbie Cooper filmed a cross-section of society as they watched a cartoon or horror film, or while they played a game. Because of their engrossment in the film or a virtual world, the children forgot that they were being filmed. Cooper applied a technique whereby the children appear to be looking directly at the camera, thus producing a voyeuristic sensation in the viewer: one is face to face with the children's undisguised emotions. The hatred, joy and fear – and also the apathy – is alarming.

The children are so absorbed in their games that they uninhibitedly talk to the screen – Cooper captured this on video. They seem to address the viewer as they snarl: 'Come back here, let me stab you', 'Let me kill you' and 'You'll get knifed'. The sound of machine guns does not evoke horror, but makes them grin instead. But here, Drew Hugh has tears in his eyes, lending this image the quality of a modern-day version of Bragolin's *Crying Boy* painting that was mass-produced during the 1950s.

Cooper's stills and videos play to concerns about the anti-social consequences of lengthy screen time and the children's supposed social isolation, as cut off from the real world. Once, similar questions were asked of reading and writing. Socrates argued that writing weakened the memory because one had to remember less, and in the 19th century, there was concern because the accessibility of books was said to have a damaging effect on society. The criticism failed to inhibit a further spread – just as daily lengthy screen time has now become normalised.
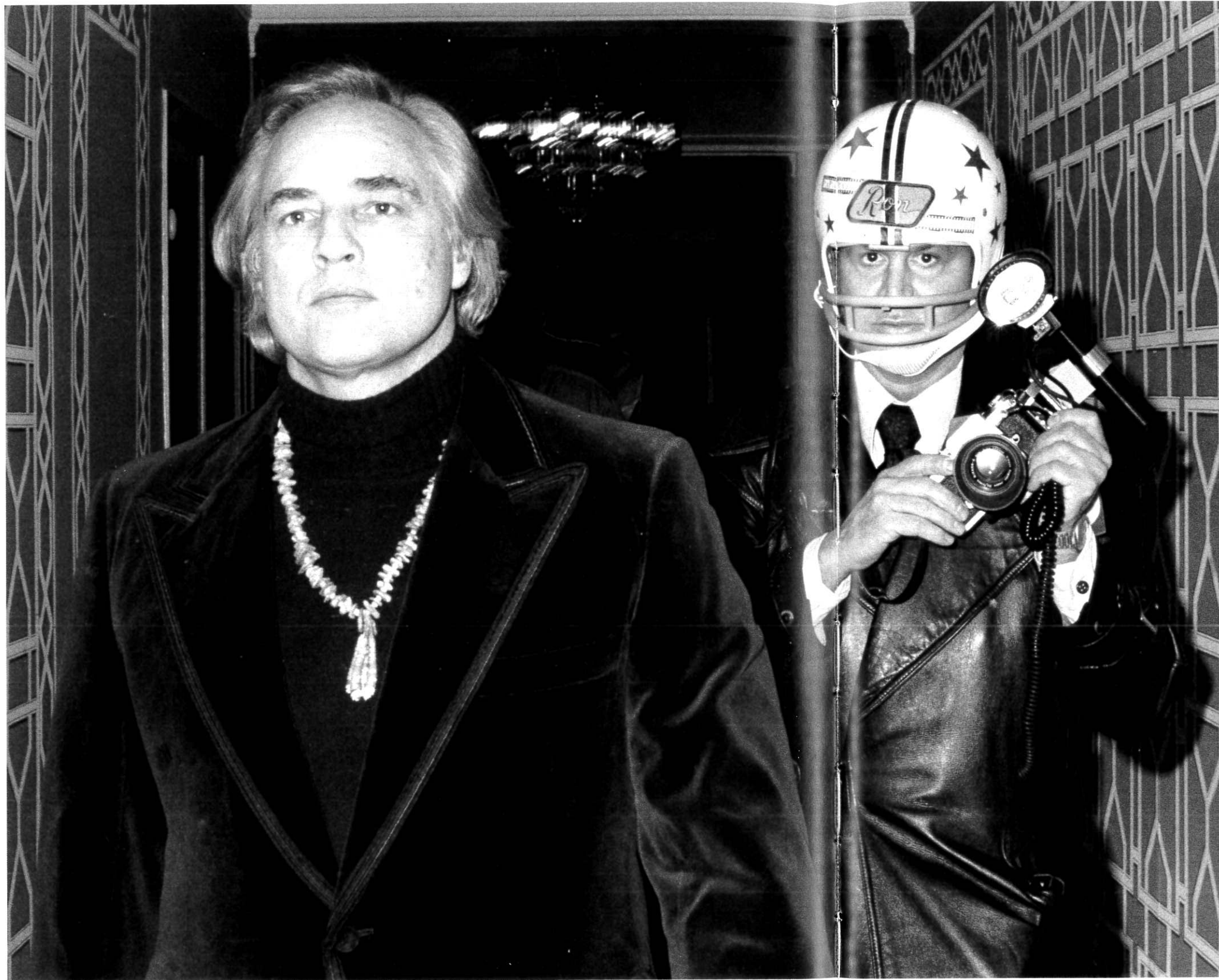
Ron Galella (born 1931)
Marlon Brando and Ron Galella at the
Waldorf Hotel, 26 November 1973 (1973)

The paparazzi genre raises questions about the cult of celebrity, the celebrity's right to privacy, and press freedom. 'There is a popular notion that the photographer is by nature a voyeur,' artist Nan Goldin has said. The American Ron Galella, one of the most noted and notorious paparazzi in the history of the profession, claimed that he was just as interested in the private personas of celebrities as he was in their public image, curious as to whether they were as glamorous in real life as on screen. The fact that getting your picture on the cover of a magazine yields a lot of money might also have been a motivation for his chosen career.

In 1973 Galella followed the Hollywood actor Marlon Brando to a New York restaurant. It wasn't the first time the photographer had stalked the actor, but this time, it seems, Marlon lost all self-control – in one single punch knocking five teeth out of Galella's lower jaw. The paparazzo subsequently sued Brando but nonetheless continued his pursuit of the actor. On their next encounter later that year, however, he took the precaution of donning a football helmet with his first name on it, and a fellow photographer, Paul Schmalbach, took a photograph of the encounter.

Galella became known for the retaliative actions taken by his 'victims': Jackie Kennedy Onassis obtained a restraining order to keep him at a distance (the trial became a groundbreaking case in the area of paparazzi photography), Brigitte Bardot had him hosed down and Richard Burton sent people to steal his film and beat him up. Ironically, the Brando incident and the lawsuit that Onassis filed made Galella himself famous, which was his ultimate goal – and he carried his nickname 'paparazzi superstar' with pride. Not all celebrities shunned him, however. Andy Warhol was an advocate for Galella's work, saying: 'My idea of a good picture is one that's in focus and of a famous person doing something infamous.'

Mary Ellen Mark (1940–2015)
The Damm Family in Their Car, Los Angeles (1987)

Sometimes photographs that at first glance look tender and beautiful turn out to be as shocking as a war scene. The American photographer Mary Ellen Mark dedicated many years of her career to a documentary series about the 'unfamous', as she called the most vulnerable people in society – from 11-year-old Indian girls sold by their parents to brothels in Mumbai, to the Damm family in Los Angeles, shown here.

At the time Mark took this photograph, the mother and her children's stepfather were addicted and homeless, living with a six-year-old daughter and four-year-old son as well as a pit bull terrier in a car. *Life* magazine published the photographs of the Damm family in the same year that Mark made them; the story, names and faces of the children were made public. It might be argued that the publication served a worthy purpose: to draw attention to the appalling situation a family can find itself in. Readers showered the Damm family with donations.

When *Life* followed up on the family eight years later, with Mark returning to photograph them, nothing had improved. Just months after the donations had poured in, the money was all gone and the family were homeless again. In addition, it transpired that the stepfather had been sexually abusing the daughter. This was all reported in the same magazine.

We might contrast this series with Nick Hedges's Shelter archive (page 168), which similarly shows families with young children living in unacceptable housing conditions. Apart from the initial use of Hedges's photographs by the charity that had commissioned the assignment, the archive was placed under an embargo for 30 years before it could be made public. The aim was to protect the privacy of the people depicted: after three decades, it was considered, they would be unrecognisable.