



Shimon Attie, *Linienstrasse 137: Slide projection of police raid on former Jewish residents, 1920, Berlin* (1992)

The French cultural theorist Roland Barthes wrote in his book *Camera Lucida* (1980) that, for him, 'The Photograph does not call up the past (nothing Proustian in a photograph) ... The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed.' This approach to thinking about photography – as providing a record of a time gone, never to be repeated – is perhaps the most common way of considering photographs. For most people, looking at a snapshot does not only make one sad for the time or person gone but can also trigger memories of the past, bringing them right back into the present in the mind of the viewer. Photographs, whether happy or sad, and especially family ones, work on both memory and remembrance – at the same time representing a memory and calling us to remember – and they hold a very special and important place in our lives. It has become commonplace for people to claim that of all their possessions, it would be the family photograph album that they would save in a fire. Although of course, this would now be the computer hard drive.

The relationship between photography and memory is more muddled than one may at first think. Do we really remember an event that happened, or do we remember the photograph of it? The majority of our snapshots are taken around happy events such as holidays, birthdays, weddings and parties. Arguments, divorce proceedings, deaths and funerals – these are rarely photographed. Snapshots record and resurrect only a select version of the past. Moreover, family photographs when printed become powerful talismans for the past: they are handed about, viewed and touched, often as part of a warm, shared experience in which stories about the relatives and friends portrayed are retold.

What is strange, then, is that canonical histories of photography have tended to leave out such snapshots, which must surely account for the largest number of photographs taken. Photography as art dominates in the written histories of photography. However, some artists have tried to address this elision by considering memory, and indeed, bring snapshots and other types of vernacular photographs into their artistic practice. *The Writing on the Wall* project (1991–2, see left) by the American visual artist Shimon Attie (born 1957) is an example of this, combining vernacular photographs with large-scale, on-location installations that are then photographed. The artist projected pre-Second World War snapshots of Berlin Jewish life onto buildings (sometimes the same buildings as the ones shown in the snapshot) in the former Jewish quarters of Berlin, the so-called Scheunenviertel. In the case illustrated here, the projection shows a photograph of a police

raid on former Jewish residents in 1920. By combining images from past and present, the city becomes one of ghosts. With the knowledge of the Holocaust, these works act as remembrance for the families in the pictures, but also for all Jews everywhere who have suffered persecution. The memories they invoke are then personal, political and cultural.

The combination of these two different types of photograph illustrates how often memory is folded into older images – which can be in the form of mourning, nostalgia, longing or love. In a very different example we can see how the photographic object is used directly as a tool for memorialisation and remembrance. In this mounted portrait designed for display on a cabinet (thus referred to as a cabinet card) of Queen Victoria (opposite) the photographer (perhaps in collaboration with the Queen) has carefully staged every part of it to signify her continued mourning for her husband Prince Albert. This was taken long after his death in 1861 and was commissioned to commemorate the Golden Jubilee. She wears her wedding veil and significantly turns her arm to show a photograph of the Prince Consort incorporated into her bracelet (the inclusion of the then-new art of photography into jewellery, notably lockets, was common in Victorian Britain). This constant reminder of a person, a sense that you must never forget them through both sight and touch, brings significance to the photographic object.

Here a photograph can be seen to offer stability in a changing world, a freezing of memories and the ability to reminisce at will. In terms of memory, photographs are not just visual records but are concerned with very human emotions.

Now, of course, the 'family photo album' mentioned earlier has become the computer's or smartphone's hard drive or cloud archive. Here thousands of snapshots are stored and rarely looked at or printed out. Photo-sharing sites have changed the way we take photographs as well as the subjects. It's not just birthdays and holidays (although they certainly still feature heavily) but also food, painted nails, cats and countless other everyday and banal things and happenings. It could be said that the way we take photographs now, by snapping, sharing, tagging and captioning, has shifted our understanding of photographs away from memory and toward experience. That's a radical change in how we understand a medium, one which has taken place over a very short time.

This shift in how we understand one of the fundamental functions of photography is once again best illustrated in social networking. Photo-sharing sites such as Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram have introduced the ability to present photographs that disappear after viewing. The purpose of these temporary photographs has nothing to do with memory, nor indeed are they the signifier of what has once existed but is now gone, from Barthes's melancholic conception. In fact, their very disappearance can be seen as a counterpoint to the predominant theoretical modes of the medium, that are to do with recording, permanence, witness, proof or 'trace' of life, as outlined by famous writers on the medium including Barthes and Susan Sontag. Once again, this illustrates that photography is a nebulous umbrella term which can encompass a wide range of approaches, media and physical outcomes.



Gunn & Stuart, *Queen Victoria* (1897)



Tatsumi Orimoto (born 1946)
Breadman Son + Alzheimer Mama (1996–2007)

Ishiuchi Miyako (born 1947)
Mothers (2000–2005)

Japanese artist Tatsumi Orimoto is best known as a performance persona whom he calls 'Bread Man' (see *Untitled*, 1996, above). Tying loaves to his face to form a sculpture, he went about mundane activities, while simultaneously looking after his mother who had Alzheimer's disease, until she died in 2017. By blending photography, performance, sculpture and life he created images that, although absurd, are also filled with love, compassion and humanity. His physical difference as Bread Man echoed the alternate reality his mother existed in, engendered by the disease. One is not sure whether his mother was fully aware

of what was being undertaken, and although this could be read as exploitative, it isn't. Why is this? As she aged, he also created a series called *Art Mama and Son*, which shows, in a more documentary style, the constant care, and the uncanny resemblance between the photographer and his mother as they both grew older. Memory and remembrance are sewn into Orimoto's work with his mother in all sorts of ways – we can't know what she remembered of their time together and what she did not.

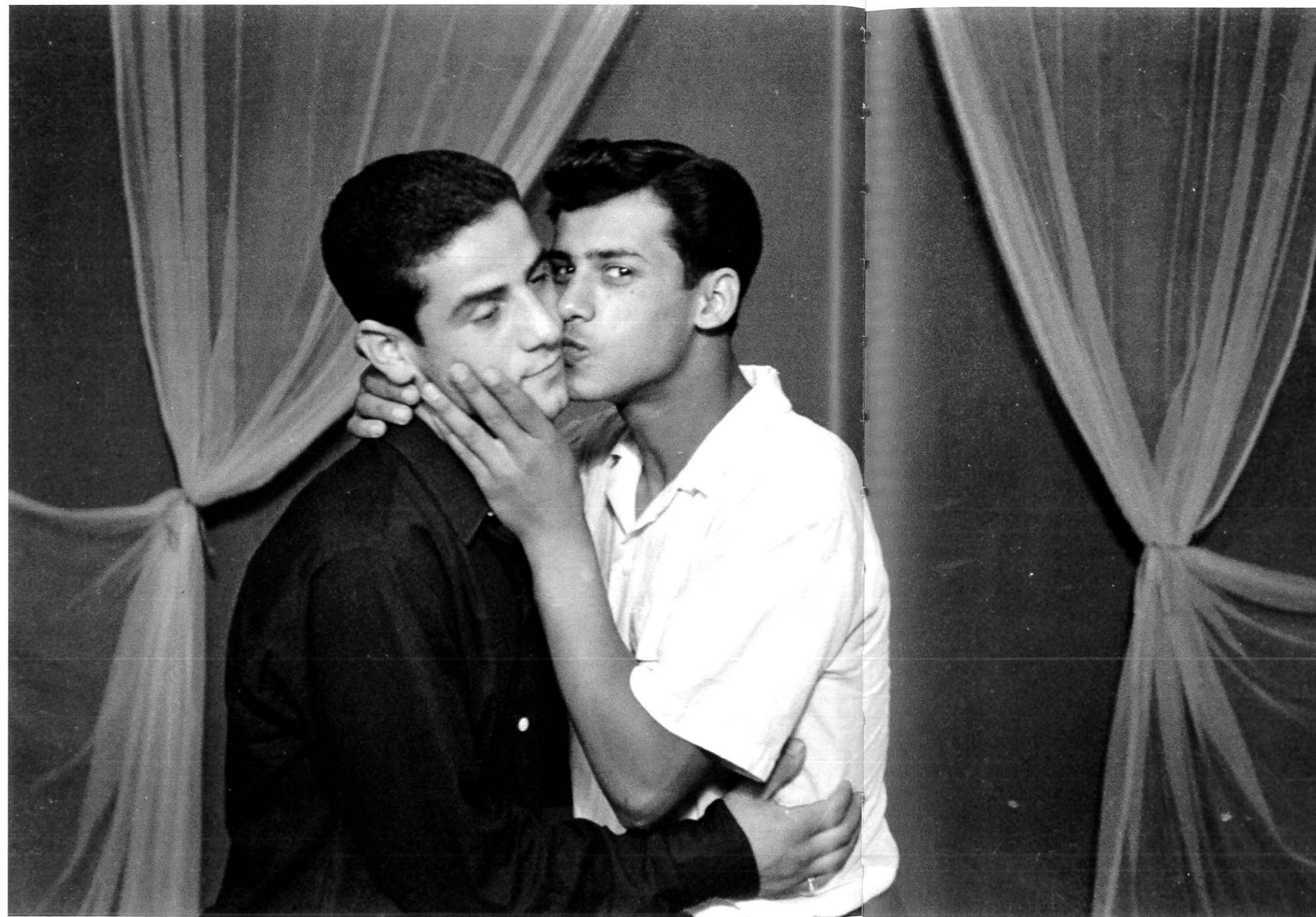
Another Japanese artist, Ishiuchi Miyako, also deals with memory and her mother, although the approach is quite different.



Mother's consists of photographs of the artist's mother's belongings, taken after her unexpected death in 2000. The series reads like a catalogue, simply shot and titled: the 2001 work shown above, for example, is titled *Mothers #5*. The relationship between mother and daughter was conflicted, and had started to heal only just before the mother's death. Ishiuchi states: 'For many years, I was pained by an inability to communicate with my mother, but after my father's death, just when the discord between us was finally beginning to ease, she passed away.' Ishiuchi attempted to come to terms with her loss by photographing her mother's remaining possessions. The

objects act both as an extension of the artist's mother's body and as a comment on the fragility and eventual disintegration of the human body. This desire to stay connected means that the objects become suffused with emotion and longing.

For both artists, the urge to document is a way of remembering and immortalising the mother, and becomes an elegiac homage to times past. What both these images show is that memory here is not about recalling appearance or enhancing the quality of a recollection, but instead describes extended acts of anamnesis – 'a state of reverie' – and, as such, explicit gestures of remembrance.



Akram Zaatari (born 1966)
Tarho and El Masri. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1955 (2007)

Look closely at this portrait of two young men. What can you say about them? This is one of those rare photographs that could easily fit into almost any chapter in this book. First, it deals with remembrance, but it is also about public versus private, identity, reality and ownership.

The Lebanese film-maker and artist Akram Zaatari has secured this image (one of many) from the archive of Studio Shehrazade, run by his compatriot, the studio photographer Hashem el Madani, who was active from 1948 in Zaatari's native city, Saida (Sidon), in Lebanon. By re-contextualising this studio portrait made in 1955, Zaatari has now given this image two 'authors' and two dates, emphasising how a photograph, when removed from its original context, can take on a different meaning in another time and in a different religious culture.

Residents of Saida of all social backgrounds visited El Madani to have their portraits taken in the privacy of his popular studio. The studio became a kind of theatre for men and women to act out various identities. The aspect of performance in this portrait is increased by the curtains hung from the backdrop. Frequently inspired by films, people could select how they wanted to be remembered. Sometimes they allowed El Madani to choose poses for them, and sometimes the customers chose from a book full of images of people in different poses that El Madani provided like a menu. Thus, these two men came to perform embracing and kissing in front of a camera. In conservative Sidon, where a public kiss between a man and a woman was a bridge too far, it seems that two people of the same sex were nevertheless willing to playact a kiss, with one of the young men pretending to be the woman demurely receiving her kiss. Why they did this remains inscrutable. What we do know is that Zaatari makes us rethink our assumptions about hidden homosexuality, and how a picture, once taken to capture and remember a friendship, actually confronts us with ourselves and our immediate judgement.



Nan Goldin (born 1953)
Cookie Laughing, NYC, 1985 (1987)

The American photographer Nan Goldin famously said she photographed people she loved so that she would never lose them. It's as if she was trying to make her memories stay alive. However, because so many of her friends died during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, the photographs have become totems for how much she really did lose, highlighting the fact that photography cannot preserve or replace a person. Instead of staving off mortality, it crystallises it, recalling Roland Barthes's idea that the essence of photography is the implied message: 'That has been.'

With this in mind, Goldin's photograph of Cookie Mueller has a dual charge: on the one hand it is free and spontaneous, and on the other it is a detailed document of a time that has been and gone. Cookie Mueller was an 'underground' actress who had parts in John Waters movies as well as being a journalist and columnist for New York's *East Village Eye*. She died of an AIDS-related illness when she was 40. This photograph is part of a series or portfolio brought together by Goldin after her friend's death. The limited number of prints and the fact that they exist as physical photographs, as if encased in a time capsule, magnifies their sadness. They have a different sensibility from the images now ubiquitous on social media sites showing friends gathered around a phone for a selfie. Goldin's community seems gloriously unconscious of the camera in a way that today's generation are not. There is no self-consciousness or posing.

As so many people subscribe to at least one social media site today, the way we handle death online is still being worked out. What is appropriate and what is not? Should you disconnect that person's page from yours? Do families still post? There seem to be no definitive answers. Perhaps forming a portfolio of photographs as Goldin did for Mueller might be a good place to start.

Unknown Photographer
Plantation owner with his wife and slaves,
Australasia (c.1856)

The problem of collective memory and histories – of who has the right to decide how a story is told and to whom – seethes just beneath the surface of this photograph. It shows a plantation owner, his wife and their indigenous workers, gathered as if they are posing for a family portrait. The ornate frame suggests that this object was treasured with great pride and no doubt was put on display. To contemporary eyes, it is chilling and strange. The patriarch carries a whip, and the young Aboriginal woman sitting at the front looks as though she is wearing a wedding gown – although we might have expected a bride to be positioned in a place of honour, not humbly sitting on the ground.

In addition, Aborigines' relationship to memory is centred in oral practices, in 'songlines', which take cues from the landscape. All this knowledge and history is absent in this photograph which appears as a mere 'blink' in comparison with the rich traditions of Aboriginal memory-making. Just as the workers have been violently severed from their culture and forced to work on the plantations, they are here subjected to a Western form of record-making and the ideology implicit in the technology.

Today, the power balances that historically have been at play between indigenous cultures and Western culture are brought to the fore, and Western ideals of ownership, control and property have been transported to another culture. The horrific oppression and exploitation that was (and in many ways continues to be) dealt against the Australian Aborigines cannot be reversed, but by showing photographs such as these more inclusive histories can be explored, and past actions accounted for.



Nickolas Muray (1892–1965)

Christmas Tree; cover of *McCall's Homemaking* (1944)

The Hungarian-born American photographer Nickolas Muray is now remembered not only for his photographs but also for his Olympic fencing achievements and his well-documented love affair with the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. He arrived in the USA aged 21 having learned the skills of colour photography and printing while working at a publishing house in Germany. The complicated three-colour carbro (carbon-bromide) printing process, of which he was a master, became popular in advertising during the late 1930s and early 1940s, and Muray worked for a range of magazines and advertisers, most notably the monthly women's magazine *McCall's*, where he pioneered the use of full colour on every page.

Muray was adept at creating mythic images for magazines. He understood acutely the need for advertising to create a fantasy, generating images of longing and desire. His commercial photographs represent an America that is over the top, generous and abundant – far from the post-war reality experienced by many. They tap into a collective idea of what a certain event should be like, whether that is Christmas or a Thanksgiving feast. They are the American Dream epitomised – a complex fantasy based on artificial memories, aspirations and ideals. Muray's image for the cover of the December 1944 issue depicts a gorgeous, idealised Christmas, tapping into a nostalgic vision of how Christmas used to be. It stands in for real memory because you really cannot get anything better than the Muray version of an event: his images represent a perfect time that never existed – just like in a Technicolor movie or in a dream.



Jeffrey Silverthorne (born 1946)
Lovers, Accidental Carbon Monoxide Poisoning (1973)

This picture was taken in a morgue in Rhode Island, USA, for a series titled *Morgue Work* (1972–91). The American photographer, Jeffrey Silverthorne, has captured a couple who were accidentally killed by carbon monoxide poisoning – keeping his balance by placing one foot on a body-refrigerator door. Silverthorne has placed himself in the picture by showing his leg – a move that seems disrespectful, although perhaps this was the only angle from where he could capture both people in one image. And perhaps, after all, they deserve to be remembered together like this, as they were lovers. However, to imagine a photographer clambering around a morgue as he tries to find the best angle for a shot jars with our ideas of how the dead should be treated.

Silverthorne's portraits of the dead raise a host of ethical questions – not least whether the families gave their permission and had access to the photographs, either through reviewing them or having editorial control. However, his treatment of the theme of death is not driven by voyeuristic desire or morbid fascination, but instead deliberately raises questions of morality, transgression and remembrance. That is a lot to demand of a photograph. This photograph has a charge, as it so directly illustrates a photographer's determination to show the shocking reality of death, usually concealed 'behind closed doors'. The photographer's foot acts as a symbol of interference, preventing the door from being closed and hiding the reality of death, which is ultimately the most shocking thing about this picture, rather than it being a photograph of the dead.





Bertien van Manen (born 1942)
West Yorkshire, New Sharlston (2004)

For her series *Give Me Your Image* (2002–5), the Dutch artist Bertien van Manen visited strangers' homes around Europe and asked to see a precious family photograph. Often people showed her photographs that told an intriguing personal story. On a Greek island she was shown the cherished photo of a murderess who had killed her husband. And a cheerful Moldavian man pulling a face in another picture from 1930 turned out to be one of the many Holocaust victims.

Van Manen then looked for a place in the house where the picture could best be photographed, and re-photographed the memory of an ordinary person, thus recording an intimate snapshot of an ordinary life, enriched by history, memory and emotion. In doing this, Van Manen takes the viewer on a journey across Europe's ragged, impoverished edges as well as to its rich centre, while also presenting many of the great themes from 20th-century history – from the Second World War to the current immigration crisis. In Budapest, she visited the new rich, and in a Parisian suburb, she met immigrants who kept their photographs in shoeboxes.

In West Yorkshire, the photographer visited a mining family, whose community had been shattered by mine closures. Here, she placed a framed picture of a group of smiling miners on a sideboard topped with the family's ornaments. The miniature high-heeled shoes and the figurine of a fairy contrast strongly with the miners' rugged appearance and their tough working conditions. When Van Manen looked through the lens, she had all the luck a photographer could hope for: the television in the background that had been on since she entered the house showed a miner with a blackened face, reinforcing the memorial function of the photograph while catapulting the scene into the present.

Van Manen's photograph clearly speaks of a desire to remember the person in the group portrait, which shows a world that no longer exists, and people who are no longer alive. The private photo showing the eternal connection to those they left behind functions as a talisman of remembrance of both people and objects. Just like Van Manen's photograph.