

ROUTLEDGE

PHOTOGRAPHY

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Photography explores the photograph in the 21st century and its importance as a media form. Stephen Bull considers our media-saturated society and the place of photography in everyday life, introducing the theories used to analyse photographs and exploring the impact of digital technology.

The book is split into short, accessible chapters on the broad themes central to the study and analysis of photography, and key issues are explained and applied to visual examples in each chapter.

Topics covered include:

- the identity of photography
- the meanings of photographs
- photography for sale
- snapshots
- the photograph as document
- photography as art
- photographs in fashion
- photography and celebrity.

Photography is an up-to-date, clear and comprehensive introduction to debates about photography now and is particularly useful to media, photography and visual culture students.

Stephen Bull is a writer, lecturer and artist. He has written articles for *Creative Camera*, *Photoworks* and *Source: The Photographic Review* and contributed chapters to books such as *The Media: An Introduction* and *Joachim Schmid: Photoworks 1982-2007*. He has exhibited in London at Tate Britain and The Photographers' Gallery. He was Course Leader for BA (Hons) Photography at the University of Portsmouth and is Course Leader for Photography at the University for the Creative Arts, Farnham.

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'Save the Day with Snap Shots' – the day of the year which brings most families together, is a splendid opportunity to take snap-shots [*sic*] of the entire family, both singly and as a group. Next year might be too late. Have your camera and a few extra film [*sic*] ready.

The duty thus falls upon the snapshooter to not just 'save' moments, but to 'immortalise' the people who they photograph.

James E Paster observes that the early emphasis on the technology of the camera to catch an instant came to be overtaken by a focus on preserving life forever: 'Kodak, and the photographic industry as a whole, wields a profoundly compelling sales tool, one that is intertwined with concepts of life, death and ritual' (Paster 1992: 139). Although Paster does not make the connection directly, his argument corresponds with Roland Barthes' claim in his book *Camera Lucida* that photographs by amateurs come closest to the 'essence' of photography, which he perceives as being the photograph's apparent ability to prove 'that-has-been' (Barthes 2000: 98; see Chapters 2 and 3). However, Barthes' explicit associations between the photograph and physical mortality – which he elaborates upon throughout *Camera Lucida* – remain only implicit in Kodak Culture (see Batchen 2003: 21). As we have seen, death itself is rarely dealt with in snapshots. West notes that a proposed 1932 campaign by Kodak that employed images and captions directly addressing the deaths of family members – including a Thanksgiving scene with elderly relatives – was pulled before it had even reached any publications (2000: 200–207).

Instead, as we have seen, the snapshooter is educated by Kodak Culture to preserve life only through 'happy memories' (West 2000: 143). West sees this memorialising as an attempt to seize control of time and find stability in an idealised past while in the midst of constant change: a form of reminiscence that became increasingly important in the era of fast-paced transformation that arrived with modernity in the 19th century (2000: 154–155; see also Chapter 2). Batchen makes a similar point, but argues that photographs are not a good way to fight against the loss of memory in fast-changing cultures as they only preserve the visual sense, leaving out other sensual experiences such as touch, taste, smell, sound and temperature (Batchen 2004: 94–98; see also Chapter 2). To Batchen, photographs are hollowed-out versions of memory, replacing a full sensory experience with a picture (see also Batchen 2003: 25). The real role of the snapshot, he argues, is less about memorialising the past (which

PHOTOTHERAPY: THE FAMILY ALBUM AND BEYOND

An important part of this planning lies in the editing and arrangement of snapshots. Batchen writes that photo albums present the opportunity to order and control the meanings of snaps, as well as add to their sensory experience with text and, in some cases, objects (for example, tickets for an event recorded in the images) (2004: 48–60; see also Chalfen 1987: 142). Marina Warner emphasises the playful nature of Victorian photo albums that often placed the photographs within hand-painted, fantasy scenes in order to create narratives of escapism (and perhaps to compensate for the lack of spontaneity afforded by static 19th-century photographs such as *cartes de visite*) (Warner 1999). Philip Stokes suggests that the inventiveness that went into assembling these albums came to be replaced over time by a more strictly systematic and chronological approach as a result of Kodak's influence, with the family being confirmed as the key subject matter (Stokes 1992). Martha Langford argues that the family album remains a performance, presenting a constructed version of the identity of its participants both to the participants themselves and to others – a process in which the addition of written explanation and narrative occupies a key role (Langford 2001). Edwards has emphasised the importance of orality to family albums, noting that they are used to narrate stories, often from a range of interweaving viewpoints (Edwards 2009: 38–39).

However, the partial tales told in snapshot albums and the selective fictions created in snapshots result in a wide gap between photographs and lived experience. This is a point made clear in some of the books and exhibitions constructed by Joachim Schmid, where he gathers together thousands of 'found' photographs taken by anonymous snapshooters (see Figure 5.1), revealing both the repetitive nature of the snapshot styles and subjects as well as indicating – by implication – what goes unrepresented (for more about found photography and Schmid see Berger 2009; Bull 1997; MacDonald and Weber 2007). A number of different but related practices under the heading of 'PhotoTherapy' or 'Phototherapy' have actively sought to address and narrow this gap by suggesting other stories that can be told using snapshots (see Chalfen 1987: 156–160).

Since the mid-1970s, psychologists, councillors and therapists, such as Linda Berman and Judy Weiser, have used photographs with their clients. Weiser devised the term 'PhotoTherapy' in 1975 and

technique of asking the clients themselves to talk – in this instance by asking them to discuss snapshots (see Chapter 3 for an examination of Freudian psychoanalysis). These snapshots could be pictures taken of the client, taken by the client, or simply pictures selected by the client. The theory is that both the photographs themselves and the ideas that the client projects into the images while discussing them allow access to their repressed unconscious anxieties and desires, aiding the therapeutic process (Berman 1993: 6–9; Weiser 1999: 1–8). Annette Kuhn has applied this process to her own unconscious, using her family's photographs to provoke her memories and creating a reading of snapshots informed by both psychoanalysis and Marxism as a way to connect the personal life of private snapshots with wider political events in public life (Kuhn 2002).

Kuhn's approach was also influenced by the work of Jo Spence and Rosy Martin, who pioneered the related technique usually referred to as 'phototherapy'. A key event for the establishment of this version of the practice was Spence's exhibition *Beyond the Family Album*, shown at the Hayward Gallery, London in 1979 (see Spence 1986: 82–97). Despite its gallery context, *Beyond the Family Album* was not intended to suggest that snapshots could be art photography, but instead created a forum to present and analyse snapshots publicly. The show largely consisted of snapshots taken of Spence from her birth in 1939 – all of which fitted the standard categories of happy snaps defined earlier in this chapter. However, as Julia Hirsch notes, the captions and texts accompanying the snapshots did not reinforce the positive messages of the images, but instead went 'beyond' the album to fill in what the photographs did not record: negative memories and anxieties centring particularly on issues of class and gender (Hirsch 1997: 133–135).

Spence did not just analyse snapshots, she created new ones too (a technique that is also sometimes used by psychotherapists, including Berman). This was a practice that she continued in the 1980s and 1990s. As well as making snapshots of everyday life such as daily work (as opposed to special occasions), this form of phototherapy also involved what Spence and Martin called 'the theatre of the self' (Spence and Martin 1995: 180). For this latter practice, Spence, in collaboration with Martin and others, used makeshift studios and a few props and outfits to restage moments from the subjects' past that had gone unrecorded in snapshots made at the time. For these photographs the participants would play younger versions of themselves or other roles, such as that of their

Yet, as Hirsch has pointed out, Spence also recognised the need to stage idealised photographs and create positive memories (Hirsch 1997: 135). As with Seymour Parrish in *One Hour Photo*, even those who are fully aware of the lies that snapshots can tell still need to believe them occasionally. *Beyond the Family Album* ends with a panel of conventional snaps mimicking the pages of albums, accompanied by the explanation: 'These pictures are here for no better reason than they remind me of happy times and of people I love.'

DIGITAL SNAPSHOTS: SCREENS AND PERFORMANCE

David Company has argued that the scenes in the processing lab that appear in *One Hour Photo* were 'made at the last point where a contemporary film could linger legitimately over celluloid negatives, sprocket holes, gurgling chemicals, and all the rest of the production process, without seeming nostalgic' (Company 2008b: 55). The film also includes many moments where characters become absorbed in what they are viewing on screens (while using a computer, playing on a games console, watching television and so on) as well as a scene where a customer discussing her camera with Parrish tells him she has been advised to 'go digital'.

Of course most photographers have now 'gone digital' and use digital cameras to make their images (see Chapter 4 for statistics relating to this). In 1986 King presciently asked of the then nascent digital photograph: 'Will these novel and intangible images further change the essential nature of the snapshot?' (King 1986: 13). Paul Cobley and Nick Haefner have argued that this is exactly what has happened – and that the fast-moving, changing character of the photographic apparatus therefore needs to be studied and commented on (Cobley and Haefner 2009: 142–143). The wider implications of digital technology for the identity of photography as a whole are debated in Chapter 2. The rest of this chapter looks at the impact of digital technology on snapshots and (in the final section) their distribution.

While contemporary art photography is often referred to as 'performative' (Green and Lowry 2003: 47–60; see also Chapter 2), snapshots are arguably the most constructed of all photographs. Hirsch suggests that snaps have always been events performed for the camera