Dear all

Thank you all so much for taking the time to read this.

First of all, I'm sorry for inflicting another piece of writing about photography on you. It's one I initially wrote at some point last year - I had hoped to be able to share something more recent, but the lockdown has prevented me from producing anything I'm happy enough with yet. This piece also suffers from COVID, as it were, in that it's a bit lighter on primary sources than I would want, and it also jumps around a bit in terms of the sources it does use. A future version of this, I would imagine, would expand the second section at the expense of the first, since that's where I think more of the interesting material is, and where it dovetails more with the rest of my thesis.

My thesis: I'm looking at what I'm calling 'popular autoethnography' in Britain in the late nineteenth/early-twentieth century. Essentially I am looking at a variety of interrelated social survey movements and representational practices that sought, in various ways, to turn the anthropological gaze inwards – kind of like Mass-Observation, but before Mass-Observation. These include things like folklore collection, ethnographic surveys, regional surveys, but also other practices like documentary photography and broadcasting. So this material is at a slight tangent to that, though photo-surveys, which I do discuss here briefly, do come into it, as will some of the discussions about forms of perception, knowledge production, the everyday, which are on-running themes. So some of this might go in my thesis; it might also not. It might also form the basis of an article, though with a more focused set of sources.

I'd be particularly interested to hear whether you think the framing works, and if there are any points where you feel the argument doesn't hang together as well as it could or should. But any and all feedback is more than welcome. Looking forward to our discussion.

Harry

The picturesque slum: vernacular photography and social knowledge in Britain, 1880-1920

Conventional histories of photography tell us that the ten years either side of 1900 saw the birth and rise of what we now recognise as 'documentary' photography, the kinds of hard-hitting expositions of the dark underbelly of modern life that helped to establish the slum within the iconography of the late-Victorian city. It was in this period, for instance, that the social reformers Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine were pioneering the practice of photojournalism via their explorations of American poverty.[1] At the same time, however, a different sort of documentary practice was taking place on the streets of the city, among the ever-growing ranks of camera owners who were increasingly taking it upon themselves to become chroniclers of life at the ground level. By the 1890s, cameras were more portable, more affordable, and required less technical expertise to operate. Technological changes had conspired to enable mass-produced cameras to take instantaneous 'snapshots', as opposed to the long exposures on which much previous photographic activity had relied. With this expansion of the medium's capabilities came new anxieties about what it meant to observe and record the world, what kinds of subjects were suitable for photographing, and how one was to go about finding them. The urban environment, with its density of social interaction and its ever-changing vistas, became a key locus for those anxieties. Visual technologies gave the urban everyday, in Lynda Nead's words, 'a new topicality and currency'.[2]

What follows is an account of how those taking up photography at the turn of the century were encouraged, via their practice, to pay new and different kinds of attention to their everyday environments. My focus is primarily on amateur and 'vernacular' photography, topics which have received increasing scholarly attention ever since art history's 'ethnographic turn' and the rise of

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[1] See Jacob A. Riis, *How the other half lives: studies among the tenements of New York* (New York, 1970 [1890]); Lewis Wickes Hine, *Lewis Hine: passionate journey: photographs 1905-1937*, eds. Karl Steinorth, Marianne Fulton, and Anthony Bannon (Zurich, 1996).
[2] Lynda Nead, 'Animating the everyday: London on camera circa 1900', *Journal of British Studies*, 43 (2004), p. 69.

visual culture studies.[3] In scholarly emphases on vernacular uses of the medium, photographs cease to be images and instead become three-dimensional 'objects in the world': attention shifts from the formal qualities of the photograph and towards the processes of 'making, distributing, consuming, using, discarding, recycling' that shape them.[4] These are histories that seek to decentre the 'image', but they are histories in which the image nevertheless remains essential, histories that begin with the photograph – the album found in a bric-a-brac market, the untouched cache in the archive – and work outwards, asking questions along the way about pleasure, performance, self-making, sexuality, memory, and more.[5]

Valuable though these histories are, my aim in this essay is slightly different, in that I focus less on historical production of photographs than the construction of the *photographer*.[6] I study one process involved in the world of the image: the cultivation of photographic sensibilities among newcomers to the discipline. I ask what distinctive modes of seeing made particular kinds of photographic practice possible, and how these were then channelled into the complex and inchoate set of norms surrounding the issue of what constituted a 'good' photograph. As the anthropologist Deborah Poole has argued, asking how certain kinds of photographs are 'appraised, interpreted, and assigned historical, scientific, and aesthetic worth' can reveal much about the epistemes that govern a particular 'visual economy'.[7] Photographic literature often impressed on its readers the need to cultivate an 'artistic eye', to observe the 'beautiful' within the 'commonplace', and to develop the kind of mentality amenable to experiencing the world as an endless succession of potential pictures.

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[3] See Geoffrey Batchen, 'Snapshots: art history and the ethnographic turn', *photographies*, 1 (2008), pp. 121–142; also Geoffrey Batchen, 'Vernacular photographies', *History of Photography*, 24 (2000), pp. 262–271.
[4] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, 'Introduction: photographs as objects', in Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds., *Photographs, object, histories: on the materiality of images* (London, 2004), p. 1.
[5] For some recent examples along these lines, see Annebella Pollen, *Mass photography: collective histories of everyday life* (London, 2016); Martha Langford, *Suspended conversations: the afterlife of memory in photographic albums* (Montreal, 2001); Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's albums and photography in Victorian England: ladies, mothers and flirts* (London, 2017); Carol Mavor, *Pleasures taken: performances of sexuality and loss in Victorian photographs* (London, 1996); Erika Hanna, *Snapshot stories: a social history of photography in Ireland, 1922–2000* (Oxford, 2020). See also Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, *Family snaps: the meanings of domestic photography* (London, 1991); and an excellent (brief) discussion of the kinds of questions involved in studying 'found' photographs Catherine Whalen, 'Finding "me"', *Afterimage*, 29 (Berkeley, United States, Berkeley, 2002), pp. 16–17.
[6] In some respects my approach resembles Helen Macdonald, '"What makes you a scientist is the way you look at things": ornithology and the observer 1930–1955', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 33 (2002), pp. 53–77.
[7] Deborah Poole, *Vision, race, and modernity: a visual economy of the Andean image world* (Princeton, 1997), 10.

Such a mentality, it was thought, required training, but it was also one that many commentators felt could, if properly cultivated, assist in the production of new knowledge. 'Picture thinking' was a form of perception that forced the distinctive spaces of 'culture' – the street, the home, the slum – and all the banal incidents that took place in them, to offer themselves up for inspection.

The question of what exactly 'picture thinking' entailed, and what kind of knowledge it was thought to produce, was, of course, never settled. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, two competing models of photographic perception emerged. The first drew on an older tradition of landscape photography that was itself indebted to the eighteenth-century language of the picturesque. That language was reworked in the late nineteenth century to acquire a harder, scientific edge that slotted into contemporary anthropological fixations on 'type'. In this formulation of 'picture thinking', photographers were encouraged to seek out scenes and characters that could be mapped onto broader scientific categories. The picturesque became the prime mode of apprehending the generic within the particular, a first step before social knowledge could be extracted from the perceptual environment. The second model reversed these values, positioning photography as a means, by contrast, of apprehending the particular within the generic. This was a model that loosely mapped onto the new emphasis, from the 1890s, on instantaneity and portability in photography: here the photographic literature stressed the potential for the camera to create new knowledge by revealing things ordinarily hidden from human vision. What looked like a typical or commonplace scene could be transformed, with the snap of a shutter, into a unique image, frozen in time. More than in any other space, it was on the streets of the city, where the boundaries between what was unique and what was commonplace were never clear, that the two models converged and coalesced.

I. The artistic eye: 'type', authenticity and the amateur photographer

In the 1880s and 1890s, photography was in a transitional phase. British photographic culture had not yet undergone its 'Kodak Revolution' – that would arrive in the first decade of the twentieth century – but what had previously been an elite pastime or the commercial activity of professional portraitists was, for the first time, opening up to the masses. Those taking up photography in the 1880s would find both an abundant literature and a rich associational life catering to their interests,

from technical manuals to picture albums to the many photographic periodicals, to the almost 200 camera clubs around the country.[8] By 1890, the *Amateur Photographer* journal claimed to have over 10,000 subscribers.[9] This infrastructure, it should be remembered, catered primarily to the more serious amateur, the man or woman (though mostly man) interested in making artistic pictures on outings to the countryside or else in gaining technical mastery over a new technology. With the expansion of the medium came new ways of apprehending its nature and purpose. A column in the American magazine *Life* captured something of the new zeitgeist:

> The Amateur Photographer has become a terror in the land. Not contented with merely distorting the features of long-suffering friends and relatives, he is now to be found lurking wherever a "view" is obtainable; and in mossy dell, on mountain top, and by river side, one is almost certain to see the now familiar spectacle of an apparently headless man propped up against a three-legged apparatus … however, out of evil cometh good, and the amateur photographer has in a way ousted the *carte-de-visite* album from its hitherto prominent position on drawing-room tables.[10]

The late-Victorian fashion for 'views' reworked a language of the picturesque in tourism that dated back to William Gilpin's guidebooks in the eighteenth century. Although the picturesque is sometimes characterised as a genre of painting that persisted from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Malcolm Andrews, Ann Bermingham and others have argued that it is better thought of as a distinct way of seeing that continued to have purchase well into the nineteenth century and beyond.[11] Timothy Costelloe dismisses the persistence of the language of the picturesque in late Victorian popular culture as 'vulgarized', but for Andrews the more commonplace usage of the picturesque in everyday speech 'convey[s] the sense that what we are seeing is gratifyingly similar to the familiar images of an idealised rural beauty promoted in paintings, postcards, travelogues and calendar photos'.[12] According to Bermingham, the nineteenth century picturesque functioned as a way

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[8] The figure for the number of camera clubs in 1900 is given as 256 by GH Martin and David Francis, but it is not clear how they arrived at this figure. Elizabeth Edwards provides a more conservative estimate of 190. Elizabeth Edwards, *The camera as historian: amateur photographers and historical imagination, 1885-1918* (Durham, NC, 2012), p. 33. G. H. Martin and David Francis, 'The camera's eye', in Jim Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian city: images and realities*, 1 (London, 1973), p. 241.

[9] *Amateur Photographer* (26 April 1889).

[10] 'The new amateur photographer', reprinted in *Amateur Photographer* (6 August 1886).

[11] Malcolm Andrews, *The search for the picturesque : landscape aesthetics and tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Aldershot, 1989), p. 239; Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and ideology: the English rustic tradition, 1740-1860* (London, 1987), pp. 69–70.

[12] Timothy M. Costelloe, *The British aesthetic tradition: from Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 241; Andrews, *The search for the picturesque*, p. 239.

of projecting metropolitan values onto the rural landscape, of rendering it legible and of transforming nature into a potential site of investigation.[13] Such an emphasis reflected the highly attenuated status of the rural economy in this period: the so-called 'death' of rural England.[14] Just as the eighteenth century's aesthetic preoccupation with 'nature' was 'consonant with its industrial despoliation', the nineteenth century found ways to derive aesthetic pleasure from an increasingly alienated landscape.[15]

The new aesthetic appreciation for the countryside in the late-nineteenth century, and the attendant revival of the picturesque through photography, has been well covered in the historical literature.[16] My aim here is less to question why this longing for the picturesque came into being than to examine the characteristic modes of seeing it demanded. Victorian seekers of the picturesque had to learn how to locate it within the landscape, and perhaps this can explain the number of articles in the photographic press in the 1880s and 1890s that impressed on their readers the need to cultivate an 'artistic eye'. One writer explicitly likened photography to Dutch genre painting, 'the mere representation of commonplace scenes and incidents' that required the artist 'to think less, to aim not so high, to observe more closely, and to paint the multitude, the citizen, the workman … to enter familiarly into their intimacy, to study them with an affectionately attentive curiosity'.[17] Instructions to observe the beautiful within the 'commonplace' also functioned as mechanisms of distinction. The 'faculty of observation', remarked one writer, 'marks the difference between a "*mere* photographer" and an "artist."'[18]

What was this faculty of observation? The fashion for 'views' was an approach to landscape that reduced it to a stable set of tropes and types that could be recombined for pictorial effect. The kinds of subjects most commonly agreed as suitable for artistic treatment remained confined, as they

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[13] Bermingham, *Landscape and ideology*, p. 158.
[14] Alun Howkins, *The death of rural England: a social history of the countryside since 1900* (London, 2003).
[15] Bermingham, *Landscape and ideology*, p. 155.
[16] Some of this literature includes John Taylor, *A dream of England: landscape, photography and the tourist's imagination* (Manchester, 1994); Paul Readman, 'Landscape preservation, "advertising disfigurement", and English national identity, c. 1890–1914', *Rural History*, 12 (2001), pp. 61–83; Paul Readman, 'The place of the past in English culture c. 1890-1914', *Past & Present* (February 2005), pp. 147–199; Edwards, *Camera as historian*.
[17] 'Photography and *genre* painting', *British Journal of Photography* (6 July 1888).
[18] A.B Stewart, 'The faculty of observation, or common-place knowledge in picture-making', *British Journal of Photography* (20 March 1885).

had in the eighteenth century, to a fairly narrow set of tropes. Winding country lanes, thatched cottages, hedgerows, churches, fishing boats, and so on – these were the subjects of late-Victorian pictorial photographs, the latest iterations of a long tradition of privileging all in the landscape that was irregular, ancient, asymmetric, and dilapidated. As one writer suggested, the new amateur 'stalks through the land. He "spots you as a pretty bit". He is graciously pleased to consider that you will "make a picture". Do not be deluded by this into self-complacency. It is probably because you have a ragged hat, or because your hair has been towzled into a mop by impertinent zephyrs, or because your appearance is that of an unwashed one, or for some such reason'.[19]

So far as norms about cultivating observation were applied to photographing human subjects, it generally meant searching for bodies, normally working-class ones, that could testify to abstracted, ethnographic 'types'.[20] 'The real difficulty of modernity in art', a reviewer in the *Amateur Photographer* proclaimed, 'is that the artist passes his life with respectable people, and respectable people are unpictorial.'[21] The rural 'native' was one such 'type', but increasingly in the late nineteenth century, so too was the inhabitant of Britain's urban slums. William Adcock, the editor of *Amateur Photographer*, went as far as stressing the advantages of seeking the picturesque within the limits of the city:

> The amateur in London has tenfold advantages over the dweller in a small town. He has a model in every street. He can lay hands on a Pecksniff - an Arthur Gride - a Uriah Heep, or a Sam Weller at will. […] Then look at river-side men, bargemen, coalheavers, draymen, cabmen - what material is here? Don't let the present or future amateur say they cannot be got - as well say you cannot get a gamin or a flower-girl. Now, of gamins, is there for points of character such a breed in the world as the London street boy - the waif of the slums?[22]

Adcock's delineation of street models also recalled an older tradition of urban ethnography belonging to the mid-century not only of Dickens, but of Mayhew too. Another author, writing in 1902, extoled the photographic virtues of the 'picturesque slum' by similarly reeling off a list of the 'types' one might encounter while there: children playing in the gutter, old women sweeping the alleys, and street

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[19] Amateur Photographer (7 Jan 1887).
[20] Erika Hanna notes the persistence of this form of photography into the 1920s in Ireland. Hanna, *Snapshot stories: a social history of photography in Ireland, 1922–2000*, p. 33.
[21] Amateur Photographer (14 Jan 1887).
[22] W.G Adcock, 'An amateur: why, what?', *Amateur Photographer* (3 December 1886).

hawkers selling kippers.[23] This writer's favourite haunt was the area around Quay Street in Scarborough, packed, he said, with 'houses with spicy histories, smugglers' dens, about some of which the inhabitants will tell yarns of the "good old days."' Still, despite the intense attraction of the area, the author warned of the difficulties faced by amateur photographers in securing good negatives of it:

> Often have I just been on the point of snapping children at play, usually dirty, unkempt little beggars artistic to a degree, frisking about in delightfully unconventional groups, when all at once their mother puts in an appearance at the door, sees your intention, and, rushing out, gathers up all these little mortals, takes them indoors, and while you stand wondering what it all means and what will happen next, they are all pushed out again with clean "pinnies" on, faces washed and hair straight and streaky, and with much pride, arranges them across the alley in a perfectly straight line, holding hands.[24]

The whole article, as with many other urban ethnographies of the time, reads as a colonial exploration: the photographic encounter as contact zone.[25] The author recommended that slum photographers ought to dress 'quite commonplace' so as not to rouse interest among their subjects or 'incite them to disturb your artistic intentions', all feeding into the voyeuristic desire to capture that most elusive of scenes: the one that would have happened had the photographer not been there.[26] But at the same time, the anecdote about the mother sending out her children in their best 'pinnies' revealed that the authenticity so keenly sought by the photographer was up for grabs. What was more authentic: a subject responding to the camera in real time, or one pretending that there was no camera? Perhaps it was not an image of a reality that the photographer wanted, but a reality that looked like an image. Photographers venturing out in search of authentic 'rustics' encountered similar difficulties:

> We lately heard of a well-known amateur who wandered over several shires of England a short time since in search of rustics in their old-fashioned, elaborately worked smock frocks without being able to find them. Imitations of the genuine article he occasionally saw worn by certain farm labourers, but he failed to discover any wearers of the real things, although he remembers having seen them in ordinary use only a few years ago in many of the villages he visited.[27]

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[23] Wanless, 'Picturesque slums'.
[24] Harry Wanless, 'Picturesque slums', *Amateur Photographer* (30 October 1902).
[25] Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the contact zone', *Profession* (1991), p. 33.
[26] Tom Gunning discusses this in relation to early cinema. Tom Gunning, 'Before documentary: early nonfiction film and the "view" aesthetic', in Nico de Klerk, ed., *Uncharted territory: essays on early nonfiction film* (Amsterdam, 1997), pp. 9–24.
[27] J. Fortuné Nott, 'Photography as a practical art IV: the portraying of home scenes', *Amateur Photographer* (21 June 1889).

The authenticity valued by seekers of the picturesque was, it seems, of a rather managed kind. The slums, like the countryside, made picturesque locations only when they conformed to photographers' notions of what it was they might find there. Photographs needed to look unstaged, but they also needed to fit preconceived ideas about what unstaged photographs looked like. Human subjects were valued only insofar as they could be mapped onto common 'types', and in this respect pictorial photography resembled contemporaneous deployments of the medium in ethnology and anthropology to discover and categorise racial groupings: Francis Galton's 'composite' portraits, for example, or the photographs belonging to the colonial administration in India that Christopher Pinney has studied.[28] In all these cases, the aim was less to create a portrait of an individual than a photograph of a body that could testify to an abstracted category, whether an Indian 'tribe' or a generic English 'rustic'. The search for the picturesque could be read as part of a broader project to render human bodies legible and knowable, in a moment when anxieties about the unseen and the undetectable were pervading late-nineteenth century culture more widely.[29]

Being alert to the characteristic 'types' and scenes that might lend themselves to photographic treatment was just as much about particular forms of observation as it was about artistic temperament. Locating suitable subjects for pictorial treatment was a matter of attending to specific visual detail that could be applied to more complex systems of knowledge – a form of perception that, in a well-known essay, Carlo Ginzburg posited as a central paradigm in the late-nineteenth century: 'detection', or 'conjecture'. The 'conjectural paradigm' was one employed in settings as varied as Freudian psychoanalysis and the Sherlock Holmes stories, and it referred to a method for deriving knowledge from incidental 'clues' and 'traces'. 'Detection' was, in essence, a semiological way of approaching the world: the clues that Holmes studied were signs to deeper connections between surface

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[28] Christopher Pinney, *Camera indica: the social life of Indian photographs* (London, 1997), p. 70.

[29] Physiognomy has received a significant amount of scholarly attention in relation to photography and the attempt to make bodies decipherable. See Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the meaning of expression in nineteenth-century culture* (Cambridge, 2005); Peter Brooks, *Body work: objects of desire in modern narrative* (Cambridge, MA, 1993); Tom Gunning, 'In your face: physiognomy, photography and the gnostic mission of early film', *Modernism/modernity*, 4 (1997), pp. 1–29; Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, pp. 145–186; Chris Otter, *The Victorian eye: a political history of light and vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago, 2008), p. 51; Jennifer Tucker, *Nature exposed: photography as eyewitness in Victorian science* (Baltimore, 2005), pp. 89–90. For concerns about the 'unseen', see Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the visual imagination* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 14–19; Shawn Michelle Smith, *At the edge of sight: photography and the unseen* (Durham, NC, 2013).

phenomena.[30] Kitty Hauser makes a perceptive link between the detective paradigm as described by Ginzburg and the semiological concept of the 'index' that has dominated much of the literature on photography.[31] Semiological approaches to photography hold that photographs are both indices in themselves, and can contain indices: that is, photographs refer to the object they depict by virtue of light having reflected off that object into the camera's aperture, but the depicted object can itself refer to some other thing. Photography was the 'detective' medium *par excellence* in the late nineteenth century: it captured all the clues and traces hidden within the world and rendered them available for repeat inspection.[32]

An integral though overlooked component of Ginzburg's 'conjectural paradigm' was the requirement for a finely-tuned capacity of observation: the ability, as Freud said, to rescue knowledge from the 'rubbish-heap' of everyday sensory experience.[33] As Hauser points out, the decipherment of clues relies on the privileged reader of indices: Sherlock Holmes' uncanny ability to produce complex explanatory frameworks from a mass of seemingly banal detail.[34] In a paper read to the Camera Club shortly after the publication of his landmark text *Naturalistic photography for students of the art*, the photographer Peter Henry Emerson tried to demonstrate how photography could be employed in the service of science:

> Assuming that we have before us a living man, let us proceed together to study him scientifically … let us proceed first to record the colour of his skin, his hair and eyes, the texture of his skin, the relative positions of the various orifices in his face, the number of his limbs, the various measurements of all these members. So we go on integrating and differentiating until we find that we have actually built up a science – ethnology. If we pursue the study, and begin to compare different races of men with each other, we find our ethnology extends to a more complex anthropology. We next observe that the eyelids open and close, the lips open, sounds issue from the mouth, and our curiosity leads us to dissect a dead subject; and we find that beneath the skin, fat, and superficial *fascia* there are muscles, each

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[30] Carlo Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: clues and scientific method', *History Workshop*, 9 (1980), p. 13.
[31] Kitty Hauser, *Shadow sites: photography, archaeology, and the British landscape, 1927-1955* (Oxford, 2007), 62-80. As Tom Gunning points out, the concept of the 'index' originated with the philosopher Charles Peirce, but was first applied to photography and film via Peter Wollen's re-reading of André Bazin's influential essay. André Bazin, 'The ontology of the photographic image', *Film Quarterly*, 13 (1960): 4–9; Peter Wollen, *Signs and meaning in the cinema* (Bloomington, 1969). Indexicality and photography are given a nuanced and sensitive reading in Tom Gunning, 'What's the point of an index? or, faking photographs', *Nordicom Review*, 25 (2004), pp. 39–49.
[32] Hauser, *Shadow sites*, p. 80.
[33] Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes', p. 10.
[34] Hauser, *Shadow sites*, p. 64; Holmes as a privileged reader of the banal is also discussed in Michael Saler, '"Clap if you believe in Sherlock Holmes": mass culture and the re-enchantment of modernity, c. 1890-c. 1940', *Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), p. 604.

> supplied with vessels and nerves. We trace these vessels and nerves to their common origins, and are led to the heart and brain. In short, we find the science of anatomy grows up under our hands.

He went on to recount how physiology, chemistry, and eventually physics might be derived via the same conjectural means.[35] The authority he invoked was Herbert Spencer's theory of differentiation, which involved 'the analysis of an unknown complex into known components', something for which he felt the camera was especially suited.[36] Importantly, for Emerson, this form of observation was one that could easily be learned: ''the method of observation […] by which such great results are obtained in Science is identically the same as that which is employed by every one every day of his life, but refined and rendered precise'.[37]

That method of observation equally applied to photographers seeking out the picturesque. Tell-tale 'signs' – the imitation smock as opposed to a genuine article – distinguished a pictorial from an unpictorial subject, and it became the task of the photographer to be able to tell the difference. A paper read at the Edinburgh Photographic Society in 1885 argued that taking pictures of authentic and typical working class subjects required the photographer to familiarise oneself with the way of life he or she was choosing to depict. 'No artist would represent a carpenter cutting a plank with a pair of scissors, or a blacksmith shoeing a horse with a sewing machine', he wrote, therefore 'the depicting of common-place subjects […] requires common-place knowledge, which can only be acquired by the cultivation of this faculty of observation'.[38]

Discussions about training the 'faculty of observation' aligned the language of the picturesque with the language of scientific method, and the connections between the two strengthened as increasing numbers of amateur photographers made efforts to stress the knowledge-producing capacity of their activities. The photographic survey movement, emerging at the end of the 1880s was a prime example of an increasingly seamless elision of the difference between seeking the picturesque

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[35] P.H Emerson, 'Camera Club conference papers II: Science and Art', reprinted in *British Journal of Photography* (12 April 1889) and *British Journal of Photography* (19 April 1889).
[36] Ibid.
[37] Emerson was actually quoting Thomas Huxley here. 'Science and Art', *British Journal of Photography* (12 April 1889).
[38] A.B Stewart, 'The faculty of observation, or common-place knowledge in picture-making', *British Journal of Photography* (20 March 1885).

and producing 'scientific' knowledge. To begin with, the survey movement consisted of little more than a handful of local clubs and societies intent on obtaining and preserving photographic 'records' of their local area, but as the movement grew it developed a more standardized framework and procedure. These local initiatives acquired a national edge when the Conservative MP Sir Benjamin Stone founded the National Photographic Record Association (NPRA) in 1897 with the aim of collating surveyors' work into a national archive. By this point, the survey movement had evolved into a mass scientific project, one that aimed to create a comprehensive record of the archaeological, topographical, architectural and ethnographic features of turn-of-the-century Britain. Such efforts were met with great enthusiasm in the photographic press: one editorial column declared that 'members of photographic societies and clubs would be far better employed [in surveying] than visiting in crowds some pretty village, and all taking views of exactly the same spot, differing, as a rule, only in the degree of mediocrity attained'.[39] A letter in the following issue agreed, stating that surveying would provide 'more pleasure than do the frequently aimless wanderings after the picturesque', and many others wrote about the possibility for photography to obtain some 'practical, lasting, and useful purpose'.[40]

Yet, as Elizabeth Edwards points out in her comprehensive history of the photographic survey movement, many of the photographs produced under its aegis did not differ all that greatly from the kinds of pictures that many amateurs were producing anyway. Ancient buildings, churches, village greens, almshouses – the picturesque clearly maintained its hold on the photographic imagination even within the more sober ethos of photo-surveying.[41] Consequently, Edwards argues that the aesthetic ambitions of the surveyors – the longing for the picturesque – came into conflict with the supposedly scientific ambitions of the survey. The kind of desubjectified, 'aperspectival' objectivity that had become associated with scientific photographs looked less certain since, as Edwards points out, surveying was an activity 'laced' with the subjective aesthetic preferences, historical

[39] 'Photographic surveys', *Amateur Photographer* (3 May 1889).
[40] Amateur photographer (10 May 1889); Amateur Photographer (20 December 1889).
[41] Ibid., 128.

imaginations, and sentimentalities of its participants. Survey photographs, according to Edwards, 'made claims both on the possibility of scientific knowledge and on the affective', thus the project as a whole 'can be characterised as a continual and dialogical tension between historical objectivity and subjectivity.'[42]

I am less convinced that objectivity and subjectivity were opposing values in the survey movement. The aesthetic and the scientific, the subjective and the objective, were not always antagonistic values making competing claims on photographs. The picturesque was not a barrier to scientific knowledge, or vice versa, but on the contrary, an important means of acquiring it. Peter Henry Emerson praised 'topographical' survey work 'from the scientific point of view' while at the same time acknowledging the 'pleasure' they gave to their makers.[43] Likewise, in a paper given to the 1886 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the scientist Frederick John Goldsmid outlined the qualities required in a geographer: 'a quick ear, a searching eye, an appreciation of scenery and outer subjects as well as physical aspects of country, a power of picturesque but an adherence to accurate description'. The *Amateur Photographer* reporter sent to comment on Goldsmid's paper wondered whether he might have considered 'how a much more extended use of photographic pictures and lantern slides would contribute to an appreciation of the picturesqueness and knowledge of the physical features of distant and unfamiliar countries'.[44] In this formulation, as elsewhere in late Victorian photography, the supposed objectivity of the camera and the ostensible subjectivity of an appreciation for the picturesque were not being held in contradistinction. For Goldsmid as for many others, to possess the 'power of picturesque' was to possess the capacity for knowledge, to have the ability to locate the clues, signs, and pictures hidden within the landscape. Apprehension of the picturesque – the dilapidated farm building, the church beam, the ancient hedgerow – could, and did, act as a prelude to establishing a subject worthy of

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[42] Edwards, *Camera as historian*, p. 17; John Taylor makes a similar argument about photo-surveying in *A dream of England*, p. 63.
[43] P. H. Emerson, *Naturalistic photography for students of the art* (London, 1899), pp. 81–86.
[44] 'The British Association for the Advancement of Science', *Amateur Photographer* (10 Sept 1886).

'objective', scientific record. The ordinary camera-owner could, via the capacity to observe, become a scientist.

II. Picture thinking: instantaneity and vernacular photography in the early twentieth century

Organisers of the NPRA survey regarded ethnographic photographs as especially desirable, possibly an attempt to compensate for the photographs of churches, municipal buildings, and so on that amateur surveyors were producing in their thousands. In 1900 Benjamin Stone remarked that 'there is a great deal to be done in the direction of everyday things around us', and that survey photographers might pay attention to 'ancient customs, which still linger in remote villages'.[45] Perhaps the relative lack of interest in ethnographic photography was a practical issue – those who participated in 'ancient customs' were hard to find and even harder to photograph – but perhaps it was also an epistemological one. The survey movement was largely shaped by what Franz Boas would later call 'salvage' ethnography, an attempt to rescue 'primitive' cultures from modernity.[46] It is easy to see how 'salvage' translates into the many photographs of architectural features, archaeological sites, and historical artefacts that populate the survey movement archives. But the question of how ethnographic photographs were supposed to speak the language of salvage was one that survey photographers seemingly found harder to answer.

Those problems were especially acute in urban centres, where 'customs' were not so 'ancient'. In any case, urban ethnographic study had developed its own, separate traditions, less oriented to the question of 'primitive man' than to contemporary social problems. Expectations about finding 'typical' subjects would be confounded as the city set the stage for a confrontation between the 'picturesque slum' promoted by certain writers and the other slum of the popular imagination: *Darkest England, Outcast London*, the place where poverty and squalor were objects of moral

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[45] 'Afternoon tea with Sir J. Benjamin Stone and the National Photographic Record Association', *Amateur Photographer* (9 March 1900).

[46] The relationship between 'salvage ethnography' and photography is discussed in Edwards, *Camera as historian*, p. 10; Elizabeth Edwards, 'Salvaging our past: photography and survival', in Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton, eds., *Photography, anthropology and history: expanding the frame* (London, 2016), pp. 67–88; Pinney, *Camera Indica*, p. 45; Laura Carter, 'Rethinking folk culture in twentieth-century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28 (2017), pp. 543–569; Oliver Douglas, 'Folklore, survivals, and the neo-Archaic', *Museum History Journal*, 4 (2011), pp. 223–244.

concern, not aesthetic interest.[47] That tension was at the forefront of what is sometimes thought to be the pioneering work of British photojournalism, John Thomson and Adolphe Smith's 1877 *Street life in London*.[48] *Street life* announced itself as the first work of social investigation that employed 'the precision of photography' to 'present true types of the London Poor'.[49] Thomson himself was an ethnographer of sorts, having published several photo-books on life and landscape in China and Southeast Asia in the 1860s and 1870s. The anthropological language of 'types' runs throughout *Street life*. Each short chapter in the book contained a full-page photograph alongside a Mayhew-esque journalistic portrait of one of Thomson's cast of stock characters: travellers, cabmen, coster-girls, flower women, shoe-blacks, labourers, street doctors, convicts, and beggar-women [**fig.1**].

Still, even as Thomson's carefully-framed, deliberately-posed photographs suggested a rigid adherence to the visual language of the picturesque – the ragged, dilapidated figures that appealed to an already-existing visual language of poverty – they combined with the text in an often uncomfortable way. Textual descriptions of characters were more inclined to stress the individuality of subjects, who were often quoted verbatim discussing their personal circumstances. In Thomson's very first chapter, he recalled how he 'hastened to note down as fast as possible the information received word for word in the original language in which it was delivered, believing that this unvarnished story would at least be more characteristic and true to life'.[50] But what was unvarnished in text was highly adorned in visual representation. In *Street life*, it seemed, requirements to be 'characteristic' competed with the requirements to be 'true to life'. The visual language of 'type', in which figures were cast as generic 'models', ran up against an ethnographic text more inclined to treat

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[47] Late Victorian social investigation was a vast literature but the two works mentioned here are Andrew Mearns, *The bitter cry of outcast London: an inquiry into the condition of the abject poor* (1883); William Booth, *In darkest England and the way out* (London, 1890); Historical accounts of this genre are equally numerous, but for some important works see Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a study in the relationship between classes in Victorian society* (London, 2014); Deborah Epstein Nord, 'The social explorer as anthropologist: Victorian travellers among the urban poor', in William C. Sharpe, ed., *Visions of the modern city: essays in history, art, and literature* (1987), pp. 122–34; Ellen Ross, ed., *Slum travellers: ladies and London poverty, 1860-1920* (Berkeley, 2007); Seth Koven, *Slumming: sexual and social politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, 2006).

[48] *Street life in London* was originally published in 12 monthly parts by Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington over the course of 1877. I refer here to the 1994 reprint, published as John Thompson, *Victorian London street life in historic photographs* (New York, 1994).

[49] Thompson, *Victorian London street life in historic photographs*, authors' preface.

[50] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

its subjects as individuals in unique circumstances. This tension may have been more acute in *Street life*, since the book was imbued with a reformist politics that was markedly less apparent in most amateur photographic activity of the period. The portrayal of 'types' in *Street life* was occasionally punctuated by chapters showing, for example, the devastation caused by flooding in Lambeth, or the impact of street advertising on the metropolitan cityscape. If these interventions can be understood in the language of the picturesque, it is in the Ruskinian tradition of the 'higher' or 'moral' picturesque rather than the *beau ideal* of Gilpin.[51] As one commentator wrote, it was to the 'rural poor' that amateurs should go for picturesqueness, and 'for pathos, to the London slums'.[52]

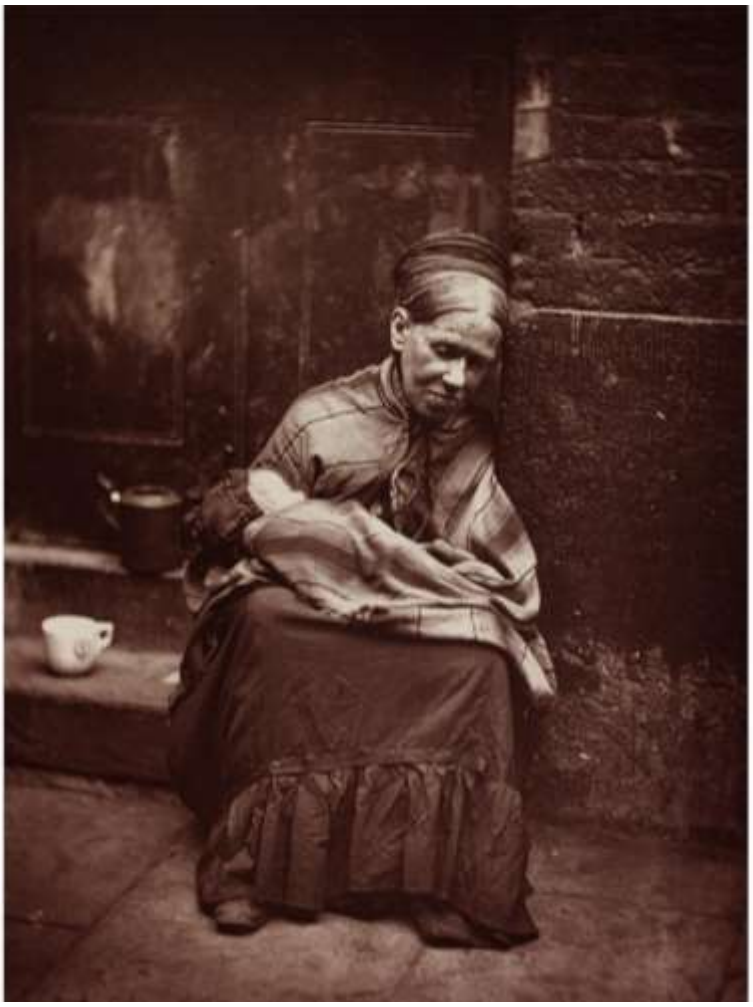

Figure 1. John Thomson, 'The Crawlers' (1877). Woodburytype print. Published in *Street Life in London* (London, 1877).

[51] Malcolm Andrews applies Ruskinian notions of the picturesque to his discussion of depictions of the late-Victorian city. Malcolm Andrews, 'The metropolitan picturesque', in Stephen Copley and Peter Garside, eds., *The politics of the picturesque: literature, landscape and aesthetics since 1770* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 287.
[52] *Amateur Photographer* (14 Jan 1887).

The tension between image and text in *Street life* mirrors a tension in the NPRA archive between two different kinds of urban ethnographic photograph. Staged, 'display' photographs showing 'typical' subjects staring directly at the camera sit uncomfortably alongside more naturalistic, unposed images with a greater sense of vitality. (The relative worth of each of these kinds of photographs was, incidentally, the subject of discussions taking place in anthropological circles at the time.)[53] The variation in approach was especially visible in a 'series of London slum life' made by the survey photographers Edgar Scamell and Henry Malby over the course of the 1890s.[54] The earlier photos, taken by Scamell in 1892, speak the language of 'type': the carefully-posed, artfully-framed pictures designed to strip away visual excess in favour of presenting a timeless, aperspectivally-viewed subject [**fig. 2**]. Malby's later photographs, by contrast, carry the sense of spontaneity that make them truer to the vitality of the scenes they depict, while at the same time making it much less clear what their value as 'records' might be [**fig. 3**]. If there is a claim to ethnographic 'typicality' in Malby's photographs, it is at the level of observer and not of subject: in other words, they are 'typical' in that they show scenes characteristic of what one might see while travelling through the city, but they are not, as in Thompson's *Street life*, an exhaustive inventory of the 'types' that populate the streets. The 'salvage' impulse had seemingly led Malby somewhere altogether more paradoxical: his photographs were documents not of the salient ethnographic features of 1890s East London, as they had been for Scamell, but rather of the subjective experience of being *in* 1890s East London.

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[53] Edwards, *Camera as historian*, 204.
[54] George Scamell, 'National photographic records', *British Journal of Photography* (20 June 1900).

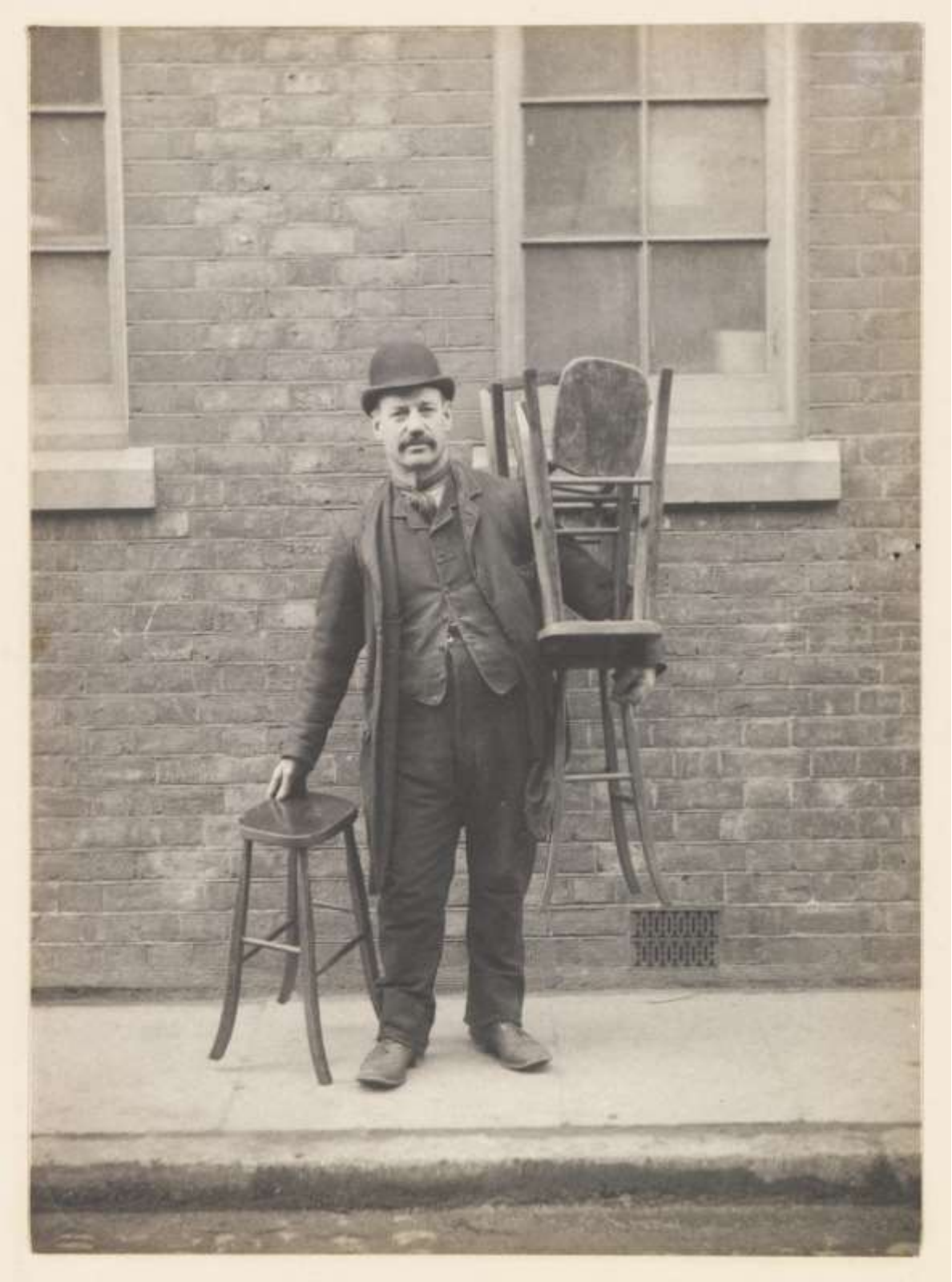

Figure 2. Photograph of man in hat by Edgar Scamell, 1892. Platinum print mounted on card with hand written ink notation. National Photographic Record and Survey collection, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Figure 3. Henry Malby, 'A market scene' (1899). Platinum print mounted on card with handwritten ink annotation. National Photographic Record and Survey collection, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

How might we account for the strikingly different registers in which 'salvage' seemed to be operating in these two cases? The simplest explanation lies in the developments in photographic technology that had been gaining pace since the 1870s. In particular, greater portability and faster exposure times had opened up new possibilities for the photography of everyday life, and had placed a new premium on the portrayal of spontaneity, vitality, and motion in photographs. Where previously bulky camera equipment might have necessitated special excursions to take photographs, the kinds of 'detective' or hand-cameras that became popular in the 1880s and '90s could be carried surreptitiously, and plates could be exposed at a moment's notice.[55] The new style of instantaneous, snapshot photography had become a permanent fixture of amateur practice by the mid-1890s.

Of course, the values that had made instantaneity and portability desirable pre-existed the wide availability of the technology. Desires to develop methods for 'instantaneous' photography were

[55] Nead, 'Animating the Everyday', p. 69.

expressed in the *British Journal of Photography* from as early as 1862, for example.[56] Lovers of the picturesque often wrote of their difficulties photographing animals and other subjects prone to sudden movements that dismantled the picture's composition. 'A picturesque subject', recalled the photographer F.M. Sutcliffe, 'such as a flock of sheep making a cloud of dust in the road, would suddenly appear, then all haste would be made to get the camera fitted up and screwed onto its legs; but good subjects generally got past before they could be caught.'[57] Similarly, in portraiture, the amateur photographic literature had long advocated for naturalness and spontaneity of expression, 'as though they had been before the moment in motion, had just stopped an instant, and would move on again'.[58]

Figure 4. Samuel Coulthurst, 'Oldham street crowds' (1894). Manchester local image collection.

[56] *British Journal of Photography* (1 January 1862).
[57] F.M Sutcliffe, 'My Kodak's second birthday', *Amateur Photographer* (30 March 1900).
[58] J. Fortuné Nott, 'Photography as a practical art III: portraiture', *Amateur Photographer* (7 June 1889).

Though building on pre-existing values, the wide availability of the new handheld cameras did have profound effects on popular photography, and on the epistemological paradigms that governed it. Malby's approach to street photography was not unique among *fin-de-siècle* photo-surveyors: the bookseller Samuel Coulthurst employed a similar approach in his survey of Manchester. Instantaneity, motion, and vitality were the governing principles of Coulthurst's pictures, and notably these were not only confined to the working-class or slum areas, but also included images of central, commercial districts [**fig. 4**]. The spontaneous, snapshot-like quality of Coulthurst's photographs reveals a *fin-de-siècle* street brimming with potential meaning, and they allow us to challenge what Lynda Nead claims was the 'failure of still photography to represent the urban everyday'.[59]

For Nead, photography's 'failure' was its inability to capture movement – something cinema would address – as well as its implication in debates about privacy in the public sphere that were starting to become more urgent. Faced with these challenges, certain photographers adopted methods of 'pictorial embalming rather than animation'. But as with Malby's images, the salient features of Coulthurst's photographs were less what they revealed about the city itself than about the experience of being *in* the city as a photographer. Chance and encounter, not scientific observation, play the major role in Coulthurst's choice of subject. The street corner – a meeting point, a place of surprise and encounter – was a particularly fertile space for him: in one of several such photographs he depicted a small crowd forming around what we presume is an object or event taking place just beyond the frame of the image **[fig. 5]**. Why they are congregating, and what they are looking at, remains concealed: the image brims with excess, it contains an abundance of signification, and yet its meaning – what it shows – remains opaque.

[59] Nead, 'Animating the Everyday', p. 79.

Figure 5. Photograph of corner of Blackfriars Street, Manchester, by Samuel Coulthurst, c. 1894. Manchester local image collection.

Even if Malby and Coulthurst were guided by the survey movement's ethos of 'salvage' – a compulsion to preserve records of life and landscape at the turn of the century – their deployment of the new snapshot technologies cut against the grain of 'type' that had shaped so much of an earlier conception of the metropolitan picturesque. In Coulthurst's photographs especially, 'excess' is mobilised, not removed, thereby obtaining an authenticity that differed markedly in form from an older genre of images of picturesque and typical scenes of slum life. Reality appears particularised, not abstracted; human bodies are individual, not exemplary of overarching categories. The new instantaneous cameras had thus enabled Coulthurst and others to move away from earlier emphases on 'type' and instead towards a new apprehension of contingency and ephemerality in everyday life. This model of photographic perception, the one that favoured the particular over the generic, the unique over the repeatable, would come to dominate vernacular photography by the interwar period. But even in the nineteenth century, there were signs that photography was coming to be recognised in this way. An advertisement for a 'Boy's Detective Camera' in 1886 joked about the 'interest and

pleasure it will give to the average boy to "detect" his papa quietly enjoying a surreptitious glass of sherry, or his sisters innocently adding to their existing charms, the elder brother kissing the governess, the butler, with excellent intentions, sampling the port, or the cook dispensing hospitality to the policeman'.[60] With instantaneity and portability came the capacity to uncover to the hidden or suppressed details of everyday life, and it was precisely this quality that gripped the imaginations of many writers on the subject. One journalist for *Time* magazine described his 'adventures' in 'detective' photography by recalling how he snapped pictures in which 'highly respectable and decorous old gentlemen would be shown standing on one leg', or in which 'others would be blowing their noses and looking ridiculous'.[61]

In 1886, *Amateur Photographer* launched its 'Home Portraiture' competition, in which the runner-up had depicted a workman picking grit out of another's eye [**fig. 6**]. The photograph was deliberately posed, but it nevertheless demonstrated the new value attached to paying 'artistic' attention to banal, ordinary, and otherwise unrecorded incidents. The editor praised the photograph for 'impart[ing] an artistic conception to the ordinary material available.'[62]

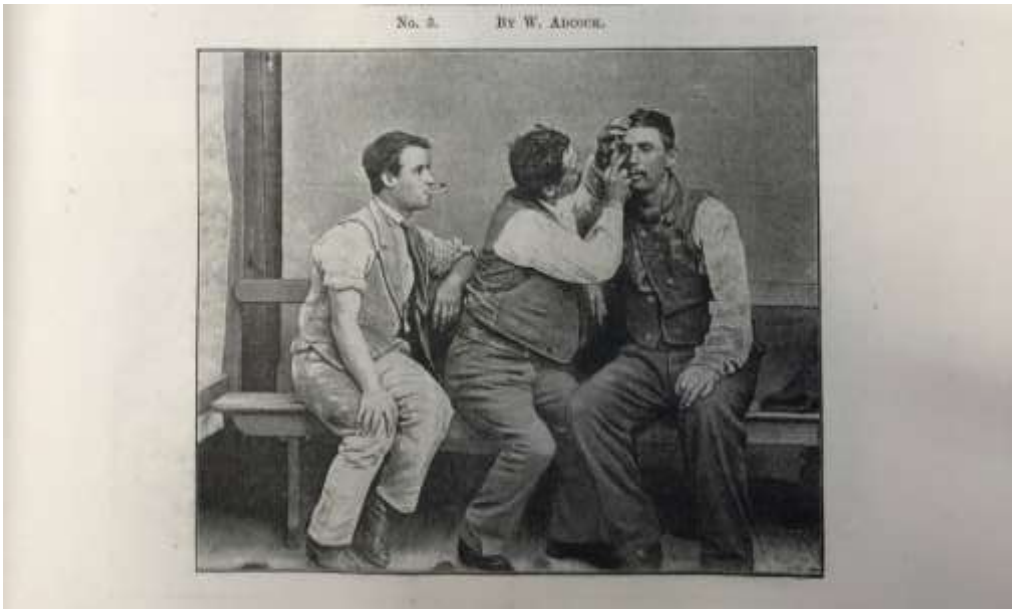

Figure 6. W. Adcock, 'A friendly service' (1886). Published in *Amateur Photographer*, 30 April 1886.

[60] *Amateur Photographer* (19 November 1886).
[61] Sigma Smith, 'Amateur Photography', reprinted in *British Journal of Photography* (8 August 1884).
[62] 'Home portraiture competition', *Amateur Photographer* special issue (30 April 1886).

The greatest beneficiary of these changing photographic values was, of course, the Kodak Company, which, by 1900, had become the market leader in Britain. In 1901, having already proved a success in America, the British wing of Kodak launched its 'Kodak Girl' advertising campaign.[63] The artist Fred Pegram's striking, hand-drawn illustrations of young women in striped dresses placed photography directly within a new, modern ethos of informality, democracy, mobility, and leisure, and celebrated the ability of the technology to capture naturalism and spontaneity. Advertising images often showed Kodak girls standing on fences, crouched behind piles of hay, sitting in the passenger seats of motor cars, or in the middle of crowds – these were fearless, intrepid characters who were prepared to look not only *around* but also *over*, *under*, and *through* in order to illuminate the world around them [**fig. 7**]. Later on, in 1923, the *Kodak Magazine* was still impressing on its readers (it claimed to have nearly 100,000 of them) the need to acquire 'picture thinking', to keep one's 'senses alert for the picture possibilities about'.[64] 'There is excitement to be got out of the ordinary, every-day scenes of life', an article in the same issue claimed, but advised its readers to take their photographs 'without letting anyone know you are doing it.'[65]

In stressing the potential for the camera to expose and record scenes of everyday life, Kodak made a major – if not the major – contribution to the vernacularization of photography in the early twentieth century. Kodak photography was more personal, more private, and more intimate than the more serious amateur culture of the preceding decades. Kodak literature likened the taking of photographs to keeping a diary, another activity experiencing a boom in the same period.[66] The *Magazine* ran photo-competitions, with themes like 'A Day with a Kodak', or 'The Spirit of Holiday', aimed at getting entrants 'to make their pictures tell of the scenes and incidents of their daily life.'[67] In the twentieth century, photography had found a new role in textualising the everyday, but it had

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[63] M. D. Gauntlett, *An outline history of Kodak Ltd., 1885–1975*, unpublished typescript. Kodak Historical Archive [hereafter KHA], British Library, London. A2890.
[64] The claim to have 100,000 subscribers is made in a Kodak market report of 1924. It is not clear whether this refers to circulation figures in Britain or worldwide. KHA/A622. 'Picture thinking', *Kodak Magazine* (January 1923).
[65] 'Photography as a sport', *Kodak Magazine* (January 1923).
[66] 'Between ourselves', *Kodak Magazine* (February 1923); Joe Moran, 'Private lives, public histories: the diary in twentieth-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 54 (2015): 139.
[67] The 'Day with a Kodak' competition was announced in *Kodak Magazine* in June 1923, with the winners announced in September.

acquired it via the reciprocal efforts on the part of observers to learn those visual techniques – 'picture thinking' – that allowed them to treat even the most minor incidents of everyday life as potentially recordable.

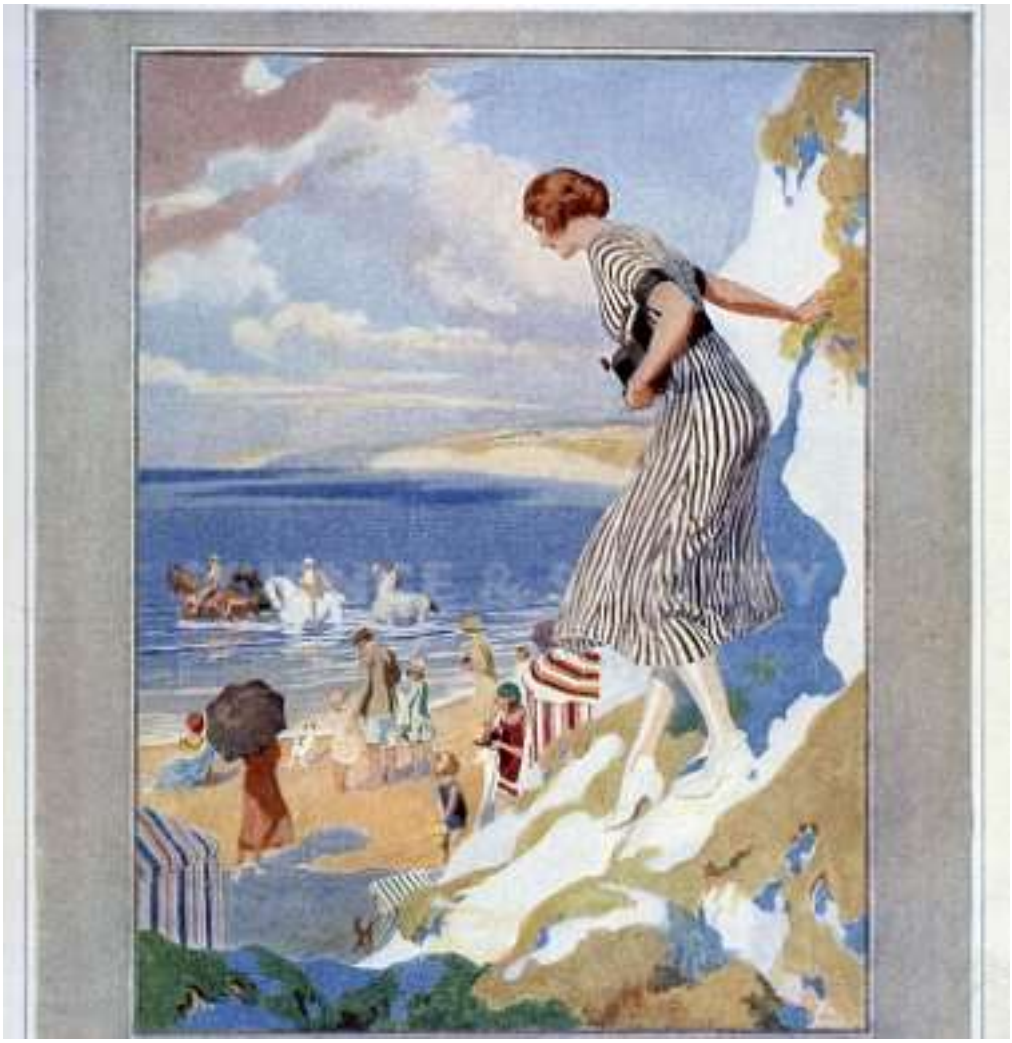

Figure 7. 'Take a Kodak with you' (1924). Colour print taken from *Punch*, June 1924.

The capacity of the camera to penetrate into the niceties of the everyday was not, however, without its opponents. From the 1880s onward, doubts circulated in the photographic press about the extent to which instantaneous photography was *truly* natural, given its tendency to expose details, expressions, and gestures that were otherwise unavailable to normal human vision. 'Nature in her kindness', wrote one correspondent, 'buries from view the necessary positions of the natural

movements of her creatures that are ungraceful by the continuance of vision'.[68] Another claimed that 'an artist can only paint what he and other people *see* in nature if he wish to be truthful', and therefore that picturing otherwise invisible 'momentary agitations' like the 'radii of a coach wheel' in motion amounted to a kind of lie.[69] Others voiced concerns about the impact of hand cameras on notions of propriety, privacy, and character: 'there was a time when a man could be pretty certain that he had a vested inalienable right to the sole possession of his own features […] no man is safe now, during the hours of daylight, even in his own house, and in the street he is actually in peril of having his picture taken at any moment.'[70]

One advocate of 'practical photography' in the late 1880s noted the 'tendency' to pronounce instantaneous photographs that caught 'unsuspecting' subjects in indecorous, frozen poses as 'grotesque', but reminded his readers that such photographs were 'unmistakably natural' all the same. The solution, he thought, was for viewers to acquire 'familiarity' with photographs of arrested motion, an appeal for a new kind of visual literacy that would pacify reactions to the apparently jarring effects of instantaneity.[71] In making this argument, he pointed to an emergent discourse in photography (and later in film) that considered how the medium, by recording things not normally seen, could assist in the production of new knowledge. Gaining 'familiarity' with instantaneous photographs meant reconciling with the possibility that the camera could draw attention to objects outside the range of vision. Handheld, instantaneous cameras required visual attentiveness to the potentially picturable incidents of everyday life, but those pictures in turn could generate new ways of seeing. It seems users of instantaneous cameras had reconciled themselves to what Jonathan Crary and others have claimed was a new emphasis on 'subjective vision' by the end of the nineteenth century. Developments in optical science had laid bare the distortions and inaccuracies in the way the human eye produces its visual impressions, and as Crary has argued, this had led to a new emphasis on the *correcting* power

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[68] 'Detective cameras', *British Journal of Photography* (22 June 1888).
[69] 'Rapid photography', *British Journal of Photography* (8 October 1880).
[70] 'Amateur photography', *British Journal of Photography* (27 November 1885).
[71] J. Fortuné Nott, 'Photography as a practical art V: instantaneous photographs', *Amateur Photographer* (13 September 1889).

of visual technologies such as photography – the ability to bring to light objects ordinarily hidden from visual experience.[72]

The cinema pioneer William Friese-Greene called still photography 'an extra bit of sight and an extra bit of intellect', since it exposed 'heaps of things we could never notice – because we never see them'.[73] Moving pictures would not be fully developed for several years after Friese-Greene wrote that particular article, but his statement does appear to be a rather cinematic way of thinking about photography. Objects in motion, processes that were too fast, too slow, too small or too large for the human eye to take in – these were the some of the more spectacular subjects of early cinema, ones that revealed the new set of values attached to visual technologies. 'In the delineation of the forms of nature', a paper published in the *American journal of photography* claimed, 'the human eye cannot approach the accuracy of the pencil of light, and photography has led us, directly or indirectly, to a perception of many of nature's latent beauties and many of her appearances which the unassisted vision might not recognise as beauties but for the camera's searching glance.'[74]

This new emphasis on the power of the camera to produce new knowledge seems a rather striking reversal of some of the claims embedded within an older mode of picturesque photography. Where previously amateurs had been encouraged to cultivate an 'artistic eye' by spotting ragged and irregular objects and formations in the landscape, the new mode of snapshot photography was one that would make the camera to do the work of detecting those formations. Importantly, these were formations that might not have been observed otherwise. By being an 'extra bit of sight and an extra bit of intellect', the snapshot camera had taken up a new role in mediating across an increasingly profound gap between the world and the physiologically-determined way that humans were thought to perceive it. And it was from that gap that the snapshot camera derived its potential to produce new knowledge.

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[72] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge MA, 1992), p. 129; see also Otter, *The Victorian eye*, pp. 26–62. Otter claims to update Crary's view, though in practice covers much of the same ground.
[73] William Friese-Greene, 'Moving pictures', *British Journal of Photography* (7 March 1889).
[74] Anon, 'The representation of motion in photography', reprinted in *Practical Photographer* (June 1897).

The cultural theorist Ben Highmore recognises the knowledge potential of snapshot photography in his discussion of modern media consumption and everyday life. Following Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, he views 'distraction' as one of the signal characteristics of modern perception, but locates an emancipatory potential within it. Our 'habituation' to the modern media environment, he argues, produces a kind of scattered, mobile attentiveness that allows us to 'apperceive' the world, but crucially it also allows space for that apperception to be challenged. Everyday life is 'saturated' with *déjà vu*, and though this can tend to prompt a habituated, absentminded attentiveness – we predict the next line of a song without having heard it before, we figure out the murderer in the detective story before we reach the end – it also opens up space for that absentmindedness to be 'breached' by something not yet experienced.[75]

Something of this phenomenology is recognisable in the particular way of being attentive to the world that companies like Kodak tried to promote. 'Picture thinking' was a form of perception that necessitated a 'breach' of ordinary, absentminded attention. It was a challenge to vernacular photographers to look again at the familiar, to pay a different kind of attention to objects and scenes ordinarily encountered in the course of the distracted everyday. It required photographers observe the details of everyday life that normally remained submerged beneath absentminded attention, and to mine them for their pictorial potential. It asked them, in short, to turn life into photographs. 'Have you ever thought', asked one Kodak promotion, 'of the beauties that might lie hidden in your town?' 'When one has lived in a town for a good number of years', it continued, 'the daily sights and scenes become too familiar, but a stranger would probably surprise you by the number of interesting and even beautiful pictures he would find.'[76] Another *Kodak magazine* writer posed the same question framed in a characteristic turn-of-the-century language of heritage and preservation:

> London is rapidly disappearing, old landmarks that we knew well a few years back are now missing and in their place are modern creations of steel and concrete. A new London is springing up around us, yet so imperceptibly that we - engaged in our everyday life - only occasionally realize what is happening. How interesting it would be to-day to turn over the leaves of an album of photographs of

[75] Ben Highmore, *Ordinary lives: studies in the everyday* (London, 2011), pp. 115–34.
[76] 'Your town is full of pictures – find them!', *Kodak Magazine* (October 1923).

> street scenes of a few years ago. Had we made the best use of our cameras, what a wonderful set of pictures we should now have of the old London of our youth.[77]

In this formulation, the phenomenological 'breach' that Highmore describes was thought to occur not only when *taking* photographs, but when *looking at* them as well. Changes in London's built environment, according to this writer, were imperceptible at the level of the everyday, but highly visible when registered photographically. Apparent once again was the disjuncture between human perception and photographic technology, between everyday distractedness and photographic attentiveness, and once again this disjuncture underwrote an attempt to affirm the knowledge-producing capacity of the camera.

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Of course, a multinational company like Kodak is not an especially likely candidate for realising the emancipatory potential that Highmore assigns to 'breaches' of distracted attention. As he points out, 'breaches' can also become the target of commodity culture's ongoing ambition to add new items to its 'list of aesthetic subject matter'.[78] But it is equally possible that photography's capacity to challenge and reshape particular forms of perception and attention predated its appearance on the stage of 'mass' culture. I hope (!) it would not be a stretch to say that the notion of a phenomenological breach is one that the serious amateurs who in the 1880s and 1890s ventured out into the English countryside in search of 'pretty bits' and authentic 'rustics' would have recognised. Practising photography required actors to pay new and different kinds of attention to their everyday environments. In turn, these everyday environments were transformed into worlds filled with signals to aesthetic possibility: a dilapidated farm building, a busy street corner, a 'typical' street urchin. How to spot and make sense of these signs became a key question that photography sought to answer.

As the focus of amateur photography oscillated between the production of art and the production of knowledge in the late nineteenth century, the human sciences' concerns with the 'typical' and aesthetic concerns with the picturesque became intermingled and indistinguishable.

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[77] 'Disappearing London', *Kodak Magazine* (February 1923).
[78] Highmore, *Ordinary lives*, 134.

Amateurs were encouraged to scour the landscape for specimens that were both aesthetically pleasing *and* typical examples of a deeper truth. But as the possibilities of handheld, instantaneous cameras began to make themselves felt, the 'excess' that characterised the instantaneous image began to undercut picturesque photography's promises to 'typicality'. Some, like Samuel Coulthurst or the author of 'picturesque slums', even tried to mobilise excess in service of typicality, by capturing the spontaneity and vitality of the 'typical' urban street. Yet vernacular photographers in a slightly later period were far more comfortable with excess. For them, it was precisely the excessive qualities of the instantaneous image – those moments of frozen motion otherwise inaccessible to the human eye – that held out the possibilities for new knowledge. Theirs was a world not only full of visible signs waiting to be spotted and recorded, but a world full of invisible ones too, a world composed of an endless succession of discrete instants awaiting the illumination of the camera – a world of Kodak moments.