SEEING SELF AND WORLD: EVERYDAY PHOTOGRAPHY AND YOUNG MALE ADULTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Abstract

With digital image technologies proliferating in contemporary visual culture, the ubiquity of photographs suggests people produce, consume and share photographs widely and routinely, in multiple contexts and with different meanings attached to them. Creating these photographs involves decisions, actions and interventions the photographer makes to guide the viewer and convey a particular message. Illuminating the ways in which photography enables one specific, often overlooked group – young male adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) – to visually express the ways they see self and the world, this thesis develops a more inclusive understanding of everyday photographic practices.

From the literature that has been reviewed for this study, there has been no investigation that offers a systematic and rigorous approach to empirical enquiry in an effort to explore the photographic image-making of young autistic male adults. The area that has been researched extensively is how autistic people perceive gaze patterns and focus on facial expressions in picture communication systems. While recent studies consider photography and analyse visual perception in ASD, there has been little collaborative discussion in the literature that encompasses autistic people's own everyday photographic image-making and self-reflective thoughts. This study is one of the first to address this knowledge gap.

The methodological framework developed for this qualitative investigation includes participatory visual research methods, and positions this study at the intersection of the recent advances in visual methodologies, and participatory creative methods. Using thematic analysis, the study identified key findings across two dimensions of ASD individuals' photographic image-making; namely, the phenomenological and social dimensions.

Participants' insights were not only deeply fascinating in their own terms, but also challenged dominant assumptions of digital photography. This qualitative study underlines the importance of multiple senses in the act of taking photographs, while expanding an understanding of what constitutes autistic people's visual and social worlds. The contribution to knowledge of this investigation is to (i) deepen the knowledge of young male adults with ASD and their everyday photographic practices; and (ii) extend the development of visual and creative research methods. Furthermore, working with this specific group sheds light on photographic practices more broadly.

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material submitted for a degree.

Signed: Uschi Klein

Date: November 2017

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Uschi
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Compositional structure: bringing photography and autism together

Two pints of beer on a wooden table, a typical scene seen in pubs; a profile view of a badger surrounded by greenery, possibly an animal sanctuary; an outdoor art installation; a colourful detail of a graffiti wall; a wet, brown leaf on the pavement, almost unrecognisable because of how it has wilted; a round stained glass window inside a church, part cropped, giving the impression it was captured in a rush; Harry Potter standing at Platform 9 ¾, looking like a film set reproduced in a museum; and a bicycle locked up in front of a shop. These are all examples of photographs taken by four young male adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the sphere of their everyday lives: Alex, Vincent, James and Joe.[1] Although a detailed outline of the recruitment process will follow in chapter four, their centrality to this study means it is important to introduce them at the outset. This thesis investigates their everyday photographic practices, and analyses their unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world as expressed through the medium. It discusses photography as a habit that is linked to broader changes in, and inclusions of, social identities and cultural practices and how these have shifted in regard to everyday life. Specifically, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, to contextualise the fields of everyday photography and autism, and outline the approaches and perspectives central to this thesis. Second, to outline the aims and research questions of this investigation before concluding the chapter with the thesis structure.

Alex (aged 18) enjoys taking photographs in suburban areas and large recreation parks near his home in London, which involves conceptualising ideas that he then seeks to express photographically. This results in a wide range of subjects of photographic interest. Aiming to improve his photography skills, he often goes out with a deliberate and self-conscious intent to experiment with his image-making. He owns a smartphone that he carries with him everywhere, but prefers using a digital compact camera for his everyday photography, referring to the latter as his "official camera". A very media-savvy young male with high-functioning autism, Alex enjoys experimenting with his camera

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[1] As Jill Boucher and Dermot Bowler (2008) note, the "[t]erminology in the field of autism research has become a minefield" (2008: xvii, Foreword). Throughout this thesis, the terms ASD and autism will be used interchangeably to mean Autism Spectrum Disorder, including high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome. This thesis will also use 'people/adults/individuals with ASD/autism' and 'autistic people/individuals/adults' interchangeably.

settings, and often uses editing features and filters to manipulate the images. In order to remember the meaning and intention behind his photographs, Alex annotates them after downloading them onto his home computer.

Vincent (aged 21) is an outgoing young male, who was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at the age of 20. He became interested in photography when he was 14 years old, a time when he was using Flickr to upload his photographs online. While his interest in photography has grown over the years, inspiring him to buy a DSLR camera and further develop his photography and video-making skills, Vincent no longer uses his Flickr account. He deliberately goes out to take images of things that interest him, namely abstract formations of lines, repetitions, textures and reflections. Due to its weight and size, he does not carry his DSLR camera with him every day. Although he prefers using the former, he also owns a smartphone, which he uses to take photographs in his everyday life. Despite his enthusiasm for experimenting with composition and lighting in his image-making, Vincent is not concerned with using photo-editing software to manipulate his images. He sometimes crops them but does not make other changes. Above all, Vincent's photographic practice is characterised by being intuitive and spontaneous in his decision-making to take photographs.

James (aged 23) is a relatively talkative young man with high-functioning autism (he prefers referring to 'the spectrum', and does not like using the autism label). Using both his smartphone and digital compact camera – sometimes even the camera on his Kindle – he takes photographs of many different things, ranging from skies and trees that have interesting formations or shapes, to places he visits with his parents and friends. His practice is characterised by a relative spontaneity; that is, he does not deliberately go out to take photographs, but carries his smartphone with him everywhere. James does not manipulate his photographs, and often prints them out at his local photography shop after selecting them on his home computer first.

Joe (aged 25) is a quiet, thoughtful young male with high-functioning ASD (he calls it 'the condition'). As an artist, he creates his own sculptures and paintings, which he wishes to do more often. Enjoying being outdoors and learning about flora and fauna, he also volunteers as a ranger at a countryside centre, a place that affords him the opportunity to take images of animals, his main subject of photographic interest. Joe started photography when he received his first smartphone about two years prior to his

involvement in this study, and does not own a digital compact camera. He keeps his images on his smartphone, saying he is not computer literate to download his photographs and manipulate them using photo-editing software. In fact, it is important for him to keep his photographic images unedited.

In general, photography involves decisions, interventions, negotiations and actions that the photographer makes in order to convey a particular message. The image-maker guides the viewer to focus on some features rather than on others to tell a story from a particular vantage point. These stories are people's personal encounters and depict ephemeral moments lifted out of ordinary time in order to emphasise an idealised sense of their special value; they illustrate the 'being there' and the 'having-been-there' (Barthes 1977).[2] There are numerous ways in which photography is practiced in people's everyday lives, and scholars argue that photography captures the ordinary and routine (Barker and Smith 2012; Hand 2012; Kaplan et al. 2007). Helen Grace claims, "[i]n looking at images we are interested in the mundane as a space of potential, where thought and sentiment arises, and as a site for emerging properties and values" (2014: 10). These images resemble a great flood of everyday visual expression, in which people seek to uncover patterns, regularities, series and dynamic sequencing. Grace adds, everyday photographs "establish repetition… seen as the rhythm of a beat that constitutes life, maintains it and guarantees its reproduction" (2014: 10). By uncovering and exploring repetition through photographs, people make sense of their everyday life, which in itself is filled with repetition on a daily or frequent basis.

Photographic images depicting the mundane are often overlooked, devalued and trivialised, and have been deemed "boring pictures", "predictable" or "art history's worst nightmare" (Batchen 2008: 121). Formal structures and aesthetic qualities were developed early in the history of photography and have institutionalised attitudes towards images of ordinary life (Price and Wells 2015). Yet, what critics disdain from the heights of the photographic canon, are in fact the most established practices and include the most popular photographs worldwide. Everyday photography has expanded from the relatively expensive production of photographs during the nineteenth century, through the mass reproduction, consumption and circulation of photographs encouraged by Kodak throughout the twentieth century, to the production, use and dissemination of instantaneous digital photographs that can be widely shared with friends and family in

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[2] Barthes (1977) referred to the spatial-temporal conjunction of the photograph, arguing that the image would not establish an awareness with the depicted object, the being-there or the here-now, but testify the moment in the past when it was taken, the having-been-there or the there-then.

real-time across the world. As this thesis will discuss within the context of photographic image-making, the development of photography does not render the photograph uninteresting or predictable.

Correspondingly, the introduction of new technologies during the twentieth century, be it the box camera, roll film, colour film or Polaroid, prompted strong criticism from established photographers and writers alike (Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). While these developments became popular among the 'casual amateur' or 'hobbyist', and led to the democratisation of photography, critics claimed the new photographic practices would pose significant problems for traditional photographic image-making (Hand 2012; Price and Wells 2015). It comes as no surprise then that the arrival of digital photography has generated similar criticism (Buse 2008; Mirzoeff 1999). For example, Geoffrey Batchen (1994) referred to the 'death of photography' when digital photography emerged just over two decades ago, while others use terms like 'post-photography' (Roberts 2009; Rosler 2004), or 'post-photographic era' (Mitchell 1992) to refer to something other than traditional photographic practices and times. However, the ubiquity of digital photographs, coupled with the increasing popularity of digital screen technologies, clearly verifies there was no death involved when analogue photography gave way to its digital counterpart.[3] Contrary to these accounts, photography is still very much alive.

Given the extensive field of photography, it is important to first establish what is meant by photographs taken in the realm of people's everyday lives and everyday photographic practices.[4] In the context of this research, everyday photography encompasses the photographic practices and images that are entangled in ordinary life, whether it is taking photographs to express the ways of seeing and being-in-the-world, collecting them for a particular purpose, using photography as a stimulus for memory, or sharing photographs with others as part of visual and personal communication. Carried out by people in their quotidian lives, everyday photography is invested with personal reasons and motivations, which are unique and meaningful to individuals. These photographic practices can be distinguished from professional forms of photography, including scientific, journalistic and governmental photography. Everyday photography is

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[3] This thesis is largely concerned with digital photography, and unless it is important to emphasise analogue photographs and practices, the terms photography, photographs, photographic image-making, images and practices refer to digital photography. This is particularly important in chapter five when participants are quoted saying 'photography' or 'photos', yet strictly speaking, they only use digital photography in their everyday lives.
[4] Although many writers use the terms 'everyday' and 'vernacular' photography interchangeably, the latter term is often categorised in relation to art, amateur or professional photography, and therefore has hierarchical implications, which are not the focus of debates in this thesis. Rather, this thesis adopts the view that digital photographic practices have become central to understanding digital photography in everyday life (Holland 2015), hence the preference for using the broad term 'everyday' in this thesis.

not a recent phenomenon or category, and involves the technological development, socio-cultural changes and diversifications of photography since its invention in 1839, together with socio-economic, technical and cultural shifts in personal and domestic life over the past 180 years (Hand 2012). While personal photography is often situated within the realm of the family or domestic photography, it cannot be limited to private, popular, family or amateur photography as if these categories are interchangeable. Although they have become blurred with the digitalisation of photography, this thesis is concerned with the dynamic constellation of photographic practices people, especially young adults, adopt and carry out with digital cameras and smartphones under the broad term of *everyday photographic practices*.

Making and circulating everyday photographic images as an ordinary element of everyday life is an activity in which more people engage than ever before (Hand 2012; Holland 2015; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). This habit is partly shaped by new camera technologies, linked with the development of online sharing platforms and telecommunication networks that extend the distribution of personal photographic images into a range of public spheres and global media (Hand 2012). As a result, everyday photography has entered a new photographic age, which includes profound transformations of the structures and relationships on which everyday photography was based in the past. For example, everyday photography is no longer strongly embedded within the family unit, where one person, often the father, was assigned the role of 'family photographer'. Patricia Holland observes, "when once snapshots and vernacular use were dismissed as largely irrelevant to photographic history, they have now become central to understanding the digital era" (2015: 179). The significance of these changes is that contemporary photography is deeply embedded in people's everyday lives. This technological presence changes former habits in that more photographs are recorded, seen, remembered and discussed, while digital compact cameras and smartphones are taken to events, gatherings and places that exceed the family home. There is a new ease of recording photographic images, with the result that private life is increasingly exposed and connected with others on a global level. Rather than recognising this transformation as a deterministic narrative of dystopian threat or dire outcome of photographic image-making, it should be seen as an evolution of photography (Hand 2012). Martin Lister (2007) affirms, "[d]igital technologies have not brought about the death of photography – there is more and more photography" (2007: 272). He acknowledges the digitalisation of technologies has led to changes in the use of the medium, and highlights that "technology (in itself) is nothing until and unless it is given

cultural and social purpose" (2007: 252). As Lister implies here, key questions on the digitalisation of photography are not merely on a technical and ontological level. That is to say, questions go beyond the different camera technologies, lenses and optics, film material and pixels, focus mechanisms and other processes and systems that define what a photograph is or how it is made, or what photography's defining characteristics are. These are not questions this thesis addresses in-depth, although participants reflect on the different camera technologies they use and why. In contrast, it is imperative to discuss photography from a socio-cultural perspective, and how the medium relates to social and cultural interactions in people's daily life.

Digital screen technologies are part and parcel of everyday life. One is less likely to hear questions like 'Did you bring the camera?'. In contrast, it is more plausible that people, both adults and adolescents, have their own cameras, or even own many devices with embedded cameras. The digitalisation of technologies has de-compartmentalised the use of photography in everyday life (Chalfen 2016). As Richard Chalfen points out, although the number of cameras per household had been growing before the arrival of digital technologies, the difference now is that "no one person is assigned the role of family photographer" (2016: xviii, Foreword). Individuals have an increased agency and choice over what they want to photograph, where and when. People carry their cameras and smartphones around everywhere, and taking photographs is no longer restricted to special family events (Hand 2012). Cameras are widely used in social and cultural settings; for example, young people take photographs at gatherings with friends, at work places, while out shopping or at music events. While these are events and places popular for taking photographs among the wider population of young adults, this is not the same for autistic young adults in this study, whose social world does not include photographing friends or other people at gatherings. This indicates there is a wide range of activities designated as 'photo-worthy' (Chalfen 2016). Similarly, smartphones have cameras embedded in them, and while people use them to take photographs virtually everywhere, camera phones exist within a network of mobile communication (Hjorth, Burgess and Richardson 2012; Lee 2010; Van Dijck 2008, 2013; Villi 2010, 2012). Among others, Martin Hand (2012) emphasises that digital photography is mainly a form of communication, rather than of memory-making (Gómez Cruz and Meyer 2012; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). This is an important distinction for this research, seeing that none of the participants foregrounded memory-making as part of their photographic practices.

The role of photography as a means of visual communication is not a new development and, writers argue, the field of digital photography has extended to encompass the multi-modal nature of mobile communication (Goggin 2012; Lee 2012; Pink 2011a). As Dong-Hoo Lee argues, "the development of mobile personal digital media has provided users with their own portable media space while they move about in physical space… thus allowing them to coordinate their temporal, spatial, and sensory experiences in the moment" (2010: 266). Lee suggests here that photography engenders a context within time and space that enables people to create, select, appropriate and disseminate their experience and perception of the world. Lee asserts, it is a setting "that conveys an individual's visual experience and feeling at that moment" (2010: 269). This development was made possible through the increasingly 'participatory culture' that emerged in the mid-2000s. People are no longer simply consuming content and information created by others. Web 2.0 has become a dynamic space where people participate and interact with one another through a variety of social media platforms, including image-centred sites like Instagram and Flickr, which people use to visually communicate with each other (Boyd 2014; Jenkins 2008; Murray 2008a). These networks are impacting upon various domains of social life and are affecting the social practices of communicating, meeting and seeing, amongst others social aspects of the everyday (Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016). These cultural and social practices are interwoven with the rhetoric of seeing and the experience of other sensory modalities, which are central to this thesis. Increasingly, the influence of perception has been explored by writers on photography, which has led to the emergence of a scholarship that addresses experience and perception in relation to photographic practices (Kiran 2012; Pink 2011a; Sobchack 2004). As Barry Sandywell argues, "acts of perception are necessarily articulated in semiotic media – and … the reach of semiosis extends beyond the verbal into the non-verbal realms of practices and sociotechnological systems" (2011: 38). Since photography is a non-verbal means of communication, this thesis is concerned with questions that address whether the medium is an extension of experience and perception, and a transformation of being-in-the-world (Sandywell 2011; Kiran 2012; Sobchack 2004).

Adopting the approach that technologies and objects have agency, in that they carry 'scripts' and conventions that both afford and restrict the possibilities of action, they carry inscriptions about their intended use (Hand 2012; Kiran 2012; Shove at al. 2007). For example, cameras are objects that carry inscriptions about their proposed actions; these might be prescriptive, like how to hold them, or open, as cameras produce images

of anything. The important point here is that like other mass media practices, such as watching television or listening to the radio, and even ordinary practices like shopping, photography has become entangled in people's everyday life, regarded by critics as nothing special (Miller 1998; Scannell 2014). The assumption is that photography can be done by anyone, anywhere and at any time, using digital cameras, mobile phones and tablet devices. This routine status has meant that other aspects of photographic image-making have been ignored, namely: looking for, composing and creating photographs, directing (posing) bodies, and editing and sharing photographs. These are all practices largely absent from debates and research, yet photography is not merely about the photograph as an end product. As Jonas Larsen writes,

> photographing is absent from most theory and research jumps straight from photography to photographs. They directly go to the representational worlds of photographs and skip over their production, movement and circulation. The diverse hybrid practices and flows of photography are rendered invisible.
>
> (Larsen 2008: 143)

The observation by Larsen is significant, not just for recognising the complexity inherent in photographic practices, but also for identifying the photographic image and its movement in an everyday context. For far too long the academic domain has comfortably settled within representational accounts of the world that have focused on analysing photographs as texts, as can be found in the works by John Tagg (1988), Robin Kelsey and Blake Stimson (2008), Mary Warner Marien (2002) and Liz Wells (2003). Their work focuses on cultural, social and theoretical aspects of photography, but ignores the photographer and the practice component, that is, the 'doing of photography' and the 'taking of photographs' (Bourdieu 1990).[5] As a result, this thesis is not about photographs primarily. To discuss the practice of photography in everyday life, it is necessary to go beyond the photograph and consider the complexity of photography as a material object, a practice, an image and a networked technology (Hand 2012; Larsen and Sandbye 2014). Drawing on an interdisciplinary literature that explores everyday photography from different perspectives, this thesis creates a vantage point from which photography is examined in relation to different layers of seeing, visual and mobile communication of self and world, and understood as a social and cultural practice.

Photography may be ubiquitous, but it is not everywhere in the same way (Hand 2012). Although the participants in this study engage with the medium on a daily basis,

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[5] Edited collections and anthologies on reading and understanding photographs have been widely published; see Kress and Leeuwen (2006); Manghani et al. (2006); Mitchell (1980, 1984, 1986); Robins (1996).

they use photography in different ways, and it means different things to them. As there has been little attention given in the photography literature on what photographers do with their cameras and smartphones, so there has been limited research on exploring the photographic practices of young adults with ASD. The focus on this age group is particularly important. According to Jina Jang and colleagues (2014), autism research mainly centres on children and adolescents with ASD. Given autism is a life-long condition, this thesis contributes to knowledge on an under-researched demographic. As a socio-cultural form, photography offers a context in which autistic adults can explore their sociality. This is crucial for them, seeing that individuals with ASD experience the world differently due to their social communication and interaction issues (Bogdashina 2005). Elinor Ochs and Olga Solomon explain, "[a]utistic sociality is not an oxymoron but, rather a systematically observable and widespread phenomenon in everyday life" (2010: 69). The writers do not discount or underestimate the social and communication problems related to ASD, but instead establish an account of autism that understands both limitations and competencies of autistic sociality. For example, they maintain that along with objects, communicative repertoires also mediate social interaction in ASD, clarifying, "[g]azing at a computer screen or piece of paper offers a domain of social coordination at a distance" (2010: 82). Considering that digital cameras consist of screens, they can be used to mediate social interaction in autism. In addition, Mary Lawlor (2010) argues that autistic people's sociality includes "the complexity of real world engagements; worlds where even animals are participants and vehicles of engagement" (2010: 169). In the light of this, Ochs and Solomon conceptualise sociality "as consisting of a range of possibilities for social coordination with others" (2010: 71). Photography is arguably one of those possibilities. Accordingly, rather than erroneously conceiving autism "as a disease that precludes meaningful social behaviour" (Grinker 2010: 172), autistic sociality entails a range of potentials for social coordination with others, including animals, objects and other beings (Ochs and Solomon 2010). For that reason, it is crucial to establish the perspective on autism within this thesis.

Following Ochs et al. and their "enriched view of autism informed by the field of anthropology" (2004: 147), this thesis adopts approaches to ASD that emphasise the significance of rethinking research on autism, and move away from dominant biomedical discourses that focus largely on symptoms and deficits (Bogdashina 2010; Grinker 2008; Murray 2008b; Nadesan 2005; Osteen 2008; Solomon and Bagatell 2010). An anthropological perspective is particularly useful for this study because of its focus on diversity and its deliberation to study all facets of cultural groups and individuals'

everyday lives. Although there are many commonalities between the fields across the social sciences, this study takes inspiration from an anthropological perspective, as it helps unpick the diverse ways participants see self and world. Above that, a phenomenological stance that embraces individual experiences and perceptions of living with ASD is necessary in order to develop a nuanced understanding of the condition, and how people with ASD relate to self and others (Solomon and Bagatell 2010). By rethinking the possibilities for social interaction and participation for people with ASD, it becomes clear there are different ways for people with ASD to engage in social activities.

The challenge current studies on social aspects of ASD face are descriptions and understandings of autism written from the perspective of a biomedical discourse that casts symptoms of ASD and their implications in a deficit-based framework (Bogdashina 2010; Ochs et al. 2004; Osteen 2008). Arguably a narrow approach, the prevailing understanding of ASD as a neurodevelopmental disorder outlines that ASD affects social cognition. Much attention has been given to cognitive accounts of autism as a disorder that affects the ability to infer another person's emotions, beliefs, thoughts, and intentions, also referred to as 'theory of mind' (Baron-Cohen et al. 1985), and the weak central coherence theory (Frith 1989; Frith and Hill 2004; Happé 2005). The latter suggests ASD disrupts a natural human tendency to seek higher-level meaning in a wide range of stimuli. This thesis does not disregard social and communication impairments in ASD as described in biomedical terms, and discusses them within phenomenological perspectives in chapter three. However, it is important to acknowledge the strong tension between biomedical perspectives on ASD and the everyday experiences of autistic individuals (Ochs et al. 2004; Nadesan 2005). As Solomon and Bagatell argue,

> The tension commonly arises at the interface of the personal and the institutional, between theories of competence and theories of disability, and among orientations toward measurable clinical change when contrasted with notions of a 'good' meaningful life.
>
> (Solomon and Bagatell 2010: 3)

This situation is made even more complicated by the increasing boundaries of the autism spectrum and its rising occurrence (Bagatell 2007). Based on the limitations of the medical framework, it is more important than ever to carry out research that includes perspectives from across the arts, humanities and social sciences. Here, Dawn Eddings Prince (2010) explains the bearing the tensions and representations have on the current understanding of ASD:

> When most people think of autism they think of violent, unreachable people in worlds completely of their own making, worlds without keys, feeling no empathy, lacking imagination, and unavailable to the deepest of human needs for contact and love. Having autism is the worst fate parents can imagine befalling their children and they dread its impact on their families.
>
> (Prince 2010: 58)

This conceptual structure of autism has profoundly negative implications for people with ASD and their families. Ethnographic studies have contested this perspective on autism, proposing accounts of how people with ASD meaningfully engage in a variety of social everyday activities with other people (Bagatell 2007; Kremer-Sadlik 2004; Ochs et al. 2001, 2004). In line with Clifford Geertz's (1973) orientation to the study of social behaviour across different cultures, researchers seek to rethink and reimagine ASD from a phenomenological, rather than a medical, point of view (Ochs et al. 2004; Solomon and Bagatelle 2010).[6]

An interdisciplinary outlook is particularly relevant to autism research in light of the history of ASD as a clinical diagnosis. Since its original description by Leo Kanner in 1943, theories of ASD have undertaken multiple transformations. As Solomon and Bagatell write, the "syndrome itself has shifted from being considered a rare psychogenic condition to being classified as a neurobiological disorder with prevalence as high as one in 110 children" (2010: 2). With an increase in ASD diagnoses and a broader autism spectrum than before, it is pertinent to approach autism through a bottom-up framework that encompasses the lived experiences and socio-cultural knowledge and skills that allow individuals of a group to interpret conventional behaviours and activities (Ochs et al. 2004). Taking the above into account, this thesis seeks to bring the fields of everyday photography and autism together in order to illuminate the ways individuals with ASD use photography to express their relationship to self and world in their everyday lives. Linking the fields of photography and autism, the interdisciplinary nature of this investigation draws on views and debates from a growing diversity of academic perspectives in which photography and ASD have been researched and debated. This research offers participants a way to engage with photography in order to negotiate and construct their own understanding of what it means to be affected by ASD. At the same time, this research is a call to photography scholars to give serious consideration to stimulate new debates about what it means to be a photographer in everyday life.

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[6] For Geertz, culture is discerned through the interpretation of signs and meaningful practices in everyday contexts, but this interpretation does not depend on a structure or universal system of signification. An understanding of lived culture entails in-depth ethnographic research that produces 'thick descriptions' of cultural life (Barker 2004).

1.2. Aims and research questions

> Autistic differences in perception and 'processing' tend to involve Other ways
> of being-in-the-world, separate senses of selves and space that give rise to
> distinctive cultural experience, and so also, cultural *expression*.
>
> (Joyce Davidson 2008: 793, original italics)

In the above statement, Davidson offers a particular approach to ASD that resonates with the main aim of this investigation, which is to explore the unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world as expressed in the everyday photographic practices of young male adults with ASD. Referring to the different sensory processing issues in autism, individuals with autism have different experiences and perceptions of the world (Bogdashina 2016; Grandin 2006). The notion of 'autistic culture' that Davidson alludes to in the quotation is discussed by other writers, including Stuart Murray (2008b) and Joseph Straus (2013). They argue that similar to the concepts of race and deaf culture, people with ASD might articulate an association or identification with others in an autistic culture. To put it a different way, akin to the idea of family resemblances, members of an autistic culture might display certain patterns of similarities, without entailing an essential commonality. These patterns of similarities can be found within the area of photography; for example, by showing a particular interest in photographing lines and patterns, or showing a preference for taking photographs outdoors rather than inside. While this thesis does not strongly support or deny the idea of an autistic culture, it sets out to question this notion by drawing on findings from this investigation.

In giving this thesis the title *Seeing self and world: everyday photography and young male adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder*, this research seeks to examine the ways in which photographic image-making enables and inhibits ASD individuals' presence in, and experience of, the world. Relatedly, this thesis intends to analyse the ways in which photography mediates autistic individuals' relationships to objects, beings, the environment and the social world; and explore the ways in which the social practices of photography of autistic individuals relate to everyday practices of communication and social interaction. In keeping the emphasis on the perceptual experience in relation to the practice of image-making, this thesis seeks to distance itself from previous debates on the pictorial perceptual experience of looking at photographs, and historical dialogues relating to photographic representation. With debates centred on embodiment and perception, it is phenomenology, specifically the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004, 2012), which were most productive for advancing the ideas and arguments in this thesis, and unpacking the photographic practices of the four young male adults with ASD

in this investigation. His work helps reveal the implications of photography as a way of seeing and being-in-the-world. Merleau-Ponty's writings have been reappraised by a number of writers working in diverse disciplinary areas that this thesis draws on, including media and film studies, computer technology studies, human geography and anthropology (Ingold 2005, 2008; Pink 2011a; Sobchack 2004). Adopting his ideas and the overall spirit of the phenomenological approach further avoids a mere reproduction of prevalent academic narratives on the representation of disability in the discussion of autism.

Bringing the fields of everyday photography and autism together means this thesis casts a wider net to find alternative perspectives on photographic practice and autism that are useful approaches in this investigation, including visual anthropology, visual studies, communication studies, human-computer interaction (HCI), cultural disability studies, and the literature that includes (auto-)biographies written by people with ASD. From the literature that has been reviewed to date, the area that has been researched extensively is how people with ASD perceive gaze patterns and focus on facial expressions in picture communication systems. While these studies consider photography and analyse perception in autism, there has been little collaborative research carried out that encompasses ASD individuals' own photographic practices and self-reflective thoughts. There are limited studies that offer a systematic and rigorous approach to empirical enquiry in order to contribute new knowledge to ways in which photography mediates autistic people's perceptions of their world, and how the medium is used in their everyday lives. Consequently, this investigation results in an original contribution to knowledge. In recognising the value of what people with ASD have to say, the questions being asked in this thesis are as follows:

> *1) What unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world are expressed in the photographic practices of young male adults with ASD*?

Sub-questions:

> *i. In what ways does photographic image-making enable and inhibit autistic individuals' presence in, and experience of the world?*

> *ii. In what ways does photography mediate autistic individuals' relationships to objects, the environment and the social world?*

> *iii. In what ways do the social practices of photography of autistic individuals (i.e. image sharing) relate to everyday practices of communication and social interaction?*

The methodological framework developed for this qualitative, image-based investigation positions this study at the intersection of the advances in visual methodologies, and participatory creative methods. The methods used in this investigation offer participants the opportunity to explore their photographic subjectivity as the image-makers behind the camera. Photo elicitation is particularly useful for challenging their own initial interpretations and subsequently discussing their photographs in a self-reflective way. In contributing to the development of visual methods, the evidence generated from ASD individuals regarding their photographic practices gave me, as the researcher, the opportunity to offer an original contribution to knowledge to the fields of photography and autism. In turn, this study deepens the knowledge of photography as a means of communication and expression of self and world, and enhances the understanding of the multiple facets of ASD.

1.3. Thesis structure

Following this first chapter, chapters two and three offer theoretical perspectives on everyday photography and autism, respectively. For clarity, these literatures are discussed separately before bringing them together in the study itself. The analytical framework developed in chapter two discusses concepts and theories in relation to phenomenological and social domains of everyday photographic practices. Divided into two main parts, Part I explores conceptual developments that include the different layers of vision (Berger 1972; Sturken and Cartwright 2009), photographic seeing (Benjamin 1980; Haraway 1991) and perception (Ingold 2005, 2011; Merleau-Ponty 2004, 2012). Rather than suggesting specific ways of seeing self and world, this thesis "gives way to the idea of vision as a mutable faculty that is constantly adapting to a cluster of social and technical forces" (Price and Wells 2015: 28).

Part II of chapter two is concerned with concepts and notions that address how digital photography has become a habitual part of everyday life for many people in the Western world. By initially placing an emphasis on the formative years of the scholarship on photography between the 1960s and 1990s, Part II draws on the rich ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1990) and Richard Chalfen (1987), whose pioneering work on photography as a cultural and social practice departs from the view of photography as a form of art. Instead, Part II will highlight photography's expressive and communicative characteristics in regard to self and others, and conclude with an overview of young people's (aged 18-25) photographic practices, which reflects the age group of the participants in this study. As a consequence of limiting traditional discussions about the photographic image,

chapter two is predicated on the photography scholarship that derives from diverse academic terrains, including visual studies, visual anthropology, cultural and communications studies. These academic fields cover several cultural and social areas and strands of photography that are relevant to this study, highlighting the multidisciplinary approaches to photography and its expansion as an academic object of research (Chalfen 2016).

Chapter three centres on the scholarship in the context of cultural disability studies and ASD. Both fields include phenomenological and anthropological perspectives, which have been essential to the understanding of perception, lived experience, seeing and being-in-the-world in relation to the four individuals with ASD in this study. These are areas in which contemporary critical writers on disability and ASD challenge materialist perspectives that are primarily discussed under the rubric of disability studies, and are often conceptualised through the social model of disability (Osteen 2008). Divided into three parts, Part I first offers a brief introduction to the field of cultural disability studies (Davis 2013; Garland-Thomson 2006; Hevey 1992), followed by an overview of characteristics that affect people with ASD in their daily lives (Bogdashina 2005, 2010, 2016; Grandin 2006; Nadesan 2005). Part II outlines three key areas in which disability and ASD have been socially and culturally constructed, including campaigns run by contemporary autism charities (Hevey 1992; Morris 1991; Taylor 2008; Waltz 2012). Part III focuses on autism, and first offers examples of photographs taken by parents of autistic children, before drawing the chapter to an end by discussing artworks created by autistic visual artists. Reflecting on academic fields across the arts, humanities and social sciences, the interdisciplinary perspectives on everyday photography, cultural disability studies and autism discussed in chapters two and three form the conceptual frameworks of this study, and contribute to the understanding of the ways young male adults with ASD approach digital photography in their everyday lives.

Chapter four offers a detailed overview of the methodology used in this investigation. Divided into two parts, the chapter will first discuss the fields of visual methodologies and visual research methods, before outlining the advantages for adopting a mixed-method approach in the context of qualitative research. Part I also provides an overview of qualitative studies with vulnerable children and young adults using photography, which largely informed the methodology of this investigation. With this in mind, Part II of chapter four provides an in-depth personal account of the

methodology of this investigation, including the rationale for this study, and a detailed description of the analysis method used for the research findings of this study.

Chapter five analyses and interprets the research findings from the four participants in this study. Key to the contribution of this thesis, these analyses give tangible forms to the abstract theories in this investigation, including vision and perception. The chapter is divided into two parts representing the two main themes of participants' photographic practices that derived from thematic analysis: first, the phenomenological dimension of photography; and second, the social dimension of photography. A number of subthemes complement the main themes, and help nuance the photographic practices of the four participants.

Chapter six concludes the thesis. Following the in-depth analysis in the previous chapter, here, the findings will be further evaluated in order to provide conclusions as to the extent to which aims and objectives have been met and new knowledge presented. In turn, this chapter will offer directions for future research.

The postscript to this study was written after the viva voce and offers further reflection and consideration on issues that were embedded in the research.

Chapter 2

The field of everyday photography

2.1. Introduction

It seems impossible to think of a world without photography, and even more difficult to consider photography as one distinct 'thing' with generalisable characteristics and qualities (Edwards 2006). Spanning almost 180 years since its invention in 1839, photography has been perceived in different ways and contexts, including as an artistic practice, a medium presenting objective evidence, a form of documentary record and a leisure activity (Kriebel 2007; Roberts 1998; Rosler 1989). Photography has also generated questions and debates around the ways in which the photograph has been examined and considered, not least as a visual form of communication and expression that affords people the opportunity to depict the ways they see the world. This diversity of photography is often discussed in tandem with cultural and socio-economic shifts in societies, and in personal and family lives (Price and Wells 2015). Photography serves different roles, and needs to be identified simultaneously as a practice, an image, a networked technology and a material object (Edwards 2012; Hand 2012; Larsen and Sandbye 2014; Lister 2014; Price and Wells 2015).

Taking contemporary approaches to digital and mobile photography into account, such as the use of smartphones and online sharing platforms, it is rather ironic that despite the medium's long history, technological changes and diverse contexts of its use, critics have only begun to treat photography as a serious object of study since the 1960s (Sturken and Cartwright 2009). The emphasis has largely been on philosophical debates on the social, cultural and theoretical impacts of photographs, in particular within the domain of photojournalism and art photography (Hand 2012). Conversely, the rise of a shared notion of everyday photography has had a slow acceptance across academic fields, and as a result, debates concerning the photographer and photographic image-making have been limited (Chalfen 2016; Larsen 2008; Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016). Within the photography scholarship, relatively little attention has been paid to the ways minority groups and vulnerable people engage with their cameras. For that reason, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, to systematically review the literature that draws on theories and concepts on photography that establish the analytical framework of this study; and second, to examine the medium's social and cultural uses, which will help contextualise the participants' photographic practices

analysed in chapter five. While there is little to be gained from revisiting familiar material on the history of photography at length, selected concepts and theories central to the arguments of this thesis will be included (Berger 1972; Bourdieu 1990; Sontag 1979), in so far as they help identify the issues and themes that have been overlooked in the past, and draw links to this investigation.[7] By applying them to new areas of study, this chapter challenges existing perspectives, identifies emergent aspects and raises new questions about photography. Notably, concepts discussed in this chapter are strongly interrelated and not easily separated into distinct debates.

This chapter is organised into two main parts and further divided into several subsections. Part I is largely concerned with perception in relation to photographic image-making, and explores how photography relates to seeing and looking. Considering the impact of vision in the process of photography, coupled with the perceptual processing issues in ASD, discussing the terms separately helps present the nuances of the different ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. Influential writers in this area are John Berger (1972), Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2009); this thesis reflects on their rich ideas to establish an understanding of the connection between seeing and looking and their culturally constructed characteristics (Jenks 1995). Related, and also central to this thesis are the concepts of photographic realism, naturalism and photographic seeing, which firmly link vision to photography. Here, Walter Benjamin (1969, 1980), Donna Haraway (1991), Patrick Maynard (2008) and Edward Weston (1980) offer key ideas that underpin this thesis. For example, addressing photography as a means of communication, Benjamin (1980) claims the photograph is a construction of reality. For Weston, the beauty of photography lies in the simplicity of form and composition, while Haraway considers the camera as a prosthetic device that facilitates an active way of seeing. Linking seeing with photography, Maynard affirms that photographic seeing is capable of transforming vision towards richer meanings.

The second section discusses photography as a mode of perception. It explores the dynamic relation between objects, beings and their environment, and considers how photography is used to experience and perceive them. Here, the key ideas and theories centre on phenomenology, embodiment and being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962), and the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004, 2012) and Tim Ingold (2005, 2008, 2011) are

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[7] See Batchen (2000); Hirsch (1997); Jeffrey (1981), Rosenblum (2008); Sarvas and Frohlich (2011) and West (2000) for in-depth accounts of the history of photography. See Long et al. (2009) and Wells (2015) for more extended discussions of photography as an academic field of enquiry.

particularly influential for this investigation. In-depth reflections on the philosophy of phenomenology and being-in-the-world will not be included, as they are not the main focus of this investigation.[8] More importantly, this thesis discusses what people do with their cameras, a key element that is largely missing from existing philosophical debates on photography. Writers who have already contributed to this area are Vivian Sobchack (2004) and Asle Kiran (2012); their work foregrounds embodiment and perception in the use of digital screen technologies. Consequently, debates on the visual perceptual experience of photographic images will not be repeated at length. Writers of that school of thought explore how photographs are visually perceived, without further analysing photography as a social and cultural practice (Barthes 2000; Brown and Phu 2014; Cavenden-Taylor 2015; Currie 1999; Hopkins 2012; Lopes 2005; Pettersson 2011; Walton 1984). In short, what sets this study apart is its focus on the practical implications of perception in relation to the *practice* of everyday photography.

Part II is concerned with questions and ideas about how photography has become a habitual part of daily life for people in the Western world. With a focus on the formative years of the scholarship on photography between the 1960s and 1990s, Part II begins with a discussion of photography's social and cultural realities. Here, the thesis reflects on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1990) and Richard Chalfen (1987), whose pioneering studies depart from the view of photography as a form of art, and underline photography's communicative and expressive characteristics in regard to self and world. Their research sets the stage for asking people what they do with their cameras in their everyday lives, which is a key element of this study. Despite their groundwork, empirical research that focuses on the everyday photographic practices of marginalised groups and individuals is still limited – this study makes a contribution towards filling that gap.

The second subsection in Part II outlines key aspects in the digitalisation of photography in relation to people's social and communication practices. The wide range and accessibility of digital compact cameras and smartphones enables people to engage with photography in several ways to depict aspects of their personal and private life (Chalfen 2016; Hand 2012). The last subsection in Part II offers an overview on young people's (aged 18-25) photographic practices. These debates will contextualise the photographic practices of the four young male adults with ASD as participants who use digital and mobile photography in their ordinary lives. Part II concludes by reflecting on Jon Prosser's (2011) view that a more collaborative approach in studies with vulnerable

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[8] See Glendinning (2007); Ihde (1990); Jensen and Moran (2013); Moran (2000); Matthen (2005) for comprehensive debates on the philosophical canon relating to phenomenology and perception, and Dreyfus (1991) on Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world.

people is often missing. He refers to "participants with communication difficulties, learning difficulties, and other disabilities" (2011: 490). Their voices and agency are largely underrepresented in empirical research studies. As there are various means of communication, and many ways in which photography can be included in everyday lives, Prosser's argument serves as a guiding principle in this thesis and establishes a link to chapter three.

Part I

2.2. Layers of seeing and practices of looking: photography's relation to vision

The shared and evolving understanding that vision is an active process and central to everyday life and experience developed in the late nineteenth century, when vision came to be seen as the dominating sense in modern societies (Berger 1972; Ingold 2005; Urry and Larsen 2011).[9] But there is nothing natural about this organising power of vision. Entangled with other senses, the act of seeing was considered to be purely mechanical. As James Elkins (1996) explains, seeing could be misunderstood as being an automatic and unconscious function:

> At first, it appears that nothing could be easier than seeing. We just point our eyes where we want them to go, and gather in whatever there is to see. Nothing could be less in explanation. The world is flooded with light, and everything is available to be seen.

> (Elkins 1996: 11)

Elkins' account on seeing implies that provided there is light, people merely have to open their eyes to see the world, but seeing is more complicated than that. It is a conscious act, and when linked to photography, it is an active means, introducing the idea of the vantage point, which affords seeing from different perspectives (Berger 1972; Szarkowski 2007). This suggests people actively see and look at different things, in diverse ways and from different perspectives, since relations and practices often associated with everyday life are fluid and dispersed across time and space (Burkitt 2004). The results of seeing are not merely depictions of nature, but embodiments of ideological and fabricated ways of seeing and being-in-the-world formed by interests and

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[9] For comprehensive discussions of vision and visuality see Foster (1988); Schirato and Webb (2004); Sturken and Cartwright (2009).

reproducible cultural conventions (Berger 1972; Hand 2012). Adopting Martin

Heidegger's (1962) notion of *Dasein*, this thesis uses the term being-in-the-world to refer

to the way beings are actively immersed and embedded in the physical, tangible, literal

day to day world which is everywhere (Dreyfus 1991).

Reflecting on the implications of people's expanded ability to see through such

visual technologies as the telescope, microscope and camera, critics of the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argued the devices were "extending the range

of our vision, compensating for its imperfections, or finding substitutes for its limited

powers" (Jay 1993: 3). For example, the inability of the eye to see parts of fast moving

objects was challenged by Eadweard Muybridge in 1878. The technical development of

the camera enabled him to successfully photograph the movement of a galloping horse,

which proved that the camera was able to capture a moment in time. Muybridge's

pioneering study served as a paradigmatic example of new ways of seeing, and opened

up debates on the range of vision, revealing elements of movement that the eye was not

able to perceive (Yacavone 2009). Seeing the unseen within the flux of movement was

also of interest to Walter Benjamin (1980), who claimed that photography reconfigured

time and space, a concept he described as the 'optical unconscious'. Referring to

Muybridge's study, Benjamin argued that photography recorded aspects of movement

that were too difficult for the eye to see and perceive, namely because they occur

quickly, such as the details of someone's walk (Yacavone 2012). He explained,

"[p]hotography, however, with its time lapses, enlargements, etc. makes such knowledge

possible. Through these methods one first learns of this optical unconscious" (1980:

203). Elsewhere, Benjamin (1969) alluded to photography's ability to offer a different

way of seeing when he asserted,

> Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked
> eye—if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a
> space consciously explored by man. Even if one has a general knowledge of the
> way people walk, one knows nothing of a person's posture during the fractional
> second of a stride.
>
> (Benjamin 1969: 236-237)

Identifying the importance of the link between presence and the unconscious in

photography, Benjamin was concerned with the realm of the unseen, which became

visible through the camera eye (Yacavone 2012). In other words, photography sheds

light on aspects of everyday life that are usually invisible for the human eye. The idea

that photography makes the unseen, including time, space, perception and experience,

visible is of particular interest to this study. While this thesis does not argue that

photography replaces the human eye, it proposes that the camera is an extension of the eye and widens the scope of vision. Considering vision is entangled with other sensory modalities, this thesis further claims that photographic image-making facilitates the sensory perception and experience of seeing and being-in-the-world. Vivienne Sobchack (2004) affirms that photography shapes people's embodied perception of the world, and alters their subjectivity while expressing time and space as significant social and personal experiences. It is the camera eye that reveals the configuration of the present concealed in photography. This thesis then extends Benjamin's 'optical unconscious' to include photography as a social practice that encompasses the unseen, including experience, perception, time and space.

As a result of the increased understanding of vision, the broad range of visual practices led to claims that certain cultures are ocularcentric, or that there are diverse ways of seeing and many practices of looking (Harper 2012; Jay 1993; Sturken and Cartwright 2009). Debates firmly established vision as the elevated sense (Urry 1990), and photography's unique ability to freeze time earned much recognition among critics. For example, John Szarkowski claims the photographer

> discovered that there was a pleasure and a beauty in this fragmenting of time that had little to do with what was happening. It had to do rather with seeing the momentary patterning of lines and shapes that had been previously concealed within the flux of movement.
>
> (Szarkowski 2007: 10)

Szarkowski alludes to an autonomous vision that goes beyond the event, that has no external reference, no trace like a footprint (Sontag 1979). Instead, it is a vision of a creative and embodied practice concerned with complex processes of signification within society. The importance here is that vision is a key mode for engaging in everyday photographic practices, and for seeing the world in new ways (Benjamin 1969). Combining vision with a fragment of time freezes a moment, which is a notion defined as 'the decisive moment'. The expression is associated with Henri Cartier-Bresson, and denotes the fragment of a second in which the elements of a scene – the essence or meaning of the moment or event and the formal, geometrical composition – join together (Modrak 2011; Price 2015).[10] Cartier-Bresson understood photography as a new and precise way of seeing. For him, the medium was a way "to find the structure of the world – to revel in the pure pleasure of form, [to reveal that] in all this chaos, there is order"

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[10] The phrase "There is nothing in this world which does not have its decisive moment" was first published in 1717, and also appears in Henri Cartier-Bresson's introduction for his book *Images à la Sauvette* (1952). However, it was not Cartier-Bresson who created the expression, but his publisher Tériade (Sire 2009).

(cited in Sontag 1979: 100). His approach to vision implies a rather gradual coordination of seeing the environment; he is searching to capture the right moment in the midst of the everyday chaos, perhaps even everyday beauty. Extending this view, Douglas Harper (2012) proposes the camera teaches the photographer seeing, by which he indicates that photography is about self-discovery and self-expression. The significance of this notion is that photography is a reflexive, self-conscious medium that advances the nature of self-expression and communication (Holland 2015; Price and Wells 2015). Taking the various approaches to vision into account, seeing is not a mechanical act as perceived by Fox Talbot and other like-minded critics of the time, but a mode of experiencing the world. In this sense, Elkins describes seeing as

> irrational, inconsistent, and undependable. It is immensely troubled… and caught up in the threads of the unconscious. Our eyes are not ours to command… No matter how hard we look, we see very little of what we look at… Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism.
>
> (Elkins 1996: 11-12)

Seeing is an active and comprehensive process. Critics argue that seeing is socially and culturally constructed (Berger 1972; Harper 2012; Jenks 1995); many relate it to looking, which is a learned ability, fraught with power and control (Bate 2009; Modrak 2011; Sturken and Cartwright 2009; Urry and Larsen 2011). The relationship between seeing and looking has been explored by John Berger (1972), who is concerned with the complexities of visual experience and notes, "[i]t is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world… We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice" (1972: 7-8). This implies a dynamic and interconnected relationship between seeing, looking and knowing, indicating that the way people see and look at things is predisposed and determined by what they believe, know or experience. Put simply, experience and knowledge change the way people look at things, a relation that, as Berger argues, "is never settled" (1972: 7). Looking is a two-way action; it underlines the separation between the one that does the looking, and that which is looked at, further implying a relation with power and control, since looking means to exercise choice (Garland-Thomson 2009; Price 2015; Urry 1990). That is to say, people look at others while they can be seen as part of the visible world; in turn, others may see things differently depending on the context in which they see things. Equally, some things and people are rendered invisible, perhaps too familiar to be noticed and seen, leaving them unrecognised or possibly even ignored. With ASD being an invisible disability (Davis 2013; Murray 2008b; Straus 2013), the implication for this study is that photography is a

tool that makes aspects of ASD visible. Considering the complex and diverse layers of seeing and practices of looking, Berger's reflections underline the importance of extending these terms to explore the visual experiences of people with ASD.

Building on Berger (1972), Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright refer to the complex and layered nature of looking, and offer the following account:

> Looking can be easy or difficult, pleasurable or unpleasant, harmless or dangerous. Conscious and unconscious aspects of looking intersect. We engage in practices of looking to communicate, to influence, and to be influenced. Even when we choose not to look, or when we look away, these are activities that have meaning within the economy of looking.
>
> (Sturken and Cartwright 2009: 9)

Sturken and Cartwright highlight that looking is inevitably part of everyday life, since people engage in the complex and layered economy of looking in order to make sense of the world. The focus on the visual in contemporary culture promotes the fascination with images and image-making, which have become routine ways of experiencing self and world (Hand 2012; Sturken and Cartwright 2009). Although detailed debates on vision and self in relation to ASD will follow in chapter three, here it is helpful to briefly highlight the significance of this relation for this study. As part of everyday life, people with autism look at things and others to make sense of self and the environment. Their vision is not only layered and complex, but it is affected by ASD, which suggests individuals with autism see the world differently. For Dawn Prince-Hughes (2004), an autistic adult, "autism can be a beautiful way of seeing the world… one filled with wonder and discovery and full of the feelings that so poetically inform each human life" (cited in Straus 2013: 474). Of course, non-ASD people's vision may be filled with wonder and discovery too, but as a disorder that affects ASD people's everyday lives, this raises the question of what autistic people see, and to what extent autism is visible in their photography. Donna Williams, an adult with ASD, shares her experience of how her vision is affected by ASD, explaining, "I had a fragmented perception of things at the best of times, seeing eyes or a nose or whiskers or a mouth but mostly putting the bits together in my head" (1999: 162). Williams specifies that vision is the ability to receive sights, but her experience of fragmented perception meant that she had to learn how to see with meaning, which is culturally framed (Urry and Larsen 2011). Although Williams does not discuss her experience in relation to photography, it is perhaps not unlikely to think that fragmented vision is visible in autistic people's photographs by way of depicting details of objects in the process of constructing their social reality.

Jonas Larsen and John Urry (2011) recognise that looking is culturally and socially fabricated and performed across many areas, notably entertainment, medicine and the everyday, which are, too, socio-cultural constructions (Hacking 1999). As a social and cultural practice, photography is a tool that extends this broad span of vision. The link between seeing, looking and photography has been long established, since the rhetoric of the photographic image centres on sight and the desire to look (Clarke 1997; Lopes 1996). Worth noting is that the proliferation of visual technologies offers people more ways of seeing and practices of looking, and different ways of filling everyday practices with significant meaning (Edwards 2006; Sturken and Cartwright 2009). This explosion suggests that more specificity needs to be taken into account when analysing seeing and looking vis-à-vis photographic image-making. This is important for this investigation. With autism affecting autistic individuals' vision, the remaining part of this section will discuss the relationship between vision and photography by focusing on the terms of photographic realism, naturalism and photographic seeing, respectively.

2.2.1. Photographic realism and naturalism

Since its arrival, photography has been understood to be a realist medium, capable of making an authentic copy of the world, bearing witness to the events and things they depict (Bardis 2004; Edwards 2006; Tormey 2013). The technology's basic qualities of being precise, mechanical and objective attached realism to vision, which was recognised as the route to knowledge and truth (Slater 1995; Sontag 1979). On the other hand, P.H. Emerson responded against the prevalent taste of the time and modelled his photographs on the way a scene would be perceived, employing the method he called differential focus; it allowed him to follow a particular focal pattern based on the assumption that the human vision does not reflect the world in sharp focus (Edwards 2006; Emerson 1980). As the understanding of photography evolved, views on its nature were challenged, and debates advanced from aesthetic and technical interrogations that featured within ontological debates, towards the recognition of photography's realist and documentary characteristic and socio-cultural construction (Kelsey and Stimson 2008; Kriebel 2007).[11] The idea of recording the 'being-there' of the subject strengthened the authority of the photograph and established photography's documentary and representational tasks, together with its status of truth and the 'single event' (Hand 2012; Jay 2009; Tagg 1988).

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[11] The term 'documentary' was first coined by John Grierson in 1926. For discussions of documentary photography see, for example, Becker (1995); Roberts (1998); Rosler (1989); Solomon-Godeau (1991).

German and French critics of the late 1920s and early 1930s, namely Siegfried Kracauer (1963), André Bazin (1960) and Walter Benjamin (1969, 1980), recognised photography's ability to "'realistically' reproduc[e] impressions of actuality" (Price and Wells 2015: 19).[12] However, the authors differ significantly in their views on the relationship between photography and realism. Bazin and Kracauer, for example, emphasise the ontological relation of photography to reality, and argue that photography's 'success' lies in its ability to reproduce reality without the intervention of the human hand. In contrast, Benjamin disputes this view and recognises that photographs are products of human creativity, agency and manipulation; they can be edited, retouched and reproduced. Benjamin claims the surface appearance of the photograph tells the viewer little about the socio-political circumstance or experience of what is depicted in the photograph. He cites Berthold Brecht who argues a photograph is a construction of reality, "complicated by the fact that less than ever does a simple *reproduction of reality* express something about reality" (1980: 213, original italics). In offering an example, Brecht explains,

> A photograph of the Krupp works or of the A.E.G. reveals almost nothing about these institutions. Reality as such has slipped into the domain of the functional. The reification of human relations, the factory, for example, no longer discloses those relations. So here is indeed 'something to construct', something 'artificial', 'invented'.
>
> (Brecht cited in Silberman 2000: 164-165)

For Brecht and Benjamin, a photograph is not merely a 'window on the world' and viewed as a realistic and accurate representation of what is in front of the lens, purely produced through light and without the intervention of the photographer (Yacavone 2012). While light is an essential requirement for photography, defined as 'drawing with light', a photograph belongs to the realm of culture, and not nature, since it constructs the real world (Edwards 2006; Hand 2012). The photographer is an active agent in the image-making process, creating photographs by filtering out what he or she sees, and through decisions and actions that are filled with the photographer's subjective reality and lived experience (Sobchack 2004).

The question of realism is central to this thesis, but it cannot be limited to exploring the 'truth-wielding' power in the age of digital photography. Inspired by light, participants in this study create photographs based on their intentions, which encompass

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[12] Photographic discourses were only slowly introduced into Anglo-Saxon academic debates. While the works of German and French writers, such as Benjamin and Bourdieu, respectively, were originally published between the 1930s and mid 1960s, their texts were only translated into English during the 1960s and 1970s or, as in Bourdieu's case as late as 1990. Nevertheless, their influence on photography theories has been significant reference points of subsequent academic work.

their subjective thinking process that mediates the viewer's response to their images. Their photographs expose their engagement with the world, and experience of a particular moment worth photographing. In that sense, they follow Emerson's view who said, "[n]ature is full of surprises and subtleties, which give quality to a work, thus a truthful impression of her is never to be found in any but naturalistic works" (1980: 104). As an advocate for naturalism, Emerson promoted working outdoors to create a naturalistic photographic aesthetic.

Referring to photographic realism, Jane Tormey explains, "[t]he desire to represent experiences is associated with a visual imitation of physical reality… this form of visual resemblance [is] referred to as 'realism'" (2013: 12). Accepting that photographic realism presents the appearance of what things look like, and captures the 'essential meaning' that goes beyond appearance, this thesis reflects on photographic realism as an ongoing relation between authenticity and representation (Tormey 2013). The relationship to realism is essentially constructed based on what is felt to be a direct experience of the world (Bardis 2004; Edwards 2006). Questions on realism continue to be challenged and divided, with new questions posed since the arrival of digital photography. The point to be grasped here is that participants in this study produce photographs that appear lifelike as images that are taken from their individual perspectives. As Steve Edwards (2006) explains, "[p]hotographs… can seem more real than reality: uncannily like the world we know, yet more perfect, ordered and coherent" (2006: 102). Photographs invite the viewer into the visual field of the photographer.

In an effort to offer an insight into his thoughts on the conceptual development of photography, Bourdieu calls for new ways of thinking about the medium and, like Benjamin and Brecht, challenges the notion of photography as a 'window on the world'. Bourdieu is less interested in observing aesthetic trends in photography, and instead opposes the idea that "photography is considered to be a perfectly realistic and objective reading of the visible because (from its origin) it has been assigned *social uses* that are held to be 'realistic' and 'objective'" (1990: 74, original italics). For Bourdieu, there is nothing inherently objective about photography. As he explains

> In fact, the 'stage' is most often set up beforehand and if, like painters, many amateur photographers force their models into composed and laborious poses and postures, it is because… the 'natural' is a cultural ideal which must be created before it can be captured.
>
> (Bourdieu 1990: 81)

Reflecting on the relation between the world and the creative practices used within a particular time and place, Bourdieu highlights that even the unexpected photograph that appears to be taken 'naturally' is not an objective depiction, but instead culturally conditioned, as individuals want to be portrayed in "ideal" poses that merely appear "natural" (1990: 81). Put differently, photography is subjectively used to 'naturalise' one's pose whilst individuals are depicted how they want to, and often must, appear, which signifies the reproduction of reality in photography. While not all people pose in front of the camera, Bourdieu's view suggests some groups and individuals have certain approaches to photography that can perhaps be explained through a shared cultural understanding and use of the camera. Bourdieu's idea is important in this context, particularly because he underlines the doing of photography, and therefore establishes a link to the photographic practices of the participants in this study. Rather than posing in front of the camera, participants have established their own values, norms and ways of aesthetic judgement that account for their practices, styles and subjects, which are unique to their photographic image-making. That is to say, participants use photography to construct and express their social reality; except, they do not use the medium to take photographs of themselves or other people, but of meaningful moments, objects and beings they encounter in familiar environments. Drawing on Bourdieu, these encounters are staged and reproduced to depict the 'cultural ideal' of everyday autistic life. Here, it is useful to briefly consider writers on ASD to gain insights into how people with ASD depict their cultural ideal in photography.

Endorsing the notion of autism as culture, Joseph Straus (2013) argues there are "self-aware people claiming autism as a valued political and social identity and celebrating a shared culture of art and everyday life" (2013: 462). He suggests that as a neurodiverse condition, ASD is a way of being-in-the-world, expressing a distinctively autistic cognitive style and creative imagination that Straus considers as a culture of the everyday. Phil Schwarz (2008) also talks of an 'autistic culture', and describes it as "a population of fellow travellers who, despite wide diversity, share experiences, values, sensibilities, sensitivities, struggles, a growing lexicon, and an emerging history" (2008: 261). Although not all ASD people link into the idea of culture in the same way, the point to make in this context is that participants of this study have more in common than their interest in photography as an everyday practice. For example, aspects associated with social communication and interaction are shared experiences among this group of people with ASD, and affect their way of seeing and being-in-the-world. While this thesis does not argue for or against an autistic culture, Straus' idea of autism as culture offers a

stimulating reference point. Equally, Benjamin's view that the surface appearance of the photograph reveals little about people's social reality is an important reference point for this study. A participant's photograph might depict a realistic depiction of an animal as a result of his image-making, but the photographic representation reveals little about the participants' social world. Extending this thought, photographic image-making does not automatically disclose participants' embodied social practices, which are central to photographic practices (Bourdieu 1990; Larsen 2008). It is through an active verbal engagement with participants that their experience, intentions and inspirations behind their photographic image-making are exposed.

The notion of photographic realism has been challenged by digital photography as a consequence of the ability of manipulating photographs using standard photo-editing software (Hand 2012; Shove et al. 2007). Although photo-manipulation and fabrication are not new practices, embedded editing software in digital visual technologies facilitates an easier and quicker way of tampering with images and challenging the 'photographic eye' (Chesher 2012; Edwards 2006). The ability to enhance particular elements in the photograph, while excluding others by using editing software or careful framing of the subjects, suggests that a skilfully composed image can augment or distort the intention of the photographer. The important point for this thesis lies in epistemological questions and interpretations; specifically, what can participants' manipulated photographs reveal about them and their autistic vision? As Edwards proposes, image-manipulation "can just as easily allow us to see and understand more… it can help us to perceive things more clearly" (2006: 138). Understanding these 'things' is less about discussing technical skills in using software, than understanding participants' social world, and the way they use the camera to fabricate (or not) their social reality. Conversely, a discussion of photography's ability to truthfully represent reality is not the focus of this thesis. In what follows, the section will conclude with a brief discussion of the term photographic seeing. The purpose is to highlight the meaning-making process as part of photographic image-making. Enabling a socio-cultural construction of the world, photographic seeing also establishes a link to the next subsection in Part I.

2.2.2. Photographic seeing

Critical reflections on the idea that the camera offers a particular kind of seeing were only slowly accepted in photographic circles. Originally, the term photographic seeing was used in mid-nineteenth century debates on the relation between the photographic image

and its painterly counterpart in order to underline the medium's advantage of being more precise in its 'true' and detailed depiction of nature and reality (Weston 1980; Walton 1984). The term took on a particular emphasis in the 1920s and 1930s, when critics like László Moholy-Nagy (2003) and Edward Weston (1980) recognised that photography afforded a different kind of seeing, and that it had a performance element attached to it. Susan Sontag defines the term to

> include a large number of anonymous, unposed, crudely lit, asymmetrically composed photographs formerly dismissed for their lack of composition. The new position aims to liberate photography, as art, from the oppressive standards of technical perfection.
>
> (Sontag 1979: 136)

For Sontag, photographic seeing is not merely a practice reserved for professional photographers, but something that makes things appear ordinary after a period of time. This is an important distinction for this study, in that participants use their 'photographic eyes' in their everyday lives to photograph beings, ephemeral moments and objects. Patrick Maynard affirms that photographic seeing "is capable of developing, redirecting, and transforming… normal vision toward richer meanings… [It] is a development of environmental seeing, which itself works through patterns, indeed the anticipation of shifting patterns" (2008: 202). Accordingly, photographic seeing is a means of revelation and transformation, a way of seeing through the camera, rather than an imitation of the human eye. It is a task, something the photographer has to learn. As Ossip Brik explains, "[t]he task of… the camera is… to see and record what the human eye normally does not see" (2003: 90). The camera has a capacity to see what the eye fails to discern, and expand human vision in order to see from different angles. Weston clarifies,

> the photographer's most important and likewise most difficult task is not learning to manage his camera… it is learning to *see photographically* – that is, learning to see his subject matter in terms of the capacities of his tools and processes, so he can instantaneously translate the elements and values in a scene before him into the photograph he wants to make.
>
> (1980: 173, original italics)

Weston underlines the task of seeing photographically is the ability to develop a new way of seeing through the camera eye. That is to say, the photographic eye creates a relationship to objects and moments in front of the camera, which enriches one's vision, and transforms it into meaning. Highlighting the technical progress that expands the range of visual experience, Donna Haraway claims,

> The 'eyes' made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific *ways* of seeing, that is, ways of life. There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organising worlds.
>
> (Haraway 1991: 190, original italics)

Haraway suggests the proliferation of photographic images signifies they are more than mere representations; they are an infinite mobility and interchangeability of different means of seeing and looking upon the world. Haraway adds that the abundance of images conveys "the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view, even when the other is our own machine" (1991: 190). For Haraway, the camera is a prosthetic device that promotes people's active way of seeing. This observation is important for this study; as a social practice, the camera enables the socio-cultural construction of autism, while it also facilitates autistic people's way of seeing self and world.

Despite the significant contributions that established a 'canon' of critical writing on photography, contemporary scholars argue, "[t]he battle between different conceptions of photography – as a branch of art history or visual studies on the one hand, and as a social object on the other – continues to be fought" (Welch and Long 2009: 5). Taking Edward Welch and J.J. Long's argument as a guiding principle, it is not enough to merely discuss concepts such as vision, photographic realism and photographic seeing in relation to photographic image-making. This thesis aims to deepen the knowledge on, and understanding of, photography, and adopt theories and concepts that come from a variety of academic fields, including phenomenology. For Maria Angel vision needs to be considered in relation to the embodied nature of perception, rather than being a quality of a medium, like photography. She claims images are not merely depictions, but

> inflections of the outside world incorporated and transformed by the body of the viewing subject. In this sense, to see involves an act of composition, a process of corporeal *imagination*, that complicates the idea that we merely subtract information from the outside world.
>
> (Angel 2009: 133-134, original italics)

In the light of Angel's remark, the following section will focus on phenomenology, including the notions of perception and the environment (Ingold 2005, 2011; Merleau-Ponty 2004, 2012; Sobchack 2004). While vision remains a significant sense in relation

to photography, the following debates will emphasise the importance of all senses in the process of photographic image-making.

2.3. Photography as a mode of perception

As a result of individuals' lived experiences and explorations of their environments, people perceive, communicate and interact with other people, beings and objects in different ways (Ingold 2005, 2008; Merleau-Ponty 2012; Noë 2004). Interested in the essence of Being and being-in-the-world, Martin Heidegger (1962) broke with Husserl and the Cartesian tradition by replacing epistemological questions with ontological ones to underline that being is 'to be there', and 'there' is the world (Dreyfus 1991). Heidegger emphasises that being is to be absorbed in the world, to be an inhabitant in the middle of the world amid other beings and things. Calling this "more fundamental way of making sense of things our understanding of being", he argues, "we do not *know* but that we simply *are*" (Dreyfus 1991: n.p., original italics). The importance here is that Heidegger's approach emphasises that the world is everywhere around us, reinforcing that the notion of being-in-the-world needs to be seen as a whole entity. Building on Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty underlines perception as a central quality of being-in-the-world, and criticises the 'real' world as it is presented by natural scientists. He argues, "it would be quite wrong to suppose that the world of perception can be dismissed as mere 'appearance' in contrast with the 'real' world" (2004: 13-14). Although Merleau-Ponty does not reject natural sciences, he claims they only offer "approximate expressions" of events, they do not encompass "absolute and complete knowledge" (ibid: 15). For Merleau-Ponty the world of science is abstract and the perceived world is the 'real' world. This is a productive distinction and signals Merleau-Ponty's central position to this thesis. His perspective helps describe the world of autism, and autistic people's perception and lived experiences. Rather than conceiving ASD from a biomedical perspective, drawing on Merleau-Ponty emphasises that people with ASD collect, interpret and comprehend information about their environment by means of their senses (Grandin 2006). In order to understand the relation between perception, embodiment and the world, Merleau-Ponty develops a new conceptual framework and argues,

> to perceive is not to have inner mental states, but to be familiar with, deal with, and find our way around in an environment. Perceiving means having a body, which in turn means *inhabiting* the world.[13]
>
> (Merleau-Ponty cited in Carman 2012: x, Foreword, original italics)

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[13] Merleau-Ponty calls this everyday conceptual framework 'objective thought', which is a term grounded in perception. See Romdenh-Romluc (2011) for a discussion of 'objective thought'.

Elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty (2004) emphasises the dynamic relation between the senses and experience, and claims the role of the senses in perception is to "organise experience in such a way that it presents to us a world of things arrayed before us in a three-dimensional objective space within which we are located as just another object" (2004: 12). By adopting Merleau-Ponty's approaches to perception and embodiment, this thesis is firmly situated within the context of phenomenology, which is linked to information and knowledge gained through the senses, and presents itself as embodied encounters with objects, humans and organism in the environment. This perspective is particularly productive because it enables this thesis to produce a comprehensive picture of ASD.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Tim Ingold (2005, 2008, 2011) is of a similar view and claims, "sensory modalities operate so closely that it is impossible to disentangle their respective contributions" (2005: 97). He refers to the contributions senses make to perception, and explains that perceiving the world involves a relation between the senses, which "unfold… in circuits of action and perception, without beginning or end, that are set up through the placement of the perceiver from the outset as a being *in* the world" (2005: 99, original italics). Importantly, Ingold affirms that perception is a state of active engagement, a starting point of being-in-the-world. It means being actively immersed in the environment. To explain this complexity in simple terms, Ingold draws on the weather, and asserts that people do not only see, but also hear, smell and feel the weather too. Whilst sight is an important sense, particularly for photography, it depends on light, which cannot be seen per se. As Ingold points out, light is both an experience and perception, clarifying, "[t]hough we do not see light, we do see in light" (2005: 97). Similar to the weather, then, one must be immersed in light with all the senses to experience the world. Although this thesis is not directly concerned with the perception of light or the weather, Ingold contextualises both notions within the environment, which is central to this thesis. Considering that this study's participants practice photography in outdoor spaces in which they engage with all their senses to experience the world, it is furthermore productive to reflect on Ingold's notions of entanglement and meshwork.[14]

Ingold considers the environment "not [as] the surroundings for organisms" (2008: 1796), but as a zone of entanglement. He explains, "[w]ithin this tangle of interlaced trails, continually ravelling here and unravelling there, beings grow or 'issue forth' along the lines of their relationships" (2008: 1807). For Ingold, the entanglement is

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[14] Ingold borrows the term meshwork from Henri Lefebvre, who describes it as "the reticular patterns left by animals, both wild and domestic, and by people … whose movements weave an environment that is more 'archi-textural' than architectural" (Lefebvre 1991: 117-18, cited in Ingold 2007: 80).

an interwoven state in which beings are entangled with other beings. He maintains, "every organism – indeed, every thing – is itself an entanglement, a tissue of knots whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands, in other bundles, make up the meshwork" (2008: 1806).[15] Ingold does not conceptualise a zone as a place, nor should place be confused with locality, even though locality can be part of place (Pink 2011a). Instead, he gives primacy to movement, which is also of significance to this study, given participants use mobile photography to capture objects, beings and moments in outdoor environments – all closely connected to movement and perception. Ingold links movement to 'meshwork', clarifying, "organisms figure not as externally bounded entities but as bundles of interwoven lines of growth and movement, together constituting a meshwork in fluid space" (2008: 1796). He defines the term meshwork as "entangled lines of life, growth and movement" (2011: 63). Lines are fluid in space, and for Ingold, "the organism (animal or human) should be understood not as a bounded entity surrounded by an environment but as an unbounded entanglement of lines in fluid space" (2011: 64). Comparable to Ingold's example of the weather, the ideas of entanglement and meshwork are useful for this thesis: they are closely linked to movement, the environment and involve all sensory modalities, further helping to understand participants' photographic practices.[16]

Making the link between perception and photography explicit, Vivian Sobchack (2004) explores the way screen technologies influence the everyday lives of people. She is interested in the embodied and material nature of human existence and questions the link between 'culturally pervasive technologies', the lived body and being-in-the-world. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty (2012), Sobchack firmly grounds her arguments in embodied experience and claims,

> experiences are mediated and qualified not only through the various
> transformative technologies of perception and expression but also by historical
> and cultural systems that constrain both the inner limits of our perception and the
> outer limits of our world.
>
> (Sobchack 2004: 4)

Sobchack argues that embodied experience is not entirely direct, but mediated through technologies or historically and culturally conditioned, further preventing the direct experience of the world through the senses. She builds on the idea of sensorially and phenomenologically integrated technologies and notes,

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[15] Ingold (2008) adopts Heidegger's (1971) meaning of 'thing', that is a gathering or binding together, not an object.
[16] In the context of this study, entanglement and meshwork are used interchangeably when analysing and interpreting participants' photographic practices.

> Each technology not only differently *mediates* our figurations of bodily existence, but also *constitutes* them. That is, each offers our lived bodies radically different ways of "being-in-the-world".
>
> (Sobchack 2004: 136, original italics)

There is an abundance of technologies in contemporary culture, a phenomenon that makes it impossible to avoid daily uses, encounters and perceptive activities – both direct and indirect – with them and the wider communication networks they create. Each technology connects people and their environments in different ways and structures. Considering the different uses and associations with social practices and cultural functions, each medium acts as a different stimulus that enables individuals to perceive their world (Sobchack 2004).

The prevalence of digital photography matches the many ways in which technologies mediate the lived and experiencing body in everyday life (Sobchack 2004). Extending Sobchack's view on 'pervasive technologies', Asle Kiran (2012) similarly discusses the use of everyday technologies and explores the idea of technical mediation, claiming that technologies not only shape one's experience of the world, but of oneself. Grounding the concept of technical mediation in the notion of 'technological presence', Kiran highlights the difference between the actual and potential use of technologies.[17] The latter idea is interesting, in that Kiran explains, "[a] mobile phone resting in your pocket is virtual communication; it can be utilised to realise the action of talking to a friend" (2012: 78). While being idle in the pocket, the smartphone is also a virtual camera, used for taking photographs. Kiran discusses digital technologies with a particular focus on the relation between human and technology, and how the former is influenced by the latter's potentiality, that is, technology's 'idle' state. He clarifies,

> The concept indicates that technology harbours both actuality and potentiality, the latter denoting that technologies offer possible actions, through which we realise specific actions, and, more importantly, realise ourselves; it is through the technological presence in our lifeworld we are able to recognise our own possibilities to be in and act in the lifeworld.
>
> (Kiran 2012: 77)

One could argue that Kiran's discussion of technological presence relates to the idea of 'technical unconscious', since contemporary technologies are pivotal features in people's everyday lives, even when they rest idle in the pocket. This is also important for participants in this study. As presence is a state that encompasses place, space and time, it is central to their everyday experience, and important in the discussion of

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[17] In his discussion of technological presence, Kiran draws on Martin Heidegger's (1962, 1977) notion of '*being-alongside*', as well as Don Ihde's (1990) typology on technologies in-use.

mediated perception. Christian Licoppe (2004) offers another key idea for this investigation. Reflecting on communicating at a distance, he emphasises the role digital and mobile technologies play in communicating with others, and the role these technologies play in the construction of social relations. He uses the term 'connected presence', and argues that digital technologies have become widespread in the formation of 'connected relationships'. The usefulness of Licoppe's work for this study emerges when he makes a connection between sociability and information technologies. He asserts that in order to maintain a connected presence with others, the relation "allows for a lesser formality of mediated interaction" (2004: 154). In other words, it is less required to reassert formal and institutional aspects of the interaction with others when a connection is already established through small acts of communication. This is important for people with ASD. Using digital technologies to connect with others and construct social relationships may improve their social interaction and communication skills.

In summary, digital technologies shape the way people experience and perceive the environment, and connect with others. As Part I demonstrated, the expansion of everyday photography as an area of scholarly research has evidently introduced an extensive interest in exploring vision and perception in relation to photographic practices. Importantly, the camera is an extension of the eye and widens the scope of vision. A phenomenological approach to photographic practices enhances the understanding of the entangled technology, and sheds lights on the photographer's embodied approach to the medium. Next, Part II is concerned with questions and ideas about the establishment of photography as a habitual part of everyday life for people in the modern world.

Part II

2.4. Becoming a habitual part of everyday life

The slogan 'You Press The Button, We Do The Rest' introduced Kodak's affordable and revolutionary hand-held Brownie camera in 1888, and with it a redistribution of photographic practices, notably within the realm of domestic photography (Bull 2010; Chalfen 1987; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011; Shove et al. 2007; Slater 1991, 1995; West

2000).[18] The practice of domestic photography has its roots in capturing social events, giving photographs the significance of producing, recreating and reaffirming the unity, identity and ideology of a group in a social environment (Spence and Holland 1991; Holland 2015; Rose 2010, 2014a). Photography became increasingly affordable and popular across social classes in Western societies during the 1960s and 1970s, and its democratisation extended the areas in which people took photographic images (Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). Interested in analysing the role of photography in the family life of groups from different social structures, Bourdieu's (1990) pioneering study was a major contribution to the scholarship on photography. He argued that theories and historical movements of the medium cannot exist in a vacuum, an approach that is pertinent to this thesis (Grenfell and Hardy 2007; Sterne 2003). Carried out in the early 1960s, his research was arguably one of the earliest ethnographic studies in Western societies that seriously analysed the social and cultural contexts in which photography was systematically used by diverse groups and classes. Bourdieu's investigation departed from the prevailing view of photography as a form of art, and established a new field of enquiry within the academy that included the medium's expressive and communicative functions. He recognised the necessity to include the practice of 'doing photography' when thinking about the medium, because it was not enough to merely consider the intention of the photographer. It was also essential to discern the relation people have to "their class condition" (1990: 16). Bourdieu drew on diverse strands and practices of photography, yet focused his sociological-empirical study on exploring the photographic practice vis-à-vis "the structure of the group… and particularly to its position within the social structure" (1990: 8).

Bourdieu recognised the relationship between photography and individuals is mediated, and affects the connections individuals have with cultural and social groups.[19] The significance here is that although photography is a social practice, people with ASD have impairments in social interaction and communication (Grandin 2006). It is therefore productive to follow Ochs and Solomon (2010) and their anthropological understanding of human sociality, which they define "as consisting of a range of possibilities for social coordination with others" (2010: 69). For example, they suggest the use of objects and

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[18] This distinction and its practices remained separate from professional and art photography throughout the twentieth century. Comparable to Erving Goffman's (1979) classic study on the performance of gender in advertising, the different cultural and social practices between amateur and professional photography were also gendered (Cross 2014; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011).

[19] In his discussion of family photography, Bourdieu points out that the role of cameras is to record photographs that narrate and recognise the moments of current and significant events, which reaffirm the social life and unity of the family; weddings, birthdays, and even family holidays are widely recognised as such occasions. See Hirsch (1997); Kuhn (2002); Kuhn and McAllister (2006); Langford (2001); Rose (2003, 2010); Slater (1995); Spence (1986); Spence and Holland (1991) for an extensive discourse on family photography.

interactions with animals mediate social communication in individuals with ASD. Taking the above into account, there are two areas within Bourdieu's study that are of particular interest to this thesis. The first is Bourdieu's emphasis on "the taking of the picture" (1990: 6). This aspect serves to emphasise the practice element of everyday photography as underpinned in this thesis. The second area of interest in Bourdieu's study is the relation between photography and the structure of the group, as well as the "relationship between individuals and [their] photographic practice" (1990: 9). Bourdieu highlights the complex relationship between individuals, their families, their social classes and cultural groups. As a result, his study helps explore the relation people with ASD have to photography, and the contributions the medium makes to their daily lives.

With Bourdieu paving the way for considering the social practice of photography as a field of study, critical debates on photography continued to focus on the medium within the domestic environment and the family's integration as a unit in the wider social context (Kuhn 2007; Rose 2010). A key text that opened a new domain of critical analysis within the field of everyday photography is Chalfen's (1987) investigation into snapshot photography and its role as a form of communication between people.[20] Chalfen is particularly interested in analysing who takes snapshots and why, as well as how snapshots are organised, displayed and archived within the family context. With reference to 'Kodak Culture', which promoted the idea of what makes a good photograph, Chalfen's study explores how "ordinary people... use their cameras and pictures as part of everyday social life" (1987: 10).[21] Noting that people only record positive changes and events during the course of their life, such as birthdays and weddings, Chalfen concludes that everyday photography consists of highly constructed images. For Risto Sarvas and David Frohlich, "the core *values* of domestic photography are to support memory, communication and identity" (2011: 9, original italics). Although this investigation is not focused on discussing Kodak Culture and snapshots at length, the area of Chalfen's research that is most relevant to this thesis is his approach to exploring how 'ordinary people' engage with the medium as a means of visual communication in their everyday lives.

Photography underwent a radical shift during the 1990s, as photographic practices expanded to include individual perspectives and experiences within social and cultural settings. No longer merely used to depict special occasions within the family or domestic context, the camera was now used to photograph every facet of individuals'

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[20] See Batchen (2008); Berger (2011); Cobley and Haeffner (2009); Pollen (2016); Slater (1995); Zuromskis (2009) for in-depth discussions of snapshot photography.
[21] See Slater (1991) and West (2000) for comprehensive accounts on the Kodak Culture.

personal lives and identities (Bull 2010; Holland 2015; Rose 2014a; Price and Wells 2015). Categories within the domain of everyday photography started to change and entered a process of reconfiguration. The boundaries became increasingly blurred, making it harder to distinguish between the private, personal and public use of photography (Hand 2012). Individuals' approaches to capturing the mundane gained in popularity, and with it an interest in broadening the context in which photography is used as a visual form of communication and self-expression. Despite the contributions Bourdieu (1990) and Chalfen (1987) made to the field of everyday photography, questions on how 'ordinary people' experience and perceive the world through photographic practices remain underexplored. Moreover, empirical research and debates on the photographic practices of marginalised groups in general, and autistic individuals specifically, remain absent in the discourse of photography. With the aim of developing a more nuanced picture of everyday photography, the next section will briefly outline the developments of digital and mobile photography in contemporary culture. The emergence of digital technologies has opened up new debates that are relevant for this thesis, including the recognition of embodiment in regard to photographic practices (Lury 2004; Sobchack 2004).

2.5. Pressing the button and doing the rest: the digitalisation of photography

The arrival of the World Wide Web and the rise of digital cameras in the early 1990s accelerated the production, reproduction and circulation of personal photographic images, and it was not unusual anymore to see images in "a range of public spheres and global media" (Hand 2012: 8).[22] The digitalisation of photographs demonstrated a continuous mobility, infinite transition from computer to computer and screen to screen all over the world, arguably in real time and with an unlimited audience (Bull 2010; Lee 2010; Lister 2009; Palmer 2013; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). The Internet enabled the wider distribution of digital photographic images, with the result that the cultural and social context of everyday photography has become ubiquitous (Hand 2012; Larsen and Sandbye 2014).

With the emergence of digital photography, scholars and photography practitioners alike anticipated big changes and major disruptions in photography (Durrant et al. 2011; Gómez Cruz and Meyer 2012; Hand 2012; Uimonen 2013; Van Dijck 2008;

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[22] The emergence of the Internet and the development of digital photography started in the late 1960s and 1970s. However, as Hand points out, digital cameras designed "with the ordinary consumer in mind were first available in the early 1990s" (2012: 109). Similarly, it was not until the early 1990s that the Internet and the World Wide Web were commercially accessible to the wider society (Abbate 1999; Berners-Lee 2000; Carpenter 2013).

Van House 2009, 2011). Sarvas and Frohlich suggest the advent of the digital medium "could be described as the biggest technological discontinuity in photography since the invention of the daguerreotype and the calotype in the 1830s" (2011: 83). Other writers claim photography's move into a 'post-photographic-era' (Mitchell 1994; Murray 2013; Robins 1995, 1996; Rubinstein and Sluis 2008). In a more pessimistic way, and arguably corresponding to Baudelaire's remarks on photography 150 years ago, Geoffrey Batchen (1994, 2000) proposes that the advance of digital technologies has led to the 'death of photography'. Similarly gloomy in a discussion on Polaroid photography, Peter Buse broadly argues that digital photography is "inferior" to the analogue counterpart, discarding digital photography into a "cultural devaluation" (2008: 221). It seems that many of these writers fail to acknowledge that regardless of the developments of digital photography, there is still no single 'thing' that can be analysed, used or practiced under the term 'photography'. Akin to debates that took place with the arrival of photography almost 180 years ago, it simultaneously remains a networked technology, a material object, a practice and an image (Larsen and Sandbye 2014).

Critics fail to recognise that everyday photographs account for the vast majority of images in the world, and that the digitalisation of photography has only increased the production, reproduction and circulation of photographic images (Hand 2012; Holland 2015). As Lister proposes, the difference might not be in the way a photographic image looks but "in the way it was 'taken', registered or transmitted" (2009: 329). Elizabeth Shove and colleagues (2007) suggest the changing materiality of digital photography and its wider use have expanded the choice of possible photogenic situations and opportunities. For example, people increasingly illustrate their messages and conversations with images (Van House 2011). Writers and practitioners have diverse, and often conflicting, perspectives on photography and its different trajectories and discourses on the development of the technology. Debates have been linked to various expectations, social practises and the transformation of photography's infrastructure (Maynard 1997).[23] To understand these emergent practices of digital photography Lister notes,

> Maybe what's happening now for photography was always its destiny and fate. But it's not the end of photography. It's rather the end of photography as we know it. To understand this change, we need a new media ecology.
> (Lister 2014: xv, Introduction)

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[23] There is, for example, a growing body of literature that discusses digital photography and the content of photographs in relation to digital codes, pixels, algorithms and metadata (Chesher 2012).

These are important developments in relation to this study, as an expanded range of photographic practices enables more people with ASD to enter the domain of everyday photography. Technical advances have not merely exchanged, eradicated or imitated analogue photography; scholars often speak of a technical evolution (Hand 2012; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). Considering these changes and questions of its nature, Martin Hand analyses digital photography and its everyday use, and offers an affirmative view on digital photography's broader function. He retains digital photography is more accessible and "enables its current ubiquity as part of broader socioeconomic, technological and cultural changes associated with information societies" (2012: 16). In support of new possibilities that digital photography affords, Hand brings to the fore that, "[t]he general novelty of the digital camera… is the erasure of time between making, viewing and distributing pictures" (2012: 105). Put simply, digital photographs are no longer the object of treasure that they used to be, but are rather perceived as an immediate form of communicating self and world, setting aside previous issues of time and space.

Although many of these contemporary developments were technically possible during the so-called Kodak years, such as the number of photographic copies individuals and families owned, higher costs and extra effort generally kept the numbers of copies low. Digital technologies have altered the methods of easy and inexpensive reproduction, and introduced new practices, namely a culture of instant sharing and distributing images online (Gómez Cruz and Meyer 2012; Hand 2012; Lister 2007; Tinkler 2008; Van House 2009, 2011).[24] The scholarship on everyday photography promotes the idea that digital image-making affords new opportunities of mobility and instantaneity, identity formation and the construction of personal and group memory (Gye 2007; Rivière 2005). Jonas Larsen and Mette Sandbye stress, there is "a sheer explosion of photographs circulating on the Internet" (2014: xvi, Introduction). This explosion is amplified by smartphones, which began to sell in high volumes in 2004, the same year the social networking platform Flickr was created (Murray 2008a; van Dijck 2010, 2013). Flickr inspired people to create, reproduce and share photographs via their smartphones, a phenomenon described by Mikko Villi as follows:

> A photograph captured with a camera phone and forwarded directly from the phone can offer an almost synchronous photographic connection between the sender and the receiver(s). Photographic communication can thus be about communicating the *now*. The photograph is valuable for the purposes of

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[24] Created in 2004, Flickr is a popular online platform for viewing, sharing and distributing digital images. See Hjorth et al. (2012); Lister et al. (2009); Murray (2008a, 2013); and van Dijck (2010, 2013) for in-depths debates on Flickr.

interpersonal interaction and engagement at a specific moment, like words during a phone call. After all, the photograph was captured with a camera *phone.*

(Villi 2014: 47, original italics)

Contemporary writers widely agree that people take more photographs than before, with the intention and ability to share their 'I was there' and 'it was there' moments with others (Gye 2007; Rivière 2005; Uimonen 2013). The purpose of sharing images online is less about depicting the special moments of people's lives, than about creating social relationships by communicating a fleeting and spontaneous moment that people subsequently wish to share with a social group (Gye 2007; Hand 2012). As Lisa Gye affirms, "[e]xchanging and sharing personal photographs is integral for the maintenance of relationships" (2007: 281). This practice is also key for some people with ASD. While social interaction might be challenging, Davidson (2008) underlines the impact of online communities on ASD people and notes, the Internet provides at least some of those on the spectrum with a means to develop and maintain social relationships. Edgar Gómez Cruz and Eric Meyer similarly argue, the popularity of image-sharing firmly shifted the camera "from a precious family object shared among family members on special occasions, to a personal and constantly carried object of visual creation" (2012: 212). Larsen and Sandbye support this idea, claiming digital photographs denote "new performances of sociality reflecting broader shifts towards real-time, collaborative, networked 'sociality at a distance'" (2014: xvi, Introduction). This is significant for this study because sharing photographs with others online has become a central element of contemporary culture, providing an opportunity to develop a shared conceptual understanding of the world. For people with ASD, this can be a crucial way to practice their 'sociality at a distance', since human sociality contains a range of possibilities to interact with other beings (Ochs and Solomon 2010). Reflecting on the idea of an autistic culture, Davidson explains,

> there are obviously elements shared among members of similar human and physical environments; after all, we are not free to construct just anything, but are limited by the realities (material, historical, political, etc.) of our embodied situations, interactions, and 'horizons'.

(Davidson 2008: 793)

Davidson proposes that sharing photographs online can be an opportunity for people with ASD to construct their own identities and develop their social interactions by connecting with others. Adding to this, Ochs and Solomon observe,

> This perspective does not impose a dichotomous distinction between autistic and normative sociality but, rather, highlights the grey areas of sociality shared by those diagnosed with autism and neurologically unaffected persons.
>
> (Ochs and Solomon 2010: 70)

There is a growing interest in the use of everyday communication technologies, and writers separate between digital photography and mobile photography. Paula Uimonen makes this distinction clear by explaining,

> Essentially, mobile photography refers to the practice of taking pictures with a mobile phone. But since the mobile phone is so much more than a camera device, it embodies much broader social and cultural processes. Unlike a digital camera, which has image-making as its sole function, the mobile phone is a multifunctional device that carries multiple layers of cultural meaning.
>
> (Uimonen 2016: 22)

This distinction is also important for participants in this study, as they use digital and mobile photography to capture their everyday lives. A particular example of a mobile phone that signifies technology convergence and ubiquity is the iPhone. With its arrival in mid-2007, a complex interaction of networked communication unfolded, enabling users to send photographs directly and almost instantly via social media networks or by email (Goggin 2012). Up to that point in time, this function was still limited to a few camera phones, hence it was the iPhone that introduced real-time distribution of photographs, making it "the perfect tool for the growing practice of many people that are interested in sharing photographs of their everyday lives" (Goggin 2012: 215).[25] The iPhone markets the experience of photography as fun and above all as social, linking digital photography to mobility, discretion and opportunity, along with processing capabilities and almost real-time possibility of showing pictures around the world (Gómez Cruz and Meyer 2012).

These diverse possibilities disrupt the notion that digital photography is a consistent practice with an established cultural meaning. Photographers do not follow one particular and predetermined way in their practice(s) as image-makers, which includes the photographic practices of people with ASD. The advent of digital and mobile technologies has changed the materiality of photographic artefacts, but people continue taking personal photographs to visually record different aspects of their daily lives, their ways of seeing and being-in-the-world, or to have visual conversations with others, often across the globe via social networking sites (Villi 2012; Villi and Stocchetti 2011). These practices facilitate the vast number of digital images that circulate on the

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[25] See Hjorth et al. (2012) for in-depth discussions on mobile communication, with a particular focus on the iPhone.

Web, raising the question of their significance and meaning (Cobley and Haeffner 2009; Luttrell 2010; Rivière 2005). Here, Hand suggests the growing number of digital images depicting the mundane appears to be "positioned as necessary ephemeral and fleeting, perhaps as glances rather than considered reflections" (2012: 91). This point is central, as it implies that everyday photographs lack in originality and authorship (Hand 2012). With so many photographs posted on social media networks, there seems to be a quest among photographers to be original. As Hand observes, "people are finding other ways to make their photos feel like *their own* (2012: 91, original italics). They use originality as a form of ownership, taking photographs that depict unique or new ways of seeing the world. The specific negotiations between ubiquity, mundanity and authenticity endorsed by individuals are of considerable significance in forming the 'new aesthetics' of the everyday (Hand 2012). With this in mind, the next section offers a brief overview of young people's everyday photographic practices. Its purpose is to establish insights into contemporary practices of young people's photography. The discussion of young people's photographic practices will be continued within the context of methodology in chapter four. Following these discussions, the knowledge and understanding developed will help with the analysis and interpretation of participants' photographic practices in chapter five.

2.6. The photographic practices of young people (aged 18-25)

Digital everyday photography is embedded in the lives of young people who own cameras and make photographs (Lee 2010; Palfrey and Gasser 2008; Shove et al. 2007; Van House 2009, 2011). Equipping children and young people with cameras is the result of the democratisation process of photography, which was sustained as a practice throughout the twentieth century (Hand 2012; Rose 2003, 2010; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). The accessibility and affordability of digital technologies break down gender 'rules' and offer an escape from family rites, which perhaps explains the excess of young people's self-representation on social media platforms (Holland 2015).[26] The transformation of photographic habits and focus on individuals is key for this thesis, since the participants in this study do not practice their photography within the context of domestic or family photography. The literature in the area of human-computer interaction (HCI) and interaction design offers empirical insights on technology-mediated practices (Lee 2010; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). Yet, an in-depth review of the scholarship with its detailed analysis of the change in practices is beyond the scope of

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[26] See Klein (2016) for a discussion of sharing selfies.

this thesis.[27] Key insights will be considered in order to develop an understanding of young people's contemporary photographic practices. But who are the young people of today? Alexiei Dingli and Dylan Seychell offer a definition that includes the age group of the participants in this study:

> Individuals, who do not find the complexity of the digital era and constant updates in the field of technology problematic, are generally referred to as 'Digital Natives'.
>
> (Dingli and Seychell 2015: 9)

For the purpose of this investigation, 'digital natives' are young people who are growing up exposed to the endless flow of digital information (Dingli and Seychell 2015). It is a generation surrounded by digital technologies for whom computers and the Internet are natural and integral parts of their everyday lives. Compared to generations before them, today's young people do not need to familiarise themselves with digital technology by comparing it to something else, like analogue counterparts. They are comfortable with digital technologies. They perceive the world through different eyes; what is considered an innovation for digital immigrants is something ordinary for digital natives (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). This is a generation of young people who grow up having a digital camera of their own, rather than a shared family camera (Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). As José van Dijck notes,

> Taking photographs… is increasingly becoming a tool for an individual's identity formation and communication. Digital cameras, cameraphones, photoblogs and other multipurpose devices seem to promote the use of images as the preferred idiom of a new generation of users.
>
> (Van Dijck 2008: 57)

Initial empirical studies on digital photography largely focus on issues of archiving, retrieving and printing digital photographs within the context of the home (Frohlich et al. 2002; Schiano et. al. 2002). These are extended by studies that centre on the sharing of digital photographs over the Internet (Kindberg et al. 2005; Murray 2008a; Van House et al. 2005). More important for this study is research that includes smartphones and the use of photography applications (apps) in their analyses (Larsen and Sandbye 2014; Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016). Considered as a site of socio-cultural practice for young people, Gerard Goggin underlines the camera phone's complex interplay, defining it as "a layering of communication repertoires, a reshuffling of attributes and histories of old media and new concepts of the social function of mobiles" (2012: 11).

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[27] Much of that detailed analysis focuses on whether and how the traditional values of analogue photography have changed. See Lister (1995); Sarvas and Frohlich (2011) and Slater (1995) for detailed discussions.

In their study on the iPhone use in China, Larissa Hjorth and colleagues argue young people view "the acquisition of an iPhone as an extension of their technological, mobile lifestyle" (2012: 48). With a focus on young people in South Korea, Lee claims the smartphone affects their personal and mobile communication, leading to "a new sociability" (2012: 65). The smartphone supports a particularly mobile and informal way of producing and consuming photographs, including visual jokes and functional visual notes, such as an image of a potential purchase to discuss with a partner (Chesher 2012; Palmer 2012; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). In their study of young people doing everyday photography, Shove and colleagues found that "digital cameras can be – and are – used not to take 'pictures' as such, but to take transient images, just for fun or capture visual data" (2007: 81). Relatedly, Villi (2012, 2014) refers to a form of communication that resembles a pictorial conversation or 'visual chit chat', which is a common way to communicate among young people. Moreover, apps are distinctive facets of the smartphone, referred to by Goggin as "haptic communication" (2012: 19)[28]. Daniel Palmer outlines the two main purposes of apps that are popular amongst young people; "first, to make images more 'artistic' or aesthetically appealing, and second, to facilitate the distribution or publication of photographs via the internet. Many do both" (2012: 88). With an abundance of free or cheaply downloadable photography apps available to choose from, young people create photographs and often apply apps to change the original appearance of the images, before uploading and sharing them on social media networks. Apps allow young people to use the smartphone in many different ways beyond conventional image-making practices. For example, many apps augment reality or simulate the nostalgic image, including the Polaroid that belongs to another time and place (Buse 2008, 2010; Chesher 2012; Palmer 2012). Apps both depart and reinforce previous photographic practices (Chesher 2012; Palmer 2012). As Chris Chesher affirms, "[w]hat distinguishes the iPhone as a camera is its capacity to perform real-time digital transformations, translations and transmissions on mobile amateur images. The camera does more than capture images. In a minor way, it enters the realm of media production" (2012: 107). Given the profusion of digital photographs posted by young people online, using apps and photo-editing software gives photographs a more unique, and perhaps original look; it makes the personal voice more visible (Hand 2012; Palmer 2012).

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[28] Goggin (2012) argues that the sense of touch, the field of haptics, became more salient in mobile communications, as touch screens enabled people to communicate with and through touch, hence haptic communication.

Although not all young people use smartphones to practice their photography, in broad terms the smartphone is a popular device among young people who associate it with fleeting moments and spontaneous photographic practices (Villi and Stocchetti 2011). Despite the growing range of research carried out with young people to explore contemporary photographic practices, uneven attention has been given to vulnerable and marginalised young people and their photographic practices. As Jon Prosser suggests, more inclusive research with disabled, vulnerable and marginalised people is needed in order to illuminate their habits concerning photography. Drawing on their insights will help develop a more nuanced picture of everyday photography. According to Prosser, "working 'with' rather than 'on' participants [is necessary]… It is important to respect people with disability and to accept they can be powerful, beautiful and sexy" (2011: 490). With Prosser's words in mind, this chapter establishes a link to chapter three, which offers an overview on disability and autism, and serves to form the theoretical and conceptual framework for this investigation.

To summarise Part II, contemporary photography has experienced anything but death. The medium has been subject to evolution, transformation and change since its invention in 1839 (Cobley and Haeffner 2009; Hand 2012; Lister 2009, 2014; Rose 2014a). As a social and cultural practice, families and individuals alike have used the medium in multiple ways to capture and share their everyday lives (Holland 2015; West 2000). While practices and activities have evolved in the past 150 years, the reasons and motivations for 'doing' photography have remained rather constant (Gye 2007; Lister 2007, 2014). The early 1990s have witnessed the emergence of digital technologies, which have merely continued the medium's trajectory. The 'digital turn' has shed a new light on photography as a discipline and social practice; it has (re-) opened and emphasised discourses on the relationship between the practice of photography and its theories (Di Bello 2008).

2.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, everyday photography is an academic field of enquiry that is informed by diverse debates, understandings, practices and theoretical discourse. These approaches simultaneously describe photography as an image, a practice, a material object and a networked technology – or as Hand sums it up, it is "[t]he weaving of *photographies*" (2012: 1, original italics). Although the early Kodak years at the turn of the twentieth century were very influential in the shaping of everyday photographic practices, critics and photography practitioners alike began to reconsider their

approaches to photography between the 1960s and 1980s and include debates that facilitated photography's expansion into an academic field that "steadily accumulated the signs and accoutrements of a recognized domain of enquiry" (Welch and Long 2009: 1). Since the 1980s, the medium encountered a transformation and split from its long-established position within the family context in order to include the photographic practices and discourses of individuals and their wider social groups.

The on-going technological and theoretical developments of photography establish that the medium has always been caught up in new technologies, uses and critical discourse. The emergence of digital and mobile technologies has not led to the 'death of photography', or to the loss of confidence in the medium as a result of the ease with which photographs can be manipulated and presented as accurate records (Batchen 1994; Price and Wells 2015). It is a complex and interwoven medium that is impossible to discuss under the rubric of one term or idea; the study of photography derived from a number of different academic fields of enquiry, including visual culture, computer, media and communication studies. This interdisciplinary approach to photography is important for this study, for two reasons. First, it offers a rich and nuanced conceptual framework for discussing everyday photography and its social and cultural currency; and second, it enables this study to pose new questions on everyday photography, and approach old ones in new ways.

In the light of this development, this chapter offered a comprehensive analysis of the scholarship on everyday photography that forms the basis of this thesis in relation to discussions of the medium's social and cultural currency. Its aim was to analyse a series of interrelated concepts, theories and developments in order to demonstrate that everyday photography needs to be discussed in its full complexity. It is not enough to examine the history of everyday photography by merely drawing on its technological development or analyse the visual content of photographs. Photography is interwoven with the social constructions and cultural changes of domestic and personal lives, as well as with the different and changing meanings and contexts of photographic images (Hand 2012; Holland 2015; Larsen and Sandbye 2014; Price and Wells 2015).

In short, Part I and II have outlined that everyday photographic image-making is constituted of phenomenological approaches as well as social habits. The discussions in this chapter have also exposed that empirical debates on the photographic practices of marginalised groups and vulnerable individuals are still limited. In acknowledging the significance of what young male adults with ASD have to say, this study inevitably poses the following main research question:

What unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world are expressed in the photographic practices of young male adults with ASD?

Although detailed debates on autism will be presented in chapter three, additional questions that arose from debates in this chapter are:

In what ways does photographic image-making enable and inhibit autistic individuals' presence in, and experience of the world?

In what ways does photography mediate autistic individuals' relationships to objects, the environment and the social world?

In what ways do the social practices of photography of autistic individuals (i.e. image sharing) relate to everyday practices of communication and social interaction?

The following chapter aims to establish the basis of this study in relation to ASD, and cultural disability studies more widely.

Chapter 3

The socio-cultural construction of disability and autism

3.1. Introduction

Building on the discussion of everyday photography in the previous chapter, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, to establish the theoretical framework of this thesis in relation to disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); and second, to highlight the complexity of disability and ASD, and reaffirm the significance of the cultural in the construction of disablement, particularly in relation to photography. As a starting point, this chapter is informed by debates from the domain of cultural disability studies, alongside an expanding field on autism that is enriched by personal and anthropological perspectives (Grinker 2008; Ochs et al. 2004). Essentially, anthropology does not underestimate the communication and social impairments in ASD, but recognises that a phenomenological approach to ASD explores autistic people's lived experience, perception of the world and social interaction – phenomena that cannot be studied at the cognitive and biomedical level (Solomon and Bagatell 2010). In addition, cultural disability studies is a field in which photographs of people with disabilities are a field of contest. Given the centrality of photography in this study, these debates help advance the arguments in this thesis. Equally crucial, this investigation seeks to distance itself from prevalent debates on the photographic representation of disability. Instead, it addresses the socio-cultural construction of disability and ASD (Nadesan 2005).

It was not until the early 1990s that debates on disability were established as a scholarly field of enquiry. The past two decades have further witnessed the development of cultural disability studies, a field that discusses embodiment and lived experiences in the context of disability and ASD. It is with these approaches in mind that this chapter links the two fields of everyday photography and cultural disability studies. Following the structure of the previous chapter, this chapter is organised into three parts, each complemented with subsections. For the purpose of this enquiry, a lengthy account of the history of disability will be avoided, as it does not help advance the arguments in this investigation.[29] Instead, the chapter will present certain debates that are pertinent to this investigation.

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[29] See Barnes and Mercer (2001, 2010); Davis (2013); Oliver (1990, 1996); and Shakespeare (1998, 2006, 2014) for a comprehensive overview on the history of disability.

Part I offers a brief introduction to the field of cultural disability studies, and an overview of features manifested in autism. These discussions are enriched by debates and theories from phenomenological and anthropological perspectives, which have been central to the understanding of perception, lived experience, seeing and being-in-the-world in regard to the four individuals with ASD in this investigation. Part II offers brief historical accounts of three interrelated developments that emerged in the era between the mid-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries. The purpose of this part is to highlight areas that contributed to the socio-cultural construction of ASD and disability. These developments are (1) photography; (2) the notion of 'normalcy'; and (3) the charity sector. Considering the comprehensive discussion of photography in chapter two, here the emphasis will be on the medium's scientific use to depict people with 'abnormalities' in medical journals, pathologising them for the medical gaze – itself a socio-cultural construction (Foucault 1966, 1972, 1973; Garland-Thomson 2009; Hacking 1999). The second section discusses the notion of 'normalcy'. The linguistic term and its derivatives "normality", "average" and "abnormal" were only adopted in the English language around 1840 (Davis 1995). The industrialisation of goods and services, and with that the emergence of factory-based work, changed previous perceptions of the human 'ideal', and facilitated the emergence of the disability category, alongside the normal/abnormal dichotomy (Finkelstein 1980; Oliver 1990). During that time, another development emerged in Western societies: the establishment and subsequent profusion of charities, using oppressive and constructed imagery for advertising and fundraising purposes (Drake 1996; Hevey 1992; Taylor 2008; Waltz 2012). To date, disability charities continue to use photographs for marketing and fundraising campaigns, creating an impression of working in the interest of vulnerable people (Waltz 2012). Supporting David Hevey's (2013) claim that charity advertising remains a key player in the construction of disability, examples of how a contemporary autism charity uses photographic imagery will be discussed in this section. With this in mind, Part III aims to extend the dialogue on autism and offer examples of how photography is used by photographers and parents in the context of constructing a picture of what it is like to live with ASD. This section will be followed by a discussion of the field of visual arts in relation to ASD to describe how autistic people use visual arts in their everyday lives. Debates are complemented with concepts and theories in relation to ASD before the chapter draws to an end.

Part I

3.2. The emergence of cultural disability studies

The academic field of cultural disability studies is largely the accomplishment of the active disabled community itself. Their voices and experiences emerged during the 1960s, when disability activists campaigned for change and demanded the redefinition of disability (Barton 1996; Hunt 1966; Shakespeare and Watson 1997). During that time, disability had been rarely discussed in the arts, humanities and social sciences, as critics and researchers mostly accepted the dominant hegemony that viewed disability in medical and psychological terms (Barnes and Mercer 2001; Shakespeare 1994; Oliver 1990). This was also the case for autism (Osteen 2008). Disability activists in Western societies challenged the status quo, and shifted the paradigm from understanding disability as a personal and medical deficit to involving the public sphere, a move that widely politicised disability (Barton 1996). Between the 1970s and the early 1990s, disabled people continued to challenge the social conditions and cultural settings in which restrictions and negative experiences took place, arguing their voices needed to be heard so that they could take part in decision-making processes that affected them and their lives within wider social and cultural contexts. This challenge ultimately led to the development of the social model of disability (UPIAS 1976). A major success for disabled people, it included the definitions of disability and impairment and the relation between the two notions:

> This differentiates 'impairment' as a medically classified biophysiological condition, from 'disability', which denotes the social disadvantage experienced by people with an accredited impairment.
> (UK Disabled People's Council, cited in Barnes and Mercer 2010: 11)

Put simply, disability restricts people with impairment(s) from participating in society and culture caused by socially and culturally constructed barriers. The social model firmly positioned disability on the political agenda and remained largely uncontested until the early 1990s. During that time, the academic field of disability studies was established (Barnes and Mercer 2010; Davis 2001; Shakespeare 2006). Disability critics became inquisitive and challenged prevailing thoughts and forms of social environments and interactions regarding disability and impairments (Barton 1996; Hughes 2004). For example, Mike Oliver argues that in order to be successful in the process of

deconstructing social and cultural barriers, the different impairments need to be accepted by society. He maintains,

> All disabled people experience disability as social restriction whether these restrictions occur as a consequence of inaccessible built environments, questionable notions of intelligence and social competence, the inability of the general public to use sign language, the lack of reading material in Braille or hostile public attitudes to people with non-visible disabilities.
>
> (Oliver 1990: xiv, Introduction)

Oliver's remark is important for this thesis, since ASD has many misconceptions and includes behaviours that are often not accepted by society (Nadesan 2005; Schwarz 2008). According to Majia Nadesan, autism has a long history with institutional practices that "aimed to divide populations according to finer wrought distinctions of health and pathology, sanity and insanity, intellectual acuity and mental retardation" (2008: 86). Notably, this division created a tension between the biomedical and anthropological perspectives of approaching (and defining) autism (Bagatell 2007; Grinker 2010; Ochs et al. 2001, 2004; Osteen 2008).

Approaches to disability have emerged across diverse disciplines, influencing the ways disability is critically discussed and perceived. For example, studies are informed by anthropological, cultural, sociological or psychological research that varies in its development of theoretical framings, research agendas and approaches to methodologies. Drawing on theories and contributions from the scholarship on feminist, ethnic, cultural and critical studies, disability writers and activists challenge the conventional binary thinking that is strongly manifested in the sociological thinking of disability in order to enrich and expand the field of disability studies (Hall 2011; McRuer 2006). Marian Corker and Tom Shakespeare suggest contemporary arguments share "an implicit sensitivity for the *complexity* of the social world… acknowledge[ing] that it is not possible to tell a single and exclusive story about something that is complex" (2002: 4, original italics). New perspectives and theories benefit current debates by exploring ideas such as embodiment, lived experiences and perception, culture and discourse, identity and resistance (Bê 2012; Bolt 2012). A pioneer in the field of cultural disability studies, Lennard Davis offers his thoughts:

> But why have the disabled been rendered more invisible than other groups? Why are issues about perception, mobility, accessibility, distribution of bio-resources, physical space, difference not seen as central to human condition? Is there not something to be gained by all people from exploring the ways that the body in its variations is metaphorized, disbursed, promulgated, commodified, cathected, de-cathected, normalized, abnormalized, formed, and deformed? In other words, is

it not time for disability studies to emerge as an aspect of cultural studies, studies in discrimination and oppression, postmodern analyses of the body and bio-power?

(Davis 2006: xv-xvi, Introduction)

The questions Davis raises are crucial, and in consolidating new and emerging perspectives on disability, he positions the notion within a political, cultural and social context similar to how the concepts of race, class and gender have been theorised (Bê 2012; Bolt 2012; Garland-Thomson 2006). Important for this study, the consolidation of different academic perspectives on disability sheds light on the ways people with ASD 'cathect' with photography in order to engage with the self and the world; that is, their investment of emotion in the act of photography enables them to experience self, as well as control and hold on to visual-temporal experiences of their everyday lives. To put it another way, new perspectives on ASD, including issues about perception and embodiment, help deconstruct the notion that autistic individuals are unable to express their emotions (Bogdashina 2010; Grandin 2006). Here, it is productive to draw on Merleau-Ponty (2012) who claims that emotion is equivalent to being-in-the-world. In that sense, 'cathecting' with photography as a social and cultural practice is comparable to the experience of being-in-the-world.

While many disability critics of conventional thinking agree that personal experiences contribute to unique perspectives and a deeper understanding of disability, promoters of phenomenological perspectives are more radical and progressive in their approaches to disability politics (Corker and Shakespeare 2002; Davis 2013). The forming of cultural disability studies is significant, and to borrow Davis' words, it is a field of critical and cultural enquiry whose "time has come" (Davis 2006: 1). The development of this interdisciplinary field further consolidated sociological and materialist viewpoints with new cultural and critical perspectives, and expanded the field across the arts, humanities and social sciences (Corker and Shakespeare 2002; Davis 2013; McRuer 2006; Meekosha and Shuttleworth 2009). This convergence is central to this thesis, recognising that values, meaning, "emotion and affect are as important as the material aspects of life" (Shildrick 2012: 32). Personal accounts convey diverse ways in which disabled people interact and experience disability within their cultural and social settings. Margrit Shildrick (2012) includes theories of embodiment that "expose the uncertain and vulnerable nature of all forms of embodied selfhood" (2012: 37). Among other writers from a feminist perspective, Shildrick draws on Merleau-Ponty and underlines the importance of embodiment needs to be strengthened in the discussion of culture and disability (Garland-Thomson 1997; Hughes 2004, 2012; Mitchell and Snyder 1997, 2001;

Shakespeare 1994, 2006; Sheldon 2004; Thomas 1999, 2004; Wendell 1996). As this brief account on the establishment of cultural disability studies suggests, disability is a complex, constructed and interdisciplinary domain that includes a range of approaches that cannot be simply understood as a reaction to trauma or tragedy. Given the focus on ASD in this investigation, the following section will offer an overview on autism to develop a better understanding of the disorder. Debates encompass anthropological and cognitive perspectives; despite the tension between the two, drawing on both perspectives is productive and paints a more comprehensive picture of autism.

3.3. Insights into the world of autism

It is largely agreed that ASD is a biologically-based, lifelong neurological disorder that affects aspects of autistic individuals' functioning and life (Baron-Cohen et al. 1985; Frith 1989). ASD is characterised by impairments in three areas of development: social interaction, communication skills and the manifestation of stereotyped and repetitive behaviour, interests and activities (Baker et al. 2008; Bogdashina 2005; Murray 2008b; Nadesan 2005; Osteen 2008). While few writers on autism would disregard and underrate these impairments as discussed within a biomedical context, Ochs and Solomon (2010), among others, challenge the scientific view of autism as a deficit, and consider phenomena like autistic individuals' ways of seeing and being-in-the-world (Grinker 2008). Nadesan (2005) discusses the social complexity of ASD and questions the standards of normalcy used in the classification of autism. She does not reject the biogenetic aspects of the disorder, but argues the standards and expectations of normality are becoming increasingly standardised, categorised and internationally distributed. This prompts Nadesan to explore the socio-cultural processes involved in the construction of ASD, claiming, "autism is fundamentally *socially constructed*… the social factors involved in its identification, representation, interpretation, remediation, and performance are the most important factors in the determination of what it means to be autistic" (2005: 2, original italics). This thesis adopts the view that ASD is a life-long disorder characterised by the triad of impairments, and draws on perspectives on autism concerning social and cultural factors for the purpose of a deeper understanding of what it means to be autistic. As Murray claims, the impairments "come together in different forms and to differing degrees in any [autistic] individual" (2008b: 21). This is central for this thesis, as it does not seek to generalise findings to a wider ASD population. As Roy Grinker suggests, "[a]utism today is better defined in terms of its heterogeneity, as a group of autisms" (2010: 173).

Impairments in language and communication are one of the core defining characteristics of ASD, and as Olga Bogdashina explains, they "are present in all autistic individuals no matter whether the person is verbal or non-verbal" (2005: 13). She asserts their impairments are not deficits but rather "different ways to interact, communicate and process information which do not coincide with conventional ones" (ibid.: 15). Grinker agrees, saying there is a need to reconfigure ASD "as possibility rather than limitation, as a sociality rather than the selfism denoted by the term *autism*" (2010: 175, original italics). Here, Jim Sinclair offers a useful analogy:

> It takes more work to communicate with someone whose native language isn't the same as yours. And autism goes deeper than language and culture; autistic people are 'foreigners' in any society.
>
> (Sinclair 1993: 2)

Sinclair's analogy is interesting, as it begs the question of how autistic people make sense of the world and communicate with others. For a clear understanding of the language and communication impairments in ASD, Jill Boucher argues that it is vital to recognise the distinction between the two terms. She explains,

> Languages… are systems of mainly arbitrary items… with rules for combining them to convey meaning to others with shared knowledge of the language… Communication, on the other hand, involves the use of language in social interaction, whether directly in face-to-face talk, or indirectly as in, for example, a recorded phone message… Thus, language is a means, or method, of communicating. Non-linguistic, or non-verbal, signals including facial expression, gesture, and body language also provide means, or methods, of communicating.
>
> (Boucher 2011: 284)

For people with language impairments, the comprehension of language is at a higher level than their expressive abilities. This is not necessarily the case in autism (Bogdashina 2005). While spoken language can appear well developed, with many ASD people acquiring good vocabulary and syntax, there may be profound comprehension problems, particularly within a social context (Boucher 2011). Bogdashina links this phenomenon to the developmental delay of cerebral lateralisation in autistic people and explains,

> when [an autistic person] surprises other people with her knowledge of something, she is equally surprised herself. The disadvantage of this, however, is that she cannot consciously get access to this information when she needs it, if it is not triggered from the outside. When she is triggered she can function appropriately on 'autopilot'. Without any external triggers, she is confused and unable to perform the activity she has done many times before.
>
> (Bogdashina 2005: 150)

Other researchers have put forward a hypothesis for ASD that all features of autism, including social interaction impairments, communication and language problems, cognitive functioning, and repetitive behaviours, are rooted in the sensory overload experienced by individuals with ASD (Markram et al. 2007). Applying these language and communication difficulties to everyday life, individuals with autism tend to find it difficult to join spontaneous conversations that are of social nature, but appear to enjoy talking about specific things that are of personal interest to them and for which they readily provide factual information (Bogdashina 2005). The participants in this study have a well-developed spoken language, with some individuals using beautiful expressions to describe their everyday experiences and photographic practices, yet their ability to engage in conversations of social nature like small talk appears to be limited. This manifestation affected conversations during the sessions, with the result that discussions remained short, but focused on their photographic practices. That is not to say that participants had nothing, or only little, to offer to conversations. As will be expanded on in chapter four, the employment of suitable methods in order to elicit insights was key to engaging research participants; accordingly, the young male adults with ASD offered many insights and made crucial contributions that resulted in rich data for this study. Bogdashina affirms autistic people's dislike of small talk, and explains that compared to "non-autistic people, who tend to experience silence as uncomfortable and attempt to fill it with small talk, autistic people prefer to say what they have to say, then stop talking and wait for the other to respond" (2005: 197).

Elinor Ochs et al. (2004) highlight that people with high-functioning ASD have diverse facets of social competence, including the ability to participate in conversational turn-taking. The writers suggest that instead of distinguishing between social and communicative domains in ASD, it needs to be contextualised within "the notion of 'social functioning' to specify socio-cultural as well as interpersonal knowledge and skills" (2004: 154). Ochs and Solomon (2010) similarly note that there is a range of possibilities of social coordination, alluding to an idea of a 'social spectrum'. These are interesting propositions. While participants in this study are all high-functioning adults with ASD with no language issues, they use photography as a non-verbal way of communicating and expressing their ways of seeing self and world.

Language and communication impairments are not the only differences that are common features of ASD. Rita Jordan emphasises that perceptual understanding of autistic individuals is also different and explains,

the child with ASD is literally on his/her own in making sense of the environment and thus is liable to develop very idiosyncratic perceptions. The child (like his/her parent or teacher) will be unaware of the idiosyncrasy of those perceptions and, exacerbated by problems with communication, those differences may remain unrevealed.

(Jordan 2011: 369)

Similar to the impact of ASD on conversations with participants in this study, autism also affects the sensory perceptual experiences of individuals with ASD. Whilst this will be further discussed in relation to methodological implications in chapter four, here it is important to emphasise that ASD individuals' differences in sensory perception did not result in little or no data. In contrast, participants' involvement in this investigation enriched the understanding of sensory perception in autism.

Making sense of the environment often involves the ability to perceive the mental state of others, which is a state defined as Theory of Mind (Baron-Cohen et al. 1985). It is argued that people with ASD find it difficult to understand the emotions, intentions and behaviours of other people; in short, they are said to have a weak theory of mind (Frith 1989; Frith and Hill 2004). Critics argue the theory of mind is not an appropriate framework to understand autism, suggesting it mirrors the weak 'mind-blindness' that is often cited with the disorder (Duffy and Dorner 2011; Ochs et al. 2004). That is to say, non-autistic people are 'mind-blind' when they deal with autistic people, since they do not easily identify the perspectives, emotions and intentions of people with ASD. Bogdashina underlines that autistic and non-autistic people do not share perceptual experiences due to their differences in perceptual and cognitive functioning. She claims,

If autistic individuals lack theory of mind, non-autistic individuals are sure to have deficits in their ability to understand the Theory of Autistic Mind. If we could remove one-sidedness from our interpretation of 'mind-blindness', we could see how limited we all are in our ability to 'mind-read'.

(Bogdashina 2016: 21)

Bogdashina's account stresses the tension between the medical approach to ASD and the anthropological perspectives that consider the lived experience of autistic individuals. Both perspectives need to be considered in a balanced way in order to offer a comprehensive picture of autism (Grinker 2008; Ochs and Solomon 2010).

There are other features common in autism, including how people with ASD perceive and see the world. Bogdashina asserts, "'autistic thinking' is mostly perceptual in contrast to the 'verbal thinking' of non-autistic individuals. The most common type of perceptual thinking is visual" (2010: 118). Given the emphasis on photography in this thesis, it is essential to explore the visual and perceptual differences in ASD, and their

manifestation in relation to photography. Studies and the lived experiences by people with autism reveal that unusual responses to sensory stimuli are seen as core features of ASD (Baker et al. 2008; Grandin 2006). Sensory perceptual experiences may involve hyper- or hyposensitivity, fluctuation between different 'volumes' of perception or difficulty interpreting a sense (Boucher 2009; Grandin 2006; Williams 1999). In short, people with ASD experience the world differently. According to Bogdashina,

> Autistic individuals cannot help seeing and hearing the 'wrong thing', and they do not even know that they see or hear the wrong thing. 'Normal' connections between things and events do not make sense for them, but may be overwhelming, confusing and scary. What makes the matter even more complicated is that no two autistic people appear to have the exactly same patterns of sensory perceptual experiences.
>
> (Bogdashina 2016: 55)

With a particular focus on vision, people with ASD have an ability to notice small changes in their familiar surroundings (Grandin 2006). As Straus describes,

> People with autism are often richly attentive to minute details, sometimes at the expense of the big picture. They have an unusual and distinctive ability to attend to details on their own terms, not subsumed into a larger totality – a propensity to perceive the world in parts rather than as a connected whole.
>
> (Straus 2013: 467)

While often performing poorly at verbal skills, people with ASD have the capacity to excel at visual–spatial skills. Temple Grandin, and autistic adult who considers herself a visual thinker, explains, "[w]hen somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures" (2006: 24), further referring to visual thinking as "a tremendous advantage" (ibid.). Visual thinkers seem to see their thoughts, words are like a second language, which they translate into pictures first in order to understand verbal information. They use visualisation as a means of concretising events, ideas, concepts and considerations (Grandin 1996). This can be an advantage for people using photography, as they can visualise what they want to photograph before the object or moment unfolds itself in front of them; their mental images are exact representations of what they perceive. Vision means the ability to receive sights, but this ability is not the same as comprehending visual images. Considering the majority of information about the world comes through vision, one has to learn how to see with meaning by developing visual processing skills and achieving the comprehension through interaction with the environment. Grandin (2006) explains that for visual thinkers, ideas and thoughts are expressed as mental

images that afford a basis for understanding the world. This way of seeing can be illustrated by overlapping the different mental images as layers (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Photograph from: Martin, C. (n.d.), *As I Am*, Redart Design and Photography.

Because of hypersensitivity, fragmented and distorted perception, and delayed processing of the senses, autistic individuals need to compensate for unreliable senses (Bogdashina 2016). Despite some autistic individuals' ability to excel at visual-spatial skills, it is important to note that people with ASD are vulnerable to sensory overload (Baker et al. 2008; Grandin 2006). Bogdashina clarifies that unlike non-ASD people, who use their senses simultaneously, autistic people use only one sense at a time in order "to process information consciously" (2005: 79). As Bogdashina explains,

> Monoprocessing means that a person focuses on one sense, for example sight, and might see every minute detail of the object. However, while his vision is 'on', the person might lose the conscious awareness of any information coming through other senses. Thus, while the person sees something, he does not understand what he is being told and does not feel touch. When the visual stimulus fades out, the sound can be processed, but then the sound is the only information the person is dealing with (disconnected from sight).
>
> (Bogdashina 2005: 79)

Amy Baker and colleagues (2008) point out the difficulty of understanding sensory processing issues in autism, claiming,

68

> Despite the abundance of descriptive literature and anecdotal reports documenting unusual responses to sensory stimuli in this population, the nature of sensory processing difficulties in autism and the relationship to the core functional and behavioural disturbances of the disorder remain poorly understood.

<div align="right">(Baker et al. 2008: 868)</div>

Perhaps one reason why behavioural disturbances of ASD remain poorly understood is because ASD, like disability, is often viewed through the lens of the medical model of disability (Murray 2008b; Straus 2013). In practice, this means the complexity and range of ASD is often discussed in terms of its limits or restrictions, rather than its full complexity and diversity. Here, Mark Osteen raises the interesting question of whether individuals with ASD should "try to be like others, or should they preserve and celebrate their differences as intrinsic elements of their identities" (2008: 38)? With this in mind, the insights into ASD described in Part I offered a brief introduction to autism. Part II examines three interrelated developments of the Victorian era that resulted into the establishment of negative imagery of disabled people and people with ASD. For many critics across cultural disability studies, these developments are areas of contest.

Part II

Historically, the socio-cultural construction of disabled people in Western societies has predominantly emphasised their 'abnormalties' and depicted them as 'monsters', 'cripples' or the 'Other' (Barnes 1992; Garland-Thomson 1997, 2009; Hevey 1992; Mitchell and Snyder 1997). While negative attitudes to, and portrayals of, disability have been documented since early periods of recorded history (Braddock and Parish 2001; Stiker 1999), the period between the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries appears to epitomise the heyday of an age and culture that saw the advent of three interrelated developments that have contributed to the socio-cultural construction of disability and ASD. First, the arrival of photography has accelerated the negative imagery of disabled people, not least because of its ability to easily create, reproduce and circulate photographs. The section begins with a debate on the gaze, a cultural construction "defined as an oppressive act of disciplinary looking that subordinates its victim" (Garland-Thomson 2009: 9). Second, while there is a common assumption that the concept of the norm has existed since the early days of mankind, it was only during

this dynamic era that the notion of normalcy entered the English language around 1840, with its derivatives 'normal', 'abnormal' and 'normality' following soon after (Davis 1995). Third, the establishment and subsequent profusion of charity organisations during the mid-nineteenth century constructed and circulated negative imagery of disabled and vulnerable people for advertising and fundraising purposes. Charities and charitable service providers continue to use imagery that is often contested, therefore remaining a key player in the construction of disability and autism (Hevey 2013; Waltz 2012). Given this study's focus on ASD, Part II concludes with an analysis of contemporary charity imagery of autistic people.

3.4. Photography and its impact on the socio-cultural construction of disability

The invention of photography coincided with the scientific discourse established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer argue that scientific debates "assumed a novel 'medical gaze' on the body" (2010: 66), which is echoed by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2009) who claims scientists were interested in "breaches of the common human scale and shape" (2009: 161). As photography advanced, and the reproduction of photographs became easier and ubiquitous, the medium was increasingly used to portray people who did not conform to 'the common human scale and shape'. This socio-cultural construction was facilitated by the establishment of hospital-based practices that used photographic images of disabled people for medical purposes and depicted their 'before and after treatment', pathologising them for the medical gaze (Foucault 1966, 1972, 1973; Garland-Thomson 1997). Photographs exposed disabled people as 'objects of nature' rather than human beings within the wider society. This had a lasting legacy of the portrayal of disabled people (Hevey 1992), who were increasingly subjected to the gaze of health practitioners and the general public throughout social institutions of Western cultures (Barnes and Mercer 2010; Osteen 2008).

Extending the gaze beyond science and health to include the notion of cultural representation, Murray acknowledges that ASD does not easily and automatically indicate its visual presence, making looking at ASD in photographs difficult. He explains,

> As a condition that does not automatically signal its presence, and unlike certain other disabilities, autism can go unnoticed, inhabiting an invisibility. Even the most pronounced cases of autistic behavioural difference do not involve a *continual* visual signification of disability... At the same time, autism can provoke sudden, seemingly inexplicable, behaviour that is highly physical and visual.
> (Murray 2008b: 104, original italics)

Lacking apparent physical signification, Murray questions, "what exactly *is* the detail involved in any invitation to look at the face of a child with autism?" (2008b: 109, original italics). Murray explores how the public reads and responds to cultural representations of people with autism. By examining photographic portraits of children with ASD, he concludes that the context in which images are created and viewed is central. Once the context is supplied, or the knowledge of autism is explicit, Murray suggests that the dynamic of the photograph changes, and "it becomes impossible not to… look *for*… autism, even as it is clear that this is an impossibility" (2008b: 111-112, original italics). While the visual rhetoric of the photograph has been discussed in the context of everyday photography (Barthes 1977; Mitchell 1980, 1986), here, it is helpful to adopt Garland-Thomson's 'taxonomy of four primary visual rhetorics of disability', explaining the different ways of looking at disability:

> First, the wondrous, which places the disabled subject on high and elicits awe from viewers because of the supposedly amazing achievement represented (and even the most quotidian activities, such as eating and drinking, are at times understood through the rubric of the wondrous); second, the sentimental, which places the disabled subject in a more diminished or lowly position, evoking pity, and establishing a relationship between viewer and viewed not unlike the custodial relationship of parent and child; third, the exotic, which makes disability strange and distant – a freakish, or perhaps transgressive, spectacle; and finally, the realistic, which brings disability close, naturalizing disability and potentially minimizing the difference between viewer and viewed.
>
> (Garland-Thomson 2002: 59)

The taxonomy reinforces the construction of disability in the process of its cultural representation, fundamentally criticising the association of disability to loss, tragedy, pity or lack of function, often depicted in charity imagery (Barnes and Mercer 2010; Garland-Thomson 2002, 2005; Shakespeare 2006). The field of cultural disability studies has committed itself to criticising such stereotypical constructions of disability, which is particularly reflected in the promotion of charities (Garland-Thomson 2009; Hevey 1992; Waltz 2012). This is important for this thesis, considering charities create images of autistic people. Before exploring the use of disability imagery in the charity sector, next I will briefly discuss the concept of 'normalcy'. The term contributed to the negative impact on societal and cultural responses to impairment and the creation of the disability category in the mid-nineteenth century (Davis 1995).

3.5. A critique of 'normalcy'

The words 'normal', 'normality' and 'normalcy', denoting the idea of conforming to a common type, only appeared in the English language in the mid-nineteenth century. Before this linguistic and conceptual expansion, the human body and mind were visualised against the 'ideal', as often portrayed in mythology, art or imagination (Davis 1995). The construction of disability was the result of replacing the ideal with the newly-emerged normal/abnormal dichotomy that arrived around the time of the arrival of photography (Barnes and Mercer 2010; Davis 1995). Subsequently, the notion of normalcy began to raise a 'problem' for the disabled person, and has been central to the discourse of disability and ASD (Davis 1995; Nadesan 2005). By stressing that humans tend to rank, measure or compare each other against what they consider the average person does, Davis claims,

> We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavours to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state… There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated.
> (Davis 1995: 23)

A prevalent ideology emerged in the 1880s that used the pseudo-science of eugenics, the selective breeding practice of human bodies, to encourage the reproduction of the 'fittest member of society' (Barnes and Mercer 2010; Garland- Thomson 2009). The healthy body was idealised and depicted as the 'norm', while a disabled person disrupted the 'normal' world of a non-disabled individual, often experiencing isolation, marginalisation and 'otherness' (Garland-Thomson 1997).[30] Considering these 'perfect' and 'normal' bodies and minds, it is precisely the reaction to tragedy, along with the curiosity, fascination and pleasure in looking, or the spectator's gaze (Garland-Thomson 2009), that has created and permeated negative imagery of disabled people across Western cultures and societies.

Referring to the idea of normal in relation to ASD, Bogdashina proposes, "[i]n many ways 'autism' is a pilot project for humanity… [and] teaches us about the differences between what it is to be 'normal' and what it is to be 'human'" (2010: 10). Bogdashina makes an important point here. Rather than creating a dichotomy by suggesting people with ASD lack certain abilities, like reading emotions, recognising the differences is more useful for understanding the diversity in human beings. As Bogdashina observes,

---

[30] A recent article by Ari Ne'eman (2015) sparked criticism in relation to ASD and emerging eugenics; see
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/30/screening-sperm-donors-autism-autistic-eugenics.

> This exploration of the ways in which autistic individuals think and 'see' the world around us assists us in understanding the diversity of our own nature and our own experiences… Many of us still do not trust anything that is different from 'normality'. We seem to be reluctant to accept that there are many different ways to see the same thing, and each of them may be correct if seen from the right perspective.
>
> (Bogdashina 2010: 15)

Although an understanding of diversity in human being is desirable, an area in which the normal/abnormal dichotomy still prevails today is the charity sector (Hevey 2013). The following section provides a brief historical overview of how people with impairments have been culturally constructed through charity imagery since the mid-nineteenth century. The motivation for this discussion is twofold. First, charities are a domain in which disability imagery is used for fundraising and advertising purposes; and second, charity organisations are a field, alongside education and psychology, in which autism is discussed. As the aim of Part II is to arrive at an analysis of charity imagery that depicts ASD, it is important to continue the dialogue of the socio-cultural construction of disability by drawing on contemporary charity imagery, namely three campaigns that were run by the National Autistic Society.

3.6. Charities – the bête noir for people with disabilities and autism

The establishment and subsequent spread of charity organisations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries expanded and perpetuated the dominant stereotypical social and cultural constructions of disabled people (Hevey 1992; Morris 1991). Competition prompted charities to increasingly rely on the oppressive representation for advertising and fundraising purposes, portraying impairments as individual failing (Barnes 1992; Evans 2002; Hevey 1992; Morris 1991; Shakespeare 1994; Taylor 2008; Wehbi 2012). Photography's cultural and social currency, as well as its technological development intensified the stereotypical representations of disabled people, making them the subject of photographic constructions (Barnes and Mercer 2010; Evans 2002; Taylor 2008). Notably, initial promotional images from the 1950s and 1960s concerned with ASD were no exception. Mitzi Waltz (2012) explains, "[t]hese portrayed a straightforward, and completely concocted, cure narrative in which near-feral children were tamed through therapeutic intervention" (2012: 222). Parents of children with ASD were portrayed as abusive 'refrigerator mothers', largely through the narrative of mainstream psychology (Waltz 2012).

It was not until the early 1990s that charity imagery received harsh criticism. An important landmark study and testimony in the struggle for alternative charity imagery of disabled people is David Hevey's (1992) work. He provides an in-depth analysis of charity imagery and argues that photographs of disabled people facilitate a passive approach to issues of isolation, objectification and oppression, while the medium itself is oppressive due to its subjectivity. Hevey identifies that charities understand their role as producers and facilitators of a culture of dependency, using a three-stage model of representation to construct a medical and dependency view of disability. The stages are based on branding, attitude change and functional status, respectively, and enable charities to create a hegemony that recognises their role and voice as that of disabled people, thus, indicating disabled people's dependency on charities. As Hevey explains, charities create an "ideology and social position [that] is hidden behind the mask of total altruism" (1992: 22).

Disabled people's values signalled an interest in expressing an affirmative view of disability and disabled identity (Campbell and Oliver 1996; Swain and French 2000). Although an affirmative view is important, Tom Shakespeare argues the call for action ultimately centres on the belief that disability would continue to be misconstrued and relegated to the "dustbins" of history if non-disabled people continued to produce disability imagery from their own prejudices (1994: 283). He urges disabled people to take responsibility for the production of their own images, so disability imagery would develop into forms and representations that are acceptable to disabled people. Shakespeare makes a crucial point here; putting those in charge who are affected is key and involves all areas of cultural construction, including the visual arts and everyday photography. To put it another way, more photographs need to be taken by people with disabilities rather than of them. The increasing involvement of people with ASD in creating their own campaigns and messages may translate into changing the imagery in the context of charity organisations directly. It is important to avoid using a simplistic positive/negative dichotomy when illustrating disability or ASD photographically (Hevey 1992; Waltz 2012). Subjective and ambivalent in nature, both terms can garner criticism; for example, positive images would encompass the refusal to deny or disavow the struggle and oppression that characterises the understanding of disability (Hevey 1992). As Stuart Hall explains,

> The problem with the positive/negative strategy is that adding positive images to the largely negative repertoire of the dominant regime of representation increases the diversity of [what] is represented, but does not *necessarily* displace the

The important point here is that despite the criticism, contemporary charities continue to use images of disabled and vulnerable people for marketing and fundraising purposes. Photographs function to place charities in a role of care, cure and control (Hevey 1992; Waltz 2012). As Hevey (2013) observes, most disability charity campaigns still use negative images – for example, photographs that inspire anxiety, sadness or fear – even when campaigns appear helpful at first glance.

Using Hevey's (1992) three-stage framework for disability representation as a key reference, Waltz (2012) is interested in exploring narratives of people with ASD within the context of charity debates, and maintains that some contemporary autism charities still use pathos and fear for their advertising campaigns. For example, a UK autism charity campaign depicted ASD "as a child-enveloping monster that had to be destroyed to allow a boy to live a normal life" (2012: 219-220). As Waltz states, "[o]lder autism organisations eschewed traditional forms of advertising until relatively recently… Autism charities also still rarely involve autistic adults in organisational governance or policy-making" (2012: 230). This is problematic; until there is a substantial involvement of autistic people in the creation of images, photographs continue to be used for eliciting pity and sadness. Notably, charity imagery of people with ASD is relatively recent. Waltz clarifies, "[a]dvertisements for autism charities were practically unknown until the 1990s, unless they were for special schools or therapeutic programmes" (2012: 223). Although the National Autistic Society (NAS) has raised funds since its establishment in 1962, it was not until 2008 that the charity ran its first large-scale advertising campaign for the public. In order to develop an understanding of the representation of ASD in the context of contemporary charity debates, the following analysis will draw on the marketing material of the NAS, which includes a brief examination of two NAS campaign posters designed to promote a partnership with Vodafone. The purpose of this analysis is to show examples of how autism is constructed within contemporary charity imagery.

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is the UK's leading charity for people affected by ASD (NAS 2015). Its website includes information for people with ASD, their families and others interested in learning about the disorder. The website contains colourful images of smiling and cheerful children, adolescents and adults who are often depicted to be engaged in conversations, tasks or play. Founded by a small number of parents of autistic children, it is one of the oldest charities and service provider for people with ASD

of all ages across the UK. Its tag line is 'Accept difference. Not indifference', and implies that the organisation retains its focus on accepting the difference of people with ASD and providing quality support, rather than trying to find a 'cure' for autism and 'normalise' them (NAS 2015). Considering the difficulty to 'see' or depict autism, the NAS mainly uses colour photographs, along with graphs and tables to illustrate statistics for their marketing purposes. The following sections focus on two NAS campaigns that use photographs to raise awareness of issues that affect people with ASD. The first campaign ran in 2010 and raised awareness of mental health issues in children and young people with ASD; the second campaign ran in 2014 and was aimed at the UK Government to address the need for care and adequate support for ASD adults.

3.6.1. 'You Need to Know' campaign

In 2010, the NAS ran a campaign called 'You Need to Know', which highlighted the impact of mental health issues on children with ASD. Research outcomes are outlined across five case studies and published in a 57-page brochure that contains 32 colour photographs of single figures in the frames, with 26 of the photographs portraying extreme close-ups of male and female children whose heads are either cropped (Figures 3.2 and 3.5, Appendix 1), or focused on their eyes and/or mouth (Figures 3.1 and 3.9, Appendix 1). The remaining six photographs are medium frames that portray subjects' upper body or chest (Figures 3.4 and 3.7, Appendix 1). Overall, the photographs differ in size and represent five individuals whose narratives are visually constructed in the context of the five corresponding case studies. The photographs are enclosed by text, with quotations (clearly attributed to other people than the depicted children) often used to function as captions for the photographs.

The representations of the children in the publication differ. While one child is shown alone playing with a car (Figure 3.4, Appendix 1), others look away from the camera (Figures 3.2, 3.6 and 3.8, Appendix 1). Many images portray extreme close-ups of individuals with stern facial expressions who show no interaction with the camera or the photographer behind it, while others look directly into the camera, seemingly aware of being the subject of the photograph (Figures 3.1 and 3.7, Appendix 1). There are a few images that expose the subjects with happy facial expressions (Figures 3.3, 3.7 and 3.9, Appendix 1); these images are positioned at the end of each series/case study, and allude to a positive outcome people with ASD may experience when they receive the support they need (Figures 3.10–3.15, Appendix 1). Used in the context of contemporary charity imagery, the questions arise of how the NAS engaged with current

disability debates, how they constructed ASD, and whether they directly involved people with ASD in their advertising campaigns. Since ASD is "truly invisible" (Osteen 2008: 4), it is challenging to visually represent autism. To overcome this challenge Osteen notes,

> Most popular representations of autism indeed either make spectacles of autists or impose neurotypical formulae or conventions on them, thereby eliding difference in order to validate neurotypical experiences.
>
> (Osteen 2008: 9)

At first glance, the images used in the 'You Need to Know' campaign represent children of different ages, race and ethnicities; some smile into the camera, others look at it seriously, yet others show disengagement. Of course, viewers can interpret photographs in ways that are different to what was intended. It is also possible to neglect semiotic codes whose function is to convey meanings. Seeing that a photograph does not easily render an 'accurate' representation of ASD, there is a different kind of looking involved regarding autism. As Murray suggests,

> Looking at someone with autism can be deeply personal, in specific ways. For any parent around the time of initial suspicion and diagnosis, for example, it is impossible not to look, and for that look to constitute some kind of search. This is especially the case with photographs taken *before*: before the knowledge; before it was obvious.
>
> (Murray 2008b: 105, original italics)

Murray implies that photographs of autistic people require a context that helps the viewer move beyond the photograph's illustrative role. In the case of the NAS campaign, the accompanying text of the publication provides the context in which the photographs are positioned. The context of the photographs facilitates their signification, and the seriousness of the mental health issues addressed in the campaign. Once that knowledge is acquired through the context, the dynamic of the images changes; the text, charity logo and branding reveal autism, inviting the viewer to return to the photographs to look at autism: the disengaged vision might turn into a clear evocation of solitude and detachment, while playing with cars might signify an absent social connection between the individual and the parent. Without the context, the photographs are merely representations of individuals, and children with ASD "remain largely undifferentiated from any other individuals" (Murray 2008b: 110). Murray further suggests that autism invites people to look:

> In the visual media, the *invitation* to look at autism has never been greater, an invitation that sets out certain rules about the display and consumption of images in question, and produces particular kinds of narratives as a result.

Murray's remark is significant, in that it implies that not much has changed in the socio-cultural construction of autism specifically, and disability more generally. More to the point, the invitation to look is an invitation to stare or gaze, which has been the subject of much work in the conceptualisation and theorising of disability (Garland-Thomson 2009). There is an inherently visual element to the ways in which disability is understood and constructed; ASD is no exception to this (Murray 2008b). The next section offers a brief analysis of another NAS campaign that serves as a comparison.

3.6.2. 'Careless' campaign

In April 2014, the NAS launched the 'Careless' campaign. The 6-page fold-out 'Careless' brochure consists of five photographs that represent five individual adult figures. Unlike the cover photograph, which takes up the whole page (Figure 3.16, Appendix 2), the images inside the brochure are rectangular and horizontal, covering the top third of the page on which they appear (Figures 3.17 – 3.19, Appendix 2). The pages also include text. All individual frames depict extreme close-ups and are dark in tone. Due to the 3/4 front view of the head, only the right sides of the adult faces are lit and therefore visible, whereas their left sides remain unrecognisable in the shadow. The camera is positioned at eye-level, inviting the viewer to directly look at the individuals. While the dark depictions of the individuals might alienate the viewer or express empathy for the depicted individual, the eye-level camera angle offers a more personal view. The four smaller rectangular frames are each complemented by a quotation, as indicated by the quotation marks, which is written in upper case letters, using white and pink font colour. The quotes are seemingly attributed to the depicted individuals, positioned within the frame and on the left side of their lit heads. The cover photograph uses the same style and position of the text, yet it has no quotation marks; instead, it poses a question that reads:

> WILL THE GOVERNMENT PROTECT VULNERABLE PEOPLE WITH AUTISM FROM ABUSE, NEGLECT AND LONELINESS?

Without prior knowledge of the Careless campaign, the title question gives the reader enough information and context to anticipate what the brochure is about. The photographs inside the brochure are contextualised by the text, which is used to construct ASD in a particular way to be effective for the campaign. Comparable to the images used in the 'You Need to Know' campaign, it is the combination of text and

photographs that accounts for a powerful message. Importantly, by comparing the photographs of the individuals depicted in both NAS publications, it is noticeable that the focus is frequently on the eyes and mouth of the depicted people. Equally, both campaigns use a narrative approach to address and represent the issues in question. With this in mind, the following section examines two NAS posters that illustrate the meaning of the mouth and eyes in relation to autism.

3.6.3. NAS Posters

The two NAS posters were designed in 2004 to promote the partnership between the NAS and Vodafone, with an additional purpose of encouraging the public to make a donation. The posters depict two extreme close-ups, one of an open mouth (Figure 3.20, Appendix 3) and one of an open eye (Figure 3.21, Appendix 3), respectively. Both posters contain text to contextualise the illustrations. The words that appear to come out of the mouth read (Figure 3.20, Appendix 3):

> All thumbs, two left feet, blood out of a stone, ants in your pants, raining cats and dogs, eyes bigger than your belly, every cloud has a silver lining, eyes in the back of your head.
> How can someone with autism trust people when all they do is lie?

And in smaller font size, the poster reads:

> People with autism take everything literally, so casual communication can be confusing and frightening. This makes social interaction extremely difficult. The National Autistic Society, supported by Vodafone, want to help the half million people in the UK affected by the life-long condition. For more information or to make a donation, visit www.vodafone.co.uk/autism or call 08702 33 40 40.

Comparably, the second poster (Figure 3.21, Appendix 3) depicts words that read:

> When a person with autism walks into a room the first thing they see is:
> A pillow with a coffee stain shaped like Africa, a train ticket sticking out of a magazine, 25 floorboards, a remote control, a paper clip on the mantelpiece, a marble under the chair, a crack in the ceiling, 12 grapes in a bowl, a piece of gum, a book of stamps sticking out from behind a silver picture frame.
> So it's not surprising they ignore you completely.

And in smaller font size, the poster reads:

> People with autism tend to see too much detail in everything, so they can't always tell what's important. This can lead to great anxiety and social isolation. The National Autistic Society, supported by Vodafone, want to help the half million people in the UK affected by the life-long condition. For more information or to make a donation, visit www.vodafone.co.uk/autism or call 08702 33 40 40.

In contrast with the two previous NAS campaign publications, the posters employ a different style of constructing autism in order to encourage the public for donations as prompted by the textual references in the posters. The more simplistic style of the posters allows the focus to remain on the two organs that play an important role in the lives of autistic people – the eyes and the mouth. Also noteworthy is the way the text is used in both posters: while Figure 3.20 increases the size of the text before posing the question 'How can someone with autism trust people when all they do is lie?', this is reversed in Figure 3.21, where the text decreases in size before the last statement reads, 'So it's not surprising they ignore you completely'. If the reader decides to ignore the textual references in the posters, the visual signs of the mouth and eyes remain visible. The posters are effective as long as the viewer knows the importance of the two organs in the lives of people with ASD.

Given the approach to charity advertising in the past, it is fair to question whether charity imagery can ever be effective and empowering for service users. The three NAS campaigns used different stylistic ways of emphasising the eyes and mouth, which are significant organs that enable people to visually and verbally communicate with others. For people with autism, these two organs are central to their impairments and processing issues, seeing the eyes and mouth are not only ways of communicating but also ways of making sense of the world (Bogdashina 2005, 2016; Grandin 2006; Williams 2006). Nevertheless, the three campaigns still position charity as a central part of the equation through their use of the NAS logo and taglines, as well as textual references to the charity. As the NAS has a role in delivering services for people with ASD, this can be seen as producing a 'need' from which it may benefit via government financing for new services. In other words, Hevey's three-stage model continues to persist in contemporary disability imagery. Next, Part III first discusses the photographic representations of autistic young people within the realm of the family; and second, it offers some insights into visual artworks that have been created by autistic individuals.

Part III

3.7. Photography and ASD

With autism charities using photographs of autistic individuals to create a 'need' and

'dependency' from which charities benefit through more funding and donations for their services, it is central to this study to offer another series of representations that depict people with autism. This section discusses a sequence of photographs that were broadly taken within the context of family photography, and highlight the unique behaviours of children with autism. Importantly, these photographs, albeit taken of children with ASD, not by them, are closest to the focus of this study. Created by family members (usually parents), these images portray the subjects in ways that are more intimate and personal, compared to the charity imagery that aims to depict individuals with ASD in a particular way to use the images for marketing purposes.

Timothy Archibald is a professional photographer and father of an autistic son, Elijah. On his website, Archibald displays a number of photographs that depict his son in various situations.[31] For example, he is wedged inside a large open plastic container, seemingly naked and with his eyes closed. The container is positioned on a wooden floor in front of white drawn curtains that form the background of the frame, signifying the container is positioned in a room, probably inside the family home (Figure 3.22, Appendix 4). Another photograph illustrates the son kneeling on a dining table and leaning forward to smell a bunch of flowers that are positioned in a glass vase in front of him. He wears an over-sized white t-shirt, perhaps from his father. The dining table and two chairs are placed in front of white drawn curtains, which form the background of the frame and suggest the photograph was also taken inside a family home (Figure 3.23, Appendix 4). The only close-up in the selected series, Elijah is depicted pressing his head and face against a red balloon that he holds in his hands whilst his eyes are closed (Figure 3.24, Appendix 4). Lastly, Elijah is portrayed standing in front of a white door, wearing a white shirt but no trousers, socks or shoes. He is bending over with his head facing towards the floor, while leaning with his right arm on what seems to be a poster roll. His left hand rests on his right knee (Figure 3.25, Appendix 4).

The photographs expose a kind of quirkiness about the young boy that appears to be quite unique; no photograph depicts a full frontal view of Elijah, like the photographs typically used by the NAS. Without providing captions or any other information about the son or the series of photographs on his own website, Archibald describes his photography as "empathetic photographs of things that are a little bit different, a little bit curious. Human, humorous and sometimes subversive, these qualities seem to surface in every project we take on" (Archibald 2017, n.p.). In a photo-

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[31] Timothy Archibald's website, available at: http://www.timothyarchibald.com/personal-projects/echolilia-/4/thumbs.

essay titled *Echolilia: A father's photographic conversation with his autistic son* (Time 2017), Archibald reveals,

> My eldest son was born in 2001. He was always a kid who went to the beat of his own drummer. When he was 5, we began making photographs collaboratively as a way to find some common ground and attempt to understand each other. Soon after we began the project, Elijah was diagnosed on the autistic spectrum. Though the diagnosis gave me the words and history to understand my son better, it didn't take away the mystery and the need to try to find an emotional bridge to him.[32]

(Timothy Archibald, n.p.)

The photographs present a collaboration between father and son, in which Archibald always operates the camera, while he often turns the creative control over to his son, explaining Elijah "often does something unexpected… something I'd never have been able to think of" (Time 2017). It is a personal project that connects the two on a deeper level, and that illustrates the relationship between the two, rather than being merely photographs representing the son with characteristics of autism (Time 2017). Describing their relationship, Archibald explains it has "three components: him, myself and then the shared stuff that we can't really define. The feeling we get when we look at all the photographs together is the channel that defines the project. That is the echolilia thing" (Time 2017).

Another parent using her camera to photograph her autistic son, Stanley, is Rosie Barnes, a photographer who seeks to use photography in order to "make the invisible visible" (Barnes 2014, n.p.).[33] In her book *Understanding Stanley – Looking through autism*, Barnes engages with photography to depict the ways her son communicates, perceives and interacts with other family members, objects and the environment in his everyday live. Photographing her son over a period of 14 years, Barnes explains that she created a book that "will help you to feel, not just to think, whilst challenging our ideas of communication, perception and perspective" (Barnes 2014, n.p). That is to say, rather than writing a textbook on the manifestation of ASD in autistic people, Barnes produced a visual reference book filled with images that represent situations, experiences and characteristics of autism, alongside observed portraits of her son (Figures 3.26 – 3.28, Appendix 4).

Both Archibald and Barnes use photography in a personal and detailed way to convey what it may feel like to be autistic and live an autistic life, instead of merely

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[32] Archibald, T., *Echolalia: A father's photographic conversation with his autistic son*, available at: http://content.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2027433_2203665,00.html.
[33] Barnes, R., *Understanding Stanley*, available at: http://www.understandingstanley.com.

describing the condition through verbal accounts, explanations and illustrations. Their approach to photography is certainly unique and offers insights into the lives of individuals with ASD that, for example, charity imagery fails to do due to its purpose and focus. Crucially, Archibald and Barnes created photographs of their children without giving them the cameras to take photographs of their own lives and from their own perspectives. With this in mind, the following section offers an overview of visual art forms that have been created by people with ASD. Although a comprehensive analysis of the art works and their creators is beyond the scope of this study, this section aims to move past a representation of people with ASD, and demonstrate that they "occupy a unique and valuable place on the human spectrum" (Osteen 2008: 9).

3.8. Visual arts and autism

A number of contemporary writers argue that people with autism have started to create an autistic culture (Davidson 2008; Murray 2008b; Straus 2013). Straus, for example, argues that autistic culture is formed through writing, art and music, "and its shared features give it cohesion and a distinct identity" (2013: 466). Using the term 'neurodiversity', Straus believes that autism is not a deficit, but a feature of "naturally occurring human variability" that understands ASD as a way of being-in-the-world (ibid.: 467). The idea derives from the disability rights movement: autism is a difference, not a deficit. For Straus, autistic culture is a different and valued way of thinking and imagining by considering music, art and writing. For the purpose of this investigation, this section will focus on visual arts, a field in which people with autism engage to "produce meaning through visual images" (Murray 2008b: 96).

Murray maintains that people with ASD offer their own narratives and lived experiences that vary from those within the dominant culture. He observes,

> These expressions can be found across a range of cultural productions, from written life stories to the visual arts, and – more and more frequently – in the cyberspaces provided by the freedom of the internet.
>
> (Murray 2008b: 6)

Within the visual arts, autistic people produce a range of different artworks, from "meticulous architectural drawings" (Osteen 2008: 13) to paintings characterised by "vivid sharp lines, geometrical shapes, and bright colors, and imbued with private codes and associations" (Straus 2013: 471). As widely argued, individuals with ASD have the tendency to focus on small details, sometimes at the expense of the bigger picture, which has been described as 'weak central coherence' (Bogdashina 2016; Happé 2005;

Straus 2013). Offering her insider view as an autistic adult, Grandin endorses the ability to perceive details in their full individuality without contextualising them as representatives of a larger category, clarifying,

> My thoughts move from video-like, specific images to generalization and concepts. For example, my concept of dogs is inextricably linked to every dog I've ever known. It's as if I have a catalogue of dogs I've seen, complete with pictures, which continually grows as I add more examples to my video library… The images I visualize are always specific. There is no generic, generalized Great Dane.
>
> (Grandin 2006: 12)

Grandin's insider remark is useful, as she describes how she visually thinks and perceives the world. Seeing is vital in any consideration of autism, and studies on sensory perceptual experiences reveal that autistic people have an ability to focus their vision on details, enabling them to notice small changes in their familiar surroundings (Bogdashina 2016; Garner and Hamilton 2001). There is as much advantage as disadvantage in the fixation on detail in visual arts. While it affects the centrally coherent imagination at the expense of the larger picture, such focus can create artistic works (Mills 2008). Clara Park, mother of autistic painter Jessica Park, outlines what might be defined as artwork of the centrally coherent:

> Jessy sits at her table, bent over a sheet of drawing paper, deftly outlining a rectangle with a sable brush. At hand are some thirty tubes of acrylics, but for today she has mixed only shades of green—five of them. Green is her favorite color. She is working from the pencil sketch she made at a friend's house some weeks ago, one of her quartz heater series, the successor to her series of radio dials and electric blanket controls. Her abstracting eye has reduced the heater to its essential design elements, 11 ranges of tiny rectangles, 72 to a range. For the painting she has enlarged them fourfold, but they still measure only a half-inch by a quarter. Today she will fill in only the greens, placing them unhesitatingly among the 792 rectangles according to a pattern we cannot see. But she can see it; she has already chosen the final color which will enclose the whole.
>
> (Park 2001, cited in Mills 2008: 128)

Jessica Park is an autistic painter who came to public attention at an early age through one of the first person narratives of ASD by her mother, Clara Park (1982). A subsequent book included Jessica Park's burgeoning career as a painter. While she started her painting career with objects like heaters, radio dials or electric blanket controls, she progressed to her current work, which encompasses architectural structures painted against an astronomically precise starry sky. As Straus describes her work, "[e]ach element is separate and distinct – no smudging or blurring – and rendered in astonishing detail" (2013: 471).

Another autistic artist whose drawings and paintings have been widely admired for its camera-like meticulousness is Stephen Wiltshire. His panoramic views of large cities and cityscapes are often created after a short exposure to the sights that he illustrates in a naturalistic and accurate way (Murray 2008b; Osteen 2008; Straus 2013). Oliver Sacks, who has written about both Park and Wiltshire, questions whether there is a "distinctive 'autistic' form of perception and art" in Wiltshire's work (1995: 196), speculating that Wiltshire cannot be a true artist. Defending Wiltshire's work, Osteen (2008) claims,

> Sacks's Romantic concept of imagination, with its emphasis on originality and synthesis, obstructs his vision. He assumes that Wiltshire's quasi-photographic art indicates a merely reproductive, mirror-like mind.
>
> (Osteen 2008: 13)

Instead, Osteen affirms that Wiltshire, like other artists, highlights specific details and excludes others, further observing, "his work shows an artistic sifting, selecting, and revising his raw perceptions" (2008: 13). Reflecting on Straus' earlier consideration of 'autistic high culture of art', it is imperative to note that the works of Park and Wiltshire are examples of exceptionally gifted autistic individuals who only represent a small minority of the highly-skilled autistic population. To challenge debates on 'savant artists with ASD', Anthony Baker (2008) uses the term 'normally autistic' to refer to autistic people who do not appear in popular media, where they are often represented as exceptionally gifted ('savants'), or as helpless victims. In the light of this, Straus' (2013) idea of autistic culture is useful for this thesis; people on the autism spectrum do 'ordinary' things that can also result in works of art, yet without being exposed as the (high art) works by Jessica Park and Stephen Wiltshire.

3.9. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to highlight the complexity of disability and autism, and reiterate the centrality of the socio-cultural construction in the process of disablement, in particular in relation to photography. This chapter further linked the scholarships on everyday photography, cultural disability studies and ASD, which offered concepts and theoretical frameworks that underpin this study. Part I provided a brief overview of the development of cultural disability studies as a scholarly field of enquiry, which formed the basis for an understanding of the social and cultural construction of ASD and disability. The debates in Part I further helped contextualise the cultural disability studies as an

academic field that includes the writings of scholars from across the arts, humanities and social sciences.

Part II established the relationship between photography, the term normalcy and the charity sector, which were three mid-nineteenth century developments that played a big part in the socio-cultural construction of disability and autism. Their interwoven nature reinforced their significance in the development of cultural disability studies. Despite the relatively late discovery of autism in 1943, the discussion of mid-nineteenth-century developments and practices informs an understanding of autism and its cultural construction. Part III moved beyond the discussion of representation, and explored the field of photography and visual arts in relation to ASD. Although the focus was on work by parents and exceptionally gifted artists with autism, who only represent a small minority of the ASD population, they include autistic values in their work that is shared by a larger population of autistic people. I now want to turn to the methodology of this study.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapters outlined the scholarship that assisted in the development of the research questions, and informed the ways both everyday photographic practices and autism have been approached in this investigation. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodological framework developed for this qualitative study, and outline how the methods address the research questions. In seeking to understand the relation between material and sensory environments, this thesis deals with this methodological and epistemological challenge by arguing that a combination of participants' photographs and verbal accounts offers insights into their phenomenological experience of seeing and being-in-the-world. At the same time, this approach helps answer the research questions. From the outlook, this thesis recognises that participants view the world through their sensory perception and lived experiences, and their own interpretation of the relation between people, objects and moments (Pink 2011b). These interpretations vary and constitute different realities of the world. With the "fuzzy boundaries" of the autistic spectrum (Singer 1999: 63), Murray claims, "understand[ing] and respect[ing] the difference of autism… involves a reconfiguration of what we might think of as a 'working' spectrum of humanity" (2008b: xvi, Preface).

Developing a methodology that enables participants to engage with photography in their own creative ways, and meaningfully communicate their embodied experiences and self-reflective thoughts in relation to the social world, was of particular significance to this thesis (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006; Jewitt et al. 2017). The investigation subscribed to the notion that the relationship between knowledge, methods and theory is vital for developing the study within the wider research context (Pink 2013; Rose 2012, 2014b). Jo Aldridge reinforces that it is particularly vital to "employ different and alternative research methodologies that ensure vulnerable participants can participate on their own terms" (2012: 49). A phenomenological stance offers a sensitive and refined perspective on participants' lived and sensory experiences (Paterson and Hughes 1999; Pink 2009). Important for this study, this approach helped explore the unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world as expressed in the photographic practices of young male ASD adults.

Treating the everyday and individuals' lived experiences as routes of knowing (Pink 2012a), this study reflects on the diverse contexts in which participants practice their photographic image-making, and includes research methods that elicit the essence that is not socially constructed, and that constitutes the very fabric of human being. More precisely, this fabric "refers to our qualitative experience of the social world, to embodied experience that has the capacity to transform as well as exceed social subjection" (Hemmings 2005: 549). In the light of the diversity of humanity, it is not sufficient to merely observe research participants in order to fully comprehend their everyday photographic practices. Instead, the data of this empirical study was gathered through a mixed-method approach, namely photo-elicitation, observation and semi-structured interviews. Using Sarah Drew and Marilys Guillemin's (2014) framework of 'interpretive engagement' for the analysis of participant's photographic images, the analysis of verbal accounts from participants and observations made during fieldwork was carried out using thematic analysis (Flick 2014; Walter 2016).

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part I offers an overview of the emerging academic literature on visual methodologies and creative, visual research methods, which is a scholarship underpinned by interdisciplinary knowledge and practice, and includes discussions of sensory approaches on which this study drew. The purpose of this outline is to provide a methodological context for this study, and consider the mixed-method approach employed in this study. Part I concludes with examples of participant-focused studies that involve photography. Part II offers a personal account of the processes of fieldwork and analysis carried out for this investigation. It starts with a rationale for this study, which includes the research methodology of this investigation, and traces the research journey and its developments. The section is followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations before it outlines the reasoning for choosing the selected sample of participants. By including participants in this investigation, and using creative and visual methods according to their abilities, sensory experiences, interests and skills, individuals were encouraged to create photographs as part of the research process. This approach enabled and strengthened dialogues about participants' photographic images, as well as their own views and self-reflexive insights that could then be theorised (Harper 2002). The chapter concludes with an overview of the processes of thematic analysis.

Part I

4.2. The field of visual methodologies and creative methods

The emerging scholarship on visual methodologies over the last two decades is a field of interdisciplinary knowledge and practice that is informed by a range of methodological approaches across the arts, humanities and social sciences (Banks 2001; Mitchell 2011; Pink 2009, 2013; Rose 2012, 2014b). Qualitative studies are paying attention "to the development of a more rigorous methodology for the collection, production, analysis, and communication of visual aspects and insights of visual media's expressive capabilities" (Pauwels 2011: 4). A new emphasis is further placed on ethical scrutiny "that arise[s] before, during and after image production" in participant-generated visual methodologies (Guillemin and Drew 2010: 175). In order to produce empirically supported responses to visual material, researchers go through comprehensive ethics approval processes before engaging with research participants and their work. For example, photographs, video diaries, drawings, maps and collages are used to explore the subjective and lived experiences of the people involved in research (Guillemin and Drew 2010; Mitchell 2011; Pink 2013; Rose 2012; Thomson 2008). Increasingly, researchers using visual methodologies stress the importance of including the notion of embodiment and the senses in the making, analysis and interpretation of visual material (Boyle 2014; Pink 2009; Rensink 2004). Given that participants in this study used their senses to engage in their photographic practices, this study was methodologically and epistemologically enriched by studies and discussions of embodiment and perception in the analysis and interpretation of participants' images (Pink 2011b). From this perspective, the social world is constantly emerging and continuously being interpreted by individuals' perception and their lived experiences. A leading scholar in the interdisciplinary area of visual and sensory methodology is Sarah Pink who describes the field as

> an area of academic and applied research that demonstrates particularly powerfully that the relationship between theory, technology and method should not be separated. Understanding methodology is concerned with comprehending how we know as well as the environments in which this knowledge is produced; as such, it involves engaging with a philosophy of knowledge, of practice and of place and space.
>
> (Pink 2012b: 3)

Elsewhere Pink notes that in the current qualitative research environment, "[i]mages are… part of how we experience, learn and know as well as how we communicate and

represent knowledge" (2013: 1), further acknowledging, "visual research must also accommodate embodiment and the senses" (ibid.: 3). The notion that senses are interdependent and interwoven is discussed across academic fields, and is increasingly explored within methodological approaches to qualitative studies (Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Luttrell and Chalfen 2010; Pink 2006, 2009). Pink reinforces that senses are essential in understanding the lived experiences of research participants. Rather than merely observing people in the field, she argues a sensory methodology facilitates "a reflexive and experimental process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced" (2009: 8).

The relationship between the senses and photography is imperative in this investigation, in which participants' photographic practices are explored through individuals' lived experiences and sensory perception. Without their self-reflexive verbal contribution to this study, it would be difficult to discuss their subjective perspectives and interpretations in relation to their image-making (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006). This also provides a degree of quality through the opportunity to interpret their own images, and understand their meaning-making process, while offering a level of flexibility. In qualitative research flexibility is required to endorse, alter or discard methods in the research process if necessary, and work in accordance with the skills and abilities of participants in order to gather data (Pink 2013). The often intertwined approach to qualitative research reveals that methodologies are likely to be established for particular studies. The complex and holistic approach to visual and sensory research facilitates the development of profound knowledge and understanding of social and cultural aspects in the everyday life of people. Relatedly, it highlights the significance of the interrelation between knowledge, methods, theory and the researcher for developing a visual methodology.

Along with the growing interest in the use of visual methodologies in empirical research across the arts, humanities and social sciences, there has been an explosion of participatory and creative research methods that abandoned the notion of the distant observer (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Using focus groups, performance, group interviews or narrative enquiries in the research context are examples of such participatory approaches. This development depicts a range of qualitative studies in which researchers produce knowledge by engaging in interdisciplinary perspectives and practices (Luttrell and Chalfen 2010). Josh Packard (2008) agrees that actively including individuals is a valuable benefit of creative research methods. He argues they reduce the power disparity between the researcher and the researched in order to produce new

knowledge that cannot be created any other way. The notion of knowledge is key here. A collaborative approach enables participants to generate new knowledge and insights through their lived experiences. Equally, the knowledge of the investigator is no less important in this process, as it is the responsibility of the researcher to articulate the theories of the lived experiences as well as the local, subjective knowledge that emerges from the research participants (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006). Researchers are accountable for producing work that is socially meaningful, and that the relationship between academics, universities and society must change; using participatory research may be the vehicle and key strategy for this proposed change (Gray and Malins 2004; Knowles and Sweetman 2004).

Advantages and strengths of qualitative visual research tools help unpack the specific and diverse visual perception of research participants. It enables them to take part on their own terms, explore the ways in which they perceive and experience the world, and express their ideas in ways that are meaningful to them (Tolfree and Woodhead 1999). As several researchers of qualitative studies argue, the issues of 'voice', inclusion, empowerment and collaboration are central to helping vulnerable young people, who might otherwise be left out of research projects, reflect on their lived experiences (Aldridge 2012; Banks 2001, 2007; Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006; Luttrell 2010; Packard 2008; Prosser 1998, 2011; Tinkler 2008; Yates 2010).

The last decade has seen a proliferation of visual methods in participatory studies across the arts, humanities and social sciences. Drawings, collages, maps, photographs and video diaries are only a few creative methods included in the repertoire of participant-focused studies. This development sees a shift from largely using visual imagery as illustrations to reinforce a text-based context, to analysing the lived experiences and subjective perspectives of research participants (Chalfen 2011b; Gold 2007; Joanou 2009; Luttrell 2010; Prosser 2007, 2011; Rose 2012, 2014b). Advocating the use of creative methods, Gregory Stanczak argues, "we must acknowledge the empirical components of the image while embracing the compelling challenges and opportunities of subjectivity and the potential emotional impact of making and reading images" (2007: 7). In an environment where photographs are ubiquitous, it is important to work collaboratively with participants to trigger their own views, meanings and interpretations of their images (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006; Samuels 2007). Using photo elicitation is a productive way to extract the unique perspectives in participants' photographic practices and photographs (Harper 2002). The method can involve participant-generated, researcher-generated or found photographs, which are used

within the research context to discuss the meaning and intentions of image-makers' images (Guillemin and Drew 2010; Harper 2002; Rose 2012). Although it is not a novel technique (Collier 1967), it is used to introduce photographs to the context of the research interview and promote reflections that words alone cannot (Clark-Ibañez 2007).

Considering the aim of this investigation was to explore the photographic practices as ways of seeing and being-in-the-world of young male adults with ASD, this study used photo elicitation as a method to gather research data during the interview process, and ultimately answer the research questions. This approach further enabled participants to describe and interpret their own images in their own words, and explain the choices they made before triggering the shutter release (Gold 2007; Samuels 2007). Despite its productivity for eliciting insights from participants, using photo elicitation alone is not enough and should be used in combination with other research methods (Aldridge 2007; Harper 2002; Joanou 2009; Packard 2008). Gray and Malins (2004) affirm that mixing various compatible research methods is more likely to produce a meaningful, critical and holistic view. The following section will briefly discuss some reasons for mixing methods to carry out research studies.

4.3. Advantages of adopting a mixed-method approach

Rather than relying on just one creative and qualitative research method to generate and interpret participants' research findings, this study employed observation, semi-structured interviews, photo elicitation, photo/visual diaries and fieldnotes in order to gather and unpack participants' specific and diverse social and personal realities (Prosser 1998, 2011; Rose 2014b). Images are part of how people learn, experience and know, as well as how they visually communicate, express and present knowledge. In research contexts, photographs may inspire conversations, or a discussion might invoke images; photographs have no intrinsic meaning attached to them and are interpreted with "no single 'correct' answer'" (Hall 1997: 9). A mixed-method approach prompts participants to discuss their lived experiences, vision and perspectives as the image-makers (Pink 2009, 2012b, 2013). This idea is supported by Jonathan Marion and Jerome Crowder who highlight that

> images have an impact. They convey meanings… Because images surround us, it is easy to overlook what goes into making and producing them – work that is always based on particular viewpoints.
>
> (Marion and Crowder 2013: 3)

It is important to use suitable and diverse methods in the research process and actively

engage image-makers to discuss and interpret their own photographs (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006). Adopting a reflexive position further indicates that integrating interviews and photo elicitation underline the participant's role in influencing the creation of visual images (Emerson et al. 2011; Guillemin and Drew 2010; Harper 2002; Lapenta 2011; Samuels 2007; Stanczak 2007). This approach emphasises the role of the 'bricoleur', the researcher who adopts a mixed-methods approach in the research process in order to explore the diverse meanings that photographs carry (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). In light of this, it was central to the methodology of this study to employ different qualitative research methods in order to elicit meanings, intentions and interpretations of participants' photographic practices, and most importantly, to use the findings to answer the research questions. The next section offers an overview of qualitative studies with vulnerable children and young adults using photography in the research process. The purpose of this section is to discuss examples of how qualitative studies employ methodologies and methods with participants, as these studies informed the methodology of this investigation.

4.4. Using photography in the research process

Photography's long and diverse history plays a substantial role in qualitative research with people, going back to the colonial period between 1860 and 1920 (Edwards 1992).[34] Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which scholars approach photography in their research. The first is to take existing or found photographs and explore their production, uses and meanings (Heywood and Sandywell 1999; Rose 2012; Schirato and Webb 2004); the second approach is for participants or researchers to produce photographs as part of the research process (Harper 2002; Pauwels 2015; Pink 2006, 2013). Both these approaches can be combined, supporting different methodologies to include photography as a core element in research studies (Pink 2013). The research studies included in this overview employ either of these approaches to explore young people's everyday photography.

It is important to ensure that children and young people are given the opportunity to participate in studies that include photography, not least to be able to visually and creatively express themselves, as well as share their insights in relation to the medium (Barker and Smith 2012; Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006; Packard 2008; Thomson and

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[34] There is a large number of studies that adopt youth-centred perspectives and photography as a tool to explore particular aspects in the lives of young people. See, for example, Poser (2006); Prosser and Burke (2007). There are also studies using photo voice as a "process by which people can identity, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique" (Wang and Burris 1997: 369), including Denov et al. (2012); Joanou (2009); Kaplan et al. (2007); Povee et al. (2014).

Hall 2008; Tinkler 2008). A growing number of scholars from different academic fields of study carry out research with children and young people to explore the ways they use photography in their everyday lives (Aldridge 2007, 2012; Awan and Gauntlett 2013; Murray 2008a, 2013). Although photography is at the heart of these studies, the following analysis demonstrates they differ in their aims, methodologies and outcomes.

Critical of the way the medium is often used in research with children and young people, Penny Tinkler argues that despite the increase of qualitative studies in this area, "very little is known about young people's photographic practices – that is, the range of ways and media through which young people take, feature in, and use photographs" (2008: 255). While Tinkler's analysis does not include a participatory and detailed empirical part, she analyses empirical studies to explore the relationship between photography and "aspects of childhood, youth and growing up [that] are often… expressed in part through photographic practices" (2008: 255), including questions of belonging, identity and memory. By distinguishing between 'the photo-method approach', 'the photo-making approach' and 'the culture of photographic technologies approach', Tinkler maps out the advantages and disadvantages of each approach, before concluding that they are not sufficient enough to provide insights into "how [young people] actually *use* and *think about* photographs and photography" (2008: 257, original italics). She proposes an analytical framework for exploring young people's photographic practices that comprises of four key elements. First, the context, in which photographic images are created; second, the materiality and meaning of the photographs; third, the access to and engagement with photographic equipment; and fourth, historical views to contextualise current practices. Tinkler's model seems to offer a productive way for approaching the study of photographic practices, as well as for gaining a nuanced insight into young people's lived experiences and their distinct ways of seeing the world through the medium.

Phil Mizen's (2005) image-based study includes photo-diary techniques in his investigation on the working lives of school-age children in England and Wales. Interested in moving beyond photography's illustrative role to offer deeper insights of participants' working lives, Mizen argues that photo-diaries of children's 'light work' can offer "a valuable, possibly unique, source of insight into the character, form, process and social relations that govern the economy of child employment in a wealthy nation" (2005: 125).[35] Photo-diaries enabled his participants to portray and record their work lives in a

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[35] 'Light work' is the term used in official discourse on child labour, and defined as "work unlikely to cause harm or to interfere with a child's education, and a permissible activity for children ages 13 and over" (Dorman 2001, cited in Mizen 2005: 124).

self-reflective way, leaving decisions about what and what not to photograph to the participants. Mizen was initially presented with "a sense of disappointment" (2005: 128) because the photographs did not depict the things and issues that the children had previously revealed in interviews and written diaries, questioning whether photographs offer researchers with a distinctive order of data (Prosser 1998). Through an increasing understanding of what the images represent, Mizen realised that the photographs advanced his understanding of what the children were actually doing. For example, rather than capturing the busy days they referred to in the interviews, they photographed empty rooms and spaces, essentially adding to a more complete representation of their working lives. Therefore, while mainly using visual research methods, Mizen's empirical study presents an example of a multi-method approach that illuminates the dynamics of children's working lives.

Standing in contrast to Mizen's single-context approach to the working lives of children, Rochelle Woodley-Baker's (2009) qualitative study analyses the complexity of young women's diverse identities as experienced in multiple roles whilst they are in part-time secondary education. She employs the visual method of photo-narrative, a process that enables participants to create personal and reflective photographic narratives that frame, interpret and present their lived experiences and social world. Photographs are characteristically polysemic in the viewing process and engender many meanings; it is only through the participants' corresponding remarks that the intended meanings come to the fore. As Woodley-Baker explains, "[n]arratives… are an interpretation of the actual story or experience, therefore treating a narration as an actively creative enterprise both highlights and acknowledges a version of self, reality and experience that is produced through the telling" (2009: 28). Facilitating the processes of 'auto-photography' and photo elicitation to combine photographs and their narratives, Woodley-Baker considers photo-narrative a productive method in the investigation and representation of identity, subjectivity and the expression of self. To illustrate this, photographs by participants that depict, for example, empty spaces or family members could have several meanings; yet, the meanings of loneliness and the role of being a carer, respectively, only emerge through the process of photo elicitation. Together, images and comments "give a particular depth to understanding the struggle of some young people 'fronting up' each day" (2010: 27). Woodley-Baker's study and the use of photo-narrative is an example of a productive combination that enables participants to depict, interpret and reflect upon their experiences of crossing multiple identities between student, adult, youth and parent.

Studies that provide research participants with cameras in order to engage them in the research process are widespread, without necessarily categorising them under the rubric of 'photo voice' projects (Durrant et al. 2011; Gallo 2002). An example of such research is Alan Radley's (2010) study that explores how hospital in-patients and homeless people talk about photographs they have taken as part of the research process, and what they do with those photographs. Although his study works with adult participants and not young people, Radley's research is noteworthy here, in particular because he highlights there is no single 'voice' that photographs make audible. Instead, he underlines there are different ways of narrating content and image production, concluding that photographs "are better thought of as versions of our experience than as constructions of the world we experience" (2010: 268). He adds that these versions are created, selected, put together and shared with others at a particular time. Using photo-production, a term he claims is "richer in potential than the methodologically inclined term *photo-elicitation*" because it enables participants to discuss how they made their photographs (2010: 268, original italics), Radley argues that people make distinct choices in the process of photographically communicating their experiences, making some things visible, while hiding others.

Given Radley's participants were either hospitalised or homeless, their photographic practices were constrained or compromised. Still, they offered a wide range of photographs that varied in their depicted contents, and which were discussed in follow-up interviews. In the case of a photograph portraying a hospital dayroom, for example, it only became clear through discourse that the participant "appropriate[d] the dayroom as a private space where she can cry in the act of collecting herself together" (2010: 273). Similarly, a homeless man revealed after showing a photograph of him standing on the Embankment with the Houses of Parliament as the backdrop, that he "not only aspired to be like domiciled people, but also asserted a claim that he should be treated in this way" (2010: 275). Another homeless person maintained in the follow-up interview that his photographs of the river Thames "*express*, rather than just denote, his distance from domiciled people" (ibid., original italics), sustaining that homelessness was "something from which… it was impossible to break away" (ibid.). The idea that individuals are actively involved in the visual construction of their social reality is well-established; Radley's use of photo-production facilitated a collaborative approach to research in which asking participants to "make their own photographs and talk about them was crucial to comprehending not only *what* they wanted to show us but also *how* they went about doing so" (2010: 278, original italics).

To summarise, the overview started with Tinkler's (2008) proposed conceptual framework for investigating the photography of young people, with a focus on better understanding how they use and think about the technology. Through careful analysis of previous studies, Tinkler identifies four key elements to develop a more comprehensive picture of young people's contemporary photographic practices, and more generally of a young generation that grows up with digital technologies. While none of the examined studies in this section adopted Tinkler's framework, overall the investigations engaged with young people who were given the opportunity to produce, represent and reflect upon their own photographs as part of the research process. Insights generated from these studies reinforce the strengths and advantages of participant-focused investigations. The researchers developed the methodologies and chose research methods in line with the research questions, aims, and more importantly, in relation to the 'voice', skills, abilities and interests of research participants. Mizen (2005), for example, limited his instructions and left decisions of what and how to photograph work places to the sensibilities and agency of the children. His approach revealed that not only interviews but also photographs enabled children to expose and reflect upon the experiences of their working lives.

Comparably, Woodley-Baker (2009) employed photo-narratives to enable her participants to produce, interpret and represent personal accounts of their lived experiences and multiple social identities. The method offered young women the opportunity to take photographs of their friends and families, as well as their school environments in which the study was located, as people and contexts formed participants' multiple identities and their regular crossing between them. It was only through participants' corresponding narratives that photographs presented meanings. In some cases, it emerged that young women were also carers of family members, which photographs alone did not reveal. It is important to develop a methodology that facilitates reflexivity around photographs and narratives of lived experiences.

In Radley's (2010) study, on the other hand, participants were restricted in their photographic practices, but they produced rich material that generated insights into the lived experiences of hospital in-patients and homeless people. Here, it was the use of photo-production that helped participants reflect on their images throughout all steps of their involvement in the research process, as the method included decisions around what they chose to photograph, and what not, and which photographs they chose to show and which not. These choices in the process of doing photography stress the significance of offering participants research methods and opportunities in which they can engage in

empirical studies. It is pertinent to fully include the image-makers in studies that draw on the complexity of their own photographs, lived experiences and complex identities. The methodologies and methods in these studies vary, yet at the heart of their enquiries is always the strong combination of engaging participants with photographs, narratives and reflexivity.

To conclude this section, these studies facilitate a collaborative approach that enables participants to provide "expert testimony about their experiences, associations and lifestyles" (Thomson 2008: 1). The unique and specific insights about participants' habitual photographic practices generate information that enriches the scholarship on everyday photography, particularly because participants offer their own interpretations of their own photographic images. More importantly, it is not possible to write about a particular social group as if they had one voice, especially if that group has been marginalised in research, as it seems to be with autistic people. Next, Part II offers a comprehensive overview of the methodology of this study.

Part II

4.5. Rationale and approach to this study

My research interest in the photographic practices of young male adults with ASD was initially triggered by on-going observations about the use of photographs and photographic practices across a number of charities and disability-led arts organisations, which I was professionally involved with over a period of seven years. As a media and communications advisor and photographer, it was part of my role to promote the work of the different charities to media outlets and external stakeholders. Over time, I became conscious of a personal conflict between my roles and my apprehension of the stereotypical representations of vulnerable people for fundraising and advertising purposes. The media and communication messages I delivered to external stakeholders strengthened the charities' positions as those in charge of helping vulnerable people, yet without having a self-reflexive stance or acknowledgement of the power relation they were fostering – similar to Hevey's (1992) three-stage framework outlined in chapter three. Through my involvement and professional work, I became increasingly critical of the charities and their use of imagery, which was further cultivated by their claims of

accomplishment and pride in their work. More importantly, I always noticed that promotional photographs were taken *of* vulnerable people, but never *by* them, notwithstanding the occasional photography project run by charities, which was barely promoted or talked about once finished, and quickly found its way into the charity's archive without ever being exposed again. This was something I wanted to further explore. Initial research on the photography scholarship concerning vulnerable people brought to the fore that the focus was mainly on the representation of physical disabilities, with limited studies actively including disabled people in the research process. Qualitative research on the photographic practices of disabled people has been by and large neglected. As a result of my research, I was able to better understand my intuitive criticisms towards charities, on the one hand, and my interest in doing empirical research with vulnerable people, on the other.

With the objective to find a new angle on these issues, further examination revealed that few qualitative enquiries were done with autistic people in relation to photography. From the beginning, it was the notion of their 'different ways of seeing' that was of interest to me. Given the significance of seeing and vision in photography, I wanted to turn the camera from an observer to a participant; rather than taking photographs of vulnerable people, I sought to see and understand images taken by them, yet not in the context of a community/social work project, but with an intellectual understanding of how photographic practices and images mediate people's everyday life. I designed the research as an investigation into the everyday photographic practices of young people with ASD. Initially, I sought to adopt a visual ethnographic approach, and observe the photographic practices of people with ASD before setting up face-to-face interviews to discuss their photography with them. I was further encouraged to adopt this methodology after meeting a parent of a non-verbal autistic teenager; the parent told me that I could observe the teenager during several bus journeys, as he enjoyed taking photographs then. Further research outlined the advantages of doing ethnography with vulnerable young people and photography across the arts, humanities and social sciences (Aldridge 2007, 2012; Tinkler 2008; Woodley-Baker 2010; Yates 2010). However, as the following account reveals, I did not use ethnography with the four participants in this investigation.

During the initial stages of my research study, I became involved in a number of activities with autistic people in order to develop my understanding of the disorder. For a year, I volunteered at an arts-based, non-residential service provider for autistic people in London, where I observed people affected by ASD whilst engaging them in visual arts

practices, such as drawing. The key insights I gained during that time were from a service user who had a particular way of progressing with drawings of patterns the service user created. After outlining the pattern with a black marker, the service user continued with colour markers in a precise order to fill in the spaces, always preferring to add a nuance of pink in the artworks (Figures 4.1 - 4.3, Appendix 5). Another interesting observation I made was from a service user who took many selfies on a smartphone. These observations enabled me to develop a nuanced understanding of ASD and insights into autistic individuals' visuality and photography.

Soon after starting volunteering, I was trained through the NAS and became a mentor for a teenager with Asperger syndrome, and we met once a week for six months. Interested in art and doing photography, the teenager expressed an enthusiasm for visiting art galleries during the times we met. Sometimes we also went to local animal farms, seeing that the teenager liked feeding animals and being around them. On rainy days, we often went to the local library to read books. During the time of my mentoring experience, I found it particularly interesting to observe the teenager's photographic practices, and found out that the teenager did not like to take new photographs before the previous ones on the camera were downloaded and organised in folders and under particular events. Interestingly, the teenager used PowerPoint to create collages before posting them on her Facebook profile, which the teenager only shared with family members. I had a very positive experience with the teenager through the NAS, but due to my role as a mentor, I was not allowed to recruit her for my study.

Regardless of what activities we carried out during the times we met, I always observed the teenager and her unique habits, and wrote my reflections down in fieldnotes, like I did with all my observations during other engagements. The most 'thick descriptions' I made was during a week-long experience at an autistic school in London that I contacted thinking I would perhaps find teenagers interested in photography there. Following a meeting with the head teacher at the autistic school, we agreed that I would observe the pupils aged between 11 and 16 for a week, before making a decision regarding their involvement in my study. The pupils were mostly non-verbal and often displayed resistant behaviour, which quickly filled me with concern and doubt over their suitability to participate in my research. Moreover, the school rigorously followed ABA principles (Applied Behaviour Analysis, which was established in the 1960s and refers to interventions that are developed from a branch of science called behaviour analysis). I strongly disagree with ABA, due to the controversy around the therapy, and because ABA is shaped by the biomedical community that views disability as a deficit and in need

to be cured or 'fixed' (Oliver 1996). Lastly, as another way of establishing contacts and potentially finding research participants, I initiated meetings with parents of autistic teenagers, either to meet individually, or during parent group meetings that were supported or run by ASD charities. These group meetings were good opportunities to distribute information sheets about my study, but not for directly observing or engaging people with ASD. Overall, these engagements helped me develop an understanding of ASD, since they involved individuals with different diagnoses of ASD.

More importantly, a few points of contention arose, which strengthened the need to re-evaluate my proposed methodology, and ways of including autistic people in my study. First, discussions about photographic practices revealed the extent to which individuals were interested in photography. This interest varied between being merely interested in looking at photographs, learning to take photographs but having limited experience at the time, and a few who were already doing photography on a regular basis. Second, the ways of being involved in the study raised questions due to individuals' autistic behaviour. Among the individuals I came in touch with, most were non-verbal. Given my limited experience in autism, communicating with non-verbal individuals challenged the ways of involving them in my research. Third, the decision-making proved difficult for parents or guardians responsible for the individuals, which was largely based on my proposed time-frame of being involved for 6-9 months, including weeks of non-participation in between the three stages that I initially planned, so I could use that time to analyse the data. In short, I was told this was too time-consuming to commit to. With this in mind, these three factors caused me to re-evaluate my methodology. If I was to include high-functioning people with ASD who were already doing photography on a regular basis, to participate in my study, I needed to change aspects of my methodology, including reducing the stages from three to two, and not employing ethnographic approach. For one, many people with ASD did not like to be observed and reacted to that with resistant behaviour. While I initially developed the methodology through research studies with vulnerable people, I quickly learned that studies with autistic people had to be approached differently. Since I was interested in exploring their everyday photographic practices without teaching them how to use the medium, it became clear that I was looking for high-functioning people with ASD, who already owned cameras as part of their everyday lives. The detailed recruitment process will follow in Part II.

Following my previous experience, I realised that I had to look elsewhere for participants. Autistic schools, organisations and autism charities did not seem to attract

high-functioning individuals on the autism spectrum. These were fairly independent people with fairly independent lives. They were able to communicate their sensory issues and how they affected their perception and experience of the world. I recognised the significance of concentrating on the senses, and decided to take a phenomenological approach to my study. As a result, the study presented in this thesis was a qualitative, visual investigation, in which my role was defined as a researcher, observer and facilitator, while participants carried out the role of photographers and experts on their lived experiences and subjective perspectives.

The investigation drew on visual methodologies to integrate the photographic practices, knowledge and personal experiences from the young male adults with ASD who took part. In the light of this objective, it is important to point out that participants' photographs were not merely considered a novel addition in this study, limited to their basic illustrative role. Rather, the photographic images created in this research context were part of the meaning-making creation that was "a co-construction between the participant, the researcher, the audience/s and the images themselves" (Drew and Guillemin 2004: 56-57). The individuals in this study were part of the co-production of knowledge, and their photographs were visual data that informed the theoretical and interpretive frameworks that underpin this study (Banks 2001; Drew and Guillemin 2014; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Mitchell 2011; Pink 2013; Prosser 1998, 2007, 2011; Stanczak 2007; Thomson 2008). This established the quality of this investigation, which replaced the terms 'validity' and 'reliability' that are conventionally used across quantitative studies with positivist approaches. These terms and approaches are not suitable for this qualitative study, which adopts the work of Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba who make "the assumption of multiple constructed realities", rather than a "single tangible reality" (1985: 295). Lincoln and Guba offer a five-point criterion list for naturalistic investigations; in addition to 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability', and 'auditing', they also suggest using 'authenticity'.

In order to analyse, interpret and understand the collection, production and dissemination of visual aspects and perceptions, as well as in-depth descriptions of photography's expressive and communicative capability, it was vital to sidestep an "overly rigid structure" in this study (Packard 2008: 66). In tandem, it was equally significant to be as systematic, constant and simple as possible (Pink 2013; Rose 2012). As Luc Pauwels observes, some research studies are less systematic and

> hop from celebratory accounts of the iconic and indexical powers of the visual to the presentation of the found or produced visual data, without paying much attention to sketching out the tedious path in between.
>
> (Pauwels 2011: 4)

This study sought to be systematic and describe all aspects that led to the collection, analysis and presentation of the visual material. Similar to Pauwels' argument, Drew and Guillemin criticise the lack of attention that is given to the rigorous analysis and interpretation of participant-generated visual images, and propose a framework for 'interpretive engagement' that addresses this shortfall. With a focus on describing the process for meaning-making of participant-generated photographs, Drew and Guillemin recommend three stages that, when used in combination, "provide rich and comprehensive visual analysis" (2014: 54). In the light of these critiques, it was paramount for this study to develop a methodology that was visual, sensory and reflexive, and that created a dynamic process that was in line with the photographic experiences, interests, skills and understandings of the research participants. An adaptable and collaborative orientation as part of the methodological repertoire helped address the analytical complexities that are integrated in the analysis and interpretation of photographs, and qualitative visual research more general. It further generated rapport and elicited information from participants that I may have otherwise never received (Chalfen 2011a; Pink 2013; Prosser 2007; Prosser and Burke 2007; Rose 2012; Stanczak 2007). It is also important to stress that collaboration and adaptation in the research process alone were not sufficient to ensure a rigorous analysis of the photographs was carried out. Rather, the study built on the analytical work of visual scholars who developed appropriate frameworks for the analysis and interpretation of visual data (Banks 2007; Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Drew and Guillemin 2014; Flick 2007, 2014; Rose 2012; Walter 2016).

4.6 Ethical considerations

Following ethical approval from the College of Arts and Humanities at University of Brighton, I thoroughly explained the study and what it meant to be involved before I obtained verbal and written informed consent from the participants. In some cases, I had preliminary meetings that were not recorded but gave me the opportunity to explain the study in full. Copies of all forms and information sheets were made and given to the participants next time we met, and information sheets were additionally emailed to

participants and parents/guardians.[36] Given the focus on photography in this study, it was paramount to discuss and reinforce that the ownership of photographs taken by participants remained with them as the image-makers. I carefully considered and explained the dissemination of their photographs, that is, what audiences the participants' images might have, and what each audience may do with the images (Rose 2012). Participants seemed to understand the nature of the dissemination was to share photographs with an academic audience through, for example, presentations, journal articles, exhibitions and the PhD thesis.[37]

The dissemination of images and information was detailed and written permission was sought from each participant to assign copyright to me for the subsequent use of each image in the research. Participants were given the opportunity to revisit decisions they had made throughout the study (Wiles et al. 2008). Ethical concerns were addressed on an on-going basis; new consent and permissions were sought as the project evolved and more photographs were taken, allowing for constant reflexivity and collaboration in the research process. Another issue that emerged as meetings were completed, was bridging the time between the two stages. Some participants and their parents/guardians showed impatience and asked when we could meet again, or even why we had not met in weeks. Although I had thoroughly explained the study at the beginning, it was necessary to remind them and explain again that gaps were necessary due to the time I needed to transcribe interviews and analyse data so further meetings could be planned effectively, including asking questions that clarified things participants had said. It was indeed a challenge for me to negotiate the time in between stages, and ensure not too much time had passed before we met again.

As a responsible researcher, it was vital to take into account the full range of ethical considerations and implications involved in working with vulnerable people, as well as in making, using, and disseminating their images as part of this study (Banks 2001; Chalfen 2011a; Mitchell 2011; Pink 2013). Involving vulnerable people in research raises a number of ethical issues, which generally relate to the contextual factors that differentiate studies with vulnerable people from other forms of empirical research, including the way in which their lives are structured by various institutions and contexts, and the relative powerlessness they often experience as a group within the research process (Brooks and Riele 2013; Heath et al. 2009). It is fundamental to protect their

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[36] Participant information sheet and consent form can be read in Appendix 6.
[37] Some of the photographs taken by the participants in this study were displayed in a research student exhibition at University of Brighton; see Appendix 7.

identities, confidentiality, rights, privacy, dignity and well-being in the processes of knowledge-production and meaning-making (Wiles et al. 2008).

While it was significant to this study to maintain participants' photographs and quotations the exact way they were captured and shared with me as part of their own meaning-making and knowledge-production, it was also my responsibility to protect participants' identities at all times, including during meetings that took place in public spaces, and when disseminating research during and after completing the participatory phase of the study. For example, as discussed with, and ultimately decided by, participants, I always included their first name in relation to their photographs and comments but never revealed specific details of where photographs were taken, the locations of our meetings or where participants lived. If participants had taken photographs of themselves or other people, it would have been necessary to negotiate issues around anonymity and identity of individuals depicted in the photographs, for example, by blurring the faces of individuals who were recognisable. Although the depiction of people was not an issue, I did anonymise the locations and environments where participants took photographs by way of not providing specific names of locations or detailed descriptions that could have led to the identification of places, which was mostly crucial when participants lived or worked there (Eglinton 2013). When locations were easily identifiable in photographs, I decided not to use those images when disseminating research; instead, I kept them and related discussions I had with individuals to develop my understanding of their image-making processes. I also clarified with participants they understood the consequences of depicting places that were easily identifiable. This practice was necessary to protect participants' (or other people's) identities. Overall, participants created enough photographs that I could use for the dissemination of research. Protecting participants' identities, confidentiality and privacy was further linked to participants' vulnerability, considering they were young and disabled people, which also meant that it was required for me to obtain a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check prior to starting working with them.

Negotiating issues around their vulnerability and confidentiality were at times challenging. Although I 'opened up' to participants to establish trust and level the hierarchies that are deeply embedded in qualitative research studies, it was equally important to remain detached and avoid "return[ing] from the 'field' feeling emotionally drained" (Eglinton 2013: 259). Kristen Eglinton (2013) discusses the division continuously produced between researchers and participants in qualitative research. Further challenges for me proved to be the negotiation of relationships, the tensions

between the 'field' and the 'real life', and between the personal and the professional during this investigation (Eglinton 2013; Fahie 2014). While it was imperative to establish rapport with participants by being open and friendly, it was also important to maintain a professional relationship with them, and ensure I exercised my power and 'privilege' to move on from situations that affected me emotionally. This created a challenge not only in regard to the participants, but also when their parents started sharing personal information with me that was not relevant to the study, such as family issues. I usually navigated around this by (re-)starting a conversation about photography with the participant so the focus of the dialogue would shift back to the study, but I often felt uncomfortable in those situations. This further caused me to question both my role as the researcher and the inherent tensions in the formation of the relationship between me and the participant, and between me and the parent.

Being uncomfortable is not an uncommon experience in the process of doing research, but the literature on research methods and methodologies tends to present research as if it is an easy, straightforward process with one step after another, which, if followed closely, will go well. When dealing with people, especially vulnerable individuals, and sensitive topics, doing research is not uncomplicated or straightforward.[38] Declan Fahie acknowledges the challenges researchers, in particular inexperienced researchers who are at the beginning of their career, face when navigating around methodological and ethical issues in the research process. Drawing on his own doctoral research on workplace bullying, Fahie describes a situation in which one participant called him at any time during the day, on a weekly basis over the course of a year. He explains, "I was deeply uncomfortable with what I felt was an intrusion into my personal life" (2014: 23). Coupled with another experience during his research that evoked similar feelings, Fahie highlights "the unpredictable nature of research with human subjects, particularly when the focus of the research is a highly personal or sensitive topic" (2014: 25). As this example shows, it is important to highlight the challenges that arise when doing research that involves people or sensitive and personal topics (Andrews 2004; Brayda and Boyce 2014; Eglinton 2013; Mitchell and Irvine 2008). While it is of central importance to safeguard the research participant(s), "it is also essential to acknowledge (and indeed, forestall) the potentially harmful consequences of the research process for the *researcher*" (Fahie 2014: 27, original italics). Researchers

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[38] Adopting Lee and Renzetti's (2014) definition of sensitive research that highlights the reciprocity of potential risk for all parties involved, the writers say sensitive research is research which "potentially poses for those involved a potential threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding and/or the dissemination of research data" (1990: 512, cited in Fahie 2014: 20).

have an ethical responsibility to understand the ways of knowing and their knowledge claims, as both shape the work researchers do.

4.7. The recruitment process

The NAS experience offered opportunities to advertise my study to potential participants, which I followed up. For example, I visited a few NAS branches in and around London to speak with parents of adolescents and young adults with ASD about my study. I provided printed copies of information sheets so parents could distribute them to potential participants. The interest was limited. I was later made aware by one NAS staff member that it would be difficult for autistic people to commit to a study without having met me in person. The engagement I had with their parents was seemingly not enough to convince or encourage them to get in touch with me regarding the study. A second opportunity to publicise my study was via the NAS website; I placed an advertisement with a call for participants and a description of my study on the charity's website for several months. Despite sharing the link to my study on mailing lists, the response rate was minimal, possibly partly because I limited my call to people living in or near London. While I received a number of emails saying things like "the project sounds really interesting", the outcome was not nearly as positive. I experienced that organisations, institutions, autistic individuals' guardians and parents served as gatekeepers, as I was never given the opportunity to talk to a person with autism directly until they gave consent to participate in the study. Given the vulnerability of people with ASD, this was not surprising. Initial discussions were held with people in charge of, or responsible for, autistic people.

Additional routes I have taken to find potential participants included contacting other autism charities and organisations, for example Families Living with Autism in Greenwich (FLAG), Creativity 1695, Lewisham Autism Support Project and Barnardo's UK. An initial email and/or phone call that explained the project was followed by providing the contact person of the organisation with a more detailed information sheet, stating my interest in recruiting between 20-25 young people with ASD aged between 14 and 25 years old to participate in Stage 1 of the project. Two of those charities offered to add information about my study into their next newsletter to local members. I also approached schools for pupils with ASD, but to no avail.

This study worked with high-functioning people with ASD. A higher level of functioning was required for people to participate in the discussions and participatory visual methods used in this study. More importantly, I sought to recruit individuals who

were already to some degree involved with photography at the outset of the study. While research methods can be changed and adapted to embrace the skills and abilities of participants, a core element and aim of this investigation was to study the photographic practices of people with ASD who were already doing photography in their everyday lives. As a result, this study recruited four white male adults with ASD. They were aged 18 to 25 and from a middle-class background. Crucially, it was not an imposed selection criteria from the beginning of this study to recruit a sample of white male adults and therefore create a gender bias. Following several routes to recruit participants through autism charities and individual connections I made, the sample is the result of four male adults interested in participating in my study. Interestingly, the four male adults arguably reflect the higher diagnostic rate of ASD in males (Grinker 2008; Murray 2008b).

All four individuals with ASD whom I ultimately recruited were found through personal recommendations, networking opportunities and individual meetings with parents. They were from different geographical locations and were not connected with each other. Comparing this to the 'large-scale' approach of advertising my study on websites and in newsletters, the positive effect of recruiting my participants through personal contacts was the ability to establish a good (and quicker) rapport with the participants. As a result of this, there was both a need and an opportunity to go deeper into the experiences and insights of a small sample and offer the 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) and richness of detail that enables the provision of a voice for the four participants, rather than working with a larger number of participants in less depth. The four participants were doing photography prior to their involvement in this investigation, and used the medium to various degrees in their everyday lives. Given their interest and abilities, participants were ready to discuss and reflect on their practices and photographs in individual sessions, which were carried out between October 2014 and March 2016, which includes six months between June and December 2015 in which no participant was involved in the study. While the number of sessions varied between four and twelve, depending on participants' time and level of involvement in this study, a considerable volume of data was collected throughout this study; precisely, 126 photographs, 30 hours of transcripts and my own fieldnotes from observations made during fieldwork.

4.8. The study design

Part I established that an effective and successful interaction between the researcher and the participants could be achieved through a participatory and visual framework.

Given the focus on participants and emphasis on photography, this study intended to be consistent with its research questions, aims and theoretical framework, and employed a rigorous visual methodology with a mixed-method approach to generate evidence and gain an understanding of the photographic practices of young male adults with ASD. Exploratory in nature, the investigation aimed to be as inclusive as possible by designing the methodology in line with participants' abilities, experiences, strengths and interests. A collaborative approach opened up more ways of generating insights about participants' photographic practices, contributed to a richer investigation, and ultimately helped answering the research questions (Prosser and Burke 2007). My year-long volunteering involvement developed my observation skills and enabled me to use my experience and knowledge I had gained of ASD to further develop the design of this investigation. These observations established my understanding of vision and, in some cases, of photography in relation to ASD, which further enriched this study.

The advantages and strengths of using visual research methods enabled the participants to discuss their photographs in a self-reflective way, and provided an opportunity to develop their skills and perspectives of their own lives and identities (Eglinton 2013; Mitchell 2011; Rose 2012, 2014b). Photography and photo elicitation were adaptable to individuals' capabilities and competences, and enabled them to take part on their own terms (Tolfree and Woodhead 1999). The latter notion is important. As Lyn Yates argues, "the use of participatory visual methods with young people is usually linked to a desire to allow them to have some greater voice in the fields of research" (2010: 280). By being as systematic, constant and simple as possible (Pink 2013), this study adopted a flexible approach in its design, which allowed the creative process of photography to develop depth and variability (McNiff 2007). Participants were encouraged to use and discuss their own photographs, and generate information that I may otherwise never reflect on (Packard 2008; Rose 2012; Springham 2008; Tinkler 2008).

Following my volunteering experience, I developed the design of this study by initially drawing on the volunteering experience and the literature on qualitative studies with vulnerable young people (Aldridge 2007; Joanou 2009; Pink 2006, 2013; Tinkler 2008; Yates 2010). I used participatory visual research methods, which provided participants with opportunities "to reflect on their lives and identities, and provide a source of data which [was] used to construct an understanding of [their] experiences from the[ir] point of view" (Eglinton 2013: 255). Once the four male participants were recruited, the study design was further tailored and methods were adapted or changed

according to their abilities, experiences, skills and interests (Packard 2008; Tinkler 2008). This was essential and aimed to "establish a rapport, prompt for further responses and be as unobtrusive as possible" (Aldridge 2007: 4). The methodology encouraged reflexivity in the research process and helped develop an in-depth understanding of everyday photography in relation to ASD.

The study included two stages that were carried out between October 2014 and March 2016, with the first participant starting in October 2014. Notably, the participants were not involved at the same time over this period. From the outset, photography provided a context in which participants felt confident, as they were already familiar and engaged with the medium prior to their involvement, taking photographs of many aspects and moments in their everyday lives. There was no need to explain to them how the technology worked, and they all used their own digital compact cameras or smartphones to take photographs for this study. Participants were motivated to use and experiment with the medium to self-reflect and illuminate their visual perception and specific and diverse social and personal realities. An affirmed confidence in the medium was central so participants were open to discuss their practices. This was important because the more 'formal' participant observation sessions that I had initially proposed did not take place, as all participants expressed concerns and discomfort with the idea of being observed, which prompted me to abandon this approach. Instead, individuals preferred to practice photography in their own time and on their own accord, which facilitated more genuine and accurate results of photographs that participants would take independently as part of the study, and discuss with me in individual and scheduled meetings. It is noteworthy that I gave participants no instructions on what and how to take photographs for this study, as it was important they felt at ease and reassured with their image-making, rather than overwhelmed and anxious from having to complete a 'task'. Participants were given many opportunities to discuss what they wanted to photograph; for example, individuals revealed their intentions of taking images at particular events and places they had planned to visit, or they discussed specific ideas they attempted to photograph. Despite their intentions, images were mostly taken spontaneously and without being previously discussed.

Generally speaking, photographs were taken in environments that were familiar to participants, and in which they spent time on a regular basis. Only very few photographs depicted people, and if individuals were portrayed, they formed part of the image background and appeared to be included unintentionally or accidentally, or persons were unidentifiable by facing their back to the camera (questioning whether they

were aware photographs were taken of them). The important point is that no consent needed to be sought from people depicted in participants' images. While there was no instance of individuals showing sexually explicit images, the approach of regularly discussing their intentions further limited the possibility of receiving and discussing images that would compromise my role as the researcher, as it gave me the chance to intervene if participants showed an interest in taking compromising photographs. Setting parameters for this study was key, and I discussed the consequences of taking photographs that identified people in direct (for example, by taking photographs of themselves) and indirect ways (for example, by taking images of locations that were easily recognisable and associated with individuals). Overall, participants appeared to feel confident in discussing their images in meetings, as these conversations offered individuals opportunities to reflect on their image-making and understand the self-reflective process of their photographic practices. Following the meetings, participants shared their images with me via email, or if they brought printed copies, they gave them to me afterwards, which I later scanned in order to have digital copies. Emails were never shared with third parties in order to protect participants' identities and confidentiality.

4.8.1. Stage 1

Using written information sheets, the study was clearly communicated to participants before and during the initial meeting that formed stage 1 of this investigation. Individuals kept the information sheets, which were additionally emailed to them so they could refer back to the information at any time, and reference anything that may have been unclear. The information that was communicated included:

- what was expected,
- what their participation involved,
- clarifying boundaries,
- ownership and issues around the copyright of the images,
- the right to withdraw from the study at any time,
- privacy issues and
- the dissemination and use of interview data and photographic work of the participants during the research study and afterwards

Initial meetings included semi-structured interviews that lasted one hour each. The meetings were arranged through the contact person of the participant, who was usually a parent or guardian, and who was also present during all meetings that took place. This approach showed the rigour under which this study operated by keeping ethical implications at the foreground. Participants were copied into the emails so they would be

aware of the conversations, but more importantly, that practice offered them the opportunity to get in touch with me directly if they wished to discuss any aspect of their involvement in this investigation. The meetings took place in venues the participants chose, and that were familiar places they had visited before. If those venues were public spaces, we chose to sit in quiet parts, as I was concerned that private and confidential information would be heard by the general public. However, apart from initial stage 1 meetings, succeeding sessions rarely took place in public venues in order to limit situations and concerns of sharing private information while being interviewed in public places (Brooks and Riele 2013).

Participants were asked to bring a few photographs they had taken within a few weeks of the first meeting, so I would gain an understanding of their current practices. It was their own choice and decision of what they wanted to show me, and how they wanted to present the images. Using photo elicitation during the first meeting enabled individuals to participate more fully in the research process by discussing their own images and meanings (Clark-Ibáñez 2008; Harper 2002; Samuels 2007). This method served as a communication bridge (Joanou 2009; Packard 2008), provided stimuli and the foundation for an in-depth interview, helped adopt individuals' gaze or point of view, and revealed something about their personalities. Interviews were fully recorded and transcribed, and available for participants if requested. Participants' views, responses and discussions during the stage 1 interview helped me develop a better understanding of participants' contemporary photographic practices. Importantly, their answers enabled the planning and development of stage 2 of this investigation.

4.8.2. Stage 2

Stage 2 of the research study consisted of several meetings, which were arranged between an ASD participant, his parent and myself as the researcher (as was the case with two participants); between an ASD participant, his guardian and myself (as was the case for one participant); and between an ASD participant and myself (as was the case for another participant). Sessions with individual participants and their parent/guardian took place over the course of three to seven months, depending on the individual participants and their level of interest and engagement in this study, as well as their time commitment. Meetings were scheduled with individual participants every three to five weeks, took place in venues and locations that participants chose, and lasted up to one hour. The sessions and their structure were discussed more broadly during the stage 1 interview, yet, individual stage 2 meetings were arranged with participants and their

parents/guardians in detail and on an on-going basis, usually at the end of previous meetings or via email, one or two weeks in advance. The scheduling of those meetings was determined by the progress that was made in previous sittings, as well as participants' motivation for producing new photographs that they wanted to discuss during the sessions. The latter was central, as meetings were more productive when participants created images that they later made available to discuss. Using photo elicitation, discussions generated knowledge and insights about their photographic practices, and therefore facilitated the data collection. It is imperative to stress here that participants found it difficult to join in with verbal exchanges between their parents/guardian and me, which were typically in form of small talk at the beginning of each session. The manifestation of ASD in participants also affected conversations between each individual participant and me during the meetings; as a consequence, verbal exchanges between participants and me often remained short, and merely focused on their photographic practices. This is not to say participants did not provide sufficient or good data. Quite the contrary, their involvement generated rich findings. It is important to underline the value of different kinds of data, and crucially, not define or perceive some participants, including ASD people and children, as less good respondents from the outset.

I also observed participants during the meetings, which formed part of my fieldnotes, since they all rejected the idea of me joining them on a day out photographing so I could directly observe their photographic image-making. It was therefore imperative that they provided access to their photographs during the sessions, as well as afterwards when they shared them with me via email. Some sessions did not include participants' photographs. These were used as follow-up sessions to talk about photographs that had not been discussed before, or things related to their photography, including whether they shared them on social media.

In order to protect the participants and myself, the sessions were joined by their parents or guardians who were told what their role was during the stage 1 meeting. This process followed ethical considerations outlined in section 4.6. The impact and effect of having parents or guardians joining the meetings varied immensely, and as a result, influenced the meetings and outcomes differently. Here, it is noteworthy to briefly reflect on the experience I had during the meetings with one participant. These meetings always involved one parent, who very often triggered or deepened conversations, for example, by recalling an event in the past that the participant photographed, but did not mention it during the session. As a result, conversations led to new insights and new

discoveries that were relevant to the photographic practices of the participant. The effect of the parent's involvement meant that the participant developed a reliance on his parent to contribute to conversations. The participant even acknowledged the parent would know him well and that he would step in if he disagreed with anything that was said. I found that very difficult to negotiate, as on the one hand, the parent did indeed generate information that was very valuable and may have otherwise gone unspoken. On the other hand, there was an issue around the notion of 'voice', as it was strictly speaking not always the participant who spoke, but often his parent. Although the participant appeared to agree to what the parent said, the involvement did mean that I missed many opportunities of direct quotes from this participant.

I found myself in the position of not being able to always express my concern when the parent was dominating the meetings, which were primarily arranged to talk to my participant. The parent was there for ethical reasons, which meant taking on a more passive role. Many times, the parent became aware of the interference and stopped, but other times was rather unaware and created a challenging situation, even if that was done unintentionally. While this experience was unique in the context of just one participant, it is important to acknowledge the issue of 'voice' and agency, especially in relation to vulnerable people, as well as the potential effect of including family members in the research process. Saying this differently, for ethical reasons it is important to include a person who is familiar with the research participant, yet it is equally crucial to ensure discussions and interviews are held between participants and the researcher, and not between the latter and a third party while the participant is present. Meetings with other participants also included parents and guardians, but they did not involve the same high intervention skills in prompting parents to step back and enable the participants to speak for themselves.

The majority of stage 2 sessions included photo elicitation, as participants were inspired to take photographs and discuss them as part of the research process. Without giving them any guidelines of what and how to take photographs, individuals produced photographs of subjects and environments that were meaningful to them, and shared the images we discussed via email, or gave me hard copies if they brought them to the meetings. Participants were also encouraged to use visual diaries during stage 2 to engage them in reflective and self-critical thinking and documentation of their own views, experiences and photographic work, as well as cultivate a sense of ownership of the study. Participants who used visual diaries spoke about them during meetings, yet, it was not a popular method for all of them.

4.9. Thematic analysis

As photographs inspire imaginations and record the eventful, they also capture something of the sensory richness and human inhabitation of the different environments that people inhabit. As Sandra Weber suggests, "[i]mages literally help us adopt someone else's gaze, see someone else's point of view, and borrow their experience for a moment" (2008: 45). Looking at someone else's photograph enables the viewer to see the photographer's vantage point of a particular event or moment. However, to fully understand and 'borrow' someone's experience, which constitutes all sensory modalities, it is not sufficient to merely engage with the visual content of the photograph, not least because there are diverse ways of seeing that entail different visions, perceptions, experiences and practices of visuality (Edwards 2012; Heywood and Sandywell 1999; Lury 2004). A photograph also involves many decisions the photographer makes before pressing the shutter release (Berger 2013). As Elizabeth Edwards (2012) maintains, photographic images cannot be analysed and interpreted through visual content alone, "but through an embodied engagement with an affective object world, which is both constitutive of and constituted through social relations" (2012: 221). Edwards focuses her approach on photographs and proposes that analytical approaches to photographs require an integrated understanding of the lived body, the domain of the social and an extended sensory realm that contains tactility, orality and haptic engagement. Edwards underlines that this approach triggers "an increasing analytical interest in photography as a phenomenologically and sensorially integrated medium, embodied and experienced by both its makers and its users" (2012: 228). Her approach is productive for this study, for it offers a comprehensive way of analysing and interpreting participants' photographs by going beyond merely looking at the visual content. Nonetheless, while this study draws on Edwards (2012), Rose (2012) and Drew and Guillemin's (2014) analytical framework of 'interpretive engagement' to analyse participants' photographic images, it largely employs thematic analysis to analyse both visual and written data that emerged from participants.

The strategy for selecting the data for analysis will be explained in this section, as it is essential to maintain a high level of transparency and avoid ambiguity in the analysis and discussion of the research findings in chapter five (Attride-Stirling 2001). Thematic analysis helps "unpack the inherent cultural meanings" within the selected data (Walters 2016: 107), and exposes the connections within the verbal and visual data collected during this investigation in order to interpret cultural and social meanings (Walter 2016). Following a set of criteria and six analytical phases in order to warrant trustworthiness of

the research data (Figure 4.4), this study adopted the analytical models advocated by Attride-Stirling (2001); Braun and Clarke (2006); Flick (2014) and Walters (2016); they helped with the selection of essential empirical data and the identification of the themes that emerged across the findings. Ensuring the analysis involved the recurring process of searching for patterns and similarities across the material (Walters 2016), two main themes and seven subthemes were identified. It was important to carry out this analytical process in a rigorous fashion, and identify each theme as a "concise and pithy statement of what was important in the various comments attached to a piece of transcript… usually expressed as phrases… [that] contain enough particularity to be grounded and enough abstraction to be conceptual" (Smith et al. 2009: 92). The six analytical steps carried out were (Figure 4.4):

1. Initial reading of texts to gain familiarity;
2. Repeated reading to code texts;
3. Developing basic themes;
4. Reviewing and consolidating themes into subthemes;
5. Defining and naming main themes;
6. Describing, exploring and analysing themes.
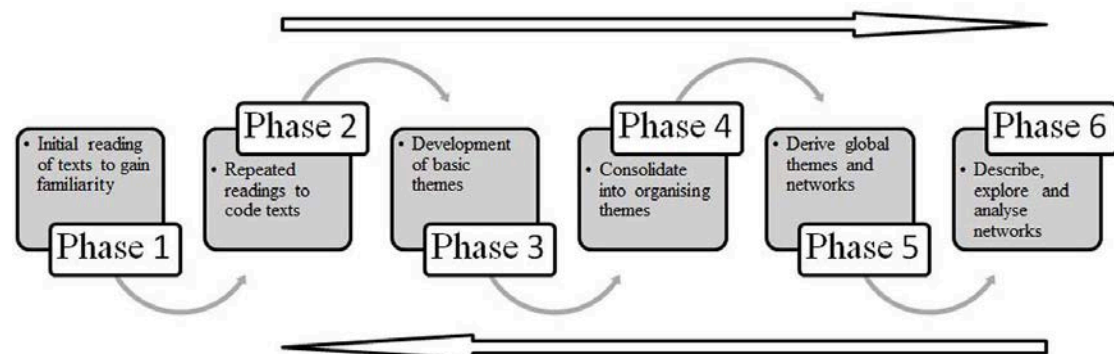
Figure 4.4. The six phases in thematic analysis [adopted from Walters 2016]. The arrows indicate its recursive nature.

While Figure 4.4 implies a linear progress of the phases, it is important to note that thematic analysis is a repeated procedure involving continuous moving back and forth between the phases (Walters 2016). The following section will briefly describe each phase to reveal the selection process and interpretation of the empirical data.

1. Initial reading of texts to gain familiarity

Given the exploratory and inductive nature of this investigation, codes, themes and subthemes were identified by repeatedly reading through the transcripts to gain an understanding of what photography meant to the individuals involved in this study. Initial points of interests relating to individuals' ways of seeing the world, and aspects

surrounding their photography, were noted in a reflexive diary, and (when possible) validated by participants in sessions immediately following the initial analysis. This reflection and reading process was carried out for both written and visual material.

2. Repeated reading to code texts

The second phase of thematic analysis comprised of a search for similarities and patterns across the data set. Repeated words, phrases and ideas used by participants, such as "see a beautiful scene" and "sharing a photo", as well as recurring descriptions of seeing and photographing meaningful moments were of particular interest and facilitated the development of thematic codes in the analysis. Similarly, verbal and visual expressions indicating contradictions and discrepancies were also included in the analysis and coded accordingly. For example, it is noteworthy to mention that while participants' verbal accounts revealed their intention to photograph people, visual evidence showed that few images across the data set depicted human beings. Images representing people portrayed them behind glass doors and facing away from the camera, which implied a less engaging and rather detached approach to photographing people as part of participants' everyday photographic practices. Therefore, repeated reading of interview transcripts was essential to establish new ideas and insights, which generated codes and themes across the entire material (Coffey and Atkinson 1994; Flick 2014; Walter 2016).

3. Developing basic themes

The codes were combined into basic themes, which were identified separately for the transcripts/written texts and participant-generated photographs. This approach was of particular significance as it strengthened the thematic analysis employed in this study (Walters 2016). Separate analyses of written texts and visual images offer a process of triangulation, which is a concept that was developed by Norman Denzin in the 1970s to enhance the credibility of social research. In his definition of the term, Uwe Flick further proposes that "triangulation should produce knowledge on different levels, which means insights that go beyond the knowledge made possible by one approach and thus contribute to promoting quality in research" (2014: 184). Basic themes were developed to represent distinctions and nuances of participants' photographic practices; however, not all participants discussed their photography in relation to basic themes. For example, only two respondents discussed the importance of light in their photography.

Given the significance of light for the medium, and the discussion of light in relation to visual perception (Ingold 2000, 2005; Merleau-Ponty 2004, 2012), 'light' was identified as a basic theme after related codes were consolidated across the data set. As a basic theme, it provided a better understanding of individuals' photographic practices in the context of vision, a subtheme in this analysis. Evidence about the inclusion of light can be drawn from their verbal accounts of using light as a source and motif to photograph a scene, as well as the visual evidence of depicting a natural light source (for example, the sun or sunrays) as a central part to their photographs. The following quotes support the importance of light in participants' photography:

> VS: So I stood here for a while. I waited for cars to come by, people to walk by because I liked the light, and again the message on the street.

> VS: There was a beautiful light when we came out of the library.

> VS: I wanted to get the light right because it was really special.

> VS: Focus on the beauty of the everyday, including the natural light. So you just search for these moments where the light is especially nice and yes, take photographs of them.

> JD: Well, I just move into the position or angle in real life when holding the phone; I don't tweak with the phone to adjust the lighting or shading. I just get into the right position to get the right amount of light and shade while getting the best image of the object in question.

Other codes were organised to form the basic theme of 'manipulation', which encompassed participants' use of camera settings to manipulate photographs, such as the use of 'selective-colour' (a camera setting that changes photographs using artificial colours). Using these settings, it was participants' intention to "manipulate the environment". Verbal and visual accounts were used to develop the codes that formed the subtheme of photographic naturalism, which included 'manipulation'.

4. Reviewing and consolidating basic themes into subthemes

In the next phase of the analysis, the basic themes were further consolidated into subthemes, which are higher-level themes with shared elements and relationships to each other (Attride-Stirling 2001; Walters 2016). For example, the two basic themes of 'patterns' and 'light' contained attributes of visual perception, which became the subtheme 'vision'. Similarly, the basic themes of 'manipulation' and 'influence' encompass qualities of photographic realism, which formed another subtheme.

5. Defining and naming the main themes

Identifying the two main themes involved further analysis of the subthemes. As Walters describes it, "the global [main] theme could be seen as the conclusion or main tenet of an argument, with the organising themes providing support and illustration (constructed through the basic themes) for reaching the conclusion" (2016: 112). With this in mind, the two main themes derived from 'going back and forth' between the codes, basic themes and subthemes, and were named the 'phenomenological dimension of photography' and 'social dimension of photography', respectively. These two dimensions are independent of one another.

6. Describing, exploring and analysing themes

Examples of written and visual accounts were selected for their ability to illustrate basic, sub- and main themes, and subsequently creating a summary of the themes. Deductions in the summary were brought together with the relevant theories to explore the themes, concepts and structures that arose from the analysis. The aim was to return to the research questions and the theoretical framework underpinning them (Attride-Stirling 2001; Walters 2016).

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the methodological framework developed for this research study on the photographic practices of young male adults with ASD. The purpose of Part I was to provide an overview of the proliferating scholarship on visual methodologies, participatory and visual research methods, as well as analyse empirical studies that helped develop an understanding of the use of photography with vulnerable young people in research. These debates helped contextualise and develop the methodology for this study, which expands the discussed literature. Part II provided a comprehensive account of the methodology of this study; it was consistent with the research questions and aims of this study, as well as its theoretical framework.

Although attempts to recruit participants through charities and public institutions largely failed, it is important to stress the significance of the understanding and knowledge I gained through the observations I made of autistic people while volunteering for organisations. This was an invaluable experience, enabling me to gain insights that enriched this study. Dialogues throughout stage 2 further revealed that photography appeared to facilitate and mediate young autistic people's perception and experience of

their everyday lives. The power of photographs to capture and freeze an image, or to preserve a moment in time, seemed to enable young male adults with ASD to explore their own photography as the image-makers behind the camera, and subsequently discuss this with me in a self-reflective way. Importantly, the photographs of the participants were not merely appendages to the investigation, but rather entangled components to learning and knowledge about the everyday photography of adults on the autism spectrum (Banks 2001; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Pink 2012b; Stanczak 2007). By approaching photographic image-making and photographs as the primary object of analysis, I adopted a reflexive stance to my study. As a result, the methodology and tools employed in this study were helpful in generating evidence to answer the research questions, and illuminate deeper knowledge and more nuanced understanding of the photographic practices of young male adults with ASD (Pink 2009, 2011b, 2013; Prosser 1998).

Chapter 5

"You could see that I see them through my eyes":[39] analysis and interpretation

5.1. Introduction

> Writing interpretations shows that what is at stake is not a whole
> world, but worlds. (John Schostak and Jill Schostak 2013: 95)

This chapter analyses and interprets the key research findings that derived from photo elicitation, semi-structured interviews, participant-generated photographs, observations and my own fieldnotes, and discusses these results within the analytical framework that underpins this investigation. Importantly, participants in this study were actively engaged in the making and interpretation of their own photographs. As David Gauntlett and Peter Holzwarth argue, "the interpretation has to come from the person who made the artefact" (2006: 86). The researcher was not redundant in the interpretation process, and had two key analytical commitments. First, that the interpretation was negotiated between the researcher and participants, not reduced to one or the other, which was also an ethical responsibility. Second, that in the interpretation the researcher addressed the relationship between the photograph and transcript, without giving primacy to either, recognising that they can at times lead the interpretation in different directions (Drew and Guillemin 2014). There are multiple ways of seeing and being-in-the-world, and in line with Schostak and Schostak's remark above, interpretations offered here present views and understandings within a broader framework of meaning (Emmison et al. 2012). The idea that seeing is a subjective experience is further suggested in the title of this chapter.

As described in the previous chapter, two main themes emerged from the findings: the phenomenological dimension of photography, and the social dimension of photography. Although the small, qualitative sample in this study does not allow any definite conclusions in that respect, the analysis also suggested that these two dimensions are independent of one another, with the importance of each to an individual participant's photography varying by degrees. For example, a participant's practice may be strongly phenomenological and yet weak on the social dimension; conversely, a participant's practice may be weak on a phenomenological dimension and strong on a social one; equally, a participant's practice could be either strong or weak on both dimensions. Additionally, several related subthemes with particular foci came to the fore

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[39] Participant Joe

in the data. The purpose of the subthemes is twofold. First, to identify nuances, preferences, characteristics and distinctions, and illustrate unique facets of participants' engagement with photography; and second, to offer comprehensive insights into autistic participants' everyday photographic practices.

Corresponding to the two main themes, this chapter is divided into two parts. Part I is concerned with the phenomenological dimension of photography and its three subthemes: (i) vision, with a focus on patterns, composition and light; (ii) photographic naturalism, which highlights photographic seeing, manipulation and the influence of others; and (iii) presence, which centres on the temporal and spatial dimensions of photography. As will become clear, the subjective experience of perception plays a key role in the photographic practices of the four young male adults with ASD. Photography mediates perception as an active and integrated element of the lived experience of seeing and being-in-the-world, and facilitates participants' relations to beings, objects and places in which individuals practice their photography. Building on the rich debates on perception as outlined in Part I of chapter two, interpretations draw from fields that include phenomenological perspectives. Merleau-Ponty's (2012) idea of embodied experience, and Ingold's (2000, 2005) work on perception and the environment are especially useful in illuminating participants' photographic practices.

Part II examines the findings with regard to the social dimension of photography, and its four subthemes: (i) communication; (ii) depiction of the social world; (iii) photographing people; and (iv) sharing photographs. At its core, Part II reveals participants have a unique approach to, and understanding of, what forms their social world, which in turn shapes their photographic practices. For example, verbal accounts reveal participants' intention to photograph people, implying they have a social and communicative disposition to photographically engage with others. In contrast, visual evidence shows that few images across the data set depict people, with the majority shown facing away from the camera, or with their heads disguised by objects. While this stands out from typical depictions of people as discussed in the literature on photography (Gye 2007; Tinkler 2008), this thesis adopts Ochs and Solomon's (2010) approach who claim there are many different possibilities for social interaction with others; ASD sociality is one of these possible interactions. Findings are underpinned by the scholarship on everyday photography concerning aspects that contribute to communication and social practices as outlined in Part II of chapter two. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this thesis, interpretations are also supported by writers whose approach to ASD is enriched

by phenomenological and social perspectives that embrace individuals' diverse lived experiences.

Part I

5.2. The phenomenological dimension of photography

> Nobody takes the same picture of the same thing… photographs are evidence not only of what's there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world. (Susan Sontag 1979: 88)

Seeing the world is a subjective experience, and as Sontag (1979) suggests, this experience is reflected in the photographs people take. Alva Noë explains the ability to see and perceive the world as something people actively do; it is "a way of acting… through physical movement and interaction" (2004: 1). The perceiver is not presented with these practices at once. Perception is an ongoing process of exploration and discovery (Merleau-Ponty 2012). Linked to one's experience, culture and beliefs, seeing is a way of exploring the world (Berger 1972).

Drawing on evidence from the photographic practices of participants in this study, perception is of particular significance for people with ASD. Although they live in the same world and encounter the same 'raw material' as non-autistic people, individuals with ASD experience sensory perceptual differences, including difficulties interpreting a sense while experiencing sensory overload (Bogdashina 2016). In this context, photography can be a helpful practice; with a focus on vision, it can assist participants in concentrating on one sense whilst de-emphasising others. That is true for at least one of the participants, Vincent.[40] He shares his insight into how photography helps him channel the senses that might overwhelm him,

> When I go out to photograph, it's an enjoyable thing to do; just to focus on seeing nice stuff, nice compositions, and it's relaxing because it blocks out other sensations doing this, nothing else. Then, at the same time, I also make photos either on these missions or spontaneously where, among all the other things that are happening around me, there's something that catches my eye or catches my attention, and I respond with the camera. Then it's not imposing structure, but following a detail, I guess.

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[40] In what follows, the material quoted from participants will be referenced using their first name ahead of the quote, or their initials when offering excerpts from transcripts. Full details of the data collection are provided in chapter four.

Vincent is clear in his statement. By paying particular attention to vision to the exclusion of other senses during the process of his photographic image-making, photography serves as an escape route from experiencing sensory overload. As Vincent is aware that other activities occurring around him could be overwhelming, possibly even intrusive, photography is a way of controlling his perception of self and world. While this may also be true for other people who photograph, the focus on vision in the process of photographic image-making has a particular resonance for people with ASD. For example, Vincent implies that exercising control over his perception provides both pleasure and relief in relation to his experience of autism.

Figure 5.1. Photograph by Vincent.

Writing from an ASD perspective, Olga Bogdashina underlines the importance of the senses in experiencing self and engaging with the world. She affirms, "everything we know about the world and ourselves has come through our senses" (2016: 47). For people with ASD, the world of perception is different from that of non-autistic people, since sensory perceptual issues are core characteristics of autism (Grandin 2006). That is to say, perception is not just an addition to one's existence, a supplementary benefit that gives people 'access to the world' (Glendinning 2007). Perception is intrinsic to seeing and being, and central to experiencing the world (Ingold 2000; Merleau-Ponty 2012). With a focus on photography, it is crucial to understand the dynamic relation between photography and perception, and the way they influence each other. While theories of perception have been applied to photography in different ways, a large scholarship centres on critical debates on the phenomenology of photographic pictorial

experience (Barthes 2000; Pettersson 2011). This study takes photographic practice, not looking at photographs, as the central aspect, and explores perception in relation to participants' photographic practices. For example, Vincent was drawn to the "beautiful light" reflected in the treetops he saw when he walked outside the library, which inspired him to take a photograph (Figure 5.1).

The four participants use stand-alone digital cameras and/or smartphones to create images of objects and moments in their everyday lives. To varying degrees, their photography is integrated into their perceptual experience; it affects their senses in unique ways, and guides their social and subjective experiences of encounters with objects and beings in the environment (Pink 2011a). Tim Ingold's (2008) notion of 'entanglement' helps emphasise that these encounters occur in terms of an entwined experience of senses, movement and photography. Whilst perception is intrinsic to being and the lived body mediates the senses, for participants in this study photography is a supplement to perceiving the world through the senses. That is distinct in the photographic practice of another participant, Joe. By answering the question 'What triggers you to take a photograph of a particular moment?', Joe underlines the implications of his feelings in his photographic practice, and responds:

> When I get the feeling that it's worth taking a photo that I can also show others, then I take the photo. If the feeling is there, then yes, if the feeling is not there, then it's a no.

Joe does not clarify what that feeling exactly encompasses, but he implies that trusting it is central to his practice. The difficulty in understanding and expressing feelings does not suggest ASD people lack emotion. Bogdashina explains,

> They have emotions but, first, they often cannot 'label' and understand them and, second, they do not know how (and why) to translate their experiences to other people. They have to learn explicitly to recognize, name and understand the meaning of emotions and what to do about them.
>
> (Bogdashina 2005: 255)

Keeping in mind the feeling Joe experiences during the process of his image-making, he adds, "when I get the feeling to take a good photo it remains a good photo to me", linking the photograph back to the moment of experience and perception of the world. For Joe, photography is an extension of his physical engagement with the environment, which enables him to take photographs that he can then show others, further establishing photography as a social practice. Sontag's statement at the beginning of this section is therefore debatable in some contexts, seeing that for Joe it is precisely 'the same picture

of the same thing', which is an accomplishment of his image-making. Several writers have drawn attention to the idea that the camera extends the photographer's body and its sensorium, while also contributing to the image-maker's sociality (Larsen and Sandbye 2014; Lister 2016; Sobchack 2004).

At the same time, the medium can, at times, take the form of an internal 'barrier', for example, when the practice is affected by a hesitant negotiation process of what to photograph and how, rather than enjoying the ease with which images can be created, and if required, deleted again. For Vincent photography can be challenging when his practice involves a "search for these moments where the light is especially nice", "searching for the experiences of the beautiful" or "searching to find a theme that continues to interest me". Vincent remains vague in his description of what exactly his search contains, though interviews suggest his search is based on the relation between seeing, looking and being seen, which can create an internal 'barrier' to his image-making, especially when he does not feel confident to be seen by people he initially considered photographing. This is notable and implies that at times, Vincent takes a more distant position to his subjects, avoiding the interaction in reciprocity with the world through socialisation with others (Crowther 2009; Sobchack 2004). As Vincent explains, "I see it [a scene] and immediately think, okay, I can take a photo, and then I walk a little bit further and then they [people] have already seen me and I can't really go back to take a photo". The camera creates a barrier to Vincent's photographic image-making. Paul Frosh (2016) reflects on the spatial separation between the photographer's body and the photographed objects and describes,

> Traditional camera design and use – of both analogue and digital devices – means that the camera is not just a machine for making pictures: it is a barrier between visible photographed spaces and undepicted locations of photographing and viewing.
>
> (Frosh 2016: 256)

Frosh implies that the depicted scene in the photographic frame is created from a position behind the camera that is then adopted by the viewer. Yet, the process of creating the photograph is not always visible to the viewer. Photography involves choices between various factors, including composition and light, in order to produce images. The decision of what objects to include in the frame, coupled with other aspects that may influence the image-taking, like wind, rain or the weather more generally, can delay the time before pressing the shutter release, which may relate to the embodied 'barrier' Vincent experiences in his image-making.

The distance between the photographer's body and the photographed object is of course part of the image-making process of all photographers, and what they photograph can also depend on the type of cameras they use, at least for the participants here. Joe, for example, solely uses a smartphone to photograph his everyday life. Like other young adults with or without ASD, Joe carries the device around everywhere, indicating the camera is at the ready when he "get[s] the feeling it's worth taking a photo" of a specific moment that unfolds in front of him. The fact that Joe exclusively uses a camera phone to photograph his everyday life is not in itself surprising, since the smartphone has become a popular image-making device over the last decade (Cobley and Haeffner 2009; Hjorth et al. 2012; Sarvas and Frohlich 2011). While Joe's practice is linked to his perception of self and world, his image-making is not carried out with the deliberate intent that the other three participants (Alex, James and Vincent) show, or that writers on everyday photography refer to in their work (Hand 2012; Luttrell 2010; Murray 2008a). Although Alex, James and Vincent use smartphones for their image-making, Alex and James are also equipped with digital compact cameras, while Vincent favours using a DSLR camera. Eve Forrest (2016) believes the multiple cameras enable photographers to look and watch, which is important in the process of image-making and helps photographers to be "tuned into the possibility of photographic opportunities, taking advantage when a chance presents itself" (2016: 205). Vincent only started using his smartphone two weeks before his involvement in this study, which is perhaps why he defends his preference, saying,

> Maybe it's a kind of prejudice against the camera of the phone because I think I can't really do anything with the camera phone. But of course, you can do things. Maybe I have to force myself to look longer and make more photos with this one, but I think again, I can't do anything, one shot and that's it.

Despite Vincent's hesitation of, and opposition to, using the smartphone, visual and verbal evidence in the findings suggest he uses his smartphone in many instances to take photographs of his everyday life. As he implies in his remark above, when using his smartphone, he tends to take only one frame per object or moment he wishes to photograph; not because he is satisfied with the one outcome, but as a result of the limited settings on his device that prevent him from experimenting with his image-making. These photographs are often medium to wide-angle frames, suggesting he does not use the zoom to its full extent, even though the touch screen of the smartphone merely requires pinching to zoom in and out the image (Palmer 2012).

Figure 5.2. Photograph by Vincent.

Figure 5.3. Photograph by Vincent.

Vincent's camera phone practice is juxtaposed with the photographic images he produces using his DSLR camera. His enthusiasm for experimenting with the latter's manual settings enables Vincent to be more creative with his image-making, implying the physical weight of the camera assists him in becoming an "accomplished practitioner" (Ingold 2000: 162).[41] The series of habitual actions often observed with photographers, including crouching down and making micro adjustments to feet, fingers, shoulders and head movements in order to get the body in the best position to take photographs, seem to inspire Vincent to take several frames from various angles, using different settings to compose and capture a particular moment, person or object. This indicates, he embraces photography as a bodily practice. Compared to the majority of photographs Vincent takes on his smartphone, the ones recorded on his DSLR camera are close-ups of details or medium frames of objects and people, but rarely wide-angle frames. This appears to be linked to the 50mm prime lens Vincent uses on his DSLR camera; the lens restricts him from zooming, requiring him to walk closer to the objects and people he wishes to record. When contrasting Vincent's photographic practices with each other, it is noteworthy that he does not tend to walk closer to people when he uses his smartphone (Figure 5.2), while that is not the case using his DSLR camera – the two young people are depicted in mid-frame, despite the glass door serving as a separation between them and Vincent (Figure 5.3). That is in itself interesting, and indicates a rather distant relation to people, in that perhaps Vincent does not want them to know they are being photographed (Larsen and Sandbye 2014; Ochs and Solomon 2010). Given his preference for using his DSLR camera, Vincent acknowledges the mobile phone's technological presence and maintains, "sometimes I see something beautiful and I know I don't have my [DSLR] camera, or it takes too long to set all the settings right, so I take a photo with my phone". Vincent has, it seems, at least two different photographically-mediated ways of seeing and being-in-the-world; one is more perceptually intense than the other, not in an overwhelming sense as manifested in ASD, but as "an enjoyable thing to do", something that is "relaxing because it blocks out other sensations doing this, nothing else". As Vincent reveals at the beginning of this chapter, photography enables him to focus on his visual sense. His preference for using the DSLR camera implies that he references that device, not the camera phone, when he talks explicitly of photography. Nonetheless, both technologies mediate his actions

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[41] Ingold refers to Bourdieu's (1977) notion of body *hexis* – characteristic gestures and postures that furnish a person and accentuate his or her distinguished bearings in the world. In this context, it is the habitual movements of the photographer that make Vincent an 'accomplished practitioner', not the mastery of technical skills.

through which he can realise himself in regard to his sensory perceptual experience of seeing self and world. Bogdashina explains,

> there is always something of *us* in our interpretation of stimuli. Our response is not objective. It depends on our previous experiences, interests, motivation. Our perception is also influenced by our culture. Though every brain constructs the world in a slightly different way from any other because every brain is different.
>
> <div align="right">(Bogdashina 2010: 26, original italics)</div>

As a cultural form, photography no doubt influences participants' everyday lives, partly in ways they think about the medium, and partly in ways they reflect on themselves, as Joe and Vincent reveal in their remarks in this section.

The mere presence of a camera has the potential to influence the way people engage with the world. This engagement includes more than a preoccupation with the mechanics of the medium. James, for example, does not differentiate between his two cameras, and equally uses his smartphone and digital compact camera, occasionally even the camera on his Kindle, to take photographs of his everyday life. His choice of photographic equipment depends on the medium available at the time he wants to take a photograph, indicating the practice is more important for the result than the kind of device he uses for his image-making. In turn, this suggests James is less attuned to photography as a bodily practice or the camera as a prosthetic device (Lury 2004). Although Heidegger was writing at a time before digital cameras were developed, he maintained that technology is an essential and comprehensive phenomenon, which governs contemporary culture. This idea is still well grounded today. As he argued,

> the essence of technology is by no means anything technological. Thus, we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it.
>
> <div align="right">(Heidegger 1977: 4)</div>

Heidegger suggested that technology never comes to its material specificity and purpose in a neutral context and to neutral effect (Clark 2002; Malpas 2006). Rather, it is historically informed not only by its materiality, but also by its political, economic, and social context, and both co-constitutes and expresses technological and cultural values. That is to say, the medium cannot solely be defined by its materiality but also by the context in which the technology is used, which extends beyond the visual to include personal and social realities (Dean 2013). As a bodily practice, photography is embodied by those who directly and indirectly engage with it, creating a dynamic relationship between the camera, subject, the environment and the self. As a

phenomenologically expressive and perceptive medium, photography offers people with ASD actual and possible activities that enable them to use their senses to express their everyday lived experiences. The choices made in the process of the image-making provide autistic individuals an opportunity to exercise control over their visual perceptual responses in order, among other things, to manage their sensory overload manifested in ASD. In what follows, a discussion on vision offers a more nuanced understanding of participants' photographic practices, and how they express their ways of seeing and being-in-the-world through photography.

5.2.1. Vision[42]

> I think when I make photographs I am really focused on the visual. That may be a way of coping with all these senses because I do get easily confused by sounds and smells. (Participant Vincent)

Figure 5.4. Photograph by Vincent.

Findings in this study suggest vision is a key sense and emerged as a subtheme for two reasons. First, participants' photographs and verbal accounts imply their strong interest in patterns, composition and light, signifying participants have a particular kind of visual experience related to their photographic practices. For example, the frontal view of different-sized and multi-coloured cables along a dark brick wall create a largely horizontal pattern that prompted Vincent to take a photograph on his camera phone

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[42] Although used as a term to describe this subtheme, it is not the purpose of this study to offer an in-depth discussion of visual perception; see Gordon (2004) for a comprehensive account on theories of visual perception.

while waiting for the London Underground (Figure 5.4). The wooden panels at the bottom right and the four glassless windows along the left and top margins of the frame are rendered irrelevant; they are simply not mentioned. "To be honest, I find it quite strange that they [cables] are so exposed. For such a rich city like London, not to have them covered up is just so strange", revealed Vincent when discussing his intention for taking the image. Although Vincent refers to the cables in the frame, he does not explain the photograph per se, but interestingly reflects on the contrast between the rich city and the seemingly unsightly appearance of the cables. Using the word 'strange' twice evokes his surprise, maybe owing to an assumption or expectation he has of London. The limited time he had to record the photograph before the next train arrived suggests his practice was mainly influenced by the visual experience of the colourful cable pattern that inspired him to take out his camera phone and take a photograph. Considering the reluctance he described for using his smartphone earlier in this chapter, this scenario alludes to a strong visual perceptual experience that focuses on the cable pattern that Vincent considered worth photographing once, without further experimenting with the composition and light to create several frames, as was his usual practice. "I don't think it says anything about me, just that the phone camera hasn't got many options to change the settings", he asserts. Vincent is aware that despite the phone's basic camera settings, used in the right context, it can be a quick and convenient alternative when he has to act fast to take a photograph. Consequently, the smartphone changes the pace and nature of Vincent's visual perceptual experience, which is similar to the photographic practices of non-ASD people. As Daniel Palmer clarifies with reference to the iPhone,

> Scenes are quickly grabbed—the fast processor gives the iPhone less shutter lag than most camera phones—and just as quickly and efficiently deleted, shared and archived.
>
> (Palmer 2012: 87)

Vincent's attraction to patterns and repetitions is not unusual for autistic people. Writers on ASD claim autistic individuals have three sensory perceptual experiences in relation to vision: (i) the inability to separate between foreground and background information, known as gestalt perception (Bogdashina 2016); (ii) the difficulty to break the whole image into meaningful units, known as fragmented perception (Williams 2006); and (iii), the overall problem of interpreting a sense, largely because people with ASD cannot rely on their senses, since all of them might be distorted in some way (Grandin 2006). A discussion in chapter three clarifies that the latter refers to the notion of sensory overload. Overall, these perceptual experiences affect the way people with ASD engage

with the world in their everyday lives (Bogdashina 2016; Grandin 2006; Williams 2004, 2006). With a focus on vision, photography is a domain in which light, patterns and reflections form a crucial part of the image-making process, largely in relation to the use of composition to create meaningful photographs (Barnbaum 2015). Concerned with the perception of patterns in the environment, Patrick Maynard further emphasises their role and argues,

> Tacitly, much of our sense perception works from pattern recognition. Indeed, changes of pattern – even patterns of change in patterns – are often perceptually most salient.
>
> (Maynard 2008: 203)

Maynard's account resonates with people with and without ASD, but for autistic people a focus on patterns, lines and light is an important way of creating structure and order (Schwarz 2008).

The second reason why vision emerged as an important subtheme was due to participants' use of the terms 'looking' and 'seeing', with some making a stronger distinction in the use of the words than others. Building on earlier discussions about seeing and looking in chapter two, photographers become accustomed to looking as part of their skill set in order to find inspiring things to photograph, which then forms into a habitual practice (Forrest 2016). Vincent has identified this process, using both looking and seeing as part of his photographic practice:

> I mean, sometimes, I see something beautiful;
>
> Often I see a beautiful scene on the street;
>
> I mean, looking for beautiful things is also looking for structures;
>
> I was looking around thinking this is beautiful;
>
> It's about seeing something beautiful and capturing it.

Vincent uses both terms more often than other participants, signifying that he self-consciously included seeing and looking as a habit into his photographic image-making. Other participants also link the words with their photography. As Joe says,

> I was standing there looking down at the people near the shoreline so I used both, a bit of zoom and a bit of walking with the camera back and forth to get the right angle.

Extending Berger's (1972) ideas of seeing and looking to participants' photographic image-making, their practices seem to depend on their agency and embodied visual

experience, which subsequently helps them express their unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. This endorses the idea that there are diverse layers of seeing and practices of looking in the process of everyday photography, and firmly establishes vision as a subtheme in this investigation (Sturken and Cartwright 2009).

Figure 5.5. Photograph by Vincent.

Visual perception is central to Vincent's photographic practice, which encompasses a number of different interests, including taking experimental images of colours, lines, patterns and surfaces, which he often intentionally juxtaposes with one another to create ambiguous photographs. One such photograph depicts reflections of the sun, clouds, trees, a street light post and what looks like a diagonal reflection of a building in a puddle (Figure 5.5). The light blue hue of the water is contrasted with the dark brown shade that is depicted in the left third of the frame. Initially triggered to take the photograph because Vincent saw "the bright reflection of the sun" next to a small, "shiny object lying in a puddle on the street", his vision was guided by other compositional aspects. Describing his visual experience before pressing the shutter release to record the instant, Vincent explains, "I then saw this line and the reflection and the clouds and the texture of the concrete". Upon reflection, Vincent rejects the quality of the photograph and firmly says, "So, that didn't really work out… It doesn't look that shiny in the picture". The photograph is one of Vincent's 'abstract' depictions that elicit a specific visual experience of lines, patterns and reflections, but more importantly, it helps him control other sensory stimuli as mentioned earlier in this chapter. According to Phil

Schwarz (2008), autistic people's interest in patterns and structure serve as effective mechanisms to manage their sensory processing issues. Sharing his own insights as an adult with ASD Schwarz explains,

> The coping strategies many of us [autistic individuals] develop to leverage the limited real-time bandwidth we have available for processing sensory input lead… to a distinct aesthetic sensibility that is an integral aspect of that [autistic] culture: an affinity for structure and patterns, for repetition and for variation-within-repetition.

(Schwarz 2008: 261)

Figure 5.6. Photograph by Vincent.

Vincent's interest in architectural structures directs his vision to urban buildings, which was pronounced when he described a photograph illustrating a cropped part of a high-rise building, signified by steel panels that separate the façade windows (Figure 5.6). Captured from an approximately 45-degree angle, the façade of the building takes up two-thirds of the frame, and the remaining frame is filled with other parts of the building, without leaving a negative space to form a background. It emphasises that lines, shapes and repetitions appear on the surfaces of urban architectural buildings, which Vincent interprets as being "a template for looking for the abstract or lines". Here, it is useful to

draw on Ingold's (2007) notion of lines. For Ingold, lines are interconnected and interwoven, and central for understanding the relationship between self and world. Life, then, is lived along lines. That is to say, life is a "meshwork of interwoven lines… An ecology of life… And its subject of inquiry must consist… of the relations *along* their severally enmeshed ways of life" (2007: 103, original italics). In this context, Vincent's visual perception of lines in the building is entangled with his experience of self in the environment, detailing:

> When I was walking there, I really wanted to get this detail. I remember looking up to the building and there was the desire to capture the whole thing, but the lens forced me to get the detail and this became the thing I wanted to capture.

It appears that the representation of the building has a clear function for Vincent and his visual perceptual experience of his surroundings. Akin to a photograph he took of a section portraying an outdoor passageway (Figure 5.7), the cropped urban building signals Vincent's enthusiasm for compositional details in the environment. This fascination only came to the fore in interviews, as there is little visual evidence that supports his interest in architecture. Here, John Barker and Fiona Smith argue that "the intention behind taking a photograph may be more relevant to research than the actual product" (2012: 94). In Vincent's case, his intention to photograph architectural structures may partly relate to his particular aesthetic sensibility for "seeing something beautiful and capturing it", and partly to his attraction to structure and patterns. The photograph is another example that shows the importance of patterns in exercising control over Vincent's visual perceptual experience, and therefore managing his sensory overload (Schwarz 2008).

Figure 5.7. Photograph by Vincent.

Figure 5.8. Photograph by Alex.

Alex, too, is interested in portraying compositional aspects in his photography, but primarily focuses on emphasising colours and texture in order to depict his visual experience of the world. For example, he photographs a low-angle frontal close-up of a wet green shrub, which takes up the lower half of the frame (Figure 5.8). Although the leaves in the foreground are out of focus and blurred, the detailed raindrops are visible, adding to the rich texture of the plant. It is positioned against a red brick building in the background that fills the remaining upper half space of the frame. The combination of red and green is based on complementary colours that engender a particular harmony in the photograph. In visual experiences, harmony engages the viewer and creates an inner sense of order, that is, a balance in the visual perception; it is pleasing to the eye (Zakia 2013). Alex's photograph is a pleasing arrangement of the colours, whereas the thriving shrub is juxtaposed with the man-made building. The depth of field allows for a sharp background, depicting the red bricks of the building clearly and in full detail. Describing the image, Alex asserts, "I like the texture and how lustrous the leaves are when they get wet". Interestingly, Alex appears to allude to his haptic perception of the leaves, which is when sight discovers in itself a function of touching that belongs to it and to it alone, and which is independent of its optical function (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Not every detail participants photograph is clearly discernible. Photographs are multi-vocal, and their interpretation is subjective and filled with ambiguities (Hall 1999). The intention of the photographer is also not always clear. Asking Vincent what he seeks to convey through his 'abstract' photographs, he responds, "it just makes it more interesting when you don't immediately recognise a form, but if it's something beautiful

and you don't know what it is, you are forced to look at it longer". This is interesting, suggesting Vincent is expressing his agency through the image by imposing a temporal demand on the viewer (and perhaps himself too) to engage with the photograph. His photographic practice is characterised by the 'abstract' that lies within the beauty for which he searches in the process of his everyday photography. The abstract includes compositional aspects, such as lines, patterns, shapes and repetition. For people with ASD, these compositional features are important. Uta Frith underlines the relation between sensation and repetition and argues, "incidental features of the environment can become an autistic person's main focus of attention" (1989: 109). But photography offers more than a means of attention; it offers a sense of security.

Figure 5.9. Photograph by Vincent.

As Vincent reveals, "I get a sense of security when my view of vision is structured in a way. That is, when you define beautiful, then you can find some rest". Vincent's equation of beauty with rest is striking, linking back to the idea that the focus on visual perception offers both pleasure and relief in his experience of autism. He often uses the expression to "see something beautiful" in the context of his image-making, recognising beauty's subjective nature and an aesthetic sensibility that is central to his photographic practice. The following remark confirms that Vincent's equation of beauty with rest links back to some form of pleasure or relief. He reflects on a photograph he took while out for a walk along a quiet neighbourhood (Figure 5.9):

I was looking at the photographs to see if they have some coherence, like if they draw my attention to one part of the photo, which also connects to other parts. In the photo with the path, the path was over there and I was… looking either to the path or the scene here. They were disconnected and had fragments of vision, and you can't really see the whole picture at once. I'm quite convinced of the coherence thing, that it's important and guides my perception of what is a beautiful photograph, I guess.

Vincent took the photograph because his vision was guided by the natural light that illuminates the arranged ornaments on the grave. "I found it quite odd that they have that glittery Christmas thing", he said, and took the photograph through the fence that encloses the cemetery. Upon reflection, he realised that one of the photographs (he took three) depicts a footpath in the background, which divided his vision and prevented him from seeing the whole picture at once. This is interesting, in that he is aware that people with ASD have difficulties breaking down the whole image into meaningful units, thus experiencing fragmented visual perception (Bogdashina 2016). The footpath Vincent references in his statement above is not clearly visible in the photograph he chose to share with me, placing the focus on the light. As he explains, "I wanted to get the light right because it was really special".

Figure 5.10. Photograph by Vincent.

In addition to patterns and composition, research data suggest natural light is another key factor that relates to participants' visual perceptual experiences of seeing and being-in-the-world. Put simply, without light there is no photography, as vision and photography depend on light (Ingold 2005). In regard to ASD, light can affect individuals who are especially sensitive to perceiving direct sunlight and flickering light (Williams 2006). In explaining a photograph that represents three persons facing away from the camera while walking on the pavement, Vincent emphasises the warm evening sun that casts strong shadows behind the figures (Figure 5.10). Without mentioning the individuals Vincent notes, "I think you also need these lines, and if you only have the golden light then it's not as strong anymore. I think you need the contrast of the shadows". Spending about 45 minutes in the area, Vincent took many photographs that emphasise the warm light during the sunset. But there were many other occasions that offered him the opportunity to capture the "beautiful light". For example, upon leaving the library on a winter afternoon, Vincent noticed another sunset that reflected on the trees (Figure 5.1), describing, "there was a beautiful light when we came out of the library… like golden treetops". On another day, while strolling along his neighbourhood, he took more images, saying "I was interested in the shadows, and the trees look even bigger than they are". As these examples indicate, Vincent's photography is guided by natural light and shadows; or rather, his visual perception of light is often what prompts him to take a photograph of a specific scene or object, suggesting he is fully immersed in his environment, which Merleau-Ponty calls "the soil of the sensible" (1964: 160), the ground of being where self and world are commingled (Ingold 2005).

Visual evidence from this study indicates that all participants have a preference for taking photographs outdoors, which gives prominence to natural light as a core element of their photographic practices. In this context, the relationship between natural light, photography and the outdoors is worth reflecting on. Ingold's (2005) work on the sensory perceptual experience of light and the environment is productive here, as it is his observation of light that helps unpick participants' ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. Ingold asserts that light itself cannot be seen; it "is an experience of being" (2005: 99), recognised by the presence of the perceiver within a certain space he or she inhabits. At the same time, the experience of the outdoor world is multisensory (Ingold 2005). As sensory perception is intrinsic to being, both light and the outdoors are experiences of being-in-the-world (Ingold 2000, 2005). In contrast, photography mainly involves vision, but not to the exclusion of the other senses. For Vincent the experience of the "beautiful light" and the environment is multisensory, while photography enables him to focus on

his vision to see the reflections of the golden light in the treetops and avoid sensory overload.

Figure 5.11. Photograph by Alex.

Figure 5.12. Photograph by Alex.

Despite participants' preference for natural light over artificial light, with none of them using the flash on their cameras, participants have different approaches to the weather. Alex, for example, had no hesitation taking photographs in the rain. When he was out taking a series of photographs during the course of a spring day, he did not stop photographing when it started to rain. On the contrary, he continued in the rain and explained, "I used that to my advantage because it gave it [the image] that sort of effect, like you see how it blurs in some areas". Some of the photographs he took in the rain depict the texture of wet plants (Figure 5.11), wet bricks, grass and close-up raindrops, in addition to illustrating complementary colour patterns (Figure 5.12). Alex said he only stopped taking photographs "because I thought it was very very wet". Walking through a park during the same afternoon, he noticed a swan and was intrigued to capture "the raindrops splashing on the water surface [which] adds to the mystery", referring to the overall atmosphere caused by the rain (Figures 5.13).

Figure 5.13. Photograph by Alex.

As a person who conceptualises his ideas (Alex disclosed that this was "not a particular deep concept"), Alex goes out frequently to experiment with his image-making, with the weather and movement influencing his practice. As Ingold explains, perceiving the weather is multisensory and "a mode of *being*" (2005: 102, original italics). Alex's interest and intent in experimenting with textures, colours and patterns in the rain implies that he has an enhanced sensory perception. Bogdashina explains that, "[i]n many ways

'autistic perception' is superior to that of non-autistics. Autistic individuals with their heightened senses can often appreciate colour, sound, texture, smell, taste to a higher degree than people around them" (2016: 229).

Another participant (James) prefers to take photographs in dry weather conditions, as he is particularly interested in the sky and the different cloud formations (Figure 5.14). Asking why he took the photograph by pointing the camera to the sky, James replied, "I took it because it looks like snow but it's sky from a different angle". The photograph was taken during the winter months, which may explain his link between snow and sky. It also suggests James is immersed in the elements, or at least that he enjoys being outdoors. Here, Ingold offers an explanation of such enjoyment, asserting,

> To see the sky is to be the sky, since the sky is luminosity and the visual perception of the sky is an experience of light. For sighted persons, light is the experience of inhabiting the world of the visible, and its qualities – of brilliance and shade, tint and colour, and saturation – are variations on this experience.
>
> (Ingold 2005: 101)

Seeing the sky is an experience of being-in-the-world; it involves all senses. While this multisensory experience is shared by people with and without ASD, autistic people experience visual-perceptual differences, so one sense is never enough to make sense of the world. They use other senses to compensate for visual overload. Looking at the sky might be one such strategy. At the same time, people with ASD employ mono-

Figure 5.14. Photograph by James.

processing as a strategy to avoid sensory overload; that is, they use one sensory channel at the time, which is caused by the inability to filter out foreground and background information (Bogdashina 2016). Notably, James does not mention the object in the bottom right corner of the frame. Instead, James's vision is solely focused on the cloud formation in the sky, without taking any notice of the object disrupting his view, further suggesting his interest in skies is closely linked with his experience of being-in-the-world.

An important sense for photography, vision is an essential sense in the knowledge-gathering process, and has been elevated to "the 'noblest' of the senses" in Western thought (Ingold 2000: 156). As Ingold asserts, vision is "not a one-way process leading from worldly object to mental image… it is immanent in the life and consciousness of the perceiver as it unfolds within the field of relations established by way of his or her presence within a certain environment" (2005: 99). Photography facilitates the scope of vision, and unlike retinal images, photographs have the power to record an image, a detail or a moment in time (Weston 1980). Photography offers ways of exploring the world and relating to objects in the environment, which is an experience that is indicated in Joe's photograph depicting two starlings (Figure 5.15).

Figure 5.15. Photograph by Joe.

The two small birds, the left one is slightly cropped from the frame, are positioned in relatively close proximity to the foreground, suggesting Joe walked close to them rather than using the zoom function on his camera. The depth of field in the image allows for a sharp background, which suggests the scene took place in an outdoor shopping area, signified by mannequins in shop windows and pedestrians strolling along in the sun. Discussing the image with Joe, it quickly emerged that none of the features in the background were intentionally captured, or even acknowledged during the session. Instead, the main focus of the photograph is the pair of birds, which is evident in the following brief verbal account:

> UK: I see that you got really close to the starlings, as you didn't use any zoom.
> JD: You could see that I see them through my eyes.

Joe shares his visual perceptual experience of the time he captured the starlings on his smartphone. Looking at the depiction of the birds on his phone screen, he seems to perceive the moment the starlings were in front of him, rather than look at a photographic representation of them. He implies this by referring to "the same group of starlings in the same time and place in town". The observation that photographs engender direct perceptual access to objects was introduced by Barthes who claimed "[w]hatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not what we see" (2000: 6). Building on Barthes, Kendall Walton (1984) argues that photographs are transparent. Comparing the perception-enhancing power of photography to that of mirrors and lenses, Walton discerns, "[w]ith the assistance of the camera, we can see not only around corners and what is distant or small; we can also see into the past" (1984: 251). For Walton, like for Barthes, it is not the materiality of the photograph that is important, but that "[w]e see the world *through* them. [Photographs are] aids to vision" (ibid., original italics). Interestingly, Joe's remark implies that looking at his photograph involves looking at the object it depicts, and not merely at its representation or the materiality of the screen, which suggests Joe renders the mediating role of the camera invisible to make the image transparent to the original perception. This is an achievement in Joe's photography, not an inevitability of the technology. His preference for proximity over zoom is a central characteristic in his image-making, something he values highly. As Joe states, he sees through his own eyes and not through the camera. In turn, he sees through the photograph, and the camera is rendered absent. It is noteworthy to point out that Joe's sense of phenomenological closeness is distinctive from widely accepted views on phenomenological proximity in photographs (Currie 1999;

Friday 1996). For example, Mikael Pettersson (2011) maintains that photographs are not transparent; instead, they evoke proximity because they are traces of the photographed object. But not for Joe, who engages in an embodied response to seeing and experiencing the birds in his photographs. The relation between perceiving and experiencing is key, seeing that ASD people experience the world differently to non-ASD individuals. Bogdashina argues that autism is characterised by 'delayed perception' and explains,

> new experiences, no matter how similar to previous ones, are perceived as new, unfamiliar and unpredictable, and responses to them are poor regardless of the number of times the person has experienced the same thing… Their subjective experience of time is also different from that of non-autistics. For them, time might seem faster.
>
> (Bogdashina 2016: 81)

In contrast to Bogdashina's account of experience concerning ASD people, Joe seems to draw on his perception of the starlings as the same experience he had when he saw the birds, not simply as similar, new or familiar. Perhaps his perception is closely aligned to the original experience because of his keen interest in and knowledge of birds and animals through his engagement as a park ranger. With this in mind, Joe's account of perception demonstrates the uniqueness of individuals with ASD, while Bogdashina's observes some shared characteristics of autistic people. Reflecting on examples offered in this section, it is notable to point out the difference between Joe, for whom the camera is an extension of perception, and Vincent and Alex, for whom the camera allows the exercise of control of perception. That is to say, while some characteristics in their photography are shared, others are different.

5.2.2. Photographic naturalism

Distinct from the subtheme on vision, photographic naturalism explores how participants use their 'photographic eyes' to capture moments in their everyday lives (Lee 2010). Along with the term photographic seeing, this subtheme analyses research data in relation to the manipulation of photographs and the influence of others. While there is no benefit in repeating the debate on photographic naturalism at length, it is worth stating why the term emerged as a subtheme.[43]

     Overall, participants seem to take naturalistic photographs of objects and beings in the environment, implying their photographs depict "the relation between experiences

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[43] For debates on photographic naturalism, see Edwards (2001); Maynard (1997) and Rosenblum (1997).

of a picture's surface and its subject" (Lopes 1996: 51). Their images are also influenced by the determinants of the camera and the choices participants made in the process of their naturalistic image-making. P.H. Emerson offered a tight case for the stylistic principles of naturalistic photography and reasoned that, "human vision does not reflect the world in sharp focus: the visual image is more clearly defined in the center than at the edges, and as representations of the visual experience, photographs should focus this focal pattern" (1980: 99). Some images in this study denote a kind of accuracy that indicates participants perceive objects depicted in the images as the same experience they had when they stood in front of the object, as was the case in Joe's picture of the starlings at the end of the previous section. Many of the subjects depicted in participants' photographs appear to be, at least in parts, unconscious of the photographer's presence, like in the image Joe took of the knight sitting on a horse at a medieval fair he visited (Figure 5.16). Where there seems to be a direct interaction between the subject and the photographer, indicating the subject looks into the direction of the photographer, the resulting photograph suggests that despite occurring at a distance, there is an interaction between the two (Figure 5.17). In that sense, photography's commitment to naturalism allows participants to depict their subjects accurately, and in the same way they perceived and experienced them in real life, which is why photographic naturalism emerged as a subtheme.

Figure 5.16. Photograph by Joe.

Figure 5.17. Photograph by Vincent.

Vincent's practice involves him acting quickly upon seeing something and recording it with his camera. He reflects on his practice as follows:

> I think it's also about if you have a preconceived idea about what photo you want to get, then I think most of the times I don't have an idea. I just go out and see something beautiful, and have to act really quickly to get it. And if I don't get it then it's gone… It doesn't really work to search for it; once you are looking for it, then it's not really there, and often when I think, okay I'm done, I just want to walk now and put my camera back, I start seeing all these beautiful things.

A closer examination of Vincent's remark suggests he has no preconceived ideas that he develops prior to taking his photographs. In contrast, this indicates Vincent's practice is largely intuitive and motivated by perceiving and recording the objects and moments he finds beautiful when strolling through the environment. As Vincent emphasises, "you have all these moments in your day when you see something beautiful and you want to do something with it". And Vincent does engage with the beauty of the everyday. As identified in the previous subtheme, Vincent's relentless use of the term beautiful signifies a particular aesthetic sensibility that may be explained with an affinity for structure and patterns providing coping strategies for autistic people (Schwarz 2008). Vincent's ability to see beauty further enables him to develop and transform his vision of the world into richer meanings (Maynard 2008), since he perceives beauty when he observes and moves through the environment. Remarkably, Vincent often starts seeing beautiful things once he puts his camera away, suggesting the camera is an external tool that is not always ready to record the reality of his everyday life. Considering photography helps Vincent "focus[…] on the visual", it is noteworthy that his vision is

sharpened when he puts his camera away. This contradiction is further apparent in the following remark Vincent makes:

> It's this terrible thing about photography. You see the best things when you don't have your camera, or you have your camera and don't see much and you really try to get something beautiful but you're looking for it too much and you put your camera away and there it is… it's *always* this terrible torture.

Vincent's emphasis on photography "*always* [being] this terrible torture" is interesting, for it relates to his sensory processing issues, which Michael Merzenich refers to as "sensory torture" for autistic people (cited in Bogdashina 2010: 56–57). Unlike the non-autistic population, individuals with ASD are not equipped with filtering systems that help them with their sensory processing. For Vincent, the camera appears to facilitate this filtering at some times, but not others, linking back to his experience of the camera as forming both an aid and a barrier to his image-making (Frosh 2016). Speaking from her own perceptual experience of the environment, Grandin explains,

> Today's fast paced, techno-driven world is louder and busier than the world I grew up in. That, in and of itself, creates new challenges for the child with autism, whose sensory systems are usually impaired in one way or another. Our senses are bombarded on a daily basis, and this can render even typical children and adults exhausted by the end of the day.
>
> (Grandin 2008: 112)

Operating the medium involves effort and planning in order to see the beauty with his eyes and thereafter through the viewfinder of his camera. In this sense, Vincent is not an image-maker in the process of an imaginative composition, but learns to see, perceive and record the world as it unfolds in front of him (Merleau-Ponty 2012). Reflecting on his own practice, Vincent describes:

> Photography is a way to relate to the world out there, experiment and engage with all of your senses, practice communication with people and searching for the experiences of the beautiful, which is a more direct experience than analysing and conceptualising ideas.

This is a thought-provoking and all-encompassing description of Vincent's practice. He acknowledges photography is a form of communication that enables him to "relate to the world out there". This is noteworthy, seeing that social communication and interaction are core issues in ASD, but perhaps to a lesser extent for Vincent who appears to engage with the medium's social currency; using photography, he seeks out opportunities to relate to and communicate with others in his environment. As a practice, photography mediates one's direct experience and perception of the world (Sobchack

2004). Photographic image-making may therefore mediate Vincent's relation to 'another world'; perhaps a world outside the realm of autism, a world in which the visual is emphasised over other senses. In this regard, elements including beauty can be thought about differently and refer to 'another world'. Simultaneously, photography helps Vincent integrate his senses to "search for the experiences of the beautiful". This can be a search for the experience of moments in everyday life, or perhaps the search for an awareness of the self in relation to others and the world. Experiencing beauty is subjective, and as a subjective medium photography authorises the search for this individual experience. This idea is supported by Dong-Hoo Lee, who claims,

> The act of photographing is not merely the act of pressing a button to mechanically fix a part of the world into an image or to produce a standardized gaze of photographic conventions. It can also be a practice of being attentive to a series of temporal and spatial moments in the locale and trying to make sense of and interpret a subject. Through the practice of walking around the site, searching for photographable objects, and framing what one wants to capture, one can face the challenge of how to make sense of what one sees.
> (Lee 2010: 272)

Since photographic seeing also involves operating the camera, the photographer negotiates between composing the frame and perceiving the environment. For Vincent, who operates his DSLR camera fully manually, taking photographs requires him to change the settings frequently, yet the camera is not always ready to record things.[44] Here, Vincent seems to work in tandem with Henri Cartier-Bresson's vision of working, that is, "the photographer searches for the moment when reality is at its most striking appearance, resulting in the 'taking' rather than 'making' of images" (cited in Bardis 2004: 210). Cartier-Bresson's working style touches on Maynard's (2008) idea that photographic seeing is capable of developing rich meanings. Evidence that Vincent's photographic practice coincides with Cartier-Bresson and Maynard's ideas is found in the following excerpt when Vincent states,

> I have this kind of naïve belief that it [the best photograph] has to happen, and when it didn't happen the first time, then it's not going to happen. Like the first shot is always the best shot, which I know is not true, but sometimes it's true. So often when I don't get it right the first time, then I think 'whatever' and go for the next subject.

Joe's photographic eyes centre on native wildlife animals in their (natural) habitats, such as parks and sanctuaries, which is linked to his voluntary involvement as a

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[44] As Edward Weston pointed out, "[t]his very richness of control facilities often acts as a barrier to creative work. The fact is that relatively few photographers ever master their medium. Instead they allow the medium to master them" (1980: 173).

local countryside ranger. Joe is very knowledgeable about animals and their different varieties, and often shared his knowledge whilst describing his photographs during the sessions. For example, it was important to Joe to refer to the specific types of the owls he photographed during a visit of the British wildlife sanctuary (Figures 5.18 and 5.19).

Figure 5.18. Photograph by Joe.

Figure 5.19. Photograph by Joe.

Figure 5.20. Photograph by Joe.

Also noticeable is the proximity of the owls and their profile views as depicted in the frames, suggesting Joe walked as close to them as possible without disturbing them. The desire not to disturb animals in the process of his image-making is indicated by the careful way Joe approaches them, which he repeatedly states in sessions. To illustrate this, Joe describes his approach to photographing a forest scene (Figure 5.20) in the following excerpt:

> JD: These here are the best pictures. You can see enough of the two kingfishers though you can't exactly see them but they are there. I know where they are.
> BD: But that makes it so interesting, Joe.
> JD: No, I'm not talking about your opinion of the picture, I'm talking about where they actually were in that picture. It's just when I saw them in real life at that time and place. I could just make them out and I just took a photo of them. I did zoom in a little but not much. This is the clearest of them so you can actually see a pair of kingfishers as close as possible from where I was without disturbing them.

In his effort to photograph the pair of kingfishers, Joe remains at a safe distance where he can still see the birds. While his photographic eyes allow him to practice his environmental seeing (Maynard 2008), it is important to Joe not to disturb the birds. Unlike the medium or close-up depictions of animals and illustrations of nature that Joe usually tends to photograph with his smartphone, the wide-angle frame of a forest scene on a cold November afternoon depicts a medium-sized tree trunk stretching horizontally across a stream, indicating that a storm may have caused the tree to fall from its natural

position. The surrounding trees have hardly any leaves and their colours are fading; the ground along the stream appears to be soft and inaccessible. It is a well-composed frame conveying the atmosphere of a late autumn day. Compared to other photographs Joe has taken, the forest scene appears in isolation. Even his parent, who joined the sessions, asked Joe whether he took the photograph because he liked the look of the forest scene, as there was no other apparent reason for taking the image, at least none that fitted within the subject matter Joe habitually photographed. Joe instantly responded with a "no!", indicating that despite zooming in to photograph the two kingfishers closer, they were too small in real life, and he was too far away to have a larger representation of them in the photograph.

A discussion with Joe revealed that he merely intended to photograph the two birds in the particular moment that he felt was worthy of being photographed. The representation of the two birds on the camera phone screen does not seem to be as important for Joe as the moment itself in which he perceived the birds and photographed them – which is the same experience he had with the starlings (Figure 5.15). It was not the forest as a location that Joe aimed to capture photographically; his visual perception focused on the birds that he saw from afar, yet could not photograph any closer due to the inaccessible terrain, and the caution in which he proceeded to avoid frightening the pair of kingfishers. This seems to relate to Joe's lesser concern with the image as a representation, which is reinforced in the following discussion:

> UK: What aspect of photography do you prefer more, do you treasure the photographs or is it more about the practice?
> JD: It's the image that the photo has that I like. Look, each time I take a photograph it's of a specific view I just like and I keep it to somehow preserve it, really, until the chance comes that I get to show it to other people in some way.
> BD: It's about the picture, not about the taking of the picture… He has the camera… and because it's on your [Joe's] phone, it's there, he doesn't go and set out to take a photo. You see something you like and you want to preserve the image, and you photograph it, right?
> JD: Yes.

Here, it is useful to reflect on Straus who asserts, "[p]eople with autism are often richly attentive to minute details, sometimes at the expense of the big picture" (2013: 467). Being caught up in detail makes it more difficult to achieve an overview of something, in this context, the forest scene. Joe's focused description of the kingfishers without mentioning the forest at all indicates that he lacked the overview. Although the attention to detail to the exclusion of the whole is a common attribute in people with scopic

sensitivity (Williams 2006), it also appears to be a particular accurate way of expressing naturalism through photography.

Figure 5.21. Photograph by Joe.
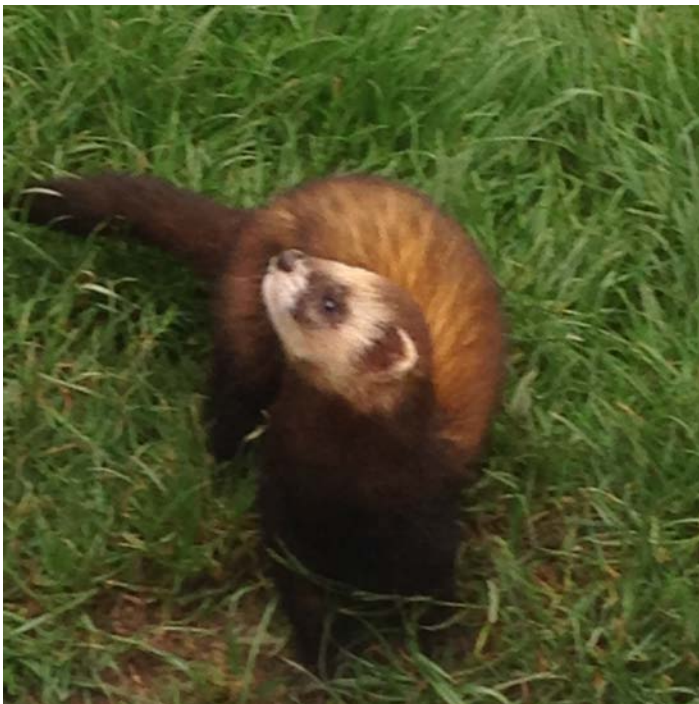
Figure 5.22. Photograph by Joe.

Joe's forest scene is therefore not in isolation to his other depictions; what appears to be at odds is merely the distance to, and consequently small illustration of, the kingfishers compared to the usual close-up or medium frames of animals portrayed in Joe's

photographs (Figure 5.21 and 5.22). The forest scene signifies a sensitivity to proximity and the importance of the integrity of the subject represented in the photograph that characterises Joe's image-making (Kiran 2012; Pettersson 2011). In other words, it is important to Joe to photograph the animals as a whole, without cropping off any parts. The kingfishers are depicted in their entirety and Joe is as close to them as he can get "without disturbing them", further showing the respect he has for animals, and that photographs depict them as he perceives them. This is an interesting observation, and relates to the integrity of practices of 'traditional' portrait photography that portray the subject's face as a whole figure, relating to the relationship between the photographer, the photographed subject and the viewer, and marking respect towards the person depicted (Clarke 1997; Tormey 2013).[45] For Joe, this respect relates to animals. Although he uses the zoom function on his camera phone occasionally to "zoom in a little", he does not appear to use it with the intention of zooming as far into the distant as possible, which would allow him to see a large representation of the animal on his camera screen. In contrast, the zoom enables him to engage with animals in their environments at a safe distance; his use of the zoom reveals his affection for animals, something he confirms by saying, "I don't want to chase them away" in the process of photographing them. If necessary Joe prefers to "walk as far forward as possible" to take a photograph of the "object in question", rather than use the zoom of the camera to create a close depiction from afar. For Joe, the zoom is not grounded in form of a distant voyeuristic gaze as part of his photographic seeing. Rather, it is related to the concept of photographic naturalism and Joe's ability to perceive the animals the same way he experiences them in real life. This is important for Joe, as he does not manipulate his photographs to exercise any control over how he wants to perceive the world.

Participants have different approaches to manipulating their photographic images, depending on their technical know-how, ability and interest in altering them. Visual evidence from this study suggests some photographs have been kept the exact way they were taken without making any changes to the photographic image, such as photographs taken by Joe and James. "I keep them as I took them", Joe says firmly in one of the sessions. Vincent, on the other hand, experiments with his camera settings by trying out different exposure times rather than using filters or photo-editing software to enhance his photographs. As John Roberts proposes, those who change their photographs "extend the critique of photographic naturalism into the domain of

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[45] With the changing conventions of contemporary photography and self-representations in particular, where cropped faces are an acceptable form, here Joe's respect to animals refers to portraiture that depicts full figures and faces.

photographic *illusion*" (2009: 289, original italics). Alex seems to enter the domain of illusion.

Figure 5.23. Photograph by Alex.

Alex takes advantage of various techniques to manipulate his images and create certain illusions, including using photo-editing software and filters to achieve that. In his attempt to give the impression of solitude, Alex positioned the tree in the middle of the frame to direct the viewer's attention to it, and additionally used a filter to create a desired blurred effect that guides the viewer to the centre of the frame (Figure 5.23). "I like the solitude of this one [tree]. It's upfront with the vast field I had", Alex clarified during a meeting. Here, Alex's photograph bears a resemblance to P.H. Emerson's naturalistic style of photography. As an advocate of naturalism, Emerson attempted to create his photographs by employing a selective focus (a technique also known as differential focus) that resulted in a photograph that was closer to the effects a human eye can perceive (Edwards 2006). Emerson argued that the human eye rarely sees anything fully in focus, so he manipulated his camera's focal plane to produce areas in and out of focus (Edwards 2006). Notably, Emerson also advocated practicing photography outdoors in nature and composing the scene with a single shot, which is largely what the participants in this study did. Apart from the composition and light, Alex also experiments with black and white filters and colour settings by way of contrasting

them. To illustrate this, he changed a colour photograph into black and white hues while retaining the green shrub along the brick wall (Figure 5.24).

Figure 5.24. Photograph by Alex.

Alex uses both his camera phone and digital compact camera to create special effects in his photographs. A present from his father, Alex carries his phone with him wherever he goes and uses its camera for his everyday photography. Although he refers to his digital compact camera as "my official camera", clarifying "I'd use my Nikon over this [smartphone] because it's more professional", he uses both cameras, clarifying, "I'm slowly getting the hang of it [operating the camera settings on the phone]". The phone camera is readily accessible, enabling Alex to photograph moments and objects as they fit into his preconceived ideas. Research findings suggest his practice is less about the professionalism linked to the photographic equipment than the ability to creatively experiment with his image-making. As Paula Uimonen (2016) notes, "the ease of use and constant presence of… cameras opens up more opportunities for artistic photography" (2016: 26). This artistic opportunity motivates Alex to use his digital compact camera over his mobile phone, since the former offers more scope for experimentation. Nancy van House adds, this creative practice encourages people to "see the world as a field of potential images" (2011: 131). Alex enriches his creative agency in the performance of cultural identity by modifying his photographs using editing software. Despite Alex's preference for using his compact camera over his smartphone,

research findings suggest both cameras offer him opportunities to visually communicate his ways of seeing and being-in-the-world.
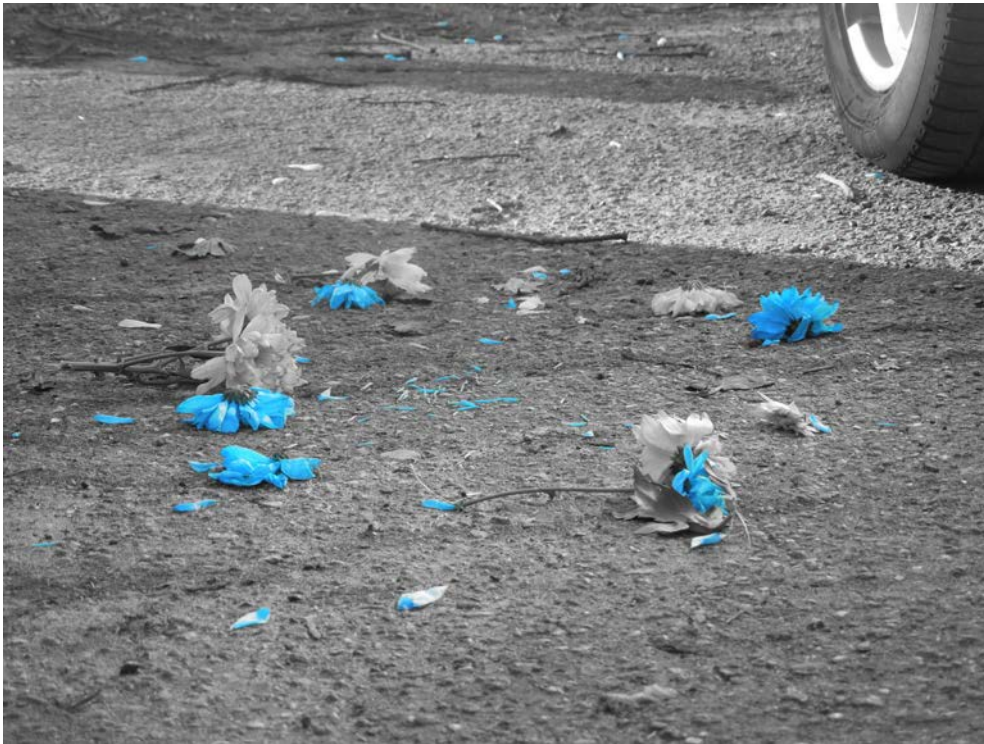
Figure 5.25. Photograph by Alex.

One day Alex comes across an array of flowers and petals positioned on the ground, which promptly inspires him to take a photograph (Figure 5.25). "I just found them in the car park. This one works best; in fact, I use it as my [phone] wallpaper", Alex explains. The black and white photograph depicts several individual flowers and petals loosely arranged in a circle in the middle of the frame and placed on what appears to be a coarse and bare, yet solid surface. The array of flowers and petals engender an area in the centre of the frame that conveys the flowers' fragility and vulnerability. This fragility is juxtaposed with the rough surface on which the flowers are positioned. What stands out in the photograph is that some of the petals are blue while others are white; the particular shade and intensity of the blue suggests it is an artificial colour edited into the photograph after it was taken. This is further signified by the impossibility of colour in a black and white photograph, unless the photograph is manipulated. In his description of the photograph Alex confirms he used a function on his camera settings called 'colour select'. The camera setting allows him to arbitrarily change the colour of some of the petals portrayed in the frame whilst retaining the black and white or grey hues of other objects depicted in the black and white photograph, itself a manipulation that Alex produced by applying a filter before taking the photograph. According to Alex, the

photograph "was taken… using a noir effect; [he spells the word] *n-o-i-r*, a sort of black and white effect but noir is more graphic. Unfortunately, it doesn't capture details very well when you zoom in". The photograph is divided into two parts, with a short twig placed horizontally between both components of the frame. The lower part of the frame signifies the flower display that is positioned in the shadow, whilst the top part conveys sunshine, and shows a few loose petals and small twigs, as well as a fragment of a car tyre. Positioned in the right hand upper corner of the frame, the tyre's robust and solid texture allows for a sudden disruption and juxtaposes the tenderness of the flowers and petals. This interpretation is supported by Alex, who reflects on the image during the session, saying "I like this; the flowers look really soft and comforting despite the fact there is a car tyre next to it". Bearing in mind the spontaneity in which the image was taken, the camera phone enabled Alex to frame the image and change the settings before taking the image. The effect of his manipulation further suggests his vision was centred on the flower arrangement, which indicates Alex manipulated the image as his creative agency serves as an aid to control his visual perception.

Figure 5.26. Photograph taken by Alex.

Comparing the photograph taken and manipulated with a smartphone (Figure 5.25) with one taken and edited with a digital compact camera (Figure 5.26), the two photographs depict similar features and qualities, showing the smartphone can produce equivalent results to those taken on a digital compact camera. It is almost impossible to

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distinguish which cameras were used to take the photographs. This further denotes that advanced camera settings are not always important to Alex, regardless of his preference to use his digital compact camera because "it's more professional". He acknowledges this by saying the smartphone "takes some good photos but I can't remember every single feature". Of course, editing images can be characteristic of the photographic practices of non-ASD people. Writers on everyday photography increasingly recognise the fading distinction between amateur and professional photography, and the quality of photographs they produce. Paul Cobley and Nick Haeffner propose, "digital cameras enable domestic photographers to take 'good' or professional-looking photographs and make certain capacities of professional cameras available for consumer use" (2009: 123). Alex uses both his cameras to different extents, in different contexts and with varying results, depending on a number of factors, including the different spaces and places he inhabits and perceives. Similar to Vincent, photography enables Alex to exercise some control over his own perception. For Vincent, this intervention occurs in distinct photographically-mediated ways, with one being more perceptually intense than the other. In Alex's case, he uses image-editing software on both cameras, signifying he brings photographs closer to his perception by selecting some areas to be more colourful than others. Importantly, both their image-making is linked to their unique perception of self and the world. The process and swiftness of photographic manipulation has changed with the arrival of digital image-making (Barnbaum 2015; Shove et al. 2007; Skopik 2003). Drawing on Shove and colleagues, the writers point out, "the camera becomes a one-stop device for capturing, manipulating and viewing digital images" (2007: 77). Lee (2010) similarly argues, "[d]igital cameras as an intimate mobile medium allow people to readily visualize every moment of their experience" (2010: 267). After seeing the flowers on the ground, Alex engaged in the technical possibilities his smartphone affords (Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016; Shove et al. 2007). When he saw the isolated swing in the playground on a wet spring day, Alex visualised a film scene he remembered seeing in the past and took the photograph thereafter (Figure 5.27). To create a realistic effect from the movie, Alex added the red hue and lowered the vantage point from which he took the image, enriching his creative agency by using the editing tools on his phone. He explains:

> This is the recreation ground. I don't know why but I like this. I guess it's the way it's isolated from other places and I can relax there. And this one, I gave this one a red hue. It's like something which is generally regarded for enjoyment but it has been left abandoned. You see the angle, right? Kind of reminds me of a shot I saw in a movie once, where there was this swing and it's just swinging

back and forth and there is no one on it. The camera angle is slightly upward, and the sky… has a slightly red hue to it, and I don't know why, but I came across this as really powerful so here I was sort of attempting to imitate that.

Figure 5.27. Photograph by Alex.

The brief account illustrates Alex's ability for manipulating his images, seemingly to create images that enhance the reality he saw at the time. Drawing on Maynard (2008), Alex's photographic eyes transformed his vision towards a richer cultural meaning. The photograph of the swing shows Alex was influenced by a film scene that enabled him to perform his cultural identity by creating his own photograph.

Similar to non-autistic people, individuals with ASD are influenced by other people, health, age, the environment and culture (Bogdashina 2010; Lawson 2001; Roth 2008). For her work as an autistic poet, Lawson (2001) acknowledges reading the work of other poets, indicating she feels connected with this particular community. Verbal accounts from research findings suggest participants have similar approaches to the work of others. For example, after visiting an exhibition of Saul Leiter's work, Vincent acknowledges being influenced by his photographs:

> I thought there was some similarity with my own photographs in terms of abstract colour patterns and also the use of reflections. All these different layers in some of his photographs, and I really liked it myself; the kind of blurred reality and different layers… the surreal thing… I liked it a lot. And I think he had some photos of people and there were a lot of signs, and a mixture of people and signs

with mixed messages… this was very much the attraction to some of these Saul Leiter photos, that you really can't see where the photographer is shooting from, and what is reflection and what is not.

As discussed in the first subtheme of this chapter, Vincent is interested in photographing patterns and reflections. Here, the discussion focuses on the influence Leiter has on Vincent's own photography. "The different layers were very much the attraction to some of Saul Leiter's photographs", Vincent reveals following his visit to an exhibition displaying the work of photographer Saul Leiter. But it is not only Leiter who influences Vincent; he copies others' ideas to create his own work:

> I am definitely influenced, of course. I do not believe in this myth of originality. I saw a film yesterday, and I want to make something similar using animation as well… I have never set out to make a one-on-one copy of other works, but I am influenced by other people's work.

Vincent's unreserved insight into the concept of originality is interesting, suggesting he is very conscious of drawing on other people's work when producing his images.

Figure 5.27. Photograph by Alex.

Comparable to Vincent's approach and acknowledgement of being influenced by other people's work, Alex also recognises that some artists influence his work, naming Frank Miller and Bernd and Hilla Becher as key influences. As the illustrator of *Sin City*,

Miller's comics inspire Alex to "get more the hand of how light sources work". Similarly, the conceptual artists and photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher influence Alex's work that depicts "old-fashioned industrial machines", as well as "derelict cities and basic deconstruction stuff". For example, Alex explains that he went to a local recreation park to take photographs because of its "very barren [environment] and interesting architectural landscapes" (Figure 5.28). The image depicts an unrecognisable, solid piece of stone statue carved on a stone base. Forming the foreground of the frame, the sculpture is arranged in the middle of the photograph. It is enclosed by a stone balustrade which forms the frame's mid-ground, and is probably still the original stonework from the mid-19th century. The background is clearly visible due to the depth of field and portrays a park, another balustrade of the palace and trees that form the horizon. The sky fills the top half of the photograph; it is white with a hint of blue and seems over-exposed. When describing the images, Alex clarifies he went to a recreation park "to sort of get ideas for landscape settings". His interest in Bernd and Hilla Becher's work inspired him to visit the recreation park to take photographs for his A-level project. The brief accounts shed light on Vincent and Alex's approaches to other people's work; they perceive the influence of artists as a way of enriching their own cultural identity, without seeking to create identical copies of others' work.

Joe, on the other hand, appears rather reluctant to the idea of being influenced by others, as the following conversation reveals:

> UK: Do other images influence your ideas? We live in such a visual world, I was wondering how that would fit into your own practice.
> JD: It's not about changing practice, really. It's just a really good picture I want to capture; it's like a one-moment thing and I take it. There is no need for change. If there is a really good picture, I just take it, nothing else to it. You can say I'm not much of an artist anymore if I'm thinking that way.
> BD: That's just your approach.
> UK: Absolutely. I was just wondering if there are any images out there that you have seen and like, and that you would like to copy in a similar way.
> JD: Hmm… Usually no. If there is an art gallery I've been to and there is a book [of the work] and I have money, then I buy it.
> BD: Do you find, Joe, when you watch those nature documentaries that the photography influences you at all?
> JD: It wasn't photography regardless of the visual images; it was filming, not photography.
> BD: So it doesn't influence you?
> JD: No, there is a difference in function and nature between photography and filming. Distinctions are worthy of being noted, as opposed to similarities.
> BD: But when you're doing your other art, like when you're doing your sculpture, you take influences from other things that you see, don't you?

JD: Partially. I don't try to copy, I try to find my own inspirations or try to make something new on my own, not just imitate something else, like generations of people have done of something else. It's a circle that I'm trying to find a way out of.

Joe's account is insightful, showing his self-awareness as a photographer and artist, and the importance of creating new work. This suggests he is more likely to believe in originality, which Vincent rejects so firmly. Importantly, Joe represents a view that challenges the belief that "autistic creativity is 'attenuated' and lacks self-awareness, that autists live solely in 'isolated moments', and are therefore less than fully human" (Osteen 2008: 15). In contrast, he reveals his autistic agency in the process of expressing his ways of seeing and being-in-the-world through photography.

5.2.3. Presence

The final subtheme is about the notion of 'being there'; being present in the world, and being self-aware of the spatial and temporal dimensions of photography when producing images of beings and objects in the environment. Although some of the aspects discussed here overlap with findings examined in the previous two subthemes, it is important to address them separately in order to highlight spatial and temporal elements of participants' photographic practices that attest to a particular momentary presence they want to photograph. Hence, this subtheme is not about the intentional face-to-face or distant presence with others that creates a mode of communication; that aspect forms the basis of the analysis in the first subtheme of Part II. In the domain of everyday photography, the photographic practice is often less about the quality of the image and its technical precision, than the way people perform photography with their body, their senses, their commitment to movement and their habits of observing the world (Pink 2011b; Uimonen 2016; Villi 2016). The camera itself is used within a dynamic relation of place, presence and being-in-the-world, and characterises the epistemological dialectic of presence and absence, the latter being the product of distance in space and time (Hjorth et al. 2012). Drawing on the work of contemporary writers on presence (Forrest 2016; Hjorth et al. 2012), and building on existing scholarship that has explored presence in relation to camera phones (Hjorth and Pink 2014; Villi 2016), this subtheme analyses how photography serves to underline the importance of presence as a key concept in everyday life. Equipped with location-aware technologies, smartphones further intensify the dynamic relation between the body,

place, senses, movement and observation, whereby the social is overlapped with the geographic and electronic (Villi 2016).[46]

As discussed earlier in this chapter, visual evidence from this study suggests participants have a preference for practicing photography outdoors. While that is of course not unusual in itself, it emphasises the centrality of movement in the process of their image-making, seeing that they move from one temporality and place to another to capture particular moments. Asking Joe what the significance of his photographic image-making is, he explains,

> It's capturing the inspiring. It's capturing what is the most inspiring and [pause] or significant for me, and what could be for others of that moment; a scene of that moment that was worth taking a photo of to help me remember it and share with others.

Joe's remark suggests moments occur in the interrelation of time, space, place, body and sensory experiences (Ingold 2008), and photography enables him to capture his subjective experience of presence; that is, the definite moment of being there (Edwards 2006; Villi 2016). Joe's habit of walking around in the environment enables him to photograph the inspiring moments that he subsequently shares with others. As photography mediates the presence of being and interactive situations, photographic image-making differently solicits and structures Joe's presence to the world, his representation in it, and his sensibilities about it, inviting his agency and participation in framing space, time and bodily investment as meaningful social and personal experiences of the world (Sobchack 2004).

Vivian Sobchack (2004) highlights that as relatively novel materialities, photographic technologies are socially pervasive and have historically symbolised and constituted a fundamental alteration of the forms of culture's previous temporal and spatial consciousness and of the bodily sense of existential presence to the world, to self and to others. As a result, this altered sense of subjectively perceived and embodied presence, both indicated and sustained by photographic technologies, emerges within and co-constitutes objective and material practices of representation and social being (Sobchack 2004; Villi 2016). Mobile technologies enable users to connect to their surrounding locations and be present, that is, experience the spatial and temporal dimensions of photography as they merge in one moment. Vincent, for example, carefully observes and moves through the environment, using it as a backdrop and

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[46] Murray (2008b) discusses the notion of autistic presence in relation to the representation of ASD in contemporary culture and argues, "[i]t is the presence of the person with autism, in whatever form, that stops the condition being only subject to the workings of metaphor and fascination" (2008b: 16).

inspiration for his image-making when something catches his attention. Using a 50mm prime lens on his DSLR camera, and as a result of his spatial awareness, he is responsive to the necessity to walk fairly close to objects he wishes to photograph. With a fixed focal length, the convenience and versatility of zooming is not an option. The locations are not arbitrarily chosen, as he explores and photographs them during his stay in London. The following vignette indicates that Vincent's photographic practice is multi-faceted and encompasses all his senses; he is self-aware of the temporal and spatial dimensions in the process of his image-making, while using photography to exercise control over his visual perceptual experiences. The medium offers opportunities to act in and experience the world (Kiran 2012).

Figure 5.29. Photograph by Vincent.

Inspired to explore urban environments in the process of his image-making, Vincent walks through boroughs and neighbourhoods in London, a place filled with the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Attracted to architecture, colours and patterns,

Vincent explains, "it was an intuitive moment again when I walked by and saw the painting, [which] I liked. And I just took a photo and afterwards I saw [pause], maybe I saw the dog first. But I also like this – somebody walking out of the photo, and the green and the purple [colour of the building]". The colourful façade is of a building that stands in one of the busiest street markets in London (Figure 5.29). Deptford Market sells a broad mix of everything, including fruit, vegetables, antique and bric-a-brac, and attracts people from nearby streets and areas. Stalls spread further than assigned by market boundaries, and are temporarily set up onto pavements where they almost merge with overcrowded household shops in the area; only a small path for pedestrians divides one from another. Whilst pavements still serve as physical boundaries for stalls and shops, the sensory systems cross all boundaries.

Figure 5.30. Photograph by Vincent.

There are endless sounds across the market, with no beginning or end; shoppers chat and haggle, stall holders shout across to advertise their goods, and the nearby traffic generates the sound of cars and buses driving past, with sirens of ambulances and police cars never absent for long. However, the excess of sounds does not deter Vincent from exploring the market and its abundance of smells in the air that are made up of ethnic food stalls, butchers and fishmongers, and of course the smell of antique objects and bric-a-brac that have been stored in attics for years without seeing any light. Vincent describes one of his purchases (Figure 5.30):

> I found these in Deptford market. The guy said these were Victorian but I'm not
> sure, because the date on the back was 1956, but they were from the old system

cameras; I think they are glass plates. I bought them and then put them by my
window, and when the light is shining through you can see the photographs.

Notably, Vincent makes reference to the natural light. Usually, he mentions light in
relation to his own photographic image-making, but here, his comment signals the
significance natural light has in Vincent's life. It is required to see the glass plate images,
and, more importantly, guide his visual perception.

Among the different smells, there is a myriad of diverse sights in the market area.
Quaint buildings feature along the streets, signs decorate shop entrances, and shop
owners stack their goods outside on the pavements, whilst market venders pile their
fresh fruit and vegetables on trestle tables. People stroll up and down the market to find
the goods and produce they need; smells change from stall to stall depending on what
they sell, and some areas appear louder than others. While negotiating the different
smells, sounds and sights, the market space offers diverse opportunities for kinaesthetic
learning. If too intense, the diverse smells, sounds and visual stimuli can confuse
individuals with autism. Photography has the power to manage the senses; for Vincent,
the technology has the ability to help him focus on his visual sense. The market is a
multisensory fluid place in movement, a rich environment that provides diverse
opportunities for photography. This is particularly true for Vincent's experience of
Deptford Market, and more generally his interest in urban surroundings in relation to his
everyday photographic practice. Looking closer at Vincent's photograph (5.29), on the
left is a depiction of a black dog, kept on a leash secured on the wall of the building,
which prevents the dog from running away. He sits there waiting. "He is tied up here
[Vincent points to the leash in the image], and then the parking sign. There's a timely
indication of waiting", Vincent notes while indicating his temporal awareness in the
process of describing the photograph. (Although Vincent chuckles in that moment, he
does not make it clear whether he viewed the scene as a visual joke.) The right-hand
side of the frame portrays one human leg, signifying a moving person, with the rest of the
body outside the frame. Vincent not only photographed the colourful building, but also
the dynamic juxtapositions between activity and inactivity and between space and time
that he witnessed in that particular moment. It is a scene representative of Vincent's
experience of the city, one in which he uses the camera to manage his sensory
perception in an environment that affords him to feel present.

Participants' photographs depict objects, beings and places in a state of activity,
placing movement at the heart of sensory perception (Ingold 2008; Pink 2011a). Ingold
suggests places are created from movement and argues, "there would be no places

were it not for the comings and goings of human beings and other organisms to and from them, from and to places elsewhere" (2008: 1808). This place of human activity and movement is captured in one of Vincent's images. Describing his own account of a sudden moment in which Vincent recorded a photograph of a running woman in a red coat (Figure 5.31), he explains:

> I was walking in this street, the light was really good and I was looking around thinking this is beautiful. It was also a very peaceful atmosphere and then, all of a sudden, she started running and it was a disruption of that moment of peace and quiet, but at the same time, it was interesting that she was suddenly running and I wanted to capture that, and, I don't know, almost chase her. This was a beautiful woman in a red coat, this object of desire, moving all of a sudden. And I also think the blurriness of the image speaks to movement and the rush comes up when all of a sudden there's something that grabs your interest and you want to chase it.
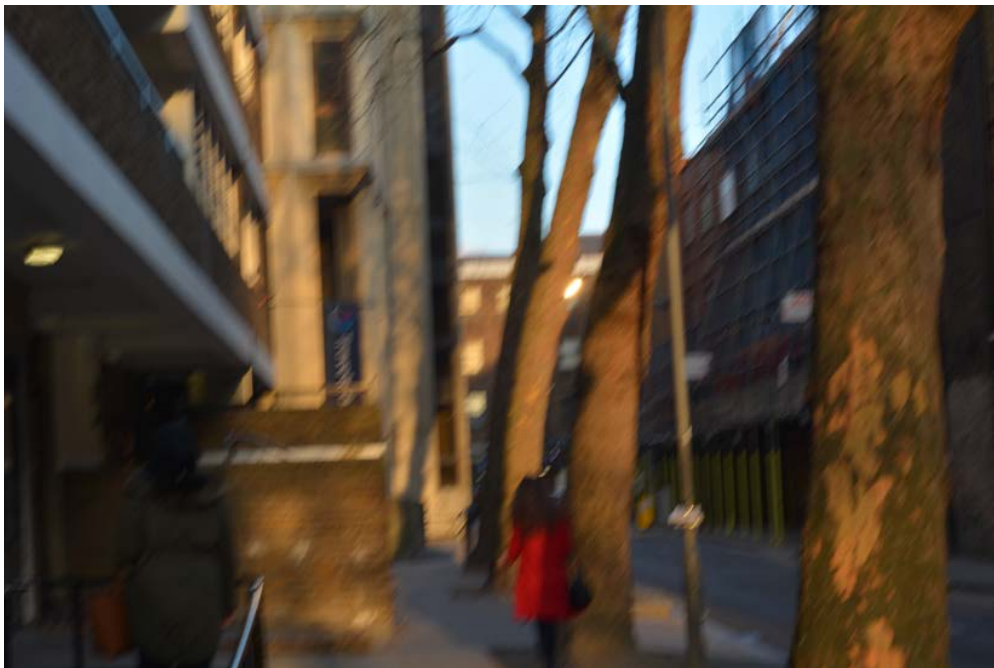
Figure 5.31. Photograph by Vincent.

Vincent's experience is revealing as it indicates he does not have preconceived ideas that he aims to capture photographically. Instead, he intuitively moves through urban spaces and places, absorbing the presence, whilst being self-aware of using his camera to capture moments in his surroundings. Referencing the natural light that guides his visual perception, Vincent vividly describes the disruption of the peaceful moment when the woman suddenly started running in front of him. His desire to capture the defining moment alludes to his interest in movement. Unlike some ASD individuals who cannot tolerate sudden, unpredictable movement and experience difficulties in perception of motion (Bogdashina 2016; Williams 1998), Vincent appears to welcome the disruption in

the sense that it offers an opportunity to capture it photographically, which is further indicated by his remark on the blurriness of the picture. The photograph of the woman seems to be less about her as a person than the sudden body movement that disrupted the peaceful presence Vincent was experiencing at the time.

Vincent's sensory perception helps him take photographs of scenes and objects that trigger his interest and are meaningful to him. The colourful building he was visually attracted to was only part of his image-making. He was simultaneously entangled in different smells, sights, sounds, space, time and movement in the process of taking the image. Considering many of his photographs depict busy and multisensory urban places, this suggests the negotiation process of this entangled sensory experience is part of his everyday photographic practice, an idea that developed from the theory of multisensoriality, movement and place-as-event (Ingold 2008; Pink 2009).[47] Although this negotiation process is also related to the photographic practices of non-ASD people, autistic people's sensory perceptual issues are core features of ASD, and influence participants' photographic practices. Since the notion of presence relates to time, space and being, Vincent's photography is an example of how the interrelation between presence, sensory experience and movement directly relate to photographic image-making. Taking this idea to a logical conclusion, individuals cannot simply return to places and take photographs of the exact same moments and objects, as the moments, too, change in movement. It is essential to capture the specific moment in the presence experienced at the time.

Figure 5.32. Photograph by Joe.

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[47] Pink (2009) argues that places are not bounded localities, but collections of things that become intertwined.

The notion of presence as a dimension of self, time, moment, space and place is also characteristic of Joe's photographic practice, as illustrated by an image portraying a sunset over a valley that is surrounded by a forest (Figure 5.32). The following excerpt represents the significance of presence for Joe:

> You see or view an image that feels right then you attempt to take a photo of it. This is a great portrayal of that view. It's really when the time comes. It doesn't really matter what time of day. It's recognising some view that was in a place and time that was particularly good and worthy of taking a photo. Being in the same place wouldn't always be the same view, or the same time of day. It's something I realised about that time and moment that I felt was unique enough to take a photo of. That would be great to put on a card or something, especially thinking that there is some uniqueness to it. That's why I have taken the photo, it looks specifically good.

Joe's sunset experience exposes the importance of capturing the right moment in which time and space collide without any significance of the place as a particular location. He seems to be interested in capturing the links between stillness and movement in his experience of presence, suggesting photography is an extension of his vision and being-in-the-world. His idea to create a [post]card from the image is noteworthy; on the one hand, a postcard further removes the sunset from time and space, and on the other hand, it gives Joe (and others) the opportunity to hold the card of the scene he photographed, and share the moment – and his gaze – with others (Urry and Larsen 2011). The sunset would not only be visible and memorable to him, but turn into a reproduction of an idealised presence in which time and space merge. With digital photography instantly displaying the image on the screen, there is almost no spatial and temporal gap between the event of exposure and the moment the image is revealed. Joe does not manipulate the photograph to show a different, or perhaps distorted, version of his reality, which explains his objection to using the zoom on his smartphone. His approach infers the complex relationship Joe has to photography, which is not merely a tool to communicate with others, but also a way to relate to animals and the environment. He is aware it is a fixed moment that cannot be altered in space and time, just like the quickly-changing and vanishing nature of sunsets. Here, Edward Weston emphasises,

> the photographer's recording process cannot be drawn out. Within its brief duration, no stopping or changing or considering is possible. When he uncovers his lens every detail within its field of vision is registered in far less time than it takes for his own eyes to transmit a similar copy of the scene to his brain.
>
> (Weston 1980: 172)

Unlike for Vincent and Alex, who tend to experiment with different camera settings before pressing the shutter release, the recording process is not drawn out in Joe's photographic practice. Only using his smartphone for his image-making, the technology enables him to record the moments in which time and space meet without causing major delays by operating the camera settings. The only delay in capturing the temporal and spatial dimensions of photography is caused in the process of including some aspects in the frame, while excluding others.

In summary, Part I offered a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the research findings in relation to the first main theme, the phenomenological dimension of photography and its three subthemes. The main theme provided the basis to discuss participants' sensory perceptual issues concerning their photographic image-making, while the intention of the subthemes was to recognise specific nuances, preferences and distinctions of participants' engagement with the technology. Importantly, despite the emphasis on vision as a key sense in relation to photography, visual perception should not be separated from the other senses and the body. Here, it was discussed in order to emphasise participants' focus on patterns, composition and light, therefore exposing a particular kind of visual experience. The affinity for light, patterns, reflections and structures, to name just some of the features participants visually perceived in their environment, is an integral characteristic of ASD (Schwarz 2008). The key aspect that was drawn out of this discussion was that photography seemed to enable participants to exercise control over their sensory overload; this form of sensory manipulation released some pleasure and relief in their experience of ASD. The second subtheme was photographic naturalism, which shed light on participants' preference for taking naturalistic photographs of objects and beings in the environment, signifying their photographic images are based on the principles of vision, namely that participants treat their subjects with varying degrees of transparency and fidelity to the moment and the exact experience, including their temporal and experiential dimensions (Emerson 1980; Lopes 1996; Maynard 1997). Distinguishing between seeing, looking and photographic seeing, the latter term was examined in reference to participants' ability to develop and transform their vision in order to achieve richer meanings of self and world in the process of their image-making (Maynard 2008). Despite its overlapping nature with other subthemes in Part I, the third subtheme was presence, a term constituted of temporal and spatial dimensions of photography, highlighting the moment when time, place, space and sensory perception unite. Presence was discussed in relation to

'being there'; being present in the entangled environment, and being self-aware of the moment that captures beings and the lifeworld.

Considering ASD is a spectrum disorder, and no two people are located in the same place along it, it was not possible, and certainly not desirable, to generalise the findings across the sample. Nonetheless, these are important findings. On the one hand, they exposed participants' shared preferences, facets, characteristics and qualities within their photographic practices, while on the other hand, they illuminated their unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. In short, Part I was pertinent for contributing to a better understanding of participants' phenomenological approaches to their photographic practices. In what follows, Part II will shed light on the social domain of participants' everyday image-making.

Part II

5.3. Introduction

Part II is concerned with the analysis and interpretation of research data in relation to the second main theme of this study, the social dimension of photography. Consistent with the structure in Part I, four subthemes emerged: (i) communication; (ii) depicting the social world; (iii) photographing people; and (iv) sharing photographs. The purpose of these subthemes is to offer a comprehensive account of the participants' photographic practices in relation to the medium's social reality. As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, participants engage with the medium in different ways and to varying degrees within the phenomenological and social dimensions of photography. The consequences of this become evident here. Adopting Ochs and Solomon's anthropological definition of sociality "as consisting of a range of possibilities for social coordination with others" (2010: 71), Part II reveals that participants have unique approaches to and understandings of what shapes their social worlds, which influences their everyday photographic practices. For example, participants acknowledge their photography functions as a mode of communication, but none shared their photographs via popular social media networks, such as Flickr and Instagram, to create group memories or build and maintain social relationships with others (Gye 2007). Instead, the interviews reveal that participants share their photographs with people they know over

the Internet, mostly as email attachments sent via their smartphones, especially if images can be used for a defined purpose, such as contributing to a conversation. Interestingly, the visual evidence suggests that participants' photographs nonetheless extend into a less frequently considered dimension of the social world through depicting encounters with animals in their everyday lives. Although digital photography expands the social use of the technology, the young male adults with ASD in this study habitually use photography, but do not focus their image-making on "expression and dialogue" with others (Lee 2013: 285), as Lee generalises for a wider population of young adults. This is an important observation, suggesting there is a need for an expanded understanding of what accounts for the role of photography in autistic individuals' social worlds.

5.4. The social dimension of photography

The emergence of digital photography brought technological and material changes to photographic technologies that have expanded the medium's social uses to comprise more than, for example, the tourist experience or special occasions (Chalfen 2016; Gye 2007; Hand 2012; Urry and Larsen 2011). The development of embedding cameras in devices has contributed to the establishment of mobile photography, a genre that emphasises "the multisensory materiality and relational sociality of mobile photographic practice" (Uimonen 2016: 19). This transformation affects the way people interact with the world. The connection to wider communication networks has extended the range of photography's social reality, and people photograph their everyday lives that they share with others via social media platforms (Lee 2010; Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz 2016; Rivière 2005). People are more likely to carry digital cameras or smartphones with them at all times, facilitating the expansion of their photographic practices, and allowing for photographs to go beyond family rites and other recognised photographic moments (Shove et al. 2007). Lehmuskallio and Gómez Cruz maintain, "not all engage in the possibilities that digital photography affords. But, importantly, many do" (2016: 1). Participants in this study engage with photography's social currency in ways that are not typical of those described in the literature on digital and mobile photography.
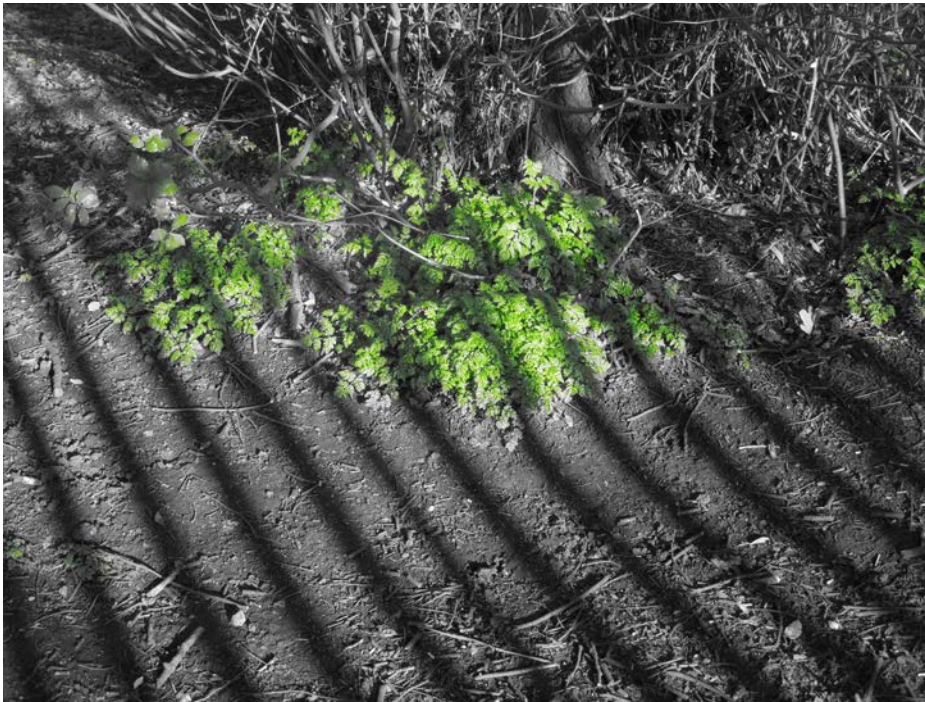
Figure 5.33. Photograph by Alex.

Figure 5.34. Photograph by Alex.

Drawing on verbal and visual evidence it is clear that for the participants in this study photography is not integral to their creation and maintenance of social relations with others (Gye 2007; Villi 2010). These young male adults with ASD do not engage with all the affordances that are specific to digital or mobile photography. The medium can nevertheless facilitate their communication and social skills. Participants in this

study take photographs of domestic wildlife animals (Figures 5.21 and 5.22), parks and other natural settings (Figure 5.33), and patterns or reflections of objects occurring in the environment (Figures 5.34). Interestingly, while much of the literature on photography is dominated by a focus on images of people and self-representations (selfies), the findings here demonstrate that whilst participants take photographs of people, the images depict people marginalised or at a distance, with their faces disguised by objects or their backs turned to the camera. The young male adults with ASD may not focus their image-making directly on people, but photography can nevertheless facilitate their social and communication skills.

Figure 5.2. Photograph by Vincent.

Vincent, for example, takes photographs of people, but the place they occupy within his photography is often marginal or ambivalent. On a visit to Cambridge, he took his DSLR camera with him with the aim of photographing the city. Asked whether he was successful with his photography, he answered, "no, I wanted to walk around so only took a couple of images, but nothing I'm proud of. But this one is nice". Rather than taking photographs of the city that day, like he intended, Vincent "just wanted to walk around and get a feel for the city". He took very few images, and notably, one of them shows his

repeated enthusiasm for lines (Figure 5.2). Pointing to the faded, curved white street line in the bottom left corner of the frame, he explains, "this line draws my attention. It forces you to lean a little back. It points you back, while these people point your vision to look forward". Interested in the detail (another image he took in Cambridge "is a detail of a wall"), Vincent's vision was focused on the line, and while he acknowledged the people in the far distance, he quickly added, "the people are not interesting to look at". This is a strong remark, and in contrast to other instances when he took images of people. Usually, his descriptions are more affirming of his aim to photograph people. At the same time, his decision to focus on walking around Cambridge, rather than taking photographs as intended, is not unusual; non-ASD people also walk around a place without using their camera despite their initial intention to take photographs (Forrest 2016). What is interesting here is that Vincent noticed the people in the distance, but maintained they were "not interesting to look at". In contrast to the almost empty and eerie street he photographed in Cambridge, Vincent took a photograph depicting many bright yellow vertical poles and people sitting on seats along the margin of the frame (Figure 5.35). As Vincent explains,

Figure 5.35. Photograph by Vincent.

This was taken in the [London] Underground. I liked that there were so many poles and I zoomed in to grow more density and repetition of the poles… I think this photo is also in the more mundane theme of people but … it's a bit de-centralised, like it's not really the people, but these yellow poles.

By describing the process of zooming in "to grow more density and repetition of the poles" in the frame, Vincent clearly signals it was not his primary goal to photograph the people. Considering he took the photograph inside the Underground, he only had a limited time to compose and take the image, and despite the many people that were present, he still centred his attention on the poles that illustrates his fascination with repetition, structure and colour in the process of his image-making.

As these two examples indicate, the people portrayed in participants' images are often unknown individuals in public places whose heads and faces are either hidden by objects (Figures 5.16), or they are captured in moments in which their heads and faces are turned away from the camera (Figures 5.10 and 5.31). More detailed accounts will follow in the subthemes, but this observation is significant for two reasons: first, unlike the frontal depictions of animals photographed from a close to medium distance (Figures 5.18, 5.21), participants' photographs depicting people are often taken from a distance (Figures 5.2 and 5.17). In general, making a photographic portrait of a person involves a complex social negotiation that has become so habituated many groups of young people take the process for granted (Lopes 1996). Graham Clarke explains, "[t]he portrait in photography is one of the most problematic areas of photographic practice… The portrait photograph is, then, the site of a complex series of interactions – aesthetic, cultural, ideological, sociological, and psychological" (1997: 101-102). Considering participants' ASD, photographing people from afar may relate to the impairments in social interaction and social communication, which are core features in autism (Bogdashina 2005; Grinker 2008; Nadesan 2005). Thus, autistic people may find photographing people particularly difficult to do.

Second, the depictions of people in participants' photographs stand out from the photographic image-making of non-autistic people in contemporary culture, who engage with the medium "in order to construct personal and group memory; in order to create and maintain social relationships; and for the purposes of self-expression and self-presentation" (Gye 2007: 280). Gye underpins the social and communicative aspects of digital and mobile photography, and implies that photographs in contemporary visual culture represent friends and individuals from wider social networks, along with images of self-presentation that include selfies, which are shared with others online. Importantly, research findings from this study reveal participants do not use photography for the

purpose of self-presentation or to create and maintain social relationships via social media networks. In contrast, participants use photography as an expressive form; their images represent aspects and moments of their everyday lives that are meaningful to them and worthy of recording. While they do not share their photographs via social media platforms, they nonetheless share them with others via email.

5.4.1. Communication

It is argued that the motivation behind the advances in technology was the need to communicate with others (Dingli and Seychell 2015). As part of this development, the role of photography has become central to interpersonal communication (Lee 2010; Rivière 2005; Van Dijck 2008). The convergence of the camera and mobile phone has created the conditions for new photographic practices, not least because the technological development, portability and the telecommunication grid linked to mobile photography have produced new contexts of the personal within the realm of communicating with others in real-time (Lister 2014; Villi 2012, 2016; Uimonen 2016). This extended range of new affordances for the social use of photography includes people's image-making at various social gatherings and events, followed by quickly uploading the images on social media platforms (Hjorth et al. 2012; Murray 2008a). Drawing on the literature of digital photography, writers often give detailed accounts of the social use of photography (Goggin 2012; Shove et al. 2007), but in so doing, they construct something like a (stereo-)typical user of image-making technologies.

For people with ASD, social communication practices are different, which underlines the need for a more detailed understanding of their social uses of photography. Participants in this study are perhaps not typical of what might be regarded as digital natives; that is, young people whose social identity is a synthesis of real and offline expressions of oneself. Nevertheless, they are not entirely uninterested in or excluded from the social uses that the affordances of the digital allow (Dingli and Seychell 2015), but they construct their social world in unique ways, partly based on the relationship autistic people have with self and others. Here, it is helpful to draw on John Duffy and Rebecca Dorner (2011), who examine the Theory of Mind (ToM) account in relation to ASD narratives and their communication skills. Referring to the incapability of "intuiting the intentions and emotions of others" (Duffy and Dorner 2011: 201), the ToM literature argues that autistic people's delay in developing ToM leads to impaired social and communication skills, which are core characteristics of ASD and often leave autistic people out from universal norms of thought and communication (Baron-Cohen 1995;

Frith 1989). Rather than considering autistic people unable to engage in the world of affect, Duffy and Dorner argue that autism is an essentially narrative disorder, based on individual symptoms, developments and subjective observations of behaviours. As a result, people with ASD have their autistic narratives, and as Duffy and Dorner claim, "[t]he significance of ToM narratives is the experience they create for autistic people: the social, cultural, neurological, and even affective worlds they assert" (2011: 213). That is to say, only by including the voices of people with ASD in research is it possible to understand the ways in which participants engage with photography's social reality, while acknowledging autistic people as active agents in their definition of self and ways of expressing their being-in-the-world (Duffy and Dorner 2011; Ochs and Solomon 2010; Roth 2008). For Alex his photographic agency includes manipulating photographs. As he states, "what I like about visual communication is the way you can really manipulate the environment at all cost".

The communicative and social facets of photography are also features of Vincent's practice. Using his smartphone to communicate with others, he explains

> By sending a photograph to somebody I can express myself and communicate in a way that is sometimes more convenient than language, verbal language. By using images, you can have a private language, which is clear between two people.

Vincent describes that the mobile phone enables him to visually communicate with others, probably referring to familiar people with whom he is close, like his family and friends, since he mentions the idea of communicating in a private language, further adding, "I think whenever I try to communicate, I try to do it in a beautiful way". Using photographs as a preferred way of mediating visual communication is popular among young people, and offers new ways of seeing the world, including new ways of seeing beauty in the everyday. Photography encourages people to see the world 'photographically', and enrich their meanings of everyday beauty (Van Dijck 2008; Van House et al. 2005). Considering the different social communication issues in ASD (Bogdashina 2005), the communicative aspect of the smartphone proves to be an alternative and useful social tool that connects autistic participants with others in their environment. For Joe, the smartphone is central to his communication; except for speaking to people face-to-face, the phone is his alternative way of communicating with others, which he confirms by saying,

> No, it's my camera and my only means of communication, well, besides talking to a person besides me. I mean communication from way-off [Joe refers to communicating from a distance rather than face-to-face.]

Interestingly, Joe expresses a sense of ownership over his ability to communicate with others via his phone. His repeated use of the personal pronoun 'my' suggests he does not share the personal device with anyone else, which is not unusual. Unlike analogue cameras that were shared with other family members in the past, mobile phones are personal devices that are rarely shared with others, since they include many other functions in addition to their communicative purposes (Gye 2007; Rivière 2005). Joe's recognition that the smartphone serves as mediated communication is noteworthy, alluding to his willingness to communicate with others, in particular, or perhaps exclusively of, people he knows. The familiarity of the people with whom he communicates is essential, suggesting Joe's smartphone facilitates social communication with existing relations (Lee 2012; Licoppe 2004). Here, Licoppe (2004) explains that telecommunication technologies are used in mediated relations to replace or compensate for the lack of face-to-face communication and the physical absence of others. Esther Milne (2010) develops these thoughts further in her study on presence and global communication technologies. She argues that digital communication networks reconfigure the experience of time and space, and as a result, distance appears to decrease, and time seems to collapse. In turn, this creates "an intense, quasi-spiritual sense of presence" (2010: 3). Occurring on different levels (emotions, gestures, memory and language), distance can achieve a sense of intimacy that is the result of "the eclipse of the material medium that supports" communication (2010: 9). For participants, this communication is often established by sending emails via the mobile phone, but not across social media platforms. With this in mind, mobile photography enables participants to "coordinate their temporal, spatial, and sensory experiences in the moment" (2010: 266). What this moment means in terms of participants' social world will be discussed next.

5.4.2. Depicting the social world

Participants in this study use photography to depict their social world within their everyday life (Gye 2010; Hand 2012; Larsen and Sandbye 2014; Lee 2010). What constitutes a social world varies from person to person (Ochs and Solomon 2010), which is evident in the photography of the four young male adults with ASD. Their sociality varies across different situational conditions, including the different environments in

which individuals spend their everyday life. For example, as a countryside ranger, Joe's social world involves a frequent interaction with native wildlife animals. As a result, animals are the main subjects of Joe's sociality, and more than mere stimuli for his engagement in the natural environment; animals contribute a large part to Joe's social world. Visual evidence confirms his preference to photograph animals (Figures 5.19, 5.20 and 5.22), and verbal accounts imply he is very caring about animals. This kindness is displayed in the way he photographs animals in their entirety, further signifying the importance of his integrity to animals and how he relates to them. His enthusiasm for animals comes to the fore when discussing the image depicting a polecat (Figure 5.22); Joe repeatedly asserts, "they [the polecats] had some really interesting head positions… and you'd be amazed how fast they go… You'd be amazed how fast they move around".

Figure 5.36. Photograph by Joe.

In contrast with the photograph of the polecat, for which Joe dealt with the fast-moving nature of the mammal, the depiction of the precisely positioned dragonfly evokes a somewhat deliberate but attentive approach to the insect, further validating the integrity of his approach (Figure 5.36). Positioned as an extreme close-up in the centre of the frame, the green and brown body of the dragonfly is camouflaged with the colours and texture of the moss growing on the wood on which the insect rests. Its fragile wings are barely visible, as the moss shines through their transparent texture. The extreme close-up of the dragonfly indicates Joe carefully approached the insect to take the image. Asking him whether he zoomed in, he acknowledges,

> JD: I did zoom in a little bit. I tried to get as big a picture of it as possible without having any parts being cut out of the view, like wing tips or such. I also tried to get the right angle with the right amount of shade and light.
> UK: Right, so that's something that is very important to you?
> JD: Yes.

The phrase "without having any parts being cut out of the view" is pertinent, for it alludes to Joe's integrity to animals in terms of photographing them in a truthful and respectful way by avoiding cropping any parts off in order to photograph their entirety. Although his integrity to animals has been discussed in Part I, it is important to reflect on it here in reference to Joe's social world, which is largely formed of animals. Depicting them in their entirety signifies Joe's treatment of and respect towards them, which is not merely related to the two-dimensional animals depicted in his photographic images. Joe's integrity and kindness to animals extend to the living beings with whom he shares the world, that is, animals as embodied souls that have "the sensation of being… of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world" (Coetzee 2003: 148). More importantly, Joe's emphasis to depict the dragonfly "with the right amount of shade and light" suggests the desired image has to be true to reality, and show an "empathetic understanding of animals" (Grinker 2010: 173). Similarly, Grandin (2006) has shown her social versatility in the way she carefully and respectfully handles cattle.

Joe's ability to carefully approach animals is characteristic of his photographic practice, and further discloses his quiet disposition and respect for animals. As part of his everyday life, he encounters many animals in their natural environments, and always approaches them with caution in order to avoid harming them. The encounter with a frog stands out from his other animal photographs, mainly because the frog is not depicted in its entirety due to it being handled by another person. The frog is placed in the palm of a

person's hands wearing lime-green and blue-grey gloves, which fill a large part of the frame (Figure 5.37).

Figure 5.37. Photograph by Joe.

The tenderness in how the frog is handled is juxtaposed with the rough texture of the gloves, but the hands appear to hold the frog very carefully, which Joe confirms:

> UK: Are they [frogs] easy to pick up?
> JD: It takes careful handling not to hurt them while they hobble away but it's manageable. Someone can do it who knows how to control their bodies.
> UK: So you took the photos, but did you handle the frogs as well?
> JD: Yeah, a bit.

Joe clearly signifies his concern that the frog may be hurt, which is true for all animals in his social world. His careful approach to animals is also evident in the following verbal account, in which he recalls an encounter with a squirrel corpse:

> JD: Look, either way, here are some latest pictures I found. It's an unusual encounter; we found a squirrel corpse at the park where I volunteer for ranger work. It's not something I regularly see, really. I thought it would be worth taking

an interesting picture of it. It's just something about the position it was in, something like a person would be in.

BD: I see what you mean, Joe. It's a completely different shape and look to the way it is if it's alive, isn't it? It's like a completely different view of it. It's something that you wouldn't normally see.

JD: Especially the position of the limbs and the body, really. It resembles how a person would have fallen down.

BD: Like lying down.

JD: Not lying down; dead. I mean the sort of position someone would be in when someone was dead. The squirrel partially resembles that position to a person but is more animalistic as it is.

Joe's remark implies he has a strong eye for details and an anthropomorphic imagination in relation to the squirrel corpse. This is interesting because research studies that centre on empathy and emotions, especially in relation to the Theory of Mind account and the view that people with ASD are unable to attribute intentions to others and respond empathetically, conclude that autistic people do not tend to anthropomorphise and relate situations to animal behaviour (Klin 2000). Joe's approach to animals nonetheless establishes that anthropomorphism is central to him, further illuminating the significance of animals in Joe's social world.

Figure 5.38. Photograph by Vincent.

Although not as frequently depicted as in Joe's photographs, animals form part of Vincent's social world and feature in his photographic image-making. His photographic practice includes images of a wide range of objects and beings, yet his description of an encounter with a cat is noteworthy, for it reveals an experience that does not always come to the fore in his descriptions of humans in his photographs:

> VS: I was walking around and found this cat. So cute.
> UK: But would have you used your camera to take this photograph?
> VS: Yeah, I would have. I was walking and I had time on my hand and… First, I was patting it a bit, and then…
> UK: and then he got friendly…
> VS: Yeah, when I first tried to pat him he was giving me his hand, so I thought that's cool so I took a picture. The only thing is that I accidently … so this [background] is in focus instead of the cat. So, the cat isn't in focus.
> UK: And you only took this one picture?
> VS: Yes. But it also makes you think and look round the scene, which is quite nice, I think.
> UK: It's quite busy but you still look at the cat although there's so much going on around it. And then your hand coming in, just like…
> VS: Yeah, I find it almost he, or she, has human characteristics.

It is, of course, not unusual to see cats in neighbourhoods and residential areas, but Vincent's description of the incident is worth reflecting on. His use of the term 'hand' instead of 'paw', and his association of the cat's behaviour with 'human characteristics" is interesting, in that he indicates his ability to experience emotional connectedness with animals and humans (Bogdashina 2010). Writers on ASD underline autistic individuals' capacity to show empathy towards animals and humans (Grandin 2006; Williams 1998, 2006). As an autistic adult Grandin observes that

> Autistic people's frontal lobes almost never work as well as normal people's do, so our brain function ends up being somewhere in between human and animal. We use our animal brains more than normal people do, because we have to. We don't have a choice. Autistic people are closer to animals than normal people are.
>
> (Grandin and Johnson 2005: 57)

Grandin's account suggests autistic people have a deep understanding of and relationship to animals, which helps explain participants' approach to them. Similar to Joe's encounter with the squirrel corpse, Vincent's description refers to a particular way of looking at the cat, as he associates human body parts and characteristics with animals. This comparison stands out because participants in this study rarely depict humans in their photographs. Joe and Vincent anthropomorphise the squirrel and cat, respectively, while other descriptions of animals reveal Joe's integrity and respect

towards animals. These observations are interesting and while research findings indicate participants have a distinct and empathetic relationship to animals as part of their social world this area remains under-researched.

5.4.3. Photographing people

This subtheme is based on participants' unique social interactions and relationships with people, as visual evidence suggests participants photograph humans, albeit rarely. Vincent, for example, maintains that, for him, it is important that the people he photographs look directly into the lens, regardless of their distance from the camera.

Figure 5.17. Photograph by Vincent.

At the same time, he has to feel confident in order to engage with his subject's gaze. The former is achieved in a photograph Vincent took after observing a person standing opposite him on the other side of the road (Figure 5.17). Initially, it was not the person he was interested in photographing. Guided by the stark contrast of the shadows cast on the buildings in front of him, he first saw the shadow of a lamppost on the left side of the frame. That shadow guided his vision to the big shadow on the yellow brick building and the reflection on the car bonnet in the bottom left part of the frame, before he saw the person whose head and torso are exposed to the sun, while the legs are in the shade. Vincent was inspired to take a photograph, or rather four, as the person did not initially look into the camera, perhaps because he or she did not see Vincent. Once eye contact was established through the viewfinder, Vincent pressed the shutter release, and his focus remained on the person. The photograph depicts the individual standing in

front of a rolled-down orange shutter. The person's right arm is bent towards the face, as if he or she is putting something in his or her mouth, perhaps some food or a cigarette. The gaze is directed at Vincent's camera. Above the door is a sign denoting the words 'Kungfu Kitchen – Chinese take away', clarifying the person is standing in front of a take-away shop. The frame is filled with another take-away food shop, signified by the words 'Perfect Fried', yellow brick buildings above the shops, two parked cars and other pedestrians on the other side of the road on which Vincent was standing to photograph the scene. In his description of the series of photographs he took of that scene, Vincent explains his intentions for taking the images:

> UK: You revealed that it was important to you that people looked into the camera, like the person across the street in the photo you took in New Cross, and the photo of the barber you took somewhere in central London. Why is it important to you that people look into the camera?
> VS: I'm not sure, I guess one aspect of it is that I've been reading a lot about visual anthropology stuff, so one thing I find engaging is the performativity aspect in documentary photography, so not to have distance and supposedly objective accounts of people, but to engage with people through performance, staged aspects of their lives. I find that very interesting. And then it's very challenging as well. I mean, you're more vulnerable and open to their gaze as well. It's more honest to acknowledge your presence in your work; it's more interesting for your subjects too, I think. It's also more interesting for people who see the images outside the context; they see some kind of interaction between the photographer and the subjects. It's also another way of practicing communication, I guess. But it's really hard at the same time. After the barber acknowledged my presence, I thought that was the best image but I didn't dare to take more photos afterwards.

As a university student in visual anthropology, Vincent refers to the readings that helped him acquire the theoretical knowledge on the performativity of subjects in documentary photography, further stating his intention of applying the theory to his own photographic image-making, therefore engaging with his subjects through their gaze when taking photographs. The contrast between his awareness of the theoretical argument and the practical ability to apply his knowledge is worth reflecting on. One the one hand, the question arises whether his theoretical knowledge and understanding of photography is influencing his practice to a greater extent than the other participants (bearing in mind that all people are influenced in various different ways). On the other hand, his interest in engaging with his subjects' gaze parallels the prejudiced gaze experienced by those with disabilities (Garland-Thomson 2009). Although autism is not a visible disorder, it can nevertheless invite the gaze and stares of onlookers (Grinker 2008; Murray 2008b). Vincent recognises his own internal challenge of being exposed to the gaze, which often restricts him from engaging with others through his photography. Jasmine O'Neill (1999)

refers to the experience of being gazed at as 'distant touching' (touching with the eye). She claims that some individuals with ASD experience being touched when someone is looking directly at them, and these sensations may make them feel uncomfortable. As O'Neill explains, "[e]yes are very intense and show emotions. It can feel creepy to be searched with the eyes" (1999: 26). This indicates Vincent's internal challenge must be difficult, yet he nevertheless often engages with the gaze of others.

The division between seeing and being seen is important, and Vincent's reference to the barber implies an asymmetrical power-relationship between Vincent and the barber (Frosh 2016). Often depicted by a compositional separation in the photograph, the unbalanced power-relationship is underpinned by the barber's brief acknowledgement of Vincent, followed by Vincent's immediate termination of taking photographs. While Vincent's remark underlines a dichotomy between seeking the gaze in his subjects on the one hand, and facing its internal challenge on the other, it is similarly important to highlight his recognition of depicting the relation between the photographer and the subject in his images. Although the relationship between the photographer and the subject has been briefly mentioned in the early pages of Part I, it is productive to refer to it again here, but this time vis-à-vis the subtheme and idea of photographing people. Unlike other participants, Vincent illustrates his awareness of people in his environment, and the internal challenges he faces when he aims to photograph them as part of his everyday life. He explains:

> For me, if I'm making photographs of people, I have to feel confident that I can engage in these interactions. Often, I see a beautiful scene on the street, like people working outside and their hands all dirty, or they are having a lunch break and then I want to take a photo… I see it and immediately think, ok, I can take a photo, and then I walk a little bit further and then they've already seen me and I can't really go back to take a photo… I like to take photos in an overt way as well but it just takes a lot of energy to open up and say, 'Hey, okay, I'm taking this photo now and make eye contact. I mean if I'm a bit hungry or if I'm tired, I just can't do it, and I'm too scared and I think, okay, it's never going to work. I think they get angry or think I'm crazy so then I resort to the covert types [of photographs].

Vincent's remark alludes to a complexity of challenges, feelings, thoughts and willingness that is taking part when he considers photographing people. This experience can be similar for non-ASD people too, as negotiating the complexity of image-making can be consuming. Nonetheless, the hustle and bustle experienced in a big city like London can be overwhelming, and ASD people's sensory perceptual issues may influence how confident they feel photographing people.
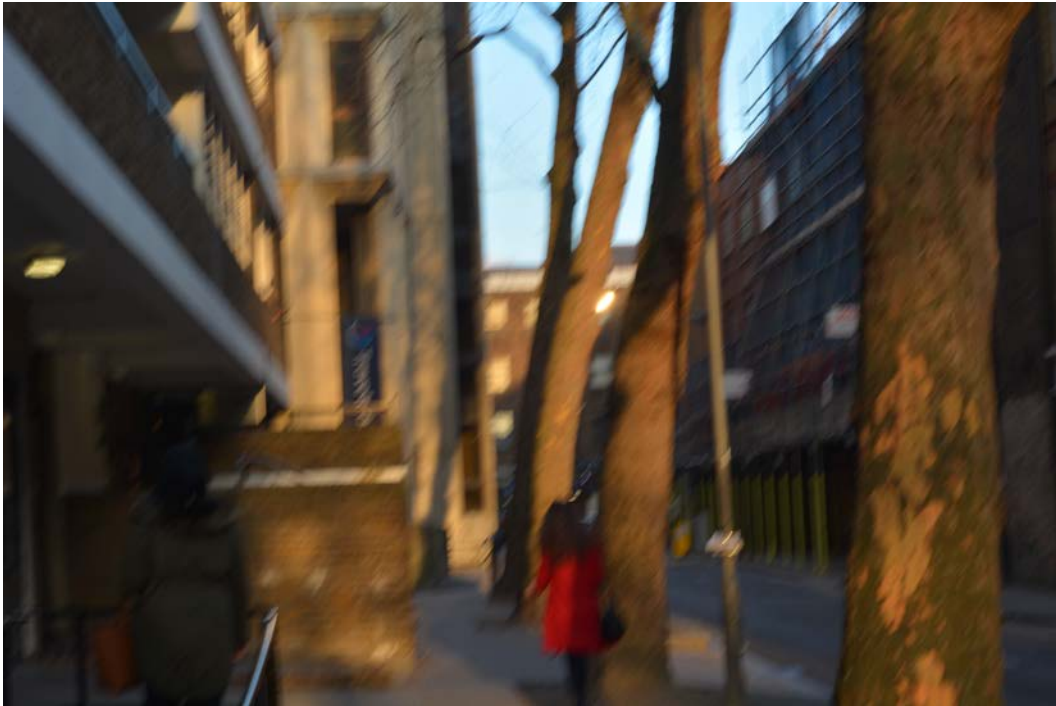
Figure 5.31. Photograph by Vincent.

Vincent did not appear to need much confidence when taking the photograph that depicts a brunette woman in a red coat in front of him (Figure 5.31). Walking along the pavement in central London, Vincent suddenly saw the woman increasing her pace before she was running in front of him; her sudden movement was disrupting the peace he was experiencing at the time. There was no eye contact between him and her that could have challenged Vincent and his image-making. Initially drawn to the golden sunlight that was reflected on the trees in the street, the woman's red coat, coupled with her unexpected movement, caught Vincent's eye, and subsequently his interest in taking a photograph of her. He reflects on the moment he saw the woman and describes,

> I was walking in this street, and the light was really good, and I was looking around thinking this is beautiful. It was also a very peaceful atmosphere, and then, all of a sudden, she started running and it was a disruption of that moment of peace and quiet, but at the same time, it was interesting that she was running all of a sudden. I wanted to capture it and, I don't know, almost chase her. This was a beautiful woman in a red coat, like this, I don't know, object of desire, moving all of a sudden. And I also think the blurriness of the image speaks to movement, and the rush comes up when all of a sudden there is something that grabs you, and you want to chase it.

Vincent's vivid recollection of the moment in which he saw the woman running in front of him suggests his focus was on the movement of the woman in the red coat, not merely on the woman per se. He refers to the calm atmosphere he experienced and enjoyed before the scene took place and disrupted the peace, further implying his visual sensory

perception enabled him to see the light that influenced him to take other photographs that day (5.10, 5.39). At the same time, the terms "almost chase her" and "object of desire" are interesting, and imply a notion of possessiveness and perhaps ownership over the individual, which is supported in the following excerpt, in which Vincent reflects on the scene a few weeks after it occurred:

> VS: But then it's a bit degrading to have this person here in the shadow part and not even see her…
> UK: Do you think it changes the way you see the photograph?
> VS: Yes, it does. I don't know… I don't necessary want her to be in the photo… it's just about me and this woman. She doesn't have to get involved. I don't know.
> UK: Interesting
> VS: She's probably also looking at her, making it much more complicated.
> UK: So now she's the disruption?
> VS: Yeah, I think so!
> UK: Interesting, especially looking at this image again since last time and reinterpreting it–
> VS: Because I don't know what she's thinking or what she's doing… I mean, she's just standing there... and also, we are divided again between her and this woman.
> UK: Hmm... maybe I shouldn't have pointed it out.
> VS: No… you completely ruined my photo.
> UK: I'm sorry… But she's there…
> VS: Yeah [laughs]… I probably would have discovered it at some point.

It is important to note that Vincent did not notice the second person standing on the left of the frame, and facing into the direction of the woman in the red coat. This revelation did not take place until the image was discussed a second time, and the person on the left was pointed out to him. Indeed, this makes the second discussion of the image noteworthy, as it reveals insights into Vincent's temporary 'imaginary relationship' to the woman in the red coat. Since it is not clear whether the woman on the left even looks at the woman in the red coat, his interpretation is interesting, perhaps relating to the narrow perception experienced in ASD (Bogdashina 2010, 2016; Grandin 2006). Moreover, the expressions, "I don't necessary want her to be in the photo… it's just about me and this woman. She doesn't have to get involved… She makes it much more complicated" further support the idea that Vincent developed an imaginary relationship with the woman in the red coat. There is a hint of jealousy in Vincent's discovery of the woman on the left. Mark Osteen suggests people with ASD often handle their anger and jealousy with humour, or turn those feelings "into a poignant tale that transcends awkward parallels" (2008: 24). Applying Osteen's idea to Vincent's second description of the scene, it seems Vincent developed his narrative in order to transcend his emotions.

While the sudden running of the woman in the red coat was the initial disruption to the peaceful atmosphere Vincent enjoyed, he changed his mind, finding the woman on the left the new disruption. Perhaps this was enough for Vincent to create his unique account, revealing insights into his relation to people.

Figure 5.16. Photograph by Joe.

Compared to Vincent, the other participants (Joe, Alex and James) are more hesitant about photographing people. Joe, for example, is very clear that he does not photograph people with his smartphone, but would consider using someone else's camera:

> BD: It's different for Joe though, he very rarely photographs people. [turns to Joe] Do you ever photograph people?
> JD: No – I would take a photo from someone else's camera but I don't usually go photographing people.

In this context, Joe means that if asked, he would use someone else's camera to take a photograph of a person but he does not photograph people as part of his own photographic image-making. Joe's photography is more about capturing the moment, and the lack of people in his photographic images suggests he does not spend much time with them, or certainly does not think of taking photographs of them. Visiting an annual medieval fair with his parents, Vincent photographed a knight depicted in full armour (Figure 5.16), which is one of Joe's few images that depict a person. Surprisingly, the horse head and tail are cropped in the image, given Joe's usual practice of photographing animals in their entirety. His description of the photograph illuminates that Joe was more interested in the knight as an object embodying medieval times, rather than the person behind the armour:

> JD: How about this re-enacting knight during the jousting?
> UK: Great.
> BD: Send it Joe.
> Joe: It's a very good position, that is, and when you think of knights you obviously think of medieval times.

Compared to the descriptions and insights Joe offers of his other photographs, which largely represent the animals he sees in his everyday life, his account of the knight stands out, in that he contextualises the knight within history, perhaps suggesting a strong disinterest in the person wearing the armour. Instead, the knight is merely of interest in relation to the medieval fair where Joe took the photograph, further indicating Joe's objectification of the knight. Although non-ASD individuals can certainly relate to people dressed up in costumes in a similar way, Joe's example of the knight is noticeable because it is the only photograph representing a person he produced during this study.

Photographing people is not a central aspect of Alex's photographic image-making, but occasionally, individuals feature in his photographs. For example, when Alex saw the person sitting on a park bench holding an open umbrella, he carefully approached the scene and felt inspired to include the tree branches as part of the composition before taking the photograph (Figure 5.39). It was raining at the time, which is signified by the open umbrella and the raindrops on the branches in the foreground of the frame. The umbrella covers the head and torso of the person, making it difficult to postulate the person's sex. Interestingly, Alex initially refers to the person as 'them' before he establishes for himself that the person is a woman. The following excerpt discloses Alex's approach to photographing the person:

Figure 5.39. Photograph by Alex.

> This was done over the weekend, by the way, and I think I chose this one as the very first one as I think it has the best quality to it, not just in terms of looks but I think the way… it's almost like a narrative, isn't it? I mean, walking up to Tooting Bec common when I just saw that and I thought maybe if I can photograph that without them noticing. And most cool yet, is the way the branches almost seem to be arching in towards her, like trying– well, I don't know if it was a man or a woman, but it's like they're almost encircling her, en-capturing her.

The photograph is one of three versions Alex took of the scene, and he explains that he chose this version because of the way the branches encircled the person with the umbrella. Making a choice is not unusual, but Alex's account of his careful approach to photograph the person on the bench without being noticed is noteworthy, implying he wished to remain at a safe distance to the person. The limited description of the individual, coupled with his enthusiasm when he asserts, "[w]hat is really cool is that the branches seem to be arching in towards her", further indicate that it was not the person that primarily caught his eye, but the way the branches spread out in relation to the individual. As a very media-savvy young male on the autism spectrum, Alex enjoys experimenting with his image-making, and often goes out with the deliberate and self-conscious intent to take photographs in suburban environments. Alex is an image-maker; for the purpose of experimenting with his photography and conceptualising his ideas he specifically goes out to parks and other suburban areas to create photographs that fit in and around the ideas he intends to depict. Despite his keen interest in

photography, discussions in interviews suggest he has a limited enthusiasm for taking photographs of people. This could relate to his "social awkwardness", which he mentions as one of the characteristics of his autism.

This 'social awkwardness' is not experienced in James' photography of people, but perhaps because the few images he took of individuals depict family members during a holiday. Overall, participants do not tend to take many images of people, but they nevertheless include them in their photography, even though they seem to have strong preferences for creating images that depict objects and animals that form their social world. That is to say, their preferences stand out from images taken by non-ASD people, as the latter group includes many photographs depicting friends, family and the self, with the intention to form group memories or maintain social relations (Gye 2007). With the development and availability of photo-sharing applications on smartphones, these images tend to be shared widely (Lee 2012). However, research findings suggest participants in this study do not tend to share their photographic images in the same way and as widely as non-ASD individuals.

5.4.4. Sharing photographs

Participants in this study were not very active social media users, including sharing their photographs online. For example, Vincent had a profile on Facebook but did not upload his everyday photographs to make them accessible to all his Facebook friends to view on his profile. By contrast, he used Messenger to "send photos to friends", but not on a regular basis. Messenger allows users to send photographs via direct messages, which is essentially like sending them directly via emails. The former is Vincent's preferred way of sharing his images with his girlfriend:

> I really like all the squirrels around the residential halls so I've been sending pictures of squirrels to my girlfriend. She likes them and sometimes I put a little caption under a photo what a squirrel might say or something fun.

Vincent indicates the smartphone's potential to create an "intimate, visual co-presence" with another person, his girlfriend in particular (Ito 2005: n.p.). Here, it is useful to draw on Mizuko Ito (2005), who explains,

> Intimate visual co-presence involves the sharing of an ongoing stream of viewpoint-specific photos with a handful of close friends or with an intimate other. The focus is on co-presence and viewpoint sharing rather than communication, publication, or archiving.
>
> (Ito 2005: n.p.)

Vincent predominantly shares his photographs to share his viewpoint but without creating captions, while Joe uses this tool to give his images a richer meaning, in particular when he shares them on Instagram. Joe did not use social media at the beginning of his involvement in this study, saying "I'm not good with social media… I'm not sharp with social things". Nevertheless, by the end of his participation, Joe set up an Instagram account with the help of his parent, but only managed to upload four photographs. Notably, he took his time to create captions for the four photographs before sharing them on Instagram, which he explains as follows:

> JD: I haven't had many opportunities to communicate with others though, like followers and such. I've only managed to put a few images on, with captions though.
> UK: So you write captions every time?
> JD: Yes. Here are the captions I've done so far. I tried to give them some metaphorical meaning behind them… I think, if I'm going to be good at any social network I might as well do some writing with the pictures as well. That's what I like about captions, so I can describe what I view or feel about the picture I take.
> UK: Without using too many words?
> JD: I try to keep them short and meaningful but it's not easy to explain it clearly enough to anyone else.
> UK: So you reflect a lot?
> JD: Yes.

Joe's decision to join Instagram came after discussions with his parent when he explained, "I'm only saying that now because I think it's really important to do that [sharing his images on Instagram]. I feel I'm being left out of what other people are involved in because I don't have the enthusiastic initiative or the holding engagement or whatever to join in and keep up". Joe refers to his work as a sculptor and the motivation to share photographs of his sculptures on Instagram so people can view his work online. But his hesitation and self-doubt kept him away from setting it up until his parent helped him. If Joe wants to share an image with others, he shares it via email attachments using his smartphone, as the following remark reveals:

> UK: Do you share your photographs with family and friends?
> JD: Yes, when I want to share a picture I share them… mostly in person, right from my phone screen. I go to the photos on my iPhone and do it then.

Considering the statistics in relation to posting photographs on social media, sharing photographs is very popular among the general population of young adults. The constant connection of the mobile phone to telecommunication networks and the Internet facilitates the quick sharing of images within an instant across the world. As Lee (2010) maintains, "[t]he moments captured by our photographic eyes can be shared and

interpreted in a present conversation or later in an individual's social space on the Web"
(2010: 270). Lee highlights the possibility of instantly sharing images with others, as well
as the opportunity to share photographs at a later stage, like Joe does with his images.
"I would share the earlier ones as well though if I thought they would make a contribution
to a conversation or are just as important as the recent ones", explains Joe when asked
whether he would share images he took in the past. "Usually I use the iPhone and if I do
get the chance to share them via email … that's great. I don't really have the PC skills to
load them on my computer and store them somewhere", he further defends his habit.
This is not unusual though; while the extent of sharing photographs on social media
platforms is greater for non-ASD people, it is not unusual to store photographs on
devices, without downloading them on home computers (Gye 2007; Lee 2010; Murray
2008a).

To briefly summarise Part II, participants in this study did not engage with
photography's social reality in a typical way, but they nonetheless engaged with social
aspects of photography. At its core, Part II revealed that participants have a different
approach to what forms their social world, which in turn influenced their photographic
practices. More precisely, key findings suggested that despite some initial intentions,
participants rarely photographed people, which is not to be taken as a sign they are not
social. As Ochs and Solomon (2010) maintain, there is a range of different possibilities
to practice sociality. Equally, research data indicated that participants communicate with
others via camera phones in a number of ways. Whilst they may use their phones to
lesser degree and without linking them to social media platforms, they nevertheless use
their phone as a tool of communication, be it to make phone calls, send private
messages or emails. For people with ASD the smartphone is another opportunity to
practice their visual communication skills.

5.5. Conclusion

Given the different approaches to photography and camera phones in day-to-day life,
photographic image-making cannot be understood through reliance on typical ideas and
generalisations. The examination and discussion of research findings from this study
suggest participants approached photography in two broad ways. Accordingly, this
chapter was divided into two parts and offered an in-depth analysis and interpretation of
data regarding the two main themes that were independent of one another: the
phenomenological dimension of photography and the social dimension of photography.
A number of subthemes additionally underlined particular qualities, differences and

characteristics of participants' photographic practices, resulting in a more comprehensive insight into their everyday image-making. As set out in the introduction of this chapter, the four young male adults with ASD engaged with the social and phenomenological dimensions of photography to varying degrees and in different ways, revealing their interests, approaches and practices of engaging with photography in their lives.

Considering the perceptual, social and communication issues manifested in autism, there were several key findings in Part I. One important finding was that natural light, lines and patterns were key elements that guided participants photographic eyes to create images that depicted their ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. While lines and patterns engender a certain order and structure for people with ASD (Schwarz 2008), in a more abstract way, lines relate to life (Ingold 2011). Ingold imagines lines in relation to life and movement, and people are in continual movement through the world:

> Along such path, lives are lived, skills developed, observations made and understandings grown… To be, I would now say, is not to be in place but to be along paths. The path, and not the place, is the primary condition of being, or rather becoming… My contention is that wayfaring is the fundamental mode by which living beings inhabit the earth. Every such a being has, accordingly, to be imagined as the line of its own movement or – more radically – as a bundle of lines.
>
> (Ingold 2011: 12-13)

Ingold calls the interrelation of these lines and paths of movement meshwork, in which the paths and lines of other beings and objects also interconnect. This interweaving nature of movement goes beyond the physical and material worlds; there are lines and paths of movement in the digital world (Pink 2016). That is to say, digital photographs are in movement too, created through the engagement of all senses and lines of life. As a phenomenologically expressive medium, photography mediated participants' presence in the world. This was effective for James and his affinity with photographing skies, and Vincent and his visual sensory experiences that guided his perception of natural light, itself a form of being-in-the-world (Ingold 2005). In comparison, for Joe photography mediated his presence by way of extending his perception; looking at a photograph for him was not about the representation of the subject depicted on the camera screen, but rather an opportunity to link photography to the moment of experience and perception of self and world when he saw the subject in front of the camera. These unique qualities of perception and selfhood among autistic people require further investigation, seeing that the four individuals are drawn to natural light – the source of being – but have diverse experiences of perception and photography. Moreover, the autistic self remains under-

researched (Nadesan 2005). As Illona Roth asserts, [t]here has been comparatively little empirical work on autistic awareness of self" (2008: 49). On the other hand, there are many cognitive studies focusing on the theory of mind approach that claims poor ToM skills demonstrate a limited ability to relate to others, and therefore to reflect on one's own thoughts, beliefs and feelings, and ultimately on one's self (Bowler et al. 2011; Duffy and Dorner 2011; Frith and Happé 1999).

This empirical study challenged the ToM approach by involving four young male adults with ASD and asking them to reflect on their own photographic image-making, and, inevitably, to reflect on their own thoughts and intentions. More key results disclosed that photography was both a supplement to perceiving self and world, and an internal barrier to the photographic practices of the young male adults in this study. Although there were some initial preferences for using digital compact or DSLR cameras over smartphones, it quickly became evident that it was not about the professionalism that may be linked to the equipment. Participants who used two or more devices for their image-making related to self and world in the same way; either using photography as an extension of their perception, or as a tool to control their perception, but the type of camera was less important as a result. Regardless of the purpose, the technological presence of their smartphones gave participants an opportunity to be at the ready and take images when they felt something was worthy of being photographed. But to what extent are autistic lives affected by digital photography? Considering the general fascination with ASD originates in large part from the idea that people with ASD are technically gifted or particularly media-savvy (Nadesan 2005), more research needs to be carried in this area of photography, and importantly, research that does not merely pronounce autistic people's intellectual strength associated with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning ASD. There is a tendency in cognitive accounts to simplify 'autistic intelligence' (Nadesan 2005), which needs to be challenged; empirical studies involving autistic individuals will elucidate the nuances and particularities of how digital technologies affect their lives.

Also noteworthy in the findings was that for participants, photography serves as an escape route from experiencing sensory overload. By concentrating their attention on their visual sense in the process of their image-making, photography enabled the young male adults with ASD to exercise control over their perception and release some pleasure and relief in their experience of ASD. This was an important finding. Although photography must privilege vision for all sighted users (with or without ASD) due to its mechanics, photographers engage all their senses when creating photographs

(Sobchack 2004). The inclination to focus on the visual exposed participants' deeper desires to control their senses, or more precisely, manipulate their sensory overload. Despite the arguably positive influence on participants' perception and their autism, it remains unclear to what extent and awareness participants manipulated their sensory perception to find pleasure and relief through the technology. It is therefore important to carry out more research in this area.

Some of the nuances and particularities in relation to participants' social use of photography were uncovered in Part II of this chapter, namely that their depictions of animals constitute their social world, and that participants have a preference for sharing images via their smartphones with people they know. Whilst discussions revealed that participants did not typically engage with photography's social reality, individuals nonetheless showed their sociality through the medium. As a social practice, photography elicits and constraints, enables and shapes habits, and no label will change that. And yet, autism is often portrayed as a condition lacking social communication and interaction skills, or even meaningful social behaviour (Grinker 2010). This study showed the implications of autistic individuals' use of photography: as an object, it mediated their social interaction (Ochs and Solomon 2010).

Importantly, the analysis and interpretation of key research findings underpinned that while autistic people may not practice photography in the most conventional ways (in itself a notion worth challenging), which are discussed in the literature on everyday photography, participants nonetheless show they are self-aware individuals who do not live in an 'isolated moment' as often (and again stereotypically) discussed in the literature on ASD (Osteen 2008). Further research that includes a broader demographic of autistic individuals is needed in this area. With this in mind, the theoretical underpinning of this study was well-suited to explore and interpret the photographic practices of the four young male adults with ASD.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

Figure 6.1. Photograph by Joe.

A forest view on an autumn day, signified by the yellow and brown leaves on the ground and the bare trees and shrubs in the background (Figure 6.1). There are no leaves that depict richer hues like orange or red, suggesting it is later in autumn, when the trees prepare for the dormant season. One tree leans in the top right corner of the frame, overgrown with moss and other trees and shrubs in the background are growing wild; it seems that some of them have fallen in storms long forgotten. The thickets and twigs point in different directions, and offshoots weave themselves around the branches and stems; they are entwined and interlocked from every angle and height. The black screen wipers in the bottom left corner of the frame disrupt the natural scene, indicating that the

photograph was taken through the windscreen of a car, which would explain its blurriness. But the forest scene per se was not the motivation for creating the photograph. Camouflaged with surrounding leaves, shrubs, grasses and trees, a robin sits at the top of a small branch in the centre of the frame bearing its recognisable plumage: an orange-red breast and face edged with grey, a white belly, and olive-brown upper parts. The robin, not the forest, was Joe's main motivation for taking the image, as he revealed in one of the sessions. In photographing the robin, he expressed his unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world through the medium. Whilst photography enabled him to perceive the bird in that moment, it also mediated his relationship to the robin and the environment. Beginning this final chapter with an example of a photograph taken by one of this study's participants, the intention is not simply to highlight the uniqueness of Joe's visual perception or subject interest, but also to offer a way of illustrating some aspects of the research findings and their implications.

This investigation included four young male adults with ASD; four unique individuals who shared a diagnosis of autism and the use of smartphones for their everyday photography, and presented a range of overlapping characteristics, similarities and preferences in their photographic image-making. For example, as represented in the photograph of the robin, all participants were guided by natural light, which had implications for the process of their image-making: they all preferred taking photographs outdoors. Participants favoured taking photographs of moments, nature, animals or objects; and, generally speaking, there were only few images of people across the data set. But there were also clear distinctions and variations in their approaches and photographic practices, effectively resulting in photographs that differed in style and content. The insights Alex, Joe, James and Vincent offered throughout their participation were fascinating, emerging from their lived experiences and leading to thought-provoking and meaningful discussions, as they were encouraged to self-reflect on their photographic image-making. The implication of this approach was that the study generated rich findings that led to deeper insights into the relationship autistic individuals have to photography. The qualitative imperative of the study brought out their unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. For example, Joe's preference for proximity over the zoom function on his smartphone was an achievement of photography that was central to his practice. Rather than using photography in a predictable or absolute way like other individuals with or without ASD perhaps do, Joe engaged with particular affordances of the technology that allowed him to preserve a trace of a moment, but less so those that disrupted his sense of the relationship between seeing and being in

proximity to the subjects that interest him, such as the zoom function of his camera. Joe valued photography as a supplement to perceiving the world in his images. The camera itself was rendered less significant than in Alex and Vincent's image-making. They both engaged with the medium to varying degrees in order to manipulate or control their visual perception. In general, photography served different roles for the four photographers, permeated with personal reasons, experiences and inspirations, which were unique and meaningful to them. As a phenomenologically and socially expressive technology with different affordances of image-making, photography offered participants bodily and perceptive ways to interact with the world and practice sociality. This was central in relation to the social and communication difficulties manifested in ASD, and importantly, challenged the biomedical discourse that refers to ASD in a categorically deficit-based framework. This research illustrated ways in which photography enabled participants to communicate with self and others through the medium; for example, sharing their photographs via email offered a domain of social coordination at a distance (Licoppe 2004; Van House 2007; Villi 2012).

Reflecting on these findings, two questions arise. The first is in what ways is it evident in the photographic practices of the four participants in this study that ASD interacts with photography; the second question is whether there is something one might describe as 'ASD photography'.[48] I do not argue for an ASD photography here; the sample size of my qualitative study was simply too small (see 6.3. Limitations), and while there are shared characteristics of participants' photographic practices, it was not desirable for this investigation to generalise the findings across a wider ASD population in order to make this claim. Instead, this research paves the way for considering ASD photography – or perhaps 'ASD photographies', which would signify the diversity of practices that emerge from autistic individuals' engagement with photography. For now, the question of ASD photography remains open. In weaving the different arguments, photographic practices and approaches to the medium together, the aim of this chapter is to summarise the key findings and arguments, outline the contributions of this thesis, reflect on the limitations of the study, and importantly, discuss the directions of future research in this area.

6.2. Summary of key findings and arguments

With an emphasis on the practice, it was the objective of this thesis to move discussions of photography away from the prevailing representations and readings of photographs

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[48] In line with the labels used in this thesis, ASD can be replaced with autism or autistic photography.

that mostly ignore the doings of the photographer in everyday life. This thesis discussed that everyday photographic image-making is comprised of phenomenological approaches and social practices. Involving people with autism in research about their everyday photographic image-making, the primary question of this investigation was:

> What unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world are expressed in the photographic practices of young male adults with ASD?

Following the systematic review of the literature on photography, there were three additional questions that emerged:

(i)   In what ways does photographic image-making enable and inhibit autistic individuals' presence in, and experience of the world?

(ii)   In what ways does photography mediate autistic individuals' relationships to objects, the environment and the social world?

(iii)   In what ways do the social practices of photography of autistic individuals (i.e. image sharing) relate to everyday practices of communication and social interaction?

In recognising the fascinating insights and lived experiences of ASD individuals, their contributions to this study constituted the data gathered from this research. Findings revealed that participants had a distinctive aesthetic vision and used multiple senses in the act of taking photographs in order to express their unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. The uniqueness was expressed in the different ways participants engaged with the affordances of photography. It was not unusual to see photographs in which the subjects were framed at a far distance because participants preferred making the image transparent to the original perception. It was also unique that participants were guided by natural light, lines and patterns in the process of their photography. While non-ASD people may prefer taking photographs outdoors and emphasise lines and patterns in their photographs too, it was the pervasive nature of these characteristics and interests, and the way they appeared to impede a 'typical' photographic style that made them uniquely autistic features and characteristics. Participants challenged dominant assumptions of digital photography and did not seem to care what others might think about their images; they each developed their own personal aesthetics, styles and meanings concerning their everyday photography. As a result, with ASD affecting autistic individuals differently, the research findings did not allow to elicit any definite answers in regard to the research questions. Nonetheless, the findings brought to the fore that photography both enabled and inhibited participants' presence in, and

experience of, the world. For some participants, the mere technological presence and the readiness of the camera enabled them to be present and experience their surroundings with the aim in mind to take photographs of objects and beings they encountered. At the same time, the camera inhibited their experience of the world if, for example, participants did not feel confident in photographing other people despite their initial intention to do so. Similarly, as a social practice photography mediated ASD individuals' relationships to objects, other beings and the social world. Here, the mere gazing at the camera screen offered a domain of social interaction with the subjects that participants photographed. When sharing those images, which all participants did to some extent, the act of sharing related to participants' everyday practices of communication and social interaction with others; albeit relatively rarely, images were mainly shared for the purpose of communication with people participants knew. Taking the above into account, it is important to bear in mind that this investigation was exploratory in nature; rather than finding definite answers, it opened up new approaches to studying photography, and overall recognised that participants' autism cannot be separated from their creativity, identity and perception of the world. The following subsections summarise the main findings of this investigation, before the chapter concludes with directions for future research.

6.2.1. New approaches to photography and ASD

It was clear from the beginning of this investigation that if there was to be a move away from the customary discussions regarding photography, then an alternative approach was required. This thesis constructed a theoretical framework that borrowed from work across academic fields, including visual communication, human-computer interaction (HCI), phenomenological philosophy, auto-biographical perspectives on autism, cultural disability studies and anthropology, working alongside photography and visual studies to develop an alternative approach to everyday photography and autism. Phenomenology was used because of its emphasis on embodiment and lived experience as a way of knowing the world, and a call to 'return to the things themselves' (Merleau-Ponty 2012). With only few studies on autism mentioning Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in passing (Klin et al. 2005), it was the objective of this thesis to include the field of phenomenology because it created a dynamic framework for discussing the sensory perceptual experiences of participants in relation to their everyday photographic practices. The benefits of including this perspective were substantial, as they enabled this research to offer an enriched view of autism and present insights into the ways

participants engage with their cameras. There is much potential in this area of research, considering the subjective experiences linked to phenomenology and people's different approaches to photography as a result of it (Hopkins 2012; Pink 2011a). Thus, developing this analytical framework was central to this investigation, because it allowed me to discuss photography within other diverse areas, such as the environment and movement, as well as highlight the habits and routines of the autistic photographer. Whilst this approach placed some challenges and demands on photography and ASD scholarship, which my study addressed, it further made two major contributions to the literature on photography and ASD; there is limited research in photography that includes ASD individuals, and equally, there is limited research in autism that includes photography as a practice and that goes beyond debates on representation (Murray 2008b; Osteen 2008). The related literature is still limited, giving me the opportunity to offer an original contribution to knowledge.

The technological innovations of image-based media give photographers more frequent and diverse opportunities for taking photographs. Embedded in everyday life, the convergence of the digital camera and mobile devices enables people to take photographs wherever they go, without necessarily missing out on capturing particular moments. Just with a swipe of a fingertip on the touch screen, the camera phone is often ready for use. Yet, despite the technical advances, I found that the academy has not fully caught up on the implications of these developments. As Chalfen notes, "[w]e live in an intellectually challenging time for witnessing, participating in and studying the emergence of new media, especially digital media immediately connected to problematic issues of visuality" (2016: xv, Foreword). The challenges Chalfen alludes to include the complexity and contexts of visual culture, social relationships, and human interactions and participation. I argue the challenges extend to the scholarship on digital photography and its primary focus on a specific kind of user. This narrow attention is problematic for it creates a stereotypical account for camera-mediated sociality that does not include a broad range of people who use photographic technologies in their ordinary lives.[49] Moreover, the classification of young people growing up with digital media into 'digital natives' does not include vulnerable individuals or marginalised groups of people, including those with autism, who see self and world differently. The key findings of this study indicate that the young male adults with ASD growing up with digital media have

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[49] In comparison, in 2016 Microsoft announced its aim to hire "people with neurodiverse conditions, including Autism or Asperger's syndrome, for full-time UK based Microsoft positions" (Microsoft 2016). This move signifies that beyond the academy, there is an increased awareness of the contribution of diversity might bring to the development and understanding of digital technologies. This points to the potential 'impact' of similar research in photography.

some clear preferences for using digital photography in their everyday lives, but these vary from the 'selfie culture'. This is noteworthy and uncovers a critical inaccuracy in the scholarship on digital photography: there is no specific kind of user.

6.2.2. Photography and ASD: being inclusive

This study offers evidence for finding nuanced approaches to exploring photography, and new ways in which the medium enables people to develop a better sense of their surroundings and their self within them. This is important, as ultimately doing more research in this area will illuminate the ways photography influences people's social worlds. The significance here is twofold. First, given the manifestation of ASD in social interaction and communication, more research in this area could lead to deeper insights into autistic people's social worlds. This could have positive implications on their own understanding of self and world. Second, many insights into participants' photographs would be lost without their active engagement in research. As Prosser affirms, "[v]isual methodologists can make a major contribution here by adopting an egalitarian stance and by working alongside the most vulnerable, under-represented, and least researched and understood members of society" (2011: 490). This thesis supports Prosser's argument, seeing that it is of central importance to include ASD individuals in research, using photographic/visual and creative participation methods, because it has the potential to enhance their own creativity and demonstrate their photography skills. This study enabled participants to do this. Furthermore, this thesis challenged fixed perceptions and assumptions about autistic people's lack of competency as decision makers or active citizens, stressed their agency, and offered a more inclusive approach to understanding their photographic practices (Aldridge 2014).

Inclusive approaches to digital media research are particularly important in order to enrich the understanding of the contributions digital technologies make to ASD people's everyday lives. This entails the involvement of participants in research as well as a more comprehensive approach to studying digital media, especially since there are many different ways of engaging with these technologies and their ongoing developments. Research that focuses on digital photography must therefore be approached in innovative and holistic ways, "adopting participatory or inclusive strategies that emphasise mutuality and… a certain degree of subjectivity in the way in which lived experience is explicated and represented" (Aldridge 2014: 114). Using a similar approach in this study engendered rich outcomes.

Participant-focused studies in photography typically take into account what the individuals do and say about the medium. Without being more inclusive in digital media research, it is impossible to gain insights into how people use digital image-making technologies. Given their rapid change of pace, it is rather naïve to assume that everybody uses photographic technologies in the same way, and with the same abilities, skills and interests. The picture is more complex than that, and this study created a space for Alex, Vincent, James and Joe to reflect on their own photographic image-making, their insights into the reasons for doing photography, and the effects the medium has on their everyday lives. Their reflections and interpretations of their images were key to this investigation, exposing not only the subject(s) they depict, but also including the intentions of the photographer, which were not always clear (Barker and Smith 2012). Notably, along with photographs and image-making, (visual) language also played a central role in this study, since photo elicitation and interview transcripts were used to interpret participants' photographic practices. Using photographs as a form of visual language, participants constructed their own visual narratives about their ASD experience of the world. More precisely, these methodological tools acknowledged the need for a 'bottom up' approach to the specific participant group in this study, which placed the four young adults with ASD centre stage both in respect to the design and the aims of this research. In extending this participant-focused approach to, and adapting it for, individuals with ASD, participants contributed to the knowledge production, and importantly, this investigation contributed to the development of visual and creative research methods.

6.2.3. An autistic perspective of being-in-the-world

The first main theme that emerged from my analysis of the research findings revealed that sensory perception has a major influence on participants' photographic practices, characterising their unique ways of seeing and being-in-the-world. Equally, the second main theme to emerge from my data analysis suggested that while young male adults with ASD were not part of a 'selfie culture' and did not share their images via social media networks, they nonetheless showed an interest in the social practices of photography by sharing their images mostly via email using their camera phones. It is important to note here that this study does not argue that all young non-ASD photographers share their photographs via social media networks, but it was less common for the ASD individuals in this study. In other words, perception as a unity of embodiment and subjectivity guided autistic people's photographic image-making, while

at the same time, the medium's social reality both enabled and inhibited their presence in and experience of their social world. This demonstrated that participants' photographic practices existed within the phenomenological and social dimensions of photography. The original contribution to knowledge lies in what these comprehensive accounts reveal about both dimensions of autistic people's photographic image-making.

Photographs discussed in the context of this thesis were not banal, illustrative or predictable (Batchen 2008), they were the results of participants' ideas, decisions, negotiations and interventions in relation to their photographic practices. They were outcomes of participants' expressions of their ways of seeing and being-in-the-world; a stimulus for memory-building; and products for sharing with others as part of their visual and personal communication. Participants' photographic images were unique selections from the world of something regarded as meaningful for some reason; they were framed in a way that reflected certain considerations, including aesthetic reasons when the subject seemed aesthetically interesting or 'beautiful'. Complex in what they encompass, the photographs were deeply fascinating, giving the viewer a glimpse of what the participants saw in their quotidian lives; their personal journeys, daily activities, ordinary objects and special interests. The implications of these practices and images were pertinent, suggesting that participants' images assisted them in making sense of their daily lives; their photographic practices mediated their relationships to objects and other beings in the environment. In a broader and equally important sense, the findings offered insights into the different uses of digital photographic technologies, ranging from different smartphones, on the one hand, to the DSLR camera, on the other. This study revealed the complexity of participants' relationship to the affordances of photography, and whilst access to the technologies was important, it was more significant that technologies were open to the multiplicity of users. I believe it is worthwhile for other researchers in this area to consider the implications of user's diverse approaches to digital image-technologies (Tinkler 2008).

6.2.4. Photography: the visual and the bodily practice

Another key point in this study was that the rhetoric of seeing and other senses was particularly pertinent, since ways of seeing and being are interwoven in the social and cultural practices that influence the experience and perception of everyday life (Kiran 2012; Sandywell 2011; Sobchack 2004). Visual perception was a key concept in this investigation, demonstrating that the experience of the world was not simply given, or 'out there', but constructed since participants actively interpreted their surroundings and

relationships with others. It was, for example, notable that participants had a particular and respectful relationship to animals, be it in ways they approached animals in the environment or in ways they photographed them. At times, participants compared animals to humans and their body parts, suggesting animals mediated participants' social coordination (Ochs and Solomon 2010). Manifested in ASD, participants' visual perceptual experience was shaped by their own interpretation, which is certainly an area that needs further investigation. Among the senses, vision has been elevated to the most vital sense, and even language and thinking are strongly associated with visual metaphors. Words like illuminate, point of view, shedding light, enlighten, reflection, clarity and perspective highlight the primacy of the visual, and that it is strongly embedded in language (Chandler 1996). This is important, as the visual remains a key sense in autistic people's photographic practices, be it to control their visual perception in the process of experiencing sensory overload, or to perceive subjects through their camera. The latter was particularly shaped by seeing patterns and reflections in the environment; these helped participants create order and structure, and attach their own meanings to what they saw.

Throughout this study, it was noticeable that participants distinguished between 'seeing' and 'looking'. Both terms contributed to their skill set in order to find inspiring things to photograph in their everyday lives. Participants established vision as an important sense in experiencing and perceiving self and world, which was illustrated in their photographs that depicted patterns, light, reflections, lines and colour – elements that helped identify vision as a subtheme. Infused within these visual sensory perceptions was movement of the bodies in the urban, suburban and small-town environments. The corporeal and sensual interaction between the body and the camera is a complex process and builds over time, forming a connection with the camera, which impacts on the everyday routines of the practising photographer (Forrest 2016). The significance of this relationship is that it emphasises different senses, and is therefore a move away from vision to a more embodied understanding of photography. This is to say that exploring the connection between the photographer and the camera shifts the attention to the bodily doing of photography (Larsen 2008). Undoubtedly, being a photographer-in-the-world reveals an interesting paradox: distance enables noticing and the ASD and non-ASD photographer needs to step back and become separated from everyday life in order to photograph it; yet photography also brings individuals closer to the subjects in the environment. Several writers approach this paradox in different ways; Licoppe (2004) discusses the idea of 'connected presence', while Van House (2007)

introduces the notion of 'distant closeness' to describe social relationships on social media networks. Important for this study is the understanding of photography as a bodily practice that relates the photographer to self and world in multiple ways. The close analysis of the photographic practices of young adults with ASD has important implications for an understanding of digital and mobile photography more broadly; the issues emphasised by this unique group of users may influence the agenda of the wider scholarship in this area.

6.2.5. The significance of movement and other senses in photography

There are several old truisms that still circulate about photography, which can be found in most of the scholarship on photography and image culture. The most persistent ones are that photography is about capturing a singular moment in time, and that the photograph is predominantly about stillness (Edwards 2001; Green and Lowry 2006). Digital mobile photography challenges this approach, seeing that to ignore the role of movement in digital image-making would mean disregarding one of the most principal everyday qualities of the practice. In the context of the photograph, movement is often seen as the opponent of practice, resulting in the unsightly blurring of a subject in the frame, like in Joe's robin photograph at the beginning of this chapter, or Vincent's blurry image of the woman in the red coat. In the context of practice, however, photography depends entirely on movement whether making micro-adjustments of the feet or hands with the camera, to large movements involving the whole body, such as walking.

Photography is closely linked to walking and movement, and both concepts have been discussed in this thesis (Ingold 2000, 2011; Pink 2011a). It has proved to be useful in the explanation of the layers of movement and the environment, both central elements of photographic image-making identified in the findings of this study, since all participants have a preference for taking photographs outdoors. To photograph in an open environment, the participants had to walk and move around and explore it. Often walking is taken for granted by the ASD individuals, it remains unnoticed, yet it is not irrelevant to photography, in fact, it is a central activity to producing different relational situations and communication, as well as affective connections between bodies, movement and photographic technologies, including the smartphone. These relationships need further research.

Connected to the reflections on movement is another central idea within this thesis: that to comprehend photography in greater depth, there needs to be a change from predominantly discussing visual sensory experiences, to a shift towards the "multi-

sensory and inter-sensory nature of photographs" (Edwards 2009: 31). When moving and walking through the environments, the photographer relates to many different senses and elements, for example the senses and the camera, the own body and the outside surroundings. In the context of this investigation, the four young male adults with ASD used all their senses when perceiving objects and other beings in the environment in order to successfully create a photograph. This was not unusual in the realm of photography, yet given the sensory issues for autistic people, the outdoors may be a source of over-stimulation; photography helped participants focus on their visual sense and further create a sense of structure (Schwarz 2008). More importantly, these micro-analyses of participants' everyday photographic practices expose aspects and preferences of everyday image-making that have largely passed under the radar of many researchers working on digital and mobile photography. These include the management of sensory experiences in individuals' photographic practices, as well as their use of composition and light, and the preference for leaving images unedited. Engaging another group of participants may bring different results to the fore, which would further illuminate the diversity of the affordances of photography.

Many recent studies focus on the more obvious aspects of the 'selfie culture' (Lamba et al. 2017; Shah and Tewari 2016), without even mentioning the notions of sensory experiences or embodiment. The significance is that while this study has revealed detailed observations of the everyday photographic practices of autistic individuals, there are many aspects of everyday photography that have been largely ignored in the scholarship on photography. That is to say, there is a much larger repertoire of photographic practices among young adults with or without ASD, and with that repertoire there are many opportunities and directions for future research.

6.3. Limitations of the study

It should be noted that this investigation had a number of limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, as it is characteristic of qualitative studies with small numbers of participants having unique approaches to photography, it is difficult to generalise the findings beyond the four participants. Including four young male adults with ASD aged between 18 and 25 generated rich findings, but the sample size, age group and gender bias do not provide consistent results in relation to the wider autistic population, especially since the widening of the autism spectrum (Bagatell 2007) makes generalising data more difficult. Further research involving a larger sample of

participants is needed to determine whether these findings are similar across different autistic populations.

Relatedly, because of the vulnerability of the participants, it was important for ethical reasons to ensure parents/guardians were available to attend the sessions. One limitation was that due to their unavailability at times, their involvement further delayed the timings of the next meetings. The presence of parents was sometimes challenging; occasionally, they contributed information during the sessions, raising concerns about whose voice was reflected in the findings. Future researchers could address the limitations arising from the involvement of parents/guardians that goes beyond their ethical duty to be present in the sessions, highlighting the importance of allowing participants to talk about their own photography.

Third, the timings of the individual sessions in which interviews and photo elicitation were employed to gather the data were fairly irregular. While it gave me the opportunity to transcribe interviews, analyse, think about the initial findings and read more of the literature in between sessions, the time gaps (up to a month) were too long for some participants. On occasions, this was problematic, as participants could not remember why they had taken certain photographs. Shorter breaks between the sessions are therefore important.

One last limitation relates to the photographic equipment of the participants. Although they all used smartphones to some degrees, some of them had additional digital stand-alone cameras. This was not problematic for this study but researchers may want to consider selecting participants with similar equipment and a similar knowledge base so findings can be better compared.

6.4. Directions for future research

In light of the findings from the four participants presented in this thesis, a number of directions for future research can be suggested. First, researchers could address the limitations arising from involving a small sample of participants by recruiting more people with autism who represent a wider ASD population.

Although it was not the focus of this investigation, it emerged that there is very limited research on the autistic self, so further research in this area is imperative.

There also needs to be more research carried out into everyday photographic practices, as that remains an under-researched area, especially in collaborative ways with vulnerable people. With digital image-making technologies changing so rapidly, more research is required to comprehend the diverse uses of such technologies.

If there is a desire to break away from old binary divides in the ways photography is understood, discussed and researched, then new ways and approaches must be opened up to study photography. A particular focus on movement and the senses would help the development of a non-image centric approach. Borrowing from other disciplines, a phenomenological perspective is most productive. Inevitably, this interdisciplinary approach will further develop a nuanced understanding of digital photography.

Finally, the question remains open whether there is an ASD photography. This is undoubtedly a direction for future research. Considering participants' phenomenological approach to their photographic image-making established in this thesis, further research in this area would need to go beyond this and explore autistic individuals' self-awareness of their sensory perceptual experiences in relation to their photography. Just like everyday photography, a relatively broad and ambiguous genre that includes a range of photographic practices and images in people's ordinary lives (Chalfen 2016), ASD photography needs to be examined in relation to the various photographic practices of people with autism. Or to say it differently, it is imperative to explore the possibility of a more defined and specific ASD photography, perhaps as part of an emerging autistic culture (Davidson 2008, Straus 2013). This close investigation of ASD individuals' photography illuminated the difference from dominant perceptions of digital photographic practices, but importantly, it opened up a case for exploring other dimensions of diversity within the realm of photography. Despite photography's long history, and people's ability to communicate in various ways, we are only just beginning to understand photographic practices in their intersection with everyday forms of social communication and interaction.

Post-viva postscript: reflections on some issues embedded in this research

An interdisciplinary research study like this one, which involved four young male ASD adults, offered many challenges and opportunities alike. Considered as a means to share disciplinary knowledge, this investigation presented a critical and reflexive engagement with theories of different disciplines, as well as with participants and their everyday photographic image-making. Such an undertaking does not conclude with the submission of my PhD thesis or even after the viva. In contrast, research is an ongoing process, of which this thesis was merely a summary or snapshot, and not the final word or discussion on the subject areas I explored in this study. This postscript serves as an opportunity, therefore, to continue the dialogue. It is an invitation to address some of the issues and questions that arose during the research, which inspire further reflection and consideration, which I hope will be of benefit to future research in this area.

Placing research participants and their photographic practices at the heart of this investigation meant that it was crucial to interpretation of the research findings to adopt a collaborative approach in the analytical phases of this study. Following each meeting, I carried out initial analyses of participants' photographs and their transcripts, and used subsequent meetings to involve them in the interpretation of their own photographs and photographic image-making. This approach allowed me to offer a rich and in-depth visual analysis (Drew and Guillemin 2014; Rose 2012), creating a process that was in line with participants' abilities, interests, experiences, skills and understandings of photographic image-making. For example, I asked them what had caught their interest to take the photograph(s) in the first place; what part of the photographs they were drawn to (linking this back to their sensory perceptual experiences); what photographic aspects were important to them; and what meaning they wanted to convey through their photographs. I also shared my own interpretation of their photographs with them, which we discussed together in meetings. This participant validation exercise offered a way to check out the interpretation of the data, and was part of the negotiation process between me and the participants, so the interpretation was not reduced to one or the other. It was also an ethical responsibility. That is to say, the processes of meaning-making and interpretation are collaborative and dynamic activities, and not simply a matter of retrieving knowledge and information from participants. Enabling them to share their

views and have a say in the way findings were interpreted and presented in the study was central, and my collaborative approach reflected its importance.

Equally, it was important to consider the relationship between participants' ASD status and their photographic training and experiences, in particular when making claims regarding their photography. In general, participants had a shared interest in photography and used the medium in their everyday lives, which they discussed in a self-reflective way. Exploring this relationship was fruitful, seeing that participants were not required to bring a specific level of experience or knowledge of photography to the study, yet it quickly emerged in discussions with individuals that their training in and experience of photography varied.

Two participants, Alex and Vincent, had a higher degree of knowledge of and training in photography, which was linked to their studies in photography and communication, and visual anthropology, respectively; they had both practiced photography for several years. Inevitably, their knowledge, experience and training influenced their photographic image-making, and the discussions we had in individual sessions. For example, Alex's interest and ability in experimenting with his cameras, specifically to highlight colour and composition, derived from years of practicing photography on a personal and academic level. Correspondingly, Vincent's emphasis on his visual sense, his interest in photographing people and his desire to establish eye contact with subjects he photographs may have been linked to his knowledge of and training in visual anthropology. There is a developed debate on photography and ethics in visual anthropology, including ideas of reciprocity in the encounter with subjects (Edwards 2001; MacDougall 2006). As Paolo Virilio puts it, "[s]eeing and non-seeing have always enjoyed a relationship of reciprocity, light and dark combining in the passive optics of the camera lens" (1994: 73). Being a formative dimension of studying visual anthropology, Vincent would have been aware of these debates, and perhaps used them to challenge his natural (autistic) instincts in relation to social interaction. At the same time, his advanced photographic practice was reflected in the equipment he preferred to use, namely a DSLR camera. To some extent, then, different aspects of Alex and Vincent's photographic training may accentuate or mitigate their ASD. However, it is also important to note that ASD is manifested in their everyday experience of self and world, and cannot be separated from their image-making; ASD is a defining feature of their lives. In the light of this study, it was difficult to clearly establish the extent to which their everyday image-making was influenced by photographic training and experience, or by experience of ASD. Although non-ASD photographers may also be drawn to

compose their photographs through patterns, lines and repetitions, aspects deeply linked to photographic image-making, participants' persistent attraction to these elements seemed to be – at least to some extent – related to their ASD (Frith 1989; Grandin 2006; Schwarz 2008).

Participants James and Joe, on the other hand, used photography in their everyday lives without having received formal photography training, nor did they have a long-established experience of photographic image-making prior to their involvement in this study. Of course, with photography being such an embedded part of our culture, James and Joe had experience of photography in many different ways, but not necessarily as image-makers. Joe, for example, only started using photography about two years prior to his participation, and only uses a smartphone. During our meetings, it became clear that for Joe the photographic equipment itself was not significant, at least not in the self-reflexive way it was for Alex and Vincent; but of course, the phone camera determined what Joe could and could not do photographically. He simply accepted that without further thought, and repeatedly emphasised that his image-making practice involved capturing a particular moment without making any reference to technical aspects of his smartphone. He was guided by his perception. A similar apprehension, ability, level of interest and experience of photography was also evident in James's practice. Despite using both a digital compact camera and his smartphone for his everyday image-making, the equipment seemed to be of lesser significance to James than the temporal dimension, which he expressed as capturing a particular moment. Like Joe, James allowed the equipment (and his lack of engagement with it) to direct his practice, without further exploring what he could achieve with his cameras. With this in mind, the claims I am making in this thesis relate to participants' ASD status, their training, varying interests, experiences, abilities and skills in photography, including their own interpretations of their image-making practices. Inevitably it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate this from their ASD.

Working with a small sample does of course impose limitations, but it was also productive for this investigation to work with four participants. Neither was it an imposed selection criteria to recruit a sample of white male adults; nevertheless, interestingly, the gendered sample reflects the higher diagnostic rate of ASD in males (Grinker 2008). The consequence for the thesis of working with a sample of four male individuals, in relation to the claims I make, was both to offer depth and quality of the investigation and eliminate the option for generalisation. Given that ASD does not affect any two autistic people in the same way, it was impossible to extend research findings, conclusions and

other accounts of participants' involvements to a wider representation of the ASD population. In contrast, it was important for this study to deliver a comprehensive picture of the participants and their photographic image-making. In other words, the claims I make in this thesis are not definite conclusions, applicable to a wider ASD population; rather they are specific and detailed accounts of the participants in this study. Yet, they offer enough for other researchers to carry out similar research in the future, and assess their applicability in other settings. This relates to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of 'transferability' as an alternative criterion to 'generalisability' in qualitative research. In that sense, this research opened up new questions, including whether there is something we can call 'ASD photography'. This remains a complex and concerning notion, especially when dealing with a small sample, which lacks diversity in respect of gender, class and so on. Nonetheless, proposed as an idea to be explored, rather than a theoretical endpoint, the notion of an 'ASD photography' responds to the data that was generated for this study. Even within a small sample, the photography differed significantly, opening up the question of what the photography might look like for female counterparts, and other autistic males of different ages and backgrounds. In other words, rather than claiming this study developed a theory of 'ASD photography', which it did not, it merely opened up the opportunity for future research in this area.

As a creative practice, research on photography further opened up some deliberation on the field of creativity as the fabric of culture (Glâveanu 2016). Here, it is worth reflecting on how participants' commentaries on intuition and originality fit within a wider discourse of creativity. More precisely, two of the participants, Joe and Vincent, reflected on intuition and originality in relation to their photographic image-making. For example, Vincent described his practice as intuitive, whilst lacking originality simply because he did not believe in that concept, further arguing that everything has been seen and photographed before. In contrast, Joe strived to create original photographs rather than copying other people's ideas, be it to capture particular moments that he felt were worthy of being photographed, or photograph something that he could share with others. Both these remarks are very interesting within the wider discourse of creativity, which is often exhibited along with intuition and insight (Barnbaum 2015).

According to Max Helfand and colleagues (2016), the definition of creativity includes two interrelated core elements: "[t]he first is newness, novelty, or originality. The second is task appropriateness, usefulness, or meaningfulness [and] context establishes the criteria for what counts as original and task appropriate" (2016: 15). Vlad Glâveanu adds that, "creative acts are always cultural in nature and culture itself is constituted by

individual and collective creations" (2016: 8). As a cultural practice, photography is an outcome of interest, keen observation and planning, and intuition and creativity originate from these foundations. Intuition is not something that can be learned or taught; as a product of observation and understanding, it can be developed and utilised when appropriate (Sullivan 2011). Creativity is often synonymous with originality and requires, too, an open mind, knowledge and involvement so that existing ideas can be shown in new ways (Glâveanu 2016). As a creative venture, photography requires thought, experience, interest and experimentation; observation and experimentation create insights, which are followed by intuition and creativity (Barnbaum 2015). Above all, creativity is not a practice of mind, but as Graeme Sullivan points out, "it becomes manifest through individual agency and creative social action" (2011: 118). Creativity is an inherent human capacity and activity in relation to the social world. Therefore, Joe and Vincent's commentaries on intuition and originality fit within the wider discourse of creativity. Their photography was based on their careful thinking, reasoning, planning and execution, as well as action to create meaningful photographs; intuition and originality derived from these motives. Where creativity discourse might seem to exclude or marginalise those with ASD, it should not.

Considering the interdisciplinary approach to this study, I encountered methodological and analytical challenges of combining and drawing on visual anthropology, visual studies, HCI, communication studies, and cultural disability studies. Notably, these are overarching fields where there is already a lot of borrowing and exchanging of theories and methods taking place. It was crucial, therefore, not to privilege one field over the other, or to dichotomise them; they all offered relevant approaches to, theories on and understandings of both photography and ASD, which underpinned this investigation. Drawing on these areas further enabled me to discover and understand new links between them, integrate knowledge from the different research fields, and ultimately enrich this study. Negotiating interdisciplinary research is something that needs to be learned and acquired, it does not arise out of thin air. More precisely, each discipline has established methods that are used in qualitative research, and by drawing on different fields it was methodologically challenging to ensure the analytical framework gained significance through the methods used in this study. That is to say, it was central, for example, to use photo elicitation as a tool to bring out new dimensions of visual perception, photographic seeing and other concepts discussed in relation to participants' image-making. The collaboration with participants was also met with a number of methodological challenges, taking into account the diversity of their

everyday life, the degree of involvement and case-specific experience and knowledge of photography that they brought to the study.

In terms of analytical challenges, it was necessary to explore and evaluate the disciplinary differences and similarities, and identify the relations between them. Here, research questions provided my principal orientation and helped me manage the range of disciplines that I drew on. Simultaneously, it was essential to select theories and concepts related to aspects and themes of this study, without repeating them at length where other authors on which this study drew on already discussed them. For example, this thesis avoided an in-depth account of academic narratives on the representation of disability in the discussion of ASD (Murray 2008). In contrast, it was important to select theories and concepts related to participants' image-making, including theories related to perception. Another challenge derived from organising and structuring the knowledge base of individual fields and synthesise the theories and concepts that underpin this study. This knowledge base had to be integrated into the specific areas that were pertinent to this study, namely photography, ASD and perception. Combining the theories from the literature with the photographic practices of participants was challenging but essential in order to offer descriptive, practice-oriented knowledge.

Similar to the methodological and analytical challenges encountered in this research, it might be argued that the different approaches to ASD research tend to be presented as a dichotomy in the thesis: the anthropological approach expounded is seen as competing with biomedical/cognitive approaches. It is important to acknowledge, of course, that not all cognitive approaches are biomedical; and that the two approaches can be complementary. However, because biomedical accounts have primarily focused on the challenges of ASD people evinced in laboratory tasks since the beginning of ASD research, there is a tension between biomedical perspectives on autism and the everyday experiences of ASD individuals, with the latter being increasingly explored in recent years. Specifically, this tension emerges as the experiences, discourses and ideologies of persons with ASD contrasts with the experiences, discourses, and ideologies of doctors, therapists, teachers and others who offer a range of services in institutional settings. The tension commonly arises at the interface of the personal and the institutional, between theories of competence and theories of disability, and among orientations toward measurable clinical change when contrasted with notions of a good, meaningful life (Solomon and Bagatell 2010).

Many approaches to and interpretations of ASD remain firmly grounded in the biomedical paradigm, yet individuals with autism, through narrative self-representations

and organised activities such as the ones offered in this research, are themselves attempting to transform how ASD is considered and perceived (Bagatell 2010). As a phenomenon that can be described narrowly as a biomedical, neurological, or developmental or educational disorder, or phenomenologically and experientially as a way of being in the world, it was therefore necessary in this research to draw on a number of complementary approaches (Solomon and Bagatell 2010). As a neurological condition, there are aspects of ASD that are best explained through biomedical/cognitive approaches to ASD, while anthropological approaches help develop an understanding of what it means to live with and experience ASD. This needs to be kept in mind: the different approaches were brought together in order to offer a more nuanced view of the various approaches to ASD, and not to dichotomise the views.

In this thesis, I have drawn on theories of social construction, however, it is important to acknowledge too that cognitive atypicality has a metaphysics too. Social constructionism invites us to see the world and ourselves as socially constructed and challenges us to view grand narratives (including those of science) as one of many discourses that are possible among others that have equal value. When we begin to view these discourses as social constructions we can begin to deconstruct fixed beliefs about their power and invite other ways of thinking. Biomedical terms such as disorder and condition starkly contrast with more ethnographically and phenomenologically derived terms on autism as a way of being. Bagatell (2010) argues that a diagnosis can actually afford opportunities for transforming modes of participation in social worlds and, in essence, provides a gateway to denser experiential worlds. In this sense, alongside the need to understand the social construction of ASD, one has to recognise that it touches upon fundamental questions of being in, and knowing, the world. ASD offers a different outlook on the same world because the sensory processing functions in autism differ considerably from those of the non-ASD population. It is possible to establish certain differences in the sensory-cognitive functioning of individuals with ASD by exploring their experiences and formulating possible explanations regarding different types of consciousness. In this regard, ASD has implications far beyond the limits of medical neurology, psychiatry and psychology. Exploring the ways in which ASD individuals think and 'see' the world around assists us in understanding the diversity of our own nature and our own experiences. ASD shifts the focus of our exploration from the practical everyday activities of life to understanding what it means to be human, and the necessity of recognising the rich diversity of life.

Developing a deeper sense of the critical problems of the study in relation to the complexity of ASD required an interdisciplinary and to some degree participatory approach. Although involving vulnerable participants in research takes time in order to build rapport prior to collecting data, and potentially raises power differentials too, participants were the best authority on their own lives, experiences, feelings and views. In terms of this study, their participation created critical and ethical issues that I had to address. My role as the researcher was not a neutral observer, but had direct and indirect implications on the research and the individuals. On the one hand, there were ethical issues around informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process, whilst on the other hand, posing questions to participants, producing images and reflecting on their photographic practices shaped the way they thought about the research, first during their involvement and then afterwards, subsequent to the final outcome of the thesis.

At the same time, this study was carried out with a critical focus that originated from the view that ASD is a condition that has acquired a specific emphasis in recent years. It is, one might say, the condition of fascination of the moment, occupying a number of cultural sites and narratives that reflect a spectrum of wonder and nervousness, including Virtual Reality, where viewers can 'virtually experience' what it is like to live with ASD.[50] By employing creative visual methods, participants were given opportunities to express themselves in a meaningful way through photography. Crucially, their engagement did not simply allow me to gain privileged access to what ASD individuals thought, saw or felt. This would be a naïve approach to the study of ASD, and as David Buckingham claims, it

> typically neglects the formative role (and indeed the responsibility) of the researcher; the generic and formal characteristics of the media that participants are asked to employ; and the participants' understanding both of the context and aims of the research itself, and of the media that are used.
>
> (Buckingham 2009: 635)

By contrast, the use of creative visual methods required a degree of reflexivity, and this study offered the participants the opportunity for self-reflective and critical thinking. Using photography as a creative visual method enabled them to think about what had changed for them and their photographic image-making in the process of their involvement. This is key, seeing that visual methods are widely employed in interdisciplinary research, yet participant-generated images and practices have

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[50] The Guardian, available at: https://www.theguardian.com/gnm-press-office/2017/oct/09/guardian-launches-the-party-a-virtual-experience-of-autism, (accessed on 18 October 2017).

traditionally been used as instruments of learning something else about the social world of the participants, rather than about the photographic image-making itself, as in this study.

This 'instrumentalisation' of photographic image-making in relation to social science questions and research is problematic if the embeddedness of image-making and its place in the lifeworld of participants is not considered. Image-making is not analogous to conducting a questionnaire or survey in order to find something out. The increasing use of digital technology is part of everyday life, and we can learn much about the use and practices of technologies through the involvement of participants. Hence, it is important to offer clarity on the claim for a contribution of this thesis to visual methods. Crucially, as a way of exploring the ways of seeing self and world, participants in this study used photographic image-making as a visual method. Used as somewhat authentic portrayals of participants' experience of how they saw the world, photography and visual methods were explored with due regard to their place in participants' everyday lives, not as a mere adjunct that was introduced to them prior to their participation. This approach contributed to the production of complex and insightful information that derived from an under-researched and often marginalised group in society. Within autism research, photography and visual methods more generally are novel ways of exploring autistic participants' views and experiences. Coupled with reflexivity and the spoken word of participants generated through photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews, this study used visual methods to make a contribution to knowledge in the context of both ASD and photography research.

Working within the realm of ASD brings inevitable challenges in relation to how ASD people are portrayed in studies, and an inevitable tension between consolidating a view of ASD people as 'other' and the ambition to deconstruct existing norms and categories. It was important, therefore, to depict participants and their photographic practices as accurately as possible, without creating a view of them performing some 'savant skill', 'enhanced power' or stereotypical autistic behaviour. Moreover, this thesis aimed to avoid creating the 'overcoming' narrative that is so dominant in the representation of disability and ASD (Murray 2008). Rather than describing ASD in a binary way, this thesis attempted to paint a richer picture of difference by reframing it in terms of neurodiversity.

At times, I referred to the photographic practices of non-ASD people in order to demonstrate that participants' image-making was not always related to or embedded in their experience of ASD, or because their practice highlighted image-making practices

that are more widely shared; sometimes participants practiced photography in a similar way to non-ASD people. That in itself begins to deconstruct any simple categorisation. For example, Vincent used his smartphone in situations in which he had to act quickly to take a photograph, which changed the pace and nature of his visual perceptual experience. This is similar to the way non-ASD people use the smartphone (Palmer 2012). While it was not central to this thesis to draw comparisons between ASD and non-ASD people and their photographic practices, this study avoided creating a view of ASD people that pictured them as something they are not. Instead, participants often described their photography in relation to their ASD, recognising that autism is part of their lives and way of being.

There is a need to develop a better understanding of ASD people, and not attempt to change who they are. While adopting Ochs and Solomon's (2010) term 'autistic sociality' was productive for better understanding participants' social use of photography, it is a provocative idea in that it invokes both potentiality for differing and othering ASD people, while it also invokes engagement and mutuality (Ochs and Solomon 2010). In highlighting the grey areas of sociality experienced by both ASD and non-ASD people, it is perhaps possible to avoid imposing a dichotomous division between ASD and non-ASD people, and portraying ASD people as 'other'. Indeed, it is necessary to redesign society to understand ASD people, rather than redesigning the ASD individual to fit into a neurotypical society. As the rates of ASD rise (Grinker 2008), and the spectrum is broadening (Bagatell 2007), ASD people themselves have the potential to have a powerful voice in how society conceives of what autism is and what it means to live with ASD. Hence, autism is viewed as a difference, a neurological variation, a vital part of the autistic person, not a disease in need of a cure.

Some ASD individuals pride themselves on being different to non-ASD people, such as Donna Williams (1999, 2004, 2006) and Temple Grandin (2006). Explaining the ways she makes sense of the world, Grandin describes herself as a visual thinker, which is an interesting remark considering this study's focus on photography. As Grandin describes,

> In my own case, I can think in pictures without words. I can access my visual memory directly because it is not masked by verbal words. When I read, I instantly translate what I read into pictures. From my own experience, I can agree with the idea that people with autism directly access primary parts of the brain that are not accessible to verbal thinkers.
>
> (Grandin 2008: 190)

For Grandin, thinking visually is a key element of her everyday meaning-making, and while she details the process with regard to her own experience, it is not to be mistaken with the experience of other ASD individuals. Indeed, highlighting Grandin's experience as a visual thinker is not to say that all ASD people think visually, or that non-ASD people cannot think visually too, but that visual thinking is a feature of ASD and relates to autistic people's sensory perception of the world. James Berger (2008) further suggests that for many ASD people language is "figurative and false, or at least ambiguous. It is an inadequate tool to organize the world" (2008: 274). Berger's claim is relevant, but should not be misunderstood as being representative of all ASD individuals either. Of course, some non-ASD people describe themselves as thinking visually, or that they have a photographic memory, but 'visual thinking' and 'verbal thinking' cannot be simply aligned with ASD people and non-ASD, respectively. As a spectrum disorder, ASD affects autistic people in different ways, and whether an ASD person thinks visually or verbally corresponds to the same idea. Asking participants whether they were visual thinkers prompted mixed responses, so it was not a matter of generalising the idea to a wider ASD population, but merely to point out that some ASD people think visually, which is particularly interesting in relation to image-making practices.

Like the complexities of cultures, societies and the individuals within them, interdisciplinary research requires a deep understanding, particularly if the research is performed in an environment in interaction with participants. The increasing interest in interdisciplinary research can be seen as an encouragement for other researchers, specifically doctoral researchers, to embark on their research journeys. Throughout my research I have encountered numerous times when ASD individuals were not mentioned, or referred to, in discussions on photography, creativity, empathy, and many more debates related to everyday life. Yet, the small sample in this study already showed that ASD people are creative in their image-making practices; they disrupted perceptions of ASD individuals being socially awkward, or unimaginative in the ways they approached the world. This research was not an endpoint, and should hopefully encourage other researchers to conduct similar studies in the future.

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Appendix 1

You Need to Know, NAS campaign, 2010

Figure 3.1. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Figure 3.2. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Figure 3.3. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Figure 3.4. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010
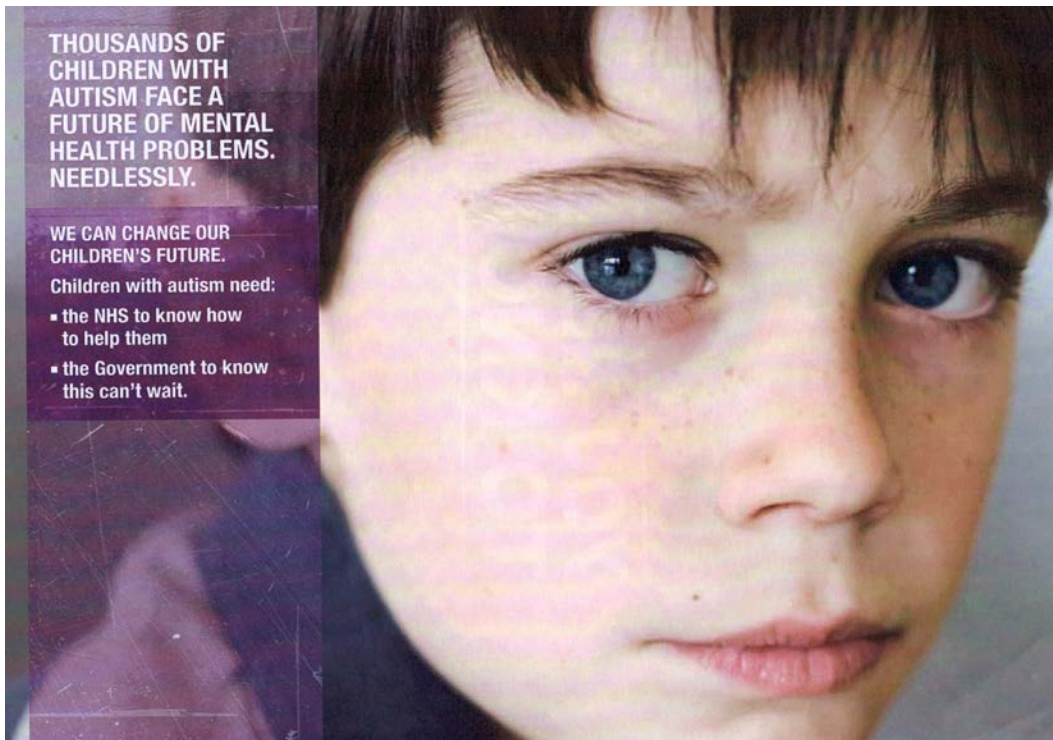
Figure 3.5. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Figure 3.6. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Figure 3.7. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Involving parents and schools

We heard from many CAMHS professionals how importantly they view parental involvement when treating mental health problems in children with autism. They regard listening to the views of parents as a crucial part of the assessment process, as well as seeing great value in involving parents in some therapy sessions. Some professionals even ask parents to work with their children at home between sessions, and equip them to do so.

"We would never work with a child in isolation. Although we might work with one child in a room and without the parents, we would always feed back to the parents afterwards. It is rare that we work with the child on their own."

Clinical Psychologist

But parents told us how often they have been frozen out of the process, unaware of how the professional was working with their child, and given no advice or support about what they could do to support their child at home. In some cases, parents told us that children as young as 13 had been given medical prescriptions without any involvement from their parents, who felt that this was very inappropriate due to the nature of their child's condition. One fifth (21%) of parents do not know what treatments their child is receiving.

Aside from home, children spend most of their time at school. But only one in five parents (21%) believe that CAMHS work well together with their child's school. Parents also told us of instances of CAMHS staff failing to attend important school meetings to discuss their child's development.

"You need to bring the parents on board. They're your greatest allies, the parents. If you've got parents on board for any of the therapies, then you start to win the battle."
Parent of a teenage child

"I'm forever trying to say [to the school] ' CAMHS have said this'. For me to remember it all and get it across in the right way, I can't do it as well. Can't they just tell them themselves?"
Parent of a teenage child

Mental health problems will often develop in part through the child's experience in the education system. Many professionals told us that it was very important to strike up a good relationship with the child's school - and those who have done so are now able to work with the school to deliver interventions for the child.

"Part of our service works almost exclusively within the school. So when we pop up we're not seen as alien, we're just seen as another person that works with behaviour support."
Clinical Team Manager

Figure 3.8. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Case study: The Hawksmere Centre[44]

The Hawksmere Centre in Hertfordshire is a newly-opened autism-specific tier 4 CAMHS service. It was set up specifically to treat boys aged between 13 and 18 who have autism with co-occurring mental health issues and complex care needs.

The Centre aims to provide a person-centred service, delivering specialist assessment, therapeutic intervention and support in a safe and secure environment. The team includes consultant psychiatrists, child and adolescent psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, nurses (paediatric, mental health and learning disability) and an education specialist.

The new therapy team will work with the child and their parents to create a person-centred care plan that meets the needs of the individual. They also aim to provide a rapid and accessible service in times of crisis, as well as a safe environment.

The Centre will offer support with the transition into adult care and appropriate step-down services via the Autistic Spectrum Conditions specific care pathway. Each transition plan is personalised by the Transition Co-ordinator, who uses a variety of tools such as story boards and Social Stories™ to ensure minimum disruption and anxiety to the young person.

The Hawksmere Centre team explained to us why they feel an autism-specific service is crucial at Tier 4:

"Staff can only begin to offer meaningful support to a person with autism if they have an understanding of what the world looks like from an autism perspective. Autism-specific environments can ensure that all staff are fully trained in autism and that every activity is appropriately focussed around the needs of young people with autism. This cannot be achieved effectively in an environment where staff have to switch their approaches from young person to young person, dropping in and out of their trained autism mode."

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Figure 3.9. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Waiting times

Following referral, a quarter (25%) of parents waited over 18 weeks for their first appointment and a further 10% waited between 13-18 weeks. On getting their first appointments, some had to begin the referral process again after an unsuccessful initial meeting with CAMHS led staff to conclude that no treatment was necessary. Others complained of a 'revolving door' situation, where their children were given short, episodic interventions of six to eight weeks and were then discharged regardless of whether progress had been made. Following discharge, the whole referral and waiting process had to start again.

"She said, 'I couldn't assess him because he wouldn't cooperate'. I was signed off."
Parent of a young child

"I wrote a letter to the Community Paediatrician saying 'I'm sorry, it's not acceptable, it's not my fault that CAMHS are overworked. I have this child at home. I now have a baby as well. I'm frightened he's going to kill her because he got so aggressive.' I just kept ringing up."
Parent of a young child

"If they say it's a problem but it's not a crisis, then they can fester for some time before they get seen."
CAMHS Clinical lead for ASD crisis intervention

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Figure 3.10. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Crisis intervention

Some parents of children with autism and mental health problems regularly find themselves in emergency situations where they need urgent, immediate support. This is particularly true of children who are challenging or aggressive towards other family members, who self-harm or attempt suicide. When crises arise, families tell us that they need support in the form of on-call home visits (73%), emergency appointments (65%) and 24-hour helpline (64%).

Emergency support from CAMHS has been a target for Government improvement over the past few years, and more and more CAMHS are reporting that they provide 'on-call services' and emergency support[19]. But despite this, very few of the CAMHS teams that we spoke to provided any emergency, on-call support in their areas. A couple of professionals told us that urgent cases are seen within a week or two of referral. But when a child is threatening themselves or family members and support is needed immediately, this response is simply inadequate. It leaves families having to call the police, who are not trained to support children with such complex needs through a traumatic episode. This is completely inappropriate and incredibly frightening for a child who is already experiencing severe mental health problems, particularly when they have autism and find it difficult to cope with unfamiliar people and situations.

"After he set fire to himself, I talked to the hospital. [He was] admitted by the casualty doctor onto a ward. The ward wouldn't accept him because it wasn't the right person because he didn't have training in Asperger's or mental health. So we were put on a ward that was actually closed and left there for hours and hours and hours."
Parent of teenage child

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Figure 3.11. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Support for families

The remit of CAMHS includes support for the whole family. That support might be through family therapy sessions[20], or could be through advice and coping strategies to help family members deal with their child's mental health problems at home and to help them to recognise signs of poor mental health in themselves.

When the whole family are supported and involved, it can enable them to continue caring for their child, to contribute to the child's recovery and prevent family breakdown. But just one third (33%) of parents agreed that CAMHS had provided for other members of the family who had needed support. It is crucial that the Government recognises the impact that mental health problems in children can have on a family, and that commissioners recognise CAMHS' responsibility to support the whole family, not just the child.

Transition to adulthood

"When I went up to adult services, [the psychiatrist] actually came with us to help with the changeover. So we had this great big discussion about how we could make it easier for me moving up, because obviously all this history with people, it's just terrifying for me to meet another doctor. We wanted to make it simple. It was helpful, I think."
18-year-old woman

Moving into adulthood is a very important time for all disabled young people who receive statutory services, but for young people with autism it is especially so. People with autism find coping with change intrinsically difficult, so the multiple changes involved in their transition are always a significant challenge.

The transition process can be made easier through good communication between children's and adult services, with plans being developed from an early stage. It is therefore worrying that for many children with autism and mental health problems, transition planning simply is not happening. The vast majority (84%) of parents of children aged 14-17 told us that their child requires ongoing mental health support. Most of these parents and parents of 18-21 year olds requiring ongoing mental health support said that there was no plan in place to determine what support their child would receive when they got too old for support from CAMHS (70%). Almost all parents (92%) worried about what mental health support their child would get when they turned 18.

Figure 3.12. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

This situation is reflected by the experiences of parents. 4 out of 5 (80%) parents told us that there have been times of crisis when they and their family have needed to access local CAMHS, but only a quarter (24%) of these families were able to get the emergency support they needed. This is not just a problem for children with autism, but for many other children with serious mental health problems.

"We had the mental health services round who sat at the kitchen table and interviewed him for a while and said they didn't think that they could offer him anything. He said, 'But don't worry, you can come back to us. If there's a crisis, come back to us' and I said, 'Oh what, that means you'll come immediately?' 'Oh no, there'll be a waiting list. About six weeks'. Off he went. It's just ridiculous."
Parent of a young adult

"During the daytime there isn't anything dedicated for crisis. So, if anyone has a crisis they've got a choice of who they ring; GP, A&E, police."
Clinical Director

"They are not very good if there is a crisis. They don't know what to do. I was left with a child who was cutting her arms and smearing blood all up the walls, locking herself in a room. So I changed all my doors so that they opened outwards so she couldn't lock herself in a room. I had to keep any form of medication, any razor blades, absolutely anything. I used to lock them in the glove compartment of my car, so she couldn't get hold of anything, keep the keys on me, so that she couldn't get hold of anything. She is very inventive and for something that she picked up in a few days, it took us months and months to stop her doing it. CAMHS didn't help us do that. They gave no advice on anything... You're just stuck on your own and you've got to deal with it."
Parent of a young adult

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Figure 3.13. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Figure 3.14. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010

Figure 3.15. You Need to Know campaign, NAS, 2010
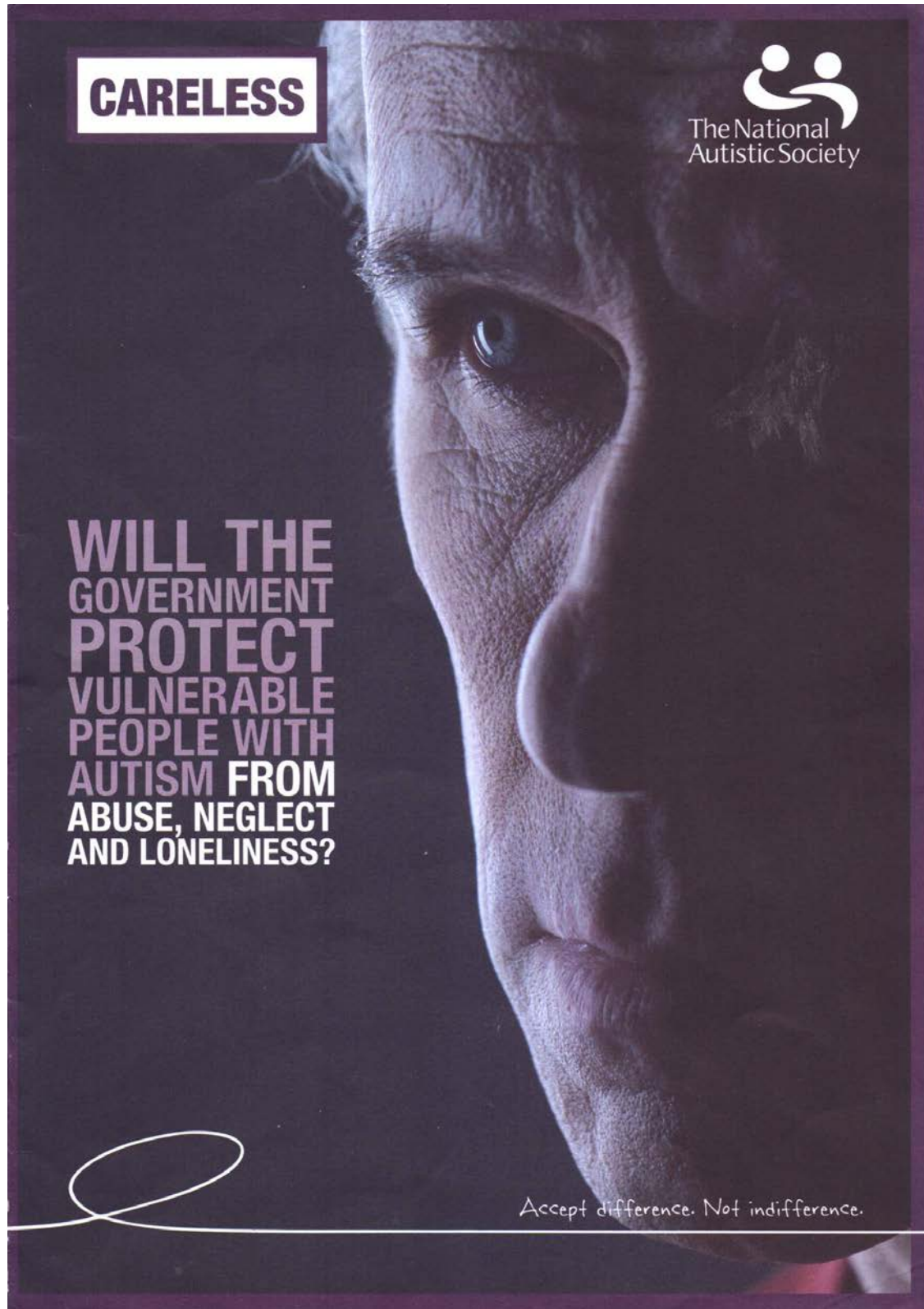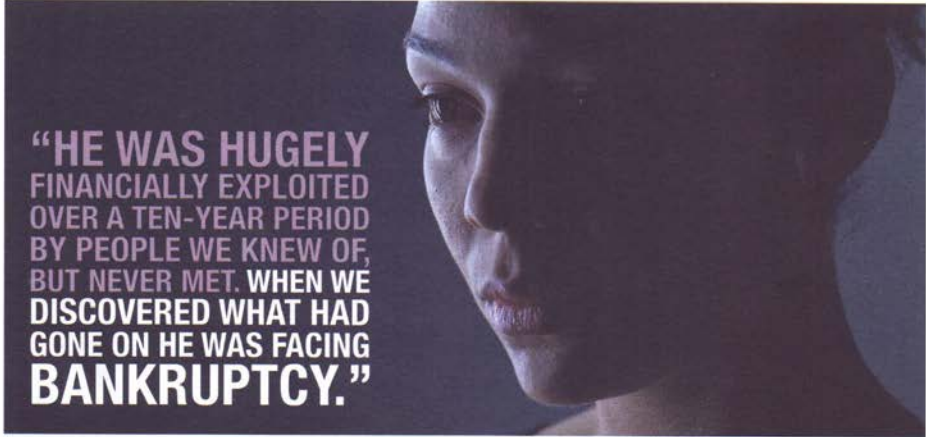
Appendix 2

Careless, NAS campaign, 2014

Figure 3.16 Careless campaign, NAS, 2014

"HE WAS HUGELY FINANCIALLY EXPLOITED OVER A TEN-YEAR PERIOD BY PEOPLE WE KNEW OF, BUT NEVER MET. WHEN WE DISCOVERED WHAT HAD GONE ON HE WAS FACING BANKRUPTCY."

Abused

Abuse of adults with autism is common and often serious. Many are abused over time by someone they trust and think of as a friend.

Someone with autism may not initially recognise that they are being abused or manipulated. They may not question the intentions or honesty of the person who is befriending them, and will simply do as they are asked. They can also fear displeasing people so much that they comply with someone's wishes even if it harms them.

This leads to some people taking advantage of adults with autism. Many are subjected to long-term financial abuse, physical abuse or are forced to do things they don't want to do, including criminal behaviour or having people stay in their home.

In our recent survey:

> **49% of adults with autism** (or parents/carers responding on their behalf) told us they had been **abused by someone they thought of as a friend**[1]

> **27%** have had **money or possessions stolen** by someone they thought of as a friend

> **37%** have been **forced or manipulated** to do something they didn't want to do by someone they thought of as a friend.

"SOME OF THE PEOPLE I THOUGHT WERE MY FRIENDS ONLY USED ME TO GET THINGS FROM ME."

Abuse can have devastating consequences. In the worst cases, it has led to people with autism, like Adrian, losing their lives. It contributes to mental ill health and social isolation. In our survey, **44% of adults with autism said they stay at home because they are afraid of being abused or harassed.**

Vulnerable people at risk of abuse need support. Until now, someone has been judged to have substantial need under social care eligibility criteria if 'abuse has occurred or will occur'. This ensures local authorities put in place support to prevent people from being exploited or abused. The Government is proposing to remove this entitlement through their new criteria. This would make it much harder for people to get this kind of support.

The Department of Health must include the need to stay safe from abuse or neglect in the eligibility criteria for care and support.

[1] 'Abuse' includes physical, sexual and financial abuse, or being forced or manipulated to do something they didn't want to do.

Figure 3.17 Careless campaign, NAS, 2014

> "WITHOUT ANY SUPPORT, HE WAS FINALLY FOUND AT HOME SUFFERING FROM SEVERE MALNUTRITION AND WITH MOULD GROWING ON HIS SKIN."

Unfed and unwashed

Many people with autism need someone to prompt them to wash, dress or feed themselves. They may be physically able to do these tasks, but without prompting will not know to pay attention to these basic needs.

> 65% of adults told us they need prompting to wash, dress or prepare a meal.

> 86% of adults who need prompting have **not washed**, **70%** have **missed meals** and **69%** have **not got dressed** because they didn't get this help.

> "I DON'T EAT, I DON'T CHANGE CLOTHES, NOTHING EXCEPT MAYBE GET A DRINK OF WATER AND GO TO THE BATHROOM WHEN I CAN'T HOLD IT ANYMORE. DON'T TAKE MY MEDS EITHER. I CAN LOSE ENTIRE DAYS AND NIGHTS THAT WAY."

The Government has proposed that people will be eligible for support if they need 'assistance' to carry out essential everyday tasks. This must be broadened to include prompting or supervision so that the particular support needs of people with autism are not overlooked.

The Department of Health must include the need for guidance or prompting to carry out essential activities in the eligibility criteria for care and support.

Case study: Nick

Nick[2] has Asperger syndrome and was living on his own in a flat with regular support from his mother. He could physically carry out everyday tasks, but often required prompting, for instance to eat, wash and manage his finances. After his mother died, he gradually lost contact with the rest of the family, eventually having to cope without any support.

He stopped paying his bills, claiming benefits and eating meals. Over several years, his health, his ability to look after himself and his home environment all deteriorated. Finally, social services found him at home suffering from severe malnutrition, poor mental health and with mould growing on his skin.

Nick was sectioned, and then left hospital in January 2014 to receive support at a residential home run by The National Autistic Society. He is developing the skills to live more independently and will return to his flat in January 2015. He will initially need support to prompt him to look after himself and therefore prevent his life from slipping back into crisis. **We are concerned that Nick would not be eligible for support under the proposed eligibility criteria.**

[2]Name has been changed

Figure 3.18 Careless campaign, NAS, 2014

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> "I DON'T HAVE ANY FRIENDS AND WHEN MY PARENTS DIE, I WILL HAVE NO ONE."
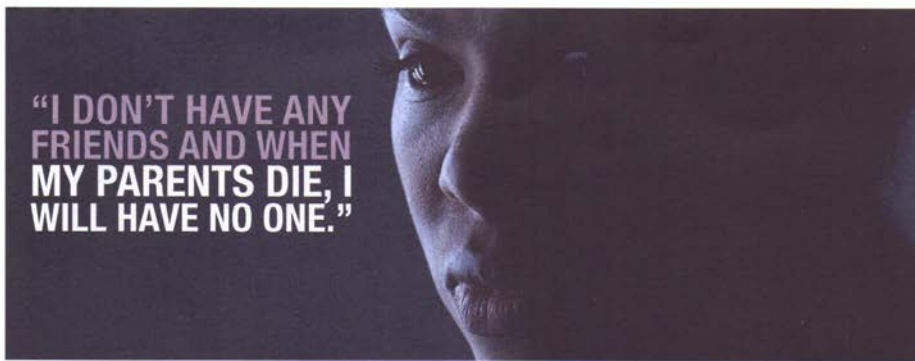
Alone

People with autism are particularly vulnerable to social isolation. One in four adults with autism has no friends,[3] and some have no personal relationships at all. The type of support most wanted by people with autism is help to improve their social skills,[4] but this is rarely available.

Social isolation has a significant impact on people's quality of life. It can damage mental and physical health. At least one in three adults with autism experiences severe mental ill health due to a lack of support.[5] Social isolation also contributes to people's risk of being abused or neglected.

> **41% of adults with autism told us they often feel lonely**, compared to 11% of the general population.[6]

> **36% do not leave the house most days**.

> **66% of respondents have felt depressed because of loneliness**.

"HE HAS NO FRIENDS. HE IS DEPRESSED BECAUSE HE WANTS TO MEET OTHER PEOPLE, BUT DOESN'T KNOW HOW."

The proposed eligibility criteria include maintaining family or other relationships as an activity for which people may need support. Many adults with autism need specific support to form and develop personal relationships **in the first place**.

The Department of Health must include the need to form and develop relationships in the eligibility criteria for care and support.

[3]Bancroft, K. et al (2012). *The way we are: autism in 2012*. London: The National Autistic Society

Misunderstood

The basic support needs of adults with autism will not be recognised unless the person assessing their care and support needs has the necessary expertise in autism. However, only one in three adults with autism thinks that social workers have a good understanding of autism.[7]

Assessors can easily misunderstand the needs of people on the spectrum if they do not have experience and knowledge of how to communicate with them, or of the impact of the condition on someone's day-to-day life. People with autism can lack insight into their own condition and may struggle to define their needs themselves.

Training requirements for assessors are clear and strong in the Autism Act statutory guidance.[8] However, autism is not explicitly included in the Government's proposed new requirements for expertise and training of community care assessors. The Government needs to send a clear message that each person with autism must be assessed by someone with expertise in autism.

The Department of Health must require that adults with autism are assessed for care and support by someone with expertise in autism.

[4]The National Autistic Society (2013). *Push for Action*. London: The National Autistic Society
[5]Rosenblatt, M. (2008). *I Exist: the message from adults with autism in England*. London: The National Autistic Society
[6]Griffin, J. (2010). *The Lonely Society*. London: The Mental Health Foundation
[7]The National Autistic Society (2013). *Push for Action*. London: The National Autistic Society
[8]Department of Health (2010). *Implementing "Fulfilling and rewarding lives"*: Statutory guidance for local authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the autism strategy. London: Department of Health

Figure 3.19 Careless campaign, NAS, 2014
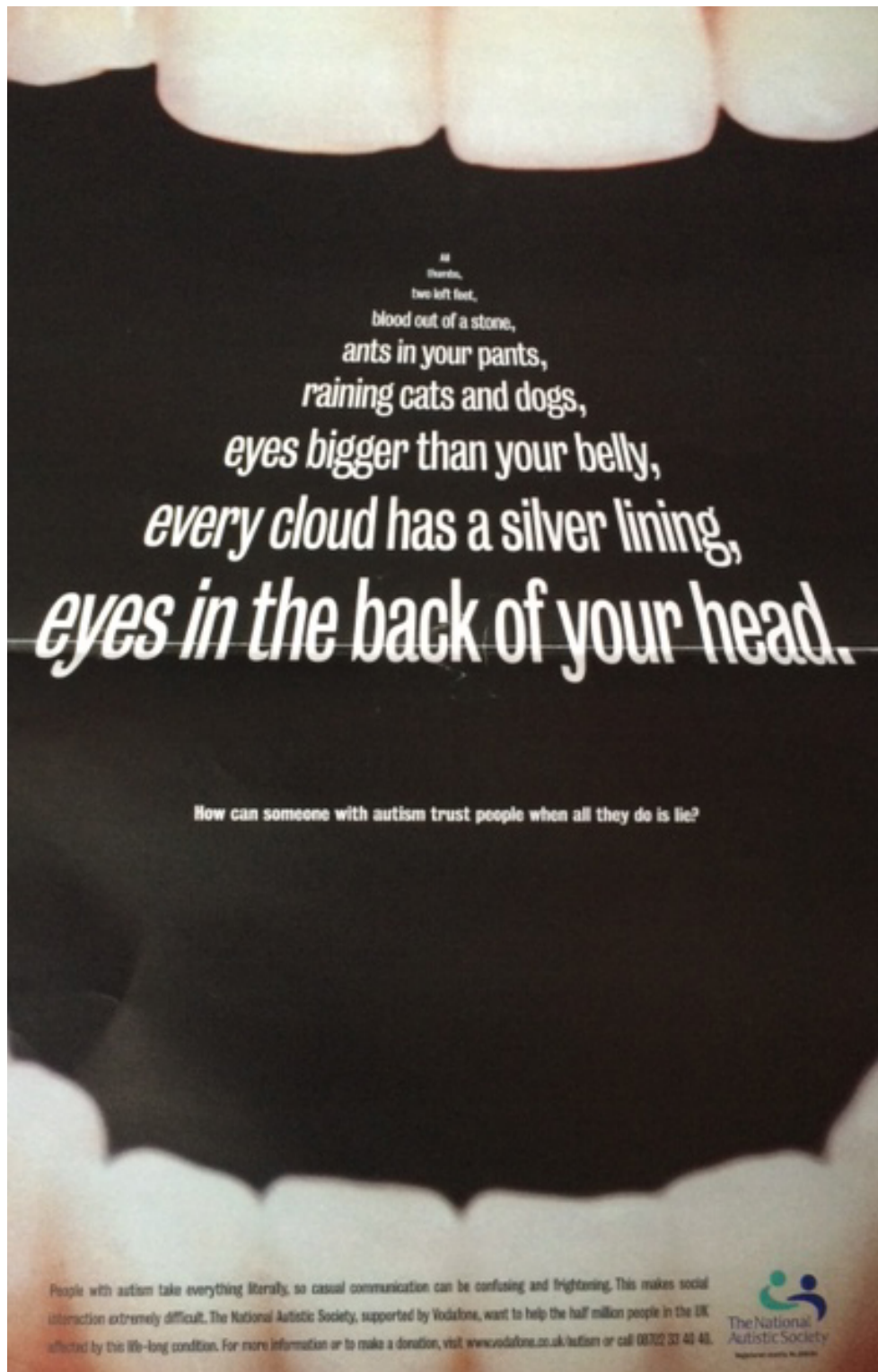
Appendix 3

NAS posters, 2004

Figure 3.20. NAS poster campaign, 2004

Figure 3.21. NAS poster campaign, 2004

Appendix 4

Photography and ASD

Figure 3.22. Screen grab from website, photograph by Timothy Archibald.

Figure 3.23. Screen grab from website, photograph by Timothy Archibald.

Figure 3.24. Screen grab from website, photograph by Timothy Archibald.

Figure 3.25. Screen grab from website, photograph by Timothy Archibald.

Figure 3.26. Screen grab from website, photograph by Rosie Barnes.

Figure 3.27. Screen grab from website, photograph by Rosie Barnes.

Figure 3.28. Screen grab from website, photograph by Rosie Barnes.
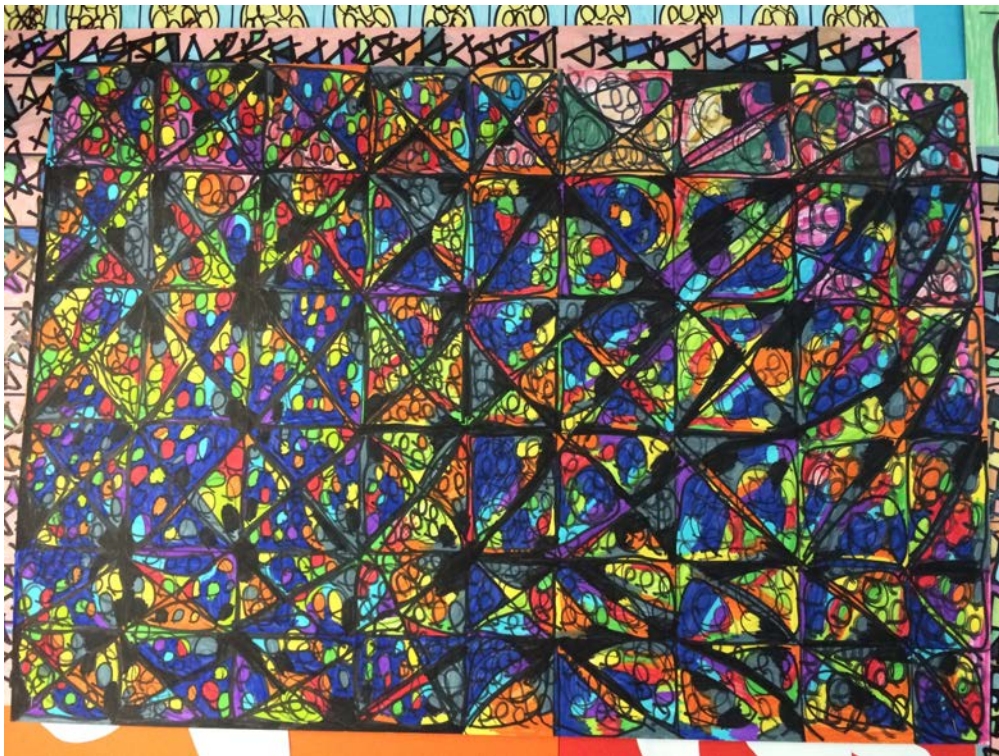
Appendix 5

Visual arts and autism

Figure 4.1. Colourful, A2-sized artwork by service user at art-based service provider for autistic people in London, felt-tip marker on paper, September 2014.

Figure 4.2. Section of artwork that depicts the structured outline and use of colour by a service user at art-based service provider for autistic people in London, felt-tip marker on paper, September 2014.

Figure 4.3. Section of artwork that depicts the structured outline and use of colour by a service user at art-based service provider for autistic people in London, felt-tip marker on paper, September 2014.
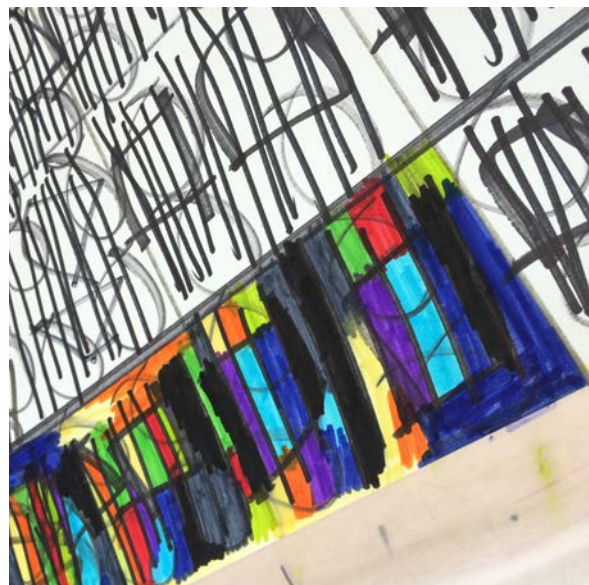
Appendix 6

5.1. Participant information sheet

Postgraduate research study on "The photographic practices of people with Autism
Spectrum Disorder (ASD)"
Uschi Klein, College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton

Information sheet for participants

You are being invited to take part in a research project that is about your photography.
Please read this information sheet before you decide whether you want to take part. It is
important for you to fully understand why the project is being done and what you will be
doing. Please take the time to read this information sheet carefully.
Talk to people you know and trust about the project and ask questions. Contact me if
anything is unclear and if you would like to know more about the project. My email and
mobile number are below. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to be involved in
this study. Thank you for reading this.

Why am I doing this project?
The purpose of this project is to understand how young people with Autism Spectrum
Disorders (ASD) use photography to capture the ways they see the world. This project
aims to understand what photography means to people with ASD, how they use
photography as a visual form of communication and expression and how images are
shared with friends and families.

Why have I been chosen?
You are being invited to take part in this project because you have expressed an interest
in photography and in being involved in this project. A person you know and trust will be
with us or in easy reach when we meet for this project. The meetings will be in places
you know, where you feel safe and take place at times that work for you. That can be for
example your home, a local coffee shop or a public/ community place.

Do I have to take part?
No, it is voluntary. It is totally up to you and you decide whether or not to take part. If you
do, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a form that
explains what the study is about. You are free to leave this study at any time and without
giving me a reason. If you wish, your photos and information can continue to be used in
this study. Personal information (for example your name and contact details) will be
stored securely. You can also choose to have your photos and information removed from
the study and returned to you. It will then not be used in any publication following the
research project.

What will participation involve?
The overall duration of the study includes three stages over the course of 8 months, with
stage 1 starting in October 2014. Your involvement is broken down into three stages,
and there is no participation in between those stages. We will discuss and agree on the
length of time of those breaks and your overall involvement in this study.
We will meet to talk about your photography. These meetings can take place at your
home or a public/ community place you know and where you feel safe to meet with me.
Someone you know can be with us or nearby while we talk, whichever would be better

for you. I will be asking you some questions around your photography, which will take around 1 hour. We will be talking about your views and experiences of your photography and you will be invited to bring some of your recent photographs to the meeting so we can talk about them. There are no right or wrong answers for the questions I will ask you.

I will be taking notes and audio-record what you say as that will help me develop a better understanding of your photography. Your name and contact details will be stored securely. At the end of the discussion I will tell you more about stage 2 of the project and you can let me know whether you want to take part. The selection will be based on your enthusiasm for this project, interest in photography and commitment you can make to this study. Although it will be unlikely that people keen to continue with stage 2 will be excluded, I will need to keep the number of participants limited due to the time commitment and resources required to carry out this study.

Should you continue with stage 2, we will need to start planning the meetings that will happen over the course of 12 weeks. Each meeting will last approximately 1-2 hours. Members of your family, your guardian or carer can be present or in easy reach during each agreed meeting. At the end of stage 2 you will be then invited to participate in stage 3 of the project, which will be another 1-hour long talk and happen up to 6 months later.

Expenses and payments
This is a student-led study and I cannot offer you money for your participation in the project.

What do I have to do?
In stage 1 of this study you will be asked a number of questions around your current photographic practices and are invited to bring along a few of your photographs to the discussion so we can talk about them. The meeting lasts approximately 1 hour. Should you carry on into stage 2 of this project you would need to agree to meet me several times over 12 weeks to talk more about your photography. You will also be asked to take photos when I'm there and talk about those photos afterwards. The last stage 3 of this research project involves another 1 hour-long meeting in which you will be asked more questions around your photography that you have done since finishing stage 2 of the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this research study?
During the project, you will be able to learn more about photography and experiment with techniques in creative ways. You will also be given the opportunity to have your photographs exhibited in a small exhibition towards the end of the project. You will be involved in coming up with ideas and ways that help you with your understanding of photography.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
Nothing. Participation is up to you and voluntary and can be stopped at any time during the project; choosing not to take part will not treat you unfairly and you don't have to tell me why you want to leave the project. Your photographs and work will be returned to you and nothing you said to me will be used or published anywhere.
Will my participation in this study be kept confidential?
Information collected from this study will remain completely private and stored securely. Your responses will be anonymised, which means your name and contact details will not be revealed and published. You can only be identified if you give permission, for

example as being identified as the creator of the photographs you take during the project.

The photos you take are all yours; you are the owner and have the right to decide if, how and where they can be copied or used. You will need to formally agree to take part in this study by signing a consent form that will explain the study, your involvement and how your data will be used in the future.

This study has been reviewed by a group at my university (the Arts and Humanities Research Ethics and Governance Committee at University of Brighton) and a risk assessment has been carried out to ensure you are safe during this project.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
All research data will be retained in secure storage for a period of 5 years following the award of the PhD and then disposed of securely. The data will be anonymised unless explicit permission is given by individual participants to identify them.

The research data will be used in the PhD thesis, in academic publications, including book chapters and online publications, in academic conferences, on websites and in small-scale exhibitions.

Contact details for any questions or further information about this study:

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Phone: 01273 643223

5.2. Consent form to participate in research study

Postgraduate research study on "The photographic practices of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)"

Uschi Klein, College of Arts and Humanities, University of Brighton

Please put a circle around the word YES or NO to describe your choice to each question. This will let me know whether you want to take part in the project and that you know what is involved.

1. I have met the person I will be working with [Uschi Klein, the researcher] and we have talked about the project together.

YES   NO

2. I have been given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and have asked any questions about the project so that I can take part in all the sessions.

YES   NO

3. I have been given a timetable with the dates and activities of the project.

YES   NO

4. I agree to take part in the research project and the activities in the timetable.

YES   NO

When signing this form, I can make the decision to stop coming to the project at any time. I can also reconsider and change any choices I have made to take part in this study at any time.

If I withdraw from the project I will be given the option to either still have my data included or have it removed from the study and returned to me. Any hard copies will be locked away securely and access to the keys strictly controlled. Electronic data will be stored on external hard drives and password-protected.

Data included in study   YES   NO

Data removed and returned to me   YES   NO

Signed …………………………………………………………………

Print name ………………………………………………………………….

Date …………………………………………………………

I have explained my project to the participant and given full and clear answers to any questions.

Signed (researcher)…………………………………………

Print name………………………………………….

Date………………………………………

For further information please contact:

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Appendix 7

Imaginative Investigations: research student exhibition

27th Feb – 18th Mar 2017
Grand Parade, Brighton
University of Brighton

Figure 7.1. The selection of participants' photographs and the audio set-up for the exhibition.

The selection process for the work I exhibited came from 126 images across the data set. Based on the space I had, I selected a total of eight photographs, two per participant. Additionally, I created two audio recordings from two participants describing two of the images on display. The selected images represented a range of different interests, abilities and formats, indicating the different cameras used to create the photographs. It was important for me to keep the images the exact size of how I received them, seeing that two of the participants did not manipulate their images in any way, so I felt that needed to be respected. As a result, the image sizes varied, but they were all printed on A3 Gicleé coloured paper.

'Imaginative Investigations' was a research student exhibition at University of Brighton. A student-led initiative, its aim was to display the work-in-progress of 14 research students (eleven PhD and three MRes students) whose studies were primarily led by images and artefacts, and whose approaches ranged from critical, interpretative, and

empiricist traditions. The works, created in a range of different media, demonstrated the many ways through which investigations can be carried out, displayed and communicated. Working across different academic disciplines, and within the Schools of Art, Design and Media, the exhibition offered insights into the process and discoveries of the University's research students.

Taking place parallel to a major exhibition, the curation of the work was restricted in the space given – a corridor and a foyer – especially since those showing videos needed screens, which could only be positioned in areas with electricity (in the foyer). Others had similar requests that limited the spaces they could use. However, these restrictions did not result in individuals being compromised in what they could show. As the curator of the exhibition, I left the selection process of individuals' artworks to each student, as long as they kept their work within the space they were given. One student's garment display was at the start of the exhibition, followed by stitching and collage in form of research diaries, paintings, drawings and photographs displayed in the corridor, and a number of different artworks in the foyer, including photographs, garments, videos and an interactive design object. An MRes student created the exhibition catalogue, which was available for download on the University website.

This was the second time the University supported a research student-led initiative to display work-in-progress material. 'Imaginative Investigations' was also accompanied by a half-day research symposium, in which research students could elaborate on the work they exhibited, as well as enter wider discussions about art and research.

Figure 7.2. One side of the corridor.