

Practising photography: an archive, a study, some photographs and a researcher

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This paper begins from the assumption that the meanings of a photograph are established through its uses. This point has been well made by a number of historical geographers in recent arguments for the importance of photography as a record of historically-specific ways of seeing the world. This paper, however, extends that argument, and focuses on the relationships between the photograph and the historical geographer. Drawing on my own experiences of working in the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum looking at photographs taken by Lady Hawarden in the mid-nineteenth century, I discuss the effects of that archive both on them and on myself as a researcher. I argue that that archive is a powerful space which to a certain degree allies the visual and spatial resources of the photographs and the research practice of the historical geographer to its own discipline; but I also argue that its discipline can be disrupted by its own contradictory discourses and by other relationships between researcher and the photographs. In conclusion, I ask for more consideration to be given to contemporary research practice in relation to historical photographs. Historical geographers cannot themselves claim to be merely the descriptive recorders of history and geography if they wish to deny this status to photographs.

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Introduction: practising photography

Many writers have suggested that the visual specificity of a photographic image lies in the way it offers an image of something that was once there in front of a camera. As Roland Barthes says, “it is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with it”.^[1] However, Barthes went on to comment that “Photography never lies, or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, but never as to its existence”.^[2] Recent work on photography and geography has certainly focused on the meanings of things photographed. Several writers have made a strong case for the importance of photographs as a source for historical geographers,^[3] but not because photographs accurately record what places looked like in the past. Like many other historians of photography,^[4] these geographers argue that photographs are not simply mimetic of the world they show. Rather, it is being argued that the production, circulation and consumption of photographs produce and reproduce the imagined geographies of the social group or institution for which they were made. In what is perhaps the most sustained discussion to date of this socio-cultural relationship between photography and geography, Joan Schwartz argues that it is because photographs are complicit with particular “visual agenda[s]” that they should be seen as “social constructs capable of performing ideological work”.^[5] Far from being objective images, she argues

that “photographs serve interests”: the interests of “the photographers who made them, the patrons who commissioned them, the entrepreneurs who published them and the audiences who consumed them”.^[6] Thus photographs should be seen in terms neither of scientific description nor of artistic aesthetics—although many critics have done and continue to do this—but as cultural documents offering evidence of historically, culturally and socially specific ways of seeing the world. And so geographers have begun to detail the constitutive roles played by various sorts of photography in the construction of Western perceptions of colony, wilderness and nation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All this work emphasizes the practices in which photographs are always embedded. For Schwartz, for example, understanding the meanings of photographs is to “understand them in terms of the action in which they participated”.^[7] Moreover, as Mike Crang has argued in his discussion of contemporary tourist photography, questions of practice demand careful and nuanced answers that take interpretation beyond what can be over-generalized arguments about particular ways of seeing.^[8] Photographs are produced and reproduced, displayed and redisplayed, to specific and diverse effects. As Schwartz concludes, it is “as a site where meaning is *negotiated* [that] photographs deserve close scrutiny by geographers concerned with questions of representation”.^[9]

In this essay, I want to acknowledge the importance of these arguments. I also want to insist that photographs cannot be used as neutral evidence of the way things looked; and I want to argue that this is because photographs entail complex practices of observation, production, reproduction and display. However, I want to take this latter point further, since it seems to me that it has quite profound implications for the methodologies of those geographers working with photographs. For if it is argued that the meanings of photographs reside both in their making and in their subsequent uses, the same argument must extend to contemporary deployments of photographs too—including efforts to reconstruct previous uses. That is, the work of historical geographers using photographs is also an effect of particular practices that put a photograph to work in particular ways. This paper addresses the paradox that researching historical photographic practices in order to specify their effects is itself a practice with its own contemporary effects on the photographs under scrutiny. This is not a paradox that can be resolved. It is, however, a paradox that becomes more pressing if the argument that particular visual agendas construct specific ways of seeing is to be taken seriously. The geographer cannot claim to occupy a position in relation to photographs that their argument denies to others who have used photographic images; the geographer too has their own ways of seeing and the specificity of these needs to be problematized also. The critic of photographic knowledges must themselves enter the interpretive picture. But how? I have argued elsewhere that full self-knowledge is impossible,^[10] both because the self is articulated in part through unconscious drives and desires and because the self is always relational.^[11] As with a photograph, therefore, any mark of the researcher’s presence in a text like this will be more than just a referent, because it will also have entailed a process of interpretation. Barthes described the effects of being photographed, for example, as producing a specific sort of self-image: “once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of ‘posing’, I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image”.^[12] For all these reasons, then, a representation of a self, like a photograph, is bound to be tendentious. I would argue though that it remains necessary to offer some sort of picture of this figure, in order to avoid a situation in which “the overhistoricization of the [image] obscures the underhistoricization of the critic’s position”.^[13]



Figure 1. Source: Lady Hawarden Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, Accession Number PH.296-1947. Courtesy of the Trustees of the V&A/Photographer.

Indeed, in this essay I want to risk underhistoricizing both a set of nineteenth-century photographs and the archive in which they are now held, in order instead to emphasize the importance of the relationship between the image and the researcher. For three years, I wrote my research papers at a table in front of which I had placed some postcards of photographs taken by Clementina, Lady Hawarden, in her London home between 1857 or 1858 and 1864, and which I had bought at the Victoria and Albert Museum's shop in London. The pictures fascinated me, and in May 1997 I spent a week in the Victoria and Albert Museum's Print Room looking at their collection of about 750 Lady Hawarden photographs. Like many wealthy Victorian women who took up photography initially as a hobby (Julia Margaret Cameron is the most cited example), Lady Hawarden almost always photographed her homes, her family and her servants. But her pictures (again like those of Cameron) make home and family strange.^[14] The rooms in which she photographed are almost empty of Victorian clutter, and in their bare spaces husband and daughters—daughters repeatedly, repetitively—pose in isolated and enigmatic performances. Figure 1 exemplifies this strangeness. A bare room, a daughter neither supporting nor being supported by a mirror, almost swallowed by her dress, the reflection that shows us only a camera where the mother should be: in its ambiguous play with subject and space, this photograph is intriguingly elusive. Its objects are perhaps not quite as they should be. This paper offers an interpretation of my research with these particular photographs.

I want to examine my relation with them in two different spaces: my study and the Print Room of the Victoria and Albert Museum. In each of these spaces, I will suggest, certain practices discipline both researcher and photograph, and their relationship to each other. In particular, it seemed to me that the visual qualities of the photographs were inflected by those different practices. The photographs did not look quite the same in those two spaces; and, as this was more than just the effect of their different forms of reproduction, I think those differences demonstrate the importance of my contemporary practices in relation to the visual meanings they may carry. But I also want to argue that the researcher and the photograph both have their own effects that can interrupt those disciplining spatial practices. The aim of this paper, then, is to examine, necessarily partially, a specific research encounter in order to assert the importance of contemporary research practice to the interpretation of historical photographs.

The in/discipline of the archive

Much, though not all, research with historical photographs occurs in archives of one kind or another. Archives can be very different sorts of places, but what they all have is some sort of system for classifying the materials they hold. I will begin my discussion with a particular and rather general account of photographic archives that emphasizes the way their practices impact both upon the images they hold and the researchers who work there, before considering the Print Room more specifically.

For Alan Sekula, when an image enters an archive it loses meaning.^[15] Sekula suggests that what is lost is the meaning the photograph had to its makers and previous users: “in an archive, the possibility of meaning is ‘liberated’ from the actual contingencies of use. But this liberation is also a loss, an *abstraction* from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context”.^[16] This removal of context reduces the complexity of any one photograph and establishes what Sekula calls “a relation of *abstract visual equivalence* between pictures”.^[17] Each photograph shares this lack of context with every other in the archive. Other writers have paid attention to the effects of the classificatory schemas used by particular archives. Brien Brothman, for example, writes that “the assignment of record group numbers, volume numbers, and inventory designations and descriptions as well as other archival adornments to permanently retained documents . . . serve to transfigure, if not to transform, the record”,^[18] and Christopher Pinney echoes this analysis of the power of the archive itself to affect how the images it contains are seen:

The archive functions as a vast linguistic grid enmeshing otherwise volatile images within what it hopes is a structuring certainty. Imprisoned within the archival grid, images (thanks to the teleology of the archive) become self-evident things-in-themselves. The language of the archive, having filled in the blank spaces of the photograph, erases the undecidable nature of the image.^[19]

According to these writers, the archive constitutes photographs in particular ways. They also suggest that this makes the archive a particular kind of space. The practices of the archive give each document a unique place in a larger, systematic order, and this “linguistic grid” of “archival adornments” is described by John Tagg as a cellular matrix.^[20] For these writers, the space of the archive is a grid which stabilizes the meaning of the photographs by putting each one in its place, to produce what Sekula calls the “territory of images”.^[21] Their arguments imply that the power of this grid is such that the researcher too has little choice but to be inserted in it, unable to see what the archive has transformed and erased; they suggest that the researcher as well as the

photographs are disciplined there. In these accounts, the textual apparatus of the archive has an effect on both the researcher and the photographs, and on the relationship between them.

In many ways (but not all; I will return to this point), these descriptions of the archive as a disciplined space describe my sense of working in the Print Room at the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Print Room is clearly organized by a **linguistic grid**, albeit, I would suggest, one rather more extensive and complex than Pinney's commentary suggests. This grid includes discursive fields such as art history, which produces the (sometimes contested) criteria by which an image will be seen as 'art' and therefore admitted into this archive. It includes the particular cataloguing system used to describe and distinguish between each photograph in the archive, materialized in the Print Room's wooden catalogue cabinets of filing cards. It includes the finding system used by the archive. And the Hawarden photographs also have a *Hawarden Collection Catalogue Raisonné*. These linguistic practices are concepts that perform work; they have effects. For example, they are reiterated every time a researcher uses that apparently most innocuous element of this linguistic apparatus, the order slip that must be completed in order to study any document in the Print Room. The order slip demands details of the 'Artist', 'Short Title of Work', 'Accession Number', 'Pressmark', 'Date' and the 'Signature of the Researcher'. Thus when I filled in one of these slips, Lady Hawarden was produced as an Artist, and, this archive being part of the national art collection, as a British Artist, even though her mother was Spanish, she was educated in Rome and lived for some time in Ireland. She is also produced as an Artist who made titled Works, even though it seems that she only ever labelled and exhibited two of her photographs and it is not known which two.^[22] The accession number of each photograph records the date the curators catalogued the photograph, the fact they saw it as a photograph, and the unique number each one was given; although many of the photographs were already numbered when they came into the Victoria and Albert Museum's possession in 1939, this prior numbering system was ignored and a new system instituted by the curators.^[23] At the same time, the curators drymounted each photograph on a sheet of drab olive card, writing the accession number on the card near the photograph. The pressmark of each of the 20 boxes of photographs is its shelf location in the Print Room store; the data and the signature requested on the order slip continue to trace the location of the box when it is in use. Boxes of photographs are thus certainly 'ordered' in the Print Room, although only in a very limited sense by the researcher. Rather, the order slip has mobilized a number of different conceptual orders—numeric, alphabetic, locational, generic, national, chronological, technological—which give a photograph particular meanings, at least at the moment of ordering.

For the researcher, though, the most influential part of the Print Room's linguistic grid in relation to the Hawarden photographs is the *Hawarden Collection Catalogue Raisonné*. This *Catalogue* is a key organizer of archive space. Funded by a grant from the J. Paul Getty Grant Programme and completed by Virginia Dodier in 1988, anyone using the Hawarden photographs is advised to consult it by the Print Room curators. Kept in two large red binders, it renumbers yet again each of the photographs in this collection and, in the order of its new numbering system, describes each photograph, listing its size, type, location and direction, and then the people, animals and objects it shows. Many entries also offer more explicitly interpretive commentary, but even the descriptions focus the researcher's attention on the photographs in particular ways. The *Catalogue's* efforts to identify places and to name people, places and pets that participated in the making of each photograph insistently tells the researcher that those

actants once existed; they were there, in that particular room and not that one; that this is Isabella Grace, the eldest daughter, and that Florence Elizabeth, the youngest; and that that really is another daughter, Clementina, even though she's wearing a wig and you can't see her face properly; that this book is the same one that appears in these other photographs. **This is a resolute listing of the real.** In its rhetoric of descriptive fact, aided by its faith that the camera is, at least in part, an objective recorder of the scene before it, the *Catalogue* invites researchers to imagine the images as bits of the truth. Just as Pinney says, the *Catalogue* wants the photographs to become "self-evident things-in-themselves". And this affects the way the photographs look. The linguistic grid's emphasis on the real makes the referentiality of the photographic image dominant. It produces a fascination with what seems real in the photographs, with their people and objects long dead. This was one of my strongest reactions to these photographs in the archive; look at these people, doing exactly that at precisely that moment; how extraordinary that I can see them as they were. Barthes describes this way of seeing photographs as a kind of assault on the viewer. He said "the Photograph is violent: not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion *it fills the sight by force*, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed".^[24] This production of referentiality by the archive forged a specific relationship between myself and these photographs: their violence made me feel absorbed into them, robbed of agency in the face of their overwhelming truth.

The text of the *Catalogue* thus constitutes the photographs in particular ways, so that both the archive and the researcher fade into unimportance as the 'real' past erases the present. Indeed, I found that one of the most powerful effects of working in the archive was the constant speculation it seemed to demand, not about its own practices or mine, but about those of Lady Hawarden: her real. **I found myself constantly asking what was really happening when she was taking the photographs.** In asking this question of 750 photographs, however, I began to feel something of the visual equivalence commented on by Sekula. **Lady Hawarden left no record of her photographic activity; there are no letters, no diaries that might offer their own version of the truth of what she was doing.** So in the archive, image followed image, question followed question about her activities, and, eventually, in the absence of any answers from Hawarden—since, in its erasure of both the researcher and the archive, the *Catalogue* produces only her as the author of, and authority on, her photographs—the photographs became rather blank; a kind of absence of meaning began to float over them all, again being reminded of Barthes and his comment about individual photographs being "matte and somehow stupid".^[25] Their visual equivalence was further enhanced by the olive mounting. Regardless of size, subject matter or condition of photograph, every single one is glued down onto the same kind of mount. This too contributes to a certain monotony: compelling, not boring, but my absorption eventually began to feel familiar. Alongside my repetitive questions, and the price of reproducing these photographs,^[26] the mount produces a certain similarity between the photographs. I often felt their apparent referentiality as a kind of impenetrability; their surfaces became flat, baffling.^[27]

Thus various practices of the archive—the *Catalogue*, the particular sort of questioning it demands, the mounting, the reproduction costs—had an effect on what the photographs looked like and on how I saw them. The photographs were given a certain referential authenticity, and a kind of blank flatness; I asked questions about their truth, and felt frustration at not being given something to know for certain beyond their objectness. To that extent, then, the grid of the archive contained both me and the photographs.

However, I also want to argue that these practices and their effects are not the only

things that happen in archive spaces. To paraphrase Thomas Richards, an archive is a *fantasy* of materials collected and united, and its order of things may be easier said than done.^[28] Indeed, I want to suggest that the arguments of Brothman, Pinney, Sekula and Tagg, ironically, construct their own fantasy of an archive—a total, disciplining archive—and do not pay enough attention to what may disrupt and exceed particular archives, nor to the slippages and fractures that may disrupt an archive's matrix. I want to suggest that the practices of the archive I encountered may themselves be contradictory. In particular, it seemed to me that the Print Room's linguistic grid materialized both the researcher and the photographs in ways that threatened its own integrity. And I also want to argue that both the researcher and the photographer may resist assimilation by the imperatives of the archive.

I have already remarked on the complexity of the Print Room's linguistic grid. The grid is also contradictory, and the contradiction I want to focus on can begin to be traced in its production of a researcher who is embodied in particular ways. This essay has been emphasizing the practices of the archive, and it is thus no surprise that embodiment should appear in its account. For, as Crang notes in his discussion of photographic practice, to speak of practice is necessarily to raise the question of corporeality.^[29] Senses of embodiment are rarely straightforward, however, and the Print Room's corporealization of researchers is typically problematic. It is through its efforts to police what a researcher does in the Print Room that this archive produces, almost despite itself, an embodied researcher.^[30] An ambivalent figure, the researcher is produced as at once threateningly present and rendered as unobtrusive as possible in relation to the photographs by a series of instructions about how to handle the photographs. These instructions begin even before the researcher enters the Print Room; outside, a notice requests all users to wash their hands before entering, and this injunction is repeated in the pamphlet entitled "Print Room Regulations" given to researchers when they first use the room and on instruction sheets laid before every chair in the room. Researchers must write only in pencil, must neither bring food or drink into the Print Room nor place coats on tables. The surface of prints, drawings and photographs must never be touched, and items must be turned over by their mounts one at a time; only the edges of the mount can be held, and the corner of a mount must never touch the surface of the item below; researchers are shown how to do this by a curator when they receive their first box of material. And on notices next to the window blinds, researchers are requested to ask permission before adjusting light levels. The effect of these instructions is to minimize the material presence of the researcher in relation to the photographs; but this also produces the researcher in particular ways. The instructions constitute the researcher as a body. They materialized me, and what a body they gave me: potentially mucky and clumsy, with sweaty fingers and leaking pens, with wet coats and poor eyesight, hungry and thirsty and dangerously threatening the photographs with all these dirty needs. The photographs are constructed as at risk from this grotesque body; all these instructions are necessary, the researcher is told, because I am looking at and handling "fragile works of art on paper". This fragility is of course true, and the vulnerability of photographs is especially marked in this case because every one of the Hawarden photographs has had its corners torn or cut off; originally in albums, they were pulled out by one of her granddaughters before she gave them to the Victoria and Albert Museum.^[31] The rigidity of the olive card mounts then thus also carries marks of its own fragility; photographs too can be ripped and shredded. Here, the relationship between the researcher and the photographs established by the archive is a much more ambivalent one than that offered by the

Catalogue; if anything, it is me that now might overwhelm the photographs with my real, my body.

But the injunction not to touch has contradictory effects on the photographs too. If it produces the researcher as a grotesquely intrusive body only to make me as unobtrusive as possible, these instructions, in their insistence that the photographs cannot be touched, seem to emphasize just what lusciously tactile objects these fragile photographs are. While this tactility may not solely be an effect of the archive, I would argue that the archive heightened its effect. The photographs' referentiality was refracted, turning them from images showing objects I could observe into objects I wanted to touch. The photographs' tonality seemed as if it would be velvety and soft, strokable. And the imperfections in the photographs—odd blotches, swirls of chemicals, hairs, fingerprints, over- or under-exposure—became the sign of another touch, that of Hawarden as she developed them. She handled them, and so might I. Thus although the archive gave me hands but demanded the lightest of touches, so the reason for the lightness produced the photographs as richly tactile.

The archive's orders not to touch, then, seemed to produce both a researcher who wanted to touch and photographs that invited touching: undisciplined effects indeed. And there were more. More unruliness was generated, I would argue, by a previous encounter between my self as researcher and the Hawarden photographs, in a different space.

The study

There were three postcards facing the desk in my study. They were stuck in the frame of the window I started through when I was thinking while writing; I'd look across them, thinking of words. They pictured Lady Hawarden's daughters in elaborate dresses, sitting or standing on bare floors, framing a mirror or next to tall French windows.^[32] I had them there because they were beautiful and because, with their women placed by mirrors and windows, they reflected to me what I was doing, myself also next to a window. They made me want to write beautifully, with clarity and lucidity, my writing next to my window mimicking the beauty inscribed by the light from their windows and mirrors.^[33] And the glass, at once making a divide between inside and outside, room and balcony, referent and reflection, and in its transparency also making those differences invisible: the glass in these images was like the glass in my window, a boundary at once solid and invisible. Glass confines us to our private spaces, I felt; them to a private house and me to a private study; there in proper dresses they pose while I try to write proper prose. None of us smile, thus caught. But all of us are close to the edge, that glass, close enough to look out, close enough for dresses to be so infused with light that the glass dissolves and the boundary between inside and outside blurs (Figure 2). Their costumes of femininity were made and unmade by that light; and I was trying to write through and beyond my position. These dissolutions and reflections served as reminders of the displacement of both femininity and perspectively-organized space. Space was doubled and blurred, just as I felt myself caught in my study by books, papers, drafts, references—words already written—and also looking elsewhere, out the window, for something new I could translate, even if only partially. If, as Bruno Latour says, “different spaces and different times may be produced inside the networks built to mobilise, cumulate and recombine the world”, then what we did in that study, those photographs and I, produced a paradoxical space at once prescribed and enigmatic.^[34] I saw my self through them, I saw them through my self, and in both cases I saw something that wasn't, strictly speaking, there.



Figure 2. Source: Lady Hawarden Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, Accession Number PH.457-1968: 502. Courtesy of the Trustees of the V&A/Photographer.

Of course, the imperatives of the study—the demand to think, speculate, write, and to do so innovatively—are no less strident than the imperatives of the archive. The demand to be innovative is articulated, ironically, by both the contemporary academy and by a certain feminist politics, for example,^[35] and the expression ‘paradoxical space’ is derived from a number of academic feminist writers.^[36] Both the study and the archive are (partly) disciplining spaces; but they are—or, at least, these particular ones were, I think—disciplining in different ways, and these affected my relationship to the Hawarden images. In my study, there was a mirroring relation between the photographs and myself. I thought my study practice in part through the elusive spaces I (could not) see in them. In contrast, my discussion of the archive suggests a number of relationships between myself and the photographs based on the different effects of their referentiality (and perhaps this distinguishes a photographic archive from other kinds): the photographs as showing objects, as being objects, my self corporealized. The interrelations between these archival effects are much more unstable than those of the study. In the archive, the photographs threatened me and I them. There was a sort of struggle in the archive, a confrontation, that was not apparent in the study. **In my study space,**

the photographs became part of my self. They mattered greatly to me, in ways I know I cannot fully explain; they gave shape to a desire I was struggling to write, a desire not entirely reducible to academic demands, a shape that actively helped me. And the form of that desire, its paradoxical shape, its dynamic excessive to disciplining demands, still lingered when I went to the archive.

The archive, again

The paradoxical space of the study was not entirely obliterated by the gridded territory of the archive. My identification with the photographs was not completely erased by the more confrontational relationship between us established through the practices of the archive, and this was particularly evident in relation to one of the arguments made by the *Catalogue*.

One of the most persistent themes in the *Catalogue* is the status of Hawarden's photographs as Art and of Hawarden as an Artist. Consistent with its empiricism, at one level the *Catalogue* suggests that this Art is visible: "the outstanding qualities of her work are clear: the self-assurance of her handling of composition and light, the forthright expression of emotion she encouraged in her models, and her stylish use of lavish costumes and theatrical gestures".^[37] But when the *Catalogue* elaborates on Hawarden's Art, the disciplining grid of the archive begins to slip in the face of the persistence of the space of the study and the alignment there of the photographs and myself. The *Catalogue* is quite clear as to the reason why these photographs are Art: it is because they are photographs of daughters taken by their mother. It describes Lady Hawarden's photographs as "centred on her family" and provides biographical details of her parents and her ten children.^[38] In an exhibition brochure, Dodier describes Hawarden's work as picturing a "domestic idyll", and in a book chapter she suggests that the apparent rapport between Hawarden and her models was that between mother and child.^[39] Unlike some other commentators, Dodier is reluctant to suggest that these photographs were engaging with contemporary debates about the status of photography, for example.^[40] Instead, the Art of the photographs is an emanation from a relationship which is, strictly speaking, invisible: the maternal. In the *Catalogue*, Dodier even calibrates Lady Hawarden's artistic development by the age of her daughters; her renumbering of the photographs is in the order in which she saw Hawarden's progress as a photographer, but the order was decided upon by the age of her daughters in each photograph.

There are a number of complications here that in different ways begin to fracture the coherence of the linguistic grid. One is attributing the creation of Art to someone who is a mother. This remains unusual in the field of art history; the assumed incompatibility between femininity and great art has for centuries been legitimated by the claim that artists cannot also be mothers of children.^[41] This suggests, again, that the grid of the archive may be less coherent than Brothman, Pinney, Sekula and Tagg assume. Another incompatibility, however, depends on the disruptive effects of the intersection of archival practices with other practices of research, in this case my study: for I just cannot see, or even not see (in the sense of 'seeing' maternity even though it is not strictly there), the idyllic relation Dodier does. Even though her account of the Artistry of the photographs as a result of maternal rapport is supported by some of the very little documentary evidence about the life of Lady Hawarden (she was apparently a doting mother),^[42] the connection between the images and this particular vision of maternity remains for me unmade. Many of the photographs seem to refuse

it too. Many of them look to me as if they picture estrangement between the young women and their mother (which of course is also a part of mother–daughter relationships but not of the conflict-free idyll that Dodier evokes). Delicately and silently bodies hover near each other, blank faces stare at the camera open and secret; everything is there but there is a persistent sense that something is missing. And the photograph that replaces the mother with the camera (Figure 1) is really quite horrible, if indeed it is a mother replaced. In their composition especially, the photographs have no visual or spatial connection with this particular part of the archive’s practice. Although some of their visual qualities can be appropriated by the *Catalogue*, then, others refuse to fit into its grid. At this point, then, I want to argue that both the photographs and the researcher, in part but only in part because of our previous relationship in the study, are resisting the archive.

In making this suggestion, I do not want to claim that the photographs have an inherent content that resists the *Catalogue*—which would simply replicate the empiricism of so much photography criticism—nor an aesthetic effect that evades the discipline of the archive—which would also evade questions of use and practice. Instead, I want to suggest that the photographs contain particular visual and spatial forms of organization. These are rich and various and possibly contradictory, and I have already mentioned just a few aspects of the Hawarden photographs: their flatness, their light, their monotony, their enigmatic spaces. Elements of these visual and spatial attributes can, I would argue, be allied, more or less strongly, with particular parts of the complex network of interpretations in which photographs are placed. Thus in the case of the Hawarden photographs, I have argued that the referentiality of the image is aligned to the empiricism of the *Catalogue*, and the extraordinary light effects are mobilized by the *Catalogue* as evidence of Art. But I have also suggested that other elements of these photographs cannot be represented in the *Catalogue*. Certain elements of spacing produce an emptiness in the image that claim about domestic idylls simply fail to fill. Thus the photographs can resist the archive.

As for me in my study, I practiced research seeing other spaces in the photographs. Drawing on other elements, I saw these photographs in my study figuring something elusive and strange in their compositions of empty spaces and elsewhere. So I cannot domesticate the spaces and bodies in the way Dodier can. I cannot see them in the way she does. The alignment forged between the photographs and myself in the study has not been entirely overwhelmed by the fierce empiricism of the *Catalogue*; a trace remains to displace the archive’s assimilatory efforts. And so too does my desire for something new, evident in the study but now directed at the archive itself. For a researcher too wants to make meaning, wants to tell a story about what the archive holds that has not already been told; that is the point of going there after all.^[43] Perhaps, in the face of the disciplined image slotted into its place in the grid, the researcher is precisely she who practices looking for something out of order. Alice Yager Kaplan’s account of using an archive claims just that: for the researcher, she says, “the archive is constituted by these errors, these pieces out of place”.^[44] I didn’t want the *Catalogue* to be right about the idyllic-maternal source of the Hawarden photograph’s beauty, for example; I don’t think the photographs support Dodier’s claim, but I can’t say I don’t have my reasons for disliking such idealizations of motherhood. Maybe then the researcher is in some kind of competition with the archive, driven to confrontation not only by the contradictory demands of the archive but also by her own desire to see something new.

The archive then is not necessarily the ordered grid of classified images and disciplined researchers evoked by some authors. Its disciplines may be contradictory, its spaces breached by other alignments of research and photographs, and the researcher and the photograph may each have their own, non-innocent resistances to offer.



Figure 3. Source: Lady Hawarden Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, Accession Number PH.457-1968: 211. Courtesy of the Trustees of the V&A/Photographer.

The photograph, the researcher and research spaces: concluding comments

I have been arguing that the particular practices of the Print Room archive had complicated effects on the Hawarden photographs and on this researcher working in its spaces. Through various written texts, that archive produces the photographs in particular ways. They become Art, for example, they become authored, they become images made by a mother of her daughters, and they become fragile. It is not only the linguistic grid that articulates these various representations, however; particular visual and spatial elements of the photographs are put to work too. Sometimes the flatness of the photograph is the ally of the grid, sometimes its content, sometimes its mounting. Sometimes though the archive's practices produce contradictory effects; the tactility of the photograph is produced by the instructions not to touch, for example. Sometimes too the formal elements of the photographs resist representation by the archive; they cannot be allied to its claims: the estrangement pictured demands scepticism about claims that the Hawarden photographs are pictures of a domestic idyll, for example. The researcher is produced by the archive in complex ways too. Sometimes disciplined—I

didn't touch the photographs, I looked instead for their meaning—but also produced by archival practices as a more ambivalent figure, threatening the archive with embodied messiness. And there is also the researcher's desire to make new knowledge by finding the fragilities and inadequacies of the grid. Thus both the researcher and the photograph may be excessive to the archive. Moreover, connections forged in other spaces—the study, for example—may intersect in disruptive ways with the work of the archive.

I am thus arguing that three interrelated elements should be considered in relation to the practices of the photographic archive: **the in/disciplines of the archive, the visual and spatial resources offered by particular photographs, and the desires and imperatives driving the researcher.** I have been trying to argue that none of these three elements are in any way innocent or pure. I am not arguing for the archive as a purely disciplinary space; I am not suggesting the researcher is simply questing after true knowledge; I am not saying that photographs have an essential look to them that may or may not be truly seen. Instead, all are constructed in particular ways, by discourses, institutions, desires. All of them mediate the others in specific ways in specific circumstances, to produce particular sorts of relations and spaces (and there are many more ways in which this might be the case than I have been able to suggest here). But none are quite reducible to any other, either. I hope I have demonstrated, then, that the arguments made by historical geographers concerning the practice-bound specificity of photographic meaning are equally applicable to their own practice. **Historical geographers should pay more attention than they have done to their own practice of interpretation and its effects on photographs, in order to avoid erasing their own specificities from their account.**

The arguments presented here, however, also suggest that the practice of historical geography in relation to photographs is a complex and unstable one. The space of the archive is more fractured and contradictory than a cellular matrix, for example. This space is one performed through practices that may not discipline successfully, or that may produce unruly effects. There are things that remain out of its placing. Its uneasy and incomplete alignments with both photographs and researcher render the space uncertain. This also means that the position of the researcher, the look of the photographs, and the relationship between those two things are unstable too. The photographs can be descriptive and uninformative, resistant and touchable, elusive and evidential; they shift and shimmer. The researcher can be seeking knowledge and dreaming desires, and can be repelled by and overwhelm the photographs. The researcher and the photographer may in all sorts of ways affect the way photographs look, but there is no simple or stable relationship between the researcher and the photograph. This suggests therefore that there is no simple or straightforward way in which the historical geographer can represent their own self in relation to the photograph. In asking for more consideration to be given to the effects of contemporary research practice on historical photographs, then, I am asking only for some inevitably tendentious sign that the researcher looks in particular ways too.

If I have argued that the historical circumstances of a photograph's production and use cannot be innocently retrieved, though, I have not meant to imply that questions of historical specificity are thereby irrelevant to contemporary interpretation. I have simply wanted to point out that the recovery of the historical past can only be managed in relation to a particular contemporary present. **Indeed, the logic of my own argument, in giving agency to photographs and by extension to other historical texts, suggests that the interpretation of photographs is not entirely a consequence of what happens in archives now.** So I want to end by commenting on one way in which the historical

production of the Hawarden photographs itself intervened in my work in the archive in the summer of 1997, and refracted yet again the way I saw the photographs.

Next to the photographs of women delicately gesturing, posed in the light from windows and mirrors that dissolved bodies and boundaries, I found other images whose subjects were not allowed such transformations by the *Catalogue*, and which I too saw differently. Governesses, a nurse, estate workers: caught in a different relationship with the camera, they very often (but not always) looked different (Figure 3).^[45] The space of the photograph seems to capture them rather than only half hold them at its boundaries. Often photographed from above, they do not seem to be actively addressing the camera as the daughters do in their poses and haughtiness. They look as if they are submitting to rather than engaging with their employer's camera.^[46] What they made clear to me, however, was how social difference was inscribed in the visibility and spatiality of these photographs. Through the light of the image and the subject's position in relation to the viewer, the subjects of the photographs are differentiated into those caught by the gaze of the camera and those almost escaping from it. From this viewpoint, the coherence of the archival grid actually fails, because the full series of photographs can be divided into very different kinds:^[47] there are the (various kinds of) photographs of daughters and there are the photographs of workers, and almost without exception these types of photographs do not mix. The former invite introspection, the latter inspection. I used to use the former for my own kind of introspection, but their contrast to the latter means that they no longer work for me in the way that they did. Their effect on me—to mark gendered class difference—disrupted my alignment with the photographs. The postcards are no longer in my study.

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Notes

[1] R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London 1982) 5.

[2] Idem, 87.

[3] D. Matless, Visual culture and geographical citizenship: England in the 1940s, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996) 424–39; G. Rose, Engendering the slum: photography in east London in the 1930s, *Gender, Place and Culture* 4 (1997) 277–300; J. Ryan, Visualizing imperial geography, *Ecumene* 1 (1994) 157–76; J. Ryan, *Visualising Empire: Geography, Empire and Photography* (London 1997); J. Schwartz, "We make our tools and our tools make us": lessons from photographs for the practice, politics and poetics of diplomacies, *Archivaria* 40 (1995), 40–74; J. Schwartz, *The Geography Lesson: photographs and the construction of imaginative geographies*, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1996) 16–45; A. Stevens, Visual sensations: representing Scotland's geographies in the Empire Exhibition, Glasgow, 1938, *Scotlands* 3 (1996) 3–17; U. Strohmayer, Pictorial symbolism in the age of innocence: material geographies at the Paris World's Fair of 1937, *Ecumene* 3 (1996) 282–304; C.W.J. Withers, Picturing Highland landscapes: George Washington Wilson and the photography of the Scottish Highlands, *Landscape Research* 19 (1994) 68–79.

- [4] S. Lalvani, *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies* (Albany 1996); M. Rosler, In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography), in R. Bolton (Ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (London 1989) 303–42; A. Sekula, On the invention of photographic meaning, in V. Burgin (Ed.), *Thinking Photography* (London 1982) 84–109; A. Sekula, The body and the archive, in R. Bolton (Ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (London 1989) 342–88; A. Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices* (Minneapolis 1991); C. Squiers, *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (London 1991); J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London 1988).
- [5] Schwartz, *The Geography Lesson*, 29, 21.
- [6] Schwartz, *The Geography Lesson*, 35.
- [7] Schwartz, *The Geography Lesson*, 36.
- [8] M. Crang, Picturing practices: research through the tourist gaze, *Progress in Human Geography* **21** (1997) 359–73.
- [9] Schwartz, *The Geography Lesson*, 35, my emphasis.
- [10] G. Rose, Situating knowledges: positionalities, reflexivities and other tactics, *Progress in Human Geography* **21** (1997) 305–21.
- [11] Several feminist historians have noted that processes closely connected to the unconscious, such as seduction, desire and reverie, are the “fragile but necessary contingent ingredients of archival work”; they also remark that, for conventional historical scholarship, such dynamics are also “the private process that is erased as soon as it succeeds in producing a bit of truth”; A.Y. Kaplan, Working in the archives, *Yale French Studies* **77** (1990) 103–16, 115. See also A. Fisher, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women: Women Photographers for the US Government 1935 to 1944* (London 1987); C. Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (London 1996); G. Pollock, The dangers of proximity: the spaces of sexuality and surveillance in word and image, *Discourse* **16** (1993) 1–32; L. Smith, Further thoughts on the politics of focus, *Library Chronicle of the University of Texas at Austin* **26** (1996) 12–31.
- [12] Barthes, *op. cit.*, 10.
- [13] M. Bal, *Reading ‘Rembrandt’: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge 1991) 408.
- [14] For essays making this point, see C. Armstrong, Cupid’s pencil of light: Julia Margaret Cameron and the maternalization of photography, *October* **76** (1996) 115–41; Mavor, *op. cit.*; L. Smith, Feminism and photography theory, in I. Armstrong (Ed.), *New Feminist Discourses* (London 1992) 238–62; Smith, Further thoughts.
- [15] A. Sekula, Reading an archive: photography between labour and capital, in P. Holland, J. Spence and S. Watney (Eds), *Photography/Politics Two* (London 1986) 153–61.
- [16] Sekula, Reading an archive, 154. Sekula here is relying on what is an over-simple distinction between a more authentic, previous use of the photographs and a less authentic reuse in the archive. However, his point that there is a change in use when a photograph enters an archive is nevertheless important.
- [17] Sekula, Reading an archive, 155.
- [18] B. Brothman, Orders of value: probing the theoretical terms of archive practice, *Archivaria* **32** (1991) 78–100, 85.
- [19] C. Pinney, The parallel histories of anthropology and photography, in E. Edwards (Ed.), *Anthropology and Photography 1860–1920* (London 1992) 74–95, 90. For another description of photographic archives, see Schwartz, We make our tools. For a discussion of the ways the spaces of display may affect a photograph, see R. Krauss, Photography’s discursive spaces, in R. Bolton (Ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (London 1989) 287–302.
- [20] Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 76.
- [21] Sekula, Reading an archive, 154.
- [22] *Hawarden Collection Catalogue Raisonné* (hereafter *Catalogue*) Vol. 1, 5.
- [23] *Catalogue*, Vol. 1, 4.
- [24] Barthes, *ibid.*, 91.
- [25] Barthes, *op. cit.*, 4.
- [26] Although the Victoria and Albert Museum does not charge researchers for photographing its holdings for private research purposes, it charges fees for reproductions of its own copies, and another fee must be paid before a photograph can be reproduced in public. I paid for

the reproductions I used to write this essay thanks to grants from the Travel and Research Fund of the Social Sciences and Law Faculty Group at Edinburgh University, and the Carnegie Trust.

- [27] "I cannot penetrate, cannot reach into the Photograph. I can only sweep it with my glance, like a smooth surface. The Photograph is flat": Barthes, *op. cit.*, 106.
- [28] T. Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London 1993) 6, 4.
- [29] Crang, Picturing practices. See also N. Thrift, *Spatial Formations* (London 1996).
- [30] The difficulty with (and the critical potential of) 'the body' is that it straddles many of the dichotomies around which much of Western knowledge is structured: for example between Nature and Culture, Reason and Passion, Masculine and Feminine; for a classic discussion, see G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London 1984). In relation to this particular discussion, it might be argued that this archive is a space devoted to knowledge and Reason, to art and Culture, and that the bodily is thus in itself an intrusion that challenges its founding discourses. Hence perhaps the quietened voices, the soft footsteps and the minimization of touch expected in its space. For geographers discussing related issues, see among others J. Cream, Re-solving riddles: the sexed body, in D. Bell and G. Valentine (Eds), *Mapping Desire* (London 1995) 31–40; R. Longhurst, The body and geography, *Gender, Place and Culture* 2 (1995) 97–106; G. Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge 1993).
- [31] *Catalogue*, Vol. 1, 1.
- [32] I knew that these women were the daughters of the photographer, not because of anything in the photographs—a point I will return to—but because the text on the back of the postcard said so. Reproductions of the Hawarden photographs almost always carry invented titles. I have not done this here.
- [33] This use of light was a technical necessity for Hawarden. This does not mean that its effects are either determined by, or reducible to, a history of photographic technology.
- [34] B. Latour, *Science In Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Milton Keynes 1987) 228.
- [35] The parallel with Woolf's argument that women need a room of their own is particularly striking; V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London 1939). For discussions of some of the current demands on British academics to produce 'innovative research', see J. Sidaway, The production of British geography, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 22 (1997) 488–504; J. Wills, Labouring for love? A comment on academics and their hours of work, *Antipode* 28 (1996) 292–303.
- [36] In my use of the term 'paradoxical space' in *Feminism and Geography*, I drew especially on b. hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (London 1991) 145–53, and M.B. Pratt, Identity: skin blood heart, in E. Bulkin, M.B. Pratt and B. Smith (Eds), *Yours in Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (New York 1984) 9–63.
- [37] V. Dodier, *Domestic Idylls: Photographs by Lady Hawarden from the Victoria and Albert Museum* (Malibu 1990) 3. This is an exhibition brochure, bound into the front of the *Catalogue*.
- [38] *Catalogue*, Vol. 1, 6.
- [39] Dodier, *Domestic Idylls*; Dodier, Clementina, 141. Tony Bennett argues that explanatory references to something invisible are inherent in an institution that has the task of evaluating and classifying objects: "it is true of all collecting institutions that they so arrange the field of the visible as to allow an apprehension of some further order of significance that cannot, strictly speaking, be seen"; T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London 1995) 171.
- [40] See for example J. Lawson, *Women in White: Photographs by Clementina Lady Hawarden* (Edinburgh 1997).
- [41] D. Cherry and G. Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London 1981).
- [42] Dodier, Clementina, 143.
- [43] In his account of the archive, Sekula argues that photographs become commodities because of the fees charged for reproducing their images. But what is bought is not, of course, the photograph itself, and Sekula argues that what is bought is not even the copy; what is bought, he says, is "a certain semantic licence" to reinterpret the photograph and thus to rework its meanings. Thus the researcher's desire to say something new is in part accommodated by the archive. Sekula, Reading an archive, 155.

- [44] Kaplan, *Working in the archives*, 115.
- [45] This is not always the case. Photograph Ph457-1968: 20, for example, shows a carpenter in his workshop. Light is shining off his apron in just as dazzling a way as it does with so many of the images of Lady Hawarden's daughters. The *Catalogue*, however, comments that the effect is to emphasize "the fact that this was a dark, cramped workplace": Volume I, n.p., photograph D131. This comment makes the photograph an image of labour rather than of liminality.
- [46] It is not, though, inevitable. Mavor, *op. cit.*, argues that the working-class women photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron and Arthur Munby were active participants in the picturing process.
- [47] Sekula argues that there are two poles of mid-Victorian portraiture, which he describes as "honorific" and "repressive"; Sekula, *The body in the archive*, 346. Following the helpful comments made by James Ryan on a previous version of this paper, I would now suggest that Sekula's account is too simple. Certainly there are exceptions in the Hawarden archive—the image of the carpenter mentioned in note 46 in particular—that disrupt Sekula's neat distinction, and there are also differences in the way the daughters are photographed too; for example, while some are shown dissolving into the light of the photograph, others confront the camera's gaze and outstare its look.