

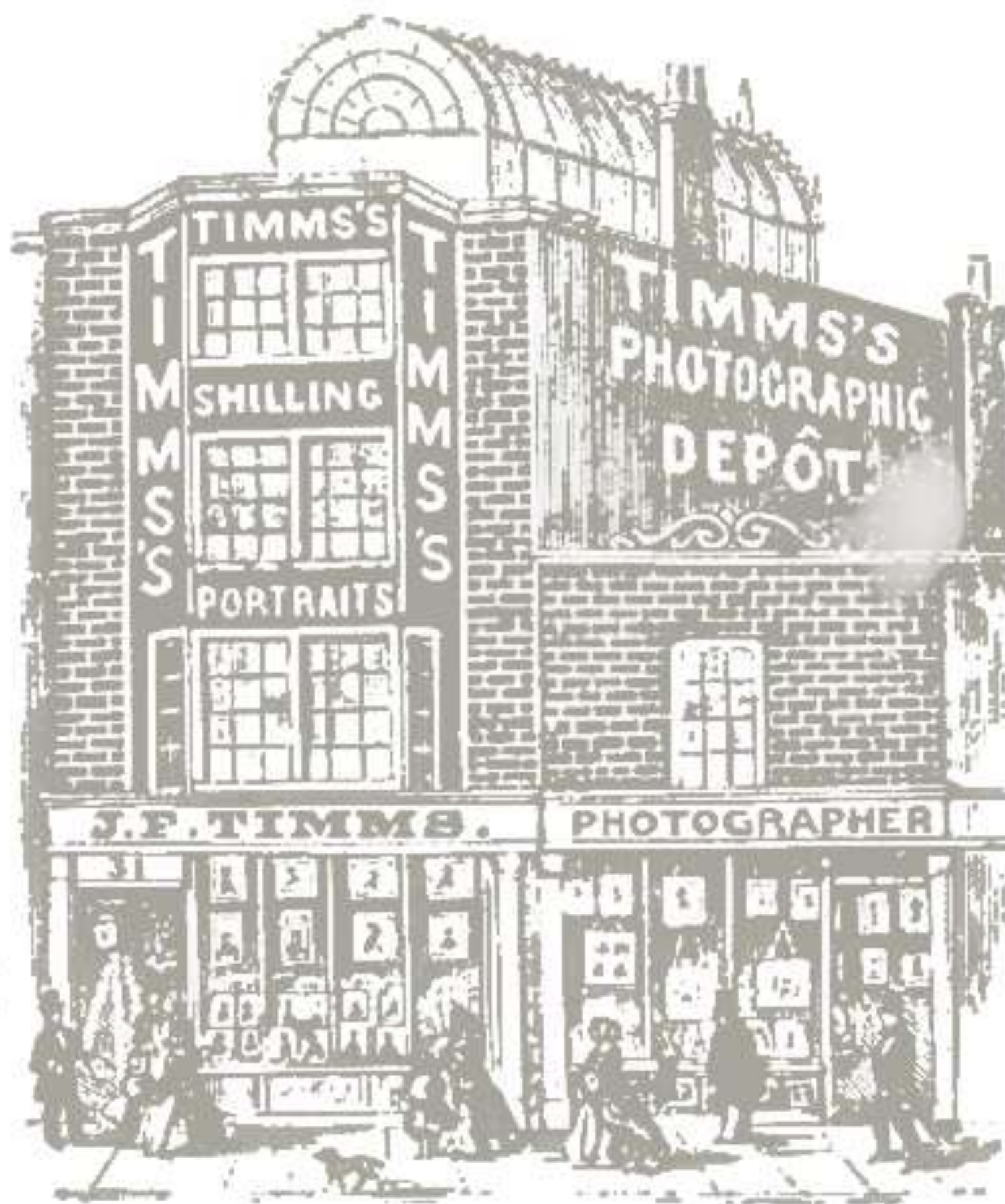
DOMESTIC ICONOGRAPHY:

**A Cultural Study of Victorian Photography,
1840-1880**

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**School of English, Communication and Philosophy
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For Tamas and Zoë

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SUMMARY

This critical study of photography between 1840 and 1880 focuses on the medium's complex role as a mediator of the ideology of domesticity in an era of intense industrialisation and far-reaching popularisation. In doing so, photographic production and consumption are located within the wide, hybrid framework of print and commodity culture, with particular emphasis placed on the patterns of communication emerging through the new network of family periodicals. This methodological approach serves in part to overcome the considerable difficulties of bringing amorphous voices vying for discursive control over photography into focus. More importantly, however, it is proposed that this journalistic field testifies to the conflicting appeal photography held for a domestic readership, and the intricacy of combining a family orientated agenda with the challenges presented by a modernising world.

The turn towards a more divisive perspective on photography in the mid-1850s is fundamentally bound up with extraneous conditions, circumstances which shaped patterns of discourse, professional practices and ordinary usage: urbanisation, an enlarging consumer market, social and demographic change and evolving anxieties around identity, gender and domesticity in light of all these permutations. As indicated by articles, published correspondence, advertisements and publicity, photography responded to conflicting desires and impulses present in culture and society at large. Liminal by nature, the medium figures as a powerful symbol of domestic boundness but also as the embodiment of a swelling engagement with the metropolis, a site of hazard and iniquity, but also an advancing arena for bourgeois social performance and play. Thus, this study, like the Victorian photographer, traces the ideological construction of the Victorian family through multiple lenses — comic, architectural, artistic, familial, institutional, topographical and social.

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Introduction

From Street to Drawing Room: Victorian Social Life and Photography

Every epoch dreams ... the one to follow but, in thus dreaming,
precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds
it.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades*

Project¹

This study charts interactions between photography and Victorian domesticity between 1840 and 1880, a period when Victorian family values are simultaneously projected through and challenged by new forms of mass communication. The phrase ‘domestic iconography’ used in the title of this thesis, encompasses a wide range of visual forms, denoting photography’s interconnectedness with illustration, drawing and painting, and signalling the emergence in this period of an ever-expanding iconic *catalogue* dedicated to the representation of domestic life. I am proposing, however, that we need a fuller understanding of the ways in which visual cultural interacted with the ideology of home and family, and it is from this viewpoint I argue for an enlargement of the body of images that we might deem to form part of the iconography of Victorian domesticity. The aim of this study, then, is to place a sharper focus on the ideologically charged nature of a wide range of photographs (familial, architectural, comic, institutional, topographical and

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London and Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 898.

social), pictures which collectively testify to the urge to reassert the dominant social and cultural values of the middle-classes in the face of modernity and change.

During these decades of broad popularisation, photography is conceptually and practically determined by different, frequently incongruous, objectives and interests. However, as I mean to demonstrate, ambivalence regarding the social effect of photography runs a thread through this era, frequently coalescing around questions of gender, the home and the familial unit. Proceeding from this understanding, the first chapter focuses specifically on the convergence between the ideology of domesticity and photography in articles published in family periodicals, arguing that this context is especially compelling when gauging the complex impact of the new medium. Following a broadly chronological trajectory, chapter one places particular emphasis on photographic communication in Charles Dickens' periodicals *Household Words* and its successor *All the Year Round*, whilst remaining attentive to more widespread discursive formations in domestic journalism. The growing topicality of photography from the early 1850s needs to be understood against a background of developments that enabled a transition from the more contained production and display of images in the early amateur phase, to the broad popularisation and dissemination that characterise the professional era. However, what distinguishes this variegated body of communication is a keen awareness of how the transformation of photographic practices interacts with more profound changes in the constitution of the social lives of its middle-class readership. Conceptualised around a series of thematic strands – gender and

the labour market, privacy and publicness, the industrialisation of print culture, urbanisation and new commodity markets – the articles and advertisements discussed in this chapter demonstrate how the debate around the new pictorial economy presented a form of interface for working through some of Victorian domesticity's most profound paradoxes.

Chapter two continues to examine the reciprocity between verbal and visual modes of communication in the mid-Victorian era by considering how the unfolding of a new familial reading culture registers in visual media. Certainly, a wealth of mass-produced images depicts domestic reading, indicating that this visual trope plays an important role in articulating the effect of print on Victorian home-life. Photography adds further dimensions to an intense mid-Victorian investment in books and periodicals as social and cultural signifiers: first, by providing new means of displaying, promoting and examining texts of different kinds and second, by drawing attention to the social and psychological dimensions of the reading act. Thus, overstepping boundaries between high and popular culture, this chapter incorporates close-readings of Henry Fox Talbot's iconic *A Scene in a Library*, studies by Lady Clementina Hawarden, composition prints by Oscar Gustav Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson and celebrity at-home portraits showing Queen Victoria and Charles Dickens. What these images have in common is the connection between reading and the virtues associated with the domestic sphere, whilst simultaneously invoking the complexities of a reading debate that is already troubled and capricious.

Proceeding from the fundamental assertion that the progress of photography in the second half of the century reflects the increasingly complex interaction between domestic values and the modern age, the concluding chapter seeks to interrogate photography's connection with the city as a built environment and as a lived space. I argue here that more needs to be said about the ways in which photographs concerned with metropolitan settings interacted with the ideological processes that shaped urban consciousness in the decades predating the handheld camera and dry-plate of the 1880s and 1890s.² I begin by mapping the technological, social and cultural conditions that shaped photographic representations of Victorian the city, with particular emphasis placed on the ways in which topographical imagery reproduced or reworked topical strands familiar to a predominantly urbanised (or sub-urbanised) public. Against this background, each strand in this chapter works toward an enhanced understanding of how the production, dissemination and use of several photographic forms, from mass-produced stereocards to published architectural photographs, bespeak an increasing engagement with the metropolis amongst the middle classes, while at the same time exposing ambivalence and ideological tension. Importantly, my analysis departs from the view that visual mass culture fundamentally resulted in a process of abstraction and dematerialisation that separated the self from social relationships, sensory impressions and tangible matter, maintaining instead that mid-century photographic images acted as mediators between middle-

² For more information on later developments of image technologies, see for example, Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 160.

class subjects and a changing social and material world in which their own role is, as yet, only provisionally sketched in.³

Throughout all three chapters of the thesis, I trace an unstable discursive response to photographic images and practices in the mid-Victorian period, maintaining that this testifies with poignancy to the intricacy involved in combining a family orientated agenda with the challenges presented by mass-produced images. I propose that viewing the domestic press as a discrete journalistic field opens up new ways of thinking about the social and cultural impact of photography. Importantly, family magazines sought to address a wide readership of both genders, and rather than appealing to the interests of men and women separately, editors generally aimed to publish material that could be read from several perspectives. Adding to this, an imperative quality of Victorian domestic journalism is its ability to encompass and create connections between wide-ranging topics and themes, thereby encouraging a vigorous, if at times conflicting, cross-fertilisation of ideas. As Deborah Wynne points out: 'Victorian readers were invited by editors to adopt an intertextual approach to magazines by reading each issue's texts in conjunction with each other'.⁴

This methodological approach to photographic discourse has ramifications in terms of the conceptualisation of mid-Victorian photography, not least because it shifts the emphasis away from some of the key priorities of specialist publications. Indeed, the well-documented and rather opaque debate

³ See Jonathan Crary's influential study *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1992).

⁴ Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 3.

concerning photography's status as an art form – a direction indicative of the prevailing cultural authority of the first generation of amateur photographers – comes to occupy a decentralised, rather than principal concern in journalism more likely to initiate a dialogue on issues of the day. As a rule, the contributions discussed here are not stimulated by the intricacies of photography's position in the arts hierarchy, or the aesthetic merits of photographic images *per se*, questions that have remained remarkably dominant in photographic critique.

This is not, however, to neglect the importance to popular journalism of specialist periodicals, or to overlook the ambitions of the popular press to make scientific and technological matters accessible to lay readers. As Laura Otis remarks, 'science was in effect a variety of literature' in the nineteenth century, noting that publications such as *Household Words* included a plethora of articles on scientific subjects from the outset in 1850, many of them effectively adapting, or reacting to, material published elsewhere.⁵ Even so, the popular press was not generally equipped to match the comprehensiveness that distinguishes the growing number of photographic publications in the 1850s and 1860s, or to equal the knowledge of the professional or the connoisseur. Instead, editors such as Dickens nurtured a journalistic style that would solicit the interests of the ordinary reader and, importantly, focused on aspects linked to a broader agenda, producing a commentary attentive to the fact that embedded in both technical and

⁵ Laura Otis, 'Introduction', in *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology*, ed. Laura Otis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. xvii-xxviii (p. xvii).

aesthetic exchanges were questions that resonated with wider social, economic and cultural issues.

In his seminal theorisation of the image/text dynamic Victor Burgin suggests that '[even] a photograph which has no actual writing on or around it is traversed by language when it is "read" by a viewer'.⁶ With Burgin, then, this discussion takes the photographic image to be 'the site of a complex "intertextuality", an overlapping series of previous texts "taken for granted" at a particular cultural and historical conjuncture'.⁷ To go further, I look toward the more recent concept of 'phototextuality' as a critical tool for re-engaging with images *as* texts.⁸ As such, this approach denotes a form of counter-historical response to a postmodern theorisation that, as Ari J. Blatt suggests, tends to 'occlude interpretations that invoke linearity or temporality'.⁹ Yet, Blatt emphasises significant historical (and contemporary) manifestations of reciprocity between words and images in pictures that not only project narratives, but also elicit powerful narrative agency in the viewer. As Blatt argues: 'We tell stories about pictures, all pictures ultimately, in an attempt to gain some semblance of control over them, tapping into their language, their innate grammar'.¹⁰

These broad themes come together in a sequence of representations of Regent Street, a place that for many became the signifying site of the new

⁶ Victor Burgin, 'Looking at Photographs', in *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 142-153 (p. 144).

⁷ Burgin, 'Looking at Photographs', p. 144.

⁸ Ari J. Blatt, 'Phototextuality: Photography, Fiction, Criticism', *Visual Studies*, 24:2 (2009), 108-121 (p. 108).

⁹ Blatt, 'Phototextuality: Photography, Fiction, Criticism', p. 114.

¹⁰ Blatt, 'Phototextuality: Photography, Fiction, Criticism', p. 116.

nineteenth-century pictorial economy.¹¹ This geographical area is subject to intense interest from journalists, artists and writers keen to capitalize on the public's growing enthusiasm for the topic (not to mention the practice) of photography, from the mid-century onward.¹² In these texts and images Victorian photography is constructed as distinctly metropolitan, a new visual technology that develops in close contact with capitalist production, consumerism, print culture and through a dialogue with a society in the process of becoming modern. Furthermore, these representations share a common mode of approach by bringing to bear upon the subject matter the look of direct observation and the implicit authority of the eyewitness. In this sense, all evince the fundamental importance ascribed to the testimony of the eye in Victorian culture, while simultaneously embodying that unstable combination of objective authenticity and storytelling that haunts photography from its beginnings.

George Augustus Sala's *Twice Round the Clock; or the Hours of the Day and Night in London* (1859), is a compilation of observations of city life based on articles published in the family periodical *The Welcome Guest: A Magazine of Recreative Reading for All* in the previous year. Sala's writing constitutes a lens through which his domestic readership is able to peer at modern life, the journalist himself becoming, as Walter Benjamin suggests, the

¹¹ With few exceptions, all the photographers and businesses covered in this study can be found at this address at different points in the second half of the century. See *photoLondon. The Database of 19th Century Photographers and Allied Trade in London: 1841-1901*. Available at www.photoLondon.org.uk.

¹² For more detail on photography's presence in public life, see John Plunkett and Jill A. Sullivan, 'Fetes, Bazaars and Conversazioni: Science, Entertainment and Local Civic Elites', in *Popular Exhibitions, Science and Showmanship, 1840-1910*, ed. Joe Kember, John Plunkett and Jill A. Sullivan (London and Vermont: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), pp. 41-60.

quintessential ‘observer of the marketplace’: ‘His knowledge is akin to the occult science of industrial fluctuations. He is a spy for the capitalists, on assignment in the realm of consumers’.¹³ To Sala, then, Regent Street in the late 1850s is an exotic and sumptuous locale, an emblem of fashionable consumerism; the ‘dash of utilitarianism’ and ‘bohemian tinge’ that the writer recalls from his childhood, having been replaced by ‘an avenue of superfluities’:

Fancy watchmakers, haberdashers, and photographers; fancy stationers, fancy hosiers, and fancy stay makers; music shops, shawl shops, jewellers, French glove shops, perfumery, and point lace shops, confectioners and milliners: creamily, these are the merchants whose wares are exhibited in this Bezesteen of the world.¹⁴

Photography is both physically and conceptually positioned inside a nexus of modern commodity culture, the writer’s covetous listing suggesting the extent to which the new image industry is bound up with other forms of consumption, and with the overwhelming visual impressions left by the street itself. As the *Literary Gazette* remarks in 1859, *à propos* the Photographic Society exhibition in nearby Suffolk Street, the local presence of a new breed of professionals is evident from ‘an almost interminable succession of “frames” ... of nameless and meaningless faces, like the cases you see hanging outside

¹³ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 427.

¹⁴ George Augustus Sala, *Twice Round the Clock; or the Hours of the Day and Night in London* (London, 1859; New York: Leicester University Press, 1971), pp. 155-157.

shop-doors in Regent-Street or the Strand'.¹⁵ In other words, the prestige of the formal exhibition has effectively been reduced to an opportunity to plug merchandise. We are, it seems, in a moment of photographic history when increasingly there is no distinguishing art from advertising, or the parquet floor from the pavement. The photographic image is evidently caught up in that peculiarly Victorian architectural and topographical narrative that ever more fervently insists on the necessity of erecting and maintaining spatial boundaries so as to articulate social, sexual and cultural difference, only to find that the ground plan is constantly shifting out of focus.

Indeed, for all the signs of affluence in sight in the capital's West End, the illustration by William M'Connell that accompanies Sala's text above shows a graphically compact and multi-layered street scene that includes a swarthy-looking street vendor of dogs, a blind beggar and an aristocrat being solicited by a prostitute; figures pressed into the gaps, and lingering on the margins, of respectability.¹⁶ Thus, the cautiously 'streety' charm of both text and image evince the need to engage with the ambiguous relationship between the middle-class reader and the city, coupled with an awareness that the nature of this dialogue is always contingent on, and governed by, ideological imperatives. Moreover, contributions to the photographic commentary by journalists and artists of the popular press recall that the broad commercial expansion of photography takes place in the wider context of an enlarging

¹⁵ [Anon.] 'Exhibition of the Photographic Society', *Literary Gazette*, 15 January 1859, 87-89 (p. 87).

¹⁶ William M'Connell, 'Two O'Clock P.M.: Regent Street', in *Twice Round the Clock; or the Hours of the Day and Night in London* (London, 1859; New York: Leicester University Press, 1971), p. 148.

print culture, in which different media collaborated in opening up vicarious, imaginative connections between domestic audiences and a modernising world. To be sure, the characteristically multi-occupational Sala (at different points engaged as a cartographer, scene-painter, engraver, illustrator, journalist) epitomises the interconnectedness between different cultural forms in the mid-Victorian period. When speaking of the process of writing he reflects on *seeing* the word on the page as an image endowed with graphic symmetry, surmising: 'I can spell ... because I can draw'.¹⁷

Furthermore, it can be deduced from the portrait-covered walls of the Photographic Society exhibition (and the shop windows of surrounding thoroughfares) that ordinary people did not share the contemptuous outlook on mass-produced photographs expressed by art critics searching for affinities with painting and scholarly aestheticism. Nor does the general commercial success enjoyed by merchant photographers indicate that they shared the views of 'educated' professionals such as Henry Peach Robinson, who proclaimed in 1869 that 'ninety-nine out of every hundred portraits are the most abominable things ever produced'.¹⁸ In reality, the exigency behind the 'extreme popularity' (as put by Robinson) of the form could not be suppressed or denied.¹⁹ In 1863 the American commentator Oliver Wendell Holmes declared that, '*card-portraits* ... have become the social currency, the sentimental "green-backs" of civilization', an assessment that can have left readers of *Atlantic Monthly* in no doubt that photography in the decade of the

¹⁷ Sala, 'Preface', *Twice Round the Clock*, p. xi.

¹⁸ Henry Peach Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography; Being Hints on Composition Chiaroscuro for Photographers* (1869; Vermont: Helios, 1971), p. 82.

¹⁹ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, p. 81.

cheap and fashionable *carte de visite* was bound up in a new condition of social and cultural ambiguity.²⁰

Certainly, in its first phase of popularity in the late 1850s and early 1860s, the patronage of royalty and the well-to-do had established a model of self-representation that promised to categorically, and with the capaciousness of industrial productivity, restate the fundamental, incontrovertible value of home, family and nation. But, as is widely acknowledged, many Victorian observers were increasingly highlighting the failures of taste and propriety that continually threatened to undermine those very principles: by 1860 domestic intimacy in photographs had been replaced by poses of rigid implacability and shrill theatricality. Probing the issue further, this study shows how peculiar fissures in the discourse on photography, most particularly anxieties around the pictorial arrangement of couples and familial groups, worries pertaining to the proper relationship between unity and variety, individuality and commonality, can be traced back to growing tensions within the ideological construct of Victorian domesticity.

The general public did not take the ever-expanding array of mass-produced known and unknown personalities as 'meaningless', however; nor did they regard them as dispiriting embodiments of urban anonymity. As argued by George Simmel, in the complex social setting of modernity, distanced, impersonal conventionality emerges as an unavoidable, indeed necessary, response to the chaos of impressions imposed by the city; a protective armour, effectively, of the inner self:

²⁰ [Oliver Wendell Holmes] 'Doings of the Sunbeam', *Atlantic Monthly* 12 (July 1863), 1-16 (p. 8).

This mental attitude of metropolitans toward one another we may designate, from a formal point of view, as reserve. If so many inner reactions were responses to the continuous external contacts with innumerable people as are those in the small town ... one would be completely atomized internally and come to an unimaginable psychic state.²¹

The prevailing formal neutrality of expression and dress did not, as one might think, lead to a lack of interest in outward appearances. In fact, Richard Sennett argues that it prompted ever-closer scrutiny of the external façade shielding the individual within: to know a person became 'a matter of looking for clues in the details'.²² Thus, Sennett speaks of the emergence of a nineteenth-century personality constructed with the aid of the mechanical and industrial processes of modernity and a transmutation in the relationships between people that by degrees came to permeate not only public interaction but also social bonds within the private sphere.²³ As the following demonstrates, the full-length, mass produced *carte de visite* (effectively a form of technological *mise en scène* of sartorial taste and social identity), represents a further provocation to observe and decode the appearance of others, strangers and intimates alike. By the same token, in a culture that shows increasing interest in peeling layers off the social mask, family portraiture is cast as a source of information, a visual testament to the deeper biological and

²¹ Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 130-135 (p. 132).

²² Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (1977; Penguin: London, 2002), p. 161.

²³ Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, p. 161.

psychological identity of individuals within the familial unit. As Holmes writes: 'The whole class of facts ... is forcing itself into notice, with new strength of evidence, through the galleries of photographic family-portraits'.²⁴

Almost two decades after Holmes' remark, H. Baden Pritchard set out 'with a view to watch photographers work', and to record his findings in a series of 'lighter and more colloquial' essays that would compensate for the absence of professional voices in photographic journalism.²⁵ What makes these 'practical' essays particularly interesting in the present context, however, is the writer's explicit interest in the social milieu of the studio, '[the] arrangements of the reception-room', 'the rules and regulations in vogue with sitters', 'the prices charged for portraits' and 'the sending out of proofs'.²⁶ In approaching Frederick Van Der Weyde's Regent-Street studio, he is also attentive to its exterior, metropolitan setting:

The lamps in Regent Street are lit, for the light fades early these short wintry days. It is still afternoon; the Quadrant is full of life; the gay costumes of the promenaders, now veiled in the midst of twilight, now made resplendent by the vivid illumination of the shops, lose none of their attraction, but, on the contrary, seem enhanced.... It is Cattle Show week, and this may have something to do with augmenting the busy crowd of loungers that hustle one

²⁴ [Holmes] 'Doings of the Sunbeam', p. 10.

²⁵ H. Baden Pritchard, *The Photographic Studios of Europe* (London: Piper & Carter, 1882), pp. 3, 5.

²⁶ Pritchard, *The Studios of Europe*, p. 5.

another upon the glimmering pavement before the bright shops and under glittering lamps.²⁷

Once inside the studio, he traces in the displayed portraits signs of the social habits and leisurely diversions of the professional and privileged classes (previously witnessed in the street), whilst reflecting that the interior is a form of facsimile of a comfortable, bourgeois domesticity: 'We mention the studio, but there are no studios in the ordinary sense of the term', Pritchard comments, 'the portraits are taken in two ordinary rooms, thickly carpeted and warmly furnished, and presenting little difference from sitting or drawing-room'.²⁸ What this narrative captures, unwittingly or otherwise, is the curious disjointedness of illusory domestic tranquillity recreated in a studio located on the doorstep, as it were, of a metropolitan, anonymous world of movement, unpredictability, odour and noise.

The heterotopic quality of the studio, its competing internal organisation and external location (a site at once private and public, strange and familiar, real and unreal), is a poignant reminder of its spatial and moral complexity. Pritchard's essay calls forth the incongruous values that are at play in the conventional photographic performance, being on one hand, an enactment of the social values of home and family, and, on the other, an act invariably subject to the banal, utilitarian and ultimately transactional conditions of trade. However carefully camouflaged, photography cannot seem to free itself from association with a modern preponderance of situations where producers make goods for consumers 'who never personally enter the

²⁷ Pritchard, *The Studios of Europe*, pp. 72-73.

²⁸ Pritchard, *The Studios of Europe*, p. 76.

producer's actual field of vision', a condition resulting in 'an unmerciful matter-of-factness' that guarantees 'the imponderables of personal relationships'.²⁹

Finally, I want to analyse a so-called instantaneous photographic view of Regent Circus, the busy intersection of Regent Street and Oxford Street, in which streams of pedestrians and vehicles have been captured, by a carefully distanced and elevated camera (figure 1). Like many photographs of its kind, the original context is obscure and as such the image presents difficulties of categorisation and contextualisation; it is, as Susan Sontag puts it, a quotation 'open to any kind of reading'.³⁰

Yet, street photography before the 1880s has been subject to limited scholarly 'reading'.³¹ Thus, I argue for a re-evaluation of mid-Victorian photographic representations of the urban environment, proposing that the sheer range and contrast of visual registers offer intriguing insights into the psychological ambivalence that marks the relationship between cities and their subjects in this period. Certainly, a distinctive trait of the new professional Victorian photographer is pragmatism and diversity of practice. Portraiture was integral to most businesses, but topographical photography was

²⁹ Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 131.

³⁰ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 71.

³¹ For examples of histories of street photography, see Mike Seabourne, *Photographers' London, 1839-1994* (London: Museum of London, 1995), Mike Seabourne and Anna Sparham, *London Street Photography, 1860-2010* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis, 2011) and Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994). See also recent critical works relating to individual photographers, including Robert Evans, 'History in Albumen, Carbon, and Photogravure: Thomas Annan's Old Glasgow', in *Nineteenth-Century Photographs and Architecture: Documenting History, Charting Progress, and Exploring the World*, ed. Micheline Nilsen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) and Lionel Gossman, *Thomas Annan of Glasgow: Pioneer of Documentary Photography* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015).

increasingly being used in areas such as architecture, illustration, official records, entrepreneurial pursuits, antiquarian and historical documentation, a development that highlights photography's growing participation in the discourse on urbanisation from the 1860s onward.³²

³² For a concise account of the expansion of photography in these areas, see David Harris, 'Architectural Photography', in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*, ed. Robin Lenman and Angela Nicholson. Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662716.001.0001/acref-9780198662716-e-80?rskey=vA8FA8&result=83>.



Copyright Image

Figure 1.
[Taylor] 'Busy Street Scene at Oxford Circus. Regent Circus Displayed on
Front of Building', 3 October 1873 © TfL from the London Transport
Museum Collection.

In addition, popular views in the form of *carte de visites* and stereocards of local and foreign towns and cities, alongside theatrical reconstructions of urban scenes, were consumed in industrial quantities by domestic audiences.³³ These diverse domestic image collections are indicative of a changing structure and texture in middle-class family life, whereby the home-centred domesticity of the first half of the century is beginning to give way to a lifestyle increasingly located in public spaces. After all, to enthusiasts such as Holmes, looking at the city through the stereoscopic viewer is to be corporally and psychologically enthralled by its mystique and daily pressures: the rush of vehicles, buildings, shop fronts, the press of all kinds of bodies on pavements, even its moral ambiguities. Meticulously reading image after image (each a 'snatch at the central life'), for the benefit of readers of *Atlantic Monthly*, Holmes' commentary is notable for its insistence on the photograph's ability to fix the flow of information, allowing the viewer to meaningfully engage with the overwhelming fragmentary quality of the city and to construct from personal and collective points of reference, a narrative weave.³⁴ Furthermore, to this contemporaneous observer photographic signification is not merely perceived as an intellectual response, but foregrounds what Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble describe as a 'visceral response', invoking

³³ For more details see, William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in the Nineteenth Century* (Gettysburg, Pa.: W. C. Darrah, 1981) and *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg, Pa.: Darrah, 1977).

³⁴ [Oliver Wendell Holmes] 'Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture; with a stereoscopic Trip across the Atlantic', *Atlantic Monthly* 8 (July 1861), 13-30 (p. 17).

‘alternative ways of knowing: ones that offer the possibility of understanding, differently, matters of self, Other, history and culture’.³⁵

As suggested above, photography in the second half of the nineteenth century unfolds in a culture of intense interaction between words and images, bespeaking in Gerard Curtis’ words a ‘new literary/visual culture ... motivated by imperial, educational and mercantile ambitions, and moderated by issues of gender, class and the impact of change’.³⁶ The articles, published correspondence, advertisements and manuals cited in the present work indicate that the new technology tapped into conflicting desires and impulses; distinctly liminal by nature, the medium figures in Victorian consciousness at once as a symbol of domestic retirement and worldly connectedness. Embedded in the social and cultural practices that develop around accumulating, viewing and displaying photographic images, are the complex workings of a culture seeking to reaffirm (and widely promote) the moral values and social codes of middle-class domesticity, while simultaneously responding to an enlarging and progressively metropolitan way of life.

The guiding intent of this project is to trace the re-shaping of photography in the second half of the century and to critically interrogate a social, economic and cultural transfiguration whereby the medium increases its power as a mass-produced marketable object, without forfeiting its concomitant emotional currency. In this sense, the evolution of Victorian

³⁵ Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, ‘Introduction’, in *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, ed. Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 2003), p. 6.

³⁶ Gerard Curtis, *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 1.

photography is both provocative and reactive, developing its particular patterns in close contact with the affective needs, material demands and moral expectations of an increasingly urbanised middle-class.³⁷ Thus, this study draws on a wide-ranging multidisciplinary critique that has contributed to furthering our understanding of the complex messages that gave shape to the politics of familial life, particularly the expanding field of studies exploring the dynamics of gender and print in Victorian culture.³⁸

Sustained critical histories of photography that engage with the sociological impact of mass-produced photographic images are noticeably limited in number, with Mary Ann Warner's examination of photography's cultural history representing a significant expansion of the debate.³⁹

³⁷ Examples of more general scholarly studies of the Victorian city that have played a key role in underpinning my understanding of photography's relationship to modernity include: *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, ed. Martin Daunton, gen. ed. Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 3 vols., Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Penguin, 1994), Mark Girouard, *Cities and People: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1985), Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago, 1991), James Winter, *London's Teeming Streets: 1840-1914* (London: Routledge, 1993). However, the questions that I want to pose in this context are more specific. They concern an underexplored body of photographic images that I argue have the potential of adding to our understanding of modernisation, the family and the Victorian city.

³⁸ For examples of recent methodologically relevant, but non-photographic studies of Victorian print culture and gender, see Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens' Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) and Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Other recent works more directly focused on visual and material aspects of mid-Victorian print include, Gerard Curtis, *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), Leah Price, *How to do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012) and John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). My intention here is to bring together these different strands in a discussion that focuses specifically on photography, popular culture and domesticity.

³⁹ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (London Laurence King, 2002) and *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History, 1839-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Nevertheless, Elizabeth Ann McCauley's remark in a study that charts the progress of commercial photography in Paris during the nineteenth century is surely relevant beyond its geographical borders:

What is noticeably lacking in the two dominant discourses that have constituted the history of early French photography — the photographer as scientist-technician and the photographer as artist — is a comprehensive attempt to place early operators ... within the context of a commercial exchange.⁴⁰

Further to this, I am sympathetic to Patrizia Di Bello's intervention when she highlights a prevailing reluctance to engage with domesticated, standardised and popular manifestations of the medium. Di Bello also draws attention to a marked preference for process-orientated historical, or, as in the case of the influential French historian Gisele Freund, art-oriented, mapping of photographic histories.⁴¹ Freund's early rejection of popularised photography as a pernicious influence on what promises to be a flourishing, liberal art form still resonates, Di Bello suggests: 'Freund's dismissal of the *carte-de-visite* as bourgeois bad taste is the most explicit version of what remains essentially the same argument in later histories of photography'.⁴² Thus, Di Bello's focus on Victorian middle and upper class women's creative photographic activities in the private sphere during the album era, provides an important alternative

Press, 1997). While not focusing specifically on the domestic sphere, Warner Marien's work has been crucial in demonstrating how the nineteenth-century debate on photography when foregrounding issues of art and education, is simultaneously working through more deep-seated societal aspirations and anxieties.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 16.

⁴¹ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), p. 15.

⁴² Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 15.

methodological model for advancing photographic research in areas where domesticity comes into contact with ideology.

What I trace in this study, however, is a more complex experience of public and private photographic gazing. I emphasise that the popular discourse on photography, unfolding in close conjunction with print culture at large, brings to the fore an understanding of the private and public milieu as bound up in an irrevocable process of growing interconnectedness. It is my fundamental contention that we have yet fully to come to terms with this ideological complexity of photography as a mediator of the domestic ethos in Victorian culture and society. My particular concern, then, is to further examine photography's dichotomous role in both enabling and resisting a convergence between the conflicting values of home and family, urbanisation, commodity culture and the ever-expanding field of mass communication.

Chapter 1.

Houses Made of Glass:

Photography, Domesticity and the Mid-Victorian Family Periodical

Domestic Culture and the Family Periodical

'We have been ringing the artists' bells. We have been haunting the dark chambers of photographers', Henry Morley and W. H. Wills announce in *Household Words* in 1853.⁴³ This ambitious article, combining aspects of photographic history, technology and science with an imaginative, personal response, is one of numerous contributions to the photographic commentary to appear in Victorian family periodicals. Its extensive account of commercial studio photography, which will be analysed in detail further on, offers a productive starting point for a number of reasons. First, because the topical approach, as I will argue, is very much shaped by the context in which it appears. Second, the article anticipates many of the key connections between the politics of the family and the progress of photographic discourse and practice, which will emerge in the decades to follow.

The larger aim of this chapter, then, is to examine the discursive construction of photography in the mid-Victorian domestic press with particular stress placed on contributions published in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. I begin to address the progressively complicated interaction between this new pictorial form, domestic values and the impulses

⁴³ [Henry Morley and W. H. Wills] 'Photography', *Household Words* 7, 19 March 1853, 54-61 (p. 54).

of modernity by outlining the key developments in photographic production and practice that enable a widened public interest and new patterns of consumption. Adopting a principally chronological approach, each of the separate sections to follow are intended to identify and unpick thematic strands that interconnect with a wider, ideologically charged domestic agenda. In doing so, this chapter proceeds by examining in turn, photography's impact on gender and the labour market, the social significance of studio conventions and reactions to an ever-increasing mechanisation of culture and society. When considering articles that appear in the transitional period of *Household Words*' metamorphosis into *All the Year Round*, I seek to demonstrate how the debate on photography becomes a forum for venting pressing questions pertaining to private/public boundaries and the commercialisation of privacy. Then, pursuing the notion of photography as a mediator between the drawing room and the street, the discussion traces the following threads: commodity culture, photography as display and spectacle in public spaces, public morality and in conclusion, the significant coexistence of advertisements proffering an array of photography-related merchandise.

The amalgamation of factual reporting and sensational narration employed by Morley and Wills in 'Photography' indicates that family periodicals, notwithstanding their individual differences, targeted a broad and heterogeneous group, thereby conflating the diverse identities of the middle-class family into a single readership.⁴⁴ To be sure, in this expanding market of

⁴⁴ For specific references to the target audience of *Household Words*, see [Charles Dickens] 'A Preliminary Word', *Households Words*, 30 March 1850, pp. 1-2 and Anne Lohrli, 'Introduction', *Household Words: A Weekly Journal 1850-1859 Conducted by Charles*

reading matter 'for the million', as advertising slogans would have it, the concept of a family readership was especially successful.⁴⁵ Among the vast number of different periodicals that came into being following the gradual reduction of the 'tax on knowledge' in 1855 and 1861, publications aimed at families became the most widely circulated category.⁴⁶

Any study of the Victorian press faces a number of methodological challenges given the near limitlessness of the material and the amorphous nature of the territory. Photographic journalism in this period reflects this diversity, so that as Helen Groth points out, 'it is impossible to extrapolate a single and defining idea of photography from these sources.'⁴⁷ With this in mind, the main part of this discussion focuses specifically on the treatment of photography in family periodicals between the early 1850s and the early 1870s, a period in which both these media emerge as key mediators of Victorian domestic ideology. It is not, in other words, intended as a comprehensive account of the extensive debate on photography that takes place in the period. Rather, the chapter takes a narrower focus by analysing in detail a series of articles on photography to appear in two leading periodical titles targeting a domestic readership: *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, both published under the editorial leadership of Charles Dickens from

Dickens (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 15. See also, Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 1.

⁴⁵ John Drew, 'The Newspaper and Periodical Market', in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 109-116 (p. 112).

⁴⁶ Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800- 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 354, 360.

⁴⁷ Helen Groth, *Victorian Photography and Literary Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 20.

1850 until his death in 1870.⁴⁸ I mean to approach the mid-century debate on photography in these family periodicals as taking place in a specific discursive field that demands attention in its own right, a site in which photographic discourse interacts with the concerns and interests of its familial readership.

This approach has a number of implications: it often shifts the emphasis from the detailed scientific and technological aspects of the medium *per se* and, more importantly, marginalises the dispute concerning photography's status as an art form. Indeed, the domestic journalism at the centre of this discussion displays far less concern with the intricacies of the medium's artistic value, the aesthetic merit of individual images or the issue of photography's position in the art hierarchy, which were otherwise dominant questions in the 1850s and 1860s. Dickens, for one, took an interest in fine art but, in Kate Flint's words, 'showed little interest in, or patience with, extended discussions of technical or aesthetic issues', preferring instead 'pictures that told a story'.⁴⁹ Crucially, neither journal carried formal reviews of photographic exhibitions, in line with the principal approach to books and literature, an area discussed in more general or contextual terms.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, both periodicals at the forefront here, *Household Words* and its

⁴⁸ The continuing success of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* in the periodical market between 1850 and 1870 coincides with the broad popularisation of photography and it is during these decades that the larger themes in the commentary on the medium emerge and are consolidated. The material from *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* included in this study is intended to give a comprehensive insight into the engagement of these two journals in that mid-century debate. However, a few additional points regarding the selection of material from both journals should be made. First, contributions deemed to be fictional pieces, in which photography is employed primarily as a device rather than a topic, have been excluded. Second, it should be noted that photography continues to feature in articles published in *All the Year Round* during the 1870s, but this material does not in any essential way expand or alter positions established in the earlier period.

⁴⁹ Kate Flint, 'Visual Culture', in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 148-157 (p. 154).

⁵⁰ Lohrli, *Household Words*, p. 6.

successor *All the Year Round*, made important contributions to the debate on photography, whilst simultaneously adopting a distinctly pragmatic approach to the subject matter and showing a propensity to anchor the medium in a wide range of ordinary concerns and interests. These writers focus on the commonplace *experience* of photography and its connection with the 'noisiest everyday life'.⁵¹ As a result, this commentary does not always sit comfortably with views expressed elsewhere, not least in coexistent specialist publications where the general public is simply regarded as an anonymous mass whose viewpoint was of little consequence.⁵²

This is not say, of course, that the social and moral narratives of the period are absent in the general debate on art, or in the discussion of photography *as* art. Indeed, Mary Warner Marien argues that the social dialogue on photography is often embedded in both the technical and aesthetic exchanges, albeit in a manner that frequently obscures wider connections.⁵³ Walter Benjamin describes the debate on the aesthetic value of photography as 'devious and confused', but underlying this discourse, he argues, is a profound sense of the social and political upheaval that will attend photography's progress.⁵⁴ Thus, while the present study does not pursue this already well-charted aspect of photographic criticism, I will attempt to bring to the fore this and other patterns that emerge in the wider debate, especially

⁵¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (1981; London: Vintage, 2000), p. 91.

⁵² [Ian Jeffrey] *The Real Thing: An Anthology of British Photographs 1840-1950* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975), p. 16.

⁵³ Mary Marien Warner, 'Preface', *Photography and Its Critics: A Cultural History, 1839-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. xiv.

⁵⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt, (1936; London: Pimlico, 1999), 211-244 (p. 220).

in terms of themes such as social mobility, democratisation and industrialisation. Certainly, the journalistic approach to photography in Dickens' periodicals reflects the fact that the subject underwent a general expansion from the 1850s whereby the intense reporting on scientific and technical aspects of the first decade was supplemented by more critical and searching questions pertaining to the nature and direction of the medium.⁵⁵ It is also clear that a number of commentators in the domestic press gauged the social significance of photography in terms of its potential democratising effect, something that certainly accounts for the particular interest paid to photographic *portraiture* as a powerful visual representation of the social ascension of the middle-classes. By early 1862, *Once a Week* makes the following enthusiastic remark: '[Our] street portrait galleries are a great success: no solemn flights of stairs lead to pompous rooms in which pompous attendants preside with a severe air over pompous portraits.'⁵⁶ To this commenorator, the trade in photographic portraiture represented a cultural form in which 'social equality is carried to its utmost limit'.⁵⁷

Furthermore, new technical and scientific discoveries were considered of interest to a domestic readership in so far as such developments could be made relevant and interesting. Hence, Elizabeth Eastlake's comment in 1857 that '[slight] improvements in processes ... are discussed as if they involved the welfare of mankind', is not only relevant to specialist publications.⁵⁸ Generally

⁵⁵ Grace Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 14.

⁵⁶ [A. Wynter] 'Carte de Visite', *Once a Week*, 25 January 1862, 134-137 (p. 135).

⁵⁷ [A. Wynter] 'Carte de Visite', p. 135.

⁵⁸ [Elizabeth Eastlake] 'Photography', *Quarterly Review* 101, April 1857, 442-468 (p. 444).

speaking, articles on science and technology were by no means incongruous to the family periodical; indeed, the popular press provided essential opportunities for common readers to acquire the linguistic and conceptual tools with which to understand the meaning and impact of scientific events.⁵⁹ Hence, Catherine Waters argues that the periodical press offers a highly productive field for gauging the full complexity of what has been termed “the technological feeling” of the Victorian period.⁶⁰ To Dickens, for example, the idea that the family periodical should function as a forum for participation in debates otherwise mystified and contained within elite circles was key to the editorial agenda.⁶¹ Indeed, the inclusion of relatively complex information in articles on photography reflects the overarching position taken by most ‘social-minded’ family periodicals, namely that the press should operate as a vehicle for entertainment *and* instruction. Thus, most of the non-fictional communication on photography in Dickens’ journals is based on the principle of interlacing factual, informative content with every-day reflections and, at times, extra-ordinary narratives in order to engage the average reader. Not being in a position to rival the specialist publications, Dickens seems to have opted to include scientific reportage or commentary in a sporadic fashion, focusing on material that connected with the wider socio-cultural agenda.⁶²

It is arguably precisely the diverse agenda and combination of different genres and styles of writing, as well as the ability to compensate for the lack of

⁵⁹ James Mussell, ‘Science’, in *Charles Dickens in Context*, pp. 326-333 (p. 330).

⁶⁰ Catherine Waters, “‘Fairy Palaces’ and “Wonderful Toys”: Machine Dreams in *Household Words*”, *Dickens Quarterly*, 25:4 (September 2008), 215-231 (p. 216).

⁶¹ Lohrli, *Household Words*, pp. 4-5.

⁶² Hazel Mackenzie, Ben Winyard and John Drew, ‘*All the Year Round*, Volume I, 30 April-22 October 1859, Nos. 1-26’, *Dickens Quarterly*, 29:3 (September 2012), 251-277 (p. 270).

illustration by projecting the visual in a variety of ways, which underpinned the success of *Household Words*. For, as John Drew points out, the combination of text and image in *illustrated* periodicals, coupled with the blending of fictional and factual contributions, played a crucial role in the mass commercialisation of the periodical press.⁶³ In this sense, both photography and the periodical naturally represent technological developments that played into the intense preoccupation with the visual that marks this period. Moreover, the array of topics and ideas, ranging from the frivolous to the profound that are covered in the context of photography, must be understood in light of the fact that Victorian periodicals were rooted in urban centres so that the agenda reflects the multitude of experiences generated by the transitional nature of city life.⁶⁴ Indeed, the hybrid form and tendency to collate diverse viewpoints or approaches is indicative of the fact that periodical journalism absorbs many of the features of a modern, urban existence, establishing itself as essentially 'provocative and reactive', a medium for communication with a mass audience on topics arising out of the current moment, presenting a discourse that is constantly under revision and subject to negotiation.⁶⁵

Even so, the rise of domestic journalism must, of course, fundamentally be understood in light of its affirmation of Victorian domestic ideology; family periodicals naturally played into, indeed fuelled, the constant demand for

⁶³ Drew, 'The Newspaper and Periodical Market', p. 112.

⁶⁴ Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 7.

⁶⁵ Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 1.

confirmation of the social and moral significance of the home and the family. Importantly, access to more affordable periodical titles in the latter half of the century also meant that Victorian families across the social spectrum could potentially be incorporated into a household ethos defined by middle-class taste and values. Many new periodicals targeted upward mobile groups, sections of what Richard D. Altick calls 'the amorphous stratum', the broad mass between the labouring class and the establishment.⁶⁶ In this sense, the family press emerges as an essential medium for the transmission of Victorian domestic values, a key provider of 'a common fund of images, information, attitudes and values associated with the celebration of home and family life', to quote Waters.⁶⁷ Correspondingly, Fraser, Green and Johnston note the prevailing emphasis on domesticity in Victorian periodicals, arguing that 'an idealisation turned into a domestic reality seems to be a primary aim of many of the journals'.⁶⁸ At the same time, any close inspection of this topical debate in the mid-century reveals intriguing discrepancies. A number of critics have reflected on the lack of stability in the promotion of Victorian household ideology. In her illuminating discussion of Dickens and domesticity, Waters emphasises that 'even though the family magazines dedicated themselves to the propagation of home values, the spread ... in their pages was never complete or unmixed'.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 82.

⁶⁷ Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 16.

⁶⁸ Fraser, Green and Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, p. 100.

⁶⁹ Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, p. 21.

This curiously double-edged effect can be felt, for instance, in an article that appeared in the *British Mother's Magazine* in 1852 when the author self-consciously draws attention to periodical reading as a beneficial, indeed essential, component in social and domestic rituals otherwise inclined towards the dysfunctional. 'A home these days without a share in the numberless periodicals that introduce to our fireside so much real enjoyment and instruction wherever they enter', the writer ruminates, adding: 'Who cares about visiting such families?'⁷⁰ A household that is not well versed in the periodical press, it is argued, risks presenting itself, as 'stiff and lifeless', 'bound by unpleasant restraint'. Alternatively, families who forfeit its 'instruction', are likely to be found wanting in the opposite fashion, displaying 'a recklessness of time, order, purpose, and, management', 'bustle and preparation when everything should be ready'. In addition, the author offers the common assertion that the 'English home has always been associated with ... comfort, peace, love, and happiness', but this reassurance is quickly undermined by the rhetorical query: 'How is it that we have so few really happy homes?' Family reading, the author concludes, will reduce 'the feeling of coldness and *nothingness*'. Almost a decade later, the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* draws attention to the growing influence of this 'new feature in the literature of the nineteenth century', namely the 'instruction and amusement' available via a wide variety of newspapers and periodicals.⁷¹ The author singles out *Once a Week*, *All the Year Round* and the *Cornhill* as

⁷⁰ ['F. C.'] 'Happy Homes', *British Mother's Magazine*, 1 April 1852, 83 (p. 83). All further references to this article are from the same page.

⁷¹ ['St. Swithen'] 'A Few Mems. on Books and Reading', *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, 1 March 1861, 270 (p. 270). All further references to this article are from the same page.

especially praiseworthy, adding that familial reading-matter will perform a vital social role by 'furnishing conversation for the dinner-table, thus preventing the awful pauses which so frequently ensue between the courses'.

At the same time, challenges to the cultural saturation of domestic themes and motifs begin to surface during the course of the mid-century. In 1860 the *Cornhill* claims that domestic idolatry has become a stifling force, dulling the intellect and the imagination: 'A man who passes his life in a succession of petty but absorbing occupations, almost infallibly dwarfs and narrows his understanding' and no woman 'who passes her whole life in domestic drudgery will be more than a domestic drudge'.⁷² In the debate on the visual arts, too, critics are objecting to an unhealthy blurring of boundaries between home life, cultural pursuits and commercialism. In 1854, *New Monthly Magazine* proposes that the pictorial arts are now in the hands of the middle-class consumer who simply wants 'pleasing views' of ordinary life with which to 'decorate his rooms'.⁷³ In the present cultural climate, art faces an uncertain future, the author concludes, although conceding that the mass dissemination of pictures by various means will 'give the middle and lower classes that *self-education* ... It will teach them to think'.⁷⁴ Similarly, the *Saturday Review* despairingly reports that '[pictures] are now but a portion of domestic furniture. The home of painting is ... the house' and images have come merely to serve the function of monotonously mirroring 'trivial incidents

⁷² [James Fitzjames Stephen] 'Luxury', *Cornhill* 2, September 1860, 345-353 (p. 349).

⁷³ [Anon.] 'Art Prospects in England', *New Monthly Magazine* 100, April 1854, 457-463 (p. 462).

⁷⁴ 'Art Prospects in England', p. 462.

of family life'.⁷⁵ Another review in the same publication finds that the pictures have become not only domesticated, but mere commodity articles, 'manufactured goods' that should be marketed and sold as such.⁷⁶

A review published in the late 1860s in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, offers a variation on this theme when the author acknowledges the abundance of art showing some form of 'domestic incidence', but concedes that modern life requires art that will 'diminish the tension on the mind', for 'the bow is bent all but to breaking': 'It is the feverish stir of City life, the artificial garb of fashion, which incline the public taste to landscape and the cottage'.⁷⁷ The pictorial market, it would appear, demanded the familiar, already known, as opposed to anything original or startling: "'Public taste in this regard does not discriminate'", wrote the Belgian painter Antoine-Joseph Wiertz: "'The same picture can be copied twenty times without exhausting demand and, as the vogue prescribes, each well-kept drawing room wants to have one of these fashionable *furnishings*'".⁷⁸

In other words, competing voices contribute to the debate on the role of domesticity conducted in the Victorian periodical press, thereby reinforcing the perception of the mid-century as an unsettled, transitional period in which anxious questions pertaining to the forces of modernity and domestic life were frequently publically mooted. As suggested previously, recent studies have

⁷⁵ [Anon.] 'The Royal Academy Exhibition', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 3, 23 May 1857, 475-476 (p. 475).

⁷⁶ [Anon.] 'The British Institution and the Female Artists' Exhibitions', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 13, 8 March 1862, 271-272 (p. 271).

⁷⁷ [Anon.] 'The London Art Season', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 106, August 1869, 220-239, (p. 230). All further references to this article are from the same page.

⁷⁸ Qtd. in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 217-218.

questioned the stability of the domestic discourse conducted via the texts, images and miscellaneous matter published in the Victorian periodical, regarding it more as an amalgamation of contradictory forces, a forum in which the centrality and integrity of the domestic domain are both reaffirmed and contested. As a result, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson suggest, the new channels for display, exposure and investigation of Victorian family life leaves the mid-century household, and its advocates, inclined to simultaneously pursue *and* revile this newfound visibility.⁷⁹ But ultimately, they argue, it is the sheer proliferation of domestic signs – ‘the spectacle of intimacy’ – that gradually causes the central tenets of the domestic ethos to disassemble: ‘The fireside reverie lost its simplicity when it took itself as a subject ... By the end of the 1850s the fascination with family life watched itself in a mirror’.⁸⁰

The period under scrutiny here manifests itself as a highly complex phase during which the great epoch of domesticity converges with commodity culture and the ever-expanding field of mass communication. But what are the implications of these arguments to photography as a progressively important mediator of Victorian domesticity in the mid-century? How does this ideological complexity play out in the discourse on photography? Against the background outlined above, I am proposing that the domestic press offers a particularly intriguing forum for gauging the impact that the new visual technology had on the established tenets of mid-Victorian domestic ideology.

⁷⁹ Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 7.

⁸⁰ Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, p. 215.

'Made for the present age': Photographic Developments

I have argued that family periodicals such as *Household Words* often take a decidedly original approach to photography, but it is equally important to note that many articles clearly develop as reactions to relevant topical features and photographic events that appeared elsewhere in the media. A variety of issues seem to have stimulated the debate on photography in the family press, including the photographic exchanges published in the growing number of specialist publications that came into being in the mid-century.⁸¹ In 1859, *All the Year Round* reflects on the fact that photography has acquired 'a literature of her own' and, as the author of 'Photographic Print' makes clear, such journals presented important informative resources.⁸² Thus even though, as Richard D. Altick points out, 'photography was constantly in the news, and more and more present in everyday life' from its inception in 1839, the mid-1850s represents a transformational period and therefore one of broadened interest.⁸³ Consequently, journalists and editors were aware of the intense interest surrounding photography and appreciated its ability to sell papers well before it was practically possible to reproduce texts with photographic illustrations in the press.⁸⁴

⁸¹ This includes the following key titles in Britain: *Photographic Journal*, *Photographic Notes*, *Photographic News*, *Journal of the Manchester and Liverpool Photographic Societies*, *British Journal of Photography*.

⁸² [Anon.] 'Photographic Print', *All The Year Round* 1, 11 June 1859, 162-164 (p. 162).

⁸³ Richard D. Altick, *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1991), p. 335. See for instance, *Illustrated London News* and *The Times*. Both publications included regular reports on the progress of photography from the late 1830s.

⁸⁴ Derrick Price, 'Surveyors and Surveyed: Photography Out and About', in *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edn, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 67-115 (p. 87). The first photograph was published in the American newspaper *Daily Graphic* in 1880 and

Other factors contributed to the general and media interest, not least the display of daguerreotypes, photographic prints and equipment at the Great Exhibition of Arts and Industry at Crystal Palace in 1851 and the first major exhibition at the Society of Arts in the following year, which gave the new medium yet more exposure.⁸⁵ But a more significant factor in quickening public interest was undoubtedly the appearance of commercial studios offering affordable photographic portraiture. Richard Beard had opened the doors of his London studio to the public as early as 1841, but the commercial reach of the medium was initially hampered by high prices and lingering patent restrictions. Even so, several prominent commercial portrait studios followed soon after, including the successful ventures of Antoine Claudet, J. J. E. Mayall and Nicholas Henneman, but it was Frederick Scott Archer's unpatented collodion process in 1851 that enabled widespread commercialisation.⁸⁶ By 1861 there were 200 photographic establishments in London alone offering a range of photographic types, including daguerreotypes, collodion positives (or ambrotypes), tintypes and different

over the next two decades steady improvements in techniques turned this into widespread practice.

⁸⁵ Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), pp. 33-34 and [Anon.], *'From Today Painting is Dead': The Beginnings of Photography. Victoria and Albert Museum 16 March – 14 May 1972* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1972), p. 37.

⁸⁶ See for example, *photoLondon. The database of Photographers and Allied Trades: 1841-1901*. Available at <http://www.photoLondon.org.uk>.

paper prints, including *cartes de visite*.⁸⁷ 'Industry', as Benjamin notes, 'made its first real inroads with the visiting-card picture'.⁸⁸

Remarking on photography's omnipresence by the early 1860s and ambiguously hinting at its social effect, *Once a Week* remarks:

Photography has now become an institution; its professors are counted by the thousand in the metropolis alone, and portraits once obtainable only by the rich, now hang on the walls of the meanest cottage. Take a walk down the New Cut, Seven Dials, or any other unsavoury locality, and there you will see how Sally the Cook, and Billy the potman, or the wooden visage of Policeman X, are exhibited to an admiring New Cut circle.⁸⁹

The shop windows and street boards of photographic studios contributed to making photography a component in the Victorian urban landscape, but the new medium also claimed a more subtle presence in popular print culture through reproductions in the form of engravings, for instance as woodcuts, which were sold and displayed by print-sellers, booksellers and stationers, sometimes operating in conjunction with photographic studios (figure 2).⁹⁰

Many early journalistic reports, however, focus on charting the progress of the two photographic processes that were initially available to

⁸⁷ John Hannavy, *Victorian Photographers at Work* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 1997), p. 4. Hannavy refers to several advertisements, including one from 1861 showing John Frederick Timm's studio in London offering the following photographic formats: 'Portraits on Paper, Glass, Iron, Silver Plate, or Leather'.

⁸⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings. Volume 2, 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999) 3 vols., pp. 507-530 (p. 507).

⁸⁹ [A. W.] 'Photographic Portraiture', *Once a Week* 8, 31 January 1863, 148-150 (p. 148).

⁹⁰ Hannavy, *Victorian Photographers at Work*, p. 14.

photographers: the French daguerreotype and the British calotype. The less laborious French metal



Figure 2.

Exterior of a Photographic Studio, advertisement (detail), ca. 1860.

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plate process appealed most to commercial operators; the British paper print being used almost exclusively by the skilled amateurs. As indicated, both types were subject to significant media interest from the start, but importantly it was the amateur group who set the discursive agenda. As Grace Seiberling's vital study of mid-century photography shows, until the mid-1850s, it was the members of this socially defined elite who dominated both the exhibitions and the written exchanges on photography. In reviewing the legacy and influence of the early amateurs, the Victorian photographer Jabez Cornelius Hughes remarks that the amateurs 'formed the first photographic society and established the first journal', adding: 'The bulk of the papers read at the societies, and of the communications sent to the journals, are by amateurs'.⁹¹

At the forefront was calotype inventor Henry Fox Talbot, a gentleman scientist who regarded photography as an intellectually stimulating leisure pursuit, an 'art-science' combining scientific knowledge and the traditional conventions of fine art.⁹² Talbot's exclusive photographically illustrated *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), the first major written communication on photography, established the terms of reference that would prevail in the photographic discourse for much of the century. In Graham Clarke's words, Talbot's illustrations and commentary demonstrate 'how much ... the meaning of the photograph has been encoded within the language and values of academic art'.⁹³ First, according to the amateur view, appropriate

⁹¹ ['Jabez Hughes'] 'A Tribute to Amateurs', *British Journal of Photography*, 1 December 1863, 466-467 (p. 466).

⁹² Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, p. 7.

⁹³ Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 43.

photographic subjects included rural scenes, antiquarian objects, monuments or still life, or, alternatively, topics arising out of scientific pursuits and interests. Social commentary and family life were not seen as suitable subjects for formal contexts, such as publications, exhibitions or exchanges, although many amateurs documented and displayed familial moments within the domestic circle. Amateur photographers initially largely upheld this view, although with the commercialisation of photography, domestic themes and stories of the sort popularised through narrative painting became increasingly common, accompanied by a blurring distinction between commercial and art photography. Second, while amateur groups clearly concerned themselves with developing and improving the processes involved, they did not regard photography as a form of reproduction comparable to other mechanical processes. They regarded it as a scientific 'phenomenon', not an expression of industrial progress or even less an aspect of what Nicholas Daly has called 'the mechanization of everyday life'.⁹⁴ In other words, '[the] interests of commercial operators and their public did not coincide with those of the privileged group of early amateurs'.⁹⁵

Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's innovation was produced along 'assembly line principles', with a series of individual stages involving polishers, sensitisers, camera operators, gilders and, finally, tinters.⁹⁶ Naturally, this near-industrial efficacy had advantages to the public, meaning that clients from a widening social circle could walk off with a finished product in no

⁹⁴ Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.

⁹⁵ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, p. 68.

⁹⁶ 'From Today Painting is Dead', p. 10.

more than fifteen minutes.⁹⁷ Somewhat paradoxically, then, it was the daguerreotype that first established itself as 'a family icon' replete with sentimental domestic associations, a treasured display item confined to a glass covered, velvet-lined case in order to protect the delicate, dark and sombre surface.⁹⁸ The daguerreotype had a number of limitations, however, which meant that in an ever-expanding commercial market for photographs, the form struggled to compete. Most importantly, daguerrotypes, unlike calotypes, could not be duplicated and remained relatively expensive. Thus, when the unpatented collodion process became available in 1851, it would gradually supersede both the earlier methods and hugely expand the field both as a leisure and commercial pursuit, turning photography into the new picture form for the masses.

Two developments in the mid-1850s were of particular interest to journalists writing for the domestic press since each contributed to making photography an integral part of Victorian household ritual, in Eastlake's neat turn-of-phrase, 'a household word and a household want', a mechanism 'made for the present age'.⁹⁹ First, the popularity of stereoscopic photography ushered in a new picture industry that would remain extremely popular until the late 1860s. Stereographs were produced by the million in the mid-century period and the success of firms such as George Swann Nottage's London Stereoscopic Company, who coined the famous catch phrase 'a stereoscope for every home', begins to suggest the considerable cultural impact of this

⁹⁷ Newhall, *The History of Photography*, p. 39.

⁹⁸ 'From Today Painting is Dead', p. 10.

⁹⁹ [Eastlake] 'Photography', pp. 443, 465.

fashionable drawing-room accessory and new domestic form of entertainment. Second, Frenchman A. A. E. Disdéri patented the name *carte de visite* in 1854, based on a technique which entailed the use of a camera with multiple lenses and a sliding holder that meant several individual images could be recorded from a single plate. In the progress of the form several phases can be identified, William C. Darrah suggests: the period between 1857 to 1861 denotes a period of respectability, a time when the cheap portrait-picture benefitted from the patronage of the royals and the well-to-do, followed by a decade of 'rapid diffusion', commonly referred to as the 'cartomania' from 1860 to 1870.¹⁰⁰ Ironically, some commentators from within the amateur group saw the development as a return to the traditional values and ideas broadly espoused by painted portraiture. But, of course, Seiberling points out, '[the] expansion of commercially available portraits of famous people must have put and end to any illusions ... about the closed circle of distinguished men'.¹⁰¹ As John Tagg explains:

The production of portraits is, at once, the production of significations in which contending social classes claim presence in representation, and the production of *things* which may be possessed and for which there is a socially defined demand. The history of photography is, above all, the history of an industry catering to such a demand.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Gettysburg, PA.: W. C. Darrah, 1981), p. 10.

¹⁰¹ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, p. 70.

¹⁰² John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 37.

What needs further elucidation, however, are the various ways in which these mid-century photographic initiatives tapped into the Victorian domestic ideology. For instance, William Merrin has argued that in spite of being routinely linked in nineteenth-century journalism and advertising, the connection between 'the parlour stereoscope' and family life has up till now not been fully understood. And yet, he argues that 'it is only by considering the issue of its domestic use that we can begin to understand [the stereoscope] and its specific role within Victorian society.'¹⁰³ The present chapter rests on the contention that this notion can be extended so as to embrace the practice, production and, above all, reception surrounding various photographic forms popularised in the 1850s and 1860s. Moreover, I propose that the family periodical in the mid-century offers a particularly productive context in which to begin systematically to examine such ideas.

Most obviously, mass produced photographs, especially portraits, played into the already well-established Victorian panache for collecting and displaying ephemeral objects associated with personal sentiments, especially those linked to domestic rituals. As noted by Sonia Solicari, Victorian verbal and visual sentimentality can be distinguished by its desire for standardized expressions, ones that could be shared, understood and readily communicated via 'material proof'.¹⁰⁴ Certainly, commercial photographers became ever more innovative in reconstructing mid-Victorian 'fireside virtues' in a studio

¹⁰³ William Merrin, 'Skylights Onto Infinity: The World in a Stereoscope', in *Visual Delights Two: Exhibition and Reception*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin and Simon Popple (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2005), pp. 161-174 (p. 166).

¹⁰⁴ Sonia Solicari, 'Selling Sentiment: The Commodification of Emotion in Victorian Visual Culture', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 4 (2007). Available at www.19.bbk.ac.uk.

setting so that the predominant period rhetoric is defined by these elaborate domestic re-enactments. Comfortable drawing rooms and libraries provided popular backgrounds, but sitters also mingled with at times incongruous combinations of rugs, columns, balustrades and draperies, according to the current fashion trend (figure 3).¹⁰⁵ Stephanie Spencer's illuminating analysis of mid-Victorian photographic portraiture shows that regardless of their social or professional roles, sitters generally opted for a domestic setting and accessories associated with homely leisure activities: 'Domestic virtues and family life were emphasised whether the sitter was viewed alone or with spouse and children', even by those 'who might be expected to emphasize other aspects'.¹⁰⁶ This new form of portraiture is thus inevitably inclined towards *conservative* values, while at the same time constantly absorbing fashionable trends and market place demands. Indeed, as I aim to demonstrate, the photographer's studio features in the periodical press as a particularly complex locus in which domestic idealisation and aspects of modernity combine, a curiously heterotopic space composed of incongruous fragments of time and space. But also as a real place marked by predictability, materiality and structure that served to offset the disorder and fluidity prevailing elsewhere; its function, to use Michel Foucault's expression,

¹⁰⁵ See for example, Helmut Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography*, 3rd rev. edn (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), p. 57 and Stephanie Spencer, *O.G. Rejlander: Photography as Art* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985), p. 54.

¹⁰⁶ Spencer, *O.G. Rejlander*, pp. 55-56.



Figure 3.

Interior of a Photographic Studio, advertisement (detail), ca. 1864.

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being one of compensation.¹⁰⁷ Benjamin, whose analysis of modernity and the nineteenth century is essential to this discussion, argues that the period is marked by such conflicting impulses: inwards, to the musty domestic interior but at the same time outwards, into the anonymous crowd and street.¹⁰⁸

Following this dual inclination, the inhabitants of the ever-enlarging and increasingly complex city landscape are wont to project the interior, domestic life onto the street and the public spaces accessed *via* the street.¹⁰⁹

Drawing on the idea of the photographic studio as assimilation of the domestic interior and public space, I am proposing, then, that the processes and practices that constitute mid-Victorian photographic portraiture play a significant role in negotiating between these two poles. The new form of visual technology thus presents itself as an amalgamation between what is often seen as contradictory forces, a medium that lends itself both to affirmation and contestation of the domestic domain. The innovation of new methods that allowed photographers to reproduce pictures faster and at a much lower cost represents a double-edged development: at once a benign, socially cohesive and, in some sense, an inclusive cultural form, but simultaneously one inextricably bound up with the destabilising forces of industrial capitalism. The uneven reaction to the new technology that emerges on the pages of family periodicals must thus be understood in the context of wider changes

¹⁰⁷ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces. Utopias and Heterotopias', in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 350-356 (p. 356).

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 423.

pertaining to urbanisation, commodification, modes of communication, gender and domestic ideology.

Certainly, many of the articles to be discussed here bear evidence of increasingly fraught attempts to negotiate such tensions, presenting a complex response that, to adopt Daly's phrase, 'condenses fears, anxieties, and longings in the face of these other changes'.¹¹⁰ Photography in the latter part of the nineteenth century can be identified as much as anything by this curious duality, the 'nostalgic and progressive' urge, which denotes an anxious response to modernity and change.¹¹¹ To appreciate the connection between Victorian photographic portraiture and the central doctrines of Victorian domestic ideology, then, means regarding it both as an emotional currency, and as a mass-produced material, marketable object. As Benjamin astutely notes, photography 'greatly extends the sphere of commodity exchange, from mid-century onward, by flooding the market with countless images'.¹¹²

'The ladies pursued their vocation like workwomen':

Photography and Gender in *Household Words*

'We aspire to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts of our readers. We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages', Dickens declares in his first *Household Words* editorial, the periodical title that he was to preside over for nearly a decade, until its metamorphosis into *All the Year Round* in

¹¹⁰ Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity*, p. 5.

¹¹¹ Warner Marien, *Photography and its Critics*, p. 111.

¹¹² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 6.

1859.¹¹³ Dickens' wording is clearly intended to connect with an idealised notion of domestic intimacy and thus to appeal to the family-minded reader, by feeding into the intimacy of 'fireside companionship'. 'A Preliminary Word' petitions a broad audience of men, women and children, ambitiously professing to address the needs and interests of 'the well-to-do' and 'the poor' (1). Furthermore, while seeking to accommodate a large readership, Dickens also wanted to avoid the sort of criticism that had been levelled against cheap sensationalist periodicals already in circulation, those appealing to 'the basest passions of the lowest natures' (2).

The greater portion of the periodical's readership, however, was to be found amongst the growing number of aspirational, middle-class readers who were in possession of some education, but less spending money.¹¹⁴ To these readers, the democratisation of knowledge that is so central to Dickens' project would have held a significant appeal as it clearly plays into the group's social ambitions. This factor explains why several conflicting pressures unfold in the pages of the domestic periodical: some directing the reader towards a sequestered, cocooned and homely existence, while others emphasise public life, productivity and social mobility. And, as we have seen, this inherent tension in Victorian household ideology did not escape the Victorian critics, who directed explicit criticism toward cultural manifestations of home worship: 'These sentiments, unhappily, find little favour with most of those who command the public attention. Such men generally flatter the

¹¹³ [Charles Dickens] 'A Preliminary Word', *Household Words* 1, 30 March 1850, 1-2 (p. 1). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

¹¹⁴ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 359.

complacency which they ought to destroy, and teach others to regard learning, science, and wit as playthings by which idle hours may be made idler'.¹¹⁵

However, Dickens' ambitious agenda and his assertion of the 'high usefulness' already demonstrated by others in the field, was clearly designed to withstand precisely this type of critique (2). And, despite the emphasis on homely snugness, *Household Words* positions itself firmly in the context of a modern metropolis, attendant upon 'the ways of life of crowds ... even with the towering chimneys ... spirting out fire and smoke upon the prospect' (1). This visual account underlines what is arguably the most complex aspect of the project, namely to mediate between the turbulent street and the innermost sanctum of home, to convey the 'wild, grotesque, and fanciful aspects' and yet, 'be admitted into many homes with affection and confidence' (1). In addition, Drew highlights the author's problematic employment of 'the shadow' as a metaphor for his journalistic venture, an idea that invokes notions of intrusive surveillance, rather than wholesome engagement.¹¹⁶ In outlining his vision for the publication, Dickens envisages the boundless progress of this omniscient entity by presenting various scenarios with a curious emphasis on liminality, while at the same time drawing attention to the porous nature of the borders between outside and inside: "[The] thing at everybody's elbow and in everybody's footsteps. At the window, by the fire, in the street, in the house, from infancy to old age".¹¹⁷ The wording unwittingly highlights the inherent complexity of domestic journalism, suggesting that the transgression of the

¹¹⁵ 'Luxury', p. 353.

¹¹⁶ John Drew, *Dickens the Journalist* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 107.

¹¹⁷ Qtd. in Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, p. 107.

supposed demarcation between private and public spaces is integral to its project. Indeed, other articles to appear in *Household Words*, such as W. H. Wills' 'The Appetite for News', similarly associates this modern craving with the intimacy of the domestic sphere.¹¹⁸ Wills locates the consumption of 'battle, murder, and sudden death', alongside 'heroism, charitableness, high purpose', firmly in the domestic interior, connecting it with the most mundane domestic activities, a key to 'breakfast-table happiness'.¹¹⁹ In other words, regardless of the journal's celebration of an enclosed familial sphere, this mass-produced mediation of family values was by its very nature also a key participant in the multitude of discourses that emerge in the wake of modernity, an era defined by 'mass visuality'.¹²⁰

The first photographic commentary of note to appear in *Household Words* is Edmund Saul Dixon's article 'More Work for the Ladies', published in 1852.¹²¹ The central focus of this article is not photography *per se*; its key aim being to raise questions regarding the limited opportunities for salaried employment open to women in Britain, but the medium provides an important mechanism for exploring this idea. The piece opens with the itinerant journalist's vivid and imaginative account of a French daguerreotype studio run by a female photographer and a troop of female employees. Having battled his way through a 'horde' of photographers – 'hunters after the heads of man, woman, or child' to add to 'previously decapitated victims' – he finally

¹¹⁸ [W. H. Wills] 'The Appetite for News', *Household Words* 1, 1 June 1850, 238-240 (p. 240).

¹¹⁹ 'The Appetite for News', p. 239.

¹²⁰ Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 9.

¹²¹ [Edmund Saul Dixon] 'More Work for the Ladies', *Household Words* 6, 18 September 1852, 18-22 (p. 18). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

enters the establishment of this 'female warrior' and is received by two female assistants: 'They had been doing some other people: a pretty, costumed, fish-woman, with her baby; a family party of English folks – for when you want a large dish of heads to be served, it only costs a trifle per head extra on the original plate' (18).

Dixon's writing should, of course, be read in the general context of the periodical's aim to make discursive, sometimes novel, material interesting and accessible to a wide readership. It also reflects a general tendency in Victorian journalism to depict the photographic studio in gothic and spectacular terms, somewhere 'between execution and representation, between torture chamber and throne room', as Benjamin remarked.¹²² Even so, the sensationalist approach seems to border on a transgression of what might be thought of as 'good taste' in a family periodical, a challenge to the principle that contributions to *Household Words* should not contain anything that might be 'offensive to the middle class', or 'objectionable as family reading'.¹²³

But it is not only the stylistic features that appear somewhat at odds with the family friendly editorial ethos. I am proposing that underlying this curious account is an ineluctable tension between current topics and key principles underpinning Victorian domesticity. It is undoubtedly the author's colourful and extensive depiction of the fiercely competitive commercialism of the female photographic portraitist's world that is most striking, in particular since it forms the basis for advocating new, acceptable means for *English* women to earn a living. This impression is reinforced by the author's conclusion, which

¹²² Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', p. 515.

¹²³ Lohrli, *Household Words*, p. 16.

suggests that women quickly become accustomed to occupying professional roles. He imagines the ensuing scenario should a working woman be threatened with dismissal by a husband wishing to replace her with men, declaring that she is now at leisure to 'read novels, and do berlin work, and crochet' (20). Would she, Dixon muses, 'abdicate quietly'? Think that 'her husband was acting the part of a kind and considerate friend'? That outcome is immediately rejected: 'She would rebel; she would tell her husband he was a fool ... she would get him put into a mad-house' (20-21). However, the reader contemplating this alarming and confusing upheaval of gender roles is offered the ambiguous reassurance that such domestic dissonance is unlikely ever to ensue since no husband with a wife thus engaged would even consider this action, for he 'knows a great deal better than to dream of any household revolution of the kind' (21).

Waters suggests that the conventional anonymity adopted by writers in *Household Words*, *All the Year Round* and other domestic periodicals besides, may have opened up possibilities for contesting the views on gender and domesticity adopted elsewhere.¹²⁴ Certainly, no unified stance with regards to 'the Woman Question' emerges in Dickens' publications. A number of articles suggest that *Household Words* sided with proponents of the key legal reforms that were debated during the life span of Dickens' journals, such as the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857) and Married Women's Property Act (1870).¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Catherine Waters, 'Gender Identities', in *Charles Dickens in Context*, pp. 365-372 (p. 367).

¹²⁵ See articles such as Eliza Lynn Linton's, 'Marriage Gaolers', *Household Words* 13, 5 July 1856, 583-585, followed by Charles Dickens, 'The Murdered Person', *Household Words* 14, 11 October 1856, 289-291. These topical articles were written in support of the parliamentary debate surrounding proposed changes to existing divorce laws.

At the same time, in the earlier leader 'Sucking Pigs' published in 1851, Dickens delivers a vitriolic attack on demonstrative feminism and exhibits a strong belief in the principle of gender differentiation in society and at home. Addressing 'Julia', a fictitious spouse, he asks: 'Beloved one, does your sex seek influence in the civilised world? Do we not, on the contrary, rather seek in the society of our Julia, a haven of refuge', long for 'the home-voice of our Julia ... after considerable bow-wowing out of doors?'.¹²⁶ The fundamental issue at stake here – the division of labour and space along gender lines – is embodied in John Ruskin's well-known domestic philosophy of gendered difference of 1864.¹²⁷ To Ruskin, a woman's characteristics are associated with the secluded interior where she attends to 'sweet ordering': 'She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise; she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest'.¹²⁸ Her male counterpart, by contrast, performs 'his rough work in open world', in a 'hostile society' that must never be permitted to penetrate the 'temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods'.¹²⁹

Dixon's readers are certainly left with the complex negotiation of seemingly incompatible ideas: how can the nature of running, or labouring in, a photographic business as depicted (and indeed encouraged) in 'More Work for the Ladies' be reconciled with Dickens' leader, published less than a year previously? These questions are further complicated by the fact that Dixon

¹²⁶ [Charles Dickens] 'Sucking Pigs', *Household Words* 4, 8 November 1851, 145-147 (p. 145).

¹²⁷ John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', in *Sesame and Lilies, The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1905), 38 vols., vol. XVIII, p. 121.

¹²⁸ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 122.

¹²⁹ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 122.

addresses both the middle-classes ('women who are deficient in pocket-money' and 'overburdened by leisure') and workers of a 'humbler kind' ('porteresses', auctioneers, shoe-blacks, 'milk-*men*', one 'farmeress') (18-19). In the case of photography, however, he compensates for the strident tone by semantically modifying the language of conflict in its evocation of mundane housekeeping activities: 'The ladies pursued their vocation like workwomen ... handling their secret pickles, preserves, and pigments, giving a suggestion as to arrangement of dress, and chatting' (p. 18). Yet, this concession does not negate the impression that the boundaries between inside and out, between home making and paid labour, are problematically blurred. Interestingly, though, this implied trajectory between inherently feminine qualities associated with the domestic interior (that alleged female propensity for 'the sweet ordering of things') and the tactile manual work involved in producing and handling photographic images, anticipates what will become a recurring theme in the discursive exchanges on women and photography.

Articles published in Victorian periodicals repeatedly indicate that women displayed both aptitude and interest in photography as a hobby, and increasingly, as a source of income. Importantly, newspapers and journals acknowledged the early contributions made by female amateurs, of whom many were linked to the eminent societies, a factor that undoubtedly bestowed respectability on the activity. And, notwithstanding the increasing commercialisation of the medium, prominent female amateurs such as Lady Hawarden and Julia Margaret Cameron continued to produce and exhibit their work during the second half of the 1850s and into the 1860s. On the whole,

the social credibility established through such endeavours clearly informed attitudes to photography as a female vocation (figure 4). Thus, the glass-house activities of the professional 'lady-practitioner', as the *Ladies' Cabinet* puts it in the mid-1850s, often conjure associations with aesthetic sensibility, thereby obfuscating a more pragmatic, financial motivation.¹³⁰ Similarly, as the *Englishwoman's Review* reassures its readers in an article entitled 'Photography as an Employment for Women' (1867): 'Ladies of the highest rank have practised it as an amusement'.¹³¹ But the article also takes a more practical approach, indicating that women are especially suited to the painstaking work involved and the 'delicate manipulation and patience' of female workers have made them popular employees. It is therefore 'most desirable that a photographic school should be established, in which women might be thoroughly taught every branch of the profession'.

Drawing and painting were areas in which middle-class girls traditionally received training, thereby making the transition into paid positions requiring skills in areas such as engraving, colouring and illustration relatively easy. Thus, in reflecting on the achievements made by the 'fair *artistes*', the *Gentleman's Magazine* reiterates the frequently voiced perception that the 'natural' attributes of women are well attuned to this line of work:

Photography hardly seems a ladies' art: delicate fingers look out of place dabbling in nasty chemical solutions, and out of condition when dyed with the inevitable silver stains; yet the fair sex have

¹³⁰ ['C.A.W'] 'Photography', *Ladies' Cabinet*, 1 June 1856, 320 (p. 320).

¹³¹ [Anon.] 'Photography as an Employment for Women', *Englishwoman's Review*, 1 July 1867, 219 (p. 219). All further references to this article are from the same page.

again and again beaten the rough in the photographic lists. Delicacy, cleanliness, patience, and, we had almost said, long-suffering, are woman's attributes, and they are necessary conditions to success in photographic operations. No wonder, then, that photography has provided considerable employment for women.¹³²

The topic also surfaces in the published dialogue between readers and editors, a forum that appears to have encouraged an unusual degree of frankness. As Wilkie Collins remarked: 'There is no ... private affair that it is possible to conceive, which the amazing Unknown Public will not confide to the editor in the form of a question'.¹³³ Apparently responding to one enquiry relating to the suitability of photography as an employment for women, the upmarket *Lady's Newspaper* is able to confirm the existence in 1863 of 'many ladies who make money from assisting photographers'.¹³⁴ Indeed, one suspects that it is in response to numerous similar requests of information on how to qualify for and obtain such work that the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* includes a form of catch-all statement from a female studio proprietor, who declares that 'some systematic effort should be made to teach the art of colouring photographs to destitute ladies'.¹³⁵

Photographers did hire female staff for tasks such as retouching, colouring and printing, but while they may have shown aptitude in these areas,

¹³² [Anon.] 'Photography Applied to Book Illustration', *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1867, 484-504 (p. 484)

¹³³ [Wilkie Collins] 'The Unknown Public', *Household Words* 18, 21 August 1858, 217-222 (p. 219).

¹³⁴ [Anon.] 'Notices to Correspondents', *Lady's Newspaper*, 18 April 1863, 466 (p. 466).

¹³⁵ [Anon.] 'Englishwoman's Conversazione', *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, 1 April 1867, 220 (p. 220).

the attraction from the employer's viewpoint undoubtedly also lay in the fact that they provided cheap labour.¹³⁶ Examples of British commercial daguerreotype businesses of the sort encountered by Dixon on the continent, did exist in the first two decades, albeit in modest numbers: only 22, out of the 750 English photographic studios opened between 1841 and 1855, had female proprietors, although with the general

¹³⁶ Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (Paris and London: Abbeville Press, 1994), p 48.



Figure 4.

'A Photographic Positive', Punch 25, 30 July 1853. Reproduced with permission of Cardiff University Library

expansion of commercial photography in the latter half of the century, the figure rose considerably.¹³⁷ Certainly, by 1859, one family periodical poses the question: 'Who are all these thousands of cheap photographers?'.¹³⁸ One category of individuals drawn to the new profession, the writer opines, 'are widows with families, whom they thus support; and some who are journeymen's wives, who pursue it to eke out the unsatisfactory wages of their husbands.' In addition, it reports that the commercial success of stereoscopic slides has provided young ladies with 'an agreeable mode of earning money' for 'the colouring is done in good part by females'.

Articles like 'More Work for the Ladies' resonate with the increasingly pressing necessity of extending the labour market for women in need of an income and seemingly anticipate the widening debate on this topic. As shown by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, a dramatic reduction in occupational opportunities had taken place since the late eighteenth century, so that by the 1850s the narrowed sources of employment for middle-class females (teaching, dressmaking and millinery), had given rise to an overcrowded labour market and low wages.¹³⁹ A contributing factor behind this was clearly the fact that as the ideological pressure to define women's social and economic roles in terms of domestic activities increased, signs of independent financial agency were progressively regarded as an undesirable anomaly and

¹³⁷ Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*, pp. 42, 45. The database *photoLondon* also demonstrates an increasing number of women being active in photographic businesses in the capital after 1850.

¹³⁸ [Anon.] 'Correct Likeness! Only a Shilling!', *Leisure Hour: a Family journal of Instruction and Recreation*, 11 August 1859, 508-510 (p. 509). All further references to this article are from the same page.

¹³⁹ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, rev. edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 313.

therefore likely to have been repressed. The 1851 census gives some indication of the gradual process of 'domesticating' women's social identity because here the wife, mother and homemaker, is presented as a new 'occupational' category.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, unofficial evidence suggests that in an expanding commodity culture, women were actively seeking and finding new sources of employment, although these undertakings are often concealed in the double sense of literally taking place behind the scenes and figuratively, by not appearing in formal records. A variety of factors, apart from ideological incentives, add to the obfuscation, then, including the fact that in the nineteenth century it was common practice for businesses to display only the name of the male proprietor. Yet, it is known that many women played an active role in photographic family businesses.¹⁴¹

In an earlier contribution to the debate on female vocations, the influential writer and social commentator Sarah Stickney Ellis outlines what she calls 'the vulgar prejudices prevailing in society against their mode of life'.¹⁴² '[If] a lady does but touch any article, no matter how delicate, in the way of trade', Ellis argues, 'she loses caste, and ceases to be a lady' (463). But having reassured the reader that her own literary tracts are entirely prompted by 'a desire to enhance ... the domestic happiness' (462), the author suggests that women in pecuniary need must be allowed to take up work in areas that seem 'peculiarly adapted to female taste' (465). Adding the caveat that such

¹⁴⁰ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 272

¹⁴¹ See for example, Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*, p. 42 and Darrah, *Cartes de Visites in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 6.

¹⁴² Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England; Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (1839; London: Fisher, 1845), p. 463. All future references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

changes call for clarification in terms of the social hierarchy, she optimistically proposes that this 'second class of females' could undertake paid employment, 'without the least encroachment upon the seclusion of domestic life, and the delicacy of the female character' (464-465). Pushing the matter further, the *Lady's Paper* speaks in favour of forming 'Associations for Female Employment' in 1860, arguing that with proper guidance and supervision (lest they should 'lose those qualifications so essentially feminine'), a kind of apprenticeship scheme would be of great benefit to women and wider society.¹⁴³ It would not render them 'less likely to make good wives and mothers', the author argues, and would leave them with a source of income 'should misfortune assail their husbands, or should they be left widows, as many thousands are'.¹⁴⁴ As it happens, this article is immediately followed by a piece, entitled 'The Stereoscope', explaining the technical principles behind the device, and giving basic practical advice with regard to the production of stereoscopic images.

In 1873, Hughes indicates that while studios run by women were still rare, significant numbers had found employment in other capacities.¹⁴⁵ Declaring himself 'a well-wisher to the women's movement', Hughes encourages women to enter the profession, declaring it 'a field unsurrounded with traditional rules ... one in which there is no sexual hostility to their employment', as long as they do not exceed the parameters of their allotted role. While he replicates several familiar arguments pertaining to women and photography, the stress placed on the political significance of opening up the

¹⁴³ [Anon.] 'Associations for Female Employment', *Lady's Paper*, 21 January 1860, 60 (p. 60).

¹⁴⁴ 'Associations for Female Employment', p. 60.

¹⁴⁵ Cornelius Jabez Hughes, 'Photography as an Industrial Occupation for Women' (1873). Available at <http://www.cliohistory.org/exhibits/palmquist/occupation/>.

profession to women is nevertheless notable. However, the author's attempt to simultaneously tap into 'conventional notions of women's capacity' *and* to attract 'those who have the elevation of woman at heart' does create a noticeable tension in the piece that bespeaks a deepening rift in Victorian gender politics. What is more, this article appeared amid mounting numbers of indecency cases against photographers, compelling the author to refute an increasingly widespread perception of photography as a decadent profession. Indeed, women's general susceptibility to the advances of rogue photographers and their employees constitutes a recurring journalistic trope, but the specific accusation that the photographic industry targets women in need of employment had also been made. In 1859, for instance, George Augustus Sala had suggested to readers of *All the Year Round* that the 'bleared faces and crinolines and legs' commonly seen in ribald photographs bespeak the plight of those desperate for a 'penny wage'.¹⁴⁶ The following year, *Photographic News* similarly claims that producers 'of obscene stereographs [...] frequently advertise, offering employment to young ladies, their object being to obtain them as sitters; and thus, probably, not a few poor women are lured to destruction'.¹⁴⁷

Comments such as these are especially interesting in the context of women, photography and the periodical press because many draw strength from the idea that it is the very experience, knowledge and skills developed inside the domestic micro-cosmos that prepare women for roles outside the

¹⁴⁶ [George Augustus Sala] 'Since this Old Cap was New', *All the Year Round* 2, 19 November 1859, 76-80 (p. 79).

¹⁴⁷ [Anon.] 'Immoral Photographs', *Photographic News* 4, 10 August 1860, 180 (p. 180).

home. Almost from the start, then, the discussion of women's roles in the field of photography pulls toward diametrically opposed poles. In this sense, the photographic exchanges discussed here begin to bring into focus a fundamental and increasingly perplexing paradox, one that is connected to what Chase and Levenson call 'a broader Victorian conundrum': '[Why] is it that by the middle years of the century, as the ideology of the separate spheres becomes finally entrenched, feminism will rise to a prominence and a visibility from which it is never again dislodged?'.¹⁴⁸

Domesticity under Urban Skylights: Victorian Studio Photography

'Photography', the article by Henry Morley and W. H. Wills quoted at the start of this chapter, is the first of a small cluster of articles offering an extended commentary on photography in the years 1853 to 1854. The text revolves around a series of visits to popular photographic studios in central London undertaken to uncover the 'innermost mysteries' of this 'latter-day magic practised under a London skylight':

We rang a bell in Regent Street – which was not all a bell, for it responded to our pull not with a clatter; but with one magical stroke – and instantly, as though we had been sounding an enchanted horn, the bolts were drawn by unseen hands, and the door turned upon its hinges. Being well-read in old romance, we

¹⁴⁸ Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, p. 85.

knew how to go on with the adventure. There were stairs before us which we mounted; swords we had none to draw.¹⁴⁹

The writers' employment of bellicose language and militaristic metaphors allows them to skilfully interlace didactic and narrative strands in a way that seems to have appealed to the readership, although critics at times found such pieces somewhat overworked.¹⁵⁰ Throughout, Morley and Wills' article fluctuates between detailed technical reporting on the various stages of photographic production and highly dramatised story telling. The studio becomes a kind of phantasmagoria in which they encounter 'faces tied and fastened down', while 'a grave man was reading on forever, with his eyes upon the same line in his book' (55). But, although the sitters are 'fixed', these figures simultaneously 'seemed in a mysterious way to come and go as the lights shifted', 'a thousand images of human creatures of each sex and every age ... glanced at us from all sides, as if they would have spoken to us' (54-55). This ghostly effect is in fact the result of the daguerreotype's sombre, reflective surface, which meant that images were only clearly discernible if looked at from the right angle. Meanwhile, the photographer, the 'taker of men', informs his visitors that the subjects "'have all been executed here'" (55).

Playing on the ambivalence that can be detected in early responses to photography and seemingly also anticipating the expansion to come, Wills and Morley construct an intriguing inversion of exterior and interior settings whereby the passing, anonymous crowd of city streets is transposed from the

¹⁴⁹ [Morley and Wills] 'Photography', pp. 54-55. All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵⁰ Lohrli, *Household Words*, p. 9.

street to the interior of the studio. The metropolitan expedition in search of photography undertaken by Morley and Wills resembles the urban adventures associated with the flâneur of the period, the attentive but detached urbanite who takes to the street intent upon 'reading' the crowds (as Benjamin notes, 'the social base of flânerie is journalism').¹⁵¹ The quest of this professional urbanite was, naturally enough, to seek the arresting and startling amid the uniform, standardised aspects of nineteenth-century life. Accordingly, they approach the city in the manner of authors of adventure stories or crime narratives. After all, Baudelaire suggestively asks: "'What are the perils of jungle and prairie compared to the daily shocks and conflicts of civilisation?'"¹⁵² The city explorer regards modernity as a new frontier furnished with the city's marketable goods, such as the photographs in shop windows, studio galleries or street boards. In Paris professional city observers allegedly 'know all the photographers' studios by heart and could recite the sequence of signs without omitting a single one'.¹⁵³ Moreover, the curious interplay between 'fixed' and mobile human bodies in 'Photography' recalls Jonathan Crary's argument that the camera (and other visual apparatus) provide 'noncoercive' means of stabilising the modern 'free-floating' subject no longer restrained by a slower lifestyle and the parameters of traditional social structures.¹⁵⁴ What the new technologies of the nineteenth century offered, from this point of view, was a new means of containment,

¹⁵¹ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 446.

¹⁵² Qtd. in Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 443.

¹⁵³ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 451.

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 15.

representing in a Foucauldian sense, 'a very real technology ... of individuals'.¹⁵⁵

More generally, 'Photography' can be read alongside numerous *Household Words* articles that draw attention to the intricate connections that are being forged between human beings, new technologies and commodity culture. It may even be suggested that the 'industrial tourist tale' provides an interesting framing for the debate on photography as a technology.¹⁵⁶ Recent scholarly work on nineteenth-century photographic portraiture has emphasised the combination of anxious technophobia and intrigued fascination that prevails in the haunting accounts of the mysterious photographic studio. Julia F. Munro, for instance, maintains that the early periodical press portrays the studio in terms that denote a sense of 'pleasurable fear'.¹⁵⁷ It is, Munro writes, 'a place of spectacle', 'an environment that encouraged overt observation of others and a commodification of the self.'¹⁵⁸ To be sure, gothic elements are present in Wills and Morley's 'Photography', Dixon's 'More Work for the Ladies' and other photographic articles to appear in *Household Words*, although it is important not to oversimplify the attitude to technological developments. Significant articles focusing on industrial processes in *Household Words* actually also work toward demystifying the world of commerce and industry,

¹⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 225.

¹⁵⁶ Waters, "'Fairy Palaces" and "Wonderful Toys": Machine Dreams in *Household Words*', p. 217.

¹⁵⁷ Julia F. Munro, "'The Optical Stranger": Photographic Anxieties in Periodical Literature of the 1840s and Early 1850s', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 7:2 (July 2009), 167-183 (p. 168).

¹⁵⁸ Munro, "'The Optical Stranger'", p. 169.

Waters suggests, so that the 'unease about the material confusions of people and things entailed in industrial production' is offset by notes of enthusiasm.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, it is worth restating that the tendency to cloak the photographic act in fantastical and imaginative terms, especially in the early stages of popularisation, is not a feature unique to the topic. It was Dickens' belief, after all, that 'exaggeration and distortion', without forfeiting accuracy, could make all kinds of topics that may otherwise appear didactic or dull, engaging and accessible to the average domestic reader.¹⁶⁰

To the authors of 'Photography' this modern visual technology ultimately emerges as 'a liberal art ... peculiarly marked with the character of our own time' and they are particularly attentive to the practises and conventions that turned photographic portraiture into a mass endorsement of Victorian domesticity (57). Thus, Wills and Morley proceed by turning their attention to a family group of 'unmetamorphosed people', consisting of a 'military gentleman', his wife and two female family members who are about to have their portraits taken. As it turns out, one of the ladies declares that she 'must be held in some way, for she was too nervous to sit still', while the couple prove to be compliant sitters:

The Lady was placed on a chair before the camera, though at some distance from it. The gentleman leaned over the back of the chair; symbolically to express the inclination that he had towards his wife:

¹⁵⁹ Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 87.

¹⁶⁰ Lohrli, *Household Words*, p. 9.

he was her leaning tower, he was her oak and she the nymph who sat secure under his shade (56).

Broadly modelling their practices on the conventions and traditions of established visual forms, by mid-century photographic portraiture adopted specific formal arrangements of groups and individual sitters that unambiguously (if not necessarily accurately) inscribe social, as well as gender configurations. Masculinity, Stephanie Spencer notes, is generally expressed via a standing pose, identifiable by an openness and angularity that indicates 'assertive expansion into the environment'. Women, by contrast, were positioned so as to invoke curving lines and closed contours, suggestive of a more contained and passive inclination.¹⁶¹

The tone of the article implies, however, that even to a contemporaneous observer such practices were becoming somewhat clichéd and overfamiliar. Interestingly, the stereotypical sameness of many portraits was not necessarily the result of technical limitations, or even due to lack of imagination in the photographer, but the consequence of client demand: 'Everyone apparently wanted to be seen as home loving and socially successful', Spencer remarks, 'no one wanted to be too different'.¹⁶² A number of prominent photographers predictably raised objections to this stalwart conformity to standardised poses, settings, accessories and lighting. Henry Peach Robinson, for one, felt compelled to provide cautionary advice to portraitists and dedicating a chapter in *Pictorial Effect* to the 'Management of the Sitter', he summarises the predicament thus:

¹⁶¹ Spencer, *O. G Rejlander*, p. 56.

¹⁶² Spencer, *O. G Rejlander*, p. 55.

Sitters often want to be made to look like other people; or rather, they think that if they sit in the same position, and attempt the same expression, however unsuitable, they will look as well as some example they have seen. It constantly occurs that persons will come into the reception-room, and, selecting a portrait of another, totally unlike in age, style, and appearance, will say: "There, take me like that".¹⁶³

Contemporary critics have argued, however, that attempts to divert the mid-century mind set away from the derivative and formulaic were doomed since in the face of fundamental social, economic and cultural change, domestic idealism came to be ever more reliant on templates. Robinson's own written contributions, which will be discussed in detail further on, bear evidence of the dilemma of marrying up creative impulses requiring 'deviation from uniformity' with ideological imperatives calling for 'order and regularity'.¹⁶⁴ As suggested by Chase and Levenson : 'Far from seeking novelty or obliquity, work after work looks to align itself with the familiar.... as if the delights of home depended precisely on the refusal of novelty'.¹⁶⁵

The keen interest in image content in 'Photography', as opposed to aesthetic or technical considerations, which were otherwise dominant aspects in Victorian photographic discourse, draws attention to the growing connection between photography and the ephemeral values of consumer culture, in particular those emanating from the fashion industry. Not

¹⁶³ Henry Peach Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography: Being Hints on Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers* (London: Piper & Carter, 1869), pp. 84-85.

¹⁶⁴ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁵ Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, p. 8.

insignificantly, when Disdéri patented the *carte de visite* in 1854 he looked beyond the aristocratic full-length portrait toward lithographs and woodcuts of popular figures, and was undoubtedly also inspired by the fashion plate.¹⁶⁶ Wills and Morley are certainly observant of what the sitters are wearing and embark on a playful, but fairly comprehensive, description of the lady's dress. Her outfit, readers are informed, included 'extensive scalp-fixings of a savage style introduced lately into this country, consisting of a ragged tuft of streamers, knotted with Birmingham pearls nearly as large as coat buttons'. Continuing their detailed description of this excessive attire, they add 'a great deal of gauze, wonderfully snipped about and overlaid with diverse patterns' and 'a border of large thick white lilies round the cape' (55-56). Despite the gentle mockery, the attention to detail here anticipates the fact that the first fashion photographers, on their part, gained inspiration from photographic portraits, attentive to the importance ascribed to dress style and accessories and also to the aptitude of nineteenth-century consumers in reading such signs.

The article also appears to augur a renewed interest in women's clothing and the beginnings of a 'bolder aesthetic' in female fashion.¹⁶⁷ Men's clothing, by contrast, turned uniform and monochrome during the nineteenth century: 'Colour dies in menswear in the nineteenth century, leaving colour and brightness to women', as John Harvey puts it.¹⁶⁸ From the 1850s fashion

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *A. A. E. Disdéri and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 36.

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth Wilson and Lou Taylor, *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: BBC Books, 1989), p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995), p. 195.

represented an enlarging sector of the commodity market, underpinned by a variety of mechanisms for promoting consumption, including advertising, post order catalogues and magazine publicity. This, in turn, resulted in masses of surplus fashion goods and the commercial circulation of second-hand clothing, which found its way into city streets and into a number of *Household Word* articles from the early 1850s.¹⁶⁹ Hence, it seems likely that regular readers of the periodical would have been alert to the problematic implications behind the alleged necessity of colouring in portraits in the final stages. Otherwise, the female assistants explain, ‘people complain ... that we make them look as if they wore old clothes’ (59). The social confusion caused by the new availability of cheap, smart clothing is a worry to which commentators on photography repeatedly return, objecting, often in the strongest terms, to photographic practices that, to quote Robinson, ‘make a maid-servant look like a duchess’.¹⁷⁰ ‘[Look] at the lady’s *hands*’, Oliver Wendell Holmes warns when speaking of stereographic group pictures: ‘You will very probably find the young countess is a maid-of-all-work’.¹⁷¹

Photographers were alert to the fact that contrasting style of dress in men and women offered opportunities to highlight differences between the sexes and to further reinforce the engendered pictorial language of Victorian photographic portraiture. It is therefore hardly surprising to find that, for instance, Davidoff and Hall’s highly visual description of feminine and

¹⁶⁹ See for instance, [George Augustus Sala] ‘Old Clothes!’, *Household Words* 5, 17 April 1852, 93-98 and ‘Fashion’, *Household Words* 8, 29 October 1853, 193-198.

¹⁷⁰ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect*, p. 113.

¹⁷¹ [Oliver Wendell Holmes] ‘The Stereoscope and the Stereograph’, *Atlantic Monthly* 3, June 1859, 738-749 (p. 747).

masculine characteristics in clothing, corresponds closely to the conventional arrangement of bodies in the photographic studio. Gender differentiation is underlined, they argue, by 'the straight lines, practical materials and business-like images of men's clothes and the soft, flowing curved lines, the rich colours and textures, elaborate detail and constricting shape of women's clothes'.¹⁷² With the gradual democratisation of fashion and the resultant complication to class-based distinctions, Christopher Breward suggests, 'questions of sexuality and gender found a heightened significance'.¹⁷³ At the same time, the evanescent, metropolitan spirit of fashion that photographic portraiture highlights, did not necessarily sit comfortably with the inward-looking traditionalism of middle-class domestic values.¹⁷⁴ Modish initiatives in photography are thus curiously double-edged, simultaneously propping up domestic idealism, 'the ideology of withdrawal', whilst increasingly encouraging families toward shops and window displays.

The powerful sign-value of clothing in stressing gender difference played out in various other ways in *Household Words* in the 1850s, notably by its response to the Bloomer controversy. Certainly, Dickens made it clear in the previously cited leader 'Sucking Pigs' that he regarded women in trousers as rather more than an amusing sartorial experiment. It represented a direct attack on domestic harmony, bound up, in his view, with females prone to 'agitate, agitate, agitate', inappropriate social ambition and 'a vast amount of

¹⁷² Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 414.

¹⁷³ Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 147.

¹⁷⁴ Breward, *The Culture of Fashion*, p. 147.

words'.¹⁷⁵ Likewise in 1852, the conservative *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* anticipated dire social and moral repercussions from this potential clothing revolution, linking it to the general decay of traditional values and the legal marriage reforms in particular.¹⁷⁶ In an article that resonates with sexual anxiety, it is suggested that muddling the dress code for men and women is 'indecent' because 'it removes the separation wall, as it were, between the sexes' (82) and 'where a man and woman are ... confused in dress, so will they be to a great extent in mind' (84).

'[A] very large portion of all that we do is simply copying':

Charting Photographic Progress in *Household Words*

The photographic pieces published in *Household Words* were not intended as platforms for pioneering scientific or mechanical discoveries. Rather, the writing formed part of an all-encompassing aspiration to produce amusing, educational articles that would appeal to a family readership, avoiding approaches that might render the subject matter irrelevant or difficult. One strategy employed, as demonstrated above, is to link photography's progress with other miscellaneous topics and events, to weave a wide variety of issues and strands into its commentary. This, along with the stylistic techniques used in order to solicit the interest of a mass-readership, including 'personification, fantasy, vision, fable, fairy tale, imaginary travels, contrived conversations, and the use of fictitious characters', sets many of these articles apart from much of

¹⁷⁵ 'Sucking Pigs', p. 146.

¹⁷⁶ [Anon.] 'Husbands, Wives, Fathers, Mothers', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 71, January 1852, 74-85 (p. 77). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

the photographic writing in specialist and more elitist publications.¹⁷⁷

Forthcoming contributions to the topic in the periodical suggest that the tactics used were deemed successful with the readers. Even so, as I have argued above, there are certainly times when the treatment of photography either subtly or directly seems to run contrary to the home values that allegedly underpin the *Household Word* ethos.

Most articles on photography published in *Household Words* share the key characteristics outlined above, although there are articles in which objectivity and clarity are prioritised over narrative finesse. This is the case with several early pieces, for instance with Morley and Wills' 'Stereoscopy', which focuses on presenting the technical facts behind the new three-dimensional visual technology.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, George Dodd's 'Busy with the Photographs' is primarily a straight-forward factual piece, although some stylistic shaping can be detected, not least in referring to photography as the 'optical stranger', calling the medium '[strange], scientific, mournful, all at once'.¹⁷⁹ In spite of the growing ubiquity of photography, the new technology clearly remained something of an intriguing novelty to many readers in the early 1850s, which explains why, even when the purpose is essentially educational, the writers in *Household Words* often chivvy their readers along with anecdotes and references to everyday, domestic scenes. For instance, in outlining photography's potential as a tool in astronomical discoveries, Dodd

¹⁷⁷ Lohrli, *Household Words*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁸ [Henry Morley and W. H Wills] 'The Stereoscope', *Household Words*, 10 September 1853, 37-42 (p. 37).

¹⁷⁹ [George Dodd] 'Busy with the Photograph', *Household Words* 9, 29 April 1854, 242-245 (p. 245).

begins in the manner of a fairy tale: 'If we are ever to know what the Man in the Moon is doing, how he lives, what sort of a house he possesses, what kind of weather he meets with, whether he has any dogs and cats ... the photograph will take a great part in eliciting the information.'¹⁸⁰

'Busy with the Photograph' is also an article that foreshadows the transition of photography in the mid to late 1850s, the gradual progression from elitist science-art to mass-produced commodity. That is, while Dodd refers to the Royal Photographic Society and reflects on the interests and approaches established by early photographers via publications such as *Notes and Queries*, he is also acutely aware of the medium's connection with modernity. As noted above, the viewpoint of the amateurs remained influential during the much of the 1850s, but this period also sees the beginning of a fragmentation of both photographic practice and discussion. While the earliest photographers saw themselves as separate from their commercial counterparts, Dodd sees the commercial practices to which photography can be put as a natural progression of the scientific and technical advancements made in the field. By contrast, within the closed circles of the amateurs, photography was, Seiberling writes, 'a phenomenon to be explored, not a technique, like lithography, for reproducing specific things'.¹⁸¹ Warner Marien similarly stresses that early accounts describe photography in terms that are different to those used in connection with 'machines, instruments and the processes of the industrial revolution'.¹⁸² Certainly, the idea of a proliferating

¹⁸⁰ 'Busy with the Photograph', p. 244.

¹⁸¹ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, p. 14.

¹⁸² Warner Marien, *Photography and its Critics*, p. 3.

photographic *industry* that made and distributed pictures in a manner similar to other print media, was entirely incompatible with the direction set out in the 1840s. In Dodd's pragmatic view, however, the 'great power of [photographic] multiplication', is not a form of vulgarisation, but the very source of its potential benefit to culture, industry and society at large.¹⁸³ In *Household Words*, then, photographs are bound up with new social experiences and they are also frequently approached as things, not unlike other manufactured and mass-produced goods.

This impression is reinforced by 'Imitation', another article by Dodd that appeared in *Household Words* the same year. Here, he displays an unmitigated fascination with the sheer concept of mass reproduction, placing photographic duplication in the same order as all manner of other forms of mechanical copying: printing, casting, pressure, stamping, drawing and tracing. What is especially interesting in this breathless account of machine-made images, is the way in which Dodd associates these processes with the human condition, arguing that '[we] copy each other more than most of us are aware ... a very large portion of all that we do is simply copying'.¹⁸⁴ Going further, Dodd virtually effaces the boundary between industrial mechanisms and human beings: 'If any one would really know what an imitative race we are, let him watch the course of ordinary mechanical employments' (580). The explicit connection made between photographic representation, a new mechanised world and human relationships in these early observations are

¹⁸³ 'Busy with the Photograph', p. 243.

¹⁸⁴ [George Dodd] 'Imitation', *Household Words* 9, 5 August 1854, 580-583 (p. 580). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

predictive of the increasingly complex view that can be seen to emerge in the course of the periodical's developing discourse on photography.

'Intruding into the private regions of superior life':

From *Household Words* to *All the Year Round*

By the end of the 1850s a series of cataclysmic events occurred that brought Dickens' domestic and journalistic life into collision in such a way that he felt compelled to terminate the publication of *Household Words*. The circumstances surrounding this drastic decision are well documented, but the focus of the present study warrants a closer look at this curious turn in Dickens' journalistic career, if only to illustrate how slippery and precarious the private/public dichotomy had become by the late 1850s. On 12 June 1858, on *Household Words'* customary leader page, the journal's readers were faced with an article headed 'Personal', which constituted a form of counter-attack to the (supposedly) widespread rumour that serious moral transgressions had been the cause behind the Dickenses' marital breakdown.¹⁸⁵ Notwithstanding the confidentiality signalled by title, the piece was not only printed in his own periodical, but across major newspapers and journals, albeit with one notable exception: *Punch*, a journal belonging to Dickens' own publisher. To the editor of *Household Words*, this blatant refusal by the publisher to offer moral support rendered the professional relationship untenable; he resolved to extricate himself from this business agreement, along with his marriage.

¹⁸⁵ [Charles Dickens] 'Personal', *Household Words* 17, 12 June 1858, 429 (p. 429). All further references to this article are from the same page.

The article's stylistic disjointedness and somewhat unstable tone – a mixture of confessional, legalistic and pious notes – reflects the complexity of Dickens' predicament. But 'Personal' also represents a striking manifestation of the contradictory impulses that informed the very journal in which it is being published, a glaring display of what Chase and Levenson call the 'double-edged resources of journalism', that is, its participatory role in a culture that 'plays out a rhythm of predictability and astonishment, familiarity and monstrosity'.¹⁸⁶ The title itself calls to mind the confidential exchanges between editor and reader reportedly on display in periodical advisory columns, identified by Collins as a forum in which domestic 'little frailties' could be aired by anonymous correspondents without feelings of 'ridicule or shame' (although that is precisely what Collins rewards them with).¹⁸⁷ Naturally, readers would have been alert to the delicate nature of referring publically to what Dickens euphemistically calls '[some] domestic trouble', making it necessary for the writer to vindicate himself by reassuring his no doubt for the most part astonished audience of the 'sacredly private nature' of home and family. The concluding paragraph returns to this point with a reminder that 'the trouble', has merely been 'glanced' at and should in no way be thought of as a lapse in good taste. Readers are also prompted to recall that Dickens' appearance here in 'his own private character' is necessitated by extraordinary and unique circumstances. They are asked to go along with the idea that the family periodical, notwithstanding its vested interest in being

¹⁸⁶ Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁷ 'The Unknown Public', p. 219.

'admitted into many homes', remains dedicated to the principal doctrine of domestic idealism: the separation of private and public life.¹⁸⁸ However, Dickens' own case implies that this assertion does not stand up to scrutiny. As Drew explains, Dickens' fictitious and personal voices cannot always be clearly distinguished and by the late 1850s 'the editorial adventure and love adventure were already being pursued together, logically enough, in full view of the readers of *Household Words*.'¹⁸⁹

During the 1850s Dickens also cultivated his intimacy with the public via the photographic medium. Mayall photographed him in 1852 and by the time 'Personal' was published, a great number of portraits of the author were in circulation and, although allegedly not comfortable with the process, he was seemingly alert to the benefits of nurturing a celebrity status. As Joss Marsh, who locates the beginnings of celebrity culture firmly in the nineteenth century, remarks: 'Fame abroad sometimes compensated for failure at home'.¹⁹⁰ By the early 1860s, the craze for portraits had become a commonplace affair with a steady traffic of images moving between the street and the domestic interior, causing *All the Year Round* to make the following remark:

We get accustomed to the portrait after a time, are able to face it, to see it on our drawing-room table in a small frame, or in an album, or even in the books of our dear friends and acquaintances. If we are public characters (and it is astonishing how many of us

¹⁸⁸ 'A Preliminary Word', p. 1.

¹⁸⁹ Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, p. 132.

¹⁹⁰ Joss Marsh, 'The Rise of Celebrity Culture', in *Dickens in Context*, pp. 98-108 (p. 101).

now find that we are so), we are actually obliged at last to get accustomed to the sight of ourselves in the shop-windows of this great metropolis.¹⁹¹

In spite of the relatively complacent mood, the author seems to imply that a photographic existence over which one has little control has become inescapable; it is part of the modern human condition. Moreover, it communicates a feeling that the distinction between the private and public self, in photographic terms at least, is very slippery indeed.

In fact, anxieties about the photograph's role in destabilising the boundaries between the domestic sphere and public spaces can be detected much earlier in Dickens' journals. John Hollingshead's 'A Counterfeit Presentment' tells the unhappy story of 'a literary lion' who falls prey to 'photographic artists' and 'public demand'.¹⁹² As a result of his reluctance to pose for a portrait, the 'detestable lens' pursues him not only in the street, but its haunting gaze follows him into the recesses of the interior where he is eventually cornered and made to submit to the 'relentless photographer' (71-72). James White, a personal friend of Dickens, published a leader entitled 'Your Life or Your Likeness' in 1857, an account of a 'plain Mr.', who through various circumstances becomes persecuted by a stream of writers and photographers wishing to broadcast his life in text and image.¹⁹³ Scenes of mundane familial intimacy are repeatedly disturbed by intruders armed with

¹⁹¹ [Anon.] 'The Carte de Visite', *All the Year Round* 7, 26 April 1862, 165-168 (p. 165).

¹⁹² [John Hollingshead] 'A Counterfeit Presentment', *Household Words* 18, 3 July 1858, 71-72 (p. 71). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁹³ [James White] 'Your Life or Your Likeness', *Household Words* 16, 25 July 1857, 73-75 (p. 74). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

cameras and pens hoping to 'catch you unawares' and produce pictures open to 'a thousand interpretations ... so that the most diverse opinions are expressed of the same production' (74-75). The persecuting 'photographic enthusiasts' threaten to worry him 'out of house and home'; it is 'like the hideous and confused thing one dreams of after a heavy supper', exclaims the innocent victim, 'there is no safety whatever'. (74-75). These articles are intended as lighter pieces, amusing narratives suitable for a domestic readership, but the implications of the events described are not uncomplicated. There would be no mistaking, for instance, the symbolic significance of 'tearing a few gates off their hinges' and boring through hedges, thereby defacing acknowledged emblems of respectable familial seclusion and 'good domestic habits'. To be sure, these transgressions resonate with the progressively complex dynamics of negotiating between modernity and the foundational principles of Victorian domestic ideology. After all, as Ruskin so chillingly remarked, the home must be a 'shelter', hermetically sealed from 'the anxieties of the outer life', or it simply 'ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in'.¹⁹⁴

'[Intruding] into the private regions of superior life, is a fact which all right demeaning parties will inscrutably resent', begins Timothy, the narrative voice in Henry Fothergill Chorley's article 'An Area Sneak', published in *All the Year Round* in 1865.¹⁹⁵ And certainly, as the spectacular narrative of familial exposure at the hands of a photographic scoundrel unfolds, one can

¹⁹⁴ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 122.

¹⁹⁵ [Henry Fothergill Chorley] 'An Area Sneak', *All the Year Round* 8, 15 April 1865, 282-284 (p. 282). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

only assume many would have read this article with a mixture of titillation, amusement and distaste. Timothy, a servant in a genteel household who is also undertaking work as a photographic model ('my Lord's uniform giving scope'), provides the author with an ideal mechanism for making connections between life in the domestic interior and various tropes familiar from photographic criticism (282). The piece clearly alludes to the extensive spread of literature concerned with the management of household staff, but also draws on common photographic tropes. Ostensibly focusing on the antics of that familiar stock-character, the rogue photographer (recognisable from similar pieces such as James Payn's 'Photographees'), the narrative impact of 'An Area Sneak' depends to a large extent on the reader's interest in the internal affairs of a well-to-do household.¹⁹⁶ Most especially, it connects with anxieties pertaining to the ambivalent status of Victorian household workers, being at once desirable symbols of social prestige and representing a form of social incursion. Indeed, Timothy, notwithstanding his repeated insistence on 'privatousness' ('unless the opposite is agreed on'), becomes the conduit for activities through which the family heirlooms and amorous indiscretions are visually recorded and turned into marketable goods (283). The spectacular revelations are not restricted to a single family, however; *all* families who keep domestic staff, it seems, are potentially at risk of photographic trespassing: 'What with taking the Countess Crossdown's dormitory chamber, with its pink Bohemian glass-suit and service (and that was shown in his frame, too)' and scores of other misdemeanours of a similar type (284). In fact, Timothy notes

¹⁹⁶ [James Payn] 'Photographees', *Household Words* 16, 10 October 1857, 352-354.

in his concluding remark that ‘there is not a family in our connexion in which the servants ... do not sit with their hair standing on end’, in dreadful anticipation of further pictorial revelations (284).

The last edition of *Household Words* was published on the 28 May 1859 and on its first page, in place of the customary leader, appeared a form of mission statement for his new periodical: *All the Year Round*. Given the calamitous circumstances that surrounded the winding-up of *Household Words*, it is hardly surprising that Dickens should use calmer notes in introducing his new journal. In addressing present and future readers, he stresses the continuity between the old journal and the new, while at the same time espousing an upbeat and optimistic mood in presenting the ‘new prospects opening out’: ‘The old weekly cares and duties become things of the past, merely to be assumed, with an increased love for them, and brighter hopes springing out of them, in the Present and the Future.’¹⁹⁷

Some significant editorial changes were brought in, modifications that would have wider implications for the established class-based boundaries in the periodical readership. Unlike *Household Words*, which derived its competitive edge from innovative articles, *All the Year Round* was to forefront quality entertainment in the form of previously unpublished serial fiction, alongside various other forms of fictional material, leaving less space for social comments. This strategic repositioning played into Dickens’ aspiration to attract ‘a very much wider circle of readers’, a nod at Collins’ ‘Unknown Public’, the ‘mysterious’ penny press millions that buy a journal ‘for its

¹⁹⁷ [Charles Dickens] ‘All the Year Round’, *Household Words* 19, 28 May 1859, 479 (p. 479). All further references to this article are from the same page.

amusement more than for its information'.¹⁹⁸ What Collins had in mind was not, of course, that respectable publications should stoop to the level of penny-readers, but that this shadowy cluster would simply 'obey ... progress' and 'learn to discriminate'.¹⁹⁹ Certainly, soaring circulation figures indicate that the move paid off, making the new publication not only more successful than its predecessor, but also giving it the pioneering lead over other 'quality' family periodicals that would follow in the late 1850s and early 1860s – including *Macmillan's Magazine*, *Once a Week*, *Cornhill*, *Temple Bar* – all of which would similarly prioritise fiction.²⁰⁰ Lorna Huett argues that key to Dickens' journalistic success was his careful negotiation between different periodical models, resulting in a journal distinguishable by its innovative hybridity.²⁰¹ Similarly, Deborah Wynne suggests that *All the Year Round* 'inhabited the borderland between "highbrow" literary culture ... and the popular literature enjoyed by "lowbrow" weekly penny magazines'.²⁰² Above all, the editorial changes that occurred in this transitional phase highlight the fact that the periodical was itself a commodity, subject to the fluctuations of an increasingly crowded market.

Portable Property:

Commodity Culture and Family Values in the era of *All the Year Round*

¹⁹⁸ 'All the Year Round' and Collins, 'The Unknown Public', pp. 217-218.

¹⁹⁹ 'The Unknown Public', p. 222.

²⁰⁰ Mackenzie, Winyard, Drew, 'All the Year Round, Volume I', p. 271.

²⁰¹ Lorna Huett, 'Among the Unknown Public: *Household Words*, *All the Year Round* and the Mass-Market Weekly Periodical in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 38:1 (Spring 2005, 61-82 (p. 79).

²⁰² Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Magazine*, pp. 22-23.

In spite of the emphasis placed on fictional contributions in *All the Year Round*, photography remained a source of interest to writers in this periodical, although new concerns emerge as old ones recede. For instance, less effort is spent explaining technological and scientific developments, reflecting the fact that the production of photographs was well understood and procedures fairly standardised. In general, the educational impetus that can be detected previously becomes less relevant, although it does not disappear. Moreover, specific events, such as planning national art collections for public display, and the role of photographic portraits in these projects, gave new relevance (though still no consensus) to issues such as the artistic merits of photography and its potential contribution to cultural democratisation. 'Portraits' and 'A New Portrait-Gallery' deal with questions belonging to this familiar territory and hence reactivate some of the questions that were debated in the periodical press in the first half of the 1860s, for example in *Once a Week's* 'Cartes de Visite'.²⁰³ In 1862 *Once a Week* complained that the 'exclusive principle' still governs many cultural institutions, including the National Portrait Gallery, while photographic 'street portrait galleries' are accessible, democratic and hugely popular.²⁰⁴ Those latter photographic 'galleries' – presumably the shop window, showroom or street board of any photographer, print or book seller – are by contrast guided only by the commercial value of the print. As observed, '[the] commercial value of the human face was never tested to such an extent as it is at the present moment'.²⁰⁵ Needless to say, conservative photographic

²⁰³ [Anon.] 'Portraits', *All the Year Round* 14, 19 August 1865, pp. 91-93 and [Anon.] 'A New Portrait-Gallery', *All the Year Round* 18, 31 August 1867, pp. 229-232.

²⁰⁴ [A. Wynter] 'Cartes de Visite', p. 135.

²⁰⁵ [A. Wynter] 'Cartes de Visite', p. 135.

journals, such as the *British Journal of Photography*, frequently decried the commercialisation of photography in formal exhibitions and beyond. The influential critic Alfred H. Wall's position is fairly representative of this camp when he rallies against what he calls the 'rage for cheapness' in ordinary photography, especially portraiture:

Therein cheapness is the order of the day. In the advertisement columns of the daily papers almost every week shows us an increasing number of these photographers who are bent upon underselling their rivals. The *carte* portraits, the 'postage stamp' portraits, and the fifty reproduced portraits for half-a-crown readily suggest themselves.²⁰⁶

Wall's indignation is indicative of the resentment felt by such critics as the medium slipped away from the refined taste and scholarly approach that informed the earliest phase. Under the present circumstances, he argues, photographic societies must defend their territory: first, by patronising photographers with 'higher aspirations', second, by 'forcing upon the public the recognition of their superior merits'.²⁰⁷ Mass production lies at the centre of these anxieties, for, with the removal of legal and technical impediments in the early 1850s, it had proved impossible to contain the medium within the social and aesthetic boundaries first drawn up. Instead, photography's progress replicated the general expansion of popular culture in the early 1860s and had

²⁰⁶ Alfred H. Wall, 'A Few Thoughts about Photographic Societies: An Opening Address', 15 October 1863, *British Journal of Photography*, 407-409 (p. 408).

²⁰⁷ 'A Few Thoughts about Photographic Societies', p. 409.

proved quick to absorb, if not drive, concomitant changes to the social demography.

As discussed, *Household Words* displays a complex, at times uneasy, relationship to commodity culture. In the following, I want to use this proposition as a route into the photographic commentary in *All the Year Round*, arguing that these articles offer valuable insights into the periodical's progressively troubled negotiation between commodity culture and domestic idealism. I begin, however, by further unpicking some of the conditions that enable this intense dialogue between the Victorian family and the photographic market place in the late 1850s. Evidently, most ordinary people did not regard new photographic forms such as the *carte de visite*, or indeed stereocards, as inferior to earlier types. The 'cheapness' Wall so abhorred, did not discourage families across the social spectrum from participating in the photographic 'craze'. Portraits of the immediate family and close friends were naturally popular, but unknown families and individuals of fame or fortune were also inserted into family albums, alongside an array of topographical motifs. Fortuitously, from a trading point of view, the ubiquitous 'domestic trade' in *carte de visite* photographs was instigated in 1860 by Mayall's photographs of the nation's premier society family: the royals.²⁰⁸ Exclusive portraits of the Queen, *Once a Week* enthusiastically informs its readership in 1862, 'sell by the 100.000', while the 70, 000 *cartes de visite* ordered within a week of Prince Albert's death should be regarded as a remarkable accolade.²⁰⁹ Further to this, presented in this the cheap and readily available format, 'the

²⁰⁸ Darrah, *Cartes de Visite*, p. 6.

²⁰⁹ [A. Wynter] 'Carte de Visite', p. 135.

spectacle of royal domestic privacy', to use Margaret Homans' phrase, was calculated to gain both in reach, influence and credibility, 'cheapness' an aid, rather than an obstacle.²¹⁰

Indeed, as Daniel A. Novak points out, 'participation in a photographic economy became a patriotic duty, it also became the medium for a profession of national, civic, and familial belonging'.²¹¹ In 1863 *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* maps out the patterns of interaction established between families, their periodicals, photographers and traders in the age of mass technology:

The court newsman has had a busy time of it to follow the royal pair through their festive wanderings. And then the printsellers and the photographers, fully alive to the demand for portraits, have been busying themselves to furnish portraits of the newly wedded ones, and every one who possesses a *carte de visite* album – and who does not? – has inserted the portrait of Alexandra together with those of their private friends.²¹²

The wifely ordinariness espoused by the Queen in many *carte* portraits from this period meant that they would not look out of place in the commonplace family album.²¹³ Thus, at this early stage of popularisation the new brand of royal portraiture provided helpful visual prototypes for the aspirational

²¹⁰ Margaret Homans, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1876* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 4.

²¹¹ Daniel A. Novak, *Realism, Photography and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 10.

²¹² [Anon.] 'The Englishwoman's Conversazione', *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, 1 July 1863, 144 (p. 144).

²¹³ Homans, *Royal Representations*, p. 46.

middle-classes, meaning that the 'social effect' of photography, not least in the realm of Victorian family life, was experienced by many as a civilizing force. Above all, royal representations of domesticity in photographic (and other) images clearly reiterated the universal, ideological principle that even matters of state are ultimately founded on 'the little world' of home and family. At the same time, it could not be denied that the mass production of pictures showing royal privacy presented something of an ideological mystification. As John Plunkett points out, newspapers and periodicals were anxiously reiterating the understanding that the dissemination of Mayall's familial royal *cartes* into the public domain was fully endorsed by the Queen, and did therefore not involve an incursion on her familial privateness: 'This frisson of excitement clearly existed because of a distinct uneasiness over the publication of the first royal *cartes*'.²¹⁴ Misgivings of this kind naturally aggrandize as the *carte's* popularity widens, leading *Punch* to announce in 1870 that in an era of celebrities, it is infinitely preferable to be 'humble, obscure, insignificant'.²¹⁵ Exposure through photography represents a particularly precarious form of self-publicity, as you may well end up 'gazing at your own photograph in shop windows, bounded by a dancer in short skirts on one side, and by a notorious criminal on the other'.²¹⁶

Concerns about the social impact of photography run a thread through the mid-century and *All the Year Round's* contributions to the topic, despite the periodical's self-professed commitment to family values, exhibit a tendency

²¹⁴ John Plunkett, *Queen Victoria: First Media Monarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 168.

²¹⁵ [Anon.] 'Comfort for the Lowly', *Punch*, 30 April 1870, 169 (p. 169).

²¹⁶ 'Comfort for the Lowly', p. 169.

to absorb, even highlight, wider tensions within the domestic ideology. In 1864, for instance, an article entitled 'Those Who Live in Glass Houses' appeared in which the author points out that 'turning over the leaves of an album, we frequently pass our acquaintances without even a nod. How is this?'.²¹⁷ Taking this paradoxical sense of estrangement as a starting point, the author proceeds to interrogate the purpose and practice of every-day photographic portraiture in the 1860s. The frustrating experience of finding portraits 'so very unlike' (the antithesis of Barthes' notion of the photograph as 'an emanation of the referent') represents a fairly constant murmur in journalism in this period, but what needs further elucidation is how this view interacted with the concomitant understanding that photography shaped and underpinned the very fabric of Victorian life.²¹⁸

Some sections of the press raised clamorous objections to the practices of commercial studios, not least the widespread use (or 'abuse') of backgrounds and accessories.²¹⁹ However, to the public the fictitious scenes recreated in the portraitist studio played a crucial role in the construction of a domestic identity that concurred with social convention and currently fashionable trends. As noted by Spencer at the start of this chapter, most sitters were 'willing to forgo reality in behalf of social pretension' and consequently there was a demand for pictures marked by repetitive conformity, as opposed to

²¹⁷ [Anon.] 'Those Who Live in Glass Houses', *All the Year Round* 12, 26 November 1864, 372 (pp. 372-374). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

²¹⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 80.

²¹⁹ [A. H. W.] 'Backgrounds:—Their Abuse, their Use, their Principles, and the Modes of Painting them', *British Journal of Photography*, 1 May 1863, 188-189 (p. 188). See also, [W.] 'Accessories for the Glass Room', *British Journal of Photography*, 1 December 1863, 467 (p. 467).

individual uniqueness.²²⁰ Indeed, the author of 'Those who Live in Glass Houses', points out that 'photographs are frequently perpetrated in which people are represented in positions, and engaged in employments equally as foreign as those in which their friends usually see them':

The conventional Smith or representative Jones attired in his habit ... seldom has the opportunity of resting his elbow on the base of a fluted column; neither is he often interrupted in the study of his favourite author (one finger between the leaves of the book), seated in a lady's boudoir, radiant with bouquets and toilet bottles, nor with a mass of unmeaning drapery mixed up with his hair, like the hood of an excited cobra (373).

Once a Week similarly notes that in '[turning] over the album at home', the viewer is struck not by familial intimacy, but rather, 'the love of appearing what we are not': 'There is Mrs. Jones, for instance, who does the honours of her little semi-detached villa so well: how does she come to stand in that park-like pleasure ground'.²²¹ The same article cites numerous such examples 'to be seen in the shop windows', and does not restrict the 'fictitious landscapes' and 'cutting up of a portrait' to 'the lower stratum of the middle-class'. Outlining the 'ludicrous effect' of many familial representations, the author turns to one of 'the Queen and Prince Albert standing up looking at each other like two wooden dolls', as well as one showing Princess Beatrice 'upon a table, with her frock so disposed that it appears to form but one piece with the tablecloth, the

²²⁰ Spencer, *O. G. Rejlander*, p. 55.

²²¹ [A. W.] 'Photographic Portraiture', p. 149. All further references to this article are from the same page.

effect being that this infant of five seems planted upon the full-blown crinoline of a woman of forty'. To these observers, Victorian family portraiture suggests that faced with the twin pressures of modernity and conformity, the middle-classes resorted to, as *All the Year Round* puts it, 'joining together inconsistencies', happily representing themselves in worlds 'partly real and partly imaginary'.²²² And, as suggested by *Punch*, photographers were more than compliant in these fictions (figure 5).

What is less often acknowledged is the extent to which contemporaneous contributions to photographic discourse connect with deeper concerns pertaining to the stability and coherence of the family unit itself. As exemplified by 'Those who Live in Glass Houses', the visual fragmentation in photographs showing groups, a discrete strand in the Victorian debate that will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, seems to strike a particularly discordant note: 'When two or more persons are taken in one picture, it is no uncommon thing to see them standing without any connection whatever to each other' (373). Instead of reassuring familial unity, these portraits show sitters not only as 'unlike', but they appear 'as isolated and independent as the statuettes on the board of an Italian imageman'. Or, standing 'all in a row', the group presents itself as both self-conscious and inflexible (373). Thus, while the standardised techniques, poses and settings (being 'precisely the same as that which the last sitter occupied') certainly appear to tow the ideological line, the failure to replicate the mid-century family in a cohesive and authentic fashion seems to contribute to

²²² 'Those who Live in Glass Houses', p. 373.

throwing a shadow over the new 'brighter hopes' posited by Dickens in the late 1850s. But this critique inevitably raises the question: why was photography such a popular chronicler of Victorian domesticity? Nancy Armstrong argues that photography was embraced not in spite of the limitations cited here, but precisely because of them. The vast complexity of contemporary life already captured by the camera brought with it a threatening confusion that called for a structured approach: images based on *categories*, rather than *individual* bodies. This new visual order allowed people to participate in 'a notion of the real',



Figure 5.
'Art v. Nature', *Punch* 48, 4 March 1865. Reproduced with permission of
Cardiff University Library

Armstrong argues, 'but also to feel they were in touch with and could negotiate a world undergoing modernization'.²²³

Further to this, the debate on photography regularly brings into view the wider debate on authenticity in Victorian culture. The question of genuineness permeates a diverse range of topics, such as physiognomy, copyright, patent laws and the fictional treatment of identity fraud.²²⁴ In photography the issue is pertinent on number of levels, ranging from the widespread professional practice of pirating of images, to the blatant misrepresentation of people. It is not difficult, therefore, to see why the development of a photographic industry in the mid-century provided a particularly fertile setting for airing anxieties pertaining to the impact of commodity culture on fundamental precepts. Crucially, as Benjamin points out, mechanical reproduction of pictures fundamentally undermines notions of the unique and permanent, replacing it with representations that are both transitory and endlessly reproducible.²²⁵ Apprehension around the identity of people and things regularly takes the shape of seemingly trivial protestations against the impact of a market full of 'cooked up' photographs: 'Here, for instance, we have lying before us a card which contains portraits of the Prince of Wales and the Princess Alexandra', the *London Review* reports in 1863, 'issued several weeks before they were married'.²²⁶ The inappropriately amorous scene can consequently be revealed as false through application of

²²³ Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 19.

²²⁴ Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words*, p. 40.

²²⁵ Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', pp. 217-218.

²²⁶ [Anon.] 'Photography and Bad Taste', *London Review*, 28 March 1863, 326-327 (p. 326).

moral reasoning: 'The lover would certainly object to the artist "posing" his intended in such a way, and the lady herself would object with still greater vehemence'.²²⁷ Below the surface of the 1860s debate on portraiture, questions of taste, morality and gender simmer, worries that naturally resonated with a socially aspirational family readership of the sort that Dickens, and other domestic periodicals besides, had courted so successfully: '*Household Words* responded to the anxieties of those new middle-class readers who were unsure how to distinguish the real from the fake', Waters suggests, by 'helping them to identify the boundary that separated the gentleman from the gent, the traveller from the tourist'.²²⁸

But in the context of the feverish photographic market of the 1860s such judgements were becoming harder to make and few critics shared Holmes' assertion that people in general were able to tell the difference between 'the make-believe gentleman and lady' and 'the genuine article'.²²⁹ 'Attitudes, dresses, features, hands, feet betray the social grade of the candidates for portraiture', Holmes assures readers of *Atlantic Monthly* in 1863, but his assumption depends, of course, on one's ability adeptly to decode the signs.²³⁰ However, Holmes' engagement with portraiture traces a deeper vein, as he suggests that portraiture opens up an understanding of the personality beneath the surface, allowing the discerning viewer to 'read the victories and defeats, the force, the weakness, the hardness, the sweetness of

²²⁷ 'Photography and Bad Taste', p. 326.

²²⁸ Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words*, p. 64.

²²⁹ [Oliver Wendell Holmes] 'Doings of the Sunbeam', *Atlantic Monthly* 12, July 1863, 1-16 (p. 9).

²³⁰ 'Doings of the Sunbeam', p. 9.

the character'.²³¹ Family likeness in particular, he suggests, reveals itself through portraiture, which offers a rich field of study for 'the physiologist and the moralist'.²³²

Searching questions around identity and selfhood in the age of cheap portraiture are also at the centre of Sala's highly original piece 'The Philosophy of Yourself', published in *All the Year Round* in 1863. The 'carte de visite movement is full of strange features and stranger helps to insight', he writes, and it all hinges on one's attention to external particulars: 'You can't disguise your wig in a carte de visite. The false parting WILL come out. Padding is easily detected. The rods of crinoline are defined'.²³³ Furthermore, while in public spaces, our attention is naturally fixated on other people (so as to 'observe their ways, and gather truth and knowledge'), but in homely solitude the new technology should be employed as a means of self-examination (392). Echoing the motto of the period's self-help movement ('Know thyself'), the author thus advises his readers to be photographed regularly, 'not for public exhibition, but for private contemplation' (393). However, sitters must be willing to forego any form of fictionalisation or embellishment ('repudiate the traditional book, or pencil, or scroll, and kick away the carefully draped table, the eternal arm-chair'), though not for aesthetic reasons, but rather as a means of exploring photography's social and emotional potential in new ways (393).

²³¹ 'Doings of the Sunbeam', p. 9.

²³² 'Doings of the Sunbeam', p. 10.

²³³ [George Augustus Sala] 'The Philosophy of Yourself', *All the Year Round* 9, 20 June 1863, 391-394 (pp. 393-394). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

In rejecting mid-nineteenth-century portrait conventions, however, the author (and photographic subject) is also refusing to be subsumed into the hegemonic notion of comfortable domesticity as the defining feature of one's personality. Indeed, the chronological, autobiographical album collection that Sala is advocating should be actively disassociated from other forms of usage, studied in solitude and contained separately ('locked in your bedroom drawer') (393). In withholding his 'multiple effigies' from public (or even semi-public) viewing, then, he is effectively renouncing the dominant social function of Victorian photographic portraiture and framing the *carte de visite* form with a different agenda, one that is informed by a new theorisation of selfhood. Thus, 'The Philosophy of Yourself' can be read as a critique of a technology that is coupled with conspicuous forms of social discipline operating across a wide spectrum of institutions, the family in particular, but at the same time as an engagement with its more complex configurations. Indeed, what Sala speaks of, in essence, is a surveillance that is interiorised, self-imposed and, in a new sense, privatised, invoking patterns that are, as argued by Foucault, gradually being dispersed and generalized into 'lighter, more rapid, more effective' forms of 'subtle coercion'.²³⁴

Trading Fantasies: The Imaginary Potentiality of Everyday Things

The ubiquitous presence of photographs and photographic accessories in the expanding urban visual landscape of the 1860s – in shop-windows, on street-boards, in advertisements – begins to explain why the topic continues to

²³⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 209.

generate discussion in the family periodical. The visibility of photography in public spaces is crucial because it connects the medium with a wide matrix of ideas that are being advanced in family journals, and the compelling allure of photography in the streets of towns and cities emerges as a subject matter in its own right in *All the Year Round* (even if the general attitude is less flattering than before). In a rare comment on photography, Dickens, writing as 'The Uncommercial traveller', reflects on the compulsion in this period to be photographed ('one of three things clamorously required') and to experience the domains of those 'seam-worn artists' with their 'large collection of likenesses'.²³⁵

But it was not necessary to purchase photographs, or indeed sit for them, in order to indulge in this cultural practice: 'The entire aspect of the shop-world of London has undergone a material change since Mr. Archer invented the collodion process', the *Leisure Hour* proclaims in 1859, photographs 'occupy ... about as much space as the placards of the bill-sticker'.²³⁶ A decade later, *All the Year Round's* 'Looking in at Shop-Windows', captures the compelling visual abundance available to men and women of all ages and 'all classes of society' in the city street, reporting that an entranced public drift 'from the window of the photograph dealer to the window of the jeweller, and from the window of the tobacconist to the window of the hairdresser'.²³⁷ 'The photographic shops are always encircled by a crowd of gazers', we learn, for

²³⁵ [Charles Dickens] 'The Uncommercial Traveller', *All the Year Round* 2, 29 September 1860, 588-591 (p. 590).

²³⁶ 'Correct Likeness! Only a Shilling!', p. 508.

²³⁷ [Anon.] 'Looking in at Shop Windows', *All the Year Round* 2 N.S., 12 June 1869, 37-43 (p. 37). All further references to this article are given parenthetically in the text.

‘there is always plenty to look at there. Does an individual achieve celebrity? He or she is to be seen photographed all over town within a week. Notoriety? Same result. Infamy? Same result’ (42). The somewhat jaded tone and general flippancy of these remarks indicates that by the end of the decade commercial portraiture has certainly shed some of its former social prestige. Having decisively drifted away from refined tastes, the popular forms of photography have come to reflect the transitory interests and fashion-driven life style of the expanding metropolis. As *All the Year Round* points out: ‘The window of a large photographic shop affords a capital means of judging of the tone of the public mind at any given moment’ (42). But the street has also become a window into the interior, accordingly: ‘An experienced Londoner ... might say with certainty from inspection of the *cartes-de-visite* in the shop windows what would be the prominent subjects of conversation at his first dinner party’ (42).

Photographic displays in shop-windows did not only allow spectators to gaze at the city’s social life, its topographical cards also offered means of fantasising about places removed from the domestic hearth via picturesque images showing ‘the places you would like to go to’: ‘Dark silent pine-woods, shady and cool; rushing torrents, ice caves, snow fields ... are mercilessly presented to the view of the compulsory stay-at-home’ (42). These motifs seem to go some way in fulfilling the promise that popular and affordable forms of photography would encourage higher sentiments in the public by providing an alternative to the sheer tawdriness of the city environment. Writing in *All the Year Round* in 1859, Sala, like many contemporaries, certainly acknowledged

the various benefits of the 'stereoscopic mania' that has 'taken possession of London': 'It is very good, I think, to look on marvellous transcripts of nature.... There are the Grand Mulets, there is the Court of Lions, there is the Almeda of Seville'.²³⁸ According to the *London Review* in 1863, the images produced by the London Stereoscopic Company ('from man to oysters and seaweeds to monkeys, from ripples on the shore to palaces and churches') promote 'intellectual habits' and 'more sensitive feelings' in 'every household where the inmates are educated'.²³⁹ But the 'usefulness' of the new medium as a means of exporting culture to the middle and even lower classes (as Sala recognised) would not stand uncontested. 'The problem with the new technologies', Lynda Nead points out, 'was that they had been harnessed to low, popular taste'.²⁴⁰

Nevertheless, benefitting from an already established penchant for visual spectacles amongst urban crowds, stereoscopic photography was a phenomenal mid-century success. But by contrast, (and notwithstanding the problematically 'immense range of subjects' on offer in stereoscopic slides), advertising campaigns in the periodical press tell us that the medium was promoted above all as a familial form of visual entertainment to be enjoyed in the domestic interior. One illustrated advertisement by the London Stereoscopic Company declares it 'unapproached for the exquisite entertainment it affords in the social and domestic circle', acclaiming the stereoscope's suitability as a wedding present and a means of recording domestic rituals, including 'portraits of the bride and bride groom at the altar,

²³⁸ 'Since this Old Cap was New', p. 79.

²³⁹ [Anon.] 'Photography as an Industry', *London Review*, 22 August 1863, 213-214 (p. 214).

²⁴⁰ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 151.

the marriage-ceremony, with clergyman, bridesmaids &c.' (figure 6). The advertisement is suggestive of a careful negotiation between interior and the exterior life, so that by alternating between text and image, viewers are able to extract a promise of worldly participation, whilst maintaining a virtuous domestic seclusion. Taking Benjamin's notion of the period's penchant for redefining the drawing room as 'a box in the world theatre', William Merrin remarks: 'Separated from the world, the bourgeoisie discovers it again by looking inwards, finding, in the closed cases of the stereoscope, a safe captured, selected and entertaining world'.²⁴¹ Incorporated into the illustration vignette is the slogan 'No home without a stereoscope', indicating the firm's aspiration of reaching into the homes of 'every class of persons'. Readers are invited vicariously to enjoy the pleasures of this virtual drawing room and to imagine the photographs contained within the stereoscopic viewers. The stereoscope in the drawing forms part of the rich index of material goods that define the scene: the billowing curtain, ornately framed picture, musical instrument, lit hearth and the chandelier, a feature augmented by its reflection in the large mirror above the mantelpiece. The London Stereoscopic Company's attention to the surrounding milieu is, as Thad Logan makes clear in her discussion of visual representations of the Victorian parlour, 'extra, superfluous, yet essential'.²⁴² Interior detail, Logan writes, 'does ideological work: homes are lavishly decorated ... to mark their

²⁴¹ Merrin, 'Skylights onto Infinity', p. 170.

²⁴² Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 205.

separation from the market place, to mask the fact of their participation in the narrative of capitalism'.²⁴³

²⁴³ Logan, *The Victorian Parlour*, p. 204.



Copyright Image

Figure 6.

London Stereoscopic Company, advertisement (detail), National Magazine 1, January 1857. Reproduced from an image produced by ProQuest LLC

Certainly, the palimpsestic arrangement with the photographic equipment at its centre, animates Benjamin's perception of the nineteenth century's intense desire for containment of the world and the self, experiencing 'the residence as a receptacle for the person, as it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case'.²⁴⁴ Even further to Merrin's cogent analysis of this mid-century photographic device as one associated with familial isolation within a private sphere, a micro-world set apart from communal spaces, I argue that the images and articles discussed here are indicative of a rather more complex experience of private and public photographic gazing. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the discourse on photography in *Household Words*, *All the Year Round* and other publications aimed at a general, domestic readership brings to the fore Benjamin's more problematic understanding of the private and public milieu as deeply interconnected.

An Innocent Pastime? Photography and Public Morality

The domestic idealism propagated in advertising and articles occurred alongside increasing concerns over photography's pernicious influence on public morale. Adding to this, a salient feature of the critique in this period – a time when photographic techniques and processes were becoming broadly uniform and consequently less topical – is a growing tendency to explore new social and cultural ideas. Sala's comments on street photography in 1859, for

²⁴⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 220.

instance, are located within the wider context of the modernisation of ordinary life. He looks toward 'the things among us, which have been born and grown strong and lusty and become affiliated to our households', and highlighting the advent of the printing press, steam engine, railway, photography, he speaks not only of profound material transformations, but the engendering of 'new types of life'.²⁴⁵ In recounting the social impact of photography, he is attentive to the experience of change itself, while at the same time carefully tracing patterns on the ground, including opening his account of photography in its present state with a speculative exposé of desperate, dissipated photographers operating in 'vile little slums'; a visualisation of urbanity that stops just short of challenging the periodical's aim to produce 'natural, pleasant, careful' material suitable to its domestic audience.²⁴⁶ Notwithstanding, he suggests, 'to peep through two little holes' so as to inhabit known and unfamiliar localities, 'not as a painters and poets have imagined them, but in their actual, terrible reality', is ultimately a great boon for the public (79). Interestingly, the article acquires much of its effect by building on the reader's prior knowledge of photography as a domestic practice, whilst at the same time using the medium as a vehicle to engage middle-class readers with more complex, unsettling aspects of urbanisation.

In part, the narrative tactics employed in this and other pieces concerned with the topic (for example, 'Looking in at Shop-Windows'), reflects Dickens' advice to avoid competition with specialist journals and to

²⁴⁵ 'Since this Old Cap was New', pp. 77-78.

²⁴⁶ Ella Anne Oppenlander, *Dickens' All the Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List* (New York: Whitson Publishing Company, 1984), p. 28.

instead seek out a more original angle. This is not to say, however, that journalists writing in the domestic press were not attentive to specialist views and interests. Indeed, the field of photography reveals the extent to which the periodical press is a forum for dialogue and exchange, with topics and ideas migrating across the boundaries of different types of publications. Besides this, the topicality of the stereoscope coincides with *All the Year Round's* particular engagement with travels and journeys, recalling 'that populations in Victorian times are far from stationary – that this is an era when migration through necessity and travel for business and pleasure result in a kind of perpetual flux'.²⁴⁷ What writers such as Sala clearly appreciated, then, was that photography provided a potent metaphor for the protean nature of modernisation and its ramifications for individuals, families and society. As argued by Warner Marien: 'Compounding issues as disparate as public morality, the effects of industrialization, and the value of cultural accomplishment, photographic discourse provided a new way to explain transitions and to articulate anxiety'.²⁴⁸

Verbal and visual depictions of second-rate photographers, profligate 'street-touters' and opprobrious outlets represent stock-tropes in mid-Victorian journalism, regularly deployed for comic or sensational effect, but seemingly without losing its ability to stir visceral anxieties about the street's vitiating force. As *John Bull* sternly remarks in 1858 (in reference to 'tradesmen [in stereocards] ... engaged in pandering to a prurient condition of public taste'):

²⁴⁷ Mackenzie, Winyard and Drew, '*All the Year Round*, Volume I, 30 April-22 October 1859, Nos. 1-26', p. 266.

²⁴⁸ Warner Marien, *Photography and its Critics*, p. XV.

‘[The] stereoscope is one thing; the stereoscope-shop is another’.²⁴⁹

Encountering photographic imagery in public spaces represents a seemingly endless source of titillating amusement for readers of *Punch*, not infrequently incorporating salacious hints. A representative cartoon from 1859 shows a gentleman peering into the peepholes of what appears to be a stereoscope rigged up in a shop window, before being shoved by two young lads; small groups of men and women further down are apparently too preoccupied with the window display to notice the incident (figure 7). There can be no doubt that the presence of several women in the background surreptitiously adds a layer to *Punch's* intervention, by recalling that fears pertaining to the dissemination of mass-produced visual forms can frequently be traced back to a progressively anxious

²⁴⁹ [Anon.] ‘Art, Morals, and the Stereoscope’, *John Bull and Britannia*, 1 November 1858, 697 (p. 697).

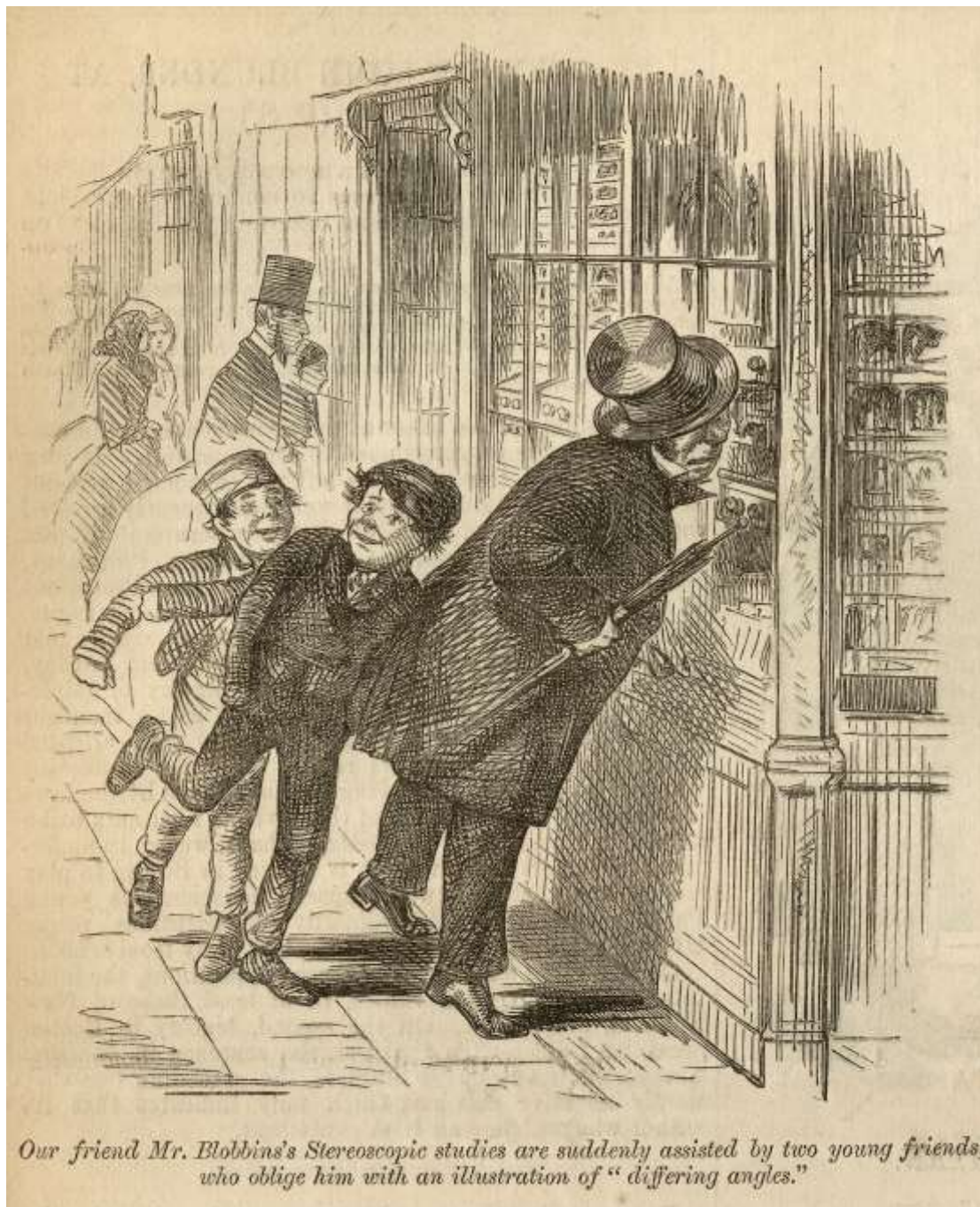


Figure 7.

'Our Friend Mr. Blobbins's Stereoscopic studies are suddenly assisted by two young Friends, who oblige him with an illustration of "differing angles", Punch 65, 16 April 1859. Reproduced with permission of Cardiff University Library

media debate on gender, sexuality and domesticity. By the middle of the century *Punch* was a pacesetter in periodical journalism and its contributions were regularly reproduced on the pages of other periodicals. As this cartoon begins to suggest, the use of comedy as a vehicle for social and cultural commentary often loosened the discursive boundaries, allowing artists and writers to push against the edges of what might be considered 'good taste' in middle-class circles. 'Acting as urban eyes on the prowl, comic periodicals "read" and "represented" evidence taken from crowded streets', Banta argues, 'although they often stated their desire to protect the sacred privacies of home and domestic virtue from contaminants seeping in from the outside world'.²⁵⁰

Others saw the photographic provocation in terms of the expansion of the print industry *per se*, which is to say the general progress made in virtually all areas of the 'communication circuit' (including production, labour, transportation, retail opportunities, expanding audiences), developments that are in the case of photography more or less unfailingly examined in the language of class and gender.²⁵¹ As one agitated *Photographic News* correspondent concerned with 'the prostitution of the beautiful art of photography' put it: 'I do not, sir, believe that the public are at all aware of the demoralisation introduced, even among the higher class of females.... Stereoscopes of the most obscene and lascivious character are in more

²⁵⁰ Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), p. 23.

²⁵¹ Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', in *The Book History Reader* 2nd edn, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 9-26 (p. 11).

common circulation than is supposed'.²⁵² Another contributor to this exchange gives prominence to the role of advertisements ('offering employment to young ladies ... and thus, probably, not a few poor women are lured to destruction') and mass circulars ('descriptive of their infamous wares'), targeting, as we may infer, male recipients in national institutions, including 'the navy, the army, the merchant service, pupils and tutors of public schools, students of universities'.²⁵³ These comments are symptomatic of what Simon Popple describes as 'a growing sense of moral panic and societal dilemma', in the decades following Lord's Campbell's anti-obscenity act of 1857, legislation that was to have a deleterious effect on the moral status of photographic print technology in public discourse.²⁵⁴ The challenge to civil society posed by the spread of nefarious print, the *Leisure Hour* wearily concludes in 1872 in the face of an overwhelming 'mass of corrupting matters' laid before the courts, has been 'greatly increased by the application of photography'.²⁵⁵

The published contributions discussed here reflect what Nead describes as an increasing 'sexualisation of space' in Victorian cities, in which, from the 1860s onward, the trade in indecency irrevocably opened up 'a passage between interior and exterior sites of production and consumption'.²⁵⁶ What, then, does this development mean in regards to the photographic image as a key form of familial narrative in the Victorian period? What significance

²⁵² [Censor Indecens.] 'Immoral Photographs', *Photographic News* 4, 10 August 1860, 180 (p. 180).

²⁵³ [Censor Indecens.] 'Immoral Photographs', p. 180.

²⁵⁴ Simon Popple, 'Photography, Vice and the Moral Dilemma in Victorian Britain', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 3:2 (2005), 113-133 (p. 113).

²⁵⁵ [Anon.] 'Varieties', *Leisure Hour: A Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation*, 13 January 1872, 32 (p. 32).

²⁵⁶ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 157.

should be ascribed to the fact that photography is publically accused of corrupting the public, while simultaneously being promoted more vigorously than ever as a medium for broadcasting domestic idealism? Crucially, can one form of usage be clearly discerned from another, the 'innocent pastime' disconnected from the thrills of depravity? Surely, these accounts testify to the increasing challenges the new photographic forms posed to the tenets of the period's home ideology, most especially in terms of gender roles and the moral integrity of the domestic sphere. In 1853 *Household Words* unhesitatingly described the stereoscope as 'one of the most beautiful little discoveries that grace the science of our day', but the combination of seclusion, theatricality and illusory proximity offered by the stereoscopic viewer also made it an ideal instrument for looking at illicit images. The stereograph became toxically bound up with Victorian erotica, so that by degrees, as suggested by Colette Colligan, it 'inflamed the nineteenth-century techno-cultural imagination'.²⁵⁷ Even so, until its popularity gradually waned in the second half of the century, the Victorian public continued happily to gaze through viewers showing 'every pomp and vanity of this wicked but beautiful world', but it is perhaps not a coincidence that *lockable* photographic albums, as indicated by advertisements in *All the Year Round*, are popularised in the 1860s (figure 8).²⁵⁸ In fact, what several of the later articles cited here communicate is the slow corrosion of public morality caused by a legitimate image economy that rendered male and female consumers largely immune to 'notoriety' and 'infamy', as *All the Year Round* tacitly suggests.

²⁵⁷ Colette Colligan, 'Stereograph', *Victorian Review*, 34:1 (Spring 2008), 75-82 (p. 77).

²⁵⁸ [D. P.] 'Larger than Life', *Once a Week*, 1 June 1861, 623-626 (p. 623).

However, the 1860s and early 1870s did see a multitude of indecency cases brought against photographers and merchants, events played out in the courts and the press. These legal spectacles gave rise to a feeling of public morality in a state of decline and, as Popple suggests, there can be no doubt that photography was indeed responsible for 'a discernable rise in the circulation of explicit sexual imagery for the first time in the 1860s'.²⁵⁹ However, the primary focus of the Obscene Publications Act was public decency and not private morality, a stance that helped avert some of the appalling difficulties of differentiation and classification. As conceded by the judiciary in one case, "there was not a photograph in those forming the subject of the charge which might not be found in every shop and on every drawing-room

²⁵⁹ Popple, 'Photography, Vice and the Moral Dilemma in Victorian Britain', p. 126.



Figure 8.

Parkins & Gotto, advertisement, *All the Year Round* 13, 27 May 1865.

Reproduced from an image produced by ProQuest LLC

table in the kingdom'''²⁶⁰ Yet the enforcement of the new legislation and the sensational publicity that followed in its wake adds a new dimension to the spectacular publicity that haunted an increasingly beleaguered Victorian domesticity in the second half the century. As Nead explains, the criminalisation of pornography from the nineteenth century onwards, brought about a 'reintroduction of sex into the public sphere.... it takes what has become the most the most profound and private aspect of individual being and transforms it into a public commodity'.²⁶¹

Photography in 'the barter market': Advertising and *All the Year Round*

I have come to the conclusion that the advertising columns give you more reliable information than any other part of the paper Now, as the whole of human society rests upon the principle of barter, a knowledge of the condition of the barter market tells you more about the state of your fellow men than any other information you can acquire. It may be a humiliating confession, but I believe the future historian of some centuries hence will gain a clearer insight into the social state of England by perusing the supplements of *The Times* than he would be reading through the more intellectual portions.²⁶²

Edward Dicey's comments from 1863, which appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*, one of the reputable family magazines that had come into being in

²⁶⁰ Qtd. in Popple, 'Photography, Vice and the Moral Dilemma in Victorian Britain', p. 129.

²⁶¹ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 100.

²⁶² Edward Dicey, 'Amongst the Mediums', *Macmillan's Magazine* 8, May 1863, 71-80 (p. 71).

1859 and 1860, attest to the fact that Victorian observers took a determined interest in the fugacious components of periodical publications. The commercial advertising pages in periodicals aimed at the general public added an important dimension to the display of goods on billboards, posters and in shop windows, by reaching into the domestic interior, thereby supplementing public gazing with private examination. But how do the advertisements interact with the discourse on photography disseminated elsewhere in journals such as *All the Year Round*? What ideological positions are promoted or contested in this field?

As argued previously, the interests, priorities and anxieties of the ordinary domestic consumer of photographic services, accessories and prints in the mid-century are often overlooked in contemporary critical examination.²⁶³ Yet, the advertising columns of the periodical press, as intimated by Victorian observers, offer an especially stark articulation of precisely such tastes and desires, and of the commercial imperative that steers the expansion of photography in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Tracing photography through the advertisements in *All the Year Round*, I mean to argue, opens up disparate and multi-faceted networks of possible meanings and usages associated with photography. Apart from photographs and services, there are the merchants proffering an array of mundane, utilitarian items such as glass and art material, albums, mounts, frames and similar products relating to presentation and display. Furthermore, the positioning of many photographic advertisements alongside treatments for hair, skin and teeth and

²⁶³ See for example, Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 15.

other assorted remedies besides, many specifically for 'family use', acts as a reminder of its role in the wider economy of every-day utility goods that were crucial in giving shape to idealised domesticity. As reflected by Hughes: 'Few persons are aware of ... how deeply [photography] has interwoven itself with all our social habits', how it has, quite simply, come to represent 'one of the necessities of civilized life'.²⁶⁴ The firm Claudet & Houghton's, for instance, placed advertisements in *All Year Round*'s columns during the 1860s offering general photographic materials and glass for assorted purposes, including the protection of fern cases, aquariums and photographic images.²⁶⁵ The business association between the company and the highly successful *carte de visite* portraitist Antoine Claudet is notable since it recalls the very real connection between photography and the commodity market. In the words of Stephen Monteiro: 'Claudet seems to have understood the lure of impulse in shopping, as well the attraction of photography as an exercise in – and the concrete product of – social spectacle'.²⁶⁶

A more vivid display of the mid-Victorian socio-cultural economy of things, and photography's role in it, is Parkins & Gotto's extensive marketing campaign, mentioned above. This to all appearances respectable stationary firm advertised a wide range of goods suitable to a family audience, most especially an extensive range of albums and an exceptional range of cases of the portable and domestic kind. Evidently a household brand in the period,

²⁶⁴ [Jabez Hughes] 'Photography as an Industrial Occupation for Women'.

²⁶⁵ See for example advertisements in *All the Year Round* 5, 30 March 1861, 4 (p. 4) and *All the Year Round* 13, 29 April 1865, 2 (p. 2).

²⁶⁶ Stephen Monteiro, 'Veiling the Mechanical Eye: Antoine Claudet and the Spectacle of Photography in Victorian London', in *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 7 (2008). Available at www.19bbk.ac.uk.

Sala regarded Parkins & Gotto as the embodiment of Victorian consumer culture, an infinite emporium of 'pretty little things', not unlike the goods-bazaar to be experienced at the international exhibitions.²⁶⁷ The phenomenally buoyant trade in photographic images during the album-era of the 1860s brought considerable profit for traders in the stationary business, who in turn promoted fashionable modes of collecting, arranging, modifying and displaying pictures. As the *Leisure Hour* noted in 1859, 'if we are to look at the industrial side of the photographic art, we should know neither where to begin nor where to stop': 'The consumption of picture frames in London alone must be thousands daily', other related products are 'in demand literally by the ton'.²⁶⁸ In 1867, the *Photographic News* considers the wider ramifications of photography (aside from its 'influence on the literature, as well as social life of the day') in terms of the spin-off markets created in the wake of popular photographic forms:

One house alone – and by no means the largest among manufacturers – has issued little short of a million of albums for the card pictures. Stereoscopic pictures have had a circulation only less than that of the portrait cards, and these as certainly involve stereoscopes as cards involve albums.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ See for example George Augustus Sala, 'Letters from Lilliput: Being Essays on the Extremely Little', *Belgravia: A London Magazine* 4, December 1867, 165-175 (p. 166) and 'The Great International Dry-Goods Store, South Kensington', *Belgravia: A London Magazine* 8, July 1872, 89-96 (p. 94).

²⁶⁸ 'Correct Likeness! Only a Shilling!', p. 509.

²⁶⁹ [Anon.] 'Photography: Its Social and Economic Position', *Photographic News*, 25 January 1867, 43-44 (p. 44).

Parkins & Gotto's advertisements from 1861 draw the reader in by incorporating detailed illustrations showing a series of elegant cases and their elaborate internal design: dressing cases, portmanteaus, mini-desks and despatch boxes, all accompanied by captions and price lists (figures 9 and 10). Beneath, the bold copy informs readers of the availability of photographic albums (as well as *carte de visites*) with space for several hundred images. Each also contains two practical columns, listing mostly boxes or cases of one sort or another and underneath the company name, the announcement of a 'splendidly illustrated and strongly bound' family bible edition. One senses in this repetitious arrangement a form of hierarchy and undoubtedly some of the items proffered would have been incompatible with the more modest incomes amongst *All the Year Round's* readership. The 'splendid' dressing cases, for instance, are likely to speak for some of a desirable, rather than actual, life style, while photographic albums (as shown in figure 8) appear to have been more democratically priced.



Figure 9.
Parkins & Gotto, advertisement, *All the Year Round* 5, 25 May 1861. Reproduced from an image produced by ProQuest LLC



Figure 10.
Parkins & Gotto, advertisement, *All the Year Round* 5, 31 August 1861. Reproduced from an image produced by ProQuest LLC

Furthermore, portable objects in general, such as travelling bags ('for Ladies or Gentlemen') suitable for tourism and travel, allude to a luxury not available to all. As the author of 'Looking in at Shop Windows' points out, 'the windows of those shops most set apart for photographs of scenery become terribly suggestive to the unfortunates who know that, by reason of work or impecuniosity, summer jaunts or autumn trips are not for them'.²⁷⁰ Yet, both this article and the objects in Parkins & Gotto's advertisement suggest that the Victorians were as a rule becoming increasingly mobile. But even (or perhaps especially) to the 'compulsory stay-at-home', the *idea* of travel appears to have been compelling as indicated by the wealth of travel narratives that featured elsewhere in *All the Year Round*. As the commentary in articles published in *All Year Round* makes clear, photography had made it possible for ordinary people (albeit vicariously) to familiarise themselves with foreign places and exotic motifs were ubiquitous in ordinary family albums (as well as in home decor). Indeed, both advertisements recall just how profoundly Victorian middle-class domesticity depended on interaction with the outside world in the process of defining itself. However, if these associations seem to probe the happy self-containment of the domestic fireside, a collective aura of pleasing domestic orderliness is at the same time projected by the lists of 'useful' objects, which by implication stress an understanding that the home remains the ideological centre of Victorian life. What is being enacted in these advertisements, then, is a delicate balancing act of being in touch, fashionably

²⁷⁰ 'Looking in at Shop Windows', p. 42.

worldly, while at the same time remaining attentive to the comfort, appearance and practicalities of one's immediate surroundings.

Advertising, as suggested by Jean Baudrillard, is 'a show ... a game ... a *mise en scène*' that may be enjoyed without incurring costs.²⁷¹ In fact, the actual commercial transaction is of less importance than the imaginary possibilities induced, he argues; the advertisement is itself a product to be consumed. Hence, even passive participation is a socially significant act that combines individual collusion with societal regulation, its function 'to ensure the spontaneous absorption of ambient social values and the regression of the individual into social consensus'.²⁷² Adding to this, the periodical market itself, reflective of society at large, was structured in a distinctly hierarchal fashion as Drew points out, whilst noting the existence of a more complex internal dynamics whereby 'magazines and newspapers (and their advertising supplements) sought to create the readership they projected, and addressed imagined communities'.²⁷³

The selection of some 3,000 different album designs attainable from Parkins & Gotto in 1865 is suggestive of the social and cultural impact of this product (the *carte de visite*, incidentally, was also referred to as the 'album photograph').²⁷⁴ Several of the articles under discussion here deal specifically with the experience of looking at photographic albums, but how well are the domestic rituals developed around the photographic album understood? First,

²⁷¹ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p. 187.

²⁷² Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, p. 189.

²⁷³ Drew, 'The Newspaper and Periodical Market', p. 111.

²⁷⁴ Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth Century Photography*, p. 4.

the contents of the Victorian family album were not limited to family intimates, as might perhaps be expected, nor was its display restricted to the immediate domestic circle: 'I exhibit it to morning callers', explains a writer in *Good Words* in 1862, 'to promote casual conversation'.²⁷⁵ Second, in contrast to the weighty materiality of its leather bound and often embossed, at times highly decorated exterior, the contents of mid-Victorian albums were fluid and variable. They were also capacious: The majority of the *carte de visite* albums were octavo size and held fifty to a hundred cards, although the quarto album had room for up to four hundred; with the introduction of the larger cabinet card in 1866, albums designed for the purpose appeared on the market.²⁷⁶ John Hannavy points out that when 'the *carte* became the standard portrait format for the album, thick pre-slotted card pages became the norm, allowing *cartes* to be added or removed at will'.²⁷⁷ The fact that album design in the *carte* era ensured that images need not be permanently fixed appears to contrast somewhat with the supposedly fixed and solid foundations of familial life. Indeed, this intriguing construction seems distinctly symptomatic of a decade in which the family finds itself drawn into the capricious vortex of modern consumer culture.

Photographic meaning is the production not only of image content but material and presentational aspects, actual, or even imaginary, qualities that stir the visual, tactile and olfactory senses. Thus, the historically specific materiality of photographic pictures, as emphasised by Elizabeth Edwards and

²⁷⁵ Ann Warrender, 'My Photographic Album', *Good Words* 3, December 1862, 107-112 (p. 107).

²⁷⁶ Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth Century Photography*, p. 10.

²⁷⁷ Hannavy, *Victorian Photographers at Work*, pp. 97, 100.

Janice Hart, communicates in significant ways by bringing into view 'a complex and fluid relationship between people, images and things'.²⁷⁸ In her discussion of domestic photographic collections, Annette Kuhn argues that the practices surrounding family photography are intimately bound up with the identity of the group itself. 'In the process of using – producing, selecting, ordering, displaying – photographs', Kuhn writes, 'the family is actually in the process of making itself'.²⁷⁹ But if so, what are the implications of the fragmented chronology, changeability and uncertainty over private / public boundaries of the mid-Victorian family album? What does it tell us about the family and how it saw itself in relationship to the world at large? Modern criticism tells us that the nineteenth-century urge to form collections of objects signal a need for control and mastery of a world in flux. The collector, Benjamin notes, is 'struck by the confusion, by the scatter, in which the things of the world are found', and collections are the embodiment of a longing for stability and cohesion.²⁸⁰ Similarly, Baudrillard emphasises the gratification involved in the arrangement of physical objects with its intricate interplay between singularity and sequence. This forms a reassuring contrast to the more complex demands posed by human relationships, he argues, although conceding that 'such reassurance is founded on an illusion, a trick, a process of abstraction and regression'.²⁸¹ The collector's game is hence always open-

²⁷⁸ Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, 'Introduction: Photographs as Objects', in *Photographs. Objects. Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-15 (p. 3).

²⁷⁹ Annette Kuhn, 'Remembrance: The Child I Never Was', in *The Photography Reader* 4th edn, ed. Liz Wells, (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 395-401 (p. 399).

²⁸⁰ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 211.

²⁸¹ Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, p. 95.

ended (it is tempting to think specifically of the Victorian album with its mobile cards, filled or, even more tantalizingly, empty slots), the sense of disorder is never fully assuaged and every corpus doomed to remain incomplete.

As I suggested at the outset of this chapter, the mid-Victorian family periodical, notwithstanding its commitment to promoting domestic idealism, produced journalism that exudes symptoms of an unfolding modernity and as a consequence, the values of home rarely look entirely secure in its pages. Dickens' journals advanced notably eclectic views on the impact of photography on the family and the individual; some articles decry the medium's vulgar exposure of people's private lives, others are distinctly cosmopolitan, forward looking and curiously alert to its revolutionary role in soliciting illuminating, if uncomfortable, insights. Importantly, the Victorian middle-class periodical press belongs to a growing urban economy based on a new culture of consumption; their prime coinciding with the decades in which cities expand exponentially and mass retailing becomes a fundamental component of life. Benjamin, for one, cites figures showing that sales in Paris' first department store amounted to around half a million francs in 1852; by 1869 it had increased to 21 million.²⁸² And, as argued by Murray Roston, Dickens was astute in his appreciation of how the widening access to commodities fundamentally altered prevailing attitudes to society, the family and the self, revealing through his fiction and journalism 'this peculiarly

²⁸² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 46.

Victorian predilection for displaying themselves through their possessions'.²⁸³

It is on the implications of that understanding that I will be concentrating in the following chapter, focusing specifically on the problematic iconicity of books and periodicals in Victorian visual culture.

²⁸³ Murray Roston, *Victorian Contexts: Literature and the Visual Arts* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 82.

Chapter 2.

Visualising the Reader:

Portraiture, Literature and the Nineteenth-Century Sense of Self

I. Photography and the Conception of a Common Readership

Domestic reading is ubiquitous in Victorian photographs of all kinds, from quotidian, impersonal studio portraits to art photography, emblemizing the period's intense investment in books and periodicals as social and cultural signifiers. But what can closer scrutiny of this visual trope add to our understanding of how texts informed and defined Victorian life? To what extent, do these images re-enact the desires (and anxieties) pertaining to education, social class, gender and the family that are woven into the public discourse? What do photographs tell us about the intellectual and imaginative experience of reading? The aim of chapter two is to examine these questions by arguing that photography in its first phase of industrialisation warrants particular attention given its intriguing synchronicity with reading as an evolving form of mass-culture, and its propensity for reproducing and reinforcing many of its characteristics and complications. More specifically, in further pursuing the reciprocity between verbal and visual communication in mid-Victorian print culture this chapter explores how the concept of a familial reading culture is transmitted through visual media.

I begin with an overview of the reading debate in this period, noting unfolding patterns in contributions published in *Punch* and elsewhere in the periodical press. Adding a further strand to this historical and discursive

framework, I suggest that the pictorial reading trope is inextricably bound up with increasingly urgent social and cultural incentives to scrutinize human relationships and the interiority of individuals, combined with the compulsion to impose on such representations a normative conventionality, manifested in photography by standardised poses, dress codes and accessories. Thus, as I mean to demonstrate, photography (from cheap portraiture to narrative scenes) is subject to a dichotomous critique that on one hand decries the expression (or promotion) of excessive feeling, but on the other rails against the medium's failure to convincingly communicate a sense of individuality and social bonding. Against this background, the chapter engages with a series of photographic word-image colloquies that suggest the complex signification of books (or periodicals) when considered alongside the ideological demands of Victorian domesticity. I begin with Henry Fox Talbot's canonical *A Scene in a Library*, followed by far less familiar representations of female readers by Lady Clementina Hawarden and Oscar Gustav Rejlander. The concluding strands turn to commercial portraiture by examining examples of what we might term celebrity at-home portraiture via a *carte de visite* sequence in which Queen Victoria and Prince Albert showcase the book's powerful potential as a signifier of wholesome middle-class conjugality, followed by a photograph of Charles Dickens reading to his family. All these images are constructed so as to invoke the virtues of reading as a domestic pastime, and yet, as mercurial contemporary exchanges on the topic suggest, they call for careful scrutiny since the benefits of books can so easily tip over into harm.

The sheer prevalence of reading matter in mid-Victorian visual culture provides a particularly apposite reminder that the education system, literary habits and the publishing industry underwent a transformation in this period, by degrees turning reading into a commonplace activity, a central feature of Victorian life and a prominent topic of debate. Thus, in this discussion on photography and visual representations of readers, the term 'literature' reflects nineteenth-century usage, broadly encompassing creative written work, including prose, poetry and drama, as well as related forms (such as journalism) written for similar purposes. Questions concerning the nature and role of what Raymond Williams calls 'polite learning' in culture and society bring to the fore new concepts that acquired prominence via the Victorian educational reform debates of the 1860s and 1870s: literacy and the democratisation of knowledge.¹ It is of particular import here that the family and the domestic sphere are central to the methodologies employed in mapping out literacy rates and the ways in which these skills, once acquired, are employed.² As noted by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, from the late eighteenth century onward familial reading came to embody a socially significant act.³ The consumption of books, they argue, constitutes a symbolic entry into 'the orbit of middle-class culture previously the preserve of the wealthy minority'.⁴

¹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp. 184-186.

² See David Vincent's methodological approach in *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 22-23.

³ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the Middle Class, 1780-1850*, rev edn (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 155-156.

⁴ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 156.

Richard D. Altick similarly observes that new reading patterns significantly impacted on the social customs of Victorian Britain, arguing that 'the reading circle was the most familiar and beloved of domestic institutions'.⁵ Of course, the privatization of reading was by no means a Victorian transformation; rather, this process can be traced back to the early modern period when an expanding book market made private ownership possible. Roger Chartier's historical analysis is crucial in understanding the role reading came to play in the nineteenth century's social and cultural prioritisation of the private sphere. As he explains: 'Conviviality, family and domestic intimacy, and individual retirement were three aspects of life in which books and reading played a major role'.⁶ Domestic reading took several forms and found expression in different ways from the outset, then, including solitary activities associated with educational work, spiritual devotion, but also making possible 'previously unthinkable audacities'.⁷ Reading was also communal, an activity pursued by husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and acquaintances; a pastime richly invested with moral, intellectual and emotional significance. Thus, Chartier's assessment of reading as a domestic practice up to the 1800s resonates in the era of photography when reading as a visual trope reconstructs many of these fundamental configurations and evokes its powerful association with domestic life.

⁵ Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1857), p. 5.

⁶ Roger Chartier, 'The Practical Impact of Writing', in *A History of Private Life III: Passions of the Renaissance*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Roger Chartier, gen ed. Phillipe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1989), 4 vols., pp. 111-160 (p. 153).

⁷ Chartier, 'The Practical Impact of Writing', p. 125.

The wealth of Victorian mass produced images depicting reading practices indicate that this trope played an important role in the complex process of delineating, defining, proclaiming but also, as I will suggest, problematising Victorian domesticity. Take for instance Richard Doyle's 1849 *Punch* cartoon, 'There is no Place like Home' (figure 11). The center of the cartoon is occupied by a stout, smiling paterfamilias, flanked by wife and baby; a newspaper rests on the paternal lap, while solitary or reading in pairs form key activities amongst the offspring. All are apparently blissfully unaffected by the political turmoil that is unfolding in the surrounding vignette. Martha Banta argues that Doyle's family portrait serves to extol the virtues of English homeliness, suggesting that the octagonal framing acts as a barricade between the family unit and the marauding, revolutionary rabble.⁸ Moreover, she suggests that the contrasting effect of juxtaposing the anonymous

⁸ Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 102.

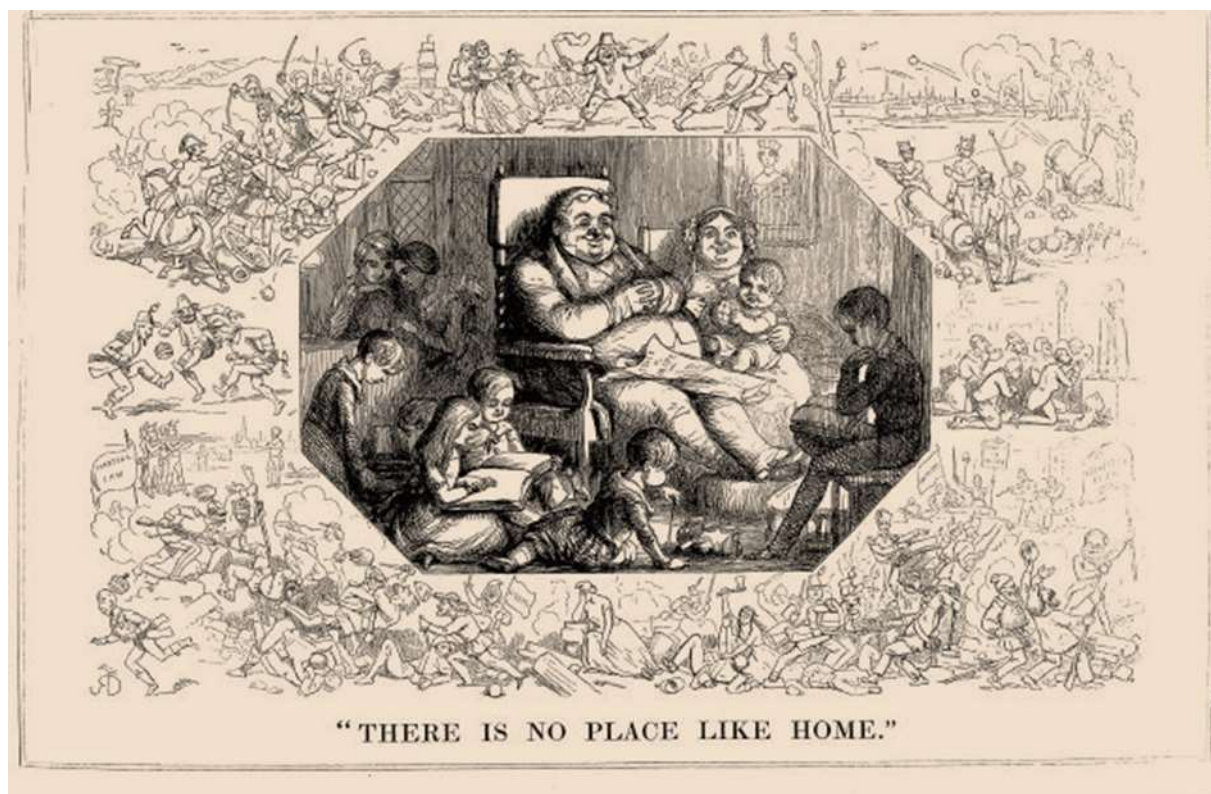


Figure 11.

[Richard Doyle] 'There is no Place like Home', *Punch's Almanack* 16, 1849 (n.p.)
Reproduced with permission of Cardiff University Library.

horde with the little familial group underscores the common creed that 'safety means staying cozily, claustrophobically, crammed within the English parlour under the beneficent gaze of Victoria'.⁹ And yet, there is no mistaking that the family is the butt of the joke, the absurd smugness of the scene underlined precisely by the (presumably) alarming newspaper headlines. In this sense, the scene offers an apt illustration of a critique suggesting that decades of domestic adulation has produced a nation of sentimental, soporific dullards, more likely to doze over the newspaper than actually read it. According to the *Cornhill*, mass produced texts and images play a key role in promulgating descriptions of Victorian home life that are 'either totally false, or applicable only to the rarest exceptions'.¹⁰

Literacy and access to books carry considerable symbolic weight in the construction of such domestic fictions, as demonstrated by 'the pictures which the correspondents of newspapers and the authors of novels have often drawn of virtuous mechanics who refresh themselves after a hard day's work by reading metaphysics'.¹¹ Highly developed literacy skills may also be tacitly understood in 'the wives of poor curates who can not only look after a large family of young children, but contribute the largest element to their husband's theological views'.¹² But as Banta goes on to show, Doyle and other caricaturists of domestic life are increasingly portraying the home not as a refuge, but as a boundless space subject to nightmarish intrusions by the outer

⁹ Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse*, p. 103.

¹⁰ [James Fitzjames Stephen] 'Luxury', *Cornhill* 2, September 1860, 345-353 (p. 349).

¹¹ 'Luxury', p. 349.

¹² 'Luxury', p. 349.

world (figure 12).¹³ In fact, notes of self-reflective irony are arguably already present in Doyle's 1849 cartoon, as the conspicuous absence of a unifying form in the arrangement of the group begins to suggest. Rather than presenting the family as a single unit, Doyle in fact casts six

¹³ Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse*, p. 104.



Figure 12.
'Useful Sunday Literature for the Masses; Or, Murder Made Familiar', *Punch*
17, 22 September 1849. Reproduced with permission of Cardiff University
Library

disparate clusters of small groups and individuals, without any apparent overlap or connection, something that seems curiously predictive of literature's role in bringing disorder into the inner sanctum of Victorian life.

Altick tells us that by mid-century the new availability of printed matter meant that 'hardly a family in Britain was without its little shelf of books and its sheaf of current periodicals', albeit with titles ranging from 'hair-raising episodes concocted by Holywell street hacks' to publications associated with pious respectability.¹⁴ As shown by David Vincent, books did indeed come to represent common household items during the nineteenth century, although he crucially also maintains that the correlation between reading and owning literature is generally weak.¹⁵ Further to this, Altick's remark seems to encourage us to think about the 'little shelf of books' in visual as well as textual terms and to consider what Gerard Curtis refers to as the cultural iconicity of books in the nineteenth century. Curtis thus highlights the complex dynamics of words and images in this period, arguing that '[literary] culture had become for some not so much textual culture, but rather iconic culture, a culture in which the book carried monetary and social value'.¹⁶ Certainly, his contention that Victorian book culture constantly worked towards finding physical representations of its ideological aims is especially helpful in understanding the connection between photography and reading as a visual element.¹⁷ It is telling, for instance, that books as commonplace props in

¹⁴ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture*, p. 16.

¹⁶ Gerard Curtis, *Visual Words: Art and the Material Book in Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 207.

¹⁷ Curtis, *Visual Words*, p. 271.

ordinary family photographs, are mostly, as it were, illegible, and yet function as powerful cultural and social signifiers, indicating that they constitute significant repositories for the shifting and complex relationship between the Victorian family, the self and literary culture. The present discussion takes the photographic representation of literature to be an especially apt reminder of the fact that the photographic image is a complex sign traversed by meanings, in Roland Barthes' words, 'a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings ... blend and clash'.¹⁸

What I am concerned with, then, are the different ways in which mass dissemination of reading matter found expression in photographs, photographic discourse and practices. Equally, I will discuss how photographic representations of books and 'readers' entered the debate on verbal and visual mass culture more generally. And while the primary focus here is not the social impact of changing reading pursuits in the mid-century *per se*, extant research in the emerging field of book history – what Robert Darnton (somewhat reluctantly) calls 'the social and cultural history of communication by print' – has helped provide a theoretical and methodological framework for the present discussion.¹⁹ Certainly, the study of reading (or implied reading) as a visual trope may further our understanding of the polyvalent nature of discourse identified by Michel Foucault. In examining what constitutes textual meaning, Foucault emphasises the importance of taking into account a wide

¹⁸ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image. Music. Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 146.

¹⁹ Robert Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 2nd edn (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 9-26 (p. 9).

variety of historically specific factors pertaining to the 'modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses'.²⁰ With this in mind, I would propose that seemingly peripheral iconographical records of reading warrant closer inspection as articulations of Victorian literary culture. Chartier and J. A. Gonzales argue that the history of reading can be perceived as revolving around three poles: textual analysis; the examination of books as physical objects; 'the study of practises which ... take hold of these objects or forms and produce usages and differentiated meanings'.²¹ But rather than delimiting these approaches, the authors set out to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of what constitutes textual meaning, stressing the importance of the reading milieu, the physical qualities of text, arguing, moreover, that 'reading is always a practice embodied in gestures, spaces, and habits'.²²

Furthermore, given this relatively recent turn towards the materiality of books in conjunction with the reading experience, it is worth considering the historical concomitance of photography and literature in the expanding mid-century market place. Printed reading matter and photographs, alongside other print media, are often presented in close physical proximity and the shop windows of booksellers offered an alluring medley of mass-produced texts and images to heterogeneous urban crowds. Cultural and professional fields, moreover, had a tendency to overlap in the mid-century and thus, as John

²⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984. Vol. 2, Aesthetics, Methodology, and Epistemology*, trans. Robert Hurley *et al*, ed. James Faubion (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 3 vols., pp. 205-222 (p. 220).

²¹ Roger Chartier and J. A. Gonz  les, 'Laborers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader', *Diacritics*, 22: 2 (1992), 49-61 (p. 50).

²² Chartier and Gonz  les, 'Laborers and Voyagers', p. 51.

Hannavy explains, it was 'quite common for photographers of the period to promote multiple occupations'.²³ The apparently resourceful photographer Thomas Chapman Browne, for instance, operated in partnership with a printing works and marketed himself at once as 'bookseller, music seller, bookbinder, printer, stationer, photographer, librarian and insurance agent'.²⁴ Both media are thus bound up in the discursive and social vagaries of a new commodity economy that responded first and foremost to the demands of an ever-enlarging market place. Lynda Nead shows how this collocation of different media in the market place was an important part of the mercantile strategies employed, something that did not escape Victorian writers, critics or the authorities, who understood 'the special relationship between text and image in creating the appeal of the new, mass literature.'²⁵ 'The pictorial printing-press is now your only wear! Every thing is communicated by delineation! We are not *told*, but *shown*!', *Blackwood's* magazine declared in 1844.²⁶ The gradual process of integrating photography into the market for graphically illustrated text is further indication of a new picture dominated culture, the article suggests, predicting that future social and political life will be 'daguerreotyped for the use of the morning papers'.²⁷

By 1861, the *Bookseller* proposes that understanding the domestic consumer of Victorian periodical literature (variously compelled towards the

²³ John Hannavy, *Victorian Photographers at Work* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 1997), p. 14.

²⁴ See Chapman Browne's advertisement in Hannavy, *Victorian Photographers at Work*, p. 14.

²⁵ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (London and Yale: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 155.

²⁶ [Catherine Gore] 'The New Art of Printing', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1844, 45-49 (p. 47).

²⁷ 'The New Art of Printing', p. 48.

‘wonderful, new, true, political, historical, or exciting’) calls for studies beyond private homes and public libraries, necessitating examination of ‘the broadside-covered walls, and the picture-filled windows, of our great centres of population’.²⁸ These observations foreground an intriguing reciprocity between the graphic and the verbal made possible by the opening up of the publishing industry in the mid-Victorian period, as well as the resultant erosion of the private/public dichotomy; developments that are enhanced by the availability of cheap photographic prints in the latter half of the century. As Edgar Allan Poe conjectured, ever alert to the nearness of the homely and the *un*homely, ‘it is the unforeseen upon which we must calculate most largely’.²⁹

As suggested, the expanding access to textual and visual commodities is fraught with uncertainties and ambiguities so that when the theme is taken up by the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, it bluntly declares: ‘Every one knows that the greatest purchasers of books are not always the greatest lovers of them’.³⁰ In this account the written word and photographic images form part of the maelstrom of marketable things, bound up with the general frivolities of a commodity culture that urges the ordinary consumer to acquire ‘cheap ornaments or useless knick-knacks for their homes’ (p. 165). The inconsistency and unpredictability surrounding the presence (or indeed absence) of books worried Victorian critics and writers, while handling, keeping and gazing at books without actually reading them constitutes a

²⁸ [Anon.] ‘Illustrated Periodical Literature’, *Bookseller*, 30 November 1861, 681-690 (p. 681).

²⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Daguerreotype’, in *Literature and Photography, Interactions, 1840-1990: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jane M. Rabb (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), pp. 4-5 (p. 5).

³⁰ [Anon.] ‘“For the Benefit of the People”’, *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, 1 May 1865, p. 165.

source of concern in its own right. The ambivalence attached to the usage, meaning and impact of books, as Leah Price's fascinating study demonstrates, disrupted the Victorian notion of 'the proper relationship of thoughts to things, in an age where more volumes entered into circulation ... than ever before'.³¹

Certainly, reactions to the reading trope in cheap photographs elicit a mixed response, as demonstrated by *Once a Week*'s comments on 'readers' in *carte de visite* photographs: 'Then there's Mr. Robinson, standing in a library with a heap of books put within reach of his hand. Now, all Mr. Robinson's little world know that he never looked into any book but a ledger in his life'.³² Here, photography has seemingly invited 'the lower stratum of the middle-class' (in collaboration with practitioners and 'no doubt they know what they are about') to stake a claim to a cultural and domestic domain denoting social privilege, wealth or education.³³ Faux libraries and book collections were routinely made available to sitters in Victorian photographic studios, adding new possibilities for poorly educated and even illiterate sitters to become 'readers'.³⁴ As recognized in the period, unstable representations of books in photographs speak explicitly of social change and a cultural hegemony that is being, in John Tagg's words, gradually 'passed on down the social hierarchy'.³⁵

A similar sense of ambiguity can be felt in the previously cited 'Photography and Bad Taste' published in the *London Review* in 1863. Here,

³¹ Leah Price, *How to do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 2.

³² [A. W.] 'Photographic Portraiture', *Once a Week* 8, 31 January 1863, 148-150 (p. 149).

³³ [A. W.] 'Photographic Portraiture', p. 149.

³⁴ Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London: Tauris Parke Books, 1993), p. 52.

³⁵ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 36.

the popularisation of photography is directly measured against the spread of literature: 'In these days everything is cheap – at least, most things are capable, so to speak, of being issued in cheap editions'.³⁶ On one hand, the author acknowledges the benevolent impact of technological advancement and the enhancement of domestic pleasure made possible by 'cheapened' (but 'correct') verbal and visual art forms. On the other, industrialised printing has facilitated 'offensive vulgarity', allowing, amongst other things, 'worthless scribblers to inflict their nonsense on the reading public'. Photographic prints have proven at least as 'liable to be perverted to base uses', it is argued, something which is evidenced by the 'sombre dens of Holywell-street and Whych-street', as well as 'respectable shop-windows', which merely 'dally with questionable situations'. Interestingly, this author perceives photography in terms recognisable from the literary and wider debate on sensation culture of the 1860s, namely as a medium 'well adapted ... to keep pace with the incidents of the day' and one 'capable of producing, especially when combined with the stereoscope, effects which are more startling than artistic'. Popular photography in the early 1860s, it seems, encompasses in equal measures quiet domesticity, up-to-date topicality and sexual ambiguity (with flashes of transgression of a more shocking kind). This critical response to mass-produced photographic images in the 1860s, then, combines strands drawn from the controversy around sensation culture: the perceived corporeal impact, gendered appeal and unchecked participation in a capitalist market economy. As Rachel Teukolsky suggests in her discussion of the female

³⁶ [Anon.] 'Photography and Bad Taste', *London Review*, 28 March 1863, 326-327 (p. 326). All further references to this article are from the same page.

celebrity *cartes de visite*, 'the image component ... added an element of fantasy, a web of socially-constructed visual meanings that filtered and shaped the physical effects of perception.'³⁷

Against this background, I want briefly to return to Darnton's definition of book history and to the communications circuit he employs to schematize the complex presence and wide reaching impact of books in the era of mechanised print. More precisely, I want to suggest that his notion of a dynamic and continuous exchange between a network of participants also offers a helpful framework for understanding the multifaceted progress and impact of mid-century photography in its various forms and manifestations. Importantly, Darnton models a dialogue between author, publisher, producer, distributor, commercial outlet and the public, whilst also encompassing, 'its relations with other systems, economic, social, political, and cultural, in the surrounding environment'.³⁸ This approach invites not only a more nuanced and inclusive analysis of photography's diverse progress in the latter half of the century, but also opens up for discussion the interaction between photography, other cultural forms and broader socio-economic conditions.

Crossovers between photography and written text are frequent and multifarious in the nineteenth century and this scholarly field has been the focus of several interdisciplinary studies, particularly from the viewpoint of literature. An understanding has consequently emerged around the ways in which photography added to the visual media that already provided means of

³⁷ Rachel Teukolsky, 'Cartomania: Sensation, Celebrity, and the Democratized Portrait', *Victorian Studies*, 57:3 (Spring 2015), 462-475 (p. 463).

³⁸ Darnton, 'What is the History of Books?', p. 11.

displaying, promoting and examining texts of different kinds, thereby expanding the dialogic relationship between text and image in Victorian culture. First, photography came to function, Jane M. Rabb argues, as 'a metaphor for the veracity and even creativity of many nineteenth-century writers ... a model for ways of seeing and representing'.³⁹ Second, key mid-Victorian art photographers, including Oscar Gustav Rejlander and Julia Margaret Cameron, famously explored literary subjects in their images and Rabb notes that Henry Peach Robinson drew on his experience as a bookseller and an avid reader, alongside his training as a painter, when entering the photographic profession in the early 1850s.⁴⁰ To Robinson, literature offered a means of invigorating the hackneyed photographer who, 'even in this kaleidoscopic world of ours', found himself in need of a subject: 'Then what vast numbers of subjects are to be got from reading!'⁴¹ In images produced by this second wave of amateurs of the late 1850s and 1860s, photography becomes a playful, creative and narrative form that evokes, to use Ari J. Blatt's phrase, 'the mystery and theatricality of the everyday'.⁴² An unusually verbal photographer, Robinson published more than twenty volumes on photography and lectured widely, often drawing attention to the direct interaction between texts and images. However, the day-to-day business of photography-as-trade, François Brunet suggests, 'was usually not considered to have much to do with

³⁹ Jane M. Rabb, 'Introduction: Notes Toward a History of Literature and Photography', in *Literature and Photography, Interactions 1840-1990: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jane M. Rabb, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), pp. xxxv-lx (p. xxxviii).

⁴⁰ Rabb, *Literature and Photography*, p. 59.

⁴¹ Henry Peach Robinson, *Picture Making by Photography* (London: Piper & Carter, 1884), pp. 65, 67.

⁴² Ari J. Blatt, 'Phototextuality: Photography, Fiction, Criticism', *Visual Studies*, 24:2 (2009), 108-121 (p.114).

imagination'.⁴³ Adding to this, Brunet speaks of an 'archival silence' in the case of many photographers, noting that few photographers published significant or extended commentaries beyond the strictly technical.⁴⁴

Thus, in order to gauge how the phenomenon of popular photography impacted on the Victorian imagination, it is necessary to move beyond the limitations of strictly photographic source material. As the previous chapter shows, in non-specialist periodical journalism the topic presents a rich reserve for observations, comments and connections that transcends the pre-occupation with aestheticism that frequently dominates specialist forums. In particular, given the present focus on photography and literary culture, it is worth restating that the medium regularly figures in exchanges on democratic, egalitarian reforms of culture. In these accounts, a form of continuum between the verbal and the visual can frequently be seen to emerge, as demonstrated by Wall's high-minded (and notably upbeat) declaration from 1862: 'We have in photography a discovery which is to art what the printing press was to literature'.⁴⁵ Oliver Wendell Holmes, with his keen interest in mass produced popular imagery, also associates the impact of the photographic image with the printed word, arguing that 'form-print, must hereafter take its place by the side of ... word-print'.⁴⁶ Photography, in his optimistic view, promises 'to make all mankind acquaintances' by reducing the world to 'an enormous

⁴³ François Brunet, *Photography and Literature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), p. 88.

⁴⁴ Brunet, *Photography and Literature*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Alfred H. Wall, 'On Photographic Reproductions', *British Journal of Photography*, 15 April 1862, 145-146 (p. 145).

⁴⁶ [Oliver Wendell Holmes] 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', *Atlantic Monthly* 3 (June 1859), 738-749 (p. 744).

collection of forms ... to be classified and arranged in vast libraries, as books are now'.⁴⁷

With this in mind, a study of reading as a photographic trope needs to transcend the border between high and mass culture that contemporaneous and more recent photographic criticism for a variety of different reasons often insists on maintaining. Gisèle Freund, for instance, argues that photography in the first phase of industrialisation pulls toward two opposing aesthetic poles, denoting regression on one hand, progress on the other.⁴⁸ Technological advances in mass printing, she suggests, effectively marginalised art photography, playing into the hands of portraitists pandering to the mediocre taste and variable income of the rising bourgeoisie and, consequently, producing images in which 'personalities are almost entirely obscured, buried beneath conventional social types'.⁴⁹ Yet, it is my contention that bypassing 'ordinary' photographs in the period leaves many aspects of the social and cultural impact of photography uncharted. Crucially, the widespread access and usage of the medium both by public institutions and diverse social groups in the second half of the century meant that different interests and priorities contributed to defining photographic practice as a whole. That is, as the initial program for photography lost its relevance, new models for the production, marketing, circulation, presentation and usage of photographic images emerged in response to shifting social patterns. As Grace Seiberling has remarked, to understand why photographs of the 1860s present differently to

⁴⁷ 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', pp. 744, 748.

⁴⁸ Gisèle Freund, *Photography and Society* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1980), p. 36.

⁴⁹ Freund, *Photography and Society*, p. 61.

those taken in the early 1850s, one must look past the confines of photographic discourse and practice.⁵⁰ It becomes necessary to examine the new conditions that shaped the medium and its reception: the enlarging consumer market; social and demographic instability; evolving discourse surrounding cultural consumption; the ideological constructs of family life. Moreover, the blurring boundary between commercial and amateur practice, as well as the eclectic ways in which photography interacts with other cultural modes similarly in the process of popularisation, signify across Victorian photography.

Cultural historians, as Jonathan Rose notes, are increasingly rejecting polarisations between polite and popular culture, instead emphasising a cross-fertilisation of practice and consumption and warning that boundaries inevitably blur and 'spill across class lines'.⁵¹ A comparable stance, although formulated from a photographic viewpoint, can be found in Roy Flukinger's searching commentary on photography's complex trajectory from the mid-nineteenth century and into the twenty-first century:

If there is a true art of photography it is to be discovered on different levels. It is found in the community of photographers that grew or stagnated, changed or would not change, during this era. It is found in the works of commercial firms and assembly-line portraitists, as well as in the cogently designed and finely prepared prints of major accepted artists. Above all, it is found in the

⁵⁰ Grace Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography and Mid-Victorian Imagination* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 104-105.

⁵¹ Jonathan Rose, 'Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53:1 (1992), 47-70 (p. 58).

ambivalent approach to the photograph of British society itself – a society that demanded improvement and innovation in all areas while striving to maintain its cultural status quo in an era of change.

52

II. Body, Mind and Matter in the Age of Industry

Images of readers, across the different areas of Victorian photography, expose with particular poignancy an exceptional fragmentation in attitude and approach to photography in the latter half of the century. In order to begin to understand this diversity, however, it is necessary to first consider the cultural, social and technical factors that shape the ways in which people are represented in photographs from the late 1850s onward. The most frequent and enduring nineteenth-century criticism of photographic portraiture, Walter Benjamin proposes, is the understanding that ‘it is impossible for the human countenance to be apprehended by a machine’.⁵³ To Elizabeth Eastlake, the failure of photography rested precisely with its mechanical precision and corresponding inability to convey meaning intuitively and impressionistically. Hence photographic portraits provided ‘facial maps’, giving ‘accurate landmarks and measurements’, but left animation to the beholder’s imagination.⁵⁴

⁵² Roy Flukinger, *The Formative Decades: Photography in Great Britain, 1839-1920* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 3.

⁵³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 678.

⁵⁴ [Elizabeth Eastlake] ‘Photography’, *Quarterly Review* 101, April 1857, 442-468 (p. 465).

Comments of this sort will be reiterated over the next decades; as late as 1891, Robinson complains of the prioritisation of backgrounds and accessories, leaving the head as a mere 'after-thought'.⁵⁵ Certainly, the *carte de visite*, principally a full length portrait, is also small, measuring only 4 x 2 1/2 inches, making detailed facial features largely illegible. Cabinet portraits, popularised in 1866 as the demand for *carte*-portraits declined, are slightly larger, but continue to employ material objects as a form of socio-psychological symbolism in the 'characterisation' of subjects. One implication of a reduced portrait size in 1860 is that dress, settings and accessories gain further significance. 'Every button is seen', Eastlake notes disparagingly, 'piles of stratified flounces in most accurate drawing are there', pictured with the exactitude of a fashion plate, but the face is 'unfinished in proportion to the rest'.⁵⁶ The camera encourages a superficiality and vanity, she suggests, more properly belonging to the market place and fashion industry than pictorial studies of mankind. However, to a general nineteenth-century observer, even trivial external marks and variations, such as those described by Eastlake, constitute indexical signs, traces, as it were, of the character within. The full-length *carte de visite* in particular, with its clarity of resolution and attention to appearance, provided a rich hieroglyphic text for the beholder to decipher. In this sense, the camera represents a new observational technique, a virtual aid for decoding bodies, one's own and those of others, in private as well as in public.

⁵⁵ Henry Peach Robinson, *The Studio: And what to do in it* (London: Piper and Carter, 1891), p. 23.

⁵⁶ [Eastlake] 'Photography', p. 461.

Personality, Richard Sennett argues, 'entered the public realm in a structured way', aided by the mechanical, industrial processes of modernity.⁵⁷ The result, as so many ordinary family photographs demonstrate, is an era of extraordinary homogeneity (and severity) in people's appearance. Personality, the endlessly reiterated symbolic references to home and hearth would suggest, is constructed in the idealised, sheltered and safe realm of the family, so as to gradually congeal in fixed, predictable patterns. Thus, according to Sennett the emphasis on social formality in the nineteenth-century is not restricted to how one presents in public, but permeates private familial relationships: 'The family parallels ... the wholesale world; in both, secrecy is the price of continuous human contact'.⁵⁸ Hence, neutrality and detachment did not, as one might think, give rise to a collective indifference to the outward presentation of others. Rather, it prompted ever more discerning ways of looking at people in order to detect clues to the individual shielded behind the inscrutable, impersonal, exterior. Indeed, this 'fearful withdrawal from expression', Sennett observes, 'puts more pressure on others to get closer to you to know what you feel, what you want, what you know'.⁵⁹ As a consequence, visual modes of observation acquire new importance and are privileged over other means of inquiry and surveillance. 'Portraiture', Sally Shuttleworth concludes, 'is conceived as a system of espionage, capturing the "true" self by reading against the social mask'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 161.

⁵⁸ Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, p. 148.

⁵⁹ Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, p. 149.

⁶⁰ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 41.

Notwithstanding its popularity, the periodical critique surrounding photographic portraiture was frequently hostile and in 1859 the review of the Photographic Society Exhibition suggested the event was overrun by portraiture, 'nameless and meaningless faces, like the cases you see hanging outside shop-doors'.⁶¹ But the author's disregard for '[ordinary] photographic portraits of persons of whom you know nothing and care less' does evidently not reflect the viewpoint of the general public. Further to this, attempts at the time to separate institutional exhibitions from street expositions (and thus, from popular taste) by ruling that photographs previously displayed in shop windows, or in commercial galleries, should be prohibited in the Society's exhibitions, proved unworkable.⁶² What I am highlighting is that the heightened interest in personality *as* appearance broadly coincides with the popularisation and commodification of photography and cheap, standardised formats that created new, fortuitous opportunities for scrutinizing persons known and unknown, at home and in public.

Taking a more accommodating view of the 'universal iconolatry' of the 1860s, *Photographic News* suggests that this new phase in portraiture offered 'a completeness' when portraying the appearance of men and women, noting how the 'small proportions' added 'a precision which secured complete identity'.⁶³ This development is not simply about aesthetic pleasure or even emotional gratification, but is linked to the medium's uncanny revelatory

⁶¹ [Anon.] 'Exhibition of the Photographic Society', *Literary Gazette*, 15 January 1859, 87-89 (p. 87). All further references to this article are from the same page.

⁶² 'Exhibition of the Photographic Society', p. 87.

⁶³ [Anon.] 'Photographic Portraiture', *Photographic News*, 9 November 1866, 534-536 (p. 534).

effect. As the author explains, 'it brings out characteristics of race and mental capacity scarcely seen in the original' and '[unexpected] family likeness is at times suddenly revealed': 'While we give it credit for only depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth no painter would ever venture upon'.⁶⁴ It would be a mistake, then, to regard the proclivity to fixed, constricted configurations evidenced by unremarkable, everyday portraits of this era as disconnected from questions pertaining to selfhood and identity: they are symptomatic of a fundamental, albeit complex, engagement. Even small, mass produced photographic images, passed from hand to hand, slotted into albums, or displayed in shop windows, on domestic walls and mantelpieces can be seen as manifestations of the paradox outlined above: the problematic desire to look at (and be seen) by others, whilst simultaneously remaining opaque, impenetrable and concealed.

Contemporaneous commentators on photography regularly invoke (though not with clinical precision) terms relating to abnormal mental states when accounting for the frantic economy surrounding popular portraiture in the 1860s, describing this collective coercion as a 'craze', a 'rage' and a 'mania'. 'There are people', one contributor to *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* testily points out, 'who can scarcely pass a photographer without rushing in to get their *carte de visite* taken'.⁶⁵ 'They have got them, not by the dozen, but nearly by the hundreds' and, if travelling, they return 'with a trunk full'. Without overstating the seriousness of such remarks, it is notable that this

⁶⁴ 'Photographic Portraiture', *Photographic News*, p. 536.

⁶⁵ "'For the Benefit of the People'", p. 153. All further references to this article are from the same page.

persistent criticism is not concerned with aesthetic or technical aspects of the images themselves, but alludes to an ordinary social routine mutated into something more pathological. Books are no less tainted by a compulsive desire for personalised goods: '[There] are numbers who from various reasons are constantly giving orders to their booksellers for new publications, or purchasing volumes at railway book-stalls, or taking in periodicals', in spite of having little experience, and even less appreciation, of literature of any kind. The trade in cultural and ephemeral commodities and the collective ritualism connected with consumerism, it might be deduced, embodies wider anxieties about the boundaries between the human minds, bodies and machines.

Commentaries on the compulsion towards photography, portraiture especially, can thus be read in terms of nineteenth-century theorisation of habits, routines and repetitive behaviour. As demonstrated by Athena Vrettos, observations of this aspect of human behaviour offered important literary, psychological, philosophical and social models for thinking about people in the context of 'an increasingly modern, mechanized culture in which human behaviour, like industrial objects, might be mass-produced'.⁶⁶ Hence, mid- to late- nineteenth-century attitudes to the impact and function of routines on the lives of individuals and in society as a whole are imbued with a deep sense of ambivalence. Routines and habits are principally conceived of as regularising, stabilising impulses; conceptualised in the bleaker terms of industrialisation and patterns of consumption, however, such behaviour

⁶⁶ Athena Vrettos, 'Defining Habit: Dickens and the Psychology of Repetition', *Victorian Studies*, 42:3 (Spring 1999), 399-427 (p. 400).

denotes individual stagnation, social inflexibility and 'the difficulty of sympathetic identification'.⁶⁷

Worries of this kind are arguably often concealed in a photographic critique that tends to forefront other concerns, such as technical or aesthetic issues and the detrimental impact of 'trade' mentality and methodology. Take for instance Wall's comments on how financial greed impinges on the aesthetic principles that have hitherto guided the progress of the medium. 'We make portraits as others manufacture pins', he mocks in 1865: 'Here comes a sitter ... We cannot pause to pose; we cannot waste time by studying the sitter's character, features, and expressions; personal peculiarities are nothing to us'.⁶⁸ The photographic act, in this account, has become streamlined, automated and business-like; the client is no longer an individual, but an impersonal image-object. On the other hand, clients, consumers of pictures-as-objects, appear to have collaborated, for according to the manual literature, they did not as a rule come to the photographer to have their characters revealed and imprinted. In fact, tension between how people want to be seen ('like other people') and how the (more ambitious) photographer wished to represent them constitutes a recurring issue in the photographic commentary.⁶⁹ The French photographer A. A. E. Disdéri, for example, advises portraitists to guard themselves against 'borrowed and studied expressions' and to employ 'a good deal of promptitude of observation, and sure tact' for

⁶⁷ Vrettos, 'Defining Habit', p. 406.

⁶⁸ A. H. Wall, 'Excellence versus Cheapness.—An Appeal to Photographic Portraitists', *British Journal of Photography*, 4 August 1865, 402-403 (p. 402).

⁶⁹ Henry Peach Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography; Being Hints on Composition and Chiaroscuro for Photographers* (1869; Vermont: Helios, 1971), p. 84.

the 'faculty of imitation is innate in man'.⁷⁰ Of course, as Robinson points out, when the sitter is a paid model, as opposed to a paying client, the situation is less complicated: 'My models are trained to strict obedience, and make no suggestions Any interference, even from superior intelligence, is sure to go wrong'.⁷¹

Outward presentation, clothing and accessories especially, are all-important representational aspects of mid-century photographs showing human subjects, although in point of fact, it was not until the end of the century that the fashion industry would seriously begin to utilize the medium, a curiosity that may be explained by technical limitations, in particular the difficulties involved in reproducing colours accurately. Peter Robinson's 'Mourning Warehouse' on Regent Street in London, which opened in 1865, seems to have pioneered the field when pasting photographs in its catalogue of mourning dresses.⁷² That photography should first appeal to a firm marketing funereal garments is hardly coincidental, though the camera's compulsion towards sepulchral solemnity must be considered in both pragmatic and cultural terms. *Once a Week*, when offering practical advice to its readership, notes that ladies should avoid colours in photographic sittings, given the camera's tendency to invert them in an unflattering manner; make-up and elaborate, colourful evening gowns were discouraged in ordinary portraits for

⁷⁰ [A. A. E. Disdéri] 'The Aesthetics of Photography', in *The Universal Text-Book of Photography; Or, Instructions, Hints, Formulae, and Useful Information, on the Various Photographic Processes, Instruments, Art Desiderata, and Et-cæteras Required to be Known by Professional and Amateur Photographers. With a Chapter on the Aesthetics of Photography, From the French by Monsieur Disdéri* (Leeds: Harvey, Reynolds, & Fowler, 1863), p. 47.

⁷¹ Robinson, *Picture Making in Photography*, p. 51.

⁷² Madeleine Ginsburg, *Victorian Dress in Photographs* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1982), pp. 17, 53.

the same reason.⁷³ Faces also presented problems in portraits, the camera deepening darker hair and complexion, as well as amplifying any imperfections. People with fair colouration, on the other hand, appeared somewhat washed out. Black silk and satin was considered ideal as it permitted light to play on the detailing; white, however, tended to be over-exposed, and as a result presented people in an ethereal, ghost-like fashion ('the chief tabooed colour', as Cuthbert Bede reminds his readers, 'is white').⁷⁴ Thus, from the photographer's viewpoint, one can only assume that widows were thus rather more welcomed than brides.

Some photographers recommended use of the studio's own wardrobe (presumably to mitigate a certain predilection to dress, in Morley and Will's words, as if attending a 'masquerade'), meaning that people with no relationship to each other are represented in the same clothing.⁷⁵ Additionally, Bede informs us that photographer J. J. E. Mayall, being a successful and much-in-demand portraitist, issued the same detailed dress code to all his customers.⁷⁶ The opaqueness of people's facial expression, rooted in Victorian class-conventions, exacerbated the drive towards standardised appearances further: '[Well-bred] people did not allow themselves the luxury of public expression of emotion', Stephanie Spencer points out, aiming instead for a more universal mood.⁷⁷ It speaks to reason then, that small material variations

⁷³ [A. W.] 'Photographic Portraiture', (p. 149).

⁷⁴ Cuthbert Bede, *Photographic Pleasures Popularly Portrayed with Pen and Pencil* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1859), p. 42.

⁷⁵ [Henry Morley and W. H. Wills] 'Photography', *Household Words* 7, 19 March 1853, 54-61 (p. 55) and Ginsburg, *Victorian Dress in Photographs*, p. 17.

⁷⁶ Bede, *Photographic Pleasures*, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Stephanie Spencer, *O. G. Rejlander: Photography as Art* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1981), p. 55.

and the employment of symbols, such as the scroll, book or album, acquire significance and are read as statements of personality.

The combined effect of these technical limitations and social conventions was all too often that of a lugubrious 'stony stare' and 'unnatural rigidity', to quote *Once a Week*.⁷⁸ Men of the mid-century were, of course, already 'opting for the dress of death', black cloth, as John Harvey points out, having been adopted as the conventional garb.⁷⁹ But importantly the grave, mournful trend in clothing is not merely sartorial; it mirrors a cultural mood that prompts Charles Baudelaire to pronounce: 'Is it not the inevitable uniform of our suffering age, carrying on its very shoulders, black and narrow, the mark of perpetual mourning? All of us are attending some funeral or other'.⁸⁰ *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* published numerous articles on related issues, many denigrating the general commercialisation of dead bodies and widespread trade in memorial paraphernalia, funereal goods and services, promoted by an ostentatious or over-sentimentalised response to the passing of public figures. As Catherine Waters explains, 'Collins and Dickens object to the lack of respect for personhood shown by the exhibition and trade of relics of the dead'.⁸¹ 'This kind of trade is regarded as an invasion of privacy', Waters writes, 'because it involves treating parts of the deceased hero's identity as alienable goods: a "new use" found out in "great men" as Collins puts it'.⁸² Photography, unsurprisingly, participated in the commerce in several ways, as

⁷⁸ [A. W.] 'Photographic Portraiture', p. 150.

⁷⁹ John Harvey, *Men in Black* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), p. 23.

⁸⁰ Qtd. in Harvey, *Men in Black*, p. 26.

⁸¹ Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 132.

⁸² Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words*, p. 132.

indicated by soaring demand following the death of the Prince Consort in 1861, demonstrating in no uncertain terms that dead personalities were highly marketable.⁸³ The *London Review*, however, registered its disapproval of this public exposure of royal grief, finding it 'theatrical' and uncomfortably intrusive.⁸⁴

But death played a significant role in bolstering the trade in photographic portraits in far less elevated circles, the demand for family portraits being in large part, Beaumont Newhall argues, due to 'sensitivity to mortality'.⁸⁵ Children feature prominently in Victorian portraiture (not infrequently as 'readers') vouching for the new and singular importance Victorians ascribed to childhood and parenting. The growing nuclear family represented a specific and important target audience for writers, critics, artists, business entrepreneurs and photographers: 'The baby is often the key that unlocks the purse', one photographer matter-of-factly observed.⁸⁶ However, a child's death, as well as its birth, could be transformed into a business opportunity, as demonstrated by the period's advertising columns where photographers readily announced their willingness to take post-mortem images.⁸⁷ The emergence of post-mortem portraiture, alongside photography's more generalised memorial function, is indicative of the fact that Victorian juveniles were not only numerous, but also perishable, prompting Anthony S.

⁸³ [A. Wynter], 'Carte de Visite', *Once a Week*, 25 January 1862, 134-137 (p. 135).

⁸⁴ 'Photography and Bad Taste', pp. 326-327.

⁸⁵ Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: from 1839 to the Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), p. 32.

⁸⁶ Qtd. in Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London & New York: Tauris Parke, 1993), p. 108.

⁸⁷ Newhall, *The History of Photography*, p. 32

Wohl to speak of the period as 'the massacre of the innocents'.⁸⁸ Displayed in the Victorian home, or slotted into family albums, in many cases prominently laid out, these images formed part of social rituals involving both friends and family members.⁸⁹

Victorian photographic albums were ornate affairs, typically modelled on precious books, often with heavily embossed covers and gilded clasps. The obvious similarity to devotional literature highlights the spiritual/material dualism that underpins nineteenth-century culture; indeed, it has been proposed that the photographic album became a kind of 'secular Bible' in the mid-Victorian home.⁹⁰ This is also apparent in the period's so-called 'Sleeping Beauty' style portrait, an often artfully wrought and sentimentalised version rooted in Evangelical notions of 'a good death'. This idealised death narrative, in which dead children at times take on almost ethereal qualities, recalls a Victorian literary topos commonly employed in popular stories, poems, music sheets, ballads and plays. In mass-produced pictorial forms they are bound up in a new economy of feeling, one in which emotions are increasingly standardised and translated into ephemeral goods. Far from all memorial portraits evoke mawkish sentimentality by conceptualising dying as a victory, however. In many portraits, death is in fact domesticated, even ordinary. Mediated through a modern technology requiring 'a particularly steady character', 'propriety' and 'rigid deportment', the tremor of mortality and the

⁸⁸ Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 10.

⁸⁹ Audrey Linkman, *Photography and Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), p. 20.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, 'Introduction: Photographs as Objects', in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-15 (p. 11).

grief of survivors is literally brought into focus, made respectable and subject to the same ideological imperatives as life itself.⁹¹ Indeed, Deborah McDowell argues that nineteenth-century elegiac portraits do not so much commemorate individuals, as maintain 'the cultural ideal of the nuclear, conjugal family as corporate entity, as autonomous unit, together and whole'.⁹²

Notwithstanding its popular appeal, the idealised childhood death trope was criticised and Dickens himself stood accused of over-exploiting public sensitivity in this respect (as Chesterton famously remarked on the controversy surrounding Little Nell's death in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 'some implored Dickens not to kill her at the end of the story: some regret that he did not kill her at the beginning').⁹³ When reviewing work by the painter Joseph Clark, a representative of the narrative (or 'domestic') style in British art, James Dafforne expresses regret at his preponderance for the childhood 'sick-room' motif. 'An Englishman, as a rule, feels pride in his home and household', Dafforne writes, 'his sympathies are in unison with everything which speaks of home-affections, home-influences, home-pursuits', but Clark's *The Sick Child* (1857) and *The Doctor's Visit* (1858) were felt to dampen that enthusiasm.⁹⁴

Robinson's narrative photograph *Fading Away*, which depicts a young girl's death from consumption while surrounded by her family, was also first exhibited in 1858 (figure 13). The subject matter proved similarly

⁹¹ Bede, *Photographic Pleasures*, pp. 40-41.

⁹² Deborah McDowell, 'Viewing the Remains: A Polemic on Death, Spectacle, and the [Black] Family', in *The Familial Gaze*, ed. Marianne Hirsch (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999), pp. 153-177 (p. 156).

⁹³ G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (Kelly Bray: House of Stratus, 2001), p. 52.

⁹⁴ James Dafforne, 'British Artists: Their Style and their Character', *Art Journal* 15, March 1863, 49-51 (pp. 49- 50).

controversial; the *Illustrated London News*' verdict of the image as 'a sickly sentimental affair' a largely representative voice of censure.⁹⁵ Beyond this, the critique is suggestive of the particular complexities introduced by the medium itself. Most critics realised that the image was fabricated (the sitters being actors and the setting staged), but members of the public (it enjoyed a 'wonderful run in the shop windows') took it to

⁹⁵ [Anon.] 'Fine Arts', *Illustrated London News*, 15 January 1859, 59 (p. 59).



Figure 13.
Henry Peach Robinson, *Fading Away*, 1858 © Royal Photographic Society /
National Media Museum / Science and Society Picture Library

be 'real' and in response pursued the photographer with harrowing accounts of their own experiences of the disease.⁹⁶ But whether it was regarded as an artistic study or a record of household tragedy, it struck many critics as excessive: 'How few there are among us who have not to lament the loss of some dear friend or relative by this terrible disease', *Photographic News* asks, 'and whose recollections, and consequently painful emotions, are revived with such intensity as to make their visit to the exhibition a source of pain instead of pleasure'.⁹⁷ Adding to this, the journal reports that many critics objected to the 'absence of expression in the mother's countenance', as, resting the book on her lap, she looks seemingly blankly toward the consumptive girl.⁹⁸ *Fading Away* was exhibited six times in a short space of time and the subject of unprecedented critical attention, but it is difficult to bring the different viewpoints into focus. On one hand, it was felt that Robinson's unsteady balancing of fiction and reality represented an inappropriately intrusive and emotive study of domestic intimacy, on the other, that the characters failed to communicate sufficient depth of sentiment. The somewhat confused response to this photographic image is reflective of a more general tension in Victorian culture between a desire to depict human relationships and the interiority of individuals, and an urge to impose what Susan Sontag calls 'imperatives of

⁹⁶ A detailed account of the exhibition history and critical response to *Fading Away* can be found in David Lawrence Coleman, *Pleasant Fictions: Robinson's Composition Photography* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Texas, 2005), pp. 118-136.

⁹⁷ [Anon.] 'Correspondence: Exhibition of the Photographic Society', *Photographic News*, 11 March 1859, 8-9 (p. 9).

⁹⁸ 'Correspondence: Exhibition of the Photographic Society', p. 8.

taste and conscience'.⁹⁹ Photographs, as Sontag notes, represent a 'new visual code'; they problematically 'alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have the right to observe'.¹⁰⁰

Rick Rylance describes the nature of the mid-century psychological debate, in which selfhood, individual and social identity were centralised, as encompassing 'fertile multiplex interactions', 'compound with manifold sources and consequences'.¹⁰¹ Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty, moreover, point out that a general interest in psychological issues was promoted by the fact that many leading commentators published their work in periodicals aimed at non-specialist readers.¹⁰² The period's popular self-help literature, from Sarah Stickney Ellis' *The Women of England* (1838) to Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* (1859), along with numerous articles, often covering specific aspects of the topic, were also significant in popularising theories on the human psyche, not least the discussion over the individual's agency and capacity for self-discipline. However, the Victorian debate on selfhood is markedly dichotomous, Shuttleworth explains, exhibiting competing discourses in which the self is regarded on one side as 'an autonomous unit, gifted with powers of self-control', on the other, as a 'powerless material organism, caught within the operations of a wider field of force'.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 15.

¹⁰² Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty, *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 40.

¹⁰³ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 28.

The intensifying interest in the complex dialogue of body and mind manifests itself, amongst other things, in a cluster of psychological studies that convene around familiar internal phenomena – daydreams, hallucinations, lapses of consciousness, dreams – aimed at uncovering their impact and function. Importantly, key writers including Frances Power Cobbe and William Carpenter, posited that intellectual, imaginative and creative activities are continuous operations that traverse conscious, semi-conscious and unconscious states of mind.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, phrenology and physiognomy, which share the understanding that internal features find expression in external bodily characteristics, were popularised in this period and exert a deep and wide-ranging influence. Psychological texts not only shed light on creative and cognitive processes, but the ideas are frequently validated by deferring to literary examples, thereby opening up a multitude of potential associations and cross-overs between different types of writing and cultural forms. Jenny Bourne Taylor, for instance, shows how psychological theorisation is woven into Victorian fiction, arguing that novelists, such as Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and George Eliot, ‘took part in contemporary debates, pushing these theories to their limits, reinforcing and upsetting their implications’.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the diffusion of psychological theory into popular culture had important implications for pictorial artists, not least since it provided the public with a rationale and a methodology for decoding bodies, faces and settings.

¹⁰⁴ Groth and Lusty, *Dreams and Modernity*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ Jenny Bourne Taylor, ‘Obscure Recesses: Locating the Victorian Unconscious’, in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. J. B. Bullen (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 137-179 (p. 141).

In photography, the ability to convey the inner character of a model or sitter singled out photographers for particular praise, exemplified by photographer Oscar Gustav Rejlander whose popularity as a narrative photographer in significant part can be explained by the evocative body language and facial expression of his models.¹⁰⁶ This circumstance is likely to have precipitated his collaboration with Charles Darwin, in the course of which Rejlander contributed photographic illustrations to *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals*, published in 1872. One of the illustrations by Rejlander, entitled 'Ginx's Baby' after William Cowper Brann's popular satirical essay about an unwanted baby, depicts a bawling infant's contorted face and convulsed body. According to Edgar Yoxall Jones, the image was considered 'vulgar in the drawing room' (although popular below stairs), but above all it denoted an important photographic development, for the image seizes a body in the midst of deep emotional affliction.¹⁰⁷ Connections between photography and theories pertaining to the human body and cognitive mind are far from merely associative, then, for the camera, naturally enough, became a tool for recording external manifestations of mental processes in the context of scientific (and pseudo-scientific) pursuits.

Most famously, perhaps, medical doctor and prominent amateur photographer Hugh Welsh Diamond (to whom Robinson's *Pictorial Effect in*

¹⁰⁶ Niclas Östlind, *Oscar Gustave Rejlander 1813(?)–1865, Moderna Museet, 5 December 1998 – 7 Mars 1999* (Moderna Museet: Stockholm, 1998), p. 36.

¹⁰⁷ Edgar Yoxall Jones, *Father of Art Photography: O. G. Rejlander, 1813–1875* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973), p. 38. See also, Charles Darwin, *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872). Apart from his contributions as a photographer, Rejlander also poses as a model in this publication, illustrating indignation, disgust, surprise and helplessness.

Photography is dedicated) used photographic portraits of female patients in his care as diagnostic tools and as part of medical records. Diamond's visual representations of the pathological mind were also, in the manner of domestic portraiture, objects of display within the institutions themselves, as part of the treatment.¹⁰⁸ The practice apparently gained wider application and in 1857 the author of *Application of Photography to Lunacy*, reports in the *Journal of the Photographic Society* that 'patients are very much gratified at seeing their own portraits ... hung up as an ordinary picture'.¹⁰⁹ Diamond's curious brand of portraiture was not confined to medical institutions, however, but appeared in the first photographic exhibition in 1852, as well as in subsequent exhibitions.¹¹⁰ Thus, as both instructive medical *texts* and aesthetic *pictorial* artefacts these portraits are bound up in an extraordinary duality, representing, as Jennifer Green-Lewis so cogently notes, 'points at which the distinctions between art and science literally collapse'.¹¹¹

A Scene in a Library:

Books, Photographs and 'the testimony of the imprinted paper'

William Henry Fox Talbot's emblematic and well-known calotype *A Scene in a Library*, the eighth plate in *The Pencil of Nature*, seems a good place to start thinking about the parallel trajectory of photographs, reading matter, selfhood and domesticity in the nineteenth century (figure 14). Importantly, Talbot's

¹⁰⁸ Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 147.

¹⁰⁹ [T. N. Brushfield] 'Miscellaneous', *Journal of the Photographic Society*, 21 March 1857, 269 (p. 269).

¹¹⁰ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, pp. 128-129.

¹¹¹ Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians*, p. 146.

library shelves initiated new ideas of what Rabb describes as ‘the potential power of combined images and words’.¹¹² Moreover, it offers a literal manifestation of the complex intertextuality of photographic images, what Victor Burgin refers to as ‘an overlapping series of previous texts “taken for granted”’ by a given audience.¹¹³ Executed in the manner of an ‘intellectual self-portrait’, the image provides insight into the catholic taste and esoteric interests of the amateur writer-scientist-photographer outside the frame, as well as inciting the viewer to consider how book ownership in general projects one’s personal and social identity.¹¹⁴ In this case the photograph provides a fixed library inventory, a declaration of possession, showing several well-thumbed volumes, alongside elegantly gilded sets on topics such as Egyptology, science, botany, poetry and art, alongside copies of the *Philosophical Magazine* containing publications by the photographer.¹¹⁵ At the same time, the shadowy *vacant* spaces, which cause adjacent volumes to noticeably list, signify in this image by conjuring associations with literary activities. One senses via these gaps something of the multiple ‘solitary pleasures of the study’, to use Alain Corbin’s phrase, the potential gratifications of that ambiguously bounded and connected

¹¹² Rabb, *Literature and Photography*, p. xxxvi.

¹¹³ Burgin, ‘Looking at Photographs’, p. 144.

¹¹⁴ Blatt, ‘Phototextuality’, p. 108.

¹¹⁵ Geoffrey Batchen, *Creations of a Moment: The Photography of William Henry Fox Talbot* (London: Phaidon Press, 2008), ‘Plate 41. *A Scene in a Library*, ca. 1844. Plate VIII from *The Pencil of Nature*’.



Figure 14.
Henry Fox Talbot, *A Scene in a Library*, 1844 © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

domestic cell.¹¹⁶ Graham Clarke suggests that to restrict Talbot's book collection to a picture concerned with 'the thingness of things', a characteristic feature of early amateur photography's spirited empiricism, results in too narrow a reading; in the end, we are looking at 'a library, with all that implies'.¹¹⁷

The library scene seems to combine what Walter Benjamin describes as 'a dialectical tension between the poles of disorder and order', prevailing in the realm of book collections.¹¹⁸ Talbot incorporates in his image both a sense of the utilitarian value of books-as-texts and the tactile arrangement of texts-as-objects, which transform the physical space of the library into (as the title may suggest) 'the scene, the stage, of their fate'.¹¹⁹ In the latter sense, the photographed bookshelves (alongside Talbot's other images of rows of domestic artefacts) educe, as proposed by Jean Baudrillard, an insight into the pleasures of collecting and arranging one's property in such a way that 'the everyday prose of objects is transformed into poetry, into a triumphant unconscious discourse'.¹²⁰ Of course, the photograph is also itself an object to be collected and ordered ('[to] collect photographs is to collect the world', in Sontag's words), not only on mantelpieces, on walls and in albums but, from

¹¹⁶ Alain Corbin, 'Backstage', in *A History of Private Life IV. From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Michelle Perrot, gen. ed. Phillipe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1990), 4 vols., pp. 451-615 (p. 541).

¹¹⁷ Graham Clarke, *The Photograph* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 46.

¹¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed., Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 62.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, 'Unpacking my Library', p. 62.

¹²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 2005), p. 93.

now on, in the published book.¹²¹ But this ‘imprint’ in particular, with its visceral traces of usage and propriety, literalises Benjamin’s notion of a nineteenth-century desire to disassociate private, domestic objects from the marketplace and to detain, so to speak, a world identifiable by its relentless mutability.¹²² What I am primarily concerned with here, however, is what Talbot’s library shelves can tell us about photography, domesticity, literary spaces and the experience of reading within the Victorian home. Specifically, I will propose that *A Scene in a Library* and its accompanying commentary, forecast the intriguing synchronicity of mid-century privatisation of the family, shifting photographic practices and literary taste.¹²³ After all, Talbot, like other amateur contemporaries in the field, was alert to the fundamental interconnection between family life and photography from the start, although intriguingly only one image in *The Pencil of Nature* (*The Ladder*, Plate XIV) shows human subjects. Even so, he simultaneously recorded his home life in numerous images. In the commentary to *The Ladder*, he reflects on the pleasure of taking of group photographs, observing that ‘family groups are especial favourites’ and, as Geoffrey Batchen points out, Talbot’s domestic images are of an ‘informal and intimate kind’.¹²⁴

In the first decade of photography, the guiding principles derived from a shared notion that cultural aesthetics were tacitly understood, taken for

¹²¹ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 3.

¹²² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 19-20.

¹²³ William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844), Plate VIII, *A Scene in a Library*, p. 29. Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33447/33447-h.html>. All further references are from this edition.

¹²⁴ Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, Plate XIV, p. 42 and Batchen, *Creations of a Moment: William Henry Fox Talbot*, Plate 29.

known within the relatively homogenous photographic community. Early domestic photographic collections, furthermore, evolved out of the pre-photographic album, a hybrid form combining various media and a wide range of topics from science and politics, to art and literature. But in spite of these worldly associations, albums were personalised, constructed in a collaborative fashion within socially privileged circles. As noted by Patrizia Di Bello, the form denotes a fluid boundary between public and private life, what she terms 'culture as performed in a private sphere'.¹²⁵ Not dissimilarly, the compilations of early photographic albums presented by photographic societies, encompassed a wide range of pictorial subjects, mixing art subjects with familial pastimes until this generality gradually gave way to a more specialised approach during the 1850s.¹²⁶ Thus, although later amateurs naturally made increasing use of photography to document family and household, this developed into a discreet, privatised form of collection. At the same time, images showing playful, familial situations, frequently costumed and in tableaux arrangement, gained popularity, but the allusions were to be understood in terms of the conventions of narrative painting and illustration, rather than a reference to the family as a social unit.¹²⁷

In attempting to further understand the association between photographic practice and familial privacy, I focus on Talbot's tightly framed photograph of two bookshelves as a synecdoche of the library, a literary space that in turn formed part of the wider architecture of the family home. In doing

¹²⁵ Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (London: Ashgate, 2007), p. 41.

¹²⁶ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, p. 103.

¹²⁷ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, pp. 86-87.

so, I am suggesting that the viewer is invited to consider the changing attitude towards domestic space amongst the upper classes, particularly the diffusion of middle-class social codes and values in upper class life. As shown by Catherine Hall, the growing domination of middle-class domestic morality is central to the process of remoulding the aristocracy during the nineteenth century, so as to give them a more passable social image.¹²⁸ Hall notes how this increasingly finds expression in the internal architecture and social arrangements within private estates: 'The interest of aristocracy and gentry in more privacy, more segregation, was reflected in the building and remodelling of their homes'.¹²⁹ Such spatial domestic regulations of people and activities in accordance with gender, age and social status, although patterned somewhat differently in the upper echelons of society, are indicative of how the common tenets of Victorian domesticity were gradually woven into gentrified life. Further to this, Mark Girouard points to a narrowing gap between the rising middle-classes and landed gentry of old, with its most significant manifestation occurring on the home-front: 'An essential part of the new image cultivated by both new and old families was their domesticity; they were anxious to show that their houses, however grand, were also homes and sheltered a happy family life'.¹³⁰ By the middle of the century the defining characteristics of the quintessential English estate had been established as respectable, but not showy, suitable, above all, to the family and its private society.

¹²⁸ Catherine Hall, 'The Sweet Delights of Home', in *A History of Private Life IV*, pp. 47-93 (p. 89).

¹²⁹ Hall, 'The Sweet Delights of Home', p. 89.

¹³⁰ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 270.

This social shift can be felt in Robert Kerr's, *The Gentleman's House; Or, How to Plan English Residences*, published in 1864. Here, the architect makes clear that although he is not intending 'to deal in any way with inferior dwellings', the project addresses the needs of families belonging to the same *moral* class, united by 'a certain sense unvarying throughout the British Islands, namely, the domestic habits of refined persons', rather than income or wealth.¹³¹ Kerr's domestic architectural philosophy is famously constructed around the principles of domestic segregation and withdrawal, deriving from fundamental precepts of social and sexual difference. As an expression of his engendered approach, the library signifies a male domain, possibly as a constituent of a sequence of rooms to be occupied primarily by men, which form counterpoints to feminised spaces, such as the drawing room.¹³² Many Victorian estates were either reconstructions or imitations of older buildings, particularly in the English Elizabethan and Tudor style, in which libraries were natural components of the home. For, as noted previously, increasing commerce in books during the early modern period gradually made large private book collections possible, creating a place within the home associated with learning, solitude and self-discovery. The library and the study continued to embody privacy into the nineteenth-century, a space denoting 'withdrawal from the public sphere ... and withdrawal from the family, from the household, from the social responsibilities of domestic intimacy'.¹³³

¹³¹ Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman's House; Or, How to Plan English Residences, from the Parsonage to the Palace; With Tables of Accommodation and Cost, and a Series of Selected Plans* (1864; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 70.

¹³² Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, p. 116. See also, Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 34.

¹³³ Chartier, 'The Practical Impact of Writing', in *A History of Private Life III*, p. 136.

Talbot's photograph of his library shelves certainly exudes this sense of personalised intimacy, although the very medium through which it is conveyed begins to suggest that even bounded domestic spaces were becoming increasingly open to inspection. As Kerr explains, the library 'would appear, at first sight, to depend altogether upon the literary tastes of the family, and to be ... a criterion of those tastes'.¹³⁴ As a Victorian architect, Kerr exhibits an intriguing reluctance in designating the library as an educational familial space however, ultimately opting to define it as 'primarily a sort of Morning-room for gentlemen' (to remain, in some cases, 'essentially private').¹³⁵ Thus the library can be seen to serve multiple functions in Kerr's wider project, being simultaneously a material manifestation of the family's educational pedigree, and a space from whence the wider household may be justly barred from accessing conversations, images or texts. However, as Girouard points out, during the latter part of the Victorian period, the library was no longer seen as an essential component in the lay-out of large houses and may in time simply be substituted by rooms defined by an exclusive aura of masculinity: the billiard and smoking room.¹³⁶

This historical contextualisation of 'A Scene in a Library' is, I would suggest, made more meaningful by the accompanying textual commentary where Talbot outlines what he calls an 'intriguing experiment or speculation', which revolves around the use of something akin to ultraviolet radiation (as yet to be discovered) and its effects:

¹³⁴ Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, p. 129.

¹³⁵ Kerr, *The Gentleman's House*, pp. 129, 131.

¹³⁶ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, pp. 292, 298.

Now, I would propose to separate these invisible rays from the rest, by suffering them to pass into an adjoining apartment through an aperture in a wall or screen of partition. This apartment would thus become filled (we must not call it *illuminated*) with invisible rays, which might be scattered in all directions by a convex lens placed behind the aperture. If there were a number of persons in the room, no one would see the other: and yet nevertheless if a *camera* were so placed as to point in the direction in which any one were standing, it would take his portrait, and reveal his actions. For, to use a metaphor we have already employed, the eye of the camera would see plainly where the human eye would find nothing but darkness. Alas! that this speculation is somewhat too refined to be introduced with effect into a modern novel or romance; for what a *dénouement* we should have, if we could suppose the secrets of the darkened chamber to be revealed by the testimony of the imprinted paper.¹³⁷

As Carol Armstrong points out, the relationship between text and image is by no means self-evident; rather, one senses between the two a curious gap, a form of breach to be negotiated by the reader. In Armstrong's words, 'it is the reader who imaginatively fills in the missing link', so that the power of signification rests, above all, with the viewing subject.¹³⁸ What interests me, then, is the way in which the narrative quality of this ostensibly scientific text

¹³⁷ Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, p. 30. All further references to this text are from the same page.

¹³⁸ Carol Armstrong, *Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843-1875* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1998), p. 129.

comes to take the form of an unfolding voyeuristic drama in which the actions and the identities of 'persons in the room' are 'revealed' to the viewer by the camera. Adjoined to the library photograph – an incarnation of the 'darkened chamber'? – Talbot's enigmatic narrative appears to anticipate photography's future invasive function, its potential role as a tool for exposing and dramatising private life. In this sense, Talbot appears to augur how the initial codes and practices of photography would collapse in the decades to follow, resulting in deviating practices that would push family life to the very forefront of the field. For, as mass production turned fiction and photography into standard features of mid-Victorian life, both forms became increasingly associated with the 'secrets' of the interior, in parity providing channels for familial life to be 'revealed by the testimony of the imprinted paper'.

We might read Talbot's imaginative account as a speculation on a more uncomfortable crossover between domestic space, photography and fiction in the era of mass communication. Certainly, his somewhat perplexing narrative resonates with a sense of the uncanny, in the Freudian sense of an experience or feeling linked to the coincidence of the familiar and the *unfamiliar*. To Freud, uncanny sensations need to be understood precisely in terms of the slippage between what we might define as *heimlich* (homely, familiar, but also secret) and its opposite, *unheimlich* (unhomely, as well as revealed).¹³⁹ As Freud indicates, the uncanny is in several fundamental ways connected to the concept of the *unheimlich* and emerges as the corollary of that which 'ought

¹³⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey *et al* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 24 vols., Vol. 17, pp. 217-252 (p. 220).

to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.¹⁴⁰ There can be little doubt that Talbot's speculation – superficially at least, an ordinary domestic apartment – plays with these familiar themes, inducing a vague feeling of unease in the reader, precisely because it juxtaposes the ordinary with the extraordinary and threatens to leave a supposedly safely walled-in familial existence open to surreptitious gazing and exposure. Anthony Vidler defines the uncanny as the 'quintessential bourgeois kind of fear' of the nineteenth century, a domesticated anxiety broadly associated with modernity and social change, but 'best experienced in the privacy of the interior'.¹⁴¹ Indeed, maintaining the new rules of conduct purposed at controlling human interaction within large households relies, somewhat paradoxically, on careful negotiation between covertness and surveillance.¹⁴² However, in the face of evolving modern technology, as recounted by Talbot above, the privacy principle begins to look increasingly tenuous.

As Vidler points out, the uncanny began to make its way into the domestic interior in the first half of the century via ghastly tales by authors such as E.T.A Hoffman and Edgar Allan Poe, whose stories often accommodate meeting points between homely security and dreadful invasions.¹⁴³ And although Poe (surprisingly) did not use photography as a device in his own writing, he seems nevertheless to have appreciated its potential to influence a wide variety of spheres, remarking that it is set to 'exceed, by very much, the

¹⁴⁰ Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', pp. 224-225.

¹⁴¹ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. 4.

¹⁴² Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, p. 148.

¹⁴³ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 3.

wildest expectations of the most imaginative'.¹⁴⁴ But it is Vidler's notion of doubling as a key motif in such fictional tales that is especially relevant to this discussion, given how photography re-enacts his understanding that 'the other is, strangely enough, experienced as a replica of the self, all the more fearsome because apparently the same'.¹⁴⁵ I am proposing, of course, that Talbot's seemingly disparate photograph and text coalesce around similar, interconnected themes: Victorian domesticity, literature and photography. Moreover, that such a reading provides us with a projection of how the paths of literature and photography are to overlap in the ensuing decades.

In Search of 'some bond of union': Picturing the Domestic Reading Circle

The portrait is 'an especial favourite in England, because it appeals to the domestic sympathies; and this is the most domestic nation on earth', Henry Peach Robinson writes in *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, first published in 1869 and intended as a 'useful' (as opposed to 'pretentious') book of photography.¹⁴⁶ His words seem to echo Fox Talbot's enthusiastic endorsement of pictorial family groups from the mid-1840s, which asserted that 'the Camera depicts them all at once, however numerous' in 'delightful pictures'.¹⁴⁷ However, Robinson's contribution to the topic of group photography does not, in fact, replicate his predecessor's confidence. Rather, his commentary radiates criticism familiar from the contemporaneous debate

¹⁴⁴ Poe, 'The Daguerreotype', in Rabb, *Literature and Photography*, p. 5. See also Brunet on Poe and photography, in *Photography and Literature*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁵ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, p. 80 and 'Preface', p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, Plate XIV. *The Ladder*, p. 42.

in newspapers and periodicals, namely, photography's notable failure in this era of domestic zeal to capture well-composed, unified groups. It is in the arrangement of several sitters that the photographer's skills are most sorely tested, Robinson repeatedly warns his readership, and never more so than when the group consists of a family. Thus, the most pertinent chapter on this issue in *Pictorial Effect* opens discouragingly, citing his erstwhile colleague Rejlander's view of the topic: 'My advice to photographers on the subject is something similar to *Punch's* celebrated advice to persons about to marry: "Don't!"'.¹⁴⁸ In a later publication, Robinson's dejected outlook has not abated; if anything, it seems to have deepened: 'The portrait group is often nothing better than a pile of humanity fitted together like a dissected puzzle; a heterogeneous conglomeration of human atoms, and sometimes dogs'.¹⁴⁹

Photographers like Robinson and Rejlander ultimately came to employ and, at least initially, advocate a somewhat drastic solution to achieving harmonious compositions: combination printing. As Robinson explains in the final, separate section of *Pictorial Effect*, 'a picture can be divided into separate portions for execution, the parts to be afterwards printed together on one paper ... so that if any part be imperfect from any cause, it can be substituted by another'.¹⁵⁰ In 1863, Rejlander had reflected on what he calls photography's 'plasticity' and outlined the particular advantages of such a technique being used in family portraits, since it enables the photographer to 'take each figure separately — for then each would be more perfect — and

¹⁴⁸ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁹ Robinson, *The Studio: And what to do in it*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁰ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, p. 192.

print them in agreeably'.¹⁵¹ The article ends on a despondent note, however, for, shortly before, the critic Thomas Sutton had publically denounced Rejlander's most famous and elaborate combination print *Two Ways of Life* as an eroticised and indecent display of 'nude prostitutes, in flesh and blood truthfulness and minuteness of detail'.¹⁵² Clearly smarting from this damaging criticism, he rejects the very technique by which it had been produced: 'I positively dare not now make a composition photograph, even if I thought that it might be very perfect.'¹⁵³

Interventions such as combination printing, and the rationale behind the practice, illustrate the complexity of a Victorian understanding of the new technology as a realistic and objective means of representation. In a passage immediately presaging the chapter on portraiture in *Pictorial Effect*, Robinson rather enigmatically declares: 'I am far from saying that a photograph must be an actual, literal, an absolute *fact* ... but it must represent *truth*'.¹⁵⁴ This statement serves as a helpful lead-in to the central concern of this section: the familiar mid-Victorian photographic dilemma of how to provide visual affirmation of dominant social values, whilst aspiring to produce aesthetically pleasing pictures with artistic value. In the collective mind-set of the Victorian public, photographic portraiture was inextricably bound up with ideological demands and, as most practitioners were portraitists, their success depended on engaging with these needs. Thus, photography in its various forms by

¹⁵¹ O. G. Rejlander, 'An Apology for Art-Photography', *British Journal of Photography*, 16 February 1863, 76-78 (p. 77).

¹⁵² Thomas Sutton, 'Address to the Photographic Society of Scotland', January 1863. Qtd. in, Jones, *Father of Art Photography*, p. 24.

¹⁵³ Rejlander, 'An Apology for Art-Photography', p. 77.

¹⁵⁴ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect*, p. 78.

necessity combines the artificial and the real, conveying narratives that *could* be true, without necessarily being so. In other words, the situation had produced a form of impasse that led some photographers to resort to practices that amounted to, in Daniel A. Novak's words, a form of 'photographic fiction'.¹⁵⁵ Novak argues that Victorian photographers and commentators increasingly came to view 'the photographic body as a form of abstract linguistic material that made possible the writing of photographic narratives'.¹⁵⁶

Robinson's narrative photograph *When the Day's Work is Done* is a case in point (figure 15). The picture shows a domestic scene with an elderly couple seated in the interior of a simple, picturesque country cottage, surrounded by the ordinary

¹⁵⁵ Daniel A. Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 6.



Figure 15.
Henry Peach Robinson, *When the Day's Work is Done*, 1877 © Royal Photographic Society / National Media Museum / Science and Society Picture Library

paraphernalia of rural life. A small window emits enough daylight for the old man to read from the large Bible on the table, seemingly aloud to his wife, who is also enclosed in the oval halo of light. In actual fact, the picture is a composite print combining six different negatives and the old man a crossing-sweeper that Robinson had invited to act as a model. Once in the studio, the halcyon domestic scene unfolded in the photographer's imagination. Of course, 'the old lady had to be found, and the cottage built', he explains, 'but they appeared to me then quite visibly and solidly'.¹⁵⁷ Wall, although initially deeply sceptical of combination printing, came to regard the practice as a creative process that is analogic to fiction writing by suggesting that elements in a photograph are 'no more to the picture than words are to the poem or the essay'.¹⁵⁸ More recently, photographic scholars have also drawn attention to the parallel domestic habit of cropping and rearranging photographic images (often in combination with other pictorial media) into collages, in order to create alternative narratives. A less invasive form of photographic manipulation is associated with ordinary family albums, which, particularly in the *carte de visite* years, comprise a fluid assortment of images showing celebrities and intimates that could be repositioned or replaced with ease. Thus, Victorian mid-century photography as a means of recording domestic life does not so much signify stability and authenticity; rather it represents a new narrative technique and mode of presentation. In Novak's words, 'the

¹⁵⁷ Robinson, *Picture Making by Photography*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁵⁸ Alfred H. Wall, "'Composition" versus "Patchwork"', *British Journal of Photography*, 2 July 1860, 190-191 and Alfred. H. Wall, "'Composition" Photography', *British Journal of Photography*, 1 January 1864, 8-9. See also H. P. Robinson's contribution to the debate in 'Composition NOT Patchwork', *British Journal of Photography*, 2 July 1860, 189-190.

nineteenth-century family cut itself to pieces in order to better write the visual life of domestic pleasure and even domestic pain.’¹⁵⁹

However, in practice, most mid-century portraitists sought less time-consuming, complicated and costly means of addressing the oft-acknowledged shortcomings of photographs showing couples and family groups. Indeed, as some Victorian critics stressed the failings of ordinary portraits, advisory texts and manuals on photography, such as *Pictorial Effect*, exerted considerable effort on inculcating sound principles vis-à-vis group photographs. Robinson’s dictum that sitters must be arranged in ways that give a sense of connection is pervasive: ‘There should be some bond of union between those who compose the group Nothing has a more disagreeable effect than two figures in one picture which may be cut in two without much injury to either half’.¹⁶⁰ The impression of ‘scattered’ figures may be addressed, he advises, by introducing an element into the picture in which the sitters are ‘mutually interested’.¹⁶¹ A contribution by Disdéri from 1863, which appeared in English in *The Universal Text-Book of Photography*, similarly emphasises the importance of introducing a unifying feature, whilst complicating the matter by adding that a fundamental flaw in group-portraiture is the failure to capture the unique qualities of individuals.¹⁶²

Reading and books (as well as other familiar activities), then, function as pictorial elements that impart something akin to John Ruskin’s ‘emotional

¹⁵⁹ Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, p. 94.

¹⁶¹ Robinson, *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, p. 94.

¹⁶² [Disdéri] ‘The Aesthetics of Photography’, p. 45.

purpose' in family photographs.¹⁶³ From this viewpoint, literature represents a means of overcoming what some perceived as a visual fragmentation in portraits showing couples, families, their social circle, while simultaneously signifying emotional depth and variation amongst individual members within the group. However, J. J. E. Mayall's group portrait of the extended royal family, united in anticipation of the wedding between the Prince of Wales and the Princess Alexandra of Denmark in 1863, communicates the difficulty involved in amalgamating these objectives (figure 16). The central table top with its scattered books, along with the reading sitter in the foreground, invokes reading as a popular and respectable past-time in the Victorian middle-class drawing room. At the same time, the self-contained expression and pose of each sitter distinctly undercuts the projection of communality, leaving the viewer with the impression of a selection of individuals dispersed across a shared space. Difficulties in negotiating the tension between unity and variety in family portraits echo well-established strands from the arts debate, but what I am proposing is that these esoteric issues acquire a new ideological edge in this period. As Elizabeth Anne McCauley points out in her illuminating study of the *carte de visite*: 'The mood of a period, whether it was boredom from an artistic and social anaesthesia or a panicked sense of "loss of centre", nudged the theoretical ideal closer to one pole, without ever leaving the other completely behind'.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ John Ruskin, 'The Task of the Least', *Modern Painters*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1905), 38 vols., vol. 5, p. 217.

¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *A. A. E. Disdéri and the Carte de Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 113.

The tension between deviation and uniformity in photographic communication seems especially resonant in a period when questions pertaining to the cultivation of the self and issues of personality feature prominently alongside the conceptualisation of the nuclear family as an insular, homogenous unit. It might be suggested that the difficulties facing photographers of familial groups are indicative of a deepening complexity in incorporating individual personalities into the narrowing definition of the family. After all, nineteenth-century protocols of familial conduct fundamentally revolve around the desire to create a sense of order in the family unit by constructing mechanisms for resisting the fluidity and unpredictability of the outside world. As Sennett suggests, 'in the stripped-down environment of the nuclear family the child will develop his personality traits by removing variety and complexity ... learning to love and trust only fixed and simple



Figure 16.
J. J. E. Mayall, 'Group taken at Windsor Castle on 9th March 1863' © Royal Collection Trust / Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2016

images of parents'. 'Created love', he reasons, 'demands fixed appearances'.¹⁶⁵

Personality, it appears, in social and pictorial terms, threatens to introduce complexity, variety and fragmentation, while the 'fixed' (or to quote Disdéri, 'studied and stiff') presentation of familial groups fails to deliver a message of familial harmony.¹⁶⁶

Conjugal Engagement in the Victorian Parlour: Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

Mid-Victorian family photographs make a show of accessories and props, but as the photographic commentary shows, this amounts to more than a mere expression of home-love or sheer indulgence in frivolity and fashion. Domestic commodities played a fundamental role in the construction of a coherent visual familial narrative and given the emphasis placed on reading as a shared familial and domestic activity during those decades, it is hardly surprising that books feature so prominently. Behind such arrangements lingers the concept of a family readership, which, as Deborah Wynne points out, by definition conflates individual family members into a single unit.¹⁶⁷ Thus, the pictorial reading trope embodies what a contemporary clientele would readily recognise to be, in Disdéri's words, 'an action common to them all'.¹⁶⁸

Additionally, as the quotation from *Pictorial Effect* at the start of this section

¹⁶⁵ Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, pp. 180-181.

¹⁶⁶ [Disdéri] 'The Aesthetics of Photography', p. 46.

¹⁶⁷ Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁶⁸ [Disdéri] 'The Aesthetics of Photography', pp. 44-45.

suggests, photographic family portraiture, in theory and in practice, is inherently bound up with the principles of a nation that defines itself, above all, by its commitment to family values. The implication being, of course, that much rides on photography's ability to depict the Victorian family in ways that propagate the doctrines of Victorian domestic ideology.

The significance of harnessing the new technology to serve such ends was well understood by the Royal household who provided prototypes of sound, well-to-do middle-class domesticity via photographs that were disseminated *en masse* from the 1860s. In Margaret Homans' words, employing the 'pictorial medium of the middle-classes' in order to reconstruct scenes of ordinary familial life bears testament to 'Victoria's highest ambition, to lead by her example a middle-class nation'.¹⁶⁹ In a series of *carte de visite* portraits taken by Mayall at Buckingham Palace in May 1860, books form a thematic strand in the domesticated representation of the Queen and Prince Albert. But what do these reading scenarios add to our understanding of mid-Victorian attitudes to books and other reading matter in the context of courtship and marriage?

The sheer ordinariness, not to say glumness, of the setting, dress, poses and accessories are indicative of a keen awareness of the ways in which the British middle-classes defined themselves. As books change hands and poses shift in these images of the couple, viewers are invited to engage in the familiar rhythms of conjugal engagement in a parlour setting. One of the

¹⁶⁹ Margaret Homans, 'Victoria's Sovereign Obedience: Portraits of the Queen as Wife and Mother', in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 169-182 (p. 181).

photographs, for instance, shows Victoria sitting with an open (but abandoned) book in her lap, while she turns to look, or listen, as Albert reads in a standing pose (figure 17). In another he sits, his fingers acting as bookmarkers in several places, while she stands by him, slightly forward leaning, an attentive, unassuming, bordering on diffident, presence (figure 18). Moreover, when Victoria poses alone in one portrait, the books are left unread; instead her profiled gaze is directed towards a space outside the frame (figure 19).



Figure 17.
J. J. E. Mayall, Queen Victoria and
Prince Albert, 1860 © National
Portrait Gallery, London

Figure 18.
J. J. E. Mayall, Queen Victoria and
Prince Albert, 1860 © National
Portrait Gallery, London

The latter arrangement adds a further variation to the photographer's literary *leitmotif*: *not* to read, to be diverted and distracted from one's reading is under certain circumstances the appropriate disposition. Some observers may have found the gender hierarchy less clear-cut, however, noting something of an air of matriarchal indulgence as Victoria allows herself to be interrupted in her own reading. Albert arguably lacks the assertiveness, spread and angularity expected of the male pose, appearing rather physically contained, almost feminised. In the adjacent image, his pose is certainly more masculine, but his inquiring facial expression and the position of his right hand inside the book (as if seeking clarification of its content), complicates the sexual order.

Consequently, this pictorial sequence unwittingly evinces concerns raised in the contemporaneous debate on reading and domesticity, a debate that, as we know, is far from univocal, but vacillates between ideologically sustaining and destabilising discourse. The right ways and kinds of reading may serve to bolster the familial equilibrium, but in the public commentary benevolence is frequently shadowed by dark alternatives: inappropriate books, unhealthy absorption, time-wasting and disproportionate aspiration.

Fictionalised accounts of books in the context of courtship and marriage abound, but they are equally inconclusive. As shown by Price, middlebrow, mid-century novelist and commentator Anthony Trollope represents the rather perplexing view that while bookish examinations of conjugality play a key role in the preliminary stages of matrimony, once in the married state, books

become means of endurance.¹⁷⁰ 'In that sense, the deployment of reading to mark a loveless marriage [in nineteenth-century novels]', she suggests, 'neatly inverts the age-old trope that makes dropping the book a preamble to

¹⁷⁰ Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, p. 59.



Figure 19.
J. J. E. Mayall, 'Queen Victoria', 1860 © Royal Collection Trust / Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2016

courtship'.¹⁷¹ The underlying idea is familiar: reading may offer instructive advice and guidance in encountering new social situations, but often raises expectations and leaves one unprepared for the hum-drum of life. In Ruskin's words:

[The] best romance becomes dangerous, if, by its excitement, it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting, and increases the morbid thirst for useless acquaintance with scenes in which we will never be called upon to act.¹⁷²

Pictures that 'tell a story': Charles Dickens at Home

Contrastingly, Charles Dickens – a sort of mid-Victorian 'unofficial laureate of this new reading people' – portrays surprisingly few readers in his fiction.¹⁷³ As surmised, 'his rendering of English culture seems to have no place for the self-reflexive tableaux of the Micawbers (as might be) settling down to hear Mr Micawber read'.¹⁷⁴ However, in a series of photographs taken by R. H. Mason at Gad's Hill Place in 1865, viewers are invited to gaze upon Dickens' own familial reading circle (figure 20). Several images show friends and family engaged in reading pursuits, whether perusing a newspaper in silence, or apparently reading aloud as a group. Dickens, notwithstanding his renowned apprehension of photography, requested the photographer's presence at Gad's

¹⁷¹ Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, p. 59.

¹⁷² John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', *Sesame and Lilies*, in *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1905), 38 vols., vol. 18, p. 129.

¹⁷³ *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. Paul Schlicke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 496.

¹⁷⁴ *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*, pp. 497-498.

Hill on a number of occasions during the 1860s, being pleased with the outcome: 'The photographs you have had the kindness to send me are extremely good', he wrote to Mason in



Copyright Image

Figure 20.
R. H. Mason, 'Charles Dickens; Mamie Dickens; Kate Macready ('Katey') Perugini (née Dickens)', 1865 © National Portrait Gallery, London

1863.¹⁷⁵ He also agreed to Mason's photographs being reproduced, though in other correspondence he expresses reservations: 'It is my fate to "come out" ferocious, and I will bear it, I dare say they will be satisfactory to many people.'¹⁷⁶ Edmund Yates, author, friend and contributor to Dickens' journals, makes clear that the upsurge in Dickens' visibility with the popularisation of photography was phenomenal. When he first met the writer in 1854 ('[there] were no photographs of celebrities to be purchased in those days'), his appearance bore no resemblance to Yates' expectations.¹⁷⁷ By the early 1860s, photographic representations of literary celebrities were ubiquitous in Victorian homes and streets, creating the curious impression of familiarity between the general populace and public figures. As *Once a Week* succinctly expressed it in 1862: 'We know their personality long before we see them'.¹⁷⁸ Sala similarly describes how the physical presence of Dickens in London life merges with visual representations of the man: 'He was to be met, by those who knew him, everywhere – and who did not know him? Who had not heard him read, and who had not seen his photographs in the shop-windows?'¹⁷⁹ The proliferation of affordable photographic portraits, as contemporaneous observers (and Dickens himself) understood, were key to creating that unifying bond with the sprawling

¹⁷⁵ Letter to R. H. Mason, 14 September 1863, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey, gen. eds. Madeleine House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 12 vols., vol. 10, 1862-1864, p. 288.

¹⁷⁶ Letter to Alfred W. Bennett, 18 September 1865, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey, gen. eds. Madeleine House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 12 vols., vol. 11, 1865-1867, p. 92 and 17 October 1863 in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 10, p. 303.

¹⁷⁷ *Dickens. Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Philip Collins (Macmillan: London, 1981), 2 vols., vol. 2, p. 205.

¹⁷⁸ [A. Wynter] 'Carte De Visite', p. 137.

¹⁷⁹ *Dickens. Interviews and Recollections*, p. 198.

anonymous crowds, providing concrete affirmation of the great author as, the 'good genius of their homes'.¹⁸⁰

Pictures, Dickens allegedly postulated, should 'add to the comfort and the happiness of the many'; like fiction, they ought to 'tell a story'.¹⁸¹ What sort of story, then, does Mason's photograph of Dickens reading with his daughters in the garden at Gad's Hill Place tell about books and the Victorian family? Is the centralised book quite simply metonymic, shorthand for the idyllic domesticity Dickens strived to transmit in his fiction and journalism? Dickens' posture, although somewhat informal, broadly accords with photographic portrait convention as his eyes rest on the page of the open book in his hand, one female sitter occupying a lower seat by his side. A reasonably informed viewer would recognise the harmonious pyramidal composition, even though, as McCauley points out, in Victorian family groups this arrangement did pose the risk of confusing the hierarchal order.¹⁸² In this case, however, the visual prominence of the father figure seems to assuage this potential difficulty. The second female figure stands, partially obscured by his frame, one hand resting affectionately on the paternal shoulder, her slightly inclined head subtly hinting at animation ('to take away that uneasy and penitential look', as Robinson instructs).¹⁸³ Each sitter is angled towards 'a common source of interest' and the attentive facial expressions implying that the words on the page are being recited.

¹⁸⁰ *Dickens. Interviews and Recollections*, p. 242.

¹⁸¹ *Dickens. Interviews and Recollections*, p. 240.

¹⁸² McCauley, *A. A. E. Disdéri*, p. 118.

¹⁸³ Robinson, *The Studio: And what to do in it*, p. 77.

Characteristically, for a period in which the pictorial language of posture and dress is heavily engendered, the female sitters are presented in feminine, curved lines. By contrast, and in spite of the informal mood of the scene, Dickens' erect and rather angular pose in the foreground communicates confidence and poised masculinity. Placing the scene outside – always a desirable alternative to cramming larger groups into restricted studio spaces – means, of course, that the façade of the actual home provides a reassuringly authentic bourgeois background. The book as a visual element, moreover, connects with other images in the series showing the comfortable domestic interior, in particular, 'a little library, the door of which was a sham book-case, with sham books'.¹⁸⁴ Verbal accounts of life at Gads' Hill tell us, furthermore, that each bedroom contained a miniature library, selected, apparently, so as to suit even a temporary occupier.¹⁸⁵ Books, then, are manifestations not simply of familial togetherness and friendship, but of individuality.

Mason's photographs seem to enclose the Dickensian household in an aura of private, domestic conviviality, the pleasure of the casually shared text signifying a hiatus from public life and the mercantile business of authorship. Yet, one can hardly imagine a more salient reminder of the mixed meanings associated with books in the context of Victorian home life. For one thing, notwithstanding appearances in Mason's at-home portraits, Dickens himself was rarely to be found *at home*.¹⁸⁶ Tellingly, one close companion dismissed

¹⁸⁴ *Dickens. Interviews and Recollections*, p. 285.

¹⁸⁵ Alan S. Watts, *Dickens at Gad's Hill* (Reading: Cedric Dickens and Elvendon Press, 1989), p. 40.

¹⁸⁶ Watts, *Dickens at Gad's Hill*, p. 45.

the initial impulse to locate his commemoration of the author in the family home, instead choosing 'the enormous labyrinth and swarming multitudes of his beloved London' as a backdrop.¹⁸⁷ The street, we are made to understand, rather than the 'little library' or study (somewhat ironically referred to as 'the Wilderness'), was the true atelier of this 'peripatetic philosopher', his sanctum the anonymity of crowds, not the bosom of the fractured family that remained at Gads' Hill Place.¹⁸⁸ G. K. Chesterton's biography of the writer offers a similar inversion of the Victorian dictum pertaining to the enclosed sanctity of the domestic sphere:

The street at night is a great house locked up. But Dickens had, if ever man had, the key of the street. His earth was the stones of the street; his stars were the lamps of the street; his hero was the man in the street. He could open the inmost door of his house – the door that leads into that secret passage which is lined with houses and roofed with stars.¹⁸⁹

What the comments and images cited above recall is that family photographs are, in Rosy Martin's words, 'subject to pressures from outside the frame, which are legible only if the social, cultural, and personal contexts are considered'.¹⁹⁰ Woven into the photograph of Dickens' familial reading circle is the broader narrative of Victorian domestic ritualism in a state of decline,

¹⁸⁷ *Dickens. Interviews and Recollections*, p. 242.

¹⁸⁸ *Dickens. Interviews and Recollections*, p. 242.

¹⁸⁹ Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, p. 20.

¹⁹⁰ Rosy Martin, 'Family History and Photography', in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*, ed. Robin Lenman and Angela Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662716.001.0001/acref-9780198662716-e-519?rskey=yl6WMY&result=3>.

the image disclosing, as much as anything, colliding values. On one hand, the transmutable and transient values of the modern marketplace, on the other, those associated with an idealised, enclosed familial circle governed by fixed and solid mores. For what Benjamin describes as the decay of the aura in the second half of the nineteenth century, so powerfully brought to the fore by family photography, is fundamentally linked to social change, new mechanical means of reproduction and the eruption of commodity culture. The decline of portraiture in the album-era of the 1860s, he argues, is nowhere more evident than in the loss of that vivid 'air of animated conviviality' and almost visceral presence of people in early group photos.¹⁹¹

The images of Dickens' domestic life at Gad's Hill re-emerged on the market in new configurations, transformed through photographic manipulation, better to suit public demand. The Fine Art Copyright Act of 1862 (which included registered photographs) was intended to control the widespread practise of pirating celebrity and other photographs, but it does not appear to have notably stifled trade.¹⁹² The problem, as Di Bello explains, was that where no prior formal agreement existed, it was unclear whether the copyright belonged to the photographer, or was associated with the object and its purchaser.¹⁹³ And, by and large, people reacted differently to finding themselves thrust into public view; some welcomed the eager *carte de visite*

¹⁹¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Walter Benjamin. Selected Writings. Volume 2, 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1999), pp. 507-530 (p. 517).

¹⁹² Robin Lenman, 'Fine Art Copyright Act, 1862', in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*.

¹⁹³ Patrizia Di Bello, 'Elizabeth Thompson and "Patsy" Cornwallis West as *Carte-de-visite* Celebrities', *History of Photography*, 35:3 (2011), 240-249 (p. 246).

trade of the 1860s as an opportunity for self-promotion, while others recoiled at the prospect. 'Much of the case', Di Bello suggests, 'rested on the context'.¹⁹⁴ It comes as no surprise, perhaps, that Dickens' exiguous response to the propagation of his own portraits is indicative of a pragmatic detachment from his 'photographic selves', forecasting something of Barthes' notion of photographic portraiture as 'the advent of myself as other'.¹⁹⁵

The Book as 'Threshold':

Female Readers in Photographs by Lady Hawarden and Oscar Gustav Rejlander

In 1857 photographer Rejlander exhibited a light-hearted, yet oddly offbeat narrative photograph entitled *Drat the Eastwind* at the London and Birmingham Photographic Society exhibitions (figure 21).¹⁹⁶ This vaguely comic, narrative composition print depicts a gloomy interior scene where the foreground is occupied by an elderly woman in a white indoor-cap and a woollen shawl who stoops awkwardly, whilst rubbing her aching joints. As suggested by the droll title, her reading has been disrupted by the rheumatic discomfort, the large book (perhaps a

¹⁹⁴ Di Bello, 'Elizabeth Thompson and 'Patsy' Cornwallis as Carte-de-visite Celebrities', p. 212.

¹⁹⁵ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 12.

¹⁹⁶ Photographic Society catalogues from London and Birmingham indicate that it was exhibited at least twice in 1857. Available at peib.dmu.ac.uk/index.php.



Copyright Image

Figure 21.
Oscar Gustav Rejlander, *Drat the Eastwind*, ca. 1857 © Royal Photographic Society / National Media Museum / Science & Society Picture Library

Bible, or in any case a substantial, bound volume signifying 'standard' reading), has duly been set aside, along with the magnifying glass. Behind her, a young woman wearing a dress so dark it almost merges with the gloomy interior leans towards the main light source, a window through which a weathercock set against a stormy sky is visible. Engrossed in an illustrated periodical, she is seemingly oblivious to her companion's affliction.

Furthermore, the lighting is arranged so as to illuminate both book and periodical, placing a visual emphasis on these particular elements. But how were visitors to Photographic Society exhibitions in London or Birmingham in 1857 expected to read this somewhat technically and narratively disjointed scene? What does it suggest about the impact of affordable mass produced print on domestic habits, gender roles and social relationships?

The photographer's choice of reading matter for his models, especially given the date of the photograph, is surely not arbitrary. While there is no particular indication that the old woman is benefitting from the relaxation of the newspaper tax in 1855, the young lady's absorption in her paper bespeaks the enthusiasm with which the middle classes embraced the paper reading habit.¹⁹⁷ This circumstance is made even more significant by the fact that Rejlander (although a member of the Photographic Society of London since 1856) was still at this point a provincial photographer and it was here that the gradual abolition of the newspaper tax had the greatest impact.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, the everyday life of the lower and middle classes offered a significant source of subjects for Rejlander and, like other well-known photographers of this era, he

¹⁹⁷ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, pp. 355, 357.

¹⁹⁸ Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 356.

drew inspiration from his own household and daily experiences, recommending that other photographers likewise observe events in the street and at home, in order to reconstruct them later on in the studio.¹⁹⁹

Periodical reading matter in the hands of a woman is particularly interesting, however, because it vividly recalls that mechanised print is bound up in the public processes of manufacturing, dissemination, display and often procurement. In terms of content, papers signify a different kind of temporality, representing a fragmentary, incidental and fugacious perspective that reaches far beyond the domestic threshold. In this sense, the project of periodical publishing coincides with that of photography, in particular the newly popularised stereoscopic slides, a point that will be further examined in the following chapter. Adding to this, Rejlander's self-absorbed young woman recalls that the period between 1850 and 1870 saw further blurring of the boundary between different print forms, not least fiction and journalism. Both sensationalist and respectable periodical publications (following *Household Words'* daring and innovative move) increasingly came to employ fiction as a way of wooing the middle-class reader. In *Plain or Ringlets?*, Robert Smith Surtees comments on the literary qualities of newspapers, describing *The Times* as 'a perfect modern miracle', a repository of 'hints for a hundred novels'.²⁰⁰ As surmised by Altick, during the 1860s 'critics were coming to think that newspapers, freshly cheapened and deliberately written to suit the capacities and expectations of the mass market, were beating fiction at its own

¹⁹⁹ Spenser, *O. G. Rejlander*, p. 71.

²⁰⁰ [Robert Smith Surtees] *"Plain or Ringlets?" By the Author of "Handley Cross, "Romford's Hounds," "Sponge's Sporting Tour," etc., etc.* (1860; Bath: George Bayntun, 1926), pp. 162-163.

(sensational) game' (figure 22).²⁰¹ Viewed against this background, *Drat the Eastwind* adds to the prevalent perception that periodical publications aroused the imagination of female readers to a point where they became all but insensible to their domestic surroundings. It is also suggestive of the ways in which the combined effect of pictorial and verbal mass culture was felt to claw at the separation between worldly and domestic politics.

²⁰¹ Richard D. Altick, *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1991), p. 81.



Figure 22.
'Tichborne v. Mudie's! A Bad Look-Out for the Circulating Libraries', *Punch*
61, 25 November 1871. Reproduced with permission of Cardiff University
Library

By 1862 Margaret Oliphant, for instance, had come to conclude that 'it is only natural that art and literature should, in an age that has turned to be one of events, attempt a kindred depth of effect and shock of incident'.²⁰² 'That distant roar', she notes in an enigmatic reference to worldly turmoil, 'has come to form a thrilling accompaniment to the safe life we live at home'.²⁰³ Oliphant's comments are especially relevant in the present context since they are suggestive of the often overlooked rhetorical overlay in the debate on sensation culture and photography in the 1860s, a decade when, to quote Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, the 'everyday routines of life were now no more deeply lodged than the spectacular interruptions'.²⁰⁴ At the very least, it seems Rejlander's image looks forward to *Punch's* many satirical depictions of the newspaper as strategic device to be employed in domestic affairs, where it is frequently used as a demarcation of personal space, a barricade against one's surroundings. In such scenarios, rather than *inducing* emotions, printed periodical matter is made to function as what Rachel Ablow calls 'a form of insulation *against* feeling'.²⁰⁵

The domestication of literature in Western culture progressively turned reading matter into a potent, but ambiguous, signifier in the realm of home, Chartier tells us. Books are at once emblems of familial togetherness and social affability, but also 'contribute to the emergence of a sense of self, as the reader

²⁰² [Margaret Oliphant] 'Sensation Novels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1862, 564-584 (p. 565).

²⁰³ 'Sensation Novels', p. 565.

²⁰⁴ Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 220.

²⁰⁵ Rachel Ablow, 'Introduction', in *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, ed. Rachel Ablow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 1-10 (p. 5). See also Leah Price, *How to do Things with Books*, pp. 62-67.

scrutinized his own thoughts and emotions in solitude and secrecy'.²⁰⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century the full force of this problematic observation can be clearly felt in the cultural debate, resulting in discursive formations that frequently converge around the figure of the reading female and, unsurprisingly, visual representations of reading women become far more common. As Kate Flint's comprehensive study makes clear, female readers were subjected to careful scrutiny in the Victorian cultural debate, gradually coalescing into a 'discrete topic', albeit one that resists any single, coherent narrative.²⁰⁷ Further to this, Catherine J. Golden speaks of the debate on female reading as highly divisive and marked by 'polarized ideologies', meaning that as a visual trope, a woman with a book (or, more unusually, a periodical) may signify in a wide variety of ways.²⁰⁸ But in any case, in the broader context of the Victorian reading debate, she will inevitably be framed by a mercurial, inconstant discourse, which, in Flints' words, 'illuminates important networks of ideas about the presumed interrelations of mind, body, and culture'.²⁰⁹

From a well-disposed point of view, literature signified educated gentility and functioned as a tool of socialisation and even social betterment; for middle and upper class women especially, it served as preparation for the familial duties associated with marriage and motherhood. In respect of the latter, Sarah Stickney Ellis councils:

²⁰⁶ Chartier, 'The Practical Impact of Writing', in *A History of Private Life III*, p. 151.

²⁰⁷ Kate Flint, *The Female Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 4.

²⁰⁸ Catherine J. Golden, *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), p. 21.

²⁰⁹ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 11.

[It] is impossible to imagine a young girl more advantageously situated than in a well-regulated home, and surrounded by an amiable and well-informed family, where occasional reading aloud from well-selected books, lively instructive conversation, and, easy and faithful narrative, constitute the fireside amusement of a social circle.... and the nearer the education of schools can be made to resemble this, the more likely they would be to make young women all which the companions of their future lives would desire.²¹⁰

But, as the illustration to W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847) reveals, a darker alternative to this idyllic scenario can never be discounted: what if the home is not 'well-regulated' and the parents not 'well-informed'? What are the consequences of reading literature that is not 'well-selected' (figure 23)? Furthermore, solitary reading represents a specific concern since it constitutes a form of retreat into imaginative or intellectual experiences, leaving the individual's internal response unregulated and unforeseeable. All the more so, of course, if the text is unsuitable: 'In the choice of books to be read for the instruction or amusement of her daughters', Ellis famously continues, 'a mother should always be consulted. A novel read in secret is a dangerous thing'.²¹¹ Full maternal access to the inner emotional workings and imaginative life of her daughters, the author stipulates, is key to successful moral guardianship.²¹²

²¹⁰ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Mothers of England; Their influence and Responsibility* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1843), pp. 193-194.

²¹¹ Ellis, *The Mothers of England*, p. 196.

²¹² Ellis, *The Mothers of England*, p. 197.

In the spirit of 1860s self-culture, however, reading that takes place outside the confines of formal education takes on new significance as a means of defining oneself as a moral, emotional and autonomous individual. As such, private reading is naturally enough subject to intense circumspection. As S. C. Hall, explains in *Sharpe's London Magazine of Entertainment and Instruction for General Reading*, reading aimed at pure gratification, serving 'to kill time', preoccupy the 'listless' or provide relief for the emotionally 'tormented' is deeply misguided.²¹³ A testament to the prevailing influence of mid-century self-help advocate Herbert Spenser, the

²¹³ S. C. Hall, 'Reading as a Means of Culture', *Sharpe's London Magazine of Entertainment and Instruction for General Reading*, December 1867, 316-323 (p. 316). All further references to this article are given in the text.



Figure 23.
'Miss Sharp in her Schoolroom', from William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair. A Novel Without a Hero* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1848)

article encourages active critical engagement, warning of the dangers of languorous reading in a transitory state between wakefulness and sleep, but also of books 'so exciting to the attention, to the imagination, to the passions, that they produce a mental debauch' (317). Profligate reading, moreover, may 'interfere with the due cultivation of the social affections', making one 'insensible to the sweet charities of domestic life' (317). Thus, in an age of 'improvements in mechanical arts connected with printing', books must be chosen with vigilance, youthful enthusiasm for 'those ephemeral productions which fall from the press upon the current of literature' to be stemmed in favour of 'standard' books (322).

Ruskinian reading advice specifically advocates 'deep and serious subjects' for girls and warns against 'frivolous' reading matter: 'Keep the modern magazine and novel out of your girl's way, turn her free in the old library every wet day and leave her alone'.²¹⁴ But Ruskin also cautions against excessive intellectual liberties, arguing: 'A woman, in any rank of life, ought to know whatever her husband is likely to know, but to know it in a different way' (128). Her need for book learning and literary sensibility at home is thus predicated upon a future marital situation and should stretch 'only so far as may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends' (128). Ruskin's contribution recalls the role books played in defining and containing the idealised Victorian family within four walls, but at the same time leaving readers in no doubt over its dual potential: to sustain or spoil the domestic equilibrium. As Michael McKeon points out, the history of

²¹⁴ Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', pp. 129-130. All further references are to this edition and are given in the text.

the novel, generally at the forefront of the Victorian debate and primarily associated with young female readers, is fraught with tension between 'pedagogic promise' and 'pedagogic danger'.²¹⁵ The narrative form may act as an effective vehicle for learning in both a broader and narrower sense, but the journey is littered with pitfalls, not least by inviting uncomfortable confrontations between reality and morality, didactics and aesthetics.

A recurring motif in the visual arts, reading girls and women inescapably solicit pragmatic and psychological concerns around the act itself. The iconic female reader framed by a wealth of advice on the appropriate balance between privacy and supervision, about how, when and what females should read, recalls that the nineteenth-century novel especially, is bound up in 'the temporal and mundane', its consumption 'less a literary than a social act', to quote Ina Ferris.²¹⁶ Victorian critique exhibits a distinct tendency to invoke the bodily and circumstantial in literary discourse, '[transforming] texts into exemplary female bodies, either positive or negative'.²¹⁷ In other words, although commentators frequently castigate the novel form, it is nevertheless invested with considerable social and cultural prowess.

In 1852, the middle-class periodical *Family Friend* ('a sort of domestic textbook' according to the preface) had demanded further, specific attention to be paid to the education of girls and young women, *warning* of the dangers of leaving it to the 'caprice of mothers': '[Women] have not only duties to

²¹⁵ Michael McKeon, 'Prose Fiction: Great Britain', in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 600-612 (p. 602).

²¹⁶ Ferris, 'From Trope to Code', p. 22.

²¹⁷ Ferris, 'From Trope to Code', p. 22.

fulfil, but duties which form the basis of social life. Is it not women who are the blessing or ruin of families ... ?'²¹⁸ Failure to firmly instil 'habits of application', the writer continues, will be detrimental to the mind and personality: 'Girls brought up in this idle way have an ill-regulated imagination ... They read books which nourish their vanity, and become passionately fond of romances, comedies, and fanciful adventures. Their minds become visionary'.²¹⁹ In 1867, the *Saturday Review* concedes that fiction is indeed 'the medium through which moral poison is most frequently administered', but nevertheless concedes its social benefits: 'Marriage is not what it appears to be in most romances, but it is more like the literary pictures than it is like the vague and hazy conception which emanates from the youthful brain'.²²⁰ Like photography, in this article presented as a form of realist twin-medium, novels may thus (affordably) ameliorate progression into adult life: 'The use of romantic fiction as a means of depicting everything and everybody is very like the invention of photography. Likenesses of every living creature ... can be had in these happy days for a mere song'.²²¹ Thus, as argued by Nancy Armstrong, realist fiction and photography in the nineteenth century are invoked by some as participants in 'the same cultural project', namely to provide people with a system of graphic and verbal images that by mutual

²¹⁸ [Anon.] 'The *Family Friend* ([ca. 1852]), excerpts', in *British Family Life, 1780-1914. Volume 3: Wives and Mothers*, ed. Susan B. Egenolf, gen. ed. Claudia Nelson (London and Vermont: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 5 vols., pp. 41-53 (p. 43).

²¹⁹ 'The *Family Friend*', p. 43.

²²⁰ [Anon.] 'Novel-Reading', *Saturday Review*, 16 February 1867, 196-197 (p. 196).

²²¹ 'Novel-Reading', p. 196.

correspondence authorised an understanding of the nature and appearance of people and objects in the world around them.²²²

Reading emerges as a natural photographic subject in Lady Hawarden's photographs given that from 1859, when the family moved into their South Kensington home in London, her photographs are almost exclusively taken indoors, mainly in the north-facing room that led onto the terrace above the private gardens, or in the south-facing drawing room. A representative of the second wave of amateur photographers of the latter part of the 1850s, Hawarden worked largely independently, developing a distinct photographic expression and finding, as Seiberling points out, new approaches to established forms, including portraiture and narrative.²²³ During a relatively short period of fervent photographic activity, beginning circa 1857 and lasting until her sudden death in January 1865, Hawarden photographed her family and immediate surroundings, increasingly focusing on her growing daughters, and regularly drawing on subjects arising out of domestic life. None of the photographs are inscribed with captions or individual titles – aside from *Studies from Life* (or, *Photographic Studies*), a generic rubric used for exhibition purposes – nor does she appear to have contributed to the intense mid-century photographic debate. She did, however, become a member of the Photographic Society of London in 1863, alongside both Robinson and Rejlander, the latter a likely mentor and sometime collaborator.²²⁴ In 1864,

²²² Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 26.

²²³ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography, and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, p. 106.

²²⁴ Virginia Dodier, *Lady Hawarden: Studies from Life 1857-1864* (New York: Aperture, 1999), p. 93.

Photographic News commented on her contribution to the 'Subjects and Genres' category in the annual exhibition, noting the 'graceful arrangement, and unusual and extremely artistic lighting, great transparency, and much tenderness and delicacy of treatment', but regretting 'that they are so few'.²²⁵ Ultimately, the writer's added desire for 'a little more reflected light on the face seen in the mirror' is suggestive of the illusiveness of both the photographer and her work. Notably, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, who found her photographs 'very beautiful', recorded his frustrating efforts of cultivating Hawarden's acquaintance by repeatedly calling at the family home, finding her either absent, or, on one occasion, 'arriving just in time to see Lady Hawarden get into her carriage & drive off'.²²⁶

In discussing Hawarden's inclination to pose her daughters as 'readers', or in the act of what Gaston Bachelard calls 'suspended reading', I am particularly intrigued by the ways in which the experience of reading, or holding books, finds expression through the variation in physical poses and the unusually wide framing of interior space.²²⁷ In several of Hawarden's later photographs, which typically conflate the scene and portrait, books are associated with liminal psychological states, while displaying a preoccupation with physical spatial boundaries: windows, doorways, mirrors, corners and thresholds. But rather than considering these compositional aspects in the language of fine art, as has often been the case in the critical response to her

²²⁵ [Anon.] 'The Photographic Exhibition', *Photographic News*, 24 June 1864, 302-303 (p. 302).

²²⁶ Qtd. in Dodier, *Lady Hawarden*, p. 92.

²²⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 14.

work, past and present, I am proposing to read these photographs through the wider lens of mid-century Victorian discourse on identity, narrative and private/public space. I maintain that Hawarden's photographic interest in the reading motif should be viewed in terms of the intense and multi-vocal debate on reading in the late 1850s and early 1860s, although the stylistic complexity seems at the same time to preclude any single, stable interpretation.

Furthermore, her large collection cannot with certainty be fixed by sequencing, chronological ordering, or by verbal anchorage, but I take a cautious view of the notion that Hawarden's photographs are 'programmatically nonnarrativizing', pure 'visual experiences', or indeed 'subjectless', as has been suggested.²²⁸ Virginia Dodier argues that the photographs elude narration, pointing out that 'contemporary reviewers ... did not "read" them, but wrote instead of their formal, aesthetic, and technical qualities'.²²⁹ Lindsay Smith, who questions the view that Hawarden's domestic scenes represent discrete and disconnected moments, seems to me to offer a more productive starting point when she suggests that the photographer's work is fundamentally connected with its surroundings, emphasising 'the way in which household objects, both decorative and functional, assume a highly charged status within the confines of a composition'.²³⁰

In thinking about what photographs meant in the late 1850s and 1860s, it should be reiterated that this represents a period of instability and transition,

²²⁸ Linda M. Shires, *Perspectives: Modes of Viewing and Knowing in Nineteenth-Century England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), p. 75 and Dodier, *Lady Hawarden*, pp. 44, 51.

²²⁹ Dodier, *Lady Hawarden*, p. 51.

²³⁰ Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 40-41.

constituting an era in which competing voices were vying for control of a medium that was rapidly becoming immersed in popular culture. Narrative scenes in photography helped popularise the medium and, as Seiberling points out, both Robinson and Rejlander owed their professional success to pictures that could be read by the public in much the same way as the stories told by the stereograph card.²³¹ But the fictionalisation of photography did not sit well with the direction set out by the first wave of photographers (though it appealed to the general public), and many critics remained deeply ambivalent. In spite of being a well-established and clearly popular form in the early 1860s, fewer amateur photographers than previously produced genre pictures. As noted above, even proponents such as Rejlander and Robinson conceded the difficulties involved: producing narrative scenes was both expensive and time consuming. Even more importantly, perhaps, both photographers faced uncomfortable criticism from those who felt that models masquerading as other people (real or imaginary) and manufactured scenes, compromised photography's supposed commitment to veracity, morality and good taste. The ambiguous tone and language in the *Athenaeum's* appraisal of Rejlander in 1862 is indicative of the present mood:

Mr. O. G. Rejlander is a good manipulator, and we have sometimes found ourselves able to praise his photographs; but he must be told, in very plain words, that the English public will not tolerate his tricks. He must not try to pass, as portraits of Garibaldi, studies from an artist's model, paid for playing the hero of Marsala at

²³¹ Seiberling, *Amateurs, Photography and the Mid-Victorian Imagination*, pp. 88-89.

fifteen-pence an hour. 'The Vision of Aspromonte', now in the shop-windows, is a nuisance. The woman is not an Italian. The man is not Garibaldi. The drapery is indecent, and the composition in bad taste.²³²

Narrative in photography, to such vociferous critics, is bound up with anxieties pertaining to the commodification of art and history, indecent sexuality, a changing consumer market and threats to English national identity.

Correspondingly, in the frequently overlapping literary debate, the omnipresence of stories is giving rise to anxieties surrounding identity, social class, public morality, gender and domesticity. In 1858, Oliphant ominously proposes that 'reading is not always a humaniser' and speaking of the newly literate masses, she describes them as lost in a 'wilderness of words': 'There are stories to begin with, stories to end with, and stories in the middle'.²³³ By 1867, the same author asserts that contemporary 'light' fiction imposes 'a revolution in all our domestic arrangements', the unity of the familial reading circle by necessity split apart into a secretive, self-contained configuration of separate individuals and subgroups.²³⁴ Oliphant's highly gendered, socio-literary critique is noticeably haunted by graphic metaphors, suggestive of the impact of new visual techniques on the Victorian imagination. The sensationalist's 'picture' of bodily desire all the more repulsive, she argues, because often produced by a woman and presented as 'the natural sentiment

²³² [Anon.] 'Our Weekly Gossip', *Athenaeum*, 25 October 1862, 531-532 (p. 531).

²³³ [Margaret Oliphant] 'Reading for the Million', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1858, 200-216 (p. 202).

²³⁴ [Margaret Oliphant] 'Novels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1867, 257-80 (p. 258). All further references to this article are from the same page.

of English girls', as 'the portrait of their own state of mind'. No longer confined to the lower classes, stories of a sensational nature, 'circulate everywhere, and are read everywhere' and 'the class thus represented does not disown the picture ... it hangs it up in boudoir and drawing-room'.

As suggested, Victorian critique of the novel evinces rhetorical patterns that are heavily invested with tangible and visual features drawn from the domestic interior. The wording is also, of course, indicative of a perceived affinity between women, modernity and consumer culture. Indeed, expressed in the broader terms of industry and the market, it should be restated that narrative is 'everywhere' in the mid-century because, like photography and other print media popularised in this period, narrative forms are associated with industrial techniques that make possible mass production, dissemination and consumption. As Leslie A. Fielder argues, cultural commodities dispersed in the marketplace are powerful because they are able to tap into needs that linger in the collective unconsciousness: 'The machine is ... the Dreamer of its communal dreams; and the machine-produced commodity novel is, therefore, dream literature, mythic literature, as surely as any story told over the tribal fire'.²³⁵

In two photographs by Lady Hawarden, seemingly taken in close succession, the younger Clementina poses alone, sitting somewhat rigidly with her face lowered over a small book in her lap (figure 24). Dark bars, accentuated by the bright sunlight, traverse the extensive floor space, one bisecting the almost shut book cupboard in the background. The reader's erect

²³⁵ Leslie A. Fielder, 'The Death and Rebirth of the Novel', in *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 189-209 (p. 191).

posture, exposed position and physical separation (referred to by Clarke as a 'critical distance') from the photographer/mother both invokes and complicates keynotes in the mid-century debate on reading as a component of the interior life of the family.²³⁶ In a second image, possibly taken at the same sitting, she contrastingly sits further back, leaning against the window frame, eyes closed, face averted and illuminated by intense sunlight (figure 25). On top of the cupboard with its door left slightly ajar, an outline of books can be detected, her now empty, folded hands suggesting that the reading has been 'suspended', recalling Bachelard's notion of the book as a mere 'threshold' to a more complex psychological state in which dreams and memories are unlocked.²³⁷ Juxtaposed in this way, the photographs bring together different, often contrasted, representations of reading: one echoing the supposed benefits of upright, conscious, purposeful application of thought and intellect; the other hinting at the familiar trope of the supine, passive reader abandoning herself to more deeply buried feelings.

It seems apposite at this point to consider more closely the significance of Hawarden's dual role as a wife, mother and as (an exceptionally productive) photographer practising in the family home. What does it mean for a Victorian mother to photograph her daughters engaged in ordinary domestic activities, such as reading or sewing? Do such images testify to her maternal duty as educator and emotional, intellectual guardian? Is the camera, above all, a mechanism of benevolent surveillance and record keeping, perceived as central to good parenting according to so many nineteenth-century

²³⁶ Clarke, *The Photograph*, p. 51.

²³⁷ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 14.

commentators? But, as the mother is also the artist and producer, are there points at which aesthetic concerns are prioritised over parental obligations? The role of photographer must surely invite a degree of personal distancing (as suggested by the unusual gap between sitter and lens) by imposing significant practical and artistic distractions? Certainly, the mother-as-photographer is curiously both absent and present, possessing the 'shadowy power' that Shuttleworth suggests is the defining characteristic of many mothers in nineteenth-



Figure 24.
Lady Hawarden, Photograph, c. 1861
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 25.
Lady Hawarden, Photograph, c. 1861
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

century fiction.²³⁸ Another photograph, clearly taken a few years later, imposes further difficulties of interpretation (figure 26). Here, the mood is strikingly sensual, a quality that imparts ambiguous connotations on the young woman who rests recumbent in an armchair located in a softly lit corner of the room, her eyes shut but with an open book still by her side. Seemingly concerned with literature's power of inducing states of mind beyond rational cognition, to transport readers to the realms of imagination, daydreams and fantasy, the image echoes tropes familiar from mid-Victorian representations of women and books. Contemporary critics have proposed that female readers displayed in this manner appeal to the inquiring male gaze, to viewers prone to inscribing eroticised assumptions onto anonymous female bodies.²³⁹ In this case, however, the image is in all likelihood destined for viewing in a more intimate setting, for while a small number of Hawarden's photographs were exhibited, the majority appear to have been compiled into album collections, and only subsequently removed.²⁴⁰

Should this image be read, then, in the context of domestic sexuality, a mechanism that, precisely as such, acquired great urgency in the nineteenth century. The middle and upper class family of this era, Michel Foucault argues,

²³⁸ Sally Shuttleworth, 'Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era', in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*, ed. Linda M. Shires (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 31-51 (p. 44).

²³⁹ See for example Flint, *The Female Reader*, p. 4 and Curtis, *Visual Words*, p. 239.

²⁴⁰ Photographs by Lady Hawarden were exhibited twice during her lifetime (at Photographic Society of London Exhibitions in 1863 and 1864). It is not possible to determine which pictures were shown, as she did not use titles other than the generic 'Studies from Life' and 'Photographic Studies'. Nor is it possible to know how many prints were shown given that several may appear in the same frame. It is clear, however, that the pictures known to the public represent a mere fraction of the entire collection, of which the majority (some 775 prints), are now held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. See Dodier, *Lady Hawarden*, pp. 86-88. For an account of the Hawarden collection history, see Mark Haworth-Booth, 'The Return of Lady Hawarden', in Dodier, *Lady Hawarden*, pp. 110-115.

operates at once as 'an agency of control and a point of sexual saturation', its own procreative and erotic function 'a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all



Figure 26.
Lady Hawarden, Photograph, ca. 1862-63 © Victoria and Albert
Museum, London

costs'.²⁴¹ Fundamental to this preoccupation, as argued by Shuttleworth, is the systematic examination of maternity, the impact and function of which was subject to observation and exploration in a wide range of texts, including scientific articles, advice manuals and fiction: 'True selfhood', nineteenth-century commentary generally agrees, 'only comes with successful maternity', but this requires a correct balance between motherhood, household and wifely duties to be consistently maintained.²⁴² Sanctified across Victorian culture, the public is nevertheless repeatedly confronted with the consequences of maternal breakdown or the void left by absent mothers in texts and images. As Shuttleworth so adroitly shows, fictionalised accounts of the 1860s, sensation novels in particular, are notable for examining tensions in the dominant discourse surrounding maternity and womanhood: 'The pages are full of unregulated motherhood: women who abandon their children or destroy them through love, who lash out in excesses of both sexual and maternal emotion'.²⁴³ To go further in the exploration of Hawarden's photograph above, are we witnessing a moment when the disciplined motherly gaze comes worryingly close to tipping over into excess, invaded, as it were, by 'the pleasure of showing off, scandalizing, or resisting'? After all, to Foucault, looking, recording and questioning are activities driven by a 'double impetus: pleasure and power'.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ Michel Foucault, 'The Will to Knowledge', in *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), 3 vols., pp. 120-121.

²⁴² Shuttleworth, 'Demonic Mothers', p. 35.

²⁴³ Shuttleworth, 'Demonic Mothers', p. 49.

²⁴⁴ Foucault, 'The Will to Knowledge', p. 45.

Although Hawarden's work remains opaque in many ways, I am emphasising that many of her 'domestic' photographs stress the complexities of her role and disclose pressures that must be understood in the context of mid-Victorian discourse on female identity and domestic life. Placed in the broader context of idealised textual and visual representations of familial reading (epitomized by Ellis' comfortable and communal reading scenario), the sparse, almost ascetic, presentation of the interior in Hawarden's reading scenes above, are strikingly modern. This domestic milieu seems incongruous with Benjamin's assertion that the nineteenth century related to the domestic dwelling as a 'cavern' and a 'maternal womb'.²⁴⁵ By contrast, many of Hawarden's photographs forestall a modernist interior which 'with its porosity and transparency, its tendency toward the well-lit and airy has put an end to dwelling in the old sense'.²⁴⁶ As a visual counterpoint to reading as a shared, contained and familial fireside amusement, these images come tantalisingly close to undermining the ideologically charged aesthetics of Victorian domesticity and hence in some measure the dominant social values associated with reading. The sparse, angular setting presented in many of Hawarden's images inverts the Victorian studio milieu, which was conventionally furnished and decorated in the manner of bourgeois entrance halls, parlours and libraries, but externally, as McCauley notes in her work on Parisian studios, '[echoing] the glass and iron construction of modern buildings like railroad stations, exhibition halls, and green houses'.²⁴⁷ Similarly, Hannavy speaks of

²⁴⁵ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, pp. 216, 220.

²⁴⁶ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 221.

²⁴⁷ Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 69.

large-scale British firms with production facilities operating in the manner of factories.²⁴⁸

Indeed, the dark, divaricating shafts created by intense light from the windows can be read as further citations of the public world just beyond Hawarden's domestic threshold; reminders of the intense architectural transformation of South Kensington in the 1850s and 1860s into a residential area, as well as a site for institutions, museums and exhibitions. As Gillian Beer has remarked, though in a different context: 'The window registers connection and difference between interior and exterior. It allows us to be in two scenes at once'.²⁴⁹ The establishment of several key museums and cultural institutions within the vicinity of Hawarden's home-studio, coincided with an intensifying public debate on home design and decoration, coupled with a critique against domestic consumption and materialism. Displays of historical and contemporary interiors in institutional spaces, along with the wealth of publications focused on domestic design, created new modes of looking at the domestic interior, posing challenges to the ways in which people thought about the relationship between private and public spaces. As asserted by Jeremy Aynsley, some regarded the publication and the commodification of the interior that unfurled from the mid-nineteenth century onward as an unwelcome abstraction, a giving way to "'graphic interiors, whose mechanical

²⁴⁸ Hannavy, *Victorian Photographers at Work*, p. 51.

²⁴⁹ Gillian Beer, 'Windows: Looking in, Looking Out, Breaking Through', in *Thinking on Thresholds: The Poetics of Transitive Spaces*, ed. Subha Mukherji (London and New York: Anthem Press, 2013), pp. 3-16 (p. 5).

assemblies of lines of shadows and light best suit another mechanical contrivance: the camera obscura'''.²⁵⁰

Girl with Dove, a composite print by Rejlander (ca.1860) is also set in an ambiguous environment and incorporates the Victorian infatuation with idealised and domesticated childhood scenes, whilst drawing attention to its increasing dependency on modern industrialised means of production (figure 27). The image shows a young girl almost crouching beneath a bookcase whilst tenderly pressing a dove to her chest. An illuminated foreground contrasts against the dark silhouettes in the background, thereby inviting a linkage between the timorous sitter, the stuffed dove and the book collection. Arrangements involving young girls and birds can be seen in photographic genre scenes of the 1850s such as P. H. Delamotte's *Innocence*, an image that echoes Romantic tropes in the manner of the French painter

²⁵⁰ Jeremy Aynsley, 'Displaying Designs for the Domestic Interior in Europe and America, 1850-1950', in *Imagined Interiors: Representing the Domestic Interior since the Renaissance*, ed. Jeremy Aynsley and Charlotte Grant (London: V&A Publications, 2006), pp. 190-215 (p. 190).



Figure 27.
Oscar Gustav Rejlander, *Girl with Dove*, ca. 1860. Courtesy of George Eastman Museum

Jean-Baptiste Greuze. But why the bookshelf? Erotic overtones in the representation of females and books in Victorian visual art similarly lead back to eighteenth-century pictorial arts where, as Stefan Bollman points out, a scene showing a young solitary female reader ‘warns against the corrupting influence of reading ... whilst addressing an increasingly hypocritical clientele’.²⁵¹

In Rejlander’s print, the girl’s direct, if anxious, gaze, her small protective hands, cupped around the lifeless body of the bird under the looming bookshelf, remind us that literature has hardly lost its sensual poignancy in the early 1860s, when the unprecedented seductive/instructive potential of mass-produced texts form a key strand in the cultural debate. By the same token, viewed as a re-mediation of Romantic child portraiture, the heavily stacked shelves in the far background recall that the ways in which images of the young were produced, manufactured and, ultimately received, was being transformed across the visual arts in the second half of the century. The background, unwittingly perhaps but nevertheless quite visibly, discloses something of the daily grind of the professional photographer and the demands of an ever-enlarging mid-century picture market in which children as visual subjects (and objects) retain their powerful allure. In fact, Rejlander’s books might be entirely mundane: we are looking at the literature of the workplace, texts offering advice to photographers on how to achieve compositions that combine the marketable with the aesthetic. Rejlander certainly felt the compound pressure of producing photographs that would earn a living *and*

²⁵¹ Stefan Bollmann, *Reading Women* (London and New York: Merrell, 2006), p. 24.

critical praise. In a letter to Robinson, he claims (somewhat rashly), to be 'tired of photography for the public—particularly composite photos, for there *can be no gain* and there is no honour, but cavil and misrepresentation. The next exhibition must then only contain ivied ruins and landscapes for ever'.²⁵²

Many female Victorian amateur photographers, being to a lesser degree subject to such extrinsic pressures, embraced the medium, in Naomi Rosenblum's words, as 'a pastime through which those consigned to domestic life might step beyond it'.²⁵³ Photography, in other words, offered an opportunity for artistic and intellectual creativity and enabled 'their greater participation in some aspects of modern life'.²⁵⁴ But, of course, this also introduces possible tensions between different duties, identities and spaces. Mastering one's medium might, apart from producing tensions within the domestic sphere, render any female artist more publically visible, especially in an era of assiduous celebrity interest, thereby drawing attention not only to the work, but also to the individual behind it. It comes as no surprise that personal exposure was far more precarious to female than male artists. Because the moral credibility of aspiring female artists relied 'upon modesty and self-effacement', Di Bello argues, 'publicity had to be carefully handled least it threatened respectability'.²⁵⁵ Julia Margaret Cameron, for instance, famously occupied an unusually prominent role in the photographic world of the 1860s, showing tendencies toward self-promotion and even commercial

²⁵² Qtd. in Jones, *Father of Art Photography*, pp. 23-34.

²⁵³ Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (Paris, London and New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), p. 40.

²⁵⁴ Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers*, p. 40.

²⁵⁵ Di Bello, 'Elizabeth Thompson and "Patsy" Cornwallis West as *Carte-de-visite* Celebrities', p. 244.

motivation. However, this left her open to at times malicious public criticism and when she attempted to use her photographic skills to redeem the family's ailing economy, 'the sale of prints was frowned on, and provoked criticism of her style as ignorant or slovenly'.²⁵⁶ Concerns about personal and professional exposure are factors likely to have played a role in deterring most female amateurs from pursuing more public roles in the second half of the century. Certainly, Hawarden, although critically acclaimed and possibly the first woman to be elected as a member of the Photographic Society, seems to have opted for a peripheral position, both as photographer and as a socialite.²⁵⁷

Benjamin inadvertently regarded the new amateur generation alongside the earliest practitioners of photography, instinctively disassociating them (as we may suspect) from the 'sharp decline in taste' of the album-era, a time when the family presents itself 'foolishly draped or corseted', precariously balancing in absurd poses amongst all manner of paraphernalia, effectively weighted down and held together by means of those 'leather-bound tomes with repellent metal hasps'.²⁵⁸ But despite his misgivings, Benjamin's nuanced reflections tell us much about the interplay between photography, the individual, the family and the material world. For, dismissing the unsightly posturing and characteristic amassment of objects in pictures accumulated on the album leaves, he remains attentive to what these seemingly trivial, material aspects reveal. Indeed, it is telling that his perception of photography as inherently radical – a revolutionary medium that will bring about 'a

²⁵⁶ Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (London: Laurence King, 2002), p. 158.

²⁵⁷ Dodier, *Lady Hawarden*, p. 11.

²⁵⁸ Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', p. 515.

tremendous shattering of tradition' – is somewhat complicated by the depiction of the human countenance.²⁵⁹

Contemplating a studio portrait from the late 1880s, Benjamin reflects on the little boy's surroundings, as he stands forlorn in 'a sort of greenhouse landscape ... thick with palm fronds'.²⁶⁰ The 'upholstered tropics' in this portrait are suggestive of the subtle but significant alterations Victorian studio aesthetics underwent, a history that allows each decade of the second half of the nineteenth century to be identified through its characteristic studio accessories and fixtures.²⁶¹ Given photography's predilection to absorb the *zeitgeist* of the immediate present, it is especially interesting to note that family portraits taken after the 1870s began to include an assortment of exotic objects and even creatures from distant shores. In addition, photographic portraits from this later period show a growing penchant for evoking different modes of transport. Emblems of the city and of urbanisation, bicycles, boats and railway carriages in family portraiture invoke a world in acceleration, a world in which priorities are shifting away from a sedentary life within the four walls of the home. In short, and notwithstanding the perfect immobility of the sitters, these portraits recall that the Victorian family in the age of photography was irrevocably set on a trajectory into modernity.

²⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 215.

²⁶⁰ Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', p. 515.

²⁶¹ Helmut Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* 3rd rev edn (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), p. 57.

Chapter 3.

At Home in the City: Photography and Urbanisation

Moving Multitudes

How is the impact of urbanisation brought to bear on photography? To what degree will new experiences emerging out of an increasingly urbane lifestyle alter the ways in which the city and its subjects are constructed (and viewed)? More specifically, in what pictures will Victorian families bound up with the pace, mutability and diversity of public spaces be depicted? As demonstrated in chapters one and two, photography in the second half the nineteenth century, notwithstanding its affiliation with home and family life, is a product of the city and its evolution synchronous with urbanisation. Chapter three, then, aims to further explore photography's role in negotiating between the period's ideology of withdrawal and the conditions imposed by a new, metropolitan life style. In doing so, the chapter draws attention to the growing range of photographic images produced for consumption within a domestic setting, arguing that pictures concerned with the city's built environments and lived spaces provided a significant mechanism for the middle-classes to visualise modernity and gauge their own role in it.

I begin by identifying and outlining the demographic, social and environmental factors that gave shape to photographic practise in the mid-century, ascribing significance to the complex impact of urban transformation processes and the unfolding of civil society. These broad themes are present in Arthur Boyd Houghton's street scene *Holborn in 1861*, a painting that strives

to communicate the full spectrum of impressions forced upon urban subjects, including the contentious presence of photography in everyday situations. The artist's representation of a photographic studio (and street board covered with images) in the midst an urban crowd productively recalls that Victorian commentators increasingly came to think of photography as a liminal form, a mixed experience that transcends divisions between private and public spaces. Pursuing this notion further, the chapter goes on to explore the popularity of the stereoscope as a domestic pastime, suggesting that this cultural practice elicits the full complexity of amalgamating domestic seclusion and worldly participation. What I am particularly interested in is retracing the evolving discursive patterns around stereoscopic viewing, focusing specifically on how topographical views and urban scenes interact with the emulous processes that shaped urban consciousness. However, a pertinent characteristic of mid-century photographic businesses is their diversity and adaptability. From the 1860s, architectural photography, generally operating under the auspices of public and private patrons, emerges as a further apparatus for recording, rationalising and publically communicating facets of the period's ongoing efforts to 'improve' cities across the nation. Thus, as I mean to argue in the final strands of this chapter, concluding with a study of Glasgow-based photographer Thomas Annan, far from foreclosing engagement with the socio-cultural dimensions of the city, these understudied collections of architectural photography expose the fundamental importance of urban spatial organisation and ornamental design in the construction of middle-class identity.

In the mid-1840s, Henry Fox Talbot comments on the pleasure of capturing people, families especially, speaking of potent photographs offering ‘much interest and a great air of reality’, but his observations open with a significant caveat:

If we proceed to the city, and attempt to take a picture of the moving multitude, we fail, for in a small fraction of a second they change their positions so much, as to destroy the distinctness of the representation. But when a group of persons has been artistically arranged, and trained by a little practice to maintain absolute immobility for a few seconds of time, very delightful pictures are easily obtained.¹

In the first instance, Talbot alerts his reader to the practical restrictions of the medium: the restless physical mobility and sheer amorphous size of the urban populace is such that it cannot for practical reasons be securely fixed onto the photographic plate; the large format box cameras initially in use required long exposure times and were hence only in a limited sense capable of freezing animated scenes into focused images. In alluding to questions pertaining to time and movement, Talbot touches on the scientific and technical issues that would restrict photography’s ability to capture mobile objects and living things close-up until around 1880.

However, as Victorian photographers came to understand at an early stage, capturing movement is a relative concept as it depends on the

¹ William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844). Plate XIV, *The Ladder*, p. 41. Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33447/33447-h/33447-h.html>. All further references are to this edition.

separation between the moving object and the stationary camera, as well as the actual pace of locomotion. Talbot's own photograph of an apparently (since moving elements would not show in the developed image) tranquil Parisian boulevard shows that sufficient space between the observer and the observed make it is possible to contain a degree of animation and to convey urban scenes without unwittingly introducing distracting, confusing or un-aesthetic elements.² Charles Nègre's unstaged calotypes of Parisian open-air markets taken around the early 1850s (evidence of Talbot's success in exporting his invention to French artists), testify to the practical difficulties in accomplishing technical perfection when observing urban life at close range, but nevertheless reveal photography's ability to record every-day scenes in cities even in its early phase (figure 28).

Photographs that stress human subjects and ordinary urban experiences, though prescient, are conspicuously rare in the mid-century period. Indeed, it is instructive to recall that Nègre is known literally to have effaced his street photographs, using the prints as canvases and publically presenting the animated street views in a different medium: as paintings rather than photographs.³ The practical, as one also begins to sense in Talbot's remark, is bound up with a growing fascination with the city but also a notion of the unexpurgated city as disorderly and un-aesthetic. Cities were subject to calamitous environmental factors, not least the blackening effect caused by smoke, fog and gas. Gloomy and turbulent fictional scenes, such as the

² Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, Plate II. *The View of the Boulevards at Paris*.

³ Colin Westerbeck, and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: a History of Street Photography* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1994), p. 70.

opening of Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (published 1853), forcefully convey the obstacles presented by the appalling environmental conditions of over-populated, polluted nineteenth-century cities: 'Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun'.⁴ This was compounded, as Dickens observes, by the constant traffic of '[foot passengers], jostling one another's umbrellas, in general infection of ill temper, and loosing their foot-hold at street-corners'.⁵ In the words of Asa Briggs: 'The ugliness of cities continued to shock'.⁶

Victorian cities were perceived as dangerous, unpredictable, disagreeable and difficult to make sense of. The uneasiness of contemporaneous attitudes to the urban

⁴ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Patricia Ingham (1853; Peterborough, Ont. and London: Broadview, 2011), p. 61.

⁵ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 61.

⁶ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1968), p. 74.



Figure 28.

Charles Nègre, 'Scène de Marché au Port de l'Hôtel de Ville, Paris (before February 1851)'. Courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington.

reflect the confusing spatial patterns of cities in a constant state of metamorphosis, for as Briggs notes, 'their surface world was fragmented, intricate, cluttered, eclectic and noisy'.⁷ Rather than emerging as a coherent whole, the Victorian city presents as a collage of fragments, microenvironments lacking overarching coherency. Notwithstanding, the nineteenth-century city was a middle-class formation and provided the stage upon which that political and cultural influence could be enacted.⁸ One important expression of this is the creation of new public sites – exhibition spaces, promenades, parks, monuments, cultural and educational institutions – in cities and towns during the latter half of the century, spaces denoting the extension of civil society, specifically, the evolution of Victorian municipal culture. Of equal importance in this context are more mundane developments, such as widening streets and pavements, the expansion of commodity culture and the introduction of new modes of transport: 'Communication and retailing were as important as sanitation'.⁹

In demographic terms, however, urban populations were overwhelmingly working class, and the heavy consolidation of poverty in cities represented a perpetual challenge to the cultural ethos and institutional power of the dominant classes. The pictorial arts, conscious of public taste and attitude, were hence slow to accommodate the full, complex force of urban life, taking a cautious approach in terms of topics and manner of presentation.

⁷ Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 17.

⁸ Richard Trainor, 'The Middle Class', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, ed. Martin Daunton, gen. ed. Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3 vols., pp. 673-713 (p. 673).

⁹ R.J. Morris, 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, pp. 395-426 (p. 413).

Poverty, as Ira Bruce Nadel and F.S. Schwarzbach note, constituted 'an everpresent danger to the economic, moral, and political stability of a hierarchal society: city art was liable to be vulgar if not actually seditious'.¹⁰ Contiguosness between different social classes was especially provoking to nineteenth-century viewers, evoking residual, visceral fears of the polluting moral and physical impact of working-class presence. Furthermore, there are virtually no photographs in this period showing large groups of working-class men and women, but a notable exception is William Kilburn's enigmatic, unstaged daguerreotype showing an 1848 Chartists' rally at Kennington Common in London (figure 29). The crowd seems unaware of the photographer's presence and it has been speculated that it may have been intended as a visual record for the police.¹¹ However, James Winter points out that street surveillance was a delicate political matter in the 1840s and 1850s and suggests that police officers were, in fact, not authorised to spy on Chartist activities.¹² In any case, the ordinary middle-class public is unlikely to have been comfortable with viewing a large working-class crowd in an open public space. Less than a decade previously, as the Cadbury manufacturing family apprehensively watched a Chartist demonstration from their Birmingham home, young Emma Cadbury recorded her dismay at the sight of the working-class women who were present then (as they evidently were in London in

¹⁰ I. B. Nadel and F. S. Schwarzbach, 'Preface', in *Victorian Artists and the City: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ira Bruce Nadel and F. S. Schwarzbach (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980), pp. xiii-xvi (p. xv).

¹¹ Mike Seabourne, *Photographers' London, 1839-1994* (London: Museum of London, 1995), p. 38.

¹² James Winter, *London's Teeming Streets: 1840-1914* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 56.

1848). As it happens, the family removed itself to the prosperous suburb of Edgbaston soon after.¹³

On the face of it, the reformist social environment in which photography became a public commodity invites unparalleled opportunities for observing and recording the wider facets of urbanisation. But, as has been widely acknowledged, until late in the nineteenth century photography displays a distinct reticence in

¹³ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago, 1991), p. 32.



Copyright Image

Figure 29.

William Edward Kilburn, 'The Chartist Meeting on Kennington Common, 10 April 1848'. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2016

response to the social effects of urbanisation on life in the street, most particularly the stresses experienced by the ever-greater numbers of poor families accumulating in city centres. John Falconer and Louise Hide, for instance, note the medium's failure to address the predicament of the poor, 'for many years it either actively avoided them or retreated into a sentimentalised pastoral past'.¹⁴ Photographic records of cities, they note, tend to reveal sanitised depictions of the physical, material environment, evidence of human inhabitants poised as if in a photographic sitting, as incidental by-product or eradicated entirely.¹⁵ Alternatively, impressions of the street were brought indoors and theatrically reconstructed in studios, not infrequently to comical or sentimental effect. Apart from isolated examples, it was only in the latter part of the 1870s that photography as a form of social documentary was tentatively brought before the eyes of a parlour audience, though the response, as Mike Seaborne points out, was 'divided about its merit as art or as propaganda'.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the unfolding mid-century city 'forced itself on the eye', Lynda Nead suggests, seemingly demanding visual representation, whilst at the same time being incommensurable with aesthetic, moral and stylistic conventions.¹⁷ As a result, artists, writers and photographers seeking a verbal and graphic language in which to express modernity employ a mixed register, shifting 'between old and new, demolition and construction, and an uneasy

¹⁴ John Falconer and Louise Hide, *Points of View: Capturing the 19th Century in Photographs* (London: British Library, 2009), p. 152.

¹⁵ Hide and Falconer, *Points of View*, p. 152.

¹⁶ Seaborne, *Photographers' London, 1839-1994*, p. 67.

¹⁷ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 14.

tension between the desolation of loss and the triumph of gain'.¹⁸ Popular forms, particularly the stereograph in the mid-1850s, brought national and foreign urban vistas, topical landmarks and architectural details of buildings into the domestic domain. Stereographic printers were beneficiaries of a commercialised photographic profession, an expanding print culture, a growing influence of popular taste and, crucially, the medium's suitability for representing topics that accorded with the interests and priorities of a burgeoning urbane middle-class, ranging from science, commerce and industry, to leisure, entertainment and learning.¹⁹ Privately and publically, Victorians pored over images of cities and the public events staged there; indeed, virtually every town in Britain and all the cities of Europe became accessible through the stereograph. At the same time, urban transformation was in many cities bound up with profound social and political upheaval, but these aspects are effectively suppressed in the innocuous representations of monuments, palatial and governmental buildings consumed by the public. As indicated by William C. Darrah: 'Photographic documentation of these underlying currents is virtually absent. Stereoviews with even a hint of political implications are extremely rare'.²⁰ Nevertheless, I argue that even standardized and repetitive pictures of the urban topography signify, bespeaking widespread engagement with the changes brought about by architectural reforms and urbanisation. They are also bound up with a more metropolitan perspective amongst the public and a growing interest in new

¹⁸ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 14.

¹⁹ William C. Darrah, *The World of Stereographs* (Gettysburg, Pa: Darrah, 1977), p. 15.

²⁰ Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, p. 111.

forms of social and leisure activities, including sightseeing and tourism, in cities that were slowly being adapted to middle-class expectations.

On a more profound level, mundane mass-produced photographs of cities are indicative of a metamorphosis in the structure and texture of bourgeois family life and of how the home-centred domesticity of the first part of the century, began to give way to an increasingly public lifestyle in the latter period. As argued by Simon Gunn in his study of the Victorian industrial city, the changes that occurred in the culture of the bourgeoisie in the second half of the century involve 'a shift ... to the more anonymous public world and social relationships of the mid-Victorian city'.²¹ Moreover, he points to a new emphasis on 'public visibility and display', manifested in acts 'conducted outdoors, as in the case of promenades and civic processions, or in settings, like the concert hall or the giant exhibitions of art and industry'.²² However, as suggested by Emma Cadbury's account of the Chartists' rally in the city of Birmingham, manufacturing cities, albeit more and more modern in character and appearance, had a long legacy of segregation and conflict. And the emerging social and cultural institutions, Gunn points out, did little to ameliorate disparate social groups, instead functioning as meeting points for privileged groups and individuals from similar backgrounds and with shared interests.²³ Hence, to contemporary observers such as Friedrich Engels, urbanisation was associated above all with anonymity and isolation, a 'dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate

²¹ Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 29.

²² Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 29.

²³ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 13.

essence, and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme'.²⁴

It is consistent with the changing nature of cities that the 1860s saw the gradual development of commercial architectural photography in urban centres, where it was pressed into the service of architects, artists, entrepreneurs, historians and governmental institutions.²⁵ In 1878 the *British Journal of Photography* encourages photographers to focus on 'the commercial life of the nation – the warehouse of the manufacturers, the marts of the shopkeepers, the palatial offices of our limited companies, the growth of architecture in town buildings'.²⁶ Practically 'any photographer in almost any town of the plainest brick and mortar type ... would find it commercially a success', the author argues, providing that the daily rhythm of streets, the opening hours of shops, the cadence of the factory flues, household chimneys and crowds of people, are negotiated.²⁷ And while the author regards this specific direction in photography largely in terms of historical and conservationist usage, it nevertheless highlights the diverse progress of the middle-classes in the city, an intention signified by the author's implicit concern with façades, which Henri Lefebvre argues became 'the epitome and modular form of bourgeoisified space'.²⁸ In Lefebvrian terms, by forming an

²⁴ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, ed. Victor Kiernan (1845; London: Penguin, 2009), p. 69.

²⁵ David Harris, 'Architectural Photography', in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*, ed. Robin Lenman and Angela Nicholson. Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662716.001.0001/acref-9780198662716-e-80?rskey=vA8FA8&result=83>.

²⁶ [Anon.] 'Street-Photography', *British Journal of Photography*, 24 May 1878, 241-242 (p. 241).

²⁷ 'Street-Photography', p. 242.

²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell, 1991), p. 361.

alliance with architecture at this crucial point, photography adds to the abstract graphic representations that, without 'frame of reference or horizon', impose 'a moral discourse on straight lines, on right angles and straightness' upon the disorder of lived social space.²⁹

While the industrial revolution was initiated at the end of the previous century, the city of the nineteenth century represents, as Eric E. Lampard points out, 'an outward symptom of a more profound tendency: the urbanization of society'.³⁰ This process, by which the population is, to use Lampard's expression, 'rendering itself urban' is at the centre of this discussion.³¹ The assimilation and interpretation of this social transformation took time though, and only towards the end of the period under discussion here, was it possible to gain a clearer perspective. Factual details, however, poured forth into the public arena throughout the era. Parliamentary committee and royal commission reports printed and published by the state in the shape of blue books, for example, entered the dynamic milieu of mid-century print culture. Oz Frankel highlights the enthusiasm for creating an 'enormous and accessible archive ... in print' shown by prominent individuals such as parliamentarian Benjamin Disraeli and social reformer Edwin Chadwick.³² Thus, 'by the middle of the nineteenth century the state itself

²⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 361.

³⁰ Eric E. Lampard, 'The Urbanizing World', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 2 vols., vol. 1, pp. 3-57 (p. 4). As Lampard explains, one-fifth of the population lived in urban areas at the start of the nineteenth century. When the first census was taken in 1851, it showed for the first time that the number of occupants in cities outweighed those living in rural districts. At the start of the following century, the enumeration indicated that three-quarters of the population were urban residents, see pp. 4-6.

³¹ Lampard, 'The Urbanizing World', p. 6.

³² Oz Frankel, 'Blue Books and the Victorian Reader', *Victorian Studies*, 46:2 (2004), 308-318 (p. 312).

became a cultural force, producing and peddling official publications'.³³

Official literature tended to stress the formidable problems associated with the working classes, but, interestingly, the 1842 report on child labour in English and Welsh mines, which includes, as Frankel notes, 'shocking testimonies of children accompanied by sensational illustrations of half-naked women pushing trolleys in dark mineshafts', proved exceptionally successful in publishing terms and was seized upon by private printers.³⁴ Chadwick's authoritative report *The Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Britain* was published the same year, similarly resulting in widespread and lasting public and political debate about the social conditions of cities.

It is against this background that Henry Mayhew describes *London Labour and the London Poor* as 'the first commission of inquiry ... undertaken by a private individual, and the first "blue book" ever published in twopenny numbers'.³⁵ It also accounts for the fact that Mayhew's 'cyclopean' work straddles different forms of verbal and visual communication, as suggested by Gertrude Himmelfarb who describes it as 'a dramatic rendition of the Sanitary Report'.³⁶ Mayhew's writing is symptomatic of a general zeitgeist in which the most extreme and abject aspects of poverty are brought to the fore, Himmelfarb writes, invoking 'an atmosphere of anxiety and crisis, a sense of

³³ Frankel, 'Blue Books and the Victorian Reader', p. 309.

³⁴ Frankel, 'Blue Books and the Victorian Reader', p. 312.

³⁵ Henry Mayhew, 'Preface', *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopædia of the Condition and Earnings of those that will Work, those that cannot Work, and those that will not Work* (1851; New York: Dover, 1968), 4 vols., vol. 1, p. xv. Mayhew's project first appeared as a series of articles in the *Morning Chronicle* 1849-50 and was first published privately by Mayhew in a two-volume edition in 1851-1852, then in a four-volume edition in 1861-1862.

³⁶ Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'The Culture of Poverty', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, ed. H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 2 vols., vol. 2, pp. 707-736 (p. 719).

psychic and social dislocation': 'The society he depicted was in a visible state of dissolution, the people in a morbid, pathological condition, a condition that was permanently critical, imminently fatal'.³⁷ The illustrative sketches, however, based on daguerreotypes by Richard Beard (as announced by the captions), are static representations, taken in Beard's studio and imbued with the conventionality of contemporary portraiture. Scenes where Mayhew's 'street-folk' appear to act out their trade in the street, are conceived by an artist, at a further stage in the process.³⁸ Even so, Mayhew's acknowledgement of the photographer's role in the captions implies an understanding, not only of photography's acclaimed truthfulness, but also of its potential as a medium in social journalism.

Further testament to the perceived interest among the ordinary public in social affairs is the (somewhat abridged) publication of the 1851 census 'in a convenient form, and at a moderate price' so as to be suited for 'popular reading'.³⁹ This book publication in 1854 is manifestly driven by the familiar moral codes of Victorian domesticity, embodying a document that reaffirms the calamitous reverberations of urbanisation, not least overcrowding. As asserted by the census, an English family 'should live in a separate house', the 'principle of separation and retirement, lying at the very foundation of the

³⁷ Himmelfarb, 'The Culture of Poverty', p. 717.

³⁸ See for example, Thomas Prasch, 'Photography and the Image of the London Poor', in *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and its Contexts* (New York and London: Garland, 1996), pp. 179-193 (p. 182).

³⁹ Great Britain. Census Office, 'Preface', p. III, in *The Census of Great Britain In 1851; Comprising an Account of the Numbers And Distribution of the People, Their Ages, Conjugal Condition, Occupations, And Birthplace ; With Returns of the Blind, the Deaf-and-dumb, And the Inmates of Public Institutions. And an Analytical Index. Reprinted, in a condensed form, from the official report and tables* (London: Longman, 1854). Available at <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011560406>. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

national character' (7). Yet, it is forced to acknowledge a disturbing degree of deviation from this standard, such that it threatens to disarticulate the rhetorical foundation of the census itself. In the northern parts of the country and in Scotland, for instance, 'the families of the middle-classes, as well as the poor, often live in large flats, which constitute separate tenements within the same party-walls' (p. 8). The defining features of 'the family' proving unworkable, they must give way to the practicable, but ideologically circumspect, term '*occupier*' (8).

This anxiety provoking mass of evidence, pertaining overwhelmingly (though not exclusively as indicated by the census) to the working classes congregating in metropolitan centres, betokened an urgent need for organisation and differentiation of individuals within these communities. Photography, a medium already incorporated into mass print culture, seemed guaranteed to perform this role with exactitude and technical efficiency. Allan Sekula speaks of the materialisation in the mid-century of a 'generalized, inclusive *archive*, a *shadow archive*' that promised to absorb, standardise and hierarchically order men, women and children across the social stratum.⁴⁰ While family albums, as discussed earlier, positioned individuals within a private social network, systematic photographic record keeping by institutions and other agencies evolved around a similar principle of classification and stratification, albeit generally serving more concrete purposes. 'Here was a method for quickly assessing the character of strangers in the dangerous and congested spaces of the nineteenth-century city', Sekula writes, '[here] was a

⁴⁰ Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 (Winter 1986), 3-64 (p. 10).

gauge of the intentions and capabilities of the other'.⁴¹ Crucially, photographic record keeping of subjects detained in private and public institutions (criminals, orphans, the sick or homeless) is linked to the gradual aggregation of social statistics, a computation of numbers that produced an increasingly abstract way of thinking about human beings: as numerical *averages*. As argued by Foucault (though he rarely mentions photography), such disciplinary and corrective techniques render the individual subjugated to 'a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power', whereby 'he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality'.⁴² What I am especially interested in, however, are the ways in which the containment of individuals within private and official photographic 'archives' impacts on the perception of people in the nineteenth-century city. For example, in what sense did practices around portraiture in the mid-Victorian period contribute to a concealment of the new network of social relationships, especially those conducted in public urban environments? After all, photographic portraits in this period do signify confinement, be it within the high brick walls of the prison or the elegant façade of the family home, and hence the form obfuscates the fact that Victorian lives were increasingly lived out-of-doors, in public, urban (or sub-urban) spaces. This idea, as I will seek to demonstrate, needs to be further explored, elsewhere, in other photographs.

But, granting a generalised social and cultural dread of the execrable human and material elements of the city, pictorial urban motifs were in fact in

⁴¹ Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', p. 12.

⁴² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 191.

no way trivialised or shunned. On the contrary, evidence suggests that pictures of all kinds present significant platforms for constructing the city's identity, to symbolically assert presence and lay claim to its topographical spaces. The extent to which the urban milieu in this period is experienced as a contested site, however, is suggested by the fact that metropolitan motifs so often articulate insecurities, the social malaise of cities intervening and intruding upon ostensibly wholesome and respectable pictorial scenes. In other words, to write oneself into the narrative of cities, to position oneself within its topography, the values and meanings of which one is still uncertain, is no simple thing. If the lesson for the Victorian urbanist, as Lewis Mumford suggests, was "'what to avoid'", then that lesson had still to be fully understood.⁴³

An Essay in the Modern: *Holborn in 1861*

By way of opening up the ambivalent relationship between photography, the Victorian family and the city, I begin with a painting: Arthur Boyd Houghton's *Holborn in 1861*, one of a group of curious and disquieting paintings depicting contemporary urban street life executed between 1859 and 1865 (figure 30).⁴⁴ Like many of his contemporaries, Houghton worked prolifically across various pictorial and textual fields, combining painting, poetry, illustration and journalism. It is therefore hardly surprising that he was keenly observant of the connections between different media of communication and the discursive

⁴³ Qtd. in Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Other titles in this series include: *Recruits* (1859), *Itinerant Singers* (1860), *London in 1865*. All are oil on canvas with an average size of 30x40 cm. See Paul Hogarth, *Arthur Boyd Houghton* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1975), pp. 20-21.

exchanges that took place against a backdrop of an expanding mass market for cultural commodities. This small painting evokes the style and form of popular narrative pictures, and Houghton's fascination with domestic life is evident, but at the same time, the subject matter appears difficult to reconcile with the entrenched values of domestic idealism. Rather, the unconventional composition and complex matrix of ideas bespeaks an artist drawn towards modernity of thought, form and vision. Indeed, to Paul Hogarth, this represents Houghton's 'most ambitious essay in modern genre'.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Hogarth, *Arthur Boyd Houghton*, p. 21.



Figure 30.
Arthur Boyd Houghton, *Holborn in 1861*. Reproduced in Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000)⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Despite assistance from several institutions (including English Heritage, University of East Anglia Archives and Victoria and Albert Museum) efforts to trace the location of the painting have failed.

One of the most striking aspects of the painting is the way in which the compositional complexity seems to defy a systematic reading. The claustrophobically crowded street-corner is kaleidoscopic and fluid in appearance, forming a collage of scattered narrative fragments. Technically, the composition is sophisticated, for some 76 figures are crammed into the view: a nursemaid (or mother) with a plump baby in a perambulator; fashionably colourful female figures; a diminutive costermonger; a great number of children occupying the gaps within, between, and even above; an enigmatic flâneur in a top hat; teeming omnibuses; a photographer (or so-called 'door-man'), flanked by a photographic street board.⁴⁷ And at the forefront of this human gallery, the shadowy members of an impoverished slum family trudge past, threadbare, stooping and unnoticed, their short steps slackening the intense tempo of the surrounding commotion. Somewhat ominously, beneath their bare feet, a deep cavity attended by the near-silhouettes of two road workers can be seen, recalling the fact that the Holborn area was the site of some of the most intense construction work undertaken in order to transform and improve London streets in the 1860s.

Houghton's modest excavation looks forward to one of the most extensive demolition and construction projects seen in the capital: the building of Holborn Viaduct between 1866 and 1869. The new viaduct was intended to alleviate road congestion and allow traffic to flow more freely between the west and the City, and to bring to London, as the *Illustrated London News*

⁴⁷ It is difficult to judge what kind of photographic prints are shown in Houghton's painting, but photography scholar Carolyn Bloore suggests the board may include engravings, such as woodcuts.

suggests, some of the monumental grandeur seen in Paris 'since the establishment of the Second Empire'.⁴⁸ Photographer Henry Dixon was commissioned by the Corporation of London to chart the progress of the works, a move indicative of photography's expansion into areas such as architecture in the 1860s.⁴⁹ However, the series produced by Dixon is not restricted to structural aspects; rather, the images suggest that the photographer regarded his undertaking through a wider lens, as suggested by the elevated vantage points adopted and the creation of panoramic views.⁵⁰ Moreover, several of the photographs foreground advertisements and billposters signifying the growing commercialisation of the area, a development with which the engineering project itself is fundamentally bound up (figure 31). Towards the end of the series, however, in the period near the formal opening, which took place in the presence of Queen Victoria, Dixon includes a number of images apparently showing congregations of officials and their families (figure 32). In one photograph a group of formally dressed men, women and children pose on the parapet of Holborn Viaduct, adjacent to a sculpture representing commerce, created by artist Henry Bursell. Presented in these new formidable surroundings, as opposed to the confines of a domesticated studio, the group adds a future dimension to the Holborn site by projecting the possibility of a city constructed on the combined principles of

⁴⁸ [Anon.] 'Her Majesty's Visit to the City', *Illustrated London News*, 6 November 1869, 445 (p. 445).

⁴⁹ See for example, David Harris, 'Architectural Photography', in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*.

⁵⁰ See Mike Seaborne, 'Urban Landscape'. Available at <http://www.urbanlandscape.org.uk/essays/earlylondon2.htm>

commercialism and patriotic art; a city suited to accommodate the middle-class family.

Holborn in 1861, by contrast, calls forth the animated disorderliness of Lefebvre's 'lived' urban space. The overall effect of the composition is literally overwhelming so that, as Nead observes, the whole scene seems to 'tip forward towards the viewer', or perhaps, the pit.⁵¹ Indeed, the painting resembles a compressed version of Mayhew's survey of the capital in 1862, where, tellingly, he describes London as a 'strange incongruous chaos', an indeterminate architectural entity, unfolding its social and topographic multiform:

⁵¹ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 49.



Figure 31.
Henry Dixon, 'Holborn Viaduct', 1869 © London Metropolitan Archives, City of London

Some persons, turning to the west, regard London as a city of palatial thoroughfares, and princely club-houses and mansions, and adorned with parks.... Others, mindful but of the City, see, principally, narrow lanes and musty counting-houses, and tall factory chimnies, darkening (till lately) the air with their black clouds of smoke; and huge warehouses, with doors and cranes at every floor; and docks crowded with shipping, and choked with goods; and streets whose traffic is positively deafening.... Others, again, looking to the east, and to the purlieus of the town, are struck with the appalling wretchedness of the people, taking special notice of the half-naked, shoeless children that are usually seen gambling up our courts, and the capless shaggy-headed women that loll about the alleys or lanes, with their bruised, discoloured features telling of some recent violence; or else they are impressed with the sight of the drunken, half-starved mobs collected round the glittering bar of some palatial gin-shop, with the foul-mouthed mothers there drugging their infants with the drink.⁵²

Further to Mayhew's sensationalist account of stark social division, Victorian London is what Roy Porter calls 'a scattered city', in which 'districts were ever in flux, turbulent eddies of change, as citizens ceaselessly moved on, to avoid going down in the world'.⁵³ But, somewhat ironically, as streets are widened,

⁵² Henry Mayhew and John Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London. And Scenes of Prison Life* (1862), p. 18. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139095327>.

⁵³ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 209.

rail tracks hammered into the ground, slums eradicated, industries, offices and shops put up, people of all ranks became increasingly likely to collide on the crowded pavements that remain underfoot.



Figure 32.
Henry Dixon, 'Holborn Viaduct', 1869 © London Metropolitan Archives,
City of London

Houghton's print shop/photographic studio may be a pictorial 'aside' and yet I would suggest that the space given up to this visual element and the illuminated band that runs across the picture – from the images pinned to the board and across the central figures – indicate that it is pertinent to Houghton's 'essay' on the nature of domesticity in the context of commodity culture, social diversity and the relentless transformation of urban spaces. Indeed, a drawing completed by Houghton around 1865, showing a couple posing in the simple domestic interior of a photographic studio, is further demonstration of his interest in the camera as an eyewitness to family life during this decade (figure 33). For all its domestic ordinariness, the effect of the arrangement is intriguing and may add something to our understanding of the polysemous role of photography in the painting. To begin with, from our side view we see what the mechanical portrait would not show: the abandoned headrest, the simple floorboards, the man's casual dress and pose in full. But Houghton's intention here is clearly not to satirise or even to articulate the artificiality of the form. Rather, the arrangement of the scene gives prominence to the experience of the self, mutating into image.

'Photography', as Roland Barthes suggests, 'transformed the subject into object, and even, one might say, into a museum object' (or, display item in a public street).⁵⁴ Houghton's drawing thus prefigures Barthes' notion of the photographic portrait as a 'closed field of forces', a site in which 'image-repertoires intersect'.⁵⁵ We, observers ourselves, look on from the artist's

⁵⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 13.

⁵⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 13.

viewpoint, imagining (even if we cannot see) the photographer's 'double' gaze at the couple (in the present studio room and in the picture to be), all while the pair looks past, into the camera's eye, in anticipation of themselves as image-objects to be studied by others. Susan Sontag



Copyright Image

Figure 33.

Arthur Boyd Houghton, 'Facing the Camera', ca. 1865 © Tate, London

suggests that photographs ‘help people to take possession of a space in which they are insecure’, a statement that captures the paradox of photography’s unfolding as a domestic ritual on a mass scale alongside, and in close conjunction with, urban modernity.⁵⁶ The practice, she notes, concurs with the diaspora of the larger family unit and its reconstitution into smaller domestic fragments. Thus, the desire to look at, collect, manipulate and order the world in photographs is bound up with a threatening sense of loss of control and an urge to make one’s environment safe, comprehensible, even docile.

Nor is the growing pre-occupation with photographs confined to the middle-classes. As suggested by one of the illustrative drawings in Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*, easy access to cheap studio portraiture in towns and cities in the second half of the century plays a fundamental role in enabling all but the very poorest to participate in this pictorial moral economy (figure 34). ‘Those who live in the west-end of London have but little idea of the numbers of persons who gain a livelihood by street photography’, Mayhew writes: ‘In the eastern and southern districts of London, however, such as in Bermondsey, the New-Cut, and the Whitechapel-road one cannot walk fifty yards without passing some photographic establishment’.⁵⁷ The central arrangement in ‘Photographic Saloon, East End of London’ shows what will be visible in the portrait: a plump, respectable looking woman with an infant child posing in a reconstructed domestic (albeit sparse) parlour milieu,

⁵⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 9.

⁵⁷ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor: A Cyclopædia of the Conditions and Earnings of those that will Work, those that cannot Work, and those that will not Work* (1851; London: Frank Cass & Co., 1967), 4 vols., vol. 3, p. 204.

the simple chair and table recalling that the range, quality and degree of specialisation of the furniture bore subtle testament to the status of both sitter and operator. The pair is framed by a white censoring screen that edits out the squalid,



Figure 34.
[Anon.] 'Photographic Saloon, East End of London [*From a Sketch*]', from *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 3 © British Library

makeshift studio environment and the street beyond, though the latter nevertheless threatens to intrude through the open door and the window above. Adding the modifier 'street' to 'photography', as he does, unmistakably degrades the term and asserts difference in relationship to other forms of practice. In this, of course, he replicates a pattern in Victorian usage of the word, for in compounding 'street' with 'walker', 'woman' or 'language' the same rhetorical effect is achieved.⁵⁸ The location, London's East End – Dickens' "'reservoir of dirt, drunkenness, and drabs; thieves, oysters, baked potatoes, and pickled salmon'" – instantly conjures images of privation, although, as P. J. Keating points out, the area has yet to emerge as a more universal symbol of urban destitution.⁵⁹ Even further, when Mayhew inspects a studio of the mobile, caravan type he finds it is being run as a family venture (and doubling up as domestic dwelling), and that the wife acts as the 'operator', since "'people prefers more to be took by a woman than by a man"'.⁶⁰

What would surely have fascinated a contemporary viewer, however, is the complex, unsettling signification in the drawing. On one hand, it indicates that the working-classes have absorbed the important lesson that normative mid-Victorian domesticity is constructed within physical structures and around objects, for, as Chase and Levenson remind us: 'Victorian domesticity was as much a spatial as an affective obsession. Increasingly, to imagine a flourishing private life was to articulate space, to secure boundaries, and to distribute

⁵⁸ Winter, *London's Teeming Streets*, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Qtd. in P. J. Keating, 'Fact and Fiction in the East End', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 2, pp. 585-602, (pp. 587, 589).

⁶⁰ Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, vol. 3, p. 204.

bodies'.⁶¹ On the other, the image seems to dramatise the delusory prospect of imposing such dreams of middle-class domestic bliss on the working classes by highlighting the studio's fundamental connection with the street, its intrusion on the scene echoing the permeability of actual floors and walls in working-class housing. Moreover, the network of gazes that are being projected across the picture displays a marked concern with Victorian urban experience as a visual spectacle, thereby signposting cultural anxieties surrounding the ocular in this era. Without stretching the point unduly, it is interesting also to note that the pictures discussed here form part of an accumulation of verbal and visual accounts of a wide range of photographic studios, indicating a cultural urge to further examine this fundamentally modern site, to which Victorian families and individuals of all kinds regularly made their pilgrimage in search of moral and social affirmation.

In *Street Life in London* (1877), photographer John Thomson and journalist Adolphe Smith follow Mayhew's lead by including street photography in their study of urban professions practiced by the 'humbler classes'.⁶² In the preface the authors declare their indebtedness to *London Labour and the London Poor*, while insisting that the present work offers a more modern and factual account by 'bringing to bear the precision of photography' ('Preface'). 'Photography on the Common' appears under the heading 'Clapham Common Industries' and is juxtaposed with a second

⁶¹ Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 143.

⁶² John Thomson and Adolphe Smith, *Street Life in London* (1877; New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1969), 'Preface' [n.p]. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

photograph, 'Waiting for a Hire', which shows costermongers (and a saddled donkey) originating from 'a slum hard by' (41). In the first view, we see the itinerant photographer with his camera about to take a picture of a nursemaid and her charge (figure 35): 'Nurses with babies and perambulators are easily lured within the charmed focus of the camera', and furthermore, 'the portrait rarely fails to excite the interest of the parents' (39). The visual proximity of these two professions recalls Mayhew's low opinion of street photography, although Smith's text vouches for the



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Figure 35.

John Thomson, 'Photography on the Common', 1877 © John Thomson / Museum of London

photographer's 'in comparison ... superior intelligence' (41). Several important aspects of the Thomson-Smith collaboration reveal Mayhew's prevailing influence, but there is a significant change in tone. As argued by Jeff Rosen, the more empathetic attitude to the poor in *Street Life in London* bears testament to the urban reform initiatives that had taken place in the interim, and projects a desire 'to meet the needs of a new public that wanted to believe that social reform efforts actually changed living conditions among the poor for the better'.⁶³

A crucial indicator of the changing moral perspective in 'Photography on the Common' is the shift in setting, from a grimy backstreet in East London to a green, public space on the fringes of the city. Parks and commons were by the 1870s

emblematic of successful societal intervention in cities, which opened up to the public respectable, regulated and wholesome leisure spaces, quite unlike those commonly found in city streets. Kennington Common, shown in figure 29 above, is a case in point: it was enclosed in 1852, four years after the last great Chartist rally. The creation of urban green space, in response to 'the present mania for "grass plots" and "bedding out"', as put by one observer in 1874, was driven by pressure groups such as the Commons Preservation Society (created in 1865), but it was also part of a larger process, as Douglas A. Reid explains, whereby 'municipalities discovered both the desire and the

⁶³ Jeff Rosen, 'Posed as Rogues: The Crisis of Photographic Realism in John Thomson's *Street Life in London*', *Image*, 36:3-4 (1993), 9-39 (p. 23).

means ... to civilise their populations'.⁶⁴ Above all, *Street Life in London* emphasises the social benefits of the common, a site where (as the reader may infer), the poor, through providing, observing (and even partaking in) familial activities such as donkey rides and family photography, are by proxy subject to the edifying influence of the happy, home-loving bourgeoisie.

Photography came to form an integral aspect of city streets during the second half of the century, a component in the general deluge of mass-produced images thrust upon and consumed *en masse* by the urban public. The structural impact of standardised, cheap portraiture on the industry, notwithstanding a critique that increasingly cast the form as insular, repetitive and imitative, was momentous, representing the vast proportion of trade activity in the mid-century, with some three to four hundred million *cartes de visites* sold every year in England between 1861 and 1867.⁶⁵ 'Few photographers', as Darrah notes, 'could afford to ignore public taste or popular demand'.⁶⁶ But, as the attentive, if not vaguely predatory, photographic merchant in *Holborn in 1861* recalls, the critical response to the commercialisation of photography was, to say the least, uneven. In the public debate, anxieties pertaining to the spread of photography are often bound up with the urban experience itself, coalescing around shop displays and the physical presence of street traders, concerns which are manifested in progressively regular outbursts in the Victorian press. In 1861 *Photographic*

⁶⁴ James Winter, *London's Teeming Streets: 1830-1914* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 159 and Douglas A. Reid, 'Playing and Praying', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Vol. III, 1840-1950*, pp. 745-807 (p. 763).

⁶⁵ William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in the Nineteenth Century* (Gettysburg, Pa.: W. C. Darrah, 1981), p. 4.

⁶⁶ Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, p. 6.

News, for instance, puts ‘the photographic nuisance’ foremost on its list of grievances relating to London streets, above ‘swindling shop-keepers’, ‘insolent omnibus-conductors’, ‘extortionate cab-drivers’ and ‘little half-naked ruffians’; individuals who, by and large, also convene in Houghton’s painting.⁶⁷

The artist’s troubled fascination with family life and with modernity as depicted in *Holborn in 1861* provokes the viewer to work through the incongruity of its thematic strands. Indeed, the sheer intensity of the painting depends precisely on the dialectics of meaning and on the moral confusion surrounding its domestic themes. Interestingly, Houghton’s illustrations form part of the so-called ‘Idyllic school’, a somewhat curious fact in this context, since the term loosely defines a group more typically drawn towards pleasant rural scenes far removed from the grime and turmoil of urban life.⁶⁸ But, as Paul Goldman remarks, although Houghton’s work may rightly be termed ‘domestic’, his scenes from Victorian family life are frequently destabilised by the presence of darker notes that, in Goldman’s words, ‘hint at a real unease at the centre of the Victorian psyche’, a tendency that is also reflected in Vincent Van Gogh’s description of the artist as “‘weird and mysterious like Goya’”.⁶⁹ Hogarth speculates that Houghton’s failure to gain wide artistic acknowledgment should be understood in terms of the ‘grotesque’ edge to his work, a quality that rendered him dubious to ‘a middle-class public whose narrow outlook did not include an interest in eccentric and socially conscious

⁶⁷ [Anon.] ‘Photographic Dens and “Doorsmen”’, *Photographic News*, 16 August 1861, 389 (p. 389).

⁶⁸ Paul Goldman, *Victorian Illustration: The Pre-Raphaelites, the Idyllic School and the High Victorians* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004), p. 115.

⁶⁹ Qtd. in Goldman, *Victorian Illustration*, p. 128 and Hogarth, *Arthur Boyd Houghton*, p. 14.

art'.⁷⁰ 'Rags, tatters, and dirt, whether on a living person or in a painted picture, are seldom quite agreeable', as one Victorian commentator succinctly concluded, *à propos* the middle-class preference for the picturesque in visual art.⁷¹

Certainly, *Holborn in 1861* is notable for the way in which it brings together different social classes, a reminder that the pedestrian practices of the Victorian public made social confrontations virtually inevitable. The geographical locus, too, an unmistakably commercialised site with walls and passing omnibuses covered by signs and advertisements, adds significance to this element. Consumption of goods, as Thomas Richards notes, entered a democratic phase in the second half of the century, an ideological shift that intended not so much equality in terms of actual procurement, but rather 'a society in which everyone was equal in the sight of things', a *coup d'oeil* of the commodity market, so to speak.⁷² The site is important also because centrally placed are several females, some chaperoning infants, others seemingly unaccompanied. The 1860s and 1870s saw considerable expansion of urban environments constructed around consumption, John K. Walton suggests, areas that drew the public into city centres accessible by foot, or (for those who lived further afield) by cab, omnibus and train:

[The] increasing visibility of women as shoppers in these contested spaces (alongside female service workers and prostitutes, in an

⁷⁰ Hogarth, *Arthur Boyd Houghton*, p. 10.

⁷¹ [Anon.] 'The London Art Season', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 106, August 1869, 220-239 (p. 230).

⁷² Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 61.

environment where perceived ambiguities of status and intent issued forth in frequent sexual harassment) brought colour and conflict, pleasure and peril to such urban settings.⁷³

But alongside (often quite literally) in-door spaces for consumption, street-traders (including Mayhew's all-consuming interest, the costermongers) continued to operate. As Winter points out, in spite of being identified as morally questionable, an economic threat to respectable businesses and a street obstruction, the total number of 'penny-capitalists' actually increased in central cities in the period.⁷⁴ In fact, street sellers came to exist in a symbiotic relationship with permanent outlets, meeting 'a real social need' by offering services whereby working-class families reliant on meagre and periodical incomes, could buy things locally, in small quantities and at low-cost.⁷⁵ In the face of such complexities, urban authorities charged with regulating these and other marginal groups – including the large numbers of street workers trading in sex, as opposed to fish, vegetables and simple household goods – responded in a manner that was inconclusive, haphazard and always subject to controversy. It hardly surprises, then, that Houghton's street scene appears so visually and topically condensed as to seem vaguely surreal. Yet, it gives a powerful sense of the city and brings out, with exceptional pertinence, the complex patterns of urbanised Victorian domesticity in the second half of the century. Those thematic strands, furthermore, play a fundamental role in shaping the relationship between photography, the city and its inhabitants.

⁷³ John K. Walton, 'Towns and Consumerism', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, pp. 715-744 (p. 723).

⁷⁴ Winter, *London's Teeming Streets*, p. 109.

⁷⁵ Winter, *London's Teeming Streets*, p. 109.

As I have suggested, the impact of mass-produced photographic forms on domestic rituals and practices, as well as the visual, even physical, impact of outlets and traders operating in Victorian streets, is revealing. In particular, the habits, compulsions and conventions surrounding popular and fashionable modes of photography are indicative of how the medium operates in relay between the interior and the exterior by constantly adding to the enlarging visibility of Victorian domesticity and, crucially, to the range of vision of those remaining within the walls of home. Thus, it is not difficult to see how photography presents a promising field for examining the impact of urbanisation on the construction of Victorian domesticity. I propose, however, that more needs to be said about the urban topography as a pictorial subject in order to better understand the ways in which photography contributes to (and problematises) the legibility of the nineteenth-century city as a social space. My particular concern, then, is to examine what photographs of urban spaces disseminated during the period of broad popularisation from the mid 1850s onward, add to our understanding of the ways in which Victorian domesticity makes a home for itself (or fails to do so) in the Victorian city.

Cultural historians have suggested that modernity unfolds via a range of discontinuous discourses and precisely through the tension between order (the surveyed, measured, planned, built) and disorder (the personal, diverse, relative, playful). As suggested by Richard Dennis, new public urban environments in the nineteenth century can be regarded 'as products of rational planning and scientific management, but also as spaces for new kinds of everyday life, and as potential spaces of resistance or subversion' (figure 36

and 37).⁷⁶ The recognition of competing or complementary approaches in defining the Victorian city provides a kind of framework in which to place the wide range of photographic images, say, narrative studio enactments, tourist mementoes, antiquarian or administrative records, that may loosely be termed mid-century street photographs. More extensive scholarly analysis of photography and the city in this period is notably thin on the ground and the slipperiness of the term itself bespeaks the uncertain signification of urban spaces and the camera's complex role in transmitting knowledge of this environment. Indeed, 'street photography' is seemingly defined by the context in which it is being used, evolving and acquiring new meanings, as photographic practices mutate and the streets themselves evolve.⁷⁷ To Mayhew, for instance, it is merely a pejorative term of reference for the most basic forms of practice exercised in squalid studio settings, although by the 1870s it may be taken to mean any photographic view concerned with the urban environment, while to others again it is becoming more specifically bound up with photography as a medium for social documentary. Even so, seemingly disparate images concerned with the urban geography do share common discursive ground, I am suggesting, each proffering a form of provisional response to that equivocal and yet pervasive Victorian question: What does it mean to be modern? What makes the photographic response to urbanisation especially notable in the decades predating the handheld

⁷⁶ Richard Dennis, 'Modern London', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, pp. 95-131 (p. 99).

⁷⁷ See for example, Mike Seaborne, 'Introduction', in *London Street Photography, 1860-2010*, ed. Mike Seaborne and Anna Sparham (Stockport: Dewi Lewis, 2011), p. 7.

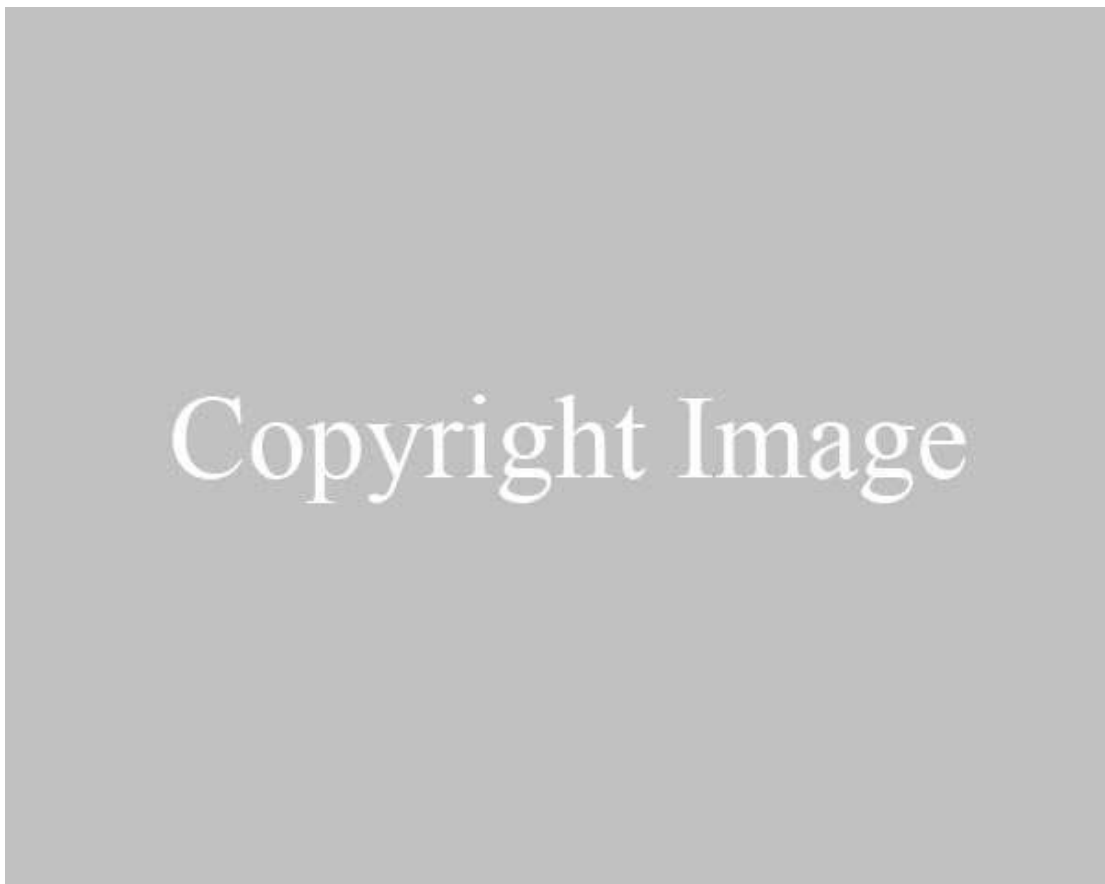


Figure 36.
[Anon.] 'Road Repairers near London Bridge Station', ca. 1860. Courtesy of Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas at Austin

camera and dry-plate of the 1880s and 90s (processes that enabled new decentred and differentiated modes of image making and consumption) is the technology's interconnection with the emulous economic and ideological processes that worked towards shaping urban consciousness. Thus, tracing the eclectic visual patterns in photographic representations of the city help amplify our understanding of the complex relationship between the Victorian public and modernity in a period marked by uncertainty and vicissitude.

Imagining: The Vicarious Drawing-Room Pleasures of Urban Imagery

It would be wrong Mark Girouard suggests, to view suburban living simply as a repudiation of the city; rather, 'it was a way of getting, or trying to get, the best of both worlds'.⁷⁸ Even so, the rhetorical and physical distancing between inner-city spaces and the family helps account for the need of alternative or ancillary ways in which the city could be constructed, explored and inhabited. The fundamental reconfiguration of society and culture brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation in the nineteenth century 'redrew the major axes of patriarchal relations', Alison Mackinnon suggests, causing 'a major reshaping of personal life ... and the development of what some have deemed new technologies of the self'.⁷⁹ Importantly, the growing geographic and social separation between the work place and the home that followed from the expansion of Victorian cities, lead to a deepening of sexual divisions in society and an entrenchment of gender binaries in the discourse surrounding domestic

⁷⁸ Mark Girouard, *Cities and People: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 284.

⁷⁹ Alison Mackinnon, 'Was there a Victorian Demographic Transition?', in *The Victorian World*, ed. Martin Hewitt (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 276-290 (p. 279).

life. Sub-urbanisation was, as we know, to a large extent made possible by the development of new technologies; first and



Copyright Image

Figure 37.

[Anon.] 'Woman trying to get on a horse bus', ca. 1850-1880 © TfL from the London Transport Museum Collection

foremost transport systems, omnibuses, trams and local railway lines, which simultaneously represent a kind of technology of retreat from the ghastly aspects of the city and the possibility of re-entering it on different terms. Access to transport also led to new forms of social relationships being established between people by creating social situations whereby travellers could survey the city and its inhabitants at a distance and, in communal travelling environments, silently study strangers within. To contemporaneous observers the most profound aspect of modernity was the nurturing of individualism, Richard Sennett reflects, denoting, at one end of the spectrum, self-reliance, but at the other, something more doleful, 'a kind of civic solitude'.⁸⁰ Sennett associates this aspect of urbanisation in a fundamental sense with the experience of movement and travel, most especially the efficiency of underground railroads, which, following the opening of the Metropolitan in London in 1863, carried growing numbers of men and, though to a lesser extent, women into and out of the city: 'The technology of the nineteenth century gradually made movement into such a passive bodily experience. The more comfortable the moving body became, the more also it withdrew socially, travelling alone and silent'.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1994), p. 323.

⁸¹ Sennett, *Flesh and Stone*, p. 338. See also Transport for London, notes on the collection: 'Public Transport in Victorian London: Part 2: Underground': 'The world's first underground railway, the Metropolitan, opened on 10 January 1863 and was immediately popular. On its first day almost 40 000 passengers were carried between Paddington and Farringdon, the journey taking about 18 minutes. To dispel any fears Victorian passengers might have had about travelling underground, stations were designed to make use of natural light and carriages were brightly lit with gas lamps, the gas being stored in gas bags on the carriage roofs. By the end of its first year of operation 9.5 million journeys were made. Even as the metropolitan began operation, the first extensions were already being authorized; these were built over the next five years.' Available at <http://www.ltmcollection.org/resources/index.html?IXglossary=Public%20transport%20in%20Victorian%20London%3a%20Part%20Two%3a%20Underground>.

At the same time, the expansion of Victorian print culture in the mid-century played a critical role in opening up an imaginative and vicarious engagement with what might well constitute new and unfamiliar urban sites and situations. As my earlier discussion of photography and domestic periodical journalism suggests, this topic represents a poignant example of how people were able to participate in urban culture at street level, as it were, from within the home. The following continues to explore this understanding by focusing on the visualisation of the city in mass-produced photographic images consumed in a domestic setting, as well as in public commercial spaces. More specifically, I look closely at the pictorial form that perhaps more than any other in this period elicits the complexity of melding worldly participation and domestic seclusion: the stereoview. In this sense, my analysis differs from William Merrin's in that I do not perceive this cultural practice as primarily defined by its association with familial separation, as a technology that works to amplify the insularity of the domestic sphere from public and communal spaces.⁸² Rather, I suggest that the enthusiasm with which the broad stratum of the middle-classes entered into the virtual reality offered by stereoscopic imagery, exposes the complexity and ambivalence that marks the relationship between mid-Victorian domesticity and modernity. Furthermore, this discussion places the surge in stereographic viewing in the late 1850s firmly within a context of metropolitan trends and patterns of consumption, viewing it as an episode in mass culture that is forged and modified through a

⁸² William Merrin, 'Skylights onto Infinity: The World in a Stereoscope', in *Visual Delights Two: Exhibition and Reception*, ed. Vanessa Toulmin and Simon Popple (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2005), pp. 161-174 (p. 170).

dialogue with advertising, the periodical press and the city itself. Thus, I am also not inclined to prioritise Jonathan Crary's view that mass visual culture in this period acted toward abstraction and dematerialisation, profoundly separating the self from other sensory impressions, social relationships and tangible matter.⁸³ Instead, tracing the discursive patterns that surround popular iconic forms in the second half of the century, I take the medium to perform more as a mediator between viewing subjects and a changing social and material modern world in which their own role is, as yet, only sketchily drawn in.

In the mid-century photographic market, stereoviews complemented cheap portrait formats such as the *carte de visite* since they were better suited to show topographical and architectural motifs, and to reconstruct interior and exterior groups or 'scenes' ('comprehending almost every incident of ordinary life', as boasted by the London Stereoscopic Company).⁸⁴ The stereograph grew into a cultural sensation following its display at the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park in 1851, where it was reportedly subject to royal approval: 'At the present moment it is in use and demand in almost every town and hamlet in the country', the *Leisure Hour* reports in 1858, 'and it is fast making its way into the households of the middle-classes'.⁸⁵ As I have already suggested, stereoscopes and stereoviews were specifically advertised to the public as domestic entertainment with a topical diversity that allegedly catered

⁸³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1992), p. 13.

⁸⁴ See for example, London Stereoscopic Company Advertisement, *National Magazine* 1 (January 1857), 18 (p. 18).

⁸⁵ [Anon.] 'A Word on the Stereoscope', *Leisure Hour: A Family Journal on Instruction and Recreation*, 3 June 1858, 346-349 (p. 348).

for every individual taste within the family unit. In the social and cultural climate of mid-Victorian Britain this marketing strategy clearly contributed to the colossal success enjoyed by scores of stereographic publishing houses, including the London Stereographic Company, which manufactured at least a thousand stereoviews per day.⁸⁶ Panoramic views of towns, ports and resorts were common, while cultural landmarks, monuments and prominent official institutions abound, alongside buildings, such as libraries, museums and places of learning, as well the collections within. More and more, public spectacles were made available to the public and all international exhibitions were photographed from 1851 onwards.⁸⁷

In the fraught context of Victorian urbanisation, then, the stereoscope tapped into the experience of modernisation in several different ways. It reworked the overwhelming sense of both clutter and magnitude associated with the urban environment by breaking it down into neat parcels, piecemeal segments (or topical collections) that made cities accessible, manageable and knowable to a parlour audience, whilst at the same time promoting engagement in urban life. As the *Leisure Hour* put it in 1858, 'home scenery and domestic portraiture are open to the selection of the purchaser': 'Hitherto the fireside traveller has circumnavigated the globe in books. He may now repeat the process, and see with his own eyes, by means of the stereoscope'.⁸⁸ But the following year, the same periodical places less

⁸⁶ Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, p. 45.

⁸⁷ For a comprehensive breakdown of stereographic topics in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Darrah's encyclopedic 'A Subject Guide to Stereographs', in *The World of Stereographs*, p. 145.

⁸⁸ 'A Word on the Stereoscope', p. 349.

emphasis on the parlour experience, focusing instead on the ways in which the exterior milieu has been transformed from a visual aspect by the mass of photographic images exhibited in city streets and 'always placed in the sight level'.⁸⁹ Stereoscopic slides, the author reports, can be seen 'by hundreds of thousands in the shop windows, and embrace an endless variety of every imaginable subject'.⁹⁰ There are scenes of families in their 'domestic retirement', narrative scenes, 'ghost scenes' and 'public buildings, exteriors and interiors, cities, towns, street scenes, coast scenes, dead game, fruit pieces'.

The confusion of different types of space and ways of being that such street displays must surely have given rise to can also be traced in the advertising campaigns of the London Stereoscopic Company. The aforementioned advertisement from 1857 emblazoned with the firm's much-publicised catchphrase ('No home without a stereoscope'), and embellished by a drawing showing a happy domestic group absorbed by the new fireside entertainment, is a case in point (see figure 6). The centrality of the parlour in the visual space of the advertisement denotes its symbolic density in an era that promoted a distinctly bourgeois brand of domesticity but at the same time, the firm is forthright about the propinquity of the home and the marketplace, urging 'all who can visit their establishments to do so', with a supplementary notification that 'those who reside at a distance' may access the stock by mail order.⁹¹ Thus the advertisement animates the complex

⁸⁹ [Anon.] 'Correct Likeness! One Shilling!', *Leisure Hour: A Family Journal of Instruction and Recreation*, 11 August 1859, 508-510 (p. 508).

⁹⁰ 'Correct Likeness! One Shilling!', p. 509.

⁹¹ Advertisement, *National Magazine*, January 1857, 18 (p. 18).

interplay between an emerging consumer culture and domestic ideology, which would give shape to the familial interior and its inmates.

To be sure, the mixed messages with which this advertisement is engaged are further underscored by an image used to promote the firm's Cheapside Studio in the City of London in the 1860s, where the commercial location has now become the signifying site (figure 38). Here, the company brand (which appears amongst the rooftops) is made to appeal precisely through its direct association with modernity, manifested by the confusing, congested, crowded urban milieu in which it is physically located. It would have been self-evident to a reasonably well-informed observer, however, that photographic technology in its present phase would not have been able to render this turbulent scene in focus, suggesting that the image has been subject to considerable manipulation. In this sense, this rather elaborate piece of publicity (like the stereoscope itself) is an invitation knowingly to indulge in the image as a simulacrum, whilst simultaneously, though in this instance subliminally rather than expressively, inducing the viewer to 'come and see'.

Reactions to the stereoscope evinced in mid-century press were rarely consistent and undivided, something which in part reflects practices that were unscrupulously commercialised and market-minded. Stereographic publishers were.



Figure 38.

[Anon.] 'London Stereoscopic and Photographic Company Co, Ltd.' , ca. 1867. Courtesy of Gernsheim Collection, Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas at Austin

first and foremost, as Darrah remarks, participants in a highly competitive print market: 'Negatives were bought, resold, multiplied, copied legitimately and pirated illegitimately. Many of the most famous photographers purchased negatives and advertised them as their own ... assistants were seldom properly credited'.⁹² At the same time, many businesses were run as family ventures, 'wives learned the trade from their husbands, sons and daughters from their fathers'.⁹³ As suggested previously, the success in both production and retailing had generally opened up new opportunities for women in a highly constricted labour market, thereby subtly widening the scope for a critical debate on gender and employment. For a variety of reasons, then, the social impact of stereographic publishing, from a mid-Victorian standpoint, is distinctly dichotomous. And, while some continued to regard it as a technology set to 'educate the popular eye', the industry would increasingly become mired in public accusations of wanton commercialism, as well as sleaze and immorality, in the decades to follow.⁹⁴

As implied by *Punch* in 1862, not even 'armchair' viewing of the Great Exhibition, reproduced in 'capital' photographs by 'the Stereoscopic Company', is untainted by notes of salaciousness: '[In] a few minutes you know all about the Exhibition.... Then there's the delicious quiet, and you can look as long as you like at *The Venus* or the *Reading Girl*, without being shoved, and without hearing the various idiots, of all ranks, emitting their

⁹² Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, p. 6.

⁹³ Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, p. 6.

⁹⁴ 'A Word on the Stereoscope', p. 348.

noises'.⁹⁵ While rendering the medium's particular educational claims somewhat dubious and destabilising any reassurance offered by the homely setting, *Punch's* piece plays on the more generalised moral consternation around visual culture and the reprographic technologies that made mass circulation of images possible in the 1860s. *Punch* invokes the period's hyper-awareness of threats poised to undermine public morality, concerns that, paradoxically enough, followed on from the various initiatives to curb the spread of indecent material. One also senses something of the complexity of temporally displacing and spatially dispersing works of art outside the realms of institutional discursive control, since, as Benjamin points out: 'permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder ... in his own particular situation', enables new and autonomous responses.⁹⁶ To be sure, in his discussion of the revolutionary impact of mechanical reproduction, Benjamin pays limited attention to popular forms of photography in the 1860s. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, I take the connection between subjective narrative agency and mass culture to be significant beyond its 'most positive form', a means of unpicking the complex, tenuous relationship between the domestic sphere, mass-produced photographs and modernity.

One of the first photographers to make a commercial success of photographing street life was the London-based photographer Valentine Blanchard. By using a small camera mounted on top of a hansom cab and by keeping exposure times to a minimum, he captured the capital in photographs

⁹⁵ [Antibabylon] 'How to See the Exhibition in Ten Minutes', *Punch* 63, 27 September 1862, 135 (p. 135).

⁹⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 215.

marketed as ‘instantaneous views’, designed for stereoscopic viewing. The *Photographic Journal*’s review of Blanchard’s *Instantaneous Photographs of London; and Marine Views* in 1862 commends the publication as a whole, noting the technical quality of his views of St Paul’s Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament, but ultimately questions the wisdom of attempting street photography. ‘Perhaps no city in the world presents greater difficulties or greater temptations to the instantaneous photographer than London’ and (in a characteristic search for ‘depth of sentiment’ and ‘artistic taste’), the journal expresses a preference for Blanchard’s nautical sunsets.⁹⁷ Certainly, the series is indicative of the repetitive compositions employed in stereo imagery, techniques intended to enhance the experience of seeing the photograph through a three-dimensional viewer and establish a familiar composition that would help audiences to make sense of busy scenes. To more recent critics, such as Westerbeck and Meyerowitz, the effect of this perspectival approach is a relentless conventionality that imposes a specific viewpoint and emphasises the camera’s ‘impersonal authority’.⁹⁸ But accounting for the appeal such images held calls for further probing of the way in which they were read and experienced by the ordinary consumer.

A more commonplace perspective seems to have informed the approach taken by the *British Journal of Photography*, when it remarks that Blanchard’s instantaneous views of the capital had made it possible ‘for those who have never visited the metropolis of England to familiarize themselves

⁹⁷ [Anon.] ‘Reviews’, *Photographic Journal*, 16 June 1862, 73 (p. 73).

⁹⁸ Westerbeck and Meyerowitz, *Bystander*, p. 82.

with the aspect of its out-of-door life and bustle'.⁹⁹ Reading a series of images in this collection, the review highlights their ability to communicate every-day events in the street, particularly the interaction between people of different age, gender and social class. The area surrounding the Bank of England consequently becomes an urbane theatre of moving traffic, foot passengers, a police constable and numerous children:

A gentleman in light-coloured trousers, and with a square parcel in his hand, is in the act of stopping while crossing the road, while a lady is just preparing to cross from the pavement in front of the Exchange, upon the steps of which may be noticed the usual groups of idlers lounging about.

In front of the National Gallery, viewers encounter 'an omnibus into which a lady is in the act of entering, the door being held open by the conductor, while leaning across from the "monkey board", according to the manner of the species', the slight blurring of pedestrians and traffic in the immediate vicinity, giving a vivid sense, the review suggests, of the daily preoccupations facing people in the streets of the city.

Further to these comments, consider Blanchard's view of Temple Bar, the ceremonial entrance point to the City of London from the western parts of the capital (figure 39). Through the peepholes of the viewer, as we imagine, the closest image plane displays ordinary men, women and children on the pavement, then further layers of traffic and pedestrians, while the vanishing point accentuates the daily gridlock underneath Christopher Wren's arch as

⁹⁹ [Anon.] 'Stereographs. Instantaneous Views of London', *British Journal of Photography*, 1 May 1863, 189-190 (p. 189). All further references are from the same page.

the scene merges into a formless mass of people, vehicles and animals. To the Victorian public, Temple Bar represented an emblem of the capital, throughout the nineteenth century acting as a key locus for ritualistic performances of civic and national identity. In accounts of the procession following the wedding of the Princess Royal in 1858, for example, the site represents a highlight, subject to exalted press communication. 'Temple-bar was decorated specially in honour of the occasion', writes the *Englishwoman's Review*, before engaging in a detailed account of the panoply of symbols denoting state and municipal puissance on the arch and its surroundings.¹⁰⁰ Frequently, however, the Temple Bar area features in less salubrious contexts, most especially as the localisation of some of the most chaotic and dangerous conditions for pedestrians and vehicles on the move in the city. Domestic readerships were fed a regular news-diet of major and minor incidents and accidents, typified by another report in the *Englishwoman's Review* some months previously of a run-away horse pulling a delivery van that careered into an omnibus under the Temple Bar arch, knocking over both omnibus and horses.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ [Anon.] 'Departure of the Prince and Princess of Prussia', *Englishwoman's Review and Home Newspaper*, 6 February 1858, 349 (p. 349).

¹⁰¹ [Anon.] 'Accident', *Englishwoman's Review and Home Newspaper*, 31 October 1857, 142 (p. 142).



Figure 39.
Valentine Blanchard, 'Temple Bar, Fleet Street / Strand', ca. 1862 ©
Valentine Blanchard /Museum of London

Throughout the 1850s and 1860s diverse periodicals took an active role in the controversy surrounding the congested passage, publishing articles and drawings on the topic, some dramatically illustrating the hazardous conditions prevailing in the area, others with a keener eye to its picturesque beauty. 'No doubt of it — Temple Bar must come down', stipulated *Punch* in 1852, irreverently adding that it could be usefully preserved as the façade of a local public house.¹⁰² By contrast, the *Lady's Paper* presented the monument (in word as well as image) as an embodiment of the nations' historical and cultural identity destined to be obliterated 'in the modern rage for *improvement*'.¹⁰³ But by the middle of the century, Lynda Nead argues, most people had come to regard the monument as 'a physical expression ... of the complex landscape of London government, which blighted dreams of a total London makeover in the image of Paris and of the creation of a modern, unified metropolis'.¹⁰⁴

All the Year Round's 'The Dangers of the Streets' represents a characteristic attempt to bring into focus the circuitous issues around London's street environment through personalised, thrilling narratives. Framed as a hair-raising journey by foot through the city's central parts, M. R. L. Meason punctuates his account with arguments, facts, statistics: '*The Times* recently informed us that, every year, two hundred and twenty-three people are killed by carts or carriages in our thoroughfares.... At this rate, about two

¹⁰² [Anon.] 'Temple Bar', *Punch* 23, 27 November 1852, 230 (p. 230).

¹⁰³ [Anon.] 'Temple-Bar', *Lady's Newspaper*, 5 November 1853, 273 (p. 273).

¹⁰⁴ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 203.

people are murdered every three days'.¹⁰⁵ The underlying problem, as identified by the author, is the absence of street regulations and the great sway given to the principles of 'self-government and non-interference', resulting in streets 'everywhere to the eastward of Temple Bar' being nothing less than 'the worst regulated thoroughfares in Europe'.¹⁰⁶ The pre-eminence of individual sovereignty did indeed run deep in the collective psyche, but, as Winter points out, there was something more personal at stake for both men and women in the debate about the streets: the freedom unchecked public spaces offered from constrictions prevailing in the domains of private society and domestic life.¹⁰⁷

The wide range of topics represented in stereographic views uniquely evinces the composite nature of Victorian cities and the broad matrix of ideas that contribute to shaping urban consciousness. Many stereoviews of Victorian cities focus on metropolitan centres (as opposed to the residential, outer circumference) and popular forms of entertainment available to urban crowds at different localities in and around metropolitan spaces. As noted by Barthes, cities have historically been experienced and constructed as a centrifugal spaces 'where subversive forces, forces of rupture, ludic forces act and meet', as foils to the perimetrical sphere, which, by contrast, is determined by 'everything which is not otherness: family, residence, identity'.¹⁰⁸ Yet, themes and topics connected with domesticity are constantly reasserted in the

¹⁰⁵ [M. R. L. Meason] 'The Dangers of the Streets', *All the Year Round* 15, 24 February 1866, 154-157 (p. 156).

¹⁰⁶ 'The Dangers of the Streets', p. 156.

¹⁰⁷ Winter, *London's Teeming Streets*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Roland Barthes, 'Semiology and the Urban', in *The City and the Sign*, ed. M. Gottdiener and A. Lagopoulos (New York: Colombia University Press, 1986), pp. 88-98 (p. 96).

Victorian press. When Hippolyte Taine trawls through volumes of *Punch* (by way of determining the essence of British identity), it is the preoccupation with familial matters that signifies. In countless pictures, Taine argues, readers are invited to delight in happy conjugal scenes, played out in pretty cottages, breezy seaside towns and snug drawing rooms: 'Not a single drawing dealing with prostitutes of any kind', nor 'a single drawing on marital infidelity', 'on the contrary, marriage is honoured, and what are represented are its sweets, its affections, its intimate poetry.'¹⁰⁹ The tone in the press is gently humouring, as opposed to satirical, he remarks: 'there are no prematurely aged and ugly *bourgeois*, no ugly, scolding, tyrannical children'.¹¹⁰ In addition, readers were rarely subjected to representations of the daily hardship of working-class families, like those divulged by Taine himself, in the shape of cold climate; hard working conditions; large families; threat of unemployment.¹¹¹

But for all that affirmation of idyllic domestic values in English periodicals, Martha Banta argues that a sceptical attitude to the dichotomous separation of private and public space is creeping into British press illustration in the second half of the century. '[The] makers of myths about harmonious lives cushioned in corners of safe refuge', she suggests, 'are equally quick to direct their talents to the task of breaking those myths apart'.¹¹² Thus, the mob that was kept at bay in the vignette of Richard Doyle's aforementioned 1849 *Punch* illustration 'There is no Place like Home', is in *Bird's Eye View of*

¹⁰⁹ Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on England*, trans. Edward Hyams (1860; London: Thames and Hudson, 1957), p. 197.

¹¹⁰ Taine, *Notes on England*, p. 199.

¹¹¹ Taine, *Notes on England*, pp. 228-229.

¹¹² Martha Banta, *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 105.

Modern Society (a compilation of drawings that had previously appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*), no longer distinguishable as separate and other. In 'modern society', Doyle's drawings suggest, there is an intense two-way traffic between public spaces (bazaars, parks, streets, exhibitions, concerts, even the sea-side) and the domestic interior. Hence, to be entertained at the homes of one's friends, comments in the 1864 edition of *Bird's Eye View of Modern Society* imply, is to subject oneself to dangers and inconveniences hitherto associated with the street, thereby amplifying the uncanny impression given by the artist, namely, that the people who inhabit the parlour *are* the crowd:

The whole staircase at last becomes choked up with 'society', closely packed ... while in the centre or middle-passage, the horrors of which increase each moment, two streams of company are seen, one supposing it is going up, and the other under the impression that it is coming down; but that is a delusion for neither has moved more than three-quarters of an inch the last half-hour.¹¹³

Urban culture was to a large extent created and conceived through a dialogue between the periodical press and the Victorian public, Michael Wolff and Celina Fox argue, the periodical becoming 'a sort of primer of Victorian urban self-consciousness'.¹¹⁴ At the same time, they emphasise that graphic representations of modernity aimed at a predominantly middle-class readership involved a careful negotiation of moral and aesthetic sentiments. New topics arising out the city did not as a rule alter the artistic style of

¹¹³ Richard Doyle, *Bird's Eye View of Modern Society* [Reprinted from *Cornhill Magazine*] (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1864), p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Michael Wolff and Celina Fox, 'Pictures from the Magazines', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 2, pp. 559-582 (p. 559).

representation in the periodical press, ‘techniques of illustration employed and artistic conventions used reflect social values, present in both staff and reader’, they argue, values ‘which collaborate towards distancing the urban reader from the urban scene’.¹¹⁵

Many photographers were slow to challenge the aesthetic and ideological status quo, but the notion of ‘instantaneously’ accessing urban situations through the lens of modern technology clearly added an important participatory dimension to the relationship between the city and middle-class audiences. In any case, the daylight ordinariness of Blanchard’s photograph communicates a more astute forecast of Temple Bar’s prospects: After finally being dismantled in 1878 it was re-erected at the entrance to the private home-county residence of the successful brewer Sir Henry Meux, an outcome that in many ways epitomises the shifting of authority that shaped all Victorian cities.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that photographic publishers became increasingly adept at feeding into the Victorian public’s awestruck fascination with public spectacles, producing views that demonstrate the complex signification surrounding specific localities. Photographer Alfred Silvester’s work, for instance, covers diverse aspects of mid-Victorian life, combining humorous domestic interior scenes with representations of the thespian, carnivalesque side of metropolitan spaces. The comic *Full stop* depicts a bizarre encounter between a young girl with a skipping rope and a vexed gentleman, who, in rushing past, has become caught in the loop of the

¹¹⁵ Wolff and Fox, ‘Pictures from the Magazines’, p. 562.

swinging rope (figure 40). Behind the pair is a money lender's shop and the walls are covered with printed bills, adding to the playful realism with the self-referential faux advertisement for 'Sketches [from?] Life for the Stereoscope by A. Silvester', at the top right hand corner. Here too, an important part of the impact derives from creating the impression that the camera is able freeze a split second, fugitive moment, and from the skill with which the photographer disguises the manufactured nature of the arrangement. But the whimsical mood of the incident is significant; after all, this could be a rather more discomfiting reminder that to venture out of doors in the Victorian city is to separate oneself from one's private identity and be exposed to the unknown. By the same token, visual (and verbal) comedy in Victorian periodicals, as Wolff and Fox remind us, put a different slant on the bleak and dispiriting side of urban living. It seems clear that stereoviews of this kind came to play an analogous role in that they too 'created an illusion of



Copyright Image

Figure 40.
Alfred Silvester, *Full Stop*, ca. 1850-1860 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

portraying urban reality that was both plausible in its presentation and harmless in its deflationary effect'.¹¹⁶

The episodic sequence *National Sports. The Rail! The Road!! The Turf!!! The Settling Day!!!!* (ca. 1865) explores what Blanchard Jerrold calls one of 'the salient features of our metropolitan life': an outing from London to Epsom Downs (figure 41).¹¹⁷ The series charts the different modes and classes of travel followed by the racing event itself and what comes after: the settling of debts. This narrative chronology was clearly intended to reinforce the illusion of going on a journey, by optically travelling into the depth of each frame and by the fact that each new slide creates a sense of moving forward in time, as well as space. Furthermore, it allows the photographer to expand the topic by weaving in associative ideas, thereby broadening the appeal. *The Rail* recalls that railway compartments became increasingly common motifs for artists and writers in the 1850s and 1860s, the framing of the compartment and varying degrees of comfort and privacy offered within neatly exposing the polarised class-divisions of society at large.

But for all the social compartmentalisation, the intimacy of public train travel as a pictorial motif inevitably ran the risk of disclosing morally questionable situations, as demonstrated by Abraham Solomon's genre painting *First Class – the Meeting: 'And at First Meeting Loved'*, exhibited in 1854 together with *Second Class - the Parting*. The maternal female with her child, flanked by a couple and a single female in a fairly austere second class carriage did not stir any hostility in critics, but the first-class study of a

¹¹⁶ Wolff and Fox, 'Pictures in the Magazines', p. 571.

¹¹⁷ Jerrold Blanchard, *London: A Pilgrimage* (London: Grant & Co., 1872) p. 73.

sleeping father and a young woman who is being befriended by a newfound suitor, was felt to be highly improper. A second version was produced, where the now alert father sits in the middle, chatting animatedly to the



Figure 41.
Alfred Silvester, *National Sports. The Rail! The Road!! The Turf!!! The Settling Day!!!!*,
ca. 1865. Courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

young man, presently transformed into a dashing naval officer.¹¹⁸ Silvester's stereographic version of second-class railway travel, however, goes further in exposing the intimacies of public transport. His railway carriage, as Carol Jacobi notes, shows a packed carriage inhabited by a small child and its mother, who appears to have fainted and is attended to by a stranger, all under the disapproving gaze of an older man with a bandaged nose (possibly indicating that he suffers from syphilis), while in the background a fight has broken out.¹¹⁹

Interestingly, in 'Epsom', one of several articles on this and related topics to appear in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* in this period, Dickens and W. H. Wills employ very similar narrative strategies. Pitched so as to engage all members of the familial reading group ('for the edification of the few who know Epsom races only by name, and for the amusement (we hope) of the many who have sported over its downs'), the authors reassuringly vouch that they 'know little of horses' and 'nothing of sporting'.¹²⁰ Dickens' and Wills' sequential tale also begins with a train journey toward the eponymous, oddly rural-metropolitan place ('[there] is little perceptible difference in the bustle of its crowded streets') where diverse scenes unfold rather like slides in a stereoscope (244). In what follows, the condensed demographic mosaic that is 'the Derby people' is broken up and transformed into *tableaux vivants* of 'so many carriages, so many fours, so many twos, so many ones, so many

¹¹⁸ Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon, 1999), p. 139.

¹¹⁹ Carol Jacobi, "'Poor Man's Picture Gallery': Victorian Art and Stereoscopic Photography". Available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/display/bp-spotlight-poor-mans-picture-gallery-victorian-art-and-stereoscopic/essay>.

¹²⁰ [Charles Dickens and W. H. Wills] 'Epsom', *Household Words* 3, 7 June 1851, 241-246 (p. 241). All further references are from the same article and are given parenthetically in the text.

horsemen, so many people who have come down by “rail”, so many fine ladies in so many broughams, so many of Fortnum and Mason’s hampers’ (245).

Silvester’s centre-piece *The Turf* reads as form of visual companion piece to Dickens’ and Wills’ fragmentary, disjointed and climactic account of the race itself: ‘Now they’re off! No. *Now* they’re off! No. *Now* they’re off! No. *Now* they are! Yes! There they go! Here they come! Where!’ (245). In *The Turf*, a coloured-in composite print, the viewer is positioned close to the nearside crowd, looking over the heads of the tightly pressed men and women (figure 38 above). At the centre of the image horses plough through, cheered on by a rapturous audience at the far side. As indicated by the influential American commentator Oliver Wendell Holmes in one of three key articles published in *Atlantic Monthly*, the cluttered, dislocating distribution of figures in stereoviews of this type simultaneously conveys the psychological and physical intensity of the moment and incites viewers to carefully navigate their way around the scene. In Holmes’ words, ‘[the] mind feels its way into the very depth of the picture’, which in turn forces upon it ‘a frightful amount of detail’, but therein lies its compelling power, for ‘a perfect photograph is absolutely inexhaustible’.¹²¹

Indeed, to Holmes the pivotal topic or subject matter of a stereoview is not at the heart of the experience, but rather the decentralised details: ‘The more evidently accidental their introduction, the more trivial they are in themselves, the more they take hold of the imagination’. ‘It is common’, he

¹²¹ [Oliver Wendell Holmes] ‘The Stereoscope and the Stereograph’, *Atlantic Monthly* 8, June 1859, 738-748 (p. 744). All further references are from the same article and are given parenthetically in the text.

adds, 'to find an object in one of the twin pictures which we miss in the other' (745). That is, these details interact rhetorically with the viewing subject by engendering new and prior narratives in a process that bespeaks a form of unpredictability, an openness to multiple readings that notably contravenes claims of the medium's authoritative perspective. Behind his insistence on the photographic image as a form of continuum of ideas, moreover, one senses the author's pragmatic awareness of the need to engage with the variegated interests and experiences of a parlour audience. With Holmes' own mid-Victorian familiarity with the practice in mind, then: how would middle-class consumers read the images discussed above? If the eye is liable to stray from the topical or visual centre, what would it take hold of? Evidently, it is not the equestrian events that would preoccupy many viewers of *The Turf* (or indeed, readers of *All the Year Round's* 'Epsom') but rather the appearance and relationship between individuals in the crowd, questions raised by, say, a masculine arm curved around a female waist ('trained like the vines' as Dickens and Wills observe), coupled with the intriguing fact that the lady appears to have moved marginally closer in the second view.

In 1861, in the face of what he regards as an incomprehensible 'indifference ... among many persons of cultivation and taste', Holmes holds up the instantaneous view of a bustling city street as an embodiment of human experience, emblematised by Edward Anthony's 1860s series of 'instantaneous views' of New York.¹²² To look at Anthony's street photography is to immerse

¹²² [Oliver Wendell Holmes] 'Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture; with a Stereoscopic Trip across the Atlantic', *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1861, 13-29 (p. 16). All further references are from the same article and are given parenthetically in the text.

oneself in 'the central life of a mighty city ... in all its multitudinous complexity of movement' (figure 42):

See the shop-boys with their bundles, the young fellow with a lighted cigar in his hand, as you see by the way he keeps it off from his body, the *gamin* stooping to pick up something in the midst of the moving omnibuses, the stout philosophical car-man sitting on his cart-tail, Newman Noggs by the lamp-post at the corner. Nay, look into Car No. 33 and you may see the passengers; — is that a young woman's face turned toward you looking out of the window? See how the faithful sun-print advertises the rival establishment of 'Meade Brothers, Ambrotypes and Photographs.' What a fearfully suggestive picture! ... What if the sky photographs ... every act on which it looks (17-18).



Figure 42.

Edward Anthony, 'Broadway, New York, in the Rain', ca. 1860 © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Importantly, Holmes' lively, fanciful description invokes the stereoview not merely as image, but as language. Compensating throughout for a technology not yet able to accommodate photographic illustrations on the periodical page, he painstakingly *reads* selected images (allegedly chosen out of one thousand views), many showing streets and tourist sites in Europe. London, seen with Holmes' keen eye, is transformed into a phantasmagoria of people, vehicles and buildings, interwoven by a bewildering array of voices and stories, past and present. The sight of the Thames induces a particularly vivid account that recalls the contested significance of this space in Victorian art, journalism and fiction, where, as Caroline Arscott notes, it features increasingly as 'an amalgam of the debased and the aesthetic'.¹²³ 'London Bridge!', he exclaims, '[the] parapet is breast-high; — a woman can climb over it, and drop or leap into the dark stream lying in deep shadow under the arches', while the distant Monument provokes further fantasies of suicidal women falling through the air in front of witnesses below (19). In sum, if we are to take Holmes seriously, the potency of even the most innocuous city view, seen through mid-Victorian eyes, should not be underestimated.

It is also in 1861 that the *Bookseller* proposes that understanding the domestic consumer of Victorian periodical literature (variously compelled towards the 'wonderful, new, true, political, historical or exciting') calls for studies beyond private homes and public libraries, necessitating careful surveys of the picture-filled streets.¹²⁴ These observations foreground an

¹²³ Caroline Arscott, 'The Representation of the City in the Visual Arts', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, pp. 811-832 (p. 818).

¹²⁴ [Anon.] 'Illustrated Periodical Literature', *Bookseller*, 30 November 1861, 681-689 (p. 681).

intriguing reciprocity between the graphic and the verbal made possible by the opening up of the publishing industry in the mid-Victorian period, as well as the resultant erosion of the private/public dichotomy, developments that are thrown into sharp relief by commodities such as the stereoscope.

Building: Photography and the Architecture of Modernity

From the 1860s, technological and scientific improvements, public interest and the sheer scale of urban development projects, mobilised photographers and institutions more systematically to accumulate images of urban spaces. 'The city became the primary stage upon which life evolved and was played out during these decades', Roy Flukinger writes, and as such, 'the events of daily life began to acquire added significance'.¹²⁵ Conversely, 'urban dwellers became more visually attuned to the city around them and particularly to the expressive and documentary powers of the photograph within that world'.¹²⁶ A salient trait of the professional photographer in this era, however, is pragmatism and diversity of practice. The most notable practitioners of Victorian street photography in the 1860s and 1870s operated across a number of fields, in activities ranging from private and public commissions on history, science art and architecture, to portraiture, stereo views and 'at-home' photography (popularised by upper echelons of society towards the end of the period). That is, professional urban mid-Victorian photographers habitually viewed their surroundings through different lenses (comic, architectural, artistic, familial, institutional, topographical or social) and operated under the

¹²⁵ Flukinger, *The Formative Decades*, p. 69.

¹²⁶ Flukinger, *The Formative Decades*, p. 69.

different auspices, each circumstance imposing specific practical and discursive demands.

Not all changes to the urban geography were systematically recorded, but several major official surveys of urban transformation projects were commissioned to photographers in the latter part of the 1860s, resulting in collections of what might be described as administrative views, collections primarily, at least originally, intended as bureaucratic records. However, many of these images remind us that the intended meaning of an image is never foreclosed, fixed or stable, since photographs are subject to material processes and may be reproduced and reconstituted in a variety of ways, even in a limited space of time. The physical environment of the mid-century city itself was fluid and unpredictable and, of course, photographers may well, consciously or otherwise, exceed the parameters of the project at hand. Moreover, as Kate Flint so astutely points out, a photograph ‘very frequently contains the stray, the unintended, the accidental, or the serendipitous’ and the construction of meaning, in the mind of the viewer, is not necessarily halted at the edge of the frame.¹²⁷ It is not always clear, furthermore, what is intended and what is not; the thing that we want, as Barthes understood, may well be found in the details that frame the centre.¹²⁸

As the nucleus of the Victorian city increasingly came to be associated with evermore overcrowded, mobile cells of poverty, the chaos of construction work and changing infrastructure, more affluent residents

¹²⁷ Kate Flint, ‘Surround, Background, and the Overlooked’, *Victorian Studies*, 57:3 (2015), 449-461 (p. 450).

¹²⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 27.

gravitated outward, or alternatively into, class-based zones, albeit with the knowledge that such boundaries were neither impermeable nor fixed. Speaking of the capital, as a result of its size and complexity especially susceptible to social and economic crosscurrents, Porter notes that '[dislocation] and relocation were always occurring—nothing ever stood still, nothing was constant except mobility itself':

Aspirant folk were always moving somewhere new, more modish, seeking a villa (or at least a semi), or a house in sight of fields, further from the brickyards, the fog and riff-raff. The coming of omnibuses and trams, overground and underground railways, meant development was never paralysed by inaccessibility or insupportably long journeys to work. The providential logic of the market kept population rise, housing demand, transport improvements and building capacity broadly abreast of each other – which is not deny that many builders went broke, railway investors lost their savings in some of the City's more spectacular crashes, and tens of thousands ended up evicted to make way for the iron horse or found themselves at the bottom of the housing heap.¹²⁹

The form, texture and pattern of the Victorian city were by all accounts uneven and changeable, a blueprint for modernity in which the overall shape of the grid is constantly slipping out of focus. The fluidity and discontinuity of urban networks, Winter argues, 'explains why so many early Victorians came to define the city as a circulatory system rather than a fixed place'.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Porter, *London*, pp. 208-209.

¹³⁰ Winter, *London's Teeming Streets*, p. 5.

Construction, regulation, clearance and demolition, allowing for constant locomotion of people, animals, vehicles and trains, played a paramount part in the construction and experience of modernity. 'It was central to the phenomenology of the city', Martin Daunton notes, 'to the cacophony of noise and the experience of dirt, to the spread of disease through the vector of flies, and the cost of haulage'.¹³¹ It comes as no surprise that there was a growing demand for portable maps, including those of transport systems ('a talisman in such a dark and dangerous place—an object of order in a place of chaos', as Simon Foxell puts it), knowledge of which promised men and women, visitors and inhabitants alike, a safer course through and out of the city.¹³² The intense official mapping of the Victorian city, its surface layers and underground spaces, is indicative of the need to produce visual signs that communicate control and mastery. From the 1860s photography, invested with technological, scientific prowess and often operating under the patronage of private and public commissions, provided a further apparatus for rationalising modernity.

Industrial and architectural imagery, produced under the authoritative gaze of town planners, engineers, architects and at times wealthy individuals was instrumental in the visualisation of the socio-cultural transformation that lay ahead, interventions that would leave the Victorian city cleansed, opened up and orderly. Thus, these images recall, I mean to suggest, that the cultural urge for separation and seclusion traced by critics in the blueprints of the

¹³¹ Martin Daunton, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, pp. 1-56 (p. 12).

¹³² Simon Foxell, *Mapping London: Making Sense of a City* (London: Black Dog, 2007), p. 51.

compartmentalised interior, in the facades, high walls and thick hedges of middle-class housing, is accompanied by a longing to inscribe those same values in the public domain. Where earlier sections of this study emphasise the role of photographic portraiture in articulating the ideological significance of the domestic interior, here I am here concerned with tracing the *complementary* role of street photography in the formation of class identity in public spaces. City centres play a significant role in providing the infrastructure that sustains the middle-class economy, but crucially the nucleus is also the location for symbolic representations of power, in monuments, public buildings, parks and promenades, the sites in and around which important aspects of public life unfold and middle-class authority is enacted. As Gunn suggests in his discussion of the manufacturing city, all these depended on transforming the urban environment: 'The architecture and spatial layout of the city centres was an integral part of the bourgeois culture of the mid- and later nineteenth century as well as providing the context in which many of the rituals of middle-class life were played out.'¹³³ This conceptual framework, then, expands the discursive significance of photographs engaged with the reconstitution of urban space and connects them in a meaningful way with the modernising city as a challenging and ambivalent social space.

Architectural photography invokes a specific perspective on Victorian cities by calling attention not merely to the built environment *in situ*, but to the active process of urban transformation itself. Yet, the interpretative

¹³³ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 30.

problems surrounding these images are apparent, not least in the uneven critical scrutiny to which they have been exposed. To begin with, major photographic projects funded by public bodies were generally subject to relatively restricted circulation, at least initially, and as a rule only available in limited editions when published, meaning that the impact and function of such images is difficult to define. Moreover, the remote viewpoint and impersonal, at times barren representation in the photographs themselves, seems to foreclose engagement with the socio-cultural dimensions of the activities represented. According to Tagg, the force of the 'instrumental camera' mobilised from within institutional settings depends on asserting its capacity to reproduce meaning in an unmediated and objective fashion: 'They had to shun the picturesque and sensational, disdain the moralism of philanthropic reformism, affect a systematicness beyond commercial views, and relinquish the privilege of Art'.¹³⁴ Certainly, the preceptive function of the institutional archive is especially interesting in relationship to visual representations of the city in the mid-century, given the complexity and moral sensitivity of the topics urbanisation gave rise to. However, as Frankel demonstrates, the interaction between governmental institutions, the public and the market place had by the 1860s become diverse, complicated and mercurial. Many official records and documents, far from being repressed and contained within the archive, were being adapted for the public domain and considered alongside popular, mass-produced forms (and formats), all of which

¹³⁴ John Tagg, 'The Discontinuous City: Picturing and the Discursive Field', in *Images: Visual and Cultural Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 83-103 (p. 90).

‘[epitomizes] not just the publishing ambitions of the Victorian state but also its great desire to be read’.¹³⁵ This understanding, I argue, implies that we need to think of the medium of photography not merely as a bureaucratic recorder of the city, but more as an emissary of state business operating *within* the expanding force field of Victorian print culture.

The Social Contexts of Professional Photography:

A Study of Thomas Annan’s Glasgow

Between the late 1850s and late 1870s, Glasgow-based photographer Thomas Annan executed a number of extensive assignments purposed to record the city’s changing urban geography. With this in mind, the following takes this body of work and the photographic practices that underpin them as the basis for a study of the Victorian industrial city as a place of spatial intricacy, conflicting desires and social diversity. Though different in nature, each commission was directly or indirectly prompted by the extensive plans for modernisation of a city undergoing exponential growth, from 200,000 in 1800 to half a million in 1870. The result, as Nathaniel Hawthorne suggests following a visit in 1856, is a composite social and structural space in a state of evolution: ‘I rambled about Glasgow and found it to be a chiefly modern-built city, with streets mostly wide and regular, and handsome houses and public edifices of a dark grey stone’.¹³⁶ The city is replete with monuments of eminent historical and contemporary figures, he notes, but in searching out

¹³⁵ Frankel, ‘Blue Books and the Victorian Reader’, p. 316.

¹³⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks, 1856-1860*, ed. Thomas Woodson and Bill Ellis (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), p. 3.

the old university in the High Street in the eastern parts, he finds himself 'in as dense a part of the town as any, and a very old and shabby part, too':

I think the poorer classes of Glasgow excel even those of Liverpool in the bad eminence of filth, uncombed and unwashed children, drunkenness, disorderly deportment, evil smell, and all that makes city-poverty disgusting.¹³⁷

It is precisely this mixed setting that enables photographers such as Annan to build thriving businesses that benefit from new prosperity, old wealth and the reformist *zeitgeist*.¹³⁸ Annan's success in the field of architectural photography owes much to the growing emphasis on municipal governance in manufacturing cities, a shift indicative of the growing political and economic influence of the middle-classes and the changing role of the old aristocratic dynasties. As Morris makes clear, to speak of a municipal *culture* from around the 1860s, implies a cumulative change of attitude toward local authority and begins to suggest its considerable influence in shaping the urban geography and in creating a localised metropolitan identity.¹³⁹ Henceforth municipalities became increasingly associated with ideas of progress and civic pride, as opposed to division and inefficiency, concepts 'physically embodied in town halls, gas works, clean water, improved housing, libraries and museums', which is to suggest 'a mixture of social engineering and the manipulation of economic externalities'.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Hawthorne, *The English Notebooks*, p. 4.

¹³⁸ See for example, Margaret Harker's account of Annan's career in 'From Mansion to Close: Thomas Annan, Master Photographer', *The Photographic Collector*, 5:1 (London: Bishopsgate Press, 1980-1986), 81-95 (pp. 81-82).

¹³⁹ Morris, 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', p. 411.

¹⁴⁰ Morris, 'Structure, Culture and Society in British Towns', pp. 412-413.

Emblematic of such aspirations was the completion of the water supplies from Loch Katrine, near Glasgow, an enormous project forced into being by overwhelming economic expansion and demographic changes brought about by northern urbanisation with its resultant overpopulation, lack of sanitation and festering diseases. In 1849, for instance, the third major outbreak of cholera, a disease caused by contaminated food and water, had prompted a telling and damning report focusing on the prevailing conditions of working class housing, specifically, the ‘dense’ central areas of ‘that district known as “the Wynds and Closes of Glasgow”’:

The water-supply is also very defective; such a thing as a household supply is unknown, and I have been informed that, from the state of the law, the water companies find it impossible to recover rates, and that, had the cholera not appeared, it was in contemplation to have cut off the entire supply from this class of property. The interior of the houses is in perfect keeping with their exterior. The approaches are generally in a state of filthiness beyond belief. The common stairs and passages are often the receptacles of the most disgusting nuisances. The houses themselves are dark, and without the means of ventilation. The walls dilapidated and filthy, and in many cases ruinous. There are no domestic conveniences even in the loftiest tenements, where they are most needed.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Dr. Sutherland, ‘Report on the Measures Adopted for the Relief of Cholera in Glasgow during the Epidemic of 1848-49’, in *Glasgow Observed*, ed. Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: John Donaldson Publishers, 1987), pp. 86-87.

Commissioned by the Town Council or Corporation of Glasgow, Annan's first major album, *Views on the Line of the Loch Katrine Water Works* (1859), provides a visual record of running the massive hydraulic system, aqueducts and tunnels through unbroken terrain in order to channel water to the city and an extensive area beyond. The majority of the images combine the natural beauty of the landscape with the different phases of the project in pastoral scenes far removed from the urban pathology conjured by the cholera report. But, Lionel Gossman argues, they do nevertheless destabilise the comfortable and familiar tenor of picturesque imagery by invoking 'the striking juxtaposition of untamed nature and modern planning for an urban community'.¹⁴² Mediated through photographic technology, the images combine a pre-modern sensibility with the impression of a natural setting destined to be subjugated to industry, with echoes of the new aesthetics of the city's warehouses, viaducts, gas-works and railway termini. Indeed, the last photograph returns the viewer to the city, though in a distinctly benign guise, showing the commemorative fountain erected in Glasgow City Park.¹⁴³

Annan came to include several group portraits of the officials and commissioners behind the project, posing on different aspects of the construction or informally lounging nearby as if on a family picnic, thereby underscoring the fact that the project had emanated from within the 'civilising' framework of the city's civic institutions. The portraits are imbued

¹⁴² Lionel Gossman, *Thomas Annan of Glasgow: Pioneer of the Documentary Photograph* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015), p. 52. Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0057>.

¹⁴³ As the city expanded, the project itself was extended and two new editions with added images were published in 1877 and 1889. See Gossman's account in *Thomas Annan of Glasgow*, p. 51.

with a culture of paternalism that permeates manufacturing cities in the nineteenth century, an environment saturated with domestic metaphors, one in which the names of local families – benefactors of hospitals, monuments, schools, façades, museums and libraries – are written into and onto the physical environment itself. Such tendencies can be felt in the speech delivered in the presence of Queen Victoria at the grand opening ceremony of the waterworks at Loch Katrine in 1859, in which the domestic concerns of the city's inhabitants and the urban economy mesh into one. This 'great public work', the audience were informed, is 'important to the social and domestic comfort and employment of the numerous inhabitants of the city of Glasgow, whose interests are entrusted to our management', but equally 'to many branches of manufacturing and commercial industry in the city and neighbourhood'.¹⁴⁴ The *Illustrated London News* published several articles recounting the event in which illustrations based on Annan's photographs are included (figure 43 and 44). Delicate references to the 'deficient and unsatisfactory condition of the water supply', and the threat it poses to 'the health and comfort' of Glasgow's population, made by the secretary to the Waterworks Commissioner and the Lord Provost at the inauguration are duly cited.¹⁴⁵

In further articles, such as 'The City of Glasgow' published in 1864, the solicitous, all-encompassing influence of Glasgow's municipal government clearly plays a role in setting the breezy, confident tone of the piece. While

¹⁴⁴ [Anon.] 'Inauguration by the Queen of the Glasgow New Waterworks at Loch Katrine', *Illustrated London News*, 22 October 1859, 404 (p. 404).

¹⁴⁵ 'Inauguration by the Queen of the Glasgow New Waterworks at Loch Katrine', p. 404.

primarily concerned with 'commercial and material progress', assurances are offered that the accumulation of wealth translates into meeting public needs, including those of the city's 'suffering humanity', in the shape of educational institutions and facilities for the sick, disabled and poor.¹⁴⁶ 'The city's appearance is not so uninviting as that of some other manufacturing towns', the author points out, and the supplementary 'large picture plan or Bird's-eye View' of Glasgow vouches for a pleasing sense of orderly linearity (figure 45). What is communicated through these exchanges, then, is the understanding that Victorian domestic rhetoric underwent an evolutionary change in these decades, the shift towards a benevolent municipal culture enabling it more effectively to encompass the complex milieu of the industrial city, without seeming to relinquish its fundamental ideological moorings.

¹⁴⁶ [Anon.] 'The City of Glasgow', *Illustrated London News*, 26 March 1864, 304-305 (p. 305).

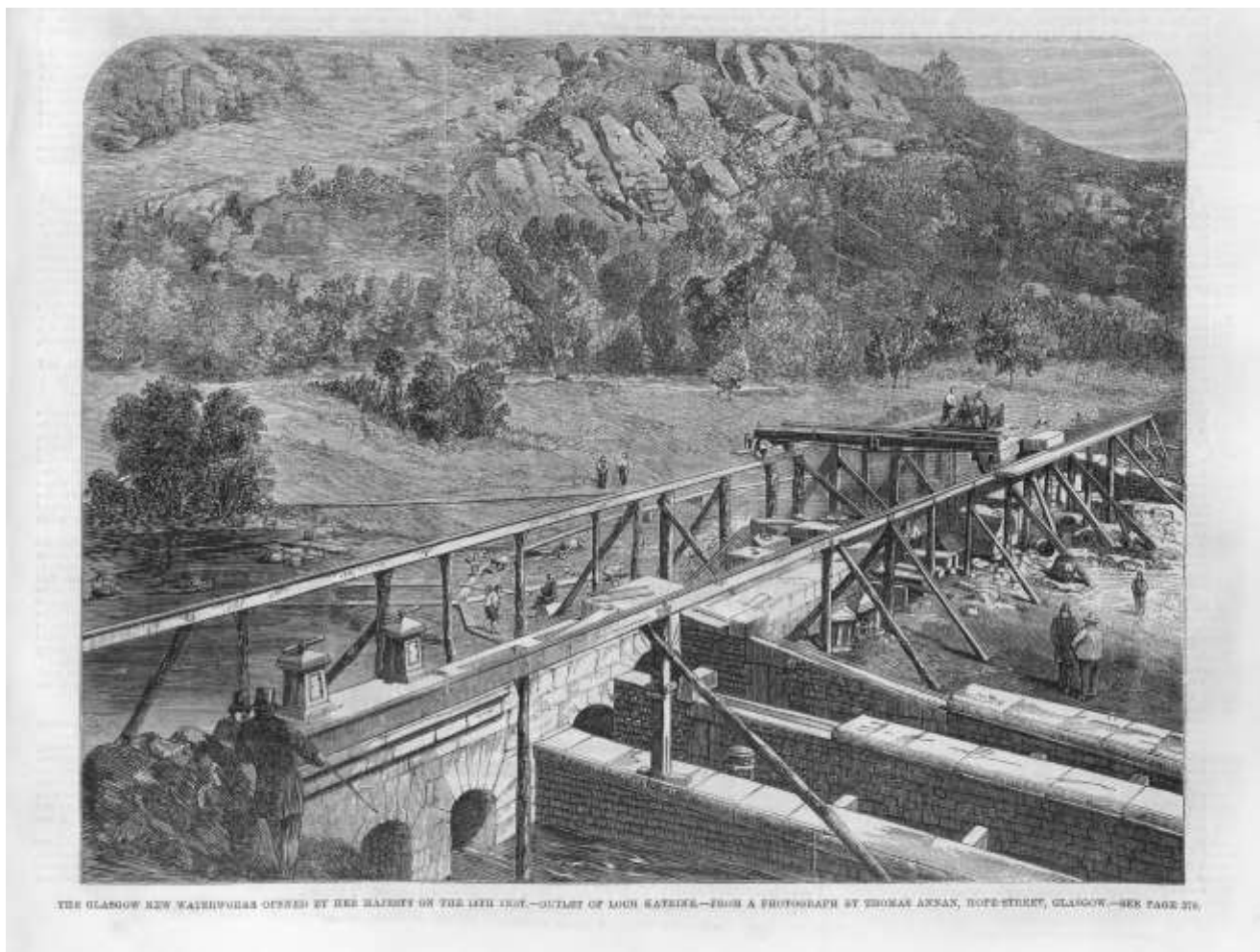


Figure 43.

'The Glasgow New Waterworks Opened by Her Majesty on the 14th Inst.— Outlet of Loch Katrine – From a Photograph by Thomas Annan, Hope-Street, Glasgow', *Illustrated London News*, 15 October 1859. Reproduced with permission of Cardiff University Library.

Nevertheless, established practices surrounding graphic material in periodicals meant that the psychological gap between the city and the readership remained. It was unusual, for example, for illustrations to be derived directly from the source (although that was in fact the case with Annan's photographs), many being adaptations of existing pictures and imprints, or even created in anticipation of a forthcoming event.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the style of representation did not change significantly and it is notable that the remediation of Annan's Loch Katrine images in the *Illustrated London News* eschew the incongruousness of the engineered spectacle communicated by the photographs. When perusing these drawings, there is perhaps no need to view the structural addition as more than an interesting feature of the pleasant scenery. Indeed, as line drawings they recall the general tendency among Victorian artists to forefront pastoral aspects in topographical views disturbed by urban elements, so that feelings of harmonious co-existence are promoted and impressions of contrast or opposition repressed.¹⁴⁸ At the same time, as the Loch Katrine articles demonstrate, the *Illustrated London News* appears anxious to promote the factualness and precision the modern medium of photography brings to the piece, citing Annan's photographs as a source in both caption and article.¹⁴⁹ Claims of authenticity constitute a central, enduring theme in news illustration

¹⁴⁷ Wolff and Fox, 'Pictures from the Magazines', pp. 562-563.

¹⁴⁸ E. D. H. Johnson, 'Victorian Artists and the Urban Milieu', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 2, pp. 449-474 (p. 465).

¹⁴⁹ [Anon.] 'Glasgow New Waterworks. Loch Katrine Outlet', *Illustrated London News*, 15 October 1859, 370 (see caption to front page illustration) and 'Inauguration by the Queen of the Glasgow New Waterworks at Loch Katrine', p. 404.

during the nineteenth century, Wolff and Fox note, but it plays out in unexpected ways: adhering to this principle restricted the possibility of showing anything that may be conceived as distressing, aggravating, controversial or biased, instead by default favouring insipid, middle-ground material.¹⁵⁰ Certainly, in the

¹⁵⁰ Wolff and Fox, 'Pictures from the Magazines', p. 566.

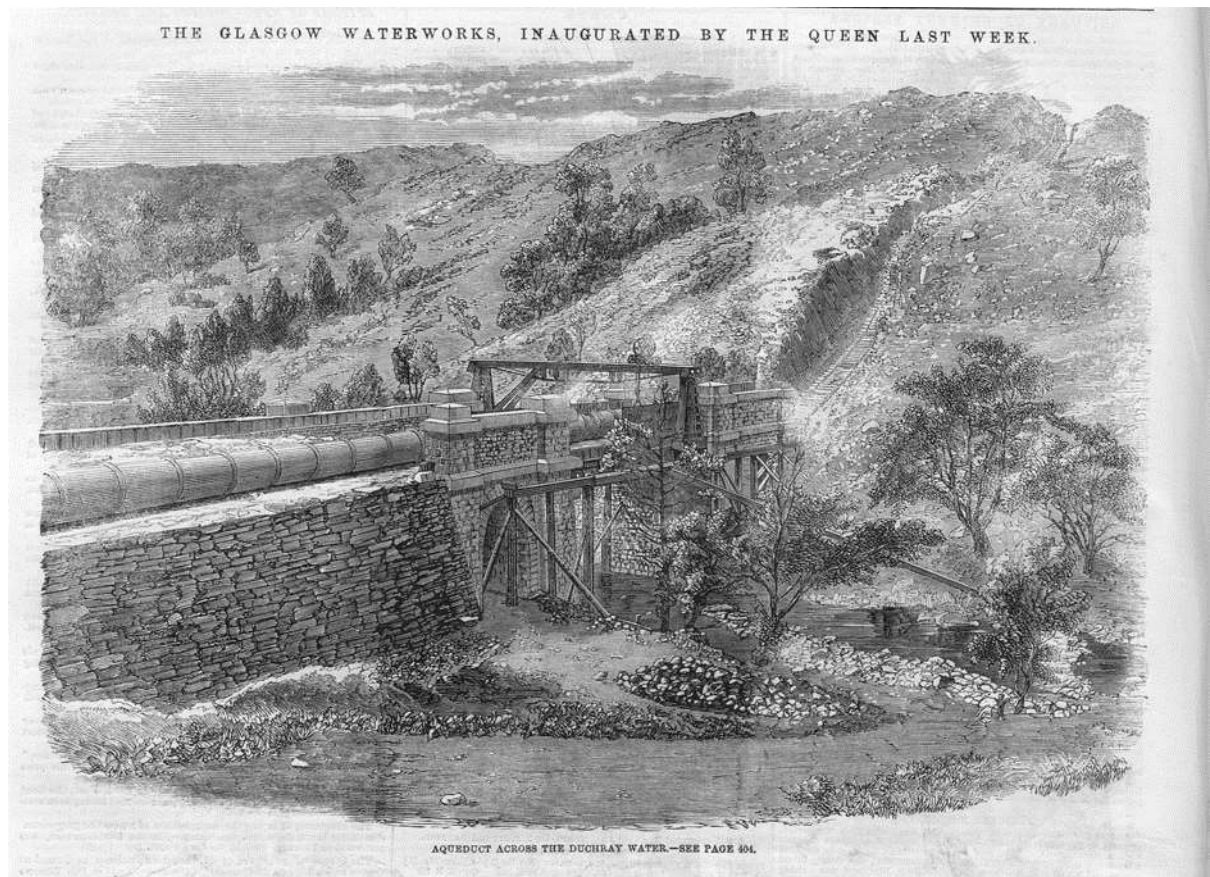


Figure 44.
'Aqueduct Across the Duchray Water', Illustrated London News, 22 October 1859. Reproduced with permission from Cardiff University Library

Loch Katrine case the words and images work towards instilling an impression of contemporaneity and factual accuracy, as well as social engagement, whilst at no point imposing visual or verbal information that might unduly ruffle the tranquillity of the middle-class drawing room.

Nevertheless, lurking behind the tactful approach taken by the *Illustrated London News* is the knowledge that the city of Glasgow, for all its modern aspirations, contains some of Europe's worst slum dwellings. Addressing the failure to advance conditions for the urban poor in 1845, Friedrich Engels speaks of 'half-a-dozen commissions of inquiry, whose voluminous reports are damned to everlasting slumber among heaps of waste paper on the shelves of the home office', adding: 'Have they even done as much as to compile from those rotting blue-books a single readable book...?'.¹⁵¹ Citing a variety of sources, Engels concludes that facts pertaining to inner city poverty are indeed well recorded (though woefully unexplored and poorly addressed) and turning his attention to Glasgow, he finds that it not only replicates but also exceeds the familiar patterns of deprivation:

The working class forms here some 78 per cent of the whole population (about 300,000), and lives in parts of the city which exceed in wretchedness and squalor the lowest nooks of St Giles and Whitechapel, the Liberties of Dublin, the Wynds of Edinburgh. There are numbers of such localities in the heart of the city, south of the Trongate, westward from the Saltmarket, in Carlton and off the High Street, endless labyrinth of lanes or wynds into which

¹⁵¹ Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 33.

open at almost every step, courts or blind alleys, formed by ill-ventilated, high-piled, waterless and dilapidated houses.¹⁵²

¹⁵² 'On the Health of the Working Classes in Large Towns', *Artizan* (October 1843), qtd. in Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 79.

And for all the gushing of clean water (an allocation of 50,000 gallons per day for the city) and civic pride on the celebrated occasion of opening the waterworks, conditions were slow to improve for the growing population of Glasgow poor. In 1865, however, under pressure from the railway companies, out of fear of disease, lawlessness and immorality, as well as the compulsions of civic duty, the city made formal plans for redeveloping its central parts.¹⁵³ Under the City Improvements Act of 1866, the decision was taken by the city's trustees to demolish large sways of slum housing, alter remaining buildings and build over thirty new streets which would, theoretically at least, enable the construction of new housing for those displaced by the scheme.¹⁵⁴

Between 1868 and 1871, Annan took over thirty photographs of houses and streets in the areas earmarked for destruction, and the albumen prints were duly compiled in a folio volume which was reproduced, although only in a few copies.¹⁵⁵ The photographer's own attitude to the project is tenebrous, and clues have to be deduced from the photographs he produced. Like virtually all professional photographers in this period, Annan exhibits what Susan Sontag refers to as 'the broader kind of class tourism', which is to say his work as a whole covers a wide commercial field (*cartes de visites*, portraits, books, albums, topographical and stereographic views).¹⁵⁶ As a family man and the proprietor of an expanding business, he was not, as Gossman puts it, 'in a

¹⁵³ Anita Ventura Mozley, 'Introduction to the Dover Edition', in Thomas Annan, *Photographs of the Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow 1868/1877 with a Supplement of 15 Related Views* (New York: Dover, 1977), p. ix.

¹⁵⁴ 'Introduction', *Photographs of the Old Closes and Streets*, p. viii.

¹⁵⁵ See for example, Margaret Harker, 'From Mansion to Close', p. 94.

¹⁵⁶ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 57.

position ... to pick and choose commissions'.¹⁵⁷ Annan was also a typically reticent author ('[the] practical worker is very seldom a writer', as H. Baden Pritchard reminds us) and his published images are invariably framed by the words of others.¹⁵⁸ In fact, the first two editions of *Photographs of Old Closes, Streets, etc., taken 1868-1877* contain no commentary at all, only captions. The municipality's motivation in engaging Annan and the precise remit of the project are rather opaque, but evidence suggests that while the images were initially intended as visual architectural records destined for official archives, those parameters were subtly widened over the next decade. In 1877 the trust was asked to contribute images to an exhibition at Kelvingrove Park Museum concerned with the old city, the inclusion of which would surely constitute 'a source of public gratification', as suggested at the time.¹⁵⁹ In consequence, one hundred albums now containing forty prints were published for the trustees, while further sets were requested by the Town council, public library and notably the medical faculty of the university, which expressed its interest in the photographs from the point of view of medical and sanitary history.¹⁶⁰

In spite of the intriguing circumstances surrounding the dissemination of the series (as museum object, emblem of civic pride, library resource, data in medical social history, wall furniture) information surrounding its public reception is scant. Even so, the fluid status and signification of the project as

¹⁵⁷ Gossman, *Thomas Annan of Glasgow*, p. 67 and Margaret F. Harker, 'Annans of Glasgow', *British Journal of Photography*, 12 October 1973, 932-935 (p. 933).

¹⁵⁸ H. Baden Pritchard, *The Photographic Studios of Europe* (London: Piper and Carter, 1882), p. 201.

¹⁵⁹ 'Introduction', *Photographs of the Old Closes and Streets*, p. v.

¹⁶⁰ 'Introduction', *Photographs of the Old Closes and Streets*, pp. v-vi. This edition contains 55 plates. The first forty plates reproduce the 1877 edition and it is those images that are under examination here. The additional plates in the Dover edition are from two further photogravure editions published in 1900.

formal publication, brings into view wider anxieties about the relationship between the camera and the urban environment, a point that is especially pertinent in these mid-century decades when themes such as social mobility, gender, democratisation, industrialisation and domesticity are increasingly being woven into public communication on photography. As I have suggested, placing Annan's work within a broader framework of Victorian print culture helps thicken our understanding of the complex (and often conflicting) network of aesthetic conventions, social expectations (as well as aspirations) and technological conditions that give shape to photographic production, practice and reception in this period.

There can be little doubt that Annan's exterior views of urban dilapidation in the city of Glasgow involve a constant and careful negotiation between withholding and showing. After all, these were (as yet) inhabited communities of men, women and children, whose presence might surely threaten to destabilise the premise of the project as we understand it and impose practical, aesthetic and moral challenges to Annan's ostensibly formal architectural views. Orderly bodies in manageable numbers, on the other hand, add a sense of spatial orientation, perspective and even what Victorian photographers and critics liked to call 'interest' to settings that might otherwise be perceived as barren and uniform to the point of abstraction. As noted by Holmes, 'a human figure adds greatly to the interest of all architectural views'.¹⁶¹ The *British Journal of Photography* concurs, arguing that architectural street scenes 'should include figures', although adding that if

¹⁶¹ 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph', p. 747.

the photographer is himself at street level, 'the difficulties are increased tenfold'.¹⁶² The inhabitants peering at the camera in 'Close no 37 High St' – an indistinct group of children at the front on the left, two young women in the middle distance and furthest to the back, a group of men – are certainly not incidental, but intended and necessary (figure 46). These small clusters of people and household objects in view (drying clothes, a white jug) give the viewer a sense of scale and become indexical points of reference in a physical environment that might otherwise be virtually illegible.

¹⁶² 'Street Photography', p. 242.



Copyright Image

Figure 46.

Thomas Annan, 'Close no 37, High St, Glasgow' (Plate 15), ca. 1868-1877 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

But domestic elements in a Victorian street view, intimate traces of human bodies and living conditions inside the walls, reverberate with moral implications being reminders of the Victorian truism that '[poverty] was in its essence antidomesticity'.¹⁶³ The increasing publication of poverty in newspapers, periodicals, books and pictures, though understated and still something of a novelty, had taught a middle-class Victorian readership synonymously to associate the working classes with catastrophic conditions of hunger, squalor, disease. It is especially pertinent to recall George Cruikshank's frontispiece to Shadow's *Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs; Being Sketches of Life in the Streets, Wynds, and Dens of the City*, published the year before Annan's *Views on the Line of the Loch Katrine Water Works* album (figure 47). Cruikshank's cataclysmic vision of Glasgow in 1858 (in essence, a graphic consolidation of the verbal 'sketches' within) is a spectacular enactment of the whole spectrum of familiar poverty themes: Vice, violence, criminality, starvation, illness, drink and domestic despair, interspersed with visions of spiritual redemption. The shadowy figure of the 'photographer' skulks behind an oversized camera, a metaphor for the author's documentary aspirations (and commitment to 'deepening the already deep interest felt in the subject'), notwithstanding the fact that the theatrical curtain signifies impulses of a more fictional kind.¹⁶⁴ Like many Victorian observers, in approaching the situation of the less affluent in the city, both image and text bring to the fore those lowest on the social stratum, the so-called residuum. As

¹⁶³ Chase and Levenson, *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, p. 147.

¹⁶⁴ Shadow, 'Preface', *Midnight Scenes and Midnight Photographs; Being Sketches of Life in the Streets, Wynds, and Dens of the City* (Glasgow: Thomas Murray, 1858), pp. v-vi (p. v).



Copyright Image

Figure 47.
George Cruikshank, frontispiece from *Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs*, 1858 © British Library

David Ward points out, the anxieties around this group was heightened as they became associated with particular geographical areas of inner-city slum: 'A district or a street symbolized the residuum and the place itself conjured up images of criminality' and depravity.¹⁶⁵

At the far end of Close no. 37, the high walls can be seen receding into a low opening, recalling the characteristically 'cellular quality' in the layout of English and Scottish Victorian city centres (a sort of 'hollow-block plan' that constantly expands *inwards*).¹⁶⁶ For that reason, A. G. Forbes' description in *Photographs of Glasgow*, published in 1868 and illustrated by Annan, of 'leading streets running from east to west, as the river flows, and crossed by other streets, generally at right angles' (as suggested by the *Illustrated London News*' map of 1864), making it 'very regular and symmetrical in its plan and outline', is destined to collapse into confusion when one moves into the unregulated territories beyond (see figure 45 above).¹⁶⁷ M. J. Daunton notes how in the Glaswegian tenements the cellularity also characterises the domestic micro-environment, out of which the children in the photograph emerge: 'The street door led from the public domain into the shared or collective space of the communal stair which was a sort of internal vertical court'.¹⁶⁸ The minimal exit point at the far end of Annan's photograph hints at what Engels regarded as deliberate structural separation and social

¹⁶⁵ David Ward, 'Environs and Neighbours in the "Two Nations" Residential Differentiation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Leeds', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 6:2 (1980), 133-162 (p. 136).

¹⁶⁶ M. J. Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City: Working-Class Housing 1850-1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), pp. 32-33.

¹⁶⁷ A. G. Forbes, *Photographs of Glasgow* with Descriptive Letterpress (Glasgow: A. Duthie, [1868]). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text [This publication is not paginated].

¹⁶⁸ Daunton, *House and Home in the Victorian City*, p. 33.

camouflage, a systematic 'shutting out of the working class from the thoroughfares ... a concealment of everything which might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie'.¹⁶⁹ As *All the Year Round* tersely puts it in 1866, the poor suffer 'under the shadow of our comfortable homes, unseen and unheeded because they are so very close to us', adding: 'British charity has a fine portly presence; it likes to keep its head well in the air while it walks abroad, and it is rather far sighted'.¹⁷⁰

To understand the social geography of the city, Engels reasons, it is necessary to decode its multi-layered spatial organisation and, interestingly, while Annan's priorities are quite different, Margaret Harker indicates that he adopted a similar methodology:

As a true professional Thomas Annan pursued his appointed task with methodological thoroughness and thoughtfulness. He took careful stock of the situation and planned his route through the maze of alleys to the courts from the more respectable highways to ensure that the area was adequately represented by the views he selected. His selection of subject material is remarkably revealing of the environment as it was at the time. Architects' plans confirm this finding.¹⁷¹

That said, Ellen Handy points out (somewhat in contrast to Harker's assessment of Annan's comprehensiveness) that many of the images 'emphasize the narrow, recessive, and distinctly uninviting passages ... rather

¹⁶⁹ Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 87.

¹⁷⁰ [Andrew Halliday] 'Charity at Home', *All the Year Round* 15, 31 March 1866, 286-288 (p. 286).

¹⁷¹ Harker, 'From Mansion to Close', p. 91.

than those courts themselves', even though these enclosed spaces (being, as Engels notes, holding areas for 'filth and disgusting grime, the equal of which is not to be found') were harrowing focal points in official and fictional accounts.¹⁷² If the alleys are less associated with abominable waste products, the spatial restriction also offers a measure of control over this unfamiliar, overcrowded environment, which, at the very least, reduces the risk of cloudy images and ruined plates. Indeed, Annan's pragmatic approach, his 'professionalism', steady hand and eye for the picturesque in the face of utter abjection, runs a thread through the frequently ambiguous response in contemporary criticism.

But then, how to communicate the indescribable? How to picture what is, after all, a domestic reality where 'no cleanliness, no convenience, and consequently no comfortable family life is possible', one where 'only a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and physically to bestiality, could feel comfortable and at home'?¹⁷³ Engels himself, Steven Marcus observes, is overwhelmed and all but silenced: 'the language itself is giving out on him', it '[refuses] to domesticate these actualities with syntax and imagery'.¹⁷⁴ Faced with this predicament, Engels adopts a strategy more drastic than Annan's: he turns into the court and faces the open privy.

¹⁷² Ellen Handy, 'Dust Piles and Damp Pavements: Excrement, Repression, and the Victorian City in Photography and Literature', in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination*, ed. Carol T. Christ and John O. Jordan (London: University of California Press, 1995), 111-133 (p. 116) and Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 88.

¹⁷³ Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁴ Steven Marcus, 'Reading the Illegible', in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, vol. 1, pp. 257-276 (p. 265).

Nevertheless, Harker's point is a salient one since the photographer's strategy evidently came to function as an ordering principle in assembling the series. The published volume of *Photographs of the Old Closes, Streets etc.* is constructed in a way that encourages the viewer, especially one with knowledge of the city, to look at the images as topographically interconnected and interdependent elements in a larger spatial network. But how does it inform the reading, beyond imparting order on a spatial environment that seemingly undermines logic? The opening image is a view of the head of the High Street, a comparatively wide and open thoroughfare with two unremarkable bakeries immediately in view, bills on the walls advertising local entertainment, gaslights protruding at regular intervals. Men, women and children appear in varying degrees of sharpness, seemingly unbidden, on pavements and in doorways (figure 48). The straight view with the end of the street at the apex, coupled with the sparse detailing, recalls the photographs produced by Annan's



Copyright Image

Figure 48.
Thomas Annan, 'Head of High Street' (Plate 1), ca. 1868-1877 © CSG CIC
Glasgow Museums and Libraries Collection: The Mitchell Library, Special
Collections

contemporary, Parisian photographer Charles Marville, appointee of Baron von Haussmann's officials. They also look forward to Eugène Atget's street photographs taken several decades later, which Benjamin famously compared to crime scenes ('photographed for the purpose of establishing evidence'), images that 'demand a specific kind of approach ... free floating contemplation is not appropriate to them'.¹⁷⁵ This type of photography augurs the new form of captioning seen in illustrated magazines (and eventually in moving images) he adds, 'where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence'.¹⁷⁶

Benjamin's remarks are peculiarly pertinent to Annan's project since from this point onward, the photographs trace a jagged trajectory toward the river Clyde, weaving into darker and narrower recesses and out again onto the High Street, and then other thoroughfares, streets and open spaces, via Glasgow Cross, Trongate and down Saltmarket, where the Court house and the South Prison are, as Forbes notes, 'advantageously situated' (n.p.). From this vantage point, the factory chimneys on the opposite side of the river dominate the view, '[proclaiming] the presence there of some of the largest factories in the city' (n.p.). The collection closes on the south side of the Clyde, outside the margins of the part 'which is properly called Glasgow', in Main Street in the notorious suburb of Gorbals.¹⁷⁷ In other words, this architectural survey simultaneously tracks journeys undertaken daily by many of the men, women

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 220

¹⁷⁶ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 220. See also Westerbeck and Meyrowitz' account of the relationship between the work of Charles Marville and Eugène Atget in *Bystander*, pp. 105-114.

¹⁷⁷ 'The City of Glasgow', p. 305.

and children that feature in the closes and minor streets along the way. Intentionally or not, this mode of working allows a more nuanced and complex story to unfold, one that complicates both coeval assumptions about working-class life and the representational conventions that accompany them. Specifically, the inter pictorial relationship animates the paradoxical condition of presence and absence surrounding the poor communities that in overwhelming numbers had made the central parts of Glasgow their home at this time. As Marcus concludes when reflecting on the project undertaken by Engels in Manchester: 'They were at the very centre of things, yet out of sight. To say that they were at once central and peripheral is to describe their contradictory existence in the structure of the consciousness of the time'.¹⁷⁸ Yet, Annan's collection (appearing more than twenty years later and conceived in the spirit of civic social reform and material improvement), while calling attention to the dichotomous relationship between the façade and its darker other explicitly (however inadvertently), highlights the interfaces between and the possibility of traversing those boundaries so as to inhabit both.

'Close no 37' shown above, for instance, is immediately preceded by 'Bell Street, from High Street' (figure 49), the incidental setting of an ordinary street scene of working-class life. A group of women, some in shawls and bonnets, are gathered on the corner, their backs turned and bodies slightly out of focus, as if gesturing while talking. Behind them a workman crosses the street and on the opposite side a bare-armed woman stands under a streetlight, while behind them, a cluster of children with a basket have formed a little

¹⁷⁸ Marcus, 'Reading the Illegible', p. 271.

social group on the pavement (all seemingly unaware of the camera); a gallery of almost transparent figures tell us that the street is busier than it first appears. The two photographs are clearly profoundly different in terms of spatial setting, perspective, tone and texture, and yet surely we can assume that people whose homes are situated in the back streets of the city are represented here? Richard Dennis points out that notwithstanding efforts on the part of the authorities to gain control over social behaviour within



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Figure 49.
Thomas Annan, 'Bell Street, from High Street', ca. 1868-1877 © CSG CIC
Glasgow Museums and Libraries Collection: The Mitchell Library, Special
Collections

poorer communities throughout the nineteenth century, most people's lives were 'neighbourhood-based', meaning that "'open doors", children playing in the street, and women gossiping' were common denominators of these environments.¹⁷⁹ And if to officials these were signs of lax attitudes to personal property and public morals, 'to residents, this relaxed outdoor behaviour constituted their performance of "community"'.¹⁸⁰

The precise meaning attached to the concept of 'community' and the extent to which neighbourhoods in inner city urban areas were socially and ethnically segregated is a point of some complexity. Ward's study of mid-century Leeds, however, questions assumptions about urban segregation, arguing that while a wealthy middle class of the city did indeed live in discrete areas, they constitute only a small proportion of the city's population: 'The remainder of the city housed people with occupations which would be classified as middle-class ... along with the vast majority of the middling or lower middle class and the working class.'¹⁸¹ Thus, he suggests that patterns of segregation were less marked in 1871 than they were in the early Victorian period when Engels produced his damning study of Manchester.¹⁸² Even if we consider class separation as something that to varying degrees is central to the urban experience in all mid-Victorian British cities, Colin G. Pooley points out that 'there was still a good deal of residential intermixing of the population in

¹⁷⁹ Richard Dennis, 'Urbanising Experiences', in *The Victorian World*, pp. 241-275 (p. 248).

¹⁸⁰ Dennis, 'Urbanising Experiences', p. 248.

¹⁸¹ Ward, 'Environs and Neighbours', p. 158.

¹⁸² Ward, 'Environs and Neighbours', p. 158.

particular localities'.¹⁸³ I am arguing, then, that what occurs in the Bell Street photograph reflects some of this social and spatial complexity and that this simple, casual street scene constitutes a subtle, but nevertheless important expansion in the representation of the working class in photography from this period. We should not overlook the fact that photographs such as these, images where the *ordinary* enlivens the representation of the poor, are exceptional and noteworthy in the 1870s. Thus, for a variety of reasons, to reduce *Photographs of Old Closes, Streets, etc.* to 'a curiosity, an exposé of the slum underworld for the middle-classes', as Ian Spring does, is to read it too narrowly.¹⁸⁴

Nearby Glasgow Cross, furthermore, where Trongate runs toward the fashionable west-end of the city and Saltmarket towards the Clyde, is represented in several consecutive street scenes. In plate 20, Trongate's imposing Tontine building with an equestrian statue of William the Third in the foreground, is illuminated by bright sunlight, the caption establishing its architectural focus. The lower part of the image, however, is occupied by a dark, irregular band of men congregating in front of the 'All Working Men's Club'. Here, several details stand out – the rays of light that catch the police officers' gold-buttons, the brims of the workers' caps, a watch-chain, a top hat – puncturing, as Barthes might suggest, the passive obedience of the photograph. Furthermore, the rhetorical expansion in this and other previous

¹⁸³ Colin G. Pooley, 'Patterns on the Ground: Urban form, Residential Structure and the Social Construction of Space', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Volume III, 1840-1950*, pp. 429-465 (p. 439).

¹⁸⁴ Ian Spring, 'Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs: Thomas Annan's Glasgow', in *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and its Contexts*, pp. 195-213 (p. 202).

images, metonymically works its way into the subsequent photograph, taken inside a close in Gallowgate, where the eye is drawn to the man standing at ease near its central path, sunlight reflecting the cap's shiny surface.

Further south, Saltmarket's closes feature in a sequence of ten images, containing some of the most intensely critiqued photographs in the collection. But, again, the back street views culminate in what is a very rare (photographic) sight (figure 50). In the large thoroughfare of Saltmarket itself an amorphous crowd of



Copyright Image

Figure 50.
Thomas Annan, 'Saltmarket, from Bridgegate' (Plate 35), ca. 1868-1877 ©
CSG CIC Glasgow Museums and Libraries Collection: The Mitchell Library,
Special Collections

men, women and children are informally congregated in view of the camera (here positioned at street level), falteringly converging on either side of the street. It is not obvious, however, from a strictly architectural viewpoint, why we need this fairly undisciplined in- and out-of-focus congregation. In aesthetic terms, neither people nor setting can be said to help produce the nostalgia associated with the urban picturesque that scholars argue so heavily inflects the collection. Indeed, it might be suggested that in this instance, at a point when the project (as the organisational logic would suggest) is nearing its conclusion, the photographer allows more nuanced dimensions of the city's social geography to come to the fore. My point, then, is that the interception of pictures showing open, public sites in the old part of the town, impacts on our reading of the collection as a whole; not merely geographical landmarks, these photographs signpost the complex, contrasting social weave, that the city is. Additionally, in moving from the physical pathways that connect intrinsic sites with extrinsic public spaces, Annan, whatever his objective, creates networks of meaning between the images, thereby deepening the viewer's understanding of the patterns and textures of life in working-class communities in the industrialised Victorian city.

Photographically illustrated publications, which throughout the nineteenth century generally meant limited editions containing photographs pasted onto unnumbered pages with or without textual elements, cover a wide range of subjects, and occupy a distinct and growing section of the publishing market from the 1860s.¹⁸⁵ They also form the basis for significant

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Hamber, 'Photographically illustrated publications, 19th Century', in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*.

collaborations between publishers and public institutions. Joseph Wilson Swan's carbon method played an important role in this development since it promised to resolve issues of discolouring and fading, hence Annan's move to acquire Scottish rights to the method in 1866 was significant in expanding the reach and application of photography.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, photography is progressively being incorporated in illustration processes: 'The 1860s was a particularly rich and varied decade in the history of British publishing and the photographically illustrated publications forms an integral part of it.'¹⁸⁷ Hence, the fact that many of Annan's Glasgow projects began as civic commissions does not *per se* preclude their participation in Victorian print culture and the issues being mooted in this environment. It has already been remarked that the state has an especially prominent and multifaceted presence in mid-century print culture, by writing, printing, binding and circulating official matter intended for public consumption. And photography, now largely in the hands of urban professionals, is becoming an ever-more active and significant contributor to an expanding print based communication circuit.

The diffusion of state affairs into the public arena through different media was not without its problems, however, since it left such materials open to scrutiny, challenge and misinformation. For one thing, official works could be reviewed and critiqued in the periodical press and other publications in the

¹⁸⁶ Sara Stevenson, *Thomas Annan, 1829-1887* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 1990), p. 7.

¹⁸⁷ 'Photographically illustrated publications, 19th Century', in *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*.

same fashion as other books, and subjected to damaging literary or factual judgment. As Frankel points out:

Trade unions and other oppositional organisations, to give an example, regularly scanned blue books in search of evidence that could confirm their grievances. They then republished these plundered bits of information in their own pamphlets and broadsides, emphasising that official investigations had produced these particular testimonies, figures, and facts.¹⁸⁸

Frankel's comments are germane to the specific media environment in which several of Annan's civic commission were released. From the point of view of the City Trust, given that Annan's work embodies prominent local concerns, the vagaries of exposition in print were presumably apparent: photography had opened up entirely new possibilities for recording and broadcasting civic progress, while at the same time leaving authorities open to all manner of criticism and judgement. Indeed, it is worth noting at this point that it was not the unmitigated success of the Trust's urban transformation projects that prompted the publication of *Photographs of Old Closes, Streets, etc.*. While the pre-modifier 'old' in the title may seek to relegate more uncomfortable knowledge to the past, circumstances would have suggested otherwise, for at the time of publication the Trust's efforts to modernise the city had stalled, not to be reinvigorated until the late 1880s. 'By the time Annan took the second series of photographs', Anita Ventura Mozley remarks, 'the Trust had become, in effect, a slum landlord'.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Frankel, 'Blue Books and the Victorian Reader', p. 309.

¹⁸⁹ 'Introduction', *Photographs of the Old Closes and Streets*, p. x.

Significantly, Scottish cities had by this time established a prodigious network of liberal and radical newspapers that catered specifically for an indigenous readership. A key feature of the Scottish Victorian newspapers market in the second half of the century, William Donaldson explains, were the cheap weekly papers (a form of hybrid publication that combined news with popular culture), many of which were aimed at a working-class readership.¹⁹⁰ Successful weekly ‘penny papers’ of the period took an explicit interest in broadcasting the social and political interest of the working classes: first, by providing a forum for communicating information about organised activities, second, by establishing themselves as sources of familial entertainment by including fictional material, often revolving around domestic, everyday experiences. Serialisation of fiction was an essential component of the weeklies, especially those aimed at working-class readers, and an emphasis on familial and domestic topics and motifs ensured that the papers were read and shared by entire households. Many of the fictional contributions are anchored in urban, contemporary experience, as opposed to the idealised rural past associated with middle-class book culture. Donaldson argues (broadly in contrast with the critical consensus), that while the Scottish bourgeoisie turned increasingly to publications that were London-based and middlebrow in the mid-century (and national titles that became successful enough to reach audiences south of the border often ‘developed a bland and

¹⁹⁰ William Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland: Language, Fiction and the Press* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), p. 10. Donaldson’s prime example is the *People’s Journal*, a radical weekly paper that established itself as the first Scottish national newspaper during the late 1850s and early 1860s. In 1862 it was the biggest weekly newspaper outside London, and would remain so well into the twentieth century.

centrist tone'), *Scottish* newspaper fiction does not fall into this pattern.¹⁹¹ In these texts, he writes, 'there are cities and slums, factories, workers, capitalists, crime, poverty, disease, in short the whole urban gamut'.¹⁹²

One of the most successful Scottish newspaper serialisations and novels of the mid-century was David Pae's *Lucy, the Factory Girl; or the Secrets of Tontine Close*, a story that with almost map-like precision traces the exploits of various characters through the streets, closes, wynds, slum dwellings, factories, warehouses and places of entertainment in coeval Glasgow.¹⁹³ Graham Law points to echoes of the sensation fiction that was simultaneously rolled out in London periodicals, although these 'urban fairy tales' are frequently played out against 'a backdrop of the grim city streets', in contrast to the middle-class interior that tends to dominate English sensation fiction.¹⁹⁴ Not altogether surprisingly, the localization and general popularity of these publications meant that they came to be perceived as direct threats to conservative interests.¹⁹⁵ As Morris notes, the Glaswegian working classes were both disciplined and methodical in the mid- and latter part of the century, and the issue of squalid housing prompted especially deep feelings of resentment. 'The "Red Clyde" was feared in London', he suggests, 'not because it was violent but because it was organised'.¹⁹⁶ Further to this, the popularisation of photography, as authorities across Europe understood,

¹⁹¹ Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, p. 14.

¹⁹² Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, p. 87.

¹⁹³ For the publication history, see Graham Law, 'A Note on the Text', in David Pae, *Lucy, the Factory Girl; or, the Secrets of Tontine Close*, ed. Graham Law (Hastings: The Sensation Press, 2001), pp. xv-xvii.

¹⁹⁴ Law, 'Introduction', in *Lucy, the Factory Girl*, pp. xii.

¹⁹⁵ Donaldson, *Popular Literature in Victorian Scotland*, p. 9.

¹⁹⁶ Morris, 'Structure, 'Culture and Society in British Towns', p. 405.

potentially added to the dangers posed by local political agitation or unrest and many countries required a police permit to be obtained by persons wishing to own or use a camera in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁹⁷

In this dynamic, unpredictable social, political and cultural environment, it may well seem necessary to employ strategies that, to use Barthes' phrase, 'counter the terror of uncertain signs', to repress the emergence of some connotations, while promoting those that yield to dominant aesthetic, moral and ideological values.¹⁹⁸ As suggested by Sekula, the semantic and legal control exercised by archival institutions can frequently be seen to operate beyond the primary repository and context, meaning, for instance, that 'the specificity of "original" uses and meanings can be avoided, and even made invisible, when photographs are selected from an archive and reproduced in a book'.¹⁹⁹ Robert Evans suggests that replacing the albumen prints used in the first folio edition with carbon prints in 1877 (a method that, although in itself innovative, bespeaks ideas associated with aesthetics and fine art) helped disassociate the project from its contemporary urban contexts. Other presentational features, he argues, including the addition of an engraving from 1774 showing Trongate in a pre-industrialised era, further encourage viewers to look at the photographs 'through a lens of nostalgia', as

¹⁹⁷ Darrah, *The World of Stereographs*, p. 111.

¹⁹⁸ Roland Barthes, *Image. Music. Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 39.

¹⁹⁹ Allan Sekula, 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital', in *Photography Politics: Two*, ed. Patricia Holland, Jo Spence and Simon Watney (London: Comedia, 1986), pp. 153-161 (p. 154).

artistic pictures linked to an idealised past, rather than records of a present social reality.²⁰⁰

Pritchard, when commenting on Annan's production of carbon prints of art works, remarked that he found them of such exceptional quality, so as to be 'anti-photographic'.²⁰¹ Pritchard's turn of phrase implies that the significance of the new printing method lies in the fact that it renders the intermediary invisible, thereby obfuscating associations between art, technology and modernity. In addition, it is telling that in this largely retrospective overview of Annan's work, published in 1881, the legacy of the photographer is constructed entirely within a framework of cultural heritage and fine arts, submerged, as Sontag puts it, 'in the generalized pathos of looking at time past'.²⁰² After his death in 1887, an obituary in the *British Journal of Photography* single-mindedly promotes the picture of a 'cultured' man 'with great natural taste for art', 'never so happy as when endeavouring to faithfully translate some masterpiece into monochrome'.²⁰³

Yet, a more comprehensive take on Annan's production suggests that amongst his diverse patrons there are indeed individuals who saw photography precisely as a technology of the present and a medium suited to commentary on social and cultural topics. *Photographs of Glasgow*, containing thirteen views by Annan alongside Forbes' commentary, combines sites in the old and

²⁰⁰ Robert Evans, 'History in Albumen, Carbon, and Photogravure: Thomas Annan's Old Glasgow', in *Nineteenth-Century Photographs and Architecture: Documenting History, Charting Progress, and Exploring the World*, ed. Micheline Nilsen (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 59-74 (pp. 65, 68).

²⁰¹ H. Baden Pritchard, *The Photographic Studios of Europe*, p. 201.

²⁰² Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 71.

²⁰³ [Anon. Thomas Annan, Obituary] *British Journal of Photography*, 23 December 1887, 803 (p. 803).

new parts, the latter made up of middle-class residential areas, shops, municipal offices and what Richards calls 'vast auditoriums, banks, stock exchanges, and corporation headquarters, dedicated to the traffic in things'.²⁰⁴ 'The present is "the age of great cities,"—and the tendencies of our time are in favour of their production and increase', the introduction emphatically states, adding: 'Of this fact, Glasgow is a striking illustration' (n.p.). Hence, Forbes is of the view that the city 'is more remarkable for what it is, than for what it has been' (n.p.). Aspects of the city are characterised by an enduring legacy of riots, political discontent, famine, ignorance, poverty and crime, the writer concedes, but this assessment can be measured against 'a pleasing extent of intelligence, and integrity and charity' (n.p.). The social problems of the present rise to the surface especially when the geographical focal points coincide with those that would come to feature in *Photographs of Old Closes, Streets etc.*, but Forbes refrains from detail, largely glossing over the situation with a measure of nostalgia over its gradual demise and concluding with the perfunctory, 'if ventilation and health, material and moral, be the result, no matter' (n.p.).

The real thrust of the project, however, is to convey a sense of the surging modernity noted by Hawthorne a decade previously. Forbes' city (and hence Annan's) is one where the middle-classes are rewarded for their toil in the world of business (and their 'large liberality') with beautiful homes in and near the city, new public spaces for recreation and provision of opportunities for consumption and entertainment (n.p.). The central areas of Glasgow's

²⁰⁴ Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, p. 2.

western parts offered all this in abundance and, starting out from Buchanan Street, he paints this shopping phantasmagoria in glittering colours (figure 51):

Now, this street is distinguished by its fine shops and warehouses, and is the most fashionable promenade in the city... there are vast varieties of costly commodities, for use and for ornament, for body and mind, and dwelling-place, in such stocks and arrangement, as will stand comparison with any thing of the same description...

From Argyle Street and Buchanan Street, enters Argyle Arcade, a glazed and elegant promenade, full of shops of the *Palais Royale* description, quite equal to those of that attractive enclosure, and rising in character and richness every year (n.p.).

The illustrating photograph is taken from a high, elevated view so as to give a full impression of the impressive façades, the wide pavements (where both men and women stroll, or stand by large shop windows) and of the street itself. Here traffic passes with a calm regularity, while readers are informed that at its foot (just outside the frame), '600 omnibuses pass ... daily' on the large thoroughfares running east to west, where 'the densest and most metropolitan crowds of vehicles and foot passengers to be found in the city' crowd the environment (n.p.). This photograph of a pleasant, yet distinctly urban milieu bespeaks a desire to shift the common discursive rhetoric surrounding inner cities toward an emphasis on the propitious presence and influence of middle-class culture and society. At the same time, the careful choice of location and respectful distancing between camera and subject

recalls the fact that respectable middle-class audiences were (as yet) unaccustomed to looking at themselves in photographs of public urban spaces.

The elegant 'free public' West End (or Kelvingrove) Park, located on land acquired by the city corporation, and embellished by designs executed by Joseph Paxton, marked a further advance in this socio-cultural project.

Annan's bird's-eye-view of the area offers an impression of extensive walks and drives perfectly adapted to accommodate the public life of the city's middle-class families, as suggested by a group of men, women and children assembled beneath the trees (figure 52). As



Copyright Image

Figure 51.
**Thomas Annan, 'Buchanan Street' (Plate XII), from *Photographs of Glasgow*,
ca. 1868. Courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard University**

Forbes points out, 'the greater part of the sward is preserved', the ancient trees having been incorporated into the new architecture of the landscape, so that 'the aspect of newness and recency, which the park must otherwise have presented, is avoided' (n.p.). What makes Forbes commentary more interesting than it may appear at a glance, then, is that like other observers of Victorian manufacturing cities in the 1860s and 1870s (such as Hawthorne and Taine), it taps into the social significance of urban spaces such as West End Park in Glasgow. The photographs add an important dimension to this, coming at a crucial time when the relationship between the middle-classes and the city is still marked by anxiety and iconographic evidence of their collective moral, cultural and economic authority in urban culture can be seen as having a constitutive force. 'The transformation was at once architectural, spatial and representational; it involved nothing less than the remaking and reimagining of the city as a whole', Gunn explains, adding: 'As such, it was both an element of provincial bourgeois culture in its own right and the precondition of many of the activities that served to define this culture in the Victorian period'.²⁰⁵

The area around Kelvingrove House seems a poignant place to conclude, given that it embodies a site in which all the dichotomous aspects of the city recorded in photographs taken by Annan between the late 1850s and the late 1870s intersect. As made clear by the commentary to *The Old Country Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry* (1870), which includes one hundred architectural views by Annan, the transition of this private residence into a

²⁰⁵ Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, p. 37.

museum and the surrounding area into a public park, is emblematic of a profound socio-economic shift, a time when there



Figure 52.
Thomas Annan, 'West End Park' (Plate X), from *Photographs of Glasgow*, ca. 1868. Courtesy of Fine Arts Library, Harvard University

was 'probably not one Glasgow man left that ever owned a slave'.²⁰⁶ Where *Photographs of Glasgow* celebrates the unfolding of a city able to emulate the economic, social and cultural authority of bourgeoisie and the assent of civic politics, the commission from members of the aristocracy and old colonial merchants of cotton, tobacco, slaves and sugar, charts the disappearance of a familial life forged in a pre-industrial era. Annan's representation of the modernised West End Park signifies particularly strongly when contrasted with the empty, stony heaviness and visual monotony he brings to bear on the old family mansions and surrounding parklands.²⁰⁷ In *The Old Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry* he adopts a view from below rather than above, a significant shift in visualisation that amplifies the role of property and land as markers of familial standing, but also one that echoes artistic aesthetics developed in the early part of the nineteenth century, a by-gone era before Glasgow came to look 'almost as new as Chicago'.²⁰⁸

It is no coincidence that the photographic fulcrum becomes a particularly sententious question as photographers came into progressively closer contact with the city in the latter part of the century. As Flukinger remarks: 'With every degree of change in camera placement, scale, perspective, relationships, and values are also subject to changes.'²⁰⁹ Annan's various commissions (and the diversity of his representational practice) reveal

²⁰⁶ John Guthrie, and John Oswald Mitchell, *The Old Country Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry* (Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1870; 2nd ed. 1878). See commentary to 'Moore Park' (Plate LXXIV), (n.p.). Available at <http://gdl.cdrl.strath.ac.uk/smihou/smihou0001.htm>.

²⁰⁷ See Harker's comments on *The Old Country Houses*, 'From Mansion to Close', p. 83.

²⁰⁸ Guthrie and Mitchell, *The Old Country Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry*, see introduction to 1st ed., 1870 (n.p.).

²⁰⁹ Flukinger, *The Formative Decades*, p. 71.

much about the keen attention to social processes required by the professional photographer in order to establish a comfortable relationship between the anticipated audience and what is being shown. In short, his contrastive work as a photographer encapsulates the variegated role of the camera in projecting messages about urbanisation and the power of imagery in staking a claim to the city.

Furthermore, as I have argued here, commercial photography's particular conundrum over questions of perspective and point of view coincides with a broader examination of the relationship between visual media and urbanisation in the mid-century. It is especially interesting from a photographic stance that for many observers in the second half of the century the elevated, distanced viewpoint came to add a significant way of relating to the city. Mayhew's introduction to *The Criminal Prisons of London*, cited at the beginning of this chapter, devotes considerable effort to thinking about the intellectual and psychological impact of seeing the city from different points of view. 'We had seen the Great Metropolis under almost every aspect', Mayhew claims, from zooming in on that which lies 'below the moral surface', to the 'small ambitions and vain parade of "polite" society'.²¹⁰ But the result, he continues, was 'a craving ... to contemplate it from above', to look at the city from the farthest perspective possible, to see with the clean simplicity of the balloon traveller, to (at least momentarily) reduce the amount of visual information, to a point when 'that vast bricken mass of churches and hospitals, banks and prisons, palaces and workhouses, docks and refuges for the

²¹⁰ Mayhew and Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London*, pp. 8-9.

destitute, parks and squares, and courts and alleys ... all blent into one immense black spot'.²¹¹

²¹¹ Mayhew and Binny, *The Criminal Prisons of London*, pp. 8-9.

Coda

'Of what kind of nineteenth century are we fondest?' Jennifer Green-Lewis asks when reflecting on photography's Victorian history and the patterns emerging out of its selective vantage points: the pastoral (over the urban); the southern (over the northern); human interest (over objects and buildings); pictures from the middle (rather than latter) part of the century.¹

Contemporary books, exhibitions and catalogues testify to the remarkable constancy and pervasiveness of those judgements, Green-Lewis suggests, which have with time coalesced into a familiar image taxonomy, into categories that allow modern viewers to neatly recognise Victorian photographs as, say, picturesque, sentimental, theatrical, exotic or nostalgic.² The central aim of this study has been to unpick that familiarity by looking beyond established canons and by further probing issues of production, reception and ideological framing.

Rosalind Krauss' illuminating critique of nineteenth-century photography adds an important contextual dimension to Green-Lewis' intervention, by emphasising the crucial interconnection between spatial framing and the construction of meaning, specifically highlighting the growing significance of the exhibition site in the nineteenth century. '*Exhibitionality*', Krauss suggests, becomes in this period a form of measuring stick by which the

¹ Jennifer Green-Lewis, 'At Home in the Nineteenth Century: Photography, Nostalgia, and the Will to Authenticity', in *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century*, ed. John Kucich and Diane F. Sadoff (London and Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000), pp. 29-48 (pp. 38-39).

² Green-Lewis, 'At Home in the Nineteenth Century', p. 39.

aesthetic value of photographic images could be quantified.³ In this way, the exhibition, which henceforth increasingly establishes itself as the dominant formal domain for photography, emerges as an authoritative discursive space, thereby obfuscating the fact that many early photographs were reproduced in a variety of forms and meanings propagated in very different visual (and verbal) contexts.

As I have suggested in this thesis (we might think, for example, of Thomas Annan's Glasgow commissions), growing professionalisation and commercialisation of photography from the middle of the century onward, alongside the impact of extraneous economic and societal conditions, conferred on the medium a range of new functions. Krauss' example, Tim O'Sullivan's photograph *Tufa Domes, Pyramid Lake (Nevada)*, 1868 (an object of undeniable aesthetic appeal to twentieth-century eyes), was in fact published in the nineteenth century as a lithographic illustration in papers on geology, but as a *photograph* it was only ever publically disseminated as a stereographic view.⁴ This contextual shift, from the gallery wall to the interior milieu of the middle-class home (or possibly the public library), raises compelling new questions regarding the contemporaneous function, meaning and experience of photographic images in the domestic domain. However, Krauss' analysis does not move forward in that direction, focusing instead on the optical and experiential peculiarities of stereoscopic viewing, so that although the social and cultural significance of the middle-class drawing room

³ Rosalind Krauss, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces', in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 287-302 (p. 288).

⁴ Krauss, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces', pp. 287, 290.

flashes into view, it dissipates all too quickly.⁵ This study acknowledges that photographic meaning is indeed still a matter for contestation, while being motivated by the need for further critical examination of the interdependence between photography and the realm of domestic life, as a discursive site of intrinsic importance in Victorian culture and society.

Victorian scholarly research is presently in a moment when historical photographs are acquiring new levels of visibility through the global digitisation of archives, and the corollary dissemination of these images into popular platforms outside formal institutional settings, such as Flickr, Instagram and Facebook. As Scott McQuire argues: 'In photography's digital age everyone is an image-maker, but also, potentially, a publisher and archivist', and, it might be added, a curator of exhibitions.⁶ What, then, are the implications of this digital accessibility of photographs to research and critical practice, and to the ways in which historical images are read? Certainly, the abundance of 'free-floating' images and the frequent absence of 'accurate' metadata in the online environment has resulted in calls for a rigorous debate around information handling processes, as well as a re-evaluation of the curatorial functions and methods of major repositories.

Not surprisingly, the digital image has also reactivated a matrix of diverse *pre*-digital concerns pertaining to the afterlife of photographs, particularly with regards to the meanings inscribed in the metadata that frame them. Susan Sontag, for instance, regards photographic images as inherently

⁵ Krauss, 'Photography's Discursive Spaces', p. 291.

⁶ Scott McQuire, 'Photography's Afterlife: Documentary Images and the Operational Archive', *Journal of Material Culture*, 18:3 (2013), 223-241 (p. 224).

random (being by nature 'inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy'), an assumption that leaves the possibility of coherent interpretative approaches in a form of vacuum.⁷ In a different move, critical historians of photography argue that the archival context is fundamentally problematic since it inevitably separates the image from its original situation, a process resulting in, what Allan Sekula describes as, 'an *abstraction* from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context'.⁸ Moreover, given the Victorian settings with which I have been concerned in this study, it should be emphasised that many current questions (in particular those around image manipulation, copyright, appropriation, the effects of mass-production and the spread of erotic imagery), lead us back to the very starting point of widening participation in the photographic economy in the middle of the nineteenth century.

With these circumstances in mind, McQuire argues for what he characterises as a retreat from 'protocols of retrieval to those of construction', cautioning against impulses to seek to stabilise the unruly polysemy of the photograph by 'simply "restoring" some original context,' as opposed to espousing the fact that the interpretative process is always on-going.⁹ Crucially, at a time when openness and accessibility are foundational principles for all public institutions, he cites the fundamental distinction between "'active and passive'" approaches to cultural memory, whereby the

⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 23.

⁸ Allan Sekula, 'Reading an Archive: Photography between Labour and Capital', in *Photography Politics: Two*, ed. Patricia Holland, Jo Spence and Simon Watney (London: Comedia, 1986), pp. 153-161 (p. 154).

⁹ McQuire, 'Photography's Afterlife', p. 228.

former seeks to “‘preserve the past as present’”, while the latter seeks to “‘preserve the past as past’”, a distinction that productively points toward new constructive models for interaction, participation and a re-evaluation of what we want to see.¹⁰

The shifting conditions for scholarly research outlined above are clearly germane to thinking about the nature of research into historical photographic collections, which are inherently powerful repositories of cultural memory. As a way of more specifically reflecting on strategies for opening up the photographic archive to active interpretation, I want to conclude with a brief discussion of the After-Life of Heritage project, a recent AHRC-supported initiative aimed at opening up strategies for interaction between academia, cultural institutions and the public through the practical design of community-based projects.¹¹ My own contribution involved the design and delivery of a workshop programme aimed at students engaged in the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.¹² The workshop, entitled ‘Photographing the Family from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day’, stemmed from research undertaken at Glamorgan Archives (Wales) in the course of this study and focused specifically on photographs from the Thompson Family of Cardiff Papers, a collection that includes several family albums spanning a period from the mid-1850s to the 1880s and beyond.¹³ The Thompson collection is particularly relevant to my own research given its rich integration of visual and verbal

¹⁰ McQuire, ‘Photography’s Afterlife’, p. 228.

¹¹ See <http://heritageafterlife.wordpress.com>.

¹² For further information see www.welshbaccalaureate.org.uk.

¹³ Thompson Family of Cardiff Collection, see document ref. DTC. Available at glamarchives.gov.uk.

material documenting the private and public life of a well-to-do Victorian middle-class family, that combines domestic iconography with evidence of the Thompsons' considerable presence in the unfolding civic culture of the Welsh capital (a legacy that is still manifest in local architecture and topography).¹⁴ Moreover, given the geo-cultural remit of the After-Life of Heritage project, the specificity of the material served to situate the images within a particular historical, social and cultural frame of reference, as well as promoting an understanding of the practical and intellectual processes involved in 'reading' photographs as social and cultural texts.

Underpinning the approach to this workshop was the fundamental assumption that the nuclear family as an idealised social norm constitutes a powerful master narrative that connects contemporary society with its Victorian past. Furthermore, that photography, as I have sought to demonstrate in this thesis, has played a determining role in sustaining the validity of this perception, while at the same time opening the utopian hearthside up to injurious scrutiny. As Mindi Rhoades points out: 'The nuclear family has never dominated actual demographics, only our imagination. Actual families are extended and unstable and positions shift across time'.¹⁵ From a methodological standpoint, the workshop design was motivated by Annette Kuhn's assertion that data, objects or artefacts, family photographs in

¹⁴ See for example James Pyke Thompson (1846-1897), who built the Turner House Gallery (now the Ffoto Gallery) in the wealthy Cardiff suburb and Victorian seaside resort of Penarth. The international art collection displayed there was subsequently bequeathed to the National Museum of Wales, see document ref. DTC. Available at glamarchives.gov.uk.

¹⁵ Mindi Rhoades, 'Shaking + Quaking + Breaking the Boughs: Deconstructing Family with Digital Visual Cultural Media', *Visual Culture and Gender*, 4 (2009), 48-57 (p. 48).

particular, can work as powerful ‘conjectural’ springboards from which wider social and cultural understanding may emerge:

In work on cultural memory, the conjectural method involves taking as a starting point instances or cases – expressions of memory of some sort – and then working outwards from them, treating what can be observed in the instances at hand as evidence pointing towards broader issues and propositions.¹⁶

Particularly helpful in this context is Kuhn’s outline of a method for the close reading of family photographs that begins by looking for subjective points of identification and proceeds by systematically asking questions about contexts of production, technology, reception and aesthetics.¹⁷ A further method of contextualisation involves incorporating what Kuhn terms an ‘autoethnographic’ dimension involving the use of personal images, which may result, amongst other things, in connections between that which is unfamiliar, distant and other, and that which is ordinary and everyday.¹⁸

‘Photographing the Family from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day’ was intended to promote discussion around past and present photographic practices, including the function and use of family pictures in new virtual fora, with emphasis on the changing, but nevertheless authoritative construction of childhood in family photographs. The evolution of childhood sensibility, for instance, was traced in the contrasting representations of little Arthur Hugh Thompson in the early 1860s as he stands

¹⁶ Annette Kuhn, ‘Photography and Cultural Memory: A Methodological Exploration’, *Visual Studies*, 22:3 (2007), 283-292 (p. 283).

¹⁷ Kuhn, ‘Photography and Cultural Memory: A Methodological Exploration’, p. 284.

¹⁸ Kuhn, ‘Photography and Cultural Memory: A Methodological Exploration’, p. 284.

erect and alone in his frock-tunic, dwarfed by the faux-studio architecture, to the informal arrangement around playful pedagogics in the portrait of Alexander and Eleanor taken at the end of the century (figures 53 and 54). The growing semblance to childhood iconography of the present is striking and each image recalls differently photography's enduring constitutive power in familial life. Further to this, historical and current tensions between family photography as inherently private *and* as a form of social performance were raised in the workshop: what social, cultural or aesthetic barriers are embedded in decisions we make over which images to show (and to withhold, or discard)? Is the social history of the camera in domestic contexts necessarily set on a linear trajectory towards ever increasing visibility and disclosure? As Walter Benjamin conjectured, '[the] camera is getting smaller and smaller, ever readier to capture fleeting and secret images whose shock effect paralyzes the associative mechanisms in the beholder': 'This is where inscription must come into play'.¹⁹

This collaborative exercise in exploring the institutional archive as a space for the critical examination of what is arguably at its essence, a technology of the self resonates with the key proposition put forward at the outset of this study, namely the enduring complexity of photography as a mediator of social norms in an ever-enlarging communication age. Furthermore, the Thompson albums, consisting to a large extent of *carte de visite* portraits, are the embodiment of the mass-produced, standardised form

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography', in *Selected Writings. Vol. 2, 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone *et al*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press, 1993), 3 vols., pp. 507-530 (p. 527).

that I have argued have been both undervalued and under-researched.

Interestingly, extending the historical framing of my own research through this collaboration worked toward the articulation of different concerns relating to the connectedness between past and present photographic practices and, most pressingly, perhaps, the understanding that the stories family photographs tell always invoke with equal force silences and absences, the *untold* stories.



Copyright Image

Figure 53.

'Arthur Hugh Thompson. Born Dec. 28.1859', ca. 1863-64. Reproduced with permission of Glamorgan Archives



Copyright Image

Figure 54.
'Alexander and Eleanor. May 1898'. Reproduced with permission of
Glamorgan Archives, Wales

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