Despite examples I have provided in chapters 1 and 2, nineteenth-century visual culture relied heavily upon codes of monocular vision, objectivity, and geometrical perspective. As part of a larger culture of realism dominating the period, these codes not only extended to kinds of painting or to the novel, but also to the new medium of photography. In its early stages, photography promised “a fantasy of perfect re-presentation, a mirroring of the object that surpasses mimesis” (Green-Lewis 25). William Henry Fox Talbot called photography the “pencil of nature,” as well as “fairy pictures,” “magic pictures,” or “words of light.” But the Victorians who capitalized on his invention often preferred to discuss it in terms of fidelity, truth, and fact.

Still, from its very beginning, photography’s relationship to monocularism and fact was also paradoxical and charged. Traditional theories and practices of vision did not go unchallenged. “For it was photography, in large part,” as Lindsay Smith succinctly puts it, “which dramatized the limitations of geometrical perspective as a dominant means of representing three dimensional space in western art” (2). If photography raised the stakes for mimesis by promising an objective duplication of actuality, it also explored borders between realities, created composite realities, and staged partial views.
Nineteenth-century art photography is remarkable for its varied relationships to verisimilitude and to monocular vision. In Jennifer Green-Lewis’s view, because photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron persistently drew on “romantic and literary themes,” it offered “the theatrically created suggestion of something other” (61) than an objective reality. To discuss art photography only in terms of its illustration of literary texts, its disavowal of the actual world, or its promotion of an aesthetic, however, is far too limiting. This chapter will take a close look at the ways in which two art photographers of the 1850s and 1860s, Henry Peach Robinson and Lady Clementina Hawarden, engaged with perspective and its relationships to content and to the observer.

While Robinson and Hawarden help destroy the pretence of monocular vision by introducing spatially and temporally contingent views, they do so in radically different ways. Drawing on culturally familiar topics or tropes in order to convey an overall theatrical effect, Robinson wants to hold in place discordant pictorial elements that threaten to move or that, because of a blur, do not match with the rest of the picture. To do so, he creates temporally fixed, allegorical, tableau-like scenes. His photography still adheres to geometric perspective. But, given his reliance on combination printing, it is perhaps more accurate to say that he depends on a set of monocular views that are, paradoxically, not always compatible with each other.

Robinson’s photography is both conservative and progressive in terms of fracturing point of view. He juxtaposes multiple negatives and prints to shape a unified pictorial composition. As a result, his work compels viewers to experience an effort that asks them to overlook the demarcations between separate prints yet often calls attention to its disparate contents. Fascinated by seasonal and temporal changes, Robinson connects perspectives, through variously placed figures in his photographs, to specific moments in time. Yet it is significant that Robinson’s photographs only thematize the relationship of perspective to time and space.

Even though a unity of effect always remains the objective of a Robinson photograph (see Robinson 1860a and 1860b; Heyert 134; Handy 1–23), his combination prints inevitably raise questions about the nature of reality and the relationship of parts to wholes. Robinson manufactures photographs that press together people, poses, objects, and landscapes that we might never see joined in actuality. Time’s passage, as represented in his photographs, thus also becomes unnatural, mythic, rather than real. As a consequence, how we see and who sees what remains as problematic for the postmodern viewer of Robinson’s photographs as it had been for informed nineteenth-century viewers.
Unlike Robinson, Hawarden deliberately challenges photography in terms of any claims it might make to verisimilitude. But it is her choice of subject matter and her handling of fluid, Turnerian light and reflection that subverts that verisimilitude. Using a Dallmeyer triple lens no. 1, which increased depth of field, she impacted the photographic medium by evoking figuraiity and dissolution. Focusing on light as an agent of change in space, Hawarden questions the stability or surety of what the eye sees. Just as her early work with a stereoscopic camera parodied monocularity, her nonstereoscopic images retain a trace of that interest as she continues to show the figure and space in a relationship of mutual recreation. Despite long exposure times needed, her photographs retain a sense of spontaneity, inviting the embodied viewer into the photograph and into a landscape of change. In printing over five hundred photographs of her eldest daughters in her South Kensington, London home, she was not just recording everyday upper-class life in a domestic circle of girls. Nor was she restating a binary between public and private worlds. Rather, Hawarden exposed a complicated relationship among girls, women, daughters, and mothers by exploring the domestic world and its boundaries. Because of her innovative choice of topic, adolescence, not girlhood or childhood per se, her photographs invent a temporal landscape and explore kinds of space—psychophysical, imaginary, and social.

Combination or double photography, begun by Oscar Gustav Rejlander (1813–75) but achieving immense popularity at the hand of Henry Peach Robinson (1830–1901), was undertaken, paradoxically, in the service of a greater fidelity to nature. Its aim was not to break the visual field, but rather to select details and position parts in order to fashion a more faithful whole. Yet, by shaping a preconceived effect in a viewer, fidelity no longer meant a faithful objective realism. Carefully chosen gestures, expressions, poses, costumes, and locations were guaranteed to elicit predictable effects from the nineteenth-century viewer. Mixed notices of some of Robinson’s most popular prints confirm, however, that viewers hardly responded as uniformly as he had expected. The photographer’s highly subjective choices of placement created, it would appear, an equally subjective array of reactions.

Combination printing initially developed because the long exposure
time needed for early photographs had called attention to the instability of the object. Rejlander notes that Robinson’s first use of more than one negative came about when he could not “get a gentleman’s figure in focus, though he was close behind a sofa on which two ladies were seated.” Other photographers reported the difficulty of photographing the moving sky and a desire to add natural-looking backgrounds. Early photographic materials, in addition, were sensitive to blue and therefore the sky would often reproduce with a light tone—if not with what Robinson called “a smudge” (1869, 192). Robinson became highly adept at replacing not only sky and figures, but also sections of foliage, backgrounds, and objects. Classical training in art taught him to believe in “immutable laws” of contrast, unity, repetition, balance, and arrangement (the best arrangement was by pyramid and diagonal). He strove to raise photography to the status of painting. Maintaining that a combination photograph should never aim to stray from the truth of nature, he cautioned photographers that “[n]o two things must occur in one picture that cannot happen in nature at the same time” (1869, 198). Yet his naturalism was based in deception in order to garner a dramatic effect.

Robinson’s very first combination print, “Fading Away” (1856) (figure 2), printed from five negatives, was exhibited at the Crystal Palace in 1858 and mass-produced for shop windows. It garnered instant fame partly because it tricked the public into thinking it was a spontaneous shot and partly because it treated a difficult, controversial topic, the death of a young girl from consumption. But, undoubtedly, it was also successful for its eliciting shared sorrow between the figures and their viewers. Prince Albert was so taken with “Fading Away” that he bought a copy of the photograph and placed an order for every subsequent combination print that Robinson produced.

For a simple combination photograph, a photographer might make prints from two different negatives, cut out parts of the prints, paste them on a photographed background, and then photograph the resulting collage all over again. The more advanced combination printing practiced by photographers such as Robinson relied on sketching a scene first; making photographic studies of parts of the scene; posing a number of models in groups; printing a large number of negatives, from five to thirty; then choosing, cutting, and arranging image parts along joining lines, which were assembled to be photographed for a final print. For purposes of composition and to capture the right effect, the heads of models could be cut off and sutured onto the bodies of others, just as the sky or landscape of one scene was scissored out and pasted into the final picture.
Figure 2. Henry Peach Robinson, "Fading Away," composite photograph made from five negatives, 1858; George Eastman Collection, Rochester, New York.
Robinson’s “Autumn” (1863) offers a particularly interesting example of the more complicated practice. Filled with puzzling elements, it serves a pastoral ideal of reality and hence may easily be dismissed as a sentimental distortion of a season and place. Our first glance of grouped figures with cut sheaves becomes more problematic upon a closer inspection of the composition’s joined parts. The sheaves do not realistically belong in this forest setting. If laborers, the figures are hardly grain cutters; their attire and their postures suggest that, instead, they may be farm workers on an outing who have decided to pause and rest to take in a river view.

The traditional meanings for the season of autumn evoked by this composition, harvest and transience, are equally unstable. Although we can’t be sure that Robinson had in mind Keats’s ode “To Autumn,” the photograph aims to prompt thoughts and images of a Keatsian fullness. The beauty of river foliage and the languid poses struck by the female figures and by a solitary male viewer suggest the celebration of a “soft-dying day” (Keats, line 25). Harvested wheat is placed next to young people, intimating a contrast between immaturity and ripeness as an integral component of nature’s life cycle. Yet the group of figures is set against a background that looks as if drawn by a young Turner or even Constable. A light-struck body of water and a distant countryside beckon as prospects to another realm.

Robinson’s composition thus is far more complicated than it may appear. The photograph positions four young women and a boy in a wooded, pastoral scene looking in different directions. The three sheaves of wheat at the lower border of the photograph anchor the picture. Although the figures were photographed in two groups, the four on the left in one shot and the single figure on the right in another, their postures divide the picture triply with the two figures on the left lounging and sitting, the two girls in the middle standing, and the single figure on the right curled up in a more compact sitting position than the girl on the left. Spatial groupings and the figures’ differing visual perspectives thus help reinforce the sense that Robinson is allegorizing three temporal perceptions associated with the season of autumn: past, present, and future. One group looks off into the distance, one looks at other figures nearby in the present situation, while the single figure’s eyes are hidden. The dying of the year is always a poignant moment for reflection back on the glories of summer, for holding onto the cider press of fall, and for anticipating the future unknowns of winter.

Robinson exploits shadow as much as compositional placement to reinforce contrary perspectives. The important single figure seated in the
right foreground is in shadow with her back to the viewer. On the one hand, she and the dark foliage behind her help steady the picture; on the other hand, her dark shape lends a note of ominousness to the scene. Since we cannot see her face and eyes, she may well be an older woman, and not a young woman, after all. Allegorically, she may represent Age, Fate, or, in Keats’ terms, a carelessly sitting Autumn herself. Here she reclines not on a granary floor or by a cider-press, as in “To Autumn,” but on a mossy bank. Nevertheless, she is “like a gleaner” or one who “with patient look” watches the passage of time (Keats, 19–22). If she is a figure for time passing or time past, the boy and girl on the left (the boy with a sense of immediacy in his pose and face and the girl with a pose of languor), seem to represent the present moment, whereas the girls in the middle who are brightly lit and look into the distant prospect beyond, may represent the future. Yet, given that the shaded figure looks in the same direction, that distance may also represent an afterlife, attainable only after crossing the this-worldly reality in which all five figures are situated.

Robinson describes one viewer of “Autumn” as complaining about the divergences among the figures, that “these figures did not agree with one another; that the light fell on them from different quarters; that the perspective of each had different points of sight; and that each figure was taken from a different point of view” (Robinson 1869, 199). This complaint, however, is precisely the point. We might critique the photograph for its artificiality and its contrivance, yet Robinson’s introduction of varied perspectives and light sources creates a tension and drama within the image designed to be imitative of the multiple effects of autumn on the human psyche.

Photographs such as “Autumn,” “Sleep” (based on the children of “Tristram and Iseult”), or “The Lady of Shalott” evidence Robinson’s thorough knowledge of nineteenth-century painting, literature, and illustration. His similarly well-grounded, numerous writings on photography show him to be in dialogue with both earlier and contemporary British and continental culture. He is especially conversant with Romantic poetry, Ruskin’s art theory, the masters of engraving, Pre-Raphaelitism, and the artist he hails as “our greatest master,” Turner (Robinson 1869, 150).

Robinson’s photographs pander to the hunger for pictorial narrative in the paintings, dramas, novels, and poems devoured by the elite as much as by the masses in nineteenth-century British culture. Art photography and historical reconstruction photography also borrowed from the available cultural codes of narrative, including intertexts and “a conventionalized language of facial expression, pose, and gesture, sometimes
remote from the gestures of contemporary life, but not narrowly bound to tradition either” (Meisel 5). Robinson drew on both the impulse to illustrate and on this theatrical language of physiognomy and the body. His photographs are static and theatrically posed, often artificial looking, sometimes featuring a single figure and often a tableau. They freeze a significant moment in time.

In this sense, and perhaps in this sense only, his work bears comparison with the paintings of John Everett Millais. Distinguishing between narrative accounts in poetry and painting versus those that concentrate the whole story in the “turning point,” Meisel places Tennyson and Millais in the latter camp (35). In their art, he says, story becomes “a situation, a moment of poise, as in some of Millais’s story paintings; a moment of epiphany as in some of Hunt’s” (35).

Robinson’s 1863 “Autumn” thus seems worth connecting to Millais’s masterpiece Autumn Leaves of 1856. Employing dark forms against a light background, Millais sets the scene at twilight. The four prepubescent girls, all lovely, stand in a strikingly lit scene with a bold, solidly defined red scarf on the youngest child at the right foreground balancing the evanescent smoke that drifts off to the left. While the girls represent youth and beauty, the clouds, smoke, and burning dead leaves evoke the inevitability of the seasons, culminating in death. So, too, the girls, innocent and blooming now, are colored already by twilight and will die. The hand of the tallest girl, at the center of the picture, blends into the dark shadows surrounding it in a central statement of encroaching darkness. Unlike Millais’s historical or illustration paintings, it bears drama and sentiment but no external narrative.

Millais had been reading Tennyson’s The Princess (1847) while painting Autumn Leaves; his painting references sentiments from the first lines of the deeply moving song of Part IV:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean.
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking on the days that are no more. (lines 21–25)

Despite the absence of color in Robinson’s photography, so central to meaning for the Pre-Raphaelites, Robinson draws in the viewer, as Millais does, via mood and subject. Like Millais’s paintings such as Autumn Leaves or its pendant Spring, Robinson’s photographs sacrifice a sense of the real to allegory and a feeling of depth to paper doll or frieze-like flat-
ness. While Millais’s figures look at the viewer directly or at each other, Robinson’s do so to a far lesser degree. In his photograph “Autumn,” the perspectives he introduces set up varied and contingent views, which do not serve only to bind the whole, but which also serve to fracture it. Moreover, he negates or neutralizes the presence of the observer, who is both invited into the picture and at the same time, facing the back of the darkened, seated female, shut out.

Consequently, the relationship of the observer to Robinson’s photographs is also doubled. The observer is both pulled in and pushed away by photographs that demand subjective mediation and yet also hold out for an ideal objectivity. Appearing as a material object that one views in a gallery or as a set on stage, the photographs offer neither a lived reality nor a scene in which the viewer can fully partake.

Even when barely noticed, the joins of Robinson’s photographs contribute to this tension. Aware of himself as a manufacturer of reality, despite his credo of fidelity to nature, Robinson cautioned against sloppy workmanship in joining the negatives of combination prints. Because combination photograph prints were contact prints with no way of enlarging certain parts to blend better with other parts, some of the joining spaces or lines are still visible, as cracks in the visual field. Moreover, forms and distances were not always accurately proportioned. Geometric perspective was difficult to maintain: a figure might be too large to fit properly, a landscape edge might not blend in smoothly, and, above all, multiple light sources or competing vanishing points might call attention to the surreal nature of the blended whole.

This handling of a geometric perspective is not unlike that exhibited in the quasi-medieval flatness of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s early paintings (see The Girlhood of Mary Virgin, chapter 2). But Robinson’s pasting of parts to make a more effective and truthful whole has a different result in photography than similar techniques in Pre-Raphaelite painting. Precisely because photography seems to tell us we are looking at the spontaneous real, the ingenious deceptions of combination printing are unsettling to viewers who become aware of the method. In many cases, one can go further to say that since Robinson produces images taken from different negatives, his photographs could be unsettling even to viewers unaware of his methods.

Robinson attempted to defend his techniques in a paper he presented to the Photographic Society of Scotland on March 16, 1860, nine years before he wrote an entire book on the subject. When his lecture “On Printing Photographic Pictures from Several Negatives” appeared in The British Photographer (2 April), it raised an outcry. For it had punctured
the illusion of his viewers when he described how he had joined one model’s head to another’s body and how he had put a bank he covered with ferns and flowers into a birch yard “about fifty feet long by twenty feet wide” (1860b, 2). At the foot of the bank, he revealed, a hole into which waste water flowed from a print-washing apparatus helped him to form a river. Accused of having created a “patchwork” school of photography (L. Smith 103), Robinson replied by insisting that he practiced a higher art of composition: “I can get nearer to the truth for certain subjects with several negatives than with one” (1860a 3).

“Fading Away” (1858) (figure 2), his most famous “composition,” illustrates the tensions that Robinson’s art sought to exploit as well as to efface. The central figure of a dying young woman dominates the foreground. By having female relatives flank her, Robinson dramatizes emotion inherent in the spectacle of death and in the solemn faces we see. The very act of choosing two figures to frame the prone body evokes a motif from gravestones. A shadowy stool in the foreground is left close to the young woman and her female attendants—perhaps inviting the observer to move the drapery on it, sit, and wait. The middle plane is occupied by a dark male figure looking out the window. A yet further ground, seen through the window, of moon, water, and sky, is linked with shimmering light and the unknown.

Although “Fading Away” clearly is meant to picture an upper-middle-class domestic circle, it is also importantly universalizing through its conventional posing. The central scene reiterates other Victorian depictions of domestic clusters around a sickbed, around a hearth, and sometimes, in the cult of the dead, around an open coffin. At the same time, “Fading Away” evokes other photographs and paintings that feature a lovely young girl in white. The props in “Fading Away” are also carefully chosen. Reading has faded (the woman on the left holds a book she has closed), flowers are fading, the light in the sky is crepuscular. Importantly, Robinson chose verses from the poem “Queen Mab” by a youthful but morbid Percy Bysshe Shelley to go with the photograph: “Must then that peerless form / . . . That lovely outline, which is fair / As breathing marble, perish?” (lines 12 . . . 17).

The selected passage calls attention to the death of a girl so beautiful that she looks as if she is art come to life and returning to non-being. Despite photography’s association with permanence, “Fading Away” highlights mobility. If combination printing allows pieces to be lifted, discarded, or re-pasted, it also allows human forms to be literally removed from their original settings and placed into alternate realities. Robinson’s photographic method of cutting and pasting can be enlisted
to call attention to transience or movement as much as to the stasis of an epiphanic moment lifted out of the maelstrom of time.

Who is the male figure turning his back on the three women in the foreground? His removal from the dying young woman suggests that he is not an attending physician but a relative, perhaps an older brother, or even an uncle, if not a father. He may thus be part of a family circle which seems to include the mother on the left and an older sister on the right, though naturally these identifications are born of coded cultural expectations and not certainties. On the other hand, if the photograph is a commentary, in part, on the spread of consumption as a disease, the pose of the man, turned away from the central event, with left hand raised to head, may indicate the sense of waste and failure felt on the part of a physician who stands helplessly by, waiting only for the last breath before he must make yet another house call. Lastly, the gentleman may be a Christian clergyman. If a doctor ministers to bodies that are transient, a clergyman ministers to souls entering another world. In the photograph this prospect of another reality, as in “Autumn,” is depicted with the water, light, and luminosity, towards which the man has turned. No matter what the man’s role in the drama of death before us, we do not know if he is a believer or a doubter. We are not sure if the young girl will float into another reality or not. Robinson does not show us. The photograph could as well be entitled “Turning Away” as “Fading Away.”

Significantly, as Lukacher suggests, we as viewers are facing the same way as the photographer and the male figure, but the object in each case differs: the photographer sees a domestic scene of waiting for death, whereas the male figure turns towards the landscape and the light source outside. The observer of the photograph thus is invited to look at and to look beyond. Equally interesting, just as the photographer would be draped between lens and curtain, the male figure stands between dark curtains before the glass window (Lukacher 33) as if reduplicating the position of the photographer’s view.

As the viewer stands in the position of the male figure and the photographer, though, nobody looks back at us or at each other. In an earlier chapter, taking direction from Leo Steinberg’s treatment of Las Meninas, I suggested we examine internal gazes in Rossetti’s The Girlhood of Mary Virgin. The narratologist and cultural critic Mieke Bal (1991, 158–60) calls internal looks “the focalizers of an image.” She explains: “If an external focalizer or spectator can look in the same way at the same thing as a focalizer in the picture, then our identification with the image will be strong” (Bal quoted in Rose 2001, 44; see also Bal 1997, 142–70 on the dynamics of focalization in “every visual text” [170]).
In “Fading Away,” this identification process is complex. Whereas the two women looking at the dying girl are the central focalizers, drawing our attention to her, the man at the window exerts a strong counterpull as he looks away, out the window. Like the darkened female figure in “Autumn,” this man turns his back to us. We are not sure what the man sees when he looks. Nor can we know if his eyes are open or shut. Does his hand cover his eyes? We have no idea where he gazes or what he sees. If we move from the women’s gaze and the dying girl to identify with the man, then the basis for identification hinges on issues of subjective thoughts and a looking beyond. Looking beyond to a future or a past is also a turning and looking away from the central present scene; this impulse passes to the viewer. In other words, the man’s gaze injects distance into the viewing as well as into the scene.

The formal innovation of combination printing started by Rejlander and developed in the tableaux rituals of Robinson was an experiment whose subject, finally, was not time, the seasons, ritual events, transience, or beauty. For combination printing inaugurated a new handling of photographic subject, a new language of printing, a new responsibility for the observer to read parts, and a new way of observing parts and the whole of an image. Robinson’s method challenged many of the cultural presuppositions about photography: its immediacy, its objectivity, its fidelity to the real, and its unity. Symbolically speaking, Robinson’s “Fading Away” concerns not only the passing of a beautiful young woman, but also the transition of a way of representing reality itself—from a mastered single field of vision to another, more fragmented mode in which parts and perspectives fissure the whole.

THE DOUBLE PERSPECTIVE OF LADY HAWARDEN

The photographs that Lady Clementina Hawarden (1822–65) took between 1857 and 1864 in her home in South Kensington, London, ninety percent of which are held at the nearby Victoria and Albert Museum, have elicited increasingly avid attention in recent years. Women scholars especially have been fascinated by the five hundred photographs of her daughters (see Barlow; Ramirez 1; Mavor all; C. Armstrong; Dodier 1999, 10; Rose 2002, 103 and 2000, 557). The luminous intensity of this collection of albumen prints registers Hawarden’s demand for and achievement of an embodied vision, but also confirms her ability to speak deeply to women about aspects of femininity and
female roles.

In her own day, Hawarden’s photographs were already celebrated for their technique and subject matter by such well-known photographers as Oscar Gustave Rejlander and Lewis Carroll (who bought several for his albums). Public acclaim came with silver medals from the Photographic Society of London in 1863 and 1864, when Hawarden exhibited her photographs under the group titles “Studies from Life” and “Photographic Studies.” Overlapping social circles with James McNeill Whistler and his brother-in-law Francis Seymour Haden may account for the possibility that Hawarden’s photography influenced mood painting and the Etching Revival (Dodier 1999, 98–104; Lawson; Haworth-Booth 113). In modern times, art journalists and art historians have stressed the doubleness at the heart of her work, praising “her awareness that fancy and fact coexist in a photograph,” and noting that “this coexistence is at the very heart of the photographic enterprise” (Grundberg 1990, 1; and see Lawson 8).

Hawarden’s early experiments in photography while still at the family estate of Dundrum, County Tipperary, involved a stereoscopic camera and prints. Embracing the stereoscope’s handling of space and depth, she quickly advanced beyond the monocular Cartesian model of scene and traditional perspective. Prominent in her London indoor photographs, examples of which I shall discuss, are her eldest daughters, especially Clementina and Isabella, often dressed in light colors or white, whether in contemporary dress or older costumes. Hawarden surrounds them with abundant and aberrant natural light and shadow; uses swaths of full skirts or long muslin or net curtains as props; sometimes positions them near stone or wood barriers and balustrades or windows; and frequently features objects such as a vase, a concertina, or a box with multiple drawers.

Hawarden’s fascination with doubling is evident in over a hundred photographs in which she positions her daughters with a mirror or reflective window glass. Again and again, her pictures establish a close, sometimes intimate, sororal relationship between paired figures. When using two figures, she frequently reinforces oppositions with dark and light dresses or stresses likeness and mimicry by counterfacing two girls with glass between them. She very rarely uses close-ups and only occasionally features a London cityscape as a blurred background.

Most critics agree that the photographs explore a time of a girl’s life, an in-between temporal phase here spatialized as a border land, on one side of which lies girlhood and on the other side of which lies womanhood. Moreover, this intermediate realm, half real and half fantastical,
is observed through a mother’s collaborative and modeling eyes. By collaborative, I mean that the girls have collaborated with their mother—they have modeled for her, they have modeled themselves after her, and they have helped with printing. The collaboration is emotional, as well as artistic, and stems from a same-sex maternal–daughterly intimacy.

The uniqueness of Hawarden’s work becomes apparent when placed in a larger context. By relying on family members as models she often dressed in costume, Hawarden drew on conventions of the day practiced by other professional and amateur photographers such as Cameron, Rejlander, Robinson, Emerson, Munby, and Carroll, who dressed friends, servants, and family. The vast number and obsessive repetition of similar poses, figures, and props also connects Hawarden to the penchant for documentation or classification that marked the early staging of photographs as a kind of museum or a mode of display (Roberts 26). Hawarden’s photographs thus participate in what Michel Foucault would identify as the interlacing of discourses and technologies aimed at the invention of new subjectivities whose reduplication could control individualization.

Yet, despite her participation in this inevitable process of modernity and her dependence on similar ideological forces, Hawarden’s photographs are also remarkably different from those produced by her contemporaries, both amateurs and professionals. The enormous emphasis on narrative in the Victorian period, which affected, as we have seen, both Pre-Raphaelite art and Robinson’s photographic combinations, is markedly absent in Hawarden’s photographs. They stand apart as programmatically nonnarrativizing and willfully resistant to narratives imposed upon them. Hawarden shatters nineteenth-century expectations for story and works against a reduction of the image to language. This seeming resistance may, of course, be partly a matter of the sketchy historical record (perhaps a Hawarden diary or a set of letters is lost), but within the photographs themselves, she rarely references intertexts by alluding, as Robinson did, to literary productions by poets such as Tennyson, Arnold, and Shelley. Moreover, she does not write about her photographs, gives them no individual titles or dates, and rarely identifies them on their reverse sides with text or code. If Hawarden resists satisfying such a cultural imperative, she also prevents a viewer from constructing some story about her photographs. Critics have trouble identifying a story or naming their topic. Indeed, Dodier (1999) and Haworth-Booth, thinking of her stress on form or thinking ahead to Whistler, perhaps, go so far as to call them subjectless. As I will later argue, although in this context subjectless refers to content, it may also be
taken otherwise. Hawarden’s photographs also shatter the perspecti-
ally based stability of a subject-spectator, thus drawing attention to the
mobility of vision and to multiple and divergent spatial views.

In terms of content, Hawarden’s images almost insist on remaining
untitled. According to Gillian Rose, Virginia Dodier’s Victoria and Albert
Museum catalogue of the photographs by number, probable date, and
identity of family members may actually prelabel the archive for any
new researcher in ways that are counter to the intentions of the pho-
tographer (Rose 2000). As we know from Allan Sekula, the construction
of a photographic archive is itself influential in shaping interpretations
(1986; 1987). Carol Mavor’s personal captions of Hawarden photographs
reproduced in her book Becoming perform an even greater disservice
by misleading unwary or casual readers who, coming upon them for
the first time, may incorrectly attribute such titles to the photographer
herself.

In other photographs of the period, such as Cameron’s or Carroll’s,
costumes offer clues to the stories, poems, or fairy tales any given pho-
tograph illustrates. Cameron’s invited reproduction of scenes of Tenny-
son’s Idylls of the King or Carroll’s and Robinson’s staging of “Little Red
Riding Hood” stem from an urge to illustrate that is not paralleled in
Hawarden’s repertoire. Nor is her use of costumes related to achieving
the single dramatic or scenic effects that Robinson had sought to pro-
duce in his work. Recent Hawarden critics have been eager to identify
costumed types such as Mary Magdalen, Joan of Arc, or fallen women
in her photographs; they have claimed to see emblematic embodiments
of coded gestures or physiognomies (see Dodier 1999; Mavor; Lawson).
Yet such identification can hardly be made with the same certitude that
allows us to unravel layers of meaning in Robinson’s “Sleep” or “Fading
Away.” Even a full knowledge of the sophisticated codes through which
the Victorians read surfaces in physiognomy and theatrical gesture is of
little help in decoding photographs that defy narration. Dodier seems to
acknowledge this difficulty when she allows that “the images in some
of these groups may have been linked by narratives that are no longer
explicit” (1999, 13). By implying that personal narratives may have
been lost to history or were based on private theatrics or made-up
stories, she tacitly acknowledges her need to pin down the nature of
Hawarden’s unusual artistry, and yet she also reveals the elusiveness of
that artistry.

When Hawarden displays her eldest daughters, it remains mys-
terious as to why she is putting them on display or how she might
link photographs that cannot be put into a discernible sequence. Her
relationship to young women is unlike Cameron’s or Carroll’s. If the photographs do offer visual cues of courtship rituals, or of literary, historical, or mythic characters, they do so only to point up young women’s reliance on or playing with cultural narratives of romance or heroism as an aspect of identity shaping, rather than serving as specific illustrations to feed the public taste. Hawarden, I would argue, encourages a playing with a range of cultural narratives, through pose and dress, and that fact is far more important than naming them.

Although each extant photograph is but a single print, with the plates lost or destroyed, Hawarden repetitively turns to her eldest daughters. The photographer-mother seems keenly interested in generation and reduplication. (It is probably significant that few photos exist of her only son.) The camera revels in her eldest daughters’ poses and reveries. Hawarden seems entranced by (or nostalgic for?) adolescent secretiveness, sexual flirtatiousness, and narcissism; she always betokens an awareness of the larger adult world that encroaches on youth and beckons an egress. Hawarden’s photographs of female meditation point to her understanding of the private worlds older girls crave and need; her photographs of sisters embracing speaks to her understanding of sororal relations, whether she documents closeness or not. Her camera is drawn to boundaries, social markers, and differences. She relies on contrasting realities such as outside/inside, dress/undress, dress-up/contemporary fashion, costumes and role play/self-identity. Although we see the camera box in one photograph, we have no more than one photograph extant of the photographer herself. Even that one image may be her own sister and not herself.

Perhaps this is why the photographer is not in the photographs; versions of her already exist in the photographs. Her daughters replicate aspects of their mother—in looks, in qualities, and, according to a cultural narrative, in their future role—and she, in turn, duplicates and reduplicates them in photographs, reproducing them in reflection doubly, while revisiting her earlier selves by photographing them. The fact that Clementina’s eldest daughter is named Clementina reinforces this emphatic sense of doubling and redoubling. Taken together, the photographic pairs, series, and sets serve as prefilmic explorations of the rituals and transitions of puberty and heterosexual desire through the lens of the mother/daughter relationship, which prepares daughters to move through the window into the outer social world, where they become women.

Taking photographs in two rooms on the second floor of her South Kensington home with views to the east and south of Princes Gardens
and of communal gardens between her home and Princes Gate to the north, Hawarden attends to different external and internal sources of light. Unlike a painter, Hawarden does not covet the unchanging light from a northward-facing studio but is drawn, instead, to the variations and streams of a southern light that “suffuses and dissolves form” rather than making it emerge (Lawson 7). In her use of multiple light sources, Hawarden thus resembles Turner and the Impressionists; in her choice of single or small clusters of female figures, she may be compared with Rossetti and Whistler.

Hawarden explores depth in terms of how light and its shadows shape our view of physical bodies which appear as forms, patterns, and substances.22 Showing light as both a creator and agent of vision, at the same time, she playfully introduces the viewer to the interplay of surfaces and depths, exteriors and interiors. Although in this chapter I don’t have space to analyze the many types of photographs she produces, I would suggest that she often toys with the viewer in those images that present us with boxes and drawers closed, but fingered or eyed, and those in which her daughters are half-undressed. Both of these seem to draw attention to concealment and to the limits of both optical fidelity and language as avenues to knowledge.

Hawarden notes traces of moving light balanced by shadows when she shows light patterns on a skirt or a bed cover, as in a photograph of Clementina reclining with a jug, table, and mirror as props. She explores reflections on glass and uses the window as the source or frame or reflector of light. Perhaps the most memorable of such photographs is a stereoscopic one that places Clementina outside, seemingly about to close a tall rectangular window or step in through it—she is emerging from and with the source of light into a lesser interior brightness. Sometimes the mirrors themselves seem to emit light, as in a photograph of Isabella in a fancy dress in front of a mirror that showers light on the reflection of her hair. Literally highlighting transitions and boundaries, Hawarden exploits photographic blurring of face or hand or sleeve into light itself, as in the photograph of Clementina kneeling before a window or in one which captures the half body of a sister next to Clementina in pants. Figures or faces blend or dematerialize into the source of vision, natural light.23 This makes the photographs, as Gillian Rose argues, especially attractive to theorists of performative femininity—the “women are both there as women and not there at all” (Rose 2002, 106). The photographs are “subjectless” not only in terms of identifiable content, but also in terms of a sense of presence.

It is perhaps by chance or choice that the textured drawing-room
wallpaper itself serves as a commentary on kinds of light sources. Installed a year or two after Hawarden started taking photographs, it features gold stars on a gray background (Dodier 1999, 35). While a fashionable pattern of the time, it is noteworthy that the chosen pattern should replicate celestial bodies that emit light and that the star is also a Marian emblem, signifying virginity.24

One of the most notable aspects of the photographs, besides Hawarden’s fascination with light, is the rigidity of the terrace stone which extends to the facades of outdoor buildings and the ceiling-to-floor window frames. In some photographs the figures seem to float, even when seated, but are counterbalanced by stone or wood, frames or sills. The use of barriers and boundaries as common backdrops and our cultural attitudes about the lives of Victorian women have led at least one scholar to speak about Hawarden’s photographs as visions of restriction or the desire for escape from the domestic sphere (Ramirez 51). The fact that barriers, balconies, balustrades, and borders exist in some of the photographs is surely significant, but I wonder to what extent separate spheres are being binarized in these photographs.

If one considers a different frame for the reading of the photographs, as a set or series about adolescence, maternity, and womanhood, then they document the things girls and young women do at home before they leave their maternal home to become mothers and wives themselves. Whether or not this is a politically progressive set of documents seems to me beside the point; mothers do not always agree with dominant cultural narratives while at the same time feeling they must prepare children to perform a role in society.25 Life at home with mother becomes not only a playground but a training ground for the very upper-class world in which Hawarden’s daughters were expected to function. The sequence of photographs of her daughters—and ultimately it seems to me their ordering is immaterial because they can endlessly substitute for themselves—exists as a recording of such a charged preparation for a future “life.” At the same time, the forward-looking photographs also offer a nostalgic look over the shoulder to the photographer’s own past lives and provide a record for the photographer to keep when her daughters have departed.

It is worth pausing a moment to reflect upon photographic sequences and their public exhibition. During the years in which Hawarden displayed her work, established methods of presenting photographs included grouping them in exhibition frames or albums (Dodier 1999, 13; 57 illustration of a South Kensington exhibition). Such sequences could convey panels that formed a story or merely cluster similar themes. Rob-
inson is credited with creating the first sustained photographic ‘story’ in his famous 1858 four-print sequence, displayed together, the *Story of Little Red Riding Hood*. The absence of individual or group titles makes Hawarden’s London exhibition titles “Photographic Studies” and “Studies from Life” all the more meaningful. In her explanation of *studies*, Dodier suggests the modesty of unretouched and domestic drawing room “exercises” that make no claim to greatness. For her, *Studies* seems to refer to a stage of artistic process, a preparation for a larger work, and something relatively small and intimate (44). This meaning can be extended to imply that Hawarden executes her works for the sake of acquiring more skill in a relatively new medium.

Yet it seems to me that with “Photographic Studies” and “Studies from Life” Hawarden may also be drawing both playfully and seriously at once on the etymology and standard meanings of study. From the Latin *studium*, study means affection, devotion, partisan sympathy, desire, and pleasure. These usages, cited first in the OED with examples from Chaucer to Dryden, certainly apply to this mother-photographer’s chosen subject matter and approach.

Equally important, and balancing the emotional connotations of the word, *study* also signifies a deliberate mental effort towards the accomplishment of a purpose. It thus denotes the acquisition of learning, the action of studying, even a room in a house used for private deliberations or reading and writing. In addition, *study* also is a synonym for mental preoccupations, abstractions, anxious thought, and reverie. Hawarden may herself be a student expending effort in her hobby, but the subject matter of her work surely involves her daughters as students of womanhood. Over and over in her sets, series, and pendants, Hawarden casts her children as students of life (in the theatrical and psychological sense of a quick or slow study) and, for their mother/photographer, they are studies from, in, and between phases and even decades of life. They study their mother and each other as models—whether turning inward or outward; hesitating on a threshold; playing out a courtship narrative in dress-up clothes; donning fluid gender roles with a change of costume, assuming male and female identities from ancient to modern times in varying skirts, pants, togas, undergarments, and overskirts; flirting, calmly looking at their reflection; lounging; or playing with each other’s hair or fingers in studied attitudes of boredom, introspection, and desire. And she studies them in her studio, a room of her own, in which she can detect herself in them, and see them in her.

A telling photograph, in this studium/study/studio context, is that of daughter Isabella Grace clothed in a fashionable dark hat and dress
of the 1860s, as if, Dodier suggests (1999, 41), she were going out in on a social call, dramatically paired with and contrasted to sister Florence Elizabeth, whose face is turned outward and whose dress and hat are light-colored and of another, earlier style. The photograph reads as if one daughter may represent her mother’s girlhood, a stage with which she still identifies, while the other sister dresses like her mother the adult, but in her own maturing womanhood. Poignantly, the dark-dressed sister clothed in contemporary fashions looks back half-way at the house (and at us inside the house) that harbors her past, while the white-dressed sister in outdated fashions from the past looks beyond her sister into the
distance and the future. Isabella’s face is sharply delineated as she looks back; Florence’s is blurred as she looks forward. Their half-embrace emblematizes a momentary meeting place of temporal and geographical horizons where identities mix, holding on to each other. Perhaps, too, this photograph best catches the maternally grasped, adolescent double moment of certainty/uncertainty. Poised at the epicenter of two vastly different worlds, a choice presents itself—which way to go, backward or forward?

While one could write a separate essay on those pictures involving role play and costumes, and yet another on those pairing models for a mirroring effect of same-sex desire, I want to focus here on three of the approximately one hundred photographs that employ the reflective glass of windows and mirrors. I shall treat this photographic trio as the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis of Hawarden’s interests.²⁶

In a well-known portrait from 1862–63, “Clementina Maude” stands full-figured clasping her hands together against the thin, light-colored curtains as if her sleeve or she herself were the cord holding them back (figure 3). She is bathed in natural light, and the lines of her right arm, her torso, her body, dress, and head are compositionally placed to reinforce patterns of light on the wall behind her and in the window frame, divided by the curtain. She is in a pose that can only be described as very difficult to hold, even pained. This print is a pendant to one in which the figure is positioned the same way, but reversed, turning to the left, inward, away from the window, with her hands clasped against the wall rather than the window curtain. For purposes of this argument, I am going to dwell on the first of the two, without losing sight that it is only one half of a pair.

Carol Mavor views coiled hair and clasped hands as images of frustration and confinement, invoking for comparison the Charlotte Perkins Gilman short story of desire, entrapment, and breakdown, “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Mavor describes Hawarden’s eldest daughter as a clipped angel of the house “pinned” to the wallpaper, marked by the shadows that mark the walls, and trapped at the window frame. In a similar vein, Dodier notes that the pose recalls for her the tortured position of the fallen woman in D. G. Rossetti’s 1853 pen and ink Found and a clinging female in George Elgar Hicks’s 1863 painting, Woman’s Mission: Companion to Manhood.

Yet one might also note the arms that reach up towards the source of light and note that the coiled hair of the chignon is like a crown (is this figure a Ruskinian queen and a trapped angel?). For the young woman is as actively drawn to the light and the window as she may be hopelessly
shut in by them, oppressed, or clamping—a point clearly illustrated by the pendant photograph. The dramatic pose struck there is one of prayer and even spiritual ecstasy. The light beams and lines of gauze curtains and their shadows form a triangle of striations—an inversion of beams such as that in Bernini’s *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa.* Not necessarily a fallen woman or a trapped woman seeking escape from an oppressive interior, Clementina may also be like a butterfly moving towards the light, to an exterior positive world of sexual and/or spiritual fulfillment. Shadows of skirts and curtains, if one looks long enough, appear like wings.

Hawarden’s daughters move back and forth across boundaries. Many other prints—such as my second example, a photograph of Clementina standing in the window frame with an empty chair in the corner of the room—position the girls in between realms. Dressed in what appears to be an undergarment on top and an overskirt, with her back to the outside, it is not clear if she is going in or coming out. She emerges from the source of light and looks to be entering the domestic; yet it is equally possible that the empty Queen Anne-style chair, a common prop in the studio, represents her past, domestic childhood and not the empty seat waiting for the woman to fill it. Visual cues are ambiguous, and messages about her sexuality are conflicting. The blouse that slips off her shoulder does not help settle an interpretation—is she dressed as if she were in a state of disarray from a sexual encounter or pausing in the window before dressing for the day? Was there a ravishment and another figure who has departed? Or is the half-dressed girl testing the sunlight’s warmth as she readies for the day, momentarily lost in a vacant reverie? Or is the photographer using her daughter as a sexually mature double of herself by looking back at the domestic interior of an earlier life, when a blouse hanging on a shoulder had nothing to do with heterosexual seduction?

I would argue not that the daughters are trapped, but that mother and daughters thrive in multiple relations to their inside and outside worlds, to domesticity, and to social requirements. The various sources of light both define and blur, create and dissolve physical materiality and suggest an alternative world touching on fairy tales or fantasies or dreams. This duality allows Hawarden to emphasize that perspective is not only Cartesian, in the sense of interior, introspective, privatized, and monocular, but fluid, simultaneously introspective and other-oriented, public and private, binocular and monocular, clear and blurry, defined and mysterious.

If the first photograph I discussed concerned a yearning towards light and ecstasy and the second pivoted on a movement back across
the threshold into the domestic, the third offers a synthesis of those two impulses and yet remains equally dialectical itself by a simultaneous examination of both movements. Daughter Clementina looks at herself in a cheval mirror. Dressed in a dark hat and light-colored dress to go out, she examines her reflection. Though “something of a cliché” in portrait photography of the period (Dodier 1999, 41), the cheval mirror served Hawarden not as a comment on woman’s vanity or to reflect a nude or to document a reflection, but to stress the differences between one view and another, one object and another. As Ramirez has noted, this type of photograph “fragmented and reorganized space while simultaneously offering two views of a sitter” (n.p., prefatory material): “By positioning the cheval glass at certain angles, placing the figures in anomalous contingencies to the glass surface, and manipulating light and shadow, Hawarden was often able to create a reflection that was very different from its source and sometimes even completely obliterated” (Ramirez 61). Occupying the left half of the photograph, Clementina stands in profile and in front of a cheval glass that occupies the right half of the photograph. Her right hand holds her left wrist. Her left hand holds the stand of the mirror. What is blurring in the left portrait is clear in the reflection, and vice versa. Her face is clear in the left portrait and blurry in the glass. Her right sleeve is blurry in the left portrait and detailed in the mirror.

The profiled Clementina draws iconographically and compositionally on a Renaissance profile tradition used for representations of aristocrats and still common in nineteenth-century photographic images (see Wolf 176; Lalvani 448; Tagg 35). However, except for her use of classed clothing, Hawarden does not provide the props congruent with that tradition. Nor does she settle on a rigid profile, indicating “ornamental status” (Wolf 178).

Nor does Hawarden’s placement of a dark hat on Clementina stress what a white dress alone might indicate: a figure of spiritual value or what a doubled white hat with dress might suggest—pure aesthetic dematerialization of form. The dark and light are provocatively mixed, as are the shadows and areas of focus. Like Vermeer in Woman with a Pearl Necklace, Hawarden awards the woman the agency of viewing, thus making her a subject of self-absorption and not only an object of the observer’s gaze. Unlike Vermeer’s woman, she looks back seductively from the dark shadow of the mirror reflection at us.

Moreover, what she sees in the mirror is not just herself, but the very act of spectatorship. Clementina sees and is seen, thus recognizing, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, “the ‘other side’” of the “power of looking” (193) or the “reflexivity” of “the seeing-visible” (1964, 168). As Clemen-
tina sees herself seeing, we are aware of ourselves seeing her see herself and look back at us—we too are seeing, and seen, and called upon to be seen as photography and perception become the subject of the photograph.

By inviting the observer into this intersubjective and somatic relationship of seeing/being, Hawarden puts the viewer in a triple position. We are physically in the room seeing Clementina; we are outside the immediate visual space of the curve-topped mirror which we face, but in which we cannot literally see ourselves or a stand-in seeing (as in, say, *Las Meninas*), and lastly, we remain outside, standing back, seeing the two almost equal halves—being and reflection—as if they were parts of a linked but not fully joined heart.

Clementina’s fully embodied action of looking occurs partly in darkness, like the photographer’s face and cloth, and partly in light, like the eye of the lens. Is the hat, sign of social calls and of going out into the public world as a woman, the daughter’s own or does it belong to her mother? Is this a dress rehearsal for growing up or the real thing? Looking forward to adulthood in the mirror, Clementina’s face in the mirror is darkened and blurred; yet looking from the mirror back into the childhood world, a woman sees her childhood past as clear and vivid. As her future looks back at her, her reflection also is looking at the present as past.

This stereoscopic image in one frame fully destroys monocularism, as Clementina looks out and back at once and faces different ways due to the angle of the mirror. She puts “vision into the visible” (Prendeville, on Merleau-Ponty 377). The pose is erotically charged because of the mirror frame and the position of her hands, indicating that entering the public world also means entering adult sexuality. Holding onto the leg of the cheval frame, Clementina holds that arm back at the wrist, and still. It is a half-gesture. With her left hand positioned—and reflected to make a pair in the form of a benediction—and her right hand positioned and reflected to make a second pair as reaching out and holding onto the mirror, Clementina remains divided. Her attitudes don’t speak the same coding. Shadows and the wooden mirror leg divide them, making the touching of the mirror the marker of a transition from girlhood to womanhood.

As Craig Owens indicates, in her photographs with mirrors, Hawarden consciously or unconsciously explores “the structural tension within the medium—between photography as extrovert, a view on the material world, and the photograph as a self-enclosed image of its own process” (80). Although he does not say so, Hawarden sees that structural tension manifested daily in her daughters’ social roles and their girlhood
reveries and in her own psychosocial experience of seeing/experiencing/mothering girls becoming women.

Because of their repetitive focus on the body and its relation to light and place, Hawarden’s photographs draw on an embodied perception in the observer, involving more than a simply specular view. Hawarden’s photographs invite the observer to a synesthetic visual experience that is not a purely mental construct, not textual, but visceral first and only then processed mentally as emblematic of temporal processes of change at the site of female identity. She especially appeals to women viewers but asks us all to consider how we are ourselves placed in the world and to reconsider the experience of our corporeality, our being in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 133–43; Bal 2003, 14). Her photographs question how we perform acts of seeing others, while she emphasizes, repeatedly and intentionally, a kind of late-Turner vanishing point—dissolution into shadow or light, not disappearance into the distance. I would go further to argue that the enlargement of the visual experience Hawarden demands, the thinking of sensation and the eroticism of thought, is also a dialectical one—mental to visceral—in which each continually redefines the other.

In experimenting with sources of light, windows, glass, frames, sills, and mirrors, Hawarden illustrates that vantage points are not always clear and that our view of figures and the meanings we attach to them can never be monocular, singular, or fixed. The eye is part of the body, not to be trusted entirely in a world of diffuse light, encroaching shadows, doubling, and reduplications—sometimes not to be trusted at all. Yet, in asserting that there is no unchanging real objective reality but only a changing one, she does not reduce meaning to aestheticism, to moods, to the sublime, to the symbolic, to the transcendent, or to enigma. Rather she explores and even celebrates transparent and reflective layers of experience, showing how in one framed view, one photograph, an observer may jostle against and within various and divergent vistas, temporal moments, and felt spaces.

Hawarden here begins to do with light, shadow, and mirror what Whistler took up differently in his Woman in White series and what Pablo Picasso fully exploited later in developing cubism, when he used a broken camera lens and prism to show how light, angle, and mirrors can condition what and how we see. Like Turner, Hawarden demonstrates that empirical experience is far more provisional than we think. That she does so with photography in the early 1860s is unusual. In single shot after single shot and in two major exhibition groupings, she exposes the Cartesian perspectival model as insufficiently embodied, neither physiological enough nor complicated enough to capture “life.”