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IN PRIMO PIANO

LA COSTRUZIONE DELLE BIOGRAFIE TERRITORIALI:  
ARCHIVI E RAPPRESENTAZIONI

a cura di Marco Maggioli

# Domesticating the archive: the case of family photography

*L'addomesticamento dell'archivio: il caso delle foto di famiglia*

*La domestication de l'archive: le cas de la photographie familiale*

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## *1. Introduction: the archive and family photography*

Family photography is a hugely popular past-time. Almost everyone possesses at least a few snaps of some family members, and with the popularity of digital cameras hooked up to home computers it would be possible to find some people with thousands. In the UK alone in 2005, an estimated 39 million rolls of film were processed, 20 million disposable cameras used, and 2.8 billion digital images taken (PMA 2006, p. 106). Well over half of UK households now own a digital camera, and even more have a cameraphone (PMA 2006, p. 19; Munir 2005). And as sales of photograph albums decline, software ensures that digital photos are organised into computer folders instead. If an 'archive' is understood simply as a searchable collection of texts, then, it follows that most homes have an archive of family snaps.

Yet most theoretical and empirical work on archives has focussed not on such domestic archives, but rather on the archives of institutions and organisations such as museums, libraries, monarchies, police forces and central government departments. Such archives began to appear the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as part of the modernising project of European nation-states, and it is these kinds of archives from which a certain understanding of 'the archive' has emerged in three decades of critical scholarship. Sekula (1988), for example, examines the Identification Bureau of the Paris Prefecture of Police as it operated in the late nineteenth century; Fisher (1987) discusses the Library of Congress, Washington DC; Rose (2000) explores the photography archive at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; while Steedman (2001) discusses both national local public archives in the UK. Broadly inspired by Foucault's concern with power/knowledge, this work has been concerned to explore the productive effects of the temporalities and spatialities articulated by institutional archives.

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These scholars have analysed a range of ways in which the development of such archives might be said to produce various accounts of history (Steedman 2001). They have also been concerned to map the geographies produced by such archives. Archives have been described as integral to articulations of national identity (Edwards 2012); as core to modern state surveillance (Sekula 1988; Tagg 1988, 2009); as part of the discourse of empire (Edwards 1992; Pinney 1992; Ryan 1997); as part of a global market in photographic images (Frosh 2003); and as part of local and regional identities (Edwards 2012; Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd 2009; Steedman 2001; Rose 2000). These different spatialities – the global, the national, the regional and the local – are embedded, often in complex and overlapping ways, in the various discourses through which an archive is constituted.

Attention has also been paid to the space of the archive itself. Much of this work has focussed on the apparatus and technologies of its design and use (Fisher 1987; Rose 2000); that is, on how an archive deals with its texts. Brothman (1991, p. 85), for example, writes that “the assignment of record group numbers, volume numbers, and inventory designations and descriptions as well as other archival adornments to permanently retained documents... serve to transfigure, if not to transform, the record”. This suggests that the archive is a particular kind of space. The practices of the archive give each document a unique place in a larger, systematic order, and this “linguistic grid” of “archival adornments” is described by Tagg as a cellular matrix (1988, p. 76) and by Fisher (1987, p. 99) as “a space of technicist power” that works like “a machine” (p. 100). Photographs in particular are understood to be constituted in particular ways by these archival technologies of classification. Pinney (1992, p. 90), for example, describes the power of the archive to affect how the images it contains are seen:

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

For Sekula, too, when an image enters an archive it loses meaning. Sekula suggests that what is lost is the meaning the photograph had to its makers and previous users: “in an archive, the possibility of meaning is ‘liberated’ from the actual contingencies of use. But this liberation is also a loss, an abstraction from the complexity and richness of use, a loss of context” (1986, 154). This removal of context reduces the complexity of any one photograph and establishes what Sekula calls “a relation of abstract visual equivalence between pictures” (Sekula 1986, 155). Each photograph shares this lack of context with every other in the archive. For these writers, the space of the archive is a grid which stabilizes the meaning of the photographs by putting each one in its place, to produce what Sekula calls a “territory of images” (1986, p. 154).

What, though, of those domestic archives of family photographs with which this paper opened? Sekula (1988) notes that related to the ‘abstract visual equivalence’ generated by the mid-nineteenth-century state archival apparatus was the ‘honorific’ studio portrait, and he argues that, together, these composed “a generalized, inclusive *archive*, a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain” (Sekula 1988, p. 347). However, as well the portraits created by professional photographic studios on which Sekula’s account depends, many wealthy men and women in the second half of the nineteenth century were making and archiving photographs of their family members, and Sekula (1988) has been criticised for not paying enough attention to these sorts of photographic images (Smith 1998). Feminist scholars in particular have been at pains to explore how such domestic photography might differ from the ‘shadow archive’, and the photographs made by upper-class women in the mid-nineteenth century have been argued to share a distinctive, feminine aesthetic (Lawson 1997, Mavor 1999, Smith 1998). Others, like Di Bello (2007) and Warner (1992), have paid more attention to the albums in which such photographs were displayed. These albums were often heavily worked by their creators, with photographs cut and pasted into watercolour scenes, surrounded by painted flowers, or made part of abstract and surreal geometric schemes. Bello’s work is particularly rich, exploring not only the albums themselves but how they would have been displayed and looked at in the drawing rooms of these women, their family members and their visitors. She argues that these women were using photographs “to give materiality to their own culturally and socially specific desires and pleasures” (Di Bello 2007, p.5), and “to give power to their fantasies and validate their experiences” as ‘ladies’, ‘mothers’ and ‘flirts’ (p. 27). That is, photographs were made and displayed as a means of asserting particular kinds of feminine identities.

This feminist work suggests a rather different account of what an archive might be. While Di Bello (2007), for example, is clear that these albums were in part about asserting their maker’s status as a ‘lady’ – in Sekula’s (1988) terms, they were indeed ‘honorific portraits’ – she also insists that the albums did more than this. They were also highly personal objects which were created and used in order to picture and perform complex emotional relations; for example, as a means for mothers to continue “stubbornly denying separation from the child by clinging to memorabilia” (Di Bello 2007, p. 105). Family photographs continue to be organised into albums, as the next section will show, as well as stored in boxes and on hard drives; and they continue ‘to picture and perform complex emotional relations’. The next section will therefore also suggest that, even if the technologies used have changed radically, the work done by the domestic archive of family photographs continues to differ from the shadow archive. It will argue that domestic archives are precisely *not* spaces of ‘abstract visual equivalence’; far from the machinic abstraction ordered by grids and matrices, domestic archives

are saturated with meaning and with the particularity of individuals and their networks of human relationships.

## 2. *Doing family photography*

Before the paper elaborates its claims about the archives of family photography, however, some account of its understanding of family photography is required.

There are by now many accounts of family photographs in the literature on photography; most are highly dismissive of it. Family photographs are criticised for perpetuating an idyllic image of the nuclear family, cementing only dominant visions of its classed, gendered and racialised identity (Bourdieu et al. 1990; Chambers 2001; Spence 1986); they are also criticised for being visually inept. Batchen (2008, p. 123), for example, claims that family snaps are “cloyingly sentimental in content and repetitively uncreative as pictures”; Slater (1995, p.134) says they are “generally regarded as a great wasteland of trite and banal self-representation”; and Evans (2000, p.112) claims that it is in family photography that “the most stultified and stereotyped repertoire of composition, subject-matter and style resides”. These verdicts are usually based on analyses of the photographic images alone; and on that basis, they are justified. Most family snaps are indeed repetitive, banal and stereotyped. This begs a question though: why, if these images are indeed so trite and dull, so complicit with patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, so aesthetically inept – why, if they are all these things, do so many people make and keep so many of them?

In order to answer that question, over a decade ago I began to interview women about their family photographs, to try to find out why their photos mattered to them (Rose, 2010).<sup>1</sup> All my interviewees were generous enough to show me at least some of their family snaps, and often very many, when I visited them in their homes. We chatted over hundreds of photos, laughed at some of them and fell silent with others. We discussed when they took them and why, what sorts they liked and which they didn't. I learnt very quickly that all of my interviewees felt obliged to do various things with their photos once they had been taken. They all agreed that photos needed dating at the very least. Photographs taken with a film camera were always printed, and sometimes kept in the envelopes or boxes they arrived in from the develop-

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on two sets of interviews with women living in two towns in south-east England, all of whom had young children, and most of whom were either at home with their children full-time, or working part-time, when I talked with them in their homes. The first set I did in 2000, when all my interviewees had film cameras and only one had a home computer. The second set of interviews were carried out between 2006 and 2008, when everyone I spoke to had a home computer, most had digital cameras, and all had sent photographs to family members on the internet. In all, I spoke to 28 women. Most were white and British; I also interviewed six members of an Israeli friendship network; other interviewees were from Pakistan and the USA. All were middle-class, in terms of their cultural capital.

ers, and then stored in cupboards or boxes devoted to them. Albums were also used for storage, especially the ‘flip-over’ kind. One interviewee had a fireproof metal box for especially precious photos. Later interviews discovered that digital photos were downloaded onto computers and put into labelled folders, and many were still made into prints. Some printed photos were selected to go into special albums; others might be chosen to be framed or propped up somewhere unframed. Some were made into collages, or pinned onto a noticeboard; some were put into purses or wallets, some were taken into workplaces. Very, very many were sent off to family and close friends. And many photos were looked at long after they’d been downloaded or printed. And this is the domestic family photography archive.

As I learnt all this, I also found myself feeling caught up in what I started to call the ‘doing’ of photographs during the interview. As these women showed their photos to me, I started to feel I was not just seeing, but actually participating in what family photos are about. Since I recruited my interviewees by snowballing from friends of mine, I was seen as a friend of a friend by my interviewees, a basically sympathetic conversant, and my interview, while never not being a research interview, was also inflected by something else as we laughed at cute photos and I admired holiday locations. Interviewing these women in their homes allowed me to not just to *look at* but to *share* their photographs with them, and to see how they, how we, were with them, to participate in some of the various “practical, bodily handlings and performances”, as one definition of practice has it (Pels, Hetherington and Vandenberghe 2002, p. 14), in which family snaps participate. By participating in part of their photographic work for the length of our interview, I got a sense of how these women lived with their photos both from their words but also from how we did the talking and the looking and the holding together. As this sense of, not just talking about, but also *doing* family photographs grew, I began to think more about its significance. What I was moving towards, in effect, was sense of photographs as objects participating in an elaborate, multi-faceted *practice* and through that participation, producing a specific and sometimes intense set of meanings, feelings and positions.

“Practice” is now a heavily theorised term, of course. A succinct definition is offered by Schatzki (1996, p. 83), who describes a social practice as a cluster of “doings and sayings”. Reckwitz (2002, p. 249) elaborates:

A ‘practice’... is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

A practice is a fairly consistent way of doing something, deploying certain objects, knowledges, bodily gestures and emotions. This paper understands family photography as a practice in this sense. In Schatzki’s terminology, the practices that constitute family photography are “integrative practices”: that

is, they are one of “the more complex practices found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life” (Schatzki 1996, p.98).

Particularly important in many accounts of practices now are the objects and technologies with which humans achieve things. The material qualities of certain objects, it is argued, are necessary for the achievement of certain practices; but practices also constrain all the possible things that might be done with a particular object. So what sort of objects are photographs? Barthes opens his book on photography by offering an ontological answer to that question. In brief, for Barthes the essence of photography is in the way it shows “only and for certain *what has been*” (Barthes 1982, 85). Photographs carry a trace of what was there when the shutter snapped, and so they reassure us that their referent – what they picture – really existed. “A pipe, here, is always and intractably a pipe”, he says (Barthes 1982, p. 5), looking at a photograph. For Barthes, it is the ability of the photograph to carry a trace of its referent that is photography’s distinguishing feature: “photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature tendentious, never as to its existence” (Barthes 1982, p. 87). Krauss (1986) elaborated on Barthes’s argument to claim that photographs are therefore indexical images: they are a sign connected to its referent by some kind of physical connection, in this case light reflected from objects onto light-sensitive film or, more recently, onto photo-voltaic cells.

Debate continues about whether “indexicality” is the correct term for the showing of “*what has been*”, and whether it is a quality inherent in all photographs (Elkins 2007). I concur with those authors who follow Barthes in seeing “the absolute Particular” of photographs as an inherent quality of photographic images (Barthes 1982, p. 4). However – and here my argument diverges from much of photography theory – that quality is only realised and significant as it is ‘activated’, as it were, by particular practices. Hence indexicality may or may not matter to a particular photographic practice; and if it does, it may have quite diverse effects. Truth claims using photographs are thus contingent and depend as much on the viewer as on the image itself, and Pinney (2008) has discussed a range of competing indexicalities that legitimate quite different versions of what is apparently the ‘same’ photograph.

There is no doubt that the indexical affordance of their photographs was taken for granted by all my interviewees, however. Indeed, whether kept and looked at as a print or a file, all my interviewees agreed that the most important aspect of the visual qualities of their family photos was their truthfulness. Photos are understood as visual objects that show what something or somebody really looks like (Chalfen 1987, p. 133). This is made possible not only by the technology that creates photographs, but also, and crucially, by what my interviewees *said* about their photos and by what they *did* with them.

Thus it was not surprising to see that three of my interviewees had made prints of their baby’s hand or foot and put them with photographs, either in an album or a frame. The photography is seen as an imprint of a scene, if you like, just as a handprint marks the form of an actual hand. All are evi-

dence of “an intractable reality” (Barthes 1982, p. 119). Indexicality was produced through several other aspects of their practice. All the mums I talked with showed family photos to their young children and babies to in order to teach them who was who in their family, and all were delighted when their children could put names to the faces in photos. This assumption of likeness also animates the sending of photographs to family and friends:

It’s quite nice to send photos of him, because if he, you know [my grandmother] doesn’t see him that often you know he changes so much so. You know it’s nice for her to keep up to to date. How he looks really.)

And I mean [my parents] they love, as I say they love them, because they can see what they’re like. What everybody’s doing.

Just a reminder of, for the children as well, how their cousins, er look and developing and looking. And they send photographs over through the year. And then so do we.

Photographs are looked at, and sent to others to look at, because they are seen as accurately showing appearances. In certain circumstances, indeed, photographs are described as showing a truth that the mother herself could not see at the time. One mother, for example, commented about the few photos that she and her husband had taken of their son when he was ill by saying:

And it’s funny, that period he was unwell, there’s a few photographs but the one’s we’ve got, we notice how, we can see, looking back now how unwell he actually was. And at the time when we were in the thick of it and the child’s ill, you don’t sort of see it. You know he’s unwell but you don’t see it so much in him. But looking back you know, you can actually see how unwell he was.

Thus photographs can be seen as carriers of true evidence of what was there when they were taken, truer even than the human witnesses to those scenes.

Photographs, then, are understood as showing unique individuals in a peculiarly unmediated way. A photograph is shown to someone and they are told, ‘this is my brother’, ‘that’s Lydia at her first birthday party’, ‘this is the best man and his girlfriend at our wedding’. *This is* – the expression in full would be ‘this is a photo of’, but ‘the photo of’ drops away and, as Batchen (2000, p. 263) remarks, “all of us tend to look at photographs as if we are simply gazing through a two-dimensional window onto some outside world”. In my interviews the photograph really did seem to be treated as if it was what it pictured. Thus one interviewee said of a photo of her boy, “It is nice to have a look at him”, and another worried about not being able to see all the framed photos on her sideboard in terms of the people in the photos hiding each other: “I was always really conscious you know that somebody was blocking somebody else out.”

This section has examined how the indexical quality of photographs is crucial to seeing the unique individual in a family snap. The next section will explore how those individuals are also located in familial networks, again as traces of individuals who become present in the archive via their photograph. The following section will then discuss how both of these characteristics contribute to the particular character of domestic archives of family photographs.

### *3. Doing family with photographs*

The previous sections noted how objects are constituted by being entrained in practices. The most important quality of the objects that are family photographs is their indexicality, which is both an affordance of their materiality and an effect of what is done with them. Practices with objects have further effects, however. In particular, they are what allow subject positions to happen. A person becomes a 'mother', for example, while making and collating photographs of her children, as Di Bello (2007) suggests. Practices also induce relations between subjects. "A practice establishes a tissue of co-existence among its participants that arranges them vis-à-vis one another", says Schatzki (1996, p. 172), and this can include relations with other people as well as with objects (Noble 2004). This section argues that the 'tissue of co-existence' established by family photographs are kinship affiliations: that is, doing family photographs also does family, and the indexicality of the photograph is crucial to this effect.

When I asked my interviewees why they liked their favourite photographs, "togetherness" was indeed the word that was used. Many of the albums I was shown contained a series of photos of a new baby with their every visitor – "every relation wants their photograph taken you know with with the new baby you know" – and several mums took a photo every time their young child saw his or her grandparents. Pictures of family members close together were often particularly important to the mums I talked with. "I like it cos we're just all together," said one, "it's really nice, I just like the way everybody's sort of cuddled up and it's just really nice." Talking about a framed photograph on a bookcase in her living room, another interviewee explained why it was there:

You know I suppose like lots of families you do get, you do get together more often than just more often than just weddings and funerals and christenings or whatever. But you don't have your photograph taken together. And that was just a photograph together.

And another told me, "if it's a number of people in the family together, then usually, and people are good, then usually it will be framed". Photographs are also staged so that all family members get pictured. Several mums told me of their efforts to ensure that there were pictures of themselves in the

family album, for example, if they were the one who usually took the photos in their family: “I want the children to be able to look at both of us”, said one. I was also told about photographs taken to show everyone present at an event. A mum told me, for example, as we looked through her album, that she was “designing just a family ph-, you know, to remember the last day” of a trip with various family members to Bucharest. Togetherness is not only done by looking at what a photograph shows, however. Togetherness is also done by how photographs are displayed and how they are looked at.

The objects surrounding a photograph can also establish family connections (Batchen 2000). A writing bureau, for example:

There’s one of my grandparents there [pointing to a photograph], my my erm grandmother died a couple of years back, and they actually left me, the the piece of furniture, that’s why that will probably always stay on there.

But most often, the objects surrounding a photograph that indicate familial togetherness are other photographs. Although some of my interviewees had misgivings about putting too many of their family snaps out on display in their houses, nine of my interviewees had whole walls devoted to family photos, which often included photos of their parents and even grandparents, their husband’s family, themselves when much younger, as well as pictures of their own children. Collages and multiframe were popular too. These displays were also seen as expressing togetherness. Some mums were annoyed at displays of photos that failed to show images of certain family members, for example; thus Linda disliked a collage of photos her mother-in-law put together because the only picture of her family was of herself, with her husband on their wedding day. All members of a family need to be shown together through these multiple displays. Crowded together in groups, photos as objects again register ‘togetherness’ as a central quality.

Moreover, the audiencing of family photographs is also central to the togetherness that they articulate. Photographs were frequently looked at by mums with their children, as I’ve noted, and children were taught to recognise family members through the photos. So one interviewee, for example, whose daughter was two years old, told me that “in two weeks we’re going to Israel, so we, I’ve started to show her pictures of her last visit so she can see people”. Looking at family photos with other family members (usually), recalling when they were taken, who took them and especially discussing who is in them, is central to how family snaps are looked at in domestic contexts. Here is one interviewee talking me through a few photos she has from her own childhood:

That’s me and my father and brother... my brother and his brother in a school play... my parents going to a wedding years ago, that’s rare cos it’s a photo of them both together... me as a flowergirl at my aunt’s wedding...

And she continued to tell me about each person pictured in the photos. This way of looking and talking that is about recognising people and remembering people and events (Langford 2006), and its enactment is another way of performing family togetherness. It also entails a certain affective stance towards the photos, which is about the memories they evoke; the way family snaps carry memories has been noted by several writers (Hirsch 1997; Noble 2004; Wise 2000).

Finally, sending photographs maintains familial affiliations and shows togetherness. After showing me her end-of-holiday snap, for example, an interviewee continued, “then I’m sending them, they’re sending me” copies of the photo. Significant photographs are certainly shared within families, as the previous chapter showed. Indeed, such circulations can extend togetherness over long distances. Copies of many of the photos in a house also exist in other houses, sent there by the women I spoke with; and they own photos of other family members, sent to them. Sending family photos to other family members is an important way of keeping this familial web together, just by “keeping in touch”. This was particularly the case for some of my interviewees with digital photos and home computers. Photos were sent quite frequently, to large numbers of family and friends, either as attachments with emails, or were occasionally uploaded to photo-sharing websites and an email sent with the link to the site. A large part of what is ordinarily done with family photographs, whether prints or files, is about making them mobile. This is especially true of snaps of families with children: they are regularly printed and posted to family members, or sent on cd discs or with emails; they illustrate an annual family newsletter sent out with Christmas cards, and sometimes are sent to be displayed on internet sites like Flickr; they are carried in purses and wallets and as keyrings; they appear as screen-savers on workplace computers. This travelling is part of the way family snaps participate in maintaining familial togetherness. They are “a portable kit of images that bears witness to [a family’s] connectedness”, as Sontag (1979, p. 8) has noted.

Family snaps certainly *picture* familial togetherness, then. But as a *practice*, family photography also *performs* familial togetherness in a number of different ways. Family photos show family members together, they are looked at together, they are sent as a means of maintaining togetherness with distant family members, and they are displayed together – and it is these practices, as well as the pictures, that make family photographs part of familial togetherness.

The practices and effects described in sections 2 and 3 are therefore quite different from those in the archives described by scholars such as Sekula, Tagg and Pinney. They are centrally concerned with the particular individuals pictured – what they look(ed) like, how they are related to other family members – and their uniqueness and their relation to other family members is established both visually in what the truthfulness of what photograph shows and in what is done with it: its display, its viewing, its explication. This is very far

from the abstraction from meaning described by Sekula; indeed, these images are so dependent for their meaning on the specificities of the family that they relate to that my interviewees felt compelled to let me know that I really didn't have to look at all the photos they were, nonetheless, showing me. As one said, "You don't like to bore people, do you. 'Would you like to see my wedding album, it'll take an hour!' That's when I say, please flick through fast". And in both the picturing and the practices, the indexicality of the image is crucial. Doing togetherness with photographs is only possible because photographs are seen to carry a trace of the person they picture.

#### *4. The spatiality of the domestic archive*

Given this power both to show and enact familial togetherness, it is easy to see why family snaps are crucial objects that turn a flat or a house into a home. Various writers have commented on the way that certain objects are central to the production of domestic space – that is, to the transformation of a built space into an emotionally-resonant home for a particular group of people affiliated to one another (Bowlby, Gregory and McKie 1997; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981). Family photographs are amongst the most powerful of these transformative objects: they are one of those objects "critical to achieving the state of being at home" (Gregson 2007, p. 24). Several of my interviewees told me that photos were one of the first objects they unpacked after moving house. Once, for example, said "Yeah I I moved in just sort of just sort of put put pictures up. Just to make it feel like home you know" (see also Chambers 2002). Family snaps are objects that, in this case, work to identify a particular family form with a specific living space. Such domestic objects produce homeliness because looking at them produces feelings of togetherness. One mum explains it thus:

I think a house looks nice with photos and it just shows how the kids are growing and how they're happy, and – it's just family. And other people, I mean there's my sister up there with her, with Hugh.

Note how she moves seamlessly from noting that the house "looks nice with photos" of the family, to actually evoking the presence of family members: "there's my sister up there". It is this indexical presence of other family members that makes the house a home.

But these domestic spaces are also complex. Here is a second difference between the archive as described in the first section of this paper, and the domestic archives of my interviewees. Far from being carefully ordered in a dedicated location, the contents of the family photograph archive are dispersed in all sorts of places in a home. I was shown album after album and box after box and folder after folder of photographs, some of which were on a shelf and others under a bed and yet others in cupboard drawers; I saw photographs on computers and sometimes on cameraphones, on websites

and hard drives; and photos were on display everywhere in my interviewees' houses, in bedrooms, kitchens and living rooms, in hallways and stairways, even in the toilets; they were "dotted about", "all round" and "anywhere". This is very different from the institutional archive, with its "ordered rows of immaculate burgundy filing cabinets" (Fisher 1987, p. 99) in which the past is "sealed and concealed" (p. 100).

And of course, given the importance of togetherness to family photography and the circulation of copies of the same photography to members of the same family, the family photography archive stretches across many different homes. Here I concur with work by Blunt and Dowling (2006) which elaborates the ways in which the space and time of a 'home' is only rarely defined by the four walls of a dwelling-space. Familial networks are traced by the sending of photographs from one home to another, the homes themselves nodes in the network where copies of the same photograph come to rest. This is not the cellular geography of a matrix, then, but rather a network of circulations and resting points for objects that, in their travels and pauses, enact familial affiliation.

The geography of the domestic family photography archive, then, is a complex one. Structured by the indexical traces of how individuals looked, and by the integrative practices that perform the presence of those traces and the kinship affiliations between them, the domestic archive is neither gridlike nor cellular. Far from it. Indeed, we might conclude that the domestic archive is inherently dispersed.

##### *5. Conclusion: domesticating the archive*

This paper is part of a wider move in photography studies towards exploring the consequences of the specific practices that create, store, display, circulate, and destroy photographs as material objects (Edwards and Hart 2004; Batchen 2000; Buse 2010). All of these practices have a geography, a geography constituted by the spaces that are performed as these practices assemble subjects and objects in specific configurations.

In the case of family photographs, I have argued that their archives are both highly particular and dispersed. They are particular in their focus on the uniqueness of the family member, and full of meaning in the way that doing things with those photos position that individual in complex histories, geographies and memories of familial relations. The domestic archive is also dispersed, both within a house as photographs are found, more or less organised, in all sorts of locations, and also between houses, as copies of the same photograph appear on mantelpieces and screensavers in the houses of more than one member of the same family. Domesticating the archive, then, at least as far as family photographs are concerned, is to understand domestic archives as collections of highly meaningful, particular and specific objects, animated by practices that also create a dispersed network of circulation, storage and display.

The focus in this paper on not just the visual content of family photographs, but also, crucially, on what is done with those images, is necessary not only for reconsidering what might be meant by ‘the archive’, however. More broadly, it is an approach that is becoming increasingly necessary as scholars from many disciplines begin to struggle with the consequences of a visual culture in which digital images can travel to very different sites (Rose 2011). And indeed, in setting up an opposition between the institutional archive and the domestic archive, this paper has neglected many of the complicated mobilities that family snaps – like all other photographs – undergo. While digital technologies have enhanced such mobilities, it is important to remember of course that the mobility of photographs is not new. As many historians of photography have noted, photos have been made to travel ever since the technology began to develop in England and France in the 1830s (Osborne 2000; Sontag 1979), and, as I have noted, a large part of what the women I spoke with do with their family snaps is to send them to distant family and friends; family photos cross oceans and continents, tucked in letters, framed as christmas cards, attached to emails and uploaded and viewed on photo-sharing websites.

Increasingly, though, family snaps are also leaving these domestic circulations and entering more public arenas. Again, some family snaps have long been visible in more public places. Framed photographs sit on many an office desk; in the United States, sending a family snap as a Christmas card is a long-established commonplace; in several European countries, it is taken for granted that a family photograph will embellish a gravestone. In the UK, though, such practices have been less popular until recently. However, in the past few years it seems that in the UK too, family snaps are entering public spaces of display more and more often. Once mostly restricted to being looked at only by the family and friends of the people pictured, family snaps are now visible more and more often to the gaze of strangers. In the UK, they are starting to appear on gravestones; they are uploaded onto websites that anyone can access by googling; they get printed onto shopping bags and t-shirts; they are turned into backgrounds and screensavers on work computers; they are published frequently in the mass media. And, of course, they often arrive in the institutional archives described in section 1. And as they do so, those domestic practices in which they are usually embedded are sometimes provoked even in public spaces: family snaps in archives have the names of the individuals written on them by family historians, unbeknownst to the archivist (Blaikie 2001); the family snaps of the victims of violence, reprinted in newspapers and on protest placards, can stir strong affiliative emotions (Noble 2010; Rose 2010). In these moments and spaces, the archive’s “linguistic grid enmeshing otherwise volatile images within what it hopes is a structuring certainty” (Pinney 1992, p. 90) falters, and ways of seeing and doing photographs in archives are inflected by domestic practices.

And as various practices of digital communication become more and more conventionalised, if not taken for granted, family snaps are caught up

in them and shift again. Several of my interviewees regularly email family snaps, for example, not in order to send indexical traces of their immediate family to the family archive elsewhere, but rather simply to 'keep in touch'. This is a form of communication recently dubbed "phatic" (Miller 2008), and such photographs are rarely kept, often sitting in the inbox only to be deleted sooner or later. And if some family snaps are indeed becoming abstract and context-free, sent only to 'keep in touch', then so too some scholars are determined to recover the unique individual from the archive, and to wonder if the archive isn't also, in some way, a home, at least for the social historian (Steedman 2001).

What is clear is that, in understanding the effects of these very different ways of practising photography, the spaces in which those practices take place, and the spaces performed by those practices, are fundamental.

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## *Summary*

The paper begins by examining a body of work on photographic archives, which depends on accounts of large, insitutional archives to make claims about the kind of space a photographic archive is. This work claims that a photographic archive, in its apparatus and technologies, is a cellular matrix that abstracts meaning from the photographs it catalogues. This argument is often based on historical studies of nineteenth-century archives. It has however been criticised for not paying enough attention to the diversity of photographic practices in that same historical period; and in particular, for neglecting the distinctive photographs and photograph albums being created in upper-class homes at the same time, often by women as a means, among other things, of articulating their subject positions and relations. This paper examines the contemporary domestic archive of family photographs also as a means of performing subject relations. It asks what kind of space it constitutes, as its distinct technologies and apparatusii are put to work in the social practice that is family photography. It argues that the family photography archive is neither cellular nor abstract, but rather an extended and dispersed network of intensely particular images.

## *Keywords*

Domestic, family, photography, network

## *Riassunto*

L'articolo inizia con l'esaminare l'insieme dei lavori sugli archivi fotografici che dipendono in buona parte dai grandi archivi istituzionali, per fare riferimento poi al tipo di spazio che un archivio fotografico richiede. Questo lavoro sostiene che un archivio fotografico, nella sua struttura e nelle tecnologie costituisce una matrice cellulare che astrae significato dalle fotografie catalogate. Questo argomento, che si è spesso basato su studi storici di archivi ottocenteschi, è stato comunque criticato per non aver prestato abbastanza attenzione alla diversità delle pratiche fotografiche in quello stesso periodo storico, e in particolare, per aver trascurato le singole fotografie e gli album fotografici creati ad esempio nelle case delle classi alte nello stesso tempo, spesso dalle donne come un mezzo, tra le altre, per articolare la loro posizione e relazione di sudditanza. Questo articolo esamina l'archivio domestico contemporaneo di fotografie di famiglia anche come mezzo per rappresentare le relazioni subalterne. Si chiede quale tipo di spazio costituisca, come sue distinte tecnologie e apparati siano presi in considerazione per lavorare nella pratica sociale attraverso la fotografia di famiglia. Sostiene che l'archivio di fotografia non è né cellulare, né astratto, ma piuttosto una rete estesa e dispersa di immagini molto particolari.

## *Parole chiave*

Domestico, famiglia, fotografia, rete.

## Resumé

L'article commence par examiner un ensemble de travaux sur les archives photographiques, qui dépend de rapports de grandes archives institutionnelles, pour affirmer la nature de l'espace représenté par les archives photographiques. Ce travail prétend que les archives photographiques, du fait des appareils et des technologies servant à les créer, sont des matrices cellulaires qui retirent la signification des photographies qu'elles cataloguent. Cet argument se fonde souvent sur les études historiques d'archives datant du XIXe siècle. Il a été toutefois critiqué pour le manque d'attention accordé à la diversité des pratiques photographiques dans cette même période et en particulier, pour avoir négligé les photographies et les albums de photographies créés dans les demeures de la haute société de l'époque, souvent par des femmes cherchant, entre autres, à exprimer clairement la position de leurs sujets et la relation entre eux. Cet article examine les archives domestiques contemporaines de photos de famille, en tant que moyen d'établir la relation entre les sujets. Il pose la question de savoir quel espace constituent ces archives, alors que des appareils et des technologies distincts sont employés dans la pratique sociale qu'est la photographie de famille. Il soutient que les archives de photos de famille ne sont ni des éléments cellulaires ni des extraits, mais qu'elles constituent plutôt un réseau étendu et dispersé d'images intensément personnelles.

## Mots-clés

Domestique, famille, photographie, réseau.