Photograph / Writing with Light:
The Challenge to Archivists of Reading Photographs

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of Requirements
for the Degree of

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Abstract

Photographic records have long presented a challenge to archivists. As photographs first began to enter archival institutions in significant volumes during the second half of the twentieth century the methods used to deal with them could hardly be characterized as satisfactory. Photographs were either largely ignored or valued only for their seemingly obvious image content. Among archivists, this resulted in widespread indifference to knowledge of the context in which photographs had been created. This often led to description of them in image catalogues based primarily on their subject content, and to their actual physical (as well as intellectual) separation by archivists from related textual documents. Archivists as well as historians, traditionally the principal users of archives, have typically valued photographs for their ability to illustrate and support facts found in textual and other records. In other words, photographs were not considered to be archival records in their own right, whose value derived as much, if not more, from the evidence they bore of the actions of their creators as from the photograph's obvious image content.

During the late twentieth century, there has been growing awareness among archivists and others of this evidential value of photographs. The slow emergence of this approach to photographs among archivists is due in part to the fact that archivists have largely been preoccupied with the textual record. As a result, modern archival theory was developed primarily for archival work with written documents. As it developed over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, archival theory increasingly stressed the

importance of understanding the provenance of records (or the context in which they were created) as the intellectual basis of archival work with them. Context, though, was still largely conceived in limited ways which, in even this limited fashion, did not usually embrace photographs as documents in need of much contextual understanding. Approaches to archival work, though more contextual, were still characterized by heavy reliance on the archivist's knowledge of the subject contents of archival materials.

Concepts of context, however, evolved over the twentieth century due in part to the dramatic rise in the volume and variety of archival records. By the late twentieth century, the contextual approach to archival work emphasized examination of the context of the creation of the records more than their subject content. Archivists then argued that it was only by looking beyond the content of the record to its underlying context that the fullest understanding of the photograph as a record could be revealed. The recent emergence of postmodernism has greatly influenced archival theory and methodology. Archivists have been exploring the potential of a postmodern perspective for new approaches to archiving. A postmodern approach builds upon the earlier contextual approach but expands the notion of relevant context beyond the traditional focus on the context surrounding the record's initial inscription. Postmodern archivists suggest there is more to know about the context of the creation of the record or the history of the record than information pertaining to its initial inscription. Other elements of context such as the record's placement in recordkeeping systems, subsequent uses, custodial history, and even the impact of the archiving process should be examined to appreciate the wider context which has shaped the record.

This thesis explores the development of archival approaches to photographic records since they first began to enter archival institutions in the nineteenth century. It will also explore the potential of the postmodern approach and suggest that this approach may be the most capable and flexible yet in dealing with the complex characteristics of the photographic record.

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Introduction

Since its advent in 1839, photography has been received with immense

enthusiasm. Photographs have been admired as pieces of art and valued for their

contribution to the advancement of science and technology and to our understanding of

history. They have been appreciated for their ability to capture the personal and family

images of our lives and acknowledged for their impact on culture and methods of

communication. At the same time, photographs have presented a challenge to archivists

who must select them for archival retention and describe them in ways which enable

their users to locate and interpret them effectively. In 1977, Canadian archivist Richard

Huyda stated: "Ten million photographs are housed in Canadian archives. That this many

documents have been collected, preserved and made accessible to the public

demonstrates our deep commitment to this segment of our heritage. The difficulties and

challenges entailed by this commitment are equally profound."[1]

These profound challenges have only begun to be confronted. Compared to

textual records, photographs are a relatively new medium, which helps explain some of

the difficulties that archivists have faced. As late as 1965, when photographs abounded in

archives, leading American archivist Theodore Schellenberg declared that there still

remained a need for a standardized and comprehensive approach to their archival

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[1]Richard J. Huyda, "Photographs and Archives in Canada," *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78), 5.

treatment.[2]

This thesis will examine the ways in which leading archivists in Western Europe (but mostly North America) have understood photographs over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the ways in which the broader society's understanding of the photographic medium have affected the archival approach. A popular trend in most disciplines, including that of archives, has been to regard photographs more as truthful illustrations than as documents to be critically examined for their evidential value. Photographs have generally been used simply to supplement textual documents with an illustrative image, taken largely at face value. Thus the readily apparent information or subject content of the photograph identifies its primary purpose. Over the past three decades, there has been a shift in thinking among archivists and other students of photography away from treating photographs as simple, reliable images and towards treating them as more complex and problematic documents. This increasing experience with visual data has given both researchers and archivists improved 'visual literacy'.

This enhanced awareness among archivists has come in part through new appreciation of the concept of provenance or understanding of the context of the creation of the records. Provenance, which states that records can only be understood in context or in relation to their origins and to each other, came to be the centrepiece of archival theory in Europe in the nineteenth century. Although provenance was widely accepted in Europe, in North America different archival traditions stalled its practical application.

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[2]T.R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 322.

The emergence of new archival theories as well as the new problems encountered with different record types, such as electronic records, prompted a re-evaluation of provenance.[3]

In the latter half of the twentieth century archivists have re-embraced and re-interpreted the concept of provenance or context as the basic intellectual tool for archiving records.[4] This re-organization of archival theory and methodology allowed for a re-examination of conventional approaches to archiving photographs.

In short, leading archivists have argued for considerable expansion of the range of information needed about photographs to do archival work with them. Influenced in part by a postmodern emphasis on the boundless contexts for understanding human communications and actions, this expanded base of information about photographs is information about the context in which they have been created, used, maintained before archiving, and archived. It amounts to as full a history of the photographs in question as is possible to obtain, so that users of the photographs (including archivists) will have a rich body of contextual information with which to archive and interpret them.

This thesis will outline the main phases in the evolution of archival thinking about photographic records, describe the prominent features of these various approaches, and discuss the implications of a postmodern contextual approach to the archiving of

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[3]Tom Nesmith, "Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," introduction to Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Scarecrow Press Inc.: Metuchen, New Jersey, 1993), 2.

[4]*Ibid.*, 2.

photographs in an attempt to illustrate the potential evidential value of photographic records and suggest reasons why the archival profession has been so slow to take advantage of this potential.

Chapter one will examine the concurrent development of the photographic medium and modern archival theory. In order to comprehend more recent developments in archival theory and methodology as well as an increased interest in photographic records and visual communication in general, it is necessary to examine the beginnings and some subsequent significant developments of both. This chapter will begin by examining some of the trends and innovations that marked the evolution of the photographic medium. It will also provide an overview of early public reception and uses of photography. Photography was generally greeted with great enthusiasm by nineteenth-century society. After centuries of experimentation human beings seemed finally able to create mechanically produced, and thus truthful and objective, reproductions. These photographs soon became popular personal possessions across Europe and North America, able to depict friends and family with an ease never before known. As the technological innovations increased and improved, the number of people able to practice photography and the uses to which they applied it increased accordingly. Not only did it quickly gain in popularity among the general public, its potential practical applications were soon appreciated by varied groups, from governmental agencies to scientists and journalists.

It will be argued that an overall knowledge of the various elements involved in the development of photography can be an important tool in assisting the archivist in the

construction of a viable approach for archiving photographic records. However, this examination of the medium, which will explore in part its widespread popularity and use, will also raise questions as to why the archival profession has been so slow to develop this approach, at least in comparison to approaches developed for conventional textual records.

At the very time that photography arrived on the scene, the modern archival profession and state-run archival institution began to take shape -- mainly in Europe. However, the emerging archival world's attention was focused on very old textual records, many of which dated from medieval time. The new European government archives did not even acquire records until they were 50 to 100 years of age at least. Thus the emerging archival profession had little experience with the new medium of photography, and, when photographs did begin to arrive in those archives at the end of the nineteenth century, they were a small portion of their overall holdings, as photography still had limited uses in government work by comparison with textual records and these state archives did not acquire personal photographs. Consequently, as photographs were about to proliferate in the twentieth century, the archival profession had had limited experience with them and (reflecting broader societal attitudes) a limited grasp of how to interpret them as historical evidence, as the subject content approach dominated archival work with them across the first three quarters of the twentieth century.

The second chapter of this thesis will examine various reasons for the continued neglect that photographic records tended to receive in conventional archival practice. It

will be argued that the classic texts of the modern archival profession largely ignored photographs. Scholars such as Dutch archivists Muller, Feith, and Fruin, Britain's Hilary Jenkinson, and Schellenberg of the United States, are rightly applauded for pioneering the contextual intellectual framework for work with archival records. This framework, though, was limited to certain aspects of contextual knowledge related mainly to textual records. It excluded visual records such as photographs and it came under increasing challenge in the late twentieth century. It will be demonstrated that even when attention was given to photographs, it was limited and focused on the content of the image and largely ignored contextual information. The emergence of the new work in the study of communication and the history of photography which inspired much of this renewed interest in context among archivists will be examined.

This chapter will expand its examination of conventional archival approaches to photographs to include the emergence of an increasing awareness of the value of photographic records among archival professionals. Additionally, it will explore the emergence in the archival profession of an increasingly contextual approach to work with archival records, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. This contextual approach, which centres archival work more on acquiring knowledge of the context of the creation of records rather than the subject-content of a record, is heralded by many archivists of this period as the most effective means of uncovering the depth of evidential value in both textual and visual records.

Both textual archivists and special media archivists responded to this new work, but it will be argued that the latter led the new trend in archival thinking. Perhaps the

most important intellectual figure in this period is Canadian archivist Hugh Taylor, whose ideas will be discussed and analyzed, as well as those of other leading thinkers in the field such as Terry Cook, Joan Schwartz, and Tom Nesmith. These archival thinkers, however, wanted to expand this perspective on context to include the more wide ranging social and intellectual context affecting the inscription and thus meanings of the records. This changing perspective on context took hold in part because of its particular relevance to the interpretation of photographs and the influence of photographic archivists who espoused it among their textual colleagues. Finally, the application of the contextual approach will be examined in respect to various photographic records to illustrate how effectively this approach lends itself to the interpretation of photographs as historical records. It will be demonstrated that the evidential value of photographic records can only be fully appreciated by looking beyond the content of the photograph to the various contextual factors which act in its creation.

The third chapter will demonstrate that there is yet more informational value to be uncovered by embracing an even broader concept of context than that which examines only those elements of context relating to the initial inscription of the records. This chapter will examine the emergence of postmodern ideas about communication and records, their impact on archival writing, and their possible impact on archiving. Postmodernism argues that our understanding of truth and reality is being constantly mediated by external factors, such as our understanding of language. This chapter will examine the various factors which can mediate one's understanding of the archival record. It will explore the resulting postmodern expansion of the concept of context to

include what happens after a record's inscription, when, for example, it is used, filed, enters archival custody, and is used in archives. Examples of specific photographic works or collections will be examined and it will be argued that this even wider range of contextual information provides archivists with greater ability to assist users of the archives to interpret the records.

Furthermore, it will be argued that from a postmodern perspective, the act of archiving itself presents yet another level of context which mediates our understanding of the record. Accordingly, this chapter will focus in particular on the influence of the archiving process on the context for understanding photographs in the archives. How do selection for archival retention, description by archivists, and subsequent use by archivists and researchers affect the interpretation of photographs? More abstractly, how does the very possibility of being archived affect the creation, use, and subsequent interpretation of a photograph? This chapter will discuss the importance of understanding the role of the archives and archivists in the creation of a record and their role in the researcher's understanding of that record.

Chapter 1

**Some Trends in the Development
of Photography and of Modern Archival Methodology**

The premise of this thesis is that photographs have great evidential value. The primary objective of this thesis is to outline the main characteristics of the provenance of photographs which enable archivists and others to understand this evidential value. As the relationship between photography and archival methodology is a major focus of this thesis, it is important to provide an overview history of each. This chapter will provide a summary of the development of photography as well as the development of modern archival methodologies.

Although literature on the archiving of photographs is not abundant, a common theme in what does exist is the importance of an understanding of the general history of the medium. In order to properly appraise, arrange, and describe any archival record, an archivist must not only understand archival methods and practices but also possess general knowledge about the given medium of communication. The same applies to visual records, but the archivist must also understand the more technical aspects of this medium.[1] Thus, the first section of this chapter will examine the overall development of photography. It will focus on three aspects of photography's history: some of the trends and innovations that marked its development, early public perception and debate, and finally, the purposes to which this new technology was applied and by whom.

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[1] Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, et al., *Archives and Manuscripts: Administration of Photograph Collections* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1984), 8.

The term photography and photographs will be used throughout this thesis, unless a specific type of image is being described which requires more precise terminology. The word photograph is easily recognizable today but, when photography first appeared in the early nineteenth century, debate about what to call it was fierce. Although it is difficult to determine who introduced the term "photography" it was soon universally adopted.[2] The term comes from the Greek *photo-graphie*, which translates literally as 'light'-'writing', but can be interpreted both as " 'light writing itself' and/or 'writing with light'."[3] Thus photography was a term that reflects the nineteenth-century desire for mechanically produced images while eliminating the possibility of human error. For the practical purposes of this thesis historian Anne McCauley sums it up nicely by noting "Historically there has been no single, coherent physical object that one can call a photograph, and the very term is a convenient catch-all for a wide array of pictures on paper, metal, glass, fabric, canvas and so forth whose only common quality is the involvement of light and chemistry at some point in the generative process."[4]

After 1839, photography advanced quite rapidly and various processes were created and discarded over the next century and a half. Knowledge regarding these different chemical processes as well as all the different photographic supports is an

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[2]Geoffrey Batchen, "The Naming of Photography: A Mass of Metaphor," *History of Photography* 17, no 1 (Spring 1993), 26-29. Astronomer Sir John Herschel is often credited with coining the word as well the terms negative and positive.

[3]*Ibid.*, 28-29.

[4]Anne McCauley, "Writing Photography's History Before Newhall," *History of Photography* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1997), 87.

invaluable and necessary resource for photographic archivists. Special media archivists

cannot only concern themselves with archival theory, but must also educate themselves

in the particular characteristics of the media in their care. It will be demonstrated that a

grounding in both archival theory and the history of photography is required for

photographic archivists to adequately practice archival functions in regards to

photographic records. These archival functions include: dating and identification;

acquisition (what implication does the rarity or cost of a photograph have?); preservation

(does the process that created the photograph have implications for storage or

exhibition?); description; and access (does the fragile nature of the record prohibit easy

access?).

For example, in the case of identification, this knowledge can allow photographic

archivists to locate an image in space and time. It is not an uncommon occurrence for

archives to acquire photographs that possess little or no identification. In these

circumstances archivists are limited to extracting information from either the content of

the image or from their knowledge about the technical characteristics of the medium.

Therefore, being able to establish the photochemical process employed and thereby

narrowing down a time frame, becomes especially useful in cases where there are no

sources of information outside of image content. An approximate time frame and name

of the photograph type, such as daguerreotype or albumen, may be the only descriptive

information an archivist is able to provide the researcher.[5] Those developments that

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[5]It is important to note however, that some photographers prefer using older methods for artistic reasons, so that a process discarded in the nineteenth century, such as the daguerreotype, may still be used to this day.

made a particular impact and significantly influenced the development of the medium will be explored here.

Long before the invention of the precursor of modern photography in the 1820s and 1830s, there had been experiments with ways of creating an image as good as an artist's rendering, but without the need of an artist's trained skills. The key was to find a method of mechanically reproducing images. A variety of methods were available at the time of the invention of photography, but all had significant deficiencies. The camera obscura (dark room) is one of the oldest and best known devices used as an aid to drawing. It was a dark room with a small hole made in one wall. When the light passed through the tiny hole an inverted image would appear on the opposite wall as the light rays reversed themselves.[6] Its utility was obviously severely limited because the image was not permanent and the room was stationary. A more portable drawing aid was the camera lucida (light room), invented in the early nineteenth century. The camera lucida made use of a lens containing a prism which would cast the image of the object placed in front of it onto a drawing board placed below. It was less cumbersome than the camera obscura but still required an artist to trace the image onto a given surface. Copies of those images were equally difficult and costly to obtain. Subsequent improvements to the camera lucida were minor.[7] There remained a need to discover a method by which an image could be transferred and fixed to another surface, by mechanical means.

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[6]Http://www.cs-photo.com/obscura/CO2.html (March 31, 2003)

[7]Brian Coe, *The Birth of Photography: The Story of the Formative Years* (New York: Taplinger Press, 1977), 9-10.

The first real breakthroughs were made by two Frenchmen, who worked for the most part independently of each other. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce and Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre can both be considered two of the inventors of photography. Niépce's successes occurred during the 1820s and Daguerre's during the 1830s. There can be disagreement regarding whose contributions were the most significant, but it was Niépce who was responsible for first "obtaining a durable image and initiating the invention of photography."[8] Niépce was an amateur scientist and while the images created by the camera obscura and the camera lucida were helpful, he wanted a method of making the images permanent.[9] He experimented with sensitizing paper with silver chloride but when that proved unsatisfactory moved on to metal plates and a substance called bitumen of Judea. In 1825 Niépce successfully produced a permanent image which he a called a heliograph. It is considered by many the first photograph.[10] The image was quite blurry and required an eight-hour exposure period. Since, the usefulness of this invention was obviously very limited, Niépce continued to experiment. Shortly thereafter he and Daguerre entered into an agreement to share any new information. However, Niépce died in 1833 before any new discoveries were made and it was not until 1837 that Daguerre finally achieved his own successes.

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[8]Gilles Mora, *Photo Speak: A Guide to the Ideas, Movements and Techniques of Photography, 1839 to the Present* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), 62.

[9]Coe, 13.

[10]In March 2002, Sotheby's auction house sold what is now believed to be Niépce's first photograph, created in 1825, for the equivalent of $443,220. Until quite recently his 1826 *View from his Window at Le Gras* had been considered his first successful attempt. For further details please see www.Newyorkreview/FirstPhoto.com

If Niépce is responsible for capturing the first photographic image, then Daguerre, the inventor of the Diorama, is credited with creating the "first practical photographic process."[11] Unlike Niépce, Daguerre's motives were primarily artistic and were greatly informed by his work as a scenic painter for the theatre. Building on his own work with the camera obscura and the work Niépce had done, Daguerre continued to work with various means of chemically sensitizing metal plates as the support for permanent images, until 1839 when the invention of the daguerreotype was announced to the world. Daguerreotypes are described as "unique, nonreproducible images, with their distinctive metallic surfaces ... characterized by great richness of detail and tonal nuance. Fully visible only from a certain angle, the image appears either positive or negative according to how the light strikes it."[12] They enjoyed an immediate success and "suppliers of materials and apparatus were besieged by customers anxious to try their hand at picture making."[13] These distinctive characteristics led it to be called the "mirror with a memory" in popular culture.

Although the daguerreotype was hailed as the first practical photographic process, it was far from easy to employ. The process began by using a well polished sheet of copper, coated with silver, which was then

> ... placed in a small box, where it was exposed to iodine vapours for five to thirty minutes. The result was a film on the surface of the plate composed of silver iodide, a light-

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[11]Coe, 16.

[12]Mora, 78.

[13]Coe, 17.

sensitive substance. This sensitized plate was then placed
in a camera and exposed to light for five to seventy minutes
.... After exposure the plate was removed from the camera
and placed in another box, which held the plate at a 45°
angle over a pan of mercury which was heated to a
temperature of 167° F. A small hole in the box allowed the
plate to be inspected during the development. When the
mercury vapors had sufficiently brought out the image the
plate was removed, washed in distilled water, saturated
with common salt or with hyposulphide of soda and then
dried over a flame.[14]

By 1840 improvements to the chemical process and the lenses reduced the

exposure time to less than a minute, which made it excellent for portraiture.

Daguerreotypes became very popular throughout the 1840s and 1850s, and even through

the 1860s in North America, despite the emergence of new and improved methods.

Despite its popularity the daguerreotype process had some distinct disadvantages. The

chemicals and equipment remained expensive and hazardous to the photographer's

health. As well, it was impossible to make copies from the original, meaning that a

second copy was just as expensive and difficult to make as the first. While improvements

on the early daguerreotype would include cheaper alternatives, clearly a technique for

making multiple copies from the first exposure was needed.

The daguerreotype can be considered the first widely used and commercially

successful photographic process, but it remained so for only two or three decades after its

introduction. The first photographic process from which modern photography developed

was created by William Henry Fox Talbot in 1840, roughly concurrent with the

announcement of Daguerre's invention. Talbot's calotypes, or Talbotypes as they were

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[14]Ritzenthaler, 32.

also known, made a major contribution to modern photography because the method used to create them employed the negative/positive process that is still in use to this day. Talbot's initial goal in experimenting with photographic processes was to develop a technique for fixing an image onto paper. Talbot discovered that a negative image could be made by inserting into a camera a damp piece of paper treated with a combination of silver nitrate, potassium and gallic acid. By using sensitized salted paper, pressed against the negative, which was then exposed to sunlight, one could make multiple positive prints from the negative.[15] Talbotypes did not become as widely used as daguerreotypes because Talbot patented his process in England and in France in 1841 and in the United States of America in 1847. Patent restrictions and competition from the daguerreotype, which had only been patented in England in 1839, limited the widespread success of the process; nevertheless, his negative/positive process became the basis for most future photographic processes. The popularity of Daguerre's discovery demonstrated there was a market for mechanically produced images and Talbot's discovery opened the possibility that affordable mechanically produced visual images could be made available on a much wider scale.

In 1851 British sculptor Frederick Scott Archer announced the invention of his wet-collodion process, which involved the exposure of a wet glass plate. The process involved brushing a glass plate with a mixture of acidic chemicals containing potassium iodide and then, before the mixture had completely dried (the plate glass should be somewhat tacky), the plate was made sensitive to light by being dipped into a silver

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[15]Mora, 61.

nitrate solution. The still wet plate was placed in a camera and then exposed and processed before it dried.[16] This process was used to create ambrotypes and tintypes, which like the daguerreotype process, produced a unique, positive image. More significantly, however, the wet-collodion process was also used to create negatives on glass. Talbot's negatives, made on paper, were generally grainy and fuzzy. However, wet-collodion or wet-plate negatives on glass resulted in a much sharper and polished image. The main drawback was that all processing steps had to be completed while the plate was still wet. This meant that the photographer often had to transport all the chemicals and bulky equipment, including a darkroom tent, on any photographic expedition. Photography remained a practice best operated in controllable and convenient environments.

The next major development affected the support to which the various chemical processes bound the image. Albumen printing paper, which produced a glossy positive print was first introduced in France in 1850 by Louis-Désiré Blanquart-Evrard.[17] Albumen prints were made by coating an ordinary piece of paper with a solution of beaten egg whites and salt and then floating the paper in a solution of silver nitrate to sensitise it to light. The albumen paper process was considerably superior to previous processes because "it created an entirely separate layer in which to form the silver image; this made possible much greater density and contrast in the print. The albumen surface

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[16]Coe, 23.

[17]Mora, 47. It was estimated in 1866 that 6 million egg whites were used in England annually for the creation of albumen paper.

was glossy and its image hues could be altered to a characteristic range of colors."[18] Albumen paper, combined with the wet-collodion process, could capture more detail, took less exposure time, and was less prone to fading than previous discoveries. This combination made it the most popular photographic process throughout the rest of nineteenth century.

However, the cumbersome nature of work with wet plate negatives remained the major drawback. A method that combined the quality of albumen prints with a quicker and simpler negative was needed. By the 1870s a gelatin emulsion was being made that could be spread on a support of glass or paper and heated until dry. These gelatin dry plates were much more sensitive to light than the wet-collodion plates and therefore needed less exposure time. An additional advantage was that they were prepared and sold ready to use by the photographer or manufacturer.[19] Photographers could now buy prepared plates in anticipation of a given project and not worry about preparation and processing in the field. Photography was becoming easier as the years passed, thus attracting even wider interest.

Another innovation that greatly influenced the popularization of photography was the development of the first Kodak camera. American entrepreneur George Eastman wanted to develop a very straightforward photographic process. He found existing equipment too heavy and the development process too complicated. In 1884 Eastman

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[18]James. M. Reilly, *Care and Identification of 19th-Century Photographic Prints* (New York: Eastman Kodak Company, 1986), 5.

[19]Ritzenthaler, 32.

entered into a partnership with camera maker William Walker to make an easy-to-use camera that came with ready-to-use negatives. They invented a negative material they called American film, which could be rolled within the camera and contained 100 exposures. The Kodak camera, which could be returned to the factory for processing and the loading of new film, was patented in 1888.[20] Suddenly the number of people using cameras and producing photographs exploded. More photographs were now being taken by amateurs than by professionals. The Kodak camera allowed for the creation of a record of the everyday life, with photographs of street scenes, social gatherings and family activities, which had not been visible in the more formal posed shots that had been the norm of the professional photographer.

The archival implications of being aware of this date and the differences between the processes before and after which will help photographic archivists identify the type used, are obvious. Photographs taken before 1888 were generally taken with more care and on a limited scale. This relative rarity, even with no identification or contextual information, makes them more likely to be automatically acquired by archives than those produced when quantity began to supercede quality. It is knowledge of the chemical processes involved and their implication to the development of the medium that would, along with other factors, influence the archival function of acquisition.

Photographic historian Brian Coe, notes that "by 1900 the basis of modern photography had been established; there had been no fundamental change in the chemistry of the process since the gelatin dry plate was introduced. As yet no materials

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[20]Coe, 52-55.

as sensitive or as versatile as the salts of silver have been found, despite continuous research."[21] However, a few innovations in the twentieth century are of some significance, such as the development of colour processes. Colour photography had been sought after in a variety of ways since the 1860s, but not until the introduction of the autochrome was it truly successful. Autochromes, which were generally made as lantern slides, were transparent images made on glass plates containing dyed particles. Once again high cost and the inability to make duplicates left room for improvement. One of the first commercially successful colour films were Kodachrome developed in 1935 for 16 mm films and 35 mm slides and Kodacolor for negatives in 1942.[22] Colour was immensely popular, especially with amateurs, but the processes remained technically very difficult. Further innovations included the development in 1972 of the first instant colour prints introduced with the creation of the Polaroid camera. The chemicals, negative and print paper are encased together in the Polaroid process.[23]

Even though developments in colour processes meant that users found them easier to manage, colour processes present particular problems to archivists due to the unstable nature of the colour materials. Archivists familiar with the needs of different forms of the photographic medium are aware that colour photographs require specialized preservation measures, such as cold storage. Furthermore, these specialized measures would limit access, since photographs kept in cold storage need to be left alone at least

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[21]Coe, 60.

[22]Mora, 71.

[23]Ritzenthaler, 54.

24 hours before they can be handled after they have been removed from the cold vault.

Digital photography is the latest in the long series of developments in the evolution of photography. In 1986 Kodak succeeded in creating the first viable filmless or digital camera. The digital camera electronically reads the object and translates the information into binary code which can then be saved and/or viewed in computer format. There are in fact two forms of digital photographs: images which are born digital, that is produced by digital cameras, and images which are digitized by converting an analog photograph to a digital image using an electronic device such as a scanner. Over the last two decades the technology responsible for both types of images has advanced, improving the quality of the images and making the equipment more affordable. Nevertheless, many professionals prefer conventional methods, and some have criticized this new technology because they question its artistic as well as its evidential value, citing the ease with which digital images may be manipulated, without leaving evidence of the alterations, as a major flaw.[24] The debate accompanying the emergence of digital photography in many ways parallel concerns that surrounded the first photographic processes in the early nineteenth century.

To this point, the importance of the technical process involved in the creation of photographs has been stressed; however, the development of photography involves more than a series of technological improvements. An equally important factor to be considered is the impact of public perception on its formation. How did public discourse,

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[24]Martha Rosler, "Image Simulations," in Hubertus v. Amelunxen, et. al., eds., *Photography After Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age* (Amsterdam: Overseas Publishers Association, 1996), 37.

acclaim and even disdain affect the way photography developed? In order to understand further the development of photography, the next section will examine public perception and debate shortly after photography's introduction in 1839.

In a period marked by numerous scientific inventions and technical advances, photography has been considered, by a varied group consisting of historians, photo historians as well as nineteenth and twentieth century inventors, to be the most important of all nineteenth century inventions,.[25] Even those who railed against modern technological advancements in the nineteenth century found something to praise in the invention of photography. Art-critic John Ruskin noted that "among all the mechanical poison that this terrible nineteenth century has poured upon men, it has given us one antidote - the Daguerreotype."[26] Many Victorians criticized technology because they felt that too often machinery was supplanting the human factor in society. However, photography was often exempt even from the harshest critics because it was felt that rather than replacing the works of 'man' and destroying the marks of civilization, the camera was actually recording and preserving them.[27]

As previously discussed, despite the difficulties involved in photography, this new

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[25]Joan M. Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics and Poetics of Diplomatics," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall, 1995), 41.

[26]Jens Jager, "Discourses on Photography in Mid-Victorian Britain," *History of Photography* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1995), 320, quoting E.T. Cooks and A Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin,* vol 3, 1903. However, it should be noted that Ruskin did later change his mind regarding the benefits of photography.

[27]*Ibid.,* 320.

technology was immensely popular from the moment of its creation. Countless photographers were at work recording the events, people and places which shaped Victorian society. One of the primary reasons for the popularity of photography was that it allowed the Victorian world to see far away places. Territorial and business expansion was as much a mark of the nineteenth century as technological advancements and photographs allowed those at home to view distant and exotic scenes. These photographs were provided first by professionals and later by amateurs as well. Often professional photographers were hired to take photographs to promote places or businesses. During an immigration boom in British Columbia in the 1890s, the Canadian Pacific Railway, for example, produced albums featuring picturesque views visible from the railway lines.[28] As well, postcards featuring scenic views or famous sights were soon popular items being purchased as mementoes by travellers, while amateur photographers could take their own photographs and create keepsake albums of their trips abroad.[29] Both professional and amateur photographers provided visual references of people and places that many people would never have the opportunity to see firsthand, especially before the invention of photography. Prior to the invention of photography, most people "would have been only dimly aware of the world five miles beyond their doorstep."[30] As

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[28]Myrna Cobb and Dennis Duffy, "'A Picture of Prosperity': The British Columbia Interior in Promotional Photography, 1890-1914," *BC Studies* 52 (Winter 1981-82), 14.

[29]Ritzenthaler, 11.

[30]Jim Burant, "The Visual World in the Victorian Age,"*Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), 110.

historian Gus MacDonald states, "In the nineteenth century, an age voracious for information, the camera immediately became its travelling eye."[31] Never before had visual images been so easy to capture and so readily available to the general public.

While photographs allowed Victorians a vicarious introduction to people and places beyond their doorstep, another reason for photography's popularity involves the old adage that "the camera never lies". The photographic process emerged when advances in technology and the sciences prompted great confidence in human ability to master the world intellectually and physically. Thus there was confidence in the power of photography to reproduce reality. As archivist Joan Schwartz says "the goal of exact reproducibility through technology held a particular fascination."[32] Photographs were considered the products of technology, whereas conventional reproductions such as engravings or works of art were created by human hands. The fact that photographs were made by an inanimate object lent them immediate credibility. They were not simply regarded as representations of reality but rather as the exact reflections of reality, and so a "faith was put in the photograph that has never been and could not be put in the older hand-made pictures."[33] Photographs were seen as visible evidence of Victorian society's dominance of nature both through images of human expansion over the earth and the

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[31]Gus MacDonald, *Camera: Victorian Eyewitness, A History of Photography: 1826-1913* (New York: Viking Press, 1980), 34.

[32]Joan M. Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision': Photography, Archives and the Illusion of Control," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), 23.

[33]Burant, 117, quoting William M. Ivins , *Prints and Visual Communications*, (Cambridge, 1953),107.

camera's ability to capture those precise images.

While the acceptance of the accuracy of photographs certainly enhanced their appeal, in some quarters this quality was a major cause for concern. Many elite artists, especially portrait artists, saw photography as an upstart technology. Conventional artists, or those who focussed on fine arts such as painting, required dexterity and many years of education and experience to do their work well. Understandably, they feared the ease and accuracy with which a photographic image could be created. Archivist Peter Robertson notes "Truthfulness was a useful weapon in photography's protracted struggle for equality with, if not superiority over, traditional visual arts such as painting. What photographers were claiming was that photographs were able to depict the same subjects as paintings and with greater accuracy."[34] By the 1840s, photographs were being discussed in the fine arts column of *The Times* and compared to miniature portraits, causing many portrait artists to fear that they would soon be supplanted.[35]

This led to debate about whether photography was an art or a science. Those favouring science argued that it had been introduced initially to scientific circles by French scientist François Arago. In addition, the majority of early works on photography dealt with the photo-chemical processes behind their creation and the earliest users were themselves scientists. At the same time, however, photographs were compared with art

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[34]Peter Robertson, "More Than Meets the Eye," *Archivaria* 1, no.2 (1976), 1.

[35]Jager, 319. See also Alan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter, 1986), 6. Since the Renaissance, portraiture had been the privilege of the wealthy and elite members of society. The invention of photographs allowed members of the middle class to possess miniature photographic portraits of themselves. Sekula argues that "photography subverted the privileges inherent in portraiture."

works and were discussed with language typically reserved for the art world.[36] A newspaper correspondent wrote that the impact of daguerreotypes was the same as that of Rembrandt's etchings. There was no doubt a justifiable fear among artists of being replaced, but instead "many unsuccessful painters ... took up the daguerreotype and later paper photography, and claimed their works to be art."[37] Their intent was to tell a story or at least to provoke an emotional response. For example, photographer Julia Margaret Cameron took her inspiration from Christian symbolism and pre-Raphaelite painters to create portraits of family and friends that were generally more fanciful and allegorical than the characteristic stiff and formal portrait.[38] The portrait photographer still dominated throughout the nineteenth century, but by the late 1850s and 1860s a number of photographers aimed to do more than to simply capture an accurate image.

This artistic movement clearly demonstrated an awareness on the part of some photographers that they were more than mere operators of a device which mechanically produced undeniably truthful reflections of reality. Perhaps influenced by the artistic movement and the concept of a photograph as more than a passive reflection of its subject matter, photographers began to contemplate a more active role for the photograph. The emergence of documentary photographs, a decisive milestone in the development of photography, illustrates this view. The ability to interpret the content of

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[36]*Ibid.*, 317.

[37]Martin Gasser, "Histories of Photography: 1839-1939," *History of Photography* 16, no.1 (Spring 1992), 53.

[38]Mora, 52.

photographs requires awareness of the medium's stages of technological development, an understanding of the socio-cultural perceptions of the users of photography, and a familiarity with the multiple applications of photography, be it for artistic, scientific or documentary purposes.[39] The following section of this chapter will examine some documentary applications of photography between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries.

The initial and most popular forays into photography resulted mainly in portraiture and still life photographs for scientific and artistic purposes, but towards the end of the nineteenth century some photographers began to believe that it was not simply their responsibility to reflect life neutrally but to document important people, places, and events. These "photographers advocated dramatic changes in the ways people saw their society. Documentary photographers broke with pictorialists, arguing that camera images must not simply reproduce nature but interpret it."[40] The emergence of social documentary photography marks a time when the photograph's ability to serve as evidence was beginning to be appreciated.

It is no great surprise that various groups soon saw the potential utility of photography in their own fields. Photography began to be employed in fields such as medicine, business and law enforcement. Judicial photography can be seen as early as the 1860s, when law enforcement offices in Great Britain and Europe saw the potential of

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[39]Ritzenthaler, 8.

[40]Robert M. Levine, "Historical Writing and Visual Imagery: Photographs as Documents," in Theo D'Haen, ed., *Verbal, Visual Crossings, 1880-1980* (Amsterdam: Restant, 1990), 49-50.

photographs as visual records of evidence.[41] In Paris, for example, police clerk Alphonse Bertillon believed a file of photographs of known criminals would be an invaluable tool. By 1890 he had compiled over 90 000 "mug shots".[42] Although Bertillon's system was too cumbersome to be truly effective, his efforts influenced policing around the world and the creation of the modern police portrait.

However, in some areas photographs were particularly well suited. Two professions which promptly took advantage of photographs were journalism and government administration. Photojournalism has been called "the branch of photography that has more influence on public thinking than any other ...."[43] Before the 1880s, when printing and photographic technology had sufficiently advanced that photographs could be printed directly onto newsprint, newspaper illustrations were hand drawn and sometimes entailed a lengthy engraving process. While some journalists and newspaper magnates were unsure of the need or appeal of photographs, others believed that photographs would shape the future of newspapers. Among the later was photographic pioneer George Eastman, who noted that "the camera is getting to be as necessary to the newspaper correspondent as the pen."[44]

Photo-historian Michael Hiley credits Hannen Swaffer, the first art editor of the London *Daily Mirror* (1904-1913), as the first and most ardent promoter of photo-

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[41]Sekula, 6.

[42]Mora, 109.

[43]Ritzenthaler, 18.

[44]Coe, 55.

journalism. Swaffer believed that "a photograph with a dramatic caption was the equivalent of a descriptive article."[45] In order to accomplish this, Swaffer needed close-up photographs of events from photographers who were at the right place at the right time. He began sending photographers on assignments instead of relying on happenstance as had been the practice before. He also made connections with likely news-makers such as members of the suffragist movement. Not unsympathetic to their cause, but also aware of the possible headlines, he arranged with them to have photographers ready at their events. The public began to expect that a visual record would accompany all important news reports and became less willing to settle for artists' renderings. Photographs were so much in demand, in fact, that when a photograph of an actual headline event was not available, such as the Relief of Mafeking during the Boer War, a photograph of a newsboy with a paper proclaiming this event was used instead.[46] By 1900, the presence of photographs in newspapers had become expected and even demanded.

Governmental use of photography is another important example of the documentary role of photographs. One reason for the importance of government photographs to this discussion is that the majority of archival holdings were and are derived from government offices. Additionally, governments operated on a much larger and varied stage and thus the uses of photography by governments offered more scope, such as evidence of military efforts, immigration and self-promotion. Photographs were

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[45]Michael Hiley, *Seeing Through Photographs* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1983), 25.

[46]*Ibid.*, 30.

also used to express social commentary and provoke specific responses in the public. In the hope of mustering support for proposed farm aid during the Great Depression, the Farm Security Administration of the United Sates government launched a series of "photographic campaigns that would make evident the full extent of economic devastation."[47] Photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans took part in this programme. Many of the photographs created as part of the Farm Security Administration remain well-known today, such as Lange's *Migrant Mother*. Photographers were sent across the country to photograph scenes of poverty and ruin wrought by the drought and Depression.[48] It was not until the 1960s that "a new documentary approach to reality began to emerge, one acknowledging that the photographers's own subjectivity influences the images that he or she produces."[49].

While governments used photography to foster public support for specific initiatives and to promote their own ideologies, they also used photographs to document their activities. In Canada, survey photography was an essential tool almost from the beginning. By the early 1850s the Royal Corps of Engineers began using photography to document their military expeditions. By 1857 all sappers were being trained to use the equipment themselves. Photographers were included in expeditions to mark out the boundaries in 1858, 1860-61, 1870 and 1871. Photography was considered indispensable

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[47]Mora, 90.

[48]F. Jack Hurley, "The Farm Security Administration File: In and Out of Focus," *History of Photography* 17, no.3 (Autumn 1993), 244.

[49]*Ibid.*, 85.

for documenting survey work.[50] Indeed, Captain Samuel Anderson, the Chief Astronomer of the Boundary Commission in 1872 noted in 1873 that "...I have taken care to make the report short and in big writing, also to attach to it several maps (of many colours) and photographs .... Great people I find never read a long report but they will look over maps & pictures, and this will tell them everything if they examine the maps & the photographs carefully."[51]

It is worth noting that awareness of these various uses of photography is another form of knowledge that will aid photographic archivists. Archivists endeavour to acquire records of particular significance. Being aware of the importance of the photographic records when they were first being employed will invariably influence acquisition decisions. Additionally, a deep and varied knowledge of the history of the medium will aid the archivist in creating detailed and rich descriptive tools.

Since the late nineteenth-century, the uses of photography have become almost limitless. In essence "photography has exploded visual culture not by destroying the old edifices, but by carrying representation into every corner of modern life."[52] Nineteenth-century society learned to communicate in ways unknown before the invention of the camera made visual imagery commonplace. Social understanding of the utility of photographs evolved as rapidly and as vigorously as did the medium itself.

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[50]Andrew J. Birrell, "The North American Boundary Commission: Three Photographic Expeditions, 1872-74," *History of Photography* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1996), 120

[51]*Ibid.*, 116.

[52]Hiley, 12.

Understanding the interactions of technological improvements in photographs with evolving public perception of its artistic, instrumental, and documentary uses helps to clarify the impact of photography on Victorian as well as twentieth-century culture. Given photography's obvious appeal and importance to society, it might appear peculiar that "archivists and historians did not always recognize photographs as primary source material" and that in "the formative years of archives only written records were regarded as archival and deserving of preservation."[53] To explain why archival interest in photographs was slow to emerge, the development of modern archival methodologies will now be examined.

At the very time that photography arrived on the scene, the modern archival profession and state-run archival institution were beginning to take shape, primarily in Europe. However, the emerging archival profession's attention focused on very old textual records, many of which dated from medieval time. The new European government archives did not even acquire records until they were at least 50 to 100 years of age. The archival profession had little experience with archiving the new medium of photography. When photographs did begin to arrive in those archives at the end of the nineteenth century, they comprised a small portion of their overall holdings, as photography still had limited uses in government work in comparison with textual records and these state archives did not acquire personal photographs of private life. Nonetheless, many of the concepts and principles formulated during this period remain relevant today, when photographs do abound in archives.

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[53]Ritzenthaler, 5.

Archivist Terry Cook has noted that "analyzing the history of archival ideas requires listening to the archival discourse of the time or place involved."[54] He adds that, archival ideas reflect the "wider cultural, legal, technological, social and philosophical trends in society."[55] Archival methodology has not evolved in a vacuum but rather has been greatly influenced by such external factors.

Traditionally, archives were tools of the societal elites which controlled them. Archives "had their institutional origins in the ancient world as agents for legitimizing ... power and for marginalizing those without power."[56] Modern archival ideas about methodology and theory only began to be explored and expressed in the nineteenth century. The political turmoil of the late 1700s and the effects of the Napoleonic wars and the French Revolution had significant effects on "administrative and legal structures throughout Europe."[57]

According to archivist Michel Duchein, these developments forced archivists to engage in introspection and re-evaluation, as many archives "had lost their practical and immediate relevance since they were associated with defunct institutions."[58] Consequently, "the bulk of the material created and accumulated in archives lost the

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[54]Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), 19.

[55]*Ibid.*, 20.

[56]*Ibid.*, 18.

[57]Michel Duchein, "The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe," *American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992), 17.

[58]Duchein, 17.

function performed for centuries ...."[59] New concepts about arrangement and description began to emerge. Issues of historical significance and cultural awareness came to predominate as archives were melded into new infrastructures. The collapse of old systems also meant the need for new centers and methods of training archivists. Gradually, schools and academies devoted to training archivists began to appear throughout Europe, such as the École des Chartes in Paris in 1821, and the Archivalische Unterrichstinstitut in Germany in the same year. However, there was still little development or exploration of what we now consider archival theory.

This increasing introspection and internal debate, intended to refine archival practices, was a reflection of the increasing awareness of the unique responsibilities of an archivist. Hand in hand with the efforts to strengthen archival ideas from the inside was a growing professionalization of the field and the desire to be recognized as independent from the government and other cultural institutions such as libraries and museums. Throughout the twentieth century archivists struggled with this idea of defining the practices, theory, and methodology of their discipline, while at the same time defining the parameters of their own role in carrying out those dictates.

While the exploration of modern archival principles began in France and Germany with the provision for formal instruction, Dutch, Italian, and English archivists also developed these ideas in writing and thus introduced them to a broader audience

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[59]Arnaldo d'Addario, "The Development of Archival Science and its Present Trends," in Oddo Bucci, ed., *Archival Science on the Threshold of the Year 2000: Proceedings of the International Conference, Macerata 3-8 September 1990*, (Ancona, Italia: Universita degli studi di Macerata, 1992), 179.

wherein debate and discussion could take place. One of the most significant works, the *Manual for the Arrangement and Descriptions of Archives,* more commonly referred to as the Dutch Manual, was published in the Netherlands in 1898. It was written by Samuel Muller, J.A. Feith, and Robert Fruin and published in conjunction with the Netherlands Society of Archives. Muller, Feith, and Fruin, like other archivists who had learned archiving in a period when new archival theories were beginning to circulate, were dissatisfied with the state of archival practice in the Netherlands in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[60] The establishment of the Netherlands Society of Archives in 1891 is another example of heightened interest in a more professional approach to archiving. The Dutch Manual was an attempt to establish standard rules that could and should be applied in any archive throughout the Netherlands.[61] It was divided into six separate sections and articulated what Muller, Feith, and Fruin believed to be the 100 most important rules concerning "both the nature and the treatment of archives."[62]

The Dutch Manual, however, does have its weaknesses. One is that it is "based on the experience the authors had either with limited numbers of medieval documents susceptible to careful diplomatic analysis or with records found in well-organized departmental registries within stable administrations."[63] This model no longer reflects

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[60]Marjorie Rabe Barritt, "Coming to America: Dutch Archivistek and American Archival Practice," *Archival Issues* 18, no. 1 (1993), 44

[61]Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual," *Archivaria* 41 (Spring 1996), 32.

[62]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 21.

[63]*Ibid.*

modern administrative structure, nor has it for most of the last century. Additionally, the

nature of the Manual posed problems for the further development of archival ideas in the

Netherlands. While these rules were applicable to the closed records from bygone

administrations held in Dutch archives when the Manual was written, they were not as

relevant to the more modern and complex records that were even then beginning to be

acquired. The initial purpose of the Manual was to standardize archival practice in the

Netherlands and the 100 rules were stated without equivocation. These were dictates, not

suggestions. Dutch Archivist Eric Ketelaar believes that the restrictive nature of the

Manual "petrified" theory in the Netherlands.[64]

Despite these negative implications for future theoretical debate in the

Netherlands, the immediate effects of the creation of the Manual on an international

scale, as the first major articulation on archival methodology, was significant and

positive. And while it was intended as a guide to archival practices and not a theoretical

treatise, by virtue of being the first work to codify these principles, it brought them to a

wider archival audience wherein these ideas could be further theorized about, ratified,

expanded upon or even discarded.

British archivist Hilary Jenkinson was one of the most influential contributors to

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[64]Ketelaar, 35. Another important figure in the development of the Dutch Manual was Theodoor Van Riemsdijk. While he agreed with the Dutch trio concerning original order, he took the idea to further lengths. He did not limit original order to a reflection of simply the original organization of the administration, but expanded it to include the entire administration system, including procedures and policy . In essence, Van Riemsdijk "focused not on the actual record, but on the record-creating process," not only making him distinct from Muller, Feith and Fruin, but a forerunner of modern post-custodialism.

the development of modern of archival theory and methodology. He was greatly influenced by the Dutch Manual, which had been published shortly before he joined the Public Record Office in 1906. Like Muller, Feith, and Fruin, he was concerned with the state of record-keeping of the period and felt that more work was needed in establishing archival methodologies, but he also spent significant time in defining the responsibility of the archivist. His major contribution was his "defense ... of archives as impartial evidence and his vision of the archivist as guardian of evidence [which] have justly become clarion calls to the profession."[65] In 1922, he published the first major English treatise on archival methodology entitled *A Manual for Archival Administration.*

Jenkinson defined archives as "the documents accumulated by a natural process in the course of the conduct of affairs of any kind, public or private, at any date, and preserved thereafter for reference ...."[66] Jenkinson believed records to be a natural by-product of a system, not the result of a deliberate act for posterity, and to be free from suspicion in regards to the uses to which they could be applied. Thus they were impartial, and "cannot tell ... anything but the truth."[67]

Further to this idea of records as the impartial evidence, Jenkinson demanded that no one be allowed to undermine the evidential value of the record. Specifically,

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[65]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 23.

[66]Hilary Jenkinson, "The English Archivist: A New Profession," in Roger Ellis and Peter Walne, eds., *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Alan Sutton: Gloucester, 1980), 253.

[67]Richard Brown, "Death of a Renaissance Record-keeper: The Murder of Tomasso da Tortona in Ferrara, 1385," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997), 29.

Jenkinson believed that archivists must remain impartial regarding archival records. To him, the role of the archivist was to guard and preserve the evidential value of the record. He considered a good archivist to be the "most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces."[68] Thus, "if records were to maintain their innocence in an archival setting, then any appraisal by the archivist was wholly inappropriate."[69] The personal opinion of the archivist was not relevant and would damage the value of the evidence. He believed that ultimate responsibility for the archives lay with the creator, unlike modern archival theory which gives ultimate responsibility to the archivist. The administrator who had created the records would decide which records should be destroyed and which should be preserved and handed over to the archives.

By giving the administrator this ultimate control over records selection, Jenkinson was disregarding the potential harm that the creator himself could do to the impartial nature of the record. It seems hard to fathom that Jenkinson wasn't aware of the controversy surrounding military records after World War I, yet he maintained the principle of the impartiality of the record. For example, in the case of Commander in Chief Douglas Haig, it is hard to understand how Jenkinson can reconcile theory and reality. Haig, in order to portray himself as a hero, had deliberately falsified reports regarding his actions during World War I. For the sake of the public, who needed heroes, and the military which needed public support, the military and the government allowed

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[68]Cook, 23, quoting Jenkinson in Conway Davies, ed., *Studies Presented in Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (London, 1957).

[69]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 23.

this view to stand, which it did until the 1960s when many Cabinet and War Office papers were released.[70] This was apparently not a secret among those in charge of records in this period and it is hard to imagine that Jenkinson was completely unaware of this. His view that ultimate responsibility for the record lay with the creator assumed the creator was trustworthy, but this extreme viewpoint would give license to the creator to destroy those records which contain unflattering or negative information. Generally, however, as in the case of Muller, Feith, and Fruin, Jenkinson's experiences were with medieval legal records "with their closed series and long-dead creators"[71]; they did not take into account different or more modern archival needs or circumstances.

The next major contributor to the evolution of archival methodology confronted some of those very issues neglected by Jenkinson and Muller, Feith and Fruin. Theodore R. Schellenberg, an American archivist working during the mid-twentieth century, articulated archival principles regarding masses of modern records being generated by more complex administrative structures. Although influenced by European archival principles, North American methodology had its roots in different archival traditions. The communal nature of the colonies influenced early perception of archives, and it was seen as an obligation of civic authorities to maintain such records as vital statistics and land titles.[72] Additionally, whereas the concept of archives as a part of a nation's heritage

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[70]Denis Winter, *Haig's Command: A Reassessment* (Penguin Books: London, 1991), 243.

[71]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 24.

[72]James O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990), 30.

was relatively late to emerge in the development of European archival methodology, the historical and social significance of North American records was acknowledged as part of the nation-building psyche of the period.

T.R. Schellenberg began his work as an archivist at the newly established American National Archives in 1935. He began his career when the knowledge of the profession was reaching new heights with the creation of a National Archives in 1934 and the production of a professional journal, the *American Archivist*, in 1938. Additionally, the sheer numbers of modern records demanded improved archival methods. When the National Archives was established there was already a backlog of ten million cubic feet of records.[73] The Depression and subsequent New Deal initiatives to bring relief and economic revival resulted in a proliferation of documentation as the government attempted to manage unemployment insurance and welfare programs. Problems only multiplied after World War II. According to archivist Terry Cook, this records proliferation had two major results: "the first was the emergence of a records management profession to help agencies cope with this paper avalanche; and the second was a fundamental reorientation of the archival profession in North America, and wherever its influential ideas were read and translated."[74]

Part of this reorientation related to the role of the archivist in modern record-keeping. Schellenberg believed that the nature of modern records, primarily their

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[73]Richard Stapleton, "Jenkinson and Schellenberg: A Comparison," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), 76.

[74]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 26.

numbers, demanded a new and improved archiving approach.[75] Schellenberg viewed the responsibility of the archivist quite differently from Jenkinson. Rather than as a passive guardian of evidence Schellenberg saw the archivist in a more active role. Specifically, he believed archivists should participate more in appraisal decisions rather than leaving decisions about what was considered archival to the record creator. Schellenberg, unlike Jenkinson, saw archivists as the best equipped to decide which records should be retained as archival and those which had no potential future use.

The evolution of archival methodology throughout the last century and a half reflects a broadening awareness of the importance of records to society as well as an increasing sophistication of archival theory and methodology as archivists attempt to meet the growing volume and complexity of records as well as the demands of users. As demonstrated, "archival principles are not fixed for all time, but, like views of history itself, or literature, or philosophy, reflect the spirit of their times and then are interpreted anew by succeeding generations."[76] The focus of archival writers such as Muller, Feith, Fruin, Jenkinson and Schellenberg was on those records that formed the majority of their archival holdings and on the particular problems they presented. The Dutch trio and Jenkinson were mainly dealing with medieval records with relatively consistent characteristics. Their goal was to protect the integrity of the record and to standardize archival practice. Additionally, Jenkinson was concerned with defining the role and the

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[75]Reto Tschan, "A Comparison of Jenkinson and Schellenberg on Appraisal," *American Archivist* 65 (Fall/Winter 2002), 180.

[76]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 26.

limits of the archivist. Schellenberg confronted different problems with masses of modern records and he was primarily concerned with the needs of the researcher, but his goal was still to create standard archival practices. In all of these cases the emphasis was on records of a known character, namely textual. Essentially, archival literature focussed on the pressing needs of the time and photographic records were outside of that focus.

The work of the Dutch trio, Jenkinson, and Schellenberg had its limitations but their significance lies in the codification of modern archival principles. Some of these principles are instrumental in the development of an approach to archiving photographic records. An understanding of these core archival concepts combined with a firm understanding of the physical and intellectual characteristics of the photographic medium provide an intellectual framework on which archivists can build and establish archival methods for archiving photographs and revealing their potential evidential value. Conditions developing in the 1960, 1970s, and 1980s such as new ideas about mass communication, expanding research interests, and the development of electronic media would force archivists to re-examine pre-conceptions of what constitutes a record. Specifically, the concept of provenance and the "contextuality" of the record has increasing relevance to further developments of archival methodology in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 2

Photographs as Documents: From Content to Context

The observation that "photographs were long ignored as records in the archival

sense" has been made frequently in archival literature.[1] Archivists have been pre-

occupied with the written record and the archival community has been slow either

recognize the importance of photographs as records, with their own evidential value

equal to that of textual documents, or to create an effective approach to the archiving of

photographs. However, archivists such as Nancy Bartlett have correctly noted that

"archivists have an obligation to consider photographs archivally since we inherit them

from institutions which have, since shortly after Daguerre, deliberately and within

prescribed conditions created and used photographs in their own sense as evidence."[2]

In the last few decades increased interest in visual media among archivists has

coincided with acknowledgment of the evidential value of photographs. Many archivists

have heralded the contextual approach, which centres archival work more on acquiring

knowledge of the context of the creation of records rather than the subject-content of a

record, as the most effective means of uncovering the depth of evidential value in both

textual and visual records. The contextual approach when applied to photographs,

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[1]Hugh Taylor, "Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist," *American Archivist* 42 (October 1979), 419.

[2]Nancy Bartlett, "Diplomatics for Photographic Images: Academic Exoticism?" *American Archivist* 59 (Fall, 1996), 488. Bartlett makes reference to agencies such as police forces, the patent office, military intelligence and anthropologists, among others who have routinely made use of photographs in their work.

demonstrates that they, like conventional textual records, "are documents created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message to an audience" and an understanding of their context "transforms photographic images into archival documents."[3] This chapter will examine the emergence of an increasingly contextualized approach to archives and the impact of this approach on the archiving of photographs. In aid of this, a brief history of the archival treatment of photographic records will be provided, followed by an examination of the emergence and evolution of the concept of provenance. The development of the contextual approach will then be described in more detail, in view of its significance to discussions of the archiving of photographs. Finally, the application of these theories and methodologies will be explored to illustrate how effectively this approach lends itself to the interpretation of photographs as historical records; it is in studying the provenance, or origins, of particular photographic records that their evidential value can be better appreciated.

Archival thinking about photographs in the classic texts has been limited. Photographs were largely ignored in the earliest of these works or, when later acknowledged, the evidential value of photographs was greatly underestimated. As discussed, Muller, Feith, Fruin, Jenkinson, and Schellenberg were leaders in the development of archival ideas over the last century. Their views of photographs are representative of the major trends in approaches to archiving them over that time and

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[3]Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us'," 42.

illustrate the lack of attention to visual images generally provided in state-run archives.[4]

Muller, Feith, and Fruin assert that objects other than "written documents, drawings and printed matter ... cannot form part of the archival collection."[5] In a footnote in the 1940 English language translation of this work, the translator, archivist Arthur Leavitt, comments that the definition was written "many years ago, when [photographs] ... had not yet come into general use."[6] He draws the conclusion that Muller, Feith, and Fruin did not purposefully exclude photographs and that they would have included them if their manual had been written a few decades later. However, Leavitt's conclusion is not necessarily valid, since the Dutch Manual was written in 1898, over fifty years after photography was introduced and after it had begun to be widely used even by many government agencies to record evidence of their activities. Knowing this, it seems more likely that the authors' experience with and emphasis on older archives, which did not contain photographic records, precluded discussion of newer media. The result is that one of the most influential treatises on archival methodology, which would spearhead archival thinking for decades, helped by translation into English in the 1940s, makes no mention of archiving photographs.

Photographic material fared somewhat better in one of the next major European

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[4]Huyda, "Photographs and Archives in Canada," 5. Before government archives began acquiring historical photographs private collectors and commercial photographers tended to house most of them.

[5]Muller et al., *Manual for the Administration and Description of Archives.* Translation of the second edition by Arthur H. Leavitt. (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1968), 15.

[6]*Ibid.*, 15.

archival publications, Jenkinson's 1922 *A Manual for Archives Administration*, where it at least merited mention in the book. Jenkinson, highly concerned with the integrity of the records in archival care and thus convinced that it was not up the archivist to influence the integrity of the evidence by choosing which records entered the archives, does refer briefly to the presence of photographs in "today's archives".[7] However, while photographs are included among Jenkinson's archives, they have definitely been assigned a subordinate status. He states that "modern photographic process reproductions are common [among archival holdings] ... but these are generally cases of 'annexing'."[8] He defines 'annexed' "as meaning something of the size to be fastened to or conveniently associated with the document to which it belongs."[9] There is no discussion of the archival treatment of photographs beyond general rules regarding physical preservation. Any further mention of photographs in Jenkinson's *Manual* is limited to the use of photography to create in-house preservation copies of textual documents.[10] Therefore, while photographs are included as part of the archival holdings, their importance is tied to the textual documents with which they are linked.

American archivist Theodore Schellenberg, the third major contributor to the development of modern archival methodology, particularly in North America, gives

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[7]Jenkinson, *A Manual for Archive Administration* (London: P. Lund, Humphries, revised edition, 1937), 7.

[8]*Ibid.*, 6.

[9]*Ibid.*, 7.

[10]*Ibid.*, 81, 132.

greater attention to photographic materials than his predecessors. By the 1960s, North American archives had then been struggling with the influx of vast quantities of modern records for several decades. In 1965 Schellenberg noted that while photographs were common in archives, as well as in other organizations interested in iconographic records, "the methods of arranging and describing pictorial records have not been fully defined, much less standardized."[11] He devoted a section of his 1965 *The Management of Archives* to the "Arrangement and Description of Pictorial Records". However, there are significant differences between his guidelines for pictorial records and those for other forms of media listed in *The Management of Archives* since Schellenberg considers photographs as "mainly important from the point of view of their subject matter, not from the point of view of their provenance and functional origins."[12]

When discussing textual or even cartographic records, Schellenberg began by outlining the substantive attributes and then the physical attributes of the records. Substantive attributes refer to organizational origins, author, functional origin, date, and subject information.[13] Physical attributes include type, media, size, and composition. In the case of pictorial records Schellenberg focusses mostly on the physical attributes. Among the substantive attributes, he lists only the date and subject information as being important for the archivist to ascertain and indicate. He justifies his position by asserting:

Information on the provenance of pictorial records ... is

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[11]Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives*, 322.

[12]*Ibid.*, 325.

[13]*Ibid.*, 119-143.

> relatively unimportant. Such information is useful mainly
> in helping to interpret pictures - to identify the time and
> place at which they were produced and the subjects to
> which they relate. Information on the functional origins of
> pictorial records is also relatively unimportant. While they
> may relate to activity, such records are ordinarily not
> produced for purposes of action and are often not truly
> organic in character. They are usually produced to record
> information or to stimulate emotional response.[14]

Schellenberg only takes this stand with pictorial records. Substantive attributes such as

administrative or functional attributes are given due consideration for cartographic and

textual records. He is clearly stating that photographs contain little or no evidential value

as compared to textual records, because, as he believed, they have not been created for

"the purposes of action." In other words, they do not record evidence of actions. It then

becomes inevitable and obvious that photographs would be considered less valuable

archivally than textual records and would be assigned secondary status within archival

repositories.

This archival assessment of photographs was fairly typical of the North American

view for the bulk of the twentieth century. However, by the 1980s various factors would

work together to have significant impact on archival theory and methodology, in turn

leading to a re-evaluation of conventional methods of archiving photographic records.

This was accomplished not so much through the development of a radically new

approach but rather through the re-affirmation of a founding archival concept,

provenance. The concept of provenance requires that archival documents be understood

"in context, or in relation to their origins and to other documents, not as self-contained,

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[14]*Ibid.,* 325.

independent items, to be re-organized in archives along new subject, chronological or geographical lines."[15]

Provenance was first defined in the nineteenth century and has more recently been described as "the most important intellectual development in the history of the archival profession."[16] In 1841, French archivist Natalis de Wailly defined the concept of provenance or *respect des fonds* as:

> all documents which come from a body, an establishment, a family, or an individual form a fonds, and must be kept together .... The documents which only make reference to an establishment, a body, or a family, must not be confused with the fonds of that establishment, body, family....[17]

Before this, the classification system of documents was based mainly on a taxonomy, in which records were put into classes by content or type, such as religious, military, or economic. This subject-based classification system completely destroyed the original order and by modern archival standards destroyed the records' validity and reliability. At the same time that provenance was taking its pre-eminent place in archival debate and general acceptance, another important principle, which has also maintained its significance, began to gain popularity. Respect for original order was put forward in Germany in 1880. Archivist Michel Duchein cites these two concepts as the founding

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[15]Nesmith, "Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada," 2.

[16]*Ibid.*, 1-2.

[17]Duchein, 19, quoting G. Desjarlais, *Le Service des Archives departementales* (Paris: E: Bourleton, 1980), 30

principles of modern archival theory.[18]

The French concept of provenance and the German concept of original order were to have specific significance to the work of Muller, Feith, and Fruin, who stressed these ideas in their influential Dutch Manual. The concept of provenance was firmly embedded in the mind of Samuel Muller, who had studied at the Ecole des Chartes in Paris. The two rules most often cited from the Manual in archival literature, rules eight and sixteen, discuss *respect des fonds* and original order respectively. Rule eight demands: "The various archives groups placed in a repository must be kept separate" and furthermore "Every document should be restored to the archive group of the administrative body or official to whom it originally belonged."[19] Rule sixteen states: "The system of arrangement must be based on the original organization of the archives group which in the main corresponds to the organization of the administrative body that produced it ... therefore, the original order should first of all be re-established as far as possible."[20] The Dutch archivists placed a premium on the principles expressed in Rule sixteen.[21] Respect for the original archival structure was important because they "believed that by so respecting the arrangement of the original record-keeping systems, the all-important archival activity of elucidating the administrative context in which the

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[18]*Ibid.,* 19.

[19]Muller et al., 8-13.

[20]*Ibid.,* 35.

[21]Ketelaar, 34.

records are originally created could be much facilitated."[22]

Different archival traditions, the nature of modern records, and the work of Theodore Schellenberg, who believed strongly that the subject content of the records and the needs of the researcher should guide archival theory, determined the development of the concept of provenance in North America. Schellenberg defined archives as "those records of any public or private institution which are judged worthy of permanent preservation for reference and research purposes and which have been deposited or have been selected for deposit in an archival institution."[23] However, unlike Jenkinson, he believed that archivists were integral to the appraisal process and that "to be archives, materials must be collected for reasons other than those for which they were created or accumulated."[24] Schellenberg ascribed a record two values, primary, which reflected its value to its creator, and secondary, which comprised its subsequent value, and was determined by an archivist and reflected its potential value to researchers. Essentially this meant that the archivist played not only a very active role in selecting records worth preserving but also in selecting records that would be destroyed. In addition to a desire to preserve that which best suited the needs of the researcher, the sheer numbers of modern records simply made it impossible to retain everything. Another notable American archivist, Margaret Cross Norton, wrote in 1944 that "it is obviously no longer possible

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[22]Cook, "What is Past is prologue," 21.

[23]T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (University of Chicago: Chicago, 1956), 16.

[24]*Ibid.*, 13.

for any agency to preserve all records which result from its activities. The emphasis of archives work has shifted from preservation of records to selection of records for preservation."[25]

Schellenberg's archival theory put the needs of the researcher above any other, whereas Jenkinson believed the intellectual and physical preservation of the record was the archivists' most important role. Both methods entailed certain drawbacks. Arrangement by provenance, which demands that "documents shall be classified, not like books, according to their subject matter, but with reference to the organic relations of the papers, the files of each body or office being kept to themselves," did not allow for easy subject-access for researchers although it did protect the integrity of the record.[26] Schellenberg's focus on the researchers' needs as the pre-eminent selection criteria coloured his application of provenance. While he acknowledged the importance of the concept in terms of protecting the integrity of the record, he believed that understanding the administrative context of the record did not serve the researcher as much as knowing the subject content. The American focus on the needs of the researcher has meant that the prevalent trend in North America throughout the mid-twentieth century and beyond has been to concentrate "on the 'end-product' of records creation, that is, the record and

[25]Margaret Cross Norton, "Records Disposal," in T.W Mitchell, ed., *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1975), 232.

[26]Marjorie Rabe Barritt, "Coming to America: Dutch Archivistek and American Archival Practice," *Archival Issues* 18, no.1 (1993), 49.

the information it conveyed, rather than on its contextuality."[27] Provenance remained a somewhat neglected concept in North America until a confluence of factors necessitated a re-evaluation of the status-quo. By the 1980s, several factors were at work, including the expanding needs of archival researchers, the proliferation of electronic records and the emergence of new ideas regarding communication, which would prompt a "rediscovery of provenance."[28]

The content-oriented subject based approach meant that North American archivists were required to have a certain expertise in various academic subjects and to possess a knowledge of the subject content of a variety of records in order to provide useful service. However, by the 1970s and 1980s, the interests of historians, the primary users of archives, began to diversify into sub-fields such as women's history. Additionally, there was an increased interest from non-academic researchers, such as genealogists, whose lack of archival knowledge demanded more attention and help from archivists.[29] It was becoming increasingly difficult for archivists to provide effective access to archival resources when that access was determined by the extent of their knowledge of an ever-broadening range of subjects and researcher interests. In fact, by

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[27]Kara Quann, "Remapping Archives: Cartographic Archives in Theory and Practice at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba." (M.A. thesis: Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg, 2001), 11.

[28]Nesmith, "Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada," 1

[29]Tom Nesmith, "Hugh Taylor's Contextual Idea for Archives and the Foundation of Graduate Education in Archival Studies," in Barbara Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa: The Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 15-16.

the 1980s, "archivists found it impossible to remain current in every field of academic history."[30] What was needed was an approach that would alleviate the need of the archivist to master the subject-contents of the archival records. Archivists were beginning to examine a method centred on the concept of provenance as offering solutions to the ever-broadening needs of the researcher.

Another catalyst for resurgent interest in provenance was the uncertainty engendered by the emergence of electronic records, which represented a new challenge to archivists. Electronic records hold such an immense mass of data that the content-oriented approach is completely inadequate to deal with it.

As evidenced by the brief survey of the classic archival texts above, archivists had been able to a certain extent to ignore the necessity of establishing an approach to photographs. One probable reason was that evidential information existed in another more conventional and readily understood medium, textual records. Early electronic records, however, contained statistical and textual data, very similar to conventional textual records. As Hugh Taylor notes:

> The printed page has remained much the same as it was five hundred years ago and, indeed, much the same as the manuscript page long before that .... The computer now sweeps all these comfortable familiarities away: "pages" and all they contain move (or "turn") at the speed of light; the "book" becomes a file of virtually limitless size, and whole libraries and archives can be compacted in rapidly decreasing shelf space.[31]

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[30]*Ibid.*, 16.

[31]Hugh Taylor, "Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?" *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88), 20.

While, in the case of photographs, archivists were faced with the challenge of an unknown or at least a radically different medium, electronic records were a new manifestation of the conventional textual record which formed the core of most archival holdings. Archivists had a number of concerns: that textual records would be replaced by this new technology; that they would be required to become computer specialists; and that their existing archival knowledge would be unequal to the task of archiving these new records. It was as if "electronic technology had opened a Pandora's box of problems and possibilities, many of which lead to a reassessment and possible redirection of the role of the archivist."[32]

Thirty years later electronic records have not taken over modern archives and archivists have not had to become technical computer specialists. Cook notes that the "first generation" of electronic archivists, referring to those archivists who had first contact with these new records in archival settings, placed strong emphasis on "information content over provenancial context" but that "such approaches by the pioneering, first generation of electronic records archivists are perfectly understandable ...."[33] The only methodology archivists had to follow in North America was the content-based, user-oriented approach. However, electronic records, compared to conventional records, are a "mass of data and [a] chaos of subject content."[34]

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[32]Shirley Spragge, "The Abdication Crisis: Are Archivists Giving Up Their Cultural Responsibility," *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1995), 174.

[33]Cook, What is Past is Prologue," 40-41.

[34]Hugh Taylor, "Information Retrieval and the Training of Archivists," *The Canadian Archivist/L'Archivist canadien* 2, no. 3 (1972), 31.

Archivists could not hope to simply apply traditional methods to these modern

challenges. A different approach was required for dealing with these new and complex

demands. By re-examining the concept of provenance, a founding archival principal,

many archivists believed they had found a workable solution. Instead of focussing on the

content or subject of the records, as guided by the interests of the researcher, a method

that focusses on provenancial information would gather contextual information about the

record. In 1985 American archivists Richard Lytle and David Bearman argued that a

provenance-based method that focussed on the form and function of records was a far

superior method of information retrieval.[35] There are fewer functions and forms of

records than potential subject categories and, similarly, records with different subjects

such as personnel files or bills created by different organizations can share the same form

or function. Contextual knowledge about the form and function of records allows

archivists to "translate a researcher's subject query into information about organizational

functions."[36]

Provenance formed the backbone of the contextual approach. This approach had a

significant impact upon the development of archival theory and methodology in Canada

and methods of archiving photographs. The contextual approach is

> concerned in the first instance with acquiring knowledge of
> the context in which information is recorded rather than
> knowledge of the information contents of the records. It
> begins with study of the creators of records, their

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[35]David A. Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-86), 22.

[36]Quann, 14.

contemporary activities, and their histories - administrative or personal, as the case may be. The contextual analysis moves on to acquire information about records: the characteristics of the media and of types of records within each medium, the immediate circumstances of their creation, their uses prior to entering archives, organization in record-keeping systems and relationships with other records and systems. The analysis turns then to the archival theory, functions, and institutional structures required to appraise, arrange, describe, make available for use, and preserve these records.[37]

Although not the first archivist to explore this new perspective on archival theory and methodology, Hugh Taylor was first to develop and espouse it in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s as best means of addressing the emerging archival problem.[38] Taylor was also an influential force in the Canadian "total archives" program (which emphasizes the acquisition of records of all types of media) and "pulled many Canadian and international archivists out of their 'historical shunt' of looking after old records and placed them firmly in the Information Age ...."[39] Before exploring the contextual approach in more detail, an examination of Taylor's ideas and the changes underway in the archival world in Canada in his time, such as the development of the "total archives" concept, are necessary.

Hugh Taylor immigrated to Canada from England in 1965 and quickly adapted to

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[37]Nesmith, "Hugh Taylor's Contextual Idea for Archives," 16.

[38]*Ibid.*, 16.

[39]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 34. The term "historical shunt" was coined by Taylor and refers to his view that many archivists were overly concerned in the 1980s with historical scholarship and not enough with contemporary record-keeping responsibilities. See Hugh Taylor, "Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984).

the North American archival scene but "brought an international perspective to North American archival literature."[40] His early writings in Canada coincided with the emergence of electronic technology and a growing awareness that current archival practices were not sufficient to meet the prospective challenges of this new technology, the increasing volume of records entering archives or the ever-broadening interests and needs of researchers. Taylor believed that the "wealth of information in the archival record had barely been tapped" and that only by moving from emphasizing knowledge of the content of the record to a study of the context of the record's creation could archivists fully tap that wealth of information.[41]

Taylor and many of his contemporaries were inspired by new ideas about communication in the work of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. Taylor was especially influenced by McLuhan and felt he "articulated much that archivists can feel in their bones: the elemental power of the media in their care and, by a power of transference, the emerging power of the archivist within society as a key figure in the information network."[42] In particular, Taylor was interested in the fact that the way in which information was communicated affected how it was perceived and interpreted.

Marshall McLuhan was a literary intellectual whose ideas about communications and media, which came to widespread attention in the 1960s, were to have great impact.

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[40]James K. Burrows and Mary Ann Pylypchuk, "The Writings of Hugh Taylor: A Bibliographic Review," in Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination*, 2.

[41]Nesmith,"Hugh Taylor's Contextual Idea for Archives," 15.

[42]Hugh Taylor, "Canadian Archives: Patterns from a Federal Perspective," *Archivaria* 2 (Summer 1976), 10.

Axiomatic to McLuhan's approach is the idea that the media of communication play a central role in shaping human perceptual capacities and social relations and it is through understanding the role that media play that we can reach a better understanding of the knowledge or message they convey.[43] To convey this view he coined the expression "the medium is the message". This phrase is well known today, if not always understood. But in 1965, McLuhan notes, it was something of a shock to be told that the means of communications were important, and not just their conventionally understood information content. According to McLuhan, people have traditionally tended to assume that the "content" of a communication or its subject matter was the message. He asserts that "the message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."[44] For example, the "railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society but it accelerated and enlarged the previous scale of previous human functions ...."[45] McLuhan illustrates this by referring to a study on the effects of television on children. The researcher focussed on areas where TV had yet to penetrate and studied the effects of the content of television such as program preferences and viewing time. McLuhan notes the man had nothing of consequence to report as he was focussed on content rather than the impact of

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[43]Dennis Duffy, *Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), 5, 16

[44]Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), 24.

[45]McLuhan, 8. Similarly, it could be said that photography did not introduce the concept of visual communication but rather it enhanced our previous ability to so communicate.

the medium on the culture, and that we can achieve better understanding of the message and more information can be conveyed through an understanding of how it is transmitted.[46]

Taylor learned from McLuhan's ideas and applied them to his knowledge of archival practice. He determined that there was much to learn from the impact of communication on civilization and that the archivist in particular had much to learn from studying the environment, or context, in which communication takes place, that is, by examining both the medium and the perception of that medium. Taylor notes "we have taken our records very much for granted; while we have respected and sought to preserve their physical nature, we have regarded them simply as the neutral 'carriers' of messages or pieces of information, despite the fact that the nature of each medium does shape administrative systems."[47] The contextual approach was one method by which the archivist could see beyond the "neutral carriers" to a better view of the information. Archivist Terry Cook summarizes Taylor's contextual approach as follows:

> Taylor discerned in our new world of interactive electronic transactions and communications, 'a return to conceptual orality,' that is to say a return to the medieval framework where words or documents gained meaning only as they were 'closely related to their context and to actions arising from that context.' In that oral tradition, meaning 'lay not in the records themselves, but [in] the transactions and customs to which they bore witness as "evidences."'[48]

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[46]*Ibid.*, 19.

[47]Hugh Taylor, "The Media of Record: Archives in the Wake of McLuhan," *Georgia Archive* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1978), 1.

[48]Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," 34.

Therefore, the subject-content may seem to contain the entire informational content of the record, but archivists have to examine the context of the creation of the records, including the significance of the medium, to determine the full evidential value of the record.

Another significant effect of McLuhan's influence was Taylor's continued interest in all forms of media. Although Taylor was interested in evaluating the effect of media in general, he was particularly interested in non-print media. Thus he was interested in subjects such as oral history and documentary art.[49] If what was important was the way in which the message was transmitted and not simply the content per se, then a knowledge of the history and impact of different types of media was also essential. As Taylor notes, "the alphabet made Gutenberg possible, but the technology of uniformity and repeatability exemplified by moveable type was not new; it had been present in writing but was now intensified in print and standardized typefaces."[50] Archivists, then, should endeavour to understand the nature and impact of the media in their care.

Although this example refers to the printed word, in McLuhan's analysis of media, as well as Taylor's, one type of media does not have precedence over another. However, McLuhan did have a rating system which classified different types of media as either "hot" or "cold" based on how much information content that particular medium possessed. A "hot" medium is considered "high definition" which means it is "well filled

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[49]Burrows and Pylypchuk, 7.

[50]Taylor, "The Media of Record: Archives in the Wake of McLuhan," 4.

with data" while a "cold" medium is labelled "low definition" because "very little

information is provided." A medium that is low definition requires that much of the

information be provided by the audience while a high definition "hot" medium provides

a considerable amount of information very quickly. Thus, speech "is a cool medium of

"low definition," because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the

listener."[51] Generally the listener has to infer added meaning through facial expression

and tone. Television on the other hand is considered "high definition" and all

information is conveyed visually and aurally.

According to McLuhan, these ideas were often considered confusing but it is

important to note that these ratings communicate distinctions in how different media

convey messages and that they don't refer to content.[52] Furthermore, it should be

understood that McLuhan is referring to the analysis of media in their original function or

initial use and therefore the ratings are less relevant when applied to archival material

which has often been decontextualized or disassociated from its original purpose. This is

especially true in the case of photographs, which have traditionally been treated as

isolated images by archivists. According to McLuhan, the information of "hot"

photographs is readily apparent and requires little analysis by the viewer. However,

evaluating a photograph in the setting of an advertisement or article where the message

of the image is set in a detailed context is quite different from evaluating an image that

has in all probability been removed from its original context. McLuhan bases his rating

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[51]McLuhan, 24.

[52]Duffy, 38.

system on media that fall into the former category, whereas archivists must expand their field of vision to work with material in the latter.

Taylor's interest in forms of media beyond conventional textual records complemented and benefited the notion of "total archives" which has characterized Canadian approaches to archival work. The "total archives" concept has been called "Canada's single most important contribution to international archival theory."[53] The concept was not new when Taylor arrived in Canada in the 1960s. Douglas Brymner, the first Canadian federal archivist (1872-1902), sought a mix of archival materials of various media and of both public and private origin. Furthermore, the Public Archives Act of 1912 officially mandated the acquisition of records in various formats, but it was only after World War II that the "multi-media goal was carried out more thoroughly...."[54] By 1980, the Report of the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives described "total archives" as "archives which, unlike many European or United States archives, actively acquire both the official records and an extensive range of private materials in all documentary media bearing on the life of their institution or region."[55]

The mid-twentieth century re-articulation of this concept was accompanied by dramatic growth at the National Archives of Canada, then called the Public Archives of Canada during the 1960s and 1970s. This growth is illustrated by the remarkable increase

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[53]Lorraine O'Donnell, "Towards Total Archives: The Form and Meaning of Photographic Records," *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994), 106.

[54]*Ibid.*, 106.

[55]Spragge, 173, quoting the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives, *Report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada* (Ottawa, 1980).

in the annual operating budget from 2 million dollars in 1968 to roughly 15 million ten years later and then to over 30 million by the early 1980s. The staff more than doubled in this period as well. The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed massive re-organization of archival programs across Canada. Michael Swift, a senior official at the Public Archives in the 1970s and 1980s, rightly notes that these figures only give a general indication of the changes being made at the archives and that more significant changes were taking place in the kinds of programs being operated.[56] The budgetary increases of the 1960s and 1970s permitted a more thoroughgoing interpretation of the "total archives" concept. One example of this at the Public Archives was the Systematic National Acquisition Program, which was a more aggressive attempt to locate and acquire records that had either been neglected or missed in the past. Additionally, special media divisions were created within the Public Archives to ensure that each media received equal attention.

One of the media to receive much needed added attention was photography. The Public Archives did not begin collecting photographs until 1897. By 1964, when the Historical Photographs Section was established within the Picture Division, the collection had grown to only 400,000 photographs.[57] Despite the Archives' long commitment to the "total archives" concept, textual archivists laboured long under the idea that photographs did not constitute sources of primary historical value. Consequently, photographs in archives tended to be treated as discrete images, arranged

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[56]Michael Swift, "The Canadian Archival Scene in the 1970s: Current Developments and Trends," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-83), 47.

[57]Christopher Seifried, "National Photography Collection," *General Guide Series* (Ottawa, 1983), 5.

in huge image banks, classified by subject content into and subsequently used for illustrations by researchers, perhaps representing something completely divorced from their original meaning.[58] Acquisition after the turn of the century continued to be sporadic and modest with a few notable collections, such as the Department of the Interior Collection and the W.J. Topley Collection, both acquired in 1936.[59] The establishment of the Historical Photographs Section was a reflection of the growing awareness of the importance of all media and of the particular importance of photographs. Subsequently, new policies and strategies were implemented to ensure the acquisition of a fuller reflection of Canadian history in photographs and a fuller realization of the "total archives" concept.

Having been somewhat passive in their acquisition of photographs, the Public Archives established the Historical Photographs Section which acted as a catalyst. And archivists aggressively sought out important acquisitions and established procedures for the transfer of photographs to the section for specialized handling from other divisions within the Public Archives. The Section continued to evolve and re-define itself. It was renamed the National Photography Collection in 1975.[60] More changes were to occur throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Art and photography were reunited in the renamed

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[58]Ritzenthaler, 9.

[59]"Documentary Art and Photography Division," in Jim Burant, comp.,*General Guide Series* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1992), 3. The acquisition of the Department of the Interior photographs was especially significant as it "confirmed the Archives' role as repository for the federal government's photographic records."

[60]Seifried, 2.

Documentary Art and Photography Division in 1986 but acquisition areas remained separate. The National Archives has always acquired photographs from the private sector and from federal government departments and agencies. In 1983 the latter accounted for one quarter of the National Photography Collection's holdings. Photographs from the private sector include images produced by private organizations, newspapers, and professional and amateur photographers. By 1992 the number of photographs held by the National Archives had grown to 15 million, and growing awareness of the importance of photographic records was being reflected in archival literature. The mandate of the Documentary Art and Photography Division was to "acquire and preserve art and photography records of enduring historical and documentary value to all Canadians."[61] The Archives was making a concerted effort to make the researcher aware that a photograph can convey information about the past that can be both significant and distinctive and that in each photographic record there are two types of information: the information revealed in the evident image content and the contextual meaning or information about the society and motivation that created it.[62]

Contrasting the total number of photographs acquired in the over sixty years before the establishment of the Historical Photographs Section in 1964 to those in the roughly forty-year period following, it might appear that archivists had been true to the "total archives" mandate of acquiring different forms of archival material. Archivist Lorraine O'Donnell believes that while archivists involved in the "total archives"

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[61]Burant (comp.), "Documentary Art and Photography Division," 1

[62]*Ibid.*, 22.

program "were very interested in alternative record types, including photographs, they did not succeed in providing a theoretical basis for the inclusion of these records in any total archives project."[63] The feeling of many archivists is that despite the "total archives" concept and its desire to embrace all media, written records are still accorded greater value as historical documents and other less traditional media such as visual records have less importance. Despite the Archives' successful efforts to make photographic records more voluminous and visible in archival institutions, the full evidential value of photographs often continued to be overlooked because methods of analysing a photograph as an historical document were largely underdeveloped and unknown. Thus, to some archivists, the total archives program was something of a Pyrrhic victory, because photographs were acknowledged as historically valuable and great strides were made in improving physical custody, but image content continued to be valued over the knowledge of the context of creation of photographs which gave them much greater documentary value.

Visual materials archivists have argued that one of the main reasons that the evidential value of photographs continues to be downplayed is the "dominion of word-based records."[64] The theories and methodologies developed by archivists over the centuries have derived from written records. As Cook notes, "almost all the concepts, practices, procedures, and even the accepted terminology of the profession reflect our

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[63]O'Donnell, 106.

[64]*Ibid.,* 105.

legacy of paper records."[65] There is an inherent trust placed in written documents and archivists almost instinctively understand how to interpret and use them. Not only has archival work and research developed around the written document but so also historical research, the discipline most closely linked with archives. The precept first articulated in the nineteenth century, that historians should rely on written documents, still prevails.[66] Taylor observes, "to those of us brought up on history written entirely from textual records, the written word has a certain respectability, a deceptive precision, a convincing plausibility that masks its limitations."[67] Referring to works of documentary art, although his observation is equally applicable to photographs, Taylor goes on to say "as such they were not regarded as documents in any sense, for documentation as we know it became the prerogative of such textual records as the printed book, the enrolment, the deposition, the letter and the diary."[68]

However, even for those who wish to regard photographs as documents, there remains the problem of an archival methodology tied to a "legacy of paper records." Archivists such as Schwartz, Taylor, Kaplan and Mifflin argue that a major hindrance to archivists developing the full evidential value of photographs is a basic inability to

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[65]Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management in Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," *Archives and Manuscripts* 22, no. 2 (November 1994), 302.

[66]Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffery Mifflin, "'Mind and Sight': Visual Literacy and the Archivist," *Archival Issues* 21, no. 2 (1996), 114.

[67]Taylor, "Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist," 420.

[68]*Ibid.,* 419

interpret visual records. Archivists' "literary training has often caused [them] to 'read' pictures 'literally' without being aware of certain rules and conventions that are in sharp contrast to the rules of alphabet, grammar and syntax."[69] Not only is there a predisposition for textual records, but archivists lack the visual literacy necessary to "read" the information "written" in a visual document.

The articulation of the expression "visual literacy," described as "an evolving concept best defined as the ability to think and learn in terms of images i.e., to think visually," is a reaction to the awareness that "contemporary culture is increasingly captured by and reflected in visual documents."[70] This proliferation of visual records means that there will be increasing numbers of visual documents entering archival holdings. Beyond that, the articulation of the concept also grew from the realization that existing methods of analysing visual documents were unequal to the task. There are, as yet, no agreed upon criteria for evaluating and understanding photographs. Archivist Joan Schwartz observes:

> archivists seldom ask the most basic questions about [a photograph's] physical form, internal articulation, purpose or intellectual result ... [consequently] subject content is erroneously conflated with their message, issues of representation are ignored, and informational value is equated only with visual fact.[71]

Thus, what archivists require is a method of thinking visually and a way of learning the

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[69]*Ibid.*, 420

[70]Kaplan and Mifflin, 106.

[71]Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us,'" 44

visual language necessary to read photographs.

Photo archivists argue that for photographs to be seen as documents, rather than just images, it is important to change the way photograph collections are managed.[72] Different methods have been suggested for increasing visual literacy and uncovering evidential value in photographs. Many rely on the premise that photographic meaning can only be discovered by uncovering the context of the creation of the record. Archivists such as Joan Schwartz and Joanna Sassoon contend that photographs should not be seen as individual, decontextualized items, valued only for their aesthetic qualities. Schwartz stresses that archivists must "rethink the nature, production, and purpose of photographs as documents in order to achieve a contextual understanding of their use by governments, businesses, and individuals to convey government policy, communicate corporate ideology, construct national identity, shape collective memory, establish symbolic space, and define concepts of self and the cultural Other."[73] Furthermore, as archivist Chris Hurley asserts, understanding records "depends upon contextual knowledge which is also historical and thus must exist outside the record."[74] Our understanding of the message of the record is dependent on knowledge of internal and external characteristics. Tom Nesmith notes:

a record is not simply a single object with boundaries set

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[72]Joanna Sassoon, "Photographic Meaning in the Age of Digital Reproduction," *Lasie* (December 1998), 8.

[73]Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us,'" 42.

[74]Chris Hurley, "Ambient Functions: Abandoned Children to Zoos," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), 23.

> by its physical extent. It is a meaningful communication,
> which means it is a physical object plus an understanding
> or representation of the object .... Some of what makes a
> record intelligible is inscribed in it, but most of what
> makes a record intelligible is not.[75]

In other words, a record is more than its physical form or content, and without knowing

its context, which is outside of the record, its significance is lost. The value of a record

lies not in its contents, but in what it represents. Contextual knowledge demands that the

archivist look beyond the visual image. In photographic terms this means that by "going

beyond photographic realism and informational value to think more broadly about

authorship and function, archivists can engage the photograph as a document, focussing

not on its content but on the functional context of its creation."[76]

In many ways, special media archivists, were pioneers of the contextual approach.

Many of the earliest articles and books promoting its use were written by archivists who

did not work primarily with textual records. A number of articles and books written in

the late seventies, when ideas about contextuality and provenance were just starting to

circulate in Canada, suggest that there were indeed archivists actively exploring the

possibilities suggested by focussing on the context of creation. In 1977, for example,

there was an issue of the Canadian archival journal *Archivaria* dedicated to photographic

records and entitled "Photographs and Archives." Photo archivists such as Richard

Huyda, Joan Schwartz, and Lilly Koltun contributed. While mention was made of the

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[75]Tom Nesmith, "What is a Postmodern Archivist?: Can Douglas Brymner, an Unmuzzled Ox, and Star Trek Tell Us?" A paper presented to the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, May 1998, 7.

[76]Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us,'" 54.

wonderful images captured and stored in archival institutions, the focus of the journal was the immense informational value available in photographic records and the fact that that research potential was rarely utilized. Huyda, for instance, analysed the conflict between archivists' obvious interest in photographic records and their inability to provide access to them due to lack of intellectual control.[77]

In 1981, a special issue of the journal *BC Studies* was issued entitled "The Past in Focus: Photography & British Columbia, 1858-1914". Archivists such as Schwartz and Andrew Birrell contributed to it. They raised some of the same concerns discussed in *Archivaria*. They also explored contextual information regarding the creation of the records, such as the working conditions and technical limitation of photographic survey work in British Columbia before the turn of the century and what they meant to the interpretation of the records. In the late 1970s archivists at the National Photography Collection of the Public Archives of Canada began research for an exhibition entitled "Private Realms of Light: Canadian Amateur Photography, 1839-1940," which sought to highlight the work of amateur photographers across Canada, and thus focus on areas of everyday life not covered in the photographs of the professional studio photographer. The exhibit later spawned several articles in *Archivaria* and a book of the same name.[78]

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[77]For examples of articles exploring the contextual approach to archiving photographs please see *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78) and *BC Studies* no. 52, (Winter 1981-82). See also Taylor, "Documentary Art and Role of the Archivist," and Walter Rundell, "Photographs as Historical Evidence: Early Texas Oil," *American Archivist* 41 (October 1978).

[78]Articles relating to the "Private Realms of Light" exhibit appeared in *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-1984).

These are just a few examples of the work done by photo archivists. They played a leading role in the articulation of the contextual approach by influencing such archival theorists Cook and Nesmith.

These photo archivists were also influencing and influenced by the work of photo-historians and philosophers in the 1970s and 1980s regarding the nature of photographs. Victor Burgin, Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag and John Berger were all actively exploring new concepts and ideas regarding photographic images during this same period. Art critic Burgin in his 1982 *Thinking Photography* criticises the lack of adequate photographic theory beyond that which explores photographic technique or critiques aesthetic qualities. In *On Photography,* Sontag examines the importance of knowing who took the image and why. She also questions traditional assumptions about the truthful testimony of the photograph. The work of visual materials archivists did not develop in a vacuum, but rather represents an expanding conception of contextual information by archivists in general at a time when photo-historians and philosophers were beginning to re-evaluate traditional perceptions of photographs.[79]

The following section will examine in more detail some applications of the contextual approach. The term context has proven difficult to define as it "refers to a vast and complex literature. To say that context is a collection of elements which

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[79]Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* (London: Fontana, 1984); John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Victor Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography,* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Estelle Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts: Photographic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1983); Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

produce meaning in no way covers all of its possible implications."[80] For the purposes of

this paper, archivist Martine Cardin's interpretation will be employed. Context is viewed

as "a determined and determining state, as a dynamic social process, and as a symbolic

act lying outside of the situation to which it gives meaning." She also states that "context

emerges from the interaction between various kinds of factors (physical, functional, and

symbolic)."[81] By examining the functions that prompted the creation of a record the

archivist can assess its raison-d'étre more effectively. The first type of contextual

information to be examined here will be the functional context, which entails four

different elements: author, purpose, message, and audience. These four elements are

derived from the belief that "the photographic image is transformed into a photographic

document created by an author with a purpose to convey a message to an audience."[82]

Perhaps the foremost element of functional context to be identified is the author

of the record. Even when there is only one creator of the record, his or her identity is not

always readily apparent. It can be the individual who authored the record, or directed its

contents, or communicated the information to an audience. Photographic records can

provide an explicit example of this concept. Is the creator of the record primarily the

individual who commissioned the picture or the individual taking the picture? Even

though the picture is being physically created by the photographer, he or she is not

always the only or even main creative force behind its realization, as often the

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[80]Martine Cardin, "Archives in 3D," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), 117.

[81]*Ibid., 117.*

[82]Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us,'" 52

commissioner of the photographs determines their content. The photographs of the

Countess de Castiglione provide a sensational example. In the early nineteenth century

the Countess commissioned over four hundred photographs of herself. The Countess was

considered one of the great beauties of the mid-nineteenth century. She was a court

celebrity of the French Second Empire and so it would not have been unusual for her to

have had many photographs of herself taken. From her own records and those of the

photographers it is evident that she commissioned the photographs and determined their

content.[83] What is most astounding, besides their sheer number, is the manner in which

she chose to pose herself. In an era when a woman's bared ankle was cause for titillation,

in one infamous photo the Countess chose to pose with legs bare from the knees down.

Other photos feature her posing in various costumes and displaying various facial

expressions.[84] As photo-historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau observes, she "substantially

determined her own presentation to the camera, dictating the pose, costume, props, and

accessories."[85] Although it is rare for a woman of her time to have had control of her own

representations, as women usually appeared in photographs as the object or the observed,

the Countess was the author of her photographic records.

The importance of realizing that the Countess was the author of her photographs

is critical, otherwise it becomes more possible to misunderstand the photograph's

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[83]Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Legs of the Countess," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), 72.

[84]*Ibid.*, 68.

[85]*Ibid.*, 71

informational and evidential characteristics if it is assumed that the photographer was the sole or actual author.

At the same time as the Countess was memorializing her beauty, cheap and readily available photographic pornography was emerging.[86] It is instructive to compare (as Solomon-Godeau does) authorship of pornographic photography with that of the Countess's photographs, because it underscores the importance of a clearer understanding of the contribution of the context of creation of the photograph to knowledge of the evidence the photograph conveys. The nineteenth century witnessed an increased fetishism of the female body, and the emergence of photography made these images into commodities. The subject matter of these photographs ranged from what would by today's standards be considered tame, such as a dancer's bared legs, to more graphic renderings of sexual acts. The fascination with bared legs was particularly strong during this period as bared legs became a common sight throughout dance halls in France and England and new dances were invented to showcase dancers' legs.

However, in these cases, regardless of the merely sensational nature of the content of the photographs, the photographer of a pornographic image was responsible for the content. He chose the back drop, the participants, the costumes, and the pose. These early works were often touched up after the fact with extreme precision to detail, making them elaborate works of art created by the photographer.[87] Not realizing that the Countess de Castiglione had commissioned her own pictures (and had chosen the style

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[86]*Ibid.*, 96.

[87]*Ibid.*, 94-96.

portrayed in them) would change an observer's understanding of their context completely. The photographs would depart from being evidence of the Countess's vanity, obsession with her looks and general eccentricities to become yet another representation of a woman's legs, perhaps joining the ranks of other pornographic works of the same period.

Knowledge of the creator(s) is also significant because it is closely linked to other aspects of functional context, such as the intended audience, purpose or message. In the case of the Countess, once her authorship of the photographs is established, the next step is to determine the intended audience. According to Solomon-Godeau, considering the nature of the photographs and the personality of the Countess, it is clear that they were for her personal use.[88] While the majority of photographs taken in this period would have been for public consumption, the Countess was interested in glorifying her beauty and preserving its image. Without knowing that the Countess was the principal creator of her own photographs, it would not likely be known that they were for private use. This is especially true of the image of the Countess's legs, which does not show her face, and could appear to be just another photograph of a woman's legs, perhaps representing nineteenth-century fascination with the bared female form.[89] Identification of the creator of the record is the first step in determining the significance of the record. Without this knowledge, other contextual information can become obscured or meaningless.

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[88]*Ibid.*, 69.

[89]*Ibid.*, 66-67, A major theme in Solomon-Godeau's article is the relationship between fetishism, photography, and the female form in this period.

Identifying the author and the intended audience of these photographs leads directly to a more detailed understanding of their purpose and message. Solomon-Godeau notes in this case that knowledge of the intended audience also reveals a great deal about the original purpose of the record. The Countess's motivation becomes clearer when we read how she describes herself: "The Eternal Father did not realize what He created the day he brought her into the world; He formed her so superbly that when it was done He lost His Head at the contemplation of the marvelous work."[90] This example of the photographic collection of the Countess de Castiglione illustrates the four elements which comprise functional context. The Countess was the author of the record, since she determined what the photographs would contain. She was also the intended audience. The purpose was to celebrate and preserve an image of her beauty, while the message was "I am beautiful." Clearly, a much greater appreciation of the evidential value of the photographs can be achieved through revealing the functional context than by simply examining the image content.

Another illustration of the benefits of employing functional context to determine evidential value can be found in the publicity and propaganda photographs of the British suffragettes. Suffragettes made great use of newspapers and photo-journalists to promote and create sympathy for their movement. There are also examples of suffragettes using other forms of photography, such a portraiture, to advance their cause. Suffragism was not only misunderstood by many but it was also willfully misrepresented. Photo-historian

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[90] *Ibid.,* 69, as cited in Frederic Loliee, *Les femmes du second empire,* (Paris, Talladier), 48.

Michael Hiley notes that photographic parodies of men dressed up as women were often published, especially at the turn of the century. These photographs "reflected widely-held public prejudices [that] suffragettes are ugly, unattractive, cranky, unfashionable and masculine."[91] Suffragist leader Christabel Pankhurst, among others, fought back. Pankhurst commissioned a photographer to create appealing publicity stills that portrayed her as attractive and warm hearted and which could be distributed at rallies and protests. The functional context of these photographs is as follows: the author was Christabel Pankhurst; the intended audience consisted of men and woman who knew little about the suffrage movement; the purpose was to dispel misconceptions about suffragettes; and the message was "I am very much like any other woman of your acquaintance." Too often photographs are viewed after they have been isolated from their original context. Functional context allows the viewer to analyze photographs more as they were originally intended.

Another type of contextual information which is rich with potential information is the societal context in which the record was created. How do the conditions, ideas, and values of a period affect the records? Our understanding of the evidential or informational value of a record can be significantly hindered without an understanding of the societal environment in which they were created.

Although photography was initially criticized by many as an upstart art which "threatens conflagration and anarchy, an incendiary leveling of the existing cultural order," its promise as a means of maintaining social stability and order was also

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[91]Hiley, 38

recognized.[92] Some who felt photography undermined the natural order did so because they viewed it as impinging on the privileges of the upper classes by providing cheap facsimiles of the portraiture reserved for the elite. Portraiture was no longer reserved for those who could afford to hire artists. Now even members of the middle class could have a reflection of his or her image produced. However, at the same as photography began to erode class distinctions, it also began to be used as a tool to identify and classify those distinctions in a social and 'scientific' context. Some saw in photography as a way of identifying and labeling those of a certain class. Gradually photography began to be used to define the generalized look or typology of social classes.[93]

As social order relied upon recognized class distinctions that were threatened by general unrest in the 1800s, it was necessary to find some way to identify the classes and thus justify their position within this hierarchy. By the late-nineteenth century, for example, photography was being used to define a particularly dangerous social group, namely criminals. This was done by using the 'science' of physiognomy and phrenology, which maintained that physical attributes, specifically on the face and head, reflected a person's inner character. Physiognomy attempted to establish correspondence between various anatomical features and personal character. Phrenology, examined the topography of the skull in an attempt to determine mental abilities. Certain physical characteristics were associated with different classes, and thus a large archive of such photography was needed in order to draw the distinctions between deviants and normal

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[92]Alan Sekula, "The Body and The Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986), 10.

[93]*Ibid.*, 12.

people.[94] These photographs became useful tools, allowing members of the middle class to make snap judgments about another person's social status, or to assure themselves of their own moral and intellectual superiority. And of course, a set of identifiers must exist to establish the identity of a normal individual or the "average man". As photography and the applications of phrenology and physiognomy became linked, the interpretation of photographs became increasingly scientific. Two of the most significant names in this field are Alphonse Bertillon a French bureaucrat, and Francis Galton, a founder of eugenics. Bertillon combined photographs, anthropometric descriptions, and standardized notes, with a comprehensive, statistically based filing system. Galton created a form of composite portraiture, which supposedly established common human characteristics.[95] As one of the founders of the eugenics movement Galton was very interested in heredity and the idea of biologically determined "types". The creation of these records was directly linked with the social anxiety. They were used by social elites to justify their continued dominion over the lower labouring classes. Thus knowledge of the historical context and the social concerns of the period in which a body of photographs was taken provides a fuller understanding of their informational and evidential value.

The technological context is another area of the contextual framework which provides useful evidential information, especially in the case of photographs. Technological context refers to the various elements of technology, such as the chemical

[94]*Ibid.*, 12.

[95]*Ibid.*, 18-22.

processes or the equipment, that affect the creation of the record. A photograph is produced by the combined elements of the perspective of the photographer who takes the image, the technology that captures it, and the chemical processes which cause the image to appear.[96] These factors shape its value as evidence. A host of variables exist, especially in the case of early photographs. Archivists should know about the various photographic processes which have existed and how they have influenced the production of photographs. For example, the ability to "point and shoot" to capture an image is a relatively new development in photography. As JoanSchwartz observes, the archivist should be able to distinguish between the moment of action and the moment of documentation.[97] As early photographic processes could not record action, many supposed action shots were actually well planned and posed. In these early days in particular, taking a photograph was a long drawn out process which required time to prepare and a certain level of skill to carry out. Seemingly impulsive shots were in reality planned and staged.

The physical characteristics of a photograph, such as texture, tonal range, size and quality are indicators of the processes used to create it. Different processes often required photographers to use their own materials, thus making the process unique. Photographers would also often add touch-ups to the positive prints, either to remove or add to the content, thus changing the message. Sassoon notes, "Its materiality has been an integral feature of a photographic object since the earliest photographic processes

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[96]Sassoon, 9.

[97]Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us,'" 48

from which there was only a single tangible item produced. Embedded within the

photographic object are clues visible to the trained eye which reveal the subtle

relationships between negatives, printing papers, and processes used to physically

produce the image."[98] Archivists who deal with photographs have to recognize both the

type of technology available in a given period and signs that might indicate subsequent

manipulations.

Not all aspects of context have been explored here, but it is hoped that this

discussion has demonstrated both that contextual information reveals more of the

photographic message than is revealed in the image itself and that archivists must be

aware of various elements of context if they are to reveal as much of its evidential value

as possible. Joan Schwartz notes:

> The photographic image is inherently ambiguous. A photograph
> of clear- cutting only becomes a document – about progress for
> developers, jobs for lumberman ... or territorial appropriation for
> native peoples – when it is tethered to a functional context. Its
> 'true nature' cannot be discerned from the form or even the
> content of the photograph alone. Its evidential value, linked to a
> message of financial investment, labour opportunity ... or
> aboriginal land claims, only becomes clear when the image is
> returned to its broader context of production, purpose and use.
> The value of the photographic image and its role in the action in
> which it participated is not inherent in the content of the image
> .... Rather it is anchored to the functional context of creation and
> cannot be teased from the image itself.[99]

Archivists such as Schwartz believe that to view photographs "only as supporting

or narrative documents is to employ a typology both inappropriate to the nature of the

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[98]Sasson, 6

[99]Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us,'" 51.

document and ineffective as a measure of value."[100] Rather, they should be viewed as important tools through which governments and organizations communicate their policies, establish their ideology, and define their identities. To grasp the significance of a photograph and read the information therein is to look beyond its content to its broader context.

The examples examined above embody one stage of contextual thinking. Since provenance was first defined in the nineteenth century, but even more since it was re-articulated in the 1970s and 1980s, the archival conception of it has continued to expand. The above examples only reflect one stage since they all focus on the context of the creation of the record. In other words, the context examined is limited to those factors that exist at the time of the initial inscription of the record. While this is a broader view of contextual information than might be employed with textual records, since the technological context is probably more complex, some would argue this is still a limited view of context. A wider view of context, explored from a postmodern archival perspective, suggests that our understanding of the evidential value of photographs also depends on what happens to the records after their inscription and initial use and even during the archiving process. This expanding conception of context will be explored in the following chapter.

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[100]*Ibid.*, 53.

Chapter 3

Increased Visual Literacy:
A Postmodern Approach to Archiving Photographs

As previously discussed, archival theory is influenced by wider cultural and

philosophical trends in society. The contextual approach, an example of this

phenomenon, developed in response to a number of factors such as the changing nature

of the record and emerging perspectives on communication in the 1960s and 1970s.

Postmodernism is the latest philosophical movement to affect archival discourse. As one

of the leading philosophical movements of recent years, postmodernism has exerted a

pervasive influence on intellectual and artistic disciplines by raising doubts about long-

held truisms and causing practitioners to re-evaluate traditional theories and

methodologies. This concluding chapter will explore the impact of postmodernism on

archival theory and methodology. It will be argued that postmodernism provides

welcome new approaches to archiving and is particularly well suited to dealing with

photographic records. The concept of postmodernism will be briefly introduced; recent

archival scholarship on postmodernism and its ramifications for archival theory will be

summarized; postmodern concepts of context will be appraised in relation to archival

records; and, finally, a specific example of a photographic record housed by the Archives

of Manitoba, a family album, will be examined to demonstrate the potential of the

postmodern approach.

An in-depth examination of postmodernism is outside the scope of this thesis, but

a brief introduction to the concept will help establish context for the remaining

discussion. An oft-stated reflection on postmodernism, generally preceding any

discussion of the topic, is that postmodernism defies straightforward or easy definition.

Postmodernism touches so many areas of concern, from the way we understand ideas of

truth or reason to even our basic trust in language. These concerns are also viewed

through the diverse lenses of many disciplines. In view of this complexity, only a limited

selection of postmodern concepts will be discussed.

Postmodernism is essentially a reaction to, but not necessarily against, the ideas

and concepts expressed by modernism and questions the validity of conventional theories

and methodologies developed through the filter of modernist expression. Modernism, the

immediate intellectual beginnings of which can be traced to the Enlightenment, is rooted

in the belief that reality can be known through scientific reasoning. It posits that there are

absolute truths; that scientific knowledge is undeniably truthful; that science is the

ultimate way of improving ourselves; and also that language is rational and transparent.[1]

Science is neutral and objective, allowing the seekers of knowledge to stand removed

and objective from that which they seek to understand.[2]

The postmodern stance, as archivist Terry Cook notes, "is one of doubtfulness, of

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[1]See Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The Enlightenment is the name given the late eighteenth-century period characterized by the spread of great confidence in reason's power to arrive at the truth about human nature, morals, and nature. This confidence has since characterized the modern viewpoint. The first prominent articulations of postmodernism took place in the 1950s, in reference to architecture or art. Over the last three decades postmodernism has been part of mainstream debate in a wide variety of intellectual fields.

[2]David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 31-34.

trusting nothing at face value, of always looking behind the surface, of upsetting conventional wisdom."[3] Postmodernists also doubt that the final truth will come from their questioning. Modernist theorists, in contrast, believe that rational inquiry will arrive at the truth. The modernist view that the truth is accessible has often led to confidence in grand narratives or "metanarratives" about ultimate truth or reality. Narratives are the stories told by societies to support or affirm their most basic beliefs. For example the grand narrative of Marxism "is the idea that capitalism will collapse in on itself and a utopian socialist world will evolve."[4] A grand narrative, an overarching story, will clearly identify what a society or group considers right or true and wrong or false. So, for every Marxist there is a capitalist, for every Christian a pagan.

Postmodernism, conversely, "eschews metanarrative, those sweeping interpretations that totalize human experience in some monolithic way, whether it be capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, the nation state, or the Western 'canon' in literature or philosophy – almost anything that reflects the past or present 'hegenomy' of dead white males."[5] Postmodernism asserts that grand narratives are historical or cultural constructs. The most successful metanarratives buttress the powerful and clearly identify as well as stigmatize those who present views contrary to the status quo. Metanarratives provide a way of privileging the powerful and the strong and marginalizing the weak or

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[3]Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds," 317.

[4]Marie Klages, *Postmodernism,*. May 3, 2003. <http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/pomo.html, (April 29, 2003)

[5]Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), 15.

the "other," which in the Western modernist tradition can include anyone who is not a white rational male. Postmodernism seeks to point out the problems inherent in the modernist view and to give voice to those marginalized. In so doing, it posits the existence of multiple narratives, or that there is no one world view, but rather many ways of viewing and interpreting ideas and concepts.[6] Additionally, given that our perceptions about what is true are constructed and thus provide partial truths, not simply the truth, these multiple narratives are not fixed but can be re-interpreted again and again, given our changing understanding of truth in relation to shifting historical, cultural, and temporal contexts.

For example, until recently the maxim "spare the rod, spoil the child" was rarely questioned. Moreover, even those who disagreed with the concept, would unlikely have been in agreement with the idea of government interference with the parental right to discipline their children as parents saw fit. However, the last few decades has seen a change in the tone of popular opinion regarding corporal punishment of children. Furthermore, several countries, such as Italy and Sweden, have made spanking illegal. Currently several other countries are considering legislation that would subject parents to legal consequences if they decide to employ corporal punishment on their children.[7] We have gone from a society that considered children essentially as property of the parent to a society that believes that children also have inalienable rights. The context which fostered the traditional belief has changed and consequently the trust placed in the

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[6] Harvey, 42-46.

[7] www.religioustolerance.org/spankin2.htm (August 11, 2003).

maxim has also changed.

In addition to questioning conventional notions of truth, postmodernists are fundamentally ill at ease with the trust placed in language. To the modernist, the rational and transparent notion of language means language "must function only to represent the real/perceivable world which the rational mind observes. There must be a firm and objective connection between the objects of perception and the words used to name them (between signifier and signified)."[8] The postmodernist, on the other hand, believes that language, just like concepts such as truth or right, is a social construct. Each individual, reading a given text, brings to it his or her own perspective or interpretation. Contrary to the modernist, the postmodernist states there is no reliable foundation of meaning behind the words we use to express our thoughts; no one can ever be certain of the exact meaning of words. Thus, postmodernism "provides a critique of representation and the modern belief that theory mirrors reality, taking instead 'perspectivist' and 'relativist' positions that theories at best provide partial perspectives on their objects, and that all cognitive representations of the world are historically and linguistically mediated."[9]

The interest in these concepts is a fairly recent development in archival circles by comparison with fields such as architecture, linguistics, or art, whose proponents first began exploring postmodernism in the 1950s and 1960s.[10] However, this has been a slow

[8]Marie Klages, *Postmodernism,*. May 3, 2003. <http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/pomo.html, (April 29, 2003).

[9]Heather MacNeil, "Trusting Records in a Postmodern World," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), 37.

[10]Harvey, 42.

and sporadic process, with a few pioneers exploring some of the ramifications of these concepts in an archival context. This past decade has witnessed a gradually increasing number of archivists who acknowledge the need to explore more fully the implications of this important intellectual movement for archiving. Archivists such as Verne Harris, Brien Brothman, Terry Cook, Tom Nesmith, and Joan Schwartz have all been instrumental in articulating the relevance of postmodernism to the practice of archives. They have discussed reasons why archivists have been slow to accept postmodernism. They have explored the works of some of the leading postmodernist philosophers and begun to outline potential applications of postmodernism to archiving.

That archivists have been hesitant to accept postmodernism is partly attributable to the fact that the movement rejects the intellectual backdrop that served as a foundation for the formulation of conventional archival theory and methodology. South African archivist and postmodernist Verne Harris has been on the leading edge of this new intellectual wave. He has been particularly interested in the potential of postmodernism to reshape archival practice and has examined reasons why the archival profession has been so slow to acknowledge its significance and to embrace the opportunities it presents. In a 1997 article, Harris examined the changes, or lack thereof, taking place in the South African archives system in the country's transition to democracy in the early 1990s. He noted that the resultant political and cultural upheavals led to "fundamental changes in the sphere of social memory."[11] These changes, however, were not yet

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[11]Verne Harris, "Claiming Less and Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997), 132.

adequately reflected in South African archives, although they are, as Harris notes, a repository of social memory.[12]

Harris asserts that this failure was due to the fact that assumptions about the function of archives are still rooted in a positivist (modern) framework, one he considers "a sterile, outmoded, archival discourse."[13] Positivism, asserts Harris, "posits a universe governed by natural laws, and a reality which is knowable," and that "this knowledge is attainable through the exercise of reason and the application of empirical methods."[14] These ideas formed the foundation from which emerged modern archival theory and methodology. Embodied in this archival paradigm are familiar Jenkinsonian ideas, which consider records as the natural by-product of actions, and thus inherently truthful, and, equally, that archivists can be impartial and objective in their administration of these records. However, postmodernism posits that there is no truth as we have conventionally understood it, and no one reality that we can call knowable or represent through archival records. Harris argues that archival records do not simply reflect objective truth. They "do not speak by themselves," but, rather, many factors affect how a record is interpreted.[15] If we can no longer accept records as essentially truthful reflections of reality which can be administered by archives impartially, then archivists must rethink

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[12]Verne Harris, "Redefining Archives in South Africa: Public Archives and Society in Transition," *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996), 7. Harris urges archivists not to dismiss the memory making function of other institutions such as libraries and museums.

[13]Harris, "Claiming Less and Delivering More," 132.

[14]*Ibid.*, 133.

[15]*Ibid.*, 135.

many theories and methodologies developed around these notions. Thus, accepting and embracing postmodernism does not simply ask that one accept new ideas and integrate them into one's existing beliefs, but demands a complete reformulation of theory and practice since the ideas that support conventional practices have been cast into doubt.

Brien Brothman is another archivist whose work on postmodernism deserves attention. His work on postmodern concepts of language and the ideas of Jacques Derrida are particularly relevant to this discussion.[16] Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction, first articulated in the 1960s, can be described as a powerful influence on postmodernism. He and other proponents of deconstruction are interested in how the meaning of communications can be so elusive. More specifically, they ask how messages can end up saying so many different things. Modernists presuppose that the meaning of communications can be controlled so that messages are clearly understandable, in part, because there is an identifiable link between the message or meaning and the means of communication used to name or express that meaning.[17] Derrida and other deconstructionists, however, believe that words have no inherent or universal meaning. Rather, meaning is shaped repeatedly and individually by subsequent readings.[18] Thus the creation of meaning is a collaboration between both the writer and the reader and each

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[16]See Brien Brothman, "The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), 205-220; see also Brothman's review of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* in *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997) and his "Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Destruction," *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999).

[17]Harvey, 49.

[18]Brothman, "Declining Derrida," 70-73.

subsequent reader may bring new and different meanings. Derrida, asserts Brothman, "is

interested in naming's power to impose as natural, truth about and true names for the

realities of the world – which turn out always to be instances of pretensions of particular

individuals and groups to determine these realities."[19] Derrida rebels against the idea that

there is one truth or one way of looking at things because this inevitably results in the

exclusion or repression of others. This, in turn, means that we tend to give priority to

certain words and marginalize others. One cannot, however, overemphasize the other

view either – the point is to see that many readings are possible.

The significance of Derrida's ideas to archiving is obvious. When archivists

declare their commitment to preserving archival records it is not the physical medium

they are promising to preserve so much as the intellectual content. Archivists are striving

to preserve the meaning, including what they believe was the author's intended meaning.

Brothman asserts that archivists employ archival tools such as description to limit

alternative readings. They strive first and foremost to establish the context of a record or

to apply a level of intellectual control. Brothman expounds further on this idea of control

by comparing the modernist concept of context to an envelope. He asserts:

> Within this impenetrable time capsule, an envelope bearing
> a sender's name, a postmark, a specific address or
> destination (at least those initially apparent) seals the fate
> of the documents. Those who later receive the envelope
> will understand from whence the contents came, and in
> understanding that, accept its authenticity and recover its
> true meaning – that original meaning placed in the

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[19] *Ibid.*, 74.

envelope by its sovereign author.[20]

Derrida and Brothman are not trying to undermine the practice of archiving, but are rather trying to present the possibility of the existence of multiple meanings, truths, and authors. It is only in acknowledging the existence of these other readings that they can be presented and understood.

Conveying the significance of postmodernism for archivists and others is just the beginning of what these archivists, and others of a similar bent, are trying to do. Put another way, they are trying to understand not only what postmodernism is, but also archival postmodernism. Terry Cook, like Harris and Brothman, has been actively promoting the relevance of postmodernism to archives and has gone beyond some other postmodern archivists by examining and presenting potentially viable frameworks upon which to formulate postmodern archival methodologies. Cook characterizes archival postmodernism

> ... as focussing on the context behind the content; on the
> power relationships that shape the documentary heritage...,
> [because] facts in texts cannot be separated from their
> ongoing and past interpretations, nor author from subject or
> ever-changing audiences, nor author from the act of
> authoring, nor authoring from the broader societal contexts
> in which it takes place.[21]

This echoes a theme of postmodern thought – that there are many truths, many narratives and many meanings, but Cook expresses it explicitly in archival terms. The record is not an objective by-product of an event or action, invested with an inherent and static

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[20]*Ibid.*, 80.

[21]Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth," 25.

meaning. It is a complex source of information, whose meaning is in a constant state of flux, because the record can be interpreted anew, time and time again, given the constantly changing contexts with which it interacts.

Cook further asserts that it is the responsibility of the postmodern archivist to "expos[e] these deeper contextual realities."[22] Cook suggests three areas of archival practice to which a postmodern approach can be applied: appraisal, description, and archival accountability. To summarize briefly, Cook stresses documentation of not only what is included but also what is actively or inadvertently excluded. Given that the majority of archives overwhelmingly record and thus privilege the powerful of any given society by the simple fact that the powerful are generally the ones who create conventional records, Cook advocates that archivists acknowledge in their appraisal practices and archival descriptions the marginalized and missing voices.[23] For appraisal purposes this means actively seeking to acquire records of those groups or individuals who are not generally represented in an archives. Greater archival transparency comes into effect by making the appraisal reports, including an explanation of what was accepted into the archives and what was refused, available to the researcher.

In description, this would mean adapting current archival description to the more complex, wide-ranging, and always fluid notions of the contexts of records creation, rather than applying to all records the same rigid, unchanging standardized descriptions, with their much more limited conception of context, that archivists now typically

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[22]*Ibid.*, 25.

[23]*Ibid.*, 29-35.

employ. Cook credits postmodern insights for allowing archivists to accept that the

contexts and activities that generate archives are more complex and fluid than was

previously acknowledged or permitted in conventional archival description.[24] In other

words there is more to establishing the context of the record than documenting the

purpose for which the record was created. Cook's expanded description would mean

expanding the limits of description to include everything that might have happened to the

record. Linked to this idea is the need for archival accountability. Cook suggests that

archival descriptions acknowledge the changes to the record, throughout its history, even

after it is archived. In effect, archivists should be more transparent and accountable and

document how their action or inaction affects the potential readings of the records.

Examination of postmodern philosophy as it relates to archival theory has

prompted some of these archivists to embrace an expanded contextual approach. The

boundless contextual possibilities discussed in postmodernism allow for levels of context

beyond that concerned with knowledge related to the initial inscription or creation of the

record. Archivist Tom Nesmith has also advocated the need for archivists to pay greater

attention to the multiple and fluid contexts that work together to create a record's

meaning by calling on archivists to examine the history of the record.[25] Nesmith

chracterizes a record as not simply "...created once, at the point of inscription," but

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[24]*Ibid.*, 32.

[25]Tom Nesmith, "Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives," *The American Archivist* (Spring/Summer 2002) and "What is a Postmodern Archivist?: Can Douglas Brymner, an Unmuzzled Ox, and Star Trek Tell Us?" Paper presented to the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, May 1998, 1-19.

"constantly changing, constantly in creation."[26] Functional context, as discussed in

chapter two, explores various elements of the context of the record, but it is limited to

the context pertaining to the point of the initial creation of the record. That is to say, all

the elements related to the initial inscription of the record. Nesmith's view of a record

that is "constantly changing, constantly in creation" suggests there is much more to know

about the history of the record.

For example, Nesmith maintains that the concept of the author of the record is

much more complex than one might think.[27] There are potentially multiple authors and

the most significant might not even be the one who first put pen to paper or camera to

eye. For instance, generally one would assume the photographer was the author or creator

of a photograph. However, what if he or she had no say about the content, subject or

layout of the image as in the case of the Countess de Castiglione's photographer? The

Countess authored the entire message and meaning, while the photographer acted more

as intermediary between her and the operation of a mechanical device. What of the

photographs of the suffragette rallies? Is the author the suffragette who arranged for the

photographer or the photographer who made the decision about which images to capture?

Perhaps more appropriately in this instance, the author is also the editor who makes the

final decision about which image to include in a newspaper and adds to it a descriptive

caption.

The postmodern concepts described thus far have to do with how we perceive and

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[26]Nesmith, "What is a Postmodern Archivist?" 6.

[27]Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 30-32.

understand the world around us and in turn how we convey that meaning to others: how we communicate. A common theme has been scepticism about the ability of various means of communication to convey the intended messages of their author, as there is no fully accessible inherent or true meaning in any message. While chapter two examined the elements of functional context as necessary to understand the meaning of the photograph beyond the image content, postmodernists urge an even broader contextual approach since "the provenance or origin of the records is a long, complex, multifaceted process, with no definitive or straightforward beginning, and no end as long as the record survives."[28] Meaning or understanding is being endlessly mediated by a variety of factors. Nesmith, among others, argues that these other factors, these other contextual elements, need to be examined and analysed.[29] Nesmith challenges archivists to go beyond the functional context or the context of the record's creation at the point of the initial inscription, and view records through the subsequent and successive filters that can create expanded meaning. Furthermore, if meaning is being constantly mediated, then archivists must continue to examine those mediating factors, even after a record has entered an archival institution.

The previous chapter focused on the contextual information relating to the creation of a record. It was demonstrated that the evidential significance of a photograph can only be grasped through an understanding of its underlying functional context and that it is the archivist's responsibility to be aware of and to attempt to reveal the various

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[28]Nesmith, "What is a Postmodern Archivist?" 6.

[29]Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 26.

contextual realities. It has been argued in this chapter that postmodernism, as it applies to archives, requires a broader understanding of contextual information than that which was explored in the previous chapter, to include what happens after the record's inscription, since meaning is being constantly mediated by a steady stream of contexts. This following section will examine some of these added contextual elements which include, for example, subsequent uses of the record, the record's custodial history, the impact of its inclusion in an archival institution, and, finally, subsequent archival activities.

As the focus of this thesis is the treatment of photographic records, these postmodern concepts will be examined from a photographic perspective. Therefore, before examining the expanded versions of context mentioned above, a brief examination of the compatibility of postmodern philosophy to archiving photographic records should prove useful. If there are few archivists exploring postmodernism, there are even fewer archivists – Joan Schwartz being one of them – exploring the ramifications of postmodernism for photographs. Schwartz asserts that conventional popular perspectives on photographs are quite similar to conventional attitudes towards archival records.[30] As Schwartz notes, nineteenth and twentieth-century modernists viewed the photograph as "unmediated and, therefore unassailably truthful."[31] This is also the standard to which other archival records are held. She draws parallels between the perceived impartiality of archives and of photographs and argues that postmodern concepts such as the destablization of truth, as applied to photographs, can provide

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[30]Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision,'" 36.

[31]*Ibid.*, 25.

lessons for archival records in general.

Postmodernists question conventional notions of truth and the idea that records have only one possible reading. Yet photo-archivists and photo-historians, despite the highly overused adage that "the camera never lies," recognize that image content cannot be conflated with the intended meaning. In many ways postmodern philosophy is particularly well exemplified when applied to the archiving of photographic records, because there are aspects specific to photographic records that do not lend themselves well to the application of traditional archival principles. Archival records serve as evidence of actions. Conventional archival theory maintains that they are the objective and unimpeachable evidence of a given act or action. In order to serve as that untainted, authoritative, and trustworthy evidence, archival records need to be reliable and authentic (among other things). While photographs might appear to reflect the unvarnished truth, in practice they do not always reflect standards of reliability and authenticity as defined in traditional archival theory. But does this truly undermine their ability to act as evidence?

Let us examine the traditional archival concepts of reliability and authenticity more closely. According to archivist Heather MacNeil, a reliable record is one that is "capable of standing for the facts to which it attests. Reliability thus refers to the truth value of the record as a statement of facts and it is assessed in relation to the proximity of the observer and recorder to the facts recorded."[32] MacNeil defines an authentic record as one "that is what it claims to be and that has not been corrupted or otherwise falsified

[32]MacNeil, 39-40.

since its creation," and which furthermore refers "... to the truth-value of a record as a physical manifestation of the facts it records and is assessed in relation to a record's original instantiation."[33] This means a photograph must reflect exactly what it appears to, with no manipulation of the image, to act as evidence. Photographs, however, do not passively reflect acts and events that naturally cross before the lens, but rather record the acts and events that the photographer chooses to capture. Additionally, the photograph is rarely allowed to speak for itself but is modified during the development process and perhaps further moderated with a caption. So despite the fact that photographs are often assumed to reflect reality, photo-archivists are well aware that the viewer is often being led to a particular interpretation and understanding of the meaning of the record. Keep in mind the suffragist propaganda photographs, a relatively subtle form of manipulation that entailed a carefully staged image context intended to evoke a sympathetic response.

A more obvious manipulation is embodied in the photograph captioned "A Canadian Battalion [goes] over the top, October, 1916." This photograph was widely circulated at the time and was used by the Canadian government to showcase the participation of Canadian soldiers in the First World War. However, it was later revealed that the photograph is actually a compilation of several images -- one of soldiers in training far from the front-line and another of shell bursts at a trench mortar school.[34] Conventional archival principles might lead some archivists to conclude that this record ought no longer to be considered reliable. But does the manipulation of these

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[33]*Ibid.*, 40.

[34]Peter Robertson, "More than Meets the Eye," *Archivaria* 1 (1976), 40.

photographs entirely invalidate the archival integrity of the resulting photographic record? Rather than invalidating it, this further contextual analysis of the manipulation changes our perspective or our reading of the photograph. The photographic record simply becomes evidence of a different view of the action in question. The photograph is no longer evidence of the courage of Canadian soldiers on the front line, but rather of Canadian war propaganda. Subsequent readings of the photograph may view it differently again. Thus this one is still partial and provisional. While these examples demonstrate the relevance of postmodern concepts in relation to photographic records, they also provide some evidence that accepting alternative truths or readings does not destroy the evidential quality of archival records, but can enhance it.

The relevance of postmodern applications is further exemplified by an examination of expanded contexts such as uses of the record subsequent to its inscription and its custodial history, as advocated by archivists such as Cook and Nesmith. Subsequent uses can refer to applications in addition to the one for which the record was created or uses other than those for which the record was intended. Many of the contexts considered in this final section, while forming a broader approach to contextual information than has thus far been examined in this thesis, nonetheless have much in common with the features of context discussed in chapter two. An examination of the subsequent uses of the record can, in fact, be an expanded exploration of the concept of authoring. For instance, while on a visit to Paris in 1900, industrialist D.M. Seaton purchased photographs being sold by the official Exposition photographers. He placed these images in a journal and wrote elaborate descriptions beneath each one which detail

his feelings about the places depicted and include anecdotes relating his experiences.[35]

These were undoubtedly copies of the same photographs being sold to other visitors to

the Exposition, yet Seaton's albums contain a unique record of his experiences in Paris.

He thus co-authored with the photographer(s) the contextual lens through which we

understand these photographs. The author of these photographs is not simply the person

or persons who literally made them. Had he not appropriated these images to create a

unique record of his experiences, they would have remained indistinguishable from the

rest of the mass-produced stock images generated for the Exposition.

The importance of understanding the contextual significance of the subsequent

uses of a record can be further exemplified by examining a record for which the intended

function was much more clearly established. Dorothea Lange's photograph *Migrant*

Mother was a product of an American Farm Security Administration (FSA) project of the

1930s. It was intended to show the extent of the decade's economic crisis and engender

support for a government aid initiative, and as such it performed brilliantly.[36] However,

in the seventy years since it was first taken, this image has been used and re-used for a

variety of different purposes and contexts. In other words, echoing Nesmith's assertion

about the history of the record, this photograph "has had a history beyond its original

context within the FSA."[37] When Lange's FSA photographs were exhibited in a gallery

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[35]Glenn Willumson, "The Getty Research Institute: Materials for a New Photo-History," *History of Photography* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 32.

[36]F. Jack Hurley, "The Farm Security Administration File: In and Out of Focus," *History of Photography* 17, no.3 (Autumn 1993), 244.

[37]Derrick Price and Liz Wells, "Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now," in Liz Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (New

setting for the first time they were transformed into works of art. Others have appropriated the image as a powerful feminist symbol, as it was taken by a woman and highlighted the plight of the Depression era woman. *Migrant Mother* has also acquired iconic status and been used on an American postage stamp, as the exemplar of the Depression.[38] All of these uses can mediate our understanding of the image. To see the image for first time on a recent postage stamp can mean something quite different from an initial viewing in the context of a documentary photographic series produced by a government in the 1930s. Our understanding of the record and its message is mediated by this context of subsequent use.

Another contextual area which is rich with possibilities for the development of new and different meanings is the custodial history of the record. Custodial history or the history of the physical arrangement and often rearrangement of the records as they move (sometimes several times) from the custody of one agency or person to others shapes and reshapes the contexts in which the records are understood. The custodial history of the photographs which ended up in the Seaton album has already implied this. The way in which a record was filed by its custodians is another key aspect of its custodial history. This positioning shapes its relationships with other records throughout its life cycle and thus affects the meanings of the records. These relationships mediate our understanding of that record's message. The American Civil War photographs of Mathew Brady illustrate this concept. Although Brady was a photographer himself, he is best known for

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York: Routledge, 2000), 37.

[38]*Ibid.*, 37-45.

assuming authorship for a large number of Civil War photographs he purchased from

prior custodians, as well as for those taken by photographers he commissioned. In doing

this, he is responsible for accumulating in one place a huge body of images of varied

provenance that he then said documented definitively the Civil War. Historian Alan

Trachtenberg asserts that the identity of the individual who created the photographs is

superfluous because it was the act of being placed together that changed the nature of

these photographs and gave them meaning. Brady was responsible for placing the

photographs "... in a distinct context, a structured discourse that has sealed them

indelibly as 'Civil War photographs'.[39]

This distinct context was created not just because the photographs were

concentrated together but because Brady organized them into categories and created lists

that placed every image in its proper place, based on both on its image content and its

relationship to the other images. They were, however, presented as one entity, with one

photograph being but a part of and inseparable from that totality. Trachtenberg posits that

without this "encompassing structure ... individual images remain empty signs, unable to

communicate a determinate meaning."[40] Thus our interpretation of the Brady Civil War

photographs is mediated both by the arrangement of the photographs and that their

meaning was communicated by the photographs as a whole.

If we acknowledge that there are many potential interpretations and that meaning

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[39]Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs," *Representations* 9 (Winter 1985), 3.

[40]*Ibid.,* 5.

is in a constant state of flux, it becomes necessary to question the role of archivists in shaping our understanding of archival records and the messages they convey. Thus, archives and archivist form another element of contextual reality which must be explored in order to grasp how they mediate our understanding. Archivists such as Brothman, Nesmith, and Cook, among others, have been suggesting for years that archivists have a much larger mediating role in relation to the understanding of archival records than they have been willing to admit.[41] Archivists have had difficulty moving beyond the positivist and modernist archival principles of authenticity, reliability, and the inherent truth of the archival record articulated, especially, by archival forerunners such as the authors of the Dutch manual and Jenkinson.

Nesmith asserts that postmodernism will help archivists appreciate that "contrary to the conventional idea that archivists simply receive and house vast quantities of records ... they actually co-create and shape the knowledge in records, and thus help form society's memory."[42] Postmodernists do not believe in concepts such as truth or the existence of one sole meaning or grand narrative which is inherent or organic. Rather, they acknowledge that truth and understanding are constructed and that multiple narratives exist which are in a constant state of flux as our understanding of truth is mediated by changing historical, cultural and temporal contexts. Thus equally, we must

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[41]See for instance Brothman's "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," and Nesmith's "Archives from the Bottom up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," in Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance.*

[42]Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 27.

acknowledge that the concept of archives is a social construct. Archival principles and methodologies, once considered impartial and non-intrusive, are revealed to be determined by the "information needs and social values of the rulers, governments, businesses, associations and individuals who establish and maintain them."[43] Whether they intend it or not, archival interaction with the record will affect its subsequent interpretation and use.

Archivists shape this understanding of archival records through various archival practices. The first archival function through which a record must pass is appraisal, a process which determines which records will and will not be acquired by an archives. From this moment, the archival record, simply by being designated archival, has already been given a privileged status. With this decision, an archivist is stating that this record has some evidential value that other records do not. It has been argued that "this mediates reality not only by affecting what we can know about the past, but also by saying that this is what we *need* to know about it."[44] Understanding of these records is now being mediated through this privileged context.

Archival description also mediates understanding of an archival record. Archivists examine the archival material and then decide what contextual information should be in the archival description or finding aid used by the researcher.[45] They choose

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[43]Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2 (2002) , 3.

[44]Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 32.

[45]Nesmith, "What is a Postmodern Archivist?" 9.

to include what they believe the researcher would be interested in knowing about those records. This interpretation of the records is what the researcher first sees of the archival record. It is the filter through which she or he may first construct the meaning of the record. Archivists then, if they admit their influence on the researcher's understanding of the record, should do more than simply acknowledge postmodernism. They ought also to consider the implications and potential benefits of a postmodern approach to archival activities. The following section will illustrate the extent of the knowledge of a record revealed through current and accepted archival practices by examining a collection of scrapbooks/family albums held by the Archives of Manitoba to which conventional methodologies have been applied. It will then suggest some of the additional questions raised about these records when a postmodern perspective is applied.

As previously mentioned, postmodern archivists advocate that it is the archivist's responsibility to expose the deeper contextual dimensions of a record. To illustrate other potential benefits of this perspective, let us consider certain aspects of conventional archival practices as applied to family albums or scrapbooks. For instance, consider a collection of scrapbooks created by Francis Edward Collinson, and donated to the Archives of Manitoba in 1999. The first mediating element encountered by the researcher (beyond the archival designation) is the archival finding aid. All archival descriptions at the Archives of Manitoba have the same basic structure and require a standard format and content as guided by the Rules for Archival Description (RAD). RAD is a standardized set of rules intended for use on a national scale throughout Canada. It was created by archivists in the belief that a standard set of rules that required all archival

institutions to follow a consistent format in the description of archives would improve
archival practices and in turn improve archivists' ability to provide access to archival
holdings. Some of the required elements include: beginning and end dates of the records;
physical description of the contents including media types and quantity; an
administrative history or biographical sketch of the creator; the custodial history of the
records prior to entering the archives; and, finally, information regarding the scope and
content of the material.

Therefore, upon reading the RAD compliant finding aid for the Collinson fonds
the researcher is provided with some basic facts about the material and the creator of that
material. For example, the Collinson fonds consists of 5 scrapbooks, 1 album and two
certificates, all of which were created between 1897 and 1945. This information can be
found in the section regarding the physical description of the material and is echoed in
the *Scope and Content* section with the addition of a few more details. For example, the
researcher is also informed that the scrapbooks consist of printed textual material,
photographs, postcards, maps, and sketches. In the *Custodial History* section it is
revealed that the records were donated by the Estate of Flora Collinson, the second wife
of Francis Collinson. The *Biographical Sketch* is just that. It is a very brief recounting of
some of the major facts of his life. For example, it indicates that Collinson was born in
Halifax England, April 28, 1883. In 1907, Collinson married Emily Kendal and in 1910
they had their only child, Margaret. He worked as an engineer with the North Eastern
Railway in England before he moved his family to Manitoba in 1913. He served as an
engineer in World War I. After the war he worked as an engineer with the Canadian

National Railway until his retirement in 1948. In 1947, two years after the death of Emily

he married Flora Cameron and in 1950 he died in Winnipeg.[46] This biographical

information and description of the records is essentially the extent of the information

revealed about the Collinson fonds through the application of conventional

methodologies.

An examination of the records themselves reveals quite a bit more. The

scrapbooks, which begin in 1897 and end in 1945, are very detailed records which

heavily document much of what he did and experienced throughout his adult life. For

example, the majority of the pages include photographs, keepsakes, and newspaper

clippings – materials one would expect to find in a scrapbook. However, there are also

handrawn maps, blueprints, diagrams, and detailed schedules recording dates and times

of important events. For instance, in the second scrapbook which he entitled "War Diary

1916-1919," he drew detailed maps of where his battalion was located and what it was

doing. He kept letters from his wife and drew sketches of his daughter. The final pages

are filled with the timeline of his final days in the army – from getting his release papers

and crossing the ocean to return home (complete with weather reports) to making his

final report in Winnipeg. The albums reveal him to be an unusually meticulous and

organized man, with a perhaps obsessive attention to detail, and thus undoubtedly an

ideal engineer. However, these are traits that are just hinted at in the finding aid.

A postmodern approach could suggest other information that might be included in

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[46]Archives of Manitoba, "Finding Aid," *Francis E. Collinson fonds* Accession 1999-58 (K. Quann, 1999).

a finding aid. This can include information relating to the entire history of the record, including both before and after its inclusion in an archive. For example, all the information included in the finding aid relates to the creator of the records. However, the records were donated 49 years after the death of the creator. Perhaps more information could have been sought on Flora Collinson, the woman who had custody of the material for those 49 years. All the finding aid contains about Flora is her maiden name and that she married Francis in 1947. Since she died still bearing the name Collinson, perhaps she never remarried, and since he was 64 when they married, they had no children together. However, we know virtually nothing about the woman who maintained these records for nearly half a century. Since the material was donated by her Estate, it may be possible to gain access to additional information about Flora among its records. Conventionally, however, the only biographical information included in the finding aid relates to that creator of the record who is its literal inscriber. Flora's authoring role, though, ought also to be considered. As custodian of these records she may have shaped them in powerful ways -- by destroying some, keeping others, rearranging them, dispersing them, adding editorial marginal notes to them, and, of course, by making the records available to the archives. These actions, though sometimes elusive, might be investigated or, at least, researchers could be informed that they may have occurred.

In addition, the last scrapbook in this fonds finishes in 1945, but Francis lived for another five years after this date. He seemed to record all aspects of his life in these scrapbooks, yet there is nothing representing his life with Flora. Perhaps confirmation could have been sought from the Estate and included in the finding aid that this was in

fact the last scrapbook? Did Flora withhold any records of their marriage from the material transferred to the archives? From a postmodern perspective there is much more to the context of the record than knowledge about the initial creator/inscriber, in this case Francis. Furthermore, the postmodern approach advocates that archivists broaden their view of what a finding aid should contain to include these other provenancial elements.

The postmodern approach also advocates that archivists broaden their usual view of the type of information to convey to the researcher, especially in relation to what happens to records after they enter the archives. The *Custodial Section* of the finding aid could be expanded to include information on a range of archival activities and decisions which might mediate the researcher's understanding of the record. Or, an entirely new section on this archival phase of the custodial history might be developed for RAD. It could include, for example, the reasons why the records were first given archival status. Generally, an archival institution will have a specific reason for archiving a body of records. These reasons can be numerous and varied. Also, this information could distinguish a body of records actively pursued by the archives from one accepted without solicitation, as this suggests much about the contemporary societal priorities and historical understanding of the staff of the archives. It may be that the material falls into an archives' specific mandate or that the material is of particular cultural or historical relevance because of the content or the creator. For example, the Archives of Manitoba would be eager to accept any material relating to Carol Shields, partly because of her relevance to Manitoba and her renown as a writer, but also because anything do to with her is of particular interest at the moment.

In aid of revealing some of this contextual information to the researcher, the Collinson fonds description, for example, could include notes from the appraisal form, including that the Collinson material was acquired because it "supplements a growing core of family records held by the Archives of Manitoba," and that it "complements current archival holdings relating to the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Canadian National Railway in Manitoba."[47] Furthermore, in relation to Collinson's "War Diary," which recounts his work as an engineer, the form notes that it is one of the few Archives of Manitoba collections to document this aspect of work in World War I. The inclusion of information on the initial appraisal and acquisition of the material will help the researcher understand why one group of records is considered archival and another is not, thereby throwing light on the mediating influence of the archival designation.

The archivist could also include information about how long the record was in an archives' backlog of work to do before it was processed for use by researchers. The Collinson fonds was processed in the same year that it was acquired, which is a particularly fast processing time. The reason for this is not the exceptional quality of the material but rather that the donor was waiting on a receipt for income tax purposes. All efforts are made to complete the paperwork for tax credits so that donors might file their tax returns on time. Thus the speed with which a collection is processed is not necessarily indicative of the historical or cultural significance of the records.

More detailed information could also be included on any conservation treatments

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[47]Archives of Manitoba, "Appraisal Form," *Edward E. Collinson fonds*, Accession 1999-58 (November 29, 1999).

that the records have undergone. Often, a conservation treatment will leave no overt

intrusive signs. It could include the removal of staples or paperclips causing rust, for

example. Or, in the case of rolled maps or posters it might entail a simple flattening

process. The researcher might never be aware of changes to the form of the record.

However, there are other times when the records are in a such fragile or deteriorated state

that the conservators must use more aggressive measures. This could include actual

physical repairs to the records, such as re-attaching sections of a torn map. However,

conservation treatment often entails instituting protective measures to ensure the

protection of the records during further storage and use, such as placing them in special

protective enclosures. The conservation treatment of the Collinson fonds was particularly

aggressive and resulted in many changes to the records.

According to the Archives of Manitoba's "Condition Report & Treatment

Record," apart from some normal signs of wear and age such as yellowing, fingerprints

on the photographs, silvering of images and small tears, the condition of the scrapbooks

was rated fair to good.[48] Nonetheless, each album received extensive treatment, which

undeniably altered the physical appearance of the record. For example, inserted between

each scrapbook page was a piece of "unbuffered, acid-free tissue to prevent further

staining from inscription inks." The conservator also used an eraser to remove existing

ink stains. Loose maps and photographs were re-affixed using Mylar pockets and corners.

Each album was also placed flat in its own box with additional buffers placed around the

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[48]Archives of Manitoba, "Condition Report & Treatment Record," *Francis Edward Collinson fonds*, Project #1606, (L. Foucault, December 1999), 1-2.

sides to reduce movement.[49] In the end, several elaborately protected records were made

available to the researcher because the normal archival safeguards, such as the use of

white gloves and pencils only, were clearly not sufficient. These activities undoubtedly

play a mediating role in the researcher's response to and knowledge of the record. If a

researcher has done any additional research they will be aware that not all scrapbooks or

albums are always so carefully treated. Archivists should endeavour to put themselves in

the place of the researcher and imagine the impression given by being presented with

records that have been so obviously attended to. Would not these measures give the

researcher the impression that these records are of a heightened value? This is especially

true when other scrapbooks held by the same institution have received no such treatment.

In this instance the "Condition Report & Treatment Record" for the Collinson fonds

gives no explanation for why these records received this level of treatment, but making it

available to the researcher will undoubtedly mitigate some of the mediating role of the

treatment.

There are yet more factors relating to the physical control of the records that

could be conveyed to the researcher. Conventional practices for the processing of

photographic albums generally entailed taking them apart and placing the individual

photographs into subject categories. The result was often a body of completely

decontextualized images. At the Archives of Manitoba, this took place as recently as the

mid-1980s. In many instances the album shell and pages were kept and have been stored

indefinitely in the Archives vaults. This information, however, has not been conveyed to

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[49]*Ibid.*

the researcher. While it would not be feasible to return all the photographs to their album skeletons, archivists could easily include this information in finding aids made available to the researcher. The researcher would then have the option to temporarily reconstruct the narrative the author intended to be seen.

Postmodern approaches should not be considered solely in relation to material being acquired by archives, but also in relation to previously processed collections – through revisions to existing finding aids. In revising them for family albums, for example, the postmodern perspective allows archivists to convey better the relevance and significance of these once consistently disregarded records. Photographic-Historian Isobel Crombie declares that the family album is an often neglected and discounted form of archival record. She explains this neglect as part of a traditional attitude of dismissiveness on the part of historians (and archivists) towards material with a "domestic emphasis."[50] She notes that the majority of albums created in the mid-nineteenth century were created by women of wealth and leisure and that their albums overwhelmingly document their experiences within relatively limited environments. The albums are generally of a large format and hand decorated with complex designs, symbols, and elaborate collages. They also often include keepsakes, sketches, and commercial photographs, more common to scrapbooks today. However, the detail and structure of the albums defies the suggestion of casualness that the term scrapbook implies. The images generally depict family members or highlight the best aspects of the

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[50]Isobel Crombie, "The Work and Life Of Viscountess Frances Jocelyn: Private Lives." *History of Photography* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 40.

family home and lands. Through selection and detailed, conscious arrangement of the images, the photograph album allowed women of the mid-nineteenth century an opportunity to document how they saw or understood themselves, other members of their family, and even their place in society.[51] The family album provides a unique record of people and a way of life not documented elsewhere. Thus by increased acquisition of family albums, or perhaps more important, a re-examination of those currently in archival institutions, archivists would be adhering to Terry Cook's suggestion that they alter their appraisal practices to foster the acquisition of records not usually represented in archival institutions. In other words, archivists would be actively recognizing the "other," the marginalized voices generally not heard in archives.

Photograph albums embody the postmodern concept of multiple narratives. An examination of albums permits archivists to examine the construction of these narratives. Trachtenberg asserts that the album, which requires the placement and ordering of individual items or records, by its very nature "provides endless narrative making possibilities."[52] Thus, the archivist must strive to determine how the narrative has been constructed. In the case of Victorian family albums, created by wealthy aristocratic women to be shared with other women in their social circle, Crombie notes that since these albums were always intended for personal and private use, they are generally remarkably candid as well as inventive. She notes that the collages, were in particular "a

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[51]*Ibid.,* 41-48.

[52]Trachtenberg, 7.

pictorial device that allowed them imaginative scope in constructing and manipulating

family and personal narratives."[53] In the case of Collinson, it is clear that he was a very

deliberate and organized man, which leads one to conclude that his albums are carefully

devised statements about how he saw himself and wanted to be seen.

Archivists and others can theorize about the purpose of this construction of a life

narrative, but in regard to albums and personal photographs in general, more often than

not, that is all that is possible. Unfortunately, albums and photographs are rarely acquired

with additional textual material that would allow the archivist to create a truly rich body

of contextual information. Archivists should be aware that a conscious selection process

was employed in the construction of the album. Most genres of photography have an

agenda or a purpose, such as documentary or propaganda photographs. Personal

photographs have their own agenda in that they are most often made "specifically to

portray the individual or the group to which they belong, *as they would wish to be seen*

and as they have chosen to show themselves to one another."[54] The photographs

individuals collect "are treasured less for their quality than for their context, and for the

part they play in confirming and challenging the identity and history of their users."[55]

Albums are carefully staged records, depicting an author's chosen story or narrative. The

album contains those images that support that narrative, meaning that those images that

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[53]Crombie, 41.

[54]Patricia Holland, "'Sweet it is to scan ...': Personal Photographs and Popular Photography," in Liz Wells, ed., *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 121. Emphasis in original.

[55]*Ibid.,* 121.

would undermine the author's carefully staged story are excluded. The responsibility of the archivist is to keep in mind that albums are purposely constructed stories or narratives and to convey this information to the researcher.

Other methods of applying postmodern approaches entail more aggressive approaches to acquisition policies on the part of archivists. I suggest that archives endeavour to learn from the record creators and donors more about why the records were created and used. Perhaps they would submit to an extensive interview with an archivist in which such information might be obtained. This will not always be possible, as some creators are no longer available for comment. For example, the Collinson albums were donated to the Archives of Manitoba by the Estate of his late wife. Since more and more institutions and associations today use visual images to communicate, it is inevitable that more and undoubtedly more complex photograph collections will be acquired by archives. The record creators obviously have a much deeper grasp of the intended function and narrative of their records than does the archivist. Archivists should be working with them to discover better methods for eliciting information for describing their records rather than relying on the conventional standardized approaches for all types of records from all types of organizations.

Archives can also affect the creation and thus understanding of the record in more indirect or abstract ways. The possibility that one's records might end up in an archives has prompted record creators to alter their recordkeeping practices. An individual who knows his or her records will one day end up in archives may well manipulate or modify their records so that he or she is shown in the best possible light. Take, for example, the

case of Commander Haig, discussed in chapter one, who deliberately falsified and manipulated his correspondence and reports to put himself in the best possible light. Australian author Patrick White, on the other hand, who was very concerned about his privacy, simply destroyed all his personal records rather than risk having them find their way into an archives some day. He routinely "consigned to the flames" his personal papers and manuscripts and urged all of his friends to burn anything of his as well.[56] Even indirectly, therefore, the existence of an archive can influence and shape the understanding of a record. Thus, in so influencing human behaviour with records, it is clear the very existence of archives means that "the history of the record does not stop at the portals of archives. Archives are part of that history."[57] In fact, it has been argued that "given that archives impose a vast temporal extension of the meaning-making process, and that archivists intervene constantly to direct an often forgetful, neglectful society's attention to the records, archivists arguably have a greater impact on the evidence the record conveys than the initial or literal inscribers do."[58]

The archival mission is to preserve records of historical, social, and cultural value, but the ultimate goal of that preservation is that those records be used and continue to function as evidence of actions, an objective that many archivists feel to be threatened and undermined by postmodernism. They fear that in a postmodern context

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[56]Sue McKemmish, "Evidence of Me ..." *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May, 1996), 34-35.

[57]Brothman, "Orders of Value," 79.

[58]Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 35.

these records would prove to be valueless. However, it is hoped that this discussion thus far has demonstrated that rather than less control over the records, this expanded contextual information gives the archivists greater ability to convey more fully as many meanings of the archival record as possible to the archival researcher. Schwartz and Cook argue that archivists wield a considerable amount of power in the creation of meaning. Furthermore, acknowledging and embracing this reality can only benefit the archival profession as "Power recognized becomes power that can be questioned, made accountable, and opened to transparent dialogue and enriched understanding."[59] Those archivists uneasy about the destabilizing effects of postmodernism, with its multiple narratives and truths, could find reassurance in the thought that it is in acknowledging and confronting the existence of these multiplicities that the archivists can feel some measure of control.

Despite the firmly, even fondly held belief that archivists are neutral observers and facilitators in the transfer of information from record to reader, postmodern theory suggests that archivists have a much larger mediating role than they would care to admit. Postmodern archivists suggest that archivists should accept that they intervene between the message of the record and the researcher's understanding of that message. More than that, postmodern archival proponents advocate that archivists should become even more active in that intervention. They raise the question: since archivists have, in reality, always played a mediating role in the understanding of records, would it not be better to admit and embrace a more visible role in the shaping of the knowledge contained in

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[59]Schwartz and Cook, "Archives, Records and Power," 2.

records, and thus the creation of societal memory? This chapter does not answer that question fully. Rather, it attempts to point to possibilities for archival practice with photographs that postmodernism suggests. Stimulated by the postmodern approach, an examination of the boundless contextual possibilities of records, including the contexts shaped by the archivist, presents improved ability to convey the information contained within records to researchers – thus fulfilling the ultimate function of the archivist.

Conclusion

Photographic records have played an important role in social and cultural history and form an integral part of the collective memory of societies preserved by archival institutions. However, the history of archival practice and theory regarding photographic records belies this view. This thesis endeavours to explore some of the challenges facing archivists in their treatment of photographs.

Despite the popularity of photographs among the general public and their use by various individuals and organizations whose records permeate archives, archivists have been quite slow to recognize the value of photographs as archival records. Traditionally, rather than evaluating their potential evidential value, archivists judged them mainly for their subject content and ability to illustrate facts and evidence found in textual records. Yet, even when archivists began to acknowledge this potential, they were faced with the challenge of developing suitable means of obtaining the informational value from the photograph. The archival methodologies developed for paper and word based records did not mesh well with the requirements of graphic material.

Archivists realized that they did not have the visual literacy necessary to read photographic records. This realization did not undermine the value of photographs, but rather has led archivists to the further realization that more flexible approaches to dealing with photographic records are required. Some of these methods, such as the contextual approach, have been explored in this thesis. However, postmodernism might suggest the most flexible perspectives yet, as it welcomes a very wide range of contextual

information as the basis of understanding and working with photographs in archives.

This thesis has explored the significance and potential of photographic records and at the same time highlighted the challenges these records present to archivists. The ideas discussed in this thesis are intended as a contribution to the ongoing discourse on the value and treatment of photographic archival material. The challenges are only going to grow as "contemporary culture is increasingly captured by and reflected in visual documents."[1] This will mean both an increasing number of photographic records entering archival institutions and increased requests for access to photographic archives. As a profession, archivists must continue to search for improved methods and make progress in their efforts to read photographs.

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[1]Kaplan and [Mifflin,] 106

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