

**THE ARCHIVAL EYE:
NEW WAYS FOR ARCHIVISTS TO LOOK AT
AND DESCRIBE PHOTOGRAPHS**

by

Ian Keenan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that a postmodernist understanding of archival records and the mediating role of archivists demands new approaches to the viewing and description of photographic archival records. The thesis identifies the way in which many archivists have continued in their descriptions to focus on the subject content of photographs, ignoring the historically and situationally specific viewpoints of photograph creators, the purposes for which they created images, the multi-layered and multivalent messages these images convey and the multiple new viewings, interpretations and purposes photographs invite. The thesis first charts the implications of a postmodernist viewpoint on archival records generally. It then traces the gradual spread of a postmodernist regard for photographic records in the context of the Canadian archival community and highlights the increasing criticism of a subject-based approach to photographs voiced by certain members of this community. The thesis then draws on the theories and methodologies of a range of other disciplines to suggest specific fresh theoretical and methodological approaches to the archival viewing and description of photographs. In a case study, it then applies these suggestions to photograph albums attributed to Edith McCash that were created in Winnipeg between 1900 and 1951 and are now held by the Archives of Manitoba. These suggestions and case study reveal that photographs are richer archival sources when considered as evidence of ongoing communicative acts rather than as transparent and neutral windows onto past reality.

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**INTRODUCTION:
WINDOWS ON THE PAST?**

*Everything comes to us through the filter of another mind.*¹
(Andrew Birrell, 1980)

*The Kwakwaka'wakw curator and anthropologist Gloria Cranmer Webster tells a story about an encounter she had with the Canadian anthropologist Wilson Duff in the early 1970s. Duff came upon her one day while she was working in the store room of the old University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. "He picked up a raven rattle, brought it over to me and asked, 'Isn't it beautiful?' 'Yes,' I replied, and went back to my typewriter. He then asked, 'But how do you read it?' Impatiently I said, 'Shit, Wilson, I don't read those things, I shake them.'"*²
(Elizabeth Edwards, 2006)

*The sky and the earth are born of mine own eyes; the hardness and softness, the cold and the heat are products of mine own body; the sweet smell and the bad are of mine own nostrils.*³
(Rabindranath Tagore, circa 1913)

Photographs are ubiquitous. They bring us important and not-so-important news. They allow us to see the infinitesimally small and the unimaginably large. We hang them as works of art. They show us places we can never go and people we can never meet. They entice us to buy things and services. They titillate us. They horrify us. They help us shape our identities in online social networks and through the pictures we display in our homes and workplaces. We take and gather photographs of family and friends to remember them in the ways we want to remember them in the future. We treasure old photographs of people, places and events as icons of our history. We treasure more recent photographs of our children and grandchildren to combat the swift wings of time. As

¹ Andrew Birrell, "The Tyranny of Tradition," *Archivaria* 10 (Summer 1980) 249-252, 251.

² Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth B. Phillips, eds., *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums, and Material Culture* (New York: Berg, 2006) 1.

³ Rabindranath Tagore, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Volume Three: A Miscellany* (Delhi: Sāhitya Akademi, 1996) 132. Bengali poet, philosopher, playwright and composer Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was Asia's first Nobel Laureate. See also Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009 [1995]).

curator John Swarkowski said in 1976, “[t]he world now contains more photographs than bricks, and they are, astonishingly, all different.” The advent of digital photography has increased that number exponentially. Among these many photographs and many uses, archives hold millions of photographs as archival evidence. But what kind of evidence? And according to whose estimation?⁴

Andrew Birrell made the statement above during a debate with Terry Cook over whether it was appropriate for certain units within the then Public Archives of Canada to focus on what were termed “special media.” Birrell asserts, “all archival media are concerned primarily with the product of the mind behind the instrument, not with the mute instrument that was used.” Yet archival debates about the nature and utility of photographs and other non-textual media have continued to the present. In large part, archives have viewed and described photographs in terms of their informational content since, as Roland Barthes states, photographs undeniably offer evidence “that *the thing has been there* [Emphasis in original].”⁵

Elizabeth Edwards recounts an exchange between a woman who would become a major figure in the renewal of Northwest Coast ceremonial and cultural traditions and a man who, as a noted academic, promoted the region’s material culture as fine art. This exchange illustrates how the legacies of colonial mindsets have privileged particular ways of seeing the world and the role of memory institutions such as museums and archives in perpetuating these ways. Archives have tended to look at and describe photographs in ways that emphasize their present utility to archives and archival

⁴ John Swarkowski, “Introduction” in *William Eggleston’s Guide* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976) 3. At the time of publication, Swarkowski was Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art and this was the first monograph on a colour photographer published by any American art museum.

⁵ Birrell, “The Tyranny of Tradition,” 251. The articles that comprise this debate will be noted in more detail at the end of chapter one; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 76.

researchers rather than looking at them for evidence of creator intent.

In the main, archives treat photographs as though they simply *index* reality, pointing mechanically, objectively and truthfully to a spatial and temporal fragment of the past. The assumption is then made that because photographs index reality archivists need only describe information content. Content description is assumed to convey a meaning that is the same in all situations and for all times. In carrying out such descriptions archivists have used schema based on modernist, empiricist assumptions, have used bibliographic models that isolate photographs from each other and have not addressed the intellectual and physical contexts from which archival photographs arise and in which they reside.⁶

The concept of provenance, one of the cornerstones of archival theory, argues that it is important to understand the context in which records have been created. Over the past twenty-some years however, a growing community of postmodernist archivists has argued for a wider, societal definition of context and asserted that context also includes all subsequent uses and understandings of records. Context surrounds records from their creation to the present. Some archivists, particularly Joan Schwartz, have argued for a contextual approach to photographs in specific. She asserts that photographs offer more than evidence of what once existed. They also offer evidence of their creators' thoughts

⁶ Four common words that have specific meanings in the fields of semiotics and visual culture are used in discussions of photographic meaning. A *sign* is something that stands for something or someone else in some capacity. An *index* is a sign that points to the existence of something or someone in the physical world but does not necessarily resemble that something or someone. An *icon* is a sign that resembles its referent in some way. A *symbol* is a sign that stands for its referent in an arbitrary convention-based way. Written and spoken words are *symbols*, as are hand gestures such as the peace sign. The colour white is a *symbol* when used to stand for purity or innocence. There exists much academic debate over whether photographs are *indexes*, *icons* or both. Some photographs, such as Joe Rosenthal's *Raising the Flag on Mount Suribachi* [Iwo Jima] are also regarded as *symbols*. See Marcel Danesi, *Understanding Media Semiotics* (London: Hodder Headline Group, 2002) 40-41, 223, 228. See also Martin Lefebvre, "The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images" in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007) 220-244.

and intents, the messages those creators hoped to convey, why they chose the medium and rhetoric of photographs and to what audiences these messages were directed.⁷

Postmodernist archivists increasingly see themselves as part of the ongoing context of records and that how they appraise, select, arrange, describe, preserve, publicize and provide access to photographs is contingent on their own historical, social, intellectual and professional circumstances. The aphorism from Rabindranath Tagore concisely summarizes a postmodernist view of the world. Postmodernist archivists increasingly see written archival descriptions as a translation of image into text, a translation between media with different rhetorics that applies the inherent filtering and shifts in meaning that any act of translation entails.⁸

Yet the archival community has been slow to examine the nature and implications of the act of looking. As cultural geographer Gillian Rose notes, “ways of seeing are historically, geographically, culturally and socially specific.” Archivists look at photographs, as they do at other archival records, to make them available for myriad forms of research. As archivist Lilly Koltun asserts, the “analysis of a lived past culture is hampered by the ‘selective tradition’ operative within a changing present culture [that] chooses its own past according to its *contemporary* system of interest and values [Emphasis in original].” Postmodernist archivists increasingly understand that, in historical, theoretical and methodological as well as in literal terms, where you stand

⁷ See Tom Nesmith, “The concept of societal provenance and records of nineteenth-century Aboriginal-European relations in Western Canada: implications for archival theory and practice,” *Archival Science* 6, no. 3-4 (December 2006) 351-360.

⁸ For the translation of photographs into textual descriptions with the problems that translation entails, see Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin, “Mind and Sight: Visual Literacy and the Archivist,” *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference* 21, no. 2 (1996) 107-127, particularly 111, 119-121. While the term “context” appears to reference “text” it is derived from the Latin *contexĕre*, to weave together. OED Online. Accessed 10 December 2010.

determines what you see.⁹

The phrases “look at” and “ways of looking” that recur in this introduction and throughout this thesis are meant in both the literal and metaphorical senses. Their use may seem awkward but they are deliberately chosen to reinforce two aspects of looking. Firstly, as already stated, the one who looks always looks from a position that is determined by their cultural, intellectual and social context. An archivist looks at a photograph in a particular institutional setting, at a particular time in history, drawing on their particular life experience, for a particular archival purpose. Secondly, the act of looking determines what is seen to at least as great a degree as the creator’s original intent and the supposedly fixed content of the photograph. “Looking at” a photograph is not passive and receptive but an active process of creating and constructing meaning.

This thesis refers to “looking at” photographs rather than “reading” them for another reason. A postmodernist viewpoint also suggests that language shapes thought. Some archivists suggest that the use of textual terms preconditions what photographic records are thought to be. Though the term “photography” literally means “writing with light” this thesis takes the stance that textual terms distort how photographs are understood and will avoid such use as much as is possible. Where textual terms cannot be avoided, the implications of their use will be briefly discussed.¹⁰

This thesis explores ways in which archivists can look at photographs from fresh theoretical and methodological perspectives to create descriptive finding aids that are less

⁹ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: Sage Publications, 2001) 16; Lilly Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options in an Archival Age,” *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999) 114-135, 132, 129. For a more general discussion of intellectual point of view, see Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Bronwen Quarry, “Photograph /Writing with Light: The Challenge to Archivists of Reading Photographs.” (MA Thesis, Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg, 2003) 10.

mediated by the specific circumstance of archival ways of looking and that better offer a view of the evidence that photographs offer. The specificity of each encounter between a photograph and an archivist results in descriptions that “get in the way” between photograph and researcher as archivists seek “to create descriptions, which are actually value interpretations.” Archivists interpose themselves between researcher and record whether that researcher sits in a research room or views an archive’s digitized finding aids and holdings on a home computer. This thesis recommends a visual rather than a textual approach to description. It suggests that archivally created digital photographs that capture the immediate physical context and materiality of archival photographs can supplement series or fonds level textual descriptions and can in many cases replace item level descriptions of individual photographs. This thesis suggests that archivists should move away from their primarily textual orientation and become more skilled at using archivally created photographs and graphic organization techniques to communicate to researchers.¹¹

To provide a context for the discussion of photographs that follows in the later chapters, the first chapter of the thesis offers examples of the postmodernist debate in archives, notes the effect of postmodernist approaches on archival core functions and locates the postmodernist debate within the context of the profession’s other debates, concerns and challenges.

Chapter two focuses specifically on photographs. It begins by tracing the attitude of certain foundation texts of the profession to photographs as archival records. It then focuses on the Canadian archival community, arguing that a postmodernist approach to photographs is most actively being debated and applied within this community. This

¹¹ Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options,” 131.

focus on the Canadian community traces both the gradual spread of a postmodernist view and the continued existence of modernist views. The chapter then provides a summary of how those outside the profession have critiqued archives as a “collective communications medium” and have seen archivists look at photographs over the past thirty years. It then draws theoretical and methodological approaches from other disciplines to suggest how archivists might more effectively look at and describe archival photographs as more than unproblematic windows onto the past.¹²

The third and final chapter then conducts a case study, applying these suggestions to photograph albums attributed to Edith McCash now held by the Archives of Manitoba in order to illustrate the benefits of these fresh approaches to looking and description. The McCash albums are chosen for several reasons. Their image content offers a rich evidential source on the social history and built environment of Winnipeg over a fifty-year span. The photographs document specific events, such as the 1939 Royal Visit and the 1950 flood. But when the albums are looked at for more than their content they offer a view of how one Anglo-Canadian woman used the ownership of a camera and the taking and gathering of photographs to define and place herself within the social, psychological and physical spaces around her. The McCash albums also offer an example of the effects of previous archival ways of looking and description. Their processing has been arrested at its mid-point. Parallels can be drawn between the physical dismemberment of one McCash album and the intellectual dismemberment that results from subject content-based description. Because one photograph within one McCash

¹² Terry Cook, “Remembering the Future: Appraisal of Records and the Role of Archives in Constructing Social Memory” in Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) 169-181, 172.

album has a profound personal meaning for this writer, the albums also provide an example of the significant difference that can exist between creator intent and viewer perception.¹³

A final comment is necessary. This thesis is itself a text that relates in specific discursive ways to the images it discusses. I choose not to illustrate it with reproductions of individual photographs. As discussion of archival looking and description unfolds and as I argue that the way in which archives present individual photographs removes them from their contexts of creation, collection and viewing, my reasons will become clear. I also believe that a work that would be repeatedly compelled to digress to comment on how the images within it have entered into yet another new use, context and relationship to text would be drawn into deeper and murkier semiotic waters. Nor would it concisely defend its thesis. For the moment, let it be sufficient to reframe these issues with a visual metaphor and note that “the eye cannot see itself.”¹⁴

¹³ See Deborah Chambers’ discussion of how family albums “represent ideas about spatial identity and belonging” in Chambers, “Family as Place: Family Photograph Albums and the Domestication of Public and Private Space,” in Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003) 96.

¹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*. Trans. Martin Turnell (New York: New Directions Pub., 1967) 25. The recurring motif of eyes in this thesis is a small *homage* to Joan M. Schwartz, “‘Having New Eyes’: Spaces of Archives, Landscapes of Power,” *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006) 1-25. A major portion of the photograph collection to be discussed exists in unprocessed backlog at the Archives of Manitoba. This status makes the granting of permission for use of individual photographs more problematic than would usually be the case.

CHAPTER ONE: A POSTMODERNIST VIEWPOINT IN ARCHIVES

This thesis argues, from an explicitly postmodernist perspective, the benefits of fresh theoretical and methodological approaches to the viewing and description of photographs by archivists. To provide a context for the discussion in chapters two and three, it is therefore necessary to first define what the term “postmodernism” connotes to archivists, to provide brief examples of aspects of the archival postmodernist debate, to note the impact of postmodernist thinking on archival core functions and on all types of records before focusing on photographs, and to place the postmodernist debate within the context of the profession’s other debates, concerns, and challenges.

Since modernist formulations continue to be implicit in the daily practices of many archivists and archival institutions, it is also necessary to define “modernism” in an archival context. The connotations of the terms “modernism” and “postmodernism” vary with the discipline employing them.¹ In the disciplines of history and archives in the late twentieth century “modernism” and its not-quite synonym “positivism” identified an assumption that neutral, objective, scientific practices would lead to an ultimate and universal truth. Archivist Bernadine Dodge notes “[m]odernism acknowledged the importance of the past as a means to shape a new and ever-improving future. History was characterized as a lineal progression of events working its way from one advancement to

¹ Accessible histories of the evolution of postmodern thought can be found in Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), and in Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2002). The evolution of postmodern thought in the historical discipline is traced in Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997). The debates among historians regarding postmodernism’s implications can be sampled from articles in *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, online at <http://www.tandf.co.uk.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/journals/routledge/13642529.html>.

another, one scientific discovery to another.” Doyen of the archival profession Hilary (later Sir Hilary) Jenkinson's statement, that “[t]he Archivist's ... aim [is] to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know the Means of Knowledge,” epitomizes a modernist viewpoint in its assumption that while transparency and objectivity may not presently exist they are achievable goals. Archivist Theresa Rowat summarizes the modernist “image of archivists as objective professionals who conduct their work consistently, transparently, and without authorship” using “systems and methodologies that present themselves as value-neutral and common to all practitioners.” In a modernist framework that Terry Cook suggests was current in Canada until the 1980s, archivists were thought of (and thought of themselves) as “handmaidens to historians,” to use the gendered language of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century.²

Archivists addressing the concept of postmodernism often begin by noting that it is difficult to define in its general sense.³ In common usage, it is frequently linked to a sense of dislocation and fragmentation. Literary critic Chris Baldick terms it

² Bernadine Dodge, “Across the Great Divide: Archival Discourse and the (Re)presentation of the Past in Late-Modern Society,” *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002) 16-30, 19. Dodge retired in 2009 from her position as archivist of Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario; “Memoir of Sir Hilary Jenkinson,” in J. Conway Davies, *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson, CBE, LL.D, FSA* (London, 1957) cited in Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997) 17-63, 23; Theresa Rowat, “The Record and Repository as a Cultural Form of Expression,” *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993) 198-204, 198. Rowat was appointed director and archivist of McGill University Archives in 2006; Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (September 2009) 497-534, 506.

³ For the difficulties of defining postmodernism, see Quarry, “Photograph / Writing with Light,” referenced in the Introduction, 85-90; Carolyn Heald, “Is There Room for Archives in the Postmodern World,” *American Archivist* 59 (Winter 1999) 88-101, 89; and Terry Cook, “Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-custodial and Post-modern era,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 22, no. 2 (November 1994) 300-328, 316. Cogent definitions are found on pages 5-10 of Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” *Archival Science*, 1 (2001) 3-24 and in Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001) 14-35.

a cultural condition prevailing in the advanced capitalist societies since the 1960s, characterized by a superabundance of disconnected images and styles a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, and authenticity are evacuated or dissolved.⁴

In contrast to this emotionally-freighted definition, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard declares that “[s]implifying to the extreme ... I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives,” where metanarratives are “those sweeping interpretations that totalize human experience in some monolithic way,” that underlie and shape human knowledge in a particular time, place, and culture. Postmodernist archivists have adopted this definition, and identify the metanarratives of archival theory and practice – metanarratives of neutrality, objectivity, trust in the fixity of language, of professional practices that are dispassionate, transparent, consistent across time and in all locations, and that arrive at a unitary truth – as constructs created at particular times, places and within particular cultures to accomplish specific goals. As archivist Mark Greene suggests: “contrary to popular conceptions, postmodernism does not seek or result in the annihilation of facts, though it does suggest their meaning is more localized and contingent than universal and objective.” A postmodernist perspective strongly suggests that because archival metanarratives originate from specific contexts they must continually be re-examined for their validity, rethought and possibly superseded as circumstances change.⁵

⁴ Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 174-175, quoted in Heald, “Is There Room for Archives,” 89. In 2011, Baldick continues work in literary criticism and theory at the University of London.

⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.) xxiv, quoted in Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense,” 22; Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense,” 17; Mark A. Greene, “The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age,” *American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002) 42-55, 53. Since 2002, Greene has been director of the American Heritage Center at the University of

While disciplines such as art history, philosophy, and linguistics began to debate postmodernism in the 1950s and 1960s, “[p]ostmodern thought [was] slower to gain a foothold in the archival profession.” The debate in archives is generally considered to have begun, at least in Canada, in the early 1990s, though Hugh Taylor’s writings during the 1970s and 1980s clearly show a postmodernist perception. Archival journal articles, conference papers, and theses with a postmodernist perspective have increasingly appeared during the 1990s and 2000s. As in other fields, these articles, papers and theses are the means through which archivists introduce new concepts and methodologies, debate their validity and critique each other’s work. This increase indicates the growing influence of a postmodernist viewpoint within the profession. It however also indicates that significant resistance to postmodernist concepts exists. It is an oversimplification to reduce the debate to a binary opposition, as “postmodernism” *versus* “modernism.” It is more fruitful to see it – at least from the postmodernist “side” – as the gradual spread of a new paradigm, and as an attempt by all archivists, individually and collectively, to work out its implications.⁶

Wyoming. In 2007-2008 he served as President of the Society of American Archivists.

⁶ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 42; Scott Goodine “Archives, Postmodernism, and the Internet: The Return of Historical Narrative in Archival Public Programming.” (MA Thesis: Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Manitoba/University of Winnipeg, 2005) 3. In his first chapter, Goodine provides a summary of the history of Canadian archives periodized in four stages. His fourth stage, beginning in 1995, is marked by archivists’ rising interest in postmodern thought concurrent with the beginnings of the Internet. Goodine became Archivist of Manitoba in 2009; Bernadine Dodge, in “Re-imag(in)ing the Past” *Rethinking History* 10, no. 3 (September 2006) 345-367, 347, refers affectionately to Taylor as “a postmodern archivist before the rest of us.” See Hugh Taylor, “The Media of Record: Archives in the Wake of McLuhan,” *Georgia Archive* 6, no.1 (Spring 1978). Numerous articles by Taylor have been collected, with retrospective comments by him, in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Lanham, Md.: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with Scarecrow Press, 2003). A condensed bibliographic review of Taylor’s writings, by James K. Burrows and Mary Ann Pylypchuk, appears in pages 244-253 of Barbara L. Craig, ed. *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992); Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country” 530, n.49. While debate via peer-reviewed journals is characteristic of virtually all intellectual disciplines, some archivists have noted that the archival profession tends to look for concepts outside its own boundaries less than do other disciplines. American archival educator Richard Cox, in surveying electronic records

In particular, journal articles with a postmodernist perspective might be said to have roughly three purposes, with most serving more than one: to seek to import postmodernist concepts from other fields such as philosophy and cultural studies; to examine the changing place of archives, archivists, and archival records in a society increasingly considered to be postmodern; and to advocate the reformulation of archival theories and practices in light of postmodernist concepts. A fourth purpose arguably began to emerge in 2007 as some archivists and historians engaged in writing the histories of specific institutions to uncover what Eric Ketelaar terms “the social history of archives” and the origin points of archival metanarratives.⁷

management literature, observes that the “range of these citations reflects that archivists are still looking primarily at themselves for solutions.” See Richard J. Cox, “Searching for Authority: Archivists and Electronic Records in the New World at the Fin-de-Siècle,” online at *First Monday: Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet* 5, no.1. Available at http://131.193.153.231/www/issues/issue5_1/cox/index.html. Accessed 8 March 2010. Both Joanna Sassoon and Joan Schwartz have made similar comments regarding, respectively, archival visual format specialists and the archival treatment of photographs. Sassoon and Schwartz will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2. Articles by archivists who identify themselves as postmodernist appear to draw on sources outside the profession more often than is the general tendency. A concise summary of archivists discussing postmodernist themes between 1991 and 1999 is found in footnote 13 of Cook “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” referenced earlier. The concept of Paradigm in an archival context is drawn from Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” also referenced earlier.⁷ Eric Ketelaar, “Muniments and Monuments: The Dawn of Archives as Cultural Patrimony,” *Archival Science* 7, no. 4 (December 2007) 343-357, 343. This number was devoted to examining “the roles which archives played in the formation of states,” as Ann Blair and Jennifer Milligan note on page 290 of the introduction. In the same issue, on page 391, cultural historian Peter Burke comments that librarians and archivists “may well be thinking that we have just rediscovered the wheel, even as we [historians] believe that we are placing their questions in a wider context which might be described as ‘archive culture.’” Both Richard Brown and Terry Cook might well agree that this is a rediscovery of the wheel. In 1997, Brown examined the historical context of official records destruction during the Renaissance in “Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper: The Murder of Tomasso da Tortona in Ferrara, 1385,” *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997) 1-43. A number of Cook’s articles relate current archival practices to the context of their historical development. See Cook, “What is Past is Prologue” referenced earlier; Cook, “The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country,” referenced earlier; and Cook, “An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession” *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005) 185-233. For its defense of “historian-archivists,” see Cook, “From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives,” *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-1985) 28-49. Numerous contributors to Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) also write the histories of specific archives.

It is of course not possible to recount all the articles, in all their ramifications, that comprise the ongoing postmodernist debate. However, it is possible to select as exemplars of each of the three above noted purposes certain postmodern archivists who have made significant contributions to the debate.⁸

Brien Brothman exemplifies those archivists who have introduced postmodernist concepts into the archival debate, in his case Michel Foucault's ideas on discourse and Jacques Derrida's theories on the nature of language. Foucault traces how each intellectual discipline develops a specialized language – a discourse – that determines what can and cannot be said and how statements are framed. For Foucault “[t]he archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events.” Intellectual disciplines, including the archival profession, in part determine their boundaries through their discourses and exert power through the control of language, and through language, of ideas. Historians Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg argue that “[b]y assigning the prerogatives of record keeper to the archivist, whose acquisition policies, finding aids, and various institutionalized predilections mediate between scholarship and information, archives produce knowledge, legitimize political systems, and construct identities.”⁹

⁸ Some postmodernist archivists not referred to or referenced in this chapter, but whose contributions to should be considered equally important include Adrian Cunningham, Hans Hofman, Chris Hurley, Elizabeth Kaplan, Steven Lubar, Ann Pederson, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed, and Frank Upward. Some of James O'Toole writings also contribute to the postmodernist debate.

⁹ See Brien Brothman, “Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice,” *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991) 78-100; Brothman, “The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution,” *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993) 205-220; Brothman, Review of *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) in *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997) 189-192; Brothman, “Declining Derrida: Integrity, Tensegrity, and the Preservation of Archives from Deconstruction,” *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999) 64-88; Brothman, “The Past that Archives Keep: Memory, History, and the Preservation of Archival Records,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001) 48-80; and Brothman, “Afterglow: Conceptions of Record and Evidence in Archival Discourse,” *Archival Science* 2, no.3-4 (September 2002) 311-342. In 2011, Brothman, a Canadian who worked at the then National Archives of Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, continues on the staff of the Rhode Island State Archives; Michel Foucault,

The 1995 appearance of the English language edition of Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* is considered significant to the archival postmodernist debate. In attempting to clarify Derrida's often-opaque writing, Brothman states that written language "never quite yields the literal meanings its users intended to express," that it "never arrives at a final destination."¹⁰

Brothman introduces two profoundly influential ideas. Firstly, the archival profession not only operates using its own metanarratives, it is itself a metanarrative that other disciplines rely upon to structure and constitute their fields of knowledge. Secondly, a written text cannot be said to have a fixed or unitary meaning, but is continually reshaped in its encounters with later readers. It should be noted that while the concept that any text, including a written archival record, has multiple meanings is usually considered to be postmodern, it is hardly a new idea. Centuries before Derrida, the fifteenth-century monk and mystic Thomas à Kempis declared, "[t]he voice of books informs not all alike."¹¹

The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. 1966 (London: Routledge, 2002); Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse of Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972). The role of discourse is not limited to the social sciences. Preben Mortensen states, on page 18 of "The Place of Theory in Archival Practice" *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1997) 1-26, that "[h]ard science is more like history or anthropology or literary criticism or philosophy than we once thought, because all these areas can be understood as forms of interpretation and construction of representations"; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 129; Blouin and Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, vii. When this collection of articles was published, Blouin and Rosenberg were professors of history at the University of Michigan.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 1995. trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Terry Cook, "The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country," 512; Brothman, "Declining Derrida," 66; Brothman, "The Limits of Limits," 210.

¹¹ See Nicholas B. Dirks, "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History," in *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, Brian Keith Axel, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 47-65, 48 for the idea that "the archive is constituted as the only space that is free of context, argument, ideology – indeed history itself...The archive is simultaneously the outcome of historical process and the very condition for the production of historical knowledge." For further discussion of how a text is created in each reader's encounter with it after its initial inscription, see Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974) and Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975). Both Brothman and Barthes would likely disagree with Walter Benjamin's assertion on page 69 of "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*,

Verne Harris exemplifies those archivists who declare that archives can no longer be “places apart” and “the tightly controlled tool[s] of a dominant minority.” His impassioned writing draws on his experiences as a South African archivist during the Apartheid era and as key spokesperson for the National Archives of South Africa in hearings before that country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Harris argues that a record should be seen as more than the evidence and natural residue of an action, since “the requirements for evidence are specific to time and place.” He draws on postcolonial studies for the concepts of hub (in his usage, the developed nations) and periphery (developing regions). He argues that conceiving of record keeping solely as the retention of evidence for accountability purposes serves the needs of the power structures of the hub in preference to any other needs. He extends the idea of periphery, and states, “the hub has peripheries – decaying inner cities, marginalized minorities, underclasses, [that are] all under-represented in or excluded from archives.” He considers a focus on the evidential aspect of records by the records management stream within the archival profession as limiting archivists to a role as legitimizing functionaries of the state. He calls for “[w]ays of knowing the record not as a cocoon of meaning but as a cornucopia of meanings” in order that archives advance social justice and address the needs of the excluded and marginalized. Harris’s call for recognition that records have multiple meanings dependent on one’s viewpoint converges with Brothman’s declaration that multiple meanings arise from the inherent nature of language.¹²

Hannah Arendt, ed. Harry Zorn, trans. 1968 (New York: Schocken Books, 2007) 69-82 that “[i]n the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful.”; Thomas à Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ*, Book III, chapter xliii (London: World’s Classics edition, 1961) 188.

¹² Bernadine Dodge, “Places Apart: Archives in Dissolving Space and Time” *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997) 118-131; Tom Nesmith, Review of *Exploring Archives: An Introduction to Archival Ideas and Practice in South Africa*. (Pretoria: National Archives of South Africa, second edition, 2000) in *Archival Science* 1, no. 2 (June 2001) 227-230, 227; Verne Harris, “Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic

Tom Nesmith exemplifies those archivists who focus the lens of postmodernism on specific archival concepts. Since the early 1990s, as archival educator and theorist, Nesmith has defined a postmodern and increasingly nuanced concept of provenance. Writing in 1993, he argues that the content of a record cannot be fully understood without locating that record within the administrative or personal context in which it is created. He lauds the Australian series system for its recognition that an organizational record may have multiple creators related hierarchically, chronologically, or through both dimensions even as his thinking has moved beyond the “formalities” of that system. In 2006, Nesmith argues for recognition of what he terms societal provenance, recognition that “[p]eople make and archive records in social settings for social purposes.” The creator of any archival record is influenced by socio-economic conditions, social value sets, limitations on access to information or to inscription and archiving technologies, and other factors that in Nesmith’s view contribute to a record’s provenance.¹³

Perspective from the Global Periphery” *Comma: International Journal on Archives* 2001 (1-2) 29-43, 40, 32, 41. For examples of Harris’s writing see “Claiming Less and Delivering More: A Critique of Positivist Formulations on Archives in South Africa,” *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997) 132-141; Harris, *Exploring Archives: An Introduction to Archival Ideas and Practices in South Africa* (Pretoria: National Archives of South Africa, 1997, expanded second edition, 2000, third edition 2004); Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, et al., *Refiguring the Archive* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer, 2002); and a collection of Harris’s work from the first decade of South African post-Apartheid democracy: Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007). For a different perspective on the TRC, see Cheryl McEwan, “Building a Postcolonial Archive? Gender, Collective Memory and Citizenship in Post-apartheid South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29, no.3 (September 2003) 739-757.

¹³ Nesmith is founder and director, since its inception in 1991, of the Joint Master’s Program in Archival Studies within the Departments of History, University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg. Articles in which he addresses postmodernism include “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *American Archivist* 65, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002) 24-41 and Nesmith, “Reopening Archives: Bringing New Contextualities into Archival Theory and Practice,” *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005) 259-274. He has also written on archival education, public programming by archives, and the place of historical knowledge in archival work. See Tom Nesmith, “Hugh Taylor’s Contextual Idea for Archives and the Foundation of Graduate Education in Archival Studies,” on pages 13-37 of Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, referenced earlier; Nesmith, “What is an Archival Education?” *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28, no.1 (April 2007) 1-17; Nesmith, “Re-exploring the Continuum, Rediscovering Archives,” *Archives and Manuscripts, The Journal of the Australian Society of Archivists* 36, no. 2 (November 2008) 34-53; Nesmith, “Archivists and Public Affairs: Toward a New Archival Public Programming” in Cheryl Avery and Mona Holmlund, eds., *Better*

Nesmith goes further, and argues in 2007 that provenance should not be limited to the point at which a record is first inscribed, rather that “record creation occurs across the entire history of the record – from its initial inscription across perhaps centuries of archival actions and use.” While this may sound similar to the concept of provenance as used by art galleries and museums – the journey of a physical artefact from its creation to the present – his concept goes beyond the concrete. He declares, “records become active agents in creating what we perceive and are not passive carriers of objective facts.” He looks beyond the physicality of a record to view it not as a thing but as an active participant, an ever-changing idea, in a continually evolving and endless sequence of new contexts that includes the archive itself. For him, this “represents a radical reconception of what a record is, what its provenance is, and what archivists do.” Nesmith’s recognition that records and their meanings continually evolve expands upon Harris’s perception of the multiple simultaneous meanings of records and Brothman’s declaration that multiple meanings arise from the nature of language. Of equal significance, Nesmith’s postmodernist conception of provenance means that, through the application of each and every archival function, archivists are co-creators of records.¹⁴

Terry Cook, another archival educator and theorist, exemplifies those who have rethought archival core functions in light of postmodernist concepts, in his case the core function of appraisal. Cook terms appraisal “the gateway function to all subsequent archival activity,” a “process [that] defines the creators, functions, and activities to be

Off Forgetting?: Essays on Archives, Public Policy and Collective Memory (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); and Nesmith, “What’s History Got to Do With It?: Reconsidering the Place of Historical Knowledge in Archival Work,” *Archivaria* 57 (Spring 2004) 1-27. See Nesmith’s introduction in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1993) 1-28. See also Nesmith, “Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the ‘Ghosts’ of Archival Theory,” *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999) 136-150; Nesmith, “What is an Archival Education?,” 6; and Nesmith, “The concept of societal provenance,” referenced in the Introduction.

¹⁴ Nesmith, “What is an Archival Education?,” 4, 3, 4.

included in archives by selecting which documents become archives and thus enjoy all subsequent archival processes.” Appraisal confers “a privileged state” upon each selected record. Cook was closely involved in the development of the concept and practice of “macro-appraisal” developed at the then National Archives of Canada in the early 1990s to deal with the massive influx of governmental records, an influx that continues to the present. He grounds macro-appraisal in postmodernist concepts of provenance. He terms macro-appraisal “a provenance-based approach” that treats records’ “conceptual rather than their physical provenance” and “shifts the initial and major focus of appraisal from the record to the functional context in which the record is created.” By selecting which organizational functions are candidates for archiving and which records provide a view of those functions, archivists are again co-creators of the archival record.¹⁵

Since the early 1990s, Cook has written extensively on the general impact on the profession of postmodernist concepts.¹⁶ In 2006, he sums up the way in which “postmodern archivists have repeatedly challenged five central principles of the traditional archival profession.

¹⁵ Cook was a senior manager at the then National Archives of Canada until 1998. From 1998 until 2010 he was Visiting Professor in the Archival Studies program at the Universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg. He has recently become Adjunct Professor to the same program. He has written prolifically on many, if not most, archival topics; Cook, “The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country,” 504; Terry Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 169; Cook, “The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country,” 504; Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 176, 175. A more complete explanation of the concept and implications of macro-appraisal than can be engaged in here can be found in this article. In endnote 22, Cook also provides a summary of his writings on the subject, as well as references to key works by other authors.

¹⁶ Numerous articles by Cook that examine the impact of postmodernist ideas have been referenced earlier in this chapter and include “Electronic Records, Paper Minds,” Cook, “What is Past is Prologue” and Cook, “Archival Science and postmodernism.” See also Cook, “Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage,” Paper delivered to Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Melbourne, 18 August 2000. In 2001 he contributed “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional rebirth,” referenced earlier, to an issue of *Archivaria* devoted to “The Postmodern Archive.” In 2002, he was co-editor, with Joan Schwartz, of two consecutive issues of *Archival Science* examining “Archives, Records, and Power.” See Joan Schwartz & Terry Cook “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (March 2002) 1-19 and Terry Cook & Joan Schwartz “Archives, Records and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 3-4 (September 2002) 171-185. Articles by Cook noted in footnote 15 above also integrate a postmodernist approach with an examination of the profession’s historical development and its relation to the discipline of history.

1. Archivists are neutral, impartial custodians of ‘Truth,’ managing records according to universal, value-free theories.
2. Archives as documents and as institutions are disinterested by-products of actions and administrations.
3. The origin and provenance of records must be found in or assigned to a single office [or creator] rather than situated in the complex processes and multiple discourses of creation.
4. The order and language imposed on records through archival arrangement and description are value-free re-creations of some prior reality.
5. Archives are (or should be) the passively inherited, natural or organic metanarratives of the state.”

These five “traditional” principles provide a framework for summing up the impact of postmodernist thinking on archival records and core functions.¹⁷

Addressing the first principle, those who adopt postmodernist concepts argue that archivists are not neutral, as their own social, intellectual, and organizational contexts unavoidably influence how they appraise, select, arrange, describe, preserve, publicize, and provide access to records. Nor is there a universal truth of which archivists can be the custodians, since where any observer stands in social, economic and intellectual terms shapes what they consider to be true. Most current archival practice makes not only modernist and positivist assumptions about the reasons for archival actions but acts on these assumptions using language evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to support processes of state formation.¹⁸

The archival profession is hardly unique in forgetting the origins of its practices and language. Communication specialists Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Star discuss how activities and physical objects become “naturalized.” Naturalization gradually effaces any

¹⁷ Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 174.

¹⁸ For an example of modernist language, see Nancy Ruth Bartlett, “Past Imperfect (l’imparfait): Mediating Meaning in Archives of Art” in Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) 121-133, where she points out the origin of the term “provenance” in the French government’s 1841 centralization of control over records created by the outlying provinces.

awareness of the historical and situational specificity of an activity or object's creation. The more naturalized it becomes "the more unquestioning the relationship of the community to it; the more invisible the contingent and historical circumstances of its birth, the more it sinks into the community's routinely forgotten memory." Naturalization is an unavoidable process, but postmodernist concepts offer archivists a way to counter its effects. Postmodernist practices encourage them to continually question and reformulate existing practices and metanarratives. Archivists are invited to practice metacognition, to think about their own thinking.¹⁹

Postmodernist concepts challenge the second principle enunciated by Cook by demonstrating that archives as documents cannot be disinterested by-products, as the creator of a document is always at some level aware of the reasons for its creation and of its potential audience. Joan Schwartz's assertion that "photographs are documents, created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message to an audience" is applicable to all archival records regardless of medium. Even if a document could be considered a disinterested by-product, it enters into an archive by a process archivist Eric Ketelaar terms "archivalization" where "the conscious or unconscious choice to consider something worth archiving" is made. Once a record is chosen, and because archives do not routinely inform their users how a record relates to what has not been selected

¹⁹ Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999) 299-300, 299; See Linda Baker "Metacognition in Comprehension Instruction," chapter 6 in Cathy Collins Block and Michael Pressley, eds. *Comprehension Instruction: Research-based Best Practices* (New York: Guilford Press, 2002) 77-95. On page 77, Baker defines metacognition as "a term that is now widely used to refer to the knowledge and control we have of our own cognitive processes. The knowledge component of metacognition is concerned with the ability to reflect on our own cognitive processes, and it includes knowledge about ourselves, about aspects of the task, and about strategy use. The control component is concerned with self-regulation of our own cognitive efforts, and it includes planning our actions, checking the outcomes of our efforts, evaluating our progress, remediating difficulties that arise, and testing and revising our strategies." For a concise review of Tom Nesmith's ideas about how archivists should re-examine their own thinking, see Joanna Sassoon, "Beyond chip monks and paper tigers: towards a new culture of archival format specialists," *Archival Science* 7, no. 2 (June 2007) 133-145, particularly 133-134, 142-143.

through appraisal, its presence in an archive confers a special status on it in the eyes of users. A record is assumed to be important because it is in an archive.²⁰

Nor are archives as institutions the disinterested by-products of administrations. Numerous historical case studies of archives, written by archivists and historians (see footnote seven, above) illustrate that archives generally originate in a state's efforts to centralize and control information to create, exert, and maintain social and political power. For example, the concept of total archives, "Canada's single most important contribution to international archival theory," arguably became formalized in the 1970s in part as a response to a changing political and social climate in which the Canadian federal government sought to recreate Canada's national image as a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multicultural society.²¹

Postmodernist concepts counter the third principle by, in Tom Nesmith's words, prompting "[s]ome archivists [to] move away from the idea that provenance is above all a single person or institution – expressed largely in the central act of literally inscribing records – and towards a multifaceted view" in which "records are the product of a variety of factors acting across their entire history – from literal inscription through to archival actions with records, and even to readings of the records in archives by their users."

While the Australian series system acknowledges that multiple creators of records exist

²⁰ Joan Schwartz, " 'We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995) 42; Eric Ketelaar, "Archivalization and Archiving," *Archives and Manuscripts* 26 (May 1999) 54-61; Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense," 34.

²¹ Peter Bower, "Counterpoint: After the Dust Settles," *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979-80) 218-229, 221. See Terry Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives,'" *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979-80) 141-149, 141-142 for the four central tenets of total archives: that "archives should acquire collections reflecting the total complexion of society," that "there should be an institutionalized system of archives" across Canada, that there should be "archival involvement in each stage of the total life cycle of institutional records," and that "all types of archival material" should be appraised, acquired, arranged, described, and made accessible. For one view of the debate over multiculturalism during the 1960s and 1970s, see Sarah V. Wayland, "Immigration, Multiculturalism and National Identity in Canada," *International Journal on Group Rights* 5, no. 1 (1997) 33-58, 46-50..

within the formal structures and lifespan of any organization, it does little to capture how “backdoor channels,” informal institutional memory vested in individuals, and societal factors that influence the individuals who make up any organization also shape records and records creation. When dealing with the records of private individuals archives typically limit provenance to the physical act of creation, to the person who puts pen to paper, brush to canvas, or who operates a camera or microphone. More complex origins, such as when works are commissioned, are typically not addressed.²²

Those who practice postmodernist approaches also argue that archivists should acknowledge the contexts through which a record passes between its initial inscription and its entry into an archive. These intervening contexts deserve more than a brief mention in a custodial history note designed to guarantee a record’s authenticity by tracing a chain of physical possession. How a record has been seen in successive contexts offers a multivalent understanding of its meaning and value. It also allows a record to be used as evidence through which to understand these changing contexts.

Nor should provenance stop at the door of the archive. Archives hold records for long periods and seek to make users aware of new potential readings and uses, therefore “archivists arguably have a greater impact on the evidence the record conveys than the initial or literal inscribers.” Because archives are a significant, arguably the most significant, part of the provenance of any record, and because any archival action (or inaction) unavoidably filters how researchers perceive records, archivists must become far more transparent and accountable regarding their interventions. They should inform

²² Nesmith, “The concept of societal provenance,” 352; Nesmith, “What is an Archival Education?,” 6. For an example of more complex origins involving more than one creator, see Allen C. Benson’s discussion of the role played by Roy E. Stryker as project director of the Pittsburgh Photographic Project in Benson, “Killed Negatives: The Unseen Photographic Archives,” *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009) 1-37.

users what criteria, methodologies, and concepts of value are used in appraising records and make users aware that the records held are but a small subset of what initially existed. Archives should also offer users information on how previous researchers have made use of the records, as these too are part of the records' provenance. While archives legitimately attempt to preserve a version of the context in which records originated, postmodernist conceptions of provenance suggest that the contexts through which a record has passed between its creation and the present moment are as important. Archives should consider each record to be an open-ended process, not to represent a frozen moment of time.²³

To address the fourth principle outlined by Cook, and setting aside debates about whether language can ever quite capture what is described, those espousing postmodernist concepts insist that arrangement and description are not value-free and do not recreate a prior reality because finding aids are themselves "cultural texts, historically situated in time and place." As archivists Wendy Duff and Verne Harris insist, "[n]o approach to archival description, no descriptive system or architecture, can escape the reality that it is a way of constructing knowledge through processes of inscription, mediation, and narration." As archivist Lilly Koltun argues, archivists "want to create descriptions, which are actually value interpretations." In attempting to transmit a supposedly transparent view of the past to the present and future, archivists in fact

²³ Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 35. See also page 13 of Sue McKemmish, "Traces: Documents, record, archive, archives," in Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward, eds. *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* (Wagga Wagga, NSW: Centre for Information Studies, 2005) 1-20; Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense," 34-35.

construct a view of the past that is determined by present interests, values, assumptions, and metanarratives.²⁴

Concepts of archival arrangement and description evolve. As archival educator Heather MacNeil notes, “[o]ver the past decade many archival institutions have undertaken retrospective conversions of finding aids to conform to new concepts of arrangement, for example, conversion from record group to fonds and from fonds to series” or to “conform to national or international standards” such as *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD). A postmodernist approach to archival description would seek to preserve earlier descriptive schema as part of a record’s ever-evolving provenance. As archival consultant Laura Millar suggests, a “wide range of descriptive processes should exist, performed at different times and for different reasons” in order to reveal to researchers that archivists have viewed and understood records in different ways at different points in time.²⁵

Those who apply postmodernist concepts also declare that archival attempts at standardized arrangement and description are built upon a modernist foundation of hierarchical organization “from the general (for example, fonds) to the particular (such as

²⁴ Heather MacNeil, “Picking Our Text: Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor,” *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005) 264-278, 274; Wendy M. Duff and Verne Harris, “Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 3-4 (September 2002) 263-285, 275. For a more detailed examination of archival narration, see Scott Goodine’s thesis referenced in footnote 6 above, and Richard Brown, “The Value of ‘Narrativity’ in the Appraisal of Historical Documents: Foundations for a Theory of Archival Hermeneutics,” *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991) 152-156. For discussion of the “linguistic turn” in archives and history, see Bernadine Dodge, “Re-Imag(in)ing the Past,” also referenced in footnote 6 above, particularly pages 246 and 254 of her article. For a discussion of narrative that ranges well beyond archives, see Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options,” 131. At the time of this article, Koltun was both Director of the Archives Preservation Division and Director General of the Archives Headquarters Accommodation Project at the then National Archives of Canada. Koltun retired as Director General of the Portrait Gallery of Canada in early 2010.

²⁵ MacNeil, “Picking Our Text,” 274; Laura Millar, “An Obligation of Trust: Speculations on Accountability and Description,” *American Archivist* 69 (Spring/Summer 2006) 60-78, 78.

individual records).” Hierarchical organization is brought into question by other ways of structuring knowledge, such as the Internet’s mutable “taxonomies of association” that allow for serendipitous connections and present dissenting views side-by-side. Koltun sums up one postmodernist view in her assertion that

no standardization, whether for electronic or other records, can ever be neutral; it re-packages and reduces multiplicity and variety to an arbitrary unity in conformity to the standards of a specific time and place and of specific decision-makers; these are obscured behind the apparent objectivity of the standards, projected to exist in a realm independent of time, place, and specific actors.²⁶

The concept of original order is also influenced in two ways by postmodernist concepts. Firstly, “archivists do not preserve or restore the original order of a body of records so much as they construct and reconstruct a so-called ‘original order’ in accordance with their understanding of the nature of records and current conventions for arrangement and description.” Secondly, even a hypothetical original order persuades archivists to think in terms of a single point in time when that order might have existed. Instead of reconstructing a unitary original order, Nesmith’s idea of ongoing context suggests “an exploration of the multiple and conflicting ‘meaning making’ capacities of the particular archival item or group, as formulated through its continual dialectical interaction with diverse present knowers acting to effect diverse pasts.” Postmodernist approaches to arrangement and description would address the multiple moments where records have been and continue to be re-ordered, re-purposed, reconceptualized and recontextualized, whether by archivists or others.²⁷

Turning to the fifth and final traditional principle challenged by postmodernist

²⁶ Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options,” 131, 125.

²⁷ Heather MacNeil, “Archivalterity: Rethinking Original Order,” *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008) 1-24, 21; Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options,” 131; MacNeil, “Archivalterity,” 23.

concepts, and taking Terry Cook's use of the word "archives" in the sense of aggregates of records rather than as institutions, archives cannot be passively inherited, natural, or organic metanarratives for the reasons already noted above in discussion of the first and second traditional principles. The careful processes of research and selection that are part of macro-appraisal further argue against state archives being natural or organic. An added reason that archives as records cannot be passively inherited is that those generated by governments are increasingly electronic in nature, requiring active and early intervention by archives to ensure their preservation.²⁸ Postmodernist viewpoints see records not as metanarratives in and of themselves but as evidence that can be used to create competing and conflicting narratives and metanarratives. As Australian archival educator Sue McKemmish declares

In the postmodern archival discourse, positivist ideas about the objective nature of the record, and the impartial and neutral roles played by archivists in their preservation, are giving way to explorations of processes of remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion, and the power relationships they embody, depicting archives as political sites of contested memory and knowledge.²⁹

Whether archives are or should be metanarratives *only* of the state also began to be addressed by Canadian archivists well before postmodernist ideas coloured the profession's discourse. Whether one focuses on the formalization during the 1970s of the Canadian concept of "total archives" that drew on the ideas of Hans Booms and Hugh Taylor, or on the much earlier societal factors that led this concept, one of total archives' central tenets is that "archives should acquire collections reflecting the total complexion of society." Terry Cook notes that a "collective shift has taken place during the past

²⁸ Koltun's, "The Promise and Threat of Digital Options," first referenced in the Introduction, discusses at length how archival attempts to deal with digitized electronic records bring into question a whole range of modernist assumptions upon which archival practices are built.

²⁹ McKemmish, "Traces: Documents, record, archive, archives," 19.

century from a juridical-administrative justification for archives grounded in concepts of the state to a sociocultural justification for archives grounded in wider policy and public use.” Nor is this justification restricted to Canada. As discussed earlier, South African archivist Verne Harris argues that archival records offer “a cornucopia of meanings.” Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar defines archives as “a public sphere, where people meet, discuss, exchange information, use information in their critical dialogue or even struggle with the state and within civil society.” In his 2008 presidential address to the Society of American Archivists, Mark Greene declared that “[w]e must renew and maintain our commitment to ensuring that our holdings adequately reflect the variety of ethnicities, religions, cultures, and so on that comprise our documentary universes.” A postmodern viewpoint is but one factor among several that shows that archives are not, nor should they be, the passively inherited, natural or organic metanarratives of the state.³⁰

The postmodernist debate is but one factor influencing records, archivists, and archives as institutions. What, then, are some of the other challenges archives face, debates they are engaged in, and concerns they voice?

As already noted in discussion of Terry Cook’s concept of macro-appraisal, arguably the most significant challenge faced by archivists is the massive increase in the quantity of records created in all media by organizations and government since the 1940s. Archivists increasingly must make considered choices about what to retain and what to discard. Institutionalized forgetting is absolutely necessary if archives are not to become

³⁰ Cook, “What is Past is Prologue,” 30, 34; Laura Millar, “Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada,” *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998) 103-146; Cook, “The Tyranny of the Medium,” 141; Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 173; Harris, “Law, Evidence and Electronic Records,” 41; Eric Ketelaar, “Being Digital in People’s Archives,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 31, no. 2 (November 2003) 8-22, 19; Mark A. Greene, “The Power of Archives: Archivists’ Values and Value in the Postmodern Age,” *American Archivist* 72 (Spring/Summer 2009) 17-41, 32.

real-world versions of Jorge Luis Borges' Library of Babel, where everything is stored but nothing can be located. The concept of macro-appraisal in Canada, of documentation strategy in the United States, and the records continuum in Australia all attempt to cope with this increase in a systematic and standardized fashion.³¹

This influx is increasingly composed of electronic records that in a strictest sense have no materiality. These records exist within data technologies and organizational practices that require the earliest possible involvement of archivists in order to ensure records preservation. Electronic records also necessitate active preservation, including the migration of records to new media platforms as technologies become obsolete and the regular inspection of data systems to ensure their continued operability. Archives are increasingly challenged to deal with these records in a post-custodial environment, where they have intellectual but not material custody.

The use by both individuals and organizations of new commercial electronic hardware and software, appearing on a three-to-five year cycle driven by market forces, also presents an ongoing challenge to archives, as does the wider adoption of terminology formerly limited to the archival profession. When anyone can refer to "archiving" the contents of a hard-drive or personal digital assistant, archivists must work harder to make their terminology, activities and role clear in the eyes of society.³²

Setting aside technical considerations, theoretical approaches to dealing with these masses of records, electronic or otherwise, have altered the relationship between

³¹ Terry Cook, "Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage." Paper delivered at the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Melbourne, 18 August 2000, 5. Available at http://www.archivists.org.au/files/Conference_Papers/200/terycook.pdf. Last accessed 1 March 2010; Edwin Williamson, *Borges: A Life* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) 254.

³² Margaret Hedstrom, "Digital Preservation: A Time Bomb for Digital Libraries," *Computers and the Humanities* 31, no. 3 (May 1997) 189-202, 191.

archivists and records management professionals, significantly affecting debates on the purpose of the archival profession. Terry Cook expresses concern that there exists a “fundamental division about the purposes, orientation, and, indeed, very nature of archives, as institutions and as records, and thus about the mission of archives in society, [that] rests on an unresolved tension between the concepts of evidence and memory.” This division exists between those who argue that records must be preserved with a minimum of interference from archivists in order to preserve records’ authenticity and value as evidence of past actions, and those who argue that archivists’ activities unavoidably shape perceptions of records that are founts of individual and collective memory as well as of evidence. The same caveat made earlier regarding oversimplifying the modernism-postmodernism debate holds here; the debate on the relationship of evidence and memory should not be reduced to a simple dichotomy between a “juridical-administrative justification” and a “sociocultural justification” of archives. As Cook points out, it is more fruitful to view evidence and memory (and the practices and theories attached to each) as “two sides of the same archival coin.”³³

Debate on the relationship between archivists and records management professionals is paralleled by debate on the relationship between archivists and historians. Both debates are in major part driven by archivists’ efforts to define archives as a distinct discipline and determine that discipline’s boundaries. Archivists have sought to define a discipline separate from, but related to, history since at least 1975, when those in English-speaking Canada formed the Association of Canadian Archivists after withdrawing as a formal section from the Canadian Historical Association. While a modernist formulation once defined archivists as the handmaidens of historians, supplying unproblematic and

³³ Cook, “Beyond the Screen,” 3; Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 173; Cook, “Beyond the Screen,” 5.

uncontested records as grist for the mill of historical research and narrative construction, a postmodernist viewpoint increasingly makes both archivists and historians aware of the “mediated nature of archives as appraised and selected records, as curatorial institutions, as professional activity, [and] as [a] body of theoretical and practical knowledge.” Both disciplines increasingly see the value, as noted earlier in this chapter, of a history *of* archives as institutions and records in addition to history derived *from* the contents of archives.³⁴

The advent of the Internet and the flood of information and information processing technologies available to individuals and organizations have had an impact on the archival profession. Some archivists express concern over both how archives should respond to increased demands for online access and the ways in which information is reused and recontextualized in a society where “the postmodern condition is intimately connected to technology, mediatization, global market-driven economies and the decline of the nation state.” Some archivists are concerned that the provision of online access unavoidably commodifies information. More detailed discussion of the impact of the Internet as a new communications medium with its own rhetoric and symbolic conventions is, however, a topic for another thesis.³⁵

Archives increasingly serve a clientele that never enters a research room, but that conducts research through email requests and online searches of the small portion of archival holdings that are digitized. Archives are under significant pressure to offer online versions of more and more finding aids and to create more and more digital

³⁴ Cook, “The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country,” 499, 509. This article presents a more detailed historical review and analysis of the relationship between archivists and historians than can be engaged in here.

³⁵ Bernadine Dodge, “Re-imag(in)ing the Past,” *Rethinking History* 10, no.3 (September 2006) 345-367, 350.

surrogates of records. To effectively do so, archives must make educated guesses about trends in the hardware and software development cycle noted above; guesses that can prove expensive if wrong.

Archives are also standardizing the description of archival records to allow researchers to conduct keyword searches, to obtain descriptions of the holdings of multiple institutions, and to have the standardized experience that library usage has led them to expect. In Canada, partly in order to provide access to archival descriptions via such Internet-based resources as Archives Canada, the archival community has developed and increasingly adopted a standardized approach embodied in *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD). Archivists including Bernadine Dodge, Joan Schwartz and Allen Benson have expressed concern that descriptive standardization is a Procrustian bed, in which the widely differing natures and contexts of records will no longer be apparent to researchers.³⁶

Online researchers are also forcing archivists to reconsider the content and purpose of records descriptions and descriptive architectures. Keyword searches give researchers the ability to go directly to the item they seek and to remain unaware of the contexts in which records were created and used. While suggestions for new approaches to description have been made that take the postmodernist role of the archivist into account, this thesis suggests that archivists need to stop thinking of description and public programming as separate archival functions. Finding aids should be designed not only to

³⁶ Bernadine Dodge, "Re-imag(in)ing the Past," 350-351. In Greek mythology, Procrustes stretched or amputated his guests' limbs to fit them to his beds. Jenny March, *Cassell's Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (London: Cassell & Co., 1998) 662. The problems inherent in standardization, particularly as identified by Joan Schwartz, will be further discussed in chapter 2. For a detailed critique of the bibliographic basis of a wide variety of current archival descriptive standards and descriptive architectures, see Allen C. Benson, "The Archival Photograph and its Meaning: Formalisms for Modeling Images," *Journal of Archival Organization* 7, no. 4 (October 2009) 148-187.

describe records but also to educate users in how to read or view records that communicate in ways specific to each medium. Each online description offers archivists the opportunity to educate as well as to inform.³⁷

With respect to archival records that are not textual documents, the Canadian concept of total archives has (in addition to what has already been discussed) challenged archivists to appraise, acquire, arrange, describe, and make accessible records in all types of media. Debate occurred in the late 1970s regarding the designation of some types as “special media” and the effect this designation had on how archives conceptualized and dealt with them. More recently, Terry Cook has pointed out that archival institutions are themselves “a collective communications medium” that mediates through its biases what we know about the past. What has been less discussed within the profession is that metanarratives specific to particular media exist in addition to the metanarratives applied to archival records (usually assumed to be textual) and to archival institutions.³⁸

This thesis contends that while there has been much discussion in the late twentieth century outside the archival profession over the nature of photographs, many archivists continue to deal with them as “unmediated and, therefore, unassailably truthful.”³⁹ After examining the historical development of archival thinking regarding photographs, focusing particularly on the Canadian archival community, and drawing on

³⁷ See Elizabeth Yakel, “Archival Representation,” *Archival Science* 3, no. 1 (March 2003) 1-25. For one example of reconsidered approaches to archival description, see Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” *American Archivist* 65 (Fall/Winter 2002) 216-230. Suggestions for the content and architecture of finding aids specific to photographs will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.

³⁸ The debate can be followed in Cook, “The Tyranny of the Medium” referenced earlier; Andrew Birrell, “The Tyranny of Tradition,” referenced earlier; Cook, “Media Myopia,” *Archivaria* 12 (Summer 1981) 146-57; Ernest J. Dick et al., “Total Archives Come Apart,” *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980/1981) 224-227; and an analysis found in Lorraine O’Donnell, “Towards Total Archives: The Form and Meaning of Photographic Records,” *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994) 105-118; Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 172.

³⁹ Joan M. Schwartz, “‘Records of Simple Truth and Precision’: Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000)1-40, 25.

the work of those archivists who have increasingly taken a fresh look at photographs, the following chapter will examine the theories and methodologies of other disciplines to identify approaches and practices that can reshape how archivists look at and describe photographs.

CHAPTER TWO: HOW ARCHIVISTS AND OTHER DISCIPLINES LOOK AT PHOTOGRAPHS

The goal of this chapter is to suggest fresh approaches to how archivists might look at – in both the literal and metaphorical senses – and describe photographs. Before making these suggestions, it is necessary to examine how archivists have previously viewed photographs and to survey how new viewpoints, influenced by contextual and postmodernist approaches, have developed over the last thirty-five years. These developments will be traced mainly in the context of the Canadian archival community, as it is argued that some members of this community have most actively taken and continue to take a fresh look at photographs. These developments often involve ideas imported from other disciplines from authors that on occasion offer direct critiques of archives and archival practices regarding photographs.

Following a chronological survey of Canadian archival views and after touching on a representative sample of these external critiques, this chapter will add its own suggestions for fresh approaches to the archival viewing and description of photographs by drawing on the theories and practices of fields including cultural geography, visual and material anthropology, art history and criticism, semiotics, history, the sociology of science, cultural communications, and education. A few examples will be drawn from the visual and written work of selected photographers.

Canadian archival views of photographs span the same range of modernist to postmodernist as noted for all records in chapter one. The modernist belief that records are the “disinterested by-products of actions” is paralleled by the assumption that photographs solely index reality. The assumption that “the order and language imposed

on records through archival arrangement and description are value-free re-creations of some prior reality” is paralleled by two assumptions: that because photographs index reality archivists need only describe their informational content; and that the resulting written descriptions are not translations from image to text with the unavoidable filtering and shifts in meaning translation brings about. As noted in the Introduction, postmodernist archivists increasingly see themselves as part of the ongoing context of records and that their interactions with photographs are shaped by their own professional, intellectual, historical and social circumstances.¹

Following some prefacing remarks this chapter is divided into three sections. The first, entitled “The Archival Eye: How Archivists Have Looked at Photographs,” will begin by noting how some archival foundational works regard photographs. The approaches of the American, Australian and English-speaking Canadian archival communities will then be briefly reviewed to justify a Canadian focus. A survey of Canadian archival thought begins with a 1978 *Archivaria* theme issue on photography and archives, touches on a series of photography books published in the late 1970s and early 1980s by Canadian archivists, returns to three *Archivaria* articles authored by Canadian historical geographer, archivist and educator Joan Schwartz in the 1990s and early 2000s, and concludes with a 2008 issue of *Archivaria*, the first since 1978 to again focus on photographs. This survey demonstrates both the continued existence of modernist, positivist approaches and the increasing influence of a postmodernist viewpoint in Canadian archival discourse.²

¹ Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 174.

² For the purposes of this survey, *Archivaria* articles written by historians are considered part of archival discourse rather than contributions from outside the field since they appear in the main discussion forum of the Canadian archival community and are immediately accessible to Canadian archivists. In the rest of this

The second section is entitled “Looking into the Archival Eye: How Others Have Seen Archivists Look at Photographs.” This section, more brief than the first, draws on three writers outside the archival profession to demonstrate how archives have been viewed as “a discursive formation in the totalizing sense that it reflects the categories and operations of the state” and how this view is shifting from “the political and juridical to the social and cultural.”³

The third and final section, entitled “Taking Another Look: Other Disciplines Suggest New Ways to Look at and Describe Photographs,” draws on the approaches of other disciplines to suggest specific ways in which archivists can more effectively look at and describe photographs. It is an attempt to put into action archivist Joan Schwartz's advice that “it is necessary to read outside the field, to extrapolate from the methodological approaches of other disciplines and allied professions, to adapt approaches from one medium to another, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the nature and value of visual materials as archival.”⁴ This section will suggest that photographs can fruitfully be described using archivally created digital photographs, sometimes in addition to textual description, sometimes in preference to text. Archivally created digital photographs can highlight the materiality and immediate physical context of archivally held photographs. Such digital photographs can also distinguish for researchers between the intents and purposes of the original creators of photographs and the intents and purposes of the archivist. In essence, archivists can show researchers photographs as an alternative to telling researchers how archivists view them. This

chapter, articles written in non-archival journals by historians are considered to come from outside archival discourse.

³ Dirks, “Annals of the Archive,” 58, 61.

⁴ Joan M. Schwartz, “Negotiating the Visual Turn: New Perspectives on Images and Archives,” *American Archivist* 67 (Spring/Summer 2004) 109.

section will focus on photograph albums since these constitute a significant portion of the photographs archives have in the past acquired. The approach to description outlined is also a response to the communicative rhetorics of the Internet and the massive influx of digital photographs that will increasingly constitute the visual records archives will in the future receive.

To write of fresh approaches in how to look means that the concept of visual literacy must be addressed. Archivists generally agree that understanding photographs requires visual literacy, but do not necessarily agree on what the term means in an archival context. At various points in this chapter three visual literacies will be discussed: that advocated by American archivists Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin, by Canadian historical geographer and archivist Joan Schwartz, and by British cultural and feminist geographer Gillian Rose. This thesis argues that Kaplan and Mifflin's approach does not venture beyond image content. Schwartz emphasizes creator purpose, intended audience and a context that increasingly includes the actions of archivists to understand the "conceptual rather than...physical provenance" of photographs. Rose adds an awareness of the context in which an image is viewed. Her approach converges with both Tom Nesmith's idea that "most of what makes a record intelligible lies outside its physical borders in its context of interpretation" and Verne Harris's assertion that records have multiple meanings dependent on the viewpoint of the observer.⁵

⁵ Kaplan and Mifflin, "Mind and Sight," referenced earlier; Joan M. Schwartz, "We make our tools and our tools make us: Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995) 40-74; Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, referenced in the Introduction; On pages 109-111 of "Mind and Sight" Kaplan and Mifflin offer a condensed history of the term "visual literacy" outside archival context; Cook, "Remembering the Future," 176; Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 32; Harris, "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records," 15.

The term “literacy” in visual literacy is problematic. This chapter follows the pragmatic lead of communications professor Paul Messaris, who notes that “it would probably be too pedantic, and in any case, it would surely be futile to resist the increasingly common tendency to apply this term to other kinds of communications skills” such as mathematical literacy or computer literacy. This chapter also endorses Messaris’s assertion that images and text are not “read” in the same linear fashion, that “images reproduce many of the informational cues that people make use of in their perception of physical and social reality” and that “familiarity with images does not entail the acquisition of a system of conceptual categories or of a set of analytical operators for ordering those categories.” This thesis does not address whether images and text are processed in neurologically different ways; that is a topic for another thesis. Instead, it acknowledges that debates exist, within and outside the archival discipline, on whether the vocabulary of text can be appropriately applied to photographs.⁶

The Archival Eye: How Archivists Have Looked at Photographs

The so-called Dutch Manual, the works of Hilary Jenkinson and those of T.R. Schellenberg are generally considered to comprise the foundations of twentieth-century

⁶ Kaplan and Mifflin, “Mind and Sight,” 111, citing Paul Messaris, *Visual ‘Literacy’: Image, Mind, Reality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) 2; Paul Messaris, *Visual ‘Literacy,’* 165. As of 2011, Messaris is a professor of communications at the University of Pennsylvania. On language in archives see Joan M. Schwartz, “Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic ‘Othering,’ and the Margins of Archivry,” *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002) 142-171. See also Hugh Taylor, “Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist,” in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflection*. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds, eds. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003) 75-89, 79. Taylor sees the origins of a conceptual split between text and image in the Italian Renaissance. Though this might now be considered Eurocentric, his understanding of the split as a construct remains valid. For more detailed examination of the relationship of text and image that also questions this duality, see literary critic Michael North, *Camera Works: Photographs and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options,” 123 for the way colloquial archival terms used for appraisal, such as “weeding” or “pruning,” serve to naturalize an interventionist activity.

archival thought. These foundation texts fail to address photographs, relegate them to a second-class status or see them as limited sources of evidence.

The *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, published in the Netherlands in 1898 and typically referred to as the Dutch Manual, makes no mention of photographs despite being published almost sixty years after the invention of photography. Only a single footnote written by the translator of the 1940 English second edition mentions photographs and then only in reference to “photographic and other reproductions of documents.” This lack of mention likely reflects that Dutch archives dealt almost entirely with textual records in the late nineteenth century, rather than a conscious rejection of the photographic medium.⁷

Charles Hilary (as of 1949, Sir Hilary) Jenkinson, the British archivist who profoundly influenced twentieth-century archival methodology and theory, assigns photographs a second-class status in his 1922 *A Manual of Archive Administration*. In defining a pragmatic boundary between documents and what he terms “exhibits,” physical objects, he includes with archival records “material evidences...which form part of or are annexed to...specific documents.” He defines annexed material as “something of a size to be fastened to or conveniently associated with the document *to which it belongs* [Emphasis added].” In a footnote, he declares “[m]odern photographic process reproductions are common amongst the Copyright Records in the Public Record Office, but these are generally cases of ‘annexing’.” He defines as archival only those photographs that are “annexed,” that is, associated with and supplemental to, textual

⁷ S. Muller, J.A. Feith and R. Fruin, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* 2nd ed. trans. Arthur H. Leavitt (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1968 [1898, 1940]) 15, n.5; For more detail on the *Manual*, see Peter Horsman, Eric Ketelaar, and Theo Thomassen, “New Respect for the Old Order: The Context of the Dutch Manual,” *American Archivist* 66 (Winter/Spring 2003) 249-270.

records. His only other mentions of photography in the 1922 *Manual* are to recommend its use in creating preservation copies of records. In a 1947 lecture, Jenkinson again considers photography solely as a preservation tool. In the same lecture, his statement that archival records are “accumulated by a natural process in the conduct of affairs of any kind” may offer a clue to his exclusion of photographs as archival records in and of themselves, since photographs are purposefully created rather than naturally accumulated, often with a conscious intent to address the future.⁸

Theodore Roosevelt Schellenberg, the American archivist who also significantly influenced twentieth-century archival practice, may have most pervasively shaped North American archivists’ views of photographs. In his 1956 *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, Schellenberg divides all archival records of institutions into two broad categories: *evidential*, that offer clues to the functioning and organization of the administrative entities that create records; and *informational*, that offer clues to people, objects, places, events and conditions in the society within which these entities operate. Archivist William Leary suggests that Schellenberg believes photographs are informational because they are rarely “necessary to provide an authentic and adequate documentation of its [an institution’s] organization and functioning.” In his 1965 *The Management of Archives*, Schellenberg states that pictorial records, within which he includes photographs, are “mainly important from the point of view of their subject matter, not from the point of view of their provenance and functional origins.” He also declares, “such records are not produced for purposes of action,” but “are usually

⁸ Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* 1922 (Percy Lund, Humphries & Co Ltd., 1966) 6, 7, 6 n.4, 63, 48 n.1, 81, 132; Sir Hilary Jenkinson, “The English Archivist: A New Profession,” in Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne, eds. *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1980) 236-259, 254, 237; As discussed in chapter one, a postmodernist viewpoint questions whether *any* record can be a disinterested by-product of an action.

produced to record information or to stimulate emotional response.”⁹

During the latter half of the twentieth century, many archivists continued to follow Schellenberg’s lead and focus on the informational content of photographs. This attitude still has substantial currency. As late as 2005, respected Canadian archivist Normand Charbonneau could assert “[p]hotographs are distinct from textual documents in that their most important value is informational.” It is also significant that Schellenberg minimizes the evidential value of pictorial records, including photographs, because they are created “to stimulate an emotional response.” Textual records are also created partly to elicit an emotional response through their rhetoric, at a level dependent on their genre, but are not considered less evidential for that reason. Presently, archival description of all records generally minimizes the emotional intent of creators, the emotional content of records, the emotional response records elicit and the use of the emotional register as a way to analyse records, again arguably following Schellenberg’s lead.¹⁰

In 2007, Australian archivist and historian Joanna Sassoon asserted “[t]hat Schellenberg saw this particular archival format [pictorial records] as having different documentary requirements for the preservation of evidence and meaning from other formats is evidence of the primacy of the culture of text among archivists.” In the same

⁹ Sam Kula, *Appraising Moving Images* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2003) 29, citing T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) *Passim*. Verne Harris’s insistence, on page 15 of “Law, Evidence and Electronic Records” that “the requirements for evidence are specific to time and place” questions the universality of Schellenberg’s concept of evidential and informational records; William H. Leary, *The Archival Appraisal of Photographs: A Ramp Study with Guidelines* (Paris: UNESCO, 1985) 19, citing Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 140. As of 2009, Leary was Senior Director for Records and Access Management, [American] National Security Staff; T. R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) 325.

¹⁰ Normand Charbonneau, “The Selection of Photographs,” *Archivaria* 59 (Spring 2005) 119-139, 120; As of September 2009, Charbonneau was Director of the Centre d’archives de Montréal - Bibliothèque et archives nationales du Québec. For an example foregrounding the emotional in photographs, see Carol Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performance of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). The emotional in photographs will be discussed at greater length in section three.

article, Sassoon critiques how the American, Australian and Canadian archival communities view photographs.¹¹

Sassoon argues that a major text of the American archival community, the 1984 *Archives and Manuscripts: Administration of Photographic Collections*, focuses on the “documentary value,” the informational content, of photographs. The 2006 manual superseding this work, *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, maintains this focus “on photographs that have enduring documentary value as historical resource materials for research, publication, exhibition, and teaching.” In this updated manual’s chapter on description, Helena Zinkham considers intended archival use, availability of staff and funding and anticipated researcher demand as the primary determinants of how a collection of photographs should be described; the nature of the collection itself is not discussed as significant. In her chapter on reading and researching photographs, Zinkham references two approaches, that suggested by Elizabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin in 1996 and that suggested by Gillian Rose in 2001.¹²

Zinkham accurately outlines Kaplan and Mifflin’s three-level schema for looking at photographs. The first level is a photograph’s immediate content, in their words, what a photograph is “of.” The second is what a photograph is “about,” which they define as its “concrete subject content.” This level combines image content with the archivist’s “specific historical knowledge of circumstances or events, participants, techniques, and

¹¹ Joanna Sassoon, “Beyond chip monks and paper tigers,” 140.

¹² Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Gerald J. Munoff, and Margery S. Long, *Archives and Manuscripts: Administration of Photographic Collections* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1984) 7; Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler and Diane Vogt-O’Connor, with Helena Zinkham, Brett Carnell and Kit Peterson, *Photographs: Archival Care and Management* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006) xiii; Helena Zinkham, “Description and Cataloguing,” in Ritzenthaler, et al., *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, 164-206, particularly 176-180; Zinkham, “Reading and Researching Photographs,” in Ritzenthaler, et al., *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, 59-77, 62. In September of 2010, Zinkham was appointed chief of the United States Library of Congress’ Prints and Photographs Division.

more” to explain what the image shows. The third level “involves the perception of the document’s purely visual, or *abstract* elements [Bold and italic emphasis in original].” While Kaplan and Mifflin’s schema is valuable in its acknowledgement that conventions and genres of visual expression exist, it is grounded at all three levels in image content. Their second level appears to acknowledge context, but by their own definition is restricted to the context of “concrete” image content. Their schema analyzes what a photograph shows, what it refers to and, through visual conventions, how it shows what it shows, but does not claim to address the historical or cultural context in which a photograph was created or the reasons for that creation.¹³

Zinkham’s outline of Gillian Rose’s schema is less accurate. Rose frames a series of questions to be asked of any image, again divided into three aspects: about the production of an image, about the image itself and about what she terms “audiencing.” While Rose’s approach will be discussed in greater detail in the third section of this chapter, what is presently significant is that Zinkham misconstrues Rose’s third aspect, stating that it addresses questions about “the intended audience.” Rose clearly has more than intended audience in mind in such questions as: “have technologies of circulation and display affected the audiences’ interpretation of this image?” Rose emphatically argues, “[i]f ways of seeing are historically, geographically, culturally, and socially specific, then how you or I look is not natural or innocent.” Rose addresses how meaning is made at the site of viewing as well as at the site of image creation. Rose’s observation that photographs are continually reshaped in their encounters with later viewers parallels Brien Brothman’s understanding, discussed in chapter one, of the ongoing mutability of

¹³ Kaplan and Mifflin, “Mind and Sight,” 111-112.

written texts.¹⁴

Zinkham's statement, "[b]oth techniques have the common goal of understanding photographs by emphasizing the context of their creation as well as their content" is substantially inaccurate. Kaplan and Mifflin's second level focuses on the context of image content, not the context of creation. Rose's schema emphasizes much more than context of creation, since she argues, "how an image is made, what it looks like, and how it is seen are the three crucial ways in which a visual image becomes culturally meaningful." Joanna Sassoon's critique of the 1984 manual is equally true of its 2006 successor: "understanding the origins and preserving the evidential values through the preservation of the context and structure of organizations is not part of the advice" offered by Ritzenthaler, Zinkham and their co-authors.¹⁵

As for the Australian archival community, Sassoon argues that a widely used manual, *Guidelines for the Management of Visual Resources in Queensland Government Agencies*, similarly does not significantly address context. A more recent major 2005 Australian publication, *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, does consider context and does not make Schellenberg's distinction between textual records and photographs, but in considering photographs as simply another genre of record, subsumes them into arrangement and descriptive practices evolved to deal with textual records. The authors suggest that once a document's genre has been determined, it can be analyzed through each of nine perspectives. Four of these – form, format, medium and technologies – focus on the record's physical nature; content and context are each one perspective of the

¹⁴ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 188-190. As noted earlier, language shapes thought. Kaplan, Mifflin, and Rose refer to "viewing", "looking at", or "audiencing" photographs. Zinkham refers to "reading." Ritzenthaler, et al., *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, 62, 77; Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 189, 16.

¹⁵ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 188; Sassoon, "Beyond chip monks and paper tigers," 140.

nine.¹⁶ The authors explicitly back away from considering how photographs have genre specific ways of communicating and therefore may require genre specific theoretical and descriptive approaches when they state:

The question of a photograph's authority, in the sense of its being an exact record of a particular moment in time and, as such, deserving of some level of special credence from its audience, is an interesting and complex one – too complex to explore at any length here.¹⁷

Thus, while these authors do not consider photographs to be second-class archival records and do not believe they have “different documentary requirements for the preservation of evidence and meaning,” they choose not to engage in debates about how the perception of information is influenced by the medium through which it is transmitted and whether photographs therefore require different approaches to description than textual records. While a significant number of Australian archivists have addressed the impact of a postmodernist approach on records in general, Joanna Sassoon is one of the few to focus on photographs.¹⁸

In her critique of the English-speaking Canadian archival community, Sassoon shows that two strands of thought exist. She condemns the 1993 publication *Managing Photographic Records in the Government of Canada* for its failure to address context. But, in her introduction and conclusion, she endorses Tom Nesmith's ideas on how

¹⁶ Sassoon, “Beyond chip monks and paper tigers,” 140, citing Queensland, Department of Public Works and Housing, *Guidelines for the Management of Visual Resources in Queensland Government Agencies* (Brisbane: Department of Public Housing and Works: undated); Robert Hartland, Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, “Chapter 4: Documents,” in Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward, eds. *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* (Wagga Wagga, NSW: Centre for Information Studies, 2005) 80-81.

¹⁷ Hartland, McKemmish and Upward, “Documents,” 84.

¹⁸ In addition to “Beyond chip monks and paper tigers,” referenced earlier, that reconsiders “the presumed format-neutrality of professional practice,” Sassoon addresses visual literacy and the status of photographs as archival records in an Australian context in “Chasing Phantoms in the Archives: The Australia House Photograph Collection,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000) 117-124. Sassoon discusses the conflict between photographic digitization and materiality in “Photographic Meaning in the Age of Digital Reproduction” *Lasie* [Library Automated Systems Information Exchange] 29, no. 4 (December 1998) 5-15.

archivists should reconsider their own thinking and in the body of her article draws on the ideas of Joan Schwartz. Sassoon demonstrates that fundamental questions about photographs are asked in the Canadian community. Though the concept of total archives has existed in Canada since the 1970s, Schwartz could still justifiably ask in 2004, “how much longer can we reasonably expect to presume that principles and procedures based on textual models and bibliographic approaches can be applied with impunity to visual materials?”¹⁹

In light of Terry Cook’s estimate “that at least 75 percent of the world’s English-language publications on the postmodern archive have been written by Canadians,” this brief review of American, Australian and Canadian attitudes, along with the survey of Canadian discourse that follows, should make it clear why this thesis focuses on the English-speaking Canadian archival community to draw on the fullest possible range of archival approaches from modernist to postmodernist.²⁰

Since its inception in 1975, *Archivaria* has been the major discussion forum for the Canadian archival community. While articles and reviews drawing on photographic sources have appeared from its first issue forward, articles directly questioning the appropriateness of archival assumptions and practices in dealing with photographs have been, until 2008, infrequent in comparison. A review of selected issues of *Archivaria* can provide an intellectual history of Canadian archival thinking regarding photographs and

¹⁹ Library and Archives Canada, *Managing Photographic Records in the Government of Canada* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1993) Available at <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/government/products-services/007002-2048-e.html#preface>. Accessed 12 January 2011); Sassoon, “Beyond chip monks and paper tigers,” 133-134, 140-143; Joan M. Schwartz, “Negotiating the Visual Turn” 109.

²⁰ Cook, “Remembering the Future” in Blouin and Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, 169.

of the influence that postmodernist concepts have had on that thinking.²¹

The first issue of *Archivaria* to focus on “Photographs and Archives” appeared in 1978, with archivist Richard Huyda as consulting editor. Articles by Klaus Hendriks, David Mattison, Linda Johnson, Stanley Triggs and Joan Schwartz briefly illustrate the strands of archival thinking then extant.

Klaus Hendriks, a conservation chemist and administrator at the then Public Archives of Canada, is primarily concerned with “the influence of residual processing chemicals, support materials and storage conditions” on photographic preservation. One of his introductory comments, “[I]ike traditional manuscript material, such records can be ‘read’ for information,” is an example of the text-based thinking and focus on informational content common in the late 1970s.²²

An article by archivist and historian David Mattison and his co-author Sandra Sherman discusses the use of the International Standard Bibliographic Description for Non-Book Materials (ISBD[NBM]) to catalogue photographs by alphabetic listing of photographer’s name, numerical accession file, or subject heading based on image content. Their advice on titling is significant, since it is both typical of 1978 and continues to be common practice. They state that if “there is no title, one is supplied describing as objectively as possible the image content. If a photograph has a title which does not accurately describe the image content” the title is followed by a description of

²¹ Richard J. Huyda's review of Eric J. Holmgren, *Alberta at the Turn of the Century: A Selection of Photographs from Ernest Brown, Harry Pollard and Other Photograph Collections in the Provincial Archives of Alberta* (Edmonton: Provincial Archives of Alberta, 1975) appears in *Archivaria* 1 (Winter 1975/1976) 117-119. For an example *Archivaria* article that draws on photographs but does not use them for evidence or question their archival handling, see Jim Burant, “Doughty’s Dream: A Visual Reminiscence of the Public Archives,” *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999) 117-130.

²² Klaus B. Hendriks, “The Preservation of Photographic Records,” *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78) 92-100, 92. The Public Archives of Canada (PAC) was created in 1872. In 1987 it was renamed the National Archives of Canada (NAC). In 2004, it merged with the National Library of Canada to become Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

that content, enclosed in square brackets. The phrase, “as objectively as possible,” acknowledges but sidesteps the challenges offered to archivists by their own subjectivity. The phrase, “a title which does not accurately describe the image content,” demonstrates an assumption that content is the focus of titling and description. This approach acts to suppress any titling by the original creator or collector that is, for example, allusive or ironic in intent, or any text or graphic marks that demonstrate a more complex interplay with the photograph. In 2008, in Canada’s *Rules for Archival Description*, rule 4.1B4 states “[w]hen describing a part of a fonds, e.g., a series, file, or item, which lacks a formal title proper, compose a brief descriptive title.” Six of the nine examples that follow this rule base description in image content, while the remaining three identify types of media such as “filmstrip” or functional use such as “sketchbook.” The assumption that it is a title’s function to describe image content remains current, as does Kaplan and Mifflin’s 1996 assertion that “[d]escriptive access...may be the most important, most problematic, and least explored aspect of audiovisual archives administration.”²³

In the same volume, an article by archivist Linda Johnson suggests the use of photocopies of photographs to circumvent a significant drawback to textual descriptions,

²³ David Mattison and Sandra Sherman, “Cataloguing Historical Photographs with ISBD (NBM),” *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78) 101-111. In 1978, Mattison was a recent Master of Library Science graduate and Sherman was about to graduate with the same degree; Mattison and Sherman, “Cataloguing Historical Photographs,” 102-103; Canadian Council of Archives, Canadian Committee on Archival Description. “Chapter 4: Graphic Materials,” in *Rules for Archival Description*, revised July 2008. Available at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/archdesrules.html>. Accessed 10 December 2010. For recent examples of this approach to titling, see photo album extracts of the Helen Creighton fonds held by the Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, available at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/creighton/resultsa.asp?Search>, or photograph sub-series of the historical manuscripts series of the William Pearce fonds held by the University of Alberta Archives, available at <http://archive1.macs.ualberta.ca/FindingAids/WilliamPearce/William%20Pearce5.html#3>. Both accessed 10 December 2010. Though quotation marks are used in place of square brackets in these examples, it is often not clear whether a title originates with the creator or is supplied by an archivist, blurring the distinction between original record and archival item-level description; Kaplan and Mifflin, “Mind and Sight,” 119.

that “the researcher could not judge from the short verbal card description whether a particular photograph was suitable.” This statement acknowledges that researchers are likely to view photographs using different evaluative criteria and with different intent than archivists. While Johnson’s 1978 approach is limited because it is paper-based, it is an idea worth revisiting in light of the now widespread availability of digital photography technology. Section three will further discuss this approach to archival description.²⁴

Articles by Stanley Triggs and Joan Schwartz demonstrate that the two strands of Canadian archival thought highlighted by Joanna Sassoon in 2007 were in existence in 1978.

In examining the career of nineteenth-century Canadian photographer Alexander Henderson, Triggs states that Henderson’s shift from “the documentary tradition that predominated in the nineteenth century” to an “at times complete abandonment of realistic portrayal” implies “[t]o archivists and social historians [that] these images are not always important as historical records but they certainly are powerful views.” While he effectively sets Henderson’s work in its historical context, Triggs assumes that it is image content that constitutes their value. He does not examine how the photographs present evidence of much more: Henderson’s exploration of different expressive modes in response to changing public taste; his changing professional and personal circumstances; and changes in the societal role of photography. In his reference to a documentary tradition Triggs confuses archival interest in what the photographs document with the function the photographs were originally created to perform. Triggs also constructs the documentary and aesthetic aspects of Henderson’s work as an opposed

²⁴ Linda Johnson, “Yukon Archives Visual Photograph Finding Aid,” *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78) 112-123. In 1978, Johnson was Territorial Archivist of the Yukon Archives and had just completed a term as President of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA); Johnson, “Yukon Archives,” 113.

binary. Both were likely present in every example of Henderson's work, in varying degrees of balance and tension. Both documentation function and binary opposition are artefacts of Triggs's looking, not intrinsic to Henderson's work. Examples of such confusion among the three aspects of visual literacy advocated by Gillian Rose – the intent with which an image is made, the qualities intrinsic to it, and how it is seen – repeatedly appear in this survey of Canadian archival thought.²⁵

Though Joan Schwartz does not refer to her own looking and does not use the term “visual literacy” in her examination of the photographic record of pre-Confederation British Columbia, she clearly states “a photograph is a document, and the historian's first business is to ask of it, as he [sic] would of any other record, who made it, to whom it was addressed, and what it was meant to convey.” She argues that photographs “demonstrate what photographers considered worth recording as well as what people wanted to buy. In short, the photographic record reflected the intellectual, political, economic and social milieu within which it was created.” Schwartz also examines the technical factors that shaped the photographic record. Cameras were large and required long exposure settings, so dark interiors or remote locations were not often imaged. Long exposures erased rapidly moving people and things, giving mid-nineteenth-century streetscapes a “misleading stasis.” Photography was a marker of social identity and orientation toward technology in which “[t]he novelty of fixing for all time the image of a person, a place, or an event, using a mechanical device and a chemical process gripped the imagination.” Schwartz also cautions that “the distortions arising from more than a

²⁵ Stanley G. Triggs, “Alexander Henderson: Nineteenth-Century Landscape Photographer,” *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78) 45-59; Joan M. Schwartz, “The Photographic Record of Pre-Confederation British Columbia,” *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78) 17-44. In 1978 Triggs was Curator of Photography at the Notman Photographic Archives of the McCord Museum, while Schwartz was an archivist with the National Photography Collection (NPC) of the PAC; Triggs, “Alexander Henderson,” 49, 50.

century of loss and breakage” must be considered. All the elements of a context that enwraps not only a photograph’s creation, but also its entire subsequent existence – barring its presence in an archive and reuse by researchers – are present here and reappear in Schwartz’s later articles.²⁶

Several Canadian archivists, including some whose work appears in the 1978 *Archivaria* issue, produced books in the late 1970s and early 1980s that draw attention to photographic archival records, publicize archival institutions and set collections in their historical context. In line with then-current archival thought, not one addresses the subsequent use, ongoing context, or role of archives in shaping viewer perception of photographs, though these publications are themselves examples of subsequent use, ongoing context and archival reframing of these records.

The contexts in which these books appeared are also significant. As noted in chapter one, the 1970s were marked by continued shifts in the political and social climate as the federal government maintained efforts to recreate Canada’s image as a multicultural society. With their focus on Canadian photographers and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canadian society, these books promote Canadian national identity. In 1975, as also noted in chapter one, archivists in English Canada formed the Association of Canadian Archivists and sought to define archives as a discipline separate from historians. These books are history written from an explicitly archival viewpoint. They also express the interest in “all types of archival material” promoted by the total archives concept. These publications appear in a wider North American context in which photography is “the arriviste of academic subjects” and photographs the focus of

²⁶ Schwartz, “The Photographic Record,” 17, quoting G.H. Martin and David Francis, “The Camera’s Eye,” in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 228; Schwartz, “The Photographic Record,” 18, 33, 19, 20.

attention “within museums and the book trade, and a voracious new collecting market.” These books are distinct in their Canadian and archival viewpoints from contemporaneous works in the United States that typically take an art history approach to their subjects.²⁷

Archivist Richard Huyda’s 1975 *Camera in the Interior* sets the work of Humphrey Lloyd Hime in its historical and technological context. Huyda demonstrates how Hime’s images were part of efforts to extend political and cultural sovereignty into what would become the Canadian West. Huyda notes how the technical demands of collodion wet-plate photography in the 1850s set limits on what Hime could capture. However, Huyda does not interrogate the photographs themselves for the evidence they offer. While they are the central focus of the book, they are used primarily as illustrations that accompany the textual sources Huyda draws on for context.²⁸

In contrast, Lilly Koltun’s 1980 exhibition catalogue, *City Blocks, City Spaces*, notes that photographs of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Canadian urban environments not only document physical change, but also “the attitudes of the contemporary spectator viewing that change.” Photographs offer “the projection of an idea of place as well as the details of place.” Koltun demonstrates how a photograph of a

²⁷ Cook, “The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country,” 499; Cook, “The Tyranny of the Medium,” 142; Douglas R. Nickel, “History of Photography: The State of the Research.” *Art Bulletin* 83, no.3 (September 2001): 548-558, 548. For examples of an American art historical approach, see Weston Naef, *The Collection of Alfred Stieglitz: Fifty Pioneers of Modern Photography* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Viking Press, 1978); John Swarkowski and Maria Morris Hambourg, *The Work of Atget: Volume I: Old France* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1981); and Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present*, revised edition (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982).

²⁸ Richard J. Huyda, *Camera in the Interior: 1858: The Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition* (Toronto: the Coach House Press, 1975) 25, 12, 45. Several works authored or co-authored by Andrew Birrell also set collections of photographs in their historical and technological contexts while using them as illustrations. See A. J. Birrell, *Into the Silent Land: Survey Photography in the Canadian West, 1858-1900. A Public Archives of Canada Travelling Exhibition* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1975); Andrew Birrell, *Benjamin Baltzly: Photographs & Journal of an Expedition through British Columbia: 1871* (Toronto: the Coach House Press, 1978); and Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell, *Canadian Photography: 1839-1920* (Toronto: The Coach House Press, 1979).

street scene taken circa 1900 offers evidence of the changing place of photography as a social practice. Though a large and highly visible view camera “set up in the middle of the road” captures this image, the “camera’s invisibility is measured in the extent to which the pedestrians ignore it.” Koltun argues that the camera and photographer’s activity are ignored because each has become “a commonplace sign of Victorian technological progress.” By combining a close viewing of content with knowledge of social context and technology, Koltun effectively draws on this photograph for evidence of much more than its informational content alone.²⁹

Koltun is also editor of the most lavish – in terms of physical size and production values – of these publications, 1984’s *Private Realms of Light*, based on a 1983 Public Archives of Canada [PAC] exhibition. While curator Ann Thomas praises the exhibition for bringing the work of many photographers to light and for presenting “the progression of pictorial conventions and the constantly changing syntax” of one hundred years of images, both exhibition and book fuel Terry Cook’s concern that “[s]ome photography units [within the PAC] make no secret that a substantial part of their acquisition activity is oriented to documenting the history of the photographic medium and that aesthetic appeal rather than historical significance is of primary importance.” The book and exhibition present a history of amateur photography in Canada, not a history *through* amateur photography in Canada. Despite her praise, Thomas criticises, at length, the exhibit’s failure to define its key term, “amateur,” in its specific nineteenth-century aesthetic and social meaning. The use of the term seems arbitrary at times, since both book and exhibition include works by a number of professional photographers including

²⁹ Lilly Koltun, *City Blocks, City Spaces: Historical Photographs of Canada’s Urban Growth c. 1850-1900* (Ottawa: Public Archives Canada, Minister of Supply and Services, 1980) 11, 29, 74, 74.

Arthur Goss and argue that “a clear distinction between their paid and unpaid activities” can be made. In Goss’s case, two examples of his pictorialist work are decontextualized from “highly exact and explanatory images documenting the municipality’s transportation, construction, health care and other services” taken during his 1911 to 1940 term as official photographer for the City of Toronto. Surprisingly, considering her analysis in *City Blocks, City Spaces*, Koltun subjects the range of Goss’s work to the same division between aesthetic and documentary that Stanley Triggs constructed in 1978. For all its success in promoting photographs as archival records, *Private Realms of Light* offers another example of archival confusion between creator intent, inherent image qualities, and categories of analysis applied by the viewing archivist.³⁰

Returning to *Archivaria*, Joan Schwartz appears, during the 1990s and early 2000s, as the most consistent advocate of a contextual understanding of photographs. She is also one of the very few during this time who directly questions archival assumptions and practices.³¹

³⁰ Lilly Koltun, ed., *Private Realms of Light: Amateur photography in Canada / 1839-1940* (Markham: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1984). Andrew Birrell, Peter Robinson, Andrew Rodger, and Joan Schwartz, all then members of the NPC of the PAC also contributed; Ann Thomas, “Reflections on an Exhibition,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84) 136-144, 143; Cook, “The Tyranny of the Medium,” 143; Thomas, “Reflections on an Exhibition,” 140-142; Koltun, “Preface” in *Private Realms of Light*, x; Koltun, ed., *Private Realms of Light*, 312-313, 202, 203. Pictorialists favoured soft focus images and reflected an Arts and Crafts philosophy. See entries for “pictorialism,” “Linked Ring, Brotherhood of the,” and “Photo-Secession” in Robin Lenman, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Koltun, *Private Realms of Light*, 36. A significantly later book than those already discussed, almost as lavish as *Private Realms of Light*, is Roger Hall, Gordon Dodds, and Stanley Triggs, *The World of William Notman: The Nineteenth Century Through a Master Lens* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1993). The authors advocate a contextual approach and do not apply the dichotomy Triggs earlier favoured. However, like Richard Huyda in 1975, they use the photographs for illustrations rather than as evidence. At publication, Hall was professor of Canadian history at the University of Western Ontario, Dodds was Associate Provincial Archivist of the Manitoba Archives, and Triggs continued as Curator of the Notman Photographic Archives.

³¹ In addition to articles noted in this survey, Schwartz co-edited two issues of *Archival Science* with Terry Cook in 2002. Their introductory essays are referenced in chapter one. In only one, “The Making of Modern Memory,” do Schwartz and Cook refer to photographs, briefly mentioning John Tagg’s statement that photographs are always representations coded by their creators’ intents. In 2007, Schwartz offers a brief critique of archival practices. On page 208 of “Medieval Archive meets the Postmodern World: The

In 1995, in “We make our tools and our tools make us,” Schwartz examines how diplomatics – the close study of documents, their origins, forms and transmission – might be applied to photographs. Schwartz has three larger purposes: to see if diplomatics, which she terms “a positivist tool in a postcustodial, postmodern world,” remains useful; to critique what she views as Canadian archival educator Luciana Duranti’s rigid, positivist approach to diplomatic analysis; and to more generally consider how “the clash between positivism and postmodernism” impacts archival theory, practice and records. Schwartz concludes, “diplomatics can offer archivists a methodological framework by which to recontextualize photographs viewed traditionally as discrete decontextualized moments.” For Schwartz, these “decontextualized moments” result from a focus on the information content of photographs; she insists that “content must not be conflated with message,” that what photographs are presently seen to document must not be confused with the purposes for which they were created. Schwartz continues to view photographs, as she did in 1978, as “documents, created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message to an audience.”³²

While Schwartz uses the term “visual literacy” several times, she does not frame a concise definition. However, she clearly sees an ability to merge understandings of content, context, materiality and technology as archival visual literacy. While the “alphabet, grammar, and syntax” of photographs promoted by Kaplan and Mifflin remains important, Schwartz argues that content must be combined with a “knowledge of the nature and history of visual communication and photographic practice.” Image

Inaugural Exhibition of the Archive of the Crown of Aragon, Barcelona, Spain,” *Archivaria* 64 (Fall 2007) 199-209, Schwartz states, “[v]isual materials, it seems, have yet to be recognized as active participants in the life of business and the business of governance, as a form of both communication and documentation, worthy of archival preservation.”

³² Joan Schwartz, “We make our tools and our tools make us,” 63, 40, 64, 63, 44, 42.

content must be set within the social milieu, intellectual formulations and technology in existence when the photograph was taken. She also offers examples of how the physical form of a photograph gives evidence of the message its creator wished to convey. She does not limit context to the point at which the photograph was created, arguing, “[t]hose who wrote captions, compiled albums, or published portfolios all contributed to the action in which the photograph participated.” She insists that “[t]he informational value of a photograph is fixed by its content; its evidential value is neither absolute nor static.”³³

Schwartz also draws attention, as has this present review, to how “archivists have presumed that photographs in the ‘realist’ vein are purely descriptive, those in the ‘expressive’ mode purely artistic, setting up a binary opposition that ignores the core of archival thinking: functional context.” However, she does not further pursue the implications of archival participation in the ongoing contexts of photographs. Instead, she widens her discussion to the impact of postmodernist thought on archival records generally, quoting Brien Brothman’s assertion that “the history of the record does not stop at the portals of archives. Archives are participants in that history.” Though in passing Schwartz acknowledges “the historicity and specificity of both photographic and archival practice,” she does not pursue a discussion of the specificity of archival looking. Perhaps due to her concern not to engage in “free-floating interpretation,” neither does Schwartz address, as Gillian Rose does in 2001, how a viewer’s (in this case an archivist’s) context and intent shape their perceptions of both the content and message of a photograph.³⁴

³³ Taylor, *Imagining Archives*, 79; Schwartz, “We make our tools and our tools make us,” 49, 48, 51.

³⁴ Schwartz, “We make our tools and our tools make us,” 63, 61, quoting Brothman, “Orders of Value,” 82; Schwartz, “We make our tools and our tools make us,” 64, 74, n.127. In 1995, this article won the W. Kaye Lamb Prize, “awarded annually to honour the author of the *Archivaria* article that, by its exceptional

In 2000, in “Records of Simple Truth and Precision,” Schwartz focuses on how photographs were constructed during the nineteenth century as true, objective, scientific and fixed in meaning to support imperialist and empiricist metanarratives. These metanarratives required specific conceptions of both photography and archives to validate state authority. Schwartz argues that at a time of rampant colonialism by European nation-states, with the increased need for control through observation, categorization and classification, “the vocabularies of photography and archives were rooted in the shared epistemological assumptions of nineteenth-century empiricism.” Schwartz further argues that the constructed dichotomy of aesthetic versus documentary serves this metanarrative and can be traced at least as far back as the 1857 writings of English essayist and art critic Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, who “dismissed photographs as works of Art” to champion them as “records of simple truth and precision.” Schwartz ends by suggesting one reason why archivists may continue to deal with photographs on the basis of their informational content: if one questions the fixity and objectivity of photographs, one is led to question the fixity and objectivity of archives.³⁵

combination of research, reflection, and writing, most advances archival thinking in Canada.” Schwartz discusses the physical form of photographs in one paragraph. For a full discussion see Joan M. Schwartz, “*Un beau souvenir du Canada: Object, image, symbolic space*,” in Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds. *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Routledge, 2004) 16-31. For another discussion of materiality, see Joanna Sassoon, “Photographic Meaning in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” referenced earlier. This article also appears in a revised and enlarged version as “Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction” in Edwards and Hart, eds. *Photographs Objects Histories*, 186-202. In both, Sassoon argues that digitization robs researchers of many physical clues to a photograph’s context of creation and use. For a general discussion of the materiality of archival records that briefly mentions photographs, see Ala Rekrut, “Material Literacy: Reading Records as Material Culture,” *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005) 11-37. For full examination of materiality, see Alicia (Ala) Rekrut, “Reconnecting Mind and Matter: Materiality in Archival Theory and Practice” (MA Thesis, Department of History, Archival Studies, University of Manitoba / University of Winnipeg, 2009).

³⁵ Joan M. Schwartz, “‘Records of Simple Truth and Precision’: Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000) 1-40. This article also won the W. Kaye Lamb Prize. For works of post-colonial theory that address the role of metanarratives, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), and the flawed but oft-cited Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); Schwartz, “Records of Simple Truth and Precision,” 39. For discussion of archiving as “a process and a powerful technology of

In 2002, in “Coming to Terms with Photographs,” Schwartz examines how language and organizational schema lead archivists to “fixate on the factual content rather than the functional origins of visual images.” She notes how the term “special media” designates photographs, moving images, art works and other media as outside the “normality” of textual records. Schwartz continues her analysis from “Records of Simple Truth and Precision,” arguing that this archival “Othering” functions in the same way as in the spread of European imperialism; it reinforces the power of those who construct architectures of classification and place objects, people, events and ideas within them. Schwartz argues that the secondary role of photographs is not only an artefact of the historical development of archives but is perpetuated by present practice. She believes that not only photographs but all archival records continue to be shaped by theories and actions built on outdated, “positivist, empiricist, totalizing” assumptions. Schwartz condemns the hierarchical and bibliographic nature of descriptive systems such as *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD) with their tendency to “reduce visual images to their visual content and denude them of their original contexts of creation, circulation, and viewing.” She again asserts that a photograph album is “a document in its own right” and defends the “evidential value embedded in the physical structure of the album, its sequence of pages, the placement of images, [and] the juxtaposition of words and

rule,” see Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Art of Governance: On the Content in the Form,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (March 2002) 87-109, 100. For archives in the spread and maintenance of imperial power, see Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993). For discussion of photography outside the metanarrative of imperialism, see Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, eds., *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Schwartz, “Records of Simple Truth and Precision,” 27, 30, quoting Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, “Photography,” *Quarterly Review* 101 (London, April 1857), reprinted in Beaumont Newhall, ed., *Photography: Essays and Images: Illustrated Readings in the History of Photography* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980) 94; Schwartz, “Records of Simple Truth and Precision,” 40.

images.” She argues that an emphasis on item-level description makes photographs available only as “discrete, decontextualized, and dematerialized images.” She reiterates that photographs “are to be understood and described in terms of their instrumentality rather than simply their indexicality,” significant for what they do as well as what they portray. While Schwartz insists that photographs are communicative acts, she does not discuss how they become new acts of communication through use by archivists and researchers. Nor does she examine how daily archival practices might be reshaped by postmodernist approaches or offer specific methodological suggestions. This thesis is in large part an attempt to build upon Schwartz’s work by drawing on other disciplines to suggest new theoretical approaches to archival looking and new methodological approaches to archival description rather than simply reiterating and refining her critique.³⁶

Articles by archivists who build on the foundations laid down by Schwartz, who apply a postmodernist viewpoint to photographs and critique archival actions, increasingly appear in the late 2000s. In the spring of 2008, the first issue of *Archivaria*

³⁶ Schwartz, “Coming to Terms with Photographs,” 143, 169-170; Schwartz, “Records of Simple Truth and Precision,” 40; Schwartz, “Coming to Terms with Photographs,” 157. See Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options,” 120-123 for the argument that the concept of the fonds and the hierarchical organization of archival description are built on positivist, modernist assumptions. See also Heather MacNeil, “Archivalterity: Rethinking Original Order,” referenced in chapter one. For a detailed critique of the bibliographic basis of a variety of current archival descriptive standards, see Allen C. Benson, “The Archival Photograph and its Meaning: Formalisms for Modeling Images,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 7, no. 4 (October 2009) 148-187; Schwartz, “Coming to Terms with Photographs,” 157. Schwartz begins to explore alternatives in “Negotiating the Visual Turn: New Perspectives on Images and Archives,” *American Archivist* 67 (Spring/Summer 2004) 107-122, which, among other works, reviews Gillian Rose’s *Visual Methodologies*, referenced earlier, and Elizabeth Edwards’s *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001). The works of Rose and Edwards will be discussed in section three. Other examples of Schwartz’s interdisciplinary approach include “*The Geography Lesson: photographs and the construction of imaginative geographies*,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, no. 1 (1996) 16-45, Joan Marsha Schwartz, “Agent of Sight, Site of Agency: The Photograph in the Geographical Imagination” (PhD Thesis, Queen’s University, 1998) and Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2003).

since 1978 to feature a “Special Section on Archives and Photography” was published with photo-archivist Sarah Stacy as guest editor. The proportion of contributions by archivists as compared to others – typically historians – is little different from 1978; between fifty-five and sixty percent are archivist written. The 2008 issue shows both an increase in postmodernist approaches and the continued presence of modernist thought.³⁷ In 1978, two of six archivists, Linda Johnson and Joan Schwartz, and no other contributors, consider more than informational content. In 2008, two of four contributing archivists and two of three historians take a postmodernist stance. The works of three contributors provide examples. Case studies by archivist Jill Delaney and historian James Opp critique specific archival practices, demonstrate that archivists are part of the ongoing context of photographic records, and address the historicity and specificity of archival looking. Two articles by archivist Jessica Bushey demonstrate a modernist understanding; one demonstrates the failure of a content-based concept of visual literacy.

Jill Delaney’s study of the Rocky Mountain Repeat Photography Project argues that the historicity and specificity of archival looking – in this case, appraisal, “the gateway function of all subsequent archival activity” – can potentially hamper the scientific use of archival photographs. She notes how archival looking has changed with time. In the 1960s and 1970s photographic “collections were valued more either for their reference to national identity...or for their ethnographic or historical content” while more

³⁷ As do articles after 2008. Allen Benson, “Killed Negatives,” cited earlier, offers examples of how photographs provide an interpretive context for each other and can have multiple creators. Rodney G. S. Carter, ‘Ocular Proof’: Photographs as Legal Evidence,” *Archivaria* 69 (Spring 2010) 23-47 shows Carter’s gradual movement from a modernist to a more postmodernist viewpoint. On page 44, Carter argues that photographic meaning is malleable and shaped by language. On page 47 he suggests that archival methodologies for description “perform a testimonial function” by outlining the contexts in which photographs are created, used and re-used. He does, however, appear to see archival descriptive language in a generally positive light. He sees description as defining archival records and adding evidential value to them, but does not consider its possible negative effects.

recent function-based macro-appraisal has tended to select records that document organizational functioning but not the end results of that functioning. Delaney challenges her colleagues to “devise a method which not only documents the functions of a scientific organization, but the actual science, which is at the core mandate of that organization.” She demonstrates how the assumptions and time-bound nature of archival appraisal can close off avenues of potential future use.³⁸

Delaney identifies another aspect of the specificity of archival looking when she states that “[w]e have been less comfortable making irrevocable archival decisions about records that we do not understand, coming as we do to the archival profession with training primarily in the humanities.” Delaney also notes how the future use of photographs is unpredictable, since they “carry so much unintentional information that has been captured by the indiscriminatory lens, that is legible to many different ‘readers.’” Though she does not draw on Gillian Rose’s concept of “audiencing,” Delaney’s statement suggests another way in which archival description based on image content is inadequate. It conveys only the content that an archivist, whose looking is shaped by her or his own context and intent, sees. It does not convey the content and information that other observers, in other contexts of looking, with other background knowledge and other intents, will inevitably identify. Though Joan Schwartz states “[t]he informational value of a photograph is fixed by its content,” different observers will focus on different aspects of content and identify different informational values based on their

³⁸ Jill Delaney, “An Inconvenient Truth? Scientific Photography and Archival Ambivalence,” *Archivaria* 65 (Spring 2008) 75-95. The Project compares phototopographic survey images taken between 1888 and 1958, now part of the Geodetic Survey of Canada collection (R214) held by Library and Archives Canada, to recent photographs taken at the same locations to, as Delaney states on page 95, “provide a stunning range of information from changes in glaciers, tree lines, and types of forest cover, to types of lichen found on the rocks in the foreground of the images.”; Cook, “The Archive(s) is a Foreign Country,” 504; Delaney, “An Inconvenient Truth?,” 91, 94.

observations.³⁹

Historian James Opp makes archives “the object and not merely the tool of history” as he examines the layers of archival handling experienced by photographs of Aboriginal persons taken in Alberta in the 1920s by Arnold Lupson. After their archival donation, the photographs were arranged into albums based on tribal affiliation and were provided with amplifying textual descriptions including extended commentaries on customs, objects and ceremonies. In 2005, some of these albums were digitized as part of an online educational project intended to critique “the Eurocentric nature of archives.” These layers of archival action shift the relationship between the Lupton photographs and the archival descriptions of them; the descriptions become primary texts in which “the images themselves have been marginalized so completely that Arnold Lupson’s name does not even appear in the online description.” Opp’s study provides an example of why “archives must ensure that they not only document the history of the record, but that they also record the history of that institutional documentation.” Such documentation not only makes re-analysis and reconsideration of archival actions possible; if made available to researchers it educates them to the changeability of the archival viewpoint and that there are multiple ways of seeing and understanding the records. The Arnold Lupson photographs provide a striking example of why archivists should work with a concept of context that acknowledges their own participation and does not obscure the original acts of communication in which photographs took part.⁴⁰

³⁹ Delaney, “An Inconvenient Truth?,” 92, 94. Delaney refers to photographer Lee Friedlander’s concept of photographic “generosity.” Friedlander’s idea will be noted in the third section of this chapter; Schwartz, “We make our tools and our tools make us,” 51.

⁴⁰ James Opp, “The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive: The Arnold Lupson Photographic Collection,” *Archivaria* 65 (Spring 2008) 3-19, 17, quoting Patrick Joyce, “The Politics of the Liberal Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences* 12, no. 2 (1999) 35-49, 47; Opp, “The Colonial Legacies,” 9, 13, 11, 19, quoting Schwartz, “Coming to Terms,” 159. The Arnold Lupson collection, donated to the Glenbow

Archivist Jessica Bushey contributes two articles to the 2008 issue, a research summary in “Reflections on InterPARES,” and an exhibition review in the “Special Section on Archives and Photography.”⁴¹

Bushey’s summary of research into the impact of digital photography on the record-keeping practices of professional photographers offers a wealth of technical information archivists need in order to actively preserve the “born-digital” photographs that increasingly comprise the visual record of society. While her preservation focus is valuable, her reference to photographs as “a visual account of something” that “makes explicit the creator’s intent to carry forward *visual information* about an event [Emphasis added]” means her article is little different in its modernist, content-focused approach from that written in 1978 by Klaus Hendriks.⁴²

In reviewing an exhibition of Fred Herzog’s photographs, Bushey fails to consider ongoing context and does not take the specificity of her own viewpoint into account. The exhibition features one hundred and forty prints, most in colour and picturing Vancouver in the 1950s and 1960s, selected by Herzog from more than eighty thousand Kodachrome

Foundation in 1955, is held by the Archives of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta. The layered interventions experienced by the Lupson photographs also provide an example of Laura Millar’s suggestion, discussed in chapter one, that “[a] wide range of descriptive processes should exist, performed at different times and for different reasons.” It is, however, an example of what can occur when these interventions are not explicitly acknowledged. See Millar, “An Obligation of Trust,” 78.

⁴¹ Jessica Bushey, “He Shoots, He Stores: New Photographic Practice in the Digital Age,” *Archivaria* 65 (Spring 2008) 125-149; Jessica Bushey, “Archives and Photography Exhibition Review: Fred Herzog: Vancouver Photographs,” *Archivaria* 65 (Spring 2008) 98-105. InterPARES is an acronym for International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems, under the overall direction of Luciana Duranti, Chair and Professor of the Archival Studies program at the University of British Columbia. See <http://www.interpares.org> for the project’s emphasis on “the creation and maintenance of accurate and reliable records and the long-term preservation of authentic records.” Accessed 13 January 2011. Reflections on InterPARES includes two other articles this chapter will not discuss, as they do not address photographs.

⁴² The Archives of Ontario defines “born-digital” records as those “that were originally created and subsequently maintained in a digital format. They differ from digitized records, which are paper-based or analog archival records that have been digitized through scanning or some other technique.” See Archives of Ontario web page at www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/collections/electronic-records.aspx. Accessed 13 January 2011; Bushey, “He Shoots, He Stores,” 130, 132.

colour slides and twenty-eight thousand black-and-white negatives in his personal archive. A book co-authored by exhibition curator Grant Arnold offers several reasons, all based on Herzog's choice of medium, why his work has not received greater recognition until this exhibition. After recounting the effects of medium on the previous reception of Herzog's work, Bushey surprisingly does not consider how the exhibition and book recontextualize Herzog's photographs when compared to his previous preference to "project his original slides and provide personal narration." She also assumes the validity of a "struggle to categorize [Herzog's] photography in the dichotomy between art and documentation." She does not examine how Herzog's four-year participation in selecting and printing his photographs is a continuation of his creative process directed to a new audience in a new context via a new medium, nor does she acknowledge her viewpoint as an archivist primarily concerned with the preservation of evidential value. Bushey complains that a failure to include damaged images – many of Herzog's slides suffered colour fading, fungal growth, and emulsion scratches due to their repeated projection – is "a missed opportunity to educate the public about the fragility of photographic media." This is a myopic expectation to have of a gallery exhibition.⁴³

Bushey's discussion of one photograph, *Chinese New Year, Vancouver, 1964* demonstrates the limits of visual literacy addressing only image content. This colour

⁴³ Bushey, "Exhibition Review," 97, 100; Grant Arnold and Michael Turner, *Fred Herzog: Vancouver Photographs* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007); Bushey, "Exhibition Review," 99, 99, 104. Bushey's stress on accuracy, integrity and authenticity, though legitimate, likely reflect her training as a graduate research assistant in the InterPARES 2 Project from 2003 to 2005. See http://www.interpares.org/ip2/ip2_index.cfm in addition to earlier referenced website. Accessed 13 January 2011. InterPARES contrasts with a postmodernist approach, and was arguably in Terry Cook's mind when he expressed concern over a "fundamental division about the purposes, orientation, and, indeed, very nature of archives, as institutions and as records, and thus about the mission of archives in society, [that] rests on an unresolved tension between the concepts of evidence and memory." See Cook, "Beyond the Screen," 3; Bushey, "Exhibition Review," 104.

photograph, as it appears on the cover of *Archivaria*, is more than two and a half times as wide as tall; its aspect ratio is roughly 5/2. Kodachrome 35mm colour slide film, Herzog's preferred medium, has an aspect ratio of 3/2. Yet she states, "Herzog deftly composes the rest of the image to include signage with Chinese characters, the flag of Taiwan, and the red ensign." This photograph, presumably appearing in the exhibition as it did on the cover of *Archivaria*, offers clear evidence of Herzog cropping the image during printing, not of his skill in initial composition. Bushey does not acknowledge the ongoing nature of Herzog's creative process, instead treating the photograph as a "discrete decontextualized moment." Her conclusion about the evidence offered by this photograph's content is questionable because content is not combined with a consideration of ongoing context and technical constraints. Bushey's review illustrates the failure of a modernist viewpoint: she does not acknowledge how forms of presentation influence the reception and meaning of photographs; she applies a reductionist aesthetic-versus-documentary dichotomy; she does not consider her own viewpoint; and she applies a visual literacy that begins and ends with image content.⁴⁴

To summarise this survey of archival discourse, some members of the Canadian English-speaking archival community continue to view photographs through a modernist lens and see importance only in informational content. In contrast, postmodernist archivists increasingly understand that each photograph is both embedded in time and must be viewed through the passage of time. Each photograph, through a changing series of physical manifestations, occupies a continually moving point of intersection with a continually changing pattern of technological possibilities and shifting intellectual, social and economic discourses to enact the intents of a succession of creators, including

⁴⁴ Bushey, "Exhibition Review," 101; Schwartz, "We make our tools and our tools make us," 63.

archivists themselves. Postmodernist archivists are increasingly aware of the specificity of their own looking and the manner in which archives participate in constructing the meaning of photographs through their arrangement and descriptive practices. Can those outside the archival profession, but who look at archivists looking at photographs, affirm or add to this awareness?

**Looking into the Archival Eye:
How Others Have Seen Archivists Look at Photographs**

The works of three writers: American photographer, writer and critic Allan Sekula; British art historian and cultural theorist John Tagg; and Australian anthropologist and ethnohistorian Elizabeth Edwards provide a summary of how those outside the profession have critiqued archives as a “collective communications medium” and have seen archivists look at photographs over the last thirty years. These three are also cited more frequently in the *Archivaria* articles surveyed in section one above than any others.⁴⁵

Sekula, Tagg and Edwards’s views on photographs in archives should first be set in the context from which they arose: the evolution of discourses on photography. The following summary of that evolution is, of necessity, greatly oversimplified. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as noted in Joan Schwartz’s “Records of Simple Truth and Precision,” debate centred on whether photography was an aesthetic or a documentary practice, an art or scientific tool. American Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946) consistently championed photography as art. The high-speed sequential photographs created by British immigrant to America Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) are often

⁴⁵ Cook, “Remembering the Future,” 172; Dirks, “Annals of the Archive,” in *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, 48.

cited as photography in the service of science. The photographs of plants taken by German photographer and sculptor Karl Blossfeldt (1865-1932) challenge any such distinction.⁴⁶

By the late 1930s in the United States, photography was codified in an art historical approach championed by American curator Beaumont Newhall's (1908-1993) exhibition catalogue *Photography 1839-1937* and the multiple editions of his book that followed, even while photographers such as Dorothea Lange (1895-1965) and Walker Evans (1903-1975) used photography to document and publicize social conditions for the Farm Securities Administration. From the 1930s to the 1970s, photographic images were widely disseminated and promoted by mass-market magazines such as *Life*, *Fortune* and *Look*. The 1960s were marked by the creation and growth of departments of photography at several major American art institutions. The 1970s and 1980s were marked by an active photographic collecting market and photography's "mounting assimilation by the museum into the precincts of high art." This period also saw a reaction, not confined to the United States, "against photography's indiscriminate appropriation as art" by critics as diverse as Susan Sontag, Rosalind Krauss, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Victor Burgin, Allan Sekula and John Tagg. These critics applied theoretical perspectives as diverse as cultural studies, feminist analysis, linguistics, psychoanalysis and Marxist analysis to multiplying photographic discourses. Art historian Douglas Nickel asserts, these critics had in common "an orientation steeped in the 1960s politics of confrontation" and used

⁴⁶ See entry for Stieglitz, Alfred, in Lenman, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*, referenced earlier. See also Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz's New York Secession* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005). For Muybridge, see Ann Thomas, *Beauty of Another Order: Photography in Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 170-175 and Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West* (New York: Viking, 2003). For Blossfeldt see Hans Christian Adam, *Karl Blossfeldt* (Köln: Taschen, 1999).

photography as a vehicle for “the larger project of postmodern criticism.”⁴⁷

In the 1990s and 2000s, two interwoven strands of academic discourse emerged that continue to the present. One strand focuses on how photographs function in the lives of individuals and within institutional settings; the other on how photography operates as a discursive system linked in historically constructed ways to other discourses on perception, cognition, memory and meaning. The former aligns photography with social history, cultural history, visual and material anthropology and the history of science. Examples include Elizabeth Edwards’s focus on photographs as material culture, Martha Langford’s focus on personal photograph albums and an increased interest on the part of academics and the public in vernacular photographs. The latter strand aligns photography with visual studies, communications theory, semiotics and theories of consciousness. Examples are found in the writings of Martin Jay and W.J.T. Mitchell. Mitchell carefully distinguishes “between visual studies and visual culture as, respectively, the field of study and the object or target of study.” Both strands draw on semiotician Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, completed just before his death in 1980. Many writing within these discourses do not directly examine archives; the following paragraphs focus on Sekula, Tagg and Edwards because they do. In the 1980s, Allan Sekula examines the political and economic roles of photographs in archives. From 1988 to the present, John Tagg argues that photographs should be viewed through their roles in discursive systems. In the 2000s, Elizabeth Edwards suggests that photographs in archives can offer the

⁴⁷ Nickel, “History of Photography: The State of the Research,” 550. In 2011, Nickel is a professor of modern art at Brown University. For Beaumont Newhall, see Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present*, referenced earlier. For Lange and Evans, see entry for documentary photography in Lenman, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph* and Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009); Julia Adeney Thomas, “The Evidence of Sight,” *History and Theory* 48, no.4 (December 2009) 151-168, 163; Nickel, “History of Photography: The State of the Research,” 554, 554, 554.

“cornucopia of meanings” advocated by archivist Verne Harris.⁴⁸

Allan Sekula is typically cited by archivists for one or more of three reasons: for his detailed case study of the Bertillon system; for his deconstruction of an art historical approach to photography; and for his examination of how archives recontextualize photographs. As an American Marxist, he consistently frames his discussions in a critique of late capitalism. He argues that archives as institutions “are not neutral; they embody the power inherent in accumulation, collection, and hoarding as well as that power inherent in the command of the lexicon and rules of a language.” He asserts that archives, as accumulations of records, “are property, either of individuals or institutions.” Sekula sees that because “photographic meaning depends largely on context” and because photographs “are fragmentary and incomplete utterances” whose “meaning is always directed by layout, captions, text, and site and mode of presentation,” archives cannot avoid recontextualizing photographs through their language use and descriptive architectures.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Nickel, “History of Photography: The State of the Research,” 555-556. In Geoffrey Batchen, “Vernacular Photographies” in *Each Wild Idea: Writing Photography History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001) 57-80, Batchen defines vernacular photographs as “ordinary photographs, the ones...that preoccupy the home and heart but rarely the museum or the academy”; See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays of Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); W.J.T. Mitchell, “Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (August 2002) 165-181, 166; For Roland Barthes on photographs, see *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) and Geoffrey Batchen, ed., *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes’s Camera Lucida* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009); Harris, “Law, Evidence and Electronic Records,” 15.

⁴⁹ For examination of the Bertillon system, a criminal classification schema created in Paris in 1893 by Alphonse Bertillon that incorporated photographs, and for Sekula’s argument that archives are complicit in surveillance, control, and the exercise of power, see “The Body and the Archive,” *OCTOBER* 39 (Winter 1986) 3-64, reprinted in Richard Bolton, ed. *The Contest of Meaning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) 343-389. For Sekula on art historical narratives of photography, see *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo-Works, 1973-1983* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1984). For recontextualization of photographs, see “Reading an Archive,” in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writing by Contemporary Artists*, Brian Wallis, ed. (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1987) 114-127. For Sekula’s Marxism, see Sabine T. Kriebel, “Theories of Photography: A Short History,” in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007) 3-49, 29. For Sekula’s focus on late

While in accord with Joan Schwartz's later views on the importance of context and archival involvement in that context, Sekula also assumes that archives have an economic incentive, arguing that "not only are the pictures in archives often *literally* up for sale, but their meanings are up for grabs [Emphasis in original]." He regards every photograph as a sign, not necessarily an indexical sign, but "a sign, above all, of someone's investment in the sending of a message." Though he believes that photographs should be viewed in the context of their original rhetorical function and as part of the larger discourse in which they originated, he argues that archives do not preserve these original contexts but supplant them with a commodified archival one. Helena Zinkham's stress in *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, in 2006, on the determination of description by intended archival use would seem to confirm the continued relevance of Sekula's view.⁵⁰

Art historian and critical theorist John Tagg is typically cited for his argument that photography is not a unified medium or technology, but a discursive system that operates across a range of disciplines, discourses and institutional spaces.⁵¹ A photograph can be a memento in one setting, an evidential record in another, an artistic expression in a third, a base for philosophical speculation in a fourth, a commodity in a fifth and can easily cross

capitalism, see *Allan Sekula: Fish Story* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995); Sekula, "Reading an Archive," 118, 115, 117, 117, 117.

⁵⁰ Sekula, "Reading an Archive," 116; Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain*, 5-6. Sekula draws on Roland Barthes's concept of "anchorage" for the idea that a photograph is dependent on text to anchor it to a single meaning. Zinkham, "Description and Cataloging," in Ritzenthaler, et al., *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, 179-180. As of 2010, Sekula continues to create photographs, films and books that critique what he terms "the imaginary and material geographies of the advanced capitalist world."

⁵¹ John Tagg, *Grounds of Dispute: Art History, Cultural Politics and the Discursive Field* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 143. For how photographic meaning came to be segmented during the nineteenth century into discursive fields, see John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, 1988 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For how certain discursive fields frame photographic meaning, see John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). In 2010, Tagg continues as Professor of Art History and Comparative Literature at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

between or combine two or more of these spaces. He also insists that a photograph “inflect[s] its context rather than reflect[s] it.” A photograph is a communicative act that shapes as well as is shaped by its context. While Tagg agrees with Sekula that photographs do not solely index reality, he also speaks of them in more active terms than does Sekula, insisting that

photography does not transmit a pre-existent reality which is already meaningful in itself. As with any other discursive system, the question we must ask is not, ‘What does this discourse reveal of something else?’, but, ‘What does it do [?]’⁵²

Clearly, for Tagg, photography and photographs do not merely index reality, they express the hopes, fears, aspirations and intents of an earlier mind situated in an earlier world.

Though Tagg does not address concrete archival institutions, he repeatedly addresses archives as an idea. He considers archives to be “a machinery of knowledge, necessarily incorporating a system of information storage and retrieval, in short, *a discourse machine* [Emphasis in original].” In agreement with Sekula, he argues that archives do not preserve the original meaning of photographs but are a mechanism whereby new meaning can be imposed; Tagg refers to “the unfolding space of the archive as the scene of a prolonged ritual of adjudication” that determines “what is interior to [the document] and what is exterior, what is internal evidence and what is background, what is text and what is context, what is structure and what is history.”⁵³

Like Sekula’s, Tagg’s ideas support Joan Schwartz’s views on context, archival involvement in that context and the nature of photographs as communicative acts. But,

⁵² John Tagg, “Neither Fish Nor Flesh,” *History and Theory* 48 (December 2009) 77-81, 78; Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 119, 119.

⁵³ Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame*, 17, 3, 235. For a view supporting Tagg’s, see Richard Harvey Brown and Beth Davis- Brown, “The making of memory: the politics of archives, libraries and museums in the construction of national consciousness,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11, no. 4 (November 1998) 17-32, 22.

while Sekula assumes an economic reason for an archival focus on informational content, Tagg asserts that archives do so to provide the denatured raw materials from which new discourses can be manufactured. This assertion adds even greater import to Wendy Duff and Verne Harris's insistence, noted in chapter one, that "[n]o approach to archival description, no descriptive system or architecture, can escape the reality that it is a way of constructing knowledge through processes of inscription, mediation, and narration." Tagg's view that photographs actively function in a variety of discursive contexts suggests that rather than reducing them to their informational content, archivists should view each photograph as operating within several discursive spaces simultaneously: in the discourse in which it was created and initially functioned; the discourses it has moved through since its creation; the discursive space of the archive itself; and the discursive spaces to be constructed by future archival users.⁵⁴

Anthropologist and ethnohistorian Elizabeth Edwards is typically cited for her insistence that photographs must be seen as material objects taking part in social exchanges. In addition to her interest in photographs as material culture, she has written on the relationship between history, anthropology and photography and on the history of institutional collecting practices. In agreement with Joanna Sassoon and Joan Schwartz, Edwards sees that "a photograph is a three-dimensional thing, not only a two-dimensional image." She also argues for the ontological complexity of each photograph because of its "dual semiotic status as both an *index* of its subject matter and yet also an *icon* that resembles it [Emphasis in original]." She views photographs as memory objects with emotional resonance as well as indexes of past reality. She argues that archival methodology must move beyond an exclusive focus on information content – on

⁵⁴ Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names," 275.

indexicality – and beyond previous critiques such as Sekula’s and Tagg’s that impose “the reductive and universalizing tendencies of Foucault-inspired readings of the ‘colonial archive.’” She sees photographs as both authored documents shaped by intent and as sites of “cultural encounter and intersection.” She counters Sekula and Tagg’s portrayal of the archive as a “space of appropriation,” suggesting that photographs are “potentially destabilizing points of fracture within the archive itself, as hitherto unheard voices within the photographic image begin to emerge and inflect archival practice.” She offers an example drawn from anthropology, recounting how in 1898 British zoologist Alfred Haddon returned to an island in the Torres Strait between Australia and New Guinea with lantern slides of islanders he had taken ten years earlier. When shown at community celebrations, each “photograph became a family and community document as well as a scientific one.” Edwards argues that the digitization of photographs and provision of online access can enact the same sort of visual repatriation, opening archival photographs to a wealth of new uses in new frames of reference. Drawing on sources that include archivists Ann Stoler and Brien Brothman, she defines the archive as an “active historical process rather than a static and unchangeable entity.” Edwards’ defense of the multiple and active nature of each photograph and her assertion that archives can be sites where many viewpoints and discourses intersect again suggests that archives stop attempting to impose a single meaning on each photograph grounded in content and archival viewpoint and adopt approaches that support multiple views and interpretations.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ For photographs as material culture, see Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds. *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Routledge, 2004). For the intersection of photography, anthropology, collecting practices and history, see Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) and Christopher Morton and Elizabeth Edwards, eds.

Such an approach opens archives to future uses. As comparative literature professor Ulrich Baer insists, in archives, “there must be room for contingency.” This is not to suggest that this approach should be user-driven; it is to suggest that archives should acknowledge and make use of recent theories that each photograph is an endless series of communicative acts open to endless reinterpretation. Sekula, Tagg and Edwards all agree that archives profoundly reshape perception of archival photographs through a stress on informational content filtered through the unacknowledged specificity of archival viewpoint. The following section draws on further sources outside the archival profession to suggest how archives might look at and describe photographs in less mediated ways.⁵⁶

Taking Another Look: Other Disciplines Suggest New Ways to Look at and Describe Photographs

This section begins by examining cultural and feminist geographer Gillian Rose’s concept of visual literacy, arguing that it offers archivists an effective guide to how to look at photographs, refine their visual literacy skills and reconsider their own thinking. It then addresses how photographs communicate emotionally as well as intellectually by

Photography, Anthropology and History: Expanding the Frame (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009). For examination of material culture’s intersection with institutional collecting practices, see Edwards, et al. *Sensible Objects*, referenced in the Introduction; Edwards and Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories*, 1; Morton and Edwards, *Photography, Anthropology and History*, 7, 1, 7; Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 4; Morton and Edwards, *Photography, Anthropology and History*, 10. For an extended critique of Sekula and Tagg that affirms Edwards, see Karen Cross and Julia Peck, “Editorial: Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory,” *Photographies* 3, no.2 (September 2010) 127-138; Elizabeth Edwards, “Photography Changes What We See, Depending on Who’s Looking,” *click! Photography changes everything*, available at Smithsonian Photography Initiative at <http://click.si.edu/Story.aspx?story=463>. Accessed 22 November 2010. For a book-length example of a participatory approach, see Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers with members of the Kainai Nation, *Pictures Bring Us Messages’: Sinaakssiiksi aohsimaahpilhkookiyaawa: Photographs and Histories from the Kainai Nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 4; Morton and Edwards, *Photography, Anthropology and History*, 10. In 2011, Edwards is professor and senior research fellow at the University of the Arts, London. She was previously curator of photographs at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

⁵⁶ Ulrich Baer, “Deep in the Archive,” *Aperture* 193 (Winter 2008) 54-59, 54.

drawing on the work of Roland Barthes, Geoffrey Batchen, Julia Adeney Thomas, and others. Martha Langford and Marianne Hirsch's work on photograph albums is then added to Rose's schema to suggest ways in which archivists might look beyond individual images. After touching on Lee Friedlander's concept of photographic "generosity" to argue that archival description cannot capture even the full subject content of any photograph, the section suggests that archival visual literacy should involve not only looking at photographs, but also using them to communicate to researchers. Digital photography can provide a less mediated form of archival description either in addition to or as an alternative to textual description and should be an integral tool of archival practice. The field of education's concept of multiple intelligences and the rise of visual modes of communication in society justify a combined photographic and textual archival approach. By no means does this section recommend the complete abandonment of textual description; it does, however, suggest that item-level textual description both misrepresents the evidential value of photographs and unnecessarily absorbs valuable archival time and energy.

Gillian Rose's concept of visual literacy has received little attention within archival discourse. Only Joan Schwartz in 2004 and Helena Zinkham in 2006 refer to her ideas. Though Schwartz approvingly reviews Rose's 2001 *Visual Methodologies*, she also cautions that the work's use of specialized terms from the field of cultural studies will challenge archivists. Zinkham does not meet this challenge and presents her misunderstanding of Rose's concept of "audiencing" as part of a summary of Rose's ideas that is only six lines of text in length.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Schwartz, "Negotiating the Visual Turn," 111-112; Zinkham, "Reading and Researching Photographs," in Ritzenhaller, et al., *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, 62, 77.

Rose's visual literacy schema is one of a number of approaches surveyed in *Visual Methodologies*. Others in this primer include compositional interpretation, quantitative content analysis, semiology, psychoanalysis and two forms of discourse analysis: the discourse or argument presented within an individual image and the discourse within which visual records as a class operate (both noted in the photographic discourses summary above). From her schema, Rose derives a series of questions that significantly resemble those recommended in 1976 by Leonard Boyle for the diplomatic analysis of documents. Boyle asks: Who created the document? Were there others involved in its creation? What form, formulae and style does it make use of? Why was it created? Where was the document created and how did place affect its form? When was it created and was there an order or procedure followed in its creation? To answer Boyle's questions, an archivist needs to consider many of the same factors suggested by Joan Schwartz in regard to photographs: the document's historical and organizational context; its physical nature; the processes and functions that created it; who created it and for what reasons and what was enacted through it. Rose's three-part schema is a natural extension of both Boyle's approach to diplomatic analysis and Joan Schwartz's contextual visual literacy. Since Rose's approach contains elements likely to be familiar to archivists and immediately applicable in an archival context, it is here selected over the others discussed in *Visual Methodologies*.⁵⁸

As noted earlier, Rose's concept of visual literacy is organized into three sites: the

⁵⁸ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 187-203; Leonard E. Boyle, "Diplomatics," in James M. Powell, ed. *Medieval Studies: An Introduction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1976) 69-101, particularly 80-91. At his death in 1999, Father Leonard E. Boyle of the Dominican Order was Prefect Emeritus of the Vatican Library, having served as Prefect from 1984 to 1997. On pages 42, 49, 54, and 63 of Schwartz, "We make our tools and our tools make us," Schwartz finds the general concepts but not the specifics of Boyle's approach to diplomatics applicable to photographs.

site of the photograph's creation, the site of the photograph itself, and the site at which it is viewed. Rose further suggests that each site can be questioned in each of three modalities: the technological, the compositional, and the social. The technological mode addresses not only the tools used to make a photograph, but also those used to preserve and display it. Digital photograph frames are an example of recent technologies of display. The compositional mode addresses not only how a photograph is visually ordered (Kaplan and Mifflin's third level) but also how these elements influence its reception. The social mode addresses the social, economic, political and institutional practices that not only produce a photograph, but also those that shape its viewing and interpretation. Rose's schema acknowledges "pictures are more than representations, because they are also resources, mediators that, along with words, give shape to ideas."⁵⁹

From this schema of three sites addressed through three modalities, Rose derives a series of questions, organized by site, which can be asked of any photograph. She cautions that her questions are by no means exhaustive; they are a starting point for the creation of further questions. She also cautions that these sites and modalities are not mutually exclusive. Internet sites such as Flickr, Picasa and Facebook are examples of intersections between the technological and social modes.⁶⁰

Questions regarding the site of image creation include the obvious. When, where,

⁵⁹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 16-28, 188-189; Alan Radley, "What people do with pictures," *Visual Studies* 25, no. 3 (December 2010) 268-279, 268; How a message is "audience'd" has also been explored in literary history. See preface to Jonathan Rose's *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), where Rose argues that readers play an active role in the making of meaning, each guided by a personal set of rules of interpretation (or "frames" in the words of sociologist Erving Goffman). Rose asserts that literary history should not only focus on authors and creators, but also on how readers receive works and appropriate and transform the messages they receive. See also David M. Levy, *Scrolling Forward: Making Sense of Documents in the Digital Age* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001). On page 106, Levy states, "[p]racticitioners of the new book history – historians, literary scholars, sociologists, anthropologists, and librarians – have been less concerned with books or texts per se than with the human activities within which these are embedded...readers making sense of symbols printed on pages."

⁶⁰ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 188-189.

by whom, under whose instructions and with what technologies was the photograph made? Less obvious questions are also asked. Has the presence of the camera initiated the event it records? What were the social identities of, and relations between, the maker, the owner and the subject of the photograph? Does the genre and content of the photograph address these identities and relations? Does the form of the photograph reconstitute, recreate, or perpetuate these identities and relations?

What does Rose mean by the form of a photograph perpetuating the relation between photographer and subject? *Migrant Mother*, Dorothea Lange's photograph of Florence Thompson and her children, taken in 1936 for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and considered to be "Lange's most famous photograph, one of America's most famous photographs" provides an example. Though Thompson co-operated in the creation of the series of photographs of which this was one, and though Lange initially tried to preserve Thompson's anonymity, in making this photograph Lange contributed (along with others such as Roy E. Stryker, Chief of the Historical Section of the FSA from 1935 to 1943) to a process that appropriated and traded on Thompson's circumstances. For many years Thompson attempted to gain some form of financial recompense, succeeding only shortly before her death in 1983. In addition to the many other roles it performed, *Migrant Mother* continued, by its existence and widespread distribution, to disempower a woman Lange had portrayed as disempowered.⁶¹

Rose's questions regarding the image itself also include the obvious. What is being shown? Is the photograph part of a series? To what genre does it belong? Less

⁶¹ Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits*, 235; Martha Rosler, "In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)," in Richard Bolton, ed. *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 302-340, 315; Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 243. See also Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) 49-66.

obvious questions include: what is the vantage point of the photograph, what might lie outside the frame and why has it been excluded? Does the photograph draw on the characteristics of its genre or comment critically or ironically on them? Does the photograph's visual appearance empower or disempower its subject? Is it a contradictory image? Questions are asked not only about what is present in or excluded from the image; but also what knowledges the image draws on or excludes.⁶²

Another example clarifies what Rose means by what knowledges a photograph draws on or excludes. A photograph album now held by the United States Holocaust Museum and likely compiled in 1944 by SS-Obersturmführer Karl Höcker consists of informal portraits of soldiers, medical staff and groups participating in singalongs, dinners, hikes and other prosaic activities. Setting aside discussion of Höcker's original intent in creating the album, its present communicative impact comes not from what the photographs show, but from what they do not. The people who appear in these photographs are the staff of the Auschwitz-Berkenau concentration camp. While this contextual knowledge renders the photographs deeply unsettling, their prosaic content and contradictory nature heightens their ability to profoundly disturb.⁶³

Rose's questions about how photographs are viewed again include the obvious: who was the original audience and who are the more recent audiences? Less obvious questions include: where is the spectator positioned in relation to the visual components of the photograph; what relation between the photograph and its viewers does this

⁶² Though Rose does not provide a detailed examination of how the visual elements of a photograph interact with its content to influence viewer perception, such an analysis can be found in Stephen Shore, *The Nature of Photographs: A Primer* (London: Phaidon Press, 2007) 12, 37, 38.

⁶³ See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Auschwitz through the lens of the SS: Photos of Nazi leadership at the camp." Available at www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/ssalbum. Accessed 12 January 2011.

produce? If the photograph is one of a series, how do the preceding and subsequent images affect its meaning? Is the image represented elsewhere, for instance as advertising material, in a way that invites a particular viewing of it? Where is the photograph being viewed and how do the rules for observer behavior in that place, be it art gallery, archive, living room, public street, or private study affect how the photograph is viewed?⁶⁴

These questions, and Rose's concept of visual literacy, significantly differ from Kaplan and Mifflin's. They ask what a photograph is "of" and "about," while Rose additionally asks what a photograph was originally intended to do, has done and is doing. Her questions also differ from Schwartz's, who asks how a photograph functions as a message in a context, to which Rose adds questions about the creation of meaning at the site of viewing. Rose's visual literacy reminds archivists that their looking is not passive, but an active process of meaning construction. As Rose insists, "writers on visual culture, among others, are concerned not only with how images look, but how they are looked at. That is, they argue that what is important about images is not simply the image itself, but how it is seen by particular spectators who look in particular ways." Rose's visual literacy invites archivists to ask not only what a photograph is doing, but also to ask themselves what *they are doing* as they look; to question their own intentions, assumptions and viewing circumstances; to understand their ongoing interpretive participation in the context of any photograph; and to hone their own visual literacy. It gives archivists a way to structure how they look, since, as photo-historian Ian Walker points out, "looking at a photograph is such a familiar activity that it's hard to analyse what happens when you do it." Rose's three-site visual literacy also gives archivists a

⁶⁴ Rose contrasts onsite and remote-access researcher experiences in Gillian Rose, "Practicing photography: an archive, a study, some photographs and a researcher," *Journal of Historical Geography* 26, no. 4 (October 2000) 555-571.

means to avoid the confusion between creator intent, intrinsic photographic elements and viewer-created meaning that this chapter's survey of archival discourse has shown repeatedly occurs.⁶⁵

Viewers, including archivists, respond emotionally as well as aesthetically and intellectually to photographs. As archivist Erin Coulter suggests, photographs “illustrate often intangible states of emotion.” As essayist Susan Sontag asserts, images are “expected to arrest attention, startle, surprise.” Anthropologist Daniel Miller suggests that the study of material objects, including photographs, needs to ask “how things matter,” that is, what emotional significance they had and continue to have, since this question “is more likely to lead us to the concerns of those being studied than those doing the studying,” to counterbalance an “intellectualized response.” Many authors have viewed photographs through dualities that include the emotions. As noted earlier, Elizabeth Edwards argues that photographs are both index and icon. Design professor Susan Close believes the impact of a photograph lies in “a found meaning that can be read from the image by the viewer,” and in “a coded sign constructed by the photographer.” Historian Paulo Palladino compares the intellectual and emotional ways of responding to photographs to the particle-wave duality of physics in which “either interpretation is neither truthful nor fictional, and truth lies instead in the complementarity of the two.” Art historian Geoffrey Batchen suggests that photographs oscillate between their roles as

⁶⁵ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 11-12; Ian Walker, “Through the Picture Plane: On Looking into Photographs,” in Martha Langford, ed. *Image & Imagination* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005) 17-25, 17. Rose notes that it is not a new idea to focus on the influence of the viewer. On page 12 and 13 of *Visual Methodologies*, she summarizes the ideas of essayist, playwright and poet John Berger, who argues, “although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perceptions or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing.” See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 10.

evidence – their indexicality – and their roles in memory and emotion – their iconicity.⁶⁶

Edwards, Close, Palladino and Batchen all refer to semiotician and literary critic Roland Barthes's 1980 *Camera Lucida* and his concepts of *studium* and *punctum*. As Batchen points out, *Camera Lucida* is "perhaps the most influential book yet written on the photographic experience," and *punctum* one of the "most abused terms in the photo-lexicon." Academic debate has repeatedly addressed the meaning of the two terms; many authors identify the *studium* with the informational and intellectual elements of any photograph, and the *punctum* with the emotional and memory elements, but Barthes's own allusive and elusive not-quite definitions are more complex. He refers to the *studium* as a "kind of human interest ... which doesn't mean, at least not immediately, 'study,' but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity." He conceives the *punctum* to be "this element which arises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me....that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)."⁶⁷

Barthes's *studium* is in part a way of looking, an unstudied, affiliative way that

⁶⁶ Erin Coulter, review of Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) in *Archivaria* 65 (Spring 2008) 187-190, 190; Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003) 23. See also Sontag's account of first seeing concentration camp photographs in Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977) 19-20; Daniel Miller, *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (London: University College of London, 1998) 3, 11. In 2011, Miller continues as professor of anthropology at the University College of London; Susan Close, *Framing Identity: Social Practices of Photography in Canada (1880-1920)* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2007) xviii. In 2011, Close continues as associate professor in the Department of Interior Design at the University of Manitoba; Paulo Palladino, Review of Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing & Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) in *Rethinking History* 4, no.3 (December 2001) 417-420. On page 419, Palladino suggests that literary texts also have *puncta*. In 2011, Palladino continues as professor of history and theory at the University of Lancaster; Geoffrey Batchen, "Seeing and Saying: A Response to 'Incongruous Images'" *History and Theory* 48, no.4 (December 2009) 26-33, 31. In 2011, Batchen continues on the faculty of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

⁶⁷ Batchen, *Photography Degree Zero*, 3; Geoffrey Batchen, "This Haunting," in James Elkins, ed., *Photography Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007) 284-286, 284; Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 26, 26-27.

draws on a widely shared body of knowledge. The *punctum* arises out of the photograph itself, is perceived in an involuntary way demanding a kinesthetic, bodily response, profoundly affects the emotions and is unique to the experience of each viewer. In declaring, “[w]hat I can name cannot really prick me,” he suggests that it is part of the nature of the *punctum* to evade analysis.⁶⁸

Many of those examining Barthes’s two concepts have treated them as mutually exclusive, despite his earlier insistence that they are never encountered “in a pure state.” As Batchen insists, “what matters is precisely their systemic inseparability.” The device referred to in the English title of Barthes’s book is a visual metaphor for the two concepts and their indivisibility. In its simplest form a camera lucida is a drawing aid consisting of a sheet of half-mirrored glass tilted at forty-five degrees toward the object being viewed. By looking straight down through the glass, the person sketching simultaneously sees the object being sketched and the drawing surface. The *studium* and *punctum* are as intertwined as these superimposed views that combine only in the eye of the observer.⁶⁹

Historian Julia Adeney Thomas reframes Barthes’s two concepts as variant ways of looking, which she terms “excavation” (analogous to the *studium*) and “recognition” (analogous to the *punctum*). This reframing links these concepts to Gillian Rose’s emphasis on the construction of meaning by the viewer and presents the two ways of seeing in a form that helps archivists better understand their own looking. Thomas suggests that excavation and recognition can be contrasted in three ways. Firstly,

⁶⁸ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51.

⁶⁹ Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” 1964, in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 32-51, 42; Batchen, “This Haunting,” 285. The title of Barthes’s original French language edition, *La chambre claire: note sur la photographie*, also directly references this drawing aid. The term “camera lucida” is Latin for “bright chamber” or “clear room” and differentiates it from the older “camera obscura” or “dark room.” OED Online. Accessed 27 February 2011. See entry for pre-photographic imaging devices in Lenman, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph*, referenced earlier.

excavation “relies on the photograph’s embeddedness in a whole network of social arrangements,” that is, it studies the photograph in its widest context. Recognition is non-discursive and seeks to apprehend the photograph in a glance, to identify it as similar to or different from what is familiar. Thomas tentatively suggests, drawing on neuro-cognitive research sources from the late 1990s, that recognition may be a pre-cognitive process. Secondly, excavation is “an act of reconstruction” that asks what a photograph “was part of” while recognition is “an act of substitution” that asks, “what is it a likeness of.” Thirdly, excavation and recognition relate the past and present in different ways. In excavation, “the discursive worlds of the past and the present each have their own integrity.” A photograph is seen as a material presence that existed in one and now exists in the other but does not necessarily function in the same way in the two temporal spheres. Recognition assumes a direct connection between past and present, an intersection of two times through the somehow transparent gateway of the photograph.⁷⁰

Having laid these foundations, Thomas then criticizes historians, who “insist that words are the products of a particular person,” but treat photographs as illustrations, as “the inconsequential windowpane that gives the eye access to the real world of years ago.” She complains how “the archival conventions identifying images are lax,” particularly because archival description fails to indicate “how a photograph functioned in the past, how it would have been seen.” Thomas then offers an extended example that illustrates how photographs taken in occupied postwar Japan were seen differently in that time and cultural setting. Thomas’s analysis suggests that archival description, since it

⁷⁰ Julia Adeney Thomas, “The Evidence of Sight,” *History and Theory* 48, no.4 (December 2009): 151-168, 153, 152, 167-168, 154, 154.

focuses on what a photograph “is a likeness of,” is heavily biased to “recognition” as a way of seeing. It also suggests that while archival description grounded in subject content seeks to be concrete, analytical and objective, it actually encourages an emotional, pre-discursive, ahistorical, presentist viewing of photographs.⁷¹

Thomas suggests that excavation and recognition are “different forms of knowing and provide different forms of historical evidence.” She cautions that

when we approach photographs as likenesses, we lose our grasp of the historicity of experience, we elide the difference between now and then, we block the possibility of seeing differently and thus seeing new meanings. When, on the other hand, we approach photographs as embedded in their own discursive worlds, we blind ourselves, no longer able to rely on our eyes, to trust our sensual experience to provide evidence.⁷²

Thomas suggests that historians must look in both ways. This thesis suggests that archivists must also look in both ways and should reshape archival description to encourage researchers to do so as well.

As has been demonstrated, archivists typically encounter each photograph in association with other photographs and other materials, yet archival description addresses them individually and in isolation. At the sites of the photograph and its viewing, Gillian Rose asks if a photograph is part of a series and how surrounding images affect its meaning. Associated photographs, especially if created at the same time, may show a photographer experimenting with lighting, viewpoint and picture elements, or responding to chance. While photographers may also visually “quote” images created by others, associated photographs are an integral part of each other’s physical and intellectual context. They provide clues to intent that single photographs do not.

A photograph’s immediate context may include other physical, textual and

⁷¹ Thomas, “The Evidence of Sight,” 156, 160, 154, 155-164.

⁷² Thomas, “The Evidence of Sight,” 168, 167.

graphic elements. Photographs in collections created under the direction of organizations or governments may reside in annotated file folders, in negative envelopes with textual or other markings, or may exist as proof prints with cropping marks. Photographs may be collected into slide storage pages, carousels or contact sheets, which may again be marked. All demonstrate a more complex interrelationship between image, text and graphic elements than exists between a photograph and its archivally created subject-based title. In the past, many collections of photographs have entered archives in the form of photograph albums in which the organizing principle (or lack thereof) is as significant as the photographs themselves.⁷³

Because Rose's schema questions individual images, she does not examine how collections of photographs communicate. Art historian Martha Langford supplements Rose's schema, examining how photograph albums are narrative in structure, fulfill social purposes and convey meanings beyond the sum of the photographs they contain. This thesis subscribes to Langford's view and regards photograph albums as narratives that take part in social exchanges. The gathering together of photographs, their arrangement into an album and the album's use and display are communicative acts layered over the initial act of the photographs' creation.

In 2008's *Suspended Conversations*, Langford examines many nineteenth- and twentieth-century albums held by Montreal's McCord Museum. Langford begins with her reaction to the albums as physical objects. In some, "the luxurious materials of the covers make a striking impression: jewel-like miniatures in brilliant morocco; mother-of-pearl and japanned covers; gold stamp and gilded edges." In others she sees "bindings

⁷³ Kaplan and Mifflin, "Mind and Sight," 121. For an example of a collection of associated photographs and their complex interrelationship to text see Allen C. Benson, "Killed Negatives: The Unseen Photographic Archives," referenced earlier.

weakening or splitting,” and “pictures fading; photo corners dried and springing loose.” Some seem to hold time at bay; others convey a sense of loss and abandonment. They are, in the words of sociology of science professor Sherry Turkle, “evocative objects” that emotionally and intellectually as well as physically enclose their photographs and predispose the viewer to view their contents in certain ways. Like more recent examples such as wedding albums these commercially produced objects also encapsulate the material economies and social conventions of their time in addition to the intents of those who filled them with photographs.⁷⁴

While Langford identifies three kinds of albums, specialty, official and personal, most of those she encounters are personal albums. She divides these into four sub-categories: collections, family albums, memoirs and travelogues, but cautions that these categories are not exhaustive and that many, perhaps most, “juggle more than one task.” She argues that a collection album reveals the intent of its compiler if the photographs within it are compared and the “pattern of internal associations” identified. She suggests that collection albums “give material form to the ancient art of memory,” the Roman technique of remembering by visual association, the visualization practices of the thirteenth through seventeenth centuries and the memory palaces of the Renaissance.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008) 6; Sherry Turkle, ed. *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007) 5. Turkle is Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, a position she has held since 1999. See also Elizabeth Siegel, “Talking through the ‘Fotygraft Album’” in Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble, eds. *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003) 239-253 for the commercial nature of early American photograph albums based on *carte-de-visite* and their function as public record as well as private objects of memory.

⁷⁵ Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 5, 6; Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007) 26; Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 42. For visualization practices in the thirteenth through seventeenth centuries, see David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 162-191 and Andrew Graham-Dixon, *Caravaggio: A Life Sacred and Profane* (London: Allen Lane, 2010) 31-33. For visually-ordered memory in the

Family albums lie “somewhere between the genealogy and the saga, the first schematic and suggestive of a family tree, the second formulaic and embroidered with lore.” That is, family albums blend indexicality and narrative part-fictions. She asserts that memoir and travelogue albums are the visual equivalents of autobiographies. They reveal not only what is remembered, but also how it is remembered; not only who went where, but also how they defined themselves in relation to other people and places. Both types may include commercial post cards and images from other sources. Mid-nineteenth century family albums may be composed entirely of commercially produced *carte-de-visite*. Any of the four types may be intended as an *aides-mémoire* for the compiler alone, or may be an object of “show and tell” linked to an oral narrative. Langford notes that only a few are intended for viewing without the presence of the compiler, and so contain captions or other text that replace oral recitation. Langford declares, “[v]iewing an album in company must be considered the normal spectatorial experience.”⁷⁶

Personal albums reveal “what the photographer or collector invested in his or her photographs, and hoped to communicate.” All tell stories; stories that are obscured by item-level description of the photographs within them; stories that can only be accessed, if at all, by viewing the often fragile album itself. Langford’s analysis suggests that albums are the visual equivalents of manuscripts. Archivists do not describe manuscript holdings to the level of the individual page, nor should albums be subjected to descriptive practices that intellectually dismantle them and fail to capture most of their layers of meaning.⁷⁷

Renaissance, see Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Penguin, 1984) 1-2, 6-10.

⁷⁶ Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 95, 65, 87, 21, 20, 5.

⁷⁷ Sharon Murray, “From Album to Archive: Context, Meaning, and Two Photographic Albums from an

Langford makes an observation about captioning that questions archival item-level description in yet another way. In examining a combined family and travelogue album created in Quebec during the 1930s and 1940s, Langford notes that few locations are identified. She asks, are these “[p]laces forgotten? Unlikely; the reverse would seem to be true: the weighting of inscriptions skews the data only because the ephemeral is described.” The compiler was so familiar with these places that there was no need to identify them. That a lack of text may be as significant as its presence indicates that item-level titling can, in its attempt to foreground informational content, actively suppress evidence of a compiler’s relationship to an album’s photographs.⁷⁸

Archives or other institutions have an impact on photograph albums even before item-level description is carried out; as Langford cautions, “[i]ronically, the very act of preservation – the entrusting of an album to a public museum – suspends its sustaining conversation, stripping the album of its social function and meaning.” Her observation suggests that archives consider conducting oral history interviews with the donors of personal albums as part of acquisition. Though donors are likely to be someone other than the compiler, the way family stories are shared offers archives an opportunity to salvage at least a fragment of the connection between an album and its former social role. Photograph collections or the oeuvre of professional photographers could, if treated in a similar way, be set in a context of their original intended functions. This is at least a partial reply to historian Julia Thomas’s complaint that archival description is inadequate because it fails to address how photographs would have previously been seen.⁷⁹

Indian Mission,” *Archivaria* 65 (Spring 2008) 39-60, 42.

⁷⁸ Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 7.

⁷⁹ Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 5. See also Mame Warren, “Oral History: Another Approach to Understanding and Preserving Photographs,” in *The Imperfect Image: Photographs, their Past, Present*

Marianne Hirsch, professor of English and comparative literature, extends Langford's investigation of family albums by examining the interplay of indexicality and narrative in the albums of Holocaust survivors. Hirsch argues these are often intended to promote healing or efface the memory of traumatic events through a visual narrative of conventional family life. She suggests that subtle clues often remain. A date to a period of occupation written beside or on the back of a photograph may reveal that an image is, to use Gillian Rose's term, contradictory. Subject-based item-level description, if it includes such a date, may intellectually distance this information from the photograph and make it more difficult for a contradictory meaning to be understood. Description based on the informational content of individual photographs may also persuade researchers, even as they later peruse a physical album, to recognize only the common themes and image types that it shares with their own family albums, to look only in the "recognition" mode suggested by Julia Thomas.⁸⁰

Though archivists can potentially apply Gillian Rose's concept of visual literacy, acknowledge the emotional in photographs and how they are looked at, and see collections of photographs as 'evocative objects,' it is unlikely they can transcend the circumstances of their own looking to create an all-encompassing textual description of the information content of any one photograph. As noted in 1978 by Linda Johnson and in 2008 by Jill Delaney, archivists do not convey through their descriptions the content that other observers will inevitably see. Photographer and artist Lee Friedlander addresses

and Future: Conference Proceedings (London: The Centre for Photographic Conservation, 1992) 12-17.

⁸⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: photography, narrative and postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) 1-15, 252. See also Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "What's Wrong with this Picture?: Archival photographs in contemporary narratives," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 5, no. 2 (July 2006) 229-252 and Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "Incongruous Images: 'Before, During, and After' the Holocaust," *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (December 2009) 9-25. In 2011, Hirsch continues on the staff of Columbia University.

not only the generosity of photographs, but also their multiplicity and resistance to reductionist analysis as he recounts how

I only wanted Uncle Vern standing by his new car (a Hudson) on a clear day. I got him and the car. I also got a bit of Aunt Mary's laundry and Beau Jack, the dog, peeing on a fence, and a row of potted tuberous begonias on the porch and seventy-eight trees and a million pebbles in the driveway and more. It's a generous medium, photography.⁸¹

A visual approach to archival description, using the widely available tools of digital photography, offers archivists a way to cope with the informational generosity of photographs and a way to describe them that is less mediated by the specificity of archival looking.

Just as textual literacy includes the ability to read and write, so archival visual literacy should include not only the ability to understand visual images but also the ability to communicate using them. Educator John Horton defines “visual literacy [a]s the ability to understand and *use* images and to think and learn in terms of images [Emphasis added].” In a wider context, cultural communications specialists Angelina Russo and Jerry Watkins argue, “media literacy is defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and *create messages* across a variety of contexts [Emphasis added].” Artist and journalism professor Julianne Newton suggests that photography “can communicate a reasonable truth...just as when words are credible.” Semiotician Gunther Kress asserts that “the major shift in the new landscape of communication” lies in “understanding the different affordances of writing and image,” in knowing when to apply one or the other or both to effectively communicate.⁸²

⁸¹ Lee Friedlander, “An Excess of Fact,” in *The Desert Seen* (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1996) 104.

⁸² John Horton, “A Need for a Theory of Visual Literacy,” *Reading Improvement* 19 (1982) 257-267, 260, cited in Kaplan and Mifflin, “Mind and Sight,” 111. Since 1987, Horton has been an instructional

Based on the above sources from outside the archival profession, this thesis makes three recommendations: that digital photographs can be used as an alternative or supplement to textual descriptions; that such digital photographs should show the immediate physical context of archival photographs to highlight their materiality and interdependence rather than in an effort to create a digital surrogate; and that the organization of archival websites should in many cases link such digital photographs to each other directly rather than isolating them within a framework of textual description. These recommendations can better present the original use, intent and message of the archival photographs while clearly distinguishing archival uses, intents, and messages from them.

A researcher could first encounter a description of, for example, a photograph album as a fonds or series level written description, a photograph that shows the album cover or the album as a three-dimensional object, or via a web page that combines both textual and photographic description. When clicked on, this page would be followed by further web pages that sequentially show each complete page of the album with all its graphic elements. The image of each photograph on each of these web pages could be an active link to another web page showing the reverse of that photograph. Only at this point might a researcher then click to detailed textual information on the dates, locations, persons and other content information of each photograph, and then only for those they

technologist and professor at St. Petersburg College, Florida; Angelina Russo and Jerry Watkins, "Digital Cultural Communication: Audience and Remediation," in Fiona Cameron and Sarah Kenderdine, eds. *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage: A Critical Discourse* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007) 149-164, 151; Julianne H. Newton, "Influences of Digital Imaging on the Concept of Photographic Truth," in *Digital Media: Transformations in Human Communication*, Paul Messaris and Lee Humphreys, eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2006) 3-14, 12; Gunther Kress, "Reading Images: Multimodality, Representation and New Media," *Expert Forum for Knowledge Presentation: Proceedings, May 30-31, 2003*, co-chairs. Peter Storkerson and Elka Kazmierczak. Available at www.knowledgerepresentation.org/BuildingTheFuture/Kress2/Kress2.html. Accessed 10 March 2011.

are interested in. Such a descriptive architecture seeks to use texts and photographs in concert and when each is the most effective communications channel rather than relegating photographs to a secondary role.

Taken collectively, these three recommendations differ from earlier attempts at visual archival description. While Linda Johnson in 1978 clearly recognizes that researchers and archivists view photographs differently, she organizes photographs by subject content. In 1993, archivist Michael Moir suggests the use of analog optical disc technology to facilitate access to archival photographs, but assumes that “photographs are most likely to find an appropriate audience when handled at the item level” in combination with a textual description of “relevant information” to facilitate “the editorial message” the researcher wishes to convey. Moir promotes the commodified reuse of photographs as decontextualized moments important for their informational content.⁸³

As earlier noted, Joan Schwartz and Joanna Sassoon express concern that digitization robs photographs of their materiality and that “digitizing is essentially a cultural process” that “raises serious questions relating to the aesthetically driven selection of photographs, the potential cropping of images, [and] the fidelity of the content.” While this thesis agrees that digitization is an inescapable cultural process, it argues that it is not digitization *per se* that masks the materiality of archival photographs, but how digitization has previously been applied. Schwartz and Sassoon also assume that archival photographs are material objects. They do not address how the photographs that archives will in the future acquire from governments, organizations and private

⁸³ Michael B. Moir, “Finding Aids and Photographs: A Case Study in the Use of Analog Optical Disc Technology to Improve Access to Historical Images,” *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993) 74-86, 75.

individuals will increasingly be born-digital, possessing no initial analogue material state. Because digital technology has profoundly affected most people's photograph-taking behavior, born-digital photographs will also appear in quantities that make any attempt by archivists to select images a Sisyphean task.⁸⁴ As the authors of the 2002 DigiCULT report created for the European Commission Directorate-General for the Information Society state

memory institutions have developed infrastructure capital that is directed toward the handling of physical objects... Today these same institutions also have to deal with intangible objects, the born-digitals. This will require new overall solutions, the implementation of new procedures and workflows, and new tools to collect, make accessible, exhibit, contextualise, and preserve these objects.⁸⁵

In the future, the archival selection of photographs by aesthetic or any other criteria will be impossible, even as their digital nature makes selection unnecessary. Any attempt at selection will impose an archival viewpoint in the same manner as illustrated by Jill Delaney for the Rocky Mountain Repeat Photography Project. The challenge for archivists will be the effective preservation of digital photographs and their metadata. As it is the intent of this thesis to suggest how archivists can use digital photographs as a tool of description and access, not as a method of preservation, it will not engage in discussion of the long-term preservation of born-digital photographs created by either donors or archivists, or survey the hardware or proprietary and non-proprietary software

⁸⁴ Sassoon, "Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction" 200. Anyone who has used a digital camera will have noted how it encourages the creation and retention of many more images than film-based technology. For one example, see Artdaily.org website, "Electronic Info Dominates George W. Bush's Archive, 20 Times the Clinton Administration's," posted 23 December 2010. Available at http://www.artdaily.org/section/news/index.asp?int_sec=2&int_new=43654&b=electronic%20info. Accessed 28 February 2011.

⁸⁵ Andrea M. Mulrenin and Axel Szauer, *The DigiCULT Report: Technological landscapes for tomorrow's cultural economy: Unlocking the value of cultural heritage* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002) 34. Available at www.salzburgresearch.at/fbi/digicult/. Accessed 15 February 2011.

that might be required. While important, these are topics for other case studies and theses.

Monitoring of several archivists' and historians' online discussion forums shows debates regarding the use of digital cameras by archival patrons but not regarding the use of digital cameras by archivists. While significant attention has been paid in these forums to the creation of digital surrogates of archival records and to the handling and preservation of born-digital records, there appears to be no discussion of an approach to visual description that does not seek to create exact copies of material records.⁸⁶

This thesis suggests the use of digital photographs for description because their use preserves both the inherent multiplicity of photographic content suggested by Linda Johnson, Jill Delaney and Lee Friedlander and the multiple ways in which photographs can be “audienced” as suggested by Gillian Rose, Elizabeth Edwards and (for archival records more generally) Verne Harris. It also recommends digital photography because the technology is ubiquitous and unlikely to suffer the obsolescence that Michael Moir’s less widespread disc technology experienced. The regular use of digital cameras will also enable archivists to develop an active visual literacy and better understand the ways in which photographers look. As Michael Lesy, a professor of literary journalism suggests, “the visual language of photography, like any other language, is best learned by ‘speaking’ it.” Because digital cameras allow archivists to more easily create images of

⁸⁶ For an example drawn from H-Net, see discussion logs at www.h-net.org/logsearch/ for 19 and 30 April 2009, located using the search term “digital cameras.” For a second example, on 29 March 2010, the VisualMat Listserv of the Visual Materials Section and Visual Materials Cataloguing and Access Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) at calmail.berkeley.edu/manage/list/listinfo/visualmat@lists.berkeley.edu provides a link to Lisa Miller, Steven K. Galbraith and the RLG (Research Library Group) Partnership Working Group on Streamlining Photography and Scanning, *Capture and Release: Digital Cameras in the Reading Room* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Research, 2010). This publication can also be accessed directly at www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-05.pdf. For a third example, see 6 May 2010 entry entitled “Digitization Update” on the Arcan-L listserv at www.mailman.srv.ualberta.ca/mailman/private/arcan-l/. All accessed 21 January 2011.

fragile archival records with less physical manipulation, this thesis recommends their use in preference to the document scanners presently more commonly in use. Digital cameras more easily create the kinds of context revealing images this thesis recommends.⁸⁷

But many archives already provide online access to photographs using thumbnail images on websites. How can the use of photographs for descriptive purposes be considered a new approach? It should be emphasized; this thesis recommends the creation of digital photographs that include archival photographs and their immediate textual, graphic and physical context. It does not recommend the creation of cropped and decontextualized surrogates of archival photographs.

The thumbnail images on archival websites typically decontextualize photographs by concentrating on the visual surface of the photograph; anything beyond its edges is cropped in an attempt to create a digital surrogate. This again concentrates the viewer's attention on the subject content of the photograph and suppresses awareness of its materiality and immediate physical context. As an alternative, a photograph album can be textually and visually described as a single archival record. Each archivally created digital photograph should show a complete page of an album with its interplay of subtle visual clues. The spatial arrangement of photographs, the nature of mounting corners and other non-photographic and non-textual elements, and the graphic qualities of textual elements will then be visible to researchers without recourse to the often-fragile original album. Visual description can offer conservation advantages. It minimizes the need for researchers to view original materials and reduces the amount of handling these materials experience. Since the edges of photographs will also be imaged, researchers will be

⁸⁷ Michael Lesy, "Visual Literacy," *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (June 2007) 143-153, 147. In 2011, Lesy continues as professor of literary journalism at Hampshire College, Amherst, Mass. Since 1973, he has produced numerous books combining historical photographs with his own writing.

reminded, “a photograph is a three-dimensional thing.” Such complete-page images will also allow researchers to distinguish at a glance between visual descriptions of digitized photographs and born-digital photographs, since the latter will lack a surrounding physical context.⁸⁸

The goal of complete-page digital images is not to create exact surrogates or copies of material photographs. Therefore, close attention should not be paid to exact colour rendering or other reproduction factors. Researchers interested in the exact colour of photographs or album pages, in signs of wear due to use, or in other material factors, should examine the original. The goal in using digital images is to make immediate context unavoidably visible and to make a clear distinction, by the literal reframing of the original photographs, between the intent of the creator or creators and subsequent archival actions. As archivists Michelle Light and Tom Hyry have suggested, traditional finding aids “fall short on at least two counts.” They do not reveal “the impact of the processor’s work” and “present but one viewpoint on a collection.” Digital photographs of archival photographs are new uses and communicative acts in new archival contexts rather than surrogates of the initial images.⁸⁹

These archivally created digital photographs should be considered, with apologies to Joan Schwartz, as images created by an archivist’s will, for an archival purpose, to convey an archival message to a range of researcher audiences. This approach makes concrete John Tagg’s observation that photographs function simultaneously in more than one discourse. It makes concrete the archival action that has been taken. It is a visual step towards the archival accountability called for by Laura Millar and the documentation of

⁸⁸ Edwards and Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories*, 1

⁸⁹ Michelle Light and Tom Hyry, “Colophons and Annotations: New Directions for the Finding Aid,” *American Archivist* 65 (Fall/Winter 2002) 216-230, 217.

archival practices insisted upon by Joan Schwartz. Digital photographs that include archival photographs can be thought of in the same way as oral history recordings. As archivists Jean-Pierre Wallot and Normand Fortier argue, “the recording, as a document, bears witness first of all to an interview, not to the subject of the interview.” By offering a visual description that makes researchers aware of the specificity of archival looking, such an approach to description also prompts researchers to consider the specifics of their own looking and begins to educate them in how to look.⁹⁰

The paths through which photographs are accessed in archival websites also significantly influence how they are perceived. The digital photographs suggested above should not be individual addenda to a superstructure of hierarchical textual description. Instead, as part of an online finding aid, they should be directly linked to each other in ways that further reinforce an awareness of their physical and intellectual context.

At present, thumbnails in archival websites are typically linked to a textual title at the item level of description within a schema such as *Rules for Archival Description* that evolved to deal with textual records and that embodies modernist assumptions. As shown earlier, these item-level titles preference image content and seek to anchor each image to a single archivally chosen meaning. As research fellow Brian Dillon notes, echoing Allan Sekula, “the archived image is never autonomous – it is overlaid by several strata of text: the artist’s name, title of the work, date, dimensions, provenance, and (as part of another order of classification) its own numbered place within the archive.” While such titling can facilitate keyword search, it as often frustrates researchers’ efforts. For example, a

⁹⁰ Millar, “An Obligation of Trust,” 78; Schwartz, “Coming to Terms,” 159; Jean-Pierre Wallot and Normand Fortier, “Archival Science and Oral Sources,” in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998) 365-378., 372. When this article was published, Wallot was National Archivist of Canada and Fortier an archivist at the then National Archives.

user searching the photograph album extracts of the Helen Creighton fonds held by the Nova Scotia Archives will find some images using a “Halifax Explosion” search term, but will locate others using “Halifax disaster” or “the explosion.” At no time will this user be aware of their physical and intellectual context; the series level description only notes that “Creighton’s camera went everywhere” and recorded many events “including the Halifax Explosion.” Photographs in such descriptive systems are “annexed” by archivists and rendered secondary to textual descriptions in the same way photographs are considered by Hilary Jenkinson to be annexed to textual archival records. Such designation persuades researchers to view photographs as of secondary evidential value and as the “discrete decontextualized moments” identified by Joan Schwartz.⁹¹

This thesis does not seek to discard text-based organizational schema, but it does seek to make visual description less subservient to text. It suggests that rather than being linked to textual item level titling, digital versions of complete album pages could be linked to a textual or photographic or combined description of the album as a physical object. A researcher could then proceed from considering the album as an evocative object to browsing a digital representation of it. Preparing such visual descriptive schema is likely to take less of an archivist’s time than the preparation of item-level textual descriptions. Other staff could carry out such preparation. Only after locating an individual image that they wish to re-purpose would a researcher follow a link to associated textual information such as date, picture location, dimensions, creator name,

⁹¹ Brian Dillon, “Claudia Angelmaier Reproduction Art,” *Aperture* 193 (Winter 2008) 56-61, 56. As of 2011, Dillon is Research Fellow in Creative and Performing Arts at the University of Kent. See photo album extracts of Helen Creighton fonds held by the Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, available at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/creighton/resultsa.asp?Search>. Accessed 10 December 2010. Ten photographs result from the search term “Halifax explosion.” Three other photographs taken at same locations in Dartmouth on the same day result from the term “Halifax disaster.” Four more result from “the explosion.”; Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, 48 n.1; Schwartz, “We make our tools and our tools make us,” 63.

and archival number. Within each digital complete-page image, each individual photograph could link to another showing the original's reverse where additional material, textual and graphic clues are often found. Such a descriptive approach applies visual and textual modes where each is the most effective descriptor, as suggested by Gunther Kress, rather than rendering visual description subservient to textual description.

This descriptive approach exposes researchers to creator intent and to the immediate physical contexts within albums before they select and re-purpose a photograph. While this approach to description makes it more difficult for researchers to locate, out of context, particular images by subject content and keyword search, it allows them to browse digital images arguably much more rapidly than they could scan a list of textual descriptions. This approach allows archivists to focus the energy they devote to archival arrangement and description. Instead of determining the dates, locations, persons and other content information for all photographs in a collection, archivists could respond to researcher demand by preparing more detailed content and context information only for those photographs about which researchers express an interest. In any case, as born-digital photographs will increasingly contain automatically generated metadata such as global positioning system (GPS) tags, the archival creation of item-level titles in a hierarchical schema will become increasingly unnecessary.

Other collections of photographs can be similarly treated. Researchers might begin by viewing a digital photograph of the entire collection as it was first received by the archive. An image of a pile of moldy boxes on a shipping pallet would make researchers aware of archival interventions and the necessity for them. Alternately, if a collection is arranged in several Hollinger boxes, a researcher could begin with a

collection level textual description or a digital photograph of boxes arranged on storage vault shelves or a table in a research room. This digital photograph could link to further digital photographs showing more detailed views of the each box's contents. Successive digital photographs could show archival photographs in association with their file folders, negative envelopes, contact sheets and other organizational, textual and graphic elements. Such visual description also accommodates collections containing a range of media and can show their interrelationship. Again, such visual documentation is likely to use less of an archivist's time and will expose researchers to the context of the archival records during their search. To a degree, a visual descriptive approach can facilitate the "more product, less process" (MPLP) approach recommended by American archivists Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner. As Ricky Erway and Jennifer Schaffer of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) suggest, "large quantities of digitized special collections material will better serve our users" and "will trump a few superbly crafted special collections." Archives may even wish to create a series of digital photographs that track the progress of processing activity applied to each collection in order to enact the documentation of archival actions recommended by Laura Millar and Joan Schwartz and to create visual equivalents of the colophons and annotations suggested by Michelle Light and Tom Hyry.⁹²

A visual descriptive approach is likely to better accommodate collections that

⁹² See Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68 (Fall 2005) 208-263; Ricky Erway and Jennifer Schaffer, *Shifting Gears: Gearing Up to Get Into the Flow* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Programs and Research, 2007) 3, 6. Available at www.oclc.org/programs/publications/reports/2007-02.pdf. Accessed 8 February 2011; Light and Hyry, "Colophons and Annotations," 224, 226, 230. A cogent example of annotating applied not to a specific archival collection but to photographs more generally, can be found at the Smithsonian Photography Initiative website at <http://click.si.edu/>. Accessed 22 November 2010. This extensive series of essays portrays the myriad uses of photography and its active nature as a communications medium. Essays are by a wide variety of authors and include Elizabeth Edwards's "Photography Changes What We See, Depending on Who's Looking," referenced earlier.

consist of a large number of born-digital photographs to which traditional item-level textual description cannot possibly be applied. An effective finding aid is likely to be a user accessible visual copy of the collection and its accompanying metadata. This approach will allow researchers to see the push-and-pull between how a collection compiler wishes to order their photographs and the technical and organizational constraints of such photo archiving software as iPhoto™, Lightroom™, ACDSSee Foto Manager™, Photoshop Elements™, Cumulus™ and others. The handling of such a collection as a unitary archival record is likely to be reinforced as archivists realize that many of the photographs within it are minor variations of each other and that creator captioning is as likely to occur only at the electronic file folder level as at the level of individual image.

In addition to more accurately presenting the inherent ambiguity, original intents and contexts of archival photographs and clearly differentiating these from archival intents and contexts, a visual approach to description will also permit archives to effectively respond to the increased use of visual modes of communication by society. Archival public programming advantages can be gained. Archivist Eric Ketelaar suggests that archivists must create “*new* tools, not just enhance *existing* products and services [Emphasis in original].” A visual approach to archival finding aids that restructures the relationship of text and image rather than adding photographs to existing descriptive schema is such a tool. The authors of the 2002 DigiCULT report insist “cultural heritage institutions can utilise information and communication technologies (ICT) as effective instruments to direct public interest back to the original objects in their trust.” They also suggest that “image analysis tools for historical pictorial data” will become increasingly

common.⁹³

Having created visually-based descriptions, archives will be better prepared for the anticipated implementation of more refined and open-source versions of such visual search engines as TinEye™, search engines that match images rather than search by keyword. Consultant David Green suggests that the need “to read, manipulate and create digital images as part of a larger body of skills needed to critically interact with today’s media landscape” is increasing for university students, faculty and knowledge professionals in the United States. In Canada, design professor Susan Close has overseen a graduate level photography course designed to “stimulate the use of photography as a hands-on visioning tool.” David Green also notes that “more dependable, high quality resources than those typically turned up in a ‘Google Images’ search” are being called for by academics. Archives can supply these “dependable, high quality resources.” As the variety of archival researcher interests continues to broaden as archives shift from a “political and juridical to [a] social and cultural” focus, archives must shift from their primarily textual orientation to acknowledge what those in the field of education have long been aware of: there are “multiple ways of knowing” that include linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal forms of “multiple intelligences.” Archives must consider a visual approach to the archival description of photographs not only because it better represents how photographs communicate and accommodates how they are viewed, but also to respond effectively to changes in the use of sign systems and communication modes in society at large.⁹⁴

⁹³ Eric Ketelaar, “Being Digital in People’s Archives,” *Archives & Manuscripts* 31, no.2 (November 2003) 8-22, 19; Mulrenin and Szauer, *The DigiCULT Report*, 8, 17.

⁹⁴ Scott Prouty, “Have You Tried Tineye [sic]” in *Views: The Newsletter of the Visual Materials Section of the Society of American Archivists* 23, no. 4 (October 2009) 6. See also <http://www.tineye.com/about>.

Having drawn on sources outside the archival field to suggest new ways that archivists might look at and describe archival photographs, this thesis will in the following final chapter explore in greater detail how this looking and description might be carried out by focusing on a series of photograph albums purportedly created by Edith McCash in Winnipeg during the first half of the twentieth century, albums now held by the Still Images Section of the Archives of Manitoba.

Accessed 28 February 2011; Susan Close, Introduction, *Travelling Concepts in Photography 2008*, by Amber Bewza, et al. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008); David Green, *Using Digital Images in Teaching and Learning: Perspectives from Liberal Arts Institutions*. Academic Commons (October 2006) 14, 6. This report draws on 400 survey responses and 300 interviews with the faculty and staff of 33 American colleges and universities including Harvard and Yale. It was prepared for the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLE) and Wesleyan University. Available at www.academiccommons.org/imagereport. Accessed 8 February 2011; Dirks, "Annals of the Archive," 58, 61; Christine H. Leland and Jerome C. Harste, "Multiple Ways of Knowing: Curriculum in a New Key," *Language Arts* 71, no.5 (September 1994) 337-345, 337, 339; Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) passim.

CHAPTER THREE:
TAKING ANOTHER LOOK AT THE McCASH
PHOTOGRAPH ALBUMS

The first of the two preceding chapters identified how a postmodernist approach argues that archivists look at records from specific institutional, personal and historical viewpoints that strongly colour archival descriptive practices and subsequent researcher perceptions. The second chapter highlighted the gradual spread of a postmodernist view of photographs in the Canadian archival community and illustrated the impact of both modernist and postmodernist approaches on the viewing and description of these archival records. The second chapter then drew on theoretical and methodological approaches from other disciplines to suggest ways archivists might take a fresh look at photographs, describe them in ways less mediated by archival perceptions and create descriptions that better present the evidence beyond image content that photographs offer.

This chapter will engage in a case study, applying these suggestions to the Edith McCash photograph albums held by the Still Images Section (SIS) of the Archives of Manitoba. These albums have been chosen because they offer several kinds of evidence. The image content of their photographs offers a rich source for the social history and physical and built environment of Winnipeg during the first half of the twentieth century. But if the albums are examined for their narratives and for the physical and intellectual relationships between their photographs, textual and non-textual elements, they also demonstrate how one Anglo-Canadian woman defined the social, psychological and physical spaces around her through the taking and gathering of photographs. Because the archival processing of the McCash albums has been stopped at its mid-point, they also

offer evidence of the impact of archival ways of looking and description. The albums have been subjected to arrangement and descriptive actions that have resulted in the physical dismemberment of one album and the separation of the albums from each other within the physical and discursive spaces of the Archives. Their physical state parallels the intellectual dismemberment that results from the subject content-based description of individual photographs. One photograph within one album illustrated how different creator intent and viewer reception can be.¹

Information on the McCash albums can be found in the Archives' accession register, card catalogue and in a finding aid consisting of a printed list of photograph titles. This chapter will contrast how these albums might be described using *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD) and the limited information gathered by the Archives of Manitoba, how they are presently described and accessed at the Archives, and how they might be described and accessed using the perceptions and suggestions offered in chapter two. This chapter will demonstrate how archivists can treat photographs and photograph albums not as decontextualized indexes of past reality, but as “documents, created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message to an audience.”²

In order to orient the reader, this chapter will first describe the physical extent and overall content of the albums without reference to where this information has been obtained. As no RAD-compliant description exists either on paper or electronically for these albums, a hypothetical description will be created using the descriptive conventions of the Archives of Manitoba Keystone Archives Descriptive Database (hereafter referred to as Keystone) that conforms to RAD. The albums will then be examined in more detail

¹ Chambers, “Family as Place,” 96.

² Further examination of the albums will suggest that Edith McCash was not in fact their compiler; Schwartz, “We make our tools and our tools make us,” 42.

to illustrate how archival viewpoint, arrangement and description have obscured their research potential. This more detailed examination will offer specific instances where the perceptions and suggestions from chapter two enrich the evidentiary potential of the albums.³

The Edith McCash Collection consists of a series of four albums that span the years from circa 1900 to 1951. In each album, black-and-white photographs taken by McCash are interspersed with commercially produced black-and-white photographic postcards. McCash's photographs depict her family, friends, gardens, homes, Winnipeg downtown buildings, locations such as Assiniboine and Kildonan Parks and her view of events such as the Winnipeg portion of the 1939 Royal Tour of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth (the future Queen Mother), the 1950 Winnipeg flood and the Royal Visit of the Princess Elizabeth (the future Queen Elizabeth II) to Winnipeg in October 1951. The postcards also depict Winnipeg buildings, parks and other locations and extensively document the public memory of the events noted above.⁴

The McCash albums are examples of the "suspended conversations" identified by Martha Langford. Without the social setting and narrative within which they once functioned as objects of "show and tell" little information exists beyond the albums themselves to place them in their context of creation and original use. The meaning that individual photographs may once have held for McCash has also been lost, requiring an archivist or researcher to rely on their own perceptions, intuitions and interpretations.

³ See Archives of Manitoba, Keystone Archives Descriptive Database: Orientation, available online at www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/keystone/orient.html. Accessed 2 April 2011; Canadian Council of Archives, Canadian Committee on Archival Description. *Rules for Archival Description*, revised July 2008. Available at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/archdesrules.html>. Accessed 10 December 2010.

⁴ Archives of Manitoba (AM), Still Image Section (SIS), Edith McCash Collection, album C130; Archives of Manitoba, Still Images Section processing backlog, Edith McCash, accession number 1976-224.

Gillian Rose's three-part visual literacy schema, with its focus on the site of image creation, the site of the image itself, and the site of image viewing, does not argue against interpretation. It does however caution that an archivist or researcher must remain aware that their viewing is an act of interpretation and this act of interpretation is not the same as the creator's intent.⁵

This lack of contextual information highlights what might have been gained had an interview been conducted, as suggested in chapter two, with the Collection's donor. The two-page accession register completed in August of 1976 notes only that the albums are "from the estate of Edith McCash." The register contains the name and address of a donor whose relationship to McCash is unknown. Though the narrative enclosing these albums has been lost with McCash's death and the donor may simply wish to be rid of them, an interview might have revealed the donor's relationship to McCash (whether as family member, friend, or neighbour and perhaps legal executor of her estate), any traces of family stories, any contextual clues to McCash's life experience and world view, any significance she ascribed to these albums, any reasons they were selected for donation to the Archives and whether McCash herself made this determination. Hints to the contexts within which these photographs functioned – contexts that Tom Nesmith suggests are as important as their context of interpretation and the records themselves – have been unnecessarily lost.⁶

Although no fonds-level archival description of the McCash Collection has been created electronically or on paper, one can be constructed following the approach used by

⁵ Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 20; Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 188-190.

⁶ See Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM) accession register 1976-224 completed on 23 August 1976. The accession number indicates that the albums were the two hundred twenty-fourth donation received by the Archives in 1976; Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 32.

the Archives of Manitoba. Information is displayed online in Keystone in nine fields: Title; Dates of Creation; Physical Description; Scope and Content, which provides a summary description of the extent and subject content of the records; Administrative History or Biographical Sketch; Restrictions on Access; Terms for Use and Reproduction; Custodial History, which charts how the records came to be in the possession of the Archives; and How to Proceed, which describes how to access the records, whether they have been microfilmed and are therefore available for interlibrary loan.⁷

A Keystone fonds-level description of the albums might, were one created, appear as follows:

Title: Edith McCash fonds.

Dates of Creation: circa 1900 – 1951.

Physical Description: 3 albums (898 photographs).⁸

Scope and Content: Fonds consists of photographs taken or compiled by Edith McCash. The photographs document McCash's family and friends, gardens, various residences in Winnipeg, various public buildings and locations in the City and public events including the Winnipeg portion of the 1939 Royal Tour of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the 1950 Winnipeg flood, and the Royal Visit of the Princess Elizabeth to Winnipeg in October of 1951.

Administrative History or Biographical Sketch: Edith McCash was born in Winnipeg on 28 October 1904. She died on 6 June 1956.⁹

⁷ For an online example see the description of the John Stewart McDiarmid fonds available online at http://pam.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/59/DESCRIPTION_WEB/REFD/11517?JUMP. Accessed 2 April 2011.

⁸ This information is drawn from accession register 1976-224. Further examination of the McCash albums will demonstrate that the number of albums indicated on the register is incorrect. Though the accession register indicates the donation of "3 photo albums," four were actually donated. This is one of the significant errors made during the accession of the McCash albums.

⁹ Accession register 1976-224 provides no personal information on Edith McCash, so this Biographical Sketch offers a particularly poor level of detail. Her birth date is available from Manitoba Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Vital Statistics, online at <http://vitalstats.gov.mb.ca/Query.php>. Accessed 2 April 2011. Her death date can be found in the burial records of Winnipeg's Brookside cemetery, available online at http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/cemeteries/Brookside/BrooksideMCA_MCD.html. Accessed 2 April 2011.

Restrictions on Access: There are no restrictions on access to these records. Any unprocessed materials are accessible by special arrangement.

Terms for Use and Reproduction: Researchers are responsible for observing the terms of the Canadian Copyright Act. Permission is required for any form of publication and exhibition.

Custodial History: These records were donated from the estate of Edith McCash to the Archives of Manitoba in 1976.¹⁰

How to Proceed: These records must be consulted in the Archives Research Room. Consult the Listings database to find location codes. The unprocessed photographic materials are accessible by special arrangement. Contact Archives of Manitoba for further details. This material is not available for microfilm loan.

Note that the Scope and Content field emphasises what, in the archivist's view, these photographic records document and does not attempt to address why McCash created them or what functions they performed in her life. This approach to description focuses at the highest level on what the records are, not what they are doing; it reduces "visual images to their visual content and denude[s] them of their original contexts of creation, circulation, and viewing." Also note that the Custodial History field does not explain why, if McCash died in 1956, the records were not donated to the Archives until 1976. Neither does it provide any information on the custodial history of the McCash Collection *after* it entered the Archives.¹¹

Any archivist attempting to create the above description would have to reconstruct this post-donation custodial history and engage in an archaeological expedition through past archival actions. Any researcher accessing the Collection using the descriptions that actually exist faces a similar task. The following examination of the McCash albums clearly demonstrates what occurs when archives do not "ensure that they not only

¹⁰ Accession register 1976-224, entry under "Subject of Research."

¹¹ Schwartz, "Coming to Terms," 157.

document the history of the record, but that they also record the history of that institutional documentation.”¹²

A researcher will first encounter a description of Edith McCash’s photographs in the SIS index card catalogue. Allen Benson notes how “many archives still maintain card catalogs,” catalogues that Richard Cox fondly refers to as “artefacts of library history.” Such a catalogue continues in use in the SIS. It holds one main-entry card under Edith McCash’s name and six cross-reference cards for her, her father James and her sister Margaret. These cross-reference cards indicate that copies or originals of individual photographs dating from circa 1900 to circa 1920 can be found in plastic-fronted folders stored in large file cabinets in the SIS area of the Archives’ research room. Questions immediately arise in a researcher’s mind. Have these photographs always existed in isolation, or have they been removed from some other physical context? What relation do they have to each other besides their attribution to Edith McCash? Do they offer any kind of intellectual context for each other? These questions will be returned to in due course.¹³

The main entry card indicates that the Edith McCash Collection is a single photograph album designated C130, containing “views of Winnipeg 1940; Royal Visit, 1939; St. James Street flower gardens in her yard, 1939.” The relationship of the individual photographs in the SIS file drawers to album C130 is not made clear. A printed list which serves as a finding aid, divided according to the same three subject areas, “Views of Winnipeg”, “Winnipeg 1939 Royal Visit” and “Winnipeg 1939, 513 St. James Street” is also available in the research room. This provides an item-by-item list of titles

¹² Schwartz, “Coming to Terms,” 159.

¹³ Benson, “The Archival Photograph and its Meaning,” 154; Richard Cox, Jane Greenberg and Cynthia Porter, “Access Denied: The Discarding of Library History,” *American Libraries* 29, no.4 (April 1998) 57-61, 57.

of the 358 photographs within the album. If a Keystone fonds-level description of the McCash Collection existed, electronic item-level descriptions similar to this list's entries would be linked to it. Whether each would consist only of a title, or of a thumbnail image and accompanying title, such an item-level approach encourages a researcher to consider the photographs as "discrete decontextualized moments" rather than as part of the visual and performative narratives that Martha Langford and Marianne Hirsch insist albums constitute.¹⁴

The printed list provides no contextual information for the photographs and no biographical information for McCash. Nor does it specify whether its individual entries transcribe McCash's own captions or have been supplied as a "brief descriptive title" by an archivist following RAD rule 4.1B4. Only a comparison of the list and album reveals that these titles only approximate McCash's captions. For example, in the list's section on the 1939 Royal Visit, the title of the tenth photograph reads "Auditorium, 200 Vaughan Street," while McCash's handwritten caption appears as "The Auditorium." Photographs thirty-nine through forty-three in the same section are all titled "Sunday, Royal Party meeting Veterans at Union Station" on the list, while the corresponding album page consists of these five photographs accompanied by a single handwritten caption at the bottom of the page that reads "Sunday, May 24, 39. Crowds drawn to see the Royal Party meeting Veterans at Union Station on return East." These variations from McCash's captioning may seem relatively minor, but one example illustrates how they mask evidence of McCash's possible intent.¹⁵

¹⁴ Schwartz, "We make our tools and our tools make us," 63; Archives of Manitoba (AM), Still Image Section (SIS), McCash, Edith, album C130; Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 5; Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 13-14.

¹⁵ Canadian Council of Archives, Canadian Committee on Archival Description. "Chapter 4: Graphic

Title one hundred-twelve in the section on the 1939 Royal Visit is “Parade scene,” a generic and mildly cryptic phrase until a researcher examines the referenced photograph in its physical context. It occupies a page with two others, positioned in the upper left-hand quadrant of a page with a commercially produced postcard below it and another to its right. The postcard on the right shows the exterior decorations of the T. Eaton Company building. McCash’s caption “Parade *scenes* [Emphasis added],” not “Parade scene,” is written between a photograph that McCash created and a postcard below it that shows a crowd standing on bleachers watching the royal automobile and its accompanying mounted escort. In the printed list, this latter postcard, number one hundred fourteen, is identified as “Royalty along parade route.” This title does not exist in the album; it is an archivist’s attempt to supply a description based on image content. The list blurs the distinction between inscription by creator and by archivist.¹⁶

The McCash photograph depicts an encounter between a seated Aboriginal man wearing a three-piece suit, braids and treaty medals and a standing Caucasian man in sports jacket, flannels, military cap and white armband. The standing man is drawing the attention of the seated man to a small square of paper or card. Tom MacDonnell’s book on the 1939 Royal Tour, *Daylight Upon Magic*, indicates that many private entrepreneurs illegally built bleachers along the parade route and charged fees for their use. The encounter in McCash’s photograph may be about payment for seating, although the photograph’s ambiguity invites any number of alternate interpretations. It is this

Materials,” in *Rules for Archival Description*, revised version July 2008. Available at <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/archdesrules.html>. Accessed 10 December 2010; AM, McCash, Edith, album C130, Winnipeg Royal Visit, archivally numbered photographs 10 and 39 through 43. As an aside, many list entries contain spelling or naming errors, such as “Leithbridge, Alberta”, “Saying farwell” and “Royal Alexander Hotel” instead of Royal Alexandra Hotel.

¹⁶ AM, McCash, Edith, album C130, Winnipeg Royal Visit, archivally numbered page 43 (archivally numbered photographs 112 to 114).

ambiguity and openness to multiple understandings that digitally created visual description can preserve and that written description based on image content cannot.¹⁷

The subject matter in both commercial postcards is square to the print edges, while McCash's photograph is tilted roughly thirty degrees from the horizontal. This tilt may indicate that she did not have an opportunity to frame the image or may be an intentional compositional element. Many of the photographs of her garden that appear in the third section of album C130 are mounted at a similar angle. Photographer Stephen Shore notes that an image can appear passive or active depending on how it relates to its framing edges. In the case of this photograph, its tilt imparts a sense of movement, imbalance and tension. Again, compositional elements that affect how the viewer perceives a photograph cannot be easily captured by textual description. Nor could textual description allow for a comparison of pictorial design elements between this photograph and those of McCash's garden.¹⁸

The caption "Parade scenes" is placed between a public, commercially produced view of the parade and a more intimate, personal view of it. No matter what McCash may have otherwise sought to convey through her photograph of the two men (and all manner of interpretations are possible, including many based on then existing attitudes toward Aboriginal persons), the contrast between public and personal views is unambiguous. The archivally prepared list ignores the possibility that McCash did not intend all her captions to simply describe content. It ignores how meaning and intent are revealed by the way photographs and captions relate graphically on the page. The apparently neutral descriptive title on the printed list, "Parade scene," is not only subtly incorrect, it masks

¹⁷ Tom MacDonnell, *Daylight Upon Magic: The Royal Tour of Canada – 1939* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1989) 113.

¹⁸ Shore, *The Nature of Photographs: A Primer*, 54-64.

McCash's editorial and possibly ironic stance. As argued in chapter two, a digital thumbnail image of the entire page preserves the photograph and caption's physical and intellectual context in a way that the printed list or its electronic equivalent cannot.¹⁹

In many cases, the difference between McCash's photographs and the commercial postcards can only be discerned by removing them from their corner photo-mounts and examining their reverse sides. The back of the McCash photograph is unmarked except for archival numbering (in pen!). The backs of the other two are marked "Postcard. Made in U.S.A. Correspondence. Address. Agfa. Ansco. Place Stamp Here." The repeated removal and replacement of photographs from C130 to make this determination risks damage to the photographs and a shortened life for the album. As suggested in chapter two, archivally created digital images of complete album pages should include links to further digitized images of each photograph's back. Such visual description will remind researchers that each photograph is "a three-dimensional thing, not only a two-dimensional image."²⁰

Visual description not only conserves the album, it also facilitates research directed beyond image content. Archivist Sandra Ferguson notes how postcards "present a cultural iconography" that portrays the concerns and interests of a society at points in its history. Postcards show what events and locations were considered important, how these were thought of, what representational conventions and rhetoric were applied in creating them and what was considered marketable. The postcards McCash interwove with her own photographs demonstrate not only her view of her world, but also the

¹⁹ AM, McCash, Edith, album C130, Winnipeg Royal Visit, archivally numbered page 43 (archivally numbered photographs 112 to 114).

²⁰ AM, McCash, Edith, album C130, Winnipeg Royal Visit, archivally numbered photograph 112 to 114; Edwards and Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories*, 1.

societal views that enwrapped hers. The postcards' use and arrangement within the album offers clues to how McCash's view aligned with or diverged from public views. McCash's use of the postcards offers not only a glimpse of her narrative, but also of her dialog with her society. By themselves, or collectively with other commercial sources, these postcards can "meet any of an infinite number of criteria set by a researcher." Visual archival description, since it preserves the physical and intellectual context of these commercial images, allows for unanticipated kinds of research and provides the "room for contingency" in archives insisted on by Ulrich Baer.²¹

The postcards' use by McCash also questions the assignment of authorship to only those who physically created photographs. The postcards in the second section of album C130 were created because commemoration of the Royal Tour was profitable. McCash acquired them and combined them with her own photographs to create a more personal commemoration. She placed the commercial postcards in a new context of use and effectively re-authored them. The postcards' presence in the McCash album supports Tom Nesmith's insistence that "record creation occurs across the entire history of the record" and his defense of the widest possible conception of provenance.²²

Moving on from the printed list and its limited portrayal of album C130, what will researchers see if they request the album itself? They will be brought a white corrugated-plastic half-Hollinger box. The album is enclosed in an archival container to physically protect it, but this enclosure also serves to frame the album in the "explicitly interpretive commentary" of the archive and to "focus the researcher's attention on the photograph[s]

²¹ Sandra Ferguson, "'A Murmur of Small Voices': On the Picture Postcard in Academic Research," *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005) 167-184, 183, 184. When this article was published, Ferguson was a senior archivist at the Archives of Ontario; Baer, "Deep in the Archive," 54.

²² Nesmith, "What is an Archival Education?," 4; Nesmith, "The concept of societal provenance," 352.

in particular ways.” The archivally assigned number C130 performs this same framing function. As noted in chapter two, photographs function in a variety of discursive contexts simultaneously, but the physical presentation of the album and its numbered place within the archive preferences the archival discursive space above any others.²³

Album C130 is clearly commercially produced; it features simulated wood-grain covers and a gilt label reading “Photographs.” It is roughly seven inches high by eleven inches wide by two inches thick and contains fifty-nine sheets of heavy black construction paper. These sheets are bound together by a cord running through two holes on the left-hand edge of the album. Many pages have broken away from this binding. Because this binding was simple to use and inexpensive to manufacture, it was popular from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1960s. As one of Sherry Turkle’s evocative objects the McCash album appears generic, understated, unprepossessing, perhaps even as an attempt to economise. This evocation may condition a researcher to view the photographs, and perhaps their compiler as well, in a similar light. The care with which multiple photographs have been arranged on each page, when contrasted to the damaged binding and a slightly musty smell that evokes the passage of time may precondition a researcher to view the album primarily in the “recognition” mode identified by Julia Thomas, as an object whose present purpose is to offer a window between past and present. Thomas’s insistence that photographs must be viewed in both recognition and excavation modes offers archivists and researchers a way to again avoid confusing McCash’s purposes with their own views of the album.²⁴

²³ Rose, “Practicing photography,” 559; Tagg, *Grounds of Dispute*, 143.

²⁴ Bryan Clarke, “Some Observations on the Development of Albums Containing Photographs and Aspects of Their Deterioration,” in *The Imperfect Image: Photographs, their Past, Present and Future: Conference Proceedings* (London: The Centre for Photographic Conservation, 1992) 69-77. Though

Black-and-white photographs are fixed to each side of each sheet by photo-corners. Therefore the album contains one hundred eighteen pages numbered by the archivist. No photographs appear to be missing from the album, so the relationship between it and the photographs in the SIS files remains unclear. Archivist-written numbers for each page and each photograph are inscribed in white pencil, as are McCash's original captions. The two hands are so similar that the boundary between what has been inscribed by McCash and what by the archivist is again unclear. Not only should efforts have been made either to avoid this intrusion into the album's physical fabric or to make these additions more distinctly different from McCash's, a note recording this archival intervention should appear in the custodial or curatorial field of a more archivally self-aware finding aid. Neither the actual description of album C130 nor the hypothetical Keystone description using RAD disclose "the impact of the processor's work."²⁵

As with the printed list that attempts to mirror it, the album is divided by subject matter into three sections, each designated by an index tab with faded lettering in the same hand as the captions. The texts on these index tabs are loosely transcribed as subject headings in the printed list, but are not identified as physical elements of the album. Another graphic clue to McCash's approach to organizing her photographs is lost unless the researcher views the album itself. These index tabs read "Wpg. 1940," "Wpg. 1939 Royal Visit," and "Wpg. 513 St. Jas. St. 1939."²⁶

Clarke's article summarizes the variations in the physical attributes of photograph albums in a British context, many of its general observations are applicable to North America; Turkle, *Evocative Objects*, 5; Thomas, "The Evidence of Sight," 152, 167-168.

²⁵ Light and Hyry, "Colophons and Annotations," 217.

²⁶ AM, McCash, Edith. Album C130, unnumbered pages. The archival page numbering of each section does not include the page with attached index tab. Each section begins with page one, rather than the numbers proceeding through the entire album.

The first section contains eleven photographs and postcard views of downtown Winnipeg buildings, including the interior and exterior of the Hudson's Bay Company store at Portage and Colony, the Royal Bank Building at Main Street and William Avenue, the City Hall, the Grain Exchange Building and the Fort Garry Hotel. This section could be interpreted as an expression of McCash's civic pride or as her attempt to provide a location frame for the rest of the album but it ends with two photographs that share a caption reading "May 25. 'Gunshot' 2 months old Shetland pony and its mother at Eaton's store." This inclusion might undercut the impression of organizational care that the index tabs suggest, might signal McCash's sentimentality or might show she possessed a sense of whimsy. Their inclusion can also be read as another instance of McCash contrasting public and personal viewpoints.²⁷

The second section contains one hundred fifty-five images of the 24 May 1939 Winnipeg portion of the Royal Visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, examples of which have already been discussed. The intermixing of commercial postcards and McCash's own photographs creates a narrative that is a larger version of the contrast between the "Parade scenes" discussed earlier. A researcher gains an impression that McCash not only wished to commemorate the Royal Tour but to personalize this commemoration. She included several photographs showing the backs of crowds, offering a contrast between her own experience of the day and the official version portrayed in the commercial images.

The third and largest section is made up of one hundred ninety-two black-and-white photographs of the extensive gardens at 513 St. James Street, Winnipeg, apparently the McCash home. Edith McCash, her sister Margaret and her mother Helen pose

²⁷ AM, McCash, Edith, album C130, Wpg 1940, archivally numbered photograph 10 and 11.

individually or together in many of these. Four photographs are mounted on each page, tilted roughly thirty degrees from the horizontal. Many of the album pages have torn spots where photo-corners have been removed. This material evidence, which again would not appear in a RAD-compliant fonds or item-level description, suggests two possibilities. It may indicate a revision, a pentimento, on McCash's part in an attempt to add visual interest to the page or it may indicate that the pages have been reused in an attempt to economize.

Every page in this section also contains text that is not reproduced in the printed list. At the top of pages one to twenty-six a line reads "Winnipeg Manitoba Views – 513 St. James Street and Vicinity – 1939," while on pages twenty-seven to forty-nine it is "Winnipeg Manitoba Views – 1940–513 St. James Street and Vicinity." These additional texts contradict McCash's own index tab, suggesting both that the photographs were arranged in the album no earlier than late 1940 and that her indexing was incomplete or somewhat careless. At the bottom of most pages is further text not included in the printed finding aid, such as "summer scenes in the garden," "spring and summer in the garden" and "around the house and garden." This section could have been intended by McCash to offer visitors a "show and tell" narrative of her pride in her garden. It may have been a comfort for her to enjoy in the depths of winter. It may have been a working visual record to guide future garden planning. It may have fulfilled all these roles.²⁸

The captions in this section also indicate that the creator of album C130 has been misidentified. Accession register 1976-224 represents either an archival error or a communications failure between donor and Archives. The caption of the second

²⁸ AM, McCash, Edith. Album C130, "Wpg. 513 St. Jas. St. 1939," archivally numbered pages 1 to 26 (archivally numbered photographs 1 to 103) and archivally numbered pages 27 to 49 (archivally numbered photographs 104-192); archivally numbered pages 1, 9 and 21; Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 20.

photograph in this section reads “Edith and mother behind the plum tree,” while the caption of the sixth photograph is “Mother and *I* [Emphasis added] behind the plum tree.” Other captions identify “My peonies” and “Edith’s peonies.” There are numerous other examples. This is clear evidence that the album’s creator is not Edith McCash but her older sister Margaret. This attribution is consistent with the donation of albums to the Archives in August of 1976, as Margaret Lithgow (Lithgow?) McCash died on 27 June 1976.²⁹

Each section of album C130 appears to have a different narrative purpose. If one follows Martha Langford’s suggested categories, the first section’s photographs of buildings appear as both a collection and a travelogue of Margaret McCash’s home city. The second section appears again as a collection, but also as a memoir of an event significant to McCash. It may also have signalled McCash’s self-identification as an Anglo-Canadian with all the traditions and viewpoints on history and culture that this identification entailed. The third section appears to merge the functions of collection, memoir and family album. In addition to the immediate purposes discussed earlier this section presents one version, authored by McCash, of her relationship to her sister Edith and her mother. While identification of these overlapping purposes is an act of interpretation, it could not be arrived at without the “evidential value embedded in the

²⁹ AM, McCash, Edith. Album C130, “Wpg. 513 St. Jas. St. 1939,” archivally numbered photographs 4, 6, 22 and 23. Margaret McCash’s death date appears in the burial records of Winnipeg’s Brookside cemetery, available online at http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/cemeteries/Brookside/BrooksideMCA_MCD.html. Accessed 2 April 2011. These records also indicate that Edith, Margaret and their father, James McCash, who died in August 1914, are all interred in the same plot. Margaret McCash was born on 11 June 1897. See Manitoba Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Vital Statistics, online at <http://vitalstats.gov.mb.ca/Query.php>. Accessed 2 April 2011.

physical structure of the album, its sequence of pages, the placement of images, [and] the juxtaposition of words and images” defended by Joan Schwartz.³⁰

The inside front cover of the album also contains a text, “NOTE: - No snapshots taken during War years 1941-1944 inclusive [.] Resumed in 1945,” that is not included in the printed finding aid and is unlikely to appear in a Keystone item-level description. This note could indicate that the album was not compiled until after 1945, but it could equally have been added later to an already compiled album. The note offers evidence that McCash may have created the album in order to look back on times past in an act of personal archiving.³¹

Gillian Rose argues that “the posing, the snapping, getting the film developed, the sorting, storing, displaying, redisplaying, dusting, and looking” are all part of the meaning of photographs. Much of the evidential value of album C130 is denied if a researcher does not speculate what role McCash required it to perform in her life. In addition to being a tool of her self-definition within her family and Anglo-Canadian society, was it a physical embodiment of memory, an evocation of friends, family and times lost, a comfort in her age? Did her possession of a camera and ability to afford having photographs developed and printed symbolize her social location to herself as well as to the present researcher? What acts of communication was McCash engaged in, and to whom? Both fonds- and item-level subject-based description do not allow these questions to be answered.³²

³⁰ Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 6; Schwartz, “Coming to Terms with Photographs,” 157.

³¹ AM, McCash, Edith. Album C130, inside front cover.

³² Gillian Rose, “‘Everyone’s cuddled up and it just looks really nice’: an emotional geography of some mums and their family photos,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 5, no. 4 (December 2004) 549-564, 552.

In the note on the inside front cover of album C130, McCash's use of the word "Resumed" is significant. It indicates this album is, or at least was, part of a larger series. This raises the question: have these additional albums survived and does the Archives hold them?³³

There are no spaces left by the removal of photographs from album C130, and the date range for the album and individual photographs in the SIS filing cabinets do not coincide. Have these isolated photographs come from additional albums? One SIS cross-reference card refers to a subject category "Winnipeg – Homes/Frame 15," indicating a photograph related to McCash is found in a collection of photographs of Winnipeg homes assembled from many sources. When examined, this photograph shows a house further identified as "Home of James McCash at 509 Langside – May 1911" with a young girl standing on its porch. The inscription, apparently original, on the reverse reads "Edith standing on verandah of our house on 509 Langside Street. Taken Coronation Day 1911. King George and Queen Mary. Taken by Mr. Renault next door." Note that the index card does not distinguish between Edith McCash as subject and as creator. This photograph also offers further hints of the McCash family and Anglo-Canadian narratives. The back of this photograph has shreds of black construction paper adhering to it, as do the others to which cross-reference cards lead. The photographs in the SIS folders are each marked with a small oval "Manitoba Archives" stamp with a handwritten "1976-224" at its centre, linking them to the 1976 accession register. The register indicates that the Archives received 898 photographs in 1976. Album C130 holds 358 photographs. The SIS filing cabinets hold a few more. The photographs in the SIS filing

³³ The RAD-compliant Keystone description notes the unprocessed material, but is a hypothetical construct. Accession register 1976-224 would not typically be available to a researcher, who would have recourse only to the card catalogue, album C130, and the printed list of photographs to answer the question.

cabinets also offer evidence that the archival principles of provenance and original order have not been adhered to. It is clear that the McCash Collection consists of more photographs than existing finding aids disclose. Where, then, are they?³⁴

Only if a researcher is able to obtain the cooperation of an archivist are they shown a cardboard box labelled “Edith McCash, 1976-224” drawn from the SIS processing backlog in a third floor vault of the Archives. This box contains three additional photograph albums and twenty-two partially prepared folders similar to those in the SIS file cabinets in the research room. This is the rest of the McCash Collection frozen in mid-processing. From a researcher’s viewpoint, the McCash Collection has been both physically and intellectually fragmented at the level of complete albums by archival arrangement and descriptive actions. One of the albums in this processing backlog reveals itself to be further fragmented on closer examination. Its disassembly offers a possible explanation why the processing of the McCash Collection was halted.³⁵

Two of the three albums in the SIS backlog have grey fabric covers with the embossed title “Photographs.” Both are labelled on their inside front covers in Margaret McCash’s hand. One is “Book A,” the other “Book B.” A third album with an orange and gilt cover and the embossed title “Photographs” has no label. All three albums have the same cord binding as album C130. All are commercially produced, have similar dimensions to album C130 and are similar to it as evocative objects. Both “Book A” and “Book B” have handmade index tabs with notations again in McCash’s hand. The unnamed album has none. “Book A” contains one hundred eighteen pages with captions dating between 1910 and 1918. “Book B” contains one hundred thirty-four pages of

³⁴ AM, SIS, Winnipeg, Homes/Frame 15.

³⁵ AM, SIS processing backlog, Edith McCash, accession number 1976-224.

photographs dated from 1920 to 1929. The third, untitled album holds ninety pages of photographs dating from 1950 and 1951 but almost no captions. If McCash's overall organizational schema was chronological, and it appears that it was, album C130 was destined to become "Book C" and the unnamed album "Book D." It is not clear whether each album was compiled shortly after the taking of the most recent photographs in it or if the compiling of all the albums began at some point after 1951. While McCash's captioning and dating of individual photographs gives some sense of their context of creation, the context of creation for complete albums cannot be determined.³⁶

"Book A" has been substantially disassembled. More than sixty percent of its black construction paper pages hold only photographic corners and captions. Some pages have been cut apart. Without the photographs with which they once interacted, the captions are as cryptic as the printed finding aid for album C130 or a hypothetical item-level textual description. "Book A" is the source of the photographs in the SIS file drawers. The twenty-two file folders that form part of the backlog were likely destined for these drawers. The physical disassembly and dispersal of the photographs makes it difficult for a researcher to understand McCash's original narrative unless she or he is willing to undertake an uncertain and time-consuming reconstruction. The "pattern of internal associations" that Martha Langford suggests can supply an understanding of a creator's narrative and purposes has been dispersed along with the photographs. This is unfortunate, since, to judge by its captions, "Book A" was composed almost entirely of photographs of family and friends taken by McCash or others. As well as being the album containing the earliest content, it may have been the most personal that Margaret McCash

³⁶ AM, SIS processing backlog, Edith McCash, accession number 1976-224, Books A, B, and untitled.

created.³⁷

The archival processing of the McCash Collection was likely halted when a more senior archivist intervened with junior staff upon discovering that the principles of provenance and original order were not being adhered to. These layers of archival action have turned McCash's "Book A" into a different evocative object. It is now an unfortunate example of the destructive potential of archival activity in the service of subject content. While its physical dispersal is of a different order from the effect of item-level description of photographs in descriptive schema such as RAD, this thesis argues that it is qualitatively the same. The photographs have been physically removed from their original contexts of purpose, use, and intended audience. Item-level description focused on subject content effects the same atomization intellectually rather than physically. It is for this reason that this thesis joins with Joan Schwartz in declaring that archivists continue to apply processes to the description of photographs that are "clear, consistent and wrong."³⁸

To return to the McCash unprocessed backlog, "Book B" is divided into nine sections by index tabs. It is organized according to which local park is the setting for the photographs; the index tabs read "B. Assiniboine Park," "B. Central Park," "B. Kildonan Park," and so on. The last section, in an organizational pattern similar to album C130, is "B. 513 St. James Street and Vicinity." As in C130, the album moves from the public to the personal. However, one section, the sixth, partially breaks this pattern. The index tab reads "Royal Bank of Canada Days" and contains photographs of Margaret and her co-workers. Most photographs are again set in local parks. Two eight-by-tens of the staff, at

³⁷ Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 42.

³⁸ Schwartz, "Coming to Terms with Photographs," 170.

a 1922 picnic in Kildonan Park and a 1923 Valentine Dance, are included. Both are marked in their lower corners with the name “Foote” and a four-digit number. This marking is consistent with other photographs taken by professional photographer Lewis Benjamin Foote. The Archives of Manitoba holds nearly twenty-five hundred images created by Foote for a wide variety of clients and purposes. These two photographs do not also appear in the Foote fonds. Regardless of whether they were duplicated in the Foote fonds these photographs offer another example of McCash re-authoring photographs through the placement of them in her own context of use.³⁹

The untitled album’s organization is also similar to album C130. It begins with forty-three pages of commercially produced postcards depicting the 1950 Winnipeg flood followed by a twenty-five page section depicting the gardens and neighbourhood surrounding 513 St. James Street. As in C130 and “Book B,” McCash moves from the public to the personal. Applying the type of analysis Martha Langford recommends a researcher fits the recurrent pattern of parks and gardens together to construct an image of Margaret McCash as a woman who loved gardens, flowers and the outdoors. One responds to the kind of person one believes McCash to have been. This response is in the recognition mode defended by Julia Thomas. Item-level description of decontextualized photographs makes this kind of response to, and analysis of, the McCash Collection far more difficult to carry out.⁴⁰

³⁹ The McCash photographs indicate that the Royal Bank to which she referred is the present day Union Bank Tower at 460 Main Street, Winnipeg; AM, SIS processing backlog, Edith McCash, accession number 1976-224, Book B, archivally numbered pages 13 and 14. See Archives Canada, online at <http://www.archivescanada.ca/english/index.html> for the Lewis Benjamin Foote fonds, which is also another example of a RAD-compliant approach to archival description.

⁴⁰ Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 42; Thomas, “The Evidence of Sight,” 167-168.

There is a second way in which the untitled album emphasises the importance of a researcher being able to see the pattern of visual associations established by McCash. This album moves progressively from public to personal not once but twice as part of its narrative structure. The section on the St. James Street gardens is followed by a thirteen-page section that again blends commercial postcards of the 1951 Royal Visit of Princess Elizabeth with photographs taken of the backs of watching crowds by McCash. She personalizes the commemoration of this public event using contrasting images in a manner similar to her narrative of the 1939 Royal Tour. It can again be read as an assertion of her Anglo-Canadian identity. This section on the 1951 Royal Tour is incomplete; it ends with a page captioned “Greater Winnipeg Royal Visit Views October 16 1951.” Material evidence, the unbroken expanse of the surface of this page, suggests no photographs have ever been attached to it.⁴¹

The untitled album ends with a single photograph of an elderly woman huddled in a winter coat walking on a downtown street toward the photographer. Through comparison of her face to photographs in the other albums she can be identified as Helen Semple Gardner McCash, Margaret McCash’s mother. Since she does not meet the camera’s gaze as she might be expected to if the photographer were her daughter, this photograph appears to be the work of a street photographer. The subject matter of this photograph is simply an old woman clutching a paper shopping bag and dressed in a hat, a fur-collared cloth coat typical of the 1950s and rubber pull-on low boots. It could be used for research into clothing styles.

⁴¹ AM, SIS processing backlog, Edith McCash, accession number 1976-224, untitled album, archivally assigned section 4, archivally numbered page 1.

But its place at the end of the untitled album's narrative and possibly at the end of the narrative structure of the entire series of albums lends it an aura of loss and poignancy. This aura may have existed for Margaret McCash, may be what she sought to convey or may be brought to this photograph by the gaze of a researcher. Perhaps a researcher or archivist is drawn to this interpretation because he or she has spent so much time looking at McCash's world through the lens of her camera and the lens of her perception, both literally and figuratively observing her world through her eyes. The place this photograph holds in the album's physical and narrative structure, and the significance conferred on it by this placement, again illustrates the necessity for viewing photographs both in the recognition and excavation modes suggested by Julia Thomas; the necessity to view them both experientially and analytically, with both the heart and the mind. Archivaly created visual descriptions of full album pages and albums' complete narrative sequences allow for both kinds of response and analysis. Item level, decontextualized description of subject content does not.⁴²

The received meaning of the photograph of Helen McCash may reside in Margaret McCash's narrative structure or it may reside in the eye of the researcher. However, a final example from the McCash albums can be offered where meaning can arise only from a researcher's perceptions. This example illustrates that the meaning an observer brings to viewing a photograph can exist entirely apart from creator intent. It provides an example of how photographs can offer the contradictory meaning suggested by Gillian Rose, the generosity suggested by Lee Friedlander and the piercing effect of

⁴² The burial records of Winnipeg's Brookside cemetery, available online at http://www.winnipeg.ca/ppd/cemeteries/Brookside/BrooksideMCA_MCD.html, offer Helen McCash's full name. Accessed 2 April 2011; Hirsch and Spitzer, "Incongruous Images," 13-15; Arnold and Turner, *Fred Herzog: Vancouver Photographs*, passim; Thomas, "The Evidence of Sight," 167-168.

the *punctum* examined by Roland Barthes. It also necessitates a brief shift from the disembodied analytic voice of this thesis into that of the first person. This example, and this shift in narrative voice, further demonstrates the benefits of applying both the recognition and excavation modes advocated by Julia Thomas.⁴³

In album C130, in the section on the 1939 Royal Tour, I saw commercially produced postcards of the dignitaries, ethnic communities, floats, marching bands and military units that took part in the parade honouring the King and Queen. On one page I saw the caption “Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders and Band” between a photograph of kilted marching men and one of a bagpipe and drum unit. Seeing this caption and these photographs, I became excited, grabbed a fifteen-power loupe and poured intently over the photograph of the kilted men. Sixty-nine years in my past, but three years into the future of these men, on 19 August 1942, many of them would be dying at a place on the northwest coast of France called Dieppe. For a researcher who views this photograph with knowledge of what will come, this image offers a meaning that is contradictory to its subject content. In front of the mass of marching men is their regimental sergeant major. His presence is an incidental detail and an example of the visual generosity of this image. He is the man most directly responsible for the welfare of these men, a man who would deeply grieve for them, a man whose grieving would colour the rest of his life and that of his family. He is RSM Charles Keenan. He is my father.⁴⁴

This photograph, which for Margaret McCash was one of many commemorating the Royal Tour, brings on a flood of emotions and associations for me. It is a pointed – in

⁴³ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 188-189; Friedlander, “An Excess of Fact,” in *The Desert Seen*, 104; Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 51; Thomas, “The Evidence of Sight,” 167-168.

⁴⁴ AM, McCash, Edith, album C130, Winnipeg Royal Visit, archivally numbered page 18 (archivally numbered photographs 60 and 61).

Roland Barthes word, piercing – example of Verne Harris’s concept of an archival record as a “cornucopia of meanings.”⁴⁵

Through their individual subject content, the McCash photographs extensively document the changes to the physical and built environment of the City of Winnipeg over more than fifty years. They document changes in clothing and recreational activities during the same period. They document specific events, such as the 1939 Royal Visit and the 1950 flood. A future researcher may use them to chart long-term changes in the area’s plant life, or river levels in specific years past, or for a host of other reasons. The visual description of complete album pages linked in a way that maintains the albums’ narrative structures will, however, preserve the physical albums for far longer and will allow, beyond subject content, a view of how one woman in the first half of the twentieth century used the ownership of a camera, the taking, collecting and arranging of photographs to understand, define and comment on the social spaces around her. The archival purposes furthered by the arrangement and description of photographic records by subject content should not obscure the will, purpose and message of their original creator. Nor should they stand in the way of myriad other present and future perceptions of these photographs.

⁴⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 71, 95; Harris, “Law, Evidence and Electronic Records,” 41.

CONCLUSION

This thesis offers a broad critique of how archivists have previously looked at and described photographs. Archivists have focused primarily on subject content and have not generally addressed the contexts that surround the creation and ongoing use of photographs, the purposes for which photographs were initially created and are continually reused (including re-purposing by archives) and the ways in which the rhetoric of the photographic medium differs from that of text. This thesis argues that archivists must become more aware of the active role they play in creating photographic meaning. It recommends that archivists can use the visual description of photographs in addition to or as an alternative to textual description.

The first chapter outlines the spread and implications of a postmodernist viewpoint in archives and how this viewpoint has impacted both archival theory and daily archival practices. Archivists, particularly within the Canadian archival community, are increasingly aware that their arrangement and descriptive actions, along with other archival activities, have significant mediating influences on how researchers understand archival records. Less attention, however, has been paid to the equally significant influences of how archivists perceive records, particularly photographs, before they describe them.

The second chapter argues in part that archivists have generally practiced inadequate visual literacy. It suggests the importance for archivists to understand and distinguish between what may have been intended by creators, what is intrinsic to photographs and what archivists see in the specific contexts of archival institutions and work. This chapter asserts that archivists can better understand photographs and the

evidence photographs convey by following the recommendations of cultural geographer Gillian Rose, art historian Martha Langford, photographer Lee Friedlander and historian Julia Adeney Thomas.

Gillian Rose advocates a concept of visual literacy that is organized into three sites: the site of the photograph's creation, the site of the photograph itself, and the site at which it is viewed. Each site can be questioned in one or more of three modes: the technological, compositional and social. Rose's approach to visual literacy not only offers archivists a more structured and systematic way to look at photographs, it also offers them a way to understand what they bring to the act of looking. It allows archivists to engage in a focused form of metacognition, to understand when what they see is the intent of the creator or creators, when it is part of the compositional or material structure of a photograph and when it arises from their own looking and their own intellectual, professional, cultural and historical circumstances.

Martha Langford suggests that photograph albums have narrative structures and patterns of internal linkage that transcends the subject content of individual photographs. This thesis suggests that Langford's observation can be extended to any archivally held collection of photographs and that all aggregates of photographs can be viewed in a similar fashion for encompassing narratives and creator intent. When combined with photographer Lee Friedlander's observation about the content generosity of photographs, Langford's approach also suggests that photographic captions have a much more complex relationship to the photographs they accompany than simply determining which of the many subject matter components of any photograph an observer is directed to pay attention to.

Julia Adeney Thomas suggests that historians need to practice two ways of looking at photographic records. This thesis argues that her observations refine Gillian Rose's concept of visual literacy and are equally of use to archivists. These ways of seeing are "excavation," an analytical way of examining a photograph in terms of its original cultural and historical context and "recognition," a non-discursive way of apprehending a photograph in an empathic, felt-sense manner. This thesis suggests that Thomas's two ways of engaging with photographs refine semiotician Roland Barthes concepts of *studium* and *punctum*. Thomas suggests that because excavation and recognition are different ways of relating to evidence of the past they should be used in concert as part of any historian's (and this thesis adds, any archivist's) intellectual research toolkit.

This thesis suggests that archivists create descriptions based on archivally created digital photographs rather than on item-level written descriptions. It suggests that digital cameras offer a more versatile tool to archivists than the scanners presently more commonly in use. While the use of digital cameras and other imaging technologies is becoming ubiquitous in society, this thesis makes its suggestions because visual literacy demands not only the ability to understand visual images but also the ability to use visual images to effectively communicate. Archivally created digital photographs not only allow archivists to practice better visual literacy, they also allow archives to present photographic records in ways that invite diverse new ways of seeing them.

This thesis then applies its suggestions, including the benefits of incorporating oral history interviews into archival intake processes, to a specific collection of photograph albums held by the Archives of Manitoba. It draws parallels between the

spatial and physical dismantlement these albums suffered and the intellectual dismantlement of photograph albums by item level, subject-content based textual description. This thesis strongly suggests that the approach to photographic description presently used by archives is simply inadequate to the task of presenting the full range of photographs' potential as records of the past. Present approaches are also inadequate to meet the challenges of future unanticipated uses of these records. As the photographs that archives will acquire in the future will increasingly be born-digital, the recommendations this thesis makes regarding visual description also offer archives a way to deal with such records in a manner that involves less time, effort and specialized archival training. These recommendations offer greater efficiency. As born-digital photographs will also enter archives in numbers that are orders of magnitude greater than what has gone before, it is imperative that archives adopt streamlined ways of coping with them. This thesis suggests that the visual rather than textual description of archival records, not merely photographs, is an area deserving of much further exploration and methodological refinement.

Art historians, art critics, archivists and others regularly make reference to “the visual turn” as though the spread of visual modes of communication in society constitutes a unique historical event.¹ Semiotician Gunther Kress offers a contrasting view. He suggests, “modes [of communication] and media exist in culturally and historically shaped ‘constellations.’ The one that has dominated the alphabetic cultures of the ‘West’ over the past 300 years of so is that of [a] mode of writing with [a] medium of book and page.” He argues further that

¹ Joan M. Schwartz, “Negotiating the Visual Turn” 108, citing James Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

in periods of stability the question of effective communication is answered by the idea of convention and competent action in relation to those conventions. In periods of fragmentation and individuation communication is fraught: each environment of communication asks that social and 'political' relations, tastes, needs and desires be newly assessed.²

A textual understanding of the world is part of the political and social milieu in which archives developed as institutions. As archives continue to shift "from a juridical-administrative justification for archives grounded in concepts of the state" to a "sociocultural justification" to meet the needs of an increasingly varied research clientele, archives must develop the ability to communicate using photographs and other non-textual media. Only by dealing with archival records in new ways, rather than simply refining traditional approaches, can archives hope to remain relevant in the proliferating media forms and modes of communication used in the western-dominated and increasingly information-based global society. Only by dealing with archival records in new ways can archives hope to present records as a "cornucopia of meanings" to communities of users and cultures that hope to maintain their individualities and distinct identities in that global culture. Acquiring and practicing visual literacy must be part of archives' efforts to practice social responsibility.³

² Kress, "Reading Images: Multimodality, Representation and New Media," 4, 8.

³ Cook, "Remembering the Future," 173; Harris, "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records," 15.

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