

Relocating the Vernacular: The Yves Beauguard Collection at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec*



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RÉSUMÉ Quel est le dépôt approprié pour les photographies « vernaculaires » ou du quotidien? Certaines institutions sont-elles moins convenables que d'autres pour faire l'acquisition, la conservation et la présentation de matériaux populaires? Ce texte explore ces questions en examinant une collection d'archives photographiques spécifique, la collection Yves Beauguard, qui a été acquise récemment par le Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. Comprenant 3 540 photographies vernaculaires, à partir des cartes de visite du dix-neuvième siècle jusqu'aux cartes postales du début du vingtième siècle, cette collection a été amassée sur une période de vingt ans par l'historien québécois Yves Beauguard. En se servant de la notion de la photographie vernaculaire de Geoffrey Batchen comme cadre théorique et comme tremplin, ce texte propose que ce type d'objet remet en question et enrichit les concepts de l'histoire de l'art qui sont à la base des musées des beaux arts.

ABSTRACT What is the rightful repository of vernacular photographs? Are certain institutions less suitable to the collection, preservation, and presentation of the vernacular object than others? This essay investigates these questions through the analysis of a particular photographic archive: the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec's recently acquired Yves Beauguard Collection. Consisting of 3,540 vernacular photographs ranging from nineteenth-century *cartes-de-visite* to early-twentieth-century postcards, this collection was amassed over a twenty-year period by Québec historian Yves Beauguard. Using the writings on the notion of vernacular photography of Geoffrey Batchen as a theoretical framework and springboard, this essay proposes that these kinds of objects both destabilize and potentially enrich the art-history concepts at the foundation of the fine art museum.

This essay traces the particular trajectory of the body of photographs known as the Yves Beauguard Collection from its initial location in a private setting to its current position as part of the collections of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec in Québec City. The analysis offered is based on my experience of working with this corpus and on the writings of Photographic

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Historian Geoffrey Batchen, concerning the nature and future of vernacular photography. After describing the makeup of the collection and discussing the gains and losses engendered by its relocation, I examine the notion of vernacular photography itself and consider which conceptual tools are most appropriate to the interpretation of this kind of object. Finally, the consideration of a few specific photographs leads me to the question of how the museum will put the objects in the Yves Beauregard Collection to use. My aim is not to argue that certain types of institutions are better suited than others for the acquisition, preservation, and presentation of vernacular photographs, but rather to draw out some of the theoretical implications of their relocation to a fine art museum.

The Yves Beauregard Collection

In the spring of 2006, I was hired as an archivist by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec. Under the supervision of curator Mario Béland, my task was to carry out the inventory of a 3,540-piece collection of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Québec photographs in preparation for its acquisition and subsequent integration into the museum's main holdings.¹ The corpus had been amassed over a period of more than twenty years by Yves Beauregard, the Québec historian and editor-in-chief of the history magazine *Cap-aux-Diamants*. The collection's particularity and strength lies in its focus on Quebec City – both as a subject of representation and as a site where photographic activity flourished, especially during the late-nineteenth century. The collection is thus a valuable record of the city's changing face during a time of great cultural and technological development.

The Yves Beauregard Collection consists exclusively of what are today termed vernacular photographs: everyday, popular photographs; photographs that were not intended as art; photographs that make up the bulk of photographic production, yet fall outside the ontological and geographical boundaries established by mainstream history of photography.² Twenty-one percent

1 The collection also includes 109 non-photographic documents relating to the history of photography in Quebec City. These were not part of the initial inventory, which was carried out from March to June 2006 at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

2 For historical and critical elaborations on the notion of vernacular photography, see Geoffrey Batchen's essays: "From Genre to Generic," *Art On Paper* (January-February 1999), pp. 48-49; "Vernacular Photographies," in *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), pp. 56-80; and *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (New York and Amsterdam, 2004). See also Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget A. Henisch, *The Photographic Experience: 1839-1914: Images and Attitudes* (University Park, PA, 1994) and Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven, 1994). These accounts of private and commercial activity, among others,

of the photographs in the collection are urban landscapes: picturesque views of the city's streets, fortifications, and architectural monuments that were sold, often as stereographic cards, to increasing numbers of tourists (Figure 1).³ These are second in number to the sixty-eight percent that are portraits. Over half of the latter are printed in the *cartes-de-visite* format, the diminutive and highly conventionalized genre that dominated all other available modes of portraiture from about 1860 to 1890 (Figures 2 and 3).⁴ The identities of more than half of the subjects pictured are unknown, and twenty-three percent of the images that comprise the whole were taken by anonymous photographers.



Figure 1: Louis-Prudent Vallée, *Hope Gate and Sainte-Famille Street*, 1870 (printed between 1879 and 1890), albumen print, 8.7 x 17.6 cm. Collection Yves Beauregard, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2006.1344).

can be contrasted with the standard histories of photography, such as Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present*, 5th ed. (New York, 1982); Helmut Gernsheim, *The History of Photography from the Earliest Use of the Camera Obscura in the Eleventh Century up to 1914* (London, 1955); and Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1997). Deconstructions of these histories in political and economic terms are offered by theorists such as Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA., 1990); Allan Sekula, *Photography Against the Grain: Essays and Photo-Works, 1973-1983* (Halifax, 1984); Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis, 1991); and John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst, 1988).

³ Michel Lessard, *The Livernois Photographers* (Quebec City, 1987), pp. 98-100.

⁴ William C. Darrach, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Gettysburg, PA, 1981), p. 24. For a discussion of the use and impact of the *cartes-de-visite* format in Quebec, see Michel Lessard, "Des portraits pour tout le monde... La carte de visite au Québec," *Photo-Sélection*, vol. 4, no. 4 (September 1984), pp. 40-41.



Figure 2: Jules-Ernest Livernois, *Portrait of a Seminarian*, between 1874 and 1900, albumen print, 10.6 x 6.3 cm. Collection Yves Beauregard, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2006.855).

Before they were moved to the museum's stores in 2006, the 3,540 items were housed in Yves Beauregard's apartment in the city's Saint-Jean-Baptiste neighbourhood. Kept in folders, bags, and boxes stashed throughout his home (and, it seems, slowly overtaking it), the items were organized according to the collector's idiosyncratic ordering system, which was undoubtedly informed by his editorial work at *Cap-aux-Diamants*. Some folders were devoted to images made by the more prolific photographic firms, such as Livernois, George William Ellison, and Louis-Prudent Vallée, while other groupings were determined variably by subject, provenance, size, or date of purchase. This order has now been replaced by the museum's standard art-history order, whereby each item is defined first and foremost by its author.



Figure 3: Jules-Ernest Livernois, *Portrait of a Family*, between 1874 and 1900, albumen print, 10.5 x 6.3 cm. Collection Yves Beauregard, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2006.881).

and then by its subject, date of production, medium, and format.⁵ What has been gained and lost by the relocation of the collection from Yves Beauregard's apartment to the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec? And how has its relocation changed the perceived meaning and value of the photographs that it brings together?

5 The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec abides by the *Documenting Your Collections: Info-Muse Network Documentation Guide*'s classification system for fine arts and decorative arts museums, which is based on the *Art & Architecture Thesaurus* produced by the Getty Research Institute. The *Documenting Your Collections: Info-Muse Network Documentation Guide* is available online at: <http://www.smq.qc.ca/publicspec/guidesel/doccoll/en/index.htm> (accessed 27 February 2008).

An evident gain is the current public accessibility of the corpus, which is valuable not only as a source of historical data, but as proof of the existence of a vibrant nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century photographic practice in Québec. Another gain is the part the corpus now plays within the rest of the museum's collection: as its first substantial photographic acquisition, the Yves Beaugard Collection can help fill a void in our understanding of the history of visual culture in Québec.⁶ Yet another is that as a result of the acquisition, the collection's precise monetary value is now known. This knowledge will undoubtedly increase the appreciation of such objects and encourage further collecting in the field of Québec and Canadian vernacular photography.

But I am more interested in the losses associated with the collection's relocation. I have, in fact, already mentioned one: the collection's former organizational logic, which followed one man's twenty-year search for evidence of Quebec City's past fuelled by his work at *Cap-aux-Diamants*, has been replaced by the museum's art-history logic. This replacement has arguably resulted in a *loss of equality*. Before, the photographs that make up the corpus were meaningful as parts of a whole; although certain individual works may have taken pride of place in Yves Beaugard's mind, the collection's sum was more important than its parts. Since its relocation, the collection has been atomized, or dissected. Each work now has its own accession number and dossier, and each work must now individually "face up" to the art-history concepts with which the museum operates. A new hierarchy, established principally in terms of authorship (whether known or unknown), has overtaken the collector's more fluid and democratic organization, which was based on his own sense of history and aesthetics.⁷

One might well ask why Yves Beaugard's logic was neither retained nor documented by the museum, or why, in other words, the archival principles of *respect des fonds* and original order were not applied. According to Michel Duchéin, the *respect des fonds* principle was instituted as a safeguard against

6 Before the acquisition of the Yves Beaugard Collection, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec's collection of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century photography consisted of about 750 objects. Important pre-2006 photographic acquisitions include William Notman's famous illustrated book *Portraits of British Americans*, given to the museum in the 1950s; a group of 67 prints acquired in 1969, which includes numerous stereographic views of Quebec City, Montreal, and Ottawa made by the foremost nineteenth-century Canadian photographers (George William Ellisson, Louis-Prudent Vallée, James George Parks, etc.); the album of Captain Frederick Stevenson, acquired in 1972, which contains 231 photographs by , among others, William Notman and Alexander Gardner; and two large albums previously owned by the Taché-Cimon family, bought in 1982. (Information taken from an unpublished report on the Yves Beaugard Collection by Mario Béland, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, 2006, pp. 2-4.)

7 For an overview of the concept of authorship as it is understood in the discipline of art history, see "Authorship," in *Art History: The Key Concepts*, ed. Jonathan Harris (New York, NY and Abingdon, UK, 2006), pp. 32-34.

the dissipation of documents forming discrete groupings, resulting in the loss of valuable contextual information.⁸ It is based on the idea that documents created or compiled to form a whole have an added level of meaning when they are apprehended together, or even that they have no *greater* meaning than that evidenced by the analysis of their internal relationships. “The archival document,” Duchein writes, “... has therefore a *raison d’être* only to the extent that it belongs to a *whole*.”⁹ The key to preserving the trace of these relationships is to put into practice the principle of original order, which requires that the organization and sequence established by the individual or institutional creator of an archive be kept intact.¹⁰ As Heather MacNeil also notes, these principles enable archivists to “protect archives not only from physical deterioration but also from loss of meaning, due to their accidental or deliberate eradication from their context.”¹¹

But whether these principles *should* have been applied by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec in the case of the Yves Beauregard Collection is not the focus of this essay. The fact is, as explained to me by curator Mario Béland, that it is not the museum’s policy to preserve the initial arrangement or integrity of groups of artworks that are incorporated into the permanent collection.¹² For example, the same process of restructuring was carried out in 2005 when the museum acquired the Brousseau Collection of Inuit Art, a 2,635-piece collection that had been assembled by Raymond Brousseau over a period of almost fifty years.¹³ The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is certainly not alone in foregoing the *respect des fonds* principle in relation to collections – the same can be said of other fine art museums such as the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the National Gallery of Canada. This is because these institutions conceive their permanent collections as a homogenous “story” rather than an amalgamation of heterogeneous

8 Michel Duchein, “Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of *Respect des fonds* in Archival Science,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), p. 65.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

10 Society of American Archivists, *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*, s.v. “Original Order,” available at http://www.archivists.org/glossary/term_details.asp?DefinitionKey=69 (accessed 23 January 2008).

11 Heather MacNeil, “Archival Theory and Practice: Between Two Paradigms,” *Archivaria* 37 (Fall 1994), p. 9.

12 Mario Béland, in conversation with the author, 28 January 2008. Indeed, the only instance in which this happens is when an artist compiled the collection being acquired. When this occurs, the collection is seen as part of the artist’s practice as a whole.

13 It bears mentioning, however, that the reorganization of this collection may have been slight, since many of its objects had previously been housed in the collector’s now-defunct Musée d’art Inuit Brousseau, in Quebec City. For more information on the Brousseau Collection of Inuit Art, see Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, “Collections: Inuit Art,” available at <http://www.mnba.qc.ca/Afficher.aspx?section=843&langue=en> (accessed 27 February 2008).

ones. Each work that enters their collection is thus subsumed within the overarching history of art. The authorial role of Yves Beauregard is acknowledged by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, but it is trumped not only by this institution's own role as author of Québec's art history, but by the authors of each individual artwork, even the anonymous. In other words, the significance of the Yves Beauregard Collection, for the museum, does not reside in its internal relationships, but in the individual photographs and their relation to the permanent collection as a whole.

Yet it should also be added that in the case of Yves Beauregard, the traces of his collection's internal logic can be studied without recourse to its actual original order. Because his collecting practice was concurrent with his work as editor-in-chief of *Cap-aux-Diamants*, and because many of the images included in his collection were published in this magazine, it is possible, by revisiting the issues of the past twenty years, to follow the instrumental process of how the Yves Beauregard Collection came to be and evolved through time. Here, apart from anything else, is a striking example of how photographic images are integral to the writing of history, and how they live in the popular imagination. Indeed, further analysis of the context provided by the magazine – including how photographs are framed by both text and elements of graphic design – would reveal the specific meaning imparted to these images. But revisiting *Cap-aux-Diamants* also demonstrates that the images now owned by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec represent only a portion of his collecting practice. A large group of twentieth-century-Québec postcards, for example, was not acquired by the museum, and remain – for now – in Yves Beauregard's hands. This fact alone indicates that he himself sees his collection as multi-faceted and multi-purpose, rather than closed in upon itself as a system of knowledge.

Vernacular Photography

Although vernacular photographs have been the subject of numerous recent histories of photography,¹⁴ the leading scholar who has consistently and persuasively engaged with the notion – even providing the basis for a “theory” of vernacular photography – is Geoffrey Batchen. His writings offer a way of thinking through the implications of the migration of the Yves Beauregard Collection because he theorizes photography in its everyday use. He has for

14 Some notable examples are: Brian Wallis, *African American Vernacular Photography* (New York, 2006); Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, *Photographs, Objects, Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (New York and London, 2004); Daile Kaplan, *Pop Photographica: Photography's Objects in Everyday Life, 1842-1969* (Toronto, 2003); and Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson, *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham and London, 2003).

several years been preoccupied with the “promise” of vernacular photography. Concerned with questioning the exclusionary/evolutionary narrative of the dominant history of photography, which to a large degree has mimicked the narrative structure of the history of art, Batchen has turned to the vernacular image as being a conceptually fruitful and “defiant” object. The vernacular is not only that which is produced in a particular place with the help of local materials and mores, as it is defined in the field of architecture¹⁵; for Batchen, the term vernacular is to be assigned to objects whose physical complexity and particular conditions of production and reception defy the usual definition of the photograph.¹⁶ He goes as far as to employ the word “abject” to describe them: “These ordinary and regional artefacts,” he writes, “represent the troublesome field of vernacular photography; they are the abject photographs for which an appropriate history must now be written.”¹⁷ Photographic albums, travel snapshots, celebrity portraits, post-mortem photographs – these are the things that have not made it into the history of photography. They are the popular face of the medium, the awkward, ambiguous “Other” of the art photograph.

The word “appropriate” frequently recurs in Batchen’s essays on the vernacular. According to him, the traditional art-history concepts with which art historians and curators analyze photographs, such as authorship, originality, intention, chronology, and style, are unsuitable for the analysis of the vernacular object.¹⁸ They are unsuitable because, with most vernaculars, what is important is not who has produced them or the individual aesthetic vision that they express, but rather what purpose they serve and how they fit within – or even abide by – social-visual conventions. Instead, Batchen suggests, conceptual tools such as those used in studies of material culture, which include typology, morphology, and genre, are more appropriate for vernacular photographs.¹⁹ While art-history concepts encourage a focus on the photograph’s unique characteristics, those of material culture encourage the investigation of its adherence to established genre conventions, of the photograph’s role or function within the mass of images of which it is but one instance.

The *cartes-de-visite*, the Yves Beaugard Collection’s predominant image type, is a prime example. In his essay entitled “Dreams of Ordinary Life: *Cartes-de-visite* and the Bourgeois Imagination,” published in the catalogue of the 2005 edition of the Mois de la Photo à Montréal, Batchen argues that

15 James Stevens Curl, *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture* (Oxford, 2006), s.v. “vernacular architecture.”

16 Batchen, “Vernacular Photographies,” pp. 57-58.

17 Ibid., p. 57.

18 Batchen, “From Genre to Generic,” p. 49.

19 Batchen, “Vernacular Photographies,” p. 77.

cartes-de-visite have been treated unfairly by photographic historians. They have been judged at best as a quaint product of the Victorian worldview, and at worst as monotonous images entirely lacking in imagination and therefore unworthy of serious scholarly attention.²⁰ Looking at the hundreds of *cartes-de-visite* in the Yves Beaugard Collection (Figures 2 and 3), it is not difficult to understand why such judgements have been made. These photographs could be seen as almost boring in their sameness. Their subjects pose in similar, rather stiff ways (either sitting or standing, leaning on a support), the style of their *trompe l'œil* studio backdrops and furniture are much alike, and their format, of course, remains unchanged. But as Batchen shows, *cartes-de-visite* were meant to look all the same. For the people who posed for them, they were sites where membership in the bourgeoisie, whether real or simulated, local or global, could be acted out. According to Batchen, *cartes-de-visite* photography is “all about the semiotics of typology and the sublimation of the individual to the mass.”²¹ In other words, not only are the concepts of art history inappropriate for the interpretation of these objects: *cartes-de-visite* and other vernaculars could have been *made* to be analyzed with the methodological tools of material culture. Sameness, uniformity, congruence: these are the guiding concepts of vernacular photography – not singularity or originality, as valued by historians and museums of art. Must one then conclude that the Yves Beaugard Collection has been misplaced?

Quebec City and the *Cartes-de-visite*

Delving deeper into the Yves Beaugard Collection, however, one is forced to acknowledge that not all vernaculars, and certainly not all *cartes-de-visite*, are created equal. There are clear differences between the outputs of the various photographic studios at work in Quebec City in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The *cartes-de-visite* reproduced as Figures 2 and 3 were both made by the Jules-Ernest Livernois studio between the years 1874 and 1900. The Livernois studio was the city’s most prolific and prestigious photographic firm at this time, Jules-Ernest having even been described by the nineteenth-century Québec journalist Arthur Buies as “*le plus artiste des photographes*” (the most artistic of photographers).²² Anyone who was anyone sat for the photographer, and a visit to his lavishly decorated studios on the bustling Rue Saint-Jean, and later at the intersection of Rue Couillard and Côte de la

20 Geoffrey Batchen, “Dreams of Ordinary Life: Cartes-de-visite and the Bourgeois Imagination,” in *Image & Imagination*, ed. Martha Langford (Montreal and Kingston, 2005), p. 63.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

22 Arthur Buies, *Sur le parcours du chemin de fer du Lac Saint-Jean. 2e conférence donnée à la salle Saint-Patrick, le 28 avril 1887* (Quebec City, 1887), p. 31.

Fabrique, was apparently a real event.²³ Livernois's images are quite different from those produced by the Louis-Michel Picard firm (Figures 4 and 5). As opposed to the story of the Livernois family enterprise, which was extensively documented and recounted in the late 1980s by Historian Michel Lessard,²⁴ very little is known today about Louis-Michel Picard. What is certain is that his business was in operation between the years 1864 and 1880 on Rue des Fossés (or Desfossés), which is now Boulevard Charest Est, in Lower Town's Saint-Roch neighbourhood.²⁵ This location itself indicates that his studio catered to the working classes of Quebec City, a hypothesis that is confirmed by the title he gave himself, printed on the back of many of his pictures, "*Le photographe du peuple*" (the people's photographer).²⁶



Figure 4: Louis-Michel Picard, *Portrait of Two Men*, between 1864 and 1880, albumen print, 10.1 x 6.1 cm. Collection Yves Beauregard, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2006.2227).

23 Lessard, *The Livernois Photographers*, pp. 96, 120.

24 Lessard's most important treatise on the history of this particular photographic enterprise, cited above, was the outcome of his comprehensive Ph.D. research. See Michel Lessard, "Le studio Livernois, 1854–1974: un commerce familial d'art photographique à Québec" (Ph.D. diss., Université Laval, 1986).

25 Louise Désy, "L'histoire de la photographie au Québec à travers les périodiques, 1839–c.1880" (Master's thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1984), p. 335.

26 Louis-Michel Picard's business was located at no less than four different addresses on Rue

Figure 5: Louis-Michel Picard, *Portrait of a Man*, between 1864 and 1880, albumen print, 10.1 x 6.1 cm. Collection Yves Beauregard, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2006.2222).



The socio-economic differences between the Livernois and Picard studios can clearly be seen in the *cartes-de-viste* that bear their stamps. Picard's compositions are more plain, his studio settings less refined, his sitters more modestly dressed. A portrait of an unknown man (Figure 5), who stands squarely to the camera, his oddly big hand resting on a makeshift column whose plaid-patterned covering is repeated in his too-large trousers, illustrates this point unambiguously. This portrait is no less historically fascinating than Livernois's, but it is a much more rudimentary expression of nineteenth-century portrait aesthetic. Here the desire to assume the look of the ruling bourgeois class, which, according to Batchen, is the imperative of the *cartes-de-visite* photograph, is, frankly, unsuccessful. It would seem that the concepts of typology or genre are not enough to come to grips completely with Picard's image because they ignore real, class-based differences. They are not able to explain

des Fossés between 1864 and 1880. The first, 31 Rue des Fossés, is where Jules-Isaïe-Benoit dit Livernois, Jules-Ernest Livernois' father, operated one of his first daguerreotype studios (from about 1858 to 1864). The connection between Picard and Livernois was also a familial one: Picard's wife, Marie-Caroline-Clémentine L'Heureux, was Jules-Isaïe Livernois' sister-in-law. See Michel Lessard, *La photo s'expose: 150 ans de photographie à Québec* (Quebec City, 1987), pp. 33, 51.

how and why this portrait fails to abide by, or even challenges, the socio-visual conventions dictated by its image type. But neither, again, is it fair to analyze this portrait only in terms of its authorship or originality, for when compared to the more visually striking photographic production of the leading nineteenth-century Québec photographers, this unknown man cannot win. Although Picard's image, by being relocated up the hill at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, has also symbolically moved up the social ladder, the chances that it will ever make it out of the museum's stores and into an exhibition or a publication – in effect, that it will ever be put to use – are rather slim. To put it bluntly, this image is just not remarkable enough; consequently, nineteenth-century social inequalities find themselves re-inscribed in the present.

Yet it should not be forgotten that this unknown man is fundamental to a full knowledge of Quebec City's history, and that he has much to reveal about the particular character of its nineteenth-century visual practices. His relocation to the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, if not a mistake, at least poses the question of how the museum is going to “deal with” him. Batchen is right to see the vernacular photograph as a defiant object. It defies categorization according to the established tools of art history, but it also cannot be exhaustively explained by those used in the study of material culture. Vernacular photographs are *demanding*; they demand that their interpreters expand their field of inquiry, let go of certain ill-suited concepts and perhaps – and why not? – think up new ones.

This essay has addressed the repercussions of the migration of the Yves Beaugard collection of vernacular photographs to a fine art museum. I have argued that one of the consequences of this migration is the reordering of these photographs into a hierarchical, art-history system – one which, at first glance, may seem inappropriate to their particular nature. Critics might turn to Batchen who claims that concepts used in studies of material culture are more suited to the study of vernacular photography than established art-history methods, in that they deal more effectively with the intrinsic similarity or lack of individuality that characterizes the vernacular. I have shown, however, that concepts such as typology or genre are not enough to fully grasp the *differences* between these objects, which in turn would indicate that art-history concepts should not be discarded outright. After all, the convention of authorship might be helpful if one were to investigate Louis-Michel Picard's possibly intentional refusal of the *cartes-de-visite*'s visual codes.

The designation of the Yves Beaugard Collection as a fonds and its placement in an archive would have preserved certain aspects of its system of knowledge, and one can regret that this was not done. But the discussion arising from its relocation to the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec may ultimately lead to greater benefits, for it offers the potential for an institutional and historiographical critique of photographic history – from within and without.