Counterpoint

Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic "Othering," and the Margins of Archivy

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RÉSUMÉ Cet article confronte certains postulats des archivistes concernant les photographies, en particulier en ce qu'ils façonnent le vocabulaire de notre pratique professionnelle. Il suggère que les archivistes, à travers leurs normes et leurs pratiques, sont dans une large mesure responsables du fait que les utilisateurs des archives n'ont jamais apprécié à leur juste valeur les documents visuels. Parce que les photographies sont comprises et conservées de façon différente dans les bibliothèques et les centres d'archives, l'article s'attache au discours institutionnel et aux pratiques de celles-ci, particulièrement à l'usage des termes « special media » et « non-textual », à l'adoption par les *RDDA* du terme « graphic material » pour décrire l'art et la photographie et aux implications pour la numérisation à la pièce. L'auteure suggère enfin que, en adoptant un modèle textuel de l'information consignée et un modèle bibliographique de la classification des images, nous perpétuons notre fixation sur le contenu factuel au lieu de se concentrer sur les origines fonctionnelles des images. En conséquence, nous n'arrivons pas à incorporer les idées nouvelles et stimulantes sur la réalité et la représentation, le contexte et le sens, et ce faisant, nous reléguons les photographies aux marges de l'archivistique.

ABSTRACT This essay confronts certain assumptions held by archivists relating to photographs, in particular, those which govern the terms we employ in our professional pursuits. It suggests that, if users of archives have persistently failed to appreciate the value of visual materials, then archivists – through their standards and practices – are, in large measure, responsible. Because photographs are understood and preserved in libraries and archives in different ways and for different reasons, institutional discourse, and the practices which are naturalized by and within them, are examined, with particular focus on the use of the terms "special media" and "non-textual," on the adoption by *RAD* of "graphic material" for art and photography, and on the implication for item-level digitization. Finally, it suggests that by embracing a textual model of recorded information and by adopting a bibliographic model of image classification, we continue to fixate on the factual content rather than the functional origins of visual images. As a result we fail to engage fully with new and exciting ideas about representation and reality, context and meaning, and in the process, relegate photographs to the margins of archivy.

Introduction: Challenging Paradigms[1]

We cannot walk before we toddle,
but we may toddle much too long
if we embrace a lovely Model
that's consistent, clear and wrong.[2] *Kenneth Boulding*

In the session entitled, "The Role of Visual Archives in Shaping Canadian History," at the Association of Canadian Archivists 2002 Annual Conference in Vancouver, Anastasia Rodgers' case study, Jim Burant's overview, and Amy Marshall's commentary exemplified the importance of bringing historical and art historical insights to the archival preservation of photographs, and the value of bringing knowledge and passion for the medium to the theory and practice of archives. The session description stated: "For many historians, photographs have traditionally been used for illustrative and supplementary purposes rather than as primary evidence in documenting Canadian history." This was not the first such session to argue for the place of visual materials in archives; similar arguments have been advanced in conference papers and on the pages of *Archivaria* many times over the last twenty-five years – not only about photographs, but also about art, scrapbooks and albums, ephemera, and maps. In his personal reflection, Burant suggested that if historians are normally attracted to text and fail to make photographs an integral part of their research agendas, archivists are, to some extent, to blame.

Let me further challenge this paradigm of the visually illiterate historian by suggesting that, if historians and other users of archives have persistently failed to appreciate the value of visual materials in the making and the writing of history, then archivists – through their ideas and standards, practices and actions, whether consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, overtly or systemically – are, in large measure, responsible. This essay confronts certain assumptions held by archivists relating to photographs, in particular, those which govern the terms we choose to employ in our professional pursuits. It suggests that, by embracing a textual model of recorded information and by adopting a bibliographic model of image classification, archives continue to fixate on the factual content rather than the functional origins of visual images. As a result, the profession's theoretical approaches, daily practices, and education guidelines have yet to engage fully with new

1 An earlier version of this essay was presented in the session entitled "Out of the Archival Box: Challenging Paradigms," at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Vancouver, B.C., 24 May 2002. Thank you to Thea Miller for organizing the session and to Terry Cook for his thoughtful commentary and editorial suggestions. Kent Haworth and Jean Dryden responded promptly to my initial inquiry, and I am especially grateful to the anonymous reviewer who generously offered a thorough and thoughtful critique.

2 Cited in Ursula M. Franklin, *The Real World of Technology*, rev. ed. (Toronto, 1999), p. 26.

and exciting ideas about representation and reality, context and meaning – ideas which will permit us to extend and adapt archival theory and principles to visual archives, and to apply and tailor theories of visual cognition and communication to archival photographs. Visual illiteracy, therefore, not just outside but more importantly within the profession, has relegated photographs to the margins of archivy. Prevailing technology and current scholarship now make it both possible and, indeed, imperative to bring them into the mainstream.

Historians and Archivists: Embracing the Textual Model

The Paradigm of Visual Illiteracy

As the ACA session description rightly pointed out and the speakers amply demonstrated, "As historical and social research trends change, the needs and requirements of evidence and documentation have also changed." The papers, in particular Burant's pleas and ongoing efforts for visual literacy, demonstrate that there is the very real need for archival specialists to keep the profession informed about these changes and their implications for our work. "History," as Carol Hoffecker has aptly observed, has traditionally been "a discipline of words."[3] But, so too, the world of archives. Indeed, it was the central registries of state textual documents which served as the models for the Dutch Trio, Jenkinson, and Schellenberg, whose ideas became the great pillars of the archival literature available in English.[4]

Hoffecker's observation has been stated by other critics and in other ways, but perhaps Thomas Schlereth best articulated the cause of Burant's angst when he asserted that questions asked by historians "have usually not been phrased in ways that photographic data can answer."[5] In this statement, Schlereth hinted at the simple but critical fact that different people think in different ways. They also process information in different ways, a fact fuelling the burgeoning "speed reading" industry which offers myriad techniques for improving both speed and comprehension by transforming the actual process of reading from linear to synthetic, from verbal to visual.[6] For example, the Advanced Reading Course of the "2000 Road to Reading Project" based in

3 Carol E. Hoffecker, "The Emergence of a Genre: The Urban Pictorial History," *The Public Historian* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1983), p. 37.

4 See Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), pp. 17–63.

5 Thomas J. Schlereth, "Mirrors of the Past: Historical Photography and American History," in *Artifacts and the American Past* (Nashville,1980), p. 15.

6 A Google search of the Web, accessed 17 July 2002, for "speed reading" brings up 43,800 hits, including sites for The Reading Genius System, Power Reading, Turbo Reading, Accelerated Reading, and Speed Reading Plus.

Lynden, Washington, promises that, "[b]y learning to apply your full visual power you will soon be reading phrases and paragraphs or whole pages as easily as you now read a single word, as easily as you gather information from a quick glance at a painting."[7] Of particular interest is "PhotoReading," a technique characterized as "right brain reading," developed by The Learning Strategies Corporation located in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Designed to cope with "information-overload" or "document shock," it is described as a method by which one makes "a mental photograph of an entire page with one glance," enabling readers to "cruise through books at a clip of 25,000 words a minute."[8]

Beyond the immediate benefits of speed reading and of the transformation from linear to synthetic information processing for literary enjoyment and corporate efficiency, there are also, according to Leonard Shlain, historical power relations between the verbal and the visual. In his provocative exploration of the impact of alphabetic literacy on society, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*, Shlain argues that it is this very left brain/right brain imbalance, tied to the invention of writing and the rise of alphabetic literacy, that not only represents opposite perceptual modes, but also has fostered patriarchy and marginalized women in Western literate society.[9] Similarly, Robert Logan, in *The Alphabet Effect* writes: "A medium of communication is not merely a passive conduit for the transmission of information but rather an active force in creating new social patterns and new perceptual realities."[10] Within the archival profession, Hugh Taylor has repeatedly offered similar insights through his writing on archival theory over the past three decades, expressing concerns for visual media, image literacy, and contextualized pattern recognition. Indeed, influenced by Marshall McLuhan's seminal writings, Taylor came to such postmodern insights long before the term or the approach became fashionable.[11]

Historians (small "h") of all persuasions – and here I include all heritage professionals – may well be, by nature, linear thinkers, drawn to words and sentences and documents which, like their largely chronological agendas, present information and construct meaning in a linear, orderly way. Little wonder then that the world of archives has traditionally paid little heed to visual materials. Little wonder then that the linearity of history and the logo-

7 See <http://www.roadtoreading.org/arc/index.htm>, Road to Reading Project, Advanced Reading Course, accessed 17 July 2002.

8 See <http://www.learningstrategies.com/PhotoReading/Home.html>, Learning Strategies Corporation, PhotoReading Home Page, accessed 17 July 2002.

9 Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image* (New York, 1998). I am grateful to Terry Cook for bringing this work to my attention.

10 Robert Logan, *The Alphabet Effect*, p. 24, cited in ibid., p. 2.

11 For Hugh Taylor's best essays, together with new reflections on his work, as well as two essays analyzing the importance of this key archival thinker, see Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (eds.), *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor* (forthcoming).

centrism of archives are mutually reinforcing. What Shlain sees as a tension between two "complementary modes of comprehending reality" – the "*holistic, simultaneous, synthetic*, and *concrete*" mode of images, and the "*linear, sequential, reductionist*, and *abstract*" mode of words – is played out in archival theory and practice. Thus, whereas photographs, prints, and watercolours are generally acknowledged to be historical, they are not normally understood as archival; while their value is readily acknowledged to be informational, it is seldom viewed as evidential. Unless pushed by colleagues or circumstances, most archivists, like most historians, do not view visual materials as documents with functional origins and material effects, and have been slow to invest the time and effort to understand them as such; at worst, archival professionals have been misguided or outmoded in their practices and pronouncements, and I have taken aim at both Theodore Schellenberg's and William Leary's writings on photographs elsewhere.[12]

In coming to terms with photographs, we must begin by asking difficult questions: What is the nature and what are the consequences of our professional sins of commission and sins of omission? Do our (text-based and library-based) models fit our (visual) realities? How is any slippage played out on a practical level? More specifically, how does our use of language – whether in everyday parlance or in standardized vocabularies – reflect and perpetuate these sins? Here, I seek to expose, from a theoretical perspective, a *mentalité* which governs traditional and ongoing archival approaches to visual materials and which is reflected in the terms our profession uses. I do not seek

12 Joan M. Schwartz, "'We make our tools and out tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomatics," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 40–74; see especially pp. 46, 53.

13 The links between library and archival description are made clear in the Society of American Archivist' *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook* compiled by Victoria Irons Walch (available on-line); Table B-3, for example, presents "Library Standards Adapted to Archival Practice." Of particular interest are Chapter 4 "Cataloging Rules (Data Content Standards)" which includes "Graphic Materials: Rules for Describing Original Items and Historical Collections (GIHC)" and Chapter 13 "International Efforts Toward Descriptive Standards" which places Canadian descriptive standards projects in American perspective. For library approaches to photographs and their cataloguing, variously as "visual," "pictorial," or "graphic," see Barbara Orbach, "So That Others May See: Tools for Cataloging Still Images," in Richard P. Smiraglia (ed.), *Describing Archival Materials: The Use of the MARC AMC Format* (New York, 1990), pp. 184–85, also published as *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 11, nos. 3–4 (1990); Jackie M. Dooley and Helena Zinkham, "The Object as 'Subject': Providing Access to Genre, Forms of Material, and Physical Characteristics," in Toni Peterson and Pal Molholt (eds.), *Beyond the Book: Extending MARC for Subject Access* (Boston, 1990), pp. 53–56; Helena Zinkham, Patricia D. Cloud, and Hope Mayo, "Providing Access by Form of Material, Genre, and Physical Characteristics: Benefits and Techniques," *American Archivist* 52 (Summer 1989), pp. 300–319; see also, Jane Greenburg, "Intellectual Control of Visual Archives: A Comparison Between the *AAT* and *LCTGM*," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (1993), pp. 85–101.

to present a comprehensive review of archival descriptive standards, a critique of its literature, or a commentary on recent developments.[13] Rather, to open this discussion at a critical juncture in the application and revision of descriptive standards at the national and international level, I turn to some examples of what may be termed linguistic "othering" – examples with which our descriptive standards are complicit.

Linguistic "Othering"

The choice of standard terms requires careful consideration for, in our use of language, in our systems of ordering, in our fields of classification, and in our rules for description, we privilege and we marginalize. The words we choose to describe what we do reflect our view of the world, the values we hold, the things of this world that we value. Yet archivists continue to employ language, sometimes based on erroneous assumptions about the nature of photographs, other times derived from concepts borrowed from other professions, which privilege some archival materials and marginalize others. For example, I am a "photo archivist." That is the term which appeared in the box for "Position Title" on my job description when I was hired. I am not and have never been a "special media" archivist, a "non-textual" archivist, or a "graphic materials" archivist. Let me explain my aversion to these terms, each in turn.

As I have stated elsewhere in the context of its use in archival education and theorizing, I am uncomfortable with the term "special media" – a label which, I argue, has effectively served to relegate photographs "to the margins of archivy."[14] The word "special" in popular parlance can, of course, be used in a flattering way to mean superior in some regard: "special delivery" – costs a little more, gets there faster. Or, it can be used with irony to mean the exact opposite: "Oh, isn't the ... *special*!" Either way, "special" places photographs and other similarly-labelled materials into a category apart; by "special" we mean that they are "exceptional" – that is, the exception, out of the ordinary, not ordinary, not normal. But are photographs truly special or are they just different?

In his book, *Reading American Photographs*, Alan Trachtenberg argues, "camera-made images have no special privilege as documents of culture. But they have their own resources, different in kind from those of paint or stone or ink and pen."[15] This has been stated in a more directly archival way by Leonard Boyle, writing about diplomatics: "Documents," he points out, are "devised, composed, and written for the purposes of entering into communication," and their forms are designed "to preserve the burden of the docu-

14 Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us'", p. 57.

15 Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History. Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York, 1989), p. 288.

ment."[16] Simply stated, words and images communicate in different ways. Their forms are designed to carry different burdens. We "think" with them in different ways. Photographs along with other visual materials are only "special" if we take textual materials as the norm. Labelled "special," photographs become the archival "Other".

The term "non-textual" is equally problematical as a way to describe visual materials, the "non" suggesting, of course, that the norm is textual. In our multi-cultural society, one need not be an expert in post-colonial theory to realize that the population of the world no longer can be divided neatly into "white" and "non-white." Nor, of course, are "white" and "non-white" impermeable, exclusive, or all-encompassing as categories. In his chapter, "Census, Map, Museum," added to the revised edition of *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson shows how definitions of racial or ethnic groups for census purposes privilege or marginalize, depending on the labels we choose to use.[17] Extrapolating to archival photographs, the textual model of recorded information may have been the norm before the invention of lithography in 1796, the invention of photography in 1839, the growth of the illustrated press throughout the nineteenth century, the advent of halftone reproduction, and the attendant rise of visual communication. However, in the overwhelmingly visual culture of the wired, Western world, is the supremacy of the textual model of recorded information – and the attendant ways of doing things in archives – still fully justified?[18]

Norms, knowns, and givens change. Our ways of knowing change, and with them, our language evolves. Hepatitis C was once termed non-A, non-B Hepatitis because its cause was not known. Tests for the Hepatitis A virus and the Hepatitis B virus could rule out what the condition wasn't, but could not ascertain its cause. When medical research established that the hepatitis-like symptoms and elevated liver enzyme tests in certain patients were the result of a single specific virus, non-A, non-B, Hepatitis was renamed Hepa-

16 Leonard E. Boyle, "Diplomatics," in James M. Powell (ed.), *Medieval Studies: An Introduction* (Syracuse, 1976), p. 77. This notion of "the burden of the document" is at the basis of John Tagg's seminal work on photographs, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst, 1988). For an extended effort to apply diplomatic analysis to photographs, see Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us'"; see also, Nancy Bartlett, "Diplomatics for Photographic Images: Academic Exoticism?" *American Archivist* 59 (Fall 1996), pp. 486–94; Elizabeth Parinet, "Diplomatics and Institutional Photos," *American Archivist* 59 (Fall 1996), pp. 480–85.

17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991), pp. 163–185, especially pp. 164–170.

18 In *The Domain of Images*, James Elkins points out: "Despite wide disagreements over the effects and nature of 'visual culture', it is not often noted that what makes twentieth-century culture so different from that of past centuries is not only the quantity of images, or their ostensible effects on literacy, but the *kind* of images we create and consume." James Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca, 1999), p. 234.

titis C. We know what visual materials are. They are no more non-textual, than Canadians are non-British, non-American, or archivists are non-historians, non-librarians. Conversely, if we define Canadian photo archivists in appositional terms, my biographical note in "Our Contributors" should be changed to read: "Joan M. Schwartz is a non-British, non-American, non-historian, non-librarian who has worked in the area of non-textual acquisition and research since 1977."

A more serious and pervasive form of linguistic "othering" arises from our adoption of a bibliographic model for the broad physical classes of materials in archives. Chapter 4 of *Rules for Archival Description* (*RAD*) is devoted to "Graphic Materials." These are defined as "documents in the form of pictures, photographs, drawings, watercolours, prints, and other forms of two-dimensional pictorial representations ... whether intended to be viewed by reflected or transmitted light." Why do art and photography share this common general material designation (GMD)? Conversely, why do maps, film, and other archival materials which share the etymological root "*graphos*" and the same representational status as "*graphic*" – carto*graphic* (*RAD* chapter 5), cinemato*graphic* (*RAD* chapter 7), even phono*graphic* (*RAD* chapter 8) – merit their own chapters in RAD and separate GMDs?

"G*raphos*" means "writing." Writing, defined in conceptual or abstract terms, is a form of representation used in communication across space and time and involving concepts of authorship and authority – those very same concerns that underpin archival principles and practice. If photo*graphic*, icono*graphic*, carto*graphic*, and other *graphic* materials are reduced conceptually to forms of writing, then the characteristics which they share with text, rather than those which distinguish the verbal from the visual, are foregrounded. Viewed thus, what does the adoption of the GMD "graphic material" reveal about the profession's understanding of, and appreciation for, art and photography as archival media of record? What are the consequences of grouping art and photography in the same GMD, and what correctives can be applied to shore up the theoretical foundations of our profession's approaches to photographs in archives?

Classification and Description: Embracing the Bibliographic Model

"Graphic Material(s)"

RAD is a consciously created tool intended to standardize description, establish the relationship between levels of records, and thereby improve intellectual control and expedite access. It has been embraced within the Canadian archival community with enthusiasm, implemented at enormous cost, tweaked to fit institutional needs, abandoned by some, urged upon the international community by others, and even credited with the "rediscovery of prove-

nance."[19] *RAD*'s grouping of works of art and photographs within the same GMD represents a taxonomic ordering of documentary materials based upon their visuality, that is, upon their observable characteristics as "pictures" rather than their functional origins and archival capacities as documents. It implies that works of art and photographs can be described and understood in similar ways. But form does not necessarily follow function with visual materials, and nowhere is this more true than in the particular and distinctly different technological – as well as social – means of production, circulation, and consumption of overtly mediated works of art, on the one hand, and purportedly objective photographs, on the other.

Perhaps nowhere has the functional distinction between the two media been more clearly demonstrated than in instances of corporate and government support. From the earliest geological surveys to the most recent military conflicts, photographers and artists have been dispatched by governments to produce "official" records of surveying and exploration. The inclusion of both an artist and a photographer on the 1858 Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition, and the inclusion of both watercolours and photographs in the official government report suggest that the handmade sketch and the camera-made image were perceived as separate and distinct information-carriers.[20] Almost twenty years later, Thomas Mitchell took part in the last British Polar Expedition, 1875–76, under the command of Captain George S. Nares. In addition to whatever statistical reports and financial records he created in his official capacity as Assistant Paymaster of HMS *Discovery*, Mitchell produced 22 watercolours and more than 100 photographs, which are now held in the National Archives of Canada.[21] One is left to ponder the

19 In his introduction to an edited collection of articles exploring the meaning and application of provenance, Tom Nesmith credits "the rediscovery of provenance" to Canadian efforts to develop standards for the description of archival materials. See Tom Nesmith (ed.), *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, 1993), p. 20. Terry Cook explores "this richer understanding of creator contextuality that can turn information into knowledge" in his "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 35–40, quote p. 37. Jim Burant tied some of these ideas directly to art and photography in his conference paper, "*RAD* and the Rediscovery of Government Record-Keeping systems for photographic records; or, How I learned to love *RAD* despite being a media archivist: A personal view," delivered at the Association of Canadian Archivists Annual Meeting in Edmonton, Alberta, 24 June 2000.

20 Appendix V of Henry Youle Hind's *North-West Territory. Reports of Progress; together with a Preliminary and General Report of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition, made under instructions from the Provincial Secretary, Canada*. 1859. For a discussion of the functional contexts of creation, circulation, and viewing of the photographs generated by this expedition, see Joan M. Schwartz, "More than 'competent description of an intractably empty landscape': A strategy for critical engagement with historical photographs," *Historical Geography* 31 (2003), pp. 105–130.

21 Because of different, media-specific institutional practices, their preservation has been managed in very different ways. The watercolours, once folded and bound into an album with 23 folios (Accession 1936–259) entitled, "Sketches made during the Voyage of the 'Discovery'

criteria which Mitchell employed to decide which medium to use, when, and why. A decade later and into the twentieth century, artists and photographers were given rail passes by the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways; their images were used in distinct ways by government and corporate interests to increase passenger traffic along the line by promoting travel to newly-opened tourist destinations and encouraging immigration to western settlement schemes.[22]

As well, war artists and military photographers have been part of Canada's Department of National Defence communications strategies during each of the major conflicts of the twentieth century, from The Great War to Desert Storm. During the nineteenth century, in particular, the production of survey photographs and field sketches, and war art and war photography, entailed considerable cost and effort. That field sketches and war art were in demand even after the advent of photography, and indeed as recently as the conflict in the Gulf, would suggest that artists and photographers were commissioned to perform different functions and to serve different documentary needs. Implicit in these observations are lessons for professional standards and institutional practices.

In developing *RAD*, the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards adopted a bibliographic model for material classes and their definitions as set out in the *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*. In turn, the Working Group preparing the *RAD* chapter for "Graphic Materials" drew not only upon *AACR2*, but also upon cataloguing standards developed by Elisabeth Betz Parker within the Library of Congress for use in the Prints and Photographs Division,[23] specifically *Graphic Materials: Rules for Describing Original Items and Historic Collections* and the Library of Congress *Thesaurus for*

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and 'Alert' to the Polar Sea – 1875–6. Under the Command of Capt. Sir George S. Nares K.C.B. F.R.S. Sailed from Portsmouth 29 May 1875. Arrived Valentia (Ireland) 27 Oct. 1876" were removed from their original housing and sequence, and subsequently preserved and matted as single works of art; Mitchell's 105 black-and-white photographs (Accession 1936–258) remain mounted with captions in two albums.

22 On the uses of art and photography by government corporate interests, see Lynda Jessup, "Canadian Artists, Railways, the State, and the Business of Becoming a Nation," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1992), as well as her "The Group of Seven and the Tourist Landscape in Western Canada, or The More Things Change ...," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 144–79; see also, Brian S. Osborne, "Constructing the State, Managing the Corporation, Transforming the Individual: Photography, Immigration and the Canadian National Railways, 1925–30," in Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan (eds), *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London, 2003), pp. 162–191.

23 It is worth pointing out that the Geography and Map Division of the Library of Congress produced its own in-house map cataloguing manual, which was subsequently superceded by the publication of *Cartographic Materials: A Manual of Interpretation for AACR2*; the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division of LC produced *Archival Moving Image Materials: A Cataloging Manual*, which also conformed to a chapter in *AACR2*.

Graphic Materials (LC *TGM I & II*).[24] According to the Scope and Purpose statement, the *Thesaurus* was "developed to support the cataloging and retrieval needs of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs [P&P] Division" and is "offered to other institutions in the hope that it will fill similar needs and will promote standardization in image cataloging." It covers a variety of still image media and formats, including prints, photographs, drawings, posters, architectural drawings, cartoons, and pictorial ephemera. The Introduction to the section on the selection and formulation of terms for subject indexing explains:

> Understanding the origins and evolution of P&P's thesaurus work, the primary sources and characteristics of terminology included in *TGM I*, as well as *TGM I* 's relationship to other thesauri, may help in evaluating its usefulness for particular applications. *TGM I* is built from a base of vocabulary that has been used to provide subject access to P&P's collections in the course of over 50 years of cataloging and indexing.

The thinking behind the creation of the chapter of *RAD* for Graphic Materials is grounded in the general structure and theory of *AACR2* and resonates with the cataloguing and retrieval needs of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. The adoption of the term "graphic materials," the grouping of art and photography in a single GMD, and the inclusion of both art and photography in a single chapter in *RAD*, take the professional assumptions, acquisition mandate, and structural organization of libraries, and in particular the Library of Congress and its Prints and Photographs Division, and naturalize them as the basis for the archival description of two very different media of record. Curiously enough, LC's *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials* combines art and photography under the word "graphic"; however, LC's bibliographic cataloguing system assigns "N" to all the Fine Arts – including Architecture (NA), Sculpture (NB), Painting (ND), Print Media (NE), Decorative Arts (NK), and Arts in general (NX) – and designates Photography as "TR" – suggesting some tacit institutional acknowledgement that photographs and art are, indeed, different.

While the larger issue of the wisdom of basing *RAD* on *AACR2* may also be debated, it is interesting to note that photographs and artwork were grouped together as early as 1949 in the American Library Association's *Cataloging Rules for Author and Title Entries*. This is part of a longstanding library practice relating to photographs, now extended, without solid theoretical basis, to photographs in archives. Indeed, *Towards Descriptive Standards* notes that "in

24 The companion documents, *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials I: Subject Terms* and *Thesaurus for Graphic Materials II: Genre & Physical Characteristic Terms*, compiled by the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress, are on-line at: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/tgm1/> and <http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/tgm2/>.

contrast to textual archives, the traditional focus of description of photographic material has been the individual image or item rather than groupings such as the fonds or series."[25] This justification for adopting a bibliographic model for the archival description of art and photographs, based on the fact that such materials have *traditionally* been described at the item level, inevitably becomes a circular argument by which *RAD*'s adoption of "graphic material" reflects, and then perpetuates, a library approach. The failure of *RAD*, in this sense, is to accept the assumptions of a tradition of item-level, largely decontextualized cataloguing by subject content and surface appearance, rather than create an archival model which recognizes that visual images have evidential value, foregrounds their functional origins, and accords equal hierarchical visibility to photographs and art as integral and instrumental participants in a function or process, created as I have argued elsewhere "by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message, to an audience."[26]

While one can, indeed, use *RAD* rules for describing the *context* of all types of archival material, including photographs, and while the tendency towards the item-level description of photographs cannot be blamed on *RAD*, we must consider how the articulation of broad classes of archival materials within *RAD* influences archival thinking, training, and practice. The GMD is, of course, just the first level of granularity and, admittedly, it is optional and may be ignored according to institutional needs or database requirements My point is, that by its very existence as a class of material for the highest level of description, the GMD "graphic material" betrays a way of thinking about art and photography within archives. If we accept that art and photography are socially, culturally, and technologically constituted representational practices, which originate and circulate within very different discourses and are imbricated in different relationships to notions of truth, reality, and evidence, then what are some of the implications of this way of thinking?

For starters, *RAD*, by definition, proceeds from general to particular, and the general, first level of description for the fonds is the only level that, for many years, will be exported to CAIN by many institutions or available even through in-house systems. In addition, the GMD is an optional addition to the title which seems to have fairly low use, for example, by the provincial networks in CAIN, and much current practice appears to rely heavily on the physical description area (which allows for more detailed information about photographs, particularly in the extent statement) rather than the GMD. If then the GMD "graphic material" is optional and few use it, then why is it there at all? Is the inconsistent use of this first layer of granularity not a weakness in the system? And, if the GMD "graphic material" is not used, is it because it is

25 *Towards Descriptive Standards: Report and Recommendations of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards* (Ottawa, 1986), pp. 65–66.

26 See Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us.'"

neither useful nor even valid? If the main reason for the existing chapters is simply to allow for rules for the *physical* description of different types of material, then is there an assumption that art and photographs are the same *physically*, that they share common ground as "still pictures" and that they can be adequately grouped, according to section 4.0A1 of *RAD*, as "two dimensional pictorial representations?"

While the inclusion of both photographs and art in the same chapter may not actually impede the full description of photographs, when used, the GMD "graphic material" significantly reduces the respective visibility of two functionally distinct media of record. Grouped with art in the primary level of taxonomic ordering, photographs, *per se*, achieve visibility only at the second level of *RAD* granularity. At that level, the recommended specific material designations (SMD) are: collage, drawing, painting, photograph, picture, print, watercolour. But, these, too, are problematical. Why has watercolour been added to the usual litany of "paintings, prints and drawings" – are watercolours not a form of painting? And what possible specificity is there in the term "picture?" Indeed, in *The Domain of Images*, James Elkins spends a chapter struggling with the question, "What is a Picture?"[27]

With "graphic" and "photograph" as cascading terms, meaningful information about the creation, circulation, use, and preservation of photographic records is pushed to levels of description which may be optional in some institutions, or which may never receive attention because of a lack of resources, a lack of interest, or a lack of training in others. But a good deal of contextual information is embedded in the very terms used at the next level of photographic specificity – meaningful information which permits database users to distinguish clearly and immediately between forms of representation which function in very different ways, carry different burdens, and raise different expectations of reliability. The word "daguerreotype" for example indicates far more than process. It immediately narrows the date of the document to the twenty-year period of the 1840s and 1850s; it indicates that the photograph is a unique image which was produced using certain kinds of apparatus and refractory procedures; it indicates that, as a form of photograph, it circulated in certain ways and followed certain trajectories, that it was never tucked into a report or glued into an album, that is unlikely to bear a handwritten inscription, and that it must be understood, in part, from its social life as a thing and its materiality as an object.[28] Other terms can be equally revealing of contexts of records creation, circulation, viewing, and preservation, and should not be lost in the hierarchical descriptive shuffle.

27 Elkins, *The Domain of Images*, pp. 52–67.

28 See Joan M. Schwartz, "'*Un beau souvenir du Canada*': *Object, Image, Symbolic Space*," in Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (eds.), *Photographs, Objects, Histories* (London, forthcoming).

Ultimately, the ability of *RAD* to "accommodate" these concerns, does not obviate the need to examine how terms, selected and formulated for library use, now underpin assumptions about the preservation and description of photographs in archives; nor does it justify the grouping of art and photography in a single *RAD* chapter and the common GMD "graphic material." Like an exercise in zero-based budgeting, let us go back to first principles and ask why archives acquire and preserve paintings, prints, drawings, and photographs, and whether works of art and photographs have similar functional origins. Are they created and compiled in the course of similar activities and for similar purposes? Shouldn't our primary taxonomic ordering privilege the nature of the respective media in terms of their origin, activity, or function, rather than, in the first instance anyway, be based on their subject, form, and genre? Shouldn't archivists be more concerned with the instrumentality of images rather than their indexicality?[29] These, by the way, are rhetorical questions; lest there be any doubt, my answer to all of them is a resounding "Yes!"

In archival description, as opposed to library indexing or gallery labelling, attribution of a photograph or a work of art is not necessarily a straightforward matter. The production of works of documentary art and photography, to say nothing of the exercise of aesthetic sensibilities, may be constrained by strict instructions governing the choice of subject matter, content, angle, and subsequent use; the name of the photographer or artist may reveal only a small, even insignificant part of an image's functional origins. As in the case of Renaissance record-keeper, Tomasso da Tortona, murdered for the fiscal policies of Prince Niccolò II d'Este,[30] the "writer" of a visual image – artist or photographer – cannot always be credited with, or held directly accountable for, visual images attributed to the hand of that individual. For example, a series of watercolours and pen and ink sketches produced between 1802 and 1809 to commemorate the battles of Napoleon in northern Italy are unquestionably by the hand of Giuseppe Bagetti, but were executed under the strict instructions of the French military administration; their authorship resides, not with the artist, but with the military establishment.[31]

29 The term "indexicality" here derives from semiotics rather than cataloguing. Concerned primarily with subject content at the level of denotation, it is used to indicate a direct connection between photographic representation and the material reality represented.

30 Richard Brown, "Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper: The Murder of Tomasso da Tortona in Ferrara, 1385," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997), pp. 1–43.

31 I am grateful to Anne Godlewska (Department of Geography, Queen's University) for bringing this example to my attention. Now preserved at the Service historique de l'armée de terre, Vincennes (France) and at the Museo Civico, Turin, Bagetti's work can be viewed as reproductions of spectacular quality through a joint Web project of Queen's University and the Service historique de l'armée de terre: <http://www.geog.queensu.ca/napoleonatlas/>. See also, Anne Godlewska, "Resisting the Cartographic Imperative: Giuseppe Bagetti's Landscapes of War," *Journal of Historical Geography* 29, no. 1 (January 2003), pp. 1–29.

RAD, of course, has access points to accommodate such nuances, as well as other subtleties about the "persons concurring in the formation of the document(s)."[32] However, we understand and investigate the creation of works of art and photographs in these terms before we can apply *RAD*'s rules to recover their functional origins and material effects. The capabilities of the system can only be realized if we first possess the knowledge and then demonstrate the desire to take advantage of them. To do so, a new way of thinking about art and photography in archives is required.

Ultimately, we cannot ignore the tenor of our times. In light of postcolonial and feminist theory, which has sensitized us to the power of language, our descriptive terminology needs to be re-visited. In light of postmodern and poststructural theory, which has sensitized us to the instrumentality of images, our descriptive conventions need to be re-assessed. Finally, in light of communication theory, in particular semiotics, which has sensitized us to the processes and structures of meaning-making, our descriptive practices need to be re-considered. At the very least, *RAD*'s use of "graphic material" – the assumptions which sustain it, the models which justify it, the systems which support it, and the practices which depend on it – must be re-examined in order to accord art and photography the same hierarchical visibility as other "graphic" media of record.

Level Concerns

Other issues, arising from the textual and bibliographic models which we have embraced, are rooted in assumptions – about hierarchical equivalents, item-level access, and conservation requirements – which have been erroneously or uncritically extended to the description of photographs in archives. For example, in our enthusiasm to embrace multi-level description, it has not been universally understood how to apply hierarchical description to visual materials. Nor is it fully understood that hierarchical levels of description are intellectual constructs which may not have material equivalents. A photograph album, as a physical structure, may resemble a file folder as a housing for related materials; however, photographs related to several Geological Survey of Canada expeditions are often contained in a single album, and photographs from the last British Polar Expedition are contained in two albums. As an intellectual construct, then, a single album may be functionally, organically, archivally part of more than one file; as a corollary, several albums may be subsumed within a single file-level description. *RAD* rules and procedure manuals are

32 For a discussion of "persons concurring in the formation of a document," see Luciana Duranti, "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science (Part III)," *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990), pp. 5, ff. For the distinction between the creator and the author of a photograph, see Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us,'" pp. 47–48.

not enough. A clear understanding of how archival theory and descriptive terms relate to visual materials must guide our daily work.

On the one hand, the preservation of photographs in archives is very much governed by the larger contexts of institutional discourse which define and naturalize what we acquire, how we describe, how and why we make our holdings accessible, and who we serve. On the other hand, it is shaped by traditional approaches to their description at the item-level. William England's *Niagara Suspension Bridge* is preserved as an original albumen print in both the National Gallery of Canada and the National Archives of Canada, but as Anastasia Rodgers points out, the boundaries between the aesthetic and the documentary – if they exist at all – are fluid, permeable, and constructed. What is valued as art in a gallery, as information in a library, and as evidence in an archive will be described in different ways. Traditional item-level description of photographs, indexed by subject and credited to the photographer, but without adequate contextual information about their functional origins and provenance, or clear links to such contextual information, transforms photographic archives into stock photo libraries, reducing photographs to their visible elements, and conflating photographic content and photographic meaning. The social and geographical implications of this transformation are exacerbated by digitization projects which aim to provide access to images on the Internet.

If photographs are to be understood and described in terms of their instrumentality rather than simply their indexicality, we must consider whether our systems are making them accessible only as discrete, decontextualized, and dematerialized images. In particular, we must be wary of embracing online access tools – databases and search engines – with limited searching capabilities and, more importantly, which reduce visual images to their visual content and denude them of their original contexts of creation, circulation, and viewing. We must also recognize that, for some records, horizontal linkages may be far more important than hierarchical relationships.

A library, subject-centred focus rather than an archival, context-centred one has implications for preservation and copying as well. In an archives, conservation treatment and holdings maintenance measures must balance evidential and informational value, intellectual and physical needs. All too often, albums are routinely disbound and pages removed, or photographs are removed from album pages, to be sleeved individually. In the process, evidential value embedded in the physical structure of the album, its sequence of pages, the placement of images, the juxtaposition of words and images, and the larger documentary universe of which it is a part is sacrificed in a misguided effort to ensure the long-term physical stability of individual photographs. The meaning of the album, not simply as a housing for the images, but as a document in its own right, and the information it was compiled to communicate is lost. Similarly, when photographs in books or reports, on card mounts with letterpress

text, or in albums with handwritten captions are copied tight to the edge of the image, or stereoscopic views are copied one side only, we lose the original context of meaning-making. Such practices persist and demonstrate how little we understand how documents in different media of record carry their burdens.

Ironically, the textual model and the bibliographic model have produced diametrically opposed approaches across media in the area of public service. Expectations of providing item-level access through subject indexing and controlled vocabularies, unthinkable for voluminous government documents or private manuscripts, are regularly applied to photographic records. Such expectations are laudable, but neither intellectually reasonable nor fiscally feasible, and only demonstrate Estelle Jussim's distinction between "search" and "research"[33] – a distinction which plays itself out in different assumptions about access to text and image by subject content rather than functional context. These expectations for fully indexed and cross-referenced item-level access are growing increasingly serious, and indeed tendentious, with demands for distant on-line access. Perhaps, instead of wrestling with the resource implications of such expectations and twisting in the wind over our inability to satisfy them, archivists might be better advised to seek a solution by considering why such expectations are unreasonable.

If what's good for the visual goose is good for the textual gander, let me use a personal example to extrapolate common expectations, for fully indexed and cross-referenced item-level access, from photographs to textual records: I am interested in finding biographical information about early British Columbia photographers. How would a reference archivist at the provincial archives in Victoria respond to my complaint that I was unable to log onto the archives Web site, key in the name of pioneer Victoria photographer, Frederick Dally, and pull up, in a matter of seconds, citations to all written mention of him in: the diaries or correspondence of early B.C. pioneers – W.B. Pearse, the Crease family, Robert Brown, Peter Rithet – who he knew or was known to have photographed; in the membership files of the St. David's Society or the Masons; in the ledger books of the Vancouver Island Coal Company and Barnard's Express; and in the official government reports of Governors Kennedy and Seymour, the Colonial Office, and the British Navy – to say nothing of all mention of him in the accounts, announcements, and advertisements in Victoria, Nanaimo, New Westminster, Barkerville, and Puget Sound newspapers? Surely I would be earmarked as a candidate for an extended stay in the Sir Arthur Doughty Home for Gently Bewildered Archivists. Yet, this is exactly the sort of item-level, content-based access that we assume we must find a way to provide to researchers in search of photographs of something (whether person, place, or event) or by someone.

33 Estelle Jussim, "The Research Uses of Visual Information," *Library Trends* 25, no. 4 (April 1977), pp. 763–778.

There are also implications for the core function of acquisition where ideas at the heart of the textual model are seldom applied to visual materials. Presumptions about the logic, indeed necessity, of functional or activity-based macro-appraisal as a valid archival strategy for textual or electronic records must be extended to photographs, permitting archival intervention without drawing criticism for perceived curatorial concerns. Archivists have accepted the impossibility of keeping everything in the post-custodial age of abundance. If the *fonds* is the totality of the records created by an organization in the course of its business, and archives acquire and preserve only a small proportion of government or private textual material, why is it that any selection or "culling" of negatives, prints, or slides from a photographic *fonds* is immediately viewed as some form of archival heresy?

There is another aspect of the item-level bibliographic model which demands tweaking to archival needs. Clifford Geertz, in *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, points to what he calls "the highly situated nature of ethnographic description" and concerns himself with the "authorial presence within the text."[34] Archival description, no less than ethnographic description, results in an "authorial presence in the text." And in our descriptions we need to look for, identify, and embed the authorial presence of the archivists who appraised, selected, acquired, described, and subsequently re-described them. Thus, archives must ensure that they not only document the history of the record, but that they also record the history of that institutional documentation, noting when, by whom, and why changes in the descriptive record or standard terms are made, for those changes – whether from Negro to coloured to black to African-American, whether from Eskimo to Inuit, or Indian to native or aboriginal or First Nation, whether from Frobisher Bay to Iqualuit – embody not only changing social or cultural or political circumstances, but also the history of our own archival practices. At present, database design which merely changes the content of a record and logs the last person to edit that record fails utterly in the archival mission to preserve the context of archival records creation.

From Margins to Mainstream

If we are to move photographs, indeed all visual materials, from the margins to the mainstream of archivy, we need greater visual literacy on the one hand, and wiser use of technology on the other. How we deal with photographs in archives depends a great deal upon our understanding of their role in society, how and what they communicate, how they are used in the conduct of business, whether personal business, corporate business, or government busi-

34 Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford, 1988), pp. 5, 9.

ness.[35] Familiarity with the theories and methodologies, nature and impact of visual communication and visual materials is essential if we wish to appreciate the nature of photographs, as both evidence and information, and their relationship to thinking, knowing, and remembering.[36] A greater awareness of the instrumentality of images, the nature of communication, and the intertextuality of meaning can lead to the more informed use of technology for intellectual as well as physical control. Computer access and digitization represent a coming together of the Iconic Revolution of the mid-nineteenth century and the Information Revolution of the late twentieth century. In this mix are systemic correctives for the visual illiteracy and linguistic "othering" at issue here.

Archival Education and Training

Both formal post-graduate education and informal on-the-job training must address the impact of changes in the nature of human communication and recorded information on archives – as records, as institutions, and as a professional set of theories, principles, and practices. Here, let me suggest three areas of scholarship – outside the obvious literature on photographic history and criticism[37] – which merit our attention. More than thirty years ago, Rudolf Arnheim published *Visual Thinking* in which he explored the relationship between perception and cognition, and argued that images play a seminal role in human reasoning, communication, and memory, warning that "the comprehension of photographic pictures cannot be taken for granted." Archivists

35 The historical background to the role of photographs "in the business of life and the life of business" is set out in Joan M. Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision': Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 1–40.

36 Useful introductions to visual culture and representation include: Ron Burnett, *Cultures of Vision: Images, Media and the Imaginary* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995); Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Chris Jenks (ed.), *Visual Culture* (London and New York, 1995), pp. 1–25; Scott McQuire, *Visions of Modernity: Representation, Memory, Time and Space in the Age of the Camera* (London, 1998); Kevin Robins, *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision* (London and New York, 1996); M. Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (Madison, 1988); Martin Lister (ed.), *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* (London and New York, 1995).

37 The most frequently cited theoretical foundations of photographic criticism are: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York, 1981, originally published as *La chambre claire*, Paris, 1980); Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, (Stanford, 1990, originally published in French as *Un art moyen : essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, 1965); Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, 1977); John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst, MA, 1988). Key essays by these and other writers are available in three important collections: Victor Burgin (ed.), *Thinking Photography* (London, 1982); Alan Trachtenberg (ed.), *Classic Essays on Photography* (Notes by Amy Weinstein Meyers) (New Haven, 1980); Vicky Goldberg (ed.), *Photography In Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present* (Albuquerque, 1988, originally published in 1981).

interested in redressing the imbalance in our profession's understanding of, and appreciation for, the role of visual materials in society and their place in archives would do well to familiarize themselves with this and subsequent key writings in the psychology of art on issues of language and linearity, words and images, perception and cognition: the role of the figurative arts as a way of knowing, in particular, "visual perception as a cognitive activity"; the "cognitive difference between things seen and things read or heard"; artistic activity as a form of reasoning; the relationship of visual image to material reality and to human experience; and the functions fulfilled by images.[38] Arnheim's assumptions – that "all comprehension of reality relies on two sources, namely the reality of sensory experience and the media of representation," and that "all media of representation rely on perceptual as well as intellectual concepts" – carry implications for a reassessment of visual materials as archival records. In an argument which can be extended to all visual materials, he claims, "works of art can be experienced perceptually, but if one wishes to understand them intellectually one must fit them into a conceptual network...."[39] If this is true, then visual literacy within the archival profession not only requires knowledge of the conditions by which sensory experience and media of representation operate and an awareness of the conceptual structures upon which they rely; it also requires a fundamental acknowledgement that "perceiving and thinking are indivisibly intertwined."[40]

Without wading into the jargon-riddled world of semiotics, archivists struggling to understand visual materials, might benefit from even a cursory foray into communication studies.[41] Particularly relevant is John Fiske's observation that there are two schools in the study of communication: "The first sees communication as the *transmission of messages*.... The second school sees communication as the *production and exchange of meanings*."[42] The concern with the transmission of messages resonates with diplomatic analysis of form and function. The concern with the production and exchange of meanings takes us into the world of signs and signifiers, denotation and connotation, but shares a fundamental regard for the importance of context.

More directly relevant here, especially when considering the inclusion of

38 See Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley, 1969); also, his *New Essays on the Psychology of Art* (Berkeley, 1986); and a number of essays in *The Split and the Structure* (Berkeley, 1996).

39 Such a conceptual network, he goes on to explain, "may be quite adequate; but it never pretends to duplicate the phenomenon itself." Rudolf Arnheim, "What Is an Aesthetic Fact?" *The Split and the Structure*, pp. 67–68.

40 Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, p. 5.

41 For a general and readable explanation of semiotics, its theories, models, and methods, see John Fiske, *Communication Studies*, 2d ed. (London and New York, 1990, originally published in 1982).

42 Ibid., p. 2.

art and photography in a single GMD, is C.S. Peirce's identification of three types of signs based on their relationship to the reality they represent and the way(s) of knowing that they support. According to Peirce's taxonomy of signs, there is the *symbol* which has a connection to its object (that is, the material reality it represents) which is arbitrary and understood as a matter of convention, mutual agreement, or established rule; there is the *icon* which shares characteristics with or bears resemblance to its object; and there is the *index* which has a "direct, existential, physical, or spatial relationship to its object."[43] Each represents a different relationship with reality, a different way of knowing, a different form of communication.[44] But, the categories are not mutually exclusive. Whether we are concerned with photographs, watercolours, and maps produced alongside the written instructions, field notes, and final report of a nineteenth-century government expedition or with the inherently multi-media nature of hypertext, a basic understanding of semiotics is useful for understanding what makes marks on paper, sounds in the air, or images on-screen into messages, as well as how words and images complement and supplement each other in meaningful communication and archival documentation.

The "archive" in a metaphorical or abstract sense has come under close scrutiny in the wake of the work of French philosophers, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, but one need not confront their frequently turgid writing head-on to appreciate new ways of thinking about photographs in terms of such key archival concepts as evidence, truth, reality, objectivity, authority, authenticity, and reliability. Indeed, scholars who have already digested the often impenetrable literature of post-structuralism or postmodernism can guide us gently around the cultural, literary, and visual turn.[45] Particularly pertinent to a greater understanding of the place of visual materials in archives is

43 Fiske devotes a chapter to "Communication, Meaning, and Signs," ibid., pp. 39–63.

44 In this conceptual framework, a word is generally a symbol; a work of art is generally an icon; a photograph is generally an index. Here, I disagree with Fiske in his claim that a photograph is essentially an icon. I do so on the grounds that a photograph has a "direct, existential, physical or spatial relationship to its object." Indeed, the index can be linked to the nineteenth-century theory of "causal genesis" which claimed that the photograph enjoyed a "special relationship" with nature because it was the direct result of light bouncing off some portion of material reality to produce a visual "trace" on a light-sensitive surface. I am grateful to Lilly Koltun for flagging the relevance of Peirce's model to this discussion.

45 The "crisis of representation" entered the social sciences through the writing of anthropologists George Marcus and Michael Fischer, Clifford Geertz, and James Clifford, unseating notions of reality, objectivity, and truth. Among other works by these authors, see especially James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), esp. James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," pp. 1–26; George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago, 1986); Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought," in *Local Knowledge* (New York,

the work of J.B. Harley in the history of cartography and the interpretation of maps.[46] Drawing on seminal writings by Barthes, Panofsky, Foucault, Derrida, and others, Harley uses a blend of iconology, semiotics, and deconstruction to expose the power, politics, and knowledge embedded in cartographic representations of space. His unmasking of subjectivity and ideology can be extrapolated to photographs which share with maps fundamental characteristics as visual representations and social constructions.[47] Blending ideas from art history, literary theory, philosophy, and cultural studies, Harley offers archivists an intellectual springboard for achieving a keener awareness of visual materials as instruments of social, commercial, and political power, devices of memory, tools of legitimation. Concerned with texts and contexts, Harley's ideas are easily transposed to other visual materials in archives, making the leap from positivism to postmodernism far less daunting.

From "Media Myopia" to the "Big Picture"

Computer databases and computerized access – and here I speak generically avoiding the specific complexities of MARC, *RAD*, Dublin Core, EAD – can help archives overcome the operational obstacles which sparked the "tyranny of the medium" debate more than two decades ago.[48] But to do so, we must be

1983) and "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973). Many of these ideas are transposed to archives in Elisabeth Kaplan, "'Many Paths to Partial Truths': Archives, Anthropology, and the Power of Representation," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3–4 (2002), pp. 209–220. For the broader postmodern analysis of archives, see Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), pp. 14–35, especially the articles cited by him in footnote 14. More specifically, the archival terrain where "positivist principles meet postmodern theories," is explored in Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002), pp.1–19 and in Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3–4 (2002), pp. 171–185, as well as in the essays in these two, double, guest-edited, thematic issues. For a critical introduction to the study and interpretation of visual materials, see Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London, 2001).

46 I am grateful to Ed Dahl and Brian Osborne for first introducing me to the work of Brian Harley. Seven of Harley's key writings have recently been published in the compilation, Paul Laxton (ed.), *J.B. Harley, The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore, 2001); included is an extensive bibliography of works by J.B. Harley, compiled by Matthew H. Edney; see pp. 281–296.

47 As visual representations, photographs, like maps, have traditionally been presumed to be unmediated and truthful because of their scientific, and therefore objective, origins in optics, chemistry, and mathematics.

48 See Terry Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives,'" *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979–80), pp. 141–149; Andrew Birrell, "The Tyranny of Tradition," *Archivaria* 10 (Summer 1980), pp. 249–52; Terry Cook, "Media Myopia," *Archivaria* 12 (Summer 1981), pp. 146–157.

prepared to take a good hard look at the way we do things and why, especially with respect to visual materials. We may well find that, on the one hand, organizational structures and operational procedures which have been naturalized and now go unquestioned, are outdated, inefficient, or ineffective; and on the other, what now appear to be poor practices are not necessarily the legacy of unsound theory, only changing expectations and applications. In particular, divisions of labour and rules of engagement put into place before personal computers and local area networks – let alone the advent of digitization and the Internet – now need to be re-examined. Two issues raised in the Cook-Birrell exchange concerning "media myopia" are relevant here.

First, there is the thorny matter of the separation of archival materials by medium. Procedures to remove visual materials – photographs, sketches, maps – from manuscript files or government reports were put in place to ensure that such materials, acquired as part of private and public fonds, were preserved in proper physical enclosures, stored in appropriate environmental conditions, described by archivists with media expertise, and made available for their informational value by medium, independently of their *fonds*. This separation of archives by medium need never have been viewed as antithetical to the principle of provenance had the "big picture" – whether collection, accession, or fonds – been front and centre, had there been greater cooperation, more consultation, better paper trails, and above all a clearer appreciation that all media of record are full participants in the archival mission, that the meaning of documents is both contextual and intertextual, and that there is no "big picture" unless all component parts are recognized.

Second, there is the issue of finding aids. Before first- and second-line researcher services were centralized at the National Archives of Canada, findings aids for voluminous photography collections were created by archivists, largely for their own use or for the use of other media specialists who had direct knowledge of, and access to, the holdings. They were like the proverbial string tied around one's little finger in the morning in order to remember to buy milk on the way home at the end of the day: they were created to remind us of what we already knew and wanted to flag for future reference. Never expected to stand alone for use by first-line reference consultants or self-serve researchers, little wonder they are now criticized as being unable to do a job they were never intended to do.

The archival world has changed, and now there are two things to help us to see and focus on the "big picture": *RAD* encourages us to foreground provenance and to consider all archival materials in relation to each other and to the larger documentary universe of which they form a part. Computerized databases permit centralized intellectual control over, and access to, all media of record, regardless of physical location. Going back to first principles, then, we need to ask: why did we create finding aids and separate media of record in the first place, and is it still necessary to do so for the same reasons? Without

question, new approaches to reference require different kinds of finding aids, and, in most cases, computerization means it is no longer necessary to remove photographs from manuscript files or government reports simply in order to track them and make them available to researchers.[49] Media expertise need not be ghettoized, but media expertise and intimate knowledge of the "stuff" is still essential for informed decision-making whenever visual materials are involved in the core functions of archival endeavour. *RAD* and computerization offers an avenue for bringing visual materials into the archival mainstream, but only if visual materials are fully understood and properly described in physical, intellectual, and functional terms. The technology is available. Archival education, visual literacy, broad vision, and creative management will be required to use it to advantage.

Electronic Imaging

Electronic imaging, as a new medium, has the potential to bridge the textual-visual gap, but its success in doing so will depend entirely on whether "electronic images" are perceived as "digital photographs" (and thus, essentially photographs) or as visual electronic records (and thus, essentially electronic records); whether guidance regarding their intellectual care is sought primarily from *RAD* Chapter 4: "Graphic Materials" or an appropriately developed *RAD* chapter for visual records in electronic form; and whether responsibility for them is assigned to photographic specialists or electronic records specialists. At present, *RAD* specifies:

> Although physically in digital form, these records can have any type of intellectual form, e.g., graphic, cartographic, textual, sound, moving image. Therefore to describe records in electronic form, use the chapter(s) dealing with the broad class(es) of material relating to the intellectual form of the unit being described.... If the general material designation is used, give immediately after the title proper the appropriate designation(s) for the broad class(es) of material existing in electronic form and add the qualifier *electronic*. Enclose the qualifier in parentheses.

In effect, *RAD* considers electronic images "graphic material: photographs – electronic." While this may be acceptable for traditional chemistry-based photographs which have been scanned, is it appropriate for electronic images which are "born digital"? Even more important is consideration whether, in

49 The exception, of course, remains those instances where the physical stability of the photographic material is compromised if the material is left within a report or file, where the environmental conditions for textual records are inappropriate for the related visual materials, or where the size, support, or fragility of the visual materials demands special storage considerations.

light of this rubric, images "born digital" are presumed by archivists to represent an outgrowth or a rupture from traditional chemistry-based photographs. The question of "outgrowth or rupture" has interesting archival ramifications, for it, like our choice of descriptive terminology, separates visuality from functionality.

The very term "digital photograph" is, of course, problematic. There are two very different beasts subsumed under this term: "digitized photographs" – that is, traditional photographs which have been scanned and converted into digital form – and photographs "born digital" – that is, images which were originally captured as an electronic file in a digital camera. A photographic print made from a negative produced by a film camera and a hard copy of an electronic image recorded by a digital camera are virtually indistinguishable. They are both made using a camera of some sort which separates observing subject from viewed object, effectively mediating the relationship between the spaces on either side of the lens, and conferring the power to record on the camera operator. Both effectively re-present some portion of material reality, rendering three-dimensional space in two-dimensional format. Once in paper print form, both circulate in similar ways, are viewed in similar circumstances, and serve similar functions. From the perspective of the paper print/hard copy, the comparison is simple and straightforward: electronic imaging appears to be an outgrowth of traditional photography. But, can the same be said of paper print and dematerialized, electronic, on-screen counterpart? Are the visual images which appear on digital camera pre-viewers, on computer monitors, embedded in documents, attached to e-mails – are these simply photographs in digital form, an outgrowth of traditional photography? Or do they represent a distinct rupture in image-making and information-transfer technologies?

The issue of "outgrowth or rupture" forces us to confront an archival conundrum far more complex than visual verisimilitude. Electronic databases are not card catalogues, and the far reaching consequences of replacing the latter with the former have been clearly articulated. Viewed in archival terms – in terms of functional origins, authenticity and reliability, authorship and authority, evidence and effect – I am inclined to argue that electronic images are not simply "digital photographs" and must not be considered – or described – as such. To bury photographs in the GMD "graphic material" is to deny their power and effect – distinct from other "graphic" materials – as communication devices, as rhetorical devices, as mnemonic devices. Similarly, to call electronic images "digital photographs" is to emphasize their visuality over their functionality, their indexicality over their instrumentality, and thus to diminish their ability to circulate and communicate, to mediate and be mediated. To understand electronic images as distinctly different from chemistry-based photographs requires that they be considered in relation to the social practices involved in their production, transmission, and reception, with attendant priorities for archival acquisition, description, and access.

From Logos-*Centric to* Logo-*Centric*

There is another systemic corrective on the documentary, archival, and (long) evolutionary horizon, one which might, in the very long term, redress the imbalance between the textual and the visual: the Internet. By this I do not mean the Internet, *per se*, but rather the neuro-pathological changes that Leonard Shlain predicts Internet use and Web design will bring about in the way we think. The Internet is a profoundly visual information carrier, one which not only permits but also demands that users perceive and process information in "non-linear" ways.[50] It intensifies and accelerates a sea-change already underway.

Images are everywhere – newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, packaging, television, film, video. Pictograms give us traffic rules when we drive, safety instructions when we fly, tourist information when we travel. Across the top and bottom of our computer screens, there are icons which permit us to point and click to open a file, highlight text, check spelling, convert endnotes to footnotes, open e-mail, search the Web. "Image is everything," declared tennis star Andre Agassi in a 1990s television commercial for the EOS Canon Rebel camera. Indeed, companies pay millions of dollars to create, promote, and protect a logo – the visual embodiment of their values or products. Designed for, and used by, a corporation or organization, particularly in packaging and advertising, a logo is an immediately recognizable emblem, a visual metonym which comes to stand for that business or activity. Registered trademarks – whether a characteristic design, for example, the updated red, white, and blue ball of "The Pepsi Generation," or words or letters in a distinctive font, for example, "Coca-Cola" in characteristic script – are profoundly visual and immediately recognizable. As Shlain aptly observes: "In classical times, the Greek *logos* meant "the word;" in the twentieth century, it contracted into *logo*, the icon."[51] Thus, while we continue to use the term "logocentrism" to voice our faith in "the word" as a fundamental expression of reality, our society is, in fact, becoming far more *logo*-centric than *logos*-centric.

In *The Electronic Word*, Richard Lanham argues that electronic text and the visual arts share a common aesthetic.[52] He examines the way in which "the digitized word is renegotiating the icon/alphabet ratio which we have since the invention of printing taken almost as holy writ." Drawing upon Rudolf Arnheim's claim that "the function of language is essentially conservative and sta-

50 Having expressed concern for language, it is only fair to acknowledge that my use of the word "non-linear" here is ironic, but at the same time suggestive of new avenues for postmodern linguistic scrutiny.

51 Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*, p. 416.

52 Richard A. Lanham, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts* (Chicago, 1993), p. 29.

bilizing, and ... tends, negatively, to make cognition static and immobile," Lanham asserts:

> The digitization now common to letters and shapes creates a mixed text of icons and words in which "static and immobile" and dynamically mobile cognitive styles toggle back and forth into a new bi-stable expressivity. Texts have long had illustrations, to be sure, but that relationship was fixed, and it seldom favored the illustrations and always protected the conventional self-denials of prose expressivity. We have now to do with a relationship, both more balanced and radically dynamic, between two kinds of signal.[53]

Lanham finds support for his claim in Susanne Langer's argument that the laws that govern visual forms – lines, colours, proportions, etc. – are "altogether different" from the laws of syntax that govern language: "The most radical difference," Langer suggests, "is that *visual forms are not discursive*. They do not present their constituents successively, but simultaneously, so the relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision."[54] Consequently, Lanham notes that readers "have to learn to alternate between these two kinds of syntax, verbal and visual."[55] Lanham also points to the work of Friedhoff and Benzon who suggest that "we are coming to depend on visualization as a vital tool for conceptual thought in ways that were simply impossible before the digitization of information.[56] Returning to Leonard Shlain's ideas of right-left brain neuropathology, will what Lanham identifies as a "major readjustment of the alphabet/image ratio in ordinary communication"[57] have a profound transformative effect on the way we think? Will the Internet push even farther the Iconic Revolution that Shlain claims began with the appearance of photography, and intensified with the advent of film and the rise of television?

Conclusion: Elusive and Incomplete Truths

In 1982, archivists at the Provincial Archives of Alberta were struggling to create an archival counterpart to the Library of Congress Subject Headings. Serious about gaining control over their records, eager to give better access to their holdings, but adrift in this unfamiliar sea of controlled vocabularies and indexing terms, they laboured hard to find solid archival ground; however, Jean Dryden readily acknowledged: "Because archivists generally have little,

53 Ibid., p. 77.

54 Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1957), p. 93; Lanham, *The Electronic Word*, p. 77.

55 Lanham, *The Electronic Word*, p. 77.

56 Richard Mark Friedhoff and William Benzon, *Visualization: The Second Computer Revolution* (New York, 1989), cited in ibid., p. 125.

57 Lanham, *The Electronic Word*, p. 125.

if any, formal training in subject indexing, they tend to seize on any tool that may solve the considerable problems in this complex area."[58] In her contribution to "Notes and Communications" in *Archivaria* 24, Dryden, a leader in Canadian descriptive standards initiatives, described how the Provincial Archives of Alberta Subject Headings (PAASH) had been developed "to provide subject access to all P.A.A. collections, *regardless of media*" (my emphasis) using Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) as the authority. Quick to point out that LCSH had "a number of weaknesses and inconsistencies" and that PAASH did not "deal with the differences between content-based and provenance-based indexing or other theoretical aspects of subject access," Dryden suggested that it is "essential that archivists become familiar with the librarians' tools" – specifically LCSH, *Canadian Subject Headings*, AACR2, and *Canadiana Authorities*. She viewed these as "indispensable in giving the archivists better access to their collections, and reducing the plethora of eccentric systems which plague archival description," but at the same time cautioned: "A controlled vocabulary is indeed a powerful tool, but it cannot accomplish what it was not intended to do."[59]

Dryden, of course, was right. The experience which she recounts with her inimitable style, dry humour, and self-deprecating grace, offers an early example of the way in which archivists, concerned with the increasing volume and complexity of modern records, have turned for intellectual succour to the tools of library cataloguing, seduced by the promise of greater control and access through subject indexing and controlled vocabularies. We *do* need to become familiar with these tools, but familiarity with such tools must be mitigated by a certain professional wariness on two levels: just as library tools must be adapted, not adopted, to perform archival functions, so must these same tools be tailored to the nature and needs of the respective media to which they are applied.

By way of a conclusion, I revisit a statement by William Mitchell, one which is as relevant to twenty-first-century descriptive standards as to seventeenth-century diplomatics: "Tools are made to accomplish our purposes, and in this sense they represent desires and intentions. We make our tools and our tools make us: by taking up particular tools we accede to desires and we manifest intentions."[60] Photographs are tools; classification systems are tools; descriptive standards are tools. They each manifest intentions. Yet the archival profession continues, despite the insights of current scholarship, and despite

58 Jean E. Dryden, "Subject Headings: The PAASH Experience," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), p. 173.

59 Ibid., pp. 173–74, 180.

60 William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 59. Mitchell's admonition forms the basis of my critique of diplomatics in Schwartz, "'We make out tools and our tools make us.'"

the opportunities of current technologies, to view photographic images, classification systems, and descriptive standards as objective, as neutral, as natural.[61] In the process, we have embraced models which are "clear, consistent and wrong" for photographs, models which unwittingly through their rules and vocabularies perpetuate the marginalization of visual materials, and in particular photographs, within archival theory and practice. To reverse this process of marginalization; to bring visual materials into the mainstream; to close the gap, lessen the tension, highlight the connections between the verbal and the visual in archives are the challenges the profession now must face, or risk becoming irrelevant and impotent in a wired world where the medium of human communication is increasingly visual and where the model of recorded information is not simply text in electronic form.

In her plenary paper at the 2002 conference of the ACA, Evelyn Wareham cited Greg Dening's work on "islands and beaches" as a metaphor for the spaces of cultural contact between orality and literacy, and as a basis for understanding the social and cultural contexts for suitable record-keeping strategies.[62] Can Dening's analogy be reconfigured to explore the spaces of cultural contact between libraries and archives, and to understand the contexts of institutional descriptive strategies? In the great documentary universe, are archival islands ringed by library beaches? Are we trying to build provenance-based castles out of content-based sand? And when the Internet surf's up, will we find ever more that the solid ground of archival contextuality is increasingly inaccessible from a shoreline shaped by waves of cataloguing tradition? The answer lies in the complexities of institutional discourse and the practices which are naturalized by, and within, them.

Photographs are understood and preserved in libraries and archives in different ways and for different reasons. As a result, descriptive terms are spaces of institutional discourse. Our models are not easily transferred across professions or media, nor are they forever fixed in time or uniform across space. Records creation, record-keeping, and archival preservation are subject to historical, cultural, and political realities, and are periodically reconfigured through social convention or technological change. Noted historian Lawrence W. Levine, has argued, "Photographic images, like statistics, do not lie, but like statistics the truths they communicate are elusive and incomplete."[63] These elusive and incomplete truths are no less part of the archival record than other parts of the documentary universe of which they were, and should con-

61 For an extended critique of the positivist view of photographs as simple reflections of reality, see Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision.'"

62 For an expanded version of this plenary paper, see Evelyn Wareham, "From Explorers to Evangelists: Archivists, Recordkeeping, and Remembering in the Pacific Islands," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3–4 (2002), pp. 187–207.

63 Lawrence W. Levine, "The Historian and the Icon," in Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly W. Brannan (eds.), *Documenting America, 1935–1943* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 17.

tinue to be, an integral, active, and influential part. It is our job as archivists – through fully informed acquisition and appraisal decisions; through our choice of descriptive standards, terms, taxonomies, practices, and systems; through contextualized reference services and outreach products; through conference papers and published articles – to ensure that photographs, indeed all visual and audio-visual materials, whether analogue or digital, continue to preserve and transmit their "burdens" with undiminished strength and clarity.