

ANALYZING PHOTOGRAPHS IN ARCHIVAL TERMS

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## Abstract

Through a comparison of the literature produced by general archival theorists with that published by photographic archivists, it becomes clear that archival principles are not routinely applied to records in photographic form.

Since reflecting knowledge about records creators and circumstances of creation is a basic archival responsibility, this thesis will begin with a discussion of a variety of past and present purposes of photographers in general. The ways in which both purposes and methods can influence photographic information will also be studied. The obligation of photographic archivists to examine records and creators in terms of administrative (including legal), scholarly and other user values will then be examined. The thesis will conclude with a survey of the literature produced by North American photographic archivists to determine whether their responsibilities are fully recognized.

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## Introduction

The reflection of knowledge about records creators and circumstances of creation (provenance) is a basic archival task. The first half of this thesis, therefore, will be a discussion of the purposes and methods of photographers in general. In the opening chapter, the purposes for which the medium was first adopted will be studied. The aim of the second chapter will be to reach an understanding of the ways in which the purposes and techniques of photographers can influence photographic records produced. Because archivists often collect a range of officially and unofficially created material, the third chapter will summarize some of the varied purposes to which the photographic medium is applied in modern industrial societies.

The second half of the thesis will be an examination of the responsibility of photographic archivists to reflect the provenance of records with reference to administrative, scholarly and other user values. In the fourth chapter, the administrative (including legal) value of archival photographs will be discussed. Because archivists often serve scholars in addition to sponsoring organizations, the fifth chapter will provide an overview of recent trends in the use of photographs

in the humanities and social sciences. In the final chapter, the literature published by photographic archivists in North America will be evaluated to demonstrate that they are largely unaware of the variety of administrative and scholarly applications of the medium and seldom recognize their obligation to analyze photographs in archival terms.

CHAPTER ONE  
THE INVENTION OF THE MEDIUM

The meaning of any record, as is acknowledged in the archival principle of provenance, is inextricably fastened to the aims and methods of its creator.<sup>1</sup> Unaware of the limitations of communication media, however, the user too readily accepts documented views of the world without considering the circumstances under which they have been fashioned. In fact, as noted critic Susan Sontag has observed, humankind revels in mere images of reality.<sup>2</sup> We have long been entranced by visual reflections of ourselves and our environments, and during the past two hundred years we have developed increasingly sophisticated means of preserving them. During the eighteenth century, the active use of mechanical aids to the graphic representation of reflections cast through refined glass lenses led to the discovery of a powerful image-making process. By 1826, in a village in France, Joseph Nicephore Niepce had invented photography.<sup>3</sup>

The silent partner of Niepce was a new scientific attitude:

The greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the invention of the method of

invention...the full self-conscious realization of the power of professionalism in knowledge in all its departments, and of the way to produce the professionals...was first completely attained in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

Desiring certain effects, scientists systematically developed the tools needed to reliably cause them. During the 1700s, the industrialization of Europe had created a large class of people with the inclination, the time and the resources available for the imitation of ruling-class self-absorption. The bourgeoisie developed a passion for portraiture. Perceiving new markets, artists were able to respond by devising efficient methods of production, and came to rely upon such instruments as the camera obscura. A box with a lens at one end, it transformed a natural scene into a traceable likeness on a built-in screen.<sup>5</sup> Similar substitutes for artistic skill were frequently used:

The middle class wanted cheap portraits; mechanical devices to eliminate the need for lengthy artistic training were put in its hands, so that every man could become something of an artist. The silhouette required merely the ability to trace a cast shadow; the physionotrace, invented by Gilles Louis Chretien in 1786, asked no more of a beginner.<sup>6</sup>

To remove the need for talent from the portrait-making process altogether, artists searched for ways to capture permanently the pictures cast by optical instruments. The

light-sensitivity of several substances (of silver halide compounds, for instance) had long been established. An object held over a medium coated by silver halide produces an image by curtailing the ability of light to affect the areas which it shadows. To prevent the subsequent action of light upon the shadowed areas once the object has been withdrawn (and thereby to create a permanent record, or "photograph," of the object), the medium must be de-sensitized through chemical treatment. The need for a suitable stabilization process was recognized by several scientists simultaneously.<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Niepce, a French citizen, was an ardent inventor. During the 1820s, he discovered a way to stabilize the reflections formed on sensitized metal plates by the projection of light, and also experimented with the camera obscura.<sup>8</sup> In 1826, Niepce learned that Louis Daguerre, an artist and entrepreneur, was working in a similar vein.<sup>9</sup> Daguerre frequently used the camera obscura to create illusionistic lighting spectacles as settings for theatrical shows.<sup>10</sup> Overcoming initial wariness, the scientist and the artist decided to collaborate. By 1837, using a modified version of Niepce's process, Daguerre was able to permanently fix detailed images on a metallic base.<sup>11</sup>

Public interest in the daguerrotype was strong. Forseeing its applications, a scientist persuaded the French

government to purchase the patent and to make the method freely available.<sup>12</sup> The government minister handling the petition suggested that, in his opinion, photography would render great service to the study of science and would be of even greater benefit to the arts.<sup>13</sup> The daguerrotype process was soon enthusiastically adopted throughout the Western world. However, it was not without disadvantages. A lengthy time period was required for reflections to register on a coated plate, making portraiture awkward and preventing the depiction of action. The street scenes which were commonly presented by photographers, for example, seem strangely devoid of pedestrians. Nevertheless, a variety of people remained keenly interested in the invention and were successfully daguerrotyped; countless still lifes and landscapes were also portrayed.<sup>14</sup>

While French inventors were experimenting with optical instruments, an English scientist was also attempting to stabilize mechanically-produced images. The interests of William Henry Fox Talbot were not purely scientific. Sketching Italian landscapes with the aid of a camera obscura, he found its "fairy pictures" remarkably beautiful, and lamented his inability to trace them accurately: "It was during these thoughts that the idea occurred to me, how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain

fixed upon the paper."<sup>15</sup> To Fox Talbot, the promise of photography was that it would faithfully record a "natural picture," one created "by the agency of light alone, without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil."<sup>16</sup>

By 1835, Fox Talbot had devised a means of fixing reflections on paper using rinses of either potassium iodide or sodium chloride (common salt). His method was not entirely reliable. Another English scientist, Sir John Herschel, later improved the process by washing exposed photographs with hyposulphite of soda ("hypo").<sup>17</sup> Fox Talbot's "photogenic drawings" first appeared reversed, but he soon discovered a way to print an unlimited number of re-reversed "positives" from the reversed "negative."<sup>18</sup> This technique gave his process an important advantage over Daguerre's: while the talbotype could be reproduced in mass quantities, each daguerrotype was unique, and could be duplicated only by hand transfer to another medium. The daguerrotype, however, could hold a more detailed image.

Although not originally motivated by financial gain, Fox Talbot eventually patented the talbotype, possibly following the example set by Daguerre. He used his invention to photograph a variety of subjects: "a pattern of laces," botanical specimens, landscapes and domestic scenes.<sup>19</sup> Other photographers employed the process primarily to record architectural features and pastoral scenes. The Historical

Monuments Commission, for instance, a French government agency responsible for the preservation and restoration of cathedrals, used the talbotype for documentary purposes.<sup>20</sup> Portraitists favored the daguerrotype, which could be more rapidly produced.<sup>21</sup>

The demand for portraits had become so great by the 1850s that photographers could scarcely cope. A procedure developed in 1851, the collodion process, soon eclipsed its predecessors. It permitted shorter exposure times, and collodion positives printed on glass were easily developed, allowing a sitter to collect a completed product almost immediately. Such modifications as the tintype, produced on metal, also became popular. Sturdy and cheaply produced, they were commonly used for simple portraits and to memorialize social events.<sup>22</sup>

Many inventors struggled to refine the portrait-making process, improving lenses and increasing the light-sensitivity of media. Innovations occurred in accordance with purposes. American survey crews needed to develop equipment which was less unwieldy than that used in the collodion glass-plate process; photographers documenting building features required sharper lenses. Heavy equipment and lenses which created soft, flattering images remained useful to portrait-makers.<sup>23</sup> In order to survive economically a 19th Century professional photographer was almost

inevitably obliged to turn out portraits, and to adopt procedures which emphasized beauty rather than accuracy. During the 1840s, a German inventor developed a technique for re-touching negatives which proved lucrative: "The news that the camera could lie made getting photographed much more popular."<sup>24</sup>

The public put great faith in the veracity of photographs. Processes had been painstakingly devised by men who had intended, in Fox Talbot's words, to allow "natural images" to reproduce themselves. A photographic record, however, is formed through humanly manufactured equipment and processes. Crowded streets can seem empty; blemished faces can be made to appear unblemished. An image channelled through carefully ground glass is not natural at all, nor does a photograph create itself, as Fox Talbot had hoped. A debate raged, however, for decades: could a photographer be called a creative artist, or did nature do the work alone? Not until the American photographer and curator Alfred Stieglitz fought at the turn of the century for public recognition of photographic artistry were camera operators considered capable of genius, revealing important and previously unperceived visual relationships.<sup>25</sup>

Photographs are manufactured representations of the material world, which usually seem so real that their aura of impartiality gives them unusual power. The world's first

photographer, Niepce, was not fooled: he labelled them "points de vue" (points of view).<sup>26</sup> Visually and mentally, they present the world from limited stances. It is not yet commonly recognized, however, that photographic images are influenced by the techniques selected or adapted by their creators and are colored by the purposes leading to their production, purposes originating in spheres ranging from art and science to commerce and the domestic realm. A variety of social purposes will be discussed in Chapter Three. In the meantime, the powerful ways in which photographic information can be manipulated deserve closer examination.

Footnotes  
Chapter One

1 Frank B. Evans, Donald F. Harrison, and Edwin A. Thompson, ed. William L. Rofes, "A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators and Records Managers," American Archivist 37 (1974): 427.

2 Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York: Dell, 1977), p. 3.

3 The term "photographic" was coined by John Herschel, an English inventor, in 1839. See T.R. Schellenberg, The Management of Archives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 323.

4 A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World. London: Lowell Lecture Series, 1925.

5 Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present Day, 7th ed. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1981), p. 11.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., pp. 11-12.

8 Ibid., pp. 12-14; Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography: From the Earliest Beginnings to the Present Day (New York: Harry Abrams, 1958), pp. 16-18.

9 Peter Wollheim, "Critical Traditions," Photo Communique 4 (1982): 7.

10 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 14.

11 Pollack, Picture History of Photography, pp. 19-22.

12 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 7.

13 Vicki Goldberg, ed., Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 31.

14 Newhall, History of Photography, pp. 16-22.

15 Pollack, Picture History of Photography, pp. 32-34.

16 Sontag, On Photography, p. 88.

- 17 Newhall, History of Photography, pp. 31-32.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 32-33.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 32-34.
- 20 Ibid., p. 41.
- 21 Ibid., p. 35.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 35, 48-49.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 28, 56-59.
- 24 Sontag, On Photography, p. 86.
- 25 See Newhall, History of Photography, pp. 31-44.
- 26 Pollack, Picture History of Photography, p. 16.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE POWER AND LIMITATIONS OF THE MEDIUM

Unlike records in several other forms, at first glance a still photograph seems to be the outcome of an objective process rather than the result of human choices. One commentator, Roland Barthes, defines photography as a product of the laws of physics (images formed through optical devices) combined with those of chemistry (light affecting substances).<sup>1</sup> Using similar terms, Susan Sontag characterizes a photographic record as "something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint...the registering of an emanation (light waves reflected by objects)...a material vestige of the object."<sup>2</sup> Because a photograph is created by a mechanical device which seems to record automatically every visual surface within its range, a viewer usually assigns it a high degree of credibility.<sup>3</sup> Sontag remarks upon our easy belief in the medium:

Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it...The picture may distort, but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture.<sup>4</sup>

A viewer is subdued both by the apparent authenticity of photographic documents and by the overwhelming quantity of information which they usually present. Media critic Marshall McLuhan notes that photographs are generally brimming with data, leaving little room for knowledge to be supplemented by the viewer.<sup>5</sup> Barthes argues even more strongly that a photograph "fills the sight by force," offering messages which cannot easily be refused or transformed.<sup>6</sup> Because photographic information is preserved outside of its original context, challenging the data delivered can be a formidable task. In most cases, a moment portrayed is simply accepted by an audience as the essential one. To the rare observer who wonders about events or objects which might have been distorted or excluded, avenues of research are not always open. The power of photographs, one eminent psychologist suggests, is rooted precisely in the difficulty of thoughtfully repudiating them, even when they have captured unrepresentative moments.<sup>7</sup>

Photography's persuasive power is also based upon its ability to arouse our emotions.<sup>8</sup> Human judgment can easily be clouded by feeling. We are often guilty of seeing only as much as we are willing to believe, and of too readily accepting messages framed in an aesthetically appealing manner. "Photographs are compelling partly because of their composition - like paintings;" and, since the medium was

first adopted, serious artisans have attempted to apply artistic rules of composition to photography in order to achieve pictorial effects.<sup>9</sup> Fox Talbot, for instance, deliberately outlined his domestic scenes using the "painter's eye" defined by contemporary Dutch artists.<sup>10</sup>

Susan Sontag asserts that the entire history of photography can, in fact, be seen as a struggle between two conflicting impulses: beautification and truth-telling.<sup>11</sup> Definitions of truth, of course, vary wildly. To peddle their own moral or political points of view in attractive terms, documentary photographers regularly beautify their subjects:

Even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience. The immensely gifted members of the Farm Security Administration photographic project of the late 1930s (sponsored by the Roosevelt government) would take dozens of frontal pictures of one of their sharecropper subjects until satisfied that they had gotten just the right look on film - the precise expression on the subject's face that supported their own notions about poverty, light, dignity, texture, exploitation and geometry.<sup>12</sup>

To create successful images consistently, photographers become consciously or unconsciously adept at manipulating elements and dynamics within the confines of a view-finder. Many critics of the medium charge that photographs lack syntax, stating that elements and organizational formats

are not routinely applied.<sup>13</sup> Information specialist Estelle Jussim argues, however, that every means of symbolic communication has some syntactical structure, incorporating culturally approved codes.<sup>14</sup> Archivist Hugh Taylor also points out that, while artists do deliberately develop schematic elements, the majority of us remain unaware of the conventions used in visual media. He recommends that we learn to recognize them, warning that we will need to look long and intently in order to become adept at discerning typical and individual styles.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to achieving an understanding of the syntactical patterns in photographic messages, more awareness of the restrictions of the medium itself is needed. A photograph is a limited record. It is a reflection of a finite view cast for a limited time period through selected optical equipment to be permanently captured in a chosen light-sensitive substance. The subjective choices which must be made about each of these elements clearly affect the document produced. To begin with, any glass lens distorts an image being reflected. A three-dimensional world simply cannot be accurately reproduced on a two-dimensional plane.<sup>16</sup> (Only through holography can spatial relationships be correctly portrayed).<sup>17</sup> In the selection of lenses, ample opportunity for deliberate distortion exists. Wide angle lenses, for example, are commonly used by advertisers to

exaggerate the size of merchandise.

In the exposure of film to light, there is also much room for manipulation. The light available when a photograph is taken can create a false impression of a scene. For example, flashbulb light projected a short distance can flatter the foreground of setting while eliminating the background, making the latter seem dark and empty.<sup>18</sup> In addition, photographic processes cannot reconstruct color relationships authentically: color is either lost through black-and-white processes or inadequately simulated through the use of dyes.<sup>19</sup> On films which are too sensitive to certain color waves, portions of a scene depicted might disappear altogether. Richard Huyda points to the lengthy light exposures and extreme sensitivity to the blue end of the color spectrum inherent in the wet collodion process, which prevents, for example, the registration of both geographical features and clouds on one negative. During the time taken to imprint such features as mountains onto a wet plate, a blue sky will have whitened relevant parts of the medium, making the sky and any existing white clouds indistinguishable in the completed print.<sup>20</sup>

Development techniques also influence photographic information. The differences between high and low-contrast printing papers affect the clarity of images. Again, scope for manipulation exists, including the opportunity for

construction of outright lies - by combining, for example, two negative exposures to form one positive print.

Along with its inability to depict the spatial world precisely, still photography cannot adequately present the passage of time. For instance, to catch only a fleeting smile during an otherwise sad event would be to misrepresent the evolving, complicated nature of the occasion.<sup>21</sup> Single moments seized as indicative of changing realities are at best incomplete; at worst, they are downright false. A grimace could incorrectly appear in print as a smile, or a series of occurrences could be deliberately or inadvertently presented in incorrect order. Because a photographer must make many decisions about the utilization of space and time, a photograph which has been consciously created can be nothing other than a subjective document, "not just a record but an evaluation of the world."<sup>22</sup>

In light of the ways in which photographs can be untruthful, their validity depends ultimately, as photographic archivist Jerry Davison observes, upon photographers' intentions.<sup>23</sup> Photography, like language, is a medium from which many works can be wrought, from X-Rays to an artist's impressions of Paris.<sup>24</sup> Purposes range from the idealization of family relationships to the denigration of power structures; from the manipulation of color to the celebration of form. Intellectual points of view can be as

diverse as those of Victorian moralists and the angry chroniclers of the Depression. Documentary photographer Robert Frank admits that bias cannot be avoided: "I have been frequently accused of deliberately twisting subject matter to my point of view...(but) life for a photographer cannot be a matter of indifference."<sup>25</sup>

Because no person can perceive every aspect of a given subject, the extent to which a photographer has been honest and comprehensive can only be established through research. With experience and luck, an understanding of the aims and methods of a creator can be reached. Upon close study of a group of records, patterns are certain to emerge, because no set of photographs is created randomly. As Beaumont Newhall puts it, a good photograph sometimes happens by chance, but successful photographers are not accidentally made.<sup>26</sup>

The manner in which a collection of records is offered for viewing by a photographer, an editor, or a collector also deserves examination. Because a photograph presents a moment removed from its original context, it must be captioned in order to have meaning.<sup>27</sup> No snapshot, from a news photograph to a portrait from a family album, can be understood without verbal explanation, and the labels assigned will always influence an audience's perception of the document. John Brumfield suggests that a caption reading "Cow For Sale" placed beneath a picture of a meadow would

lead our eyes to the animal in the centre of the scene, whereas "Yosemite Valley" would guide us to the mountains in the background.<sup>28</sup> Verbal descriptions, of course, can be blatantly untrue. The impression caused by a set of photographs can also be falsified through their arrangement.<sup>29</sup> Chronological elements of a published "photo story", for instance, could be laid out in incorrect order. In addition, Susan Sontag cautions that the moral and emotional weight of a still photograph will shift according to the environments in which it is seen.<sup>30</sup> An image meant to arouse outrage will be ineffective without "an appropriate context for receiving it."<sup>31</sup> Because of existing public prejudices, depictions of interned Japanese Americans and Canadians which were published to generate concern during the 1940s did not affront many people. Richard Huyda summarizes: "Every photograph is altered in some manner by the intention of the creator, the nature of the apparatus, the film, the processing and printing, and the unique interpretation of the photograph by each viewer."<sup>32</sup>

In spite of its limitations, photography is an invaluable medium. Photographic documents lend themselves to examination and learning, keeping open for scrutiny an instant which the flow of time normally replaces immediately.<sup>33</sup> It cannot be denied that the external world does, to some extent, participate in the making of a photograph, nor

that, during the past century, we have indeed been "privileged to look the past in the eye."<sup>34</sup> We should not forget, however, that photographs do not reproduce reality precisely. Unlike footprints, they are not records which have been created directly by the objects which they represent. Resulting from light waves manipulated by manufactured equipment and human techniques, they can only be facsimiles posing as originals. As historian Barry O'Connell warns us, to remain uncritical of photographic images, and to believe that they "simply give us the world as it is," is to be helpless before them.<sup>35</sup>

Footnotes  
Chapter Two

1 Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981; Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1981), p. 91.

2 Sontag, On Photography, p. 154.

3 Stanley Milgram, "The Image Freezing Machine." Psychology Today 10 (1977) 52, cited by J. Robert Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye: The Historian's Use of Photographs," B.C. Studies no. 52 (1982): 18.

4 Sontag, On Photography, p. 5.

5 Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York, Toronto and London: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), p. 22.

6 Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 91

7 Milgram, cited by Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye," p. 18.

8 Gisele Freund, Photography and Society (Boston: D.R. Godine, 1980), p. 217.

9 Sontag, On Photography, p. 107; Newhall, History of Photography, p. 61.

10 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 34.

11 Sontag, On Photography, p. 86.

12 Ibid., p. 6.

13 See, for example, McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 197.

14 Estelle Jussim, "The Research Uses of Visual Information," Library Trends 25 (1977): 300, 306.

15 Hugh Taylor, "Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist," American Archivist 42 (1979): 420-427.

16 Claude Minotto, The Archivist and the Photograph: An Image That Holds (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1974): p. 46-4.

17 Richard Huyda, "Photographs and Archives in

Canada," Archivaria no. 5 (1978): 12.

18 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 158.

19 Ibid., pp. 193-94.

20 Huyda, "Photographs and Archives," p. 12.

21 Ibid.

22 Sontag, On Photography, p. 88.

23 Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye," p. 20.

24 Sontag, On Photography, p. 148

25 Goldberg, Photography In Print, p. 401.

26 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 178.

27 Ibid., pp. 182-183.

28 John Brumfield, "A good milk cow is not a helicopter, and that is a fact," Photo Communique 2 (1980): p. 32.

29 Freund, Photography and Society, p. 149.

30 Sontag, On Photography, p. 105.

31 Ibid., p. 17.

32 Huyda, "Photographs and Archives," p. 12.

33 Sontag, On Photography, p. 111.

34 Paul Theroux, "The Past Recaptured," Foreword to Margaret Luke, ed., The World As It Was (New York: Summit Books, 1980), p. 10, cited by Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye," p. 17.

35 Barry O'Connell, "The Photograph as a Source for Public History," Amherst, Massachusetts, 1977. Unpublished manuscript (Mimeographed).

years. Photographic information held on metallic plates or on other bases could be duplicated on the printed page only through laborious hand transfer to a publishing medium. As a result, photographs were seen only rarely in newspapers and magazines. Eventually a process was invented which allowed their mechanical reproduction on the same press as type. By the 1880s they could automatically be scanned according to area densities, transferred to telegraph wires, communicated quickly over long distances, and easily reconstructed in great quantity.<sup>4</sup>

The incorporation of photography into journalism had profound social consequences. Using streamlined, portable cameras, bands of professional photographers formed quickly to present a mixture of sensationalism (railroad accidents, for example) and glamour (celebrity portraits) to the masses.<sup>5</sup> Later, images were coupled on equal terms with verbal reports in "photo stories" built around carefully chosen themes.<sup>6</sup> To produce features for Life magazine, for instance, a journal which was first published in 1936, editors and photographers worked together, determining both visual and textual points of view before a single picture was ever snapped.<sup>7</sup> The world which Life painstakingly constructed contained light, hope and a minimum of shadow. Everyday lives were described alongside those of celebrities. In an industrialized, standardized society,

CHAPTER THREE  
OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL PRODUCTION  
OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN MODERN SOCIETIES

In modern industrialized societies large quantities of photographs are produced officially (by chartered organizations) and unofficially for a multitude of purposes. The medium was born into a world in which the production of goods is mechanized and organized on a broad scale, and in which information must be disseminated on an equally broad basis. Vast amounts of data must be communicated to maintain order, to exploit resources efficiently, and to influence the consumption of products.<sup>1</sup> Repeatability, the core of the mechanical principle which is typical of any industrial endeavor, has characterized the communication field during the past few centuries.<sup>2</sup> Early in the history of the photographic industry, inventors devised methods whereby an unlimited number of positive prints could be repeated from one negative image. The development of prints soon became a science, with film exposures timed by stopwatches and with labour efficiently divided in photo-finishing factories to facilitate mass production.<sup>3</sup> Dissemination of visual images on a large scale, however, remained difficult for many

Life and its counterparts deliberately attempted to convince their readers that individuals mattered; and that hard work and talent would always be rewarded.<sup>8</sup>

Journalistic photographs bombarded the public in increasing numbers. The messages created reflected the perspective of the industrial establishment, which financed their creation. Working through an advertising system which was the most crucial factor in the success of major publications, some magazine owners admitted outrightly that they hoped to sell philosophies along with consumer goods.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to their independence during previous decades, by the 1930s newspaper and magazine publishers no longer controlled their own work, reporting now to their advertising clients. Because advertising revenue had become the major source of profit for newspapers and journals, their editors and publishers were forced to regard readers as consumers, ensuring that articles and editorial commentary did not affront advertisers' ideology.<sup>10</sup> A consumer society, writes Susan Sontag, requires "a culture based on images."<sup>11</sup> Through photography the owners of industrial and of communication networks were easily able to fashion a world of images in their own interests. The medium, notes Gisele Freund, can be an unusually valuable and even dangerous tool when it is used to create needs, sell goods and mold minds.<sup>12</sup>

Photography can also be a dangerous tool when it is wielded by governments. Many of its early official applications seemed innocuous enough: the French government, for example, employed talbotypes to record distinctive features of heritage buildings.<sup>13</sup> Glorification of the French empire, admittedly, was one of its aims. In North America, during the middle of the nineteenth century, photographers depicted not only buildings, land and life on the home front, but were included in government-sponsored expeditions which surveyed frontier areas.<sup>14</sup> Other aims were to record unusual events and to document ownership of property. In Canada, government agencies have routinely filed officially-produced photographs from the 1850s on.<sup>15</sup>

In every modern nation, government agencies have also used the medium for the surveillance of citizens. Since a round-up of revolutionaries in Paris in 1871, when policemen took snapshots of Communards who were later identified and shot with weapons of a different nature, photography has been a tool for monitoring increasingly mobile populations.<sup>16</sup> Another less-than-innocuous purpose has been the use of photographs to disseminate propaganda. In Canada, for example, both the federal Department of Immigration and Canadian Pacific Railway sent glowing views of the prairie

undertaken was the idealization of Depression-era farmworkers by the federal Farm Security Administration, whose archives still constitutes the largest group of documentary photographs ever assembled on this continent. Roy Stryker, the co-ordinator of the project, recognized that images could be subtly manipulated to effectively convey any chosen message.<sup>18</sup> Hoping to gain the support of a middle-class audience, he coached his team of photographers to paint a portrait of America's impoverished rural citizens as uniformly dignified and hard-working.<sup>19</sup>

Applying the medium to goals very different from surveillance and image-making, modern societies now generate great quantities of photographs for scientific and medical research. According to Marshall McLuhan, before the development of photography, scientists lacked adequate non-verbal means of transmitting knowledge. Greek and Roman botanists, for instance, were frustrated in their attempts to convey information about plants quickly and accurately. McLuhan points out that it is very difficult to describe verbally the attributes of even such a simple object as a bucket. The development of the printing press did allow quick reproduction of painstakingly sketched images. The camera has since become an indispensable instrument to researchers, providing workable visual descriptions quickly.<sup>20</sup> It has been used for scientific purposes since its conception: one

of its inventors, William Henry Fox Talbot, was the first scientist to record botanical specimens photographically.<sup>21</sup> Another photographer, Edward Muybridge, took advantage of the camera's ability to register material phenomena which the human eye cannot see, capturing a horse at several stages of gallop to determine whether all four of its feet left the ground at once. Today, through the use of stroboscopic lights, the public is able to view such wonders as hummingbird wings moving at high speed and tennis players swinging.<sup>22</sup> Scientists have become so dependent upon photography that progress in many fields would be impossible without it. To prove the existence of subatomic particles, for example, the only tangible records which a nuclear physicist can offer us are the tracks of light which the particles have left on film as they passed over it for amazingly brief moments.<sup>23</sup>

Medical researchers have also relied upon photographic processes for many decades. In order to improve the design of artificial limbs, in 1863 one physician, Oliver Wendell Holmes (physician and photographer), scrutinized stereoscopic prints of people in motion.<sup>24</sup> Since then, standard medical equipment has come to include photographic units which are sensitive to X-Rays beyond the range of normal sight, along with cameras attached to electron microscopes used to scan organs.<sup>25</sup>

Photography is now the primary tool in the investiga-

tion of much physiological activity and psychological behavior. Using hidden cameras to discover the subtle differences between prosecutors' treatment of black and white defendants in American courtrooms is one example offered by Estelle Jussim. She adds that students of the social sciences are now regularly asked to utilize cameras in recording and analyzing the behavior of their subjects.<sup>26</sup>

Photography has helped humankind discover itself and has extended the limits of our knowledge of the physical world. Photographic plates coated with sensitive emulsions and attached to telescopes for long time-periods have revealed previously uncharted galaxies.<sup>27</sup> Since 1856, when Hadar patented the idea of taking photographs from air balloons for use in mapmaking, aerial photography has allowed us to survey our own planet.<sup>28</sup> Using cameras, we can watch the development of eye and muscle co-ordination in handicapped children.<sup>29</sup> Photographic information is useful to spies, meteorologists and coroners.<sup>30</sup> Vicki Goldberg points out that news, fashion, surveillance and propaganda images can also powerfully affect the manner in which we eat, dress, vote and think.<sup>31</sup> As valuable as the medium can be, we must be forever mindful of the purposes behind the messages.

Turning from the public to the private sphere, the impact of photography is no less impressive. Cameras pervade

modern societies: almost every household has one. With the manufacture in 1888 by George Eastman of the easily-operated Kodak, amateur photographers became, and have remained, the largest source of support for a healthy photographic industry. Most of the six billion photographs taken annually in North America are snapshots made for private purposes.<sup>32</sup>

To snapshooters, by definition making quick photographic records of their surroundings, the basic requirement of the medium is simply that it render subjects recognizably.<sup>33</sup> Time is rarely taken to compose aesthetically pleasing images, although many individuals are disappointed when their developed prints often fail to match the appeal of those crafted by professionals. Although their aims are seldom articulated, amateur photographers generally hope to create idealized images of themselves and their immediate worlds.<sup>34</sup>

Since amateurs first adopted the camera, the subjects of their photographs have remained remarkably the same. Portraits have always been extremely popular. In addition, as George Eastman observed of his customers in 1892, the public has long favored memoranda of personal lives and travels.<sup>35</sup> Archivist Richard Huyda confirms the pattern: private collections stored in archival repositories usually contain likenesses of family members, along with views of places both familiar and exotic.<sup>36</sup> Cameras have also long

been incorporated into many social rituals. In contemporary cultures, we routinely photograph the newly-born and the newly-wed. Unlike our Victorian ancestors, however, we do not treasure images of the newly-dead.<sup>37</sup> We document ownership of expensive possessions (cars, boats and homes) and note unusual events (parties and ceremonies). Almost never do we photograph the mundane activities which form the basis of our daily lives (ourselves at breakfast, for example).

Throughout the past century, the subjects represented in private collections have changed relatively little because our lives have fundamentally altered so little. Photography and industrialism were born during the same era, and photographs have tended to reflect the private wounds caused by industrial systems. Living within standardized, impersonal social environments, we struggle to assert our individuality, trying to create favorable self-images by matching the photographs in commercial advertising. Our efforts are not always reassuring, but pictures which are unfavorable can be easily discarded, while idealized depictions are readily framed. In an image-mad consumer society, few of us can resist gathering flattering snapshots of wedding tuxedos and tropical vacations: "It seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along. Photographs will offer indisputable evidence

that the trip was made...that fun was had."<sup>38</sup>

The medium is used to cast favorable impressions not only of ourselves, but of our families, both immediate and extended:

Photography becomes a rite of family life just when, in the industrializing countries of Europe and America, the very institution of the family starts undergoing radical surgery. As that claustrophobic unit, the nuclear family, was being carved out of a much larger family aggregate, photography came along to memorialize, to re-state symbolically, the imperiled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life. Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family's photograph album is generally about the extended family - and, often, is all that remains of it.<sup>39</sup>

Whether or not the nuclear family is indeed a very recent phenomenon, we collectively believe that extended families should maintain close ties and employ photographs to suggest our connectedness - or, as David Jacobs puts it, to "arrange relations" among ourselves.<sup>40</sup> Annual visits by cousins and in-laws are duly recorded. Complicated personal relationships are glossed over, and portrayed as static and invariably positive: "close" couples, "smiling" sisters. In reality, of course, we are not unfamiliar with conflict and change. Family members must commonly live great distances apart. We lack the continuity supplied by ancestral homes

and the solidity of "old furniture, grandparents' pots and pans - the used things, warm with generations of human touch." Familiar with disposable objects, we nevertheless cling to photographs, "featherweight portable museums," carrying them from home to home.<sup>41</sup> People robbed of their pasts make the most fervent picture-takers, argues Susan Sontag, who adds that almost everyone living in an industrial society is obliged to relinquish too much of the past.<sup>42</sup>

Photographs, of course, allow only mock possession of times gone by.<sup>43</sup> To their subjects, they offer false memories, even counter-memories, overwhelming a subject's own thoughts and maintaining a past which was in fact seen only by the camera operator. Photographs also confer false importance on isolated moments. They "disarm judgment" and "invite sentimentality."<sup>44</sup> Roland Barthes believes that we usually regard them tenderly because we are subconsciously aware of their subjects' vulnerability against a future which has already happened.<sup>45</sup> In a sensitive and popular autobiography, film actress Liv Ullmann inadvertently confirms his theory. Dwelling upon portraits of herself and her mother, she perceives their own mortality:

Seeing pictures of Mamma when she was young makes me sad. She is lovely, her eyes are happy and full of expectation. Why is time so merciless?...In a framed

photograph we line up for posterity, next to other pictures in which we are infants, five-year-olds, schoolchildren, brides. We stare out into space, never to exist again.<sup>46</sup>

Each one of us has gazed at personal photographs in an equally melancholy fashion. Photographs, unfortunately, assign undue importance to the past. Left alone, our memories of past experiences will gradually erode, leaving a wholesome orientation to the present and the future. Barthes argues that photographs, on the other hand, have the power to inhibit time's healing ability, allowing "something terrible: the return of the dead."<sup>47</sup> By collecting images of those dear to us and by subjecting ourselves to portrait-makers, we sometimes risk self-damage. Marshall McLuhan points out that we too willingly pose for pictures, altering our postures and expressions.<sup>48</sup> Roland Barthes also feels a guilty sense of "imposture" when he knowingly adjusts his behavior for a camera.<sup>49</sup> Unlike him, most of us pose unthinkingly, but equally uncomfortably, adopting conventional "snapshot grammar" - standing in malleable groups, for instance, with shorter people placed in the foreground, everyone looking directly at the photographer and ignoring the environment.<sup>50</sup> Subconsciously, we hope to be immortalized in uncharacteristically becoming positions, under unusually flattering lights. Our concern about the element of luck and the ability of the photographer involved

causes us to stiffen before the camera, "fearing its disapproval."<sup>51</sup> In truth, we fear the disapproval of each other. As viewers, we can be critical. As photographers, we can be overbearing and even predatory, organizing relatives into tidy groups, arranging spouses into attractive postures so that they will reflect well upon us and trying to catch friends in embarrassing disarray. Photographers invariably want something from their subjects. They "convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption or promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation."<sup>52</sup> As collectors, Barthes complains, we would gladly treat him as an object, classify him, file him, subtly misrepresent him.<sup>53</sup>

Some private photographers move beyond the social use of the camera, of course. Many amateurs use the medium to display artistic sensibilities, capturing sunsets, wild-flowers and empty park benches. To limit the infinite range of subject matter available, dedicated hobbyists often settle upon themes. Some set themselves high aims as scientists and others as moralists, uncovering hidden truths, conserving vanishing pasts or making inventories of the world.<sup>54</sup> While amateurs frequently outline their areas of interest, however, their reasons are rarely defined explicitly. Upon close scrutiny of their work, many of the

purposes of photographers, collectors and posing subjects are not difficult to ascertain. Such purposes deserve more of our attention. Whether or not the observations of Gisele Freund, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes and other critics upon the social applications of the medium are always valid, we could not help but benefit from close individual study of our own motives in so enthusiastically embracing photography.

Footnotes  
Chapter Three

- 1 Freund, Photography and Society, pp. 103, 141; Sontag, On Photography, p. 178.
- 2 McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 159.
- 3 Newhall, History of Photography, pp. 47, 92.
- 4 Ibid., p. 175; Freund, Photography and Society, p. 103.
- 5 Newhall, History of Photography, pp. 154-156, 175; Freund, Photography and Society, pp. 103, 111.
- 6 Freund, Photography and Society, pp. 115, 124.
- 7 Newhall, History of Photography, pp. 183-184.
- 8 Freund, Photography and Society, pp. 148-149.
- 9 Ibid., p. 141.
- 10 Ibid., p. 142.
- 11 Sontag, On Photography, p. 178.
- 12 Freund, Photography and Society, pp. 103, 217.
- 13 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 41. See also: Richard Rudisill, Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerrotype on American Society (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), p. 116.
- 14 Birrell and Greenhill, Canadian Photography, p. 84; Newhall, History of Photography, pp. 72-76.
- 15 Huyda, "Photographs and Archives," p. 5.
- 16 Freund, Photography and Society, p. 105; Sontag, On Photography, p. 5.
- 17 Birrell and Greenhill, Canadian Photography, p. 143; Minotto, Archivist and Photograph, p. 46-5.
- 18 Goldberg, Photography in Print, p. 349.
- 19 Sontag, On Photography, p. 62.

- 20 McLuhan, Understanding Media, pp. 158, 192.
- 21 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 33.
- 22 Ibid., p. 159.
- 23 McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 192; Jussim, "Research Uses," p. 774.
- 24 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 83.
- 25 Ibid., p. 167; Jussim, "Research Uses," p. 774.
- 26 Jussim, "Research Uses," pp. 767-768.
- 27 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 167.
- 28 Beaumont Newhall and Nancy Newhall, Masters of Photography (New York: A and W Publishers, 1958), p. 32.
- 29 Jussim, "Research Uses," p. 767.
- 30 Sontag, On Photography, p. 22.
- 31 Goldberg, Photography in Print, p. 21.
- 32 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 89; Geoffrey James, "Responding to Photographs," Arts Canada no. 192 (1974): p. 6.
- 33 David Jacobs, "Domestic Snapshots: Toward a Grammar of Motives," Journal of American Culture 4 (1981): p. 3.
- 34 Sontag, On Photography, p. 28; Jacobs, "Grammar," p. 3.
- 35 Newhall, History of Photography, p. 94.
- 36 Huyda, "Photographs and Archives," p. 5.
- 37 James, "Responding to Photographs," p. 6.
- 38 Sontag, On Photography, p. 9.
- 39 Ibid., p. 8.
- 40 Jacobs, "Grammar," p. 3.
- 41 Sontag, On Photography, p. 68.

- 42 Ibid., p. 10.
- 43 Ibid., p. 167.
- 44 Ibid., p. 71.
- 45 Barthes, Camera Lucida, pp. 90-96.
- 46 Liv Ullmann, Changing (U.S.A. and Canada: Alfred Knopf, 1976; Bantam edition, 1978), p. 66.
- 47 Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 9.
- 48 McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 197.
- 49 Barthes, Camera Ludica, p. 11.
- 50 Jacobs, "Grammar," p. 3.
- 51 Sontag, On Photography, p. 85.
- 52 Ibid., p. 110.
- 53 Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 14.
- 54 Sontag, On Photography, pp. 56-59.

CHAPTER FOUR  
ADMINISTRATIVE VALUE IN  
ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHS

The purposes and techniques of a photographer clearly determine the nature of the information contained in a photographic record. Using the preceding three chapters as a basis for understanding the importance of creators and circumstances of creation, the provenance (respect for the origin) of archival photographs can now be examined.

It is a sad comment upon the current state of archival art that among the custodians of photographs in Canadian repositories there are few archivists to be found. In the literature underlying this profession, it has long been recognized that, in addition to appraising scholarly and other values, one of the principal functions of an archivist is to protect the administrative (and, in particular, the legal) value of the permanent records produced by official organizations. (Official organizations will be defined here as corporate bodies or chartered organizations functioning for clearly delineated purposes, including governments, churches, businesses and labour unions). Such respected British and American archivists as Hilary Jenkinson, Oliver

Wendell Holmes and Margaret Cross Norton have emphasized their responsibility to their creating agencies.<sup>1</sup> Unlike other documents of permanent value, which may be gathered and made available by curators for public use, official records are preserved by archivists primarily for their benefit to administrators, and only secondarily to other users.<sup>2</sup> American theorists in particular have tended to make a useful distinction between "archivists" as custodians considering both administrative and other (including scholarly) values, and "curators" whose only concern is scholarly records.<sup>3</sup> By whatever terms they are labelled, archivists and curators have an important difference: an archivist must protect the administrative value of official records.

Because many documents created in the course of administrative activity have legal importance, it is vital that custodians always handle them in a manner which does not impair their admissibility as evidence in courts of law.<sup>4</sup> Canadian archivists employed by governments and corporations, however, have yet to demonstrate a healthy regard for photographs of legal significance. They function, in effect, as curators. A survey of their published work yields few references to the serious administrative uses of photography. In their discussion of the appraisal process, different criteria for records created unofficially and for

those generated officially by organizations are rarely established. Typically, both types of documents are assessed on the basis of scholarly value alone. As records in non-textual form are utilized increasingly in the judicial sphere, more attention must be given to the administrative and legal uses of officially produced photographs.

In modern industrial societies photographs are generated in great quantity for a variety of official and private purposes. As indicated in Chapter Three, they record social gatherings and capture aesthetic images. They are produced by industry and government for advertising, surveillance and scientific research. The camera documents ownership of property and communicates information about routine and unusual events. Engineering photographs, for instance, serve as permanent legal records of construction projects. Many police departments, as another example, regularly arm their officers with cameras, using still and motion pictures to train personnel, to make traffic studies, to further public relations and to counter charges of brutality by recording arrests in which suspects offer resistance.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of their extensive application, photographs are consistently misinterpreted, and are too readily accepted as accurate representations of the material world. As we have seen, a photographer can present a subject

fairly or misrepresent it entirely through manipulation of a photographic process, light, space, time or captioning. The value of the content of a photographic record is dependent upon the knowledge available about the purposes and techniques of its creator.<sup>6</sup> This tenet directly parallels a basic archival principle: it is important that custodians of records in any medium gather information illuminating provenance. With photographs of legal value, it becomes crucial that the creation, use and storage of documents be carefully documented. In a courtroom, a photograph is never accepted without examination of its origins.

Still photographs are now commonly employed in legal disputes.<sup>7</sup> Although they are considered a special form of evidence, photographic records are subject to general rules of admissibility. Their content must first be relevant to a case being tried. Secondly, they must constitute the best evidence available. (Some resistance to the use of non-traditional documents has been apparent. Many judges continue to consider verbal testimony preferable to evidence in photographic form.<sup>8</sup> In a majority of North American jurisdictions, judges also retain the right to exclude photographs on the grounds that they can be inflammatory, influencing juries emotionally.)<sup>9</sup> Thirdly, evidence must be authenticated by a witness. Because photographs are most often introduced to illustrate verbal testimony,

verification simply consists of an oath that the information contained in a picture accurately represents a subject.<sup>10</sup> It is the verbal statement that is normally open to question, not the photograph itself. Finally, because a witness usually swears to firsthand knowledge of the subject of a photograph, another barrier to admissibility, the hearsay problem, is rarely an issue. (Hearsay evidence is information received through a third party who is not available for testimony).<sup>11</sup>

When photographic documents are presented independently of the testimony of persons able to confirm the veracity of their content, authentication by expert witnesses becomes necessary.<sup>12</sup> In one recent lawsuit, for example, specialists were asked to inspect photographs of illegal activities which a Californian couple had filmed in their home. The site could be verified by their landlord, but neither he nor any other witness speaking for the prosecution could swear that events depicted had been fairly portrayed. "Expert testimony was given to the effect that the photographs were not composites or fakes, and were probably taken by one of the parties to the acts."<sup>13</sup> To insure that the photographer had not intended to create a false impression, the information in the photographic negatives was authenticated through examination of their form.

As the evidentiary value of a photograph increases,

additional documentation about the circumstances surrounding its creating is frequently requested. As one authority explains:

The extent of verification (degree of proof of accuracy) required varies depending on why the picture is introduced and how important it is in determining the issues in the case. For example, if the photograph is simply used as a convenient method of illustrating the witness' general description of a scene, minimal proof of accuracy may be sufficient; but when it is offered to show a slight difference of height, breadth, or length of vital importance, much more convincing proof should be required.<sup>14</sup>

Because the medium can so easily be made to convey an incorrect message, explanatory technical information must often be supplied. In addition, the testimony of the photographer can be vital. Sometimes only the creator will have sufficient knowledge of a subject and the conditions under which it was filmed to confirm the accuracy of a record.<sup>15</sup>

In Canada, along with general rules of admissibility, the photographs generated by governments and other incorporated bodies are subject to sections of the federal Evidence Act which apply to business records in any form. To ensure that the official origin of documents is clear, Section 24 of the Act requires that a copy of a record be certified by an officer responsible for its custody.<sup>16</sup> In

addition, a record must have been created in the "usual and ordinary course of business."<sup>17</sup> An employee of a large organization often relies on hearsay to verify that a record has been created in an ordinary manner. Hearsay evidence is not normally admissible, but an exception is made for business documents.<sup>18</sup> A hospital administrator, for instance, is usually permitted to authenticate an X-Ray photograph stored under his/her care without having personal knowledge of its contents because it is assumed that reliable record-keeping practices have been followed.<sup>19</sup> Any responsible employee of an agency can normally validate a document: if transfer to an internal archives has been authorized, an official as far removed from record creation as an archivist may testify.<sup>20</sup>

In many Western countries, officially produced records are assigned strong evidentiary value. In a recent British maritime dispute, for example, lawyers for the prosecution introduced photographs which had been created automatically at a Coast Guard station. A camera which regularly recorded all vessels in range had registered two ships colliding. The defendants argued against the validity of the records on the grounds that no witness could swear to having direct knowledge of the events pictured. In a precedent-setting decision, the judge rejected the argument.<sup>21</sup> In keeping with the practice of automatic acceptance of business

records, official production and regular circumstances of creation rendered the photographs admissible. One legal authority indicated in 1973 that Canadian judges were beginning to follow the British and American lead in accepting systematically produced photographs without the supporting testimony of witnesses.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, current Canadian evidence laws are inadequate in several ways. Under present provisions, it can be too readily assumed that a document held in official custody is genuine.<sup>23</sup> Authentication should be less automatic. In an archival repository, for example, where the history of a record is not well indicated and custody transfers are poorly registered, its origin should be carefully examined. In addition, it can too easily be taken for granted both that an employee has adequate familiarity with a record-producing program and that the system itself is dependable. Using an example from another medium, Kenneth Chasse, a lawyer and an expert on the admissibility of evidence, recently noted that such vague statutory phrases as "the usual and ordinary course of business" have led to inconsistent judicial decisions on the extent to which the reliability of record-keeping systems must be questioned.<sup>24</sup> Using computer data systems as a model, he recommends the development of uniform records management principles and techniques, along with the insertion of clear admissibility

requirements into evidence statutes.<sup>25</sup> Among other criteria, he believes that judges should be required by law to request assurances that entries into a data base have been made regularly, that input procedures have conformed to standard industry practices, that security features have been effective, and that a responsible person has overseen and recorded all processes.<sup>26</sup>

The "Microfilm as Documentary Evidence" standard issued by the Canadian General Standards Board has established equivalent guidelines against which the credibility of record-keeping programs for documents in micrographic form can be measured. The Board advises, for instance, that programs be implemented under written authority, that internal procedures be documented through the use of manuals, logs and other records, that filming accuracy be regularly checked, that independent audits be instituted, that provisions be made for adequate storage, and that an officer responsible for the system be designated.<sup>27</sup>

In some North American jurisdictions, there have been similar attempts to standardize requirements for the admissibility of photographs. The strongest legislation exists in the state of Wisconsin, where judges are required to consider such technical information as the documentation of the direction, position and distance of a camera before allowing a photograph to stand as evidence, even if these

factors are not likely to affect the reliability of the information conveyed.<sup>28</sup> Such critics as Kenneth Chasse believe that in future for records in any form there should be laws against which systems of production would need to be checked.

While the role of records managers and archivists within the judicial realm has yet to be defined, it is possible that standardization within both professions will lead to the licensing of record keepers able to qualify legally as expert witnesses.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, under existing legislation, archivists and other officials caring for records of long-term legal value may be called upon to explain the production, use and storage of documents through both firsthand knowledge and hearsay evidence.<sup>30</sup> To protect themselves, archivists will need to demonstrate a greater interest in the complete life span of records in order to insure that information about their origin is recorded.<sup>31</sup> In the absence of well-defined admissibility criteria, as much supporting documentation as possible should be saved. The most useful retention guidelines may be found in basic archival theory: a strong relationship exists between fundamental archival principles and the legal premises for the admissibility of business records. First, through the collection of policy papers, procedural manuals, administrative histories and organizational charts, an

archivist is obliged to reflect the identity and evolving purposes of a creating agency. Information about the subsequent custody and storage of documents produced is also collected.<sup>32</sup> Mirroring this requirement is the legal need (defined in evidence acts) for assurances of the official origin of business records. Secondly, an archivist must protect the original order of a body of documents, and gather additional information about the production and care of records (about technical processes, filing systems, and so forth) to indicate that material has been generated and treated in an ordinary manner.<sup>33</sup> This tenet matches the legal requirement that records be produced routinely. The needs of the user determine the extent to which the two components of the archival principle of respect for provenance must be honored. Limiting provenance by sampling, for instance, which might sometimes be seen as a violation of respect for original order, is often justifiable. An archivist responsible for police photographs could legitimately save only a sample of textual and photographic records as evidence enough of the functioning of the creating agency for scholarly purposes or for training personnel. If, however, photographs were being saved as a defense against potential brutality charges, policy statements and letters authorizing filming would also be required, original order would need to be scrupulously

respected, and the rationale for any file reductions made by the creator would need to be demonstrated.

Canadian photographic custodians seldom appraise official photographs in conjunction with textual material, nor are they aware of the functions and record-keeping practices of their parent agencies. In an article published in Archivaria in 1980, Terry Cook of the Public Archives of Canada indicated that administrative records in non-textual form are too often torn from their functional roots and stored according to media without respect for their connection to related textual documents.<sup>34</sup> To date, most photographic custodians remain unaware of the important administrative uses of non-textual records. In 1983, I sent a letter to custodians in many Canadian corporate, federal, provincial and municipal institutions, asking for an indication of the criteria which they considered important in appraising photographs. Of the eighteen who responded, only one provincial archivist did not make the apparent assumption that the only photographs worthy of appraisal were those of scholarly value alone. In keeping with a written policy, he indicated that his institution appraises official photographs as "archival government records" of administrative value, and analyzes them in conjunction with related documents in other forms. Even he, however, did not isolate legal value as an appraisal criterion.

Because the majority of media repositories in this country were established primarily to serve scholars, the existing curatorial approach to photographs is understandable. As photographic evidence is used more often in courts of law, however, archivists will need to acquire a greater awareness of the permanent legal value of many official photographs, and must begin to protect that value systematically. Present custodial practices are certain to improve if we acknowledge the extent to which the archival art can be an archival science, built upon sound principles and legally tested procedures.

Footnotes  
Chapter Four

1 See Oliver Wendell Holmes, " 'Public Records' - Who Knows What They Are?" American Archivist 23 (1960): 5; Hilary Jenkinson, A Manual of Archive Administration (London: 1937), p. 9; Thornton W. Mitchell, ed., Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival and Records Management (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1979), pp. 13-14.

2 Jenkinson, Manual, pp. 4-8; Mitchell, Norton on Archives, p. 13; Maynard J. Brichford, Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1977), pp. 5-7.

3 See Robert L. Brubaker, "Archival Principles and the Curator of Manuscripts," American Archivist 29 (1966): pp. 505-514; Lester J. Cappon, "Historical Manuscripts as Archives: Some Definitions and their Application," American Archivist 39 (1976): 429-435.

4 Mitchell, Norton on Archives, p. 27.

5 George Chernoff and Hershel B. Sarbin, Photography and the Law (New York: American Photographic Book Publishing Co., 1977), p. 107.

6 See Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye."

7 William D. Gehl and Frank L. Mullare, Photographs: Worth a Thousand Words as Evidence (Wisconsin: Institute of Continuing Legal Education, 1971), p. 1.

8 Chernoff and Sarbin, Photography and the Law, p. 105; Gehl and Mullare, Photographs as Evidence, p. 5; Bruce A. MacFarlane, "Photographic Evidence: Its Probative Value at Trial and the Judicial Discretion to Exclude It From Evidence," Criminal Law Quarterly no. 16 (1973); Manitoba Law Journal no. 5 (1973).

9 Gehl and Mullare, Photographs as Evidence, p. 5; MacFarlane, "Photographic Evidence," p. 161.

10 Chernoff and Sarbin, Photography and the Law, pp. 104-106; Gehl and Mullare, Photographs as Evidence, pp. 5-7; MacFarlane, "Photographic Evidence," pp. 151, 162.

11 Kenneth Chase, "The Legal Issues Concerning the Admissibility of Computer Printouts and Microfilm," paper

presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Vancouver, B.C., 1 June 1983, p. 4.

12 MacFarlane, "Photographic Evidence," pp. 153, 175.

13 Ibid., p. 153. See also: Canadian Evidence Act, R.S.C. 1970; c. E-10, s. 30 (6). Judges may consider both the content and the form of a record to determine its probative value.

14 Gehl and Mullare, Photographs as Evidence, p. 9.

15 Ibid., p. 21; Chernoff and Sarbin, Photography and the Law, p. 109. For more information about lenses and films acceptable in courts, see Fred Hertel, "Picture Your Rights," Photo Life 62 (September, 1981; October, 1981).

16 Canada Evidence Act, s. 24.

17 Ibid., s. 30.

18 Chasse, "The Admissibility of Computer Printouts," p. 4.

19 Gehl and Mullare, Photographs as Evidence, pp. 92-93.

20 Mitchell, Norton on Archives, pp. 27-28; Jenkinson, Manual, p. 9.

21 MacFarlane, "Photographic Evidence," pp. 158-59.

22 Ibid., p. 161.

23 Mitchell, Norton on Archives, pp. 27-28. In 1943, Norton indicated that under American law it was likely that records kept by a responsible officer would be considered authentic. She noted, however, the importance of honoring provenance in order to safeguard official documents.

24 Chasse, "The Admissibility of Computer Printouts," pp. 1-2.

25 Ibid. Clear provisions for the admissibility of documents produced by computerized record-keeping systems have already been enacted in other countries. See p. 19.

26 Ibid., p. 24.

27 Canadian General Standards Board, Microfilm as Documentary Evidence (Ottawa, 1979).

28 Gehl and Mullare, Photographs as Evidence, p. 11.

29 Chasse, "The Admissibility of Computer Printouts," pp. 1-2.

30 Canada Evidence Act, s. 30 (6). Archivist Meyer H. Fishbein also points out that archivists may be questioned about the provenance of records and their disposition since accessioning. In addition, support documentation on record-keeping systems may be requested. See "The Evidential Value of Non-Textual Records: An Early Precedent," American Archivist 45 (1982): 189-90.

31 On the extent to which archivists might be considered accountable, see Mark Hopkins, "Records and Records Keepers Judicially Considered: Credibility or Convenience?" Archivaria no. 18 (1984): pp. 154-165.

32 Mitchell, Norton on Archives, pp. 106-108. See also the definition of "provenance" in Rofes, A Basic Glossary. On the types of records which should be collected to reflect provenance, see Brichford, Appraisal and Accessioning, p. 5.

33 See Schellenberg, Management of Archives, p. 92.

34 Terry Cooke, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives,'" Archivaria 9 (Winter 1980): pp. 141-150.

CHAPTER FIVE  
RECENT SCHOLARLY USES  
OF PHOTOGRAPHS

In addition to serving an official organization, an archivist is often given a mandate to allow public access to records for genealogical, journalistic, scholarly and other purposes. In recent years, the use (and, in particular, the quantitative use) of photographs by scholars has increased dramatically. Officially and privately created photographs have been a rich resource for the humanities and social sciences. To psychologists and sociologists, for example, they constitute a wealthy mine of data for the study of human behavior. To historians they offer valuable images of the past. Archivist Tom Nesmith noted in 1982 that the burgeoning field of social history requires non-textual sources of knowledge about people who did not leave such written records as diaries and letters.<sup>1</sup>

Carefully studied, photographic records can furnish an astonishing amount of social information, especially when scholarly enquiries involve the acquisition of knowledge about creators, collectors and users of photographs. Although archival collections have been regularly accessed

by such researchers as artists, television producers and historians, their use has generally been for purposes far from intellectual.<sup>2</sup> Librarian Estelle Jussim has observed that the majority of requests for photographs have in past been made for single, unconnected pieces of visual information. Extended research projects utilizing photographs as a primary investigative tool are rare.

A number of information specialists and scholars have lamented the minimal use of the medium. Included, for instance, are a librarian (Estelle Jussim), archivists and curators (Jerry Davison, Joan Schwartz), historians (Walter Rundell, Pete Daniel, Stuart Seely Sprague), a sociologist (James Borchert), and a professor of literature (Barry O'Connell).<sup>3</sup> They suggest a variety of causes. The most obvious explanation is habit: because they are unfamiliar with nontextual media, scholars tend to gravitate towards familiar sources. In addition, many academics, along with the general public, believe that photographs simply present the material world "as it is", leaving nothing to be interpreted: "photography's resistance to interpretation partly explains why most historians write as if the medium had never been invented."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, widespread distrust of the medium is clear. Pete Daniels, himself an historian, notes that some scholars are wary because photographic images can be too easily manipulated to support

any given theory and can be readily placed into misleading contexts.<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag agrees: photographs represent slices of life which are far removed from the backgrounds in which they had meaning.

Photography reinforces a nominalist view of social reality as consisting of small units of an apparently infinite number...Through photography, the world becomes a series of unrelated, freestanding particles; and history, a set of anecdotes...It is a view of the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity, but which confers on each moment the character of a mystery. Any photograph has multiple meanings...<sup>6</sup>

She adds that a viewer readily accepts images supplied by a camera, believing that they offer knowledge of the world, "but this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks...Functioning takes places in time, and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand."<sup>7</sup> Scholars narrate and analyze, ordering the past and establishing causes and consequences. Sontag suggests that photographs, conversely, oppose ordered history, implying that reality is arbitrary and unclassifiable.<sup>8</sup>

Isolated units of data in any form can seem unrelated, of course, and open to manipulation. It is the task of the scholar to make an honest effort to understand source material in its original context. Using photographs as a

starting point, some understanding of a subject and its social background can generally be acquired.<sup>9</sup> The reconstruction of an original context is not a simple matter, however. A viewer may linger over any given photograph, but knowledge of the circumstances under which it was created is sometimes impossible to attain.<sup>10</sup> An innovative response by some academics has been to pose questions which can be answered not by individual pictures but through systematic study of a large number of images.<sup>11</sup> In an excellent article on the sophisticated uses to which non-textual media can be put, Estelle Jussim compares superficial searches for visual answers to single-question enquiries to serious research by intellectuals (research undertaken within scientific investigative structures, to understand the relationship between two or more variables). This quantitative approach is now common in the humanities and social sciences.<sup>12</sup> The essential assumption of such research is that history is not a compilation of unique events for which visual records exist, "but rather is a normative phenomenon for which the quantitative evaluation of the content of large numbers of visual records may provide evidence."<sup>13</sup> Gone are the days when research institutions could maintain random, haphazardly-collected files.<sup>14</sup> To permit generalizations about hypotheses, researchers require access to extensive, routinely gathered

bodies of information. Some specialized media repositories organized by subject areas do exist. One film collection, for instance, allows the study of cultural differences between the depiction of women in German and English movies. To be thorough, such an analysis of media as the carrier of the culture which produced it is possible only when a mass of data is available.<sup>15</sup>

Some scholars agree that unsystematic acquisition of the photographs held in research repositories has in past limited projects and biased samples.<sup>16</sup> Given an adequate supply of resource material, however, serious investigation can begin. Contrasts can be made; differences and similarities can be observed. Walter Rundell recommends beginning with a set of photographs and letting research hypotheses emerge. James Borchert also indicates that recurring subjects and motifs shape his studies. During one of his investigations, for example, the kinship patterns in a Washington community emerged only after prolonged study of photographs of the area.<sup>17</sup>

In any case, to glance at photographs is never enough. Truths underlying superficial images can be gleaned: body positioning, for instance, can reveal the nature of the relationships between people portrayed.<sup>18</sup> Captions, too, must be carefully examined. Dates and other information can be verified by close comparison with evidence in the

photographs themselves and with information from external sources. Corroborating documents in other media can include manuscripts, maps, newspaper clippings and city directories. To understand the content of both images and captions, immersion in secondary literature is also important.<sup>19</sup>

With time and thought, photographs inevitably yield much more information about subjects and creators than first meets the eye. A review of the collective and individual purposes of photographers, along with their choice and treatment of content, is both necessary in order to understand their work and socially revealing. Individual purposes can be difficult to ascertain. Access to creators is valuable but rarely possible, and sometimes even the name of a photographer cannot be obtained. In past, many repositories failed to document the provenance of photographs. In any event, many deliberate and unconscious purposes can be determined through analysis of the records themselves.

The scholarly use of photographs has broadened during the past decade. An issue of the Journal of American Culture published in 1981, for example, includes articles about the utilization of the medium by cultural historians, about the manner in which labourers were photographically depicted between 1840 and 1920, about domestic snapshots,

and about the photo-journalism of Robert Capa. In Canada, projects have ranged from studies of the pioneer output of professionals to examinations of architectural photography and the attitudes revealed in urban images.<sup>20</sup>

Photographs cannot be employed in every type of enquiry. They can describe the visual world well, but they cannot answer questions of an abstract nature. Marshall McLuhan notes that while language allows statements in general terms along with projections into the future, photographs may invite speculation but cannot express future possibilities.<sup>21</sup> As descriptions of the past, however, they are an invaluable and largely untapped lode of knowledge.

Footnotes  
Chapter Five

1 Tom Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," Archivaria no. 14 (1982): p. 8.

2 Jussim, "Research Trends," pp. 763-764.

3 James Borchert, "An Analysis of Historical Photographs: A Method and Case Study," Studies in Visual Communication 7 (1981); Pete Daniel, "Photographs as Historical Document," Arkansas Libraries 35 (1978); Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye"; Barry O'Connell, "Photograph as a Source"; Walter Rundell, "Photographs as Historical Evidence: Early Texas Oil," American Archivist 41 (1978); Joan Schwartz, "The Past in Focus: Photography and British Columbia, 1858-1914," B.C. Studies no. 52 (1982); Stuart Seely Sprague, "Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? How to Develop a Pictorial History," History News 38 (1983): 15-17.

4 O'Connell, "Photograph as a Source," pp. 1-2.

5 Daniel, "Photographs as Historical Documents," p. 3. See also Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye."

6 Sontag, On Photography, pp. 22-23.

7 Ibid.

8 O'Connell, "Photograph as a Source," p. 5; Sontag, On Photography, p. 80.

9 O'Connell, "Photograph as a Source," pp. 5-7.

10 Barthes, Camera Lucida, p. 99.

11 See Rundell, "Early Texas Oil"; Sprague, "Pictorial History."

12 Jussim, "Research Uses," p. 764.

13 Ibid., p. 765.

14 Ibid., p. 767.

15 Ibid., p. 769.

16 See Rundell, "Early Texas Oil"; Borchert, "Case Study."

- 17 See Borchert, "Case Study."  
18 See Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye."  
19 O'Connell, "Photograph as a Source," p. 6.

20 Justin Kestenbaum, "The Photograph: A New Frontier in Social History"; Richard Oestreicher, "From Artisan to Consumer: Images of Workers, 1840-1920"; Jacobs, "Grammar"; Lawrence Rudner, "The Involved Eye: Robert Capa as Photojournalist, 1936-54," Journal of American Culture 4 (1981); Phyllis Lambert, "Photographic Documentation and Buildings: Relationships Past and Present"; Stanley G. Triggs, "Alexander Henderson: Nineteenth Century Landscape Photographer," Archivaria no. 5 (1978); Lilly Koltun, City Blocks, City Spaces: Historical Photographs of Canada's Urban Growth, 1850-1900 (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1980).

- 21 McLuhan, Understanding Media, p. 201.

CHAPTER SIX  
A CRITICAL SURVEY OF  
LITERATURE BY PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVISTS

Accepted archival theory has been overlooked or disregarded by an overwhelming number of professional custodians of photographs. An examination of the literature which they have published reveals that concern for the permanent administrative value of many officially-produced photographs is often lacking. One of the causes, no doubt, is the confused treatment of visual records by leading theorists in the archival field. For example, in a manual published in 1965, T.R. Schellenberg, long acknowledged as a parent of North American archival and curatorial practice, established several basic professional principles, but unfortunately did not apply his own tenets to records in non-textual media. While noting that archival records derive meaning from their organizational origins and from the organic activities which produce them, he stated that pictorial records are exceptional:

...the provenance of pictorial records in some government agency, corporate body or person is relatively unimportant, for such records do not derive much of their

meaning from their organizational origins...Such records are ordinarily not produced for purposes of action and are often not truly organic in character. They are usually produced...to stimulate emotional response. Thus, a photographer or an artist may produce pictures for artistic pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not Schellenberg understood that pictorial records are generated by creating agencies for serious purposes, his respect in general for the crucial links between the activities of creators and the records which they create has been accepted as integral to the archival profession.

In a study of archival appraisal criteria produced for the Society of American Archivists in 1977, author Maynard Brichford also made an unfortunate distinction between visual records and documents in textual form, agreeing that general standards of appraisal should be utilized for non-textual records, yet adding that such special considerations as "quantity," "quality," and "significant compositional arrangement," must be applied to photographs.<sup>2</sup> Challenges posed by unwieldy quantities of records are hardly unique to visual records, however, and documents in any form must always be of sufficient quality to serve the purposes for which they have been created. Such issues should always be seen only as secondary concerns. To custodians of official records it is the archival criterion

of on-going administrative value which must remain paramount. Brichford's treatment of photographs, along with Schellenberg's, is apparently based upon the belief that they are generated only for purposes peripheral to the primary functions of organizations: "...for a gift or a publication...Photographs, like artifacts, have unique values for exhibition."<sup>3</sup>

In an article on aural and graphic archives, an American map archivist, Ralph Ehrenberg, refers refreshingly to the direct relationship between photographs and the activities of their parent agencies or donors. In addition, he discusses the disposal of official material when its administrative value has expired. Nevertheless, even Ehrenberg is misled by the issue of "quality", suggesting that aural and graphic archives can basically be distinguished from "traditional" records by both technical and aesthetic considerations.<sup>4</sup> Again, the distinction is misleading. A technical problem such as lack of clarity must be faced with documents in any form. Illegible printing in a report, for example, will destroy informational value. In addition, it is not impossible for records in textual form to possess artistic value (an illustrated manuscript, for instance), while the aesthetic quality of a permanently valuable photograph of safety wiring remains irrelevant.

One of the most clear-thinking American archivists,

Margaret Cross Norton, recognized as early as 1956 that, regardless of form, it is primarily the informational content of official records which must be appraised and protected. Technical considerations are secondary:

The archivist's interest in the physical qualities of records is based upon the problems which face him after the permanent records come into his custody [Emphasis mine]. Will they create problems in storage; will they require restoration in connection with their preservation; will they be in a form which will make it easy for him to locate data in the records?<sup>5</sup>

In other words, before acquiring records an archivist must consider administrative value rather than technical details.

Two Canadian archivists, Hugh Taylor and Terry Cook, have also made valuable contributions to the existing body of literature on non-textual media. In his reflections on "Documentary Art," Hugh Taylor noted that custodians have tended to plunder units of government records to obtain work solely for its artistic value.<sup>6</sup> He pointed that visual records which have been produced as official public documents (war paintings commissioned as propaganda tools, for example) should be treated as such. In other words, they must be collected for their documentary (informational) rather than their aesthetic value. It is also important to determine whether related documents in other media have an

organic relationship to the documentary art in question.<sup>7</sup>

Hugh Taylor also recommended greater awareness of a creator's viewpoint, of the circumstances of creation, and of the specific ways in which an artist uses a given medium to convey a particular message.

In 1979, Terry Cook applied the archival principle of provenance to the Public Archives of Canada and discovered some serious flaws in that institution's practice of separating records by media. Understanding that the meaning of any official record is related to the organic circumstances of its creation, Cook realized that federal government record groups were being mistreated by custodians in such internal Archival divisions as the National Photography Collection:

Some photography units make no secret that a substantial part of their acquisition activity is oriented to documenting the history of the photographic medium and that aesthetic appeal rather than historical significance is of primary importance. For example, one such unit has refused on occasion to accept photographs found on government files and recommended for transfer [by textual archivists]...<sup>8</sup>

The National Photography Collection had been bringing curatorial rather than archival criteria to bear, with a heavy emphasis upon scholarly and artistic rather than administrative values. Cook regretted that official records

were often being disregarded or being torn from their functional roots for narrow purposes without adequate documentation of their provenance, including their links to related material. In the process, the value of bodies of records was being damaged.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, few contemporary caretakers of officially produced photographs have shown any interest in the lessons of Norton, Ehrenberg, Taylor or Cook. In their writing on the appraisal of photographs, the variety of important administrative (including legal) uses of the medium have rarely been mentioned. Canadian custodians, in fact, have scarcely even addressed the issue of appraisal in general terms. One early attempt was made by Claude Minotto in 1974, in a work printed for the archival training program of the Public Archives of Canada. Minotto observed that photographs should be approached critically, and pointed out that research into their origins illuminates their documentary content. He also indicated that institutions should define collection areas, choosing subjects of wide general interest and gathering the output of noted photographers.<sup>10</sup>

In a thoughtful piece submitted to Archivaria in 1976, Peter Robertson outlined many of the ways in which photographic information can be deliberately and unintentionally distorted. He, too, demonstrated the need

for a critical eye. Robertson indicated that a custodian should learn as much as possible about a photographer, and should watch for distortion of photographic information.<sup>11</sup> In a tone which has since been echoed by many authors, Robertson also lamented the incomplete use of the medium by historians.

In an issue of Archivaria devoted to the theme of "Photographs and Archives," Richard Huyda produced an overview of the professional concerns of photographic caretakers, mentioning such problems as maintaining a balance between the adequate provision of access to original records and their damage through over-use. In a discussion of collection policies, he noted that only recently have Canadian repositories gathered material on the basis of photographer, photographic type, or in light of photographic trends and practices. The collection of records produced and preserved for on-going administrative value, however, was ignored by Huyda. His focus was upon independent photographers and upon the medium itself. In a revealing statement, he deplored the "inadequate representation of the skills and abilities of Canadian photographers because of [archivists'] prevailing pre-occupation with content."<sup>12</sup> His lack of awareness of archival theory is apparent here. The acquisition of photographs having informational value (content) in addition to evidential value (light shed on the

purposes and practices of creators) should hardly be seen as an unworthy pursuit in any archives.<sup>13</sup>

The next commentary on the issue of appraisal appeared as a response by Andrew Birrell of the National Photography Collection to Terry Cook's charges. Birrell insisted that the historical value of photographs and the aesthetic history of photography could be identical, implying that abstract photographic art yields valuable evidence about a nation's history.<sup>14</sup> Like Huyda, Birrell did not reflect any awareness of the fact that archival and manuscript repositories have customarily aided scholars in their study of societies through the collection of records possessing both informational and evidential value. For researchers interested in the history of artistic practices (in the changing concerns of artists reflected by the evidential value of their work) the art in question could be metal sculpture, needlepoint, or artistic photography. The business of archivists, however, has traditionally been those documents which also contain informational value (information about people and their environments). Abstract art does not belong in this category. Meanwhile, Birrell failed to respond to Cook's allegation that the National Photography Collection had neglected photographs of permanent administrative value. He replied only that transfers to the Collection from public record groups formed

"a very small part of the holdings of the non-textual media (divisions)."<sup>15</sup> No doubt they still do. The question, of course, is whether they should. The small percentage probably reflects the fact that many official government records are being wrongfully ignored. Perhaps a separation of archival and curatorial roles within the N.P.C. (similar to an existing division within the National Map Collection between caretakers of government records and those collecting from the private sphere) would encourage photographic archivists to devote more energy to public records and would promote an understanding of the ways in which archival concerns are distinct from those of curators.

The remaining articles about photographs written for Archivaria do not address the issue of appraisal, and seldom do they touch upon the other important professional concerns of custodians. Too many of them could have been written with equal justification by historians and other academics. Alongside Huyda's overview, for instance, is a summary by federal archivist Joan Schwartz of her outstanding thesis on those cultural attitudes of frontier British Columbia which can be discovered through photographs.<sup>16</sup> The thesis itself was undertaken as part of her studies in historical geography. Although the article is meant to set an example to researchers, social values are examined to an extent which goes beyond the archivist's customary role.

In the same issue, several other contributors focus directly upon custodial matters. Included are articles on conservation, cataloguing and the use of visual finding aids in reference rooms.<sup>17</sup> Rounding out the edition is an annotated bibliography compiled by Lilly Koltun of the Public Archives of Canada outlining the nucleus of a reference library for photographic archivists.<sup>18</sup> Listed are works under such headings as storage, conservation, description, copyright and exhibition, along with background readings dealing with the history of photography, technical concerns and artistic photography. Oddly, given both that the bibliography is addressed to archivists and that appraisal is equal in importance to description, conservation and other archival processes, there is no section assigned to appraisal, and no reading in the archival field (and, in particular, about official records) is recommended as a prelude to acquisition. Brichford's manual on appraisal, for example, which had been published earlier in 1977, should have been mentioned. Comments upon non-textual media by such acknowledged leaders as Margaret Cross Norton should also have been cited. Sadly, it is again clear that a serious charge can be legitimately levied against contemporary photographic archivists: they seem to be largely unaware of archival theory.

Contained in subsequent editions of Archivaria were an

historical note by Peter Robertson on the early use of X-Ray photography in Canada, plus, included in a volume honoring the achievements of archivist Dr. Kaye Lamb, a presentation by Peter Robertson and Glenn Wright of several illustrations of Dr. Lamb and other illustrious persons.<sup>19</sup> The presentation is entitled "Photographic Interlude." As an interlude is defined in at least one dictionary as "a lull in activity," one wonders whether photographs are yet taken seriously even by archivists as active sources of information.<sup>20</sup>

The most recent article about photography produced for Archivaria was a multi-authored examination of the output of amateurs working in this country between 1839 and 1940. (The subject has also been treated by the authors in an attractive book which was released late in 1984).<sup>21</sup> The feature reflects the efforts of the curators of the National Photography Collection to locate and obtain some of the outstanding photographs created privately during the past century. In the first article included, Andrew Birrell gives an interesting account of the background research involved, along with the steps taken in acquiring, exhibiting and publicizing the collections. The second article, written by Birrell and four other staff members, outlines several distinct periods of development within the history of Canadian amateur photography. The authors indicate that

amateurs were "among the first to take on-the-spot snapshots, the first to pursue photography as an art form, the first to experiment with colour photography, and the first to adopt the miniature camera."<sup>22</sup>

Undeniably, amateurs played an important role in the technical and aesthetic development of the medium. It is also true, or at least almost true, as editor Terry Cook states in his introduction, that "the photographic work of gifted amateurs is the purview of all archives in every region of the country."<sup>23</sup> Many repositories (some business archives, for example) are not in fact obliged to collect private material. While the majority of archival institutions do gather both official and unofficial records, however, there is some danger involved: unsure of the responsibilities inherent in their two roles, custodians risk hurling themselves much more enthusiastically into the collection of photographs from the private sphere than from the chartered institutions which sponsor them. A balance should be sought.

In spite of the fact that archivists by definition have a responsibility to their parent agencies, photographic archivists have remained relatively uninterested in official records. Although it willingly investigates amateur photography, the National Photography Collection has not yet attempted to publish an in-depth treatment of the many

administrative uses of photography by the Government of Canada.

Turning away from Archivaria, the assessment of photographs was well treated by archivist Jerry Davison in an issue of B.C. Studies devoted to "Photography and British Columbia."<sup>24</sup> Davison aptly demonstrated to historians that photographic information cannot be accepted at face value, but must be seen in light of the purposes, integrity and methods of its creators. In the same volume, which was edited by Joan Schwartz, other government archivists continued to pursue their interest in historical rather than archival issues. Joan Schwartz and Lilly Koltun interpreted photographs of a frontier town, Andrew Birrell described survey photography in B.C., and David Mattison of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia compiled a short annotated bibliography and a larger list of publications relating to the history of photography in the region. To repeat an earlier point, much of this work could have been generated by historians. Archival expertise was not required. While the contributing archivists did bring to their subjects a strong awareness of the importance of creators and circumstances of creation, they sometimes exceeded their professional obligation to make available photographic records along with a minimum amount of background information, instead acting as scholars by

using photographs as source material for the reconstruction of history and the determination of past social values. In a review of this group of articles, historian Douglas Cole applauded the archivists involved:

Archivists have been in the vanguard of historical photographic studies in Canada. Not content to await historians and others to discover the caches of images collected and preserved in their repositories, they have forged ahead with the presentation and interpretation of Canadian photography.<sup>25</sup>

Cole also cited the superb books about frontier photographers produced by Andrew Birrell and Richard Huyda.<sup>26</sup> While an historian might approve, from an archivist's point of view it is unfortunate the attention given to official holdings is very far from equal to the energy which was directed into these books and a flurry of reviews of scholarly books utilizing historical photographs (including reviews by Claude Minotto, David Mattison, Richard Huyda, Elizabeth Blight, Andrew Birrell and Andrew Roger).<sup>27</sup> Each of these reviews, printed in Archivaria, was written by an archivist responsible for official government records.

Finally, a glance at the literature on appraisal published by American photographic archivists brings further disappointment. The strong administrative value of

photography has simply not been acknowledged. Since the first article about photographic records appeared in American Archivist in 1950, the appraisal of photographs has been viewed almost entirely from a scholarly point of view. Hermine Baumhofer, an archivist for the Air Force, did at least observe that the content of official photographs is related to the functions of the agency creating them.<sup>28</sup> She believed, however, that research use of such records would be made basically by historians, sociologists, genealogists, publicists, and private manufacturers. Potential administrative applications beyond publicity were not anticipated. Instead, she described reference requests originating outside of the agency, involving images of such specific subjects as a propellor shaft, the growth of a frontier town or soil erosion in a given area.<sup>29</sup>

In 1958, archivist Joe Thomas also tackled the subject of archival photographs, suggesting that not every document created should be preserved, and wisely indicating that records management is as necessary for photographs as for textual records.<sup>30</sup> He recommended appraisal on the basis of both informational and aesthetic values. Along with Baumhofer, though, Thomas did not delve into the variety of administrative reasons for preserving photographic records.

In 1965, two articles by custodians of corporate photographs appeared in Special Libraries. Betty Hale of the

Public Relations Department of Socony Mobil Oil regarded photography as a tool for relating the history of a company as well as a useful element in advertising campaigns, annual reports and newsletters.<sup>31</sup> Irene Simpson of the History Room of Wells Fargo Bank also emphasized the public relations value of visual images, offering photographs of miners, stagecoaches and historical landscapes to commercial artists, publishers and television producers. Again, neither author was aware of the other serious administrative uses of the medium.<sup>32</sup>

Archivist Paul Vanderbilt produced a leaflet on the evaluation of photographs for the Society of American Archivists in 1979, assessing photographic records in historical and aesthetic terms: "What constitutes historical value? Rarity...striking imagery...artistic interest...historically significant individuals..."<sup>33</sup> While he did make reference to "archival photographs in the classical sense of records of official agencies with some legal status," he made the astonishing assumption that involvement with such records would be beyond the role of the archivist, recommending that official records with on-going administrative value be left to "originators" to handle.<sup>34</sup> Vanderbilt believed that creators would themselves identify and retain any photograph of permanent value, a stance which opposes a commonly held belief that an archivist is

reponsible for helping to determining on-going informational and evidential values for both the creating agency and outside researchers.

The most recent article on archival photographs to appear, published in 1983, was written by Mildred Simpson of the Atlantic Richfield Corporation.<sup>35</sup> In a now familiar pattern, she indicated that the company's photograph collection forms part of a public relations unit which produces information for both employees and shareholders. Simpson described an automated system devised for control of the collection, but did not delve into the issue of appraisal.

In conclusion, it has become clear that although administrative use of photography is growing, notably in the legal sphere, photographic archivists have continued to focus almost entirely upon the publicity value and the scholarly use of both officially and unofficially produced material. In future, in order to apply adequately the archival principle of provenance to the records created by their sponsoring bodies, they will need to show a greater interest in working both with originators and with archivists of textual records and other related media to establish thoughtful records management and archival programs.

Footnotes  
Chapter Six

- 1 Schellenberg, Management of Archives, p.324.
- 2 Brichford, Appraisal and Accessioning, pp. 3-4.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ralph E. Ehrenberg, "Aural and Graphic Archives and Manuscripts," Drexel Library Quarterly 11 (1975): pp. 55-71.
- 5 Mitchell, Norton on Archives, p. 255.
- 6 Hugh A. Taylor, "Documentary Art," pp. 417-428.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 420-426.
- 8 Cook, "Tyranny of the Medium," pp. 141-144.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Claude Minotto, Archivist and the Photograph.
- 11 Peter Robertson, "More Than Meets the Eye," Archivaria no.2 (1976): pp. 42-43.
- 12 Huyda, "Photographs and Archives," p. 6.
- 13 For definitions of informational and evidential value, see Rofes, "A Basic Glossary."
- 14 Andrew Birrell, "The Tyranny of Tradition," Archivaria no. 10 (1980).
- 15 Ibid., p. 25.
- 16 Joan M. Schwartz, "The Photographic Record of Pre-Confederation B.C.," Archivaria no. 5 (1978).
- 17 Klaus B. Hendricks, "The Preservation of Photographic Records"; David Mattison and Sandra Sherman, "Cataloguing Historical Photographs with ISBD (NBM)"; Linda Johnson, "Yukon Archives Visual Photograph Finding Aid," Archivaria no. 5 (1978).
- 18 Koltun et al., "The Photograph: An Annotated Bibliography for Archivists," Archivaria no. 5 (1978).

19 Peter Robertson, "The All-Penetrating 'X'," Archivaria no. 10 (1980); Peter Robertson and Glenn T. Wright, "Photographic Interlude," Archivaria no. 15 (1983).

20 See Sidney R. Bergquist, ed., New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language: Canadian Edition (Chicago: Consolidated Book Publishers, 1975; Willowdale, Ontario: Nelson, Foster and Scott, 1975).

21 Andre Birrell, "From Acquisition to Exhibition"; Andrew Birrell, Peter Robertson, Lilly Koltun, Andrew Rodger and Joan Schwartz, "On View: the Evolution of Amateur Photography"; Ann Thomas, "Reflections on an Exhibition," Archivaria no. 17 (1984); Lilly Koltun, Private Realms of Light: A Selective History of Amateur Photography in Canada (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1984).

22 Birrell, et al., "On View," p. 115.

23 See editor's foreword to Birrell, "From Acquisition to Exhibition," p. 106.

24 Davison, "Turning a Blind Eye."

25 Douglas Cole, review of Joan Schwartz, ed., "The Past In Focus: Photography and British Columbia," Archivaria no. 14 (1982): p. 187.

26 Andrew Birrell and Ralph Greenhill, Canadian Photography: 1839-1920 (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1979); Richard J. Huyda, Camera in the Interior, 1858: The Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1975).

27 See, for example, Clause Minotto, review of Robert F. Harney and Harold Troper, Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930 (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975; Archivaria no. 4 (1977); Richard Huyda, reviews of Richard Vroom, Old New Brunswick: A Victorian Portrait (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978); Tony Cashman, A Picture History of Alberta (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1979); Roger Hall and Gordon Dodds, A Picture History of Ontario (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1978); David Mattison, reviews of Andrew Birrell, Benjamin Bultzly: Photographs and Journal of an Expedition through British Columbia, 1871 (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1978); Carole Harmon, ed., Great Days in the Rockies: The Photographs of Byron Harmon, 1906-1934 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978); Archivaria no. 9 (1980); Elizabeth Blight, review of Richard J. Huyda, Camera In the Interior, Archivaria no. 2 (1976); Andrew Birrell,

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