

«To speak again with a full distinct voice».

Diplomatics, Archives, and Photographs

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A critical survey of key concepts of diplomatic analysis provides insights into the nature and role of photographs as documents and their preservation in the problematized space of the archive

FOREWORD: WE MAKE OUR TOOLS AND OUR TOOLS
MAKE US REVISITED

This essay is an abridged version of a much longer essay entitled *We make our tools and our tools make us: Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomatics*¹, which was written in response to Luciana Duranti's challenge to find «new uses for an old science»². It was undertaken at the invitation of the guest editors as a way to introduce readers of «Ricerche di Storia dell'arte» to the application of diplomatics to photographic archives. The original paper, offered within the «total archives» context of Canadian archival tradition, has been shortened significantly to meet journal standards; it has not been substantially revised or updated in its text to reflect the evolution of these ideas since its first appearance; however, a (selective) literature review has been appended to alert readers to recent sources and postmodern approaches to photographs and archives. The concepts explored here, as in the original article which included extensive explanatory notes, are applied to analogue photographs, and remain to be fully investigated for the realm of digital images.

In pursuing this topic initially, my understanding of diplomatics was based on Duranti's six-part series, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science*, which appeared in «Archivaria» between 1989 and 1992, and on Leonard Boyle's chapter

on *Diplomatics* in James Powell's *Medieval Studies: An Introduction*³. Critical approaches to representation from a wide range of disciplines – including art history, anthropology, cartography, communication and media studies, geography, history, philosophy, and photographic history and criticism – supplied, by example and by extrapolation, valuable insights for evaluating diplomatics as a critical method for understanding photographs within an archival context. From them, I adapted theoretical positions and extracted analytical strategies in order to assess the text-based approach of diplomatics against ideas about the fundamental nature of visual communication, basic questions of representation, and the nature of both photographic and archival practices. Readers schooled in diplomatic analysis will quickly see that I did not address the distinction between general diplomatics and special diplomatics.

My conclusion then was that diplomatics had some valuable insights to offer about the character of photographs in archives, but that it also contained serious limitations and advocated potentially misleading positions. Research and writing by others since has further undermined the narrow legalistic assumptions behind diplomatic analysis in favour of much more expansive contextual approaches to records of the past, including photographs. While my studies over the past two decades have not employed diplomatic analysis per se, the concepts explored here have

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1. Stefano Fancelli, wall of photo boxes before the move of the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz from via Giusti to Palazzo Grifoni, section «Architektur». Digital photograph, 2009 (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Photothek).

informed my subsequent work on issues of representation, descriptive standards, authorship, materiality, and memory as these pertain to photographic archives.

The initial examination of diplomatics, archives, and photographs was an intellectual exercise, more theoretical than practical in nature, more general than specific in application. As presented here, many of the concepts of diplomatics remain interesting, even thought-provoking, but in the real world of photographic archives, they are relevant only in an oblique or circumscribed way, or in carefully adapted and significantly altered form. The original article was not, by any means, a ringing endorsement for diplomatics as the seminal new tool to exploring photographic archives, as some have presumed. In retrospect, it is clear that I picked my way through the diplomatic minefield of precisely defined and rigorously employed terms, relevant primarily to textual records of a juridical character, in order to discern those concepts, if any, which resonated

with postmodern approaches to photography as a social practice.

Such postmodern approaches, drawing on a wide range of critical theory across many disciplines, were and remain far more germane to explorations of the rich contexts and deeper meanings of archival images. In many ways, the insights gathered from this exploration of diplomatics, archives, and photographs served to validate, rather than supplant, existing analytical strategies arising out of the 'crisis of representation' in the social sciences and humanities.

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INFORMATION REVOLUTIONS: DAGUERRE TO DIGITAL

In his 1992 keynote address to the XIIth International Congress on Archives in Montreal, Canada, Jean-Louis Roy, Secretary-General of the Agence de coopération culturelle et technique (France), noted: «The new information technologies have changed and will change our

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2. Sommer & Bebles, Giotto's bell tower and part of the still unfinished façade of the Florentine cathedral. Photographic albumen print, before 1871. Mount board: 23,5 x 33,7cm, photograph: 18 x 25 cm (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Photothek, inv. nr. 228238).



ways of doing things and our ways of thinking»⁴. Roy was referring to the new digital technologies of electronic recorded information, but his remarks could just as easily have been made in the mid-nineteenth century in the wake of announcements that optical-chemical processes had been developed for recording, preserving, and transmitting information in visual form. Described by Edgar Allan Poe as «the most important, and perhaps the most extraordinary triumph of modern science»⁵, and more recently claimed to have «altered the world more utterly than Marx and changed our view of man more radically than Darwin»⁶, photography has been part of a systemic shift with far-ranging cultural repercussions. It revolutionized memory⁷, produced «a massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices»⁸, and occasioned a «major readjust-

ment of the alphabet/image ratio in ordinary communication»⁹. Archives could not escape such intellectual upheavals.

Prompted by Luciana Duranti's assurances that diplomatics is «the key to an understanding of the action in which the document participates, and of the document itself»¹⁰, and encouraged by Leonard Boyle's assertion that diplomatics is «an art by which written records from any age and of any kind are made to speak again with a full distinct voice»¹¹, I embark upon this exploration of diplomatics and its application to photographs. It is not an effort to construct a model of photographic equivalents for the extrinsic and intrinsic elements of written documents. Nor do I pursue diplomatics in order to bring a 'higher scientific quality' to archival work, for science, itself, has been unmasked as a highly political and socially

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constructed process. Rather, I am drawn into this exploration of diplomatics to extract 'lessons in looking' from its systematic approach to documentary form. To be effective, however, this effort to find «new uses for an old science» must be more than an instance of (to paraphrase Terry Cook) «logocentric minds trying to cope with visual realities»¹², more than an exercise to place a seveneenth-century template on modern documents.

I proceed in the hope that the exercise to apply diplomatics to photographs has the potential to enrich commonly held understandings of: 1) the photograph as the embodiment of a series of decisions governing form and function; 2) the nature of photographic communication; and 3) the place, value, and meaning of photographs in archives. What follows is an overview of key diplomatic concepts and terms, with comments on their relevance to photographs. I do not confine my remarks to the usual objects of diplomatic analysis; that is, «original probative juridical documents» or documents created by «public persons [who] wanted to communicate authoritatively or unambiguously»; to do so would be unduly limiting¹³. Furthermore, despite obvious implications for digital images, I confine my remarks to traditional chemistry-based photographs.

DIPLOMATICS AND PHOTOGRAPHS: KEY CONCEPTS

Codified by Dom Jean Mabillon in his *De re diplomatica* published in 1681, the discipline of diplomatics originated in the need to determine the *authenticity* of documents «for the ultimate purpose of ascertaining the reality of rights or truthfulness of facts»¹⁴. Its purpose was to identify, evaluate, and communicate the «true nature» of archival documents by studying their origins, forms, and transmission, as well as the relationships between documents and the facts represented, and between documents and their creators¹⁵. To apply diplomatics – as a «means of thinking and talking about quite minute fragments of the document»¹⁶ – to photographs in modern archives requires extending the discipline's analytical reach from documents of verbal communication to documents of visual communication, from documents created by the few according to prescribed formulas for bureaucratic purposes to documents produced by an increasingly democratized process and with individualized intent. To take up Luciana Duranti's challenge to find «new uses for an old science» is, in effect, an effort to employ a positivist tool in a postmodern world.

At the heart of diplomatics is the 'written' document. This concern with 'written' documents

can be extended to photographs if 'written' refers to «the purpose and intellectual result of the action of writing»¹⁷. Photography, of course, literally means 'writing with light'. Despite the fact that «iconic languages, like photography, work differently»¹⁸, photographs can be considered 'written' in the sense that they embody authorial intentions and communicate ideas in visual form. Participants in larger processes of receiving and sending information, they are created for the attainment of effects, although we often fail to see them as prompted by an act of will to produce consequences.

The statement that «a document has an external makeup which is its physical form, an internal articulation which is its intellectual form, and a message to transmit which is its content»¹⁹ is useful in that it forces archivists to inquire into a photograph's physical form, internal articulation, purpose, and intellectual result. Too often, in archival circles, a photograph's physical form and internal articulation are presumed to be curatorial concerns, subject matter is conflated with message, issues of representation are ignored, and meaning is equated with content. But, as John Berger points out, «the simplicity with which we usually treat the experience [of looking at a photograph] is wasteful and confusing»²⁰. More to the point, Rudolf Arnheim cautions, «the comprehension of photographic pictures cannot be taken for granted»²¹.

While the notion of visual 'authority' is increasingly undermined by the manipulative possibilities of digital technology, the photograph has long been perceived as an unmediated record of reality – neutral, transparent, objective. But, «information does not exist in a vacuum. It has to be made and used. Data has no inherent function»²². While photographs are perceived to derive their authority from their realism – and accuracy, what historian of cartography J.B. Harley calls «a talisman of authority»²³ – the meaning of photographic documents is conveyed through function and context. The 'truthfulness' and authority of photographic facts originally rested upon assumptions about mechanical origins and optical precision; it is now understood that neither is a guarantee of documentary neutrality.

The photograph is neither truth nor reality, but a representation now subject to intense scrutiny for its subjectivity and 'text'. Its message, while embedded in the visual transcription of facts, emerges only in functional context. The ability of photography to use optical-chemical transformations and Renaissance linear perspective to convey outward appearances with unparalleled accuracy does not negate its ability, simultaneously, to communicate carefully crafted

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3. Hans Werner Schmidt, *Villa Sauli in Genova, the ball after the bombardements of World War II*. Photographic silver gelatine prints, inventoried on November 15, 1968. Mount board: 34 x 23,9 cm, photographs: 12,7 x 12,5 cm (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Photothek, inv. nr. 241405).

messages for bureaucratic or corporate purposes. Archivists, therefore, must recognize that photographs, no less than maps, are linked to the exercise of government, business, and private affairs, and must ask how photographs function as «silent arbiters of power», how they «express an embedded social vision», and how they operate through the «sly rhetoric of neutrality»²⁴.

With Richards' idea about «data» in mind, I take as my central premise that photographs are transformed from visual information to visual documents by their functional context of creation and circulation. Here I think of a 'document' in conceptual rather than concrete terms. More than a statement inscribed on a support, a 'document' is the product of actions and transactions (whether bureaucratic or socio-cultural, descriptive or expressive). It has functional origins, embodies authorial intention, is invested with meaning, and is capable of generating effects. Perceived in relational terms, a document is *created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message, to an audience*. At once postmodern and diplomatically inflected, such a definition

yokes the content of the photograph to its embeddedness in the relationship of will-purpose-message-audience, facilitating its return to the action in which it participated and to the documentary universe in which it circulated and generated meaning. All photographs can be studied as documents in this way.

THE EVENT-DOCUMENT RELATIONSHIP

In trying to apply the central notion of authenticity to photographs (here I do not distinguish between diplomatic authenticity, legal authenticity, and historical authenticity), it becomes clear that, while not wholly transferable to photographs, the concept is, nevertheless, useful in breaking down the *event-document relationship* into its component parts. Whereas authentic and genuine may be used interchangeably in common parlance to signify *bona fide*, Duranti explains that «a document is 'authentic' when it presents all the elements which are designed to provide it with authenticity; a document is 'genuine' when it is truly what it purports to be»; however, she goes on to

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

clarify that, in contrast to diplomatics, «history evaluates only the content of the document, so that, historically, authentic is synonymous with genuine»²⁵.

In attempting to untangle these concepts and apply them to photographs, Rudolf Arnheim's approach to the «true nature» of photographs is straightforward and clear: «in evaluating the documentary qualities of a photograph we ask three questions: Is it authentic? Is it correct? Is it true? Authenticity [...] requires that the scene has not been tampered with. Correctness [...] calls for the assurance that the picture corresponds to what the camera took [...] Truth [...] refers to the depicted scene as a statement about the facts the picture is supposed to convey»²⁶.

Consideration of the concept of authenticity forces us to examine the photograph, as both physical object and visual image, and encourages us to inquire into the relationships – between content and context, representation and reality, fact and meaning – which it embodies. In drawing attention to the event-document relationship, we are directed to those elements and circumstances that shape the meaning and agency of a photograph as a document: the technical, social, and cultural limits on the creation, composition, and 'look' of the image, as well as to the correspondence between the image and the reality it depicts, and between the image and its label.

The *authority* of the photographic document, often conferred or confirmed by the reputation of the photographer or the power of the patron or commissioning agency, is also linked to the diplomatic concern for *validity* as a measure of the degree to which physical form and internal articulation conform to the requirements of some commissioning or controlling authority. Photographs used in a variety of identification documents to confer upon or withhold from the bearer certain rights and privileges can be subjected to diplomatic analysis more readily because the form of both image and document is prescribed. In point of fact, photographs seldom function independently to enforce or enact legal, political, or social obligations. Physical form and internal articulation are seldom strictly prescribed, and validity, therefore, is not a concept directly relevant to the majority of photographs in archives. However, what is useful about the concept of validity is its insistence that we pay greater attention to the significance of physical form and internal articulation within the functional context of document creation.

Also related to the relationship between event and document is the diplomatic notion that the *moment of action* and the *moment of documentation* are 'conceptually distinct moments'. Inter-

preted as both intellectually and temporally distinct moments, this notion is particularly useful in analyzing the bureaucratic and cultural actions and transactions that lie behind the creation of photographic documents. In the nineteenth century, the need to transport cumbersome equipment and chemicals, and the requirement to prepare negatives or create artificial lighting, involved a decision to document temporally quite separate from the act of documenting. Because early emulsions could not record action, documentation of action or event, often preceded, interrupted, or followed the action of commemorative or newsworthy events. Even today, commissions and assignments for government, business, or newspapers continue to make photography a deliberate and premeditated act. The temporal slippage between action and documentation demands investigation, particularly in terms of the decisions which enabled the moment of documentation and the products that subsequently resulted from it.

DRAFT AND ORIGINAL

Closely linked to authenticity is a concern for the *original*. In diplomatics, an original is «the first complete and effective document, that is, an original must present the qualities of primitiveness, completeness and effectiveness»²⁷. It must be perfect in the diplomatic sense that it is «complete, finished, without defect, and enforceable»²⁸. In an age of fakes and forgeries, the concept of the original record was intended «to distinguish an original document from a draft and a copy for the purpose of determining the degree of authority of the document under examination»²⁹. But photographs are neither complete nor incomplete, nor enforceable. Primitiveness is not necessarily significant, and effectiveness is not a matter of authority.

How, then, do we apply the diplomatic concept of the original to photographs when, as John Berger has pointed out, «the very principle of photography is that the resulting image is not unique, but on the contrary infinitely reproducible»³⁰. Indeed, many 'original' prints may be made from a single negative and a single original print may be 'repurposed' to reach different audiences. This does not deny the existence of something considered an original, but rather recognizes that the concept of 'original' functions differently for documents involved in different kinds of information exchange.

In his influential UNESCO RAMP Study, intended to «recommend general principles and specific

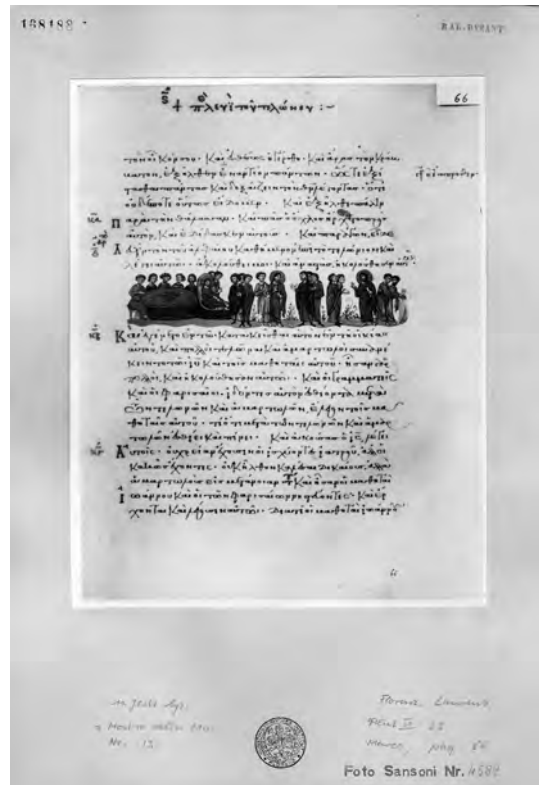
«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

selection criteria guiding the appraisal of photographs in archives», William Leary calls the original negative the «truest record of the information captured by the camera» and claims: «Because of the importance of uniqueness in appraising archival records, photo archivists emphasize that the camera negative (or colour transparency) is the record copy of any photograph». He goes on to suggest that «concentration upon the negative as the 'record copy' is an important characteristic distinguishing archives from some picture libraries and virtually all art museums»³¹. Leary's emphasis on negative over print, uniqueness over function is misguided and has led to the destruction of valuable vintage prints. In fact, both negative and print are important.

Here, diplomatics offers one of the most important lessons for photographic archives: the negative, however important as a camera-made trace of the real, is a draft, and the photographer, however famous, may be the equivalent of a scribe. Printing, cropping, burning, dodging, mounting, enlarging, and inscription may all be involved in the transformation of a negative into a photographic document. The diplomatic concepts of draft, original, copy in the form of original, imitative copy, and pseudo-original are important because they draw attention to the transformation of the photographic negative, as the «truest record» of what was in front of the lens, into the photographic document that conveys the message of its author to an audience. In this way, a single negative may be used to produce multiple prints, which, if used by different authors for different purposes, effectively constitute separate photographic documents with different, even contradictory, messages. This negation of Leary's claim underscores the importance of preserving *both* negative and print(s) so that differences between stages of document creation may be studied and compared as indicators of authorial intentions and interventions.

PERSONS CONCURRENCE IN THE FORMATION OF A DOCUMENT

Another of the key lessons offered by diplomatics lies in its insistence that we study the complexity of creative forces behind the photograph. «Persons are the central element of any document», Duranti states. «We identify, acquire, select, describe, communicate, and consult documents largely in relation to the persons they come from, are written by, directed to, concerned with, or have effect on». In distinguishing between the author of the act, the author of the document,



4. Mario Sansoni, page 66 of manuscript Plut. VI-23 from the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence. Photographic silver gelatine print, inventoried on June 15, 1966. Mount board: 23,8 x 33,9 cm, photograph: 17,9 x 22,7 cm (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Photothek, inv. nr. 168188).

and the writer of the document, diplomatics reminds us that the photographer may not be the only «person concurring in the formation of the document»³². Rather, like a papal bull or royal edict written by a scribe, a photograph «written» by a known photographer may, in diplomatic terms, be «authored» by another person, commissioning agent, or editorial body.

Focussing on the relationship between photographer and photograph, diplomatics sheds light on the transformation of the photograph-as-image into the photograph-as-document. In seeking to identify the persons intervening in the creation of the photograph and the nature of the document in relation to them, diplomatics makes visible the mediating influence of patrons, writers, editors, designers, publishers, and a host of others who determine the photographic documents we see, the meanings they communicate, and the contexts in which we confront them. In so doing, it allows us to separate the creative genius behind the image from authorial intention behind the document, and urges us to probe be-

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yond surface appearance to reveal carefully crafted, visual arguments that expressed ideological, social, or economic aspirations, or were embroiled in political controversy, scientific debate, or cultural confrontation. Ultimately, the distinction between the author and the writer of a document heightens our awareness of those instances where the photographer, whose optical-chemical transformations produced the negative and even the print, was not alone in shaping the photographic document.

FORM AND FUNCTION

Diplomatics focuses attention systematically on the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the form of a document, and postulates a clear and direct relationship between form and function. Where concern for extrinsic elements of physical form offers a welcome focus on the medium of record and can be extrapolated to the materiality and presentational form of photographs, diplomatic categorization of intrinsic elements is, not surprisingly, deeply problematical. Whereas diplomatics was developed to study documents «devised, composed and written for purposes of entering into communication» and have forms that were «designed the better to preserve the burden of the document»³³, words and images communicate in different ways and carry different burdens. A certain syntactical tension is immediately evident between a discipline based on the linearity of verbal communication and documents exhibiting the simultaneity of visual communication. Particularly ill-suited to photographs is the gathering of elements of intellectual (intrinsic) form into protocol, text, and eschatocol. These concepts are not transferable to photographs in which the constituent elements of «are grasped in one act of vision»³⁴.

Duranti suggests that «the first important contribution of diplomatics to archival work is its definitional component, which identifies the meaning and function of the constituent parts of the document, and names them in a consistent and significant way»³⁵. However, the terminological rigour of diplomatics is a product of the same rules that governed the documents written in accordance with precise, unvarying formulae upon which the discipline was founded. Such definitional precision supplies clarity to certain forms of communication, but, as Richard Bolton notes, «the intrinsic and universal properties of the photograph have never been established with complete satisfaction»³⁶. Furthermore, photographs do not share a common form or 'typical structure' with textual documents. They are not produced by the same

rules, and their structure is differently constituted and much less rigorously defined.

Despite differences in the nature of the photograph as a carrier of information, detailed structural analyses of the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of photographic form have been attempted, primarily by librarians for cataloguing purposes. However, these do not conform to diplomatic concepts and do not work as tools of appraisal. Even if alternative definitions of intrinsic elements are considered – for example, if protocol constitutes «the administrative context of the action» (Duranti); if the text comprises the action, event, and argument in visual form; and if the eschatocol presents the documentation context of the action, means of validation, and indications of responsibility – component parts do not necessarily present themselves in physically distinct and recognizable sections. While the grouping of intrinsic elements of intellectual form must be rejected as an analytical strategy for understanding photographs as documents, attention to the relationship between intellectual articulation and physical form highlights the importance of studying photographic materiality and meaning.

Diplomatics was founded upon the strict relationship of documentary form and function, but the form and function of a photograph are not linked predictably in a determinate way. Not only do photographs communicate in different ways, but also their physical form and internal articulation are not necessarily indicators of function or markers of context. «The formal arrangement of a photograph explains nothing», John Berger contends³⁷. Outward appearances are reproduced with accuracy, but neither message nor function is encoded in form. Here, at the very core of diplomatics, in the principle linking form and function, the application of diplomatics to photographs clearly fails.

EVIDENTIAL VALUE

Because «people not machines make records»³⁸, photography's «relationship with reality is as tenuous as that of any other medium»³⁹. In order to understand the evidential value of archival photographs, archivists must first abandon their propensity to equate realism and truth and to conflate content and message. Because the mechanical origins and verisimilitude of the photographic image have long veiled its ability to affect, shape, and communicate views of reality, photographs have been successfully enlisted by organizations and individuals as rhetorical devices. Here, the broader purpose of diplomatics

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| Datum | Provenienz-Nummer | Gegenstand | Klassifizierung | Künstler | Signatur | Exponent | Provenienz | Anzahl an Abbild. | Schreib. | Bemerkungen |
|-------------|-------------------|---|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| 25. III. 36 | 1607 | Römisches Theater | | | a. Borsig | Ant. Aut. | Ges. v. Borsig | 1 | Tauernstein | |
| | 1608 | Südturm des Westfassades | | | | | | | Manzoni, Dom | |
| | 1609 | Fassade neu Detail | | | | | | | Cefali, Lorenz | |
| | 1610 | 1. Ansicht von Kreuzgang | | | | | | | Palazzo, S. Giovanni degli | |
| | 1611 | 2/3 Tante Christi - Spies, von der Bronzezeit | | Andrea Pisano | | Sei. Got. | | | Florenz, Baptistenbrunnen | |
| | 1612 | 4. Trauende Maria | | Teikmanns v. V. H. Jh. | | | | | Sig. Loeser | |
| | 1613 | 5. Madonna, Halbfigur, Relief | | Tino di Camaino | | | | | | |
| | 1614 | 6. Badende Venus, Kleinbrunne | | Giov. da Bologna | | Ren. | | | | |
| | 1615 | 7. Weibl. B. Christi Büste | | Desiderio | | | | | Brigella | |
| | 1616 | 8. Giovanni, Büste | | Ant. Rosselli | | | | | | |
| | 1617 | 9. Nofte | | Michelangelo | | | | | Medienkapelle | |
| | 1618 | 10. 2 sitende Bronzefiguren von Myrtusbrunnen | | Annunziata von 1600 | | | | | Prassa Signora | |
| | 1619 | 1. Satyrnische, Marmor | | | | Bar. | | | Sig. Loeser | |
| | 1620 | 2. Fassade, Oberteil | | | | Ant. Ren. | | | S. Minerva | |
| | 1621 | 3. Christus Vorde, nach NW | | | | Got. | | | S. Maria Novella | |
| | 1622 | 4. Details der Fassade | | | | Ren. | | | Lucca, Dom | |
| | 1623 | 5. Portal mit Blendbögen | | 12. Jh. | | | | | S. Giovanni, S. Giovanni | |
| | 1624 | 6. Kriegerfiguren, Marmorfiguren | | 14. Jh. | | Sei. Ren. | | | Venedig, S. Marco | |
| | 1625 | 7. Hase u. Igel, Reliefs | | 14. Jh. | | Ant. Ren. got. | | | | |
| | 1626 | 8. Kapitell im Hofen | | Westwerk des Binn | | Sei. Ren. | | | Pal. Ducale | |
| | 1627 | 9. Portal mit 4 Nargatyden (Türken) | | | | Ant. Bar. | | | | |
| | 1628 | 10. Kuppel aus Zinnen, Geläut | | | | Ant. Bar. | | | | |
| | 1629 | 11. 3 schlafende Jüngere, Fragment eines Oberts | | Lozano Monaco (Skulpt.) | | Ant. Bar. | | | Florenz, Baptistenbrunnen | |
| | 1630 | 12. Mäcker u. Mathias | | Fra Angelico Schule | | Mal. got. | | | L. V. F. B. | |
| | 1631 | 13. Madonna u. Christophorus u. Jakobus | | Ant. des. Pompeio Andre | | Ren. | | | Hannover, Westwerk, Museum | |
| | 1632 | 14. Felschspieler | | Caravaggio | | | | | Charlitz, Mus. Orde | |
| | 1633 | 15. St. Georg, Oberteil | | Donatello | | Sei. Ren. | | | de. Roma, Sciarra | |
| | 1634 | 16. Bronzedarstellung, neu Detail | | | | | | | Florenz, Brigella | |
| | 1635 | 17. Verkündigung | | | | | | | | |
| | 1636 | 18. Judith | | | | | | | S. Croce | |
| | 1637 | 19. Anbetung des Kindes | | Boticelli | | | | | Prassa Signora | |
| | 1638 | 20. Heilender (mit einer Anbetung des Kindes?) | | Putzschale | | | | | Offizier 209 | |
| | 1639 | 21. Reiter, schrag von rückwärts gesehen | | | | | | | 1521 | |
| | | | | | | | | | 1219 | |

5. Anonymous, inventory book of the Phototbek nr. XVI, list of photographs inventoried on March 25, 1936. Digital scan, 2010 (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Phototbek).

«to determine the reliability of documentary sources»⁴⁰ runs into problems.

While the message of the photographic document may rest upon the presumed reliability of the photographic image as a transcription of material reality, the meaning of the photographic image itself and its value as an archival document do not reside solely in the veracity of the facts represented, and are certainly not apparent through a diplomatic analysis of photographic form. Rather, the meaning of a photographic document is inextricably tied to the functional context of its creation, the action in which the photograph participated, and the documentary universe in which it circulated. Evidential value can only be understood within the broader context of the process and purpose of document creation, circulation, and viewing.

If anything, diplomatics helps to discredit the standard approach to photographs which Theodore Schellenberg championed: «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 [...]. Information on the functional origins of pictorial records is also relatively unimportant»⁴¹.

But, photographs are an integral part of the means by which governments 'manufacture consent'. They convey, in a non-verbal way, the ideological values and societal beliefs that inform and animate legislated policies and official practices. As such, they constitute an important interface between institution and individual, government and civil society. To see them only as ancillary documents is to employ a typology both inappropriate to the nature of the document and ineffective as a measure of value. If, as Marshall McLuhan so forcefully argued, «the medium is the message», then the very choice of the photograph as the carrier of information for the purposes of communication demands serious consideration. By going beyond photographic realism and informational value, to think more broadly about authorship and evidential value, archivists can engage the photographic document more fully, focusing not on its content but rather on the functional context of its creation and the action(s) in which it participated.

The extension of diplomatics from records of bureaucratic transactions, created within the procedural rules of a juridical system, to records of cultural actions and transactions, created within the technological and cultural rules of production of a social system, requires closer consideration of

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

what Brien Brothman calls the «social act of authorship or origination»⁴². This influence of written and unwritten, conscious and unconscious, social rules on authorship and origination has been explored by scholars across a range of disciplines. In *The Burden of Representation*, a title reminiscent of Boyle's «the burden of the document», art historian John Tagg defines photographs as «material items produced by a certain elaborate mode of production and distributed, circulated and consumed within a given set of social relations», and points out that images are «made meaningful and understood within the very relations of their production and sited within a wider ideological complex»⁴³. In his analysis of the photographic archive of General Electric, historian David Nye suggests that «all photography must be understood *not* as a form of realism or as a hierarchy of better or worse artistic expressions, but as the concretization of social values»⁴⁴. As well, French sociologist and cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu examines how photographic practice is subject to social rules and invested with social function, and concludes that photographs are taken within «an explicit and codified system defining legitimate practice in terms of its objects, its occasions, and its modalities»⁴⁵. While this «system» affects the photograph, that system is rarely juridical as understood by diplomatists.

VISUAL LITERACY

At the same time that the rigour of diplomatic criticism is undermined by the inherent ambiguity of the photograph, diplomatics demonstrates the critical importance of visual literacy, by which I mean the ability to 'read' the message of the photograph, to comprehend its evidential value, and understand it as a document. By studying the first principles and foundational concepts of diplomatics, archivists will glean insights into the relationships between the photograph and the facts represented. Applied to the photograph, not as a more or less accurate transcription of the material world, but in terms of its relationships with the persons concurring in its formation, diplomatic concepts may help to break the presumed link between the photographic image and visual 'truth' by revealing the photograph to be a selective and mediated representation of reality – the product of a series of decisions; created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message to an audience.

Indeed, the most important lesson arising from this exercise to apply diplomatics to photographs points to the seminal importance of, and urgent

need for, visual literacy. «It is impossible», Duranti quite rightly points out «to understand the message fully without understanding the makeup and articulation which the author chose to express it»⁴⁶. Similarly, Leonard Boyle cautions that the application of diplomatics «demands a thorough competence in the language of the document» and «a knowledge of chronology [...] and of local usages [and] conventions»⁴⁷. The implication is obvious. In emphasizing the need to understand the language of the document, diplomatics makes it incumbent upon archivists and scholars to acquire a knowledge of the history of photography and photographers, of photographic technology, processes, and practices, and of pictorial styles and conventions. Such knowledge is essential to uncover what Boyle considers part of the 'central reality' of the document.

If pressed, one might be able to concoct photographic equivalent of diplomatic terms. Emulsions can be considered the photographic equivalent of inks. Blindstamps and embossing are the counterparts of mediaeval seals and the passepartout and velvet liners of cased images can be read as special signs, but visual literacy cannot be reduced to a mechanistic exercise in terminological rigour. Rather, visual literacy is essential to be able to distinguish annotations made in the execution phase from those added in the handling and management phases and to recognize that polarity can reveal the status of transmission, that process and format can point to date of creation, and that size may suggest purpose and serve as a marker of cost, labour, and prestige. What diplomatics offers is another way of asking the questions and addressing the concepts essential to an understanding of photographs in terms of relationships: event-document, author-audience, form-function, purpose-message, intention-impact. Visual literacy is essential to help answer them.

DIPLOMATICS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND ARCHIVES

Diplomatic attention to the extrinsic elements of physical form suggests, by extrapolation, caveats for digitization as the latest panacea for the age-old archival problem of balancing preservation and access. Copying photographs and providing safe and easy access to fragile originals by means of digital surrogates homogenizes the image, removes differences in presentational form, and perpetuates the notion that photographs can be transposed from format to format without losing the full meaning of the content. However, just as the import and authority of a declarative statement in pencil on a scrap of paper differs from the same words in letterpress text on newsprint

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»



6. Luigi Brillet-Buyet, Tito Lessi: The Bibliophiles. Photographic albumen print, 1883, with inscriptions, dedication and stamps by the photographer, the author of the reproduced painting, the original collector and the archivists of the Phototbek. Main mount board: 22,2 x 27,1 cm, photograph: 13,0 x 16,8 cm (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Phototbek, inv. nr. 435166).

or in calligraphy on parchment, physical form is integral to the ways in which the photograph communicates.

Presentational form frames the way in which a photograph is circulated, viewed, and made meaningful as a document.

FORMAT MATTERS: a photograph taken with a view camera and tipped into an album conveyed a very different will, purpose, and message than one recorded with a stereo camera and sold in a series of stereoviews.

SIZE MATTERS: a whole-plate daguerreotype is a powerful statement, much more so than a quarter-plate or a sixth plate, because of the cost involved and the prestige conferred by the choice of plate size.

PROCESS MATTERS: the choice of an ambrotype over a paper print implies a desire for uniqueness; the use of platinum over silver gelatin, a desire for status; the use of gold chloride toning, a desire for permanence.

COLOUR MATTERS: the brown-and-cream tones of an albumen print reveal process and period, just as the colour of a stereoview cardmount can reveal publisher and place.

ACCOMPANYING TEXT MATTERS: Letterpress titles, logos, credits, and handwritten inscriptions, both recto and verso, help construct and constrain the meaning of the photograph as a document.

All these elements of presentational form represent decisions consciously made by the persons concurring in the formation of the document. In our enthusiasm to embrace copying technology, whether analog or digital, we must proceed cautiously and thoughtfully in order to protect, preserve, and reproduce aspects of the photographic message embedded in its original physical form.

Archivists have unwittingly perpetuated visual illiteracy through institutional practices of item-level description based on a Schellenbergian conception of photographs as discrete «pictures of something»⁴⁸. Seen only in terms of their informational value, isolated from fonds or series, removed from album pages or cardboard mounts, made accessible by content keywords, archival photographs are robbed of their functional context of creation, the documentary universe in which they circulated, and their power to communicate meaning beyond content. In turn, they are

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

used by researchers to illustrate published narratives, often with minimal information and inadequate attribution, and cropped to suit book design, further reflecting and reinforcing the idea that visual materials occupy a lower level in the hierarchy of archival documentation. The micro-analytical contextualizing strategy of diplomatics, if applied creatively, may help archivists to rethink the theoretical underpinnings of photographs as documents and revise their approach to describing and providing access to photographs in their care.

In her series on diplomatics, Luciana Duranti expresses the hope that «archivists knowledgeable about special media archives will make an effort to apply diplomatic concepts to the material in their care»⁴⁹. Who are these archivists and how did they get to be knowledgeable about the special media in their care? Certainly not as a result of the logocentric thinking which frames archival education, underlies archival theorizing, and governs archival practice. Indeed, it is difficult to «respect all types of records as full participants in the archive economy»⁵⁰ if we do not recognize that we live in a visual culture and that information is communicated in different ways by different media. Diplomats is not a litmus test for justifying what does and does not count as archival. Ultimately, we must reject this moniker of 'special media', which only serves to relegate photographs and other 'non-textual' materials to the margins of archivy⁵¹.

At the same time, diplomatic concern for the internal structure of the document can help to resolve debates over the status of photographs which have transgressed and transformed the boundary between art and fact. For example, the work of the Mission Héliographique in France and the western survey photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan in the United States were initially produced as visual records and are now valued as works of art. When preserved in an art museum rather than an archive, the original purpose and message of photographs taken on such government sponsored initiatives are subordinated, if not effaced entirely. However, aesthetic expression and functional origin need not be diametrically opposed or mutually exclusive. In parsing the photograph as a document to identify author, purpose, message, and audience, and in identifying persons concurring in the formation of the document, diplomatics can shed light on the distinctions, imposed by institutional and disciplinary perspectives, on the photograph as art vis-à-vis fact and allow photographs to be appreciated, simultaneously, as works of creative expression and as purveyors of visual information.

While aesthetic considerations are a minor element of the archival (*vis-à-vis* curatorial) apprais-

al of photographs, they do merit attention for the way in which visual composition and detail contribute to 'the consequences wanted by the author'. Just as good grammar assists verbal communication and standardizes comprehension, aesthetic quality aids visual communication. If the art museum tends to remove the photograph from its functional context of creation and offer it up for, what Svetlana Alpers calls, «attentive looking»⁵², then interrogation of the photograph as document can also reverse the process, by helping to recover the functional context of document creation and reveal the documentary universe in which photographs were invested with and generated meaning.

THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF DIPLOMATICS AND ARCHIVES

Diplomatics, Duranti contends, is based upon the universal nature of documents – more accurately, some would add, certain institutional documents – but the application of diplomatics in contemporary archives can no longer assume 'the universal nature of documents', nor presuppose such a fixed and monolithic view of archives, nor, for that matter, proceed from a totalizing vision of photography. This slippage forces us to consider the politics and poetics of both diplomatics and archives, and heed their historicity. In this effort to apply diplomatics to photographs in archives, the lack of fit is important and symptomatic of an underlying theoretical disjunction which merits further investigation for «those interpretive practices which are ostensibly most remote from overtly political concerns, practices which are carried out under the aegis of a purely disinterested search for the truth or inquiry into the natures of things which appear to have no political relevance at all. This 'politics' has to do with the kind of authority the interpreter claims vis-à-vis the established political authorities of his society, on the one hand, and vis-à-vis other interpreters in his own field of study or investigation, on the other, as the basis of whatever rights he conceives himself to possess and whatever duties he feels obliged to discharge as a professional seeker of truth»⁵³.

Here, Hayden White's words resonate with Sir Hilary Jenkinson's view of «the good Archivist [...] [as] perhaps the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces»⁵⁴. They seem especially relevant in view of the arguments of those neo-Jenkinsonian «professional seekers of truth», whose positivist stance embraces archives as neutral, archivists as objective, and documents as innocent. But postmodernism has stripped

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

concepts of truth, reality, and objectivity of their paradigmatic authority.

Returning diplomatics, itself, to the action in which it first participated reminds us that it was developed to ascertain the authority and validity of documents in an era when the documentary universe consisted of isolated records which served to maintain the hegemonic ideologies, political powers, and economic might of the great families, the state, and the church. In the current era of archival abundance and visual communication, diplomatic microanalysis based on textual records created for bureaucratic purposes strikes a chord of methodological dissonance.

Similarly, the politics and poetics of archives implies those processes by which the nature and function of archives are shaped or reconstituted through discursive practices and social conventions. What archives keep and what archives do is constructed and situated in time and space. As memory institutions, archives preserve what society deems worthy to remember, and things worthy of memory are constituted by concepts of truth, authority, order, and value, grounded in assumptions about the relationship of past to present, framed by means of communication, and preserved by information technologies, including photography. Like the documents they preserve, archives have been created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message to an audience. Furthermore, they do not simply acquire and preserve records of value; rather, they must be understood to be «creating value», that is, an order of value, by putting things in their proper place, by making place(s) for them». The avowed goal of diplomatics as a positivist search for 'truth' is also fundamentally incompatible with the acknowledgement that «the history of the record does not stop at the portals of archives. Archives are participants in that history»⁵⁵.

«TO SPEAK AGAIN WITH A FULL DISTINCT VOICE»

The nature, form, and function of recorded information have changed since Dom Jean Mabillon published *De re diplomatica* in 1681. On the one hand, it would be easy to dismiss the seventeenth-century discipline of diplomatics as arcane and outmoded, and declare its terminology cumbersome and of limited relevance to modern archives. On the other, it would be dangerous to accept and apply it uncritically and without reservation. Developed for a practical reason at a given juncture in history, diplomatics was a tool fashioned to perform a particular task. However, «tools are made to accomplish our purposes, and in this sense they represent desires and inten-



7. Anonymous, card catalogue of the Photothek, drawer «Architektur-Topographie. Italien: G-K». Digital photograph, 2011 (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Photothek).

tions. We make our tools and our tools make us: by taking up particular tools we accede to desires and we manifest intentions»⁵⁶.

Photography is a tool of communication, and any effort to «find new uses for an old science» must acknowledge that 'new' media not only configure old information in new ways, but also transmit different information in previously unimaginable ways⁵⁷. Photographs, therefore, must be situated, analyzed, and understood within both the evolution of communication and the changing roles and responsibilities of archives: they constituted new forms of records creation and record-keeping, created new uses of and needs for information, and spawned new approaches to information storage and transfer.

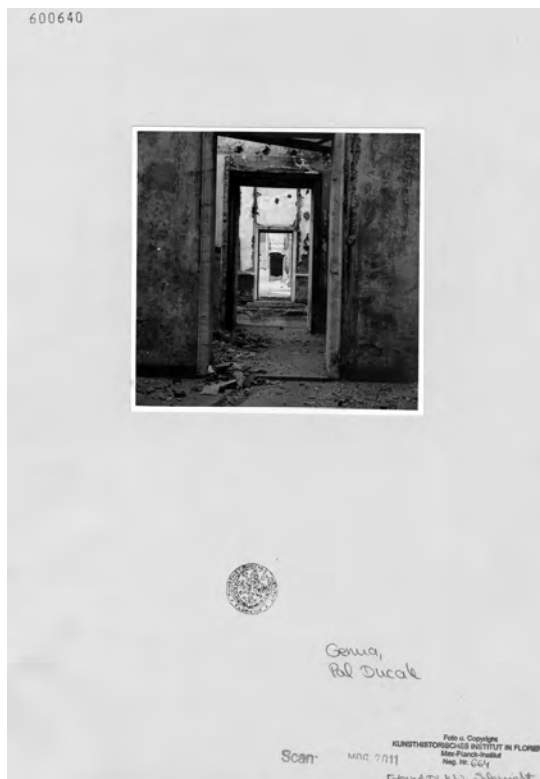
«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

Our inability to apply a rigid concept of diplomatics to photographs in archives is not surprising; it is not the right tool for the job. However, the very lack of fit suggested here points to three areas for further consideration, each with broad implications for archival institutions, theory, and practice. The first is the evolution of communication technology and its impact on records and record-keeping; the second concerns changing concepts of the nature and uses of memory; and the third involves shifting notions of authority, reality, and truth. A concern for photography runs through all three.

Diplomatics is useful, not as a mechanistic tool, not as a 'scientific' exercise, but rather as «a mind-set, an approach, a perspective, a systematic way of thinking about archival documents»⁵⁸. It poses «some of the most fundamental questions which must be asked in order to gain an understanding of archival materials»⁵⁹. It can help to shift attention away from content and focus on functional origins, authorial intentions, and presentational form. However, procedures developed for documents issued by mediaeval chanceries and exhibiting «a different form based on what they aimed to accomplish»⁶⁰ cannot be readily applied to documents which perform different functions and for which form does not follow function. Above all, diplomatics must not be employed to marginalize photographs in archives or deny their status as documents.

While «diplomatics provides a rigorous and precise means of examining the elemental archival unit, and thereby serves to sharpen both our individual perceptions and the other tools in the kit of the compleat [...] archivist», other contextualizing strategies must be used «to corroborate the discoveries of diplomatics and to address questions left unanswered by diplomatics»⁶¹. Interrogation of the photograph as a document requires an understanding of all elements of meaning-making and their transformations over space and time. As one avenue among many, diplomatics may assist archivists to understand what John Berger means when he calls the photograph «a message about the event it records»⁶² and what Svetlana Alpers suggests when she urges us to look at photographs, «not as pictures illustrating history [...], but rather pictures themselves constituting a social fact»⁶³.

If extended from bureaucratic transactions in juridical systems to cultural transactions in social systems; if adopted more as a conceptual framework than as a mechanistic tool; if applied flexibly and by analogy, rather than rigidly and directly; if assessed, adapted, and applied alongside other contextualizing strategies, then diplomatics can contribute insights to our understanding of



8. Hans Werner Schmidt, *Palazzo Ducale in Genova after the bombardements of World War II*. Photographic silver gelatine print, made before 1968. Mount board: 24 x 33,9 cm, photograph: 12,7 x 12,3 cm (photo: Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Photothek, inv. nr. 600640).

photographs – their nature as images, the action(s) in which they participated, and the meanings invested in and generated by them as documents.

In the clash between positivism and postmodernism at the heart of this exercise, the historicity and specificity of diplomatics, archives, and photographs emerge as seminal, intersecting concerns. To take up Luciana Duranti's challenge to find «new uses for an old science», let us then be open to the concepts of diplomatics, explore and adapt them – as may be useful and relevant – to new forms and functions of documents in an effort to probe meanings beyond content. Let us not embrace diplomatics as an infallible orthodoxy, but rather make use of its concepts cautiously and creatively better to understand the nature of photographs as documents. Above all, taking inspiration from Leonard Boyle's articulation of the goal of diplomatics, and using whatever analytical tools are available to us, let us strive to allow photographs «to speak again with a full distinct voice».

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

AFTERWORD: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION /
(SELECTIVE) LITERATURE REVIEW

In true postmodern form, I must state the ground I stand on: my perspective on photographs, archives, and diplomatics reflects my Canadian experience as an archivist, my North American perspective as a scholar, and my familiarity primarily with English-language scholarship. The original essay was informed by writing on photographs, archives, and the crisis of representation, notably by the work of James Clifford, George Marcus, Michael Fischer and Elizabeth Edwards on ethnographic representation⁶⁴; Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, and Susan Pearce on museum representation⁶⁵; and Pierre Nora, Raphael Samuel, Jacques Le Goff, and Patrick Hutton on memory⁶⁶. The postmodern writing of the late J.B. Harley in the history of cartography was especially illuminating for ideas that could be transposed from maps to photographs as two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional space⁶⁷. Postmodern approaches to the dynamics and malleability of photographic meaning were gleaned from the early work of John Tagg, Richard Bolton, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau⁶⁸.

Since the publication of the original essay, I have built upon concepts explored in my initial attempt to apply diplomatics to photographs. Yet, at each stage in the evolution of my approach to photographic archives, my ideas have drawn upon, benefitted from, and been part of the growing body of postmodern scholarship that has radically changed the terrain upon which studies of archives and photographs are carried out. At the same time, in my essays in archival theory, photographic history, and historical geography, I have engaged continually in the kind of 'cross-border intellectual shopping' evident in my examination of diplomatics and photographs. This interdisciplinarity, mirroring the materials and uses of archives, is demonstrated and advocated explicitly in a review essay in which I urged archivists to be «learners and borrowers – from other forms of representation, from other disciplines, and from other professions [...], prepared not simply to adopt, but to study, evaluate, and adapt – ideas, methods, strategies, and models from outside the world of archives»⁶⁹.

DIPLOMATICS: Duranti's six-part series on diplomatics in «Archivaria», sparked a flurry of responses by Canadian and American archivists on the application of diplomatics to modern records and North American archives. However, even before the first installment of Duranti's series, Don Skemer questioned the relevance of diplomatics to the needs of North American

archivists «hard-pressed to cope with the ever-increasing volume of contemporary records»⁷⁰. Subsequent curiosity did not breed unequivocal enthusiasm. As Susan Storch pointed out, «Identifying the extrinsic and intrinsic elements of documentary form in modern documents is not as simple or obvious a process as Duranti wants us to believe». Noting the slippage in documentary structure between modern and mediaeval records, and the lack of standardization of documentary form, Storch concluded that diplomatics «should not be applied to modern North American collections», but conceded that «general diplomatics provides a number of important concepts which should be studied by archivists for their contribution to archival practice and theory, and can contribute to the ways in which archivists examine records»⁷¹.

Essays on diplomatics and photographs by Nancy Bartlett and Elisabeth Parinet appeared in a *Special Section on Diplomats and Modern Records* in the Fall 1996 issue of «The American Archivist»⁷². Paralleling and complementing my own approach, they too examined «the basic building blocks of diplomatics as they might pertain to a more nuanced analysis of visual images». Subsequent explorations of diplomatics by North American archivists, notably by Heather MacNeil, have focused primarily on its use for establishing the integrity of electronic records⁷³. That diplomatics has received relatively scant attention or acceptance in North American archival circles is a realistic reflection of the age, nature, plurality, provenancial complexity, and sheer abundance of modern archives, and a concrete recognition of the fact that the overwhelming majority of records from private and personal sources, and in 'non-textual' media of record, simply do not conform to the juridical assumptions underpinning diplomatics.

ARCHIVES: Canadian archivists and «Archivaria», the journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, have been at the forefront in embracing postmodern thinking and exploring its relevance for archives. For pioneering postmodern writing on archival issues by key Canadian archivists, especially Terry Cook⁷⁴, and Brien Brothman⁷⁵, as well as by such influential international archivists as Eric Ketelaar (Netherlands), Sue McKemmish (Australia), and, especially, Verne Harris (South Africa)⁷⁶, to mention but three, see the comprehensive listing in Cook⁷⁷ and Schwartz and Cook⁷⁸. Since these early studies, there has been an explosion of such writing in archival journals and books of collected essays encouraging archivists to investigate their power over the record and their role, both historical and contemporary, in the construction and mediation

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

of social memory. Perhaps the best entrée to this burgeoning literature on postmodern archiving, as theorized and practised by archivists, is the writing of Terry Cook, whose many and influential essays are a tour de force of analysis, synthesis, and criticism.

In the broader arena of historical scholarship beyond what archivists are writing from the inside, 'archive' now has considerable academic cachet, and interrogation of 'the archive' has become a focus, one might even say an obsession, in the humanities and social sciences over the last two decades. In addition to my own discussion of some of these perspectives on 'the archive' from outside the profession⁷⁹, Cook has pointed out that historians and others writing on 'the archive' (singular) have marginalized, if not ignored entirely, the role of the archivist working in 'archives' (plural): «despite the impressive external theorizing on the 'archive' in recent historical writing, what is still missing is the voice of the archivist, who, after all, is the principal actor in defining, choosing, and constructing the archive that remains, and then in representing and presenting that surviving archival trace to researchers»⁸⁰. I interpret this disciplinary disjunction as an academic/archival divide which separates professional archivists and their literature from theorizing and writing by historians and others who take a metaphorical and somewhat fluid definition of «the archive»⁸¹.

Nevertheless, the metaphorical «archive» as a system enabling and controlling the production of knowledge, analyzed so innovatively and influentially by Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida⁸², and explored in the work of Thomas Richards, Carolyn Steedman, Antoinette Burton⁸³, and others, carries valuable insights for managing and interrogating photographic archives. Not surprisingly, therefore, archivists have increasingly abandoned their rhetoric of neutrality to explore the 'power' of archives and records over identity and memory. Edited collections by Cook and Schwartz focus directly on the power of archives and archivists over the record⁸⁴. Issues of power are central to work by Rand Jimerson and Verne Harris on the role of archives in social justice⁸⁵; by Richard Cox and David Wallace on archives and the public good⁸⁶; by Margaret Procter, Michael Cook, and Caroline Williams on political pressure and the archival record⁸⁷; and by Fran Blouin and Bill Rosenberg on documentation and institutions of social memory⁸⁸. This literature, while exploring issues of power more generally, has clear implications for photographic archives and the role of photographs in constructing, legitimizing, and maintaining hegemonic social structures and political authority.

Archivists have also embarked upon scholarly analysis of the history of archives—as records, institutions, profession, ideas, and social activity—in a series of International Conferences on the History of Records and Archives (I-CHORA) held first in Toronto (2003), and subsequently in Amsterdam (2005), Boston (2007), Perth, Australia (2008), London (2010), and Austin (2012). Papers presented at I-CHORA have revealed archives to be historically and culturally contingent, reflecting the power and authority, biases and prejudices, technologies and ideologies of their contemporary societies. They build on Cook's critique of «archival science» as term and concept⁸⁹, and Tom Nesmith's discussion of how the broader «contextual turn» in archives—which he defines as a move toward deepening appreciation of the role of contextual knowledge about records in archival work—«has taken some important, radically new directions in archival thinking, influenced by postmodern insights»⁹⁰.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Increasingly over the past two decades and across a range of disciplines, photography has been the subject of conferences, journal issues, edited collections, and books, devoted to postmodern and postcolonial interrogation of photographic archives. The broader literature is far too extensive to survey here; however, the launch of the new journals «Photographies» and «Photography and Culture»; the proliferation of conferences on photographic meaning, effect, and affect; and the avalanche of essays on photography in the journals of otherwise visually arid disciplines speaks to the heightened interest in and use of photographic archives. «Picturing Places», edited by Schwartz and Ryan, offers insights into «photography and the geographical imagination»; «Photographs Objects Histories», edited by Edwards and Hart, remains the seminal work on «the materiality of images»⁹¹.

Philosophical and theoretical ruminations on both 'the photograph' and 'the archive' by Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Vilém Flusser, Eduardo Cadava⁹², and, most recently, Jacques Derrida as well as John Tagg, Geoffrey Batchen, and Robin Kelsey⁹³, are best balanced, and occasionally mitigated, by insights based upon the empirical understandings and practical experiences of those responsible for the care of photographic archives. For an overview of the discourse on photographic archives that has emerged over the past three decades, see Tim Schlak's essay in «Archival Science»⁹⁴. Linking ideas from the archival literature with modern conservation and museological theory and practice, Ala Rekrut has advocated «material literacy» for archivists⁹⁵. She notes that, in its articulation

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

of the extrinsic elements of documentary form, diplomatics recognizes and values the tangible qualities of records. Postmodern critiques by Rodney Carter, Joanna Sassoon, Beth Kaplan, Jeffrey Mifflin, among others, address both analogue photographs and digital images from a distinctly archival point of view⁹⁶.

Perhaps reflecting the importance of photography in a relatively young country, little older than the medium of photography itself, Canadian archivists have championed the value of visual materials. Hugh Taylor, considered by Cook and Dodds «one of the most important thinkers in the English-speaking world of archives»⁹⁷, was among the first to embrace Marshall McLuhan's dictum «the medium is the message»⁹⁸ and throughout his writings over three decades encouraged a greater appreciation of media records and highlighted the need for visual literacy. Two generations of photo archivists at Library and Archives Canada, formerly the National Archives of Canada, have published extensively on the history of photography and the management of photographic archives, in particular in «Archivaria», which has devoted two special issues to 'photographs and archives'⁹⁹.

Nevertheless, the professional literature also demonstrates that photographic archives are still at risk where postmodern thinking about photographs has yet to garner attention of working-level

el archivists. The now discredited pronouncements by Schellenberg and Leary about the place of photographs in archives still hold sway, for example in a 2005 essay by Normand Charbonneau on «The Selection of Photographs»¹⁰⁰ or in a recently released corporate video on Library and Archives Canada's website, which declares, «When you convert documents, films, paintings, photographs, music into digital form, they are no longer the prisoner of their original format»¹⁰¹.

At this time when political resource allocators, archival policy-makers, and collection managers take solace in digitization as the cure-all for preservation and access ills, the Florence Declaration¹⁰² and a seminal volume edited by Costanza Caraffa¹⁰³ extend current scholarly thinking on archives and on photographs to their intersection in «photographic archives and the photographic memory of art history». This issue of «Ricerche di Storia dell'arte» promises to stretch theorizing about photographic archives even further by bringing to new audiences, both geographical and disciplinary, key concepts capable of generating fresh ideas and debates.

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NOTE

I am grateful to Luciana Duranti for first introducing me to diplomatics; to Terry Cook and Nancy Bartlett, my fellow adventurers in exploring postmodern archival theory; and to Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena for encouraging me to republish this essay in abridged form.

¹ Schwartz 1995.

² Duranti I-VI.

³ Boyle 1976.

⁴ Roy 1992, p. 8.

⁵ Poe 1840/1980, p. 37.

⁶ Wood 1989, p. 1.

⁷ Le Goff 1992, p. 89; first edition in Italian 1977.

⁸ Crary 1990, p. 3.

⁹ Lanham 1993, p. 125.

¹⁰ Duranti V, p. 21.

¹¹ Boyle 1976, p. 78.

¹² Cook 1994, p. 301.

¹³ Boyle 1976, pp. 74, 76.

¹⁴ Duranti I, p. 15.

¹⁵ Duranti I, p. 17.

¹⁶ Turner 1990, p. 99.

¹⁷ Duranti I, p. 15.

¹⁸ Fiske 1990, p. 109.

¹⁹ Duranti I, p. 15.

²⁰ Berger 1980, p. 294.

²¹ Arnheim 1969, p. 30.

²² Richards 1993, p. 73.

²³ Harley 1988, p. 300.

²⁴ Harley 1992.

²⁵ Duranti I, pp. 17-18.

²⁶ Arnheim 1974, p. 157.

²⁷ Duranti VI, p. 9.

²⁸ Duranti I, p. 19.

²⁹ Duranti I, p. 18.

³⁰ Berger 1980, p. 291.

³¹ Leary 1985, p. 46.

³² Duranti III, pp. 5ff.

³³ Boyle 1976, p. 77.

³⁴ Langer 1942, p. 93, quoted in Lanham 1993, p. 77.

³⁵ Duranti VI, pp. 7-8.

³⁶ Bolton 1989, p. x.

³⁷ Berger 1980, p. 293.

³⁸ Craig 1992, p. 105.

³⁹ Ritchin 1990, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Duranti I, p. 22.

⁴¹ Schellenberg 1965, p. 325.

⁴² Brothman 1991, p. 96.

⁴³ Tagg 1988, p. 188.

⁴⁴ Nye 1985, p. 158.

⁴⁵ Bourdieu 1990, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Duranti I, p. 15.

«To speak again with a full distinct voice»

- ⁴⁷ Boyle 1976, p. 78.
⁴⁸ Schellenberg 1965, p. 325.
⁴⁹ Duranti III, p. 19, note 15.
⁵⁰ Craig 1992, p. 9.
⁵¹ See Schwartz 2002.
⁵² Alpers 1991, p. 27.
⁵³ White 1987, p. 58.
⁵⁴ Quoted in Cook 1997, p. 23.
⁵⁵ Brothman 1991, pp. 82, 91.
⁵⁶ Mitchell (Will. J.) 1992, p. 59.
⁵⁷ See Gitelman/Pingree 2003.
⁵⁸ Duranti V, p. 21.
⁵⁹ Duranti VI, p. 18.
⁶⁰ Duranti IV, p. 20.
⁶¹ Turner 1990, p. 101.
⁶² Berger 1980, p. 292.
⁶³ Alpers 1991, p. 29.
⁶⁴ Clifford/Marcus 1986; Marcus/Fischer 1986; Edwards 2001.
⁶⁵ Karp/Lavine 1991; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Pearce 1994.
⁶⁶ Nora 1984-92; Samuel 1994, especially *The Eye of History*, pp. 315-336; *The Discovery of Old Photographs*, pp. 337-349; *Dreamscapes*, pp. 350-363; *Scopophilia*, pp. 364-377; Le Goff 1977; Le Goff 1992; Hutton 1993.
⁶⁷ Harley 1988; Harley 1992, also collected in Harley 2001.
⁶⁸ Tagg 1988; Bolton 1989; Solomon-Godeau 1991.
⁶⁹ Schwartz 2004.
⁷⁰ Skemer 1989.
⁷¹ Storch 1998.
⁷² Bartlett 1996; Parinet 1996.
⁷³ MacNeil 2000; MacNeil 2001; MacNeil 2004.
⁷⁴ See especially Cook 1994; Cook 2001a; Cook 2001b.
⁷⁵ Brothman 1993; Brothman 2001.
⁷⁶ Ketelaar 2001; McKemmish 1994; McKemmish 2005; Harris 1997; Harris 2001; Harris 2007.
⁷⁷ Cook 2001b, note 14.
⁷⁸ Schwartz/Cook 2002, note 17.
⁷⁹ Schwartz 2006.
⁸⁰ Cook 2009, p. 513.
⁸¹ Schwartz 2002; Schwartz 2008.
⁸² Foucault 1970 (French original edition, 1966); Foucault 1972 (French original edition, 1969); Derrida 1996 (French original edition, 1995).
⁸³ Richards 1993; Steedman 1998; Steedman 2001a; Steedman 2001b; Burton 2006.
⁸⁴ Cook/Schwartz 2002; Schwartz/Cook 2002; Schwartz 2006; Cook 2011.
⁸⁵ Jimerson 2009; Harris 2007.
⁸⁶ Cox/Wallace 2002.
⁸⁷ Procter/Cook/Williams 2006.
⁸⁸ Blouin/Rosenberg 2006.
⁸⁹ Cook 2001a.
⁹⁰ Nesmith 2005.
⁹¹ Schwartz/Ryan 2003; Edwards/Hart 2004a.
⁹² Benjamin 1988 (German original edition 1936, first English edition 1968); Sontag 1977; Barthes 1981 (French original edition 1980); Flusser 2000 (German original edition 1983); Cadava 1997.
⁹³ Derrida 2010; Tagg 2009; Batchen 1997b; Batchen 2001; Batchen 2004; Batchen 2009; Kelsey 2007; Kelsey/Stimson 2008.
⁹⁴ Schlak 2008.
⁹⁵ Rekrut 2005.
⁹⁶ Carter 2006; Carter 2010; Sassoon 2004; Kaplan/Mifflin 1996.
⁹⁷ Cook/Dodds 2003.
⁹⁸ Taylor 1978.
⁹⁹ See Huyda 1977-78; Stacey 2008.
¹⁰⁰ Charbonneau 2005.
¹⁰¹ <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/librarian-and-archivist/multimedia/Pages/corporate-video.aspx>.
¹⁰² Florence Declaration 2009.
¹⁰³ Caraffa 2011a.

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