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Review Essay

Elisabeth Kaplan, Editor

**Negotiating the Visual Turn:
New Perspectives on Images and Archives**

Joan M. Schwartz

Visual Methodologies

By Gillian Rose. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2001. x, 229 pp. Illustrations. Index. Cloth. \$105.00. ISBN 0-7619-6664-1. Paper. \$33.95. ISBN 0-7619-6665-X

Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence

By Peter Burke. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001. 224 pp. Illustrations. Cloth. \$35.00. ISBN 0-8014-3968-X. [Originally published in Great Britain in 2001 by Reaktion Books, London]

The New Nature of Maps

By J.B. Harley. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Edited by Paul Laxton. xv, 331 pp. Illustrations. Cloth. \$45.00. ISBN 0-8018-6566-2. Paper. \$19.95. ISBN 0-8018-7090-9.

Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums

By Elizabeth Edwards. New York: Berg Publishers, 2001. xiii, 270 pp. Illustrations. Cloth. \$75.00. ISBN 1-85973-492-8. Paper. \$25.00. ISBN 1-85973-497-9.

Introduction: Visual Culture and the Visual Turn

Despite wide disagreements over the effects and nature of “visual culture,” it is not often noted that what makes twentieth-century culture so different from that of past centuries is not only the quantity of images, or their ostensible effects on literacy, but the kind of images we create and consume.¹

¹ James Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

In this statement, James Elkins presents archivists with several sound reasons to reconsider the way we treat visual images, both in theory and in practice. His recognition that culture has become increasingly visual, with attendant effects on literacy, carries with it a concomitant acknowledgement that the nature of communication, and by extension and default, the nature of recorded information, the processes of record creation, and the practices of recordkeeping are very different from that of past centuries. Since the invention of lithography at the close of the eighteenth century and the advent of photography in the mid-nineteenth century, the Western world has, as Elkins points out, witnessed not only a dramatic increase in the quantity of images in circulation, but also a profound change in the kind of images created and consumed. The Iconic Revolution that began with the inventions of Alois Sennefelder, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, and William Henry Fox Talbot has been extended, accelerated, and compounded by the advent of photomechanical reproduction, film, television, video, and the Internet—to say nothing of various forms of information gathering, manipulation, transmission, and storage by satellite, medical, and geographical imaging systems.

As I have argued elsewhere, specifically with respect to photography, new information technologies and imaging systems have had profound implications for the way we create, record, manipulate, circulate, store, interpret, remember, and use information.² In turn, archives are inevitably and inextricably implicated in such changes to the technological, intellectual, and social production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge. Yet the shifting balance between verbal/textual and visual communication—what Richard Lanham, writing in *The Electronic Word*, has called “a major readjustment of the alphabet/image ratio in ordinary

² Joan M. Schwartz, “‘We make our tools and our tools make us’: Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats,” *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995): 40-74.

communication”³—has largely been ignored. Indeed, the impact of the “Iconic Revolution” of the nineteenth century has received scant attention from archivists, while the “Information Revolution” of the late-twentieth century has sent ripples of panic throughout the profession. Even the “nitrate can’t wait” scare of the late 1970s pales in comparison to concern for the preservation of electronic records. And yet, nitrate, diacetate, triacetate, and colour materials, like electronic images (including digital images) are not only voluminous and highly fugitive, but also demanding of tailored visual, rather than hand-me-down textual approaches.

Existing archival theory and practice do not adequately address the nature and value of visual materials. If key statements about photographs in such foundational archival manuals as Theodore R. Schellenberg’s *The Management of Archives* or William H. Leary’s *The Archival Appraisal of Photographs: A Ramp Study with Guidelines* can be taken as a barometer of the profession’s broader understanding of visual materials of all kinds, one must question how much of current archival practice is ill-informed and benignly mistaken at best, erroneous and dangerously misleading at worst. The absence of required courses on visual thinking, visual communication, and visual representation in American and Canadian guidelines for formal post-graduate education and informal on-the-job training only reinforces this concern. How much longer can we reasonably expect to presume that principles and procedures based on textual models and bibliographic approaches can be applied with impunity to visual materials?⁴ Where can we seek the theoretical blocks and practical mortar for building a new understanding of the role of visual materials in society as well as the place of visual materials in archives?

³ Richard A. Lanham, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 125.

⁴ Joan M. Schwartz, “Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic ‘Othering,’ and the Margins of Archivy,” *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002): 142-71.

Four books, published in 2001, should dispel any lingering doubts as to why archives acquire and preserve visual materials. A close reading of them should also clarify the place that photographs, works of art, moving images, maps, and indeed sound recordings should be properly accorded in archival theory, practice, and research. Because the archival literature itself—some of it outdated, some plain wrong-headed—provides little direction for understanding visual materials in archival terms, it is necessary to read outside the field, to extrapolate from the methodological approaches of other disciplines and allied professions, to adapt approaches from one medium to another, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the nature and value of visual materials as archival, and in turn to improve archival approaches to appraisal, acquisition, description, and access. I am not suggesting that such approaches be user-driven; rather, I am advocating greater sensitivity to evolving notions of context and evidence that are attracting increasing attention and attaining greater sophistication in scholarly arenas that intersect, however obliquely, with the world of archives.

It is significant, then, that these four books project authorial voices with differing conceptions of, and relations to, archives. Gillian Rose is a cultural and feminist geographer of note. Peter Burke is a noted historian of European cultural history (1450-1750) and the history of historical thought. The late Brian Harley was an influential historian of cartography, who played a leading role in promoting the critical re-assessment of mapping practices. Elizabeth Edwards is an internationally renowned ethnohistorian, whose curatorial and academic contributions stem primarily from the field of visual anthropology. Perhaps not coincidentally, these authors are all British by training, although their careers and writings have attracted a following in international and interdisciplinary circles.

Following the visual turn in the humanities and social sciences, all four authors write from

a conviction that visual images carry important social consequences and that the facts they transmit in visual form must be understood in social space and real time. What links their scholarly approaches is a common belief that context is seminal for understanding the ways in which visual materials function as documents and participate in processes of meaning-making. This focus on context, increasingly urgent in postmodern scholarship, not only connects the concerns of users of archives to the aims of keepers of archives, but also shows that archival description cannot proceed from surface content alone. Archivists must go beyond the “of-ness” of a photograph or a watercolour or a map to search out the deeper meanings, rhetorical flourishes, and ideological nuances embedded in and generated by them. Our job is to seek their intended function or role—be it personal, social, political, or economic—as a means of communicating a message across time and/or space, and then to consider how to preserve and describe them in a way that respects, reveals, and retains their impact on human relations, power, and knowledge.

As archivists, our concern for visual images must not be limited to those within our holdings, for archivists not only acquire and preserve visual images; we also produce, manipulate, and disseminate them in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. We copy them in ways that do not always respect their integrity as records. We create catalogue cards and other reference tools that reproduce them in standard sizes, change colours, mask physical attributes, obscure their documentary context(s) and evidential linkages. We disassemble albums, mat watercolors, and lift photographs from pages, reducing visual narratives to individual images. We ignore the significance of intertextuality when we remove and flatten maps originally folded and bound into reports. We display visual images in exhibitions and incorporate them into official and popular publications, websites, PowerPoint presentations, and reports seeking resource allocations or

supporting corporate accountability, often with too little thought as to what such images convey about our assumptions and with too little consideration for how we frame their meaning for viewers by the very way(s) in which we situate them in physical or intellectual space.

Postmodern sensitivity to the power of visual representation now means that archivists can no longer naïvely collect, use, and create visual images as if we were neutral, detached observers.

Nor can we ignore such theory when new ideas about the world we live in, the records we preserve, and the relationship between the two have shaken the foundational assumptions upon which archives and the archival profession have long been based.

Reading Visual Images: Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*

Because our need to understand the many ways in which images are made meaningful is predicated on the fact that archivists are not only *keepers* of visual images, but also *creators* of visual images, Gillian Rose's *Visual Methodologies* should be of interest not only to everyone in the Visual Materials section of the Society of American Archivists, but also to archival educators, reference archivists, and anyone responsible for description, public programs, and on-line access. In this book, subtitled *An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, Rose seeks to provide to readers, primarily students of visual culture, a "critical visual methodology," defining "critical" to mean "an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations." Her emphasis is on "meaning and significance," and she examines "why it is important to consider visual images, why it is important to be critical about visual images, and why it is important to reflect on that critique."

Visual Methodologies is divided into eight chapters, each dealing with a specific method, and while individual chapters examine a narrow range of visual sources—"paintings,

photographs, films, televised soaps and adverts”—the methods Rose discusses relate to all forms of visual images and can equally be applied to other media and genres, including those of direct archival concern, such as architectural records, maps and plans, video, and websites. Following an engaging and substantial introduction, separate chapters treat compositional interpretation, content analysis, semiology, and psychoanalysis. These are followed by two chapters on different aspects of discourse analysis; the final chapter treats other methods as well as the mixing of methods.

Of particular relevance to archivists are the two chapters on discourse analysis: the first focuses specifically on text, intertextuality, and context; the second examines institutional practices. Rose clarifies the difference between the two forms of discourse analysis by citing two approaches to “the archive:” the former treats them as transparent windows, concentrating instead on the source materials; the latter views them in relation to issues of power and knowledge, emphasizing the ways in which they not simply preserve, but in fact create “orders of value” as Brien Brothman has clearly articulated.⁵ In introducing the notion that institutions are inextricably tied to the workings of power, Rose cites the work of both Allan Sekula and John Tagg on photographic archives, pointing out that this type of discourse analysis emphasizes sites of production and reception and what Rose calls “social modality,” by which she refers to “the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used.” Rose cites Sekula’s claim that “archives are not neutral,” but rather “embody the power inherent in accumulation, collection and hoarding, as well as that power inherent in the command of the lexicon and rules of a language,” a notion recently explored by the authors in two, double issues of *Archival Science* devoted to the theme of

⁵ Brien Brothman, “Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice,” *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 78-100.

“Archives, Records and Power.”⁶ It is both easy and useful to extrapolate from Rose’s exploration of the “apparatus” and “technology” of the art gallery and museum to the architecture, spatial, and bureaucratic and intellectual practices by which archives frame the use and meaning of the materials in their safekeeping.

While her references are extensive, Rose’s selection of “useful reading on various visual media” is thin, particularly for photographs and maps; however, this may well reflect her intention to produce a manageable overview of visual methodologies rather than an exhaustive compendium of analytical approaches. She also cautions that *Visual Methodologies* touches upon both theoretical and methodological issues, each with its own, often esoteric, vocabulary. Not everyone is familiar with the notion of “preferred readings” or “discursive formations” or “scopic regimes;” and, I suspect, few archivists traffic in the jargon of cultural studies. Even common words, such as “audience,” “gaze,” “narrative,” and “surveillance,” are now freighted with meaning beyond common parlance. To flag important ideas and to make obscure or complex concepts more accessible, key words are highlighted in bold and noted in the margin the first time they are discussed; they are also included in a “list of key terms” with references to the place where each word or phrase is explained. This should prove particularly useful for harried archivists with little time and less patience for such seemingly irrelevant postmodern, theoretical mumbo-jumbo. *Visual Methodologies* is a valuable primer for gaining a deeper appreciation and fuller understanding of visual images. It offers archivists an opportunity to add new interpretive skills to their professional toolkit, skills which can help in appraisal and acquisition decisions, guide selection and arrangement practice, inform description activities, and ultimately increase the use, enjoyment, and understanding of the materials in our care.

⁶ See “Archives, Records, and Power (I & II),” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), guest edited, with introductory essays, by Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook.

Back to basics: Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing*

At the outset, Peter Burke explains that he wrote *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* “both to encourage the use of ... evidence [from images] and to warn potential users of some of the possible pitfalls.” He weaves a middle ground between “positivists who believe that images convey reliable information about the external world, and the sceptics or structuralists who assert that they do not.” Burke suggests that instead of insisting on the binary opposition of “reliable” and “unreliable,” we consider “degrees of reliability” or “reliability for different purposes.” The result is a useful book, one that both historians and archivists will want to read, and certainly one educators of archivists and historians will see as important. Writing in language which is jargon-free and readily understood, Burke examines photographs, portraits, the meaning of iconography and iconology, and images used by religious groups, political organizations, and governmental bodies, exploring how images reflect material culture and other aspects of society. Archivists will find that Burke employs a vocabulary familiar to them, for example, when he considers moving images:

The problem ... is to evaluate this form of evidence, to develop a kind of source criticism that takes account of the specific features of the medium, the language of the moving picture. As in the case of other kinds of document, the historian has to face the problem of authenticity. Has a certain film, or a scene from a film, been shot from life, or has it been fabricated in the studio using actors or models Every film shot on location may not be completely reliable as a record.

Clearly Burke is not addressing “reliability” or “authenticity” in archival terms.⁷

Nevertheless, his observation is not only relevant to all visual materials in archives, but seminal when distinguishing between digitized images and images born digital.

⁷ Luciana Duranti, “The Concepts of Reliability and Authenticity and Their Implications,” *Archivaria* 39 (1995): 5-10.

Burke's assumptions about visual materials research call to mind Estelle Jussim's important distinctions between "search" and "research:" "Unlike research, which is usually the investigation of the relationship between two or more variables, a search simply accomplishes the finding of a wanted item. The visual information being sought represents a one-time need, unrelated to any scientific structure or investigation." Jussim also distinguishes between visual information ("the visual content of documents") and visual communication ("the purposes, social interactions, context, or other variables of the larger process"). Writing in 1977, before the postmodern and digital bandwagons gained momentum, Jussim aptly observed that "print itself is a carrier of information beyond the content of the sounds of its individual letters," adding: "Words and images each have their own unique characteristics and their own ambiguities." Increasingly we have come to share her concern over "whether or not the information profession can learn how to control, manage, store, retrieve and disseminate the complex aggregates, the technological forms and the new access modes required for important research which both demands and produces visual information."⁸

At the same time that Burke claims that the message of a painting or photograph "may be scanned with relative rapidity," he states that his book "is intended to show that "images are often ambiguous or polysemous." He then goes to considerable lengths to demonstrate how an understanding of context can help us through the thicket of slippery or multiple meanings. Indeed, Burke quite rightly points out that historians would not have been able to widen their interests over the last generation or so and carry out research in a number of new directions—including the history of everyday life, material culture (Chapter 5), *mentalités* (Chapters 6,7), the body, and other fields—had they "limited themselves to traditional [written] sources such as official

⁸ Estelle Jussim, "The Research Uses of Visual Information," *Library Trends* 25 (April 1977): 763-78; The quoted passages are on pages 764, 763, 773, and 775 respectively.

documents, produced by administrations and preserved in their archives.” However, his conclusion that visual images “have often played their part in the ‘cultural construction’ of society,” underestimates just how pervasive and powerful their part has been over the last century and a half.

Burke’s credibility in the world of archives surely unravels four pages from the end of the book with his declaration that:

Documentary evidence is often available only to someone prepared to visit the archive in which it is stored, and may take hours to read, while a painting or a photographs is often easily accessible, especially in reproduction, and its message may be scanned with relative rapidity.

Whereas Burke here acknowledges that archival research into textual documents is a time consuming and labor intensive activity, equally, there are no shortcuts through the primary sources in visual form. In fact, visual materials research, like any other historical research, involves long hours in an archives, where in fact paintings and photographs are far less accessible—cannot be viewed at all times, cannot be viewed without supervision, cannot be placed in a locker for consultation after hours, and often must be consulted only in special vaults or viewing spaces. In my comments here, there is an implicit admonition for archivists enamoured of digital access.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Burke, as a trained historian, uses the term “documentary evidence” to refer only to textual records, suggesting that visual materials researchers need not visit archives, consult originals, or engage in the usual lengthy and often frustrating historical research processes. He also implies that the message delivered by photographs is easily understood—thus obviating the necessity of reading his book and becoming visually literate—and that paintings and photographs are not only easily accessible in reproduction form, but that it is sufficient to consult them as such.

The notion of doing visual materials research using paintings and photographs in reproduction form ignores the meaning-making attributes of an image's materiality, its physical presentation, its immediate documentary universe, its archival context. The kind of research Burke seems to recommend can be done with catalogue cards, books, or library vertical files where paintings and photographs are available as single, invariably decontextualized images, catalogued and made accessible by key words derived from their subject content. This suggestion is further exacerbated by the idea that the "message" of an image "may be scanned with relative rapidity." Burke, here, follows the misguided historiographical approach, all too often taken by archivists as well, which conflates content and meaning. *Eyewitnessing* then ends rather abruptly after Burke posits four general points, which he is careful to offer not as universal principles, but as "summaries of problems of interpretation."

In his very brief preface, Burke acknowledges that he wrote *Eyewitnessing* relatively quickly, but that his preoccupation with the subject of images as historical evidence goes back more than thirty years to a time when he was writing a book for a series that did not include illustrations. If, as Burke suggests, he was on the leading edge of the visual turn some three decades ago, it is a shame that he waited so long to publish his thoughts on the subject. In so doing, he missed an opportunity to nurture a significant shift in historiography and has now produced a book that, while interesting enough, is more catch-up summary than cutting-edge methodology.

Burke's problem in this regard may be one of disciplinary insularity. Missing from his "Select Bibliography" are a number of important works from a range of disciplines outside academic history on the nature and role of images. Where, for example, are seminal writings by Rudolf Arnheim, John Berger, Victor Burgin, Richard Bolton, Estelle Jussim, Abigail Solomon-

Godeau, and Barbara Maria Stafford? Also missing are references from the voluminous literature on museums and memory that explores analogous historiographical issues through the lens of institutional practices and physical objects. One area that has contributed greatly to our understanding of photographs is visual anthropology, and no author has contributed more in this regard than Elizabeth Edwards, whose most recent collection of essays is, as I shall go on to explain, also well worth archival scrutiny.

Ultimately, Burke's discussion of the use of visual images as historical sources raises interesting possibilities, poses sticky questions, and presents dangerous pitfalls. Yet, in the end, much of *Eyewitnessing* is basic and adds little to the increasingly sophisticated methodological literature on the use of photographs, paintings, maps, and film as evidence. That said, Burke is an interesting read that warns against presentist tendencies and emphasizes context as the basis for understanding the meaning and power of the visual document.

Graphic comparisons: J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps*

While there are gaps in Burke's bibliography, one very important essay included in it is J.B. Harley's "Deconstructing the Map," which is reproduced in another volume worth careful consideration by archivists. *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, edited by Paul Laxton, is a collection of seven seminal, previously published essays by the late Brian Harley (1932-1991), a geographer whose ideas on the meaning and interpretation of maps have influenced not only geographers and map historians, but also scholars interested in all forms of representation, including art, photography, and literature. Harley's focus on facts and meaning, texts and contexts resonates with archival concerns through a shared focus on the instrumentality of documents.

Three essays in *The New Nature of Maps* are worth more detailed comment here because of the parallels they offer for understanding photographs in particular, visual materials more broadly, and archives in general. In “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” originally published in 1988,⁹ Harley laments that maps are seldom understood as “a socially constructed form of knowledge” and sets out “to explore the discourse of maps in the context of political power.” He contends that, “both in the selectivity of their content and in their signs and styles of representation maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world.” While he has been criticized for his shotgun approach to theory, Harley profitably draws upon literary criticism, Panofsky’s iconology, Foucault’s sociology of knowledge, and Giddens’s critique of historical materialism in an effort to “envisage cartographic images in terms of their political influence in society.” Case studies grouped under headings such as “maps and empire,” “maps and the nation state,” “maps and property rights,” “map content and the transaction of power” examine deliberate and unconscious distortions of map content, subliminal geometry, silences, representational hierarchies, and symbols of power. Called “one of the most powerful essays ever written on cartography,” “Maps, Knowledge, and Power” make “a general case for the mediating role of maps in political thought and action,” and concludes:

The cartographic processes by which power is enforced, reproduced, reinforced, and stereotyped consist of both deliberate and 'practical' acts of surveillance and less conscious cognitive adjustments by map-makers and map-users to dominant values and beliefs. ... Like the historian, the map-maker has always played a rhetorical role in defining the configurations of power in society as well as recording their manifestations.

Analyzed this way, maps “cease to be understood primarily as inert records of

⁹ J.B. Harley, “Maps, Knowledge, and Power,” first published in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 277-312.

morphological landscapes or passive reflections of the world of objects, but are regarded as refracted images contributing to dialogue in a socially constructed world.”

In “Deconstructing the Map,” first published in 1989, Harley sought to “show how cartography also belongs to the terrain of the social world in which it is produced,” claiming that, “maps are ineluctably a cultural system.”¹⁰ Archivists will be only too familiar with the list of what he calls the “orthodox words” in the vocabulary of cartographers—impartial, objective, scientific, true—claiming that these seldom capture “resonances of class, gender, race, ideology, power and knowledge, or myth and ritual.” Harley embraces deconstruction “to break the assumed link between reality and representation” which has provided “a ready-made and taken-for-granted epistemology for cultural studies of maps as geographical or historical records.” Seeking an “alternative epistemology, rooted in social theory rather than in scientific positivism,” Harley borrows from Foucault's insistence on the “omnipresence of power in all knowledge” and Derrida's notion of rhetoricity of all texts, in order to reveal how maps work in society as a form of power-knowledge. He contends that, from the seventeenth century onward, positivistic epistemology set forth the “standard scientific model of knowledge and cognition,” which defined the object of mapping to be the production of “a ‘correct’ relational model” of landscape based on positivistic assumptions—not unlike those which have, during the same period, framed the “object of archives” to be a correct relational model of records to actions and transactions—that the objects [records] in the world to be mapped [archives] are real and objective, and that they enjoy an existence independent of the cartographer [archivist]. With resonances for postmodern approaches to archives, Harley dismisses the idea of “value-free” maps, claiming:

¹⁰ J.B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” first published in *Cartographica* 26, no. 2, (1989): 1-20; reprinted with modifications in Trevor J. Barnes and James S. Duncan, eds., *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 231-47.

Much of the power of the map, as a representation of social geography, is that it operates behind a mask of a seemingly neutral science. It hides and denies its social dimensions at the same time it legitimates. Yet whichever way we look at it the rules of society will surface. They have ensured that maps are at least as much an image of the social order as a measurement of the phenomenal world of objects.

Particularly salient to archives is Harley's fundamental premise that "to deconstruct ... is to reinscribe and resituate meanings, events and objects within broader movements and structures." I would add that as a way of making explicit the play of intention, myth, silence, and power in maps, such an interpretive strategy can be extended to photographs as well as to archives. Indeed, one could substitute "photographs" or "archives" for "maps" in many of his seminal statements—his call for "a rhetorical close reading" of maps; his characterization of the map as "a silent arbiter of power;" his interest in the "social importance of maps;" his conviction that maps are a "signifying system" through which "a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored."

At a time when some archival schools continue to think of archives as a "science" and objectivity as the cornerstone of archival practice, Harley suggests that deconstructing the map "allows us to challenge the epistemological myth (created by cartographers [archivists?]) of the cumulative progress of an objective science always producing better delineations of reality...; to redefine the social importance of maps ... adding different nuances to our understanding of the power of cartographic representation as a way of building order into our world...; [and to] allow geographical cartography to take a fuller place in the interdisciplinary study of text and knowledge." Whether or not one accepts his arguments, Harley's conclusion that "postmodernism offers a challenge to read maps [photographs? archives?] in ways that could reciprocally enrich the reading of other texts" is the very reason that his essays in *The New Nature of Maps* offer the possibility of enriching our understanding of visual materials as well as archives.

In 1990, the year after this deconstructionist crescendo, Harley contributed an introduction to a collection of essays entitled *From Sea Charts to Satellite Images: Interpreting North American History through Maps*. His “Text and Contexts in the Interpretation of Early Maps” demonstrates the simplicity and sophistication of Harley’s approach to the map as historical document.¹¹ Avoiding the postmodern linguistic quagmire of “Deconstructing the Map” and, apart from the adoption of the sustained metaphor of map as text and a sprinkling of references to symbol, rhetoric, and deconstruction, Harley expands the concept of “context” and explores the social and political implications of cartographic representation in a way that is useful for archivists in their dealings with visual materials. Criticizing the traditional emphasis on representational accuracy, Harley argues that “maps do not simply reproduce a topographical reality; they also interpret it.” He argues, “representation is never neutral, and science is still a humanly constructed reality.”

Of particular relevance to visual materials archivists, is Harley’s search for “the meaning of maps” by applying “the iconographical methods of art history to maps” to “complement the rules-of-society approach.” His key question has evolved from “What did the map represent?” to “What did the map *mean*?” Using Panofsky’s terms of iconographical analysis, Harley suggests cartographic parallels to “excavate beneath the terrain of [the map’s] surface geography.” As “products of both individual minds and the wider cultural values in particular societies,” maps offer “crucial insights into processes of social history.” As such, they deserve attention as “fundamental documents” that have contributed both to the practical development and cognitive images of modern America. Harley’s contribution ultimately rests upon his application of

¹¹ J.B. Harley, “Texts and Contexts in the Interpretation of Early Maps” in David Buisseret, ed., *From Sea Charts to Satellite Images: Interpreting North American History through Maps* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 3-15.

interpretive methods developed in the humanities and the social sciences to the study of maps. But notwithstanding criticism of his “eclectic” methodological approach, Harley must be credited with much more than introducing the jargon of literary criticism and social and cultural theory to existing concepts of map interpretation. Drawing from both Foucault (power/knowledge) and Derrida (deconstruction), he has forged new tools for inserting a humanistic dimension into what has traditionally been viewed as a scientific enterprise. By emphasizing that maps are “authored documents,” Harley suggests that archivists can better understand photographs and other visual materials as well as archives (as both records and institutions) by conceiving of them as “authored.”

The essays in *The New Nature of Maps* (and many other of Harley’s writings listed in the extensive bibliography appended to it) offer archivists opportunities to explore, through example and through extrapolation, the “new nature of archives.” Transposing Harley’s concerns to archivists, archives, and archival practice, we can ponder how are archivists, representing actions or transactions, or even “history” when we preserve records of some past “reality”? Are we, as archivists, willing to confront the positivistic proposition that the principle task of archives is “to mirror accurately some aspect of ‘reality’ that is simple and knowable and can be expressed as a system of facts”? Are we prepared to consider why archivists acquire and preserve records and what influence our perception has upon archival (and historical) practice? Is it, in fact, the attitude of archivists towards records and their view of their profession that is responsible for promoting the illusion of archival objectivity?¹² Is there a lesson for archivists in Harley’s claim that “cartographers resist the notion of text because presumably if you are posturing to be a scientist you do not wish to be seen in bed with a literary metaphor”? The message is clear if we substitute

¹² See Joan M. Schwartz, “‘Records of Simple Truth and Precision:’ Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000): 1-40.

the word “archives” for “maps” in Harley’s assertion that all maps are “highly selective constructions” of a reality that is perceived not objective, and that they offer “a new proposition of the world as much linked to our present agendas and ideologies as to those of the past.”

Disciplinary Crossovers: Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories*

Just as it is edifying to extrapolate to photographs from writing on other forms of (visual) representation, so is it useful to consider how work outside the field of archives can help us understand the material in our care.¹³ Anthropology is one field that has amassed a substantial literature not only on the use of photographs as historical evidence, but more importantly on the significance of context for understanding the production, function, and meaning of photographs. The leading thinker and writer in this field is Elizabeth Edwards, curator of photographs at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Her new collection of essays, *Raw Histories*—published in Berg’s “Materializing Culture” series—is an impressive book, and Edwards’s collected wisdom on photography should become part of the photo-literary canon. Edwards’s introduction, entitled “Observations from the Coal-Face,” accomplishes two things. As with most such introductions, it marks the road ahead, presenting an overview of the general direction of the book, its origins and influences, its contents and aims; then introducing the essays, touching upon the major theoretical thrusts, each in a clearly delineated section. However, and more importantly, it establishes the ground Edwards stands upon. Her work originates “at the coal-face” of what has become fashionable to call “vernacular photography” (recently “discovered” by established art historians such as Geoffrey Batchen), the very sort of photography that archives preserve. It is empirically based and historically grounded. Its greatest strength is, at times, also its greatest weakness.

¹³ See, for example, Elisabeth Kaplan, “‘Many Paths to Partial Truths:’ Archives, Anthropology, and the Power of Representation,” *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3-4 (2002): 209-220.

Edwards's formidable command of visual theory permits her to mine images with tremendous intellectual dexterity. At the same time, it sometimes makes for difficult reading. The inclusion of the word *punctum* in the opening sentence of *Raw Histories*, although used in a casual and informal way, establishes Edwards's expectation that her readers will have not only read Roland Barthes' classic work, *Camera Lucida*, but also understood his use of *punctum*. For Edwards and anyone familiar with the pillars of photographic criticism, this is basic stuff; but for archivists, photo-criticism, let alone Latin keywords, may be foreign, daunting, alienating. Do not be scared off! Her long, often complex sentences are shot through with important ideas and new, exciting ways of thinking about photographs. Edwards has much to say, and the effort to work through the occasional dense patch will be amply rewarded.

Two essays are grouped in Part I under the heading "Notes from the Archive." In the first of these, "Exchanging Photographs, Making Archives," Edwards examines photographs as "socially salient objects, enmeshed within a visual economy that reflected complex and wide-ranging scientific and social networks." Drawing on the work of Arjun Appadurai and Greg Dening, Edwards seeks to trace the "social biography" of archival materials. Noting that there is "relatively little commentary" on the huge body of material extant in anthropological photographs collections, Edwards looks to museum documentation and manuscript material to try to understand their physical trajectories and intellectual transformations between field and archives. Part of the explanation, she posits, lies in "a combination of the status of photograph collections within anthropological institutions and museums and the way they have had their contexts destroyed through archiving." Edwards also notes that fieldwork photographs remained largely in "the private domain of individual research and publication until they had outlived their usefulness for their originator and were archived, thus becoming 'public domain' or centralized resource."

The second essay in Part I examines institutional practices for photographing ethnographic objects “at that stage of their social biography when they are labeled ‘museum specimens’” and the way in which these practices are “naturalized” within the museum. Addressing the tensions between objectivity, aesthetics, and meaning in the pursuit of taxonomic ordering, Edwards raises concerns that have obvious parallels in the world of archives, photograph catalogues, online databases, and descriptive standards. In these two essays, Edwards’ concerns for the “homogenising discourses” of institutional practice connect directly to Gillian Rose’s second chapter on discourse analysis and the power of institutional practices to frame photographic meaning.

In another essay, “Visualizing History: Photographs of the D’Entrecasteaux Islands,” Edwards ponders a set of photographs taken by a young Oxford anthropologist as “a site of intersecting histories” and examines them in terms of “the history within them and the histories around them” as a way of revealing how “forms of truth value are attributed to photographs over time and space.” Within the essay, in a section entitled “In the Archive,” Edwards argues that “it is not what a photograph is *of* in purely evidential terms that should primarily concern us, but the context in which it is embedded.” The message for archivists is clear: as “keepers of context,” we must abandon the longstanding professional tendency to view photographs as materially stable and describe them in terms of their subject content in favor of an approach which follows their performative trajectories, maps their social biographies, and acknowledges the primacy of context for grappling with the mutability of their meaning.

As Ruth Phillips and Christopher Steiner have argued (in terms of objects), authority “lies not in the property of the object itself, but in the process of collection, which inscribes, at the moment of acquisition, the character and qualities that are associated with the object in both

individual and collective memories.”¹⁴ In this sense, archives, in the process of appraisal, acquisition, selection, arrangement and description, and outreach may be considered to inscribe the character and qualities associated with records in both individual and collective memories. Wary of the “indexical certainty, analogical insistence, and beguiling realism” of photographs, Edwards hints at the “raw histories” that photographs contain and presents archivists with a series of case studies which probe the power of both photographs and archives.

Conclusion: Reading Outside the Archival Box

Writing about the applicability of a textual model of binary word-image relations in an age of electronic records, Elkins suggests that such relations are “demonstrably untrue” and persist “because they correspond to institutional habits and needs [and] are too ingrained to be abandoned or easily critiqued.”¹⁵ These four books, if read in the spirit of interdisciplinarity and embraced for the lessons for archives embedded in their approaches to visual material, will help us understand, critique, and even abandon those ingrained professional needs and institutional habits that, more than time, theory, or money, hinder archives and archivists from engaging with lessons of current scholarship on “the archive” and putting postmodern theory into everyday practice.

In his preface to *The New Nature of Maps*, Paul Laxton calls Brian Harley “a learner and borrower from other disciplines.” Perhaps this is the lesson at the heart of this review essay. Archivists, too, must be learners and borrowers—from other forms of representation, from other

¹⁴ Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner, *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 19.

¹⁵ Elkins, *The Domain of Images*, 84.

disciplines, and from other professions. If we are prepared not simply to adopt—but rather to study, evaluate, and adapt ideas, methods, strategies, and models from outside the world of archives, then we have much to gain and nothing to lose from such cross-border intellectual shopping. Individually and collectively, these writings by Rose, Burke, Harley, and Edwards offer the opportunity to engage in just such an exercise.