

Documentary Art and the Role of the Archivist

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NOT LONG AGO I BORROWED A BOOK for our youngest daughter from the local university library. She was preparing an essay on the causes of the First World War, and I thought it might be helpful to allow some images to speak for themselves before we became lost among the great armies of words which tramp across the pages of histories. The work I had chosen was an unusually well-illustrated account with captions which not only described but also explained the photographs. Unfortunately I soon discovered that several pages had been cut up, presumably to adorn someone else's project. When I pointed this out to the librarian on duty, her reply was: "We often have this problem, but as long as the *text* is still there it isn't so bad, is it?"

This librarian should have been with us last year when President Rundell triumphantly broke with tradition and treated us to an absorbing presentation on photographs as records making their statements, supported by, and not in support of, the historian's text.¹ This year I will try to make a case for treating another form of visual creation as a document worthy of full membership in an archival family that now embraces not only records and manuscripts but also maps, photographs, film, sound, and that formidable non-record until recently, machine-readable archives. I wish to bring before you the watercolor and the oil painting, and I would plead for their legitimacy at a time when I believe many of you have grave doubts about these media, for are they not works of art altogether too wayward in conversation for their more staid companions, the record and the manuscript? Most of us have examples of these charming pieces in our repositories, but are not too certain how they fit into our scheme of values. If they are "good," should they go to an art gallery; and if they are not "good," what kind of rating can we give them? I think there is a small voice in all of us which says: "You can't really trust those painter chaps!"

¹ Walter Rundell, Jr., "Photographs as Historical Evidence: Early Texas Oil," *American Archivist* 41 (October 1978): 373-91.

Let us try to go back to the beginning of communication between adults in its simplest form. It seems fairly clear that if a message was to be conveyed in a form other than sound and gesture, its form would have been in some way representational of familiar shapes—humans, animals, birds, and the like—which could be scratched in sand or mud and later painted on rock. In recent times, Indian braves recounted their exploits and counted their coups by recording them on teepees and buffalo hides in just this manner.² In short, the first statements to survive the sound of a voice were pictures, not words. Out of these simple shapes emerged the pictogram, the ideogram, and the hieroglyph conveying complex information and ideas in brush strokes still carrying the subtle suggestion of a pictorial origin and influencing the thought processes in a most distinctive way. The loss of this image base before the onset of the phonetic alphabet seems to have had a profound effect on literate society in the West, and the consequent linear stress was further intensified from the fifteenth century onwards by Gutenberg's invention of printing from movable type.³ What became of the picture?

The craftsmen of ancient Greece, for want of a more flexible medium, executed some of their finest pictorial work on their black and red figure vases, and painted miniatures on glass worked with gold leaf. We can trace a continuous line from this tradition to the illuminated manuscript⁴ and the transcendent historiated initials in the psalters of the Middle Ages. These works were designed to be explored through touch, as the vase is raised or the page turned. They were used in elaborate ceremonies which engaged all the senses. Above all, they were not just to be looked at. Such images retained their central place in communication sacred and profane, from which text and voice were never far away. From earliest times the artists had accepted the challenge of building narrative into a basically static form of expression. Few secular examples remain, but the eleventh-century Bayeux Tapestry, protected by the authority of a great abbey church, has survived as one of the finest pictorial documents of the early Middle Ages, essential for an understanding of the Norman Conquest of England. Incidents are elided with great skill, as the narrative is developed in the manner of a strip cartoon.⁵ Again, one cannot omit the mosaics of Byzantium glowing and flickering in their vaults, to be matched later by the stained glass of Chartres and York, enveloping the court and the church in total environments of color, design, and record.

Without this wealth of iconography we would know little of the appearance of things during those centuries. The biblical narratives and the lives of the saints were communicated in a mythic way, in "modern dress," and an all-at-onceness which can still be experienced in medieval churches to this day. This has been termed acoustic space, which we are now re-experiencing through the instantane-

² Barry Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada* (Toronto: New Canada Publications, NC Press, 1974), pp. 12–13.

³ Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), passim.

⁴ McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 78.

⁵ Otto Pächt, *The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 10.

neous communication of electronic media and the reaffirmation of all the human senses through both sides of the brain. This acoustic experience was to be totally at variance with Renaissance tradition in which text and image parted company and developed quite literally along their own lines. Paintings became “works of art” and have remained so. As such they were not regarded as documents in any sense, for documentation as we know it became the prerogative of such textual records as the printed book, the enrolment, the deposition, the letter, and the diary. Even seals, those wonderful, visual, tactile expressions of status which were appended to all medieval conveyances of land, lost their significance with the increasing use of signatures by the literate. In England, the symbol of the sovereign’s authority through image and seal, rather than sign manual, was retained only for royal letters patent, a reminder of an ancient usage in a world of print and literacy.

In this harsh, geometric world of continuous space bound by the laws of Euclid and the philosophy of Descartes, which limited the spectator to a fixed point of view, the great machine of passing time slowly revolved. Historians prowled happily amongst the gears and levers, showing us more or less how it all worked, and used as their blueprints those textual records which by the end of the nineteenth century abounded in the archives of Europe and America. The more they found, the better the past could apparently be explained; but the cumulative effect was asymptotic. They never quite got there; scientific history proved to be a delusion, and we now turn to the more human disciplines of archeology, anthropology, folklore studies, and the “new” history, seeking pattern and process within a field rather than cause and effect along a continuum. Textual records have been supplemented and at times even replaced by the whole range of oral and visual media, with which we have now become familiar. In an almost tactile approach to data, the electronic scanner of the cathode ray tube and the selective process of the computer become an extension of ourselves in our search strategy and have helped us to appreciate visual configuration in a new way, not just as illustration in support of text but as a pattern of record in its own right capable of making statements far beyond the power of speech and writing. We must now examine more closely these visual media of record.

First, we should recognise that archival principles, as we know them, were formulated and developed by scholarly bureaucrats from a careful study of textual public records based on the registry and the filing cabinet, and this is reflected in our stewardship over the past century. Non-textual material showed little evidence of a time series and obstinately resisted an original order between inclusive dates. Repositories are filled with map collections, for instance, arranged by size and geographic area with little attention to provenance; the map record group is still comparatively rare. Likewise, photographs were long ignored as records in the archival sense, and collections were plundered for unusual illustrations or, more mercifully, allowed to gather dust pending more enlightened treatment. We now preserve the sanctity of the photographic collection and maintain the photographer’s order based on his records, if this is possible. Photographs have joined the family. Film, on the other hand, preserves its original order at twenty-four frames a second. Although film archives tend to operate more like special libraries, the fundamentally documentary nature of a wide range of film, includ-

ing some feature films, is now clearly recognized, and copyright laws enforce a meticulous record of provenance.

There remains one group of media for which no crisp generic term exists, which include paintings, drawings, prints and occasionally posters, seals, and medals. The term *iconography* is sometimes used, and I might have included it in my title rather than *art*, which can be a rather loaded word. For the most part, we do not harbor *works of art* in our archives in the sense that an art curator or historian would use the term, i.e., as works important primarily as paintings in their own right rather than as documents. We give house room to documentary art or iconography, and we control it after a fashion, so that it can be retrieved, but do we really believe it to be archival? With archivists, like latter-day Noahs, welcoming documents of every kind, nature, and description into their arks, it is time that we gave some thought to the matter. I am limiting my paper to drawings and paintings in oil and watercolor, but much of what is said applies to the other pictorial categories.

Perhaps we can first agree that a picture is a statement in the same way as is an entry in a diary or a paragraph in a letter.

No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times. In this respect, images are more precise and richer than literature.⁶

But this is also art, and at once we become nervous.

If the painter does nothing but render exactly, by means of line and color, the external aspect of an object, he yet always adds to this purely formal reproduction something inexpressible.⁷

To those brought up on history written entirely from textual records, the written word has a certain respectability, a deceptive precision, a convincing plausibility that masks its limitations. In a similar way, "most of us regard print as the familiar, comfortable, rumpled dressing gown of communications. We take print for granted."⁸ We still communicate with words, not pictures (unless we are non-smokers looking for a washroom), so naturally we feel more at home with them. We believe we can depend on them, and our very literacy blinds us to other modes of expression, even speech itself. But historians and archivists are also very well aware that textual sources can be biased, inaccurate, selective, and downright misleading, but they have one great merit: their content is presented serially, within time, through grammatical statements and logical arguments. Likewise, our literary training has often caused us to "read" pictures "literally" without being aware of certain rules and conventions that are in sharp contrast to the rules of alphabet, grammar, and syntax. How then, should we as archivists approach pictorial art?

⁶ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 10.

⁷ J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Edward Arnold, 1970), p. 253.

⁸ Donald R. Gordon, "Print as a Visual Medium," in Lester Asheim and Sara I. Fenwick, eds., *Differentiating the Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 34.

In early classical antiquity the Latin *ars* meant a craft or skill; the modern concept of art was a product of the Renaissance.⁹ Non-literate cultures have no art, they simply do their best. *Ars* in mediaeval Latin became book learning, the liberal arts. Fine arts emerged in the eighteenth century as *les beaux arts*, which in English became simply *art*, a century later. In short, art, as we know it, is of relatively recent origin, and as archivists we may do well to consider painting not as art in the nineteenth-century sense, since we will rarely deal in masterpieces, but as the product of a craftsman who has learnt the business as professional or amateur painter, much as fine writing was learnt from the writing master. For Malraux, these are “non-artists” who produce at best “a memory, a sigh or a story; never a work of art. Obviously, a memory of love is not a poem, a deposition given in court is not a novel, a family miniature is not a picture.”¹⁰ But all of these can provide reliable records.

Writing, with its origin in the pictogram, may be regarded as a highly stylized form of painting and the word *style* is derived from the stylus of the scribe. Let me again be clear that I am not denying creative excellence as expressed by the term *work of art* or the creativity of the great artists who quite transcended their teachers. If we have to consider any of these works from a documentary point of view, we will need all the help we can get from gallery curators and art historians. However, that such a work is a masterpiece should in no way affect its status as a record; it may reveal insights on a level which a lesser artist could not convey, and so increase its value for us. (As an aside, I cannot resist reminding you that every M.A. thesis submitted is a “masterpiece” in its ancient but scarcely in its modern sense.)

Let us now see whether drawings and paintings meet the criteria we apply as tests of archival material. First, we must try to establish authenticity. As with public records, a continuous period of unbroken custody is valuable (but not conclusive) evidence, and over-painting is a real possibility. However, no one forges the second rate or tampers with laundry lists. We can take comfort in the relative obscurity of much that we hold.

A picture may be authentic, but how do we assess its evidential or informational value? If works of art are to be considered as documents, then we have to grapple with the concept of representation which lies at the heart of the problem. Many artists in our collections will imitate styles, especially those of their teachers, but there is no way they can imitate or provide a mirror image of their subjects.¹¹ We are dealing with an order of truth somewhat different from the compilation of an inventory. We can, however, usually reckon that the artist is not out to deceive by adding significant elements which do not exist in the subject. This does not mean that a painting will look exactly like its subject, but that it will convey and suggest truthful comment as perceived by the artist as observer, which is as much as we can expect from any observer. The caption may, however, be misleading, but this

⁹ R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 5.

¹⁰ André Malraux, *The Psychology of Art*, Vol. 2, *The Creative Act* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), p. 73.

¹¹ Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, p. 42.

may not be the fault of the artist. We have to recognize that in all representational painting, as in correspondence or report writing, there is selection and omission. This is also how archivists appraise and select records for permanent retention. Even the camera is highly selective, especially in tonal range, and may omit color altogether.

To communicate in a representational manner, the artist must also use techniques acceptable to the viewer if an accurate report is to be conveyed. The language must be understood.

Up to a point this is done by representing the object literally; but beyond that point it is done by skilful departure from literal representation . . . and thus . . . produces in one's audience the kind of effect one wants to produce.¹²

We have recently been reminded that the aesthetic of the picturesque, so popular with the early Victorians, was in origin more practical and realistic than we now tend to think, and was closely bound up with the making of an accurate record. The Reverend William Gilpin, champion of the picturesque in England, once wrote: "Your intention in taking views from nature may either be *to fix them in your own memory* or *to convey in some degree your idea to others*,"¹³ which is precisely the visual aid provided by the modern snapshot.

We must now ask ourselves whether, in the case of a streetscape, for instance, we can isolate topographical fact from the formal conventions of composition with which the artist unifies his work and communicates with the viewer. There are those who would still argue that art and fact are in conflict, but this is true only if one restricts fact to a mirror image of reality, a goal as unattainable as that of "what actually happened" in historical research. Many of the early views of Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the eighteenth century show Citadel Hill more pronounced than it really is, but that may be a way of emphasizing the importance of the hill for the inhabitants and for the military garrison stationed there.

If we are to admit the archival legitimacy of documentary art, we should make a study of those artists who left a record of the territory within our jurisdictions and become familiar with their artistic language and form. Nova Scotia, along with other parts of Canada, is indebted to the work of army and navy officers from Britain for much of the visual record before photography. For purposes of military intelligence they were taught to draw and paint in watercolors as part of their training. Their drawing masters at the military academies included David Cox (1783–1849) and Paul Sandby (1725–1809), who "created the norm for half of the watercolor painting of his time";¹⁴ both were outstanding artists of the English watercolor school. A certain military precision was emphasized and, to aid the neophyte, definite drill sequences for making a watercolor were devised.¹⁵

¹² Ibid., p. 53.

¹³ As quoted in Michael Bell and W. Martha E. Cooke, *The Last "Lion" . . . Rambles in Quebec with James Pattison Cockburn* (Kingston, Ontario: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1978), p. 12.

¹⁴ Graham Reynolds, *A Concise History of Watercolours* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 1971), p. 55.

¹⁵ Paul Duval, *Canadian Watercolour Painting* (Toronto: Burns & MacEachern, Ltd., 1954), text unpaginated. Duval quotes one of these systems.

The artists painted the world of colonial peace, order, and good government, which they knew best. A fair number of their neat sketches were subsequently published for the comfort and enjoyment of the upper classes. Trade, commerce, factories, and poverty were not fit subjects for art. By contrast, the tradition in the United States was much more down to earth, and commercial enterprise was often recorded by local craftsmen. Travellers, writing in their journals or in letters home, gave the lie to this over-tidy vision of Canada, as did one artist himself when he exchanged the brush for the pen.¹⁶ In general their work was not intended to deceive; it was simply selective in theme and content, and we must be aware of these limitations. An outstanding artist in this group was James Pattison Cockburn, whose record in watercolors of early nineteenth-century Quebec, is unrivalled. To enhance their accuracy he used a *camera lucida* and placed his buildings in their correct relationships.¹⁷

Whereas prose is created serially, artists put together their information organically as they build up their compositions. If one substitutes for brush strokes pieces of information on paper, this is also how the documents of an organization accumulate in their groups, series, and subseries, like the secretions of an organism growing more complex and richer in information with the passage of time. We are trained to recognize this pattern of growth, and we should perhaps look at paintings in this manner, as we identify the various elements and their interrelationships to achieve certain effects, in much the same way as our institutions are, or should be, designed to perform a function and leave their paperwork in a configuration which reflects this function.

Artists develop their carefully learned *schema*, such as the shape of various trees or stock attitudes for figures, modifying them and integrating them into their work or, if they are exceptional, transcend these *schema* altogether.¹⁸ In this sense they are using *figures of paint* rather than figures of speech to describe a scene, and this is particularly true of those topographical artists who are thoroughly competent but do not attain the first rank. In this regard Etienne Gilson distinguishes helpfully between painting and what he calls "picturing" or the art of "doing pictures" and goes on to say:

We do not intend to minimize the importance of pictures or images. On the contrary, if one succeeded in introducing a distinction between pictures and paintings that looks so well founded, pictures would benefit by it as much as paintings. We need a history and an aesthetics of the art of picturing conceived in a spirit of sympathetic objectivity suitable to the importance of the subject.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Mary Sparling, "The British Vision in Nova Scotia, 1749–1848" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, Halifax, N.S.) for an excellent study of this theme. For a well-illustrated survey of early Canadian topographical art, matched with contemporary textual description, see Michael Bell, *Painters in a New Land* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Ltd., 1973).

¹⁷ Christina Cameron and Jean Trudel, *The Drawings of James Cockburn: A Visit through Quebec's Past* (Agincourt, Ontario: Gage Educational Publishing, Ltd., 1976), Introduction.

¹⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), chapter 5, "Formula and Experience," pp. 146–78.

¹⁹ Etienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1958), p. 261.

Rudolf Arnheim suggests that artistic activity and visual thinking can be thoroughly rational.²⁰ We conceptualize and organize our thoughts around categories, stereotypes, and well-established concepts, which act as comfortable pigeon holes for the initial rough sort of our ideas. This is much the same process as form-filling, and we use the same term, *form*, in art to denote the deployment of the various elements in a picture. Similarly, the term *form* is used with legal records in such phrases as "common form," which are in fact groups of standardized legal *schema* which help tell us (at great length) what the document is about. Likewise *formularies* were whole books of *schema* for those drawing up title deeds and similar documents. Forms management may reduce a multiplicity of *schema* to a common form; form letters are built up from common form statements to give the appearance of uniqueness and spontaneity. The study of diplomatic is the study of forms as a clue to the nature, purpose, and date of early documents.

Although the "life of forms" is a familiar concept in art, this comparison may appear somewhat forced, but I believe it helps us to recognize the documentary nature of works of art. So much of our seeing is a matter of habit and the expectation of the familiar: "The visual arts are a compromise between what we see and what we know."²¹ We read the first letters only of a scribbled word and conceptualize the rest, a practice which is most useful in paleography or deciphering poor handwriting, as we all know.

Winston Churchill, a very competent painter who was as familiar as any man with public records and communication, spoke of the artist turning light into paint via the post office of the mind which directs encoded pigment onto the canvas in the form of a cryptogram; the pattern only becomes clear when all the paint is in place.²² He uses code here as a metaphor, yet the halftone block, the "wire" photograph, and the television screen rely on the code of a pattern of dots from which to build up the image. Seurat did much the same, and so do many of the magic realists of today. If we are to use pictures as record, we must recognize the pattern and read the code correctly as we do in other media.

If, then, art is conceptual, documentary art cannot be true or false, but only more or less useful and reliable for the formation of descriptions. Information reaching the eye is so dense and complex that our awareness must in self-defense select in order to conceptualize, and the history of art is the painful development of conventions through *schema* and modification. "If we shed any instinctively or throw them out deliberately, either they are replaced before too long or we fall back into private universes, self-immured, incommunicado."²³ Without communication there can be no record.

Finally, we should consider whether the output or collected work of an artist has an organically related quality we can recognize as archival. Let us take some

²⁰ Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. v.

²¹ Bernard Berenson, *Seeing and Knowing* (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1953), p. 14.

²² Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 38.

²³ Berenson, *Seeing and Knowing*, p. 11.

examples: sketches within or attached to correspondence or a report present no problem, largely because textual records are classically archival and lend their archival quality to their attachments, like the label on Jenkinson's elephant. Sketches in a notebook with captions by the artist are probably the closest parallel to a diary, and these too would be accepted in most instances as archival, especially if they are dated. With loose and perhaps unfinished drawings or sketches of a work to be completed in the studio, we leave familiar ground but they are statements just the same. And so we come to the easel painting itself, and I hope that what I have been saying will help us to see this too as a record whereby the finished works of an artist may be considered as documents. The fact that they have been sold and are scattered half around the world is irrelevant, provided they have been authenticated. Some public documents and many manuscript collections have been dispersed in this way, to be reconstituted on paper and by the exchange of microfilms.

For those archivists who have patiently borne with me up to now, this last paragraph may well break the back of their patience!

Are *all* paintings, then, to be regarded as documentary record? At this point common sense must prevail, but let it be the *sensum communis* which engages all our senses and faculties. Clearly we must try to distinguish between an artist's personal record expressed through the painting in non-representational terms, or a work of art which has no point of reference with the world of appearances, and the kind of documentary art which seeks primarily to record, using this expression in its widest sense to encompass paintings which may only remotely look like their subjects but express other qualities, in particular the creation of profound generalized statements about their subjects.

For Malraux the final liberation of painting came when the artist was able to express his work and his subjects solely in paint, and not with paint subservient to a recognizable image or story.²⁴ Perhaps this is the point where art ceases to be a document that may be used for documentary content in the archival sense. In any case, documentary content may be quite irrelevant to the painting as a work of art. As with many administrative documents, it is to be used by the archivist for a purpose for which it was not created, but for which it is perfectly valid. We must, however, still be cautious, because the development of an artist as expressed in all of his work is obviously an autobiographical record, of a kind. Must we then take over all the art galleries; and anyway, why stop at painting? Why not sculpture and ceramics? The line is by no means clear-cut and points up the dilemma of a culture that distinguishes art from record in an uneasy dichotomy.

Sometime ago the Public Archives of Canada presented the retrospective of an artist who had emigrated from Europe to Canada many years ago. Here was the record by an artist of what it meant to be an immigrant in Canada, and so it was presented jointly by the National Ethnic Archives and the Picture Division, both of the Public Archives. There was not much explicit Canadian content in the pictorial sense, yet it seemed to me a valid record of an artist's experience in an entirely non-textual form. Not everyone agreed, but I believe the point was worth

²⁴ Malraux, *The Psychology of Art*, Vol. 1, *Museum without Walls*, p. 73.

making, if only once.²⁵ The retrospective exhibit is, of course, a commonplace in art galleries; but it may also be seen as an archival occasion.

In practical terms we must take a more arbitrary, pragmatic approach to the problem. We accept thankfully that there are art galleries staffed by curators and historians whose concern is with art and excellence, but we, and they, must realize that galleries are rich in visual documentary material such as we have been discussing, and that, because content is not the primary concern of the curator, information retrieval of a documentary nature may be difficult. It is significant that the rediscovery by both curators and archivists involved with the military artists, whose record of early Canada is so remarkable, has resulted in much closer relations between the two professions. Perhaps each will take on some of the characteristics of the other, with the archivist identifying the documentary record wherever it may be and ensuring that this aspect of works of art is fully appreciated.

I have said nothing of genre painting, which is analagous to anecdote, narrative, and literature²⁶ and may also be designed as illustration. Despite the apparently accurate observation of place and period which may be displayed, the archivist should be very cautious in regarding these as documents in the same sense as topographical drawings. They are probably best regarded as the pictorial counterpart of literary manuscripts.²⁷

There is one category of documentary art which would seem to have all the attributes of public record, yet scarcely ever finds its way into an archives. Governments in two World Wars have commissioned war artists to prepare records in their own fashion of this most intense of national experiences. There is ample evidence that, despite vast photographic coverage, the artists' contributions were appreciated, if only, at worst, as an arm of propaganda. In general, these artists were permitted a free hand and the total output was quite naturally somewhat uneven. Yet once the wars were over, most of this material found little response anywhere and was bundled into the vaults of reluctant galleries and museums, there to be neglected for years; because, good or bad, it was identified as art before it could be processed as document. Was it because archives laid no claim? This example is cited not to point the finger, but to point up the problem.

It may have struck you as rather strange that I should have spent so much time discussing iconography in classical archival terms, based on textual record. The reverse procedure might provide some interesting observations on manuscripts, which must wait for another time. Sufficient that our increasingly multi-media view of archives is already modifying principles, especially those based on the serial nature of archives. Machine-readable records cannot be viewed in this serial

²⁵ Public Archives of Canada, *Karl May Retrospective, 1948-1975* (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1976), 62 pp.

²⁶ Sacheverell Sitwell, *Narrative Pictures: A Survey of English Genre and Its Painters* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1972), p. 1.

²⁷ What appears to be the only paper ever published by the *Canadian Historical Review* (CHR) on historical iconography is "The Visual Reconstruction of History," by Jefferys (CHR 17, no. 3 [1936]: 249-65), who discusses the whole question of accuracy in Canadian historical painting and illustration. As a competent artist and illustrator himself, his observations are particularly valuable.

way, and the storage of this information in the computer, when it periodically leaves the tape, is chaotic by human standards.

We must look to future technology, such as the videodisc, for the simultaneous retrieval of multi-media information in the televisual mode with a wide range of "hold" and "browse" capabilities. Picture as record will then be available with text and sound to provide us with a balanced media fare. Meanwhile, I believe closer attention should be given to the reproduction of documentary art through increasing use of slides and microfiche. In this way the *fonds* of an artist's output can be assembled through adequate reproduction. This is what André Malraux is saying in his concept of the "museum without walls," by which we may study the entire work of an artist and make comparisons with all styles and all ages, in a manner once totally impossible, with some surprising results. The colored microfiche series, published by the Public Archives of Canada, of the works of the artists in its collections are a means to this end and are the direct counterpart of a micro-film edition of a manuscript collection.

We can catch a glimpse of how records, both textual and pictorial, may be used as evidence and woven into a non-linear presentation, by studying the precepts of Jacob Burckhardt who writes that only "long and intensive exercises in viewing, the constant parallelizing of facts, the laborious steeping in best sources can develop the all important sense of style and awareness of the typical."²⁸ Because he sought to make general statements, he refused to use concrete images merely as illustration, and yet his command of words was such that "he could teach art history and lecture on painting and architecture, when projectors and other 'visual aids' were still largely unavailable."²⁹ Like Burckhardt, many of the so-called new historians are now presenting their history without heroes in a similar way, and increasingly they need the records of pattern rather than of achievement for their findings. We archivists should spend more time looking at pictures if we are to become what we behold and grasp the true nature of record in all its richness of form, substance, and texture.

In this brief survey, I have only touched on the problem. We need to explore the nature of documentary information in the context of all media of record and to realize that in iconography we have a great deal to learn from our colleagues, the art curators. At the same time I would suggest that the present methods of identification and cataloging of works of art by curators are curiously literary and oriented toward externals. Entries tell us a great deal about the physical nature of the painting as artifact, the exhibits in which it has featured, and (if possible) its impeccable record of provenance, yet there is often little about the work itself beyond its title or caption, which may be less than helpful. Of course, it can be argued that the researcher should then view the original or a good copy. But what if the line of enquiry is, for instance, concerned with form or detail not related to the information on the catalog card? We must all learn to describe pictorial content in words if we are to retrieve it.

Estelle Jussim, a library school teacher by profession, in an invaluable article on

²⁸ Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 153.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

the subject,³⁰ uses the term “visual information” to describe the visual content of documents and, following Bernard Karpel, argues for descriptions taken from the language of art theory and from those who are accustomed to describe art in words. This whole subject is, of course, even more urgent in the context of automated systems of retrieval.

Again, we must try to define more clearly the roles of the archives and the art gallery as repositories, for it makes little sense if galleries are to retain, by implication, the privilege of creaming off all that is excellent and leave archives to deal with the second rate. In fact, and to our credit, archivists have assiduously cultivated the acquisition of the second rate on the correct assumption that in documentary art Oscar Wilde’s aphorism that “if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly” holds true; their subsequent discovery by galleries has sometimes left near masterpieces on our hands as the bad turns out to be primitive or folk art. I offer no solutions, but hope you will see that we have a problem here.

I would like to end on a more general note. Barrington Nevitt, a management consultant with a background in communications and a colleague of Marshall McLuhan, challenged the Association of Canadian Archivists last year by asking a number of searching questions which he believed we should face, including the following:

Has the archivist as communicator yet learned to anticipate the effects of media on his publics?

and in reference to McLuhan’s comment that “ever since Burckhardt saw that the meaning of Machiavelli’s method was to turn the state into a work of art by the rational manipulation of power, it has been an open possibility to apply the method of art analysis to the critical evaluation of society”:³¹

Has the archivist as art critic yet learned to recognize the ‘text’ which evokes the context of their times—what to keep and what to destroy?³²

The study of documentary iconography will not only help us extend our range, it may also enable us to develop the faculty of the artist to program effects and recognize new patterns within an information environment, where process and change have eroded old rules and verities. Only then will we assume once more the role of shaman which the ancient keepers of records knew so well. To perceive, by projection, the future patterns of our documentary galaxy, and to act in the light of this knowledge, must be our awesome task.³³

³⁰ Estelle Jussim, “The Research Uses of Visual Information,” *Library Trends* 25, no. 4 (April 1977): 763–78.

³¹ Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951), p. vi.

³² H. J. Barrington Nevitt, “Archivist and Comprehensivist,” unpublished paper, 1978, pp. 3, 6.

³³ Since most of the examples of documentary art which have been discussed above are Canadian, I would not like to close without special mention of Robert V. Hine whose *Bartlett’s West: Drawing the Mexican Boundary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) and *The American West: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973) strongly emphasize the pictorial record.