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Résumé de l'article

L'évaluation et la disposition des documents gouvernementaux à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada (BAC) visent principalement à acquérir les « bons » documents pour mieux documenter une fonction donnée du gouvernement du Canada. Une fois les documents confiés à BAC, l'accès est offert par une approche non uniforme de fiches descriptives en ligne et d'instruments de recherche sur place, souvent accompagnés d'informations contextuelles minimales ou incorrectes qui nuisent à leur découverte et à leur utilisation. En étudiant à la fois les documents photographiques du Fonds de l'Office national du film du Canada et le projet de recontextualisation actuellement en cours à BAC, l'auteure étudie l'histoire des documents, depuis les pratiques de tenue de documents jusqu'au transfert à BAC, et certaines des interventions des archives pour décrire et façonner ces documents sur plusieurs générations de travail de gestion de la collection. Toutes ces actions ont eu une incidence cachée sur l'utilisation et la compréhension des documents individuels et de la collection dans son ensemble. Cet article présente une étude de cas qui montre comment un réarrangement fondé sur des recherches sur les créateurs, les systèmes de tenue de documents des organisations et les pratiques de conservation des archives peut faire ressortir des provenances complexes et multiples et fournir aux chercheurs une histoire contextuelle plus complète du document.

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ABSTRACT   Appraisal and disposition of government records at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) focuses primarily on acquiring the "right" records to best document a given function of the Government of Canada. Once records pass into LAC's care, access is provided through an inconsistent approach of online descriptive records and on-site finding aids, often with minimal or incorrect contextualizing information that hinders their overall discoverability and use. Through a study of both the legacy photographic records in the National Film Board of Canada Fonds and the recontextualization project currently underway at LAC, the author examines the history of the record, from recordkeeping practices to the transfer to LAC, and some of the interventions by the archives to describe and shape these records over several generations of custodial care. All of these various actions have had a hidden impact on the use and understanding of both the individual records and the larger collection. This article provides a case study in how rearrangement based on research into creators, organizational recordkeeping systems, and archival custodial practices can draw out complex, multiple provenances and provide researchers with a fuller contextual history of the record.

RÉSUMÉ   L'évaluation et la disposition des documents gouvernementaux à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada (BAC) visent principalement à acquérir les « bons » documents pour mieux documenter une fonction donnée du gouvernement du Canada. Une fois les documents confiés à BAC, l'accès est offert par une approche non uniforme de fiches descriptives en ligne et d'instruments de recherche sur place, souvent accompagnés d'informations contextuelles minimales ou incorrectes qui nuisent à leur découverte et à leur utilisation. En étudiant à la fois les documents photographiques du Fonds de l'Office national du film du Canada et le projet de recontextualisation actuellement en cours à BAC, l'auteure étudie l'histoire des documents, depuis les pratiques de tenue de documents jusqu'au transfert à BAC, et certaines des interventions des archives pour décrire et façonner ces documents sur plusieurs générations de travail de gestion de la collection. Toutes ces actions ont eu une incidence cachée sur l'utilisation et la compréhension des documents individuels et de la collection dans son ensemble. Cet article présente une étude de cas qui montre comment un réarrangement fondé sur des recherches sur les créateurs, les systèmes de tenue de documents des organisations et les pratiques de conservation des archives peut faire ressortir des provenances complexes et multiples et fournir aux chercheurs une histoire contextuelle plus complète du document.

Introduction

"One of the great glories of Canadian archives lies in their splendid and massive photographic collections," wrote archivist Hugh Taylor. "It may be that these photographic collections will become the most prized and sought-after resources in the archives of Canada. The foundations laid by these great collections must be built upon."[2] The photographs in the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) Fonds held at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), encompassing over 640,000 images and spanning almost a century of history, is one such great collection. The subjects found within the NFB Fonds range from tourist promotion to wartime propaganda and from agricultural to industrial scenes, with almost all linked to functions and activities of government. While the NFB is better known for its films, it also created an important bank of photographs. These images are frequently used to illustrate books, websites, and social media feeds, and yet the history behind the collection is little known. LAC's arrangement and description does little to explain the context of these records.

Much of the intellectual energy LAC has put into government records has gone toward the complicated process of appraisal, in an environment of increasing records abundance and digitally born documents, and toward setting the requirements for acquiring these at a future date. With hundreds of government departments, agencies, and Crown corporations, the analog and digital records set to be appraised and acquired are staggering in their number and complexity. Due to these challenges, LAC has struggled to address its enormous collection of legacy records, which arrived from government departments poorly described and which have often remained that way in archival custody. But in recent years, LAC staff have turned more toward these legacy records and have conducted reappraisal, arrangement, and description work.[3] Using the NFB still photography

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2   Hugh A. Taylor, "Archives in Britain and Canada: Impressions of an Immigrant (1969)," in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor*, ed. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 31–43, 39. First published in *Canadian Archivist* 1, no. 7 (1969).

3   The reappraisal program in the Government Records Initiatives Division began around 2008 as the Clearing the Path project to remove non-archival records from LAC's holdings, thus reducing the volume of records that would be arranged and described. For more information about reappraisal at LAC, see Tina Lloyd, "From Projects to Policy: The Evolution of a Systematic Reappraisal Program," in *Appraisal and Acquisition: Innovative Practices for Archives and Special Collections*, ed. Kate Theimer (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015). There have also been individual projects by archivists to improve arrangement and description as well as a targeted project to eliminate and recontextualize interim series.

collection as a case study, this article will attempt to unravel some of the challenges facing this high-use legacy collection. Studying the archival mediations as part of the record's life cycle offers new insight into the role of archives in shaping the record, which is far from neutral, and into how the choices made in arrangement and description affect the meaning of records.

Part one of this article outlines the contents of the NFB Fonds and provides a brief history of the creators and the recordkeeping systems used to manage the photographic records, which is important to understanding the complexity of the records created and later archived at LAC. Part two moves on to explore the main interventions in the archival custodial history of the records, explaining how the archival organizational system based on transfers of photographs led to a poorly arranged fonds at LAC. Part three focuses on the recontextualizing project underway in the NFB Fonds to better elucidate the creators and custodians of these records, analyzing the importance of rebuilding knowledge about the contexts and management of records by their creators and custodians, the value this will bring to archives and their many users, and how the archivist-caretaker also shapes the meaning of and access to records. This article will demonstrate that all of these actors have shaped the photographic record through their multiple archival interventions.

Part 1: Brief Custodial History of the Photographs in the NFB Fonds

The NFB Fonds at LAC contains an estimated 640,000 photographs.[4] Although the photographs are described and arranged as part of the NFB Fonds, multiple government departments created and managed them. Before arriving at the Archives, some of the records were transferred back and forth between departments by different custodians as responsibility for this collection shifted over

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4   For the purposes of this article, I have referred to all types and formats of photographic records using the term *photograph*, which is designated in the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* as the official specific material designation, the standard that the NFB Fonds descriptions are based on. However, in the realm of photographic study, the term *photograph* refers specifically to a print, and the term *image* is used to describe multiple formats. In this article, the two terms will be used interchangeably. See Canadian Committee on Archival Description, *Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa: Canadian Council of Archives, 2008), *RAD* 4.5B1, http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/RAD/RAD_Chapter04_July2008.pdf. As well, the number of photographic records in a fonds does not equate to unique images, as there may be multiple prints and negatives of individual images.

time. As a result, the NFB Fonds at LAC includes photos taken by the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (CGMPB), the precursor institution to the NFB, but also photos from government departments such as the Department of Immigration and Colonization from the 1920s. There are also private collections acquired and managed by the NFB, such as photographs of the Peary Arctic expedition in 1896. The NFB acquired and managed the photographs from the Wartime Information Board (WIB) during the Second World War as well as copies of official wartime photographs from the Department of National Defence's Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit and British and American forces, all of which are part of the NFB Fonds. NFB films are also documented in the fonds' photographic records through photographic stills. Mixed throughout the fonds are filmstrips created by the Still Photography Division (SPD) of the NFB, sometimes in partnership with other government departments, for promotion, education, and propaganda, as well as a set of pictorial photo essays, known as the photostories, also produced by the SPD. Many of the photographs in the NFB Fonds were part of the various iterations of a government photographic library that began as a curated collection crafted first by the CGMPB, then the NFB, then Information Canada from ca. 1970 to 1975, then the NFB again, and finally Supply and Services Canada from ca. 1984 to 1990. With the function of government photographs carried out by a number of federal departments and the collection shifting from department to department, there are at least four departments and agencies that created photographic records. And yet, as the reader shall see, all of these records have been generally grouped into the NFB Fonds, and there is almost no means for researchers to distinguish the different creators and agencies.

Furthermore, because of the historical separation of textual and visual records at LAC, few of the textual records related to the photographs are listed as part of the physical extent in the fonds.[5] For example, there are approximately 90 centimetres of photostories in the NFB Fonds, but these were included as finding aid

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5   See Joan M. Schwartz, "The Archival Garden: Photographic Plantings, Interpretive Choices, and Alternative Narratives," in *Controlling the Past: Documenting Society and Institutions: Essays in Honor of Helen Willa Samuel*s, ed. Terry Cook (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011), 69–110; Terry Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives,'" in *"All Shook Up": The Archival Legacy of Terry Cook*, ed. Tom Nesmith, Greg Bak, and Joan M. Schwartz (Chicago: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists, 2020); and Ala Rekrut, "Love Media Tender . . . Eventually: Playing Cook's Archival 'Record,'" in Nesmith, Bak, and Schwartz, *"All Shook Up,"* for discussion of the impact of cartographic, audiovisual, art and photographic divisions operating separately.

material in the sub-series description. Inaccurate description of content is just the beginning of the problems with the NFB Fonds as there are also unprocessed boxes of material, lost or non-existent finding aids, and a sparse and confused arrangement that does nothing to contextualize the records for researchers. An analysis of the 640,000 photographs found that they are listed in over 100 accessions, with a mélange of online item descriptions, microfilmed finding aids, and textual finding aids making much of the fonds inaccessible to researchers. While many legacy collections could likely be described in a similar manner, this article will attempt to unravel some of the reasons why these records are arranged in this way and suggest what might be done to provide more context and clarity in the descriptions.

At LAC, the context of these images is expressed through its hierarchical arrangement in the NFB Fonds. The majority of the photographs were arranged into a series under the NFB Fonds entitled Photothèque, which was further organized into three sub-series for three creator or custodian entities: Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, Wartime Information Board, and Still Photography Division. However, these sub-series were incomplete and puzzling in terms of their content. CGMPB photographic accessions were linked to the SPD sub-series as well as in the CGMPB's sub-series; even stranger, there were no photographs from the War Records (WR) classification in the WIB sub-series. To add to the confusion, there was no indication in the series or sub-series descriptions that Information Canada and Supply and Services Canada were responsible for the creation, accumulation, and management of the images from ca. 1970 to 1975 and then from ca. 1984 to 1990, respectively. There was a misconception at LAC that the Archives only managed images up to 1971, but in fact there are many images from the later periods, although these were hidden in the multiple accessions linked to the SPD sub-series. Disentangling and making sense of the layers of context within this complex custodial history has required intense research into the NFB, the other government agencies that were created and disbanded, and the many recordkeeping systems that were used over the decades – as well as the past attempts by LAC to provide contextual information for these records. And yet, all these creators, custodians, and recordkeeping systems can provide insight into the current photographic records, giving more nuance to the current NFB Fonds while highlighting provenance and the evidential value of the records.

There are few historical studies of the photographic work of the National Film Board and its predecessor and antecedent institutions, but the two most useful

studies are Carol Payne's *The Official Picture*, which presents the work of the Still Photography Division from 1941 to 1971, and Andrea Kunard's doctoral dissertation on the National Gallery of Canada's collection of Still Photography Division photographs.[6] But there is a richer and fuller story to be told. The responsibility for producing and managing still photography began in 1917 within the Exhibits and Publicity Branch in the Department of Trade and Commerce.[7] This became the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (CGMPB) in 1923 after the bureau emerged as the country's primary agency creating film productions for the purposes of education, documentation, and promotion. The CGMPB photographed agricultural processes to be used for education and training, scenic landscapes to encourage travel, and prosperous settlers and living conditions to stimulate immigration.[8]

The NFB was established in 1939, initially as an advisory board for government film work, and it operated alongside the CGMPB until 1941, when the NFB absorbed the film and photographic production function of the CGMPB. While the NFB expanded rapidly during the war to produce hundreds of films, it also acquired the CGMPB's records, although it continued to use the classification

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6   Carol Payne, *The Official Picture: The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division and the Image of Canada, 1941–1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013); and Andrea Kunard, "Promoting Culture through Photography in the National Gallery of Canada and the Still Photography Division of the National Film Board of Canada" (PhD dissertation, Queen's University, 2004). There are other theses and publications that provide some additional background as well: Renate Wickens-Feldman, "The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division: The Griersonian Legacy," *History of Photography* 20, no. 3 (1996): 271–77; Andrea Kunard, *Photography in Canada 1960–2000* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 2017); Julie-Ann Latulippe, "Le 'tournant artistique' du service de la photographie de l'ONF, 1960–1978: mutation du statut de la photographie et construction de sa valeur artistique dans le contexte canadien" (MA thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2009); and Nicole Courrier, "Picturing Archives: The National Photography Collection, Public Archives of Canada, 1975–1986" (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 2017). For more information related to the CGMPB period, see Charles Backhouse, *Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau 1917–1941* (Ottawa: Canadian Film Institute, 1974); for more on NFB's wartime history and the Wartime Information Board, see Gary Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) and William Robert Young, "Making the Truth Graphic: The Canadian Government's Home Front Information Structure and Programmes During World War II" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1978). For more on the later periods of Information Canada and Supply and Services, see Gary Evans, *In the National Interest: A Chronicle of the National Film Board of Canada from 1949 to 1989* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

7   Other government departments, such as the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, had been using photography to document, teach, and promote Canada since the early 1900s. See Kunard, "Promoting Culture through Photography," 171–72.

8   Payne, *The Official Picture*, 21.

system used by the CGMPB to organize its photographic library to arrange and retrieve its photographs.[9]

A further organizational change occurred in the NFB's Photo Services in 1943, when it merged with the Wartime Information Board (WIB) Photo Unit. The WIB Photo Unit was originally established as part of the Bureau of Public Information in 1941, and it, along with the NFB, were the Government of Canada's two main producers of home front photographic propaganda during the Second World War.[10] With the NFB emerging as the dominant agency, the WIB Photo Unit's still image library came under the control of the NFB in 1943.[11] All of the photographs taken by the WIB Photo Unit were subsequently managed by the NFB, and the WR recordkeeping scheme begun by the WIB was maintained and used by the NFB throughout the war.[12] By war's end, there were two main recordkeeping systems: the CGMPB classification system and the WR classification system.

In the post-war period, Photo Services was renamed the Still Photography Division, and the recordkeepers in the division also developed a new method of classification for its photographs – a series later known as the pre-1962 numeric and the K series – to exert better control over its ever-enlarging photographic collection.[13] New products also emerged to meet the needs of federal departments, including the filmstrip, produced as a tool for training and education;

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9   It may have originally been known as the Alphabetical Prefix Series, but over time, it has been referred to as the CGMPB classification. It provides subject or departmental access points through an alphabetical code, and these are followed by numbers in ascending order. For instance, images for the Fruit Branch of the Department of Agriculture are coded under "EC." See Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 3364598, accessed July 19, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3364598&lang=eng.

10   For more information see Evans, *John Grierson and the National Film Board*, and Young, "Making the Truth Graphic." A more concise history was available in the former LAC virtual exhibition *Canadian War Industry during the Second World War*, which included an essay by LAC archivist Andrew Rodger, "The Wartime Information Board and Photography." Copy in author's possession.

11   Payne, *The Official Picture*, 23.

12   An alphanumeric system similar to the CGMPB classification was used for the WR subject classifications. There are 12 different codes, all beginning with W, that cover various domains such as WRF (Royal Canadian Air Force), WRM (manufacturing), and WRI (internment), among others.

13   The numeric series is also known as the pre-1962 numeric series, and the first photographs in this classification are from 1945. The numbers are assigned in ascending numeric order. One example from the pre-1962 numeric series is Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 4295839, image number 11408, accessed July 19, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=4295839&lang=eng; an example from the K series is Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 4292767, image number K-2089, accessed July 19, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=4292767&lang=eng.

and the photostory, which focused on stories of human interest or promotional appeal that aligned with the country's views around healthcare, workplaces, national parks, and multiculturalism.

In the 1960s, the role of the SPD continued to evolve, embracing the notion that it should extend beyond the documentary to the artistic. The SPD also broadened its mandate to include exhibitions, with curators regularly mounting shows and publishing books to promote the artistic work of photographers in Canada.[14] The recordkeeping scheme was altered in 1962, when the NFB brought in a new sequence referred to as the post-1962 numeric classification.[15] The photographic library also underwent some modifications to facilitate access. Card catalogues indexed by geographic location and subject were established for the CGMPB and the pre-1962 numeric sequences.[16]

With the expansion of government in the post-war era, the explosion of federal records became increasingly unmanageable. The Task Force on Government Information was formed in 1968 to examine information creation and management across all government departments and to make recommendations related to public access and issues of preservation of all information, including photographs. The study published its final report, *To Know and Be Known* (1969), in which it recommended the establishment of a centralized information service for the government. In the area of photographic holdings, the report lamented the decentralized nature of the many photographic holdings in the government. There were 67 different collections, totalling 4 million photographs, that were kept in a variety of ways. "Almost half the negatives were stored in conditions that were bound to contribute to their decay," noted the task force report, which also said that, if properly cared for and harnessed, "the government's numerous but scattered photo collections could be so utilized as to provide one of the country's most important resources of historic and contemporary infor-

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[14]　Payne, *The Official Picture*, 45.

[15]　The first block of numbers refers to the year the photo was taken or the year it was integrated into the new classification scheme, and the second number is assigned according to the ascending numeric order of the photos. One example is Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 4950167, image number 63-189, accessed July 19, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=4950167&lang=eng.

[16]　Paul Couvrette, "Notes from a Report on the Still Photography Division, National Film Board of Canada" (unpublished report, April 1978), 12, in the author's possession.

mation."[17] It also examined the already growing photographic collection at the Public Archives of Canada (PAC),[18] and it highlighted the establishment of the film archive at PAC, in 1969, as a direct result of the 1967 nitrate film fire at the NFB storage facility in Beaconsfield, Quebec, which destroyed much of Canada's film heritage.[19] The report suggested that, with these successful new programs preserving and collecting photographs and film, PAC could be the home of the government's diffuse collection of photographs, since the "Public Archives has more than a million stills, all of which may easily be seen by the public."[20] A senior NFB official echoed this recommendation, stating that, while the institution's photographic library had a well-indexed collection, "a still photo library should be the responsibility of the Public Archives."[21]

This desire to centralize government information across all departments resulted in a further shift in the SPD. The division was split three ways to meet the new centralization policy. As one of the main recommendations of the task force, Information Canada was created in 1970 to better manage the "information" of Canada, including the still photography library at the NFB. The photographs in the library that were considered active records were stripped from the NFB and transferred to this new department, and they became known as the Information Canada Photothèque.[22] The photothèque performed the same function as the NFB's photographic library, providing access for all departments, as well as the public, to a centralized library of images. The photothèque also continued with the role of documenting Canada through photographs, through either assignments or the purchase of already existing photography collections.

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17   Government of Canada, *To Know and Be Known: The Report of the Task Force on Government Information* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969), 180–81.

18   The Public Archives had recently established a historical photographs section in 1964. For a history of photography at the Archives, see Joan M. Schwartz, "The National Archives of Canada," *History of Photography* 20, no. 2 (1996): 168–67.

19   The archive then became known as the National Film Archives Division in 1973. It later became known officially as the National Film, Television and Sound Archives. Sarah Cook, "Shrouded History: The Canadian Film and Photo Unit, Records Creation, Reuse, and the Recontextualizing of 'Lost' Audiovisual Heritage," *Archivaria* 83 (Spring 2017): 138.

20   Canada, *To Know and Be Known*, 181.

21   Canada, 181.

22   *Photothèque* is the French term for photographic library and appears to be the name provided to the photographic library from 1970 onward.

The NFB's artistic images and functions remained at the NFB in the SPD; the images considered to be historical and archival documents were transferred to PAC in 1971.

Information Canada was a failed experiment and was dissolved in 1975; its photothèque was subsequently transferred back to the NFB the next year. With much of the historical collection at PAC, the remaining collection at the NFB was orphaned, and Paul Couvrette, a Carleton journalism graduate who was asked by the NFB in 1977 to prepare a report on the Still Photography Division, noted that there was little new funding for the maintenance and preservation of the remaining images in the photographic library. New content was also neglected, poorly described, and badly arranged, and photographs were stored in the open air and susceptible to further deterioration. Couvrette remarked in his report that "all of this leads one to believe that the NFB has learned little from the fate of Canada's early film history."[23]

From the late 1970s, the photographic collection continued to be dismembered and shuffled about, with photographs periodically transferred to PAC. In 1984, the SPD was transformed into the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (CMCP), which was affiliated with the National Gallery of Canada, and the division's remaining photographic library – a treasure-trove numbering over 156,000 photographs – was transferred with it.[24] Around the same time, to maintain an active photo library service for government images, the remaining photographs at the NFB were shifted to the Department of Supply and Services, where another recordkeeping classification, an elaborate subject index system, was established.[25] In 1990, the Department of Supply and Services closed its operation as a centralized photographic library and service provider, and this

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23   Couvrette, "Notes from a Report on the Still Photography Division," 47–48.

24   Martha Langford, "The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography," *History of Photography* 20, no. 2 (1996): 174–80; Renate Wickens-Feldman, "The National Film Board of Canada's Still Photography Division: The Griersonian Legacy," *History of Photography* 20, no. 3 (1996): 271–77; and Evans, *In the National Interest*, 308.

25   This system was based on four separate subject blocks but was not fully enacted as it was created to accommodate subject codes for content that did not yet exist. Instead, the majority of the photographs are arranged in a three-numeric-block system: the first block is a main subject, like 004 = indigenous; the second block refers to geographic location, such as province/territory; the third block is assigned an ascending numeric sequence or a secondary subject category; if applicable, the fourth block is assigned an ascending numeric sequence. One example is Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 3514363, item number 004-002-012-010, accessed July 19, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3514363&lang=eng.

precipitated another large-scale transfer of photographs to the then–National Archives of Canada (NA).

The record history of images in the NFB Fonds is thus very complex, with the collection and the function shifting from different agencies, such as the CGMPB, Bureau of Public Information, Information Canada, Supply and Services, and the CMCP, and with over five different recordkeeping systems being used. Nevertheless, while this was not a unique situation for a government department, the complex transfers of government photographic records were a challenge for the Archives when it came to describing, contextualizing, and making these records available to the public.

Part 2: Archival Custody

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the Archives received disordered but rich sets of images with multiple provenances through many transfers from the various departments and agencies responsible for the collection. While the first acquisition was a set of photographs of the 1927 Dominion-Provincial Conference created and transferred by the CGMPB, the majority of the acquisitions were transferred to PAC in the 1970s and 1980s. Separate divisions were created to acquire, manage, and provide access to the visual archives during the 1970s.[26] This was an important step toward PAC's approach to total archives, but due to the separation of records of different formats into separate divisions, records from the same provenance were not integrated or managed together.[27] With the establishment of the National Photography Collection in 1975, archivists sought out photographic records to build the collection and worked tirelessly to advance the theory and study of photographs and archives.[28] Given the

26 The National Map Collection was formed in 1967, with the National Photography Collection and the National Film Collection being established as divisions in the mid-1970s. See Antonio Lechasseur and Danielle Lacasse, *The National Archives of Canada, 1872–1997* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1997), 20.

27 There were separate ways to access records at the archives, depending on their format. The visual archives were organized around the accession record, whereas the textual government records of the NFB were arranged according to the record group system, under RG53.

28 For more information about the collecting mandate at LAC over the years, see Schwartz, "The National Archives of Canada," 166–71; and Courrier, "Picturing Archives." Chapter 2 provides some of the context around the acquisition as well as a description of these records.

traumatic effects of the 1967 fire, PAC staff moved with urgency to acquire as many collections as possible, since the photographs were already degrading from improper storage and damaged from overuse of the original negatives. Aware of this fragility, PAC even went so far as to duplicate original negatives, returning copies for the photothèque's continued use while preserving the original negatives at PAC. Safeguarding the records was the primary concern. While PAC proposed a scenario of regular yearly transfers of dormant photographs from the post-1962 recordkeeping system, this plan never came to fruition. The photographic records continued to be sent episodically by the NFB or other institutions to PAC, usually in large collections that contained many images from multiple recordkeeping systems.

For much of their time at the Archives, the main organizational principle for photographs was the accession record.[29] An accession record was created for each transfer, and so these records were organized around when the records were sent to the Archives.[30] Generally, the images were transferred to LAC when the custodian determined they were no longer active and they were removed from circulation from the government photographic library. This was a process of picking and choosing, largely based on what was seen as no longer relevant to contemporary needs. The first of these many large-scale transfers, accession 1971-271, comprised over 115,000 photographs from the CGMPB, WR, K, and pre-1962 recordkeeping systems that spanned from the 1920s to the 1960s. Because of the collection's breadth and size, and the comprehensiveness of its finding aids, it became a highly used accession for the NFB collection. But it was not the entire set of records.

There were other large photograph transfers, many of them driven by the organizational shifts and the movements of the photo library through the 1970s and 1980s. Accession 1976-068 comprised approximately 200,000 photographs from the post-1962 classification scheme, and accession 1976-208 comprised over 12,000 images from the CGMPB and the pre-1962 classification. When the NFB's photo library was shifted once more, this time to Supply and Services, two more transfers – accessions 1982-015 and 1982-177, comprising over 6,000 photographs from WR, K, pre-1962, and post-1962 numeric series – were sent

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29   See National Archives of Canada, Documentary Art and Photography Division, *General Guide Series* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1992), 9, which was published prior to the fonds conversion.

30   The accession number identified the year of transfer.

to PAC. The closure of the photographic library in 1990 led to the third-largest transfer, encompassing over 60,000 photos: accession 1991-262 consisted of photographs from the post-1962 and post-1982 recordkeeping systems. By the early 1990s, there were over 100 National Film Board photographic accessions at the archives, some comprising only a single item and others containing over 100,000. To minimize the number of accessions, some were merged into accession 1971-271, regrouping some photographs of similar classification systems together; however, for the most part, researchers needed to access multiple accessions to consult the records of a single recordkeeping system.[31] While there were many ways to access this massive collection – from the original card catalogues to item-level descriptions in the Archives photographic database – the main principle of organization was the transfer, which was reflected through the accession.

In the 1990s, there was a major shift in how archives were to be described, with *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* emphasizing the pre-eminence of the fonds.[32] The fonds was a system of arrangement based on the context of records that was meant to emphasize its provenance.[33] The National Archives of Canada (NA), as it was renamed in 1987, adopted the fonds and underwent a massive reorganization of its records through a retrospective conversion (recon) project that led to the conversion and integration of all of its separately described and disparately arranged visual and textual records into the newly established fonds.

While the fonds conversion at the NA brought together the various formats of a single creator and contextualized the records through the creation of administrative histories, it did not fully integrate the visual records of a creator or custodian. The greatest limitation of the recon project was that multiple provenance was not easily accounted for in *RAD* or in the database structure developed for the fonds- and collection-level descriptions at the NA.[34] Further-

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31 One example is Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 12801, accession 1979-241, accessed July 10, 2021, https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=12801 &new=-8585756815326584617.

32 The first chapters of RAD were issued in 1990. Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice* (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 1.

33 Danielle Lacasse and Antonio Lechasseur, "Du *record group* au fonds d'archives: Normalisation du classement et de la description d'archives gouvernementales aux Archives nationales du Canada," *Archives* 28, no. 3–4 (1996–1997): 57–79.

34 The presence of multiple creators is only one of many issues with *RAD*. Richard Dancy points out the various

more, the contextualization exercise did not extend to the accessions records because they were not considered "descriptive" records under *RAD*. Instead, the accessions were linked to new series and sub-series attached to the new NFB Fonds, and additional creators and custodians were not added as additional provenance points in the records. This was a significant limitation to the project and, by maintaining the structure of the accession records within the fonds, simply created another level of "description" within the fonds hierarchy. While there is value in knowing when something was sent to the archives – as this demonstrates a shift in the life cycle of the record, especially when it moved from active record to dormant archival record – there was little value in using this as the basis for an arrangement to access and contextualize the 640,000 photographs in the NFB Fonds. In short, the artificial construct of the accession based on transfers survived through the fonds conversion, even though it obscured the complexity of the records.

After this significant conversion, the arrangement and description of the NFB Fonds was still missing the nuance of its multiple creators and custodians. While the NA procedures for arrangement suggested that "the best basis for a series is a file-management system," this was not the approach taken for the NFB Fonds.[35] There were three sub-series attached to a series entitled "Photothèque"; 16 accessions, ranging from one item to over 3,000 photographs, were linked to the CGMPB sub-series; and all of these accessions were assigned titles with some variation on "CGMPB." However, photographs from the CGMPB classification transferred and catalogued after 1941 were titled as part of the National Film Board collection. Therefore, to access the photographs from the former CGMPB alphabetic classification scheme, one would have to review not only the accessions in the CGMPB sub-series but also the SPD sub-series. For example, a portrait of Frederick Banting (X-323) was organized by PAC under

problems, which include titles, multiple creators, the relationships between the intellectual and physical records, and the limitation of describing only from the general to specific. See Richard Dancy, "RAD Past, Present and Future," *Archivaria* 74 *(Fall 2012): 7–41.* Furthermore, the instructions in the NA's *Corporate Archival Control Manual* related to arrangement and description were overly simplistic and did not adequately deal with the realities of government records. The name of the fonds was meant to reflect the name of the institution for which the NA had last received records, and additional provenance points were to be added to reflect the additional creators and custodians. However, this does not appear to have happened with the NFB, and there was likely confusion between the theory and its application with this set of records, with its multiple creators and custodians.

35   Library and Archives Canada, *Corporate Archival Control Manual* (unpublished internal documentation), 6.2C4a.

the NFB accession title, and a portrait of John Abbott (XX-29) was organized by PAC under the CGMPB accession title.[36] Both photographs were from the same CGMPB recordkeeping system but, due to the lack of context in the accession records and the execution of the fonds conversion, these records were arranged into different series based on the title of the accessions (in this case the transferring entities), and there was no discernible link made between the two.

Two accessions were linked to the WIB sub-series, but both consisted of WIB posters, not the extensive collection of photographs from the WR classification system. The WR photographs were transferred to PAC in a number of different accessions, with accession 1971-271 and accession 1975-381 encompassing over 20,000 photographs. However, in an illustration of the difficulties of the accessions and transfers as an organizing principle, the WIB was not identified in these photographic accession records because the WIB did not directly transfer these photographs.[37] In fact, the WR photographs have an even more intricate provenance and custodial history, as some of the photographs predate the existence of the WIB and were originally created by the photo unit in the Bureau of Public Information. With the single point of provenance in the recon conversion and the limitations in addressing the multipart provenance of the accessions, the full archival history of these records remained obscured.

Closer examination of the NFB Fonds reveals other problems. The SPD sub-series contained a mixture of accessions with titles like "NFB Photo library collection," "Photothèque collection," or simply "NFB collection" and included many of the accessions that comprised multiple recordkeeping systems and creators. Due to the rigorous rules and inflexibility of the fonds conversion at NA, accessions comprising multiple recordkeeping systems were linked only to the SPD sub-series rather than to the other relevant sub-series. There were 43 accessions linked to the SPD sub-series, and while many of these photographs were created or managed by the SPD, there were others, like the post-1982 subject classification series found in accession 1991-262, that were not. And so, the existence of the over 27,000 photographs from this classification and time period was obfuscated

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36   See Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 3214697, accessed July 19, 2021, http://central.bac-lac .gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3214697&lang=eng, for Banting, and Library and Archives Canada, NFB Fonds, Mikan 3212334, accessed July 19, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol &id=3212334&lang=eng, for Abbott.

37   1975-381 is titled "National Film Board of Canada collection," and 1971-271 is titled "Collection Office national du film du Canada. Photothèque."

through this arrangement.[38] This misunderstanding of provenance and scope was further compounded as there are only 15 online, item-level descriptions for the post-1982 photographs, and these descriptions are skeletal at best. The item-level descriptions provide no title or date information; only the subject classification number sequence is listed, with no explanation as to its meaning.[39]

Although the fonds conversion focused on the provenance of the records, the mass of legacy records with multipart-provenance accessions – and the inflexible approach to arrangement and description, combined with the lack of resources to fully research and draw out the different recordkeeping systems mixed within them – led to the failure to fully elucidate the multi-creator and multi-custodian relationships in the records of the new NFB Fonds. The new fonds arrangement did not meet the call for archival contextualization – something that is required so that the images may be understood, writes Joan Schwartz, "as the product of actions and transactions."[40] In short, there is greater value to the photographs than just their visual depictions of places, persons, or things. Government photographs were created with specific purposes in mind, as noted by Schwartz, and "it is their functional context that transforms photographic images into archival documents."[41] In effect, the new fonds structure did little for under-standing the records' evidential value – both as individual objects and as part of a recordkeeping series – because the majority of the accessions were massed together in the SPD sub-series. The details surrounding the creation of an image – the photographer, the equipment, the subject matter, and its end use – were not the same for photographs from the 1920s CGMPB, the Second World War WIB and NFB, the 1960s NFB, or the 1980s Department of Supply and Services. Even the most casual researcher would understand that; and yet, for the NFB Fonds, the homogenization of all these photographs stripped these valuable records of much of their evidential value and contextual significance. Through its application of the fonds system and failure to disassemble the accessions, the

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38   Neither Information Canada nor Supply and Services Canada is identified in the accessions in the NFB Fonds, even though these would have been the transferring institutions for some of these accessions. Furthermore, fonds descriptions exist at LAC for Information Canada and Supply and Services, and there are two accessions of what are likely parts of the former photo library linked to these respective fonds.

39   See Mikan 3514357 to 3514370 for two examples.

40   Joan M. Schwartz, "'We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomatics," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995): 42.

41   Schwartz, 42.

Archives altered and even limited the knowledge that could be obtained from these records through its arrangement and description. The fonds presented the history of these records as a straightforward, hierarchical path of context, but as explained in part 1, these records were created and managed through a continuum of relationships and activities, with various actors and agents, and this should be reflected in the series-level descriptions and arrangements.

Part 3: Records Continuum

There is a significant literature exploring archival arrangement and description, with some key guiding work by Terry Cook, Laura Millar, and Geoffrey Yeo.[42] To assist in conceptualizing the fonds structure, Peter Horsman has proposed virtual provenance while Terry Cook and Geoffrey Yeo have explored the fonds as an intellectual or theoretical construct.[43] Embracing the messy questions of many creators and provenances, Tom Nesmith and other theorists have offered ways to think about the multiple, parallel, and societal provenance of records.[44] Nesmith explains, "Some archivists have broadened the concept of provenance to include the actions of archivists and users of archives as formative influences on the creation of records."[45] As such, it is increasingly common to see the archival repository not as the end of the life cycle of the record but as another way station

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[42] Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 24–37; Laura Millar, "The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Space and Time," *Archivaria* 53 *(Spring 2002): 1–15; and Geoffrey Yeo, "*The Conceptual Fonds and the Physical Collection," *Archivaria* 73 *(Spring 2012): 43–80.*

[43] Peter Horsman, "The Last Dance of the Phoenix, or the De-discovery of the Archival Fonds," *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002) 1–23; Terry Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 17–63; and Yeo, "The Conceptual Fonds."

[44] Tom Nesmith, "The Concept of Societal Provenance and Records of Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal–European Relations in Western Canada: Implications for Archival Theory and Practice," *Archival Science* 6, no. 3–4 (2006): 351–60; Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, NJ: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists, 1993); Tom Nesmith, "The Principle of Provenance," in *Encyclopedia of Archival Science*, ed. Luciana Duranti and Patricia C. Franks (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 287; Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era"; Chris Hurley, "Parallel Provenance: Part 1: What, if Anything, is Archival Description?" *Archives and Manuscripts* 33, no. 1 (2005): 110–45; and Chris Hurley, "Parallel Provenance: Part 2: When Something Is Not Related to Everything Else," *Archives and Manuscripts* 33, no. 2 (2005): 52–91.

[45] Nesmith, "The Principle of Provenance," 287.

along the road. Nesmith's expanded view of provenance, as "an ongoing process in which records are created and re-created," also has shaped my thinking in this project.[46] This extension of provenance to the archive – with its acts of accumulation, arrangement, description, digitization, and subsequent reuse – demonstrates the role of the archive as another actor shaping the record. Archival interventions can reveal and obscure, but there is no denying their impact.

The NFB Fonds passed through a radical reorganization in the 1990s, but that action failed to fully draw out the archival complexities and, in fact, obscured much of the complex provenance. As the archival theorists above note, however, there are layers of meaning in archives and within archival records – not the least are the interventions from archivists. These may be for good or ill, or tied to archival theory, the latest organizational directives, or new technological advances.

I, too, am a part of this continuum of interventions. After studying the LAC NFB Fonds, I set out to clarify the context, conducting significant research into not only the organizations described earlier but also their internal recordkeeping systems and the evolving government policy toward information management. Disentangling the complex creation, transfer, and arrangement history also revealed that past decisions had a deep effect on the records and influenced how they were described, arranged, and even accessed. There were reasons for the arrangements outlined above – primarily, that earlier generations of archivists had as their first priority saving endangered records and that they were dealing with an onslaught of large transfers. Furthermore, the issues encountered with the accession organization system were not related simply to the NFB visual records but concerned millions of other government records that arrived at the Archives. And, finally, the recon conversion, and its strict application of *RAD*, was not a failure in many cases, although it was too inflexible for multi-provenance government records and was more problematic for visual archival records.

And so, with these successes and failures in mind, this rearrangement project has been broken down into stages: the first stage included research, review of all archival descriptions, and the creation of new series.[47] Through this examination of the records' life-cycle continuum, as seen in parts 1 and 2, it became clear to me that there was already an existing intellectual arrangement for many of the images in the NFB Fonds based on the multiple classification systems used by the various

46   Nesmith, 287.

47   This intellectual rearrangement project did not encompass a physical rearrangement of the images.

custodians of these images. And while there are few published studies of visual government records arrangement projects, at LAC, the Department of National Defence photographs have undergone significant rearrangement and description work, with the classification systems used as the arrangement structure for the photographs.[48] There are advantages to arranging by classification system. As seen with the NFB Fonds structure, series based on a creating body or an organizational unit can be difficult to contend with, as these organizational structures are frequently created, collapsed, remade, and renamed. In this particular case, the recordkeeping systems remained the same, for the most part, and withstood all of the various organizational changes. The item numbers provide contextual information as the recordkeeping scheme identifies the creator and/or custodian and the time period during which each item was managed in the government photo library. Once the item arrives at the Archives, the recordkeeping system and its classification numbers link directly to the original finding aids that are still employed to access these images.[49] And if descriptions or finding aids are not available for particular images in a classification sequence, often the preceding or antecedent images in the classification are related to each other. Since not all images in the photographic classifications are described online with item-level descriptions, the series provides a "landing page" for all of these undescribed records, with an extent and overview of the scope and content within the classification, creating a more stable entry point to identify and use finding aids and to locate other images of the same classification sequence. In the end, regrouping images together from the same classification system provides more evidential and information value for images.

While there are advantages to an arrangement by classification system, there are studies warning that the layers of custodial and archival intervention related to original order and arrangement can create false constructs leading to an obscuring or misunderstanding of records. However, these mainly relate

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48   Photographic rearrangement and description, originally undertaken in 2013 by a team working with photo archivist Shannon Perry, has been carried on by Department of National Defence archivist Alex Comber.

49   There is even an internal guide to the images in the NFB Fonds, which was created to help navigate the fonds and the accessions. It too was broken down by recordkeeping classification, demonstrating that although the fonds was "arranged" in a particular way for public consumption, this arrangement did not help with the access. See Helen Roytblat, *A Guide to National Film Board Photographic Materials and Finding Aids* (LAC internal report, 2003).

to private records.[50] While it is true, for these photographs, that the various custodians changed methods of classification many times through different "orders" and recordkeeping systems, for the most part, the old recordkeeping systems were maintained when each newer one was established. As well, when the images were culled from the photo library, or removed from active use, and transferred to the Archives, the photographs' recordkeeping numbers continued to be used for identification purposes, and the images were identified for the most part by the numeric codes from their recordkeeping systems. Regardless of the transfers, accession records, and fonds arrangement structure, the record-keeping system with the individual item identification number was preserved and used as a main access point by the Archives – and in the current, unmedi-ated access model, arrangement by recordkeeping system has clear advantages.

There are 12 series based primarily on the various recordkeeping systems that were employed by the creators and custodians. This structure is far different from the fonds rearrangement of the 1990s and more clearly elucidates the multipart provenance and recordkeeping systems of the past creators and custo-dians. The accessions and item-level descriptions have been linked to these new series, which in the case of the WR classification, resulted in 4,700 item descriptions that are now contextualized together in a series for this record-keeping sequence. To give but one example, this provides new meaning for a series of images of the Japanese internment operations during the Second World War, which are now contextualized together and can be better understood as part of the government's wartime propaganda. Finding aids that break down the accessions by recordkeeping number have been created for the multiple record-keeping accessions. The containers have been linked to their new series, making it easier to physically locate the photographs. Previously, LAC staff had to consult multiple databases or lists to locate the correct container. In future phases, more series and sub-series will be established over time to reflect some of the more complex issues, such as those concerning the photographs that were not offi-cially numbered into the recordkeeping system, the out-takes, the photostories, and other unique recordkeeping structures. As well, as the backlog of legacy records is processed, it is certain that more records will be uncovered and that

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50   Heather MacNeil, "Archivalterity: Rethinking Original Order," *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 1–24; Jennifer Douglas and Heather MacNeil, "Arranging the Self: Literary and Archival Perspectives on Writers' Archives," *Archivaria* 67 (Spring 2009): 25–39; and Jeremy M. Heil, "The Procrustean Bed: A History of the Arrangement of the Al Purdy Fonds," *Archivaria* 76 (Fall 2013): 27–54.

the arrangement and its series will adapt and grow. However, the contextual information that is currently provided remains limited. Some of the deficiencies Schwartz outlined in 2002 regarding the "context of archival records creation" remain present in LAC's archival database.[51] LAC's archival description system is still based on the fonds, and it does not support multiple provenance. This means that the context of the record is articulated through the display of the hierarchy, which is still, at this time, a linear expression. For example, the photographs from the CGMPB classification are linked only to the NFB Fonds rather than being linked also to the Department of Trade and Commerce, although additional provenance points have been added to the series to indicate that the Department of Trade and Commerce was an additional creator of these records.

The context and description of photographs matter even more in today's digitally based environment because of the decontextualization that so often occurs with web-based archival access and through the continued reuse of visual records as new digital objects. Joanna Sassoon states that "photographs in these large collections are more than visual images," calling them "historical documents that have accumulated a range of meanings over their lives from the interactions between their content, the contexts in which they have been placed and used, and their photographic or published formats."[52] In effect, the life cycle of the record has not ended at the archival repository as the records continue to evolve; as Heather MacNeil notes, records "are in a continuous state of becoming, as they are resituated and recontextualized in different environments and by different authorities."[53] In this way, other users continue to influence and alter the record.

While records have an afterlife, this life is better lived if there is a firm contextual foundation that researchers and other users can employ to better understand the provenance of the records. In fact, as these photographs became more untethered from their contexts, archivists must work even harder to ensure that the provenance is clear. Again, to return to the NFB Fonds, there is a difference between an image of Prime Minister Mackenzie King taken in 1927 by the

51   Joan M. Schwartz, "Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic 'Othering,' and the Margins of Archivy," *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002): 159.

52   Joanna Sassoon, *Agents of Empire: How E.L. Mitchell's Photographs Shaped Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2017), viii.

53   MacNeil, "Archivalterity," 21.

CGMPB and a wartime propaganda image of him included as part of the WR recordkeeping sequence.[54] It may be that researchers use these two images inter-changeably in their products with little care for the provenance, other than to account for the difference in age, but archives, as champions of context, need to care. Through this NFB rearrangement project, LAC has reinvested in the value of provenance by treating these records as the "whole" and not just the "parts" – thereby giving researchers the opportunity to understand the photographs as more than just neat old pictures but as acts of government – with the full, rich, and messy context enhancing the visual evidence of promotion, documentation, education, and propaganda activities in fundamentally important ways.

And so, my work in the NFB Fonds from 2018 to 2020 builds upon the work of previous archivists, and I am not unaware of the irony that someone in the future will likely unravel my own work. But guided by Schwartz's call to action, that "archives must ensure that they not only document the history of the record, but that they also record the history of that institutional documentation," I have attempted to lay out my own work through official documentation and in this article.[55] So often, decisions regarding arrangement and description are hidden from the public and from archivists as well. They are undocumented in the records, difficult to detect in the metadata, and yet, they matter.[56] Just as there is a continuum of the records' life cycle, there is a continuum of archival inter-ventions, which become another chapter in the history of the record, of which my own work is now a part.

Conclusion

Even with these archival interventions, arrangements based on archival prin-ciples, and attempts at recontextualization, archival images will continue to be repurposed and decontextualized, and this after life of the record is largely out of

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54 Library and Archives Canada, Mikan 3624910, XB-5D, accessed July 15, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca /.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3624910&lang=eng; Library and Archives Canada, Mikan 3239342, WRE-229, accessed July 15, 2021, http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3239342&lang=eng.

55 Schwartz, "Coming to Terms with Photographs," 159.

56 Nesmith, "Documenting Appraisal as a Societal-Archival Process: Theory, Practice, and Ethics in the Wake of Helen Willa Samuels," in Cook, *Controlling the Past*, 41–47.

the archives' control. These reuses should be embraced as they demonstrate the purpose and value of archives to a wide and diverse audience. However, it is still our duty as caretakers of the records to document the creator and custodian when we can and to explain the meaning that lies in original recordkeeping systems.

LAC has recently sought to better balance the challenge of describing its older records with the ever-pressing appraisal work required to continually manage government records. Exploring the NFB Fonds has laid bare the value that can be found in addressing these legacy issues for a complex, multi-department creator and subsequent custodial history. It reveals the value of historical research, married with an understanding of theoretical approaches, and the practical work. Theoretical work guides, but there is nothing like actually attempting to disentangle the many archival knots related to the creators, the recordkeeping systems, or the images. And there is always more work to be done. Further research is needed to explore the intricacies of the recordkeeping systems and to examine the histories of the institutions involved in visualizing Canada. Others will be interested in analyzing the images themselves, individually or in the new context, aided by the breadth of the content within the recordkeeping systems described in its series. The many lives and afterlives of records are part of the continuum of interactions between creators, custodians, archives, archivists, and users.

This archival exercise and this article have also considered how the Archives has been not a neutral bystander, simply providing access to the records, but an active participant ascribing new meaning(s) through the choices made in determining how to describe, arrange, and make them available. This article has shown that archival interventions do not end with the transfer – they continue by design or by negligence – and that there is a benefit to government archives entering into continual discussions with legacy records. By working further upstream, as archivists do in appraisal, we can ensure that archives are not only preserving the best records but also receiving adequate metadata and context to make these records available to the public. Archives should work for more control over how records are transferred to them. While there will be cases where this is not always possible, especially if records are at risk, it is better if the contextualizing, arranging, and description work is done prior to a transfer, with archival staff working more closely with the records managers.

This article also demonstrates that intellectual theory does not always fit easily with archival practice. As the NFB Fonds reveals, more attention to arrangement

and description is required, with a greater focus on dealing with the tyranny of past transfers, previous and now-outdated descriptive standards and systems, and archival interventions. Arrangement and description are core archival principles that should be reinvigorated as we move deeper into the digital age of decontextualized image searches and online photo banks such as Flickr.

The disentangling of the NFB Fonds also reveals that returning to the past will create a better path going forward. Lack of description, or even poor description, along with the failure of the archives to explain the context of creation in an increasingly disparately accessed archival world, can lead to misunderstandings of past government messaging and functions while shrouding evidence of government actions, goals, and perspectives, including those directed toward privileged or marginalized members of society. When archives are unable to make this context evident, or when archival records – in this case, photographs – are unmoored from their context, there is an impact on the continued use and understanding of the records that ultimately reduces the photographs to illustrations. Instead of being located in the time, place, and context of creation or use, records are left as individual objects, decontextualized from the whole, and vulnerable to misuse, intentionally or not. The review of legacy records and description of the images in the NFB Fonds is a profound re-embracing of archival principles that are crucial to understanding the history behind the archive and the context behind the photographs. More robust arrangements and descriptions will do much to explain why the photographs have been preserved at LAC, how they relate to each other and their creators, and why archives matter.

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