

Archival Transformations and the Value of Photographic Objects

BRINGING DOWN
THE
"ARCHIVE FEVER"

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The majority of photographs in the world comprise “photographs that operate within everyday life”:¹ amateur photographs taken in private settings and so-called documentary pictures produced for scientific research, social control, or journalistic purposes. These kinds of photographs are only rarely mentioned in the official histories of photography because it is not easy to adapt them to historiographic schemas based on aesthetic values and articulated by styles and/or technological innovations. Photographs of this type have often haphazardly accumulated in vast sedimentations: more or less ordered masses of frequently anonymous pictures, of varying provenance, representing different techniques and dating to different historical periods. In this essay, I deal with a specific category within the realm of photographs that act in the world of the everyday: photo libraries and photographic archives created for documentation and comparative purposes in universities, research institutes, monument protection bodies, museums, and other cultural heritage institutions. Some of them form what Elizabeth Edwards calls “non-collections”² of photographs that are often forgotten, left to moulder away in dusty cabinets, or simply discarded. Other photographic archives might be well sorted, catalogued, and sometimes even digitised; however, their status in the academic system is very low and their very existence must be periodically legitimised. In this paper, I will start by uncovering the practices of a specific art historical photographic archive, the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz — Max Planck Institut (KHI), founded in Florence in 1897 with the aim of providing scholars with visual documentation of Italian art and architecture. I will examine these archival and photographic practices in relation to the value systems that have shaped their codification over time, between the analogue and the digital formats. In the second part of this essay, I shall give some clues about the strategies that can be implemented to activate and explore the epistemological and societal, but also the aesthetic potential, of these archives. Combining a material approach with the transdisciplinary dimension implicit in photography studies, I will propose some ways to reactivate photographic archives as laboratories as well as places of possible encounters.

Since the second half of the 19th century, photographic technologies have played an active role in the formation of academic disciplines, both in the natural sciences and in the humanities.³ The rhetoric of the presumed objectivity of the photographic medium, which seemed to be able to provide evidence and thus support genuinely “scientific” methodologies and arguments, could help to legitimise the humanities in the same manner as the natural sciences. The use, circulation, and accumulation of photographs in archives is common to art history, archaeology, anthropology, geography, as well as for instance diplomatics or numismatics. Between the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, all these and other disciplines underwent a process of institutionalisation with the progressive establishment of university chairs. In this process, photographic archives functioned as scientific laboratories of knowledge

- 1 Edwards, Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories*, 6.
- 2 Edwards, “Thoughts on the ‘Non-Collections’ of the Archival Ecosystem”.
- 3 Mitman, Wilder, *Documenting the World*; Bärnighausen et al. *Photo-Objects*.
- 4 Edwards, “Photographs, Mounts and the Tactile Archive”; Bärnighausen et al., *Foto-Objekte*.
- 5 Schwartz, “‘Records of Simple Truth and Precision’”; Cook, Schwartz, *Archives, Records, and Power*.
- 6 Cited in Cook, “What is Past is Prologue”, 23.
- 7 Caraffa, “From ‘Photo Libraries’ to ‘Photo Archives’”.
- 8 Merriam Webster, s.v. “Archive”.
- 9 *Ibid.*, s.v. “Library”.
- 10 Manoff, “Archive and Database as Metaphor”; Bologna, “La sedimentazione storica della documentazione archivistica”. See also Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 4–7; Manoff, “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines”.
- 11 Cook, “From Information to Knowledge”.
- 12 Schwartz, “‘We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us’”. See also Edwards, Ravilious, *What Photographs Do*.
- 13 On the notion of the photo-archival ecosystem, see Edwards, “Photographs: Material Form and the Dynamic Archive”, 49; Caraffa, “Manzoni in the Photothek”; Edwards, “Thoughts on the ‘Non-Collections’ of the Archival Ecosystem”. See also Stylianou-Lambert, “Photographic Ecosystems and Archives”.

production. It was precisely the practices of photographic archives (such as mounting, captioning, and classifying) that transformed photographs from simple images into validated documents and standardised working tools; and it was in photographic archives that various scientific methodologies were developed.⁴ The rhetoric of objectivity was common to archival science, which during the same time period underwent a similar process of professionalisation. The Foucauldian and Derridean cultural climate that led to the deconstruction of the paradigm of photographic objectivity in the 1970s and 1980s also had a decisive impact on the contemporary conception of the archive. It was above all Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz who shifted the focus from “the archive” as an institutional metaphor of power to individual archives with their working realities, including even those arbitrary decisions that archivists have to make on a day-to-day basis.⁵ The positivist credo of the archivist as “the most selfless devotee of Truth”, formulated at the beginning of the last century by Hilary Jenkinson,⁶ has been questioned precisely because of the transformations documents are subject to in an archive. Archives are not just “temples of memory”. They are complex, dynamic organisms that are endowed with their own materiality and that interact with (photographic) documents themselves, with the structures in which they are housed, with the technologies used, with the various institutional, academic, or even social and political ideologies that preside over them, and also with archivists, collectors, and users. In archives, memory is not simply kept alive, but constantly shaped and reshaped.

Now, at first glance, photographic collections such as the Florentine Photothek seem to be lacking in the character of spontaneous or involuntary sedimentation that traditional archival science considers the pre-condition for the definition of an archive. However, as I have already argued elsewhere,⁷ I do not consider the traditional distinction between an archive as “a place in which public records or historical materials (such as documents) are preserved”⁸ and a library as “a place in which literary, musical, artistic, or reference materials (such as books, manuscripts, recordings, or films) are kept for use but not for sale”⁹ very helpful. Rather, I am interested in what Marlene Manoff has called “archival effects” and I believe in the heuristic and epistemological potential of a broader definition of the (photo) archive that includes different kinds of (photographic) sedimentations.¹⁰ Furthermore, I embrace Terry Cook’s intellectual paradigm for archives, which shifts the emphasis “from information to knowledge”.¹¹ My main concern is not with ontologies and definitions, but rather with the uses of photographs and archives over time: to paraphrase Joan M. Schwartz, what people do with photographs and archives, what photographs and archives do with us.¹² In this sense, I will likely contribute to keeping archive fever high rather than cooling it down.

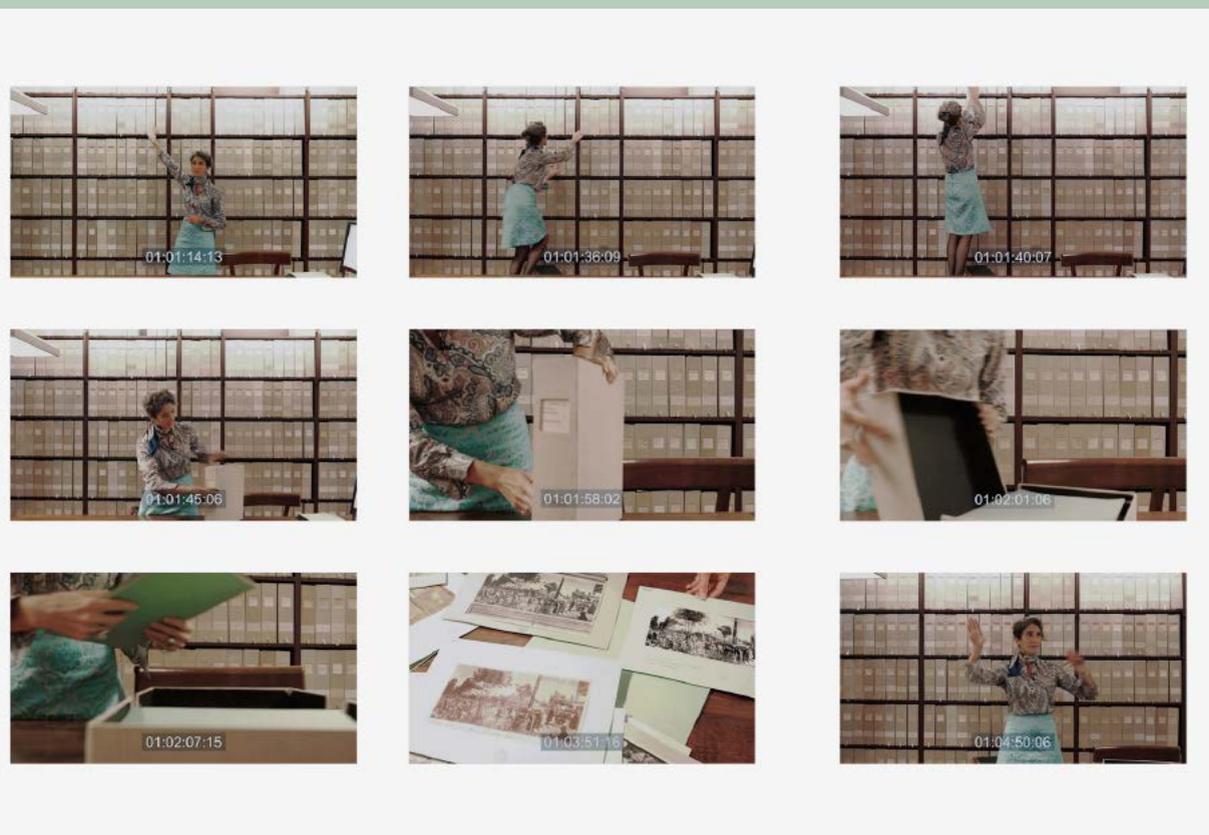
Since my focus is on the agency of the archivists as well as on the interactions that take place in the ecosystem of the photographic archive,¹³ I will start with myself acting in a

specific photographic archive. A series of still frames from a long video interview shot by the artist Armin Linke in the Photothek in Florence in 2018 (Fig. 1) helps me to further define my intellectual approach and my position. The archive is a space — an ordered space. Its order is governed by a classification system that determines the “right” place for each photograph.¹⁴ This place is dynamic because the archive itself is in continuous transformation. In a photo archive, photographs (or photo-objects¹⁵) are not only preserved, they are produced and transformed by archival and scholarly practices.¹⁶ In the video, I not only show photographs — I re-enact these practices.¹⁷ This performative moment, this choreography, underlines the active role of archivists (but also users and scholars) in shaping photographic documents and their possible uses. It is a reconfiguration of the archive that, from mere repository, becomes a laboratory for new and different kinds of research activities.¹⁸ And also for aesthetic and artistic practices, as I am not the only actor; Armin Linke is also there with his camera, the questions he asks during the interview, his own experience and his own gaze on photographic archives. I will come back to this artistic collaboration later.

A few words about the historical context. The Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, including its Photothek, was founded in Florence in 1897 on the initiative of a group of art historians coming from German-speaking countries and devoted to the study of Italian art and architecture.¹⁹ For over one hundred and twenty-five years the institute's photographic archive has been collecting, cataloguing, and classifying photographic reproductions of Italian works of art and architecture and placing them at the disposal of scholars for comparative purposes and for art-historical research.²⁰ So, what is this photograph (Fig. 2) doing here?

It shows a street view from a city in the Eastern Mediterranean, most probably Cairo. Here we see the façade of a building with a mashrabiya, a type of projecting oriel window enclosed with carved wooden latticework, characteristic of Arabic houses, and the corner of another building on the right.²¹ An examination of the visual content of the photograph goes hand in hand with a close analysis of its material characteristics: it is an albumen print, measuring 30.6 × 24.9 cm, taken and printed probably in the 1860s. The long exposure time that was necessary at the time is shown by a cloth hanging in the wind, which is transparent in the photograph (it is located in the middle lower part). The surface shows traces of its production (for instance some bubbles and a little retouching) as well as of time (a crack on the upper right). On the lower edge, an inscription is partially visible, one that could eventually help us to track down the photographer and reconstruct the original context of the photograph.

Until now I described the photograph as a picture *and* as an object. To extend the scrutiny to the entire photographic object (Fig. 3), I should also consider the cardboard on which it is pasted, with its stamps, inscriptions, and other material



Sl. / Fig. 1 Fototeka Instituta za povijest umjetnosti u Firenci — Institut Max-Planck, video kadrovi razgovora s Costanzom Caraffa, Firenca, 2018. (postprodukcija: Giulia Bruno) / Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz — Max-Planck-Institut, video stills of the interview with Costanza Caraffa (postproduction: Giulia Bruno), Florence, 2018 © Armin Linke 2018. Ljubaznošću umjetnika / Courtesy of the artist. ↑

14

Dercks, "And because the use of the photographic device is impossible without a proper card catalog..."

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Bärnighausen et al., *Photo-Objects*.

16

Schwartz, "The Archival Garden".

17

Caraffa, "Choreografien des fotografischen Archivs II".

18

Pijarski, *The Archive as Project*.

19

Hubert, *Das Kunsthistorische Institut in Florenz*.

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Dercks, "Ulrich Middeldorf Prior to Emigration".

21

The main function of a mashrabiya is to produce shadowy zones on the façades and act as a kind of natural air conditioning. Orazi, "Mashrabiyya"; Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo*, 35–36.

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Caraffa, "Isole di immagini"; Caraffa, "Archival Islands, Presences of Disappearance"; Caraffa, "Einleitung: Inventarnummer 228280 — Kulturerbe im Fotoarchiv".

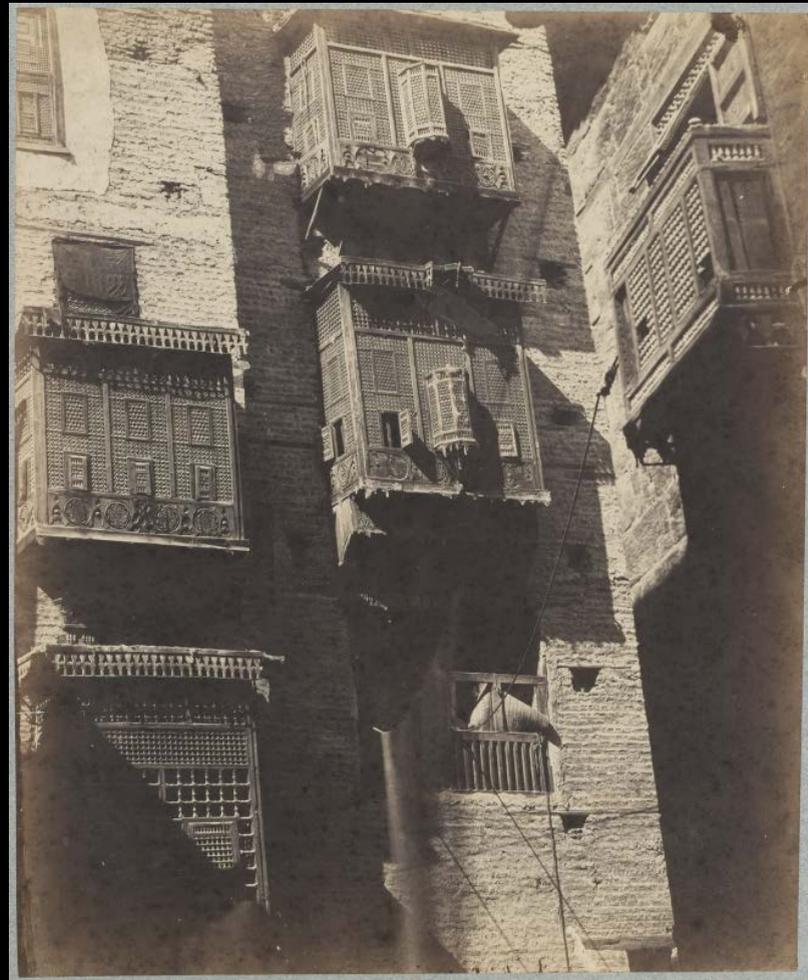
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Derrida, *Demeure, Athènes*.

traces. The blue-grey cardboard is of a kind that was produced in the last third of the 19th century and consequently dates back to the pre-archival life of this photo-object. At the same time, the cardboard bears evidence of the institutional biography of the photograph within the archival ecosystem: in the lower part in the middle the stamp of the KHI is visible, and in the upper left corner is the inventory number, which is a unique number given to every single photograph at the moment when it is inventoried in the Photothek. The so-called shelf mark above the right-hand corner of the photograph shows that it is preserved in the section "Kunstgewerbe", subsection "Holz" (Applied Arts/Wood). The date of the object represented in the photograph, "19th century?", and the place, "Kairo?", left and right beneath the photograph respectively, are both accompanied by question marks. This kind of treatment in the process of archiving reveals a lot about the underlying value system: in an archive devoted to Italian art, for an object of this kind less energy has been invested in determining this information more precisely. The provenance is given by a stamp — "Dono" — and the inscription "Pater Croquison" (donated by Father Croquison) at the bottom of the cardboard on the right side.

The donation from the Belgian Benedictine friar and Christian archaeologist Father Joseph Croquison is documented in the inventory books of the Photothek. This and another sixty photographs of monuments from the Eastern Mediterranean were inventoried on November 23, 1967 and stamped with inventory numbers ranging from 228222 to 228282.²² The archival biography of the photographs after accession is inscribed on them in different manners. Many of the boards had to be trimmed in order to fit into the Photothek's boxes or folders, so that sometimes the cutting lines in pencil are still visible. Occasionally, the cut caused the partial loss of the inscription. A material analysis of the entire Croquison fonds reveals that all the photographs can be dated to the 1860s, long before Croquison was born in 1890. And this opens up a discourse on temporality, fuelled by Jacques Derrida's reflections about the different temporal layers of photography in his short, invaluable book on Athens.²³ Photographs are always from the past, but these photographs confront us with multiple temporal layers: the time in which they were taken, approximately in the 1860s; the time of the first collector who pasted them on the blue-grey boards towards the end of the 19th century; the time of Croquison, who probably bought them during his documented trips around the Mediterranean in the 1950s and 1960s. And then, the temporal layer of their arrival in the Photothek in 1967; the time, around ten years ago, in which they were electronically catalogued and digitised; as well as the present time, in which I am using these photographs to convey something to future readers of this publication.

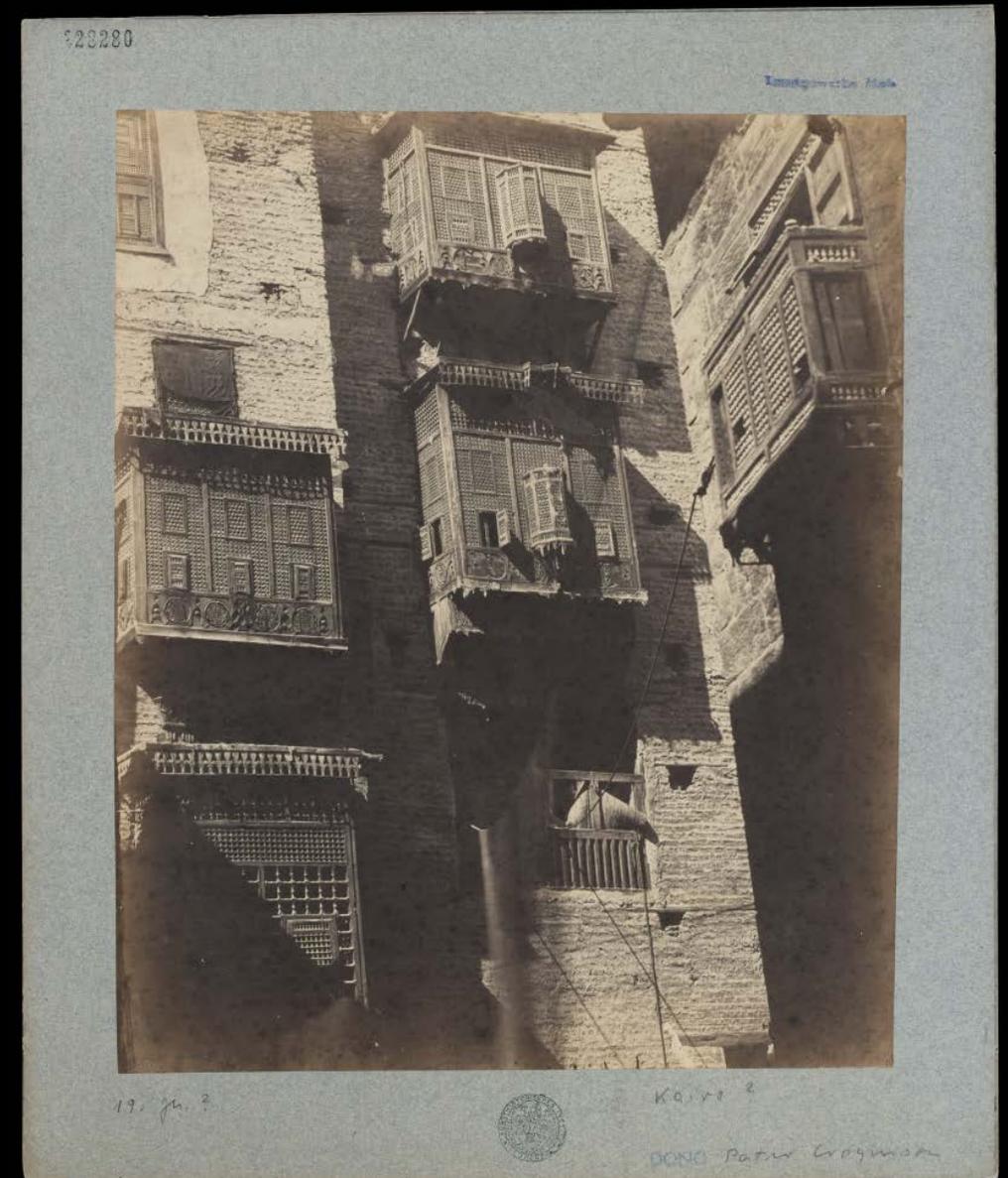
Another important issue regards the place of these photographs within the Photothek. Again, what are photographs of monuments in Cairo, Giza, Thebes, Philae, Petra, Jerusalem, Baalbek, Istanbul, and Athens doing in a photo



Sl. / Fig. 2 Ulično pročelje / Street façade, Kairo, albuminski otisak na kartonu /
albumen print on cardboard, 30.6 × 24.9 cm, inv. n. 228280, 1860–1870. Nepoznati
snimatelj / Photographer not identified © Digitallabor KHI Florenz 2011.

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Sl. / Fig. 3 Fotografija inv. br. 228280 na kartonskoj podlozi /
The photograph inv. n. 228280 on cardboard support, 37.1 × 30.7 cm
(vidi / see Sl. / Fig. 2) © Digitallabor KHI Florenz 2012.

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collection devoted to the documentation of Italian art and architecture? Their presence seems to be legitimated by the fact that these are highlights of Mediterranean architecture, which by this time would have become part of the UNESCO's World Heritage List.²⁴ Yet, world heritage is a problematic concept with an intrinsic ambiguity: it touches upon questions of identity and on the dialectic between the "Self" and the "Other". Heritage is also the result of complex phenomena of appropriation, transformation, and destruction.²⁵ One could conclude that photographs of these monumental sites within a Western institution represent an appropriation of "the heritage of the Other", a manifestation of the colonial gaze.

In 1967 these photographs were mainly incorporated into the Photothek's section dedicated to antiquity and in particular to ancient architecture, which includes a box labelled "Architektur Islam", although Islamic architecture does not really belong to ancient architecture. It is in this section, which is marginal in relation to the archive's focus on Italy, that the Eurocentric logic of its classification system is unmasked. Looking closer, the Croquison collection shows how the "cultural heritage of the Other" has been marginalised rather than appropriated. But at the same time, it brings into focus the real cultural appropriation that takes place in the Photothek: the photographs collected here appropriate Italian artistic heritage — the great "Other" of German culture throughout the long nineteenth century²⁶ — that was absorbed into a cultural and institutional project rooted in Wilhelmine Germany and in German *Wissenschaft* (science).²⁷

Thus, an apparently innocuous art-historical photographic archive proves itself to be a place for negotiating cultural and artistic heritage. In fact, photographs and photographic archives do much more than just document heritage: they have historically contributed to fixing historiographic models and periodisations as the grids in which the value of individual monuments is assigned. What connects photographs, archives, and heritage is their presumed neutrality: unveiling photographic and archival constructedness is a means for investigating construction(s) of artistic heritage over time and space. Cultural and artistic heritage is not only captured in photography, it is shaped by photographs and archives. Moreover, photographic archives must be considered as part of our cultural heritage.

I would like to return to the photo-object 228280 to discuss a further temporal layer that is closer to the present time: the red dot. The Croquison photographs caught our attention while preparing the Photothek's holdings for a move to new premises in 2009/2010. We immediately realised that these interesting materials would help us to understand the archival practices both of the past and the present. Thus, in 2012, the photographs were digitised, catalogued in the Photothek's database and marked with a red dot in the upper right corner in the proximity of the inventory number. In the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz,

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Cf. UNESCO World Heritage List. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list> (date of access November 22, 2022).

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Vinken, *Das Erbe der Anderen*. Among more recent publications see Silverman, Waterton, Watson, *Heritage in Action*; Albert et al., *50 Years World Heritage Convention*; Timm Knudsen et al., *Decolonizing Colonial Heritage*.

26

Cf. representatively Maurer, *Italien als Erlebnis und Vorstellung*.

27

Caraffa, "The Place of Photographs in an Archive and the Place of German Wissenschaft in Italy". Cf. Seidel, *Storia dell'arte e politica culturale intorno al 1900*; Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*.

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Cook, Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power", 183–184.

29

Caraffa, "Choreografien des fotografischen Archivs II".

a red dot added in ballpoint or felt-tip pen to the inventory number located on the top left of the board indicates that the related photo-object has been catalogued electronically (for reasons of conservation, rare photographs from the Cimelia Photographica collection are now marked with red pencil dots). Since 1993, the metadata of every photograph, which are visible also on both the mount board and the index cards of the card catalogue, have been continuously entered into a database, beginning with the new acquisitions. The exact position of the red dot with respect to the inventory number is linked to a specific person or function within the Photothek's organisation chart. The work of cataloguing the photographs was done according to the particular fields of research. Red dots in the upper left corner are found primarily on reproductions of medieval art, the specialist field of the former head of the Photothek. The central position above the inventory number was reserved for the former deputy head, a scholar of Venetian Renaissance painting; the scientific collaborator, a Renaissance sculpture expert, placed her dot at the top right. Successors to these functions "inherited" the individual dot positions. Over time, other dot positions were added for additional staff members, including the ones beneath the inventory number to the right or left. Other staff members in different positions used a red asterisk. Sometimes, a certain symbol and position were assigned not to a single person, but to a group. This was the case when the Photothek began digitising its holdings between 2002 and 2005, as part of a DFG-funded project, which involved not only entering metadata into the database, but also scanning the negatives. An entire team of collaborators worked on the project. They were not identified by individual markings, but were assigned a collective symbol, a small red triangle to the right of the inventory number. In fact, the red dots are an expression of the archivists' agency, but also point to the hierarchies within the Photothek. For several years now, interns have also been entering photographs into the database under supervision. But because these entries tend to be basic, their dots are added only in pencil. When a photographic object is entered (and marked with a red dot), the corresponding catalogue index cards (the artist's catalogue and topographic catalogue) must be marked with a red dot as well. The red dot thus links the Photothek's analogue and digital archiving practices.

The agency of the archivists as manifested by the red dots is normalised using a scheme, an overview with the assignment of red dot positions to specific individuals that must be updated regularly. A detailed set of rules also governs electronic cataloguing, recording at the same time individual agencies and their temporalities (who did the data entry when). The production and transformation of (photographic) documents in an archive follows "scripts".²⁸ These can also be described as dance notations that regulate the gestures of archivists and scholars in an archive.²⁹ Thinking about the gestures and the notations brings the bodies of the archivists to the fore, as a response to Jamie A. Lee's challenge "to look closer at the bodies — human and

non-human, as well as bodies of knowledge — that produce and are produced by archives”.³⁰

A further scrutiny of the board 228280 provides an additional level of temporality. In the bottom right-hand corner, a digital reproduction number is visible, which goes back to the digitisation of this photo-object in 2012. According to the Photothek’s workflow, photographs are first digitised and then catalogued. So, the red dot comes after digitalisation. For this reason, the digital reproduction of 2012 doesn’t show the red dot. A more recent digital reproduction number to the left of the KHI stamp refers to a second digitisation that was conducted in 2019 in order to show the red dot on this cardboard. All these transformations have to do not only with archival practices as rules and “scripts” that allow archivists to carry out their work every day, but also with the new value that is assigned in the Photothek to 228280 as a response to its affordance. Without our acknowledgement of the particular value of this photo-object, which allows us to address so many different and interesting issues, we would probably not have carried out the second digitalisation. Indeed, in the meantime the photograph was transferred to a section called Cimelia Photographica,³¹ the Photothek’s special collections in which particularly rare and fragile photographic objects are preserved.

To summarise: the material approach considers photographs or rather photo-objects not only as images, but also as material objects existing in time and space, in social and cultural contexts.³² It helps to come to terms with the many layers of meaning and mechanisms of knowledge production that are inscribed in photographs. It allows us to go beyond visual content and to overcome traditional hierarchies of value, based on uniqueness and authorship. Moreover, the material approach is useful to deal with vast sedimentations of apparently monotonous photographs in archives. It is not necessary to claim for them the status of works of art in order to recognise their value as part (and not only documents) of our archival and cultural heritage. In 2008, Nina Lager Vestberg coined the term “archival value” as opposed to museum values, that are often very strongly connected to market values.³³ In fact, our own definition of Cimelia Photographica (Latin for photographic treasures) could be misleading, not only because the idea of “photographic treasures” can change over time: if we decide to move photographs to the Cimelia Photographica, it is never to musealise them and separate them from the archival ecosystem. Every close reading of holdings from the Photothek is intended as an itinerary that may take us to the context of origin of that photographic object, but which ultimately always leads back to the archive itself.³⁴ It is precisely the material approach that visibly impacted research on photographic archives over the last two decades, and that allows us to remain open to further future expansions of our value systems.

Now this opens up the question: is it possible to display archival values in a museum? The exhibition *Unboxing Photographs: Working in a Photo Archive* held in Berlin at the



Sl. / Fig. 4 *Raspakiravanje fotografija. Raditi u fotografskom arhivu / Unboxing Photographs. Working in the Photo Archive, postav izložbe / exhibition view, Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2018 © Dietmar Katz / Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 2018.*



Sl. / Fig. 5 *Raspakiravanje fotografija. Raditi u fotografskom arhivu / Unboxing Photographs. Working in the Photo Archive, dio postava s foto-objektima Veliki rez II iz Arhiva Hahne-Niehoff, / display with photo-objects Der große Schnitt II [The Great Cut II] from the Hahne-Niehoff archive, Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Germany, 2018 © Dietmar Katz / Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 2018.*

³⁰ Lee, *Producing the Archival Body*, 1.

³¹ Caraffa, “Cimelia Photographica”.

³² In addition to the literature quoted in previous notes, for an overview see Caraffa, “Photographic Itineraries in Time and Space”.

³³ Vestberg, “Archival Value”. Regarding the question of value I am very much indebted to Armin Linke’s and Estelle Blaschke’s project *Image Capital* about photographs as currency between the analogue and the digital world. Cf. *Image Capital*, exhibition series and online publication <https://image-capital.com/> (date of access January 30, 2023).

³⁴ On the technique of the close-up see Edwards, *Raw Histories*, 3.



Sl. / Fig. 6 *Raspakiravanje fotografija. Raditi u fotografskom arhivu / Unboxing Photographs. Working in the Photo Archive, izložbeni postav s video instalacijom / exhibition view with the video installation An den Rändern, rau, Toby Cornish and Johannes Braun, Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 2018 © Dietmar Katz / Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 2018.*

³⁵ *Unboxing Photographs: Working in the Photo Archive*, Exhibition at the Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, February 16, 2018 to May 27, 2018, curatorial concept by Julia Bärnighausen, Costanza Caraffa, Stefanie Klamm, Franka Schneider, and Petra Wodtke. <https://www.smb.museum/en/exhibitions/detail/unboxing-photographs/>, <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/aktuelles/ausstellungen/2018-02-unboxing-photographs.php> (date of access November 21, 2022). Cf. Klamm, Schneider, “Unboxing Photographs”.

³⁶ “An den Rändern, rau”. <https://vimeo.com/510742598a> (date of access 21 September 2022).

³⁷ Schwartz, “We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us”, 62.

³⁸ Kratz, “Rhetorics of Value”.

³⁹ Cf. p. ex. Alberge, “Tate’s National Photographic Archive ‘Rescued From Skip’ After Internal Tipoff”.

⁴⁰ „Courtauld Considers Drastic Cuts to Archives”. Since then, the Conway and Witt Collections underwent a complex process of digitisation; at the moment they are not accessible due to the refurbishment of Somerset House. <https://courtauld.ac.uk/libraries/collections-and-image-libraries/image-libraries/> (date of access December 30, 2022).

⁴¹ Florence Declaration – Recommendations for the Preservation of Analogue Photo Archives. <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/photothek/florence-declaration.php> (date of access September 21, 2022).

⁴² In 2016, the Yaoundé Declaration with recommendations for the preservation of and access to analogue and digital photo and film archives in Cameroon was issued: <http://african-photography-initiatives.org/index.php/research/yaounde-declaration> (date of access December 30, 2022).

Kunstbibliothek in 2018, was an attempt. The exhibition was the conclusion to a collaborative project entitled *Photo-Objects: Photographs as (Research) Objects in Archaeology, Ethnology and Art History* conducted with partners in Florence and Berlin between 2015 and 2018. The challenge was displaying the archive and literally unboxing our photographs without losing the sense of the archive as an entirety (Fig. 4).³⁵ What we explicitly wanted to avoid was to put only a few exceptional objects in the white cube, forgetting the archive itself, its practices, and the knowledge about these archival practices. The aim was to give an insight into the life of institutions as ecosystems in which all the actors act and interact, sometimes as a collective, sometimes through the agency of single persons (Fig. 5). Technically, the exhibition was based on several series of photographs, but also on a number of close-ups that we used to explain specific issues; these close readings always worked as pars pro toto in relation to their archival ecosystem. The theoretical and methodological concerns of the project were quasi visualized and materialized in the video installation “An den Rändern, rau” by Johannes Braun and Toby Cornish, which shows people doing things with photographs, archivists as “historically situated actors” (Fig. 6).³⁷ Knowledge about archival practices, scholarly research into the archives themselves, and the interpretation through artists were connected in the exhibition as a form of “cultural display”. As Corinne A. Kratz argues, cultural display always produces a certain “rhetorics of value”.³⁸ We handle this rhetorics of value in our multiple roles as archivists and scholars and curators.

This introduces the second part of my essay. I would also like to approach a certain crisis in the awareness of photographic archives that started around 2000 with all-encompassing digitization programmes. There are well-known cases of photographic archives that were deaccessioned or put into storage after digitization,³⁹ and surely there is a greater number of less well-known documentary photo collections in museums and universities that were just disposed of. This latent crisis became overt when in the summer of 2009 the specialized press revealed that access to the renowned image collections of the Courtauld Institute in London would be drastically reduced.⁴⁰ It was also in response to this that in October 2009 we issued the Florence Declaration with recommendations for the preservation of analogue photo archives.⁴¹ The Florence Declaration wishes to generate a greater understanding of the inescapable value of analogue photographs and archives for the future of the arts, social sciences, and humanities. It is necessary to keep not only single photographs, but also the entire archives as ecosystems in which the photographs are active. Only integration between the analogue format and the digital format can guarantee the fitting preservation of photographic heritage for future research and at the same time creatively exploit the potential of digital tools. The Florence Declaration is a very open document, which sees for photographs a diversity of meanings, purposes, and possible uses. Its principles are still valid today and could be extended to the preservation of digital photographic heritage.⁴² A lot has happened since

2009: several photo archives have been threatened, but in many others basic research work has begun and the foundations for their re-legitimation have been laid. Photo archives generally do not have an independent budget but are strongly dependent on the cultural policy of the institutions to which they belong and to which they are accountable. In order to be recognised among the priorities of their institutions, photographic archives cannot simply wait for the positive consequences of the cultural change currently taking place, which in itself is favourable to both photography and archives: it is necessary to take the initiative and develop strategies to activate or re-activate the archive.

The Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz is a research institute, therefore at the Photothek it was obvious that we needed to begin with scholarship, with basic research into the history of our holdings and our own archival practices. International conferences, publications, exhibitions, and online exhibitions are important “outputs” that can be featured not only on a scholarly level, but also before the highest decision-making hierarchies.⁴³ Moreover, these are significant moments of intellectual exchange that helped over the years to establish an international and transdisciplinary community of archivists, scholars, and curators. In the meantime, this network began to include more and more artists.

Working together with artists really helps us to think beyond assumed notions and to set energy free. A series of artists who had visited the Photothek in previous years contributed to the exhibition *Unboxing Photographs* as well as to the book *Foto-Objekte*: the already mentioned Toby Cornish and Johannes Braun, Ola Kolehmainen,⁴⁴ Joachim Schmid,⁴⁵ Elisabeth Tonnard,⁴⁶ and Akram Zaatari.⁴⁷ However, their works were not supposed to become part of the archive. Antonio Di Cecco is a photographer from L'Aquila working on photography and catastrophe. For his project, published in 2018 in an online exhibition,⁴⁸ he used holdings from the Photothek and subsequently donated a set of his own photographs to us. This raised the question of how to treat artistic photographs within the archival ecosystem of the Photothek. This is a somewhat paradoxical question, because an archive of documentary photographs such as the Photothek normally does not include artistic photographs, and even artistic photographs are supposed to be arranged and catalogued only according to their documentary value. Antonio accepted the challenge to reflect together with us about the clash between the institutional “mission” of the Photothek to photographically document works of art in the service of scholarship, and the inclusion of photographic works of art in its holdings. In a dedicated workshop we acted out the cataloguing process of some of his photographs: we produced the boards together. This is the core of the production of the photographic object, which in the Photothek is also primarily a scientific object. Di Cecco's photographs represent places in L'Aquila and elsewhere in Italy impacted by earthquakes. The question was in which section to put these photographs: as visual documents of destroyed places they



Sl. / Fig. 7 Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Modaliteti fotografije, radionica, Firenca, 2019. / Modalities of Photography, workshop, Florence, 2019 © Armin Linke 2019. Ljubaznošću umjetnika i Vistamare Milano – Pescara / Courtesy of the artist and Vistamare Milano – Pescara.

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Sl. / Fig. 8 Fototeka Instituta za povijest umjetnosti u Firenzi – Instituta Max-Planck / Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut, Predmeti migracije. Fotografski predmeti povijesti umjetnosti: susreti u arhivu / Objects of Migration. Photo Objects of Art History: Encounters in an Archive, Massimo Ricciardo, radionica s članovima Projektne grupe Amir, Firenca, 9. travnja 2022. / workshop with members of the Amir Project Group, Florence: Costanza Caraffa and Ebrima Saidy, April 9, 2022 © Bärbel Reinhard 2022.

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should have been put in the section Architecture, sub-section period (i.e. Romanesque/Gothic, Renaissance/Baroque, or Modern Architecture), sub-section region Abruzzo, city L'Aquila. Instead, we created the fictive section “Photography of the 21st century” with a corresponding stamp: here Di Cecco's photographs would have been at the same time the documentation and the documented work of art. However, this was only an experiment and we did not actually implement the new category. In the end, it was too simple a solution for the issue we faced. But it was an interesting attempt to question the apparent logic of a scientific archive from the inside.

A more substantial step was taken in a workshop organized in 2019 with Armin Linke and a small group of archivists and scholars (Fig. 7).⁴⁹ Here we applied standardised archiving procedures to a group of photographs by Armin Linke that represented a wide range of subjects: most of them were not compliant at all with the Photothek's classification system, but the boards had to be put in one box or the other, as this is an essential part of the daily work done in an archive. This gave rise to creative solutions based necessarily on fictitious arguments: a picture showing a computer waste dump in Guiyu, China, was catalogued by Estelle Blaschke as “Kunstgewerbe / Plastik / 21. Jahrhundert” (Applied arts / plastic / 21st c.),⁵⁰ while Hannah Baader connected a photograph of an interior in the Iron Mountains Preservation Facility, USA, displaying on the wall a reproduction of one of the famous pictures of the Moon Landing, to a statuette of the Renaissance artist Tiziano Aspetti representing an allegory of Selene alias the Moon (category “zu Skulptur / Renaissance / Tiziano Aspetti”).⁵¹ That time we did put these few boards in the corresponding boxes. The ultimate sense of these operations is not to freeze artists in one or the other category, but rather to challenge and disrupt our taxonomy from within. The astonishment they might cause if they are found by common users of the Photothek looking, for instance, for Renaissance sculptures would be a little, additional moment of deconstruction.

Taxonomy is also at the heart of a project by the artist Massimo Ricciardo, *Objects of Migration, Photo Objects of Art History: Encounters in an Archive* (Fig. 8).⁵² The installation has been repeatedly displayed in the Photothek since 2017 and co-curated with my colleague Almut Goldhahn. Here the artist creates a dialogue between photographic objects from the Photothek and objects of migration collected on the shores of Sicily and Lampedusa: things functional to the journey, such as passports and nautical charts, but also to identify and memory, such as family photographs, diaries, a sample of the homeland. These “speaking” objects bear material witness to the often-tragic experience of migration, but also incorporate a critique of the power of the archive. The installation, which gave rise to a book,⁵³ puts forward pressing questions: to whom do these objects belong? What are the appropriate artistic and curatorial practices if one decides to collect, archive, exhibit, and transform them? Moreover, by working with Ricciardo on the installations and the book,

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For an overview of the Photothek's projects and publications cf. <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/photothek/index.php> (date of access December 30, 2022).

44

Kolehmainen, “Unboxing glass plates in Cologne”.

45

Schmid, “Lost Memories”.

46

Tonnard, “More than a few glimpses of its charms”.

47

Zaatari, “All that refuses to vanish”. Zaatari's work is highly influential for the Photothek's approach. Cf. Zaatari, *Against Photography*.

48

Belmonte et al., *Photography and Catastrophe*.

49

The workshop gave rise to a publication: Linke, *Modalities of Photography*.

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Linke, *Modalities of Photography*, 44. Cf. Blaschke, “Modalities of Photography”.

51

Baader, “Image Ecologies and the Post-Anthropocene”. Cf. Serena, “Interferences, Processes of Institutionalization”.

52

Goldhahn, Ricciardo, “Objects of Migration”; <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/forschung/photothek/objects-of-migration-photo-objects-of-art-history-encounters-in-an-archive.php> (date of access September 21, 2022).

53

Ricciardo, *Encounters in an Archive*.



SI. / Fig. 9 Estelle Blaschke and Armin Linke, *Kapital slike / Image Capital*, postav instalacije / installation view
(u suradnji s: / in collaboration with: Martina Pozzan), Fondazione MAST, Bologna, 2022 © Armin Linke 2022. Ljubaznošću
umjetnika i Vistamare Milano – Pescara / Courtesy of the artist and Vistamare Milano – Pescara.

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we became even more aware of the connection between the taxonomisation of photographs documenting works of art and the taxonomisation of human races. Every classification system produces categories, groups, boxes — or, in the case of human beings, ghettos, refugee camps, “reception” centres, segregation. Taxonomisation on ethnic grounds produces discrimination, abuse, and conflict, ultimately leading to migration. With this project, the Photothek engages in an essential debate concerning the contemporary world, hosting in its spaces objects that can potentially create short-circuits. The performative nature of the installations and connected workshops creates an intense exchange and reinvents the archive space as a laboratory of encounters. This project reminds us that no archive is innocent, every archive is political.

With all these projects we aim to contribute to current critical discourses on the negotiations of cultural heritage as well as to a new definition of the role of photo archives for academic disciplines and in our post-digital societies.⁵⁴ Working with artists is particularly inspiring because it helps to refine our analytical instruments; it adds a view from the outside, stimulating the self-reflectivity and positionality that is implicit in our work; and it helps to maintain the transparency of our own narratives and rhetorics (Fig. 9). This constant process of deconstruction is not intended as an end in itself, but rather as a way of making the archive available to contemporary society.

I come to my conclusion. Considering photographic archives as dynamic organisms that exist in space and time, in social and cultural contexts, implies a focus on the processes of institutionalisation. This was also the topic of one of my most recent projects with Armin Linke: *On Alinari: Archive in Transition*.⁵⁵ This project focuses on a specific moment, the transition of the private Alinari company to a public institution of the Regione Toscana in 2020. The Regione Toscana acquired the entire Alinari archive in 2019 from the former owners. With its five million objects Alinari is probably the biggest and best-known Italian photo archive. This company shaped the image of Florence and Italy all around the world and is firmly rooted in the identity of Florence and the Florentines. The reconfiguration of such an archive is not an easy task. In our project — and in Armin’s photographs — we decided to focus on the transition, on the storage facility in the industrial outskirts of Florence, in which all the Alinari holdings are (still) housed (Fig. 10). Here the materiality and the temporality of the Alinari archive momentarily collapse, and the bureaucracy of the archive is played out at its most basic level. We suggest interpreting this moment of transition not as loss and failure, but rather as potential and vitality. The concrete building and the fire protection system of the storage facility, shown by Armin Linke in his pictures, are also a hint at the enormous value that is assigned to the Alinari photographic objects. The book is a polyphonic work to which not only Armin Linke and the invited scholars contributed: the voices of some of the actors involved in the Alinari firm and the recent institutional transformation are



Sl. / Fig. 10 Arhiv i zbirke Alinari u prostorima za pohranu Art Defender, video kadar, Calenzano (Firenca), 16. listopada 2020. / The Alinari archive and collections at the Art Defender facilities, video still, Calenzano (Florence), October 16, 2020 © Armin Linke 2020. Ljubaznošću umjetnika / Courtesy of the artist.

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also included. And then there is Armin’s work, with his many ways of performing the aesthetics of the archive. The project shows, once again, that the archive, a photographic archive, is a place in which things happen, in which transformations occur. It is not static, it is dynamic; it is not something of the past, it is something of the future. And here I close with a quote by Jacques Derrida as the father of any “archive fever”:

*... the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. This is not the question of a concept dealing with the past which might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal, an archivable concept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what this will have meant, we will only know in the times to come.*⁵⁶

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Favero, *The Present Image*.
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Caraffa, *On Alinari*.
56
Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 36.

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