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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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[My] book was just about to be published when I
was asked to review a manuscript
by a man I had never heard of:
Robert Taft, Professor of Chemistry
at the University of Kansas.
It was titled: *Photography and the American Scene*.
I read
the manuscript avidly.
I found that he had gone over the same ground and
in many cases had come
to the same conclusions as I had.
I felt compelled to ask the publisher,
Macmillan, to send me a confirmation that
the manuscript had been sent to me after
my book had gone to press.
My reader's report to them was positive,
and the book, now a classic, came out
in 1938. It was a different kind of book,

as it turned out, than I had written.
 I found certain objections to his aesthetic
 conclusions, which, at my suggestion,
 were dropped. Perhaps some student
 might find it interesting to knock on the door
 of the University of Kansas, where the papers of
 Professor Taft were deposited after his death, to
 see if the excerpted portions of that old
 manuscript which I thought forty years ago were
 not worth publishing,
 perhaps might be reconsidered.
 –Beaumont Newhall, ‘Toward the New Histories of
 Photography,’ 1983

- 1 The first two major twentieth-century American histories of photography arrived at the US Copyright Office on the same day – October 12, 1938. Beaumont Newhall's *Photography: A Short Critical History* (henceforth *PSCH*), entered for copyright on August 24, was published by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) as a slightly revised edition of the catalogue copyrighted on March 15, 1937, and previously published under the title *Photography, 1839–1937* (henceforth *P 1839–1937*). The second was Robert Taft's *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1839–1889* (henceforth *PAS*), published by Macmillan, and entered for copyright less than two months later, on October 11, 1938.¹
- 2 This coincidence inaugurated the long but diverging lives of the two books, both of which are still in print in 2012. Newhall's *PSCH* was completely rewritten for the 1949 edition, later revised twice more (1964, 1982), and translated in several languages; by 1982 it had become the standard text on the international artistic history of the medium. Taft's book was reprinted, first by Macmillan, then in a paperback format by Dover from 1964 on, and more recently in a digital edition (ACLS Humanities E-Book), but it has never been translated and its fame has remained mostly confined to the sphere of historians and collectors of nineteenth-century American photography.
- 3 The coincidence of the two publications in 1937–38, the hitherto unnoticed network of interactions that linked them, and the emergence of not one but two American histories of photography in the 1930s, form the topic of the present paper. This topic has until now been approached solely from the viewpoint of an art-historical historiography, concerned with how photography came to be incorporated into art history and the art museum, and what role Beaumont Newhall (1908–93) and the MoMA played in that process. The present paper is part of a broader inquiry, which seeks to assess the ways in which, between the 1880s and the 1930s, photography and photographs became, in the United States as elsewhere, associated with public memory, historical research and writing, and what Elizabeth Edwards calls ‘historical imagination.’² Central to this inquiry is the work of Robert Taft (1894–1955) – professor of chemistry at the University of Kansas, collector of western American art, and historian of American photography – and his book *PAS*. This book was preceded by a monumental archival and testimonial search conducted over a period of about ten years and reflected in its some five hundred footnotes as well as in the collection of Robert Taft's papers preserved at the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka (KHS), a portion of which, relating to Taft's researches on photography, has recently been digitized and put online.³ These papers shed considerable light on Taft's enterprise and its context, especially his little-known dialogue with Beaumont Newhall in 1937–38. Thus

the purpose of the present article is not merely to study the historiographical discourse at work in Taft's book, as I have done elsewhere,⁴ nor, for that matter, to attempt a new interpretation of Beaumont Newhall's well-known text. It is, rather, to map out the larger context in which the two American histories of photography emerged, simultaneously but divergently, and to bring to light, through a study of the dialogue that took place between the two historians, the strategic differences – and commonalities – between their two histories. And to begin, I will highlight the strongly diverging historiographical destinies of these two founding texts of American photographic history.

Two Diverging Destinies

- 4 As is well known, Newhall's history achieved, by the time of its last edition in 1982, the status of a standard art-historical text on photography and a canon-maker. At the same time it came under attack as a selective reading, favouring a modernist conception of the medium as a self-determining form of expression, as well as a particular range of photographic masters. This critique was formulated most trenchantly by Christopher Phillips in a landmark *October* article,⁵ which targeted MoMA's growing power as a shaping museum of photography from Newhall to John Szarkowski. So relevant was this critique, in the context of emerging deconstructions of photography's new 'canon,' that it quickly became canonical itself.⁶ In recent years it has in turn come under revision, particularly by Marta Braun,⁷ Christine Hahn,⁸ and most recently Sophie Hackett.⁹ While much of this 'history of history' has concentrated on the 1937 MoMA exhibition and the institutional strategies it reflected, rather than on Newhall's text, Newhall's choices and guiding concepts in writing the history of photography have become a standard chapter of that history – usually envisioned as a history of aesthetic ideas.
- 5 By contrast, Robert Taft's book, seventy-five years after its initial publication, still suffers from a kind of non-status. For many years it was the only available general history of American photography in the nineteenth century, continually reprinted by Dover. Insofar as it presents itself as 'an accumulation of facts' (*PAS* vii), and as its notion of 'social history' can be viewed as 'amateurish' or 'popular,' *PAS* is loosely linked to the later prolific lineage of monographs, exhibitions, and compendia on nineteenth-century American photography, a partly non-academic historiography for which Taft remains a highly relevant reference, even though many of his 'facts' have been criticized or augmented.¹⁰ Beyond the realm of specialists, Taft's book is and has been used by journalists and general historians as a trove of facts, quotations, references, and anecdotes.¹¹ Yet, à la Newhall, it cannot be considered a 'master narrative' because of the virtual lack of *critical* attention given it and the formidable investigation that preceded it, unlike Newhall's book. The special issue devoted in 1997 by the magazine *History of Photography* to historiography contained almost nothing on Taft. In a recent special issue of *American Art* magazine on 'American Histories of Photography,' edited by Anthony W. Lee, one finds only a few passing references to Taft's book, Michael Kammen merely mentioning it as a 'standard' reference.¹² Alan Trachtenberg, the most incisive commentator of the relationship of photography to history in the United States, seems never to have taken more than a passing interest in Taft's enterprise, and then only to gently debunk its nationalist undertones.¹³ In her 2005 article on the English-language historiography of photography, Marta Braun is one of very few contemporary photo-historians to pay some attention to Taft – and to the relationship between Taft and

Newhall.¹⁴ In sum, Taft's monumental endeavour has functioned, until now, as a *primary source*, rather than a *history*. Does this mean that the book's claim to lay out a 'social history' is empty? That only Newhall's history is to be reckoned with, both as influential text and as conceptually significant historical work? This two-part question will be first tackled through a brief comparison of the narratives of the two American histories of photography.

Conflicting Narratives / Parallel Histories

- 6 Beaumont Newhall's critical argument on the history of photography is well known and can be simply recalled here by quoting the first lines of the preface to his *PSCH*. Newhall sought to build an aesthetic 'foundation' for the history of photography, and saw his main task as that of 'remedying' the original 'confusion' between photography and other graphic arts:

'The purpose of this book is to construct a foundation by which the significance of photography as an esthetic medium can be more fully grasped ... The confusion with other forms of graphic art which it superficially resembles was also latent in photography's origin; the remedying of this harmful confusion, therefore, must be based on an examination of photography's relationship to other arts during its short, but eventful, development' (*PSCH* 9).

- 7 Taft's approach to 'social history,' by contrast, is not so familiar to today's readers. To put it in a nutshell, it was grounded in what Taft called, in contradistinction to an 'artistic' appreciation, the 'historic(al) value' of photographs. Though Taft generally avoided theorization, one may summarize his notion of 'historical value' under two main headings: the image as document, and the image as event. On the one hand, Taft sought to envision the photographic image as a historical document, an approach that he explicitly contrasted to Beaumont Newhall's 'system of photographic aesthetics' in the main 'theoretical' passage of his book, inserted at pages 314–21 in the midst of chapter 16 ('The Cabinet Photograph'):

'The social historian, obviously, is not in a position to answer this question [whether photography is an art], nor is it his function. The question is still argued, but there appears to be developing at present a satisfactory and logical system of aesthetics based on the distinguishing features of the photograph [footnote*: Beaumont Newhall's recent penetrating analysis of the problem, which at least outlines a system of photographic aesthetics, deserves the most careful consideration of any one concerned in its answer.] The social historian is interested, however, in a question which is interwoven to some extent with the above question; namely, "Are photographs historical documents?" Such a question can be answered' (*PAS* 316–17).

- 8 Taft was indeed one of the very first authors, in the United States, to draw the public's and the historians' attention to photography as a means of historical knowledge, inviting his readers to collect and 'document' old photographs as building blocks for familial and local histories. 'Documenting' photographs meant evaluating their truthfulness, providing them with dates, captions, and subjects in order to use them historically (*PAS* 319–20).¹⁵
- 9 On the other hand, Taft was keenly aware of the image as event in a larger 'social history' – of photography's 'influence' or 'impact' on American history. He singled out certain 'epochal' images (Lincoln's portraits by Mathew Brady, the first photographs of the

Yellowstone Park area by William H. Jackson) as 'making history,' once again in contrast to art:

'It may also be worth while noting that if a photograph can be appreciated for its historic value, another factor of evaluation can be considered ... If, for example, I can point to a given portrait and say, "This photograph was an important factor in the election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States," shouldn't we value such a photograph more highly than other portraits of the same period of equal artistic merit?' (PAS 321).

- 10 Both of these concerns merged into a kind of popular visual history that the University of Kansas professor advocated, almost explicitly, as a form of democratic culture.¹⁶ The book's opening and closing paragraphs were quite explicit about this popular, and almost political, mission of photography:

'Photography affects the lives of modern individuals so extensively that it is difficult to enumerate all of its uses. In addition to preserving for us the portraits of loved ones, it illustrates our newspapers, our magazines, our books ... It has recorded the past, educated our youth, and last, but not least, it has given us the most popular form of amusement ever devised' (PAS vii).

'Whatever may be the faults and flaws of the pictorial press it is probable that humanity has in this agent one of her most powerful weapons in the fight for the abolition of war, in combating ignorance and disease, and in the attainment of social justice. Through the use of this medium it should be possible, if ever, to reach more rapidly that long sought goal – the brotherhood of man' (PAS 450).

- 11 Like other aspects of Taft's book, these 'populist' and utopian visions echoed nineteenth-century ideas that Newhall, for one, clearly preferred to stay away from. Taft, indeed, relied on notions of progress and historical agency that were borrowed from 'Whig' history, and used a broadly 'Turnerian' vision of American history as driven by the conquest of the West.¹⁷ His narrative was generally written in a 'popular' or easy-reading style and made no references to fashionable authors of the 1930s. As shown by the quote given above, Taft was mindful of overstepping the boundaries of 'social history' towards discussions of art, with which several passages of his book show his discomfort.¹⁸ Although Newhall's influences and choices have been in debate, his text and vision were, as he himself pointed out in various reminiscences, steeped in European art history and connoisseurship, combined with modernist aesthetics and Alfred Barr's strategy for the modern art museum.¹⁹ One facile formulation of the difference is that Taft's 'social' narrative functions as a 'low,' popular history, while Newhall's is a 'high,' 'critical,' aesthetic and an intellectualizing one; or that Taft's was an all-American, even western or midwestern, history, while Newhall's text spoke to a New York and transatlantic readership.
- 12 Newhall's history revolved around the central concept of photography as (aesthetic) 'medium,' a concept that was constructed from the combination of a 'high' photographic lineage (P.H. Emerson, A. Stieglitz, P. Strand) and German art history. The medium of photography was defined on the basis of a technological and semiological core that served to distinguish it from the other graphic arts and to measure a purely photographic artistic achievement. Taft, by contrast, did not elaborate theoretical concepts; but his book included at least one significant theoretical passage, which opened with a discussion of artistic versus historic 'values' of photographs, and continued with a subdivision of historic values between the 'image-as-document' and the 'image-as-event.' The combination of these two notions brought Taft close to the conceptualization of photography as a mass medium, though he did not use the phrase. Thus the larger

conceptual differences between Newhall's and Taft's narratives are obvious: medium versus mass medium; art or aesthetics versus information or history; attention to formal experiments versus attention to commercial portraiture; attention to 'pictorialism' (Newhall) versus attention to the 'pictorial press' (Taft).

- 13 Another obvious difference was in the scope or corpus encompassed by the two histories. Taft's narrative was strictly limited to American photography, and generally avoided pronouncing on the European inventions and developments of photography. His two categories of 'historical value,' the 'image-as-document' and the 'image-as-event,' informed an oscillation in his text between the ordinary and the epic, the mundane exploration of the 'American scene' and the grandiose story of America.²⁰ Taft's narrative was also limited to the period between the announcement of Daguerre's results in the United States in the fall of 1839 and the launching of the Kodak in 1888–89. Thus it can be read as a history of the Americanization of photography – rather, I would argue, than as a 'nationalist' history. Newhall's narrative, by contrast, presented itself in 1937–38 as international and even internationalist, although it focused on France, Britain, and the United States; its subsequent editions until 1982 augmented its 'global' outreach.
- 14 Still, in choice of corpus as in other key aspects, there remain important commonalities between the two histories. Throughout its various editions Newhall's history always gave ample space to American photographers and inventors. Like Taft, Newhall singled out – as early as the 1937 and 1938 editions of his text – certain American moments, particularly Mathew Brady and the Civil War, the development of the hand-held camera and the Kodak.²¹ For both authors the American photographer Mathew B. Brady served as a pivotal figure, whether as pioneer of 'straight photography' or as the first 'photographic historian.'²² Another shared base was the technological skeleton of both narratives, inherited from Josef-Maria Eder's and especially Georges Potonniée's histories. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the two texts reflected a shared concern for the contemporary spread of photography and the illustrated press, in the 1930s, which appeared, more implicitly with Newhall and more explicitly with Taft, as an imperative to write its history. Their parallel developments on 'news photography' (Newhall) or the 'pictorial press' (Taft) similarly gave importance to this domain and did so for partly similar reasons, that is, the resonance and ubiquity of photography, although Taft saw the pictorial press as a 'weapon' towards 'the brotherhood of man' (*PAS* 450, quoted earlier), while Newhall singled out the kind of news photograph that 'transcends the ephemeral and becomes a great document.'²³
- 15 In summary, the two histories were, at the same time, conceptually opposed and historically parallel. Whereas Newhall's sophisticated 'critical history' configured photography as a medium of aesthetic expression, Taft's incompletely articulated social history envisioned American photography as a mass medium (as window on the past and as social force); and this constitutes a basic and durable distinction between the two histories. Yet the two approaches had more than a little in common, even leaving aside their common appreciation and reevaluation of American photography. Both books were motivated, though in unequal parts, by a typically mid-twentieth-century attention to the communicative powers of photography. Although the Beaumont Newhall of 1938 was less concerned with this social dimension than Robert Taft was, the two histories shared an awareness of photography's present importance in 1930s America and the need to assess this importance in larger historical narratives. They were, in this sense, both the products of the broader American context for reevaluation of photography in the 1930s.²⁴

And as I will suggest in the last section of this paper, the initial reception of the two books in 1937–38 seems to corroborate the public's interest in historicizing photography and the complementary appeal of the two histories. First, however, I will turn to the hitherto unnoticed interactions between Taft and Newhall in the writing of their respective books. For as we shall see, the apparently radical dichotomy between the two American histories of photography requires qualification in view of the relatively intense collaboration that linked their authors.

Opponents or Collaborators? Clues in the Published Record

- 16 Today we know a great deal about the making of Beaumont Newhall's MoMA show and his book, as a result of the mass of statements found in his published reminiscences, and even though his papers remain to be examined systematically in this direction.²⁵ As the art historian recounted, his ideas on photography matured between his entrance to Harvard in 1926, the beginning of his PhD work in 1932–33, and Alfred Barr's assignment for a photography show at the MoMA in 1936. While various influences have been claimed by and for Newhall, his goal was clearly to establish a *critical* approach to photography. The MoMA show appears to have been quickly prepared, between the spring of 1936 and the late winter of 1937. It opened on March 17, 1937, and as we saw, the catalogue was published on March 15, 1937, with 3,000 copies printed; the revised edition appears to have been elaborated in the first semester of 1938 (the preface was dated June 7).
- 17 From the published record – that is, leaving aside for the time being the Taft papers – we know a lot less about the making of Taft's book, except for the ample glimpses into his research correspondence afforded by his footnotes, and that the chemist was at work on it since at least the early 1930s, with researches on early photography in Kansas and the west²⁶ and on Mathew Brady and the 'daguerreotype era.'²⁷ *PAS* was copyrighted on October 11, 1938, with Macmillan. While the coincidence of dates with Newhall's second edition seems accidental, evidence from both books show that the two authors were in dialogue in 1937–38.
- 18 Although Newhall's catalogue *P 1839–1937* did not mention Robert Taft, his preface to the 1938 *PSCH* listed Taft among a small group of colleagues acknowledged for help in 'textual revisions' and 'compiling the biographical index.'²⁸ The overall amount of textual revision for *PSCH* is small; in one significant instance of revision, a passage on attribution and appraisal of Civil War photographs by Mathew Brady and his 'assistants,' it is probable that Robert Taft's text or advice inspired the rewriting, particularly the excision of a sentence that, in the 1937 text, entertained the notion of Alexander Gardner 'stealing some of Brady's negatives.'²⁹ In his text Robert Taft had taken pains to emphasize 'the actual work of photographing the War was carried out by many others as well as by Brady himself.' In the same passage, the chemist poked irony at 'more than one would-be critic in recent years [who] has discussed at length the artistic merits of many Brady war photographs, which, as a matter of fact, were very probably not made by Brady at all, but some of his staff.' 'It is all very well,' Taft insisted, 'to give Brady his just credit, but artistic criticism should be confined to work which is known to come from his hands and his alone. This principle, the would-be critics have ignored completely'³⁰.

- 19 The principal addition to Newhall's text in 1938 was the twenty-five-page biographical index of photographers, and it is likely that Taft's text and notes were used in some of the American entries, as Newhall acknowledged in the Brady entry.³¹ Newhall listed Taft's book in his bibliography, where it was the only addition to the heading 'Histories' and one of a total of three additions to the entire bibliography, accompanied with this comment: 'an important history of the development of photography in this country, with special emphasis on the relationship of its development to our social history.'³² Let me note here that after 1938, during the organization and reorganization of the MoMA's photography department, Robert Taft would be repeatedly taken into consideration as one of the few expert historians of photography in the United States, and even made a member of the department's advisory committee.³³
- 20 From several of Newhall's reminiscences it appears that he became aware of Taft's work between the two editions of his book. In one statement from 1986, Newhall declared that Taft's manuscript was transmitted to him by the photographic expert and translator Edward Epstein, who had been asked for a review by the publisher Macmillan (this, probably, in mid-to-late 1937).³⁴ Newhall recalled being startled by the 'similarity' of Taft's conclusions to his own, to the extent that he asked Macmillan to certify that Taft's manuscript had been sent to Epstein after the publication of his own 1937 catalogue.³⁵ In a reminiscence from 1983, reproduced in this article's epigraph, Newhall stated that in his report on Taft's manuscript he had requested the retraction of some comments on the aesthetics of photography, and offered the typical suggestion that perhaps a future 'student' might some day visit Robert Taft's archives in Kansas and 'reconsider' the value of the excerpted passages. A great believer in 'serendipity' as a research method, Beaumont Newhall also knew to be prudent.³⁶
- 21 Similarly, Taft's book shows that the chemist became aware of Newhall's exhibition and book sometime in 1937, that is, at a period in which he was putting the finishing touches to his manuscript. On page 94, Taft reproduced a daguerreotype from the Met 'photographed by Beaumont Newhall July 1937' (a credit line that is striking in a book where most reproduction photos are uncredited). In his theoretical passage (PAS 314–21), Taft made a reference to the quest for a 'satisfactory and logical system of aesthetics based on the distinguishing features of the photograph,' adding a footnote to refer to Newhall's 'penetrating analysis' and then attaching to the footnote an endnote (numbered 341) that cited *P 1839–1937* as well as several statements by 'leaders in American photography' on the subject of photography as art. The quotes in endnote 341 included excerpts from published statements by Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Steichen in defence of straight photography, and also mentioned letters of confirmation requested by Taft from the two 'leaders.' Stieglitz's letter is dated November 17, 1937; Steichen's, January 18, 1938.³⁷ Perhaps we can agree with Geoffrey Batchen, when he writes on the basis of this association of Newhall's work with Stieglitz and Steichen, that 'the close relationship between the historical method adopted by Newhall and the views of Stieglitz is made explicit in [Taft's] self-declared "social history."³⁸ But what seems even more tangible from the dates of these letters (two of the very latest sources used in the whole book)³⁹ as well as the complex redaction of this page, with its two-tiered expansion in notes, is that Taft's very short remarks on aesthetics, and possibly the theoretical passage as a whole, must have been not just inspired, but elicited, by Newhall's report to Macmillan.

22 If this hypothesis could be proven, it would help explain the odd feeling experienced by Taft's reader when coming across this theoretical passage, and its painstaking effort to distinguish 'artistic' and 'social' historians. As we have seen, in other passages Taft did not hide his skepticism regarding the 'artistic' speculations of 'would-be critics.' Whether such piques were aimed at Beaumont Newhall – or, through Newhall, at 'the views of Stieglitz' – or whether they targeted other authors, or represented earlier moments of Taft's redaction, all of this remains uncertain. Whether and how, more generally, the mutual acquaintance of the two historians may have impacted the peculiar coincidence of simultaneous publications in 1938 is open to question. But the clues contained in both books clearly suggest that there was dialogue and even collaboration, as much as latent confrontation, between the two historians. The portions of the Robert Taft papers I have been able to consult do not yet fully confirm this hypothesis, because major documents are missing – foremost, Taft's original manuscript, Newhall's report to Macmillan, and most of Taft's correspondence with Macmillan. Still, the available documents shed considerable light on the two historians' relationship.

Dialogue behind the Scenes: The Testimony of the Taft Correspondence on Photography

23 The collection of Robert Taft's papers preserved at the Kansas Historical Society⁴⁰ does not appear to have been investigated by photo-historians until now. The recent digitization of one segment of these archives, the photography correspondence, now available online, is a great boon for research.⁴¹ This section of the present article will be limited to a preliminary survey of this correspondence, concentrating on the Taft-Newhall dialogue. It must be noted, however, that the Taft-Newhall dialogue is only a small aspect of the photography correspondence, which itself is only a small portion of the Taft collection at KHS. Taft estimated in 1936 that he had 'written well over two thousand letters in search of material' since 1930 (March 2, 1936, to Fannie Huntington Morriss). As a whole, this correspondence yields a fascinating wealth of information on Taft's enterprise, its evolution and slow march towards publication (as late as March 1937, Taft was looking for a publisher, and Macmillan was not his first choice),⁴² the great diversity of topics it encompassed,⁴³ and the wide response it received in the latter 1930s and early 1940s. This response evokes the picture of a large sociability network of photo-historically concerned correspondents – including descendants of pioneers; archivists and librarians; local and amateur historians; professional photographers; editors and publishers; representatives of various commercial firms; and some foreign correspondents – that is markedly different from the networks we have been used to associating with the elaboration of Newhall's history, and definitely deserves further study.

24 On May 10, 1937, a letter from John Tennant (of Tennant and Ward, publishers of books on photography and the *American Annual of Photography*) told Taft of the publisher's great interest 'in learning that you have completed your history' and his hope 'that Macmillan will accept [it] for publication.' Tennant, who was announcing the publication of Edward Epstein's translations of Potonniée's and Eder's histories, may have been a link with Macmillan. At any rate, his next paragraph must have startled Robert Taft:

'Have you seen Beaumont Newhall's "Photography 1839–1937"? It is a detailed catalogue of the recent historical exhibition held at the Museum of Modern Art – of

which he is the librarian; but has a short history of photography as introduction. This, I hear, is part of a more comprehensive history of photography which he is preparing for press. As far as it goes it is very well done!

- 25 Since there are no previous mentions of Newhall or his exhibition in the correspondence, this may well have been news to Robert Taft. But the correspondence does not tell us anything about his initial reaction, on account of a gap in the file between May 13 and October 12, 1937, when the record resumes with exchanges revealing that Taft's book, now entitled *Photography and the American Scene*, is 'to be published by Macmillan next year' (Taft to Ellsworth Ingalls, Oct. 14, 1937), and soon involving Beaumont Newhall.
- 26 The Taft-Newhall correspondence preserved at KHS begins, indeed, with a letter from Taft to Newhall dated October 16, 1937, thanking the latter for 'suggestions and criticisms' of PAS 'as relayed by Mr. Latham of Macmillan's.' These remarks, Taft continued, were 'well taken' and correctly pinpointed 'some of [the book's] weak spots.' As I have mentioned, Newhall's report, Taft's original manuscript, and his correspondence with Macmillan remain to be located in the archives. Quite strikingly, however, after this acknowledgment Taft broke off to request Newhall's help with some illustrations (a print of Julia Cameron's portrait of Herschel and 'a copy of a daguerreotype, or tintype, which shows clearly the right to left reversal, i.e. one in which printing appears'). Newhall replied as early as October 18, 1937, offering answers to the illustration queries⁴⁴, but primarily expressing, in what appears to be his first personal letter to 'Professor Taft,' his 'delight' 'that Macmillan [was] at last publishing [Taft's] book,' his 'pleasure' and 'privilege to read the manuscript,' and his previous frustration in restraining a 'natural desire to write [Taft] at length,' in view of the fact that they had 'both independently arrived at many similar conclusions.' Promising to send his 'little contribution to the history of photography,' Newhall went on to praise several specific topics in Taft's work (for example, 'your dope about the importation of the news of daguerreotypy is epic'). Taft's narrative of photography's presence in the building of the transcontinental railroad was 'entirely new' and 'most significant,' Newhall stressed, and at the same time begging to include some railroad stereoscopic views cited by Taft in a small exhibition of American photography he was preparing for a show of American art at the Jeu de Paume in Paris in 1938.⁴⁵ The art historian also praised the chemist's treatment of Mathew Brady ('still a puzzle to me,' Newhall wrote, declaring himself 'hopelessly mixed up in the proper attribution of the many Civil War views,' a subject he called 'one of the highwater marks of American photographic history'). He concluded with an invitation to Taft to come to New York – a prospect that apparently never materialized.
- 27 This first exchange set the tone for much of the ensuing correspondence, which, in the online edition, consists of twenty-one letters from Newhall to Taft and ten from Taft to Newhall – with obvious gaps in the file – and concentrates for the most part on the period from October 1937 to May 1938.⁴⁶ The Taft-Newhall dialogue, which can only be briefly characterized here, appears to have immediately functioned on several levels and for several purposes, not all equally explicit nor manifesting an equality or commonality of goal and status beyond the reciprocal rendering of services. In 1937–38 Taft repeatedly obtained Newhall's help with illustration requests from New York museums and libraries – and possibly used his intercession to obtain the above-mentioned letters from Stieglitz and Steichen, which were requested after Newhall's report and with his blessing. In the same period, and later, Newhall frequently sought Taft's information on historical collections or advice on historiographical matters (for the catalogue of photographers of

his 1938 *PSCH* and for a variety of other projects).⁴⁷ Still, the initial impulse and the main early focus of the exchange was Newhall's critical view of Taft's aesthetic discussion in the manuscript he reviewed for Macmillan.

- 28 That we are currently missing Newhall's report and Taft's original manuscript makes a full analysis of their exchanges impossible at this point. We do know from the record that Taft reworked the topic of aesthetics, possibly upon Macmillan's request, and, as we shall see shortly, to no avail, since Newhall's eventual judgment on the second draft was, again, negative. But what needs emphasis is that, through this awkward conversation, Taft was apparently led to refine the theoretical argument of his book, indeed to reframe it – around history rather than aesthetics. It appears that it was Taft's felt need, in the wake of Newhall's report, to rework his 'failed' section on aesthetics that led him, in a sort of contradictory reaction, to elaborate his *opposition* to the whole topic of aesthetics, perceived as a burden and a mere fad, and his elaboration, as an *alternative to aesthetics*, of the 'historic value' of photographs.
- 29 On October 29, 1938, Taft thanked Newhall for the MoMA catalogue, noting that 'your material on photographic esthetics will be of particular value to me when I attempt to rewrite my section on the relationship between art and photography.' This section, Taft added, had been 'inadequate' in the first place, primarily because he was 'little interested in the question' and had only felt obliged to mention it as 'the question has been raised so frequently.' In the following paragraphs Taft stated, quite forcefully, a focus of his book that he perhaps felt had not been sufficiently clarified in his manuscript:
- 30 'The question which has seemed most important and most interesting to me, I have stressed only indirectly, chiefly through the illustrations and the title, namely "of what value is the photograph as a historic document?" My answer is that it is the most vivid and one of the most important records, if properly documented, available, supplementing the written record.
- 31 'As you have said the great psychological difference between the photograph and the end product of any of the other graphic art[s], lies in our belief – no matter how well founded – that the photograph recreates the original scene with absolute fidelity – we can again glimpse the past. The use of the photograph and its importance in recreating the past, I believe has been largely overlooked – especially in the pre-half-tone-period – a period in which "straight photography["] was the rule, largely of necessity.
- 32 'The outstanding exception, of course, is the Photographic History of the Civil War – which, incidentally, I have had occasion to curse long and bitterly at times – but surely if the photographic method is important in recording abnormal life, it is equally as important to record normal life. A photographic History of the 1860's would be equally as important and interesting and probably of more value. I am firmly convinced that there are literally thousands of photographs of this period still available, but unknown and which, if collected and properly documented, would make a truly astonishing and faithful record of the past American scene.

'However, while history in photographs is important and interesting, the more significant aspect of photographic history is the part, or influence, that the photograph has played in determining history. To trace out this development is a real problem since it is difficult to obtain actual data. I have made the attempt, however, and whatever worth my manuscript has, I feel lies largely in pointing out [that] the photograph has influenced American social, political, and artistic life' (Taft to Newhall, Oct. 29, 1937).

- 33 In the absence of Taft's original manuscript we cannot decide to what extent, prior to October 1937, the chemist had fashioned his theoretical argument about the historic value or values of photographs. The above formulation, however, reads not just as a prefiguration but as a radical condensation of the theoretical passage found on pages 314–21 of *PAS*. Moreover, in this letter Taft makes two points that are not found in *PAS*: that straight photography 'was the rule' in the pre-half-tone period; and that photography is 'as important to record normal life' as it is in recording 'abnormal life,' in this case wartime.
- 34 These two points, which may strike the reader of 2012 as rather insightful, might have deserved more comment; quite possibly they were not kept in the final script of *PAS* because Beaumont Newhall, as might be expected, strongly objected. Though we do not have the whole extent of Taft's two successive developments on the aesthetics of photography, it seems reasonable to assume that one particularly objectionable point, for Newhall, was precisely Taft's contention that nineteenth-century photography, in general, was 'straight.' As the art historian wrote in his answer, dated November 3, 1937:
- 'The reason why I feel that an esthetic discussion is indicated in a history of photography is that of all the thousands and thousands of photographs in existence, certain ones are better than others. I think that the reason lies in an esthetic rather than a technical proficiency. The esthetics of photography have very little to do with esthetics in other branches of art; it is just beginning to be studied.
- 'I wonder if photography before the half-tone period was so much "straight" as you seem to indicate in your letter? How about H.P. Robinson and the whole pictorial movement? Sometimes I think that the half-tone itself brought about an appreciation of straight photography because of the great interest it fostered, and the rise of news photography' (Newhall to Taft, Nov. 3, 1937).
- 35 The ubiquitous 'influence' of photography as a news medium was a very relevant context of the discussion between the two historians. In this same winter, 1937–38, Taft's photography correspondence is filled with questionnaires sent by Taft to various press editors about the past and present roles and rules of modern illustrated magazines, the answers to which were used in *PAS*'s chapter on the 'Pictorial Press'; Taft's questionnaires and his exchanges with press editors of the period (including Henry Luce of *Life* magazine) also deserve close scrutiny. Newhall, however, consistently insisted that some photographs 'are better than others.' From the Taft-Newhall dialogue it appears more generally that the chemist was made further aware, by Newhall's very insistence, of his own aversion to the fashionable subject of photographic aesthetics, and yet that the reflections borne out of this discussion helped him frame a broader theoretical argument about photography, history, and society.
- 36 Taft did the desired rewrite on the section on aesthetics, but only to shoulder another stringent – and this time, decisive – rebuttal from Newhall. On December 12, 1937, Newhall wrote Taft a lengthy letter that oddly opened with the colloquial if not vexing address 'Dear Taft,' which Newhall would repeat in his 1938 letters. This letter contained a detailed critique of Taft's reworked section on aesthetics, accompanied by his annotated draft and a syllabus of a Newhall lecture on photographic aesthetics 'presented at Harvard last Thursday.' After some polite preliminaries, Newhall's critique began with the following rather stark pronouncement:
- 'After considerable study and thought I very much regret to write that I consider [the reworked section on aesthetics] confused and unsatisfactory. I very much

recommend that you drop all esthetic consideration from your excellent text. As you yourself say, "It [aesthetics] is not one of primary interest to the social historian." For the benefit of those who wish to pursue the subject, you might refer to my book, which I think outlines in a sketchy way the lines on which an esthetic of photography might be built' (Newhall to Taft, Dec. 12, 1937).

- 37 Indeed, Taft's second draft – which is not worth analyzing here in detail, in the absence of the first one – included a marked reference to Beaumont Newhall's arguments on the distinction of photography from the graphic arts and his contributions to a 'satisfactory system' of aesthetics (while at the same time obliquely questioning this distinction as meaningful aesthetically, a comment that seems to have infuriated Newhall). In the published version of *PAS*, the reference to Newhall's authority would become about the sum total of Taft's development on aesthetics. For, as Taft wrote to Newhall on January 12, 1938, after sending his final copy off to Macmillan, he decided to leave out 'the several pages of debatable matter' on aesthetics but to include the paragraphs on 'historic value,' a decision that, according to him, came back to his 'original intention.' This decision was already on Taft's mind on December 18, 1937, when he wrote his first reply to Newhall's ominous letter of December 12:

'I haven't as yet had time to thoroughly digest all of your criticisms. I have been engrossed ever since sending you the rough draft, on remodeling and rewriting the last chapter of my book. I believe it is very considerably improved. Following your suggestion, I have renamed it and called it "Photography and the Pictorial Press."
'Christmas vacation has just started and, theoretically, my time should be my own. I hope to get back on the final write-up of the section on pseudo-aesthetics next week and will write you further then' (Taft to Newhall, Dec. 18, 1937).

- 38 The 'final write-up of the section on pseudo-aesthetics' must correspond to the theoretical passage of *PAS* 314–21. 'Pseudo-aesthetics' is an apt term for a discussion that basically eliminated aesthetics in favour of the methodology of history. Thus it seems not exaggerated to conclude that Newhall's report and the ensuing dialogue helped Taft refocus his 'unsatisfactory' discussion of aesthetics into a whole argument on the 'historic' value of photographs – their conditions of truthfulness and the documentation protocols required to make historical use of them, which Newhall praised in his letter and which in today's view arguably stands as one of the achievements of *PAS*⁴⁸ – combined with a stronger characterization of their 'social' powers, a theme that indeed permeated *PAS*'s last chapter and closing statement about photography and the pictorial press as weapons for the 'brotherhood of man' (*PAS* 450, quoted earlier).

'The Camera's Century': Notes on the Initial Reception of Newhall's and Taft's Histories

- 39 Marta Braun is correct in stating that the 'narrative élan' of Newhall's book eventually eclipsed the other available histories – Taft's, as well as Epstein's translations of Eder's and Potonniée's histories (published in 1945).⁴⁹ Braun's comment, however, refers to the 1949 edition of Newhall's book, a complete rewriting of the 1937–38 text.⁵⁰ An examination of the *New York Times* (*NYT*) archives for 1937–39 shows that Newhall's exhibition and Taft's book both made strong impressions on columnists. While the MoMA's show drew some criticisms in art circles,⁵¹ it 'received considerable attention by both the local and the national press,' writes Christina Hahn, citing five mentions in the *NYT* prior to opening day and a 'lead editorial' in the *New York Herald* in evidence of the

show's 'overwhelming success.'⁵² Newhall's catalogue, *P 1839-1937*, also received attention as a book, as shown especially by an unsigned review, entitled 'The Camera's Century,' which appeared on June 27, 1937. For the critic, whereas photography had until then been 'confused with all other graphic processes,' 'that confusion is resolved and photography is examined in light of its own principles in this highly informative book,' 'a beautiful book.' This reader, though obviously convinced by Newhall's method, considered the book's merits in a rather eclectic fashion:

'Step by step from its semi-embryonic beginnings the scientific development of photography is traced in these pages. But the layman's most vivid interest will probably be awakened, first, by the reminder of Brady's Civil War photographs – those remarkable views taken with the awkward "wet plate" camera ... Yet it is as an art that photography holds its keenest interest ... This book is comprehensive as well as concise; but even if its text were far less enlightening than it is, it would be worth having and keeping for its photographs.'⁵³

- 40 Even the MoMA's show and catalogue, however, did not monopolize the attention of photographically minded New Yorkers, who had many other objects of interest in 1937.⁵⁴ And the following year, in the end of 1938, Robert Taft's *PAS* drew more attention in the *NYT* than Beaumont Newhall's book, though less than the 1937 MoMA show. Between October 11 and Christmas Day, 1938, the newspaper published three lengthy reviews of Taft's book, all emphasizing Taft's approach to photography as a tool for history. In the first of two articles, Ralph Thompson (a regular *NYT* critic who also reviewed literature from Virginia Woolf to Ernest Hemingway), declared 'that photography is the most wonderful of human inventions.' Noting that some clung to a 'German' taste for Leica-style cameras, while others 'regard the taking of pictures as a fine art, an avocation or a profession,' the critic added, in explicit recognition of Taft's method,

'Photography is doubtless all these things. But it is also – and here, it seems to me, its true greatness lies – a method of history, a superb and unmatched recorder of men and events. This may sound obvious, but not everyone realizes it. For example, how many of those who have been "thrilled" and "terribly interested" by recent Civil War novels know that the story of that same war has been set down a thousand times more graphically than any Margaret Mitchell at her ultimate best could or can ever hope to set it down? How many have even heard of the ten-volume "Photographic History of the Civil War" published in 1911, let alone seen it?'

- 41 Thompson concluded: 'It is a long, solid book and the sort of thing some of us have been waiting for a long time ... Though solid, it is not solemn.'⁵⁵ In his second review, which heralded 'a banner year for books of and about pictures' and also touched upon Walker Evans's *American Photographs* and John Kouwenhoven's *Adventures of America, 1857-1900: A Pictorial Record from Harper's Weekly*, Thompson paid more praise to Taft's book – 'not merely for the text, which is doubtless the best history of the subject we have ... the most intelligent, scholarly and inclusive, but also for the illustrations, of which there are about 300.'⁵⁶ Finally, the Christmas Day issue of the *NYT* included a review signed by S.T. Williamson, which aimed at clarifying the 'social' nature of Taft's history. The critic echoed Taft's thesis of photography's 'influence' on American history ('We learn how Jackson's photographs inspired establishment of the Yellowstone National Park and how a photograph set Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to writing "Hiawatha"'). This influence, according to Williamson, must be understood not just as 'a list' of momentous events but as 'a story' and the object of a voluntary, continuing effort, destined at 'preservation and

classification' – another explicit nod to Taft's own call for collection, preservation, and documentation of old photographs as testimonies of America's visible past:⁵⁷

'For despite photography's value as a historical record, no one has been concerned with estimating the social significance of the photograph and with tracing what its development has meant to daily lives and habits of the people of this country. No one, that is, until Professor Taft ... Enough has been brought to light by Professor Taft to indicate that the next step must be the preservation and classification of these visual historic records. The history of the last hundred years could be told in photographs. Its preparation will be a laborious and costly process, but it is eminently worth-while undertaking, and it must be launched before time ravages more prints and negatives.'⁵⁸

42 In 1937–38, the *New York Times* gave comparable attention to Newhall's MoMA show and Robert Taft's book, suggesting the period's wide interest in photo-history.⁵⁹ The two histories, however, were discussed by different critics and in different tones. The dual categories of 'art' or 'art history' and 'history' or 'social history' were already well in place in these columns, which did not mingle the two books. Yet we retain a sense that, at this time, the two histories still belonged in the same realm, even as that would have been defined as the 'picture book' and primarily valued for illustration rather than text.

43 This ambiguous proximity is perceptible in the *NYT* down to 1964, when the paper's photography expert, the critic Jacob Deschin, noticed the new edition of Newhall's *History*, 'a volume that is more than ever the most readable guide on the subject,'⁶⁰ before paying homage, in a separate review devoted to that year's crop of photo-history books, to the Dover reprint of Taft's book, 'a long, leisurely and eminently readable narrative ... first published in 1938.' Showing perhaps more deference than true critical spirit, Deschin gave the republication first place, acknowledging it as a 'valuable service,' while describing *PAS* in language blending distance and curiosity:

'The author's work offers what he subtitles "a social history" of American photography from 1839 to 1889. Hard fact mingles with revealing anecdote and an easy writing style to win, and maintain, the reader's attention throughout. Seldom is the combination so engagingly executed as in this wholly absorbing survey.'⁶¹

44 Deschin's phrasing would suggest that by 1964, Taft's book, in spite of its value as 'survey,' was already viewed as something of a relic; the reprint gained less attention than Newhall's new edition. Yet Deschin gave Taft equal footing to Newhall in the history of *American* photography, and appeared to consider the two histories as complementary rather than opposite or unequal. Let us recall that Robert Taft died in 1955, not long after the publication of his survey of western illustrative art, *Artists and Illustrators of the Old West* (1953);⁶² and that it was mostly after Taft's death that Beaumont Newhall entered the vein of 'American scene' photo-history with *The Daguerreotype in America* (first published in 1961)⁶³ as well as countless articles and several reprints of nineteenth-century American texts. This may help explain why the same blend of proximity and difference observed in the 1937–38 reviews of Newhall's and Taft's works is still perceptible in Deschin's columns. For Deschin in 1964, as for many later American photo-experts, Taft's book was still a relevant history of American photography.

45 This leads me to suggest that the 'falling off the radar' of Taft's book in criticism (and American studies) occurred later, sometime between 1965 and 1980. In this scenario, the foremost explanation of the Taft book's lost appeal is as a side effect of the rise to dominance of the Newhallian model of history and its institutionalization in major art museums and the art market. But it may have also been the fruit of the growing

fragmentation of criticism, photo-history, and photo-education that evolved in the United States in this period. The reconfiguration of the history of photography, especially American photography, that resulted from the diverging yet cumulative efforts of John Szarkowski at the MoMA, Nathan Lyons at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, Peter Bunnell in the photography chair at Princeton, Alan Trachtenberg at the English Department at Yale, and the emerging 'postmodernist' critique nurtured by Alan Sekula, Douglas Crimp, and Rosalind Krauss around *October* magazine, was strikingly captured in Jonathan Green's novel narrative of the history of American photography published in 1984 – the first 'critical history' since Newhall's.⁶⁴ The 'contest of meaning,' in Richard Bolton's phrase, that newly characterized the cultural and historical understanding of (American) photography around 1980 had less and less business with Taft's style of history as an 'accumulation of facts,' except perhaps to use those facts as ammunition in deconstructions of the 'modernist' brand of history. As Beaumont Newhall prophesized, however, the time would come to reconsider the moment of 'historical imagination' encapsulated in *Photography and the American Scene* in a new light, with new ideas and new means.

NOTES

1. The epigraph is from Beaumont NEWHALL, 'Toward the New Histories of Photography,' *Exposure*, no. 4 (1983): 7, cited in Marta Braun, 'Beaumont Newhall et l'historiographie de la photographie anglophone,' *Études photographiques*, 16 (May 2005), 19–31, note 15. I thank Marta Braun and Rachel Stuhlman (George Eastman House) for providing me with a copy of this article. Beaumont NEWHALL, *Photography: A Short Critical History (PSCH)* (New York: MoMA, 1938; Beaumont NEWHALL, *Photography, 1839–1937 (P 1839–1937)* (New York: MoMA, 1937); Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1839–1889 (PAS)* (New York: Macmillan, 1938). For copyright documentation, see Catalog of Copyright Entries, respectively: Part 1, Books, Group 1, New Series, Vol. 36, for the year 1939, Nos. 1–12, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1940, 816; Vol. 34, for the year 1937, Nos. 1–112, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1938, 803; Vol. 35, for the year 1938, Nos. 1–112, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939, 626.
2. Elizabeth EDWARDS, *The Camera as Historian, Amateur Photographers and Historical Imagination, 1885–1918* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). See also the ongoing series *L'Oeil de l'Histoire* by Georges DIDI-HUBERMAN, especially *Atlas ou le gai savoir inquiet, L'Oeil de l'Histoire*, 3 (Paris: Minuit, 2011).
3. Robert Taft collection, Kansas Historical Society (KHS), Topeka. The portion of this collection that has recently become available online is the photography correspondence, which I discuss in part 4 of this paper. The existence of this new facility only came to my attention after my first draft had been completed and presented, and I thank April Watson and Jane Aspinwall (Nelson-Atkins Museum) for alerting me to it. Taft's photography correspondence was digitized in 2010 by a KHS team including Michael A. Church (coordinator and editor of the collection), Teresa Coble (assistant editor), and Steve Wood (imaging), and put online in early 2011 through the Kansas Memory gateway. I warmly thank Michael A. Church, digital projects coordinator at KHS, for guiding me through it and providing me with additional information. In an email to me dated

July 10, 2012, Church tells me that additional segments of the collection may be digitized at a later date, depending on the response to this first endeavour.

4. François BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique de l'Amérique selon Robert Taft (Photography and the American Scene, 1938),' *E-rea*, no. 8.3 (2011), <http://erea.revues.org/17772011>.

5. Christopher PHILLIPS, 'The Judgment Seat of Photography,' *October*, no. 22 (1982): 27–63; reprinted in Annette Michelson et al., eds., *October, The First Decade, 1976–1986* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1987), 257–93.

6. Along with Mary Warner MARIEN, 'What Shall We Tell the Children? Photography and its Text (Books),' *Afterimage* 13, no. 9 (April 1986): 4–7. See also Richard BOLTON, ed., *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1989).

7. M. BRAUN, 'Beaumont Newhall et l'historiographie de la photographie anglophone' (note 1). In her footnote 1, Braun gave an extensive bibliography of the 'history of history'; see especially the special issue of *History of Photography* 21, no. 2, 'Why Historiography?' (Summer 1997), with the articles of Allison BERTRAND, 'Beaumont Newhall's "Photography 1839–1937": Making History,' 137–47; and Anne MCCAULEY, 'Writing Photography's History before Newhall,' 87–102.

8. Christine Y. HAHN, 'Exhibition as Archive: Beaumont Newhall, Photography 1839–1937, and the Museum of Modern Art,' *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 18, no. 2, special issue 'Following the Archival Turn: Photography, the Museum, and the Archive' (2002): 145–52. Hahn argues that Newhall rather avoided advancing an aesthetics for photography and was influenced by the all-encompassing art theories of Alois Riegl and the period's fascination with the machine.

9. Sophie HACKETT, 'Beaumont Newhall, le commissaire et la machine: Exposer la photographie au MoMA en 1937,' *Etudes photographiques* 23 'Politique des images / Illustration photographique' (2009): 150–76. Hackett also emphasizes the cult of the machine as source of modern art promoted by Alfred Barr and Paul Strand especially, and Newhall's wide-ranging choice of iconography. In the same issue, see also Matthew S. WITKOVSKY's article, 'Circa 1930: Histoire de l'art et nouvelle photographie,' 116–38.

10. See François BRUNET, 'Samuel Morse, "père de la photographie américaine,"' *Etudes photographiques* 15 (2004), 4 and n. 2. For an example of a discussion of Taft's research on the daguerreotype era, see Cliff KRAINIK's reconsideration of Robert Taft's article on 'John Plumbe, America's First Nationally Known Photographer' (*American Photography*, 30, January 1936, 1–12), in *Daguerreian Annual*, 1994: 48–57.

11. See, for example, Daniel J. BOORSTIN, *The Americans*, vol. 3, *The Democratic Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 658; Michael SCHUDSON, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 95. A search on Google Books confirms that Taft's book is also currently commonly used.

12. Michael KAMMEN, 'Photography and the Discipline of American Studies,' *American Art* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 13–18. See also F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4).

13. See F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4). It is relatively common to read that Taft's book was inspired by a nationalistic perspective, which is probably an oversimplification (see part 2 of this article).

14. See M. BRAUN, 'Beaumont Newhall et l'historiographie de la photographie anglophone' (note 1). I discuss this further in this article; see Geoffrey BATCHEN's comments below, part 3, and note 38. Douglas Nickel states that Taft's book 'does not appear to have been an influence' on Newhall's, and notes that the latter was Macmillan's outside reader: Douglas R. NICKEL, 'History of Photography: The State of Research,' *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 3 (2001): 557.

15. F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4), 18–22.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.* 2–4.

18. For further discussion, see part 3 and notes 29 and 30.
19. C. PHILLIPS, 'The Judgment Seat of Photography' (note 5); S. HACKETT, 'Beaumont Newhall, le commissaire et la machine' (note 9). Published reminiscences of Beaumont NEWHALL include B. NEWHALL, 'Toward the New Histories of Photography' (note 1); Interview with Beaumont NEWHALL from March 1975, in *Dialogue with Photography*, ed. Paul HILL and Thomas COOPER (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1979), 377–412; B. NEWHALL, 'The Challenge of Photography to this Art Historian,' in *Perspectives on Photography*, ed. Peter WALCH and Thomas BARROW (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 1–7; B. NEWHALL, *Focus: Memoirs of a Life in Photography* (New York: Bulfinch, 1993). Significant holdings of Beaumont and Nancy Newhall's papers are found at the MoMA (MoMA Archives), the Getty Museum (Getty Research Institute), and the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona.
20. See F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4), 13–22.
21. On Mathew Brady and Civil War photography compare B. NEWHALL, PSCH (note 1), 48–50 (a separate chapter on 'Brady: Documentation of the Civil War,' falling between 'Ambrotypes' and 'Photographic Realism') and R. TAFT, PAS (note 1), chapter 13 ('Civil War Photographers,' 223–47). On hand-held cameras and the Kodak, compare PSCH, 59–61 and PAS, chapters 18 ('A New Age,' 361–83) and 19 ('The Flexible Film,' 384–404).
22. F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique,' 23–25.
23. Compare B. NEWHALL, PSCH (note 1), 76–80 ('News Photography,' where the art historian attempts to distinguish between 'photographic interpretation' and mere 'sensation') to R. TAFT, PAS (note 1), chapter 21 ('Photography and the Pictorial Press,' 419–51, which is much more concerned with technological evolution, especially the invention of half-tone printing, and social 'impact'). In an interview from 1975, Newhall stated that the 'exciting things' happening in photography in the 1930s were the FSA's work and 'straight' photography, experimental photography, and photojournalism: Interview with Beaumont NEWHALL from March 1975 (note 19), 383. This 'excitement' was linked, in the late 1930s, to the rise of 'documentary photography' (see Olivier LUGON, *Le Style documentaire: D'August Sander à Walker Evans, 1920–1945*, Paris: Macula, 2001).
24. This context, which deserves further study, has been touched upon by commentators interested in the making of Beaumont Newhall's history. See references given in notes 5–9 and F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4), 4–6.
25. For references to published reminiscences of the art historian, see note 19.
26. See Robert TAFT, 'A Photographic History of Early Kansas,' *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (February, 1934): 3–14, http://www.kancoll.org/khq/1934/34_1_taft.htm.
27. See Robert TAFT, 'M.B. Brady and the Daguerreotype Era,' *American Photography* 29, nos. 8 and 9 (1935): 486–98, 548–60.
28. Along with René Auwillain, secretary of the Société Française de Photographie; H.H. Blacklock, secretary, and J. Dudley Johnston, curator of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain; Lewis Mumford; Georgia O'Keeffe; Louis Walton Siple; and Monroe Wheeler (B. NEWHALL, PSCH [note 1], 10).
29. Compare B. NEWHALL, P 1839–1937, 50 and PSCH, 49–50 (note 1).
30. R. TAFT, PAS (note 1), 229–30. In Taft's text, this terse recrimination seems not intended as a diminution of Brady's artistic or other merit but as a caveat against the speculative excesses of 'artistic criticism.' Later in the same chapter Robert Taft gives details about Alexander Gardner's career and separate venture from 1863 on (*ibid.*, 230–31) that are not found in Newhall's texts.
31. B. NEWHALL, PSCH (note 1), 194.
32. *Ibid.*, 219.
33. See Erin Kathleen O'TOOLE, 'No Democracy in Quality: Ansel Adams, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, and the Founding of the Department of Photographs at the Museum of Modern Art (PhD

thesis, University of Arizona, 2010), 288–89. O'Toole also quotes a letter from James Soby to Dick Abbott, dated June 26, 1944, when in reference to the reorganization of the MoMA's photography department Soby reluctantly opts for the 'Stieglitzian-Fine Arts' approach and 'professional as opposed to commercial photography,' adding: 'And here Nancy Newhall knows more than anyone except Beaumont, Hyatt Mayor and [Robert] Taft, none of whom is available' (ibid., 263), http://arizona.openrepository.com/arizona/bitstream/10150/204109/1/azu_etd_10947_sip1_m.pdf.

34. B. NEWHALL, 'The Challenge of Photography to this Art Historian' (note 19), 6. Edward EPSTEAN (1868–1945) had become interested in the history of photography before 1900 while in the photogravure business. Translator of many French and German early publications on photography, including Josef-Maria Eder's and Georges Potonniée's histories, he also published several historical works of his own, including *Daguerreotype in Europe and the United States, 1839–1853* (with John A. Tennant, s.n., 1934) and *The Centenary of Photography and The Motion Picture* (s.n., reprint from the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*, 1939).

35. B. NEWHALL, 'The Challenge of Photography to this Art Historian' (note 19), 6: 'I was fascinated to discover that this unknown author had gone over much of the same ground that I had and come to certain similar conclusions as myself. Indeed I felt so strongly about it that I requested a letter certifying that the manuscript had been sent to Epstein after the publication of my own book. I highly recommend[ed] the publication of Taft's book, which, as I am sure you all know, became a classic, twice reprinted.'

36. In other statements, however, Newhall did not mention Taft among his peers in photo-history of the period, see for example *Interview with Beaumont NEWHALL from March 1975* (note 19), 387.

37. R. TAFT, PAS (note 1), 496–97.

38. Geoffrey BATCHEN, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 211, n. 45. He is, to my knowledge, the only critic to have commented on Taft's curious endnote 341. Yet he oddly states, after the sentence quoted, that Taft 'then attaches an endnote that details Newhall's MoMA catalogue and moves straight on to quote the views of Stieglitz, as published in the *New York Times* in 1934.' Taft's endnote does not detail Newhall's catalogue, but merely cites it; he does move on to quote views of 'leaders in American photography' because, he explains, 'they bear [him] out with regard to the point raised in the text.' The problem is that, this comment being inserted in an endnote itself attached to the footnote referring to Newhall's 'system,' 'the point raised in the text' is a bit hazy, unless that be the prudent statement that 'there appears to be developing at present a satisfactory and logical system of aesthetics based on the distinguishing features of the photograph,' to which the footnote is attached. The quoted statement by Stieglitz is a defence of straight photography, and the letter merely reaffirms the statement. The quoted statements by Steichen, taken from a 1923 interview in the *New York Times*, go in the same direction ('Mr. Steichen urged a return of sharp pictures and praised the "meticulous accuracy of the camera"'). What is also worth noting is that Steichen's letter, written in reply to Taft's request for confirmation of these statements, rather expresses a form of denial ('in detail they cannot have been accurate') and retrospective self-justification ('at that time I took every opportunity that presented itself to urge the abandonment of certain prevalent soft focus and other vagaries ... I had been one of the ring-leaders in the production of these technical aberrations'): R. TAFT, PAS (note 1), 497.

39. None of the references I have seen in Taft's endnotes seem to date later than January, 1938.

40. Robert Taft collection, KHS (note 3). This collection consists of fifty-six boxes, described by an online finding aid: <http://www.kshs.org/p/robert-taft-collection/> 14128.

41. Robert Taft collection, KHS (note 3), boxes 10–12, accessible through a page selection tool: <http://www.kansasmemory.org/item/221204/page/1>. The photography correspondence ranges

from 1926 to 1955. In the following pages I simply reference the letters quoted by authors' names and dates.

42. Taft initially hesitated on the scope of his book, between a more limited subject which he labelled 'The Early Use of Photography in the Explorations of the West' (Jan. 19, 1933, to A.J. Olmstead) to a more inclusive one ('a history of American photography in the period 1839 to 1880,' May 5, 1933, to Horace W. Davis; 'a popular history of American photography in the period 1839-1880,' June 13, 1933, to Agnes Rogers Allen). As early as 1935, he declared his project to be 'nearing its close' (April 19, 1935, to K.D. Metcalf). In the end of 1935 he started on a search for a publisher, while publishing portions or drafts of his work, on Mathew Brady particularly, in a series of articles for *American Photography* (see R. TAFT, 'M.B. Brady and the Daguerreotype Era' [note 27]). On November 19, 1935, Taft petitioned to Houghton, Mifflin Co., writing that he had 'completed the first draft' of a book that treated American photography 'as a phase of American Social history rather than a technical history and as such it should be of much broader interest to the public at large,' and offering as a tentative title 'An American sun shines brighter'; the response was apparently negative. In June 1936, Taft expressed his hope to 'get [the book] off to the publisher by the end of the summer' (June 17, 1936, to L.W. Siple); from 1936 on he seemed primarily engaged in collecting illustrations, though important textual revisions were still to come. On January 15, 1937, still without a publisher, Taft wrote Edward Epstean to inquire about the 'two books announced by Tennant and Ward dealing with the history of photography which you have translated' (i.e. Potonniée's and Eder's histories, which appeared only in 1945). From a letter preserved in his general correspondence, which I thank Michael Church for communicating to me, we learn the important fact that on March 11, 1937, Robert Taft approached the publisher Little, Brown & Co., who sent a denial letter on March 18 (Robert Taft Papers, Kansas Historical Society, Coll. 172, Box 1, General Correspondence, Folder 1937). Quite probably, then, negotiations with Macmillan only started after this date, although this cannot be confirmed until Taft's correspondence with Macmillan is found. Michael Church assures me that so far this correspondence has not been located in the Taft collection.

43. For instance, Taft's letter to Epstean quoted in the preceding note (note 42) was the starting point of an exchange that developed around the question, raised by Epstean in his January 22, 1937, letter to Taft, of 'when "photography," the word as noun, adjective or otherwise, was first used and by whom'; to which Taft replied with references to German and English sources (esp. John F.W. Herschel's letter to Talbot of Feb. 19, 1839, proposing to substitute 'photographic' for Talbot's 'photogenic') that did not appear in PAS.

44. Newhall advised Taft to use the Camera Work reproduction of Herschel's portrait (a suggestion that Taft adopted, see R. TAFT, PAS [note 1], 106) and sent him a copy of a Southworth and Hawes view of a Boston street, which is the source of Taft's illustration, already mentioned, of the right to left reversal appearing, with credit to Newhall, in Taft's book on p. 94.

45. About this exhibition and its relative failure, see Laetitia BARRÈRE, 'Influence culturelle? Les usages diplomatiques de la photographie américaine en France durant la guerre froide,' *Études photographiques*, no. 21 (2007): 44-45 and n. 8 and 9. Newhall described the plans for this exhibition in a letter to Taft dated February 23, 1938.

46. The last letter or copy of a letter from Taft to Newhall extant in the file is dated March 7, 1938. After this there are two more letters from Newhall to Taft in March and May, 1938. Then the correspondence becomes less frequent and includes only five letters from Newhall to Taft (between January 1939 and March 1943) and one from Nancy Newhall, acting as Beaumont's interim at the MoMA in 1942. Throughout the correspondence several letters from Taft to Newhall appear to be missing from the file.

47. Concerning, for example, Alexander Gardner and the photography of railroad construction in the West (Newhall to Taft, Nov. 11, 1937), the Mexican war daguerreotypes (Taft to Newhall, Nov.

- 30, 1937), W.H.F. Talbot materials in the possession of Robert Taft (Newhall to Taft, Dec. 2, 1937; Taft to Newhall, Dec. 7, 1937), etc.
48. See F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4), 20–22.
49. M. BRAUN, 'Beaumont Newhall et l'historiographie de la photographie anglophone' (note 1), 30.
50. Under the new title *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present Day*; on the rewriting, with the help of Hollywood screenwriter Ferdinand Reyher, see Interview with Beaumont NEWHALL from March 1975 (note 19), 407–08; M. BRAUN, 'Beaumont Newhall et l'historiographie de la photographie anglophone' (note 1), 26.
51. See S. HACKETT, 'Beaumont Newhall, le commissaire et la machine' (note 9), 150–52.
52. C. HAHN, 'Exhibition as Archive' (note 8), 146–47. Mentions of the MoMA show I have found in the NYT online archive appeared on March 5, 1937; March 14, 1937; March 17, 1937; March 21, 1937; April 4, 1937 (signed H.D.: 'the art of the camera is decidedly to the fore at the moment, with material enough on exhibition to please all varieties of photographic taste and keep devotees of the lens busy for some time.');
53. NYT, June 27, 1937, 'Miscellaneous Brief Reviews of Recent Non-Fiction,' unsigned review entitled 'The Camera's Century.'
54. On October 7, 1937, a eulogious article was devoted by the NYT to the annual US Camera Salon: 'Camera Show To Have 700 Prints.' In a review of 'The New Books on Photography' by Edward Fitch HALL (NYT, October 31, 1937), largely devoted to technical or popular books, we find no mention of Newhall's catalogue.
55. Ralph THOMPSON, 'Books of the Times: A Method of History, Pictures and Text, A Broad View,' NYT, October 11, 1938. See Francis TREVELYAN Miller, ed., *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, 10 vols (New York: The Review of Reviews, 1911); and F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4), 5.
56. Ralph THOMPSON, 'Books of the Times: Walker Evans and Others Cartoons to Comic Strips from Harper's Weekly,' NYT, November 29, 1938.
57. See F. BRUNET, 'L'histoire photographique' (note 4), 20–23.
58. S.T. WILLIAMSON, 'Early American Photography: Mr. Taft Writes a Social History of the Camera's First Fifty Years in this Country,' NYT, December 25, 1938.
59. Taft's book received a number of reviews besides the NYT, not all favourable (see *The Saturday Review*, December 17, 1938, 6). PAS even received a mention in *Life* magazine's issue of June 5, 1939, where the book and its illustrations appear to have been the main source for the photo-essay on 'American Yesterdays, Nearly a Century of National History Has Been Recorded by the Camera,' which stated that since the Mexican War of 1849 'photography as art in America took second place to photography as a medium for the recording of history' (unidentified author, *Life*, 5 June 1939, p.p. 24, 29–40). See also Robert Taft to Elmo Scott Watson, October 14, 1938, KHS, Taft Collection (note 3), Photography correspondence.
60. Jacob DESCHIN, 'History Updated: Newhall Book Appears in a New Edition,' NYT November 8, 1964.
61. Jacob DESCHIN, 'History Speaks Volumes,' NYT, June 27, 1965, p. X24.
62. Robert TAFT, *Artists and Illustrators of the Old West, 1850–1900* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).
63. Beaumont NEWHALL, *The Daguerreotype in America* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1961, reprint Dover, 1976).

64. Jonathan GREEN, *American Photography: A Critical History 1945 to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984).

ABSTRACTS

This paper examines the historical coincidence, conceptual difference, and generative dialogue linking the two accounts of photography's first century, created simultaneously by the American historians Beaumont Newhall and Robert Taft. Whereas Newhall's catalogue to the 1937 MoMA exhibition and subsequent *History of Photography* have long been considered foundational documents for the aesthetic interpretation of photography, Taft's 1938 *Photography and the American Scene* has been given very little critical attention, in spite of its plausible claim to serve as a 'social history' of American photography and of its function as a medium of national memory and history. In addition to comparing the two texts, the paper sheds light on the generally unnoticed working relationship between the two historians and the initial reception of their work.

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