

‘That was a posed photo:’ reflections on the process of combining oral histories with institutional photographs

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Abstract

This paper emerged from observations following oral history interviews with thirty people who worked at the New South Wales (NSW) Government Printing Office, Sydney between 1933 and 1989. This project incorporates photographs from the NSW Government Printing Office collection: institutional images taken within this public service workplace. This paper describes how the use of institutional photographs during the oral history interview can provide insight into the disjuncture between bureaucratic representations of an organisation, and former employees’ recollections of working life. Oral history interviews indicate that these former employees possessed a confident and playful awareness of the ‘grey area’ between institutional representation and everyday practice, and they performed an active role in the shaping of some of those situations. This paper engages with oral history literature on the relationship between oral testimony and photographs, and opens up the field to include the use of institutional photographs in the interview process, rather than personal or family images, which have often been the focus of previous research in this area.¹

Introduction

The relationship between oral history and photography is a relatively new but growing area in oral history literature.² While recent scholarship in this field has tended to focus on personal and family photographs,³ this study uses photographs from an institutional archive: that of the NSW Government Printing Office. Oral history interviews have revealed that this public service factory was colloquially known as ‘the Guv’ – a term I will employ henceforth.⁴

In the context of family photographic collections, the photographic record often belongs to those who are depicted; it was often generated by them, or by other family members. These photographs (as physical objects and images) are often invested

with strong attachments and associations, already tightly bound to memory, and embedded into the way in which individuals already make meaning in their lives.⁵ The introduction into the oral history interview of workplace photographs produced by an institutional employer introduces an entirely different scenario.

This is a meaningful shift; these are photographs that are not personally ‘owned’ by the people being interviewed, and yet the images may still record important aspects of these participants’ lives. With institutional photographs, the questions of ‘what?’, ‘how?’, and ‘in whose interest?’ are sometimes difficult to answer specifically, although it is usually possible to say that photographs depicting workplace scenes were generally produced in a manner that was officially endorsed. Such images were taken and distributed with the aim of representing the institution in a positive light, to relay an appropriate image of this organisation to the public. The images are depersonalised; they are not usually produced with the aim of recording someone or something ‘special’, but with the aim of recording and distributing normative, best-practice images of idealised labour.

Given that many of these photographs were taken in the service of a government institution, the collection has a certain bureaucratic quality. American writer and theorist Susan Sontag raised concerns about the bureaucratic classification produced by the photographic medium.⁶ She warned of how, through institutional photographs, ‘the world becomes a series of unrelated, freestanding particles; and history, past and present, a set of anecdotes and *faits divers*’.⁷ This could risk a historical view that trivialises and fetishises isolated photographic images, rather than understanding their deep interconnectedness with social and historical contexts.⁸ That is why the photographs from the Guv cannot easily stand alone, but when juxtaposed with verbal accounts (among other sources), we may have some hope of stitching things back together in a variety of ways, providing the connections that can be lost when an image is isolated from its context.



Alan Leishman pouring acid toner, 1962. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Government Printing Office collection 2 #22009.

What happens, then, when an institutional photographic collection is re-introduced into a contemporary context, into an oral history interview?⁹ In this case, what happens when these photographs are presented to former employees of the Guv? These are the people who are perhaps best equipped to ‘read’ the images and tell a richer, and perhaps more complex story about the layers of workplace history and institutional representation, but their testimony may not operate in predictable or straightforward ways. Interview participants’ testimony should not simply be used to ‘decode’ or explain the photographic content; what they say can potentially tell us far more.

The use of institutional photographs in the oral history process does not demonstrate workplace practices ‘as they were’ in a documentary sense, but it can reveal some of the ways that this institution sought to represent itself, and how employees responded to those attempts by the institution to present particular narratives. More importantly, the examples provided in this paper also indicate that these participants are shrewd, active, and sometimes mischievous contributors to the production of the Guv’s public ‘image’.

Background to the Project

Precarious Printers: An Oral and Pictorial History of Technological and Social Reordering at the New South Wales Government Printing Office 1959-1989 is an ongoing doctoral research project that examines the three-decade period prior to the closure of the NSW

Government Printing Office in 1989. My sources include oral history interviews with thirty former employees, photographs from the State Library of NSW (SLNSW), and archival materials held with NSW State Records.

Between 1959 and 1989 the Guv operated out of a centralised printing factory in the inner-city suburb of Ultimo, Sydney.¹⁰ The 1960s to the 1980s was a period of dramatic upheaval in the printing industry, in developed capitalist economies.¹¹ Hot-metal typesetting and letterpress printing was phased out, and replaced by high-speed offset lithography and electronic phototypesetting systems.¹² This meant that the traditional craft trades such as letterpress printer, Linotype operator, and hand compositor (to name but a few) were utterly transformed, and many trades swiftly became redundant.¹³ *Precarious Printers* explores how workers at the Guv experienced this transitional stage. In the *Precarious Printers* project (as a whole) oral history is used as a way to access individual and collective ways of talking about working life at the Guv. In this particular paper, however, my observations are limited to the intersection of photographs and oral history.

The Photographic Collection

Many historians will already be familiar with the NSW Government Printing Office picture collection held at SLNSW. It is a remarkably diverse resource for nineteenth and twentieth century images of NSW, comprising 208,706 digital images and photographic copy negatives.¹⁴ The collection grew from the production of the Guv’s photographic section, which from the 1860s provided visual documentation of the colony’s major events, public buildings, and labour activities.¹⁵ In the twentieth century the Guv produced photographic records for the state departments of Main Roads, Agriculture, and the Tourist Bureau (among others), and later on the photographic briefs concentrated on cultural events and portraits of public servants.

One of the most intriguing aspects about the Guv’s collection is that their photographic section turned their lenses on themselves, so to speak, to record their own workplace. The sheer quantity of photographs, taken of and within the Guv, means that the available photographic trace of this workplace is extremely rich. In the photographs from the 1960s to the 1980s, print workers pose amid stacks of paper, heavy cast-iron presses, and electronic typesetting machines. Women in overalls stand facing printing equipment, and male compositors in collared shirts and shorts slouch over computer keyboards. Bookbinders wield hand tools, and compositors lean over pages of type laid out on imposition slabs. Men in suits, grinning, assemble next to boxy electronic equipment.

Needless to say, these images do not provide a direct window into 'working life' at the Guv. The nature and function of these photographs is various, and we cannot treat them as straightforward documentary evidence. Many photographs were produced for promotional or reporting purposes, such as annual reports or apprentice recruitment, and thus depict consciously posed scenarios. The intended audience was often the NSW Public Service, or potential apprentice recruits. The staged or constructed nature of certain photographs does not, however, discount their value as sources, particularly when combined with oral histories.

Institutional photographs also operate in a different way materially: the Government Printing Office collection is generally experienced not as a set of physical objects, but as digital images in an online catalogue, and so the material connection to the past is once removed, not something that can be tangibly 'felt' in one's hands. While I used printed copies of the Guv's photographs when interviewing participants, the print-outs themselves of course held no special object 'aura',¹⁶ they were mere facsimiles, digitised institutional reproductions.

I approached this project with the understanding that – as with oral history – photographic meaning is contingent upon the contexts of interpretation that emerge during the interview, and afterwards, in the processes of visual analysis, presentation, and the writing of history. Photographic theory has established that meaning in historical photographs is not simply given, waiting to be discovered.¹⁷ Rather, meaning is deeply contingent upon the 'subject position' of the viewer (who they are, what they know, where they come from), and the contexts of interpretation and presentation. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall has explored how in photographs (as with oral histories) meaning is produced on a number of levels, and in changes at different historical stages.¹⁸ Put another way, the 'decoding' work undertaken by the viewer/reader is subject to their own background and experience, and the context in which the image appears.¹⁹

With this in mind, I acknowledge that the photograph selection process for this project was originally influenced by my existing research interests in the impact of technological change on the printing industry's labour process. This meant that I initially looked for photographs of men involved in typesetting activities – whether it be on hot-metal typesetting machines or using computer typesetting equipment – because I guessed that the presentation of gender and skill in these images might provoke interesting discussions. The way that I 'read' these photographs was, of course, wholly different from the way that the interview participants interpreted them. Some participants were able to take on the position of 'expert', and appeared to enjoy the sense that their technical knowledge – of machinery that is long obsolete – could



Former Monotype caster Bob Day pretends to type on a Monotype keyboard, 1985. Captioned 'Photos of printing machines for video presentation' on the State Library of NSW online catalogue. Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, Government Printing Office collection 4 #38079.

be of use once more. This is particularly apparent in the second example, which features an image of a man sitting at a Monotype machine.

Existing Research

The intersection of oral history and photography is a discussion that was spurred on in 2011 by Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson's edited collection of essays, *Oral History and Photography*.²⁰ Prior to Freund and Thomson's publication, oral historians' references to using photographs occurred haphazardly,²¹ and the organised theoretical discussion about photographs in the oral history process was a notable gap in English-language oral history literature.²² Oral history has come some distance since the early advice for oral historians to be wary of using photographs during interviews, as they could easily 'generate false memories'²³ or kill the conversation entirely.²⁴

Freund and Thomson observe that the intersection between oral history and photography is not a new phenomenon in practice.²⁵ The handling of photographs is without a doubt well integrated into the work of historians and oral historians alike.²⁶ While earlier studies tended to treat photographs as memory triggers in interviews, as 'evidence' to back up a verbal claim,²⁷ or simply as illustrations to accompany quotes,²⁸ the possibilities are more diverse and complex. It is well established that oral history is a process that produces and generates meaning on a number of levels: through the processes of listening and asking questions, through transcription, and finally, through quotation and dissemination.²⁹ The idea that oral history constitutes a co-construction of meaning, where interviewer and participant work together to produce historical meaning through conversation, is now well established in oral history literature.³⁰ The

matter that is still somewhat under-discussed, however, is the multiplicity of interpretive functions of historical photographs, when introduced into this context.

Judith Modell and Charlee Brodsky's 1994 *Envisioning Homestead* project is notable in this context, chiefly because they interpreted photographic material as being a major part of what the participants had to say.³¹ In researching the community of Homestead, Pennsylvania, Modell and Brodsky brought along their own selection of photographs (from press images and community archives), and encouraged participants to provide some of their own personal images.³² Like Modell and Brodsky, I did not want to use photographs only as reminders, or as simple 'illustrations' to stories.³³ Instead, the photographs became part of 'a conversation about the past', in a context wherein the interviewer and participant collectively examine the photographs, offering possible explanations, interpretations, and sharing ideas.³⁴ For Modell and Brodsky, their use of photographs helped these participants to put their experiences in a broader historical context, to 'make these points "history"'.³⁵ The use of photographs in oral history interviews can enable what Modell and Brodsky call a 're-viewing' of verbal history, and it can affirm the spoken word, sometimes adding specificity and confidence to the participants' recollections.³⁶

As it turned out, in the case of the Guv, the use of photographs during the interview did not always place participants' experiences in context, or affirm existing institutional narratives. Rather, the conjunction of oral history interviews and institutional photographs sometimes destabilised established institutional accounts about the Guv, and opened up new avenues for understanding workers' relationships with their institution.

The Interview Process

The oral history component of this project involved interviews with thirty former employees (twenty-four men and six women), between October 2011 and March 2013.³⁷ The participants were employed at the Guv between 1933 and 1989, and worked in a variety of positions and trades, including book-binding, hand and machine composition, computer typesetting, letterpress, lithography, graphic reproduction, proofreading, planning, despatch, and senior management. Participants were recruited through printing industry advertisements, social media, and word-of-mouth 'snowball' sampling.³⁸ The audio interviews took place at community centres, local libraries, RSL Clubs, and private homes in Sydney, the Blue Mountains, and the NSW Central Coast.

During the interviews I asked participants open questions about the Guv's culture of working life and about their recollections of technological change.

Although a focus on material culture is a key element of my research, participants were not guided too sharply in the direction of providing sensory recollections and discussions about objects and machinery, so as to not force observations.³⁹ The participants were aware that I came from the UTS School of Design, but my research focus was only explained in general terms, to avoid overly prescriptive responses (and to diminish the risk of interviewees trying to guess what I might want to hear, to the extent that this is possible).

To each interview I brought along a variety of photographs sampled from SLNSW's Government Printing Office photographic collection. The selection of photographs differed slightly with each interview, because my collection of images was enriched over time with further catalogue discoveries as my research progressed. This selection was broadly representative of the main sections at the Guv (bookbinding, printing machining, composition, document reproduction, management), and I included images of spaces within the factory building, close-up photographs of machinery, and images of leisure activities (such as netball on the roof and special events in the canteen).

In most cases, the photographs were shown to the interview participants towards the end of the interview session.⁴⁰ This was when most of my questions had been exhausted. Often, while we were consuming refreshments, the photographic browsing would begin, usually quite organically. I left the recorder on during this period, with the consent of the participants. Many participants began by scanning photographs for familiar faces, staying quiet until they recognised someone they knew. This sometimes meant that the end of the interview consisted of silences, or observations about the images that do not yield useful quotes, such as, 'Yep, I know him ... I know him ... I know him too.' This process required patience. Occasionally particular photographs had the effect of sparking a conversation, reminding the participants of something that had been forgotten, and that I would not have known to ask about. When this happened, the conversation could start up again. In this way, some photographs operated as direct mnemonic devices in the oral history process, as memory triggers.⁴¹ But that is not what is compelling about the use of institutional images in this process.

The examples provided in the following two sections demonstrate a subtly different dynamic. While they remind us of the unpredictable mnemonic power of photographs, and how the presence of photographs in the interview process can enable different ways of talking about the past,⁴² more interestingly, these examples demonstrate the awareness that participants had about how their institution sought to represent itself publicly. In response to this formal performance of institutional competency – as demonstrated in the images filling Annual Reports and apprentice

recruitment material – the workers responded playfully, with humour, irreverence, and creativity.

‘Typical, as they Say’

Consider the photograph ‘Alan Leishman pouring acid toner, 1962’. [Fig. 1] Alan commenced at the Guv in 1955 and was apprenticed in photo-etching and engraving. He worked in the photography and lithography sections at the Guv and became a senior manager, staying until the closure in 1989. The following excerpt is from an interview undertaken with another man, Graeme Murray, who was apprenticed in lithographic dot-etching and engraving in 1960. While Graeme refers to Figure 1 in the interview, the image was not actually present at the time. In this way, Graeme’s interview took on a visual sensibility, indicating the presence of institutional photographs within his memory of working life at the Guv. Graeme recalled:

We did all these posters ... it’s occupational health and safety, but it they never knew the word then. ... But Alan [Leishman] was in a situation where he was working with a lot of dangerous Nitric acid, all the time, and he was in an area there where they have massive baths where they put zinc plates in to be etched with this acid. But Alan used to have this dustcoat. Everyone had dustcoats ... and Alan’s one was particularly shredded because of the acid splashes over the years. ... But they had this poster going on, they wanted to show the safe way of handling acid. So they brought into our section the proper rubber gloves, up to the elbows, they brought in special aprons, they brought in goggles, hair thing, the whole lot. The photographers photographed him with all this gear on. As soon as they finished photographing him with all this gear on, they took all the gear back, and Alan went back to his dustcoat! Typical, as they say.⁴³

As Graeme’s comment indicates, photographs had a strong presence in these interviews, even when they were not on the table. The quote also tells us about the production and use of one of these photographs, in its original context. This discussion also opened up an avenue where Graeme was able to talk about how the ‘official’ institutional version of events differed from his on-site knowledge of the Guv.

One month after interviewing Graeme, I interviewed Alan Leishman, and showed him the acid toner photograph. Seeing the image of himself in 1962, Alan immediately shifted to telling another (related) story:

Oh yes! That was the old acid! [laughs] We did have an interesting incident at Liverpool Street. When we were packing up to move

[to the new building], there was myself, and a chap called John Devrice. Previous to that, we used to get acid in earthenware jars. We were on the fifth floor, and as he walked around the corner it clipped one of the corners, and a full earthenware jar, [over a foot] high, and pure Nitric acid went everywhere! I grabbed him and threw him into a sink. ...

The interesting thing with that photograph is that a lot of that safety equipment was taken away immediately after they photographed it. They came and photographed it for health and safety and they took the equipment away. [laughs] We did get equipment after that, I must say.⁴⁴

In this case the photograph functioned as a memory trigger, and Alan immediately recalls the workplace accidents that came with using hazardous materials. But more than that – Alan’s comments again remind us that the employees were fully conscious of the staged nature of institutional photographs, and they were knowing (and somewhat amused) participants in this production of institutional imagery. In other words, they were well aware of the gap between workplace practices and performed institutional representations.

Here we have moved from the use of a photograph as a memory trigger and an historical document, into territory that begins to examine the epistemic status of the image.⁴⁵ These two interviews opened up discussion about the circumstances in which the image appeared in the first place, and how its use evolved over time. Two decades later, in the mid-1980s, the apprentice Sandra Elizabeth Stringer joined the Photographic Reproduction section at the Guv. During her interview, Sandra glanced at Figure 1 and said, ‘That was actually an OH&S poster we used to have on the walls there.’⁴⁶

The photograph of Alan Leishman pouring acid toner lived on – as a poster – for almost three decades at the Guv. Tellingly, Sandra also observed that although workplace safety equipment was most definitely available by the time she worked at the Guv, it was often inappropriate for female apprentices:

By the time I got there they were very good at providing things like protective clothing, and all that sort of thing. But one of our issues was ... they couldn’t get their head around the fact that women were a lot smaller in size to the males that worked there, so ... [laughs] often getting things like gloves that’d fit you. [...] I used to have a big problem because the gloves’d be really huge on me, and I’d end up with more stuff inside the gloves than what I would on the outside!⁴⁷

Again, this is an instance where an interview participant positions their experience and their narrative as somewhat separate from the official institutional

narrative. There is tolerance and affection in Sandra's accounts of the Guv, but also an admission that the institution was somewhat flawed and deficient.

Man at a Monotype

Throughout this project it has become apparent that the captions provided by the SLNSW online catalogue are often quite limited.⁴⁸ For example, specific images are titled with the generic term 'machines' rather than describing particularities. Oral history interviews have enabled me to add a great deal of information to these captions, although this must be attempted with caution.

Early in my research I had come across a photograph depicting a seated man, captured in profile, who appears to be operating a hot-metal typesetting machine. [Fig. 2] Initial assumptions about this image might easily be that it was a scene of a compositor at work. The image is dated 1985. The date itself is of historical interest: for a worker to be operating Monotype or Linotype machines in a large factory context in 1985 was unusual, as this hot-metal typesetting technology was well on the way to obsolescence at this stage. On the SLNSW online catalogue the image is simply captioned, 'Photos of printing machines for video presentation'. This caption suggests that the image was produced for some sort of official presentation purpose, but, as with the image itself, we cannot wholly trust the caption, and must work harder to critically interrogate the available visual, spoken, and textual sources.

After a number of oral history interviews in which this photograph was shared, it became clear that this was a Monotype keyboard, that the man posed with the machine was not a Monotype keyboarder, and that he was not properly operating the machine. Former compositor Rudi Kolbach considered the image, and he could tell by the man's posture that something wasn't right. There are two stages to Rudi's interpretation. Recognition, with a statement, then a closer look:

Yep. Still workin' on the Monotype keyboard. Well, [long pause] they didn't sit that far away, and they don't have a copy there, and they never, ever looked at the keyboard, because they learned to touch type, without any need to look there.⁴⁹

As Rudi notes, there was no copy present from which to type.

Former Monotype operator Lindsay Somerville had a similar response, but he also indicated his embodied knowledge of the practice of Monotype setting.

Oh, there's a Monotype, yeah. That was the old thing. ... No copy in there – he's not working! He hasn't got any copy on the board! And ... ahh ahh ... that hose doesn't look like it's connected

anyway. So ... he wouldn't be setting like that. Look at it. He's too far back. Look at his back, he'd kill himself. You had to sit with your legs apart, to get close enough. Then you had to swing it around, to use the bold and italics, and so on.⁵⁰

There is great pleasure in Lindsay's conversation, pleasure in being able to 'read' this photograph expertly enough to be able to swiftly ascertain that the photograph was in some way staged.

Another interview participant was able to identify the man pictured. Former Linotype operator Bob Law's response adds detail in describing to the character of the man pictured:

There's Bobby Day! This man was a Monocaster. Bob Day. He passed away. He wasn't a Monotype operator. That was a posed photo. He was a real character, he'd walk around ... he'd just had a haircut, and everyone was really bagging him about his shocking haircut, and he'd walk around and say, 'I went to the Barber's yesterday, and I said, "Make me like a fighter!"' 'Cos all boxers in those days used to have real basin cuts. He was a funny bloke. But he's long gone, too.⁵¹

The man sitting at the Monotype keyboard – Bob Day – was not indentured as a Monotype keyboard operator; he operated a hot-metal Monotype caster machine in the room next door at the Guv (a caster was a large machine for producing individual metal letters from rolls of punched tape).

Linotype operator Geoffrey Hawes confirmed this identification:

Bobby Day! That guy sittin' at that keyboard would not know anything about it! He was a mono caster operator, and they've got a photo of him sittin' at a machine! He wouldn't know a thing about it.⁵²

There is a hint of ruffled feathers in Geoffrey's response. The fact that he specifically mentions Bob Day's trade (Monotype casting) is significant. Geoffrey emphasises that Bob would have had no knowledge of how to use this machine, he was *pretending* to be a Monotype keyboarder. Monotype keyboarding was traditionally seen as a higher status printing trade than the casters,⁵³ and in normal circumstances demarcation rules set by the Printing and Kindred Industries Union would have strictly prevented Bob Day from even touching a Monotype keyboard.

We have discovered that this image was posed – and it depicts a scenario that is not a scene of 'actual' work at the Guv. But this should not be perceived as a problem, and it does not lessen the photograph's historical value

as a source. When brought into an interview context, this photograph discloses a moment of play, once a manual trade had disappeared. It also brings to light an aspect of the trade demarcation rules of this period in the printing industry. The fact this man is pretending to operate this machine is not merely silly, it would have been a significant industrial transgression, had the photograph been taken one year before, in 1984.

Why do the years matter? Archival research confirms that the Monotype room at the Guv finally closed down in April 1984.⁵⁴ By 1985 – the date ascribed to this image – the Monotype keyboards were no longer in place in the old Monotype room on the fourth floor. Instead, the machines were taking up space elsewhere at the Guv, waiting to be discarded, as redundant machines. Bob Day is not performing everyday work at the Guv, he is posing at a recently historicised object, a *new* relic. The act of posing with this relic and recording the act shows a playful, but also respectful, acknowledgement of the dramatic transitions facing the printing industry.

There was one major problem in interpreting this photograph: everything was blurry. In fact, image quality of almost all of the Government Printing Office images on the SLNSW online catalogue is extremely poor. There are historical reasons for this. From the 1960s to 1986, the Guv's glass-plate and film negatives were stored in the basement of the Ultimo building, in problematic conditions for the safe preservation of negatives.⁵⁵ In 1986 the Guv was awarded a Bicentennial grant to conserve its collection, and the negatives were subsequently copied and transferred to videodisc. In the mid-1990s SLNSW digitised the videodisc images, not the copy-negatives, which resulted in low-resolution images online. While this might seem a menial detail of collection digitisation, it has real effects for historical study. The fuzziness of these images produces a sense of interpretive distance, as if gazing at the past through layers of cellophane. Upon request, SLNSW can re-scan the copy negatives in high-resolution, and being able to access high-resolution images has allowed details to come to the fore – a vital process for close visual analysis.⁵⁶

Once I was able to access a high-resolution version of Figure 2, a few details became clear. In the background the photograph, a number of large machines (most likely Monotype casting equipment) are swathed in drop-sheets. To the right in the middle ground, a sign reads:

‘Goodbye, Farewell and Amen: M * O * N * O.’⁵⁷ Therefore, far from being an image of a man at work, typing at a Monotype machine, this image is a spirited but memorialising tribute to an out-dated technology, a lost trade, and an outmoded skill set. The machines that Bob Day would have mastered are in fact visible in this photograph; they are (probably) underneath

the funereal drop-sheets in the background. When coping with large institutions in the midst of a major transition and technological change, employees can be remarkably good at expressing humour, giving some solace in a world of bureaucratic madness.

Conclusion

An exploration of the connections between these two types of sources should occur in a manner that is constantly aware of the socially shaped nature of both photographs and oral testimony, and the role of the historian is to carefully assess the way in which these sources coalesce. The spoken word can open up visual possibilities, and the use of photographs (in the interview, and in the interpretive stages that follow) opens up potential for new ways of speaking about the past. The Guv offers a particularly rich example of this, partly because we have the privilege of access to a large and diverse photographic collection held at SLNSW, and because many former employees of the Guv are still alive to tell their stories.

These playful or absurd actions – such as Bob Day's memorialising performance at being a Monotype operator, or Alan Leishman's obliging charade demonstrating the supposedly correct use of protective equipment – have become embedded in the historical archive. Without the interview content, these photographs are but two of 4000 or more images of people at work at the Guv. Once just a few of these photographs are introduced into oral history interviews, new stories emerge, and we are reminded of the ways in which memory, history, and visual culture are deeply intertwined.⁵⁸

The convergence of oral histories and institutional photographs can produce a productive slippage, or a gap, between what is said and what is pictured. It is precisely because these sources do not match up neatly that makes the stories and the images so compelling. This illuminating gap hints at the complexity of human labour experience, and begins to disclose the relationship that workers had with their institution. It provides insight into how people coped with the challenges and bureaucratic rituals that characterised this particular public service factory, through irreverence, humour, and through a tolerance of the rather human flaws inherent in bureaucratic process.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds), *Oral History and Photography*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011, p. 7.
- 2 *ibid.*, p. 1.
- 3 *ibid.*, p. 7. Freund and Thomson do not offer an explanation for this emphasis on family and personal photographs in oral history practice, except to say that they believe this 'is intrinsic to current oral history practice.'
- 4 This colloquial nickname for the Printing Office was also found in Government Printing Office *Staff Journals*, sometimes spelled 'the Gov.'
- 5 Although, as Alexander Freund and Angela Thiessen have noted, getting participants to respond to family photographs is not a straightforward matter either, and some family photographs are not 'used' by participants to make meaning in their lives. See Freund and Angela Thiessen, 'Mary Brockmeyer's wedding picture: Exploring the intersection of photographs and oral history interviews,' in *Oral History and Photography*, pp. 30-31.
- 6 Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin Books, London and New York, 1979 [1973], p. 156.
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 21.
- 8 *ibid.*, p. 23.
- 9 With the photographs from the Guv, however, participants were sometimes unfamiliar with the images (or had not seen them for many years) and many were delighted by the experience of seeing so many photographs of their former workplace gathered together. Printed and digital copies of particular photographs were shared with interview participants, when requested.
- 10 The Guv was closed down by the NSW Government in 1989.
- 11 Alan Marshall, *Changing the Word: The Printing Industry in Transition*, Comedia, London, 1983, pp. vi-9.
- 12 Rob Dunn, Ray Hester, and Andrew Readman, 'From letterpress to offset lithography,' in *Print and Electronic Text Convergence*, Bill Cope and Diana Kalantzis (eds), Common Ground Publishing, Champaign, Illinois, 2001, p. 83; Frances Robertson, *Print Culture: From Steam Press to Ebook*, Routledge, London and New York, 2013, pp. 112-14.
- 13 Cynthia Cockburn, *Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change*, Pluto Press, London, 1983, pp. 61-95.
- 14 NSW Government Printing Office, *Priceless Pictures from the Remarkable NSW Government Printing Office Collection 1870-1950*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1988, pp. 6-8. See also SLNSW's current information on the Government Printing Office picture collection: <<http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemdetailpaged.aspx?itemid=153687>>
- 15 *ibid.*, pp. 6-7. The collection also benefited from donations of images, notably from the *Star* newspaper.
- 16 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction,' in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1968 [1935].
- 17 Susan Buck-Morss, 'Visual studies and global imagination,' *Papers of Surrealism*, vol. 2, 2004, pp. 1-29, online <http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal2/acrobat_files/buck_morss_article.pdf>; Allan Sekula, 'On the invention of photographic meaning,' in Vicki Goldberg (ed.), *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1988 [1975], pp. 452-54; Derrick Price and Liz Wells, 'Thinking about photography: Debates, historically and now,' in Wells (ed.), *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London, 2000, pp. 9-64; Jennifer Tucker with Tina Campt, 'Entwined practices: Engagements with photography in historical enquiry,' *History and Theory*, vol. 48, December 2009, pp. 1-8; Stuart Hall (ed.), 'The work of representation,' in *Representation, Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Sage, London, 1997, pp. 13-74; Anandi Ramamurthy, 'Constructions of illusion: Photography and commodity culture,' in Wells *op.cit.*, pp. 165-214.
- 18 Hall, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.
- 19 *ibid.*
- 20 *ibid.*
- 21 Freund and Thomson (*op.cit.*) provide a thorough list of oral history publications that refer to the use of photographs, pp. 19-23.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 3; Beth M. Robertson, 'Book review: Oral History and Photography,' *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 34, 2012, p. 78.
- 23 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, second edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1978, p. 134.
- 24 Historian Edward Stokes advised interviewers against the use of photographs during the interview process, citing one example where the method was unsuccessful. Stokes, 'United we stand: A synthesis of oral and pictorial history,' *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 5, 1982, p. 55.
- 25 Freund and Thomson, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
- 26 *ibid.*
- 27 *ibid.*
- 28 For example: Paula Hamilton, *Cracking Awaba: Stories of Mosman and the Northern Beaches community during the Depression*, SHOROC Council Libraries, Sydney, 2005; Margaret Park, *Doors Were Always Open: Recollections of Pymont and Ultimo*, City West Development Corporation, Sydney, 1997.
- 29 Katherine Borland, 'That's not what I said: Interpretive conflict in oral narrative research,' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, Routledge, London & New York, 2nd edn, 2006, pp. 310-21; Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré, 'Positioning: The discursive production of selves,' *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1990, pp. 43-63; Paula Hamilton, 'The knife edge: Debates about memory and history,' in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 15; Siobhán McHugh, 'The aerobic art of interviewing,' *AsiaPacific MediaEducator*, vol. 18, December 2007, pp. 147-54; John Murphy, 'The voice of memory: History, autobiography and oral memory,' *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 87, 1986, pp. 155-75; Arlene Oak, 'Particularising the past: Persuasion and value in oral history interviews and design critiques,' *Journal of Design History*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2006, pp. 345-56; Howard E Sypher, Mary Lee Hummert & Sheryl L. Williams, 'Social psychological aspects of the oral history interview,' in *Interactive Oral History Interviewing*, Eva M McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers (eds), Lawrence Erlbaum & Assoc., Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1994, pp. 47-62.
- 30 Perks and Thomson, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

- 31 Judith Modell and Charlee Brodsky, 'Envisioning Homestead: Using photographs in interviewing', in *Interactive Oral History Interviewing*, Eva M Macmahon & Kim Lacy Rogers (eds), Erlbaum, Hillsdale New Jersey, 1994, pp. 141-61.
- 32 *ibid.*, p. 143.
- 33 *ibid.*, p. 142.
- 34 *ibid.*, p. 145.
- 35 *ibid.*, p. 159.
- 36 *ibid.*, p. 145.
- 37 This project was approved by the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee #2011-285A.
- 38 Participants contacted former colleagues, and soon I was receiving phone calls and emails from up to sixty former employees of the Guv who were interested in finding out more about the project. Some participants found out about this research project through the blog, *Penultimo* (a blog about the Sydney suburb of Ultimo), written by the author between 2010 and 2012. <<http://penultimo.tumblr.com>> and through the author's photograph research process blog, *Picturing the Guv*: <<http://nswgovernmentprintingoffice.tumblr.com>>.
- 39 For discussions of the careful handling of material culture in oral history, see Linda Sandino, 'Oral histories and design: Objects and subjects', *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 4, 2006, pp. 275-82; Janis Wilton, 'Telling objects: Material culture and memory in oral history interviews', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 30, 2008, pp. 41-49.
- 40 Judy McKinty and Margaret Tomkins had a similar but subtly different strategy when engaging in an oral history project related to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB). In their interviews, photographs were presented *before* the formal interview process, with a variety of results. McKinty and Tomkins, 'From the cradle to the grave: Sister Lindsey and the blind babies' nursery', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, no. 34, 2012, pp. 27-31.
- 41 Freund and Thomson, *op.cit.*, p. 4; Hugo Slim, Paul Thompson, with Olivia Bennett and Nigel Cross, 'Ways of listening,' in *The Oral History Reader*, pp. 148-49.
- 42 Freund and Thomson, *op.cit.*, pp. 5-6.
- 43 Graeme Murray, interview with the author, 9 September 2011, tape held by the author.
- 44 Alan Leishman, interview with the author, 28 October 2011, tape held by the author.
- 45 Freund and Thomson, *op.cit.*, p. 3. Recent oral history literature that involves interviews with photographers also covers this territory, albeit in a different way. Howard Bossen and Eric Freedman write about the way in which steel and industrialisation has been pictured in the past, and they conducted oral history interviews with both steelworkers and the photographers who depicted them. See Bossen and Freedman, "'Molten light: The intertwined history of steel and photography": The roles of oral histories and other first-person,' *Oral History Review*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-14.
- 46 Sandra Elizabeth Stringer, interview with the author, 17 October 2012. 'OH&S' refers to 'Occupational health and safety', tape held by author.
- 47 *ibid.*
- 48 Oral history interviews indicate that this photographic collection was thoroughly indexed by staff at the Guv in the 1980s. Unfortunately these indexes are disconnected from the online image collection.
- 49 Rudi Kolbach, interview with the author, 12 December 2011, tape held by author.
- 50 Lindsay Somerville, interview with the author, 15 December 2011, tape held by author.
- 51 Bob Law, interview with the author, 27 February 2012, tape held by author.
- 52 Geoff Hawes, interview with the author, 16 February 2012, tape held by author.
- 53 Cockburn, *op.cit.*, pp. 44, 52-53.
- 54 *Government Printing Office Staff Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, April 1984.
- 55 The original glass-plate negatives are now held with NSW State Records. After 1989 the copy-negatives and videodiscs were transferred to SLNSW. See *Priceless Pictures*, *op.cit.*, p. 6.
- 56 The SLNSW charges for rescanning the negatives. I am funded only by an Australian Postgraduate Award; this has limited my access to high-resolution images.
- 57 The April 1984 *Staff Journal* (cited above) also made reference to the TV series *MASH* in the 'M*O*N*O' title.
- 58 Tucker (with Camp), *op.cit.*, p. 3.