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Using the Photographic Archive: On the Life (and Death) of Images

“Ars longa, vita brevis” goes the famous aphorism. Whether or not art really does endure, there is no doubt that reproductions of works of art certainly can, although they too are born and can eventually die as technologies and tastes change. How and why this happens is the subject of the present essay, using reproductions of sculpture from Renaissance Italy as a case study through which to explore these questions.¹

The decision to concentrate on images of Renaissance sculpture is not arbitrary, but rather grows from the fact that one of the most influential figures in the early history of Art History as an academic discipline, Heinrich Wölfflin, himself focused on this topic in a pair of articles published in 1896–1897 and 1915, titled “Wie man Skulpturen aufnehmen soll” or “How one should photograph sculpture”.² Actually, this was the title of the first article; in the second publication, Wölfflin added a question mark, thus changing an emphatic directive to a more open-ended query. But Wölfflin’s conclusions in both pieces were equally proscriptive since, according to him, there was only one correct way to photograph Renaissance sculpture and the art of other “classic” periods, namely, directly from the front and head-on, since this was, according to Wölfflin, the originally-intended principle view.³

¹ This essay was completed during a Research Fellowship very generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust. On the photography of sculpture in general, see esp. Mary Bergstein, “Lonely Aphrodites: On the Documentary Photography of Sculpture”, in: *Art Bulletin*, 74 (1992), pp. 474–498; Geraldine A. Johnson (ed.), *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, Cambridge 1998.

² Heinrich Wölfflin, “Wie man Skulpturen aufnehmen soll”, in: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 7 (1896), pp. 224–228, and 8 (1897), pp. 294–297; id., „Wie man Skulpturen aufnehmen soll? (Probleme der italienischen Renaissance)“, in: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 26 (1915), pp. 237–244. Most of the examples used by Wölfflin were

Italian Renaissance ones, although some Classical works appeared in the second part of the first article. On Wölfflin, see: Joan Hart, “Reinterpreting Wölfflin: Neo-Kantianism and Hermeneutics”, in: *Art Journal*, 42 (1982), pp. 292–300; Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven 1982, pp. 117–151; Martin Warnke, “On Heinrich Wölfflin”, in: *Representations*, 27 (1989), pp. 172–187; Matthias Waschek (ed.), *Relire Wölfflin*, Paris 1995; Daniel Adler, “Painterly Politics: Wölfflin, Formalism and German Academic Culture, 1885–1915”, in: *Art History*, 27 (2004), pp. 431–456; and David Summers, “Heinrich Wölfflin’s ‘Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe’, 1915”, in: *Burlington Magazine*, 151 (2009), pp. 476–479.



1 Anonymous artist [left], Woodcut reproduction of a Marian relief attributed to Donatello, and Anonymous photographer [right], Photographic reproduction of a Marian relief attributed to a follower of Donatello. Reproductions in Wilhelm von Bode, *Die italienische Plastik*, Berlin 1891 (1st ed.), pp. 68–69

In 1891, a few years before Wölfflin's first article appeared, another important late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholar, Wilhelm von Bode, published the first edition of his survey of Italian sculpture, with many of the examples coming from the Berlin Museum where he served initially as a curator and later as director.⁴ Although photographs of works of art had been available for more than half a century—indeed, reproductions of sculpted objects had even appeared in the first-ever book illustrated with photographs, William Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature*, published in the mid-1840s⁵—Bode's volume included both photographic and woodcut reproductions of Renaissance sculpture, sometimes even on facing pages (fig. 1).⁶ This was probably due to the fact that photographs suitable for publication were not yet available at this date for all the objects under discussion.

The impact of photography is, however, evident even in the woodcuts. For instance, the woodcut of a Marian relief attributed to Donatello on the left-hand page of the spread illustrated here (see fig. 1) is

³ Photographs have been used to support similar claims about the essential frontality of ancient Roman reliefs. See Jås Elsner, "Frontality in the Column of Marcus Aurelius", in: John Scheid / Valérie Huet (eds.), *La colonne aurelienne*, Turnhout 2000, pp. 255–259.

⁴ Wilhelm von Bode, *Die italienische Plastik*, Berlin 1891. On Bode, see: Manfred Ohlsen, *Wilhelm von Bode: Zwischen Kaisermacht und Kunsttempel: Biographie*, Berlin 1995; Jaynie Anderson, "The political power of connoisseurship in nineteenth-century Europe: Wilhelm von Bode versus Giovanni Morelli", in: *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 38 (1996), pp. 107–119; Alexis Joachi-

mides, "The Museum's Discourse on Art: The Formation of Curatorial Art History in Turn-of-the-Century Berlin", in: Susan A. Crane (ed.), *Museum and Memory*, Stanford 2000, pp. 200–219; and Catherine B. Scallen, *Rembrandt, Reputation and the Practice of Connoisseurship*, Amsterdam 2004, ch. 1–2.

⁵ See the two views of a plaster bust in William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, London 1844–1846, pls. V and XVII. On this publication in the context of early photographically illustrated books, see Carol Armstrong, *Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843–1875*, Cambridge/MA 1998, pp. 107–178.

a print that very self-consciously seems to reproduce every one of the original object's nicks and scratches (e.g., see the chips and gouges along the base), thereby visually echoing the apparent "truthfulness" of photographic reproductions—although whether the print was based on a photograph or on a drawing that mimicked "photographic" ways of seeing remains unclear.⁷ More significantly, despite the visual clues hinting at the print's pseudo-photographic accuracy, even a quick comparison with a photograph of what is apparently the same relief, which was published in another book by Bode in 1902, shows significant differences between the woodcut and its source object: not only is the seemingly convincingly worn base in the former different from the latter, but one now realizes that the haloes around the two figures' heads must have been eliminated from the woodcut, not to mention further differences in the Virgin's hair and in details of both figures' draperies (fig. 2).⁸ Although woodcut illustrations would have allowed art historians, editors and publishers creatively to "edit" the objects reproduced as they saw fit, glaring discrepancies such as entirely missing haloes must have become increasingly obvious to a visually literate public and would have helped to hasten the "death" of woodcut reproductions in serious academic publications. In fact, by the time a sixth edition of Bode's 1891 survey was published in 1922, the final triumph of photography was evident, for now all but one of the book's 103 illustrations was a printed photographic reproduction, including that of Donatello's Marian relief.⁹

The transition to fully photographically illustrated publications is also demonstrated by the case of the Italian art historian G.B. Cavalcaselle. The biography of Cavalcaselle that was added to the 1903–1914 edition of his monumental *A History of Painting in Italy* (co-authored with J. A. Crowe and first published in 1864–1866) spoke admiringly of the fact that this scholar's "extraordinary [visual] memory [had] enabled him to do



47. Donatello. Maria das Kind an sich drückend im Berliner Museum.

ein Halbbojen wölft; zur Seite stehen zwei nackte Engel, ihrem Gesang mit Zither und Zimbel beginnend; in den Zwischenen neben dem Baldachin ist je ein Cherub angebracht. Das Ganze ist eingerahmt durch ein Holztabernakel von charakteristischen Donatelleschen Formen und Profilen; bemerkenswert ist der Schmuck

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2 Anonymous photographer, Marian relief attributed to Donatello (formerly in the Berlin Museum). Photographic reproduction in Wilhelm von Bode, *Florentiner Bildhauer der Renaissance*, Berlin 1902, p. 114, fig. 47

⁶ For example, see Bode 1891 (note 4), pp. 68–69.

⁷ There is a vast literature on the 'truthfulness' or 'transparency' of photography, but see esp. Joel Snyder / Neil Walsh Allen, "Photography, Vision and Representation", in: *Critical Inquiry*, 2 (1975), pp. 143–170; Rosalind Krauss, "A Note on Photography and the Simulacral", in: Carol Squiers (ed.), *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, Seattle 1990, pp. 15–27; and Peter Galison, "Judgment against Objectivity", in: Caroline A. Jones / Peter Galison (eds.), *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, New York 1998, pp. 327–359.

⁸ The relief was reproduced photographically in Wilhelm

von Bode, *Florentiner Bildhauer der Renaissance*, Berlin 1902, p. 114, fig. 47. The version of this design (known as the *Verona Madonna*) most similar to the woodcut in Bode's 1891 volume is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, although the Madonna sports a halo. The relief in the photographs in Bode's publications, which may have served as the model for the woodcut in the 1891 volume, seems to be the one now in the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld. See Anna Jolly, *Madonnas by Donatello and his circle*, Frankfurt 1998, figs. 46 and 49.

⁹ Wilhelm von Bode, *Die italienische Plastik*, Berlin 1922⁶, p. 78.

without the help of photographs” and to accomplish more than current scholars could ever hope to even “with all the modern aids to study”.¹⁰ The irony was that the re-issued volumes were now illustrated with photographic reproductions and photogravures, including a frontispiece based on an Alinari photograph of a Marian statue by the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century sculptor Giovanni Pisano, very much in contrast to the engravings and diagrams that had appeared in the original edition (fig. 3). Equally tellingly, the title page that had in 1864 proudly proclaimed that the text was based on “recent researches in the archives of Italy; and from personal inspection of the works of art scattered throughout Europe”, now simply stated that the volumes were “illustrated”, mostly with Alinari photographs and including a number of reproductions of works by sculptors, notwithstanding the title’s ostensible focus on painting.¹¹ The art historian Raimond van Marle’s admiration for Cavalcaselle’s heroic scholarship, supposedly conducted without the aid of photographs, was evident when he praised the “enormous advances” of his predecessor’s “scientific treatise”, especially given that “it is well known that CAVALCASELLE had to make sketches of the works of art which he wished to study or compare”.¹² In reality, even Cavalcaselle had relied in his research on photographic reproductions in addition to personal sketches, and when his opus was re-issued just after the turn of the twentieth century, photographs had in practice also become the only suitable form of reproduction in art historical publications.¹³

But how exactly did art historians and their viewer-readers define a “suitable” photograph in this period? One aspect of suitability was undoubtedly related to technical developments in photographic and printing technologies. For instance, only in the early 1880s could actual photographic reproductions be printed directly onto book pages, rather than having to be pasted in by hand (a slow and expensive process) or merely used as models for wood engravings, and only in the 1890s could the full chromatic range of art objects be properly captured in photographic negatives.¹⁴ Indeed, in the case of paintings with a wide range of colours, photographs initially were often taken from engravings after the paintings, rather than from the original works themselves.¹⁵ Just how problematic printing photographic reproductions could be is suggested by the curious case of Henry Goodyear’s *A History of Art*, which appeared in a first edition in 1888 illustrated entirely in photographic half-tone images, but was published in a second edition just one year later primarily with traditional wood engravings and just a smattering of the new-fangled half-tones largely due to the unsatisfactory appearance of the latter when printed on paper.¹⁶

But the suitability of photographic reproductions was not just a question of their quality when printed. As Wölfflin made clear in his articles on the photography of sculpture, photographs could also be “correct” or “incorrect” thanks to their formal and aesthetic qualities. In fact, in his first publication on the subject in 1896–1897, the captions beneath side-by-side illustrations of the fifteenth-century sculp-

¹⁰ Joseph A. Crowe / Giovanni B. Cavalcaselle / Langton Douglas (ed.), *A History of Painting in Italy. Umbria, Florence and Siena. From the second to the sixteenth century*, London 1903–1914², vol. I, p. XVII.

¹¹ Joseph A. Crowe / Giovanni B. Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in Italy from the second to the fourteenth century*, London 1864–1866, vol. 1, title page; Crowe / Cavalcaselle / Douglas 1903–1914 (note 10), vol. 1, title page.

¹² Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian School of Painting*, The Hague 1923–1938, vol. 1, p. IX.

¹³ Until the end of the nineteenth century, the supposed advantages of prints over photographs in the reproduction of art continued to be asserted by some writers, but

this debate had fizzled out by the early twentieth century. For Cavalcaselle’s use of photographs, see Trevor Fawcett, “Graphic versus Photographic in Nineteenth-Century Reproduction”, in: *Art History*, 9 (1986), p. 206.

¹⁴ William M. Ivins, Jr., *Prints and Visual Communication*, Cambridge/MA 1953, pp. 127–130; Estelle Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts*, New York 1974, pp. 56–69; Fawcett 1986 (note 13), p. 206; and Sylvie Aubenas, “The Photograph in Print: Multiplication and the stability of the image”, in: Michel Frizot (ed.), *A New History of Photography*, Cologne 1998, pp. 225–231.

¹⁵ Jussim 1974 (note 14), pp. 237–278; and Fawcett 1986 (note 13), pp. 188–189.



3 Alinari photographer, *In the Campo Santo Pisa: Giovanni Pisano. Photographure in: Joseph A. Crowe / Giovanni B. Cavalcaselle / Langton Douglas (ed.), A History of Painting in Italy. Umbria, Florence and Siena. From the second to the sixteenth century, London 1903-1914 (2nd ed.), vol. I, title page*

tor Andrea del Verrocchio's bronze statue of David very clearly stated that the left-hand image was an "Unrichtige Aufnahme" ("incorrect photograph"), while the one on the right was "Richtig" ("correct") (fig. 4).¹⁷ As previously noted, Wölfflin believed that sculpture produced in "classic" periods like the Renaissance should only be photographed head-on in order to capture the originally intended "direct frontal view" ("die direkte Vorderansicht"), something that, according to him, was not the case in the left-hand reproduction.¹⁸ As I have discussed elsewhere, the historiographic and methodological implications of such claims were very much tied to Wölfflin's formalist approach to Art History.¹⁹ But how, in practice, did art historians and their editors and publishers (it is often impossible to split one from the other) actually use, misuse or not use the images available in the contemporary collective photographic archive to illustrate their writings?²⁰

Wölfflin's example of the photography of Verrocchio's *David* is a good starting point from which to try to answer such questions. By the time Wölfflin published his first article on the photography of sculpture in 1896-1897, several reproductions of this object were already available. But for Wölfflin, none of the photographs offered for sale by companies such as the Alinari were adequate, including the example illustrated in his own article (i. e., the left-hand image in fig. 4).²¹ For Wölfflin, this image showed the figure too much from its right side, which made it difficult to see the space between the feet and to appreciate that the arms projected into different planes. It also

¹⁶ Jussim 1974 (note 14), pp. 262-271, where the author discusses the importance of paper quality, as much as printing technology, for illustrated books in this period.

¹⁷ Wölfflin 1896-1897 (note 2), p. 226, captions for figs. 2 and 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 225. Wölfflin cites Adolf von Hildebrand on the importance of frontal views. In light of this, the ever-changing illustrations in the various editions of Hildebrand's influential *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, Strasbourg 1893—there were at least eight German editions by 1910, plus translations—merit further study.

¹⁹ See Geraldine A. Johnson, "'(Un)richtige Aufnahme':

Sculpture, Photography and the Visual Historiography of Art History", *Art History*, forthcoming.

²⁰ The use of photographic reproductions in teaching and lecturing is a separate subject. See Robert S. Nelson, "The Slide Lecture, or The Work of Art History in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in: *Critical Inquiry*, 26 (2000), pp. 414-434.

²¹ Wölfflin 1896-1897 (note 2), p. 225. In his second article, Wölfflin used an 'incorrect' photograph of the statue taken by Anderson to make his point. See Wölfflin 1915 (note 2), p. 240, fig. 3.



4 Alinari photographer [left], Andrea del Verrocchio's David ("Unrichtige Aufnahme"), and Anonymous photographer (commissioned by Heinrich Wölfflin) [right], Plaster cast of Verrocchio's David ("Richtige Aufnahme"). Photographic reproductions in: Heinrich Wölfflin, "Wie man Skulpturen aufnehmen soll", in: *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, 7–8 (1896–1897), p. 226, figs. 2–3

5 Brogi photographer, Andrea del Verrocchio's David (incorrect view). Photographic reproduction in: Hans Mackowsky, *Verrocchio*, Bielefeld / Leipzig 1901, fig. 4

over-foreshortened the sword and showed the unattractive metal brace between the hand and the weapon, all of which resulted in a photograph that was both "false" and "unclear" ("falsch" and "unklar").²² Wölfflin's solution was to commission his own, new photograph of the statue.²³ However, because he was probably in Basel when writing his first article, Wölfflin substituted a plaster cast of Verrocchio's statue for the bronze in Florence, with the paradoxical result that the supposedly more "correct" photograph had actually been taken from a three-dimensional copy of the original sculpture (see the right-hand image in fig. 4).

In 1901, the German scholar Hans Mackowsky published another pair of full-length images of Verrocchio's statue, once again contrasting an apparently inadequate photograph of the original object (this time taken by Brogi) with a marginally differently-positioned photograph of another plaster cast (the latter presumably in Berlin, where Mackowsky was based, given that it looks different from the

²² Wölfflin 1896–1897 (note 2), p. 224, and Wölfflin 1915 (note 2), p. 238.

²³ In his first article Wölfflin states that the photograph was taken by an "amateur", but in his 1915 article noted that he himself had commissioned it. See Wölfflin 1896–1897 (note 2), p. 226, note 1, and Wölfflin 1915 (note 2), p. 239, note 2.

²⁴ Hans Mackowsky, *Verrocchio*, Bielefeld / Leipzig 1901, figs. 4 and 6. Mackowsky worked for the National Muse-

um in Berlin and died in 1938 in a concentration camp. It is sadly ironic to see a 1934 letter by the Jewish Mackowsky on National Museum letterhead signed "Heil Hitler!". The letter was recently on sale on the Austrian ebay website. See http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Mackowsky and <http://cgi.ebay.at/HANS-MACKOWSKY-KUNSTHISTORIKER-BRIEF-/250616809776> (both accessed 20 May 2010).

²⁵ Mackowsky 1901 (note 24), p. 23.



6 Brogi photographer [left], Head of Andrea del Verrocchio's *David*, and Anonymous photographer (presumably commissioned by Hans Mackowsky), Plaster cast of Verrocchio's *David* (correct view). Photographic reproductions in: Hans Mackowsky, *Verrocchio*, Bielefeld / Leipzig 1901, figs. 5–6

cast in Wölfflin's photograph) (fig. 5 and the right-hand illustration in fig. 6).²⁴ A detail of just the head of Verrocchio's *David* taken by Brogi (see the left-hand illustration in fig. 6), which is close to the position of the head in the photograph of the cast, seemed to meet with Mackowsky's approval. For the full-length figure, however, it was only by selecting a photograph taken from what Mackowsky defined as "the absolutely frontal viewpoint" ("die reine Frontansicht") that a clear image of the sculptor's artistic conception emerged.²⁵ Although Mackowsky did not acknowledge Wölfflin in his discussion of the *David*, the photograph he commissioned and his formalist terminology clearly echo Wölfflin's earlier textual and visual arguments. Interestingly enough, Wölfflin himself did refer to Mackowsky in a note in his second article of 1915 in which he stated that the latter had used a "similar photograph" ("ähnliche Aufnahme") to his own, but that the angle chosen—even though almost imperceptibly different from his own illustration—nevertheless was still taken from too far to the right (compare the right-hand images in figs. 4



7 Alinari photographer, Andrea del Verrocchio's *David* ("nearly [...] correct"). Photographic reproduction in: Maud Cruttwell, *Verrocchio*, London 1904, plate facing p. 64

and 6).²⁶ Ironically, in a letter written in 1897 to the historian Jacob Burckhardt, Wölfflin had complained that “today people want to have only the photographs explained”, even though explaining photographs was precisely his main concern in his 1896–1897 and 1915 articles.²⁷

In 1904, Maud Cruttwell, a one-time housekeeper for the connoisseurs Bernard and Mary Berenson who eventually became a respected writer on art herself, published a monograph on Verrocchio in which, once again, a debate on the formal qualities of the various photographs of the sculptor’s bronze *David* ensued.²⁸ Cruttwell used a different Alinari photograph of the sculpture to illustrate her volume than had either Wölfflin or Mackowsky, claiming that the image “here reproduced is taken nearly, though not quite, from the correct point of view”, which she believed should be slightly more to the right (rather than less, as Wölfflin suggested) so that “the face be [sic] completely full-front” (fig. 7). In a note, she specified that the correct view was best captured in “the reproduction taken from a cast in Dr Mackowsky’s ‘Verrocchio’”.²⁹ Therefore, nearly a decade after Wölfflin’s initial critique, the images available to writers on Renaissance sculpture apparently still did not include exactly the right head-on view of Verrocchio’s bronze figure. Despite the fact that the collective photographic archive now numbered in the tens or possibly even hundreds of thousands—for instance, by 1912, Harvard and Princeton University each owned c. 45,000 photographs and lantern slides³⁰—at least some contemporary art historians continued to feel that photographs taken from plaster casts were more “truthful” than any “professional” images currently available. Indeed, as late as 1931, Wölfflin was still complaining that there were not enough appropriate photographs of Italian Renaissance sculpture in circulation.³¹

Despite such laments, there is no doubt that by the mid-twentieth century, the collective photographic archive had continued to expand. But in 1969, the German art historian Günther Passavant nevertheless continued to critique photographic reproductions of Verrocchio’s sculpture. He noted that, for decades, scholarly views about the correct position from which to view the statue had continued to concur with Mackowsky’s “opinion, based on a photograph of a plaster cast, [...] that the figure was to be looked at so that the head of the boy was directly facing us”. Using his own formal analysis of the statue and the position of the figure’s eyes, Passavant argued that “[a]mong earlier published photographs of the bronze *David* the most nearly correct viewpoint is that illustrated by Max Dvorák”—a photograph that, like Passavant’s own illustrations, was unattributed, but looks very similar to the Alinari photograph that was labeled “nearly [...] correct” by Cruttwell (see fig. 7).³² Although Passavant still subscribed to the idea of a dominant view, he also believed that the statue, which was “not conceived to stand in a niche”, had actually been designed by Verrocchio to be nearly as successful, from a formal point of view, from three or four other positions. Passavant’s claim was supported visually by his decision to use four full-figure and three head-only photographs of the sculpture, each taken from a different angle.³³ Interestingly enough, the most head-on of the full-length views seems to be identical with the Alinari photograph published in Cruttwell and Dvorák.

²⁶ Wölfflin 1915 (note 2), p. 239, note 2.

²⁷ Cited in Wolfgang M. Freitag, “Early Uses of Photography in the History of Art”, in: *Art Journal*, 39 (1979–1980), p. 120. On Wölfflin’s ambivalence about using photographs, see also Frederick N. Bohrer, “Photographic Perspectives: Photography and the Institutional Formation of Art History”, in: Elizabeth Mansfield (ed.), *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline*, London 2002, pp. 254–255.

²⁸ Maud Cruttwell, *Verrocchio*, London 1904. On Cruttwell, see <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/cruttwellm.htm> (accessed 20 May 2010).

²⁹ Cruttwell 1904 (note 28), p. 65 and see pl. facing p. 64.

³⁰ Earl Baldwin Smith, “The Study of the History of Art in the Colleges and Universities of the United States [1912]”, a pamphlet reprinted in: Craig Hugh Smyth / Peter M. Lukehart (eds.), *The Early Years of Art History in the United States*, Princeton 1993.

³¹ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die Kunst der Renaissance: Italien und das deutsche Formgefühl*, Munich 1931, p. 72.

³² Günther Passavant, *Verrocchio. Sculptures, Paintings and Drawings*, complete ed., London 1969, p. 15; and Max Dvorák / Johannes Wilde / Karl M. Swoboda (eds.), *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Re-*

Writing in 2005 and still presenting an essentially Wölfflinian formal analysis of the sculpture, Dario Covi was much more proscriptive than Passavant, claiming that “although finished on all sides [...] Verrocchio’s [*David*] is nevertheless conceived as having a single correct viewpoint, with *David* looking straight out at the observer”. Indeed, in a footnote, Covi even cited Wölfflin’s first article on the photography of sculpture as the initial source for this conclusion. More significantly, many of Covi’s own observations about the figure’s composition seem to be based as much on the single full-figure photograph chosen to illustrate his book as on the object itself—for example, when emphasizing the figure’s “openness” (a very Wölfflinian term) and the diagonal aspects of the design, features that are most evident in photographs taken from head-on rather than from a fully embodied encounter with the statue or, indeed, when relying on multiple views of the figure as Passavant had done.³⁴ The photograph used by Covi may well be the same image that appeared in yet another monograph on Verrocchio published more than six decades earlier by Leo Planiscig in 1941.³⁵ More importantly, Covi’s image, like his formalist argument, is a further descendent of the text and image first published by Wölfflin in 1896–1897. Indeed, the latter’s initial photographic reproduction of a white plaster cast of Verrocchio’s statue lingers like a ghost or, better, acts as a kind of palimpsest underlying any number of later photographs, including those taken of the original bronze itself from a supposedly “head-on” position (even though, as we have seen, exactly where the front of the statue should be located from a formal point of view varied from one scholar—and one photograph—to the next).

The rather convoluted history of the photographic reproductions of Verrocchio’s *David* demonstrates the persistence of images within the collective photographic archive and art historical memory, images that appear, disappear and reappear, with even the slightest variations in angle and pose between one example and the next noted by scholars of a formalist bent working both near and far from the object itself. The life and, one might say, afterlife of photographic images is further illustrated by another example from Renaissance Italy: the photographs taken of Donatello’s marble *St John the Evangelist*. This statue had originally been made for the facade of Florence’s cathedral, the *Duomo*, in the early fifteenth century, but since the later sixteenth century had been displayed inside the building in one of the central tribune’s chapels. By 1903 at the latest, an Alinari photographer had taken a very Wölfflinian head-on photograph of the piece, an image that appeared that year in three different books on Donatello published in England, Germany, and the United States (fig. 8).³⁶ Several writers around this time complained about how difficult it was to see the original statue properly in the tribune due to poor lighting, the implication being that viewing the brightly-lit photographic reproduction might actually be more helpful than encountering the object itself.³⁷ Such an attitude was made explicit by Bernard Berenson, who happily admitted in later life that he actually preferred assessing art works through photographic reproductions; indeed, his “time could have been better spent in the library, with books and photographs”, rather than travelling to see the original objects themselves.³⁸

naissance, Munich 1927–1928, vol. 1, plate 69. The editors stated that the images in the latter book were selected from lantern slides used in Dvorák’s lectures. See *ibid.*, p. VIII.

³³ Passavant 1969 (note 32), pp. 15–17 and pp. 16–22; there is also a detail of the head of Goliath in pl. 23.

³⁴ Dario A. Covi, *Andrea del Verrocchio: Life and Work*, Florence 2005, p. 48 and fig. 25.

³⁵ The image is credited to Brogi in Leo Planiscig, *Andrea del Verrocchio*, Vienna 1941, pl. 25, but in Covi’s volume is attributed to Alinari, which bought the Brogi archives in 1958. See John Hannavy, *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-*

Century Photography, New York 2007, vol. 1, p. 26. Like Passavant, Planiscig also included additional full-length views of the statue, as well as reproductions of various details.

³⁶ Alfred Gotthold Meyer, *Donatello*, Bielefeld / Leipzig 1903, p. 11; Lord Balcarres [David Lindsay Crawford], *Donatello*, London 1903, pl. facing p. 18; and E.H. Colvin / E.W. Bashfield / A.A. Hopkins (eds.), *Donatello*, Boston 1903, pl. 8.

³⁷ See, for instance, Balcarres 1903 (note 36), p. 14, and Maud Cruttwell, *Donatello*, London 1911, p. 27.

³⁸ Cited in David A. Brown, *Berenson and the Connois-*

Such attitudes notwithstanding, in 1904, Donatello's *St John* was moved to a much better-lit position in an aisle of the cathedral's nave and then, after being placed into storage during the Second World War, was installed in Florence's Museo dell'Opera del Duomo where it remains to this day, albeit without the halo seen in the pre-1904 photograph.³⁹ Despite these peregrinations and the fact that the statue was now no longer framed by the architectural decoration of the



8 Alinari photographer, Donatello's *St John the Evangelist* (photographed in Florence Cathedral's tribune). Photographic reproduction in: Lord Balcarras [David Lindsay Crawford], *Donatello*, London 1903, fig. facing p. 18

seurship of Italian Painting, Washington/DC 1979, p. 44; from Bernard Berenson, *Sketch for a self-portrait*, New York 1949.

³⁹ For a summary of the sculpture's movements, see John Pope-Hennessy, *Donatello: Sculptor*, New York 1993, p. 321, note 28. It is unclear when the halo was removed. It no longer appears in photographs of the sculpture taken in the 1930s by Brogi for Jenő Lányi (discussed below), but the halo may have still been in place between the initial move to the cathedral's aisle in 1904 and the



9 Alinari photographer, Donatello's *St John the Evangelist* (photographed in Florence Cathedral's tribune, but with background excised), original photograph taken by 1903. Photographic reproduction in: Arduino Colasanti, *Donatello*, Rome 1933, plate VIII

cathedral's tribune, it was the pre-1904 photograph that continued to be reproduced in any number of books published in the following decades.⁴⁰ In a 1933 survey of Donatello's works, the Italian writer Arduino Colasanti did try to update the standard Alinari image precisely in re-

1930s given that it is visible in an undated photograph credited to Ilse Schneider-Lengyét in Ludwig Goldscheider, *Donatello*, London 1941, pl. 9.

⁴⁰ See Paul Schubring, *Donatello: Des Meisters Werke in 277 Abbildungen*, Stuttgart 1907, p. 3 of "Donatellos Werke" section; Cruttwell 1911 (note 37), pl. 4; Arduino Colasanti, *Donatello*, Rome 1933, pl. 8; Emilio Cecchi, *Donatello*, Rome 1943, pl. 2; and Leo Planiscig, *Donatello*, Florence 1947, pl. 12.

gards to the distracting, historically-inaccurate architectural background. Rather than obtaining or commissioning a new photograph against the Cathedral aisle's blank white wall, however, Colasanti instead simply arranged for every trace of the sculpture's pre-1904 setting (including even its shadow) to be excised from the negative (fig. 9).⁴¹ Interestingly enough, Wölfflin explicitly deplored the practice of deleting backgrounds from negatives in order to silhouette statues, thereby creating what he felt were false contours, even though most of his own illustrations of sculpture set the objects against neutral white, grey or black backgrounds, thereby resulting in a very similar effect.⁴²

Even when new photographs began to be more widely available, the original head-on, Wölfflinian view of Donatello's *St John* persisted. For instance, in H.W. Janson's landmark 1957 monograph on Donatello, the statue was illustrated with specially commissioned photographs taken by Brogi in the 1930s under the direction of Jenő Lányi, who had begun the book eventually completed by Janson.⁴³ Although now no longer sporting a halo nor framed by the tribune's architecture, the statue was still photographed frontally and head-on. What is more surprising is that this type of view persisted well into the 1990s despite Charles Seymour's oft-cited conclusion, first published in 1966 in his well-known survey of Italian Renaissance sculpture, that the "correct" view of the figure should actually be from below, not head-on, given that the statue was originally designed to be placed well above head height on the Cathedral's facade. Indeed, according to Seymour, only when seen from below were the work's formal oddities resolved into a satisfactory composition, a point supported in his book with an appropriately *di sotto in su* photographic illustration.⁴⁴ A print of this photograph now at Villa I Tatti in Florence, Bernard Berenson's erstwhile home, includes an anonymous annotation stating that the image was taken for Seymour in 1955 (fig. 10). Interestingly enough, a second annotation in Berenson's own hand on the verso of the photograph states emphatically: "Donatello as meant to be seen on façade of Duomo".⁴⁵ However, John Pope-Hennessy and Joachim Poeschke, despite both explicitly agreeing with Seymour's



10 Brogi photographer (commissioned by Charles Seymour Jr.), Donatello's *St John the Evangelist* (photographed from below in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence), original photograph taken in 1955. Photographic print now in the Fototeca Berenson, Villa I Tatti, Florence

⁴¹ Colasanti 1933 (note 40), pl. 8.

⁴² Fawcett 1986 (note 13), p. 207; and Joel Snyder, "Nineteenth-century Photography of Sculpture and the Rhetoric of Substitution", in: Geraldine A. Johnson (ed.), *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 29–30.

⁴³ Horst W. Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, Princeton

1957, vol.1, pp. IX, XIX and 11–16. On Lányi, see John Pope-Hennessy, *The Study and Criticism of Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, Princeton 1980, p. 29, and the essay by Alessandra Sarchi in the present volume.

⁴⁴ Charles Seymour, Jr., *Sculpture in Italy, 1400 to 1500*, Harmondsworth 1966, pp. 56–57 and pl. 13.

conclusion that the “correct” view is from below, commissioned new photographs for their respective 1993 monographs on Donatello that continued to depict the statue head-on, rather than seen from below.⁴⁶ An earlier example of this phenomenon is found in a 1935 survey of Italian sculpture by Eric Maclagan, at the time director of the Victoria & Albert Museum. While Maclagan suggested in his text that the apparent distortions of Donatello’s prophets for the bell tower of Florence’s cathedral were only rendered satisfactorily when viewed from below, he too illustrated this point with head-on views taken by the Alinari—although in this case, this was probably because no *di sotto in su* photographs of the statues were readily available and Maclagan himself was unable or unwilling to commission new ones.⁴⁷ But the fact that Pope-Hennessy and Poeschke continued to favour essentially Wölfflinian, head-on views even when commissioning new photographs in the 1990s demonstrates just how powerful a visual paradigm can be, even as scholarly (written) paradigms change.

The persistence of Wölfflinian views of Renaissance sculpture and, similarly, of architecture and even paintings and drawings produced in this period (all of which are, after all, very rarely seen absolutely head-on in practice) is a phenomenon also found in the photography of art objects made in many other times and places. Indeed, one could argue that the Wölfflinian front-and-centre photograph has become *the* standard view for the vast majority of serious academic and museological publications, whatever the original viewing circumstances may have been. Exploring the paradigmatic case of the photography of Renaissance sculpture and considering the life and, occasionally, death of such images, as well as examining what kinds of reproductions were available in the collective photographic archive at any given time, can be profoundly revealing about the practices and priorities of art historians. As we enter further into the digital age, with its ever-increasing virtual archive of images (ARTstor’s online database, for instance, now includes more than 1 million images, while the *Bildindex für Kunst und Architektur* has approximately 2 million),⁴⁸ and with the advent of ever more technologies for manipulating these images, it becomes even more important to explore the relationships that exist amongst scholars, art historical memory and the collective photographic-*cum*-digital archive.

⁴⁵ Although credited in Seymour’s book to “I.D.E.A., Brogi-Seymour” (*ibid.*, p. XIII) and stamped with the Brogi name on the print at Villa I Tatti, the image does not appear to have entered the Brogi archives, which were purchased in 1958 by Alinari (see note 35 above). The photograph thus seems to have been privately commissioned by Seymour. On Seymour, see <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/seymourc.htm> (accessed 4 August 2010). I would like to thank Giovanni Pagliarulo for confirming the annotations on Villa I Tatti’s print and Alessandra Biagianni for searching for this image in the archives now held by Alinari.

⁴⁶ Pope-Hennessy 1993 (note 39), pp. 25 and 321, note 27, and fig. 12; Joachim Poeschke, *Donatello and His World: Sculpture of the Italian Renaissance*, New York 1993, p. 7, p. 380, and fig. 46.

⁴⁷ Eric Maclagan, *Italian Sculpture of the Renaissance*, Cambridge/MA 1935, pp. 100–101.

⁴⁸ Email communication from Caroline Caviness (ARTstor), “The size of ARTstor’s collections”, 17 May 2010. For the *Bildindex* (kindly brought to my attention by Costanza Caraffa), see <http://www.bildindex.de>.