



Photographs in archives: the production and meaning of visual records*

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Abstract

Based on discussions dealing with archival theory and methodology, the intention is to discuss the status of the photograph as an archival record. By means of the analysis of some attributes and characteristics of the photographic record, its specificity as a record is highlighted, as well as the need for a contextual approach to its production and its roles in the process of constituting the archives per se. The scope of this work is to question traditional methods of organizing photographs into archives, which perceive these records as being removed from the remaining documentation and which value the factual content of the images above any other elements of meaning.

Keywords: photograph; photographic archive; diplomatics; archival science; visual records.

The article discusses the status and value of photographs as archival records, i.e. as records produced and accumulated during the course of a personal or institutional life trajectory and which, in the custody of institutions of record, are subjected to technical treatment seeking their availability as sources for various uses. Being sought after by students, researchers or any interested parties, these records are acknowledged as being capable of documenting facts, as well as visual aspects of the past. The work discusses some characteristics of the process of construction of these devices for recording and visual communication as records, within archival theory and practice, a discipline that dictates the rules of their organization in the majority of institutions for the safeguard of historical archives.

Archives and working with photographic records

While archives are one of the places in our society where photographs can be found in systematic order, this fact has contributed little to the development of more in-depth studies on the topic of photographic records. Photographs have their place in most archives, be they public or private, institutional or personal, where they are identified, arranged or classified, and described, yet the archival professionals who deal with these photographs have rarely sought to problematize them; more specifically, they have not addressed the question of what roles are assigned to these photographic records in the actual process of forming an archive.¹

It has been argued that this lacuna can be explained by the fact that documentation of a textual nature has tended to predominate in archives ever since the first sets of documents were gathered in ancient times. Indeed, both photographs and film – to cite only two kinds of documents comprised of images – are records that have been produced and gathered in the modern and contemporary eras, starting in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Representing ‘recent’ acquisitions in the archival universe, such records also signal a remarkable transformation in the field, which profoundly changed the way archives are produced and accumulated in our contemporary world – an impact that only more recently was relativized by the appearance of electronic documents.

As ways of recording action and information, images possess a materiality and constitute a resource for expression that distinguishes them from other, verbal-based records found in the trove of documents gathered over the centuries. This is one of the main differences responsible for the difficulty of applying the archival methodology generated in accordance with the historically encountered reality in archives to these new records.

In addition to the language difference, the lack of a link between the origin of the visual documents to the administrative techniques and procedures has deepened the gap between these records and textual documents. According to Lopez (2000, p.191), “technical advances in the manner of production of textual documents have always had a close relationship with the administrative procedures and are therefore more easily incorporated into the reality of the archival organization of documents”.²

Furthermore, the way visual records are produced or amassed in archives entails different actions and procedures than those used in producing written records. Since they do not

fall within the category of documents created to represent actions of juridical or legal importance, they display no features that would allow them to be classified according to some type of official nature. Once produced, they can become part of different sorts or types of documents or they can be used separately, depending upon one's requirements. A new series of copies can be reproduced for purposes other than the intent behind their original appearance. Lastly, they can be archived in accordance with a unique logic, totally unlike that applied to all other records produced by the same institution. However, and despite these singularities, the creation and amassing of photographic records for instrumental purposes, whether the result of an institutional activity or the life story of an individual, display their own 'economics,' or production rationale, and the reasons behind their appearance should be researched within this context. In terms of archival handling, this is the paramount moment in the life of a record, a moment that can shed light on the reasons and meanings of the record, its relation to its counterparts, and the relation between the whole and the person responsible for its existence, namely the creator of the archive. As a rule, records are organized for research purposes years after the archive has been completed. In the case of personal archives, this coincides with the creator's death, whereas in the case of institutional archives, with the demise of the institution. These relationships, which are supposedly more clear-cut when the archive is being created, often need to be reestablished or rebuilt.

The lack of purposeful reflective thought in the field of archival theory and methodology geared specifically to photographs as archival records, means that treatment of such material has been based on rules and methods devised for other disciplines, especially library science and history. Photographs have been systematically organized according to the informative value of the image content, to the detriment of their evidential value and value as a record of what gave rise to them. Additionally, they are often deemed single pieces, individually described, even when they belong to a broader set of records, ignoring the basic foundations of archival science, which not only call for preserving links between records but also recognize the vital importance of preserving their provenance.

Any image can be called a record in that the broad concept of a record refers to any information that has been recorded in a given medium. Images as archival records are those that not only convey a broad gamut of contents, but are, first and foremost, the product of the actions and transactions of a bureaucratic or sociocultural order that were responsible for their creation. Linking them to the universe that 'generated' them should be a task of archival handling, based on a less naturalized approach to these records. But this is not what happens. Visual material, more specifically the technical images resulting from visual production – including therein photographs and film records – have traditionally been viewed as self-referential, images of 'some aspect,' devoid of any clear connection to the rest of the archive or the entity that produced and is responsible for the existence of the whole. The hegemony of the factual value of images is what determines their treatment, and irrespective of the type of archive in question, all effort to identify and describe the material is focused on the facts, people, places, and eras portrayed.

Diplomatics and a reflection on photographs in archives

The discussion surrounding the documental value of archival photographs and the shift away from an interest in the content of the image towards the search to understand the context in which these records were produced has grown out of the dialogue between studies that have either tangentially or directly explored the issue of photographs within archives. It also reflects the advocacy or rejection of their nature as an archival record, and a discussion of how they differ from 'typical' archival documents. More recent studies rely on the theoretical and methodological perspective afforded by diplomatic analysis as a tool for understanding the documental status of records in our contemporary world, where the very materiality of these records, such as electronic documents, no longer takes traditional forms. Although diplomatics originally gained shape between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a discipline concerned with formulating a criticism of records in the form of manuscripts, which tended to suffer countless adulterations, it has been recently reinvented as a valid conceptual framework for addressing the new modalities of records that have appeared in the world today.³

While the creation of diplomatics predates modern bureaucracies, harking back to a time of much greater formalism and stability in the production of documents, as a general rule diplomatics still offers a sound theoretical and methodological tool applicable to records created today in both the public and private domain. According to Duranti (1996, p.107-108), applying criticism to modern documental procedures "is valid ... because human effort still displays identical features even though the world has indubitably become more complex. ... Within a juridical system, even though many prevailing principles change over time and from place to place, human tasks always display an organizational, instrumental, executive or constructive role."

The point of departure for diplomatics is the record itself. It is through its analysis, namely diplomatic criticism, that an attempt is made to ascertain the rules, procedures and persons who assisted in the genesis of this record. This analysis is usually applied to records governed by standardized and controlled formalities, such as governmental and notarial documents. Based on the identification of records produced in accordance with stipulated formula within a given social and legal system, diplomatic criticism endeavors to tie these records in with their legal and administrative context. According to Duranti (1996, p.20), "when there are rules governing the genesis, forms, routing, and classification of documents, special diplomatics can identify the rules through the criticism of documents."

Although Duranti's work has focused on textual records produced as part of a practical, official and public administrative activity, the concept involves engaging in a dialogue with their origins, while taking into consideration the debate about the differences displayed by photographic archival records as vehicles of communication and documentation. While diplomatic criticism is not wholly applicable to archival photographs, it can deepen our reflection of records belonging to sets of documents because it stipulates the need to find a link between archival documents and the context in which they were produced.⁴

In archival science, the valorization of diplomatics as a conceptual and methodological framework for exploring documental forms and their relation with documental genesis in

order to establish their authenticity represents a major step forward. The application of diplomatics has elicited a series of 'answers' and 'counterpoints' that reflect complementary or contrasting views about the relations that the field establishes between the nature and character of archival documents and the operational context in which they were created. Although diplomatics is concerned with studying the nature of records in their individual form, its central tenets can be broadened for application to serial documents, whereby the scientific archival approach can help to trace more precise contours.

Methods of diplomatic analysis seek to establish the formal structure of official records (government and notary), understand the internal features of each one that are responsible for creating their legal validity, and tie these in with the procedures used to generate them (Pazin, 2005, p.8). Cook (1997, p.36-37) has pointed out the importance of diplomatic studies, in that they focus "archivists' attention on the record, especially on its properties as evidence of the acts and transactions of its creators." Diplomatics thus have "much of value to say to modern archivists, ... about the necessity to conduct careful research into the form, structure, and authorship of documents, especially in electronic environments." However, for him, this approach "must be coupled with a broader understanding ... of the animating functions, structures, and interrelationships of the creators that contextualize those isolated documents." Cook underscores the importance of individual documental analysis, provided that it is linked to an understanding of supradocumental relations, as a theoretical and methodological approach to archives, private universes in which records are never atomized or detached from the whole.

New studies have recently begun focusing on visual records, in part because the issue of electronic documents has risen higher on the agenda of discussions essential to archival theory and practice. An effort has been made to understand these records within the archival environment, approaching them as parts of a whole and, as such, records that display the same bonds with the creator of the whole as textual documents. The momentum generated by a growing valorization of images as a historical and cultural research source in general must be taken into account within this trend. The importance of archival sources can be strengthened or reinvigorated by the studies, whose analyses may nourish theoretical and methodological thought about archives and foster a very fertile interdisciplinary process of exchange. Even though few studies in the field of archival science have looked at the question of images, a discussion has been taking shape about the treatment of photographs which bears in mind their documental nature, their presence in the spheres of archival record production and the presence of elements in the visual record itself that may reflect this documental origin and, accordingly, the possibility of contextualizing it within the universes that generated them. At the center of this debate lies the defense of a new methodological posture toward the visual records, one that places importance on their contextualization during the stages of identification and classification, to the detriment of overestimation of the access to information offered by the record, which is the approach that has traditionally guided work in the area.

Towards a contextual approach to archival records

The premise that archival records are inseparably linked to the context of their administrative creation, as Duranti has emphasized, brings us to an important and possibly pivotal point in the discussion of the archival nature of photography: the purpose of studies into the nature or character of records from an archival perspective differs from those of studies of iconographic images conducted by historians. This is especially relevant to differentiate between approaches that vary little in this area.

Photographs are usually taken as unique records that refer to the topic or visual fact depicted in them, whose authorship lies in the photographer who created the image. Those who use such photographs in their research rarely take into account the difference in meaning between an image taken alone and an image tied in with its archive of origin. Interest in the factual value of the visual record overrides the fundamental meaning of the serial and oftentimes bureaucratic character of the production of archival records. Archive names often appear in studies as nothing more than information on the source of the reference. Two things are lost with this attitude. First, no consideration is given to the possible meanings to be found through an examination of the circumstances under which the document was produced within a functional context, together with the relationships of meaning that an analysis of the documental series might afford. Second, one runs the risk of assuming a naïve attitude towards the source when one fails to question and instead simply assumes that the photographs described in research tools do not in themselves bear the marks of methodological and theoretical decisions that helped transform them into 'sources available' to the user.

In an objective relation between user and source, notions impregnated with meaning, like provenance, are not even taken into consideration as an element in analyzing documents or in their use. If, for example, the significance of provenance in archival production is not understood, it can be confused with the simple idea that a document belongs to a certain archive, rather than the key to understanding the functions, relations and meanings for the existence of the documents taken as a whole. Users turn to archives to find the sources that will serve their research purposes in thematic terms, with differing results.⁵ This is why it is worth conducting an analysis of the nature of archival photographic records rather than their potential as a source of information about 'visual facts' or 'visual representations' of historical research, though it is possible to deal with aspects that are common to both studies. In examining the internal perspective of archives, this endeavor will not seek to identify the meanings of photographs but rather to understand them within this specific universe.

Bringing diplomatics to bear on studies of photographic records makes it possible to question the nature of the photograph generated by actions, transactions, and administrative whim. This movement to some extent relativizes the strong conviction that photographic images are basically works of art or the result of personal production; it also represents a dissonant voice in a culture that distinguishes between art and document, with little room for compromise (Taylor, 1979, p.425). As pointed out by Delmas (2003, p.554), there is some agreement about the existence of a division in studies of photographic

processes. On the one hand are the visual works that have the status of works of art; on the other, works that are considered merely documents. Despite the study and use of these works as historical sources, it is their artistic value that is taken into account, while their documental impact has been much less studied.

Photographs in archives demystify the character of a unique work attributed to artistic photographs, though this value may be present in various records in an archive. The quantitative aspect of the serial nature of archives, which evinces the production of records in a series, reinforces the idea of the authority of a record and, in the case of photographs, adds to the realistic effect of the photographic discourse, contributing to conferring the concept of evidential value upon the series. Since production in series derives from the need of the proprietor of the archive to produce it in this way, understanding an archive must be subordinate to understanding this logic of production. Photographs are not always part of a stable series; on the contrary, they may be scattered among a number of series of distinct documental typologies, 'being part' of textual, printed, and electronic records. These features are an example of marks of identification and of functional context that we should look for in photographic records, which are the key to understanding how they were used by a given administration. These marks are far more to be found in the use made of these records than in a documental recreation inherent to the photographic record.

Understanding this production logic and lending clear form to it through a research tool for organizing an archive from a contextual perspective is a way of avoiding what Sekula (1997, p.116) has identified as a feature of archival photographs: the suspension of their meanings. According to this author:

In an archive, the possibility of meaning is 'liberated' from the actual contingencies in use. But this liberation is also ... loss of context. Thus the specificity of 'original' uses and meanings can be avoided and even made invisible, when photographs are selected from an archive and reproduced in the original book. ... Thus, since photographic archives tend to suspend meaning and use, within the archive meaning exists in a state that is both residual and potential. The suggestion of past uses coexists with a plenitude of possibilities.

Not only is it a challenge to assign meanings to photographs; these meanings can never be represented through mere thematic identification and the exclusive reliance on this approach as a method impoverishes the record. A proposed alternative is a search for the functional and production context within the archive as a basic prerequisite for the future recontextualization of the record for the purposes of research and other uses. This task should be taken up by those who devote themselves to organizing archives. By reading and understanding the record from a contextual perspective, provided by the archive, users will be better equipped to examine the source from their own standpoint. If the work of the archivist cannot attain this goal, it contributes to re-creating circumstances in which records are presented as inert components of what Sekula (1997, p.118) appropriately calls an inventory of appearances.

Advocating the search for the meanings of archival records does not mean that these records should be understood as holding the power to proffer neutral testimony about what 'really' happened at the moment of their production. On the contrary, to search for

this moment is to endeavor to understand this record as the result of procedures taken during its genesis, which is the only way of re-endowing this documental mass, accumulated over years and long divorced from its original attributions, with more coherent contours regarding its existence. By atomizing images and dealing with them in terms of their factual content, a contribution is made to strengthening an empiricist model of truth, both regarding archives as neutral repositories of production, accumulation, and collection and as regards photographic records as impressions of reality.

Document characteristics: a discussion about photographs

Diplomatics-based documental criticism is based on the presupposition that rules governing genesis (origin or moment of production), form (its physical constitution and the logical chain of its parts), the documentation process (internal circulation reflecting the necessary formalities to be followed), and the classification of records (establishing their nature) are inherent to records themselves. Indeed, many documental forms were created in line with strict formulas in order to exhibit in their manner of presentation the distinctive hallmarks of their documental nature, to the extent that “it is not possible to dissociate the layout and the material construction of the document from its legal and administrative context of genesis, production and application” (Belloto, 2002, p.13).

The question was therefore posed of how applicable this reasoning would be to photographic records, taking into consideration the specificities involved in producing these records. It is not necessarily the case that the physical configurations displayed by photographs that are produced and used as documents automatically reflect the acts and procedures responsible for creation of the record. And like documental objects such as certificates and receipts, the configuration of photographs has never been linked to a documental function. The documental value of photographic images is a social construct, to the extent that the results of the image were not seen as a representation but as a transparent channel for the object being represented. Trachtenberg (1989, p.288, in Schwartz, 1995, p.56) emphasizes that “camera-made images have no special privilege as documents of culture. But they have their own resources.” So these resources help define the nature of photographic communication and the rationale of their creation, grounded in a new model of recording and printing information. Taking into account the uniqueness of the visual record, coupled with the context in which the document appeared in a specific situation, is the path that will enable us to grasp the meaning of the record and assess its archival context.

Rather than apply diplomatic criticism to photographic records in accordance with the model applied to traditional administration documents, the important thing is to reflect both on the standards that are followed in the formation of images as documents, as well as on their deviations and peculiarities, defining spaces of regularities associated with production conditions. These standards should be understood in the situation of the document in relation to the archive of which it is an integral part and between the archive and its producer/compiler. Establishing standards and rules of stable documental procedures for images, which are valid for other contexts in absolute form, defies the basic

premise that photographic records are, due to inherent characteristics of the medium, taken out of context and placed in another †context in each new communication situation and for every new use. Therefore, it is important to consider that the meanings of a visual documental set can be investigated in this universe of production – which is never repeated in the same manner in different archives – but there are forms of record production that can be more standardized in institutional environments, for example, or more general standards of documental functions for images produced in a private setting, etc.

Applying diplomatic notions and principles to studies of photographs in archives, rather than attempting to apply a diplomatic criticism on the terms in which they are used for traditional documents, would seem to be a more promising path with respect to the quest for an understanding of the meanings of a record in relation to the whole, namely the archive. Some points in relation to which the principles of diplomatics can enrich the discussion of photographic records are given below.⁶

The documental form as representative of its function or how photographs cannot be reduced to this premise

For diplomatics, the concept of form pertains to the result of internal norms to the context of the creator of the record, norms governed by social standards (legal, juridical). The form of the record is the sum of its characteristics, both physical and intellectual, and is composed of the external aspect (physical form), internal structure (intellectual form) and message to be conveyed (content). It should not be confused with the determinations that the themes, people or places that the record deals with can convey (Duranti, 1995, p.6, 1996, p.27). In the case of photographs, form must also be thought of as a condition of the very nature of the device, relative to the structure of the photographic representation, formed by the point of view (perspective) and the setting, in which the creator (or creators) of the document cannot substantially intervene⁷, although a whole repertoire of image-building options may be available, both to the author of the photo (the photographer), and its institutional author/creator (person responsible for contracting the photographic service or for the visual project).

In the ‘physical form’ and ‘intellectual form’ categories, the following are merged in a photograph: ‘format’ – the general characteristics and dimensions for the medium of the photographic image (negative, positive, slide); the commercial format of the photographic image (*carte-cabinet*, *carte-de-visite*, postcard, photo album, stereoscopic photographs); the type of photographic equipment (35mm, 6cm x 9cm, etc.); ‘photographic processes’ – any of the techniques that make it possible to obtain photographic images (Ibac et al., 1992, p.85-92); ‘discursive genres’ – socio-historically defined communication devices (Maingueneau, 2000, p.73-75): documentary, pictorial, abstract, etc.; specific ‘photographic genres’ (portrait, landscape, photojournalism, family photography, etc.).⁸ All the above are shaped by the prospective construction of the photographic image.

In photographs, the external appearance, internal articulation and content on record are not necessarily indicators of function or markers of context from which they originated, as recommended by diplomatics for archival records. In the case of images, these elements

are the starting points for understanding their function, considering their different contexts of creation (Schwartz, 1995, p.51). In other words, the choice of given standards of photographic form is directly related to the function to which a photographic record was originally destined, but an analysis of these 'hallmarks' of choice, considering the photographic image alone, does not automatically point to that function. By way of example, two situations may be considered: first, when the photographic record is presented in its original communication (or documentation) situation, i.e. the photograph in an annual report, institutional journal, work report, etc. In this case it cannot be thought of as an isolated image, but as part of the larger record in which it was inserted and of which it became an integral and inseparable part; this provides a starting point for important inferences as to the functions for which the record was produced. Another situation is seen with respect to the numerous isolated photographic records that appear in archives of all kinds – personal or institutional – archived using various systems of organization. In this case the references that the record may have in its materiality must be considered in order to seek the origins of its production by understanding the functional context in which it arose, and in most cases counting on other documents that share space with the photographs of the archive and have participated in the same activity. Archived photographs, separated from their original use, need to be placed back in context.

Thinking of a direct relationship between the elements of documental form and the function intended for the photographic record is no simple task, since several aspects need to be considered. One aspect relates to the qualities of completeness and perfection inherent to a finished record, which is able to act and bring about consequences. For diplomatics, the documental form is a complex of rules of representation used to transmit a message, and the presence of all its elements of documental representation is the precondition for a record to be considered complete and perfect. The parts of the documental discourse required for presentation of its content are the initial protocol (that contains identifying elements of the administrative context of the action), the text (that contains a description of the action) and the final protocol (that contains the documental context of the action). The arrangement of these elements, known as the intrinsic elements of documental form, is responsible for the quality of completeness of the record. Despite some differences in configuration, in diplomatic documents, by their nature, the fixed or variable data of the records are as a rule these fundamental parts (Duranti, 1996, p.119; Belloto, 2002, p.42).

Whereas in textual documents the initial protocol, content and final protocol are written and arranged in a linear fashion, in established sections (protocol, text and eschatocol), in the image what is 'written' can be seen simultaneously, at a 'single glance,' which is characteristic of non-linear language. According to Schwartz (1995, p.49) in his work of analysis of diplomatic photographs, "these component parts, however, do not necessarily present themselves in three physically distinct and recognizable sections, and the grouping of intrinsic elements of intellectual form can be accomplished by analysis of protocol, text, and eschatocol elements as presented in physical location (front/back, corners) and expressed in visual or verbal form." This means that elements of recognition of the documental form may or may not be present in photographs in archives or may only be partially present, which implies the need for a different approach to these materials.

Another important point to be highlighted concerns the presence or absence of a verbal reference to accompany the photographic record. For the image and meaning to be stated and stipulated in the function of the document based on knowledge of its context of creation, the date and place of documental production must be established (which may differ from the date and place of the scene depicted), the reasons for production, in addition to the subject content of the image (location, date and subject of the scene depicted). These elements may or may not be written on the photographic records and, if necessary, should be sought outside the record. Some of these may be inscribed on the back of the photograph, on the photographic negative⁹ or in other sources of information attached, but others undoubtedly will only be determined through research. Even the visually perceived content by the similarity it bears to the image in relation to its reference can only be interpreted after investigation for identification. It is necessary to know the author of the image, the institutional author and the people who contributed to the fact that the image was created and became able to fulfill a function. These data may refer to both the physical and intellectual form, depending on how they act.

The choice of form, format and genre is associated with important differences in the outcome of the photographic record. In the textual records the external elements of the form are often linked to the function of the document in a symbiotic manner. A receipt serves the function of attesting to a financial transaction and this function is clearly manifested in the way the record is articulated. The function of a declaration is to state a fact, and presented itself clearly as a vehicle of this function. In photographic records, however, such a linkage does not occur automatically. In the majority of cases, the external and internal elements do not necessarily reveal the circumstances, acts or facts that gave rise to the documentation. It is necessary to reestablish the links with other documents that were involved in the transaction that gave rise to the record, which leads us to consider the relationship with other documents as a condition for the contextualization of photographic records.

Since they are informal records in relation to control of form and procedure, photographic images often have a *sui generis* institutional trajectory between their creation and the archiving of same. On the one hand images are created and on the other hand images are used, without their necessarily being a clear connection between these two moments. Being polysemic records by definition, photographs are created and can later be reused in different communication situations and in other vehicles or informational media, thus establishing a new usage and a new record. This is the main point of differentiation between visual communication records and traditional textual communication documents. For diplomatics, the procedures for creation of records are responsible for attribution of the specificities that ensure that the record is at the same time, authentic and reliable.¹⁰ This concept can be extended to photographs, if these creation procedures are considered more as documental practices based on which given types of photographic records were generated in a given universe of documental production, rather than as formal requirements based on which the document is 'authenticated.' The conceptual body brought by diplomatics is rich in possibilities of connections with the photographic records, but does not encompass all

aspects of visual communication, due to being bound, in its assumptions, to the reality of the production of documents of a legal character and textual nature.

The absence of formal documental characteristics in photographs can be felt in the way they appear in the classification, which in archival science, correlates documents according to their characteristic elements such as medium, form, format, genre, species and type. A diplomatic analysis or even a typological analysis of textual documents finds a valid instrument for definitions of the various documental configurations in this classification scheme. However, photographic records are not included therein. Only in the 'genre' category, which means the "configuration that assimilates a document in accordance with the signage system used in the communication of its contents" (Gonçalves, 1998, p.19), are iconographic documents mentioned, whereby the documents that use the fixed image as a basic language are included in this group. In this sense, image-based records might be considered a genre of records akin to textual documents. A definition of greater consensus on what the specific details of each documental configuration are that can be created within this genre – the photograph being just one of these configurations, along with other forms of visual representation such as drawings, paintings, etc. – has always proved problematic (Lopez, 2000, p.207-209).¹¹

The characteristic elements of records that are present in various existing records are important and should be taken into consideration in any documental, diplomatic or typological analysis. According to Gonçalves (1998, p.20), "at least in the case of archival records, one of these elements is even more crucial in the organization of the documentation: the context of production, i.e. the circumstances that led to the record's existence and had a specific medium, form and format, constituting a given documental type."

In the archival area, textual documents are those that most clearly manifest the constituent elements – i.e. are present in the documental species and type¹² – responsible for attribution of their nature and function. Nevertheless, they should also be considered from the standpoint of the broader context of production in which they originated. Photographic records, whose physical and intellectual configuration attributes have not even been established yet by archival theory and methodology, demand that their functional context be known, which is a key instrument for their documental analysis and treatment.

Photographic record: content and message

Common sense dictates that a photographic image can be considered a record by taking into account its direct relationship with the referential that was present at the moment that the image was recorded. This is the fundamental condition that underlies the 'belief' in the objectivity of photographic representation. For the image to have the ability to document what was printed on it from the outside world, it must also have 'meaning,' i.e. possess the necessary identifying connections with the elements of this reference. Thus, to say that an image is a record means that it represents, or has the ability to represent, a fact, a subject, a theme, a situation that was printed in a physical-chemical process, in the physical materiality of the photographic object (negative, photographic paper, etc.). But this is only the broadest meaning of the word document.¹³ A photographic

image only becomes an archival document when, after its production, it has a trajectory driven by a desire to document an action, a fact; when it constitutes a kind of record or communication medium – always in connection with others from the same activity that generate the documentation – which takes into account a receiver acting within the corporate, governmental or institutional scope to which it belongs. In this process, the message of the record (not to be confused with the subject content), as defined by its ‘issuer’ (the institutional producer), is created.¹⁴

In the case of personal archives, the documental value is more closely linked to the function or use of the image in relation to the life of the owner of the archive and needs to be considered in close relation to the concept of accumulation. Individuals may never have produced images as a way of proving actions or due to functional obligations arising from their professional activity, but may have collected and accumulated images throughout their lives for different reasons and these are the reasons that may reveal the usefulness of the collection of records throughout the life trajectory, both public and private, of an individual.

When considering these various facets that govern the economics of the production of sets of photographic records, by individuals or institutions, it transpires that it is no simple task to try to label the various photographic ‘documental types’ into standardized categories. In some cases approximations are possible, but it soon becomes clear that it is impossible to reduce all cases to pre-existing categories. This proves the need to return to the understanding of the trajectory through which an image rose to the category of a record. In this manner it is possible to establish that a single image may have been involved in multiple acts of creation, having been used in various communication situations, for example.

Schwartz (1995) emphasizes the aspect of the dual meaning of the documental image by addressing two distinct values that, in her view, are impregnated in each of these approaches to the photographic record: the informational value, linked to the image content, and the evidential value, linked to the circumstances of creation and use of the record in the broader documentary context in which it took part. According to her:

a photograph ... only becomes a document ... when it is tethered to its functional context. Its ‘true nature’ cannot be discerned from the form or even content of the photograph alone. Its evidential value, linked to a message ... only becomes clear when the image is returned to its broader context of production, purpose, and use. The value of the photographic image and its role in the action in which it participated is not inherent in the content of the image or embedded in the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of form. Rather, it is anchored to the functional context of creation and cannot be teased from the image itself ... The informational value of a photograph is fixed by its content; its evidential value is neither absolute nor static, but rather varies with the multiple circumstances of document creation (p.51).

It is clear that the author establishes an important difference between message and content, which are ideas that overlap in common sense usage. The message refers to meaning or meanings attributed to the photographic record through the knowledge of its context and function (linked to its documental evidential value), while the content is understood

as the visual information that the authority of the realistic record of the photographic image conveys as 'documental' (it is the 'visual fact,' linked to the informational value). It should be added that content, when assessed with knowledge of the causes that led to the creation of the image and the 'biography'¹⁵ of the photographic object used as a record, can enable the perception of far richer meanings than those that are detected from the simple identification of the visual fact presented.

The formation of the record and those responsible for it

In order to promote a discussion about the people taking part in the production of a record, a distinction needs to be made between responsibility and authorship, the latter including a link of a creative and proprietary order with the object produced. Despite the existence of authors in the production of works of individual creation destined for documental use, other agents concur for production to occur, namely individuals who share positions of responsibility and creativity in relation to the document created by interfering in its generation. It is necessary to perceive that the author of a photograph, for example, despite the non-transferable nature of his/her status as creator of the image, is a link in a chain of people responsible for creating the photographic record. It ranges from decision-making on the need to document a fact by means of production of images, followed by discussions on how they should be produced, through to the point where they are worked on with an idea in mind of the final product and focusing on the composition of a given communication situation, all of this being after its formation as a positive image. Everyone involved in this process is part of a chain, appropriately named by Schwartz (1995) as a "complexity of forces" behind the documental production. Also according to the author,

The photographers whose optical-chemical transformations produced the images were not alone in shaping the photographic record. Those who commissioned portraits and views as well as those who communicated them to a wider audience must be recognized [government, large and small businesses, etc.]. ... Those who wrote captions, compiled albums, or published portfolios all contributed to the action in which the photograph participated (p.47-48).

Currently other actors can be involved, depending on the more or less complex production environment responsible for the emergence of the document. The important thing is to investigate the role of the various agents involved in creating the photographic record and ask what the nature of the document is in relation to them.

Broadening the notion of author

Diplomatics offers an important notion in relation to the concept of author, seen as one of the people who concur in the existence of a document. It is established that the author is conceptually distinct from the act that gave rise to the record and the author of the document, who represent, respectively, the moment of action – linked to the facts as elements pertaining to what surrounds the document – and the moment of documentation – linked to documentation procedures responsible for incorporating the fact(s) to the record.

Identifying the actors involved in the production of the record and their relationship with it helps to identify the functional origins of the event-record relationship with the photographic image, namely the relationship defined by virtue of the manner in which the photographic device is perceived. In this sense, the photographer, usually defined as the author solely responsible for the record-making decision and preparation of the photographic image, and who in the historical studies that use photography as a source is of fundamental importance in the construction of meaning of the image, acquires a less decisive role in documental contextual studies. In the case of photographs, whose production takes place in an institutional context, the role of the author should be established.

In an institutional documental production, the operations conducted are the result of the choices of producers, bearing in mind the repertoire of norms that govern their production. The construction of the image becomes possible to the extent that the actors involved in this process have certain 'knowledge' relating to procedures inherent to the medium in which they are involved, which is far removed from the vision of the image as spontaneous production, governed only by a flash of inspiration. These procedures relate to the rules of composition that are incorporated as a set of principles or prohibitions – which may or may not be the norm for a communication system and for a specific institutional environment. Knowing these norms, however, does not necessarily mean that the producers of the records know reflectively, and in their entirety, the links between the different precepts of which they are comprised.¹⁶ In the production of a photographic record, for example, the construction of meaning of the images is related, from the outset, to the cast of operations defined within the photographic discursive universe and not to the pure intentionality of an empirical creative individual, namely the photographer. Despite the importance of defining the impression framed by his eye, the photographer is also an operator who avails himself of a set of technical and aesthetic possibilities in the photographic field – ways of framing, types of films, cameras and lenses, operations of shutter speeds and exposure, etc.

But we are also referring to the production of images that contribute to the composition of given communication spaces, and this condition places the individual creator of the image in an institutional activity, being subjected to another repertoire of norms that will give the document – the photograph – the character of the result of an institutional project of meaning. An integral part of a communication medium that contains heterogeneous material, the image features several formal and thematic components related to the other texts that border on it in the documental scenario in which it is conveyed (title, caption, written text, flyers, etc.). Moreover, the photographic record is circulated – and recognized – in a broad universe of communication that often transcends the limits of institutional origin and, in the process, several exchanges and influences occur.¹⁷

As stated by Schwartz (1995, p.47), “diplomats reminds us that the photographer is not the only ‘person concurring in the formation of the document’”, emphasizing the necessary relativization of the role attributed to the photographer as sole creator of the photograph and reminding us that his action is situated at a moment in a sequence of procedures that make the photographic image a record inserted in a specific functional context.

Another consideration can be raised on the question of photographic authorship in an analysis of archival records. Diplomatic theory states that for a document to exist it requires the concurrence of at least three persons who are integral parts of the action, namely the author, the audience and the writer of the document. When referring to the term 'persons,' diplomacy is also considering companies, corporations, entities, and not just individual people. While the author is acknowledged as the "the person(s) competent for the creation of the document, which is issued by him or by his command, or in his name" (Duranti, 1996, p.69), and very often the author of the document coincides with the author of the fact put into being or referred to by the document, and the addressee is the "person or persons to whom the document is directed" (p.70), the figure of the writer emerges as an interesting category for the photographic record. In diplomacy, the writer is the "person responsible for the tenor and articulation of the writing. ... [This person] may coincide with the author, or one of the authors of the document ... or be a delegate of the author with authority to write the document" (p.71). Making a reflection with respect to photography, it might be considered that the photographer acts in the role of that writer, which contributes to the manner of writing the document – in this case, the visual record. Photographers may or may not be the author of the document and, in the institutional documental production, may not represent the authority that decides to produce images for a given function, since they are often hired to be part of a line of documental production within which the creation of the photographic image is just one of the links. But the authority to write the document was effectively delegated to them as they have the technical knowledge and the ability to express such a record and know the manners of composition, and therefore play a unique function in the process. Although the 'writer' element has been thought of in relation to employees who had the authority to draft official textual documents, an interesting parallel can be drawn with the photographer as 'editor' of the photographic record, especially in a situation of institutional production of images.

Linking the notion of authorship to this web of responsibilities is a reflection of the understanding of the photographic record beyond its materiality as a work or product with an individualized form, i.e. the result of its connection to a single creator. The photograph, in the universe of routine and bureaucratic production of institutional documental output has its origin determined by the hands of the photographer, but this is a single timely moment in a chain of 'production' that contributes to defining the contours of photographic records. For this reason, in this investigation of the context of production, which includes the functional logic, it is important to seek out the parameters for defining authorship or the people involved in the production of the record, as recommended by diplomacy.

Principles of diplomacy as valid tools for the analysis of the photograph as an archival record

When dealing with textual documents, diplomacy bases its discourse on the juridical and legal system that underpins the more or less controlled norms for production and configuration of documents. This control of production, based on standardization, aims

to achieve the expected efficiency of a document – that of being able to impose itself due to qualities of authority, validity, authenticity and reliability. Diplomatic analysis attempts to measure these qualities present in the record judged to be valid and authentic based on the characteristics of the document per se, always considering the universe of meaning imposed by the juridical or legal standards under which the documents are generated. This does not mean believing that the document is objective and neutral per se, but assessing whether it is really what it claims to be within the parameters of its socio-juridical production and validity.

When attempting to apply this analysis to photographic records, it is necessary to leave this area of formalities and controls of meaning with validation rules typical of the juridical system responsible for legal documents, to move into a scenario marked by differentiated forms of production that are less standardized, but not for this reason are they any less routine and shared.

With all these points of divergence highlighted, why should the diplomatic approach be considered? Because it makes it possible to question the photograph from the standpoint of the “inventory of differences,” and develop a line of thought appropriate for the situation of photographic records. Its emphasis on analysis based on the record makes it possible to problematize photographs beyond their factual dimension and content, shifting the emphasis to their materiality as a record (trace, hint, reflex of a given action of documentation, which has a purpose and is located in a specific time and context). The shift of focus from content analysis towards documental analysis makes it mandatory to see that, for photographic records, it is imperative to transcend the record and establish its functional context as a condition for understanding the documental form. The search for functional context, which is traditional for the treatment of textual documents, is most necessary for photographs which, as typically occurs in the archival area, were treated subject to different rules.

By emphasizing the complex of practices and representations embedded in documental forms and the need to understand them, diplomatics establishes the presence of this dynamic at a theoretical level in the production of all records, considering the differences in documental media. All these movements begin to converge on the way in which photographs in archives are generally considered. Interpretation of the image directly for its factual value, merely for its informational content, is beginning to be regarded as incapable of attributing the image with its evidential value of the facts and acts that gave rise to it, namely its archival bond. For the archival field, whose vocation is the handling of documents in their most varied media, it becomes important to problematize its objects and its methods. This can be done with the assistance of the critical tools of diplomatics.

NOTES

* This article is a modified version of the second chapter (“A fotografia como documento de arquivo”) of my doctoral dissertation (Lacerda, 2008).

¹ Starting in the 1980s, photographic archives became the object of relatively few studies in archival science. Articles have been found exploring aspects of the technical treatment of this type of record at

institutes that preserve such holdings in the main journals presenting academic and methodological production from this field of activities in Brazil, top among these being *Arquivo & Administração*, published by the Brazilian Association of Archivists (Associação dos Arquivistas Brasileiros), and *Acervo*, published by the National Archives (Arquivo Nacional). There are likewise some manuals available on the technical procedures used in organizing photographic records; noteworthy among these are *Metodologia de organização de arquivos pessoais: a experiência do CPDOC* (CPDOC, 1998), *Manual para catalogação de documentos fotográficos* (Ibac et al., 1992), and *Como tratar coleções de fotografias* (Carvalho, Filippi, Lima, 2000). A bibliographic review and qualitative analysis of articles produced on this topic in recent years falls outside the scope of this article. It can nevertheless be affirmed that there have been few systematic studies either in Brazil or abroad that address the topic while shining a theoretical light on the procedures adopted in regards to archival photographs.

² In this and other citations of texts from non-English languages, a free translation has been provided.

³ See the series of articles by Luciana Duranti originally published in *Archivaria*, the journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, and later put out in book form (Duranti, 1996).

⁴ In this regard diplomatics is about the relation between a record and its legal and administrative context. As will be seen, many obstacles present themselves to the strict application of diplomatics to the issue of photographic records, one of them being to consider a legal framework that has etched a verifiable procedure in photographic records. But dialogue with some of their assumptions in an application geared to the reality of documental photographic production can have a good chance of success in finding connections between these documents and the administrative context of production from which they originated.

⁵ For an overview of the uses of visual sources in areas like history, sociology, and anthropology, see Meneses, 2003.

⁶ Although the importance of diplomatics is known for contemporary archival practice and theory, no attempt is made in this work to undertake an analysis of diplomatic theory per se, but examine it, from points considered relevant for in-depth study of the theme of the archival nature of photographic records.

⁷ An instigating approach regarding the limited possibilities of intervention of the operator of the machine in the structure of the photographic device is found in Flusser, 2002.

⁸ It is important to stress that the photograph has not duly established these definitions and the word 'genre' is applied to a whole gamut of classifications often built around a certain thematic constancy or a certain treatment given to specific photographic themes. Indeed, the problem of classification of genres of discourse is the difficulty of establishing stable typologies of discourse to the variety of criteria that can be considered. In this respect, see Maingueneau, 2000, p.143.

⁹ Photographic emulsion is the layer of gelatin overlaid on paper or photographic film in which silver halides are to be found, constituting a surface that can be imprinted by light, namely that part of the photographic record where the image is located, as opposed to the reverse side.

¹⁰ Regarding the procedure of documental creation and its implications for the concept of authenticity of documents, see Duranti, 1995, p.5-10.

¹¹ Lopez attempts to apply concepts that express the characteristic documental elements of photographic records, despite acknowledging the difficulty of using some of them, such as that of species.

¹² Documental species is the "configuration that a document assumes according to the disposition and nature of the information contained therein," while the documental type refers to the "configuration that a documental species assumes according to the activity that generated it" (Camargo, Bellotto, 1996).

¹³ A broad concept of the term 'document,' used by all areas of documental treatment and that includes this description, is that which refers to the document as any information recorded in a given medium.

¹⁴ Although representing different approaches to the photographic image, an approximation is made between the affirmation on the documental value of the photographic image linked to its nature as an indexical sign versus the value of the documental photographic image linked to the meanings from the functional context, with the line of reasoning developed by Schaeffer regarding a distinction between photographic information (as an indexical type and defined as a receptive fact) and photographic message (defined by the issuer and is not transmitted by the image itself, but is configured as an intentional act of communication issued and directed to a recipient). See Schaeffer, 1990, p.56-64.

¹⁵ The word 'biography' is used here with the meaning attributed by Willumson (2004, p.62-80), i.e. that photographs are marked by their trajectory as objects in an institutional structure, an aspect often not

valued in the organizational spaces represented by custodial institutions such as museums and libraries. In this sense, marks on the photographic object point to the history of their forms of presentation and the obligations contained in the choices of such display devices. See also Edwards, Hart, 2004, p.1-15.

¹⁶ An analysis that addresses the production process specifically devoted to press photography, comparing some differences in norms relating to its status among French newspapers, for example, is found in Boltanski, 1965, p.173-198.

¹⁷ There is no intention to claim that in obtaining an image there is no room for happenstance or intuition of the individual creator. The intention is to point to a set of rules – some explicit and others not – that on a daily basis impose limits on the action of the empirical author in an institutional situation of image production.

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