

Writers' Archives in Latin America: Something More Than “a Mass of Typewriting”

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In 1897, the theater critic and lawyer Bram Stoker published *Dracula*, a novel that, in addition to pointing out the lust of the old to take over youth and the arrival of evil in the modern city through the real estate business —Count Dracula is a foreigner who buys a medieval property in the city outskirts but has maps of London in his library—, is an exhaustive repertoire of the modes of writing of the waning century. The novel is devoid of an omniscient narrator and can be read as an exhibition of written documents: Harker's writes his diary in shorthand in order to elude the Count's gaze and reach Mina, who can decipher his writing, while Doctor Seward records his diary on a phonograph. The characters communicate by letter and telegram. Mina is a good typist and has a portable typewriter where she copies documents, summarizes the facts in chronological order and produces carbon copies to share information more efficiently while keeping a diary where she pastes newspaper articles. This novel dramatizes the control of bodies and posits writing as the force that arranges the facts and restores a certain order. As Friederich Kittler (1999) notes, what clarifies the novel's intrigue is the passage to writing: “only the typed transcription of all cylinders, recommended as early as 1890 by Dr. Blodgett, by a certain Mina Harker will reveal to him and all the others hunting Dracula that the Count himself was behind Renfield's schizophrenic nonsense” (87). Once the patriarchal order is restored, with Mina becoming a sweet mother, the novel ends in the contemplation of those drafts; that is, it ends just before the publication of the book we have just read:

I took the papers from the safe where they had been ever since our return so long ago. We were struck with the fact, that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of typewriting, except the later note-books of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum. (Stoker: 378)

“Nothing but a mass of typewriting” is a powerful image that could depict many

¹ Author's note: Due to the time stipulated for the oral presentation, some parts of the text marked in gray will not be read.

archives of twentieth-century writers, to which some laptops could be undoubtedly added. Far from constituting evidentiary documents, these papers only testify to the struggle to dominate meaning and seek to articulate difference. As in the novel, these working documents remain even once they have fulfilled their “communicative function”, and by so doing, they preserve something of the writer’s aura. In the twentieth century, the materiality remains almost the same as in Dracula’s time, although handwriting becomes sloppier as faster writing instruments are introduced. The typewriter retains its place despite the incipient introduction of electric machines, until computers appear and radically change everything. But before that, we find in literary archives a distinctive materiality that can be defined as the hallmark of the last quarter of the twentieth century: photocopies. These plebeian bodies of the archive locate themselves on the borderline between writing and its image and pose several analytical problems. One can even say that they are not even a body but a surrogate, their double. Of the many archives that still remain closed or that should be rescued because they are at risk, I can speak of my work in the creation, digitization and organization of Manuel Puig’s archive, an Argentine writer who wrote novels, screenplays, chronicles and plays that stage non-hegemonic bodies and desires, and who left after his death “a mass of typewriting”. Photocopies proliferate in this archive.

1. The Bodies of an Archive

The archive of Manuel Puig’s manuscripts (1932-1990) is digitized and openly accessible at the ARCAS site of the Universidad Nacional de La Plata (<http://arcas.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/arcas/portada/colecciones/manuel-puig>). It consists of his writing notes, dating from 1956 (when he left Buenos Aires for Italy to study film direction at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome) until his death in Mexico in 1990. This time span turns this archive into a testimony not only of the work of a remarkable artist, but also of the diversity of writing practices of a South American writer who made “errance” his way of life and navigated the second half of the twentieth century on the waters between tourism, exile and migration (Goldchluk, 2005). Puig’s decision to keep his working papers, his marginal notes and his unfinished ideas, speaks of a particular relationship with writing that bypasses a mere communicative purpose, that is to say, that he maintained a relationship with his drafts that goes beyond their supposedly preparatory function. Hence, these papers continue to speak to us, not only because they allow us to see what Puig chose to publish, but

mainly because they let us delve into what he discarded, those traces that acquire new meanings in the present.

Puig wrote all his novels, screenplays and plays on a portable Olivetti purchased in London in 1958. Almost all the sheets are typed on the back of already used paper as an expression of a recycling economy corresponding to times before the massive use of personal computers and home printers, which in turn had the effect of putting into circulation an unimaginable amount of paper. These circumstances reinforce the documentary value of the archive, as the documents it contains do not speak only through the written signs, but also through the very materiality of their supports, whether they are hotel sheets, flight schedules, magazine clippings, Soviet news agency cables, originals manuscripts of other writers or, from 1974 onwards, photocopies. We can say that this archive was born when Puig left Buenos Aires on a ship, from where he began to write letters, or we can think that it was born in 1990, when, upon the death of the writer, his brother made the decision to preserve what he found on Puig's desk and keep it as a single body, until the digital body was later added.

All the digitization was done by the family, starting in 1998. It was done in an artisanal manner and in parallel with the organization and exhaustive description of the documents, carried out by me, according to international archival standards. The initial impulse was given by the preparation of a critical genetic edition of *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) for the Archivos Collection, whose editorial scope combines the publishing of rigorous scientific editions with the desire to disseminate fundamental Latin American literary works of the 20th century.

Regarding *El beso de la mujer araña*, a novel that has a length of 243 pages in a paperback edition, we can say that its preparatory documents add up to 1973 pages, of which 1688 were digitized, that is to say that 249 were not scanned. Were they not scanned because censorship reasons? No. Just because they are photocopies. The documents of this novel, written between the end of 1973 and the beginning of 1976, are full of photocopies, some of which bear annotations that were digitized, and others that do not contain anything different from their originals, and that is why they were preserved but not scanned. On the other hand, there are many more scans than there are paper documents, but not twice as many: this is due to the fact that only the verses

containing inscriptions were digitized... and here is where extractivism makes its entrance.

2. How does a Writer's Archive Work?

Contrary to what happens with the works of visual artists, which increase in value after their death due to the certainty that their production will not continue, the books of a deceased author, after a short commemorative moment, decrease in value. The literary market feeds on novelties. The classics are those books that continue to be published they belong to the public domain. For the family of a deceased writer, beyond the economic benefit, what vanishes after the author's death is the recognition of the work, which is no longer mentioned in magazines and hence the author's already published books do not appear on the most visible bookshelves of bookstores, but go to the warehouse instead, unless posthumous publications appear.

The first way in which the archive is exploited is by publishing some books post mortem. In some cases, those were the books that the writer was preparing to publish, and in other cases, there is simply no reason not to publish them. This is the case of the novels and other posthumous texts of Julio Cortázar or the scripts, plays and plots of Manuel Puig that were not published during his lifetime. When I am asked what should be published, my answer is that the question is poorly formulated. It is not a question of what should be made known (the equivalent of asking what should be hidden), but rather, of how to do it. The market produces its readers by creating conditions of readability, and that is why unfinished scripts are being released now, something that was impossible a century ago. However, editing books requires selecting work that leaves behind those documents preserved by the archive: that which cannot be found in bookstores, together with that which can be found, that is available in the webpage of the Universidad de La Plata, under the heading "working papers".

Considered from the experience of someone who studies the archives of Latin American writers, the publication of working papers or unpublished texts cannot be reduced to a question of extractivism. One has to take into account that this is at the same time a gesture of safeguarding, of reconstructing an archive and a way of making it known and available. A completely different thing is going to the archive in order to find an unpublished novel. Since Kafka's death, every researcher who approaches a writer's archive expecting to find some version of *The Trial* is really disappointed because what

can be found is only what one already knew but with imperfections, abandonments, gaps and failed expressions. In other words, those who go to the archive looking for novelties only find what they already knew. Reading the archive as one reads a published but incomplete book is to strip it of all singularity, to subtract the body of the archive in order to read only the already known signs. Returning to the Count Dracula's story, we can now understand that what we read is not that "mass of typewriting" but the extraction of that story by the real vampire who signed the book. It is not so much a matter of denouncing "the fictitious character of the archive that constructs history" (Alarcón, 2021: 73)², but of pointing out the operation of emptying the body of an archive that implies extracting the signs that contribute to consolidate a meaning that might restore a certain order.

Digitization is a form of safeguarding, but how can it be done without an allocated budget? And I am addressing here the personal archive of one of the major Argentine writers, but there are thousands of other Latin American literary archives that are at risk or that will be lost due to institutional neglect.³ So, for digitizing Puig's papers first we scanned only the recto of each page, unless we detected that Puig himself had continued writing on the verso, but we quickly began to perceive that the advertisement or the movie program he used to write on was in dialogue with his handwriting on the other side of the page, which was not only acting as a support, but as something linked to the writing act itself (that is, the author had held that program or advertisement in his hands, he had most probably read it and kept it, etc.) and all this provoked a coexistence of different times and logics in the same page that years later we recognized as part of the constitutive anachronism of art⁴.

²Alarcón (2021) analiza la novela de Norberto José Olivari, en *Un vampiro en Maracaibo* (2009), que hace evidente la contradicción entre la lógica narrativa de *Drácula* y la esperable confusión y desacuerdos de estilo que tendrían los documentos presuntamente hallados, convirtiendo este desacuerdo en clave de su parodia.

³Nunca hubo una subvención destinada a digitalizar ese archivo. Sin embargo, al ser docente de la Facultad de Humanidades de la Universidad Nacional de La Plata, me era dado utilizar horas de investigación en el viaje de La Plata a Buenos Aires para ordenar, clasificar y comentar el archivo. Cada año formó parte de mis informes de investigación, y promovió el desarrollo de Proyectos de Investigación y Desarrollo (PID) alrededor de los cuales se congregó un grupo interdisciplinario con el que fuimos desarrollando herramientas metodológicas y pensamiento. No sólo trabajamos con "nuestros" archivos (además de Puig, Mario Bellatin, Niní Marshall, Horacio Quiroga, Arturo Carrera, Andrés Caicedo, Edgardo Vigo, por nombrar algunos de los que pasaron por el equipo) sino que asesoramos a muchos más. Paralelamente, Mara Puig se hizo cargo de la digitalización de los papeles de su tío, con la colaboración inestimable de Pedro Gergho.

This showed, as I said before, that far from disembodiment the archive, digitization endowed it with a second body that had its own attributes (Calvente and Calvente, 2018). Having remote access to the images of an archive implies a fundamental democratization movement, but at the same time it is necessary to release information that includes the possibility of accessing the archive that generated its digital double and, most especially, a description of the organizational criteria and exhibition conditions (Gómez-Moya, 2011). Otherwise, the physical archive vanishes as if the images were replacing it instead of being pointing at it and the danger that lurks in the dematerialization of writing becomes twofold: not only does it reduce the manuscripts to a pure transportable semiosis without residue, but it also implies a privatization of reading based on the critical construction of a narrative that is presented as natural. Calvente and Calvente (2018), warn that "For centuries reading practices have been marked by the paradigm of linearity, configured by the codex; sequential reading, circumscribed to the perception of a successive temporality", and that "the access of materials on the web does not mean that they are seen, that they are looked at from a reading practice different from the canonical one, which is a look that finds what it seeks" (s/p). The digital body of the archive is there, accessible, but to make it is instead a poetic intervention analogous to the one made in the Album Puig (Rasic, 2017), which starts from the images to build a new printed object that turns the gaze on the material. It is in the interference of the traditional reading caused by these archives where the new can emerge, the digitization of documents democratizes the possibility of such reading, but does not guarantee it. The digital body of the archive is there, but giving real visibility to it implies on the part of the researchers a poetic intervention analogous to

⁴El tiempo del archivo es, en sí mismo, anacrónico. Al ser regido por "la lógica retrospectiva del futuro anterior" (Derrida, 1997: 17), supone en sí mismo la convivencia de dos "tiempos heterogéneos" (Didi-Huberman, 2011: 107) en los cuales origen y comienzo se debaten. Esta multitemporalidad es experimentada cuando realizamos el trabajo de transcripción y ordenamiento cronológico de los documentos. Con frecuencia, ese ordenamiento necesario para la lectura es apenas una hipótesis orientadora, y la determinación de las diferentes campañas de lectura y reescritura hacen ver que el camino trazado es uno entre otros posibles. La mejor cura contra la idea de un orden cronológico es la transcripción detallada de un capítulo de novela, que –si está hecha a conciencia– redundará en un mapa de la escritura más que en un relato ordenado de ese proceso. En otra dimensión, el tiempo del archivo abre el tiempo aparentemente homogéneo de una obra publicada en determinado año, bajo tales circunstancias históricas. "Leer desde el archivo, tener al archivo como política de lectura, no implica siempre o únicamente buscar manuscritos para ver de dónde salió una ocurrencia, sino –como señalamos– pensar en las relaciones de esa consignación como afectaciones imprevisibles, y al mismo tiempo negarnos a resignar en un recorte a priori qué retazos entran en la obra, o realizar clasificaciones cronológicas tales como 'obras de tal o cual período', que son desmentidos permanentemente por la insistencia de presencias que surgen únicamente de la lectura del archivo del modo como podamos llegar a leerlo durante nuestro trabajo" (Goldchluk y Stedile Luna, 2012).

that carried out in the *Album Puig* project (Rasic, 2017), which is based on a visual reorganization of the images of Puig's manuscripts, offering a new and non-linear reading of the material. So, in short, the digitization of documents democratizes the possibility of reading literary archives, but it does not guarantee it.

3. The Photocopy and The Desire for a Writing Without Body

The photocopy has a public and a private history. The first xerographic copy was made in 1939; in 1959 the first Xerox machine was installed in an office; and by 1961 the machine had become a giant, indispensable and very expensive piece of furniture (<https://www.excelcopiers.com.ar/xerox-914/>), as the series *Mad Men* recently reminded us in the episode that opens the second season. However, this technology remained strictly in the realm of the office until the early 1970s. Given that Manuel Puig traveled frequently to New York between 1973 and 1976, I consider his archive to be symptomatic of this passage of the photocopy from the world of business to the realm of writing and education.⁵

The first photocopies that appear in Puig's archive date, most probably, from 1973, when he was writing his novel *The Buenos Aires Affair*. In a set of 1962 documents, there are several carbon copies and 17 photocopies, nine belonging to a medicine book published in Buenos Aires, and eight to a corrected chapter. These copies are made with a thicker paper than the one used for writing and correspond to the "office use" of the photocopy that I was making reference to before. It is no coincidence that the appearance of these copies is contemporary to the writing of *The Buenos Aires Affair*, a novel in which Puig tests all kinds of "technologies of the word" (Canala, 2020) and experiments also with photocopies: one cannot read otherwise the consultation in

⁵El dato es relevante ya que la difusión de la tecnología y su democratización no corrió de manera pareja en el norte y el sur del continente americano. James Gleick (2012) señala la década de 1950 como el nacimiento de la máquina fotocopidora, reemplazada en la difusión de cadenas de mensajes por el correo electrónico alrededor de 1995; sin embargo, es una vez más el cine norteamericano quien nos brinda imágenes de este traspaso. Es icónica en este sentido la escena de *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996) en la que el protagonista, después de redactar su "revaluación de propósitos" acude a un *copy shop* de 24h a fin de obtener duplicados para toda la oficina. Bajo la mirada latinoamericana, el tamaño y funcionamiento de ese negocio supera en mucho la experiencia local, aún 20 años después del estallido de las fotocopadoras. Dos años más tarde, se estrena *Tienes un e-mail* (Nora Ephron, 1998), remake de *The Shop Around the Corner/ El bazar de las sorpresas* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1940) que testimonia el nacimiento de una nueva forma de comunicación junto con el de las cadenas de expendio de libros. En la película de Ephron, los e-mails en Nueva York reemplazan las cartas intercambiadas en Budapest de la película de Lubitsch. De ese modo, la desmaterialización de las cartas se conecta con el peligro de la desaparición del libro ligado a su mercantilización. Por otro lado, el negocio de Mr. Matuschek representa un estado del capitalismo que se imaginaba "humano" y claramente patriarcal, sobre el que Lubitsch ensaya su habitual ironía; pero en la segunda película, el capital ha perdido el rostro.

Buenos Aires of a book published in Buenos Aires through photocopies that are difficult and expensive to get. On the other hand, their coexistence with carbon copies indicates that this is an experiment that refers to the usual method of duplicating writing, an artisanal method that maintains a direct relationship with the original and that has been used since the 19th century. The carbon copy is the result of the same stroke that the typewriter type imprints on the first sheet of paper, which has repercussions on a second and sometimes even on a third sheet. The photocopy, on the other hand, originated on the already printed sheet and allowed for the first time the possibility of making copies of copies, generating an uncontrolled proliferation of written documents.

After 1974, photocopies proliferated, with or without corrections, and became a means of circulation of both manuscripts and banned books, or simply of expensive books (a form of segmentation of the readership). As is always the case with technologies, there is a plebeian use that becomes uncontrollable and escapes punitive legislation. This is inevitable, as Derrida (2013 [1995]: 222) points out, since "the structure of the archive is such that we cannot in fact protect it because it is exposed immediately". But the photocopy was the beginning of something that acquired monstrous proportions now with the emergence of born-digital documents. For Gago and Mezzarda (2015), the decoupling of the dollar from the gold standard that occurred in 1971 can and should be connected to the military coup against Salvador Allende in Chile that led, in 1973, to a "series of dictatorships and financial reforms that reshaped the continent" (39). Together with the proliferation of banknotes and other papers that no longer correspond to any "original", this moment inaugurates a proliferation of information that bypassed commercial offices and entered personal archives: it is no longer a matter of anyone being able to print, but of a duplication of the duplicated. A parallel trade, of popular economy, which includes photocopy fairs and the sale of copied books and notes among students, leads to a series that at some point also crosses public life and installs the image itself as merchandise. Facebook, for instance, was born in the heart of a student community and became the largest "harvester" of data, duly organized, moreover, by the participants themselves.

What we see in photocopies, replicated in digital copies as well, and which makes a qualitative leap in digital writing, is the erasure of the body of writing in favor of a greater and more oiled circulation of the semantic chain it contains, which also favors big data operations. To stay in the realm of digitized copies, text recognition software

(OCR) works better when there is less "noise" in the image. With this in mind we can analyze "data mining" as well as "data harvesting", knowing that metaphors are not always such. These constructions say precisely what they are saying: mining is practiced in order to obtain a benefit that does not take into account the environment from which it is obtained nor the function that this environment previously had. What remains of the archive, that "mass of typewriting", goes to institutions in the North that buy them to accumulate cultural capital, with the project of producing papers that reproduce the institutional order given to those archives, starting with the classification of "Latin American literature" or "Spanish department" that confines them to cultural data and expression of minorities, conveniently separated from the production of ideas. But the dispossession of the archive begins before this physical transfer, with the keywords that organize our cultural goods according to a logic of repetition without difference, that is to say, a logic of homogenization of differences.

One of the challenges then is to build tools for the classification and description of these impure archives, made of clippings, copies of copies, and also of originals, which do not fit completely into the existing biblionomic criteria. These tools, which can only come into being from those who need them, will serve for South-South and also South-North exchange, and will be able to function as signals that allow us to show and read outside efficiency paradigms, following the slow time of philology.⁶

Photocopies, then, as the first link in a chain that wants to convert everything into classifiable and retrievable units of information (and to do so without noise, without residue), but also, the photocopy as a generator of plebeian archives, of bodies that resist, of a presence that circulates along other paths. The presence of photocopies can be seen both in the archives of writers, who duplicate their production in order to better share it, to write over it, to modify and recopy it in typewriter times, and in the archives of intellectuals who possess a library, manuscripts and photocopies of other people's books. For an institution that receives an inheritance of papers, what place should this area of a writer's collection, characteristic of a part of the 20th century, occupy? Similarly, there are plenty of photocopies among the miscellaneous documents housed in the archive of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Bossié, 2013: 150).

⁶ En este sentido es necesario realizar una relectura de las prácticas que se llevan adelante en las bibliotecas, aportando desde la archivología la amplitud necesaria para visibilizar y a la vez valorizar los documentos de archivo albergados en ellas. Algunos avances en este sentido se muestran en Giménez (2013); Bossié, Calvente y Pené (2013) y Pené (2016).

In Latin America, where the ban on photocopying books was not enforced in the same way as in central countries, the same material became the possibility of archiving. Far from functioning as ephemeral reproductions, photocopied copies occupy a space similar to that of books and remain in the archives of writers as testimony both of their research and of unexpected readings or writing support. Photocopies abound and with them the paper that sustains them and that, like the newspaper clipping in Mina Harper's diary, remains beyond its programmed obsolescence.

As a plebeian body, the photocopy became the founding mark of Eloísa Cartonera, a publishing project that was born out of the Argentine crisis of 2001 and that expanded throughout Latin America. An unexpected combination of recovered cardboard, photocopies and high culture, this publishing project functions through writers and translators' donations of their copyright, in order to produce books that the "cartoneros" (i.e., people who collect and sell paper products and other recyclables in order to survive) crafted. As in any popular economy project, the livelihood also favors an unexpected symbolic circulation that can be read in the presentation of the project: "Ours are books of Latin American literature by the most beautiful authors we have known in our lives as workers and readers, and we are very happy for this!". In the educational field, photocopies were replaced by PDFs, and Vera Cartonera (Universidad del Litoral, Santa Fe, Arg.) honors that genealogy: this project makes books with cardboard covers with a stamp that is printed by hand on each copy and releases them in PDF format at the same time of publication.⁷

Popular books are a way to build a Latin American archive and to position collaborative and artisanal work as a sustainable possibility. In our context, it will not be with data mining that we will build archives that open up other ways of thinking, but with a patient work of localization and digitization that involves a network of researchers⁸. Rather than harvesting with powerful machinery, archival work should approach the work of the gleaners in Millet's painting taken up by Agnès Varda, in *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, as proposed by Hafter and Stedile Luna (2016), who take up the image and

⁷“El nombre de la editorial tiene una justificación que incluye varios sentidos: la continuidad con la práctica de las editoriales cartoneras de elegir un nombre de mujer; la alusión al lugar de producción, es decir, nuestra ciudad, Santa Fe de la Vera Cruz; la referencia a las orillas que también signan nuestro habitar dado que nuestra ciudad está rodeada por ríos; la insinuación de cierto modo de ver el mundo que fantasea con alguna pretensión de “verdad” y el envío a la planta de nombre científico *Vicia-sepium*, comúnmente llamada “vera”. Este último sentido se recoge en el diseño del sello creado para imprimir de modo manual en el interior y en el exterior de cada libro”. En:

<https://www.fhuc.unl.edu.ar/veracartonera/quienes-somos/>

point out that "every mode of harvesting is also confronted with legislation" (s/p). The recollection of what is out of the production-consumption chain, of what is left, the legislation that contemplates those actions or void of law, the involvement of the gleaner who builds an intersubjective memory and to start again, the dispersion of that memory for re-appropriations. This is the image I have chosen to think about archives in Latin America outside of extractivist policies and in pursuit of building other ways, also symbolic, of existence.

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⁸Con estos principios construimos el sitio Orbescrito: "Se trata de un proyecto a la vez colaborativo e institucional, que reúne investigadores de las áreas de literatura argentina, latinoamericana y comparada, así como de historia de la lengua, archivística, bibliotecología e informática, e involucra además a varios especialistas de crítica genética. Al mismo tiempo, propicia la participación comunitaria a través de la integración de entidades intermedias (como bibliotecas, no sólo universitarias sino también populares y fundaciones) y se presenta como un espacio hospitalario para legatarios de manuscritos y colaboradores espontáneos que pueden participar como corresponsales para la constitución de la misma cartografía". <http://orbescrito.fahce.unlp.edu.ar/comoColaborar>

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