Abstract:
This article is the first wide-ranging exploration of the emerging field of Digital Literary Studies and Digital Humanities in Mexican academia and cultural institutions. Divided into three sections, it first surveys matters regarding the digital archive in general, examining the impact of the media on the institutional and cultural significance of archives, their scope and accessibility, the complexities of their preservation and, crucially, the scholarship produced in and around them. The second section explores how digital archives of both digitized materials and born-digital ones have intersected with the origin and consolidation of the Digital Humanities in the US, underscoring the way these intersections have fostered the development of suitable methodologies and vocabularies to examine digitized and born-digital cultural products. The third section explores a handful of Mexican projects developed in the last few years, and proposes that Mexican digital literary scholarship is unique in its emphasis on decolonial perspectives, community building and recovery, education and training, and new creative expressions.

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In her lyric discussion of historical archives, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, Carolyn Steedman includes a short passage in which she draws a suggestive parallel between
historiography and magical realism—a form of writing “in which a girl flies, a mountain moves, the clocks run backward, and where … the dead walk among the living” (150). Steedman’s invocation of Jules Michelet’s mythical archival dream of “making the dead walk and talk” is a compelling starting point to think about what makes a digital literary archive, the scholarly work demanded and facilitated by them, their creation, scope, and ultimately, their cultural relevance. If making the dead walk and talk was the original dream of working on physical archives, what are the aspirations of digital archives that have originated from the media shift? What dreams are currently projected onto digital (literary) archives and the (digital) scholarship carried out on their bases?

The topic of archives, and specifically, digital archives, has produced no shortage of scholarship. As the matter at hand is much broader than can be covered in an article, my goal in the following pages is humble. I seek to offer an overview of a few salient considerations regarding archives in the digital age and a brief discussion of the reciprocal impact that digital (literary) archives and Digital Humanities have had on each other (largely in the US, the context from which I write). This will allow me, in the second part of the article, to examine a handful of examples of digital literary projects produced in Mexico. As such, this article constitutes a first attempt to map the incipient field of digital literary studies in the country.

Digital Archives: Renegotiations of a Field

The first thing to be considered when discussing digital archives is the decidedly indistinct terminology I hint at in my title. “Digital archive” simultaneously refers to the online databases, libraries, collections, repositories, and archives of physical museums, archives, libraries, and other collections both private and public. Furthermore, digital archive can also mean a collection
of digitized materials, as well as a collection of born-digital ones. Ultimately, digital archive may refer to digital humanities projects like collections of digital editions or curated selections of materials.

The term (digital) archive, and along with it the idea of (digital) archive, has expanded to contain collections of a wide range of digital files made available online, the storage and infrastructural undertakings meant to make them accessible and legible, and the preservation efforts aimed at maintaining the cultural record of the digital age. For Marlene Manoff, the digital shift has eroded the distinctions between materials collected in digital archives—all of them a digital file of a given format. “As libraries, museums, and archives increasingly make their materials available online in formats that include sound, images, and multimedia, as well as text, it no longer makes sense to distinguish them on the basis of the objects they collect” ("Theories" 10). We may say, following Manoff, that “digital archive” has become a metaphor for many types of collections, surpassing distinctions of discipline, various kinds of material holdings, and even the defined role of the physical buildings where said materials are stored either as digital files or as physical artifacts.

Even without going as far as thinking about the archive in Foucauldian terms as an all-encompassing system of discursivity, the figure or metaphor of the archive in the digital realm is much broader and more capacious than the cultural institution from which it borrows its name. The expansiveness of the archive is also the subject of Kenneth Price’s “Edition, Project, Database, Archive, Thematic Research Collection: What's in a Name?” For him, “archive in a digital context has come to suggest something that blends features of editing and archiving” (par. 22)—a short set of skills that can be further complemented with curating, design, outreach, and accessibility. Nevertheless, because, archive has not totally shed its longstanding cultural
associations as it simultaneously gains new ones, what makes a digital archive or who uses it is problematic to pin down. Digital libraries are not the only site of literary scholarship, not even special collections ones. Digital archives are hardly the sole realm of action for historians. As a metaphoric term, we might be witnessing the rise of “archive” as a wildcard name for collections where documents, historical records, ephemera, still and moving images, and books somehow unfasten their material and disciplinary properties to become digital surrogates of physical artifacts subject to machine processing and analysis. Given this context, throughout this article, I will use digital archive to refer to digital collections that may have been termed either explicitly as an archive or, as it often happens, as a library, a database, a catalogue, or a project.

The metaphorical use of the archive goes beyond its usage by libraries, museums, and archives making digital surrogates of their holdings. Technological changes have influenced the very use of the term. In contrast to the work of safeguarding unique physical materials for posterity, Matthew Kirschenbaum offers a useful and succinct catalogue of the technological uses of the verb “to archive”:

The verb form of archive is largely a twentieth-century construction, due in no small measure to the influence of computers and information technology. To archive in the realm of computation originally meant to take something offline, to relegate it to media which are not accessible or indexical via random access storage. It has come to do double duty with the act of copying, so archiving is coterminous with duplication and redundancy. In the arena of digital networking, an archive connotes a mirror or reflector site, emulating content at remote hosts to reduce the physical distance information packets have to travel. In order to function as a reliable element of network architecture, however, the content at each archive site must be guaranteed as identical. (par. 11)
This may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about digital archives. Neither are the archives of digital materials found on social media and the web at large.

Archives of digital surrogates of the holdings of existing physical libraries, museums, or archives are a more familiar trope, and one whose cultural importance and scholarly usefulness is uncontested. In contrast, web archives might not seem immediately pertinent vis-à-vis official records and traditionally archived materials in institutions such as the Archivo General de la Nación, the Biblioteca Nacional de México, or the Archivo de Indias. Along with copies of files and social media platform publications, emails, files on desktops and laptops, browsing history, application data, and so on are increasingly becoming the “papers” of public figures, authors, and artists. They are “the equivalent of the unofficial diaries and private records that have been so important in the past to historical understanding apart from official records” (Blouin and Rosenberg 190). Their importance, even more, lies in the scale at which these records are produced—not just the output of public figures, but everyone with an online presence. Whether these data are collected and used for marketing, surveillance, literary studies, journalism, or any other kind of purpose, the scale of their production is extraordinary. A token of this explosion is presented by Blouin and Rosenberg: “in the U.S. National Archives, electronic holdings have grown over 100 times faster than holdings on paper” (204). Although not the rule yet, in time, these new “papers” will constitute the matter of biography writing, manuscript and edition studies, and documentary reconstruction. Due to their volume, abundance, and fragile materiality, digital “papers” are likely to become a gold mine or a black hole of philological and biographical research. Indisputably, digital archives will be complementary to physical and digitized ones.
The growth in digital archives has led archives professionals to question the means of achieving core principles like provenance, assessment, order, and the very materiality and value of primary records. For example, the Library of Congress in the US archived terabytes of data from Twitter from 2010 until 2017 – when the endeavor was announced to shift its attention to “events such as elections, or themes of ongoing national interest, e.g. public policy.” (Library of Congress 1). The inflection point when a great deal of our everyday activities happens, either on the surface or on the deep web, has made the life of everyone subject to archiving—an issue that begs the question of what should be archived and for what purposes. On the occasion of the acquisition of the Twitter archive, James H. Billington—then the Librarian of Congress—argued that archives like the Twitter one have a monumental potential "for research into our contemporary way of life"; and furthermore, provide “detailed evidence about how technology based social networks form and evolve over time” (Raymond par. 3). In addition to offering a look at social movements like los Indignados, Black Lives Matter, and the Arab Spring, in literary studies, an archive like Twitter’s will indeed safeguard literary specimens like Twitter bots, micronarratives, and netprovs, as well as the literary debates that have unfolded in the last few years on this platform. It remains unclear how the newly announced decision will affect the collection of Twitter literary works past December 31, 2017. With this scenario, “one can only think that at some point, scholarship and scholarly discourse may well pass [a] ‘threshold of adequacy’ where digital resources will eclipse paper-based resources as an adequate basis of historical and other kinds of authority” (Blouin and Rosenberg 204). Or as Kirschenbaum puts it, records such as “electronic texts, files, feeds, and transmissions of all sorts are also now, indisputably, primary records” (par. 4). Primary records in literary studies nowadays are not
synonymous with physical records. And similarly, digital archives are not synonymous with
digitized materials collections.

In spite of their potential and growing relevance, one must not fall prey to
hyperoptimistic takes on digital archives. Like their analogue counterparts, digital archives
impose forms of discursive authority, shape their reading and navigation, grant access to their
holdings and obfuscate their deficiencies, give some rein to peruse them freely, but ultimately
shape the knowledge that can be extracted out of them. The limitations imposed by digital
archives is perhaps one of the most suggestive areas of inquiry, whether we refer to archives of
digitized or born-digital materials. Two of the basic premises of archive studies: that archives are
structures of power and authority as Derrida proposed them, and that archives are systems of
discursivity as Foucault viewed them, are further exacerbated in their digital form with the
technocultural imperative of innovation led by software and hardware corporations. The power
these corporations exercise touches both government and cultural institutions as well as
individual users and scholars. It is undeniable that “new technologies of information creation,
storage, retrieval, and the nature of the dependency of scholars on these new digital possibilities
raised questions about the nature of scholarly communication among humanists generally”
(Blouin and Rosenberg 4). But again, not all developments have served everyone’s best interests.
As Siva Vaidhyanathan argued about Google, software corporations “expan[d] the reign of
technocracy … fee[d] on and then fee[d] our techno-fundamentalist belief in the benign effects
of technological progress … [They also] supplement thought while recording the traces of our
thought and exploiting that data in the service of more efficient consumption” (133). On this
basis, we must acknowledge that this “reign of technocracy,” as Vaidhyanathan calls it, impacts
every step of scholarly work, from the creation of born-digital cultural objects prone to
obsolescence, to precarious storage systems, to the limitations of search engines and their impact on forms of thinking.

Given that digital archives can be collections of digitized materials or of born-digital objects or data, one of the aspects that digital archives have unsettled the most are the relationships between temporalities. The past brought to the present—that which by design or haphazardly became part of an archive and, after passing a second filter of chance or willful selection, is presently available in digital form. There is also the present projected to the (near) future—that which is currently being archived so as to be available later on—one of the most pressing challenges for the preservation of digital archives. Manoff calls these negotiations of time “archival effects” (“Archive” 386). Archives of both digitized and born-digital materials, perhaps more compellingly than physical ones, enact these negotiations. Archives of digitized materials from the past shorten temporal as well as geographical distance. Archives of born-digital materials desperately try to slow down the passage of time and delay the rapid cycles of innovation and obsolescence that constantly threaten their integrity. With this scenario, as Blouin and Rosenberg put it, “archives and archivists … are situated at a central and contested point of connection between history and memory. Their sites reinforce the very abstractions of social memory, while their processes affirm and validate particular kinds of collective understanding” (115). As I show in the final section, several of the Mexican projects considered here enact a creation of memories that complement or counter existing canons or cultural stereotypes, and seek to rebuild the landscape of a particular literary community. These movements enact various manners of archival effects.

While my discussion up to now has focused on general considerations about digital archives, I now turn to the way that digital archives have influenced humanities scholarship.
More specifically, I offer a brief overview of the disciplinary challenges the media shift has had on literary studies for both those based in digitized print materials as well as those focused on digital-born works of literature.

Digital Archives and Digital Humanities

Across the disciplines identified as Humanities and Social Sciences, the proliferation of digital collections, institutional as well as independent or private (archives, databases, digital libraries, and catalogues), has granted access to a massive amount of materials, many of which were previously accessible to only a few. In our lifetime, we have witnessed a shift from a culture of information scarcity to one of abundance (Rosenzweig 739). The optimism following this explosion is not unjustified. Scarcity, transmission challenges, and geographic distance to primary materials have been ameliorated in part due to inexpensive e-books, freely available online digital editions, institutional repositories and databases, both open access and subscription-based, and even the so-called shadow libraries. From corporate mass digitization efforts like Google Books, to nonprofit pan-Hispanic collections like Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, to national projects like the Biblioteca Digital de México, and to boutique projects like Biblioteca Digital del Pensamiento Novohispano, the growth in availability of materials is undeniable. Traveling to archives or libraries, while still a common practice for literary studies, is no longer the only way to produce knowledge out of special collections holdings.

Increased availability of digitized or digital materials and their metadata, together with various interfaces for access, and emerging critical vocabularies and approaches have rendered these materials prone to scholarly computational approaches which were new, until a few decades ago, in the humanities. Among these methodologies are topic modeling, text processing,
visualization, text mining, tagging, mapping, clustering, and image analysis. When put into practice, each one of these responds to particular research interests, specific research questions, and crucially, the properties of the materials at hand. These approaches, made possible by the machine-readability of digital files, offer the possibility to study the large-scale archives available, at the same time that they compel researchers to adopt said methodologies in order to do justice to the size and scope of collections comprising tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of items.

The media shift has not only given rise to massive digitized collections and computational scholarly methodologies vital to study them; it has also led to the creation of born-digital cultural objects requiring new critical and technocritical vocabularies to understand and examine them. Born-digital materials, however, are contingent on technological innovation and obsolescence, or the ever-evolving “context of computing”; that is, the “operating systems, applications, the network environment, and interface hardware” (Montfort and Wardrip-Fruin). Upgrades and new storage and file formats easily render born-digital materials, whether spreadsheets, flash animations, or whole websites, illegible for both humans and computers. Digitized materials are not untouched by this phenomenon, either. The fragility of digital materials, whether web-based or stored on hard disks, CD-ROMs, or floppy disks has worried information scholars for decades now. The urgency of the matter, for example, led to the funding of The Internet Archive in 1996. Tasked with archiving portions of all the available internet around the clock, The Internet Archive has made available its digital holdings via the WayBack Machine; it has also collected video games, films, books, image collections, obsolete software, etc.
Though successful in many ways, The Internet Archive is unable to prevent the disappearance of much of the historical record published online. The cultural relevance of web-based content, even for its sheer scale, cannot be understated. In the literary field, works of electronic literature are under constant danger of becoming inaccessible except perhaps as increasingly vintage physical objects like CD-ROMs and floppy disks. Without devices (desktops or handheld) equipped with the right peripherals and appropriate operating systems, electronic works of literature are isolated from most forms of scholarly literary analysis. Authors’ digital papers—whether working on electronic literature or not—like emails, manuscripts, notes, and other ephemera are equally precarious. Early digital humanities projects and digital editions are in need of constant upgrading or risk obsolescence. This point has been touched by both information professionals and literary scholars worried that “the medium for the retention of this kind of digital information is very unstable, even more so than with institutions” (Blouin and Rosenberg 190). Consequently, just as new methodologies are demanded by large-scale digital archives and libraries, new fields and subfields, like media archaeology and digital archiving, have emerged to deal with the fast processes of innovation and obsolescence. These developments in the field of Digital Humanities in the US are good reference points to explore the influence of digital archives in digital literary studies.

The creation of literary archives of digitized print materials as a manifestation of literary studies follows two parallel lines in the US. On the one hand, as Amy Earhart argues in Traces of the Old, Uses of the New, the creation of archives followed the rise of New Historicism: “scholars working within the rubric of new historicism positioned the physical archive and print materials as the centerpieces of their work. The digital environment would serve as a mechanism for refining the archive” (40). On the other hand, still following Earhart, the adoption also had
pragmatic reasons. The production of stand-alone digital editions, usually published on CD-ROM, that had dominated in the early 1990s was starting to experience problems of operating system incompatibility, as well as the limitations imposed by the limited storage space on the disks. This prompted scholars like Jerome McGann, John Unsworth, and Price to take projects like the Rossetti Archive and the Walt Whitman Archive online. As extensible projects that continue to evolve for years after their initial publication, the metaphor of the archive must have seemed much more fitting than that of edition. Ultimately, the adoption of the archive as the metaphorical space of digital projects back in the 1990s may have also been a response to suspicions and anxieties that work done on digital media still produced in academic circles. “Archive” served to validate work in the digital medium that was still seen with concerns regarding its reliability and rigor.

According to Earhart, “The mimesis of the rare book archive, a form understood and given great value in scholarly circles, provide[d] a means by which to bring value and authority to digital work” (46). Since then, the trope of the archive in Digital Humanities has gained such prevalence that a simple search in Digital Humanities Quarterly yields over 120 results ranging from digitized content cataloguing, to scholarly editing, to feminist interventions, to the literary canon. The widespread use of “archive” to name Digital Humanities projects, however, has not come without reflection or criticism. Price, for example, has used his experience as founding coeditor of the Walt Whitman Archive to launch an interrogation of the terminology of digital literary studies:

Digital textual studies seem to me inadequately described by the terms now available. *Project* is amorphous; *archive* and *edition* are heavy with associations carried over from
print culture; *database* is both too limiting and too misleading in its connotations; and *digital thematic research collection* lacks a memorable ring and pithiness. (par. 2)

The critique of digital archives (projects) both as a Digital Humanities practice and as sites where heteronormative Western canons are reinforced, though still unsolved, is also a vibrant area of inquiry. As Jacqueline Wernimont has written, in addition to literary studies, the juncture of fields like information science, feminism, postcolonialism, ethnic and area studies, queer studies, and others reveal the interdisciplinarity and porousness of the work between digital archives and Digital Humanities (par. 3). The creation of archives and other projects in the Digital Humanities is compelled to enact such porousness.

While the same kinds of cultural critical concerns exist for archives of born-digital works of literature, the stage of their creation and preservation is quite different. The fragility of digital material impacts not only the “papers” of digital writers, but the integrity of the works themselves. As Joseph Tabbi puts it,

contrary to expectations, the electronic archive has not been conducive to the creation and circulation of literary writing. Writers of electronic literature have needed, to a degree unimaginable in print, essentially to build the environment for their own work. Those who neglect basic preservation issues very quickly discover the mess that technological obsolescence makes, not only of individual works, but of the connections among texts, images, and code-work that are crucial for any sustained, community-wide literary practice.

To complicate matters more, the critical literary standing of electronic literature—as a much newer field than the study of print literature—was not well established until recent years. The work of professional organizations like the Electronic Literature Organization, as well as large-
scale projects like Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice (ELMCIP), has been instrumental in moving both the preservation of born-digital literary works and the scholarship about them forward. In the inaugural “Acid-Free Bits,” Nick Montfort and Noah Wardrip-Fruin state, “keeping [works of electronic literature] on a shelf doesn't mean that it will be easy, or even possible, to read it in the future. Even putting it into a vault with controlled temperature, light, and humidity won't ensure its availability.” Archiving digital literature, it will be obvious by now, is radically different from archiving print literature, even when it has been digitized. Permanence is the first and foremost priority. Even databases and anthologies like the Electronic Literature Collection (in three volumes) and the ELMCIP Knowledge Base, which have captured records and versions of hundreds of works, have been unable to solve the problems presented by constantly changing contemporary operating systems.

Perhaps unexpectedly, physical archives of electronic literature provide one of the most reliable contexts for the preservation of and access to older works of digital literature. Providing access to both the works in various formats and the necessary hardware and software to read them, physical archives like the Electronic Literature Lab, the Media Archeology Lab, and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities often keep authors’ digital papers as well, in the form of old computers, hard and floppy disks, and notebooks and galleys, for example. They are also often the sources for other creative approaches to archiving, at least in part, the early works of electronic literature. *Pathfinders* and *Traversals*, both by Dene Grigar and Stuart Moulthrop, are the two facets of a preservation project of early works of electronic literature. In response to the complexities of digital migration, porting, and emulation, Grigar and Moulthrop have devised the “traversal”—an exhaustive record of material components and documentation
of works of digital literature accompanied by footage of live readings and interviews with the works’ authors.

Furthermore, going back to authors’ papers, “in the specific domain of the literary,” Kirschenbaum warns us, “a writer working today will not and cannot be studied in the future in the same way as writers of the past, because the basic material evidence of their authorial activity—manuscripts and drafts, working notes, correspondence, journals—is, like all textual production, increasingly migrating to the electronic realm” (par. 4). This situation is no longer something to expect in the coming years for literary studies in Mexico or of Mexican literature. Even when still largely composed of paper materials, collections like the Carlos Fuentes Papers at Princeton University and the Gabriel García Márquez Collection at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin already include, respectively, magnetic media (“Carlos Fuentes Papers par. 1), and obsolete Apple computers (Schuessler par. 3). Kirschenbaum’s warning touches not just the disciplinary expectations of researching personal archives, which in Mexico are usually found in fundaciones devoted to individual authors like Juan Rulfo and, in the past, Octavio Paz. Kirshenbaum’s call can also provide a lens for devising and renewing archives, libraries, and projects that can expand the skills and cultural beliefs of our profession and demand these skills be fostered at scholarly and cultural institutions in the country. The following survey of examples of digital archives, projects, and libraries created in Mexico will allow us to observe the various purposes of each one, as well as the many platforms, approaches, and shapes that, broadly understood, digital literary archives have taken in Mexican academia.
Digital Literary Archives and Digital Humanities in Mexico

Mexico is without a doubt one of the countries outside of the “Global North” where the Digital Humanities have developed more steadily. The influence of the Red de Humanidades Digitales (RedHD) has facilitated much of the community development and proper academic venues and fora for the field to grow (Galina par. 14). As an interdisciplinary collective, Digital Humanities is not solely concerned with literary studies. As a matter of fact, unlike in other geographic contexts where literary studies have been dominant, it could be said that in Mexico, DH has flourished more prominently under the disciplines of philosophy, communications, and information science. Nevertheless, literary and textual scholarship are not unrepresented. Digital literary projects or archives in Mexico and elsewhere come in many forms, depending on their objectives, the corpus they deal with, and the institutional support they enjoy. Projects like Biblioteca Digital del Pensamiento Novohispano and México Imaginario emerge from the research apparatus at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Other projects, like Cartografía Literaria de Ciudad Juárez from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, led by Carlos Urani Montiel, and Plataformas de la Imaginación, curated by María Andrea Giovine, Cinthya García Leyva, Roberto Cruz Arzábal and other members of the laboratorio de literaturas extendidas y otras materialidades (lleom), enjoy some institutional support, but rely heavily on the communities they dialogue with; others, like Poesía Mexa, are independent projects that depend on volunteer work and donations of materials; and still others, like Editorial, are government-funded through the Centro de Cultura Digital de México. Some projects and archives are built around academic circles and institutions, and others are formed by and around communities that either share common interests or are bound by geography. I will briefly discuss each one of them to provide an overview of their scope and approaches where possible.
Biblioteca Digital del Pensamiento Novohispano (BDPN), led by Ernesto Priani in the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras at UNAM, is “a collection of digital editions of diplomatic transcriptions of texts from seventeenth-century books and documents dealing with the practice of astrology and astronomy marked up in TEI/XML” (“Proyecto”). The library is also conceived as a “research laboratory,” “a set of digital tools,” and ultimately, “an open work, where both document collection and the creation of the critical apparatus is in constant collaborative construction” (“Proyecto”). The project’s interface offers a facsimile view of the documents next to their marked-up transcription, and includes sections for collections and indexes within the library. Separate sections gather the scholarship originated from work on the Library by Priani, postdocs, and students, as well as tools to visualize its holdings.

At the center of the BDPN are two documents outlining the editorial criteria and the methodologies that have been followed. The BDPN mandate to serve as a laboratory has provided the space for students and scholars to gain the skills in “traditional” methodologies like paleography, as well as digital ones like TEI/XML markup. Though focused primarily on the philosophical thinking of New Spain, the collection of materials contained in BDPN include works by canonical literary figures like Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz and Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora. Ultimately, the emphasis on astrology and astronomy practices lends itself to the analysis of highly metaphorical language as much as philosophical references.

Co-led by Ana Elena González Treviño and Claudia Ruíz García, also at the Facultad de Filosofía at UNAM, Mexico Imaginario is a project of imagology that seeks to “collect representations of Mexico and Mexicanness in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century print culture, both in English and French” (“Acerca”). Taking as a starting point the scale of the mass digitization project and collection Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO), México
Imaginario does not offer a library of the texts identified to contain representations of Mexico. Rather, the project is presented as a database (and as a thematic research collection) with concise references in a frame of keywords in context to locate those allusions and mentions in their original sources, as well as in their proper historical and disciplinary context. With an initial literary grounding, but focused on the collection and curation of examples, the project invites contributions and usage from historians of science and culture, geographers, biologists, etcetera. Just like BDPN, México Imaginario serves as a training laboratory for students identifying and collecting the references that it contains. González Treviño and Ruíz García have elaborated a guide shared among their contributing students with detailed explanations about the hows and whys of each of the sections in the records. Additionally, the overall ethical objective of the project is clearly stated, to guide the students’ selection and creation of entries: “Remember that any characterization of otherness reveals the speaker’s prejudices and preconceptions; one of the objectives of the catalogue is to provide proofs capable of dismantling stereotypes” (Guía 4). México Imaginario, while not an archive of documents per se, fulfills the archival function of selecting and describing particular records, in this case from a decolonial perspective.

A very different kind of digital literary project is being developed at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez. Led by Carlos Urani Montiel, Cartografía Literaria de Ciudad Juárez has identified and digitized around 400 literary works that focus on Ciudad Juárez as either a fictional or a real space. From that corpus, Cartografía recovers the routes and streets found in its corpus as a yet-unexplored heritage of the city, where reading memory, space, and documentation is a citizen practice. Project leaders, then, organize community walks around the space of the city as the “heritage that written discourse has settled—and which is tangible, patent, and walkable” (“Proyecto”). The design of the literary routes seeks to “visualize the
relationship between literature and space … the routes hope to make the links between fictional spaces portraying Cuidad Juárez and the actual city more visible and dynamic” (“Rutas”). The kind of collection fostered by Cartografía, aside from preserving relevant materials, aims to keep alive the memory of the city through literary discourse, both contemporary and historical, and perhaps most importantly, through its activation in social spaces. Widely divergent from BDPN and México Imaginario, Cartografía is an archive gathered from its community and put into practice for a robust public use.

Similarly, Plataformas de la Imaginación was a curatorial project that introduced electronic literature for the first time to a large audience in Mexico. Working as an independent group, but sponsored by institutions like UNAM, CONACULTA, and the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, the laboratorio de literaturas extendidas y otras materialidades (lleom) curated a series of exhibitions and other activities, displaying a broad corpus of works of electronic literature in several venues across Mexico City: the Museo Universum, the Centro de Cultura Digital, the Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco, the Casa del Lago, and the Palacio de Bellas Artes. The curatorial project resulted not only in a temporary archive of the works selected to be displayed in the exhibits, but also its enactment and activation through a series performances, readings, interventions, and academic symposia. In a similar fashion to Cartografía, Plataformas de la Imaginación was a live archive meant to put its “holdings” into practice and reach communities beyond just academic ones.

The Editorial project at the Centro de Cultura Digital México (CCDMx) is focused on fostering the creation, scholarship, and dissemination of digital works of literature in Mexico. The interdisciplinary model adopted by Editorial consists of promoting collaboration among creative professionals in verbal arts, design, programming, and editing. The setting fostered by
Editorial has sought to remediate a patent lack (or lack of visibility) of digital literature produced in the country. Working under the auspices of the Secretaría de Cultura, a government agency, CCDMx, and more particularly, Editorial, have become the first hub in the country for the collective production of and scholarship on digital literature—a model that is not often found in other locales. Thanks to Mónica Nepote’s leadership, to date Editorial has published and made available a sizable corpus of articles in its Revista 404, and eight works of digital literature—all of them now constituting a living archive on their website.

These examples should not give the impression that projects of this nature take place exclusively under the auspices of large institutions like UNAM, the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, CONACULTA, or the Centro de Cultural Digital. Independent digital archives, like Poesía Mexa (PM), propose a radically different approach to collecting and providing access to materials. As editor, Luis Eduardo García indicates in the project’s description that PM is “a virtual archive of recent Mexican poetry.” The collection is made up of the works that around fifty authors and/or publishers have donated for download from the PM website since it was launched in 2016. The only criterion the archive follows is the gathering of “authors who value risk taking in their writing … those that contribute to the heterogeneous and mutant body of Mexican poetry.” This emphasis results in the collection of works published in the growing independent publishing scene in Mexico. In addition to the PDF files of the books donated, PM also includes video and audio files and short biographies of the authors—a simple but meaningful addition when dealing with young poets whose names might not yet be recognizable to most. Unlike the three projects already mentioned, which largely deal with materials of the past, Poesía Mexa is a forward-looking archive that seeks to build a community, to preserve materials—not unlike born-digital ones—at risk of becoming inaccessible due to short print runs.
and distribution challenges, and ultimately to form an incipient, albeit arbitrary, as the editor admits, canon of recent Mexican poetry.

From this selection of digital literary projects, it will be evident to readers that unlike the scene presented by Price on the one hand, and Earhart on the other regarding the development of digital literary studies in the US, the field in Mexico has not been occupied primarily with canonical figures like Walt Whitman. As mentioned above, archives on Elena Garro, Carlos Fuentes, and others reside in the special collections of US universities, while those that are still located in Mexico chiefly remain locked behind the doors of fundaciones, and more rarely, in scholarly or research institutions. Similarly, at the time of this writing, scholars concerned with figures like Fuentes or Garro have not yet embarked on the creation of digital archives or projects that will, as in the Mexican examples, include both students and the surrounding community. Large-scale digitization projects in the country are also not focused on literary texts or figures, either. Instead, examples like the Biblioteca Digital Nacional de México and the Biblioteca Digital section of the Biblioteca de México tend to focus on bibliographical and historical aspects. This scenario explains the need for projects like México Imaginario to use digital libraries, like ECCO, that are already operational. In parallel, the donation of materials by authors and publishing houses provides the foundation for both Poesía Mexa and Cartografía.

The uniqueness, and thus the contribution, of Mexican digital literary scholarship to the world of Digital Humanities and Digital Archives can be seen in the scope and objectives of these projects. Decolonial perspectives, community-building and recovery, education and training, and fostering new creative expressions go hand in hand with rigorous literary, cultural, and discourse analysis. The shift away from the most canonical figures in Mexican literature is too unique to the country’s literary scholarship, and two projects I have not discussed, Impresos
Populares Mexicanos (1880–1917) and the Archivo Ulises Carrión, are further evidence of how literary archives and projects are concerned with corpora unlikely to be already included in textbooks and anthologies. I would even say that the study of these corpora tends to reside in the interstices between literary scholarship and at least one other field—the blurring of disciplinary boundaries pointed out by Manoff and outlined earlier in the article. In that sense, these projects carry out a corrective to print and academic canons and establish proposals and principles to rethink literary scholarship, the public place of literature, and in the case of Editorial, literary creation, in the twenty-first century.

As early examples of a media shift in Mexican academia, these projects can be seen as an incunabulum of sorts, where interface, archival, scholarly, and computational practices are being tested. They also form the foundations for future digital work: the needs and conclusions emerging out of a project like Mexico Imaginario is likely to shape future digitization projects in the country; the expertise required by BDPN is not only literary and philosophical but also computational; archiving digital materials, whether they are the PDFs included in Poesía Mexa or the dynamic works of literature published by Editorial and curated in Plataformas de la Imaginación, will dictate the longevity of these new corpora and the shifting of Mexican literary canons. Consequently, as Kirschembaum and Blouin and Rosenberg posit, the threshold of adequacy and the disciplinary shifts are only going to be more dramatic. It falls upon scholars to embark on an exploration of methodologies to deal with both digitized and born-digital materials, whether it takes place through computational, theoretical, or curatorial and community approaches. Aside from taking advantage of corpora that are larger and much more varied than canonical ones, digital literary scholarship will ensure that our scholarship remains prominently engaged with the literary, cultural, and discursive principles, premises, and rigor we value.
Preserving key works as the BDNP does; discovering and creating new materials and connections between them, as Poesía Mexa, Cartografía, Plataformas, and Editorial do; and decolonizing literary canons, as Mexico Imaginario proposes, all constitute negotiations of temporalities capable of unsettling our relationships with the past and proposing alternative ways of engaging with the present. These projects entail an expansion of our knowledge and a modification of the current scholarly landscape. Ultimately, going back to Steedman’s reference to magical realism with which I opened this article, these projects—archives, libraries, catalogues, and databases—have the capacity to produce unforeseen connections and outcomes, and these should be the aspirations of digital literary studies, the expansion and furthering of the knowledge we produce. There is much room left for Digital Archives and Digital Humanities projects to develop in Mexico, as well as in the rest of the world. Infrastructural as well as cultural issues will continue to pose challenges that will push scholarship and technical solutions forward. But it is undeniable that the media change has forced a juncture of fields and disciplines needed to address issues and answer questions we did not have before—an aspiration that we as scholars can only be lucky to have.

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