



## Thinking the Archive, Insisting Within the City\*

*Pensar o arquivo, insistir na cidade*

*Pensar el archivo, insistir en la ciudad*

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\* This text has been translated from Portuguese to English by RaphiSoifer.



## Abstract

*This work reflects on some of the pressures involved in researching the documentation kept by the Canadian firm 'Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company,' better known in Brazil simply as 'Light'. It is well known that Light held monopolies for some of the principle urban networks in the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis, and that the company played a leading role in transforming urban environments, affecting population mobility, and expanding development vectors in Brazil's largest cities during the first half of the twentieth century. Beyond the strong ties that link the urban domain to the history of public utility companies, what effects can archival turning have on the questions presented in this article, as well as on the ways in which we conduct and present research on cities? Addressing the materiality of physical archives while experimenting the city, and vice versa, the fragments presented in this article rehearse a way of articulating the archive that reflects on the state and the city, while also articulating certain forms of violence: promises of conservation; threats of destruction; efforts of remembering and forgetting; and forms of access, authorization and insistence.*

**Key-Words:** archives, urban networks, multinational companies, urban history

## Resumo

*Este trabalho reflete sobre algumas das pressões que envolveram a pesquisa da documentação mantida pela empresa canadense Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company, mais conhecida como Light. Já é sabido que a Light deteve o monopólio de algumas das principais redes técnicas urbanas do eixo Rio-São Paulo, exercendo papel determinante no grau das transformações, na mobilidade dos seus habitantes e nos vetores de expansão observados nas duas maiores cidades brasileiras ao longo da primeira metade do século XX. Por outro lado, para além dos nós rígidos que tensionam os domínios do urbano com a história de empresas de utilidade pública, que efeitos a virada arquivística é capaz de suscitar sobre as questões que formulamos, bem como a maneira como produzimos e divulgamos pesquisas sobre as cidades? Recorrendo à materialidade do arquivo físico enquanto experimenta a cidade e vice-versa, os fragmentos aqui trazidos ensaiam um dizer Arquivo que diz Estado e Cidade, que por sua vez também diz de certas violências: promessas de conservação, ameaças de destruição, esforços de memória e esquecimento, acessos, autorizações e insistências.*

**Palavras-Chave:** arquivos, redes urbanas, empresas multinacionais, história urbana

## Resumen

*Este trabajo reflexiona sobre algunas de las presiones implicadas en la investigación en la documentación mantenida por la empresa canadiense Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company, más conocida como Light. Es de conocimiento que Light tenía el monopolio de gran parte de las redes de tendido en el eje Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo, teniendo un rol determinante sobre el grado de transformaciones, la movilidad de sus habitantes y los vectores de desarrollo observados en las ciudades más grandes de Brasil a lo largo del siglo XX. Al mismo tiempo, más allá de los nudos que enlazan los dominios de lo urbano con las empresas de servicios públicos, ¿qué efectos tiene el giro archivístico sobre las cuestiones que formulamos, así como sobre como elaboramos y divulgamos investigaciones en torno a las ciudades? Abordando la materialidad del archivo físico en tanto que experimenta la ciudad y viceversa, los fragmentos presentados ensayan un decir Archivo que dice Estado y Ciudad, que a su vez dice sobre ciertas violencias: promesas de conservación, amenazas de destrucción, esfuerzos de memoria y olvido, accesos, autorizaciones e insistencias.*

**Palabras clave:** archivos, redes urbanas, compañías multinacionales, historia urbana



## 1. Introduction

“The Canadian tourist in Rio or São Paulo need not go far to find the vestiges of Light, formerly Canada’s greatest foreign investment<sup>2</sup>.” This observation appears at the end of the book “*The Light: Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company Limited 1899-1945*,” published in 1988 by historian Duncan McDowall. For years, McDowall scoured archives in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Europe, and – first and foremost – at the company’s former headquarters in Toronto so as to elaborate what he called an unofficial history of the Light Group (MCDOWALL, 2008, p. 22). Since then, McDowall’s work has become a mandatory rite of passage for anyone examining the company’s history, as well as the territories in which it operated. Many authors have already demonstrated the importance of the Light Group – which held a monopoly on some of the most important public utilities in Brazil’s two largest cities – in understanding the role of technical networks in Brazil’s urban development, especially in terms of providing services including electricity, public illumination, gas, telephones, and collective transport (WEID, 2017; SANTOS, 2009; LOBO & LEVY, 2008; LAMARÃO, 2002; SZMRECSÁNYI, 1989; ABREU, 1988; SEABRA, 1986).

It is worth noting that McDowall’s book – originally directed toward a Canadian readership – ends by addressing a foreign tourist visiting Brazil. At the same time, his observation is dear to Brazilian researchers, inasmuch as it demonstrates – in its own way – issues enshrined in thinking about urban spaces. Such issues include: the action of international capital and of power groups; the adoption, in the context of the Global South, of models developed in the northern hemisphere; and reflections regarding industrial artifacts that – whether or not they have been landmarked as official points of heritage – still rise up from cities’ landscapes.

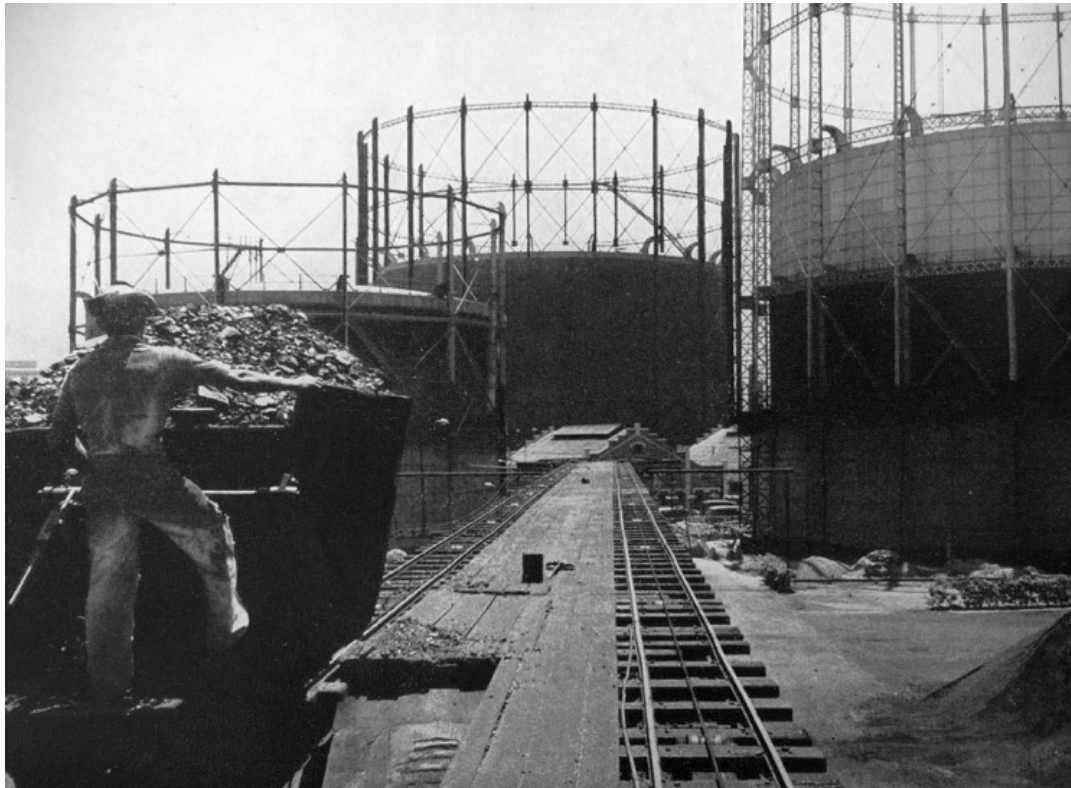
In distancing itself from these plots without losing sight of them, this article aims to take the opposite path: namely, that of a Brazilian researcher searching for vestiges of the Light Group in its home country and through its primary archive. Combining visual fragments, records of exchanged messages, and descriptions of the bureaucratic rites experienced both at home and as a foreigner, the following pages will seek to operate both within the *archive* and within *archiving*, highlighting certain pressures that involve archival access, conservation, and destruction, as well as the creation of other, new archives. What other forms of knowledge and transmission are at play when we consider the archive as an event that is capable of creating a part of the record, in addition to registering that which is created? Finally, how do the archivist’s reflections cross through disciplines and suggest new questions for the study of cities?

By way of a conclusion, the article’s final section experiments with a brief return to the city, searching for and imagining vestiges of Rio de Janeiro’s gas network, which was formerly operated by the Light Group (Figure 1). Taking up, once more, the problematic of the archive through other supports and temporalities, the text gestures toward underlining absences, exercising presences, and destabilizing records.

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<sup>2</sup> This is an English translation of an excerpt from the Portuguese language version of Duncan McDowall’s book. Given that the author’s contact with this particular text came by way of a translation, we have elected to provide the reader with a similarly mediated – not to say destabilizing – experience in considering excerpts from McDowall’s text, rather than citing the original. (T.N.)

**Figure1:** Interior of the São Cristóvão Gasworks, with three gas storage tanks in the background. This factory was responsible for producing and distributing the gas manufactured in the city of Rio de Janeiro for almost 100 years, more than half of which (1911-1969) were under the auspices of the Light Group.



Source: B.T.L.&P. Co. Ltd. 39th Annual Report, 1951. Brascan Fonds, vol. 662. Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

## 2. Thinking the Archive

[Monday, January 22, 12:50 am]

*We acknowledge receipt of your request. Please be assured that your request for retrieval of archival material will be processed within 5 business days and we will contact you to confirm it. Incomplete or incorrect references may result in delays.*

[Monday, January 22, 2018 de 2018, 14h31]

*Your appointment has been booked for Tuesday, Feb. 6th at 10 a.m. Please proceed to the Reference room located on the second floor (left hand side) and I will meet you there.*

**Tuesday, February 6, 2018, 10 am:** I was wearing boots that were nowhere near warm enough for the -10-degree cold. The leather was still damp, stained by the mixture of mud, snow, and salt I had trekked through upon my arrival to Ottawa the previous night. With every step on the marble floor, I could feel in my soles some of the pebbles sprinkled on the sidewalks as extra protection against slipping, a risk taken by everyone who walks through the city in winter.

The ritual began half an hour before Ms. Tellier arrived in the main room of *Library and Archives Canada* (LAC): I crossed Wellington Street and pushed open the two heavy doors as I removed my gloves and the scarf that protected my face. I identified myself at the entrance, left a few belongings at the coat-check, and climbed the stairs carrying only the most basic necessities in a clear plastic bag that the security guard handed me. I identified myself at the *Registration Desk* and was pointed toward



the *Reference Room*. When I identified myself at the Reference Room, I was instructed to sit while I waited for her.

Like myself, Ms. Tellier – the archivist with whom I had first been in touch five months before – arrived on time. She greeted me, had me sign each of the ten *Restricted Access Forms* she brought with her, entered the necessary access permission into the system, thanked me, and told me to go up one more flight of stairs to the *Restricted Documents Room*. Once again, I identified myself to an archivist in the reception room for the restricted documents section, and then signed the *Term Governing the Reproduction and Use of Material from the Collection of Library and Archives Canada*. A few minutes later, the same archivist – now in the consultation room – came to meet me, pushing a cart with ten of the 663 volumes from the *Brascan Limited* fonds.

Brascan was the new name given to the *Brazilian Traction, Light & Power Company*, better known in Brazil simply as *Light*. Under the auspices of Library & Archives Canada – an institute equivalent to a combination of Brazil's National Archives and National Library – the Brascan Fonds contains over a century's worth of records (1880-1987), including a few hundred linear meters of texts, photographs, and maps from the company's central offices in Toronto, which over the course of several decades had the mission of "coordinating the decision-making process, financial operations, acquisitions, and relations with shareholders" (MCDOWALL, 2008, p. 18). Although Brascan's archives are housed under the auspices of the LAC, Brascan's authorization is still required to access or reproduce any documentation more than 40 years old, while newer documents are not available for consultation. I was not given any dates or details regarding the transfer of Brascan's archives to LAC, but the principles that guide LAC's strategy demonstrate the archives' relevance – to Canadian history, that is. As the LAC's website notes, documents considered to have national importance are:

[...] those that bear witness to the Canadian experience (federal or Canada-wide), those that have influenced the development of Canada, those that have a broad national scope, those that have or have had an impact on trends and events in the country, and those that illustrate Canada's contribution to and perspectives on international trends and events.<sup>3</sup>

Before we access the *Arche*, however, it is worth noting that the nature of these documents, the context in which they were created, the effort of their transference, preservation, monopoly, and finally, the restrictions placed on accessing them even in the present day makes it clear that this particular archive is also a matter a state business. In this case, the relation between the archive being consulted and the company being studied is obvious, but the relation between archive and state can sometimes go unnoticed. As such, it is worth emphasizing from the beginning that, even in this specific Canadian case, in spite (and because) of the instruments that guarantee bourgeois democracy, the genesis of the state has been and continues to be violent. This violence can be best interpolated through the German term *Gewalt*, which references both the current notion of violence as well as that of "legitimate force" – in other words, violence presumed to be based on authority. If, as Jacques Derrida imagines, the archive is imbued with violence from its very founding, we know that the concept of law underlying the modern-colonial state is as well<sup>4</sup>. Facing the archive, the narrative I will elaborate here is not only

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<sup>3</sup> Available online: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/Pages/acquisition-strategy.aspx> . Accessed: October 30, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> In analysing Walter Benjamin's article "Zur Kritik der Gewalt," Derrida writes "The foundation of all states occurs in a situation that we can thus call revolutionary. It inaugurates a new law, it always does so in violence. Always, which is to say even when there haven't been those spectacular genocides, expulsions or deportations that so often accompany the foundation of states, great or small, old or new, right near us or far away." (DERRIDA, 1992, p. 35).



permeated by issues inherent to the company, but also permeated by my experience with the authority of a foreign state, and through my own state of being foreign; although this was relatively tranquil, it was always projected onto coercive bases<sup>5</sup>.

In authorizing myself to begin my report on my first day in this Canadian archive, I run the risk of silencing the times in which I maintained myself outside of it. As such, I will make a detour here so as to avoid tilting the scales (un)favourably toward a particular country or institution. This is especially relevant because, as Maria Blassioli Moraes observes, few Brazilian companies maintain and organize their own archives, and fewer still make these available for public consultation (MORAES, 2008, p. 18). Happily, the archive of Light Rio, maintained by Light's Cultural Institution in Rio de Janeiro, is an exception<sup>6</sup>. Still, my consultations there were restricted by the limited availability of a sole archivist who had to devote himself to multiple tasks, and who could only attend to me for four hours per week, at most. Meanwhile, the multinational Naturgy corporation, which has been responsible for natural gas distribution in Rio de Janeiro since 1997, when the service was privatized – and which, ideally, would accumulate the most relevant documents relating to its services – does not have any structure capable of supporting such archival work. Rio's old Museum of Gas has been closed for more than two decades, and items from its collection (comprising no less than 100,000 documents, 4000 photographs, and 300 pieces) have been observed for sale at the city's largest flea market<sup>7</sup>.

Derrida reminds us that, before the act that authorizes the passage from public to private sphere, there is no archive without its exterior. In ancient Greek, *Arkheion* designates the living space of the archon, a magistrate endowed with the power of unifying, identifying, classifying, and interpreting the documents that compose the *Arche*. While still in Rio de Janeiro, I understood that the selfsame violence that founds and conserves the archive also institutes its limits. At times, I situated myself within these limits, due either to the presence of an almost insurmountable barrier or an excessively well-protected *Archon*, or else due to the imminent possibility of erasure, whether through the destruction of the *Arche*, the demolition of the *Arkheion*, or the fall of its archon. In other words, the history preceding my arrival to the Canadian archive is both the history of the outside and the suggestion of a negative, of the records that I – when faced with the authority of the *Archon* (an authority that is *violent*, inasmuch as it is *legitimate*), of the company, or of the state – did not access:

[Monday, September 18, 2017]

Dear Sir, good afternoon. We are grateful to have you writing to us once again regarding the subject of one of the utility services provided by Light. In terms of my availability, this week I will only be able to attend to you on Friday, as I already have other research appointments scheduled.

[Monday, September 25, 2017]

Good evening. Unfortunately, I am unable [to meet] either on Thursday or on Friday afternoon. We will schedule another date in the coming week.

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<sup>5</sup>To summarize: a saying-Archive that pronounces itself to be the state, which in turn pronounces certain acts of violence that reach the body that writes: a white, cisgender body that adheres to heteronorms, speaks the two official languages of its host country, and that was formally invited to cross its territorial boundary and to remain there for six months.

<sup>6</sup>According to Eulália Maria Lahmeyer Lobo, the Light archive in Rio de Janeiro includes “six million manuscripts, 300,000 blueprints, 1346 volumes of newspaper excerpts, [and] 150 rolls of film and photographs” (LOBO & LEVY, 2008, p. 20).

<sup>7</sup>Available online: <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/ceg-quer-criar-novo-museu-do-gas-recuperar-documentos-desviados-da-empresa-16581173> . Accessed October 29, 2021.

[Wednesday, October 24, 2017]

Good morning. This week is difficult because we are hosting a large-scale event that is demanding all of our attention until the end of the day on Friday. It would be best for us to schedule a meeting next Monday. I await your confirmation.

[Friday, October 27, 2017]

Good evening. Another demand has arisen, and I will have to go to Nova Iguaçu on Monday morning for a technical visit evaluating the archive. I would like to reschedule your visit for Tuesday or Wednesday. What do you think?

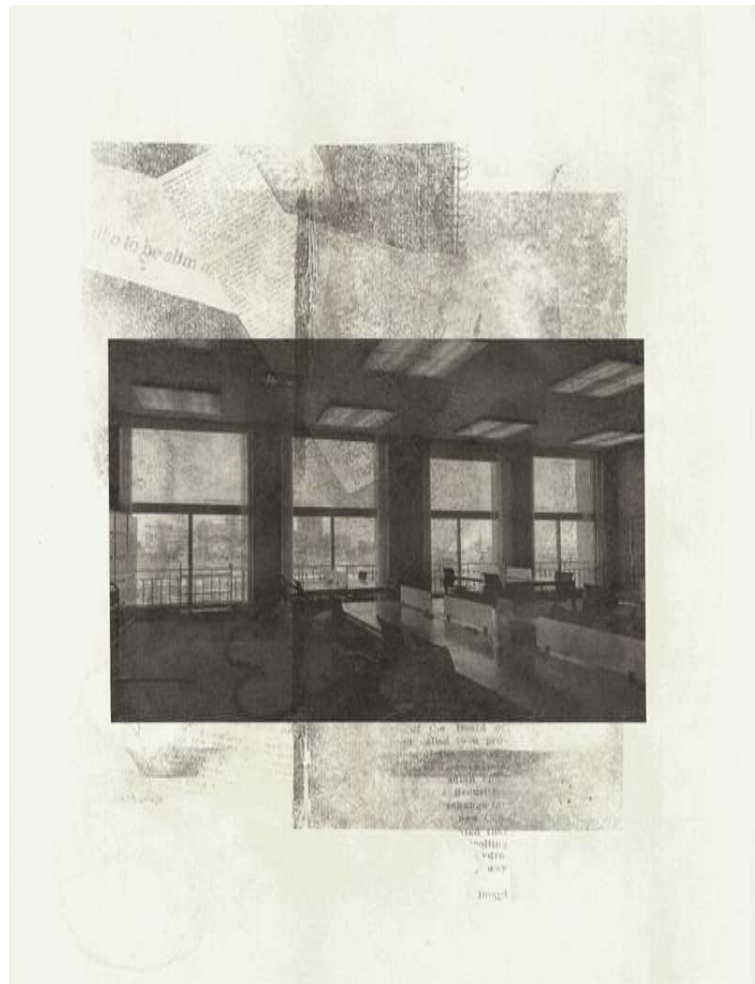
[Thursday, November 30, 2017]

Good afternoon. Because of our payment policy, I will not be at Light tomorrow, as I have a day off. As such, I would like to suggest transferring your visit to next week, between Monday and Wednesday. I await your response.

[Monday, April 15, 2019]

[...] unfortunately, I have to cancel your research visit scheduled for tomorrow. I apologize for cancelling your visit the day before it was scheduled.

**Figure 2:** Restricted Documents Room, Library and Archives Canada. Collage with photocopy transfer.



Source: Created by the author



**Tuesday, February 6, 2018. 10:45 am.** LAC was built in the 1960s. It is spacious, with high ceilings, large windows, touches of light wood, polished marble on all of the floors and the walls in the stairwells, carpets in the reading rooms, gilded hardware, and comfortable seats. Once inside this hermetic box, it seems safe to emphasize that the term *archive* refers simultaneously to a collection of documents and to the building that serves to shelter such a collection. There is no possibility of accessing this building without the preceding ritual: a contract of confidence was established; a written authorization was emitted; an in-person meeting was scheduled; a visit to the building occurred; and physical volumes were delivered to me so that I might finally reflect on what was archived, and on that (and those) which, for whatever reason, had not managed to achieve the same privileged status.

If the *Arche* designates both *beginning* and *command*, principles that are both original (of nature, of history) and nomological (of law) converge in constituting a discursive system; in other words, a system that derives from a dominion of what is said, and that also circumscribes the unsaid. As is to be expected, multiple records exist expressing the desire for certain documents to enter the Light archive. For example, in 1928, an excerpt from a favourable news article was sent to the leadership in Canada, basically in order to confer a positive view of the company: “As this article reflects feelings that are widely expressed here [in Brazil], it seems appropriate for it to join the archive as a counterpoint to the critiques that appear in the media with much greater frequency”<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, less common trails signal absences, and indicate that archival work should also repress that which threatens its *nomos*: “I tell you this so as to give an additional verbal explanation, especially because there are certain points that we ought not address in letters sent by mail to Brazil”<sup>9</sup>. Discursive regimes inevitably show questions of excessive pressures – impression, repression, and suppression.

In his discussion of business archives, Marcelo Antônio Chaves asserts that the Light Company “is a rare case of a business in Brazil that demonstrated a sense of preservation of its institutional memory,” which he sees in the “culture inherited from its [place of] origin” (CHAVES, 2017, p.19). Chaves bases this assertion on the work of Maria Cristina Vitoriano and Telma Madio, who, in their analysis of the formation of Light’s archives in São Paulo, affirm that its pioneering organizational culture led to:

[...] the formation, since the company’s beginning, of a well-structured archive that organized necessary documentation and made it available. The existence of long series of documents in different sectors of the company, covering the entire period of Light’s service as a public utility, demonstrates the importance that administrators placed on information and legal proof. (VITORIANO & MADIO, 2015, p. 137)

All archiving is based on a promise of conservation, and it is because of this promise that archiving continuously exercises its capacity to place things into reserves. Derrida, countering the reading of a *lieux de mémoire*, reinforces that the archive intervenes in the arrival of the future, rather than acting as a support that registers what has already passed. The archive *makes something* to the extent that it takes advantage of an economic principle: guided more by the anxiety of someone who accumulates curios than by the cunning of the book collector, accumulation becomes an investment which will eventually be recompensated.

Circling the uncertainties of the present, good laws governing the house are also those that guarantee the future of the family. Two distinct examples illustrate the value attributed to certain series of business archives. To introduce the first example, I draw on the work of Maria Blassili Moraes, who observed that

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from G. P. Conrad to Miller Lash (President of the Light Group). December 28, 1928. Brascan Fonds, vol. 92, 100.2 pt.2.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from A. Hutt to J. M. Bell. May 13, 1937. Brascan Fonds, vol. 239, 560 pt.3.





researchers at Light São Paulo, under the auspices of the Energy and Sanitation Foundation<sup>10</sup>, were primarily interested in photographs, to the detriment of other types of records:

Since the Energy and Sanitation Foundation's founding, its archive has been open to the public, yet one of the most frequently researched parts of the archive was the collection of photographs from the defunct São Paulo Tramway, Light & Power Co., Ltd, which is now Eletropaulo. These photographs, which date from the beginning of the twentieth century, recorded the installation of public illumination, street car lines, and other services in the city of São Paulo; they recorded social and urban transformations. Researchers sought out these photographs primarily in order to illustrate their academic or commercial works. However, these images were made to record and offer proof of the work carried out by different sectors of the company, and they were originally part of annual reports. As such, the photographs are directly connected to textual and cartographic documents, but this dimension was not preserved through the frequent use of the images as mere illustrations. (MORAES, 2008, p. 19)

Moraes' affirmation ought not serve to disqualify studies based on visual experiences, but rather to illustrate the hierarchy of senses as it manifests in academic production. Recognizing that the choice of an image over other examples (textual, plastic, sound-based, etc.) is an equally valid position, it is worth understanding that this position is imbued with forces capable of attributing distinct values to documents. Such forces may either conserve determined segments relating to advantageously special conditions, or else exclude other, less "interesting" positions, thereby threatening the principles of originality and of the wholesale preservation of information. In this sense, the 100 Years of Brascan in Brazil Collection – composed of 15,780 images that the company donated to the Moreira Salles Institute (IMS), a cultural institution noted for its work in the field of photography – is especially noteworthy. The company's photographic archive, intentionally disconnected from a much larger grouping of documents, became autonomous, and joined the collection of a major private cultural institution within the Brazilian art market. It is important to note that, in this transfer, the nature of the archive is also altered, inasmuch as its repertory acquires greater monetary value which can suddenly be collected through the sale of images and reproduction rights.

In a second example of the negotiations that aimed to show the origins of the Light company, the transformation of accumulation into investment also stands out. At the end of the 1940s, facing increasingly frequent threats of the nationalization of public utility services in Brazil, the group's directors began to form accords regarding the importance of steering their collective efforts and resources toward a publication examining the company's trajectory in Brazil. Although this undertaking would take time to execute, the contents of the forthcoming publication, and the arguments it would advance, were already clearly outlined:

I believe that such a record, emphasizing the tremendous contribution of imaginative and constructive brain power and of huge sums of courageous money, should be of great value in Brazil in any difficult situations that may later arise between the Company and the various government authorities of the future in our attempt to get a fair recognition of what the Company has done.<sup>11</sup>

In this case, the current archive<sup>12</sup> became a resource for a story that needed to be told, so as to

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<sup>10</sup> São Paulo's Historical Foundation for Energy Patrimony was created in 1998 as part of the effort to preserve the historical patrimony of local energy and gas companies faced with the process of privatization, which began in 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Letter to E.C.Fox (vice president). November 18, 1949. Brascan Fonds, vol. 323, Troop: Working paper pt5.

<sup>12</sup> According to the Brazilian Dictionary of Archival Terminology, a current archive is "a grouping of documents,

guarantee that the company's social mission would be fairly recognized (and valorized). Additionally, thanks to a certain hierarchy of places that has shown little variation over the course of several decades, the company's directors believed that most of the material required for the book's development could already be found in Light's Canadian headquarters. Given that the hierarchy of places coincided with a hierarchy of decision-making, the imperative concentrating the most sensitive decisions in Toronto also applied to the construction of the company's most important archive. Decades later, this fact continued to make collecting information in Light's Brazilian offices a secondary concern. In a sort of affiliative principle, the archive contained its patriarch's DNA, a specter guaranteeing that its history would be written by a Canadian historian, operating from the company's Canadian headquarters, without bothering the Brazilian public: **"It would be advisable to travel to Brazil to have a clearer image of the panorama of the company's operations. But the bulk of the necessary material can be found in the Toronto archive"**<sup>13</sup>.

Complementing the material already at hand, heretofore unreleased reports written by Canadian expatriates stocked the archive at the company's headquarters, filling in potential lacunas that arose during the process of writing the group's history. On the other hand, the expansion of the archive also highlighted information that would be excessively sensitive for Brazilian public opinion. The letter signalled that this would not cause any impasse, and it attributed the task of mediating the transit of information between public and private spheres to the archon:

Concerning your remarks in regard to the desirability or otherwise of making certain comments. I entirely agree that whatever is written for publication must be suitable for circulation in Brazil although published exclusively in English and normally circulated abroad. Anything that was offensive to Brazil would be extremely dangerous, not to say very bad taste. On the other hand, I do not think it would be necessary to write two completely separate books. If we prepare a history by means of filling in a skeleton framework such as is suggested above, these various and sundry chapters by individual writers, no doubt duplicated in several instances, **could remain in the permanent archives of the Company in Toronto and, being entirely confidential in character, could contain all the nasty comments we wish!** It will merely be up to the ghost writer or editors to see that the data for final publication has been properly expurgated.<sup>14</sup>

Here, a certain anticipatory dimension of the archive becomes clear, one that guarantees, *a priori*, the protection of what is to be registered; a virtual power that acts even before the record is made. Additionally, by endowing the process with security, archiving is capable of intervening in the very logic that guides writing. In this operation that both produces and records an event, no excessive force of printing is automatically rejected, even if it questions the appropriateness of the narrative built by the company. The record will find its place in the unconfessed, intimate space of the archive for an undetermined amount of time, even if it is not a consignment that the editor-interpreter intends to make public.

By the same measure, if the archive contains accumulation, it is first and foremost an accumulation of fragments, with a vision toward the Herculean effort that will be mobilized to classify them. This effort, in

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whether in process or not, that – based on its primary value – is the object of frequent consultations by the entity that produced it and that is responsible for its administration" (ARQUIVO NACIONAL, 2005, p. 29). The current archive (i.e., the archive in its first age) is contrasted to the permanent archive (third age) which, because of its historical value, ought to be preserved definitively.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from John Stevenson to Henry Borden (president). October 19, 1949. Brascan Fonds, vol. 323, Troop: Working paper pt. 5. My emphases.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from J.M.Bell to Col. Walter Gow. September 13, 1948. Brascan Fonds, vol. 323, Troop: Working paper pt. 5. My emphases.

turn, generates ambiguities, redundancies, and lacunas. Within the archive, fragments are indexed by date, subject, type, individual, company, subsidiary, and classification level, as well as by the combined total of these categories, or else by everything that eludes them. As Jorge Luis Borges says in presenting his Chinese encyclopedia of animals<sup>15</sup>, one must recognize that the classification of the universe is always arbitrary and based on conjecture. However, whether in Borges' encyclopedia or in an apparently more logical business archive, the challenge is not one of imagining and validating the classifications that arise. Instead, the more difficult task is that of finding possible places in which such classifications might approach each other<sup>16</sup>. Beginning with language, every archive inhabits its own classificatory threat.

Even when it pivots away from this threat, the archive is still a trail of that which will never be completed. In the convergence of often-conflicting pressures, the archive frequently cannot be reduced to a unifying point, even if it claims to be totalizing. With each indication of a "secret" to be discovered, chances increase that, when we turn the page, the numbers will no longer be continuous, the subject will change abruptly, the index will be missing, the series will end, an indecipherable form of writing will appear, or an impossible juxtaposition will grow closer. In facing the arguments that explain these facts, whether through a lack of organizing structure or an intentional effort at suppressing content (which might stem from its origin, or else have arisen as part of its process), we can be certain that archiving or dis-archiving can only be partially achieved.

But if archiving/dis-archiving is partial, it does not cease to open paths. When understood as a project, the attempt involves the ability to manage tools that always come into being in a circumstantial, situated way. Without the ties of a transcendental method, the duration of archiving/dis-archiving only increases if – through the persistence of certain techniques and encounters with other, new techniques – it shows itself capable of sustaining a practical, inventive engagement, attuned to the formulation of questions intercalated with the process. In the search and for the search, in the means and for the means, we must constantly reposition our gaze.

In the distance established between that which is searched for and that which, by chance, is found, refusing the logic of lacking shows itself to be strategic to the extent that it protects us from a certain paralyzing impulse that relates to primitive capitalist accumulation, which is responsible for generating scarcity from abundance<sup>17</sup>. If anxiety signals an eternal distance, the eternal lack of something extraordinary, the deep dive that desires and experiments is capable of bringing an excess of fragments to the surface: flows of translations, manuscripts, newspaper articles, encoded telegrams, scraps and letters and projects and... blocs of intensive sensations, with no apparent outcome or finality. From this experience and at each impasse, to the extent that the archive teaches us the potential of the fragment. Never total or universal, fragments affirm multiplicity as they archive *n-1*, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, in a sum that never gathers its parts into a totality:

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<sup>15</sup> In Borges's Chinese encyclopedia, animals are divided into the groupings: "(a) those belonging to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) trained ones; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabled ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush; (l) *et cetera*; (m) those that have just broken the vase; (n) those that from afar look like flies" (BORGES, 1999, p. 94).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. FOUCAULT, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> "Lack (*manque*)\* is created, planned, and organized in and through social production. It is counterproduced as a result of the pressure of antiproduction; the latter falls back on (*serab at sur*) the forces of production and appropriates them. It is never primary; production is never organized on the basis of a pre-existing need or lack (*manque*)." (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 2010, p. 28).



We live today in the age of partial objects, bricks that have been shattered to bits, and leftovers. We no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date. We no longer believe in the dull gray outlines of a dreary, colorless dialectic of evolution, aimed at forming a harmonious whole out of heterogeneous bits by rounding off their rough edges. We believe only in totalities that are peripheral. And if we discover such a totality alongside various separate parts, it is a whole of these particular parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity of all of these particular parts but does not unify them; rather, it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately. (DELEUZE & GUATTARI, 2010, p. 62)

This attention to the fragment is capable of awakening reflections on the violence that operates not only in the archive's founding, but also in the researcher's disciplinary training, which legislates what and how far it is possible to dis-archive. For example: from such an ample grouping of correspondences that cover crucial points of the business's trajectory, what does the presence of the first shy view (never given in the first person) of Light's workers suggest? What place do streetcar drivers and gas factory workers – all of whom participated in strong organizations during the first decades of the twentieth century – occupy?(SANTOS, 2009) Inspired by Gaytari Spivak's questioning, I venture to ask: in the archive of a Canadian company under the auspices of a foreign state, can the subaltern speak to the Brazilian researcher?

According to Spivak, archival and historiographical work is a task of measuring silences (SPIVAK, 2014, p. 82). The specific archive examined here abounds with fragments that indicate that we ought to question not only the "conscience" of subaltern subjects or the "restitution" of their words, but also – above all – researchers' capacity to hear them. If done attentively, gathering a text's supplementary meanings is an endless act of listening; it is the potential of an archive that never closes. **"It's always possible to re-interpret an archive. And this future-oriented structure of the archive is precisely what confronts us with a responsibility, an ethical and political responsibility"** (DERRIDA, 2002, p. 46). If every act of archiving begins with an urgent act of conservation, responsibility also calls on us to respond by listening, and to listen in our responses, in the face of the silence of the defeated, non-archived figures who, although they are not authorized to enter into the archon's living space through the main door, are still present. If, as Achille Mbembe (2002) affirms, the archive has the capacity to institute an imaginary, what imaginary are those who dis-archive prepared to hear?

In *Lieux de mémoire*, Pierre Nora signals the vertiginous expansion of archives in contemporary society, affirming that their production is an imperative of our time. For Nora, in an increasingly desacralized world, the promotion of history (understood here as the representation of the past) occurs to the detriment of the faculty of spontaneous memory (a current, living phenomenon) exercised by traditional communities. In this movement, Nora sees the multiplicity of *lieux de mémoire*, as "[t]he less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs" (NORA, 1989, p. 13). The archive is a lieu de mémoire par excellence, inasmuch as, unlike spontaneous memory, archival memory is the reflection of the impulse that provides protection as it accumulates vestiges, undoing *memory-man* as it multiplies its places:

No society has ever produced archives as deliberately as our own, not only by volume, not only by new technical means of reproduction and preservation, but also by its superstitious esteem, by its veneration of the trace. (*ibid*)



In responding to Nora's formulation, it would be fitting to mobilize the Freudian schism – highlighted by Derrida – between archive and memory. For even if memory exists in the archive, other forces coexist there that are not limited to memory. In addition, if we draw nearer to the trace that Nora brings to the fragment elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, we reinforce once again the positive (and productive) key conferred to it. For just as the archive is not only memory, the fragment is also, in and of itself, not something negative; just as memory is not an unambiguous force that names the archive, the collection of fragments can also serve as a trampoline to becoming. And what if – when faced with the *vestiginous* expansion of the archive – opportunities for leaps also accelerated?

Regardless, Nora leaves us a partially open gap when he affirms that “*lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications” (*ibid*, p. 19). Through examples of more recent incursions in the arts (ROLNIK, 2011; FOSTER, 2004), of the potential for diffusion created by digitalized archives or archives born in computerized environments, archives appropriated by activist agendas or state documents leaked anonymously through external platforms to bureaucratic-academic circles, the archival turn appears to be more of a betrayal. In betraying the archive, we produce something different: the solid, radicular axle of the institution and the archivist where everything ought to turn cedes an increasing amount of space to a tangle of practices that, rather than making the archive disappear, prolongs its scope and amplifies its horizon of possibilities.

Happily, nothing is less reliable; “**nothing is less clear today than the word ‘archive’**” (DERRIDA, 2001, p. 117). In betrayal – with no guarantees, and paraphrasing Walter Benjamin – it may be necessary to brush against the grain of the archive so as to generate enough damage to disturb the authority of its archontic principle (the law, the state, the institution), whether momentarily or permanently. In so doing, we may recognize the **archiviolitic** capacity that the archive has of acting against itself – installing crises, tracing lines of flight, reinscribing and testing the very concept (or the possibility of a concept) of the archive.

Regardless, to archive is to insist on the effects of the *pharmakon*, including its disturbing effects. Where fragments abound, where I insist on a drive toward memory and truth, in an obsessive order of classification and reproduction acting as I consult, where I throw foreign words into a translation app, as I separate the page, photograph, transcribe, and note references, immersed in the formulation of my own archival plot. Against red eyes, against the drowsiness of antihistamines and the pain in my lower back, the desire that acts as I insist on exhaustion and, finally, on the *pathos* that disturbs and enchants. All of a sudden, a discovery hits me, making me smile and continue to insist.

**Tuesday, February 6, 2018, 6:00 pm.** I finish my first day of consultation. Before rising from the chair, I brush my hand across the surface of the table, scattering the vestiges of paper flakes that – in spite of my extreme caution – tear at the lightest touch. I look at the security camera that observes me as I observe the others who share this work in insisted-upon silence. I drag the empty cart into the corner of the room and leave the last volume I consulted on the shelf of items to return. I call the security guard, store the five remaining boxes in two closets, thank him, and take my leave. I go down the stairs, collect my belongings at the coat check, and return my key and the transparent bag at the reception desk. I protect my face with my scarf and put on my gloves as I prepare to open the first heavy door leading to Wellington Street. And I will return there once again, to the interior of that same hermetically sealed box, at 9 am the following day and on all subsequent visits, alternating my gaze between the papers available in front of me and the landscape that peaks through the window curtain.

### 3. Insisting Within the City

**April 2017.** Over the course of slightly more than a month, two cranes alternated in the silent dismantling of the last gas storage tank remaining from the gas factory in Rio de Janeiro's Port Zone, which opened in 1911 (Figure 3). With no headlines in the papers, with no furor, almost as if through a sleight-of-hand, its imposing physical presence disappeared. Revitalization – a prize eyed by the productive dialogue long established between governments and the market – has been insistently promised for Rio's city center for two decades now, but it has yet to take off. Still, destruction has yet again hurried to leave its marks on the landscape. These are the marks of a way of saying, an archive that says State and Business, and that also pronounces certain forms of violence.

**Figure 3:** May 2017, the process of dismantling the gas tank in Rio's São Cristóvão neighbourhood.



Source: Elaborated by the author

**June 2019.** Of the records of the old gas tanks that I collected over the course of my research, I disarchive one specific one, taken on the day the factory opened. I increase the size of the photograph and make a silkscreen with it. Exerting the necessary pressure, I reproduce the photograph on different physical services. I experiment, calculating the force that ought to be transferred in the paint-soaked spatulas passages over the nylon screen; observing the black pigment that passes through the gaps and adheres to the white paper; selecting the best reproductions, immersed once again in the formulation of my own archival plot.

Back in the city, what imaginary will that archive be ready to set into action? I walk through some of the points that used to be part of Rio's gas network until I arrive in the Port Zone, on the lot where its largest factory – disactivated almost twenty years ago – used to function. I raise the tank (Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** June 2019, the process of re-erecting the São Cristóvão gas tank.



Source: Elaborated by the author

Its imposing physical presence arises again, this time unattached to the landscape, outside of the time, scale, and place to which it belongs. The unstable image leaves the archive and returns to the city for a few short instants. I photograph, confident that any act of archiving is based in a promise of conservation. I transform the gesture into image, adding a new page to the archive. Against the tired body, against the noise of cars and the scalding sun, I wish to act to the same extent that I insist on exhaustion in this city that disturbs and enchants. In the flux, the impulse of a living, excessively hot, possibly feverish body. A symptom of archive fever:

It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it anarchives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. No desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no repetition compulsion, no "*mal-de*" can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, *en mal d'archive*. (DERRIDA, 1996, p.91)

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