Queer Infrastructures: Digital Intimacies, Spaces, Affordances and Collaboration

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This panel centers queer epistemological formations as they structure the study of digital phenomena. Each of the papers mobilizes the methodological foundations of what Kara Keeling has called a "Queer OS" (2014) -- or an operating system in which "the historical, sociocultural, conceptual phenomena that currently shape our realities in deep and profound ways, such as race, gender, class, citizenship, and ability (to name those among the most active in the United States today), [are understood as] mutually constitutive with sexuality and with media and information technologies, thereby making it impossible to think any of them in isolation" (152). The panelists address core questions including how digital infrastructures mirror and/or model queer and feminist approaches to scholarship, social and artistic practice; what are some possible aesthetic/political retoolings for digital technologies originally designed to surveille and/or maximize female bodies as reproductive vessels; how do social media platforms shift the organizing of live performance cultures?;

what are some of the genealogies for contemporary queer digital culture and design?; how can we mobilize theories of interiors and architecture to help us think about the design of online spaces?; what can we learn from long histories of queer social, erotic, political and artistic life that can help us to build online platforms that resist calls to full public access?

These four papers contribute to the larger conversation at the nexus of Digital Humanities, Digital Media Studies, and Theories and Practices of Transgender, Feminist and Queer Cultural Production. Here we bring together the practice of performance art that merges digital technological invention to the long history of feminist body art, and the often invasive politics of digital surveillance and control of women's bodies, along with the introduction of "Transmedial Drag" as a set of methods for analyzing the digital transfer and potentiality of live performance art, analog queer networks and spaces. We bring this together with a discussion of the development of digital and analog infrastructures for minoritarian spaces and scenes in Mexico City and a material analysis of many of the tropological framings of digital culture--screens, codes and filters--which have been centrally important to the field of feminist design and architectural studies.

Transmedial Drag: Transgender, Feminist and Queer Performance Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction

T.L. Cowan

One of the central foci of Digital Humanities scholarship has been the production of online repositories of previously inaccessible archival materials. Often the project of producing an online repository is generated by the assumption that open access to materials that were once held behind the walls of institutional protocols or hidden in personal collections, is a good thing both for the research community that may want access and for the materials themselves and the lives and events that they assemble. However, as scholars invested in the project of decolonization--including Mukurtu and Local Context co-founders Jane Anderson and Kim Christen--have show us, making openly accessible all of the archival materials collected about a particular community, will very likely violate the cultural protocols of that community. Indeed, the entitlement required to imagine that all materials about a particular community should be made accessible to

people who are not part of that community is a perspective with long colonial and imperialist genealogies.

In this paper, I present a range of speculative-pragmatic methods that my collaborators and I have used towards the development of The Cabaret Commons: An Online Archive and Anecdotal Encyclopedia for Trans- Feminist and Queer Artists, Activists and Audiences. Over the course of the past 5 years of community-engaged research, we have worked both to assemble materials from live performance scenes in Mexico City, New York City, Montreal and Toronto to make publicly accessible for researchers and artists alike, and to design the Cabaret Commons as an online platform structured by community protocols, filters, ethics, and aesthetics of the stages and performance spaces that structure the social-cultural scenes that produce these materials.

After years of working with the idea of the Cabaret Commons, I named our method "Transmedial Drag," and have elaborated how we work in the mode of transmedial drag along with co-investigator Jasmine Rault, and collaborators Dayna McLeod, Carina Guzmán and Robyn Overstreet as well as many performance artists with whose work we are in conversation.

"Transmedial drag" is the method of study, knowledge production and citational practice involved in moving across media/mediums (for example, from live performance, to video documentation, to digital archive to online platform), which creates a sort of pastiche of the 'original,' denaturalizing its status as 'originary' and teaching us something new about the excesses and limitations of each media form. Riffing on Judith Butler's game-changing theorization of drag as a performance that, "[i]n imitating gender ...reveals the imitative structure of gender itself--as well as its contingency" (Gender Trouble 138). Or, thinking through Benjamin's anxieties about transmedial transfer in the early 20th Century, it's what we might call *the work of queer performance art in the age of digital reproduction...!* Thus we practice a process-heavy collaborative protocol that seeks to "simulate," not just the "aura" of live performance, but is also structured by locally-specific, community-based social and political ethics as manifested in minoritized cabaret scenes. Transmedial drag compels us to reckon with the cultural and ethical limitations of digital accessibility in the face of technical possibility (cf. Robertson 2016).

The decolonizing, community-collaboration and accountability methods for the digital transmission of traditional Indigenous knowledges, practiced for example by the projects Mukurtu and Local Contexts, provide a generative model for negotiating this paradox of intimate privacies and networked cultural histories and memories. Indeed, Indigenous studies has pointed out the colonial and Western-expansionist logics and impulses underlying the push to open-access and digitization, and have developed networked information management and archiving systems that follow indigenous cultural protocols, prioritizing privacy and multi-tiered user-generated-access levels.

What we're calling transmedial drag refers to the troubling excess that remains in even the most 'successful' transition from one medium or digital form to another – those elements that are incompatible to the form/medium as it currently exists and compel us to ask whether the form/medium exists *because of* these constitutive exclusions, or on the condition that certain elements remain excessive/external. Indeed, what remains excessive, incompatible and bit of a drag on the seductive techno-cultural possibilities of openness, are things like labour, consent, privacy, the agency and will of research-collaborators. For those of us trained in gender, sexuality, critical race, post and decolonial research, it becomes clear that our scholarly fields and practices of digital media and digital humanities can be sustained by reproducing a familiar set of constitutive exclusions -- those skills, values, techniques and priorities cultivated by and for the survivance of women, people of colour, indigenous people, trans people, queers, etc.

Transmedial drag is indebted to Elizabeth Freeman's work on 'temporal drag' and Heather Love's on "feeling backward" -- or the ways that queerness is often experienced, expressed or interpreted as an attachment to the past, as a stall in personal or social development, a drag on cultural-temporal progress narratives. We are also indebted to Kadji Amin's work on transgender temporalities, which allow us to understand the ways that "transgender experiences are constituted by yet exceed normative temporalities" and the necessity of incorporating asynchronic temporalities "in order to do justice to the complex ways in which people inhabit gender variance" (220).

With Love, Freeman and Amin, our digital research-creation project is oriented to those people, scenes, cultures, affects and knowledges cast as a drag on the forward-momentum- digital-entitlement fantasies of unfettered access to everything, everyone, everywhere -- fantasies that resonate so strongly with the gender, sexual and racial histories of colonial-moder-

nity that we know too well. Thus in true queer episte-mological form, "transmedial drag" is both a method of study modeled on queer performance and theories of performativity (i.e. Butler) and a conceptual frame-work through which to make sense of elements of cul-tural life and work that are generally unintelligible (nonsense).

Like the deep cultural understandings, consulta-tion, collaboration and re-engineering that led to the development of Mukurtu and Local Contexts, we imag-ine culturally-sensitive and specific software that pri-oritizes highly nuanced _cultural_ logics, protocols and specialized knowledges in the development of _compu-tational_ logics, protocols and specialized tools, to-wards what Kara Keeling calls a "Queer OS/operating system". Keeling's QUEER OS is an operating system in which the "historical, sociocultural, conceptual phe-nomena that currently shape our realities in deep and profound ways, such as race, gender, class, citizenship, and ability (to name those among the most active in the United States today), [are understood as] mutually constitutive with sexuality and with media and infor-mation technologies, thereby making it impossible to think any of them in isolation" (152).

Indeed, transmedial drag denaturalizes the constitutive exclusions of most of our media and information technolo-gies; lets us both recognize their limits and imagine their nec-essary transformations; _and_ puts into relief some of the dy-namics of cabaret that continue to sustain trans- feminist and queer scenes and lives _even within_ media environments that are designed around their impossibility and imperceptibility.

In this moment when new digital archives of mi-nority and subcultural scenes seem compelled to re-produce perilous Web 2.0 logics of unbridled open-ac-cess -- based in modern-colonial entitlement fantasies of absolute accessibility -- the Cabaret Commons is us-ing trans feminist and queer relational epistemologies towards the decolonizing project of ethical collective platform protocols for sensitive cultural memory, her-itage projects and accountable digital design. This is part of a larger epistemological-transformational pro-ject to decolonize both trans- feminist and queer prac-tices, and the dominant digital cultural practices that assumes that all networks are networked publics lead-ing us to theorize what we're calling networked pri-vates.

The hope that we have for the Cabaret Commons is that it will bring the activated characteristics of cabaret performance, as well as other grassroots and politically-engaged live perfor-mance (like street performance, marches and protest arts, what Mexican artist/activist Jesusa Rodríguez calls "mass cabaret") along with their translocal trans feminist and queer

scenes, ethics, politics, social and sexual lives to bear on digi-tal archiving infrastructures.

Screens, Codes, Filters: sapphic modernist design genealogies for queer digital culture
Jasmine Rault

What can early twentieth century modernist archi-tecture and design teach us about contemporary de-colonizing, feminist, queer and anti-racist practices and protocols for networked digital architecture? Euro-Atlantic modernist architecture was driven by ideals of internationally standardized open communi-cation – beyond the mass rail, steamboat and automo-bile distribution of low-cost print media and photo-graphic reproductions towards material changes like the open floor plan, strip windows and glass walls, un-impeded visual access to interior and exterior space, eliminating walls and structural as well as decorative or symbolic obstructions to complete open access. There are some striking ideological continuities be-tween these modernist architectural ideals (and aes-thetics) and contemporary Euro-Atlantic values of un-bridled digitization, designing global information net-works for unobstructed open access – and these conti-nuities need to be understood within a context of mod-ern-colonial regimes of gender, sexuality and race. My presentation focuses on early twentieth century women's queer interventions into modernist architec-tural and design ideals as a genealogy to contextualize, better understand and support recent innovations in decolonizing, queer, feminist and anti-racist designs for networked digital practices, archives and spaces. I draw from my research on Eileen Gray – which ex-plores some of the intersections between histories of communication, European architectural modernity and sapphic modernity, or the cultural history of fe-male sexual dissidence – and my collaborative re-search on "the Cabaret Commons," designing a net-worked digital archive for trans feminist and queer performance artists, activists and audiences.

My research on Gray, and her contemporaries in queer interior designs, shows that modernist architec-ture was invested in creating not only new buildings and living spaces, but new bodies and subjects. As such, modernist architecture was contributing to the modern production and regulation of sexuality, race and gender. Moreover, from around 1900 to 1935, modernist architecture was increasingly committed to communicative clarity – or immersive living spaces of total communication – and several sexually dissident

female artists, writers, interior designers and architects, like Eileen Gray, worked to interrupt this clarity. Indeed, women in the US, Canada, Western Europe and the UK worked on domestic interior design to work out new possibilities for gender and non-heterosexualities.

I focus on the creative extent to which these possibilities depended on codes, screens, filters – as interpretive and communicative strategies, but also as design materials. That is, the aesthetic, social and cultural phenomena of female gender and sexual queerness was enabled at the start of the 20c through complex claims to privacy. My presentation draws connections to my current book project, co-written with T.L. Cowan, provisionally entitled, *Checking In: Feminist Labour in Networked Publics,* which takes up the ways that similar claims to mediated privacy are emerging as central concerns in the design of very different spaces – online digital designs for networked trans-feminist and queer archives and social memory.

We are currently working with the data set of the digital (digitized) archive of the Meow Mix Cabaret, a show and dance party for "bent girls and their buddies" which ran in Montreal from 1997-2012. Technically, we have been granted permission by the copyright holders to make this archive public through an online platform. However, through interviews with individual performers who have appeared on the Meow Mix stage over the years, we've learned that a majority of the artists are not interested in reproducing or getting involved in the distribution of a full-run, open-access digital archive of their materials – for many reasons: including low or degraded quality of the video and images; the unpolished/amateur aesthetic of their work at an earlier stage of their careers; the fact that they did the performance *for their friends* or for a particular event and do not want broad circulation that will leave a digital trace; gender, sex, sexuality, body shape and size transitions; nudity; and the potential hazards of being associated with trans- feminist and queer scenes. However, many artists are interested in *some* of their work being available online for *some* people. And thus by working through what we are calling a speculative/pragmatic method of transmedial drag, we are designing an online space in which this kind of mediation will be possible.

In this presentation, I suggest that understanding the architectural innovations of Gray and her contemporaries, who built on the premise of mediated privacy, on filtered access, offers us a unique genealogy to studying and designing digital architecture that respond to similar needs and desires for online spaces through which minoritized subjects push back against the dominant pressure for full publicity, for the full availability and open access to our online selves, socialities and intimacies. The metaphor of architecture is often used in reference to online built environments but rarely is the metaphor pushed to a point of usefulness. Danah Boyd has argued that "what it means to be public or private is quickly changing before our eyes and we lack the language, social norms, and structures to handle it" (2007). Indeed, queers, people of color, indigenous people, trans folks, and disabled people are hacking popular social media corporate sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc. to build differentiating filters in order to choose which *selves* to "out" in which contexts, and organizations like the Feminist Technology Network (FemTechNet), the Center for Solutions to Online Violence (CSOV), Fem-Bot, Crash Override (Zoe Quinn & Anita Sarkesian) are working not only to build these infrastructures but also to communicate the differential consequences of total publicity, open access, or the digital 'open plan.' That is, we can see the development of networked 'privates' rather than the fetishization of 'networked publics' and we are working on collective action towards, what we might have learned from Gray and her contemporaries: techniques of mediated privacy.

Queering the Vaginal Canal: Make Art Here

Dayna McLeod

My presentation will examine how feminist performance artists have employed explicit performance-based practices in their work, specifically by using their vaginal cavity as a site of art production. I will compare these works, practices, and methodologies with my own, specifically citing **Uterine Concert Hall**, a vaginal media work that features my body as a concert venue. Equipped with a 54 kHz internal speaker (Babypod), my vaginal canal acts as the stage with my cervix as the proscenium, for the audience of my uterus. A live DJ pumps sound directly into me via 6-foot cable that reaches from their booth. My vaginal canal is the scene of the performance and the instrument of its production. I can feel the DJ's varying frequencies, pitch shifts, and throbbing tones while external concertgoers are invited to eavesdrop via stethoscope, on the faint echoes of the recital through the very flesh of my body. Like showing up to a concert and listening from outside, this piece purposefully excludes external listeners while engaging with explicit performance-based production practices, and feminist art practices of intimacy.

In *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Rebecca Schneider identifies Annie Sprinkle's cervix,

viewed similarly through a medical device (a speculum) in *Public Cervix Announcement* (1990-1992), as a "theoretical third eye," a counter-gaze that looks back at the viewer who is gazing at Sprinkle's cervix (55). In **Uterine Concert Hall**, the viewer's gaze and concentrated attention is focused on me and on the message my body embodies for their speculation: the spectator sees, hears, and touches my body while I absorb both the concert through my vagina and their expectations. My "theoretical third eye" listens. Schneider also notes that "any body bearing female markings is automatically shadowed by the history of that body's signification" (20), and the invasive imagined construction of that body. For an external audience to **Uterine Concert Hall**, my uterus-as-intended-audience - cervix-as-proscenium - vagina-as-stage, all become a singular blank screen of possibilities for viewers to project their fantasies onto: to imagine its appearance and construction, and imagine what sounds might emit from my flesh. How might my body distort or otherwise enhance the anticipated DJ set? (How) does sound transform the body (my body)? By the time the viewer arrives at my side where they are handed a stethoscope to eavesdrop into/onto/through my flesh, their anticipation and fantasy is confronted by the very real presence of the mise en scene. Here they are featured in the role of pseudo-physician, which is complicated by issues of consent, interior/exterior bodily access, and their demands of the body (my body) as sound medium.

This outsider, exclusionary status that the viewer is assigned also comes with a controlling, medicalized, obstetrical gaze. In Canada and the United States, we employ much monitoring of women's bodies through our expectations of how women look, behave, act, and feel. These expectations are pathologized, reinforced, and legitimized through medicalized surveillance and control. Invasive and non-invasive examinations and procedures like ultrasounds, transvaginal probes, and visualizing and monitoring technologies are normalized for bodies marked female who are evaluated by a normalized and medicalized gaze in relationship to potentially housing or not housing a fetus (Balsamo). "Protection of the fetus is often offered as a commonsensical, and, hence, ideological rationale for intervention into a woman's pregnancy, either through the actual application of invasive technologies or through the exercise of technologies of social monitoring and surveillance" (Clarke and Olesen). **Uterine**

Concert Hall is not a place for babies, fetuses, or heteronormative determinism. However, it is a site that questions these cultural assumptions of women's bodies, of what we expect from bodies marked female, and why we think we have the right to make any kinds of demands on these bodies in the first place. This project does this by using digital technologies and affordances to interrupt their intended functions (i.e. playing music for a uterus-bond fetus from an adjacent vaginal canal) that contribute to the medicalized surveillance and control culture of women's bodies.

In this panel presentation, I am also interested in discussing **Uterine Concert Hall** in its queering of the uterus as a viable physical space, the performing body, and the artist-audience exchange. Further, I am interested in putting **Uterine Concert Hall** in conversation with the works and practices of artists who have similarly used vaginal and uterine space *as* physical space as the site of their works' production, like Annie Sprinkle's *Public Cervix Announcement* (1990-1992), Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll* (1975), and Casey Jenkins' *Vaginal Knitting* (2013).

"How many lesbians does it take to flyer for a party?". The impact of shifting digital landscapes on queer women's nightlife organizing in Mexico City since 2005.

Carina Guzmán

In this paper, I open an inquiry on how the evolution of the digital landscape has brought shifts in the strategies of queer women's nightlife organizing in Mexico City since 2005, and what the possible implications of these shifts are.

Following Cowan and Rault's concept of transmedial drag, I ask if and how social media platforms and media such as memes, used as organizing/political tools, can possibly take the shape of/mimic/reflect the queer world-making of the social scenes they are being used to create, especially when contrasted with the resources they have replaced such as e-mails or flyers, which necessarily imply physical contact between organizers and the queer crowd. I pay special attention to independently organized events held outside the circuit of commercial gay nightlife venues; dance parties and cabaret revues in adapted spaces such as *azoteas* and *casas de cultura*. This leads me to consider the intersection of labour, material culture, digital culture, and the sexual politics of place-making. At the same time, I consider the shift within digital culture that has happened with the emergence of social

media as an organizing tool, and memes as political statements.

In my doctoral research in the Communication Studies program at Concordia University I have established, partially through an autoethnographic narrative, that independent and capitalist-alternative lesbian and queer women's nightlife organizing in Mexico City is a political project that responds to issues of economic gender disparity and spatial justice.

The small lesbian collective *Meras efímeras* was formed in 2005 by a group of friends I was a part of to organize nightlife alternatives for queer women in Mexico City. At the time, the main nighttime recreational events for queer women were "ladies' nights" at gay men's bars and clubs. Though inexpensive and conveniently located in the city's gay ghetto, these were not especially well organized; patrons could often find poor service, strip shows that made some feel uncomfortable and unclean facilities. It was evident that they were held to create a niche clientele on slow weeknights.

Meras efímeras contended that within the capitalist logic of commercial nightlife, a queer women's crowd could not "compete" with an audience of gay men, making it virtually impossible to find women-oriented or women-welcoming queer events on the weekend. We, thus, understood that independently organizing nightlife implied taking a political stand on the economic disparity between men and women, and the issue of spatial justice for queer women in the urban nightscape. This also implied we could not expect to be paid for our work. And, as we were also unable to pay rent at a club, we had to physically adapt spaces or negotiate agreements at other types of venues outside of the gay ghetto.

Today's use of memes to make political statements, as well as the use of platforms such as Facebook event pages, Twitter and Instagram as an event organizing tools contrasts sharply with what it was like to call on a queer crowd for a political/social event around 2005. Our main digital resource was a Yahoo! Groups mailing list to which we would manually add e-mails requested at the door of our events. We also advertised in the local LGBT free weeklies. But, the first point of contact were flyers we'd drop off at businesses or hand-out outside "ladies' nights" events.

In this paper I establish that the simultaneous use of paper-based and e-mail group based strategies *Meras efímeras* employed around 2005 constitute a pre-social media-as-we-know-and-use-it-today organizing landscape that straddled material and digital culture. While this strategy was partially material and partially digital, it necessarily implied exchanges made physically; handing out of the flyer on the street, requesting and giving an e-mail at the door of an event. So, this paper also asks what are the stakes in queer women's nightlife organizing, as a political project, in the transfer from organizing strategies that implied a physical presence to current social media resources. Moreover, I ask if resources such as memes, Facebook event pages, Tweets or Instagram are capable of an effective transmedial drag; can they properly represent queer women's nightlife political world-views?

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