

CHAPTER TWO



Don't you know that *digitization* is not enough? Digitization is *not enough!* Building Accountable Archives and the Digital Dilemma of the Cabaret Commons

T.L. Cowan

Queerness is often transmitted covertly. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack. Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility.

– José E. Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence,”
Women & Performance, vol. 8, no. 2, 1996

One serious cultural obstacle encountered by any feminist writer is that each feminist work has tended to be received as if it emerged from nowhere; as if each of us had lived, thought, and worked without any historical past or contextual present. This is one of the ways that women's work and thinking has been made to seem sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own.

– Adrienne Rich, *On Secrets, Lies and Silence:*
Selected Prose 1966–1978

When is gossip integral to what needs to be articulated?

– Linda M. Morra and Jessical Schagerl,
“Introduction: No Archive Is Neutral,” 2012

Introduction: Leather Pants

Several years ago, I published the chapter “I remember ... I was wearing leather pants’: Archiving the Repertoire of Feminist Cabaret in Canada” in Linda M. Morra and Jessica Schagerl’s volume, *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace: Explorations in Canadian Women’s Archives*. This essay marked the start of the research project in which I am still enmeshed, a project that studies the translocal aesthetic, political, and social phenomena of trans- feminist and queer grassroots cabaret (the satirical variety show) in North America (Canada, the US, and Mexico), and how what I am calling a “cabaret methodology” might inform the collection and circulation of the afterlives—the archives and repertoires (Taylor)—of cabaret. At the time of writing that earlier chapter, I was imagining cabaret’s distributed and embodied archives, and contending with the memory and material fragments, anecdotes, and impressions that constitute the remains of trans- feminist and queer (TFQ) cabaret performance, but I had yet to fantasize about a digital infrastructure that might house them. However, as I sit to write this current chapter for *Moving Archives*, I realize that the work of the last few years has really been about reconciling the findings of the research and writing of the earlier chapter that I now refer to as simply “leather pants” (thanks to Abby Werner Herlin) with the hail of the digital’s *hey you!*—some interpolative combination of genuine interest, funding incentives, and the technological turn in our shifting Humanities disciplines.

In response to this digital *hey you!*, along with my ongoing collaborator, Jasmine Rault, as well as early collaborators Dayna McLeod and Robyn Overstreet and current collaborators Carina (Islandia) Guzmán and Stephen Lawson, I have been working with the viscera and ephemera of the cabaret in order to design the Cabaret Commons, a speculative platform for sharing these memories and materials.¹ The digital’s *hey you!* has hailed me as a targeted funding initiative: this research has been supported by a SSHRC Insight Development Grant in Digital Economies. It has also hailed me as curiosity-based interpellation that sparked my interest in “transmedial drag,” which is what I call the method of study through which we *move* materials across mediums and media, and “technologies of fabulous,” or the mechanisms and techniques through which trans- feminist and queer performance fabulates its own existence and survival. Here, I draw out some of the ways that the digital’s *hey you!*, which prompted me to digital thinking, has shifted the way I do performance studies research and how I have come to articulate and practise a cabaret methodology that must inform

the transmedial *movement*, or *migration*, from live performance to digital design. Indeed, while the project of making an archive of performance media (photographs, handbills, video documentation, posters, and so on) may seem straightforward enough—just digitize and upload, right?—my collaborators and I have found that the prospect of doing so ethically and accountably, by respecting the affective intimacies of community, has been about as far from straightforward as possible.

The Cabaret Commons

Our hope for the Cabaret Commons is that it will bring the activated characteristics of cabaret performance, as well as other grassroots and politically engaged live performance, including street performance, marches, and protest arts—what Mexican artist/activist Jesusa Rodríguez calls “mass cabaret” (Alzate 66)—along with their translocal trans-feminist and queer scenes, ethics, politics, social, and sexual lives to bear on digital archiving infrastructures. The Cabaret Commons was initially proposed as a hybrid speculative-pragmatic experiment in designing a digital built environment based on the political, ethical, and aesthetic values of the cabaret scenes that we sought to document. We began with a commitment from the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory (CWRC) for infrastructure support, as we would be working towards a pilot “multi-media” archive to be hosted on the CWRC platform (The Cabaret Commons). With the help of our SSHRC Insight Development grant, we have been working through numerous design experiments in consultation with the artists and audiences we want the site to serve, and to whom we as researchers are accountable.

We have been deeply influenced by Johanna Drucker’s work on speculative computing, which allows for a temporary suspension of “the practical requirements of computational protocols” in order to focus on Humanities methods and tools “grounded in subjective judgment” (2009, xi) and to prioritize complexity and ambiguity. Speculative computing is strangely similar in methodology to our ongoing curiosity-driven research, which studies and theorizes trans-feminist and queer cultures, aesthetics, politics, and affect, while trying to not contain or foreclose upon the conditions of possibility within these cultures. Based on the principles of “pata-physics”—Alfred Jarry’s science of “imaginary solutions” (Drucker; Jarry; McGann, *Radiant Textuality*; Nowvieskie)—speculative computing “free[s] us to imagine what as yet we don’t know” (McGann, “From Text to Work”). This approach requires us to imagine what an online cabaret space might

be and to design it based not on what is computationally possible, but on some of the central tenets of trans- feminist and queer grassroots cabaret: ambiguity, currentness, trust, risk, satire, collaboration, distributed fame, and a porous membrane between performers and spectators. The speculative process has required us to study deeply these elements of cabaret scenes in North America, and to build our emerging vision for the proof-of-concept site incrementally: a speculative, creation-based research and iterative design process for the development of a Cabaret Commons site.

We seek to use this process not only to research and experiment with the principles of cabaret, but also to teach us about the digital condition and its limitations. As Drucker importantly notes, “speculative computing is not just a game played to create projects with uncertain outcomes, *but a set of principles through which to push back on the cultural authority* by which computational methods instrumentalize their effects across many disciplines” (xi; emphasis added). Certainly, as trans- feminist and queer artists, activists, and theorists, we have been engaged by similar principles and pushed back against a range of cultural authorities throughout our careers. It is interesting that neither “feminist” nor “queer” is listed in the index of Drucker’s *SpecLab*, nor are they referenced as shared epistemes within the book. The central concept that shapes her work is *aesthesis*, that is, “the theory of a partial, situated, and subjective knowledge . . . whose aims are ideological as well as epistemological” (xiii). This theory is meant to subvert the conventionalized authority of the superimpositional, totalizing *mathesis* and *graphesis*, yet she does not make an explicit connection to feminist “ethico-onto-epistem-ologies” (Barad 185),² which might be understood to serve similar goals across a wide range of cultural fronts and to have importantly informed this work. Interestingly, Drucker uses an example of an affective encounter to demonstrate how computational processes cannot replace Humanities methods, even in the study of printed media. She notes that XML tags “may describe formal features of works such as stanzas, footnotes, cross-outs and other changes in a text” but cannot account, for example, for “<flirtation>” in a text “without considerable extratextual knowledge” (13). That is, affect is all about context and interpretation. When we consider the intimacies of trans- feminist and queer artistic-political-social-sexual scenes, we must, therefore, also consider how not just to account for “flirtation” and affects but also to be *care-full* with it.

In the context of a recent research project, the Digital Research Ethics Collaboratory (DREC), initiated by Jasmine Rault and me, along with collaborators Emily Simmonds and Jessica Caporusso, we have begun to

think through the *care* work of digitizing TFQ archives as *care-full* work. We hope to conscientiously, deliberately, meaningfully move away from the paternalistic and often non-consensual imposition of “help” in a settler colonial context, and how this care has shaped research and archive cultures and economies. So often when “care” is offered, it implies superiority and is used to put a kind face on the domination practices of nationalism and white supremacy. Following the work of Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson on “ethnographic refusal” (95), in May 2018 Jasmine Rault and I organized a public critical conversation with Emily Simmonds, Aylan Couchie, d’bi-young anitafrika, and Karyn Recollect, entitled *The Labour of Being Studied/The Labour of Refusing to Be Studied*. As a result of this conversation and subsequent discussions, we have begun to shape the work of the Cabaret Commons as being *care-full about care*, especially to not impose the research, digital, and archival logics of open access, speed, and preservation on TFQ artists and audiences who may just want to be forgotten, to move slowly enough to contemplate the outcomes of online publication or exhibition, to pause in the process, or to have their time-based performance or participation in a party, disappear without a trace. In as much as we might see the research (and career) value in creating an online archive of TFQ cabaret materials in order to enter these into a larger knowledge economy, we are trying to flip the logic, by caring more for TFQ cabaret affective logics than for university career logics. Our first priority in this method of *care-fullness* is, as Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor note about feminist ethics of care in the shaping of archival economies and cultures, to understand how “people are linked to each other and larger communities through webs of responsibilities” (28). This means considering the responsibilities of researchers in the transmedial migration—in shifting the contexts of temporality and scale—of TFQ materials.

Our research, inspired by Drucker, is driven by an explicit agenda of materializing, or embodying, trans- feminist and queer principles in a digital environment. As we proceed, we imagine that the Cabaret Commons will operate by a cabaret methodology. How to design a repository that is at once a form of entertainment and a site for research which is both produced by and produces trans- feminist and queer lives? How to structure our design process and its results to incorporate structures of feeling (Williams) and “feelings of structure” (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* 216) that include an appreciation of variety, risk, difference, provocation, and surprise accompanied by a concurrent sympathy with, or high tolerance for, the rough-around-the-edges aesthetic that characterizes many cabaret performances?

A cabaret methodology is developed through a set of principles and values that allow an audience to enjoy a show not *in spite* of the mixed-bagness of cabaret, but *because* of it (Cowan, “a one-shot affair”).

In our first two stages of design, we developed a set of accounting and accountability protocols to structure the labour and compensation values within the project (Cowan and Rault); we also developed sets of digitization and metadata protocols established through the process of uploading a range of cabaret’s media artifacts (videos, posters, images, newsletters, emails, and so on) to the CWRC server (Cowan, Rault, and McLeod). What we quickly realized is that the process of “onlining” (Cowan and Rault) needs to be done in close collaboration with *every* person in each photograph, video, and document; although collaboration prolongs the process and means that we are sitting on materials that will never go online, we realize that the dramatic contextual shift of temporality, scale, and audience of the trans-medial migration of materials from small show to personal archive to online exhibition, repository, or archive requires not just the copyright permission of the creators of the materials (photographers, videographers, and so on) but every other participant as well. Their affective proximity to and engagement with this project matters. We are realizing that the transmedial shift is largely about the dramatic shift of affective valences—the archival remains of TFQ cabarets are largely made up of images and videos of people or personae who seek out TFQ culture as a space in which it is relatively safe to take risks, especially the risk of *being oneself*. While who we are (onstage and offstage) is *understood* in the context of TFQ cabaret scenes, we are marked as *strange* and, predictably, maliciously *misunderstood* within the broader cis- and hetero-normative culture. To put these images, videos, and other documents online is to move the people in them from a cabaret scene in which their presentation, aesthetics, and resourcefulness is valued as fabulous, into an online context that potentially exposes them to the general public, to whom our genders, bodies, aesthetics, and desires are regularly understood as abnormal, deviant, dangerous.

As we move to the next stage of Cabaret Commons design, we find ourselves with a project that remains at the intersection of the pragmatic mode of building an archive using available technological capacities and the speculative field of imagining design beyond the limitations of what is computationally possible, in order to develop innovative new “digital archival environments” (Moravec 186). What I call “cabaret’s digital dilemma” is a dilemma that is predicated on an attempt to produce digital structures that might do the work of preserving trans- feminist and queer aesthetic and

social innovation and the cultural memories associated with this work—to make those memories available to new audiences who might need these materials for their own sense of belonging, survival, or even aesthetic well-being—while not recklessly exposing them to being made dangerously strange, to misunderstanding, or attack. That work might be done through digital and archival infrastructures that are modelled on and faithful to trans- feminist and queer cabaret as live performance, while also modelled on and faithful to the context of production within minoritized and at-risk cultural, social, political, and sexual scenes with implied and explicit codes of access and ethics that are not necessarily compatible with the default open-access protocols of most digital spaces. Our process is largely informed by the decolonizing and anti-colonial archival and cultural heritage protocols developed by Murkutu and Local Contexts, two platforms that place traditional knowledges and practices, as well as the past, present, and future needs of the Indigenous, Aboriginal, and Native peoples whose materials they collect and display (Christen)³ at the centre of the design process.

Our initial aim for the Cabaret Commons was that it would be an online archive, anecdotal encyclopedia, gossip rag, and memories and feelings bank for trans- feminist and queer artists, audiences, and researchers. Of course, an archive is not an encyclopedia. From the beginning, we realized that we needed a hybrid structure that was both curated and user-generated—interactive and responsive—that would somehow *move* the affects, aesthetics, and politics of the cabaret stage to an online platform: that is, that materials would be made available through the curatorial decisions made by the research team, as well as those made by our *imagined* Cabaret Commons users who might also upload their own content, comments, and choices via what they select for circulation on this *imagined* site.

In order to work toward a proof-of-concept, we found ourselves in need of a case study and data set. Since 2014, we've been working with the collected materials of Meow Mix, a cabaret and party “for bent girls and their buddies,” which ran in Montreal from 1997 to 2012. We have been given access to, and permission to work with and publish the archive of, Miriam Ginestier, the producer of Meow Mix, as well as the collections of Sasha La Photograph, the photographer who documented the shows and parties through their final several years. Sasha also curated the Meow Mix Retrospective in 2013. We have been *trying* to work with this data set, which involves several terabytes of digital and digitized flyers, posters, photos, and video, and are grappling at once with the technological problems of digital transfer and the many ethical problems of labour and consent. We

have found that, although we have secured copyright permission from the photographers and creators of these materials, we need to seek consent from each artist for each archival instance and to provide what Adrienne Rich calls a “contextual present” for them before making them publicly available and searchable on the Internet. These ethical demands are similar to those that Tara Robertson outlines in a blog post in which she highlights the ethics gaps apparently unattended to in REVEAL DIGITAL/INDEPENDENT VOICES’ open-access digital release of the full run of the DIY lesbian porn magazine *On Our Backs* (published 1984–2004). As Robertson notes, we need to take into consideration the unique ethical questions that arise when dealing with and being care-full for trans, feminist, and queer community-oriented DIY materials.

“Most of the *On Our Backs* run was published before the internet existed,” Robertson notes. “Consenting to appear in a limited-run print publication is very different [from] consenting to have one’s sexualized image be freely available on the internet. These two things are completely different. Who in the early 90s could imagine what the internet would look like in 2016?” (“Digitization” n.p.). Indeed, modelling permission on trans-feminist and queer community protocols, as in “saying yes on one occasion doesn’t mean that you imply consent forever,” is a standard that my collaborators and I are working with, in addition to the required research ethics board (REB) guidelines. We’re thinking of it as an experiment in Permission and Rigorous Informed Risk. What this translates into is prioritizing accountability in the communities that we study (and these are our home communities) *over* accountability to the professional pressures to unveil the digital-cultural heritage site that we’ve been working on now for *several years!*

We’ve found that most of the Meow Mix artists are not interested in reproducing or getting involved in the distribution of a full-run, open-access digital archive of their materials. The reasons are many: 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* 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.

Because our primary concern is being accountable to the people and scenes whose work we study (and to which we belong as performers, audiences, fans, promoters, etc.), we are designing (mostly speculatively at this point) the Cabaret Commons through a process that is beneficial to these

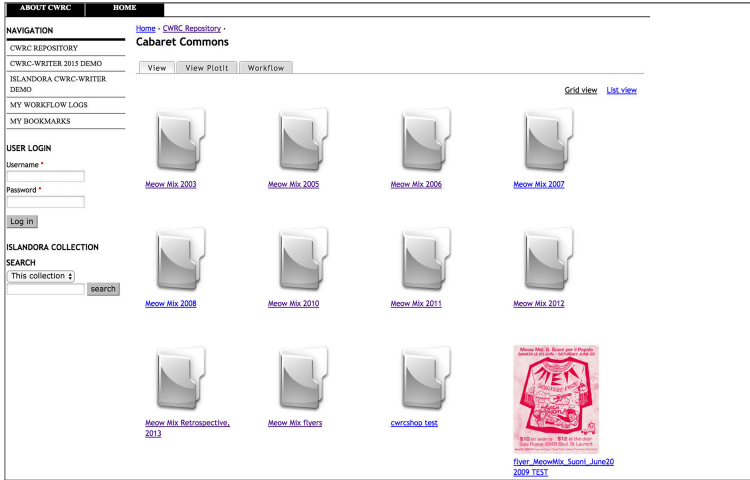


FIGURE 2.1 Cabaret Commons early-stage database grid view. Photo by T.L. Cowan.

people and scenes as well as to the scholarly project of archiving “full runs” and networking performance scenes and knowledges, and to the shifted affective context of the Internet, which is very different from the generally small audiences (usually no more than 300 people, most of them known within the broader TFQ scene, or artistic, activist, community network) of grassroots cabaret. Indeed, it turns out that many artists whose work is documented in the Meow Mix archives would be happy to have some of the work made public if it were contextualized through a curated exhibition rather than uncut or uncontextualized.⁴ Many of these artists are not interested in having their work simply “out there” as raw archives; if their work is going to be online for the infinite, unpredictable, and often cruel audiences of the Internet, they want to be written about, not just splashed onto the landing page and into the metadata of a research website.

Attending to artists’ suggestions on how a research website might be useful to them checks our archival impulse and shifts the focus and methodology of our project far more toward context-rich publication and exhibition practices. Indeed, the practices of representational autonomy and responsibility—the right to control one’s image and how and to whom it is circulated—become increasingly important to TFQ-generated digital culture, as we come to realize that we need to be care-full about what we put online and how we online it. It is often only in the process of onlining itself that we, or the artists we work with, can make affectively informed decisions about what we are comfortable having online and under what conditions. Most performers will tell you that you don’t really know your own material

until you bring it onstage—until you platform it. Online staging—or platforming—works similarly. You may have been perfectly happy with a live performance and think that you are fine with the documentation of that performance online, until you upload it and think about its infinite Internet life and the possible audiences that may now view the piece. Our onlining decision-making process necessarily includes an artist-controlled take-down policy, because our realities change, and what we were once comfortable with might shift depending on our shifting realities and circumstances.

In their article on the dilemmas faced by Digital Humanities scholars, Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy, Stan Rueker, Jeffery Antoniuk, and Sharon Balazs note that *one* problem with digital publishing is the problem of “never being done.” We have found that attending to the connected technological and ethical problems of producing a digital archive of live performance, living cultures, and collective social memory and experience, our problem has been one of “never being *begun*,” or, rather, that the *pre*-platform process is never done. These problems are instructive and necessary, and indeed our mode of experimentation has been to examine them thoroughly *before* producing a publicly accessible Cabaret Commons. That is, after almost a decade of thinking through this digital dilemma through the ethics of cabaret methods, we have been able to start building the speculative commons site of our dreams.

Transmedial Drag

What I am calling transmedial drag (Cowan, “The Internet of Bawdies”) 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 unassimilable by the form or medium as it currently exists and compel us to ask whether the form or medium exists *because of* these constitutive exclusions, or on the condition that certain elements remain excessive and external.

I’ve chosen to describe the image in Figure 2.2 because it is a typical document from the Meow Mix archives, kept by its producer Miriam Ginestier. If we published this still image, or uploaded the video from which it is taken (I don’t remember if we have access to the video), the viewer might get a sense of what happened onstage during this performance. However because of the degradation the videotape has suffered, it is impossible to identify the performers unless you were one of them or, perhaps, if you saw the performance live. Further, the video does little to capture what was happening

In this video still from 2003 we see a stage, framed by red velvet curtains and lit with a small lighting grid on the ceiling in front of the stage and by a chandelier on stage. The scene on stage is of four bodies dressed in black suits and one body in a hot pink halter-style dress. The body in the hot pink dress is in close proximity to two of the bodies in suits. It looks like they are probably dancing. The faces and bodies of the people in the image are blurry. The heads of about 10 audience members in the first three rows are visible and also blurry. Actually, the whole image is blurry, but I love it. I think it looks like a painting.

FIGURE 2.2 “Untitled, Not Pictured,” Meow Mix performance, 2003. From the archives of Miriam Ginestier. Textual reproduction by T.L. Cowan.

offstage, which, at a Meow Mix—a prime site for dyke and queer cruising, breakups, public drunkenness, and other gossip-mill fodder—was always at least as important as what was happening onstage. And it’s in these back- or offstage performances—in gossip, drama, and fabulation—that much of the political, cultural, social, and economic life of trans- feminist and queer scenes are processed, and worked out and over. It’s in the joy, anger, crushes, betrayals, gossip, disagreements, arguments, forgiveness, and newly articulated needs happening away from the staged “show” itself that much of TFQ culture, politics, and socialities take place and take change. It is exactly these affects that we want to be care-full of, recognizing how difficult it is to move affect across context, across platforms.

One aspect of the transmedial drag analytic and method is the slowness—the drag—of the process, of designing with and for the trans- feminist and queer “community ethics,” best practices, subcultural economies, aesthetics, and “scenes” that we are interested in in the first place. Fig. 2.2 is a typical object from the Meow Mix archive. We often can’t identify *who* the people in the images or videos are—partly because we weren’t at all the shows, or these people are no longer in the scene, or these people have transitioned over time and are unrecognizable, or the quality of the image is so low that we can’t make out the details.

There are differential consequences to remediating and recirculating TFQ archival remains without rigorous permissions protocols. For some

people, these remains are at worst an embarrassing but funny or nostalgic reminder of another time and life; for many others, however, it can do real damage by threatening their lives and resource networks. Some people's professional and artistic reputations and careers could be hurt, and we can't know in advance what the consequences of onlining cabaret archival materials might be. Cabaret = trust. It is a temporality of trust. As Jas Rault and I have noted, on top of the potential harm, circulating these media without permissions "might just miss the point of exactly the sexual subcultures and their shifting, historically specific and very local politics, ethics, and aesthetics that we're ostensibly working to archive and sustain" (Cowan and Rault, "Onlining Queer Acts" 126).

Ultimately, we keep asking ourselves, How do we design a digital space and archive that runs on what Kara Keeling calls "queer OS" (a queer operating system)? One that does not subordinate the knowledges and practices of trans- feminist and queer subcultures to the limited needs and interests of existing software, computational capacity, and the protocols of professionalized digital and academic ethics and economies. How do we reimagine digital capacities, platforms, architectures, and logics into a Queer OS that takes, as Keeling writes, 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), to be mutually constitutive with sexuality and with media and information 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 technologies, allows us both to recognize their limits and imagine their necessary transformations, and puts into relief some of the dynamics of cabaret that continue to sustain trans- feminist and queer subcultures and lives, even within media environments that are designed around their impossibility and imperceptibility. Thus, transmedial drag is the method we are working with and working on, to create the Cabaret Commons. In particular, this method requires us to build in digital affordances that will accommodate technologies of fabulous—the anecdotes and gossip, the intimacies formed and broken in their relating, the performative orientation to utopia in the face of obvious disaster, the impossible networks of survivance that may never show themselves in the (staged) "show" (Cowan, "The Internet of Bawdies").

This processual drag is fabulously generative and the affects produced through our transmedial processes have moved us to design a space that does

not rely primarily on archival materials. It has led us to the creation of two Cabaret Commons spaces: the Cabaret Commons Critical Practice (CCCP), launched in October 2018, and the Cabaret Commons Exhibition Place (CCXP). In our inaugural posts on the CCCP, we situate ourselves in the context of the project and how our priorities are shaped by cabaret methods (Cowan, “Cabaret”) and by the desire to “build a commons that adds rather than extracts value from the people and more-than-people who have created and/or cared for the resources that we might make commons” (Rault n.p.). We continue to do the work, because “the critical impulse to be, create and survive through sharing is what makes a show” (Guzmán n.p.), and, arguably, is what keeps us with this troubling project. And our many years of producing not-for-public-consumption proofs-of-concept, the fact that we are still not *done*, that we keep on being *re-begun*, is, as Stephen Lawson put it, understanding of practice as its own value: “Practising can create contingencies, preparedness for the unexpected or unknown, allowing for improvisation when necessary and the ability to confidently say ‘yes’ to the moment. It is the counterplot, the conspiracy and the sedition that mocks the cultured, the fashionable and the erudite. Sometimes it becomes the source for change and then sometimes it becomes the rule” (n.p.). The many years of not having a public-facing site is, in itself, the practice of staying living in a grassroots trans-feminist and queer aesthetic and epistemic sphere (Muñoz), that is deliberately, blissfully, critically out of line and offline. Indeed, as we prepare to launch the first public iteration of the Cabaret Commons, it turns out that that first public instance will have little to do with Meow Mix or other particular archives. Learning from the technological *and* affective lessons of our earlier (not-public) proofs-of-concept and in response to artist consultations over the past many years, we are using cabaret methodologies and an artist-run sensibility to shift away from an archive, which would primarily serve the needs of researchers, toward a site of critical engagement and enactment for artists, audiences, and activists *along with* researchers.

Postscript: Don't you know that *digitization* is not enough? ... Digitization is *not enough!*

Throughout the past several months of working with Meow Mix and the archives of other cabaret artists to develop a collaborative, accountable design and work plan for the Cabaret Commons, I've had the worst song stuck in my

head: “Tears Are Not Enough,” by Northern Lights, the early (1985) crowd-source effort of the “supergroup” of Canadian music all-stars (all the all-stars?), recorded and sold to raise relief funds for people suffering massive drought and famine in Ethiopia. The idea, of course, was that offering sympathy, feeling bad, was an inadequate response to this crisis. While of course my digital archives project has nothing to do with that scale of devastation, I have this ear worm that has become the theme song to the project—*Digitization is not enough! Don't you know that digitization is not enough, not enough!* Perhaps this is a ridiculous title for a book chapter, but it remains an important reminder to me when I get frustrated with the project of making digital scholarship that works for accountability to the scenes that I am and that I study.

Notes

- 1 Q: What is the distance between a solo-authored chapter and the conversations that make it possible? A: There is no distance at all. This work has always been in conversation with Jasmine Rault and with an ever-expanding network of artists, organizers, activists, friends, lovers, co-conspirators, students, and mentors. Most directly, this work is in conversation with our current collaborators, Islandia Guzmán and Stephen Lawson, who are working as co-managing editors of our first public-facing Cabaret Commons project—the Cabaret Commons Critical Practice.
- 2 Karen Barad uses “ethico-onto-epistem-ologies” to characterize the intra-active, agential character of objects and their human counterparts, and to help us conceptualize a post-human performative that works ethically to decentre the individual human (researcher) from theories of being and knowing, and to place human actors in a dynamics of action and consequences.
- 3 See murkutu.org and localcontexts.org.
- 4 In January 2013, Sasha La Photograph organized a Meow Mix Retrospective photo and video exhibition at RATS 9 gallery in Montreal. Initially, it was the materials from this exhibition that we intended to online through the Cabaret Commons. However, recognizing and feeling the consequential transmediation of scale from a month-long exhibit in a small gallery in Montreal, situated within the locale of the Meow Mix context, to the infinite and perpetual exposure of the Internet is what first prompted our study into the ethical practices of online open-access archives.