Introduction[i]

As stated by jake moore[ii] of the feminist new media project *Matricules*[iii], "archive" is both noun and

verb. As a noun, the archive is a physical repository, where materials are stored for preservation and for

perusal---and reference point, where records are consulted. As a verb, the archive functions as a social

history-building project, and facilitates storytelling. The feminist archive, as imagined by jake moore,

ceases to exist without being in process: acquiring documents, being accessed and utilized, articulated

and critiqued. In essence, the archive ceases to be when it is no longer engaged in creating, contesting,

and remixing stories[iv]. Online, this seems to be made all the more possible by the largely participatory

culture of the web, and the wide array of tools and applications made freely available. The online archive

relies on users to participate in its ongoing development: as programmers, curators, fans, hackers, editors,

writers, organisers, commenters, designers, contributors, readers, etc., and also for the preservation of the

projects themselves. Participation in a project online often means sustaining it: by generating copies,

conversations, and activating a culture and community around a shared reference point, from which a

project can be both grounded and expanded.

However, it needs to be said that much of what constitutes the online archive is also a challenge

to established archival modalities: fixity, provenance, scarcity, and authenticity, for example, are largely

undone, as are conceptions of time and place as markers of identity. Thinking of archiving in an

increasingly digital and networked environment has therefor meant considering the impact of easy

duplication and wide-scale distribution, but also the inherently ephemeral and volatile nature of memory.

As such, the tension between the archive's promise and its threat largely shapes the discourses of

preservation and access online, but its politics remain determined in no small part by the participants and

communities from which specific online initiatives emerge.

Using the example of nomorepotlucks.org (NMP), our intention is to explore how the politics of a

social movement—queer, LGBT, feminist—are reflected in a movement's archival strategies online,

though by no means always advertently. With this in mind, we attempt to address how NMP positions itself

politically through its strategies for sustenance—not so much to come up with a definitive stance about

who and what NMP is, or how it can or will be read historically, but rather to demonstrate the correlation

between self-preservation and politics, or, in other words, to identify the link between NMP and the activist potential of the online archive.

The title of this presentation *Taking the Archives Down With Us* is an homage to a statement made in 1979, by Pat Leslie, founder of the *Canadian Women's Movement Archive* or CWMA. In response to the threat of not being able to sustain the archive, Leslie pleads:

> *Specifically lesbian Herstory will be forever buried. What little exists now consists of hopeful conjuncture. It is the fear of oppression and the shyness of self-expression which makes that invisible veil so heavy. If need be, the Women's Movement Archives would go underground, file by file, to protect records of the growing movement. Access to everything donated by lesbians is strictly limited.[v]*

The CWMA did not go underground, however, it was transferred to the Morisset Library at the University of Ottawa, deemed by the group to be the most secure, stable and politically aligned repository, where it has resided since 1992. However, this transition to a university, a process which is significantly under-documented, leaves much to ponder considering the founder's plea to keep the archives within the community of women activists. In 1979, Leslie also wrote:

> *To ask the patriarchy to preserve our lives for us is a suicidal act. We do not need to be researched by patriarchal/academic institutions; we do not need to be financially supported by governments, capitalist or otherwise. [What] we do need is a link to future generations of feminists and lesbians who will have access to our lives.[vi]*

Researching lesbian history, therefore, means tracking the history of the archive itself. Lesbian-feminist critiques of the archive ask us to consider not only the relationship of women to the archive, as repository and process, but also the problematic nature of defining and delimiting the lesbian community. Who counts as a historian, archivist, and subject of history, and how is history created? How do citizenship, nationality, race and ethnicity further complicate the lesbian/queer archive? In outlining a Canadian context for NMP, we attempt to delimit the current boundaries of the lesbian archive and propose that a perspective positioned within queer (as verb, rather than noun) and feminist theory is of great value when situating the practices of web culture within a larger archival discourse. The question of where lesbian or queer histories belong, as we explore in this short presentation, is revisited in and through queer community new media appropriation, and their preservation.

About NMP

Before addressing some of the points raised above with examples of NMP's organization and process, let us first tell you a bit about NMP.

Launched on January 1, 2009, www.nomorepotlucks.org (NMP) is the first and only independent web-based and print-on-demand journal of arts and politics in Canada. Since its inception, the strong feminist underpinnings and visibly queer ethics of the journal have been made evident; however with no explicit mandate, NMP becomes an interesting site of inquiry into perceived ideas and ideals of feminist-queer media today.

NMP initially emerged in part from our longstanding friendship but also from our volunteer experience with the Dykes on Mykes (DoMs) Radio show at CKUT in Montreal and our collaboration with the show's host Dayna McLeod.[vii]

Now let's consider some of the ways that the politics of the LGBT, queer and feminist movements are reflected in, and influence our strategies for sustenance and preservation. The first point I'll touch on is the participation of the LGBT, queer and feminist communities in the creation and development of NMP. For the sake of brevity, I will provide most these examples in point form but please feel free to ask for clarity in the following Q&A.

1. Participation of the queer, LGBT and feminist communities in NMP

- NMP relies on the participation of these communities for our development in the most basic way by accepting text (interviews, articles & stories), audio files, videos, photos and illustrations to make up the content of the journal.
- While there is a small group of us that make most of the decisions regarding design and content, we have a number of researchers and informants that offer ongoing suggestions and ideas.
- We have contributing programmers that help us design, maintain, update and back up the database.

- Our Art Director (Mél) and a couple of volunteers design, layout and format the print issues and website.

- We invite readers to comment and discuss the submissions in NMP and often "comments" result in lengthy discussions both on and off the site.

- We invite one guest editor per year to pick a theme and curate an issue.

- We maintain a media page and calendar of events across Canada. Readers can create their own media account and update this page independently. The calendar (on the media page) was created and is maintained by a contributor to NMP.

- We have a group of incredibly committed copy editors, fact checkers, and translators.

- We have regular subscribers, people who provide donations, and who purchase the print issues.

- And of course, we also have our readers.

The community and network that we have been able to develop through DoMs and NMP began locally in Montreal and has since expanded to include queer, LGBT and feminist communities across Canada. A great example of our involvement in these communities is this conference - there are roughly a dozen people here who have been on DoMs, another dozen who have contributed to NMP, and countless others that we have been in touch with about future contributions.

Like most feminist/queer projects we follow a "by and for" approach – we don't ever attempt to speak on behalf of anyone or for everyone. With so much participation from volunteers, we try to reflect the communities that support us and we let the ideas from these communities drive us and push our development.

2. The second point we want to consider is: *Funding*

When it comes to issues of sustenance and preservation funding is of course an important issue. In our introduction, we quoted Pat Leslie's reference to the DIY and independent nature of feminist and queer communities, Leslie stated: "we do not need to be financially supported by governments, capitalist

or otherwise."[viii] While we do not necessarily subscribe to this, we have found that having no funding is hugely tied to independence—the kind of independence we want as a journal.

- NMP functions with very little funding and we generate a few pennies per print-on-demand issue. Some of you may know Montreal's Miriam Genestier and her famous *Meow Mix* parties. Each year she hosts one of these as a fundraiser for NMP and from this event we generate our annual budget of roughly $1000.

- We have received very generous donations from organizations and individuals in the past but all of these have been given and received with a "no-strings-attached" understanding. Because NMP is committed to changing with the ideas and ideals of our communities we do not want any funding to sway our content or political direction—lucky for us, our supporters feel the same way.

- What Pat Leslie does not address in her quote (above) is the fact that we may not need to be supported by governments, but we do need to support each other. The primary reason we debate applying for funding is so that we can pay our contributors and volunteers for their work. But we also know that money will change the entire structure of our journal.

- The subject of funding is of course an ongoing conversation between us because while it can open a number of doors for a project like ours, it can also become very restrictive. For now, we are very happy to exist without any funding and rather than think about all of the things that we are unable to do without money, we continue to look at all that we are capable of without it.

As stated in our introduction, much of what constitutes the online archive is also a challenge to established archival modalities, including: fixity, provenance, scarcity, and authenticity. In stark contrast to Leslie's idea of "going underground", NMP - as an example of an online feminist archive – is doing quite the opposite.

Rather than fixity and provenance our choice of technology allows for unlimited revisions to both the web and print issues of NMP – thereby challenging the idea of an "original copy". And instead of scarcity and authenticity, we prioritize accessibility and wide distribution.

3. The final point we will consider here is: *Accessibility* by means of *Technology*

- We started out requiring a paid subscription to access our back issues, however with the launch of our current "*Motive*" issue (July/Aug 2011), we reconsidered our own motivations and scrapped this model in favour of free and open access.

- Print-on-demand, unlike traditional journals that require tremendous capital to finance print runs, is a system that allows readers to order any number of print copies directly from the printer, online.

- We make a PDF available for only $3.99 to allow people access to a version of the print issue at a lower cost.

- NMP's website is created using the free and open source software Drupal, which is a highly flexible content management system.

- NMP also uses DropBox alongside many other free and/or cheap online tools (including social media) to meet our file sharing, communication, promotional, and administrative needs.

- NMP podcasts each episodes of DoMs, through the NMP website and also through iTunes for easy access to the show.

We'll stop here, but this should give you an idea of how NMP functions, and how it demands a revisiting of the lesbian archive as something coveted and protected.

Conclusion

Our title harkens back to feminist lesbian pleas of the late 1970s, when freestanding archives of the women's movement and lesbian community were first imagined. While this lesson has informed some of the lesbian media activism in which Nomorepotlucks situates itself, print-on-demand, open source

content management systems, podcasting and emergent technologies of display and dissemination, in conjunction with the mainstreaming and increased tolerance of queers (in certain places or contexts anyway), have also challenged the possessive nature of lesbian history, as emoted by Leslie.

We lesbians could no longer take our archival collections underground, file by file, as Leslie's 1979 plea proposed. Lesbian culture belongs to and is now housed in our personal collections, on our media players, hard drives, in email and cloud storage, and on our servers. Because the web, print on demand, and podcasting allow for easy access to information, both in their creation and consumption, lesbian culture has been able to expand and redefine itself in the digital age; lesbians and their archives can be seen and heard, not just represented and talked about. Lesbian culture online maintains the urgency and necessity of a distinctive lesbian culture, often in conjunction with, but sometimes in opposition to, queer, LGBT, as well as various feminist political stances. New means of communication have thus afforded otherwise invisible and marginalized lesbian communities the means with which to re-represent community, challenge dominant representations, highlight the importance of minority representation itself, and archive the results of their activity and activism.

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[i] This paper borrows from previous publications by one of the authors:
Hogan, Mél "Dykes on Mykes: Podcasting and the Activist Archive" in *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* Issue 20: 199-215 2009.
Hogan, Mél "Archiving Absence: A Queer Feminist Perspective" Masters Thesis, Concordia University, Montreal. 2007.

[ii] Moore, Jake. 2006, october 11. *Brief: Matricules (parts 1 and 2) : Database and archive project: Studio XX the first 10 years*. Dpi. Accessed August 30, 2011. http://dpi.studioxx.org/demo/?q=fr/no/07/brief-matricules-database-and-archive-project-studio-xx-first-10-years.

[iii] Ibid. Accessed August 12, 2011.

[iv] Hogan, Mél. *Dykes on Mykes Podcasting and the Activist Archive*. Topia, no. 20. Pp. 199.

[v] Leslie, Pat. 1980. Women's Movement Archives. *Lesbian/Lesbienne*, 1(1): 11.

[vi] Leslie, Pat. 1980. Women's Movement Archives. *Lesbian/Lesbienne*, 1(1): 11.

[vii] Dayna McLeod. http://daynarama.com/

[viii] Leslie, Pat. 1980. Women's Movement Archives. *Lesbian/Lesbienne*, 1(1): 11.