



Selected Papers of #AoIR2020:
The 21st Annual Conference of the
Association of Internet Researchers
Virtual Event / 27-31 October 2020

STOR(Y)ING ON THE INTERNET? THE PRAXIS AND ETHICS OF ONLINE QUEER LATIN AMERICAN CABARET ARCHIVES

Carina Guzmán
University of Toronto

My doctoral research includes the design and implementation of an online archive and digital exhibit of the community materials of two Mexico City-based collectives which I was a member of. The first is *Meras efimeras*, dedicated to organizing lesbian nightlife events such as dance parties and cultural soirées, and the second, which emerged from within *Meras efimeras* is *Burlesquimeras* a queer neoburlesque troupe (both active approx. 2005-2012). Some of these materials were born-digital, while other analogue ephemera will be digitized. Digital photographs and social media certainly existed in the years *Meras efimeras* and *Burlesquimeras* (MeB) were active, but it was before the two were seamlessly integrated through the ubiquity of smartphones and unlimited data plans—at least in the Mexican context.

Most materials have been preserved by community members in what scholars have theorized as queer archives constituted by the clutter or messiness associated to trans-feminist, queer and often migrant lives (Cowan, 2012; Manalansan, 2014). In the process of producing the MeB archive, I am weaving a conversation between said scholars and Latin American thinkers who also theorized the concept of messiness, as well as others such as *relajo*, magic, civil society and Utopia (Aínsa, 1984; Cerutti Guldberg, 1989; Monsiváis, 1998a, 1998b; Portilla 1986; Quijano, 1993). Through this conversation, I propose a specifically queer and Latin American form of archival preservation, custodianship and digital praxis I call “stor(y)ing” *mi desmadre* (Mexican slang for “my mess”). “Stor(y)ing” *mi desmadre* collapses the trans-feminist and queer (TFQ) community member’s ability to store ephemera and other materials afforded by *mi desmadre*, with the historical narrative that *mi desmadre* enacts by merely/queerly existing.

“Stor(y)ing” begins when someone holds on to ephemera and keeps it in that messy corner of a closet or hard drive. The next steps of “stor(y)ing” happen when, usually after several years of fostering *mi desmadre*, they get together with other community members to constitute a formal collection available for consultation, with varying

Suggested Citation (APA): Guzmán, C. (2020, October). *Layers of “Networked Privacy”: Stor(Y)ing On the Internet? The Praxis and Ethics of Online Queer Latin American Cabaret Archives*. Paper presented at AoIR 2020: The 21th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Virtual Event: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.

degrees and modes of institutional help. Almost implicit in the collaboration between TFQ communities and archival institutions is the latter's expectation (or demand) that digitized/digital materials be available for consultation through public-facing online platforms.

The call for open-access means the now formally-archival materials that were created and circulated within the "integral audiences" and "queer negotiated intimacy" of a TFQ community of artists and show-goers will be available for the first time not only outside that context, but to the general public of the internet (Cowan & Rault, 2018). This inevitably raises ethical questions about the transfer of the risk of queer existence and queer nightlife in Latin America to the internet; questions that archival institutions are not necessarily concerned with (Cowan, 2020; Cowan & Rault, 2018).

In the case of the MeB project, I have partnered with the Cabaret Commons Critical Practice and Exhibition Place (cabaretcommons.org); an initiative that is deeply concerned with TFQ community ethics of "onlining" archival material. In conversation with the Cabaret Commons team and co-directors, we have worked hard on understanding and translating to the online sphere the *public, but not open to just any public*, dynamic and ethic of care present in MeB events, like in so many other TFQ nightlife communities in the American Hemisphere (Cowan, 2020). One key conclusion we have come to is that the MeB archive will have password-restricted access. Only those who have contributed materials to the digital archive--in other words, community members who were once present in the nightlife spaces and shows--will (by default) be granted the password. Third parties will have to request access to the online collection. Additionally, there will be a public-facing exhibition of ethically selected materials to inaugurate the archive.

Lastly, I would like to share the issues I am currently thinking through with my *compañeras* of Meras efímeras and Burlesquimeras and the Cabaret Commons team: A) how to handle access requests to the password-restricted archive and B) what ethical criteria should we apply to select material to include in the public-facing digital exhibit (beyond, of course, having consent from the creator or people who appear in the material). The following are some questions and considerations we're thinking through in this process:

- What would justify access to the online archive?
- If a third party is granted access to the online archive, how can we control what they use the materials for?
- How will we sustain the labor of processing requests?
- Will there be a single person in charge of processing requests? A committee? Should all contributors be consulted?
- In terms of selecting and getting permission to include materials in the online exhibit, the dynamic of friendship may have an impact:
- For instance, if I approach a friend requesting their consent to show an image in which they appear, our relationship may make it uncomfortable for them to say "no".

- On the other hand, our friendship could avoid other types of discomfort and potential community ethical breaches. That is, in many cases we can avoid requesting consent to include an image of someone and their ex, given our familiarity with the community history of hookups and break-ups.
- I recently launched a call on my Facebook for people to send material for the archive and exhibit. We decided to ask people for archival materials, but also works they could create now to remember those events such as memes, collages, stories, etc.

Sources (based on video script)

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