no more potlucks: a case study

by Staci Tucker, University of Oregon
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[no more potlucks](#) (NMP) is an open-source queer feminist journal based out of Montreal Canada. NMP produces approximately six bi-monthly issues a year, combining queer feminist scholarship, calls to feminist activism, and queer feministic artistic expression. All issues are available for free on the website, which is built on [Wordpress](#), an open-source PHP/XML/mySQL based content management system, or in print for a nominal charge. NMP serves as a fantastic example of open feminist scholarship, both based on its regional success and regard in the global academic feminist community. NMP is a model of resistance against closed academic scholarship, serving alongside increasingly adopted examples of open access, collaborative, and anti-capitalist projects, founded on queer and feminist ideology. NMP is a visually stunning, intellectually rich, dynamic, bilingual online journal, complete with more than 70 hours of archived *Dykes on Mykes* radio podcasts.

no more potlucks **serves as a model for:**

- Tactical media: NMP seeks to promote social change and criticism through the open publication of queer feminist research and by challenging traditional models of partially/fully profit-motivated academic publishing.
- Interdisciplinary: NMP works closely with activists, artists, and scholars in content decisions concerning journal themes and editorial.

- Community: NMP utilizes its platform to promote activist, scholastic, and art events in the greater community.

The History and Key Players:

No More Potlucks is the love child and realized dream of a team of dedicated and driven volunteers whose goal is to "redefine culture with each issue." The current version of NMP is an upgrade from the old website, originally a Montreal-based, queer events calendar launched in 2003, which included both French and English versions. However, the French mirror of the site was dropped in 2009 with a redesign, which offered bilingual functions. The new site organizes multimedia content around a central theme.

The original website was hand-coded in HTML but, according to Mél Hogan, founding member and current art director, "we were constantly overwriting and replacing content." The redesign in 2009 was built on Drupal, which allowed for a less cumbersome maintenance of the site. "The web has changed so much and with that, our intentions and goals. Originally we functioned as a kind of posting board for queer women's events in the city (Montreal) seeing as people coming in through town would have no idea where to look to find parties, workshops, organizations, etc. So that was our goal in 2003 and while there was no way then to assess who was looking at the site or how useful it was, we do hear stories now from people who remember the site and how great it was to have a site to consult to find out what was going on."

Hogan was originally alone is maintaining the website(s), but M-C MacPhee joined the project in 2006 with the intention of expanding the project to a journal with monthly editions. "It's hard to say when the idea came about but I think we were sort of holding out for the technology to make this feasible before we could really make the switch. I think we knew that what we were doing was temporary and as soon as Friendster came out, it was clear that social media was going to make us obsolete: there's no way two people could keep up with events in the way a whole community could. So I think social media displaced us but also forced us to become what we always wanted, which is the bimonthly journal we now put out online and in print on demand."

The start of the project began with the collaboration between Hogan and MacPhee, through their community radio experience with *Dykes on Mykes* co-host Dayna McLeod, with whom they'd been working for four years. "…We also had clear roles established: m-c did all the communications and outreach, Dayna was able to improvise, be witty, and interview anyone on the spot, and I was doing mostly the behind the scenes technical work," says Hogan. During their initial meetings to discuss the possibility of launching the journal they envisioned a monthly edition with four submissions each. They imagined it would be difficult to fill the four slots per issue. However, an outreach volunteer with experience in production, Mathilde Geromin, suggested a quarterly journal similar to *Fuse*. The original collaborators felt a quarterly edition was too few and compromised on bi-monthly journal with 8-12 pieces, which continues today.

The name for the project came from the early iteration of the website as a posting board for queer and feminist events. According to Hogan, "The idea was [that] both feminists and lesbians [have] a reputation - from the second wave women's movement - to host potlucks as a social activity, and in saying 'no more potlucks' we were gently poking fun at this, and saying there's more to do in the city than eating hummus and layered dips. We actually [received] a few emails in the early days from people saying they like potlucks and what was out problems with them and so on. But I think people now understand that it is homage to those lesbian feminists more than anything. If there's one underlying philosophy to *no more potlucks* it is a respect [for our] our roots."

Key players:

Mél Hogan – Art Director & Publisher

Mél Hogan is currently completing her research creation/media archaeology doctorate in Communication Studies at Concordia University in Montréal, Canada. Her research documents crashed online video art repositories within a Canadian cultural context. Hogan is part two of two of theBRUCE video art duo, and a media activist; she is the cofounder of nomorepotlucks.org, and sound technician and co-host for radio show *Dykes on Mykes*. Hogan is also on the Board of Studio XX, conducts

interviews for *Vague Terrain*, and is working with archive nerds on a new project called archivism.

M-C MacPhee – Editor & Content Curator

Marie-Claire MacPhee is a Concordia University graduate who made the obvious transition from women's studies to carpentry. When she's not learning about sustainable building, she is a freelance researcher and communications coordinator in Toronto. M-C is the programmer for *Dykes on Mykes* Radio in Montreal.

Other Players:

- Dayna McLeod – Editor & Video Curator
- Fabien Rose - Rédacteur
- Gabriel Chagnon – Rédacteur & Traducteur
- Momoko Allard - Publishing Assistant
- la Mathilde – Informatrice
- Lukas Blakk - Web/Technical Support
- Elisha Lim – Regular Contributor
- Nicholas Little - Regular Contributor (Jan 2009 – August 2011)
- Yasmin Nair - Regular Contributor
- Jenn Clamen - Copy Editor & Consultant
- Renuka Chaturvedi - Copy Editor
- Andrea Zeffiro - Copy Editor

Project Mandate:

"…We don't have a mandate," Hogan explains. "We decided not to have a specific group that we're targeting, or a specific way of being, or reflect a certain politic. It's all about 'mostly.' It's going to reflect who's working on it in a big way. It's mostly Canadian, mostly French and English, mostly women, mostly about arts and politics and culture."

In none of their promo or editorial is there mention of the word queer. "Ironically, it's like putting one version of queer politics into practice, whereby your identity is much more complex than just your sexual orientation, just your background, just your education, just your whatever," Hogan says. "You know the LGBTQ squared alphabet soup? We're just not interested

in making those lists. But they're there for a reason and we've learned from them. We're admitting that that has informed the way we do things. We're just taking the next step." Hogan admits that the project is obviously queer and feminist, so doesn't feel it's necessary to state these identities in their mandate. NMP fears that by limiting their identity as a project they will limit the nature of the submissions.

As for the future of NMP, "We don't really know," Hogan admits. "That'll probably get us into trouble. We're still responsible, we're still accountable, we're still making choices about who we're representing and how. And fair enough. It's a risk worth taking."

Behind the Scenes:

"Anyone can do what we're doing," claims editor Mél Hogan. "We're all self-taught." For the first issue, "Début | Birth," the editors cashed in favors to handpick big name contributors such as Mary K. Bryson, Julie Doucet, Allyson Mitchell and Catherine Opie. Though initially worried about producing only three articles, Hogan had to redesign the site to accommodate between 12 and 15 articles per issue. The current issue of NMP is available on the website. Past issues are also available in full-color hard copy a few weeks after the issue launch. "This is something we could only do now, maybe in the last couple of years," Hogan states of the print-on-demand technology enables NMP to print as many, or as few, copies of the journal as readers want. "When the next issue comes up, you don't have access to this one anymore, unless you subscribe," Hogan says. "But print issues you can order anytime."

Journal contributors come from across Canada and beyond. The site offers video, audio and textual submissions, and encourages people to send content and participate in online discussion. They typically have between 8-12 submissions per issue, totaling 214 submissions over 18 issues. Submissions are typically arranged six months in advance. Unlike many journals, NMP doesn't employ a regular call for submissions. They pick journal themes a year in advance and contact artists, activists, and academics, whose work reflects those themes.

Contributors are asked to pitch ideas to coincide with a themed issue. Submissions are received two months prior to publication. The editors review and make necessary edits, sometimes sending work back to the contributors for correction. "Once we've confirmed a

submission from [a contributor], we try our best not to put any constraints (other than length and time) on their work," says MacPhee. "We let interviewers take conversations in whatever direction they want and we let writers focus on what inspires them. This means that sometimes the only common thread between pieces in any issue is the theme. Sometimes very natural connections happen and sometimes we curate the topics delicately to ensure there is some flow, but again it depends on the writers, the media, and topics."

According to MacPhee, "Deciding on themes is an ongoing process. Generally we try to be a year ahead with this… Picking themes is really fun and also really stressful!" The editors select a single word with multiple possible meanings. They also try to select themes that are translatable between English and French. "We always encourage our contributors to interpret the themes as broadly as they like," says MacPhee.

Themes for 2011 included:
- Jan/Feb - CHANCE
- Mar/Apr – ANIMAL
- May/June – VENEER
- Jul/Aug – MOTIVE
- Nov/Dec – AMOUR

Themes for 2012 will include:
- Jan/Feb – ISSUE
- Mar/Apr – WITNESS
- May/June – WASTE
- Jul/Aug – RECORD
- Nov/Dec – PANIQUE

Hogan and MacPhee do the bulk of the organizing, editing, communications, art direction, and publishing. Dayna McLeod is also very involved in the process but is currently taking a break. They often use Skype to conduct meetings about potential themes, contributors, issue goals, and workflow. NMP also benefits from an incredible team of volunteers that help with translation, copy editing, web/tech support, contribution suggestions, and additional resources. They also have between 2-3 regular contributors who contribute twice a year.

Technology allows NMP to put out print on demand journals at no cost to them and they've rebuilt our site, to be launched January 2012, using a free open source platform. NMP was previously using Drupal, which failed to be sufficiently backward compatible, limiting the

online application. "We're very DIY, which is also an ongoing challenge. The flipside of that is that it allows incredible freedom to put out whatever we want with having to answer to nobody," says Hogan.

Community:

NMP continues to have a close relationship with *Dykes on Mykes*, which is where the three founding members met, working on the show together in 2005. NMP, through their Facebook page, continues to be used to promote local art, academic, and activist events. Also, according to MacPhee, "Over the years we have attended a number of conferences to talk about our work with NMP and *Dykes on Mykes*. These serve as great outreach opportunities. We have also endorsed and helped to organize a number of community events."

Funding/Resources:

Expenses such as server fees and back-up hard drives are out of pocket or are covered by fundraisers. Readers can support the project by subscribing or making a donation. "Obviously, we're not doing it for the money," Dayna McLeod says. "At all. Ever. But it would be really great to be able to pay the contributors." According to Hogan, "…The machine has taken on a life of its own, which is amazing and weird considering nobody is paid and the whole thing runs off a budget of $1500/year, money we get from a Meow Mix party hosted and organized by Miriam Ginestier." Every year since 2009, Miriam Ginestier of Mim Productions hosts a December Meow Mix benefit for NMP, which provides their annual budget. All other funds are received via small donations from groups and individuals.

Challenges:

"…We held off for years to make it happen because we didn't have the connections then, didn't have the experience to coordinate such a huge project, and the technology wasn't ready for us! So to answer the question of challenges at the same time here, I'd say it was those three factors: connections, experience and technology - and in the order because even if you have the

tech, if you don't have the people and the labor of love element, you have nothing," says Hogan. Recently NMP has overcome significant technical challenges by rebuilding the website in Wordpress, which is more backward compatible. The new version of the website will launch in early 2012.

Significance and Assessment:

Online scholarly journals certainly aren't new. By the turn of the century, 75 percent of academic journals were offering online editions and more than 1,000 peer-reviewed journals existed in digital form (Thapa et al, 2001, Tenopir, 2001). While evidence suggests that print editions will continue for some time, the rush to offer an online presence suggests a strong digital future for academic scholarship. The timely, hyperlinked, and globally accessible possibilities of electronic publishing serve its readers very well. Online publishing technologies are capable of reversing what has otherwise been a state of declining access to an ever-growing body of research. Nearly every field is experimenting with open access journals, which make the content available to wider range of readers than print or subscription models could ever achieve. Continued pursuit and experimentation with open access journals is likely to have a profound impact on the state of knowledge and traditions long-held in the academy.

For some, including many in feminist and queer research, the age of open scholarship has long-since arrived. However, there continues to be significant resistance in the academy to experiments such NMP. In many ways, open source journals represent institutional change and resistance, not unlike much queer feminist work. Open-source journals still lack status and respect in the academy. Credit for open-source publication is given significantly lower regard than publication credit in traditional peer-reviewed publications. Partly this is due to the fact that many of these journals are freshman and have yet to earn a level of respect and status in the research field.

Partly this is also due to skepticism surrounding the potential lack of rigidity in peer review process of open publishing, related to to patriarchal and elitist strains which run throughout all aspects of higher scholarship. For the most part, peer-review is a closed process to

an invited few, generally regarded with esteem in their field. While the intention of this is to ensure empirical Western rigor and value in the work deemed noteworthy for publication, the result is often isolation and separation from a larger audience. For the most part, queer and feminist work has conformed to expectations of the academy, producing a wide selection of their own peer-reviewed scholarship. However, many queer feminist scholars challenge notions of Western positivism, as well as limiting the audience to a select few with access to what is mostly expensive subscription-based content, preferring instead a more fluid, diverse and collaborative approach to social and human experience and a larger conversation that extends far beyond the walls of the university.

Unlike many academic journals, NMP incorporates art, activism and scholarship in the content of its journal and website. NMP heralds and promotes artistic expression in the pages of its editions, alongside peer-reviewed submissions. Also, due to NMP's close relationship to activist ventures, such as *Dykes of Mykes*, NMP has a close relationship to queer feminist community activism and the larger queer feminist community. NMP utilizes its online presence to inform the community about activist, educational, and arts events locally and globally. In this way, NMP is both community-centered and interdisciplinary.

Also, open source journals promise to disrupt the business model for traditionally published academic journals. Admittedly, there are few sustainable funding and resource solutions to maintain open access journals indefinitely, given the widespread struggle with successful online monetization in general. Currently academic journals are largely supported by academic institutions, specifically academic libraries, which possess the funding and resources to afford high subscription costs. While over-head in electronic publishing is significantly less than print publishing, academic journals continue to depend largely on subscriptions to support themselves. For all these reasons and more, NMP is an important model to examine, given how authentically representative of feminist ideals of grassroots driven and supported sentiments. However, as is often the case with non-profit organizations, NMP's economic and production model is not necessarily supportable in the long term if it fails to continue fostering and growing a community willing to sustain the project. When the founders and key players choose to the leave the project its future will depend greatly on the willingness of new dedicated leaders taking control.

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NOMOREPOTLUCKS

Current Issue
amour no. 18

Past Issues
magie no.17

motive no. 16

veneer no. 15

animal no. 14

chance no. 13

Archive

amour no. 18
Issue #: 18

L'amour est le thème du 18ième numéro du NMP, nov/déc 2011.

L'amour, as in:

- infused with or feeling deep affection or passion
- a sexual passion or desire
- to take great pleasure in

Amour, admiration, adoration, affection, altruisme, amitié, ange, attachement, béguin, charité, coeur, culte, désir, dévouement, entente, enthousiasme, estime, fanatisme, fraternité, idolâtrie, liaison, passion, penchant, relation, tendresse, vénération.

There's plenty to love in this issue.

Antonia Hernández asks: Is love a force? Andrea Zeffiro offers up traces of a secret love affair. Barbara Crow, Ana Rita Morais & Allyson Mitchell love grey, all the way. Tracy Tidgwell gives us an overview of Deirdre Logue's long-term love affair with the arts. And, 98% of Vivek Shraya's songs are about love.

But love is complicated.

Two NMP pieces consider community accountability in response to the impact of abuse in radical organising circles: regular NMP contributor Yasmin Nair in *Fuck Love*; and Ching-In Chen and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in their discussion of *The Revolution Starts at Home*, an anthology published by **South End Press**.

In conversation with NMP, Isabelle Hayeur talks about the state of the environment, her inspiration, installations, and underwater worlds. Her photography graces the cover of NMP 18.

Indu Vashist is a queer feminist, community activist, and an independent scholar. She talks about the Indian Penal Code, diaspora, decriminalizing homosexual sex, and weaving queer and desi identities.

Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin, in conversation with cultural theorist Lauren Berlant and political philosopher Michael Hardt talk about their use of love as a political concept. In the exchange they discuss how love can be used to think through a non-sovereign notion of both a political body and self.

And, in *Le jeu du pendu*, Lamathilde speaks of love lost.

Thank you to all the contributors who have made this another excellent issue of NMP. Thank you m-c for the ongoing curatorial genius and for taking on several interviews in this issue. Thank you Tamara Shepherd, Fabien Rose, Homoko Allard, Jacinthe Dupuis, Lindsay Shane, and Jenn Clamen. Huge thank you again to guest editor Sophie Le-Phat Ho and all the amazing contributors in the last issue, **NMP 17: magie.**

We are **saving up** to rebuild NMP in a a more stable content management system/version, so if you would like to **donate** toward this, please know that your money will go to anticipating and hopefully preventing the site from crashing. Any amount is good – it adds up!

Be sure to also come to the Meow Mix NMP benefit, **Saturday Dec 3, 2011** at the Sala Rosa. Thank you, G!

If you would rather donate your skills in Drupal or Wordpress, please let us know.

You may now also pitch us submission ideas for 2012 issues, by consulting our **submit** page. Note that issues are booked almost a year ahead of publication, so contact us now!

Télécharger/Download: **Proposal Form/Formulaire**. Nous accueillons toujours avec grand plaisir et intérêt toute idée que vous souhaitez nous soumettre.

Follow us on Twitter for updates **@nomorepotlucks.**

Dear readers, we are still and always committed to bringing forward a fiery and unconditionally loving journal bimonthly.

Mél' Hogan

Tweet

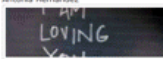- *Add new comment*
- 516 reads

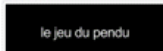### Transforming Landscapes: An Interview with Isabelle Hayeur
NMP

Indu Vashist on Queer India and Co-Existing Diasporic Identities
NMP

Performing Love #01: I am loving you.
Antonia Hernández

Le jeu du pendu
Lamathilde

Fuck Love
Yasmin Nair

Art is a Healer: Talking with Vivek Shraya
NMP

Accounting for Change with Ching-In Chen and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
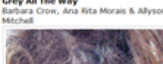NMP

Looking for Love in all the Right Places: Deirdre Logue
Tracy Tidgwell

No One is Sovereign in Love: A Conversation Between Lauren Berlant and Michael Hardt
Heather Davis and Paige Sarlin

Grey All The Way
Barbara Crow, Ana Rita Morais & Allyson Mitchell

A[r]MOUR
Andrea Zeffiro