

DIGITAL LITERACY IN SIX MICRO-BITES



arca

INTRODUCTION

by Anne Bertrand

“Digital Literacy in Six Micro-Bites” is a series of six essays disseminated as part of “L’arca in the loop,” ARCA’s monthly newsletter, from December 2019 to May 2020. The series is also published in posts on ARCA’s website. Each of these six posts focuses on a key concept in digital culture, providing definitions and outlining technical considerations in plain language, along with insights on how digital technologies might support artist-run centre personnel in their day-to-day activities.

ARCA and its partner organization l’Association des groupes en arts visuels francophones (AGAVF) hired digital consultant Isabelle L’Heureux, currently employed by the Regroupement des centres d’artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ), to adapt a series of essays on digital culture, produced for members of Quebec artist-run centres (ARCs), to a Canada-wide context. The many references in these essays to Quebec-based initiatives were deemed essential considering Quebec’s investment of \$125 million in its Plan culturel numérique (PCNQ), launched in 2014 and recently extended to 2023 as part of the province’s cultural action plan.

Back in February 2017, on the occasion of its Forum on *Diffusion* held in Quebec, AGAVF had invited Mériel Lehmann, former director of Avatar, to present to representatives of visual and media arts organizations from Francophone and Acadian communities, a conference on the impact of the digital shift on artist-run centers. Added to this publication to bring perspective to the essays, the summary of his presentation reminds us how the principles of digital thinking have long been part of the practice of artists.

The series begins with essays on blockchain technology: one in English, by scholar Aaron Tucker, and another in French, by L’Heureux. ARCA hired Tucker to report on a panel discussion, organized by CARFAC Ontario and Access Copyright, to introduce Prescient, a licencing

system driven by blockchain technology and machine learning. Prescient connects creative works with rights owners, thereby helping to locate copyright owners for easier attribution in the hope of generating revenues for artists. In the French essay, L'Heureux describes how blockchain is applied in cultural industries to manage licensing of copyright-protected material, but her research also reveals how some artist-run centres are exploring the potential of this technology for enabling complex, self-managed community partnerships.

In the second brief, L'Heureux tackles “discoverability,” a notion much hyped for its promise of recognition in the context of a vast, globalized digital economy dominated by Web giants. Reaching out to fans and forming new publics requires a multi-pronged strategy, ranging from organizing in-person events to tweaking file legibility with search engine optimization, underlining the variety of processes by which cultural objects and ideas circulate and how the likelihood of them being “discovered” may be increased.

In brief number three, on open data, L'Heureux describes what openness might mean to ARC members, for whom the Internet is just one among many spaces available for the public sharing of artworks, documentation, texts, and other cultural expressions. Providing free access to an artist-run centre's information and knowledge base for purposes of research and cultural production can contribute to a centre's public recognition and profile. It may also help to open up previously unknown areas of inquiry or merely enable a resurgence of artistic expression over time, which may resonate with new generations of art makers, curators, and historians.

Networked connections require that data live more or less freely in the “Cloud.” In brief number four, L'Heureux outlines the pros and cons of migrating our workflows to proprietary cloud-computing suites (Google or Microsoft) for better collaboration and greater transparency. Published on March 12, just days before the C19 pandemic forced our labour force into confinement and remote work, this timely brief provides tools and methods for moving work files to the Cloud and thus

enabling work to carry on from home, for better or worse.

In the fifth brief, “Online Documentation and Archiving,” L’Heureux draws from workshops developed by Hélène Brousseau, digital librarian at Artexte, to explore the value of online documentation for research and knowledge production in the wider visual arts ecology, shifting the logic of restricted access to intellectual property over to a digital ethos, while ensuring rightful attribution with Creative Commons licences.

In the midst of the pandemic, some artist-run centres saw an opportunity to reconfigure their programming in online forms: quickly throwing things onto a web browser, whether or not the program was digitally native and whether or not minimal technical standards could be established; In the sixth brief, “Reconfiguration,” L’Heureux draws in part on the ARC community’s responses to ARCA’s survey on the impact of C19 on artist-run centres during the first thirty days of confinement—in particular the question on whether or not centres have adapted their programming. It is worth noting that some artist-run centres preferred to suspend their programming temporarily and to take the time to reflect on their capacities, and their desire, to shift their programming online.

We hope these essays on digital literacy, produced to clarify some key aspects of this quickly evolving milieu, will enable artists managing small organizations to use the digital world and embrace its elusive promise of renewal. In this context, the “Arts in a Digital World” research findings and literature review, commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts and conducted by Nordicity Consulting in 2015, warrant closer scrutiny. Many of the findings support the Council’s strategic focus on equity and youth. Others, however, expose systemic gaps and blind spots in our generous public funding model, which espouses “the dialogic, pluralistic and participatory ideals of digital culture” in the assumption that digital technologies will unleash our communities’ potential for innovation, but which also ignores the very real limitations in the human and material resources needed to make such innovation happen in a chronically underfunded artist-run

network.¹ The Council's promotion of project funding over core funding poses a very real challenge to organizations that wish to develop or expand their digital infrastructures, as it is "difficult for these organizations to build a coherent, consistent digital capacity across many such projects."² In addition, the population in general already suffers from the most basic limitations of digital technologies, such as the uneven distribution of content, infrastructure, and access—limitations which the new G5 network or the Internet of Things will not solve. The untested G5 network, for example, requires an infrastructure of closer rather than more distant relays, improving coverage for remote communities unlikely.

The purpose of this publication is to describe some of the more common digital phenomena to allow for a greater critical understanding of their impact on our work and on our lives as we learn new tools and adapt to new ways of working. ARCA trusts in our community's capacity for independent thought, even when this means taking positions contrary to mainstream belief and opinion, and drawing information from multiple sources. ARCA stands behind our community's desire to cultivate independent spaces—whether this means online spaces, or physical gallery or production spaces—and invest in community-based sharing platforms to reduce dependence on useful but exploitative corporate models.

¹ These ideas are developed more fully by Felicity Tayler in *The Grey Guide to Artist-Run Publishing and Circulation* (ARCA, 2017), 59.

² Nordicity Consulting, "The Arts in a Digital World – Survey Data Report," Canada Council for the Arts, February 2017.

PUTTING DIGITAL CULTURE **IN PERSPECTIVE**

by Mériol Lehmann

For some time, the need for cultural organizations to transition to digital technologies has been repeated with almost dogmatic insistence. However, I am among those who think this transformation is no longer an option, and am not afraid to say it! My position diverges from the dominant discourse: contrary to what is commonly put forward, I don't believe cultural organizations should necessarily develop new, extrinsic ways of working and thinking. Rather, I see such a transition as a return to basics, because the ideas and values promoted by the digital realm are also fundamental to how artists think.

The most important element in a digital transformation is not the technology: it's how we think. A digital transformation aimed at reproducing old habits is doomed to fail. Michel Serres saw digital technologies as triggering a societal transformation as vast and significant as the invention of the written word or the printing press. Digital technologies have profoundly transformed society as a whole, how we communicate, how we access knowledge, and how we experience culture. And so, it is crucial that we acknowledge these changes and adapt our thinking accordingly.

The good news is that the fundamental principles behind digital thinking have been at the heart of artist-run centre culture for half a century; therefore, transformation is not a question of mastering new methodologies but of reviving what we may have lost over the years. If we look at the values that Silicon Valley has imposed upon the modern-day workplace, they may be divided into three main categories: creativity, collaboration, and iteration.

Creativity is one of the essential values of digital culture. We are constantly reminded of how creative we are. Some pay as much as \$2,500 to attend the C2 summit—the Mecca of digital creativity—to be told this over and over again. But for artists, creativity is so innate that this

type of self-affirmation is rarely in evidence. It's simply fact. And with creativity comes innovation, another core value of the digital ecosystem. Innovation depends on the ability to see the world differently. But what is an artist if not someone with a unique view of the world?

Collaboration is another core value of digital culture: today we see co-creation, co-learning, and co-working spaces with a horizontal rather than hierarchical organization. To think collectively by pooling our knowledge within a shared space, in a collegial rather than an authoritarian context—does this not describe an artist-run centre? All those revolutionary fab labs and media labs are sites where equipment and skills are shared among a community of interests. Sound familiar?

Finally, iteration—so important in software development—has become omnipresent in the organization of work. Because digital technology evolves at such a rapid pace, organizations must continually challenge themselves to remain relevant. But don't artists continuously challenge themselves, too? Working and reworking the same ideas, always seeking to improve them, is at the heart of all artistic practice. Constant evolution, and a perpetual search for answers, are part and parcel of being an artist.

The important thing to remember is this: digital transformation is an exceptional opportunity to reconnect with our roots. For the umpteenth time, it is not a question of surrendering to external dictates but of emphatically reclaiming what is already part of the DNA of the artist-run centre. Nor is it a matter of using a single model, but of casting a plethora of models, each anchored in our deepest values. Once again, it is time for artist-run centres to revisit their history and take concrete steps to revive the vision of a more equitable world for which they were first established.

Mériol Lehmann is an artist working mainly with photography and media arts, a teacher, a sound designer, as well as a digital art/culture consultant. He's currently a doctoral student at Université du Québec en Outaouais.

BLOCKCHAIN **TECHNOLOGY** **EXPLAINED**

by Aaron Tucker

On November 28th 2018, Access Copyright, Prescient & CARFAC Ontario hosted an event in Toronto to present blockchain technology; emissaries from those organizations included Roanie Levy (Access Copyright/Prescient), Sapan Narang (Access Copyright/Prescient), Stephen Sawyer (Access Copyright/Prescient) and Elissa Pendergast (CARFAC). ARCA invited Toronto-based Aaron Tucker to attend the presentation and produce the following report to shed light on this notion.

Blockchain 101 for Visual Artists: Future of Rights Management and the Promise of Web 4.0

It is easier to start with what blockchain is not: it is not an app; it is not a social media or virtual world; it, itself, is not a currency; it is not a creation tool. Instead, very simply, blockchain is a tool to track virtual transactions and/or potentially facilitate exchanges of resources; in application, blockchain is being used to track food as it moves from farm to store; as a way to keep track of government spending in Dubai; and to establish ownership over a particular artist's work(s) to then track the reproduction/distribution rights attached to said work(s).

Blockchain operates like a giant spreadsheet that is shared by all the users that are on the blockchain's network. This sharing creates a peer-to-peer distributed network, with no centralized hub of control, a feature that is essential to the security and transparency that are its core benefits. Each item on the "spreadsheet" is a token: using an artist as an example, they may upload a work to the system; that work is then given a virtual ID called a token and that token becomes an entry in the "spreadsheet." When another user enacts some form of transaction with that token, that information is recorded as a hash (a number that represents the transactions but does not contain the actual private details), representing the exchange as a "smart contract." That smart contract is shared with every other node on the network. Once there is a consensus that the encrypted transaction has taken place, or the smart contract has been fulfilled, (i.e. 51% of the users agree on the parameters of the transactions and "record" it in their spreadsheet), the transaction is closed, then bundled with other exchanges into a "block" that is kept as permanent and public record of the transactions; multiple "blocks" are put together to form a chain.

As an example, an artist may want to sell access to a virtual copy of one of their works; alternatively, they may want to sell a physical copy of their works. In the case of a virtual work, an artist, after creating a token for their work, can choose to give varying amounts of access to that work, with access and its record of that access being recorded using blockchain; the artist is then paid, peer-to-peer, for that access within that blockchain. For those selling physical copies of the work, blockchain can be used to keep track of the information of that sale; again, the currency involved in the sale is shared peer-to-peer with no intermediary.

Proponents of the technology point to how both secure and publicly transparent the technology is: because blockchain requires 51% of its users to agree on all the information in its system, it becomes extremely difficult (though not impossible) for a bad actor to change information; as well, because each “block” is shared across the whole network, each transaction is auditable. Further, when considered virtual distribution and permissions, blockchain makes it very easy to track who has access to what particular artwork, with further control being given to how public or private the interaction on the blockchain can be. This leads to 3 “A”s that are important for those artists considering blockchain: attribution, authentication and automation. First, blockchain makes it much easier to control attribution to a work as once the work is attributed to an artist, it can’t be changed, or exchanged, without a consensus record. Second, blockchain, through its encrypted managing of all its transactions, makes authenticated access to works as restrictive or open as the generator of the token (i.e. the artist) wishes. Lastly, all of the transactions, and “record keeping” of the transactions are automated and currency goes directly to the artists.

Given all of this, it is worth remembering that while blockchain holds vast potential, the technology is still relatively immature and will require more time to grow. Currently, individual blockchains are not interoperable, meaning that information stored in one blockchain is isolated from information in another blockchain. At this stage, an artist would have to potentially subscribe to multiple blockchains; while it is true that in the perfect version of blockchain there are no third parties taking

royalties on transactions, there may be a subscription fee for artists to allow access to each blockchain's services.

However, the main issue that I can see at this point, and why it may be worth talking about and implementing blockchain now as opposed to when it is fully mature with a large database, is that, for artists, digital control over the works needs to start well before it is entered into a blockchain: if a digital version of the work exists outside the blockchain, it exists in our current digital world that, by its very nature, makes it such that any piece of information can be easily copied and distributed. Therefore, for blockchain to be effective, digital versions of the work need to be processed as if they are going to be entered into blockchain from the earliest stages of their conception. More, there is also nothing to say that someone who does not own the work cannot create a token for a work and sell access to it. To this end, Access Copyright used the event to talk at length about their new company, and service, Prescient, as an extension of Access Copyright's mandate to help artists to be fairly compensated for the rights to their work(s). As such, Prescient adds a layer of digital rights management for artists, encouraging artists to begin to register their works with them so that they might better licence and distribute the works.

Overall, blockchain is in the early stages of popular adoption, with larger infrastructures for its use starting to be built. It is important for artist, and artist run collectives, to know the basics of the technology and its potential uses, in particular the developments at Prescient. I'm not certain that rushing in as individual artists make sense, but considering entering into blockchains as larger groups/collectives, or even as a group of collectives, may make more sense at this stage, with individual adoption being more viable in the coming years.

Aaron Tucker is the author of the novel Y: Oppenheimer, Horseman of Los Alamos (Coach House Books) as well as two books of poetry and two scholarly cinema studies monographs. His current collaborative project, Loss Sets, translates poems into sculptures which are then 3D printed (<http://aarontucker.ca/3-d-poems/>); he is also the co-creator of The ChessBard, an app that transforms chess games into poems (<http://chesspoetry.com>).

Currently, he is a lecturer in the English department at Ryerson University (Toronto), teaching creative and academic writing. He began his doctorate as an Elia Scholar in the Cinema and Media Studies Department at York University in the Fall of 2018.

Additional Resources

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THE LEVERS OF **DISCOVERABILITY**

by Isabelle L'Heureux

Did our [clickbait](#) work?¹ The use of attention-grabbing, intriguing, or even shocking headlines to lure readers to click on links is a clever trick used by marketers to increase advertising revenue by driving large numbers of Internet users to their sites. Our intention is quite different: we wanted to draw your attention to this purely digital and rather reprehensible phenomenon as a way to introduce the second chapter of our online resource, Digital Literacy in Six Easy Chapters on the topic of discoverability. We suggest the following four excellent tricks—never mind the clickbait—to give your online content greater visibility.

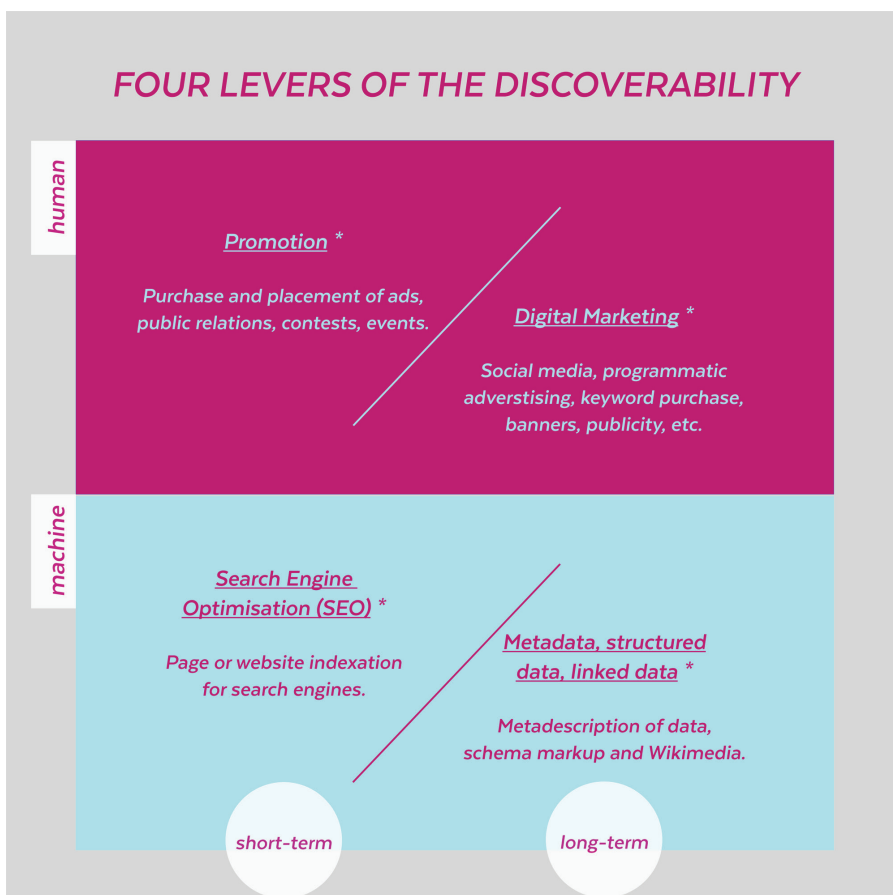
Defining the Concept of Discoverability

Concerns around the [discoverability](#) of cultural content on the Web have been the subject of several debates in recent months. As a concept, discoverability is “the degree to which something, especially a piece of content or information, can be found in a search of a file, database, or other information system.” The idea is particularly important when it comes to the visibility of diverse cultural expressions when pitted against content that’s promoted or supported by the usual Internet giants. During the international symposium [Accès et découvrabilité des contenus culturels francophones à l’ère numérique](#) (Access and Discoverability of Francophone Cultural Content in the Digital Era) held in Montreal in the fall of 2019, a large number of participants spoke of recent upheavals in the music and audiovisual industries. As outlined in [this article](#) written for the RAIQ, we can conclude that within contemporary art and artist-run centre scenes, the digital upheaval has actually provided new opportunities for creativity, dissemination, and the cultural life of our communities. We are open to experimenting with new tools and new ways of doing things based on our objectives, interests, skills, and willingness to learn.

¹ This essay was introduced in our January 24th newsletter with the following teaser: “Digital Literacy in Six Micro-Bites: Are You Digitally Illiterate?” This “clickbait” was used to lure visitors to the essay published on our website while informing about this tactic widely used in the media.

But the concept of discoverability itself isn't set in stone. In their [theoretical and practical guide on the subject](#) (available in French only), database librarian Josée Plamondon and the Fondation Jean-Pierre Perreault use the term “discovery” rather than “discoverability.” This choice reflects a desire to reduce terminological ambiguity and encourage broader adaptation of the concept by more people.

To illustrate the kinds of actions we can take to improve discoverability, Andrée Harvey and Véronique Marino of LaCagency, together with Josée Plamondon, have illustrated the concept by dividing it into four main “pillars, or levers”. These levers include strategies that target either humans or machines, and apply to either short or long-term uses. The four levers are further outlined here:

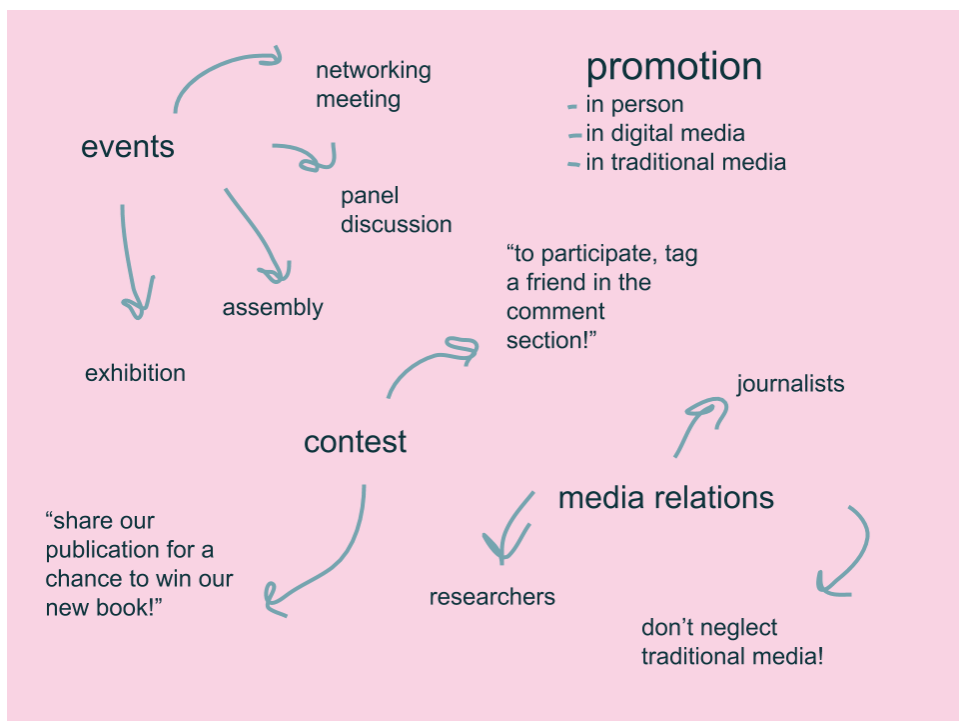


Promotion

human + short term

Promotional activities are not exclusive to the digital realm, but may be expressed in new forms on the Web. In fact, discoverability can be implemented in real life work in the real world to make new people aware of the activities and missions of our organizations through events such as exhibitions, panel discussions or networking cocktail hours with peers and like-minded groups.

Some may also organize contests on social media networks, for example, by holding a draw (for show tickets, books, etc.) and inviting people to participate by tagging their friends in comments or reposting the event. Such practices can broaden our reach by accessing the personal and professional networks of our members, friends and subscribers.



Digital Marketing

human + long term

Digital marketing activities also take traditional marketing processes and apply them to digital environments. These include the purchase and placement of ads and promotional campaigns on social media. Web infrastructure has also enabled the development of programmatic ads, which benefit from advances in recommendation systems and data collection of Internet users' behaviour and interests.

Interested organizations can learn about ad platforms from Google, [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#). Canadian non-profits can register with [Techsoup](#) and the [Google Ad Grants](#) service to access USD \$10,000 of in-kind advertising per month for text ads.

It's also advisable to take time to develop and periodically evaluate your social media communication strategy by remembering the key concepts of relevance, authenticity, and consistency.

Search Engine Optimization

machine + short term

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a set of practices designed to improve the ranking of a page or website in a search engine's list of results. These practices must constantly adapt to [search engine modifications](#). This might include, for example, paying particular attention to the coherence of key words that are used throughout a website, page layout that follows html markup conventions (structuring content by using the title tags <H1> et <H2>), and the strategic use of hyperlinks to other pages on your site or to other websites.

Several free or low-cost resources are available to help you with your optimization activities. Many cultural organizations have a WordPress website, and the platform offers several SEO extensions. You may want to familiarize yourself with the [most frequently used extensions](#) and

their specificities, and then compare each option to choose the one that best suits your needs.

[YoastSEO](#) is a popular, user-friendly extension with a free basic version that offers a range of tools to evaluate and optimize WordPress content. It also allows the addition of Schema structured data, which we will cover in the next section.

[Google Search Console](#) is a tool that measures a website's performance in terms of how it ranks in Google's search results.

[Online Broken Link Checker](#) is a tool that analyzes hyperlinks and locates broken links so that they may be quickly replaced with existing URLs.

Metadata, Structured Data, Linked Data

machine + long term

— Metadata

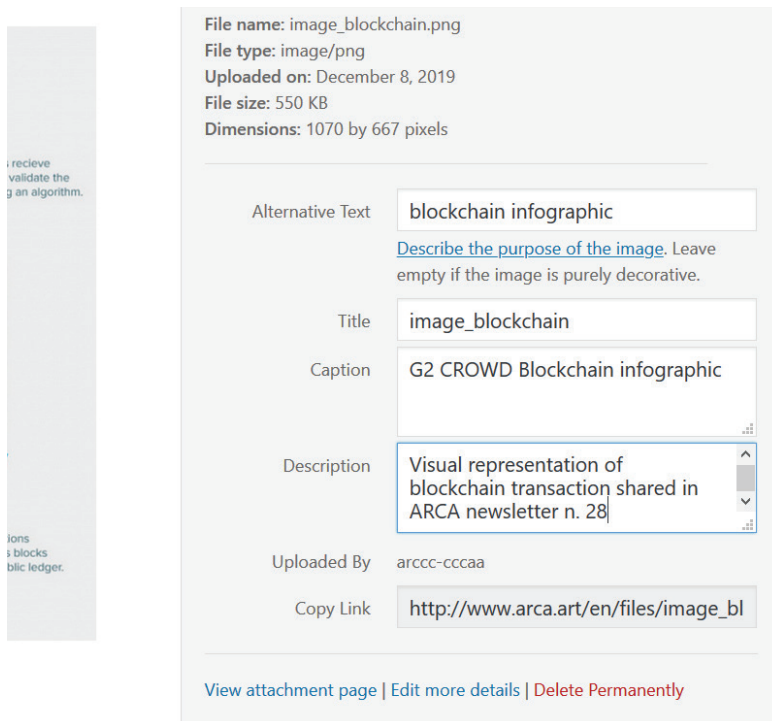
Metadata is data that describes or contextualizes other data or files.

For example:

- Much metadata is information that is automatically associated with the digital files we create. For instance, an Excel document's metadata could include a name (Budget_2020-2021), a creator (Employee X), a date of creation (2019-11-25), a format (.xlsx), etc.
- Metadata can also be associated with any other type of data or content. An artist-run centre's database, for example, may contain the names of its members, the date they joined, their current status, etc.

Web content that is described by accurate and machine-interpretable metadata is identified more easily in specialized database search results

(e.g. a museum or library collection), on a website, or by a search engine. For this reason, make sure that the metadata of the images or videos you place on your website reflects their content: e.g., a specific title (not “image003”), exact attribution, or a creation date.



The screenshot shows a metadata form for a file named 'image_blockchain.png'. The form includes fields for File name, File type, Uploaded on, File size, and Dimensions. Below these are fields for Alternative Text, Title, Caption, and Description. The Description field is highlighted with a blue border. At the bottom, there are links for 'View attachment page', 'Edit more details', and 'Delete Permanently'.

File name:	image_blockchain.png
File type:	image/png
Uploaded on:	December 8, 2019
File size:	550 KB
Dimensions:	1070 by 667 pixels
Alternative Text	blockchain infographic
	Describe the purpose of the image. Leave empty if the image is purely decorative.
Title	image_blockchain
Caption	G2 CROWD Blockchain infographic
Description	Visual representation of blockchain transaction shared in ARCA newsletter n. 28
Uploaded By	arccc-cccaa
Copy Link	http://www.arca.art/en/files/image_bl

[View attachment page](#) | [Edit more details](#) | [Delete Permanently](#)

— Structured Data

Structured data is a concept that is primarily associated with [Schema](#), a markup tool developed by a consortium of search engines (Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, Yandex) to organize and treat information on a web page. Technically speaking, it's a vocabulary that can be used in different programming languages, including RDFa and JSON-LD.

As mentioned earlier, a few extensions such as Yoast SEO and [Schema Pro](#) support the addition of certain schema tags on sites developed with WordPress. This can be beneficial for organizations that have a WordPress site but don't have regular staff with programming expertise.

Those who wish to further explore the concept and technology of structured data can do so with Google's [structured data testing tool](#) and [structured data markup helper](#).

— Linked Data

Linked data, finally, is a concept that relates to semantic web technologies. The main idea is to assign a uniform resource identifier (URI) to each dataset distributed on the web by using standard machine-understandable descriptions that allow that dataset to relate to other groupings of data. But implementing the technology is complex and may require collaboration with national and international partners. The [Europeana](#) portal is a good example of a linked data project serving the collections of European heritage institutions. To find out more about this concept, follow the development of initiatives such as [Savoirs communs du cinéma](#) (an initiative of the Cinémathèque québécoise), and [Linked Digital Future](#) (from CAPACOA, the Canadian Arts Presenting Association).

Isabelle L'Heureux is a cultural worker based in Montreal. She has a background in archival science and art history. She is interested in the multiple intersections between digital arts and technologies from a perspective that is both historical and practical. She holds the position of digital cultural development agent with the Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques (CQAM), the Regroupement des arts interdisciplinaires du Québec (RAIQ) and the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ).

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OPEN DATA

by Isabelle L'Heureux

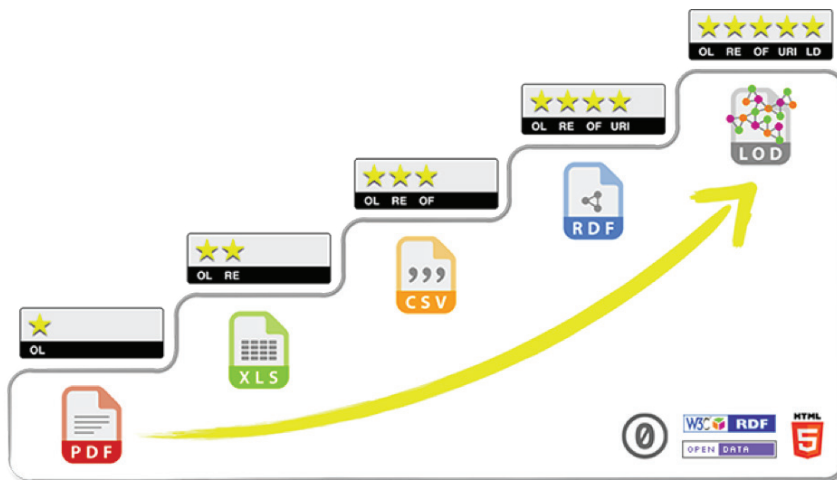
Defining the concept of open data

Open data is structured, machine-readable, royalty-free data that is accessible and reusable. This data can be statistical or geomatic, or it may correspond to coordinates, lists, plans, items in a collection, research results, and more.

Open data has a few defining characteristics. It must be accessible, that is, it must be available to all, free of charge, in its entirety, and ideally in an open, standard, editable format. The CSV format (which stands for comma-separated value), for example, meets this criteria and can be used to facilitate access to data sets. Open data must also be published under conditions that allow its re-use and facilitate cross-referencing with other data sets. Finally, open data favours universal participation, which means that its use is unrestricted, even for commercial purposes.

Within a cultural context, many kinds of open data sets are imaginable. Some organizations will publish data relating to events they have organized (list of festival concerts, attendance statistics, etc.) or to items that are part of their collections (tables or graphs—we'll come back to the notion of graphs in the next section—with titles, names of artists, dates, materials, etc.).

It's interesting to note that open data sets can exist at different levels within a fairly broad spectrum of *openness*. Not all initiatives follow the same degree of complexity. Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the Web, schematized the different levels of openness that internet data can have in his 5-star Open Data plan. The first level corresponds to minimal openness and is often very easy to publish, while the fifth and final level involves a maximum level of openness, and is perhaps more difficult to achieve.



★ The first level is when a document is published on the Web under an open license. For example, a text in PDF format published under a [Creative Commons Attribution](#) licence.

★★ The second level involves publishing a structured document on the Web, for instance an Excel spreadsheet.

★★★ The third level involves publishing structured information in an open and non-proprietary format such as CSV.

★★★★ At the fourth level, each element in the data set (object, person, relation) is identified by a URI, or [Uniform Resource Identifier](#), which gives it an unambiguous, perennial identity that can be referenced the same way anywhere on the Web. For example, a publication's ISBN can play the role of a URI on the Web.

★★★★★ The fifth level is achieved when open data is linked to other open data, which then turns it into [linked open data](#). Several concepts are associated with this level: [linked data](#), [Semantic Web](#) (and [Web 3.0](#) for others).

The advantages of open data

For communities and individuals, there are many benefits to opening up their data.

- for government entities, having open data can indicate a willingness to maintain transparency;
- it supports innovation by providing access and opportunities to reuse information and knowledge;
- greater availability also benefits the world of research;
- in some contexts, it can help people make more informed decisions.

The [Canada Council for the Arts](#) gives access to their [data tables on grant recipients](#), which gives the art community a statistical portrait of arts funding across the country. Based on these, organisations can reflect upon, investigate, identify trends, and position themselves within this overall profile and have a more informed opinion. Opening data can mean opening a dialogue. As a practice, it can be embedded in values of engagement, sharing, collaboration, and the creation and circulation of knowledge.

Technical issues

As seen earlier, open data can be modified in relation to the context or technical expertise at hand. Of course, not every Canadian cultural organization has a Semantic Web specialist on staff. The cultural milieu is composed of passionate, competent professionals who, for the most part, work on multiple fronts simultaneously often with very limited resources. Therefore, it may not be relevant for everyone to invest in complex open data projects. Nevertheless, it seems useful to remember that some open data projects can be part of an organization's mission or values, they can be quick and simple to implement, and have positive and surprising impacts. For example, any organization that has a website can publish data, whether in text or PDF, HTML, CVS or other format (level 1, 2, or 3 in the Berners-Lee Open Data Plan) under a free licence.

Other initiatives rely on existing infrastructure, such as [Wikidata](#), or open data portals (i.e. [Données Québec](#)).

Technical expertise is most required for projects that involve the attribution of URIs and linking between several data sets (levels 4 and 5 of the Berners-Lee Open Data Plan). It's better to call on relevant experts, often from outside of the organization, to accurately assess what resources (time, money, staff) are necessary and to create the proper conditions to successfully complete the project.

In many cases, it's good to anticipate the need for updating and versioning. Will the data set remain unchanged or will it be revised annually? Will it be replaced by a new data set after a pre-determined period? Different answers and processes will apply depending on the type of data and the publishing organization's objectives.

Legal issues

Legal issues should also be considered in open data initiatives. It is vitally important to ensure that the data to be published under free licence is not subject to any prior restrictions on use or distribution. It's therefore preferable for an organization to own the data it wants to open, or for the data to be understood as facts (gallery addresses, titles of works, etc.) and thus not protected under Canadian copyright. To guarantee that no laws will be violated in the publishing of a data set, it's good to seek legal advice from competent professionals.

For its project called [Savoirs communs du cinéma](#), the Cinémathèque Québécoise hired Olivier Charbonneau, a research librarian with a doctoral degree in law, to prepare a preliminary report on issues of copyright in the dissemination of cultural metadata (available in French only: [Enjeux en droit d'auteur de la diffusion ouverte de métadonnées culturelles](#)). Although this document responds to a specific context, it can be useful for many Canadian cultural institutions.

Course of action

The concept of open data gives us new ways to give greater value to the content and information produced by our organizations. However, it's important to assess what our objectives are and what costs and skills are required to make it happen. Is it simply a matter of exporting information from an existing database in CVS format and making it accessible on the organization's website, or does the project require data to be compiled by a human or system? If the project requires original creative work, how will contributors be paid? Is making data open consistent with the organization's mandate, finances, and other resources?

As an example, the RCAAQ will participate in open data by sharing its members' coordinates (which it draws from [ARCA directory](#) database), on the Données Québec portal. This requires a minimal amount of time and effort and is part of the RCAAQ membership's promotional activities. By publishing artist-run centres' contact information in an open and structured manner, the number of access points to this type of information is multiplied and its reuse is facilitated. While this data set may not be used immediately or widely, its availability helps us consider different ways of integrating artist-run centres into a linked data ecosystem.

By reflecting on the theme of open data, we might also consider free licenses for textual content produced by the centre (newsletters, publications). In the right circumstances (organization's values, intellectual property, business model), these publications can be made freely accessible in a non-proprietary format (PDF, HTML) on the centre's website or through the [e-artexte](#) digital repository. Felicity Tayler thoroughly and critically explores this idea in her essay "[Situating Artist-Run Publishing Within Digital Culture](#)" in the *Grey Guide to Artist-Run Publishing and Circulation*, published in 2017 by ARCA.

Through the concept of open data, we might also find a way to add value to an archive by extracting certain data to facilitate access to it (i.e., present a centre's entire list of exhibitions and the curators and

artists involved; analyze the evolution of an organization's membership through the years). Grunt Gallery's *Activating the Archive* is an ambitious and inspiring project that certainly reflects the logic of open data.

Finally, for more ambitious projects, it can be helpful to associate your organization with a university partner. Precious alliances can be found in departments such as Information Sciences, Art History, Cultural Studies, and with researchers in the field of Digital Humanities.

We hope this chapter has strengthened your collective grasp on the concept of open data, and that it will inspire relevant and daring initiatives across the Canadian artist-run centre community.

Isabelle L'Heureux is a cultural worker based in Montreal. She has a background in archival science and art history. She is interested in the multiple intersections between digital arts and technologies from a perspective that is both historical and practical. She holds the position of digital cultural development agent with the Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques (CQAM), the Regroupement des arts interdisciplinaires du Québec (RAIQ) and the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ).

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CLOUD COMPUTING

by Isabelle L'Heureux

Over the past decade, [cloud computing](#) has become a well-established trend in the digital world. Defined as a computing model that relies on pooling a large number of networked servers to store and manage data, it allows small organizations and individuals to access a vast amount of processing power at low cost. In concrete terms: rather than working with software installed on computers (where everything is stored locally), users have access to a variety of tools through web applications (i.e., communication happens via a network of servers over the internet).

Cloud computing offers a wide range of services. The most relevant for artist-run centres and other cultural organizations usually relate to information storage and sharing services as well as office automation tools. As many of us are considering a transition toward cloud computing (more specifically, toward services that integrate office, messaging, and document management, such as Gsuite and Office 365), it seems relevant to review what this technology entails. This chapter is a useful resource for understanding what cloud computing services are all about and how they might be useful to artist-run centres. It will also help guide organizations in their choice of service provider and provide step-by-step instructions on how to implement the service within their workforce.

Free software or proprietary services

An interesting and perhaps little-known fact is that non-profit organizations have access to various [Google](#) and Microsoft products for free or at reduced rates through [Techsoup Canada](#), a program that promotes access to digital technologies for non-profit organizations (NPOs). [Gsuite](#) and [Office 365](#) have been widely adopted by companies, institutions, and organizations of all sizes. As a result, they offer various advantages in terms of ease of installation and use, low or no operating costs, interoperability with other systems and services, regular upgrades

by development teams, reliable customer service, and a large user community.

That said, these services are offered by very powerful companies whose values and business models are often at odds with our own. However, free software, in the form of cloud computing services or self-hosting platforms, offers alternatives to these tech giants. Although they require greater investment in terms of operating costs (e.g., management of server space) and the expertise necessary for their implementation, free software alternatives are likely to be more in line with the ethics and self-management values of artist-run centres. For alternative storage services, check out [Sync](#) (Canadian-based cloud computing service). And for office suites and other platforms, options include [Nextcloud](#) (German-based, self-hosting), [Framasoft](#) (France), and [Wikisuite](#) (Quebec-based, self-hosting cloud computing service).

The pros and cons of integrated cloud computing services

This partial list of pros and cons will help you decide if transitioning to an integrated cloud computing service is right for your artist-run centre.

The pros:

- Extends a computer's useful life;
- Promotes collaboration among staff members and between organizations;
- Gives staff members better access to an organization's documents and includes the ability to restrict access to sensitive information;
- Solves issues related to versioning and tracking changes;
- Facilitates remote working;
- Allows automatic backups;
- Potentially saves time and money.

The cons:

- Internet connection must be reliable;
- Energy-intensive technology;

- Proprietary systems (in the cases of Google and Microsoft);
- Data is hosted abroad (on Google's or Microsoft's servers);
- Lack of transparency regarding the use of data from organizations registered with “free” services (Gsuite offers greater privacy than Google accounts for individuals);
- Time-consuming data export.

[This article](#), from Techsoup Canada, provides further information about the advantages and disadvantages listed here.

Resources for transition planning

The CQAM and the RCAAQ, with the help of the [Hub numérique de l'Estrie 0/1](#), has developed two essential tools to help guide cultural service organizations in their decision-making and planning processes as they transition to Gsuite.

Access these free tools here:

- [Comparative table of Google and Microsoft services](#)
- Implementation schedule (download [PDF](#) and [.xlsx](#))

Certain companies also provide their own help resources. Google has clear, relevant, and well-organized information [here](#). Microsoft offers start-up information in their FAQ section on [this page](#) and offers support services once you've registered your organization.

The transition to Google or Microsoft services can be made within a couple of months. Regular commitment is required to accomplish each step, but these can be carried out over a longer or shorter period. Transition time should be based on the availability of competent staff within your organization, access to technical support during installation, and the steepness of the learning curve.

Moving forward

Skills

Most people have the necessary skills to carry out this type of transition. Also, it is well known that the artist-run centre community is full of professionals who are highly skilled in project management, research, analysis, problem solving, and learning new tools.

Relying on small workforces of staff and volunteers, cultural organizations can accomplish a great deal, often with few means and resources. It's a good idea—crucial even—to take the time to thoroughly assess your organization's current and projected work load for this type of transition, the anticipated learning curve it implies, your available resources and expertise (both internal and external), and any other needs. It may also be helpful to keep an eye out for relevant training opportunities within your milieu.

Keep in mind that installing most of these products requires no prior programming or IT experience (this is especially the case with Google and Microsoft products). It's more a question of following instructions and navigating the overall user-friendly interfaces to create and configure the accounts you want to set up. Having a clear vision of your organization's current document management processes would be very helpful (for instance, do you have a classification plan and a file-retention schedule?). Part of the secret to success in this venture is being confident in one's abilities. And if you have any questions, use that search engine or ask a seasoned colleague for advice.

Self-management and future developments

To end this chapter on an inspiring note, let's look at two recent initiatives by artist-run centres who wanted greater control over their information and the tools they use every day.

Last fall, [Studio XX](#) transitioned to free, collaborative platforms thanks to the concerted efforts of a special committee assembled for this task. The platforms they chose are [Nextcloud](#) (a self-hosted productivity platform) and [Mattermost](#) (an instant messaging app similar to [Slack](#)). Studio XX created the ideal conditions for this endeavour: a serious commitment from staff and board members, the help of relevant experts in the field, and the integration of these new processes into the centre's ongoing programming ([Slow Tech](#)). In this case, the coherence between Studio XX's work methods and their values is clear. We look forward to asking them about their experiences.

Another interesting case is [Film Reel](#) (Integrated Arts Management System), an integrated arts management system developed by the [Film and Video Arts Society of Alberta](#) and specifically made for artist-run media arts centres. The system is designed to support, over several modules, membership management, inventory and rentals, project management processes, event and workshop scheduling, and compiling grant reports. This system will likely meet the needs of many artist-run centres and small cultural organizations. In fact, the people behind Film Reel have expressed interest in further developing this service (providing updates, developing new modules, and making the service available in French) and increasing their user pool in the near future.

We hope this chapter has provided useful information and resources for artist-run centres that are considering migrating some of their workflows to the cloud. Despite its ethereal name, this technology has become firmly rooted in our material and socio-political realities.

Isabelle L'Heureux is a cultural worker based in Montreal. She has a background in archival science and art history. She is interested in the multiple intersections between digital arts and technologies from a perspective that is both historical and practical. She holds the position of digital cultural development agent with the Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques (CQAM), the Regroupement des arts interdisciplinaires du Québec (RAIQ) and the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ).

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ONLINE DOCUMENTATION AND ARCHIVES

by Isabelle L'Heureux

This article is based on two workshops—“La diffusion de la documentation en ligne et l’archive (Dissemination of Online Documentation and Archives)” (2019) and “Performance Documentation: Exploring Digital Curation and Archiving” (2018)—given by Hélène Brousseau, librarian at Artexte. These workshops were commissioned by ARCA for members of the Association des groups en arts visuels francophones (AGAVF) and members of an ad hoc group of performance art presenters, with support from the Canada Council for the Arts Digital Strategy Fund.

This article considers the possibilities of archives and documentation, with a specific focus on their online dissemination and circulation. Particular emphasis will be placed on archive and documentation access and reuse by the greatest number of users possible. In the history of archiving, this was not always the most popular approach. Some archivists continue to advocate for the idea of protecting the integrity of an archive by limiting physical access to it. Today, given the fact that the vast majority of documents created are natively digital, the access-versus-preservation dilemma, which once had some relevance, is usually no longer an issue. Whether a webpage is consulted three times or 300,000 times, its physical integrity and legibility will remain unchanged. We are thus faced with a particularly favourable opportunity to further open and even circulate artist-run centres' archives and documents.

Why document and archive?

As defined in the Canadian Encyclopedia, “[archives](#) constitute that coherent body of recorded information created or received by a government, corporate body or organization in the course of its business, or by an individual in his or her activities, which is selected for its enduring value and then maintained, preferably in continuous authorized custody, as a record of that business or activity.” The term *documentation*, for its part, is more comprehensive, as it includes documents that are not necessarily produced or received by a person or organization—e.g., publications about a person or organization (articles, magazines, books, journals, encyclopedias, etc.) produced by a third party.

As mentioned in the introduction, increasingly our archives and other documents are digitally integrated, whether they are natively digital, digitized for purposes of access and preservation, or simply listed in a numerical index. These groups of documents may be preserved by the

individuals and organizations that produce them, or by national-level organizations devoted to this type of work, such as [Artex](#) (for the Canadian contemporary art milieu), or [Library and Archives Canada](#). The value of preserving archives lies primarily in their testimonial value. For this value to be experienced fully, archives must be visible/viewed and usable/used. Furthermore, they afford creative groups and individuals a record of their practices and achievements, can be used by artists and organizations as a means of referencing past events, and are indispensable to researchers as primary sources.

For artist-run centres, an archive is not only a portal into an organization's memory, but also into the history of a particular cultural movement in Canada. [The preservation of these traces thus contributes to validating and creating new knowledge about contemporary art](#). It forms a documentary base, which helps us to confirm the historical and ongoing importance of ARCs to the structure of our independent arts community. Finally, archives promote informed perspectives on this structure, which in turn may facilitate regular re-assessment of it and help us deal with the constantly evolving issues of artistic creation in different social, technical, and political contexts.

What do we archive? What do we document?

In our contemporary art community, archiving and documentation originate with the various entities operating within our particular ecosystem: artists, artist-run centres, funders, public-sector organizations, universities, researchers, publishers, and the media.

Documentation of art practices, art works, or events may take a wide variety of forms: texts, drawings, scripts, images, videos, photographs, audio recordings, posters, brochures, interviews with artists or others, reviews, press coverage, etc.

Archiving the Web

Artist-run centres that wish to keep a record of their website may easily do so with [Webrecorder](#), a tool that creates interactive copies of web-pages. This open-source program is a project of Rhizome, a New York-based organization devoted to digital art. A webinar on the use of webrecorder.io, produced by Artexte, can be viewed [here](#).

Legal issues of online dissemination

Copyright

As part of their documentation and dissemination activities, artist-run centres must take into account Canadian copyright legislation. Artists have the right to document their work, to give or not give consent for documentation of their work, and to make copies of such documentation. For their part, ARCs are responsible for obtaining the artist's consent for all forms of documentation. Further, if the documentation is to be used in new ways not outlined in the original contract, the artist's consent is required. Documentation of an artist's work remains the artist's property. In 2012, however, Canadian copyright law was amended to give ownership of copyright to the photographer rather than the client who hired them. This means that unless an ARC has a specific contract with the photographer or videographer documenting an exhibition, the ARC's licence to use these images will be limited. Therefore, there must be consistency between the contract with the artist and the contract with the photographer hired to document the artist's work. Thus, if the artist is to retain copyright over the documentation of their work, this clause must also be negotiated with the photographer. The same logic applies to text-based documentation. Use of an author's material must be negotiated with the author before it can be published online by the artist or the ARC.

Contracts and agreements

Contracts between creators and disseminators can include clauses on the documentation of art works. Such clauses should specify whether copyright is exclusive or not, and transferable or not, and should indicate the term of the contract and the authorized usage. The declaration of copyright also makes it explicit who owns the documentation. This helps to clarify whether or not obtaining a licence for future use will be necessary.

Free licences

In some cases, creators (in the fields of research, art, or cultural work) may choose to attach free licences, such as Creative Commons, to their publicly accessible content. Such licences specify the categories of use allowed for each category of content, and facilitate the sharing and broader circulation of such content in compliance with copyright law. It should be noted that *free* does not mean *without cost*. Access to licenced content can be granted in exchange for payment. One common example is publications that are available online for free (or at cost) under Creative Commons (usually in PDF or HTML format), but with a print version also sold in bookstores. Application of such licences to ARC content (calls for proposals, event documentation, essays, etc.) should involve prior discussion between the various collaborators (writers, artists, photographers)—and this information should also be integrated into the collaborators' respective contracts. Felicity Tayler's essay "Copyright as a Practice of Daily Life for Artists and Artist-Run Publishers" describes this process clearly.

Online circulation

When legal issues are properly considered, the spectrum of possibility for online dissemination is quite broad. Options include making documents available on an artist-run centre's website, on social media platforms, on a digital repository such as e-artexte, or via platforms such as

[Wikimedia Commons](#) and [Internet Archive](#). Initiatives like [Matricules](#) (Studio XX), [Décades](#) (Optica—whose [archival fonds](#) are also stored at [Concordia University](#)), and [Activating the Archive](#) (grunt gallery) are just a few examples of how ARCs have spotlighted their organizations' archives and documents.

If you are interested in exploring such possibilities for your organization, we recommend starting by assessing what kinds of documents you have and selecting which ones you'd like to make available. The following questions will help guide you through this process:

- What are your organization's needs? Perhaps you wish to make an under-represented history more visible, mark an anniversary, share your organization's ideas, etc.
- What means does the organization possess to carry out these things? Going online will involve labour on the part of organization personnel, and may require soliciting help (legal, technical, etc.) from external experts. You must also assess costs related to Web hosting or to other online services or storage.
- How will your documentation be published? Will it be indexed and/or categorized on a website, or described using suitable metadata? Will the available documents be searchable by users? Will online access be promoted on your website, or via social media or local media?
- Who might want to access your organization's information?

Open access, digital repositories, and circulation

For the research sector, the open-access movement offers interesting perspectives on the issue of knowledge circulation. Open access aims to make the results of publicly funded research available online free of charge and accessible to all, with due respect for copyright. The concept can be applied, in similar ways, to ARCs and the world of contemporary art. This was the impetus behind the [e-artexte](#) digital repository. E-artexte depositors are artists and organizations that wish to archive their

documentation and make it accessible while maintaining ownership of the associated copyrights. To specify which uses are permitted, depositors are encouraged to attach Creative Commons licences to their documents. For e-artexte, this kind of open-access deposit has many advantages. Visibility and accessibility are enhanced, as documents are indexed via a catalogue and further contextualized within a specialized repository designed for contemporary art. Description of materials using standardized metadata is conducive to research and discovery. Finally, a team of specialized librarians ensures that deposited documents are preserved and maintained in compliance with digital archiving standards—also a significant asset.

The idea behind open access is to promote wider circulation of knowledge and perspectives by making content more accessible and by facilitating diverse modes of use: reading, downloading, quoting, sharing, transforming, and reusing. Reducing barriers to access, whether these be geographic, legal, or technological (or sanitary!), can also have a positive impact on the cultural sector's international outreach—a relevant factor to bear in mind when transferring archives and documentation online, whether onto one's own website or to a digital repository.

Disseminating an artist-run centre's archives and documentation feeds into a broader cycle of creativity and reflection, and may stimulate multitudes of possible connections and directions. This idea can be illustrated with a fictional scenario: An ARC's collection of exhibition brochures is examined as part of a researcher's PhD thesis, which, in turn, is accessible via a university's institutional repository and eventually published by a book publisher. The published book is then used as a source to support an article about the centre on Wikipedia, which enhances the centre's online profile in regard to search engines, etc. Though perhaps cursory, this illustration invites us to imagine how our archives and documentation may travel and evolve when they are visible, accessible, and circulating freely on the Internet. If everything remains filed away in some lost folder at the bottom of a locally stored digital tree on an aging office computer, such new connections and discoveries will remain out of reach.

Isabelle L'Heureux is a cultural worker based in Montreal. She has a background in archival science and art history. She is interested in the multiple intersections between digital arts and technologies from a perspective that is both historical and practical. She holds the position of digital cultural development agent with the Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques (CQAM), the Regroupement des arts interdisciplinaires du Québec (RAIQ) and the Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ).

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DIGITAL RECONFIGURATIONS

by Isabelle L'Heureux

Dissemination, mediation, and production

For this final digital literacy micro-bite, we originally thought we'd examine what the digital future has in store for us while addressing some larger issues like the environment, cybersecurity, and self-sufficiency. But given our current, exceptional circumstances, we decided to take a more practical approach and look at the notion of reconfiguration.

The closure of nearly all public spaces in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the enforcement of physical distancing measures have wreaked havoc on every aspect of society and, more specifically within our own context, on our modes of creating, disseminating, and experiencing art. Therefore, we'd like to map out some approaches that artist-run centres may explore for reconfiguring their activities in response to this exceptional situation.

Needless to say, any reconfiguration should be relevant to your centre's mandate and activities, and suitable to your membership and audience. And while not every centre has the necessary technological infrastructure, skills, and means to undertake a major reconfiguration, some processes or migrations can be quite simple. What's important is to define your needs clearly and to identify what resources you possess to launch something new that is coherent with the centre's programming, without imposing a lot of extra work on those involved in carrying out the centre's ongoing activities. To find out more about issues regarding public engagement, read this article on digital engagement in the arts: ["From arts marketing to audience enrichment: How digital engagement can deepen and democratize artistic exchange with audiences."](#)

Activities

Dissemination

Dissemination activities in the digital realm can take many forms. In the previous chapter, we looked at [online dissemination of artist-run centre documentation and archives](#). On the positive side, the current, unanticipated interruption of regular ARC programming can provide the impetus for this, as the cancellation of exhibitions and other public programming may have freed up some time for staff to reallocate resources to this type of project.

For example, many centres have focused on presenting documentation produced as part of a cancelled gallery exhibition, making that content accessible online. Reconfiguring regular programming as audio walks, essays, photographs, filmed tours, and even virtual exhibitions are just a few ways of providing access to artworks and artists' practices that were originally meant to be experienced in person in the gallery. This way, artists may still enjoy some of the visibility they would have received from a regular exhibition. Other centres have also opted to highlight their archives and other documents by featuring profiles of their artist members and revisiting past programming—for example, by providing access to certain thematic documentary files on their website or through programmed publishing on social media or newsletters. Some centres have even created original content in response to the pandemic. Various initiatives have been aimed, for example, at recording stories from artists and cultural workers, conducting virtual studio visits and interviews, or launching long-distance collaborative projects. For purposes of such initiatives, CARFAC and RAAV offer [guidelines for paying artists during the pandemic](#). For online reproduction of works, please refer to the [Reproduction Royalty Schedule – Non-commercial, Non-advertising](#). Issues such as cultural mediation and the aesthetic consequences of transitioning to the digital realm demand further exploration and reflection. It's useful to note that not all works lend themselves well to digital translation, and so it would not be advisable to present a digital

version of a piece if it worked against the artist's original intent. That said, the artist-run centre network was built upon a willingness to rethink institutional conceptions of aesthetics and to experiment with new ways of producing, viewing, and critiquing art. We may assume that the organizations, artists, and cultural workers that make up the artist-run centre network are typically inclined toward experimentation and research-creation, and will be ready and able to come up with relevant ways of reconfiguring some of their cultural offerings in light of the current rules on social distancing.

Reconfiguring dissemination activities for the digital realm using available resources can contribute a certain dynamism to the community. Whether it's to highlight existing content, to provide an opportunity to see or hear work that would normally have been presented in a gallery, or to create something entirely new, each act, no matter how large or small, helps promote our members and our network. We invite you to read, or re-read, our earlier chapter, "[The Levers of Discoverability](#)," if you're interested in making such initiatives more public.

We might also note that regional artist-run centre networks (or other, similar groups) can also take part in promoting their members' activities. This could involve relaying information on social media or making room on the organization's website for member news. To find out more about automatic aggregation of new website content, check out [Press-Forward](#), a free WordPress extension for aggregating and editing RSS feeds.

Cultural mediation

Many artist-run centres complement their programming with [cultural mediation](#) activities, which bring together audiences, objects, and cultural knowledge. Even before the current pandemic, Marilyn Farley and Marie-Laure Robitaille noticed a change in how some organizations talked about *digital mediation* rather than *cultural mediation* (see their essay "[La médiation culturelle en confinement : entre distance](#)

[et connexion](#)”[in French]). This shift from the social (the relational in cultural mediation) to the technical (the apparatus behind digital mediation) illustrates the distinction between the act of disseminating content online and that of convincing audiences to interact with that content. For Farley and Robitaille, reconciling these two concepts in an effective digital cultural mediation means encouraging interactions that are sustainable and that allow sharing among all participants.

Artenso, the Centre for Research and Innovation in Art and Social Engagement, has an impressive [list of resources](#) (in French) on digital cultural mediation to help readers strike a balance between relational mediation and technology. Elsewhere, the International Council of Museums has a few suggestions on [how to engage with audiences during the pandemic](#), some of which may be applicable to artist-run centres. In May and June 2020, Artenso will be hosting “[midi-demos](#)” (lunchtime demos) during which invited guests will present their digital cultural mediation tools and initiatives as a means of helping the cultural sector to reconfigure its activities.

Many organizations have turned to various videoconferencing tools to provide cultural mediation activities such as conferences, talks, meetings, and even workshops and training sessions that lend themselves to virtual formats. A few tips to remember for this type of virtual activity include: limiting the event’s duration (videoconferences should be no longer than 90 minutes); stimulating attention and engagement by increasing interaction among participants; and explaining the software’s functions (turning camera and microphone on or off, chat functions, etc.) to participants as clearly as possible. Such reconfigurations can be done at little to no cost, and many online videoconferencing apps are available for free or for a small fee. More than anything else, time is vital for planning and coordinating such changes (proposing meeting times, confirming participant attendance, selecting a proper app, emailing instructions) and for adapting your activity to a virtual environment (reorganizing, if needed).

Production

Reconfiguring an artist-run centre's production activities presents significant challenges, some of them perhaps insurmountable. Public access to workshops and studios, and the lending of equipment, for the most part, cannot be virtualized! However, issuing user licences for software and apps is technically possible. Some production centres are exploring this method of working. Some artists—including visual and sound artists, digital and media artists, performance artists, and others—have access to some or all of the tools they need to continue working within their own studios. In this case, centres with production facilities may consider offering technical support services via video or telephone, based on the availability of their technicians. Other artists may wish to apply for virtual or home-based residencies and other calls for submissions. Such initiatives allow organizations to maintain and support their production activities, and provide grants and fees to artists who are able to work (see the Canada Council's micro-innovation grant program [Digital Originals](#)). Another possibility is offering virtual training sessions and workshops via videoconferencing, as discussed earlier.

Tools

We have already discussed some basic digital tools above. Here, we explain in greater detail some accessible tools and services that can help you to digitally reconfigure your centre's dissemination, mediation, and production activities.

Computer and Internet connection

If artist-run centre staff do not have access to computers, then obviously any form of remote work that demands communicating and coordinating with others will be very difficult. Any digital reconfiguration of ARC activities rests on having computer and Internet access. However, such infrastructure and hardware cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, the issue of access to funding for computer and sof-

ware upgrades for artist-run centres seems all the more relevant in the context of this pandemic.

Website

An artist-run centre's website is a window onto the activities of the organization and its personnel. It's also a space that demands development and reconsideration in light of today's needs and aspirations. A centre might consider showcasing some of its archives (currently lying buried in a forgotten sub-folder) or starting up a blog with short essays, updates, images, and audio tracks, or simply promoting the centre's digital reconfiguration initiatives.

Social media

Social media can be used to present work, highlight content, and promote events, calls for submissions, and other activities within your broader network. It can also act as a hub for assistance and exchange in response to current events (see the [Artist-Run Centres and COVID19](#) support group on Facebook).

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing services are not only useful for meetings, mediation activities (conferences, talks), and workshops, but also to provide technical support for artistic production. The most common videoconferencing services are [Zoom](#) and [Webex](#). These commercial services have free or paid account options, and the terms and conditions of use vary depending on the package you choose. Both offer several functions that allow you to screen share, annotate, hold breakout group discussions, chat, record your meetings, and more. These services are supposedly encrypted, but Zoom's security features have been called into question in recent weeks by organizations that uphold strict privacy standards and require confidential meetings, such as governments, international organizations, and private enterprises. Alternatively, [Jitsi Meet](#) offers a free, open-source, and anonymous solution for your videoconferencing needs.

Live streaming

Live streaming services can be used to stream conferences, performances, virtual tours, and more. They can also be used in tandem with a videoconferencing service (e.g., a Zoom chat may be live streamed on Facebook). Many live stream service providers are available, the most popular being [Vimeo](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitch](#).

Other immersive experiences

For more daring folks, cyberspace is overflowing with options. Over the past several years, the Indigenous research group [AbTeC](#) has been headquartered in [Second Life](#), where it organizes its activities. The Quebec/Canada XR community keeps a [list of alternative virtual or augmented reality solutions](#) (in French) for large cultural gatherings (for one example of this kind of innovation, see the [Museum of Other Realities](#), which hosts several virtual events).

It is up to each artist-run centre to assess its particular priorities, needs, and available resources, what activities or ideas are most relevant, and whether to use the current moment to slow down or be more proactive. In digitally reconfiguring your centre's activities, however, what is more important than anything else is to be mindful of everyone's availability, as well as their health and well-being.

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This publication was made possible thanks to financial support from l'Association des groupes en arts visuels francophones (AGAVF).

The Artist-Run Centres and Collectives Conference (ARCA) and l'Association des groupes en arts visuels francophones (AGAVF) joined forces to invite Isabelle L'Heureux, digital development officer for Le Conseil québécois des arts médiatiques (CQAM), Le Regroupement des arts interdisciplinaires du Québec (RAIQ), and Le Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ), to present six essays on key themes of digital literacy.

The objective of this publication is to raise awareness and resource communities working in the visual arts in Canada so that they may better harness the powers of digital technology for artistic creation, presentation and organization. The essays were first published in *L'arca in the loop*, our monthly newsletter from December 2019 to May 2020.

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*Except for the introduction by Anne Bertrand, the essay "Putting Digital Culture in Perspective" by Mériol Lehmann and "Blockchain Technology Explained" by Aaron Tucker.

PUBLISHED BY

Artist-Run Centres and Collectives
Conference / Conférence des collectifs
et des centres d'artistes autogérés
C. P. 125, Succ. C
Montreal (Quebec) H2L 4J7
www.arca.art

ISBN 978-0-9959968-2-3

Legal deposit, 2020

Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
and Library and Archives Canada, 2020

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Conference / Conférence des collectifs
et des centres d'artistes autogérés

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