

Re-enacting process: temporality, historicity and the Women's Liberation Music Archive

Deborah Withers*

University of the West of England, Ground Floor Flat, 3 Roseberry Rd, Redfield, Bristol, BS5 9QD, UK

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This article uses the Women's Liberation Music Archive (WLMA) as a case study to explore re-enactment as the performative 'doing' of history. As an archive composed of music-making processes rather than commercial 'products', the article argues this is an invitation to consider the time of history as one of action and enlivenment. The article frames the dissemination of material in the WLMA as a delayed event that is made possible by the digital technologies, in particular free web tools, such as blogs. It explores the implications of the resurfacing of marginal cultural histories within the present moment, and how this can transform conceptions of historicity and time. Finally, the article asserts the value of digital archives within the context of music histories, thus challenging the notion that effective historical encounters can only occur through engagement with original objects.

Keywords: feminist music making; re-enactment; digital archives; temporality; process

The Women's Liberation Music Archive (WLMA) is an online blog archive that documents the histories of music making in the UK Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) 1970–1989. Launched in May 2011, it contains digitalised music, film and photographs, oral history excerpts, written personal narratives, songbooks, fliers and other ephemera from a wide range of bands and solo artists connected to feminist political communities during the 1970s and 1980s. For many of the acts documented on the blog, it is the only evidence they ever existed, even if that was only for one spontaneous performance at an agit-prop cabaret event in Hackney, London in 1981. The blog uses the possibilities afforded by free 2.0 web tools to address the marginalisation of these women's contribution to alternative music history. These are histories that even in the early twenty-first century still cast only a cursory glance to oppositional music made by women, including within so-called radical accounts (see Lynksey 2011).

This article explores how the WLMA digitally *re-enacts* the histories of feminist music making. By using the term 're-enactment', I deliberately deploy it in a different way to theorisations of historical re-enactment that tie it to the *practices* of historical re-enactment societies, or the re-enactment of historical events and situations on television, radio and film. Vanessa Agnew, who has written about

*Email: debiwithers@yahoo.co.uk

practices of re-enactment in popular culture, does however suggest that the term can be utilised in a wider way. A consideration of re-enactment, she argues, ‘enables us to map trends within historical thought, examine the implications for our understanding of the past and interrogate history’s social and political uses’ (Agnew 2007, 301). I engage with the flexibility of recent theorisations of re-enactment that suggest when the past is brought ‘to life’, it can create openings for relating to history in affective, empathetic and corporeal ways. Jerome de Groot echoes this by highlighting the potential of re-enactment to ‘undermine the controlling and disciplining claims of an all-encompassing, authoritative historical mainstream’ (de Groot 2011, 588).

This article is especially inspired by the work of Rebecca Schneider in *Performing Remains* (2011), which explores re-enactment as the encounter between performance theory and historiography. Schneider’s engagement productively highlights the particular temporal dimension and experience communicated by re-enactment practices: that of ‘liveness’ and the performative ‘doing’ of history. However, crucially in Schneider’s characterisation of historical re-enactment, ‘liveness’ is not just ‘a matter of temporal immediacy, happening only in an uncomplicated now, a “transitory” present, an im-mediate moment [... it can be] punctuated by, syncopated with, indeed charged by, other moments, other times’ (Schneider 2011, 92). The materials in the WLMA, I argue, are a particularly rich source to think through a re-enacted historical ‘liveness’ and the attendant playing with time because the remains left by these communities are ‘incomplete’, ‘fragmentary’ or ‘unfinished’ and thus communicate the *processes* of feminist music making. They are examples of histories that are ‘utterly impossible to conserve in ‘representations’ that can be taken along in the hand luggage with which we traverse time’ (Runia 2006, 305). Finished representations embody and enact a particular temporal logic – we arrive to the event or object *after* it takes place or has been made. The process-based materials of the WLMA, however, communicate a wholly different temporal dimension. Encountering these materials is comparable to arriving at event in the middle of its duration, or to the construction of a building as it is being made, while simultaneously suspending the expectation that the event will end, or the house will ever be built. This kind of temporal retraining is integral to understanding what the re-enacted histories of the WLMA *do*. As they are read through the lens of performance theory’s proximity to liveness, and how digital media facilitates high levels of networked relationships, linear time is muddled, as past, present and future touch and rebound in unexpected ways.

Digital media platforms are the crucial and transformative vehicle for the re-enactment of Women’s Liberation music histories in the contemporary moment, and the theoretical significance of this will also be explored in the article. In the case of the WLMA, the free online digital platform creates the possibility for the large-scale circulation of non-commercial music that was simply not possible during the time it was created: feminist music making was embedded in a certain time and place, and within particular communities. In terms of mainstream popular culture, it may as well have not existed—such was its invisibility. Women’s liberation music making subsequently disappeared, only to re-emerge as a digitally mediated ‘untimely history’, as will be discussed later. The re-circulation of historical materials or ‘re-presence of the past’ (Sobchack 2011, 323) via digital networks has also been theorised as changing temporal experiences and relations in a similar way to Schneider’s use of re-enactment. Digitally ‘networked re-enactments’ create what

Katie King calls ‘*pastpresents*, run together all in one word, in which pasts and presents very literally mutually construct each other’ (King 2012, 12). In this article, then, I bring together the different ways performance theory, historiography and media studies have implicitly or explicitly theorised re-enactment, so that the term can be used to understand different experiences of historicity and time using the WLMA as my case study.

This article is split into three areas that explore the re-enactment of feminist music making in the contemporary moment. The first section provides context about women’s participation in music making within wider culture, highlighting that participation still remains uneven among the genders, from grassroots to professional levels. This is followed by explanations about why the music of the WLM has remained largely invisible until its dissemination on the WLMA. The next section frames the re-enactment of feminist music making as a delayed event, exploring the temporal implications of their untimely emergence in the present through the vehicle of digital technologies. The final section explores the question of digital re-enactments and the value of digital archiving, and whether digitally re-circulated artefacts can engender affective and corporeal historical experiences. To begin the article, I will elaborate the cultural situations that have shaped the emergence of the WLMA.

Women and music: a fragmented legacy

In 2013, women are still massively under-represented in the music industry, from grassroots to professional levels. In 2010, the UK-based Performing Rights Society (PRS) noted that men who registered as songwriters and music creators with the organisation outnumbered women from 6 to 1 (PRS 2010). While in 2009, 77% of people working in promotion and management work in the music industry were men (Guardian 2009). The marked gender discrepancy within the UK is clear. Although there are a number of reasons for this, the lack of access to the histories of women who have made music in the past, and the lack of visible role models in the public sphere as a consequence, is arguably one of them.

The aim of the WLMA, and its partner exhibition project *Music & Liberation*,¹ is to organise and communicate the varied histories of women’s music making in the UK WLM. Saving some acts like Spoilsparts and The Fabulous Dirt Sisters from obscurity, and bolstering the knowledge of established music makers such as Maggie Nicols, Frankie Armstrong and Carol Grimes, the archive aspires to create an enduring legacy that sticks permanently into the grooves of culture. The blog aims to create a sense of tradition to allow for a ‘temporal depth rooted in [the] continuities’ of feminist music making, affording those histories a ‘disposition to value’ (Cubitt 2007, 181) that has previously been denied to them because of their ephemerality, unknown and non-commercial nature. Of course, it does not necessarily follow that greater access to women’s musical histories will equate with more balanced opportunities for women musicians in the future. However, allowing these histories to *circulate* on the Internet and other public spaces creates possibilities for people to collide with them. This can happen deliberately or through more opportunistic means, such as following the trails of hyperlinks from other websites, or clicking through to the site after search engine terms such as ‘list of bad haircuts,’ ‘female playing congas’ or ‘blue cow music record’ list the WLMA as part of the search results.²

The cultural interventions made by feminist music makers have largely been invisible prior to their dissemination on the blog in 2011. Much of the evidence of feminist music making from the 1970s and 1980s has been locked away at the back of cupboards, stuffed into old shoeboxes, largely forgotten and sometimes deemed unimportant by the music makers themselves.³ Or, if the music has been collected in archives, such as the Women's Revolution Per Minute archive that was stored at Birmingham public library for over 10 years, the recordings languished in an archival basement, without the facilities to listen to the music. The WRPM collection moved in 2012 to the Women's Art Library at Goldsmiths, London, which should now improve access to the material, with regular opening hours and listening equipment available.⁴

Despite the lack of discernible legacy of WLM music in mainstream and alternative music histories, the personal collections of people involved in WLM music making generated large amounts of material. Recordings were stored on now obsolete formats such as ½ and ¼ inch Ampex tape, U Matic and Betamax videotape, or on more common analogue formats such as audiotape and vinyl. The launch of the WLMA has been a catalyst for the small-scale digitisation of some of this material, but this has often not been to archive quality standards because it has been reliant on domestic digitisation technologies that tend to output highly compressed mp3 files, rather than uncompressed WAVs or AIFFS. The Heritage Lottery Funded *Music & Liberation* project did provide resources for high quality, professional transfers, and this has further facilitated the digitisation of rare material.

Explaining invisibility

There are a number of specific reasons for the enduring invisibility of the histories of feminist music makers that are worth mentioning here. Firstly, there was a deliberate political strategy of some bands to purposely eschew the popular, capitalist 'malestream', which meant groups positioned themselves outside the dominant popular culture (including against punk), and were more concerned with creating and controlling their own means of cultural production. As the Women's Liberation Music Projects Group, who was instrumental in organising debates related to feminism and music in London in the late 1970s, stated in their introduction to the songbook *Sisters in Song*:

We are firmly against feminist music being taken up by the music industry and commercialised in any way. We are involved in taking control over our own music, which means not only playing and singing, but also gaining knowledge about instruments, equipment, sound engineering and recording – usually a male domain, and having control over the distribution of our music, etc (WLMP n.d., 4)

Such an attitude meant that women had to find ways to be independent, but this also meant that feminist bands had limited public exposure. The commercial popular music industry was a particular target for feminist criticism because it melded capitalism and sexism in oppressive ways, as the Northern Women's Liberation Rock Band challenged in their manifesto: 'these songs help to keep women in their accustomed role of wives and mothers, dependent on men, because they hide the real conflicts in women's lives and relationships with men and so prevent them from understanding their oppression' (1974). Opportunities for participating in

music making were limited too in the 1970s: at worst women were excluded outright, at best they could occupy limited, stereotypical roles, such as a genteel backing singer.

Another factor affecting the audience reception of women's liberation music was that much of the music was written for circulation within feminist communities. Lyrics celebrated taboo subjects such as lesbianism, and often referred to the dynamics of being in the movement itself. To a large degree, the subject matter of the songs reflected the 'world' of the WLM, and drew on and created specific codes that would have been relevant only to women who were also participating. The appeal to 'outsiders', and the potential to engage wider audiences, was therefore arguably limited. There were exceptions, of course, with bands such as The Guest Stars having a good degree of popular success throughout the 1980s.⁵

Another important reason for the lack of a well-known legacy for WLM music making was financial: finding funds to support activities such as practising, acquiring equipment and organising gigs was difficult, and this compromised the sustainability of women's ventures. Lack of money also impacted on many music makers' capacity to realise practical aspects of music making, like recording music in studios. Making a record of 'studio quality' music and releasing it on an album or 7" single is one way to make a concrete legacy of musical activity, whether done professionally or in a more amateur setting. Having such recordings can facilitate 'canonisation', a crucial technology of recognition in popular music history, and of course, wider culture (Von Appen and Doebling 2006). Yet many feminist music makers did not manage to do this with all of their work, although there are exceptions. Ova, for example, set up their own recording studio in 1986 and managed to record four full-length albums during their career. In the late 1970s, music studios were very expensive to use. Although Portastudios (portable recording equipment) came into usage in the late 1970s and early 1980s, home recording was in no way as accessible, high quality or common as it is today. Recording studios could also be intimidating places for women who had little or no experience of working in such a context that was, for the most part, the exclusive domain of men. To put it simply, a lot of music made by women in the 1970s and 1980s went unrecorded. There are far more recordings of demo tapes, practices and live performances than studio recordings available. It is this basic lack of music and legible musical 'products', that render it difficult to recognise the legacy of Women's Liberation music making within the terms of recognition afforded by mainstream popular music histories.

The circulation of Women's liberation music

The circulation of the music made within the Women's Liberation was therefore minimal by commercial music standards. Some bands existed for a few shows, never recorded music and only played in their local area. Others lasted for years, toured extensively but only recorded one record. Jam Today is a pertinent example of this. In a career that spanned eight years (and three different line-ups), they only recorded and released the four songs on *Stereotyping* EP (1981),⁶ and they had to borrow the money to do it. Even *if* or when the music was recorded, there was then the issue of distribution. This could be an exhausting and pain staking experience, particularly if you were organising and funding the activity yourself, as Figure 1 indicates.

Given the limited resources of women's liberation music makers, organising recording music *and* distributing it was exceptionally hard work. Women's Revolu-

tion Per Minute (who are mentioned in Figure 1) was the only distribution company that sold ‘women’s music’ in the UK. They sold cassettes, records and later CDs through a catalogue, at events, in women’s bookshops such as Sisterwrite in London, and at radical bookshops across the UK. The re-distribution of artefacts on the WLMA re-enacts all aspects of music making, and does not just focus on ‘finished’ musical products, or the success stories. Sales lists, as included in Figure 1, sit alongside album covers, budget books next to photographs of live performances. The archive thus communicates process, doing and action. It re-enacts this sense of ‘liveness,’ and relays the cultural interventions made by feminist music makers.

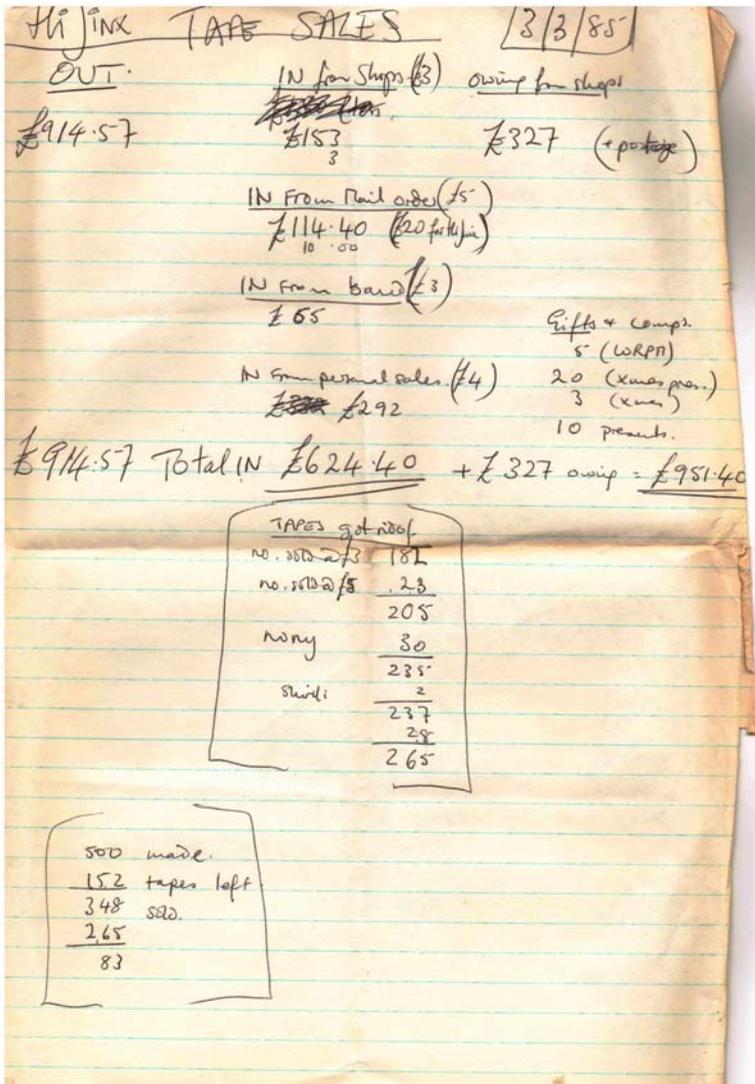


Figure 1. Hi-Jinx Tape Sales. Image illustrates the financial pressures of women recording and distributing their own music in Women’s Liberation music-making communities. Item appears courtesy of Ros Davies who funded the recording of the one Hi-Jinx album *Stepping Over and Out*.

Given the nature of legacy material described above, prior to setting up the WLMA the circulation of Women's Liberation music histories across time and generations has been minimal. To give a sense of this point, I want to share here my own opportunistic encounter with the music of the WLM. In 2007, I became interested in the histories of the WLM and regularly visited the Feminist Archive South (FAS) in Bristol. The archive was then based in the back room of a public library. Posters hung on the walls and the periodicals protruded invitingly for visitors. The material was as accessible as it could be; it was largely an 'open archive.' In 2007, I was very involved in feminist music making myself (albeit in a different context), and was generally interested in uncovering the 'cultural' legacies of the WLM. The FAS has a fairly good collection of tapes and vinyl but had no facilities on which to play the items. Very few of the bands featured in the archives had further information about them on the Internet. It was frustrating, but also tantalising, to see and touch what felt like cultural secrets in a space that was relatively accessible for the public. Significantly, should I be seeking a similar experience today it would not be possible. In 2009, the FAS moved to premises at Bristol University so that trained archivists, rather than volunteers, can look after the archives. While this may be a key step toward institutionalising these histories, it also makes it far more difficult for people to have chance encounters with marginal cultural histories in public spaces.

To create the possibility for public encounters is precisely what motivated the creation of the WLMA and its exhibition project, *Music & Liberation*. In January 2013, 18 months after being launched, the site has had over 45,000 unique visitors. Considering the limited audiences for such music during the time it was being performed, this is a staggering number. The online archive has the potential to reach audiences across the world and with great speed, as Anna Reading summarises: 'digital media technologies and digitization enable the capture and storage, management and reassembly of data records in ways that in relation to earlier mediated memories are less costly, globally connected, and reproducible across different media' (Reading 2011, 242). Although people have viewed the blog across the world, the highest numbers of visitors to the site come from the UK, USA, Canada and Australia.

Women's Liberation music histories as a 'delayed event'

For many of the bands in the WLMA then, being documented on the site was the first time the material was subject to large-scale media circulation. Before the archive was launched these histories were the province of temporally and spatially located communities of interest, reliant on oral transmission, personal and collective memories and the distribution of analogue recordings for their coherence and communication. In the digital age however, this has radically changed as they have become accessible to far wider and diverse publics. The WLMA acts as an example of what Victoria Browne, following Christine Battersby's reading of Nietzsche, calls an 'untimely history':

the untimely event is not simply used up as it occurs. It does not fall back into the past: spent and wasted, but nor is it swept up and appropriated [...] Nietzsche's untimely events and forgotten ideas are not subsumed within historical time. Nor do they disappear from it. They remain on the fringes of cultural memory and pop up again at unforeseen moments, to break apart and disrupt the sedimented time frames and

syntheses that cannot entirely suppress or contain them. This upsets the linear ideal of history as a simple succession or step-by-step accumulation of events. (2012, 11)

Such a description seems fully appropriate to describe what happened to the music making histories of the WLM. The potential of such histories was not ‘used up’ at their time of happening because they simply did not reach that many people to have a substantial impact. Moreover, the specific, anti-capitalist and woman-focused nature of music making meant that they were also too ‘difficult’ to be appropriated, unlike other radical musical movements of the time. Punk’s oppositional stance, for example, became commodified, at least at an aesthetic level, almost as soon as it arrived on ‘the scene’. Women’s Liberation music making, however, has remained on the fringes of cultural memory and still has the capacity to surprise: ‘who knew feminist rock was full of sax? Not me’ wrote music critic Alexis Petridis in *The Guardian* in an article about the WLMA (2012). Arguably it is only with the technological conditions of the early twenty-first century, in particular digitisation; that provide a fertile context where these histories can emerge from the margins. Importantly, they do so in a different, digitised form that has implications to be explored later in this article.

The last part of Browne’s quote is also indicative of what the very materials of this untimely history *do*: they break apart established historical time precisely because they re-enact the *processes* of Women’s Liberation music making. They jolt time into the moment of action as we can listen to women practising together, tarrying in time, going through the motions (in the motion) and trying (but often) failing to get the song right. We do not have access to the ‘final’ performance because there is no such recording in existence. We can hear the chatter of ‘I missed that bit’ in the corner of the recordings, followed by frustrated laughter as the women attempt again.⁷ These archives indicate and re-enact *learning*. Recordings of practices and demo tapes by any band can capture that similar sense of ‘working things out’. Such alternative recordings allow a glimpse into how familiar recordings could have been otherwise, and challenge the sense of closure that the final mix represents. But, it is important to note that recordings of anti-commercial feminist bands’ practices are very different to a commercial band like, say, the Beatles, whose recordings are overwhelmingly part of the machinery of representation that moulds temporal and cultural expectations in popular (music) culture. The difference now is that in the digital age, commercial and non-commercial, ‘finished’ and ‘unfinished’ music can circulate simultaneously. It does so with similar speed and intensity that pre-internet was only the purview of the commercial music commodity. There is no need to package the histories of the WLMA so they can be sold, they are simply distributed and re-enacted in the process.

Such techno-cultural movement creates an avenue into a time of action and doing that opens the present moment up to the possible simultaneity of past, present and future. The re-enactment of materials in the WLMA, with their emphasis on process, functions as a performative undoing of linear temporal logics. It offers a different sense of time that is continuous and historically capacious because it is grounded in ‘doing’ and ‘liveness’. It creates an experience of ‘historicality that spans the division of past, present, and future, not only revealing the past as in some way always present but also revealing the present and future as in some way already past’ (Sobchack 2011, 324). This historicality is a space where normative demarcations of time recombine and flow together, liberating static conceptions of linear history that render the dissonances of ‘the past’ into neat caricature, naturalise

an unsatisfactory present and smother visions that the future could be any different from established 'tradition'. Such time travelling antics occur when the fragmentary remains of women's liberation music making are circulated to mass audiences via versatile and freely accessible digital platforms.

Digital re-enactments: what is lost and what is gained?

The re-enactment of the women's liberation music making is then absolutely entangled with its digital dissemination. But, can digital archives open up relations to history in affective or corporeal ways, as Schneider suggests are part of the allure of re-enactment, or do they pale into insignificance when compared to original documents or recordings? Is the WLMA merely a collection of imitations and copies, and what role do embodied and affective responses play in forging relationships with historical material? For Emily Robinson 'archival research is in large part an affective experience. And it is absolutely dependent on an encounter with an original document or artefact' (Robinson 2010, 510). She goes on to state:

The rather ambivalent response to digital records is a clear indicator of the extent to which the archival endeavour is predicated on an encounter with physical artifacts. Without doubt, digitisation has transformed the historical discipline and made it possible to pursue topics that might otherwise have seemed insurmountable [...] This does not, however, mean that the historical discipline is ready to substitute the convenience of digital archives for the *sensory experience of the real thing* (Robinson 2010, 509, italics mine).

The key part of this quote is Robinson's affirmation of the *sensorial* sovereignty of 'real thing'. However, the 'real thing' arguably becomes less important when what is historically significant are recordings stored in the object, rather than the object itself in its non-operative state. Particularly if the recordings are of live performances or practices, rough copies that were never destined to be 'the real thing' but became that way through an accident of history: a lack of money and organisation, the pressures of everyday life or the break up of a relationship.

Phillipe Le Guern has commented on the inferior value of digital recordings such as MP3s and WAVs over vinyl, suggesting that no one cares about digital copies in comparison to the awe produced by a material encounter with a record (2011). Yet, what is the value of the 'curious inadequacies of the copy', and what do 'inadequacies get [...] right'? (Schneider 2011, 6) For when there are no records or artwork, and each tape looks the same as each other (bar idiosyncratic label sticking and hastily scrawled handwriting), the digital copy really comes into its own as an affective historical experience (Figure 2).

There is nothing more pleasing, in a sensory way, than hearing a digitised version of the one live show a band collected in the WLMA did before they split up. Upon listening, there is an added excitement and sense of preservation, and that something as ephemeral as a performance has left a trace that can be re-captured, tidied up and shared with thousands of other people because of digital technology.

To privilege the 'real thing' rather than these re-enacted copies is also to miss the point of how music and sound can affect people. As Brandon Labelle suggests,



Figure 2. Abandon Your Tutu tapes. Rare recordings of live performances of London-based, avant-garde feminist band that never recorded a ‘proper’ album.

Sound is intrinsically and unignorably relational: it emanates, propagates, communicates, vibrates, and agitates; it leaves a body and enters others; it binds and unhinges, harmonizes and traumatizes; it sends the body moving, the mind dreaming, the air oscillating. It seemingly eludes definition, while having profound effect. (Labelle 2006, xi)

The re-enacted music contained in the WLMA requires no original because of the primacy of the *embodied* musical encounter it presents. Here, digital material provides an invitation to reconsider traditional historiographical methods that privilege the authenticity of original objects. If archival research is no longer dependent on an encounter with an original object but is part of the everyday media-scape most people in the world inhabit, it indicates that these modes of re-enactment and what they can ‘do’ have the potential to reach people and transform the *conditions* of historicity. This distinct sense of historicity is, ironically, unleashed by digital formats, smothering the social with simultaneous encounters that circulate ‘presence’ that meld past, present and future in a continuous and capacious now. This sense of time is characterised by an

endless rhythm of things appearing and disappearing [...] The continuing-across of things [...] To grasp time, as apart from the being in or out of time of any particular thing, or even of all things, you must look to the middle, to the continuing, where appearance and disappearance cross, returning the instance to itself. Time has no loose ends, only existential interweave’. (Massumi 2006, 204)

However, I want to stress here that digital formats are not omnipotent. I do not want support fantasies of ‘superhuman digital programmability’ (Chun 2011, 185) that assume that digital presence will always exist in ‘perfect’, preserved form. Digital formats degrade and require similar forms of intervention and management as other forms of data. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun suggests we must try to ‘grasp a present that is always degenerating [and] the ways in which ephemerality is made to endure’ (Chun 2011, 200). Yet, it is precisely the circulation of digitised ephemeral artefacts that characterise the content of WLMA. The WLMA re-enacts material culture practices that never had a stable referent or origin within culture. The conditions of the culture were always ephemeral and transitory.

Paradoxically, in the age of the enduring ephemeral such low-budget, marginal histories come to claim a space that had previously eluded them. As a consequence, the ‘long-term survival of data [which] tends to depend on some combination of dissemination and concentration’ (Cubitt 2007, 183) is realised through digital resources in a moment of ephemeral compatibility. Indeed, it is the specific conditions of the digital age that have made the materials in the WLMA *legible* and, consequently, *legitimate*. People have become adept at reading operational, ephemeral forms of media such as the ‘imperfect’ youtube video, video footage from mobile phones and news reporting told through fragmentary ‘tweets’. This means the partial qualities of the WLMA seem to be ‘in time’ with the digital present as these histories merge consequentially into the everyday landscape of infinite archive and pervasive media.

If it is true then that we are living in a cultural moment that privileges the circulation of transient and marginal cultural histories at the same velocity as monumental, established histories, we are arguably ‘much closer within the global memory field’ (Reading 2011, 249) to an egalitarian historicity. In taking the risk of stating what may seem like a naïve declaration, I feel it is worth doing because of the possibilities that free web tools such as blogs and wikis offer marginalised cultural groups wishing to share their histories. As they do so they move from an invisible periphery to a diversely populated memory centre. Web 2.0 allows for hidden, untimely histories to become quickly visible to global audiences, as Ana Laura Lopez de la Torre from the Remembering Olive Collective, a community history and blog-based project focused on the life of British Black Panther Olive Morris, states:

As information was coming into [us we could] publish it straight away so it is very immediate and that really appealed to us. [...] There is some information there [...] that is not published on the internet at all. There is nothing, for example on the British Black Panthers, and if you type ‘British Black Panthers’ we come on top so I think it has been really instrumental in contributing to filling a gap about information online about this. (de la Torre 2009)

Of course, such online presence needs to be concentrated in other areas, such as exhibitions and physical archives, in order to provide multiple and varied sites where these histories can be re-enacted. Yet, the potential cultural reach of the Internet in such a context is unquestionable.

Web archiving projects, as conducted at the British Library (of which the WLMA and Do Your Remember Olive Morris? is part of), are also important for

documenting the process of archival activity on the Internet. The intermittent snapshots capture sites as information is accumulated, and taken away. They provide important backup for information, preserve vulnerable histories and mitigate their disintegration. As Cubitt asserts, memory ‘data’ survives within culture through a combination of dissemination *and* concentration, and the blogs offer un-funded and oppositional cultural histories a vital porthole into the world. And importantly, through their re-enactment they not only circulate ‘presence’ but also rework the flow of time itself, ensuring that the past protrudes into the present in a way that denies its past-ness and declares its enlivenment.

Conclusion: the value of re-enactment to historiography

This article has explored re-enactment as the performative ‘doing’ of history, a recirculation of the time of action and process facilitated by free digital platforms. I have thought through the digital re-enactment of the marginal, untimely history of the WLMA in terms of ‘liveness’, not only in terms of immediacy, but as being ‘punctuated by, syncopated with, indeed charged by, other moments, other times’ (Schneider 2011, 92). Re-enactment is premised in the time travelling, affective historical encounter that can bring history *alive* in a continuous present where past, present and future interweave. Such an action forces those that encounter historical materials to become intimate with the rough edges of process, to refuse narrative accounts and in their place attend to the ‘presences’ that circulate within culture. Within the context of the WLMA, the re-enactment of histories allows the materials to speak for themselves because they clearly betray the processes of their production. And, fortuitously, it is through their digital re-enactment that those processes become intelligible within a current cultural context amenable to their articulation.

While the effects of such profound transformations cannot necessarily be quantified, qualitative shifts in time, historicity and cultural value are undoubtedly discernible. These shifts have created affective and corporeal openings to what was once known as ‘the past’, but can arguably no longer be called so, as the undeniable force of lived events rubs into and beyond a ‘now’ that is changing its temporal complexion in the process. Because of these changes new historiographical terminologies are needed to cope with the challenges a capacious and continuous time offers. As Jussi Parikka writes: ‘similarly as the photographic and new image cultures in the early part of the twentieth century forced not only a rethinking of perception but also of collection, memory and organisation [...] now software cultures demand a rethinking of similar extent’ (2012, 90).

One such historiographical terminology is re-enactment. It is a useful tool because it does not deny the performative force of ‘doing’ history. It wears its process openly, allowing for affective, textual, spatial, digital and corporeal engagement to be part of its ‘onto-epistemology’ (Barad 2007, 34). What is lost in re-enactment’s ‘objectivity’ is gained in greater potential for intimacy and proximity to historical action. Thinking through re-enactment with the WLMA has been a productive exercise because the archive materials resist representation and are instead grounded in the time of action and process. Through combining these two areas, my aim has been to show the potential of re-enactment as the performative ‘doing’ of history, as well as asserting the value and difference of cultures that resist commercialism can make to historiographical methodology. Through their re-enactment in digital culture, it creates opportunities for these enduringly

ephemeral histories to become legible and widely available in a profoundly transformed present.

Notes

1. *Music & Liberation*, which was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2012, is an exhibition that draws on the material collected in the Women's Liberation Music Archive. It aims to create an 'open archive', where people can watch and listen to archive material, as well as look at objects and ephemera collected as part of the project.
2. These are some of the search terms people have used which has led them to the archive.
3. During interviews conducted as part of *Music & Liberation* one interviewee questioned the importance of the histories, and expressed doubt if anyone wanted to know about them or not.
4. See <http://www.gold.ac.uk/library/collections/wrpmcollection/>.
5. The Guest Stars were however part of the evolution of feminist music making in the 1980s, and wouldn't have necessarily seen themselves as part of the WLM in the same way that a band like Jam Today would have.
6. See <http://youtu.be/vsyIh6ISLzE> for the film 'Jam Today 3 at the Moonlight Club and More'.
7. The recording of the Jam Today 2 practice 'Where Do We Go From Here?' is a good example of this. Available online: <http://womensliberationmusicarchive.wordpress.com/j/>

Notes on contributor

Deborah Withers is a writer, researcher, curator and publisher. She is the curator of two exhibitions about the cultural history of the Women's Liberation Movement, *Sistershow Revisited* (2011) and *Music & Liberation* (2012), both funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Her academic work has been published in the *Journal of Oral History*, *Women: A Cultural Review*, the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* and the *European Journal of Women's Studies*. To find out more about her projects please visit www.debi-rah.net

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