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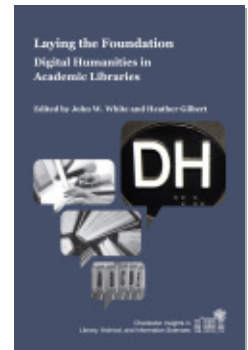
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5 | Many Voices, One Experiment: Building Toward Generous Interfaces for Oral History Collections with *Mapping the Long Women's Movement*

Seth Kotch¹

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will address one approach to extending the archival model outside the library, as represented by the library's online catalog, and into the more flexible and experimental space of digital humanities. Therefore, it is less digital humanities *in* the library, than digital humanities *inspired by* the library and done with the strengths and habits of the library in mind. It addresses *Mapping the Long Women's Movement*,² a project that reimagines the oral history collection as a dynamic digital space that illuminates connections between materials and invites browsing among them. The project team's experience with this work pointed to ways in which traditional and nontraditional archival processes can inspire and support DH projects, and the way in which DH projects can nudge and challenge archives to create more responsive interfaces and useful presentations.

Mapping the Long Women's Movement represents fifty oral histories with people in the Appalachian South that address the strikingly understudied story of second-wave feminism in the region.³ These interviews situate southern women's activism in the context of the women's movement of the 1970s, not only by adding new perspectives to a critical conversation dominated by studies of coastal cities but also by understanding the role of space and place in the creation and development of feminist consciousnesses, institutions, networks, and activisms in places like rural Bumpass Cove, Tennessee, and urban Knoxville. This project focused on the grassroots women's movement that developed in eastern Tennessee; women-led

unionization drives; antipoverty campaigns; environmental justice campaigns; reproductive rights and women's health; and women's fight for access to and equity in public education and in the workplace. The research was grounded in an extensive, deeply theoretical body of scholarship, perhaps most notably works by Doreen Massey, Anne Enke, and Nancy Fraser that explore how women and their allies use public and private spaces to build movements,⁴ but ultimately it rested on the lived experiences of the interviewees.

The interviews trace feminist activism in rural and urban areas and showcase how widespread the women's movement was, the pathways leading in and out of the movement, and the routes movement activists—not all of whom self-identify as activists, as participants in a movement, or as feminists—used to pursue their own civic, personal, and professional growth. Interviewees ranged from labor, civil rights, and environmental activists to artists, attorneys, clergy, and community and church activists. Their testimonials to the role of space in shaping their lives and identity suggested the utility of a digital project that could visualize those spaces and their connections to one another.

The goal of *Mapping the Long Women's Movement (MLWM)* was to visually represent not just feminist use of space in Appalachia, but also connections between people, places (like towns and cities, not to mention the American South as a whole), and spaces (like universities, health clinics, homes, and other commercial and public spaces). The interviews themselves yielded not only stories of personal transformation and productive activism on reproductive services and domestic violence, among other issues, but also revealed a network of activism that extended beyond the southeastern United States and into urban centers in the Northeast and the West and even to international sites. By situating the interviews on a Cartesian map, the project team hoped to add “showing” to the interviewees’ “telling” about their lives.

Doing this showing required something of an epistemological shift away from the standard model in place at the Southern Oral History Program and many other oral history programs, major and minor, wherein the creation of research matter exists separately from its preservation, archiving, and dissemination and toward a model where the presentation of the material flows out of its intellectual underpinnings. This new model would not only

present oral histories in response to a keyword search or browsing prompt, but would also allow users to explore results in ways that could be suggestive, provocative, and revealing. This project would visualize an archival collection while allowing users to manipulate that visualization.

Our approach to this collaborative work—which engaged staff historians and field scholars at the Southern Oral History Program⁵ in the Center for the Study of the American South⁶ at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), archivists at Carolina’s Southern Historical Collection,⁷ and staff and students at the newly organized Digital Innovation Lab⁸ in the UNC’s Department of American Studies—draws on Mitchell Whitelaw’s concept of a “generous interface.” Whitelaw posits interfaces that “offer rich, browsable views; provide evocative samples of primary content; and support an understanding of context and relationships.”⁹

The inspiration behind our understanding of Whitelaw’s ideal is the fact that in many archives, and certainly in the expectations of the users of those archives, the digital has replaced the corporeal. To paraphrase David Weinberger’s three orders of order¹⁰: In the first order, we organize things. In the second, we organize partial information about those things, such as cards in a card catalog, which exist nearby in a discernible order. The third order, though, is “dynamic and miscellaneous,”¹¹ casting aside the limitations of organizing physical objects in physical spaces and allowing both archivists and users to dynamically organize and reorganize archives every time they use them without interfering with other users’ interventions.

For library users, gone is the expectation of a rich visual and physical experience that follows a fairly bare-bones textual search; it seems increasingly true that users want the experience of searching *itself* to offer them something. And even if there is a fascinating and thought-provoking object awaiting them on a shelf in a library, it is less and less likely researchers will pursue it if they can see a suitable representation of it online. In short, the archive’s representation of the object has subsumed the object. The work of archiving can no longer be understood as separate from the work of disseminating. At Carolina, that dissemination is done through the Southern Historical Collection (SHC).

One of the great strengths of the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) is that its interviews are archived in the University of North Carolina’s Southern Historical Collection. It is easier than ever for individuals and

small organizations to responsibly and effectively archive and make available oral histories, but the advantages that affiliation with UNC Libraries gives the SOHP are undeniable. That our interviews are archived and preserved at a major research university library means that they are available to scores of students, teachers, and researchers around the world; that they will be preserved as long as possible as physical objects (cassettes, papers) and in perpetuity as digital objects (MP3s, WAVs, documents) even as file formats change; and that they are likely to benefit from the technical and access innovations taking place in the library, whether or not the SOHP is aware of them. And, maybe most important to the staff historians and student-historians at the SOHP, the arrangement frees them to research and conduct more interviews.

The arrangement is mutually beneficial. Under the shared supervision of SHC and SOHP staff, student archivists at “the Southern,” as it is known, catalog and maintain the SOHP’s thousands of oral histories, including preservation and web audio and text records such as transcripts, tape logs, and field notes. Those texts are scanned with optical character recognition software to make them keyword searchable, and each is assigned a number of Library of Congress keywords, which are more or less useful for bounded browsing within the collection.

But like any happy marriage, this partnership is not without its problems. And like in any happy marriage, these problems are best addressed through communication and experimentation. The issues discussed below are common to any curated collections of research objects (i.e., “libraries”), but to oral historians they seem especially troubling for oral histories, which are complex, compound sources similar to but not identical to the books and articles with which they share virtual shelf space.¹² It is important to emphasize that these thorny issues do not bother many trained academic scholars, some of whom reject curation as interference, mistrust transcripts produced by third parties, and have a more specific sense of their research needs than undergraduate students or so-called “laypersons.” Trained historians are not the audience for this project. Our audience is the undergraduate student, the public outside of academia, and those more interested in serendipitous discovery than targeted research, though we hope as we continue to develop it, the project will have broad application for scholars, particularly in their teaching.

Before laying out the problems mentioned above, it may be useful to briefly define terms. *Mapping the Long Women's Movement* is at its heart an oral history visualization project. But what is an oral history? This is not the space to explore this deceptively complex question at length. Scholars have written at length on the discipline, which, emerging in the 1940s and reforming itself in the crucible of the 1960s and with precursors stretching back at least to the 1930s, sought to include yet unheard voices in historic scholarship: those of African Americans, Latin@s, women, the working class and others whose lives, seeming smaller to many working historians, were ignored.¹³ Its advocates fought for its recognition as a legitimate discipline and they seem to have succeeded, as measured by the wide adoption of oral history methodology across disciplines not only as a core research tool but also as an essential complement to traditional archival research. Practitioners continue to think on the page about oral history's past and future, which has become deeply entangled with digital practices and dissemination due to its reliance on technology for production and consumption.

ORAL HISTORY PROBLEMS IN A DIGITAL PRESENT

The question here, though, is not "What is oral history?"; it is "What is *an* oral history?" And, more specifically, "What is an oral history for the purposes of this digital project?" There are many answers, among them that oral history is triumvirate of word and deed: a methodology, the application of that methodology in a structured interview, and the result of that application in a representation of the interview.¹⁴ In the archive, the oral history exists as the latter: a series of integrated audio and textual records that model but are not constrained by the narrator-driven sequential telling of a life history. This definition, such as it is, leads us to the first and perhaps most insidious of oral history's problems: silence.

Silence. Oral historians like to talk about the power of the human voice, channeling Bakhtin's celebration of the power of personal narratives to illuminate unseen aspects of the human experience. But as many oral historians have pointed out—Jacquelyn Hall citing the field's central irony and Michael Frisch hauling up its "deep, dark secret"¹⁵—very few people actually listen to oral history, and by and large, once the interviewer stops the recording, the interviewee is never heard from again. This silence is important for at least two reasons. First, among oral history's strengths is

its ability to connect people with the human power to create and interpret history. The core driver of that connection is the sound of the human voice. Its richness, its tone, its inflection, its starts and stops—all these qualities carry meaning that lends itself to interpretation.

There is wide consensus in the oral history community about the limits of just reading oral history as text.¹⁶ When an oral history is transcribed, it undergoes what Frisch calls a “flattening of meaning.” Frisch writes,

Meaning inheres in context and setting, in gesture, in tone, in body language, in expression, in pauses, in performed skills and movements. To the extent we are restricted to text and transcription, we will never locate such moments and meaning, much less have the chance to study, reflect on, learn from, and share them.¹⁷

Sadly, oral historians and their allies have been complicit in this flattening, creating reams and reams of transcripts and thus offering researchers an easy way to avoid listening and, indeed, to avoid engaging in depth with interviews at all, “CNTRL-F-ing” their way through narrators’ life stories.

Furthermore, silence diminishes the power of the interviewee in telling and retelling, even if only by use of the rewind function, their own story. Oral history scholarship is rooted in the noble if not always realized concept of shared authority¹⁸: the oral historian brings his or her expertise about the context of the interviewee’s life, and the interviewee brings her or his expertise about its specifics, and of course those areas of expertise overlap and influence one another. By silencing the interview audio, even in a responsibly described collection, the oral historian impedes the field’s mission to increase the humanity in the study of history. In other words, using text records of interviews alone scuttles the core mission and values of oral history scholarship.

This is a persuasive point, and was never truer than today, when widely available technology means listening is more possible and likely than ever. Such technology also opens the interpretive doors to scores of students and scholars, who might in the not-too-distant past have been restricted to reading transcripts for their own research projects. Yet oral historians and listening advocates must also acknowledge that even skimming text is preferable to avoiding engagement altogether. An undergraduate with

three overlapping paper deadlines will never choose a two-hour audio file over a transcript as a resource; it is important to recognize that ease of use is a virtue, even for powerfully human sources. *MLWM* aims to combine the deep engagement engendered by listening with the utility of skimming, meeting somewhere in the middle between the deep engagement lauded by academic oral historians and complete and utter silence.

Invisibility. For people, invisibility is a superpower. For oral histories, it is a severe hindrance. It can be frustrating and difficult to find oral histories that will help you write a course paper, put together a presentation, create a teaching unit, or write a scholarly book or article. In major collections such as those at UNC, the University of Kentucky, and Berkeley's Regional Oral History Office, to name a few, users need to search across thousands of oral histories, and that is assuming the user knows that there is a body of materials to search and how to search it. Many library users at the University of North Carolina, for instance, will not drive down to the SOHP Collection to search for oral histories. They will search from the Google-esque search bar on the library's home page, and oral histories will appear as digital objects hidden among articles, books, manuscript collections, and more.¹⁹

If users do attempt a more constrained search among oral histories alone, they often browse under broad subject headings (such as "civil rights," which will yield thousands of results in this and other oral history collections) or type in keywords (again, such as "civil rights"). They sift through voluminous results without much sense for why they are getting the results they're getting, without much sense for why one item appears at the top of the list and another at the bottom, and without much sense for what might actually be useful to them. Oral histories are buried among other resources and assumed to be like those resources, and this invisibility translates to underuse.

Opacity. The invisibility problem stems in part from the unknowability of online searching, but also because the nature of an oral history intertwines itself with another problem: opacity. It is very difficult to gauge the contents of an oral history on first encounter, a problem exacerbated by the absence of a metadata standard for oral histories.²⁰ Oral history suffers from an "aboutness"²¹ problem: to say an interview is about just one thing or one other thing is hopelessly imprecise. Oral histories share a lot with

books and articles in that they are complex, varied, interpretive research products built collaboratively on a foundation of life experience, archival research, and secondary research. Like a multi-author volume, they may feature contributions from a variety of participants with a variety of perspectives. But even solo life histories, by far the most common form of oral history, can vary widely, shifting from, for instance, the life history of a child growing up in the rural South to the philosophy of a queer feminist activist, that child grown up. And here is where an oral history diverges from the book, because even a book with an inapt title often features an index, which can not only point the researcher to the precise information he or she may need, but also in summary presents a general sense for what the text is about. Oral histories generally lack indices, and of course their opacity is even murkier if the oral history has not been transcribed, as oral historians and their allies have only just begun experimentation with making legible the contents of digital audio files.

There is one obvious solution to the opacity problem. As one interviewee wrote in a metadata form that accompanied the individual's interview, when asked what the interview was about, "Read the damned thing." Or even better, listen to the oral history! That's research. But that could take hours, and if oral historians and archivists want to encourage students and other untrained researchers to use oral history in teaching, research, community events, and more, they have to compete with the vast stores of easily accessible information out there. Therefore, they must provide some new paths of access. Ideally, in an archive or through an interface on top of an archive, they can provide multiple paths of access to oral histories that are understandable to users.

Moreover, unlike books and articles, oral histories rarely attain surface-level descriptive metadata, otherwise known as titles, during their creation. That oral histories are most often named after the interviewees, such as "Oral History with Jane Doe," means that the grassroots philosophy of oral history plays against its discoverability as an archival object: Jane Doe is unlikely to be recognized by a researcher. For the general researcher, the one who needs the most guidance finding research material, that oral history may as well be titled, "Oral History with Person." Once again, the researcher leaves the oral history behind in favor of a more obviously legible source.

Disconnection. Anyone who has located and retrieved a specific book from a library shelf and then also grabbed the books to the right and left of it, knows how useful a well-crafted title can be for the research process, and how curated—or even just organized—collections can lead to serendipitous discovery. When we buy shoes at Zappos or music at Amazon, these retailers are always prepared to show us more items we might like to purchase through the use of recommendation systems (yes, this is also true at our beloved independent booksellers). These recommendation systems, which are integral to this online retail model of browsing, do not appear to exist in a useful way as part of academic research. Indeed, it is difficult to suggest employing a “retail model” in academia without one’s gorge rising just a bit. But one of the premises or promises of digital humanities is applying new skills and intelligences to humanities practice, and retailers have been cleverly applying many of these new skills for years. Oral historians and librarians may not be able to create algorithms to help researchers “shop” for archival material, but it would be useful to find ways to suggest connections between oral histories and perhaps, eventually, empower researchers to suggest and strengthen or question those connections themselves. This requires identifying those connections; however, archivists are already doing that work by assigning basic metadata, such as Library of Congress subject headings, to oral histories that digital humanities practitioners could leverage to work toward a solution to this problem of disconnection.

MAPPING THE LONG WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

Mapping the Long Women’s Movement is the straightforwardly if inelegantly titled project that emerged in order to suggest one way to address these problems. *MLWM* envisions the archive as a space that can nurture creativity and even playfulness while maintaining appropriate scholarly rigor and immersion and honoring the human subjects of research. Our basic question: can we visualize these oral histories in a way that encourages discovery, visualizes connectivity, and maintains humanity?

Years ago, someone joked that digital humanities mainly entailed creating bad maps. It is not hard to demonstrate that at the very least, this is no longer entirely true.²² This comment reflects the way in which early digital humanities work revealed a lowering of technical barriers to innovation before the development of a cross-field theoretical skill set. So while today

many digital humanities practitioners would push back against this wry generalization, they would probably recognize that the increasing sophistication and variation among mapping projects in the digital humanities represents a maturation of the field. This comment also serves as a warning against enthusiasts blundering into an unknown discipline, which can only be successfully navigated following thorough training. At the same time, bad maps find their home in the space created by Jesse Stommel's claim that "digital humanities is about breaking stuff."²³ If so, the idea of creating bad maps with good intentions is a liberating concept that should encourage tentative DH practitioners to dive joyfully into their projects, worrying less about whether they are bad than about whether they are so bad as to be useless.

Of course, there are a variety of different ways to map a set of materials, but the *MLWM* project team decided to use a standard Cartesian map because while many of the oral histories poised to contribute to the project described the growth of networks, it was important to represent the physical spaces that influenced and were influenced by social and environmental activism.

Before executing the project, the team had to confront two significant obstacles. The first was the size of the digital audio files and how to get this audio content playing on users' computers. The interviews were recorded as CD-quality WAV files, which tend to create approximately 1 gigabyte of data per hour of audio recording, but the library retains those files for preservation only. The public-facing MP3s are substantially smaller, only creating approximately 100 megabytes of data per hour of audio recording, or averaging one-tenth the size of the WAV file. Still, creating a project that involved loading audio onto users' computers would be disastrous: even a progressive download would be too weighty for most mobile devices and would likely crash browsers on even the more robust machines. We needed *MLWM* to be as lightweight as possible.

A second problem was delivering the audio. At the time of this writing, UNC Libraries is experimenting with deploying a streaming system for its audio collections. When we were developing *MLWM*, we had heard rumors of such a service but were concerned that it would not be able to be implemented by the time we wanted to launch. So we decided to upload the files to SoundCloud. This was something of a leap of faith for oral historians used to the security of a university library, but its benefits were obvious. With a SoundCloud Pro Unlimited account for just \$135 a year, we could upload

as much audio as we wished to the service, which also offered the possibility of users building playlists, commenting on, and “liking” the audio. This solution is substantially less expensive than building a streaming service on campus; one administrator suggested yearly costs for physical space, server space, maintenance, environmental controls, and more could reach six figures. For the first time the SOHP enjoyed the promise of dynamic interaction with the researchers who use its collections.

PROJECT EXECUTION

Not unlike conducting an oral history, the origination of the *MLWM* project was an act of joint creation that involved considerable shared authority. The idea emerged around the same time that UNC’s Digital Innovation Lab (DIL) was being organized. Not yet a true lab, the DIL in 2011 was a group of credentialed scholars, graduate students, and undergraduate students who met in a coffee shop until eventually finding some shared space on Carolina’s main campus. The DIL’s flagship digital publication platform, DH Press (then known as diPH), evolved in response to its creators’ dedication to open-source, open-access, publicly engaged digital scholarship as well as the needs of *MLWM* (bearing in mind that those needs could and would be echoed by projects that followed). DH Press grew into a WordPress plug-in that, in the words of its creators, “enables administrative users to mashup and visualize a variety of digitized humanities-related material, including historical maps, images, manuscripts, and multimedia content.”²⁴ The manuscripts and multimedia in question were oral history transcripts and audio, which *MLWM* sought to describe, connect, and visualize on a map and in other ways.

Creating data for the project began with reading and marking up paper transcripts by hand, a decidedly analog act of data production. Readers read through a body of over fifty oral history interviews, identifying passages of particular relevance and resonance with an eye toward those passages with some kind of spatial identity. After all, in order to be placed on a Cartesian map, oral history material needed some kind of geographic anchor. That anchor was dropped with varying precision: sometimes, by using Google Maps, the project team could determine the (fairly) precise location of a cemetery, for instance, or the site of a significant event. Other locations were less precise: a march that took place in Atlanta, near Emory

University, or a river that was the site of PCB pollution. In these instances, the project team agreed to take a best-guess approach, defaulting to town and city centers when necessary, but always relying on the interviewee to provide essential context for the location assigned to their recollection. The precision of the latitude–longitude pair produced by a Google Maps inquiry and the more subjective recollection provided by the interviewee make for a nice contrast. In the future, we hope to integrate polygon locations into the map so we can describe areas, not just points.

As project historians moved through the interviews, they kept a running list of keywords that slowly began to take shape as a controlled vocabulary. After the number of keywords ballooned to well over one hundred, ranging from “reproductive health” to “education” to “consciousness-raising,” the newly formed controlled vocabulary had to be culled down to a limited, understandable list of parent–child categories. In the end, the list featured just twelve parent categories, each of which owned about three child categories.

Each keyword or set of keywords described a portion of an oral history interview. The question of “aboutness,” as described above, meant that seeking to assign a set of keywords to an oral history in its entirety would be counterproductive: At what point is an interview about so many things that it may as well be about nothing? And what use is the text itself as far as representing true meanings? Even the most eloquent and well-prepared interviewees rarely say precisely what they mean in an interview, and humans use all kinds of shorthand that can be perfectly clear to the listener or reader but completely opaque to the optical character recognition a library search engine might rely on. Take, for instance, an interview with the daughter of a hugely influential civil rights activist who refers to her father only as “Daddy” and never as “Martin Luther King.” Would OCR help direct a King biographer to that interview?

Passages, on the other hand, can be more easily and accurately described, and in describing them, the project team could describe the interview in which they are contained as well. The goal of directing researchers to passages rather than the oral histories as complete products risked elevating the part over the whole, but we believed that if we still provided easy access to the whole, the passage could become a doorway into the complete interview rather than a disincentive to engagement. We assigned no more

than three of these pairs to each interview passage, and each interview contained approximately ten passages, with the sections in between acting as accessible but not described research matter. In the final product, we made sure that each excerpt included pathways to the interview as a whole and to the library record for the interview as it exists in the archive.

In an order of operations that will be reversed in future projects, after reading through the interviews, identifying passages, and assigning categories, we used software called *DocSoft AV*, licensed on a temporary basis through UNC, to insert timestamps into the transcripts. First, we stripped the transcripts of everything beyond the text representation of the spoken interview: formatting, transcriptionist notes, page numbers, interruptions, and more. Then, we saved the Word documents as UTF-8 encoded text files and batch uploaded them, along with their corresponding MP3s, to *DocSoft*. *DocSoft*, which uses *Dragon* speech recognition software, inserted shockingly accurate bracketed timestamps into the transcript every few moments. We now had a text transcript that could be aligned closely with its audio partner.

To complete this alignment, we needed to develop a way for our interface to read the transcript. Fairly quickly, our programmer developed a custom script in WordPress that synced the audio and the transcript. The result was a scrolling text transcript that scrolls as the audio progresses as well as the capacity to jump to any point in the audio with a click of the mouse on the transcript. I will let him explain what he did in his own words:

The player has built in functions and events that are used with custom code that I wrote to sync with the transcript. 1. The transcript has the timestamps coded into each line so when the media player's PROGRESS event reaches a certain position in seconds, it highlights the respective line. 2. Vice versa: when a line is clicked on, it passes the coded timestamp into seconds, which uses the media player's SeekTo function to update the player position.

I pull the SoundCloud API into the DH Press plug-in code where the custom script handles the "sync." The timestamps are hidden in the transcript html as data attributes on each line (generated dynamically by the DH Press plug-in).

This process addresses the problems of silence and opacity in oral history interviews because, first, it transforms the transcript from a disincentive to listening into a tool that encourages listening, and second, it makes the audio quickly accessible and visible. Listening is no longer a chore; instead, it is something that can occur throughout the research process, and even if that listening is fairly passive, it puts the researcher into contact with the interviewee in a way that could produce deeper understandings of the historic record.

As this and other tasks were under way, researchers contacted every interviewee whose interview we wanted to use in *MLWM* in order to describe the project and be sure they were comfortable with their interview being a part of it. To be sure, each interviewee had freely given permission for virtually anyone encountering their interview in the SOHP collection to make use of it in a variety of not-for-profit ways, but we wanted our first step into full-blown experimentation with interviewees' life histories to take place with their blessing. We found it gratifying that only one interviewee declined to join the project.

As this process drew to a close, the project team had in hand a dense spreadsheet that broke each interview down into passages described with terms from our controlled vocabulary as well as with time codes, so the interview's chapters would be legible both to human users and the custom script that would allow these users to navigate it. The data was cleaned and entered as a batch into DH Press.

The published product, which is not final but is ready for robust use, features a map populated by color-coded markers, each of which represents an interview passage. Users can navigate the site by selecting "legends," which include primary concepts (the parent categories we developed—visible child categories are in the works), spaces (e.g., religious spaces, educational spaces), and interviewees. Users can select and deselect between these options, creating custom maps that might show clusters of educational spaces identified by interviewees, or simply one interviewee's personal narrative as laid out against a Cartesian backdrop. Once we develop the functionality to combine legends, such as overlaying a handful of interviewees with certain kinds of spaces, complex narratives can emerge. But for the time being, we can see the overlap between "Education" and "Civil Rights Movement" as primary concepts, suggesting a relationship between campuses and the movement and inviting students, for instance, to explore that connection.

RISKS

This approach is not without its risks, but for the most part these risks are generalizable to online oral history dissemination. At the root of these risks is the fact that “public” is a much more powerful word than it was twenty years ago. In the pre- and protodigital past, an interviewee might sign a standard interview release form, giving over rights and title to an interviewer or a university and making provision for the free, not-for-profit, public use of their interview. They could do so with the comforting confidence—if not the disappointing certainty—that few people if any would ever read, much less listen to, their interview. Today, a Google search can lead anyone directly to the text and audio, so while the strict meaning of “public” here has not changed, access has exploded. Archives have moved from their strange position as secret-keepers to the sources of rivers of information.

The first and most pressing risk is the potential harm to humans. For years, oral historians have worried what the digital turn means for the privacy of their narrators. For all the commitment of oral historians toward democratizing history, they remain acutely aware that the stories they were seeking to bring into the public understanding of history might be used against their tellers. Although the recent case of the police subpoenas of interviews about Ireland’s Troubles²⁵ has dramatized the ways in which telling stories can harm the teller, it is rare that an oral history can be used to defame an interviewee. Indeed, the interviewee is generally much more likely to inflict harm; after all, it is they who can speak freely about their neighbors and then happily giving the interviewer permission to share their damaging stories widely. But however small the risk, it cannot be overlooked.

Oral historians also worry about decontextualization. Since the oral history engages in a kind of conversation with itself, and a spoken or written passage late in the interview might correct or qualify a passage from earlier in the interview, it is possible that by isolating and describing interview segments rather than the interview itself, researchers could find and make use of bad information. Leaving the interview in its entirety at least puts the onus on the researcher to use the material responsibly; that is, a researcher publishing a false claim drawn from an oral history segment could more readily claim he or she used what was available, whereas someone taking a similar passage from a complete oral history record would have less claim to that excuse. To

address this risk, *MLWM* connects each segment to its complete record, both within the project and in the archive, at the least removing deniability and ensuring the part is indeed represented as a portion of a larger whole.

This kind of a project also risks a tottering step toward diminished humanity, as opposed to ascending toward the lofty but attainable goal of the field: to enhance the humanity of history scholarship. The presence of voices reveals humanity, but cramming them into a clump of colored dots on a screen may reduce them into a kind of graphical anonymity, in which they become part of the kaleidoscopic visual clutter of the Internet. The problem we continue to confront is if by claiming to reintroduce the human voice to the study of history through this project, we raise the bar past the point of reaching, and the glaring non-humanness of these clustered dots on the screen exacts a greater toll on meaning. This potential downside raises a larger issue for oral history representation online: How do digital humanities practitioners pick icons to represent people? Or should they?

Since oral histories deal with living human subjects, and often with subjects who do not hold traditional forms of power, oral historians are cautious about these risks and others. But that caution must not prevent joyful experimentation with freely given interviews. In considering their responsibility to the interviewee, oral historians working in digital environments must acknowledge risk without allowing that risk to stifle speech. If the oral historian is confident an interviewee understands the boundaries, or lack thereof, in the digital public space, they must not play gatekeeper unless asked; by doing so they assert ownership they do not have over a story that is not theirs.

Although it is not a risk, there is a practical consideration to add here. While the basic tasks—reading, data creation—of this project are doable without robust infrastructure, this chapter does not pretend it was created without substantial resources not available to most oral history practitioners. As one of just two full-time employees at the SOHP at the time I worked on this project (and as a grant-funded, temporary employee), I was always surprised to hear the program described as a “big dog,” as one familiar name in the field did at an Oral History Association conference. But, returning to the institutional relationship laid out at the beginning of this piece, it was the SOHP’s relationship with a major research university library that made this project possible, and that means this project is not likely to die out if I move to a new position or forget to renew its web hosting.

CONCLUSION

I am not an archivist. Therefore, it will not surprise me if archivists reading this piece roll their eyes as they observe me fumbling core concepts of the field. But while I am not capable of understanding the archive, I may be capable of breaking it and playing with the pieces in such a way that something useful results. George E. P. Box stated that “all models are wrong; the practical question is how wrong do they have to be to not be useful.”²⁶ I agree with Box that one need not be right to make something useful, and I embrace the idea of being productively wrong. Yet if one thinks about a curated collection such as this one as provocative, manipulable, subjective, and even surprising, such a collection starts to seem like a fairly faithful representation of the voices in it. If the line between the digital representation and the archival object has been blurred if not erased, this outcome does not seem unwelcome.

This project hasn’t replaced the Southern Oral History Program’s oral history archive. For one thing, it’s too small to be useful to a wide array of researchers. But this kind of project, especially at a greater scale, may in the future at least substantially complement the archive as the public-facing element of a digital library. In other words, rather than drawing on material from an archive to make an interesting presentation or visualization, it draws on that material to represent the archive itself. That representation will allow content creators, archivists, students, and other researchers to see into the archive in ways that have heretofore not been possible and to listen to the voices of the past speaking up after decades of unwilling silence.

NOTES

- 1 Assistant Professor of Digital Humanities, Department of American Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Thank you to Jessica Wilkerson and Liz Lundeen for their insightful comments on this piece.
- 2 *Mapping the Long Women’s Movement*, DH Press (<http://projects.dhpress.org/lwm>) was funded by a grant reallocation from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. It was conceived by Seth Kotch and developed and executed at the Southern Oral History Program by Kotch, Elizabeth Lundeen, and Jessica Wilkerson, with contributions from Hudson Vaughan. The Digital Innovation Lab team was led by Pamella Lach, with programming work by Joe Hope of the Renaissance Computing Institute, Bryan Gaston, and Chien-Yi Hou, and

design work by Jade Davis. Christopher Breedlove, Beth Carter, Charlotte Fryar, and Lauren Stutts assisted with data collection. The project uses oral history interviews researched and conducted by David Cline, Jennifer Donnelly, Joey Ann Fink, and Jessica Wilkerson during fieldwork supported by the Southern Oral History Program. Sally Council transcribed the interviews. Jaycie Vos, Jackie Dean, and the interviewers accessioned the interviews into the Southern Historical Collection. The idea of a long women's movement grew out of Jacquelyn D. Hall's conception of a long civil rights movement.

- 3 For a complete listing of the interviews and links to audio and transcripts, see http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/s/Southern_Oral_History_Program_Collection.html#d1e54968.
- 4 Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Doreen B. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
- 5 Southern Oral History Program, <http://sohp.org>.
- 6 Center for the Study of the American South, <http://south.unc.edu>.
- 7 UNC's Southern Historical Collection, <http://library.unc.edu/wilson/shc>.
- 8 UNC's Digital Innovation Lab, <http://digitalinnovation.unc.edu>.
- 9 Mitchell Whitelaw, "Towards Generous Interfaces for Archival Collections," <http://mtchl.net/towards-generous-interfaces-for-archival-collections>.
- 10 David Weinberger, *Everything Is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder* (New York: Times Books, 2007): 17–20.
- 11 Georgina Hibberd, "Metaphors for Discovery: How Interfaces Shape Our Relationship with Library Collections," <http://searchisover.org/papers/hibberd.pdf>.
- 12 Reagan L. Grimsley and Susan C. Wynne, "Creating Access to Oral History in Academic Libraries," *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 16, No. 4 (2009): 278–99.
- 13 Linda Shopes offers a brief but thoughtful explication of the origins of the field in "What Is Oral History?," posted on *History Matters*, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/oral.pdf>.
- 14 This definition riffs on that offer in Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 2.
- 15 Michael Frisch, "Three Dimensions and More: Oral History Beyond the Paradoxes of Method," in *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hess-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Guilford Press, 2008): 223.

- 16 See Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as a Genre," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alastair Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 17 Michael Frisch, "Oral History and the Digital Revolution: Toward a Post-Documentary Sensibility," for publication in *The Oral History Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert Perks and Alastair Thompson (London: Routledge), www.randforce.com/media/frisch--ioha%2orevised%2oand%2oedited%2ofor%2ooral%2ohistory%2oreader.pdf.
- 18 See, for instance, Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, *Letting Go: Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia, PA: Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, 2011).
- 19 Advanced researchers, at least in one study, tended to use broad searching as well. See Max Kemman, Martijn Kleppe, and Stef Scagolia, "Just Google It—Digital Research Practices of Humanities Scholars," in *Proceedings of the Digital Humanities Congress 2012*, in *Studies in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Clare Mills, Michael Pidd, and Esther Ward (Sheffield, UK: HRI Online Publications, 2014), <http://arxiv.org/abs/1309.2434>.
- 20 Jaycie Vos, "The Development of a Shared Metadata Standard for Use in Oral History Collections" (MA Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/record/uuid:882f1c1f-95fb-4d98-a655-2288433f5788>.
- 21 For more on aboutness, see Jonathan Furner, "FRSAD and the Ontology of Subjects of Works," *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly* 50 (2012): 494–516, www.jonathanfurner.info/docs/furner2012.pdf.
- 22 Stanford's Spatial History Project alone provides an able riposte: <http://web.stanford.edu/group/spatialhistory/cgi-bin/site/index.php>.
- 23 Jesse Stommel, "Digital Humanities Is About Breaking Stuff," *Hybrid Pedagogy* (2013), www.hybridpedagogy.com/Journal/the-digital-humanities-is-about-breaking-stuff.
- 24 *DH Press, a Digital Humanities Toolkit*, <http://dhpress.org>.
- 25 Kevin Cullen, "BC Exercise in Idealism Opened Old Wounds," *Boston Globe* (July 6, 2014), www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2014/07/05/belfast-the-shadows-and-gunmen/D5yv4DdNIXaBXMl2Tlr6PL/story.html.
- 26 G. E. P. Box and N. R. Draper, "Empirical Model Building and Response Surfaces" (New York: John R. Wiley and Sons, 1987): 424.

