

DRAFT

Listening for the sounds of place and memory in popular music heritage

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Introduction: auditory culture, popular music and memory

In this paper, we are concerned with the auditory culture of cities, with the sound of popular music in particular and the practices that define it and locate its meanings. In particular, we ask: how does this musical terrain enjoin with the work of memory in the perception of individuals and the collective in evoking the space of the city and its experience?

These questions are explored here through reflections on the mission and activity around the Birmingham Music Archive (BMA), a virtual project that went online in early 2009.¹ A result of a partnership between academics and a music industry professional, BMA is inspired by and emulates similar projects which have contributed to the identities, cultures and indeed, to the profile and tourist industries in other cities with confidence in the relationship of locality and musical heritage.

We will proceed in the first part by sketching out some concepts and means for thinking about music, place and memory, drawing upon the developing literature of auditory cultures and emergent literature on digital memory. We then turn to outline the nature and activity of the BMA and some of the ways in which its users respond to the invitation to populate its site with memories of music and place.

While we are 'close' to this project as its originators and managers, this opportunity for critical reflection has afforded a useful perspective on the particular dynamic of this project. It speaks to current descriptions of the digitization of memory and the nature of online practices in and around the meanings and validation of

¹ <http://birminghammusicarchive.co.uk/>

popular culture in the identity formation of subjectivity and the cultural identity of place.

Theorizing the urban soundtrack

In light of the dominance of a focus on the visual, a number of scholarly efforts have turned to consider the auditory experience of modern life. Thus, in response to the *ocular centric* nature of the dominant accounts, of the city for instance, it has been *listened* to in relation to its sounds and their cultural interpretation, informed by issues of power, identity, and subjectivity formed in the urban “soundscape” (see, for instance, Thompson 2004; Hilmes, 2005; Bijsterveld 2009; Mattern, 2009). Our own use of the concept of the soundscape here comes from Emily Thompson whose own ideas are prompted in part by the work of R Murray Schafer and Alain Corbin. She defines the idea of a soundscape as ‘an auditory or aural landscape’, which, like landscape, is at once physical as well as a way of perceiving such an environment: culture. She writes that

A soundscape’s cultural aspects incorporate scenic and aesthetic ways of listening, a listener’s relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what. A soundscape, like a landscape, ultimately has more to do with civilization than with nature, and as such is constantly under construction and always undergoing change (Thompson, 2004: 1-2).

Sound then is to be accounted for not only as a matter of what we hear, but in addition encompasses those practices that produce, use and make sense of them. This offers a suggestive means of making sense of the role of music in and about the city, of musical cultures of encounters with the polyphony of tunes, of *how* they are heard and the meanings they have for creators, consumers and those who would avoid or ignore them, amplify, mute, commodify, preserve or indeed *recall* them as an aspect of experience.

From a slightly different perspective, the relation of the urban and popular music has formed a distinct trope in cultural studies and its precursors. For instance,

Charlie Gillett, in his innovative 1971 study, described the rock and roll of the 1950s and after as *The Sound of the City*. He announced at the outset of his book that:

The city's sounds are brutal and oppressive, imposing themselves on anyone who comes into its streets. Many of its residents, committed by their jobs to live in the city, measure their freedom by the frequency and accessibility of departures from it.

But during the mid-fifties, in virtually every urban civilization in the world, adolescents staked out their freedom in the cities, inspired and reassured by the rock and roll beat. Rock and roll was perhaps the first form of popular culture to celebrate without reservation characteristics of city life that had been among the most criticized. In rock and roll, the strident, repetitive sounds of city life were, in effect, reproduced as melody and rhythm (Gillett, 1971/1983: viii).

While Gillett's characterization invites some unpicking and problematising, the approach accords with ongoing ideas about the relationship of sound and locale in popular music studies. In this regard, Sheila Whiteley has offered a succinct account of the interleaving of music and space, of the search for the relationship of meaning and experience in urban (and rural) life. For her, space is a factor in the 'musicalization' of everyday life, playing a role in the construction of national identities, the formation of cultural industries and the interrelationship of local and global, amongst other things. Music, locally produced, interacts with wider 'structures of feeling', informing notions of collective identity and community in particular spaces. Whiteley cites GH Lewis who writes that 'People look to specific musics as symbolic anchors in regions, as signs of community, belonging, and a shared past' (Quoted in Whiteley, 2004, p. 3). Thus, music plays a part in and alongside local knowledge and dispositions in defining meanings and significance on particular places and histories, operating in the dynamic between the individual and the communal.

In proceeding, we should say something about the meanings of music, memory and place, expanding perhaps on the rather determinist relationship between the rhythm of the city and the lineaments of song as suggested by Gillett. For instance, it is not uncommon to reduce song meaning to the literalness of lyrics and

yet this is but one, often misheard and thus unreliable aspect of the value of popular music. Lyrics are not a necessary part of music, which may indeed be wholly instrumental or employs vocalizations in the form of shrieks, grunts and groans. Words are but one possible element in a musical repertoire which relies upon rhythms and sounds which generate non-cognitive affect on the body, the emotions and so on. While there is more to say about such matters, the point is that in this context, music and its relationship with space and indeed memory is not defined purely, if at all, by citation and direct reference. The sound and shape of music works for different people in different ways but nonetheless, the associations of particular sounds with particular places, practices and times may sometimes appear to be described essentialist terms. While it is practice, habit and historical circumstance which construct such associations, one suspects that it is at base an essentialism which underwrites the way in which music plays a role in the kinds of heritage industry and music tourism we describe below.

Theorizing music and memory work.

Our understanding of memory is informed by the ideas of Frederic Bartlett and Maurice Halbwachs by way of Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and others (2009). In their work, memory is a process, an act, a mode of recalling and representation - acting upon the past that is called up and inevitably changed in this process. The individual, subjective act of memory is also one that requires 'distinct *social* frameworks: patterned ways of framing the flow of remembered actions, images, sounds, smells, sensations and impressions' (Hoskins, 2009: 2). For Halbwachs, the social framework is an anchor for memory and meaning, indicating the suggestive dynamic between the subjective and the collective contexts and shared cultural forms that invite and are used in the act of remembering. Amongst these forms are the sounds and musical texts and cultures that have contributed to our lives and experiences.

Bethany Klein (forthcoming) has noted individual and collective aspects of memory centered on popular music in an exploration of music's role as a carrier of embedded collective memory. As she suggests, songwriters themselves consciously evoke particular memories in the scenario of song, bestriding personal and public. Lennon and McCartney's *In My Life* would be one well known example for instance,

but any number come to mind: The Move's *Fire Brigade* ('Cast your mind back ten years to the girl who's next to me in school...') or Dexy's Midnight Runners' *Geno* ('Back in '68, in sweaty club [...] before Jimmy's machine and the rocksteady rub'). Furthermore, and as Klein suggests, while songwriters 'insert' memory into song, the openness of popular music texts also provides listeners with opportunities to recognize and invest in them their own memories. For Klein, the practice of song-sharing among romantic couples represents perhaps the most pervasive use of a popular cultural object to celebrate memories forged together. On a broader scale of course, music often serves as an indexical reference point for memory – enlisted time and again in film and TV in particular, to refer to particular moments and collective perception.

The lyrical references of songs are obvious places to start with in thinking of place and memory. Lennon and McCartney's work is rightly, and ripely, appropriated by Liverpool, providing a virtual A-Z of Merseyside. As Lennon told *Rolling Stone* in a discussion of *Penny Lane* for instance: 'The bank was *there*, and *that* was where the tram sheds were and people waiting and people waiting and the inspector stood there, the fire engines were down *there*. It was just reliving childhood'. (Quoted in MacDonald, 1994/1997: 196) As stated however, we must think beyond recognizable reference to consider the associative, experiential and sensual aspects of musical sound and how it works in anchoring ideas of place in our perceptions.

Whether Strawberry Fields, Blackberry Way or Handsworth, there is perhaps some further thinking to be done about the recognition of geographically locatable places referenced in song, understood and experienced by those in proximity to them, or who may seek them out, and those to whom such places are forever imaginary and mythical places – 'over the rainbow' for instance. That the 'real' and the mythical interact in the possible perceptions of musical place reminds us of the imaginative and affective power of music. Indeed, this conflation and confusion offers an important aspect of the music tourism we now turn to consider.

Music heritage, tourism and identity of place.

Sites associated with the histories of high Culture have long been objects of pilgrimage for the aficionado: Shakespeare's Stratford, Joyce's Dublin, Wagner's Bayreuth and so on. For cultural pilgrims, there is something essential and meaningful

in such locations and the specific sites located therein as the *mise-en-scene* of genius: that *these* very streets and *that* house is where they lived and worked. In turn, this association, for the devotee and the mildly interested, has translated into economic value as the structures of the tourist industry overlay such sites and experiences – improving, advertising, extending – physically as well as symbolically. In the case of Joyce’s Dublin, the 16th June sees an annual ‘Bloomsday’, evoking the events of *Ulysses* and attracts thousands of visitors who take part in the event, whether they are familiar with the novel or not. Shakespeare for instance is credited as the key attraction for the 5.5. million visitors who head for Stratford-Upon-Avon every year. (<http://www.stratford.gov.uk>).

While the ‘popular’, and popular music in particular, is less securely sanctified in the broader cultural inheritance, its industry, products and associated practices are properly at home in partnership with the kind of tourism described above, exploring and regurgitating the past for commercial gain. Cities such as Chicago, Memphis, Detroit and New Orleans in the USA or, in the UK, Liverpool and Manchester, present well developed routes for pilgrims to travel, identifying sites to visit and offering lots of purchasable keepsakes celebrating each city’s pop heritage. All of this attention from tourists leads to the pumping of cash into hotels, restaurants and so on. In turn, economic value is enhanced by cultural cache in the form of the ‘PR of place’ that agents in cities and regions now seek to inculcate. This is the ineffable ‘coolness’ that its prophets such as Richard Florida describe as essential to competitive advantage in the post-industrial knowledge economy (for context see Musterd and Gritsai, 2009).

In this circuit then, economic benefits are derived from, and by turn serves to consolidate a sense of identity and confidence around particular locations derived from this exploitation of cultural heritage. This identity has value for ‘natives’ just as much as it does for those visitors whose attention and patronage is so vigorously sought. The San Francisco Jazz Heritage Centre evinces all of the qualities of these kind of enterprises, announcing in its online mission statement that:

The JHC honors San Francisco’s contributions to jazz through educational vehicles and by providing access to jazz images, artifacts, and music to ensure that the city’s jazz legacy is communicated to today’s visitors and future generations [...] As part of its focus on the Fillmore, the JHC will also

promote and highlight the contributions of the diverse communities that have called the neighborhood their home, particularly African-Americans, as well as Jewish-Americans and Japanese-Americans

(<http://www.jazzheritagecenter.org>)

This initiative bestrides heritage activities as well as contributing to the active generation of cultural work and consumption, acting as a centripetal force for the diverse communities who have contributed to an idea of jazz music in this case and its various practices. It is useful too to place this particular site in its local context as contributing to economic revival. The not-for-profit centre is housed amidst a \$72 million capital project comprising mixed-use buildings designed to aid in the regeneration of the historical Fillmore district – there is a jazz club and restaurant as well as a residential block of condominiums.

In the UK any attempt to engage with such cultural history – whether civic or commercial in inspiration is overshadowed by the ignominious failure of the National Centre for Popular Music. Costing £15m, a substantial amount derived from the National Lottery, the interactive nature of the centre was unattractive to visitors who stayed away in their millions and it was closed after barely a year. More recently, the spirit of this endeavour has been echoed in the establishment in British Music Experience housed at the O2, formerly the much-derided Millennium Dome. This hitherto successful and permanent exhibition seeks to show ‘how rock, pop, dance and many other genres were formed and have influenced the last sixty years of British culture. [...] to advance the education and appreciation of the art, history and science of music in Britain’ (<http://www.britishmusicexperience.com>).

The emergence of these two ambitious projects from within the years of New Labour is an instructive one for understanding a broader thrust behind BMA, other localized and small-scale initiatives like it, and the relatively positive reception they have been afforded. The ethos here was authorised by (if not wholly originating with) the advent of the Blair administration. The ascription of the label ‘Cool Britannia’, whatever its limitations, serves as signal here for the expression of an overcoming of narratives of national decline in favour of a cultural confidence and confidence in culture. While there are complex contradictions in this label, Alexei Monroe summarises the nature of the project it refers to, i.e. an ‘ongoing attempt to “rebrand” Britain as a multi-ethnic, youth-culture dominated, globalization-friendly country, in

which ideological divisions have been erased' (Monroe, 2002: 138). In relation to this analysis, the confidence and official support for localized projects such as BMA can be related to the nature of the way in which post-industrial cities such as Birmingham – or Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool - have been reimagined and repositioned in recent decades as cultural destinations.

Over the last two decades, agencies within the City of Birmingham have sought to re-brand and re-position a site that was once the acme of industrialization, the 'city of a thousand trades'. This 'remaking' of Birmingham has been widely remarked upon for the manner in which both physical and cultural aspects of the city have been retooled in order to overcome a largely negative set of associations accrued about it, and indeed to make it legible – to those within as well as those without (Kennedy, 2004; Parker and Long, 2003 & 2004). Developments such as the ICC, NIA and Selfridges testify to some considerable investment and success in this project, resulting in making the city a visitor destination as well as a desirable place for more permanent relocation. Seen from one angle as a necessary response to the downturn of its manufacturing base, this project of post-industrial realignment meets too with significant investment in the cultural sector and the nurturing and attempted attraction of creative industries.

Birmingham Music Archive

The first thing is to establish some credentials in order for the reader to understand our roles and investment in this archival project. The originator of BMA, Jeremy Collins, is not an academic but a music industry practitioner with over 20 years experience in public and private sectors, mainly in and around Birmingham. He is not a musician but of that group that Pierre Bourdieu has labelled 'cultural intermediaries': 'all the occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration and so forth) and in all the institutions providing symbolic goods and services' (Bourdieu, 1984/1979: 359). Thus, for Collins in his guise as an advocate for particular types of music, and like many of those involved in the cultural field, what matters is much more than just the economics of cultural production. It matters where music comes from and what it says about 'us' and who 'we' are – where *we* come from. In this case, the where is Birmingham.

The partisan nature of this project is not unlike other instances where cultural studies academics have initiated and engaged with local projects designed to explore aspects of popular music. Liverpool University for instance has collaborated on *And the Beat Goes On...* This project continues the work of Liverpool's curators have staked a fair claim on its heritage in popular music. This exhibition was presaged by several others in the same vein: *Now these days are gone - The Beatles photographs of Michael Peto*; *Collecting The Beatles*; *Spotlight on Eric's Club*; *Stuart Sutcliffe and The Beatles*; *Mike McCartney's Liverpool Life and The art of Paul McCartney*. In total, this activity has been predicated on the claim that:

Liverpool is world famous for popular music. Local artists have had so many Number One hits that in 2001 the Guinness Book of Records named Liverpool the world 'City of Pop'. A 2008 Arts Council survey also named Liverpool 'the UK's Most Musical City' so there's definitely a lot to be proud of (<http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/>).

This then is an example of the kind of local chauvinism that informs the politics of preservation, taking seriously that which has historically been considered to be ephemeral culture – linking it to local identity and innovations in and ideas for the cultural economy.

Birmingham's online archive was conceived as a means of representing the worth of place, of making a contribution to civic pride and underlining the meanings that Birmingham has produced and has around the world. It was galvanized amongst the moment of the cultural regeneration of the city and its originator's despair at the absence of music heritage in the various *grand projets*, of any address to a rich history of music making and music cultures, not to mention an ongoing and productive contemporary scene identified as key to the regional creative economy. This absence at home chimed with a growing sense of frustration at the portrayal of Birmingham and its music in the national press and within music journalism in particular. Certainly, when compared to the associations of sites such as the aforementioned Liverpool, or Manchester, and the ways in which popular music history is narrated and its canons constructed, music from Birmingham has been afforded but a bit part, often grudgingly. A recent online example should illustrate the continuing frustrations and ignorance which interweaves dismissal of music with some familiar stereotypes:

Birmingham, that murky, grey metropolis. It's easy to think of everything in the 'second city' as indistinct and ethereal as a cloud of smoke, a no-man's land slap bang in the middle of the country [...] On first impressions the music scene seems to represent just this, be it Editors' dreary drone or The Twang's desperate New Laddism; this is not a place which bands are proud to call home. And why would they? Birmingham boasts a musical heritage so bland – UB40, Black Sabbath and Duran Duran – that the 'progressive' council is trying to concrete over it, tearing down venue after venue until all that remains is a hulking great shopping centre (<http://www.readplatform.com/local-heroes-birmingham-uk>).

A generic riposte to such dismissals is expressed in the avowedly civic mission of BMA, which is outlined at its home page. This mission is aimed at 'celebrating, preserving, and sharing Birmingham's music heritage ... to inspire the future'. The ultimate object is to build a picture of musical activity from the city over the past 50 years or so, whatever that activity might be, no matter how well known or obscure. It seeks to use a range of technologies to capture these stories – in writing, audio, film using new and repurposed material, digital maps etc. While there is a focus on registering and recalling bands, records and managers, BMA seeks to contextualise such primary names and also to elicit accounts of 'all those personal experiences and memories that surround and inform this vibrant city and its music'. Users are thus invited to participate in this site, to 'tell us what you know' – and 'what you think'. The last question is not meant to precede mere evaluation (is the idea good or bad?), but seeks input on the direction the archive should take and what its parameters could be, seeking to install those for whom music has meant something as actors in its stories. While there are some assumptions about what should be 'archived', the active process is thus led by the collective act of memory and its self-determined hierarchies.

Memory making and mapping the city's soundscape.

What then are the kinds of activities around memories of popular music culture and the imagining of the historical soundscapes of the city engendered by BMA? In what

manner do users respond to the invitation and expectations of the archive? Space will not allow for detailed examination of the evidence but we'll itemise some of the key themes that we've observed.

The first thing to note is that they have indeed responded, and in significant numbers and with a variety of demands and reference points to a project with what has had relatively little promotion or organisational support. Indeed, it can be counted a success for the simple fact that it is relatively easy to establish space for communities online, but this does not necessarily entail that a population will come, let alone settle and contribute to its sustainability. Users continue to add to the site and individuals mail requests for information and offer aid and news of potential material additions to what may yet result in a physical archive.

How is this material and its form significant? At first glance one might be inclined to dismiss the majority of postings for a number of reasons. Firstly, and not unlike a lot of online activity, the care with which users choose to add their points leaves a lot to be desired if one is looking for limpid prose or reasoned exposition. Secondly, and in relation to this point, posts are often limited to a listing of remembered names, places and dates.

Red Sun at The Locarno on the revolving stage, the BRMB birthday parties and Birmingham City F.C dances at either The Locarno or Top Rank, Dale End. Robin Valk on BRMB and the outdoor extravaganza's he produced at Cannon Hill Park's outdoor arena 'The Lark in the Park'... featuring bands like, Slender Loris, Rainmaker, Little Acre, Ruby Turner, City Boy, Fashion. Live bands at the Barrel Organ, Digbeth, Hooker ,who changed their name to School Sports,(to name one)Their guitarist, Mark Bristow,who went on to be in The Dealers(formerly Mean Street Dealers) their packed weekly gigs at the fabulous Railway in Curzon Street(where your feet stuck to the floor!) the obligatory crowd participation sing-a-long in 'Nice Boys' [...] Clubs like Pollyanna's in Newhall Street, where the music from Saturday Night Fever filled the floor, Samantha's, Thursdays, Faces, Rebecca's, oh and the sunken dance floor in Snobs(is that the only club still there now?)The Night Out, Bristol Street, The Cresta Club (though that was in Solihull) Charity all day concert Heartbeat '86 at the NEC, featuring many of Brum's great music acts.

Well there's a few things to think about! How about you?

debJones@hotmail.co.uk

Debbie Jones

In its scrappiness and in interactions, user posts echo the rather uneven ways in which we make memory. Names are given and users call on others to add detail for their own sometimes vaguely recalled fragments. While famous bands and events are cited here, references to the specifics of the local and specialised knowledge of 'also-rans' and sites that have long-since gone or whose purpose has changed offers a profound layering and deep texturing of activity in the city and the places in which music was sought out and experienced. Examples here would include the internationally renowned 'Mothers' club which itself was situated in a dance hall in a semi-suburban sector of the city. The building has long been a furniture store and still attracts visitors from around the world, seeking out the place in which Pink Floyd's 'Ummagumma' was recorded and which *Billboard* cited as the *world's* best live venue.

What a place Mother's was. I remember seeing Led Zeppelin there, I was stood by the stage only 6 inches from Jimmy Page. I'd been to the Diskery earlier that day and bought Led Zeppelin I, which was only available on import, so you can imagine how I felt stood there getting my mind blasted out and clutching Zep 1. What great memories. I was fortunate to be there for Pink Floyd's awesome performance that eventually made it's way onto Ummagumma, they were great days.

gb@redditch.com

Geoff

Such knowledge engenders fondness, pride and reflection on the passing of the kinds of culture made in such places and which is, by and large, something that was confined to youth for most users. In this vein and most interesting perhaps is the way in which substantive comments which offer autobiographical

sketches. These snippets interleave the music, the space of the city and insights into personal development.

bogarts in new street was my very first night club at the tender age of 16, I had my first drink there , i can remember all the rock music and people lounging about not a care in the world ,nothing to do with the drugs,i dare say. but i have fond memories ,and yes they were great days.

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heather finnerty

http://google

The wealth of user comments maps out place and incident, of visits to musical venues as highlights in the week, convivial spaces reached through potentially hostile streets. There is of course a tone of nostalgia involved throughout this site, even when recalling incidents of danger, threat and uncertainty, these are located as an element in the rite of passage and wider dynamics of cultural life:

I remember buying vinyl from Cyclops – remember the grumpy Welsh bloke who owned it? If you dared to go into the shop the conversation used to go

Welsh bloke: “Can I help you son?”

Me: “Oh, I’m just browsing, thanks”

Welsh bloke: “Well can you wait outside until you know what you want”

Honest, that’s how it went. We used to wait until he went for his lunch before going in .. his wife was much more amenable.

info@rocklens.com

[2009/03/10 at 12:35pm](#)

Overall, in the words of many posts, these are ‘experiences to treasure’, instances of moments and places ‘Never to be forgotten’. The urge to develop this process beyond a simple posting of a recollection amplifies the call of the archive with those questions that ask: ‘Anyone got any info/ recordings’ or, ‘Where are they now?’, ‘What was/where was that place’ etc.

Picking up the ethos of the BMA project itself, there are those who seek official recognition and attention to important sites such as the venue for 'Henry's Blues House'. This was the club where Black Sabbath developed their sound and as one user comments:

Last time we were in the crown, some japanese sabbath fans were in there wanting to go upstairs!. The place is in a shocking state apparently. Why don't the council do something about it?

Me and my other half [shes from bearwood and was a regular there] are setting up a site to show bcc, english heritage, nat lottery fund etc that it should be saved.

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paul bush

http://www.henrysbushhouse.tk

Conclusions

Alongside BMA and other 'planned' and 'official' projects in the city that feed the heritage industry,² there is enormous activity across disparate communities and by individuals who take an active interest in Birmingham and the history of popular music in the city. 'Brumbeat' focuses on bands active in the 60's beat boom and has spawned two books.³ The Facebook social network is particularly active with sites devoted to reassembling, virtually at least, the communities and scenes of long-gone clubs and venues such as the 'Barrel Organ',⁴ Mermaid,⁵ and alternative nightclubs in

² Key projects that have garnered Heritage Lottery Funds or City Council investment include: 'Home of Metal', which focuses on the wider West Midlands and its role in the development of this genre (<http://www.homeofmetal.com/>); 'Soho Road to the Punjab', which celebrates the role of the city and its artists and entrepreneurs in the development of Bhangra (<http://www.sohoroadtothepunjab.org/>); 'Birmingham Music Heritage' effectively mirrors BMA although restricts itself to the period 1965-85 and a remit authorized by the site's creators (<http://www.birminghammusicheritage.org.uk/>)

³ <http://www.brumbeat.net/>

⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=23119422706&ref=ts>

general.⁶ The more generalized interest site Birmingham History Forum has extensive threads on nightclubs and music of the past.⁷

All of these sites take advantage of the template base and multi-media posting space of forums and social media networks. The wide availability of scanners and digital technologies and user aptitude means that the actual project and mission of BMA is echoed and spread widely across a plethora of sites. Community participants post photographs, scans of fliers, fanzine pages, audio and so on. Such artifacts give shape to digital memories and its processes, the range of energy and attention attesting to the way in which the media and associated technologies have been identified as shaping a contemporary ‘memory boom’ (Huysen, 2003).

Of course, many of these projects crossover and share communities but by the same degree struggle over similar territory. Indeed, the idea of struggle is particular interesting for the way in which users on such sites contest memory as much as build it communally, debating the authenticity and authority of what is said and indeed who says it and in what ways. In fact, and in spite of the apparent democratization of spaces online, access and ability and the dimensions of communities demand our attention. While there is undoubtedly a proliferation of memory work, even on BMA, it may not yet quite reach the inclusive dimensions aimed at.

Furthermore, the relationship of the commercial, ‘officially’-sanctioned sites, the ‘personal’ and individual memories pose further questions and issues for consideration. Indeed, in the ‘digital age’, the way in which memories of popular culture are supported by the posting of artefacts online – some of which are subject to copyright law, raises interesting challenges for memory and that which we think we ‘own’.

Finally however, and acknowledging the unfinished project of BMA, which is much like memory itself, it has suggested ways of thinking about and textualising the city, anchored to the musical reference points integral to experience and the meaning that so many carry with them.

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<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=77042988445&ref=search&sid=501104150.2689952077..1>

⁶ <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=99994883425&ref=ts>

⁷ <http://forum.birminghamhistory.co.uk/forum.php>

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