THE THRILL OF DISCOVERY
LORRAINE SMITH
Fashion cultures student (LCF)

When I began the MA History and Culture of Fashion (now MA Fashion Cultures) at London College of Fashion, I had never used an archive before. It was one of the things I was most looking forward to on the course, as I enjoy the thrill of a new discovery from something old. One of the sessions offered during the welcome event was an introduction to the LCF Archives and I was immediately drawn to the objects we were shown and the stories that accompanied them, whether fully formed or still incomplete. As my course was theoretical rather than practical, it wasn’t long before I found an opportunity to use one of the collections, the EMAP Archive, when researching an essay, and it proved to be a fascinating and extremely useful source of information for my work.

My favoured research area throughout my course was underwear and my dissertation topic focused on twentieth century technological developments in the bra, which led me to collect objects which illustrated some of the features I had read about in Draper’s Record or the library’s many lingerie books. As I had discovered so much from these garments, directly through object analysis and then subsequent research, I decided to donate them to the LCF Archives upon completion of my final project so that they could continue to educate and inspire researchers from UAL and beyond. As designers often look to the past for inspiration, I hope that fashion contour students will also find the collection useful in their design research process.

Donating my collection has also meant that I was able to expand my knowledge – of the objects themselves and of archival procedures – through cataloguing. Ensuring that each item is carefully wrapped and stored, plus listing every piece of information I have accumulated on each one, will hopefully provide a good foundation for others using the collection for their research in the future. Since I began cataloguing, I have given a talk to the BA (Hons) Fashion Contour students about the interesting features that I have discovered on bras in archive collections, and have given an overview of what is now available to them in the LCF Archives. I hope to be able to help with introductory sessions in the future, selecting objects from my collection to inspire future lingerie designers and researchers alike.

AN EXHIBITIONS ANTHOLOGY
LUCY STEEDS
Exhibition Studies Pathway Leader, MRes Art: Exhibition Studies (CSM)

When editing the book Exhibition for the Documents of Contemporary Art series, I would visit the UAL libraries almost as routinely as I brushed my teeth. Only it was excitingly different every time. Compiling an anthology brings a new urgency to reading, as one text alters how you read another and, through the brutal process of selection and rejection, you begin to shape a response to a field – in my case, to exhibitions of contemporary art.

In the first section of my book, I gathered texts that debated what exhibitions are, or can be. Here I drew on several genres of publication, not least exhibition catalogues and art periodicals. Browsing back issues of Studio International was hugely rewarding, as were my encounters with more recent periodicals, such as Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art. I also sought out the numerous existing anthologies on curating and curatorship (I would argue that the focus of my own book, Exhibition, was subtly but significantly different) and from here I picked texts for republication that foreground the voices of artists.

Sometimes selecting an existing text for inclusion in a new book is fraught with concerns over what the act of republication will omit from the original. Take, for example, my decision to transcribe selected cards from Lucy Lippard’s loose-leaf publication in accompaniment to c.7,500, her feminist conceptual art show of 1973–74. By fixing the order of Lippard’s prose from
cards that had been designed to complicate linear sequencing, I inevitably betrayed her playful intention. Yet, by adding this prose to the second section of my book, titled 'In the Exhibition Moment', I hope I was able to point towards the distinctly event-based nature of its initial incarnation. Moreover, this is an event that may be revisited by consulting the card-based catalogues for further so-called 'numbers shows' organized by Lucy Lippard, which are archived with the Artists' Books Collection at Chelsea College of Arts Library.

The final section of my publication, titled 'Exhibition Histories', relates most closely to my work on the Exhibition Histories series for Afterall Books, based at CSM. But only one text was drawn from this series and it was a pleasure to sample the field more broadly. The survey of practice in Dakar written by artist El Hadji Si (for a Whitechapel catalogue in 1995), returns us to the question of how we may define exhibitions, with a promising suggestion: 'as arenas for speaking out'.

ARCHIVING IMPROVISATION

DAVID TOOP
Chair of Audio Culture and Improvisation

All archivists agree: there is far more to archiving than simply collecting and protecting ancient artefacts. Yet however problematic and complex the issues of archiving tangible objects of historical interest, they are outweighed by the difficulties of archiving improvised music.

In 2015 there was an agreement to transfer to the University, Archives and Special Collections Centre a collection of materials related to the London Musicians Collective (LMC). The LMC was founded in the mid-1970s by improvising musicians (myself among them) and was finally put to sleep by a withdrawal of Arts Council funding in 2009. As documentation of that increasingly fascinating and fashionable entity – the near-anarchic self-determined artist-run organisation of the turbulent 1970s – the LMC materials have tremendous research potential. In time they will reveal economic, administrative, philosophical and artistic trajectories of which the LMC members were barely cognizant.

What they will struggle to do is tell us anything about the music itself, the music (or its sound) being largely absent within the materials thus far assembled. This is an important omission because it leaves unasked the question of who owns the archive material. Free improvisation, as it is rarely called these days, was founded on the idea that music could be created spontaneously, in the moment, without recourse to composers, leaders, writers, directors, conductors or any form of score or instruction. It's making belonged, if to anybody at all, to the group.

Documentation was largely expedient. Musicians made records not because records were a central pillar of their practice but because if there were no records then evidence of the music was non-existent. An audience could not be built up without (semi) permanent audio traces and without an audience this form of music without objects would die.

But the recordings were not the music. To fully engage with the music you had to be present, witnessing interactions within the group and the way the sounds activated the space of its making. An archive can fill many of the gaps that this ephemerality leaves gaping but to claim that archival practice can represent the entirety of the process would be the equivalent of instituting a museum of clouds. This raises challenging, provocative questions about both archiving and free improvisation. How can they co-exist, learn from each other and be reconciled to the intangible, transitory, collective nature of the music? I have every confidence that future researchers will find answers to these daunting problems.