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Archival Genres: Gathering Texts and Reading Spaces

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The archive and desktop are already synonymous. Once denoting a material repository of documents governed by an established institution (e.g., a state archive), definitions of the archive continue to loosen. For a new generation of readers and writers, the archive may be known only as a site of virtual storage. However, even for a generation more intimately acquainted with and attached to the material world of documents, the desktop can easily be understood as a type of archive, or gateway to the archives. Not only is it a site of storage, a repository of documents, but also a space governed by a specific order, or a set of laws. Both the desktop's visible order (the icons of folders and documents), and its hidden order (the code underpinning this smooth iconography), determines where and how we manage our personal files and subsequently, what relations of knowledge are rendered visible. If the desktop is recognized as a type of archive, it follows that writing begins with entry into the archive. We type in passwords to negotiate access to files; we immerse ourselves in the system's order. As we write, we frequently move between the private or semi-private archive of the desktop and the innumerable archives available online.

To write in a digital age is to write *in* the archive, but do we also write *for* and even *like* the archive? If so, how is the structure of the archive inflected in our writing, especially in emerging genres of writing? What, if anything, has prompted this turn *back* to the archive? Or is this question based on a false presupposition? As Jacques Derrida suggests, the archive may not be a "concept dealing with the past that might already be at our disposal" but rather "a question of the future."¹ Redefined as a "question of the future," it is possible to begin exploring how the archive structures the production of writing, especially the development of digital genres.

This discussion of textual practices, genres, and archives is based on the premise that the archive is both a point of departure and destination for writing. It considers the "archival turn,"² and how this turn has manifested itself at the levels of theory and method across the humanities and social sciences, as well as at the level of everyday practices. The objective is to offer an open-ended but workable definition of "archival genres" through an investigation of two types of authored collections: the commonplace book and the blog. Emerging over five centuries apart in different mediums, these eclectic genres may appear to share little in common, and may not even appear to fit the criteria for a genre. Commonplace books are broadly defined as compendiums of adages, sententia, and examples. In the Renaissance, these collections of textual fragments culled by readers from a myriad of sources were embraced as memory aids and as rich storehouses of materials that might eventually be incorporated into composition of one's own making.³ Although blogs are sometimes described as digital diaries, like commonplace books, their contents are often primarily or entirely comprised of images and texts culled from other sources. As I will demonstrate, commonplace books and blogs are both products of collecting and ordering (archival practices) and reflect common understandings of authorship, intellectual property and subjectivity. In addition, both forms or forums are ambiguously situated between the public and private spheres. However, this examination of archival genres is less invested in establishing parallels between past and

present genres than it is in displacing the assumption that new communication technologies necessarily foster new genres, at least not immediately.

Despite great expectations about the new genres that would appear with the development of the Web, more than a decade after the Web's popularization, digital genres from Flash poetry to hypertext fiction no longer appear as imminent nor as revolutionary as they once did. This is not to suggest that readers have yet to discover textual and visual forms or forums that are markedly different from late twentieth-century print genres. While digital poetry and fiction primarily remain subjects of inquiry for scholars of digital textuality, millions of readers are immersing themselves in text-based blogs and visually-driven social networking forums. But do these curious forms or forums necessarily represent *new* genres of writing? Are they genres, collections or archives, social spaces, or a combination thereof? What historical precedents might enable us to better understand the structure and uses of these eclectic authored collections or archives? This article maintains that like the commonplace books that were popular with readers in the Renaissance, emerging archival genres on the Web may represent textual and social spaces where new genres are taking form – genres that may, in time, replace or radically redefine the genres that appeared with print cultures, including the diary and the essay.

Archives and Genres

The currency of the archive in contemporary cultural theory is indebted to Michel Foucault's early writings (*The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*). Where library scientists had been content to offer methods for describing the archive and protocols for ensuring its order remained undisturbed, Foucault's theorizing repositioned the archive as a space of enunciation: "The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events...it is *the system of its enunciability*."⁴ Repositioned as something that defies exhaustive description, for Foucault, the archive becomes engaged in the production and authorization of discourse itself.

While theorizing on the archive remains deeply inflected by Foucault's early writings, Derrida's *Archive Fever*, published in French and English in 1995, has become a central point of reference for theorizing on the archive across the disciplines.⁵ This, however, is somewhat surprising, since *Archive Fever* is not necessarily about the archive, but as historian Caroline Steedman observes, a "sustained contemplation of a work of history."⁶ While Steedman is correct to point out that *Archive Fever* is not really a book about the archive *per se*, it is a book about a book that Derrida describes as an "archival book on the archive"⁷ – Yosef's Yerulshalmi's *Freud's Moses*. It is also a book based on a talk first delivered in an archive, and a book preoccupied with the promise of the archives, or false promise of origins the archive implies. To be "*mal d'archive*," as Derrida suggests, is to have an "irrepressible desire to return to the origin."⁸ This desire, however, is invariably linked to death rather than life or origins. It is the inevitability of death, most importantly the destruction of memory itself, which guarantees the archive's existence: "the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of...memory."⁹ In this formulation, the conservation drive is not simply opposed to the death drive, but rather the death drive is the basis upon which the conservation drive turns.

In the *Diacritics*' review of *Archive Fever*, Herman Rapaport concludes, "Where there is regularity and efficiency in Foucault's archive, there is trauma in Derrida's."¹⁰ While Rapaport's claim may be somewhat hasty, it effectively isolates two central concerns in contemporary theorizing on the archive. Whereas Foucault interrogates the systems of classification that attempt but ultimately fail to describe the archive, Derrida offers the feverish and fragmentary. But Foucault's archives and Derrida's may not be as different as Rapaport implies. In Foucault's case, the archive is a site of enunciation, and in Derrida's, a site of possible enunciation. At the centre of both theories is an insistence upon the archive's link to narrative production.

The theoretical underpinnings of the archival turn have repositioned the archive, once assumed to be both dead and mute, as a speech event. This has led some theorists to posit the archive as a genre. For example, Pamela Banting characterizes the archive as an “avant garde” genre engaged in the deconstruction of the book and the author: “The genre of the archive releases writing from the bondage/the binding of the book and inaugurates a veritable carnival of inscription.”¹¹ It would be misleading, however, to characterize the archival turn as something that has been exclusively enacted by theorists and methodologies in the academy. In the past decade, the archive has also become an increasingly pedestrian space. A growing number of origin-seeking tourists now cross paths with professional researchers in regional and national archives. The archival turn is also evident outside the archive proper – most notably, at the level of textual and cultural practice.

In the world of arts and crafts, scrapbooking, a nineteenth-century phenomenon, has regained popular appeal resulting in a growing demand for archival quality papers and glues from people who are neither archivists nor practicing artists. While the scrapbooking craze is frequently subject to ridicule and easily dismissed (perhaps due to the predominantly older and female demographic it attracts)¹², it is arguably only a material manifestation of what a larger and generally younger demographic is enacting on the Web. In blogs and other social networking spaces, the drive to collect and re/present one’s self is apparent in a myriad of emerging forms of expression. These forms or forums may appear to share little in common with the archive as it has been traditionally defined, but they are one part of the radical reconfiguration of the archive currently underway. Beyond redefining the archive,¹³ they are products of archival practices: collecting, preservation, and ordering. However, these online forms or forums are neither new nor unique, but rather part of a long, albeit largely neglected, history of everyday textual practices.

Since the archival turn in the early 1990s, researchers have reconfigured everything from collections of graffiti under highway overpasses to the human genome as types of archives.¹⁴ The plasticity of the concept has opened up new avenues through which to question the authority of the archive while simultaneously legitimizing non-institutional collections as important sites of research and inquiry. However, there is also a danger in the term’s over-application. If any collection can be an archive, we risk losing sight of an important distinction between carefully constructed and highly regulated collections that produce “official” narratives about the past and shape people’s lives in the present and random collections of objects and documents that bring pleasure to the collector but have little or no impact on the larger order of things.

In the introduction to *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece*, anthropologist Penelope Papailias offers a useful distinction between archives and mere collections. Referencing Walter Benjamin’s “Unpacking My Library,” she reminds her readers that collectors do not revere tradition and its authority but rather destroy it. Archives, by contrast, “seek not to erase, but to preserve, signs of the original contexts from which their material come: they are about reference.”¹⁵ As she further emphasizes, the archive, unlike the collection, is frequently also the product of a more “chaotic process of accreditation.”¹⁶ In short, while the documents and objects that comprise collections are usually determined at the point of entry, archives can be comprised of material artifacts that may or may not appear to contain any resemblance. Finally, Papailias privileges the term archive over collection, because it serves to highlight “the relationship – sometimes implicit and unconsciously mimetic, other times ironic and directly confrontational – which diverse documentary assemblages establish with real (or imagined) public archives.”¹⁷ In other words, to adopt the term archive over collection is to consciously choose to think about documentary assemblages as sites that are as much about texts and textual practices as they are about people and relations of power. Following this definition, the archive, in contrast to the collection, is referential, accumulative, and engaged in the construction of textual realities. But the archive does share at least one thing in common with the collection – it stands in contrast to but not necessarily at cross-purposes with the “ephemeral repertoire of embodied knowledge/practice.”¹⁸ In *The*

Archive and the Repertoire, performance studies scholar Diana Taylor emphasizes that “the archive exceeds the live”¹⁹ by providing an opportunity to return to the same objects again and again, but even Taylor warns that the preservation of objects should not be conflated with the fixity of knowledges. Archival memories are just as ephemeral as those that belong to the repertoire of speech, live performance, and ritual. Objects and documents can and do disappear, even in the archives.

This article has already identified several genres as “archival,” including the commonplace book and the blog. While their link to the archive may be obvious since both forms are, at least in part, the products of collecting and ordering, their status as genres is questionable. Commonplace books have at times been considered rhetorical devices, or information technologies, or mere sites of storage, but rarely described as genres. While blogs are often understood as a sub-genre of life writing, they may also be cast as templates used to manage information. Conventional definitions of genre refer to a category of literature; the forms under investigation here overlap with the diary, journal, and essay, but they do not fit neatly into any of these categories. Compilations or compendiums frequently defined by their copiousness rather than coherency, these archival genres resist categorization on many levels, but this is precisely the problematic with which I am engaged. Like the archive, which defies exhaustive description, archival genres are difficult to define. For this reason, they may be best understood as intermediary genres, or genres that offer a textual and social space where new genres can develop. To further understand archival genres and their intermediary status, I offer readings of two texts: mid-seventeenth-century reader Thomas Grocer’s commonplace book, and contemporary poet and critic Ron Silliman’s blog.

Commonplace Books

In the introduction to her study on the significance of commonplace books in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Ann Moss suggests that “the decline of the commonplace into the trivial and the banal was foreshadowed in the seventeenth century, accelerated in the eighteenth-century, and was irreversible by the nineteenth.”²⁰ The trajectory of decline charted by Moss echoes Walter Ong’s observations on this ill-fated genre. As Ong suggests in *Interfaces of the Word*, although many of the Renaissance’s most prolific writers and celebrated pedagogues used and promoted commonplace books, in today’s “technological cultures” commonplace collections have become “peripheral to serious discourse.”²¹ As Ong further argues, the commonplace book was already strangely antiquated at the peak of its popularity in the mid-sixteenth century. Describing the commonplace method as “an organized trafficking in what is in one way or another already known,”²² he observes that at the very moment when the impact of movable type was beginning to transform the transmission, storage, and retrieval of knowledge, commonplace books and the discursive practices they imply remained largely backward-looking and preoccupied with the need to refine and perfect the ultimate mnemonic device.

Until recently, there has been little reason to question the commonplace book’s decline. Its descent from essential part of the humanist curriculum to clumsy intellectual prosthetic has generally been accepted as more or less inevitable and complete. However, as digital writing and communication technologies have prompted readers and writers to question print culture’s assumptions about intertextuality, authorship, and intellectual property, this transitional genre/space of textual production has received renewed attention from researchers. At least some recent studies on the commonplace book appear to be motivated by a recognition that this antiquated genre holds the potential to provide important insights into emerging digital genres and social spaces.²³

Thomas Grocer’s mid-seventeenth commonplace book is ultimately unremarkable.²⁴ In contrast to many surviving commonplace books from the period, Grocer was not a known writer, philosopher, or aristocrat, but simply an avid reader committed to diligently recording anything of significance he encountered. Beyond the fact that he lived in London, little is known about Grocer, but his choice of passages reveal something about the social context in which he read and kept his commonplace book. On the cover of his

commonplace book, he describes himself as a “*florelegius*” (a flower collector). His self-identification is significant. Commonplace books stemmed from *floriligia* – precursors to the encyclopedia that appeared in the late Middle Ages. His adoption of a horticultural metaphor also locates his commonplace book in relation to Humanist discourses, which were ripe with such metaphors.²⁵

Whether Grocer’s commonplace book served a pedagogical purpose is unclear, but it is likely that he first learned to keep such a book as part of his education. Commonplace books generally took the form of collections of textual fragments gathered by readers and rearranged under common topics, including rhetorical topics (i.e. metaphors and similes), and moral topics (i.e., drunkenness and swearing). Erasmus, a major proponent of commonplace books in the sixteenth century, explains: “One should collect a vast supply of words from all sides out of good authors... have a wealth of words on hand, [but]...It will not be sufficient to prepare an abundant store of such words unless you have them not only at the ready but also in full view.”²⁶ For Erasmus, and subsequent advocates of the commonplace book, including John Locke²⁷ whose blank commonplace book was popular in the early eighteenth century, the commonplace book was a “storehouse” where one might “heap up” discursive “riches,” and a method of information management. This has invited contemporary analogues. Ann Moss posits the commonplace as an “information retrieval system”²⁸ while Jonathan Sawday and Neil Rhodes describe these books as a type of “Renaissance computer.”²⁹

But like web-sites and cyber-spaces, the commonplace book was also understood as a *place* where readers/writers might “dwell” among texts, eventually generating texts of their own making. Here, it is important to emphasize that the reference to “place” in commonplace is derived from the Greek *topos*. The double meaning of *topos* – site and topic (or argument) – is especially significant when thinking about the commonplace book as an archival genre. Both the commonplace book and the archive can be understood as places where texts and textual fragment are housed, and as sites of enunciation, or places where narratives are generated.

But how and when does a collection or technology of information management become a genre? At the most basic level, what distinguishes a genre from a collection or system of information management is the presence of a voice (albeit not necessarily the unified voice of a single author), as well as evidence at the levels of content and structure that there has been an attempt to say something. In his study of commonplace books in Tudor London, David R. Parker makes reference to the “genre-defying miscellaneous nature of commonplace books.” He further speculates that “compilers of [commonplace books] were not consciously writing within a genre [but rather making] books...”³⁰ While it may be the case that commonplace books have rarely been understood as a genre, it is important to emphasize that even at their height of popularity in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, they were rarely, if ever, read as mere heaps of textual fragments culled from other sources.

The commonplace book participated in the transformation of readers into writers, laying the foundations for the author-centered genres that took shape in the early modern era. Most notably, there is considerable overlap between the commonplace book and the diary or journal (in some libraries, the genres are even grouped). The Huntington Library’s collection of commonplace books, where Grocer’s book is housed, also contains collections of letters, political notebooks, and chronologically arranged and dated collections outlining details of the compilers’ everyday lives.³¹ But traces of subject-centered genres are in even apparent in traditional commonplace books, which neither feature dated entries nor personal reflections or commentaries. It is nearly always possible to gain insights into the personality and private life of the commonplacer from the textual fragments they chose to painstakingly recopy into their books. Grocer’s commonplace book includes a short anonymous verse entered under the title of “A wish to privacy”: “Give me a cell [...] Where no foot hath a path...”³² In what appears to be a highly personalized collection, primarily compiled of excerpts that suited his tastes and interests, Grocer’s decision to copy “A wish to privacy” might be read as an expression of his desire for a place to retreat to be alone amongst

his books. Barbara Benedict emphasizes that Grocer's choice of categories, which range from "Jealousie" and "Felicity" to "The Body" and "Revenge," is also revealing: "Grocer defines for himself the moral content of the literature available to him. The public sources he uses both shape and are shaped by the private context of his own experience."³³

The commonplace book also appeared to provide a space and possible model for the development of the essay in the early modern period. Although Montaigne condemns the practice of producing mere "patchworks" of quotations, his essays continued to reflect this rhetorical mode in their abundant use of intertextual references.³⁴ Moreover, both Montaigne and Bacon chose to structure their collections of essays around headings that resemble those found in commonplace books.³⁵ Bacon, for example, offered essays on truth, death, love, revenge, praise, and gardens – headings that frequently appeared in commonplace books from the same period. Even several decades later, Milton's essays remained deeply informed by the practice and structure of the commonplace book. Mapping the relation between Milton's commonplace book and essays, Ruth Mohl observes that much of what appears in Milton's essays is taken directly from his commonplace book, or reflects discursive practices associated with the commonplace book tradition. She further observes that the entries included in his commonplace book were often marked by the same distinctive voice present in his essays: "Sometimes Milton adds a comment of his own which sheds light on his thinking as he made the entry."³⁶

The significant overlap between the commonplace book and authored-centered genres, such as the diary and essay, which appeared in the decades following the arrival of movable type suggests that the commonplace book may be best understood as a transitional genre that provided a space where new genres (and perhaps more importantly, a new breed of writers) could develop. On this basis, these personalized, portable archives may also provide important insights into emerging forms of writing and cultural expression. The commonplace book's story – marked by a brief period of popularity in early print cultures and a long period of decline beginning at the end of the Renaissance – also gives us reason to question whether digital forms, even those that appear relatively established (such as blogs), should be read as the much anticipated new genres promised in the early years of the Web, or simply as textual spaces where new genres continue to take shape.

Blogs

In contrast to commonplace books, from their inception, blogs have been understood as a genre, usually a sub-genre of the diary or journal. That blogs were quickly categorized as a sub-genre of the diary is understandable. Various descriptions as "web diaries," "digital diaries," and "online journals," blogs share many features in common with established forms of life writing. Most notably, they usually feature dated chronological entries and often offer insights into bloggers' private lives. Although a growing number of institutions, political organizations, and journalists have adopted blogs, as Adam Reed observes, "the journal or diary blog remains dominant."³⁷ However, the characterization of blogs as a form of life writing is at least somewhat misleading. Many blogs are partially or predominantly comprised of excerpts culled from other sources, or links to other sources. Even blogs that can be understood as types of "digital diaries" are quite literally "linked" to the public sphere: "Most bloggers locate themselves within a larger community through the device of a 'blogroll', that is, a sidebar with a list of permanent links to other blogs likely to be of interest to readers."³⁸ Although bloggers can determine which features to adopt, the templates provided by blog hosting services place as much emphasis on the link and the archive as they do on the dated entry.

Poet and critic Ron Silliman's blog is as revered as it is reviled. Since its inception in 2002, the blog has attracted over a million visitors. Silliman is not alone in attracting such a high number of visitors to his blog. What makes the high traffic on the Silliman blog unique is the fact that his blog focuses on contemporary poetry and poetics, in particular the innovative poetry and poetics with which he has long

been associated. Considering the fact that many of the books reviewed by Silliman have print runs between 500 and 1000, the popularity of his blog cannot be understated. Beyond its popularity and impact on the reception of contemporary innovative poetry and poetics in North America, Silliman's blog is significant insofar as it demonstrates the multi-faceted function of the blog as a genre. Silliman's blog contains dated entries, but it also contains links to thousands of other sites and blogs. His blogroll serves as a central point of entry into a dispersed community of poets and critics across North America and increasingly around the world. In addition, many of his dated entries feature links, and some of his dated entries are simply lists of links to other texts. In this respect, Silliman's blog, like many blogs, may appear to share more in common with the commonplace book than the diary or journal.

Since the onset of his endeavour, Silliman has articulated a consciousness of the "genre-defying" nature of the unfolding form he has chosen to adopt. In his inaugural entries, Silliman locates himself first as a reader, a very slow but voracious reader, and next, as a writer. His first blog entry, dated August 29, 2002, begins:

...this project is clearly a step into un- (or at least under-) charted territory. My idea is to write briefly from time to time mostly about my writing and whatever I might be thinking about poetry...it may prove that there is no audience for such an endeavor. But this project isn't about audience. The fact that the blog has the potential to carry forward the best elements of a journal and seems inherently prone to digressive, if not absolutely plotless, prose gives me hope that this form might prove amenable to critical thinking.³⁹

Here, Silliman is unapologetic about the individualistic nature of his new project – ironically, a project that simply "isn't about audience." His first book review is also significant. Writing about a pirated typeset of Robert Duncan's *H.D. Book*, which never appeared in its entirety in print but rather was released in straggling segments published in various journals and eventually in the form of a pirated typeset edition, Silliman observes that Duncan's book is "a work of criticism with no argument, no theme, no development...a text that straddles...critical theory and autobiography and proceeds as plotless prose – a work whose point is never to get anywhere, but always to bring the reader into the presentness of reading itself."⁴⁰

Silliman's inaugural blog entries anticipate what his blog will become – something plotless and meandering, something that straddles autobiography and critical writing, and something accumulative – an archival project in all respects. Here, it is important to emphasize that Silliman is both a serial critic and a serial poet. "The Alphabet," for example, is a poem he started writing in 1979, but didn't complete until 2004.⁴¹ The title of his new project, "The Universe," also promises to be something of epic proportions. The continuity between his critical and poetic projects further underscores the genre-defying nature of the blog.

For many people in the experimental poetics community, including even Silliman's most virulent critics, Silliman's Blog is regarded as a partial and highly subjective but by no means insignificant archive of the community's contemporary history. His criticism, reviews, and at times mere lists of "books received" serve as a record of books in print, poets on the radar, memorable readings, and brewing debates. In this respect, Silliman's blog also provides insights into the impact digital technologies have had on experimental poetics. Without minimizing the experiments of writers engaged in digital poetics, Silliman's blog might suggest that if digital technologies have transformed poetics in the past decade, it is not exclusively or even predominately at the level of form but rather at the levels of circulation and reception. Silliman's blog, and the myriad of blogs to which he links, have come to play a central roll in the circulation and critical reception of experimental poetry published by small presses and arguably enabled many small presses to survive in an era when the small press appeared doomed. More importantly, these blogs continue to change the nature of literary criticism by spawning a new generation

of poet-critics and fostering a form of criticism that is both more immediate and more poetic as the ability to side-step print culture's refereeing processes frees the poet-critic to further explore critical forms not bound by the constraints of the traditional essay.⁴²

As the preceding readings of Grocer's commonplace book and Silliman's blog reveal, both the commonplace book and blog can be understood as types of authored collections that serve either exclusively or partially as records of readers' engagements with other texts. They may also be read as templates or technologies that offer readers a means to organize information. Both forms are located at the intersection of other genres, including life writing and criticism. Finally, both of these eclectic authored collections challenge the rigid distinctions that have traditionally separated public and private forms of communication, and published versus unpublished documents. Commonplace books usually originated in private, but were comprised of materials considered common property (for example, adages).⁴³ Moreover, some commonplace books were published and many unpublished commonplace books, including Grocer's, appear to have borrowed liberally from these published collections. Blogs also straddle the public and private spheres. Blogs are written or compiled by individuals in what may be best understood as a semi-public sphere (a space where individuals are free to voice private concerns and highly subjective standpoints to the public). Like commonplace books, much of the material found on blogs, including images and links, is appropriated with an understanding that it constitutes a form of common property. Archives also straddle the public and private spheres. Originally housed in the archon's home, the archive was first conceived as a private space for public records.⁴⁴ Today, archives are more often associated with the storage of private and confidential documents (including letters and diaries) in public spaces (regional and national archives). In either case, the archive is a site where the division between the private and public spheres breaks down. Such structural break downs may result in personal stories becoming collective histories or collective histories becoming state secrets. Either way, the archive is invariably a site of power and narrative production. As Antoinette Burton maintains, "archives are always already stories."⁴⁵

The similarities between Renaissance commonplace books and contemporary literary blogs suggests that they are both genres deeply structured by archival practices and principles. Like the archive, they simultaneously function as sites of storage, methods of information management, and semi-public spaces where readers dwell amongst texts. And like the archive, they are far from neutral – these *authored* collections engage in the construction and circulation of narratives, even when they appear to serve as mere compilations of existing textual fragments and links. This discussion has also emphasized the intermediary status of archival genres. Grocer's collection of textual fragments is a highly subjective text and precursor to the diary and journal, despite the fact that it contains none of the markers readers usually associate with these genres, such as dated entries. Similarly, a meandering critical project, such as Silliman's blog, may not reflect the traditional essay or formal literary criticism, but this is no reason to assume that Silliman's blog will ultimately prove any less significant than his earlier published essays.⁴⁶ Repositioned as an archival genre, an endeavour such as Silliman's blog might be read as a space where new approaches to critical writing are taking form. Like the archive, which is neither a neutral space where texts and artifacts simply accumulate nor the source of a single or stable narrative, archival genres may be understood as collections and spaces where readers and writers are permitted to dwell amongst documentary remains, crafting new narratives and new genres.

NOTES

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 36.

² The preoccupation with the archive since the early 1990s is frequently described as the "archival turn." The term, coined by anthropologist Ann Stoler, is usually used to signify the archive's repositioning as a subject of investigation rather than mere site where research takes place. That the term was coined by an anthropologist rather

than humanities scholar highlights the archival turn as a multidisciplinary phenomenon. See Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance. On the Content in the Form,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, eds. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 83-100.

³ For an introduction to the commonplace book see Earle Havens’s *Commonplace Books: A History of Manuscripts and Printed Books from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (New England: University Press of New England, 2001).

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 129.

⁵ It is important to emphasize that while contemporary theorizing is deeply influenced by poststructuralist and deconstructionist theorists’ insights on the subject, scholars who have traditionally laid claim to the archive (historians and library scientists) have not necessarily followed this theoretical trend. Historian Caroline Steedman’s clever and eloquent response to Derrida’s *Archive Fever, Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002) foregrounds the archive’s materiality and offers a blunt reassessment of the historians’ meticulous and arduous research methods in a climate where such methods have come under attack.

⁶ Steedman, *Dust*, 3.

⁷ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 58.

⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 91.

⁹ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 11.

¹⁰ Herman Rapaport, “Archive Trauma,” *Diacritics* 28 (1998): 2.

¹¹ Pamela Banting, “The Archive as a Literary Genre: Some Theoretical Speculations,” *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986-1987): 122.

¹² Karina Hof reports that the vast majority of “scrappers” are female (365). See “Something you can actually pick up: Scrapbooking as a form and forum of cultural citizenship,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9 (2006).

¹³ On the Internet, archive usually refers to a large file containing several smaller files or any collection of computer files grouped together and stored under one file name (ZIP files are a common format). In some software programs and templates, archive has a more specific application. Blog providers use archive to designate the place where old posts are stored.

¹⁴ For specific examples of research that seeks to stretch the traditional definition of the archive, see the following edited collections, conference proceedings and special issues of journals: Antoinette Burton, ed. *Archive Stories: Facts, Fiction, and the Writing of History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Rebecca Comay, ed. “Lost in the Archives,” *Alphabet City*, 8, (2002); Francis X. Blouin, ed. *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Penelope Papailias, *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 3.

¹⁶ Papailias, 4.

¹⁷ Papailias, 4

¹⁸ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

¹⁹ Taylor, 19.

²⁰ Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 2.

²¹ Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 178.

²² Ong, 151.

²³ Comparisons between Renaissance commonplace-book and websites are made by Leah S. Marcus in “The Silence of the Archive and the Noise of Cyberspace”, Nonna Crook and Neil Rhodes in “The Daughters of Memory: Thomas Heywood’s Gunakeion and the Female Computer”, and Anne Lake Prescott in “Pierre de la Primaudaye’s French Academy: Growing Encyclopaedic”; these essays are published together in Neil Rhodes and Jonathon Sawday’s edited collection *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge technology in the First Age of Print* (London: Routledge, 2000).

²⁴ Thomas Grocer, *Dayly Observations* [commonplace-book], 1580. Available in Renaissance Commonplace Books from the Huntington Library.

²⁵ See a discussion of horticultural metaphors in humanist discourses, see Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

²⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 24 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 307.

- ²⁷ John Locke, "VI. A New Method of a Common-Place-Book," *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, vol. 2, 19th ed. (London, 1793).
- ²⁸ Moss, vi.
- ²⁹ Neil Rhodes and Jonathon Sawday, eds. *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- ³⁰ David R. Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London* (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 9.
- ³¹ Among the commonplace books in the Huntington Library's collection of commonplace-books are several that bear a closer resemblance to diaries and other dated collections than commonplace books. Described as an ephemeris and notebook, Sir Edward Dering's "collection" is dated, organized chronologically (with the exception of the poems and scattered recipes and remedies that appear on the final pages), and at times contains personal entries. A detailed listing of Renaissance Commonplace Books from the Huntington Library is available online at: http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/renaissance_commonplace_books_huntington/Detailed-Listing.aspx
- ³² Grocer, *Dayly Observations*.
- ³³ Barbara M. Benedict, *Making the Modern Reader: Cultural Mediation in Early Modern Literary Anthologies* (Electronic version of a printed monograph, Princeton University Press, 1996) <http://press.princeton.edu/books/benedict/chapter_1.html> (1 June 2007).
- ³⁴ Michel Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).
- ³⁵ Francis Bacon, *The Major Works including New Atlantis and the Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- ³⁶ Ruth Mohl, *John Milton and His Commonplace Book* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1969), 8.
- ³⁷ Adam Reed, "'My Blog Is Me': Texts and Persons in UK Online Journal Culture (and Anthropology)," *Ethnos* 70 (June 2005), 221.
- ³⁸ John Quiggin, "Blogs, Wikis and Creative Innovation," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 9 (Fall), 483.
- ³⁹ Ron Silliman, "Silliman's Blog," 29 August 2002 <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2002_08_01_archive.html> (15 January 2007).
- ⁴⁰ Ron Silliman, "Silliman's Blog," 31 August 2002, <http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2002_08_01_archive.html> (15 January 2007).
- ⁴¹ Like Robert Duncan's *H.D. Book*, Ron Silliman's *The Alphabet* was published in segments over the course of its long development.
- ⁴² It is important to emphasize that long before the arrival of blogs and other digital forums, poet-critics, including Silliman and his contemporaries (Charles Bernstein, Steve McCaffery, Kathleen Fraser, and Alice Notley among others) were redefining critical genres – often creating cross-genre hybrids located at the intersection of poetry, the essay, and life writing. The Web, however, has enabled more poets to engage in the exploration and dissemination of experimental critical writings while at the same time heightening and enacting something poet-critics have long emphasized – critical writing should be a response (a dialogical rather than didactic form).
- ⁴³ See Stephen Orgel, "The Renaissance Artists as Plagiarist," *English Language History* 48 (1981): 476-495.
- ⁴⁴ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 2.
- ⁴⁵ Burton, *Archive Stories*, 20.
- ⁴⁶ Ron Silliman's *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1977) is now in its eleventh printing.