

“THE TEXTURE OF THE EVERYDAY”:
APPRAISING THE VALUES OF WOMEN’S DIARIES AND WEBLOGS

by

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ABSTRACT

For many people, the internet has revolutionized personal record keeping. Archivists must respond to the challenges posed by personal digital records, and soon, or risk an irreversible gap in the archival and historical record. Most of the progress that the archival profession has made over the past three decades in developing strategies and standards for archiving digital records has been in relation to those records created by large governments and corporations; much less satisfactory progress has been made with private personal records created using digital technology. One of the most fascinating of such new media is online computer weblogs. This thesis explores weblogs and, for purposes of comparison, their paper near-equivalent, the personal diary. The analysis demonstrates the values that weblogs hold as potential archival records, in and of themselves and in comparison to their diary “equivalents,” and then suggests appraisal concepts and strategies for archivists in collecting weblogs. The emphasis of this study is on women’s diaries and weblogs, and gender analysis is incorporated into the discussion.

The research and analysis on women, diaries, blogs, and archives is presented in three main chapters in this study. The first chapter discusses traditional paper-based diaries and their importance to their creators, historians, and other researchers. The reasons women make diaries and the different forms that they take are examined, and these arguments are illustrated with examples from women’s diaries held in Manitoba archives.

The second chapter focuses on the phenomenon of the weblog: establishing a definition, discussing different types of weblogs, and identifying ways in which weblogs are similar to and different from traditional diaries. The chapter suggests that while blogs can play the same role in their creators' lives that diaries once filled, they also possess characteristics of other web-based genres that allow them to fill some fundamentally different needs from those that have been addressed by paper-based diaries. The characteristics of weblogs and motivations of their creators will likewise be demonstrated with examples from blogs written by Manitoba women.

The third chapter of the thesis explores the archival appraisal of diaries and weblogs, discussing the literature relating to how archivists have thought of diaries, and personal records more generally, in terms of their evidential, transactional, and informational values, and suggesting additional types of value that weblogs hold for their creators and contemporaries. Such values archivists should be incorporating into their appraisal criteria and acquisition policies.

This thesis indeed concludes by suggesting a possible approach to appraising weblogs and formulating an acquisition and preservation strategy that archives could apply to these records, including a discussion of the technical, legal, logistical, and theoretical challenges that blogs pose for archivists.

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INTRODUCTION

The way that society communicates and records information is changing. A recent British study states that today only 13 per cent of all written communication involves the traditional media of pen and paper; 49 per cent is via e-mail, 29 per cent via cell phone text messaging, and 10 per cent via instant messaging over the internet. This trend is even more dramatic when the habits of different generations are taken into account. Adults over the age of 65 continue to use paper-based communication 39 per cent of the time, while this number drops to 5 per cent for people between 15 and 24 years of age.¹

What is communicated also differs, as in part does the audience. What was communicated a few years ago orally in person or by telephone is now replaced for many human activities by short written-text messages sent by these new and multiplying number of devices. Digital images, music, and video are also communicated along with text messages, or separately, in a manner and volume not imaginable in the analogue or paper-based world, and to wider and often more distant and even anonymous audiences. The implication of this shift cannot be overlooked; archivists must respond to the challenges posed by digital records, or risk an irreversible gap in the archival record.

While the archival profession has accepted this challenge, and significant progress has been made in the past three decades in developing strategies and standards for archiving digital records created by large governments and corporations, much less

¹ Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, *Pioneering TouchPoints Survey gives new integrated picture of consumer lifestyles, behaviours and multi-media use* (2006), <http://www.ipa.co.uk/touchpoints/Pressrelease230306.cfm> (accessed on 28 October 2006).

satisfactory progress has been made in terms of private personal records created using these new digital technologies. One of the most arresting of such new digital media of communication are online computer weblogs. This thesis will explore weblogs and, for purposes of comparison, their paper near-equivalent, the personal diary. The analysis will attempt to discern the values that weblogs may have as potential archival records, in and of themselves and in comparison to their diary “equivalents,” and then suggest appraisal concepts and strategies for collecting weblogs. Moreover, the emphasis will be on women’s diaries and weblogs, and incorporate gender analysis into the discussion.

Women’s personal records, particularly the records of “ordinary” women who are not well-known or influential in such areas as literature, politics, or the arts, have been largely ignored by archivists and historians until recent decades. However, gendered historical analysis, since the 1970s, has been contributing critical insight into issues of power, representation, and identity. Records, such as diaries, have been helping scholars to (re)write the history of women, and make the history of all people more complete and nuanced; there is the very strong possibility (and desirability) that weblogs may one day perform the same role. Recent research has shown that women are highly active participants in the “blogosphere,” creating as many weblogs as men, and even more in some demographic groups. Yet the weblogs that are noticed, debated, and written about in the media, and are widely regarded as the most valuable examples of the genre, are primarily those created by men. Computers and high-technology is one of the last areas of society in which women are marginalized, at least in the public, and potentially archival, perception. This thesis will undertake an exploration of the gender-based differences in who is creating weblogs, why they choose to do so, and how they and their digital records

are perceived by society, in the hopes of helping archivists to recognize the different types of value that these records hold.

Diaries have been an important form of personal record keeping, particularly for women, and can serve many different purposes in their creators' lives. Many diaries end up in archives, where they provide researchers with a rich source of information and evidence of different people, places, and times. In a recent article about the distinctive challenges that diaries pose for archivists, Michael Piggott states that diaries are as pervasive in modern society as "occasion photographs, birth certificates, tax returns, and perhaps census records ... No other record is so well known and so often published." Diaries have received a great deal of attention by academic historians, literary critics, and increasingly other disciplines such as gender studies, but within archival discourse, "the phenomenon of diaries has all but been ignored."²

Over the past decade, a new form of personal record has emerged that fills many of the same roles as the paper diary, as well as others that have been made possible by computer and network technology. The weblog, or blog for short, a type of online diary, is an immensely popular form of record keeping, particularly among young people. As with the traditional diary, women's blogs may provide details about their lives, relationships, and ways of viewing the world that might otherwise remain undocumented. For archivists, blogs pose a new set of challenges and require a different approach to appraisal, acquisition, description, and preservation than has been applied to personal non-digital records in the past.

² Michael Piggott, "The Diary: Social Phenomenon, Professional Challenge," *Archives and Manuscripts* 31, no. 1 (May 2003), p. 85.

For many people, the internet has revolutionized personal record keeping. Photo albums have been replaced by online Flickr accounts, home videos are shared with the world on YouTube, and emails or comments posted on friends' MySpace or Facebook pages have supplanted letter writing in everyday situations. These popular websites provide online services for hosting and sharing photographs and videos, and social-networking, respectively. They have changed the way that millions of individuals, particularly young people, document their lives. These different forms of digital personal records are often inter-linked; people will include links to YouTube videos, or use Flickr or other photo-hosting websites, in order to include these other media in their weblog postings. Some weblogs take the form of photoblogs, consisting entirely of images, or videoblogs, captured on webcam and posted directly to YouTube. All of these new record-keeping technologies, their connections, their uses, and their values, are deserving of further study by archivists and academics in other disciplines. This thesis, however, will focus specifically on weblogs that are primarily text-based for three main reasons. First, a thesis-length exploration of all of these new media at one time would necessarily be superficial, while focusing on one type of record will allow a more in-depth analysis of the archival issues surrounding this new online medium. Secondly, weblogs are related to a traditional, paper-based form of personal record, the diary, that has been extensively studied and thus allows for comparisons of the roles that these records play in their creators' lives and their potential archival value. And thirdly, the conclusions reached in this study of diaries and weblogs may help archivists in thinking about the issues such as gender, societal and archival value, appraisal, acquisition, and preservation that relate to these other forms of new media as well.

The research and analysis on women, diaries, blogs, and archives will be presented in three main chapters in this thesis. The first chapter will discuss different ways in which diaries have been defined, and establish a working definition of the diary for use throughout the thesis, while acknowledging that such a definition will necessarily overlap with the boundaries of other genres of records. It will address the questions of why diaries have been such an important form of record for women, and why women's diaries have been such an important resource for historians and other researchers. This chapter will consider how recent thinking about diaries has been influenced by postmodernism, gendered historical analysis, and more specific theory on the relationship between diaries and autobiography. It will consider the reasons women make diaries and the different forms that they take; however, as the history of the personal diary has been written about extensively, a detailed examination of its evolution is beyond the scope of this thesis. An analysis of a selection of women's diaries held in Manitoba archives will be used to illustrate and support the arguments made in this chapter.

The second chapter will examine the phenomenon of the weblog by reviewing some of the vast literature that has appeared about it over the past five years both in print and online. The chapter will define weblogs, discuss different types of weblogs, and identify ways in which weblogs are similar to and different from traditional diaries, and how blogs differ from other forms of online digital personal records and personal storytelling, such as such shared digital host sites as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, or stand-alone individualized websites. The chapter will also suggest that while blogs can play the same role in their creators' lives that diaries once filled, they also possess characteristics of other web-based genres that allow them to fill some fundamentally

different needs from those that have been addressed by traditional paper-based diaries. The characteristics of weblogs and motivations of their creators will likewise be demonstrated with examples from blogs written by Manitoba women. This chapter will also look at the gendered nature of the “blogosphere,” and argue that weblogs have come to reflect some of the same trends and can be perceived accordingly to similar societal values and needs.

The third chapter of the thesis will explore the archival appraisal of diaries and weblogs, a topic which is only beginning to be addressed in the archival literature and archival profession. It will briefly outline the concept of appraisal and its historical development, and then turn to a discussion of the literature relating to how archivists have thought of diaries, and personal records more generally, in terms of their evidential, transactional, and informational values. This will be followed by a discussion of the different types of value that weblogs hold for their creators and contemporaries; recent archival theory suggests that each of these values should be incorporated into a discussion of appraisal value and the development of specific appraisal criteria to judge which kinds or genres of blogs should be acquired by archives and which should not be. Documentation strategy and macroappraisal can contribute ideas to help guide private records archivists in targeting diaries and weblogs for preservation, as the number of diaries available to archives today is dramatically greater than those that have survived from past centuries. This thesis will conclude by suggesting a possible approach to appraising weblogs and formulating an acquisition and preservation strategy that archives could apply to these records, including a discussion of the technical, legal, logistical, and theoretical challenges that blogs pose for archivists.

It is important to note that this thesis is focusing specifically on diaries and weblogs created by women, while recognizing that “women” are not by any means a homogenous group. Any generalizations that can be made are exactly that – generalizations, which should not be understood to apply to every individual. An analysis of issues relating to ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, language, and the many other characteristics that may influence people’s experiences with record keeping, technology, and the creation of societal memory are equally important, but lie beyond the scope of this thesis. This study will investigate the creation, appraisal, and preservation of weblogs on a relatively local scale as a case study to demonstrate the value and applicability of archiving blogs; extending the findings so discovered to research the issues surrounding weblogs from a national or even global perspective would be a fascinating direction for future research. Likewise, examining men’s weblogs and personal record-keeping activities, either alone or in comparison with those of women, would be a valuable exercise, but in the context of this thesis would draw the attention away from the archival issues surrounding women’s weblogs, which is the chosen focus here.

The research methodology used in this thesis is a combination of a review of relevant literature from archival studies, as well as other disciplines such as gender studies, English, and psychology, and qualitative analysis of diaries and weblogs written by Manitoba women. The diaries and weblogs have been selected as examples to illustrate the uses and values of these types of record, but no quantitative methods were used or statistical analysis performed on the data collected. Ethics board approval and copyright permission to use portions of weblogs in this thesis were not necessary, because materials, including weblogs, are already made publicly available on the internet

by their creators, and thus there is no question of invading their privacy, despite some of the very personal information posted in some blogs.

Locating women's diaries in Manitoba archives was made possible by the reference tools and finding aids provided, and the help of the archivists working in these institutions. Finding weblogs written by Manitoba women, however, proved more difficult. Many weblog-hosting sites do not allow users to narrow down their searches by location, in some cases the creators of weblogs are not identified as male or female, and often weblogs that were identified as written by Manitoba women were not updated with any regularity or had been abandoned. These obstacles were overcome using another modern technology, the mass email, sent out to friends, relatives, and colleagues asking for suggestions of weblogs that met specific criteria. It was requested that the weblogs be written by women from or living in Manitoba and maintained on a regular basis for at least six months. Furthermore, the examples selected for use in this thesis are personal weblogs, as opposed to those based on a business or organizational affiliation, and not written by anyone with whom the author has a close personal relationship. Both the weblogs and diaries that are used as illustrations have been reproduced as they were originally written, including any idiosyncratic or erroneous grammar and spelling, although font style, colour, and size have been standardized for ease of reading.

Women create many different types of personal records, both digital and paper-based, but a full discussion of archives' role in preserving women's personal records is too broad and rich a topic to be addressed in this thesis. Instead, the focus is specifically on diaries and weblogs, while recognizing that archivists should also consider preserving

other significant records in all media, including letters, emails, photographs, videos, and websites, created by the individuals whose life-writing is being targeted for preservation.

It is hoped that this thesis will provide researchers with further evidence and information about the role of personal record keeping in women's lives, and assist readers in understanding what is written in new digital formats and technologies as well as how it relates to traditional paper-based genres. Further, this thesis will suggest different ways in which archivists can think about the archival value of diaries and weblogs, argue that archives must act soon if they are to prevent the loss of important digital, web-based records, and propose criteria to help archivists make difficult appraisal decisions about which weblogs to preserve. The way that society communicates and records information is changing, and archivists must adapt their approaches to appraisal, acquisition, and preservation if this generation is to have a history, and the future to have a past.

CHAPTER ONE

DIARIES AND DIARISTS

It was always the best way of finding out information; just go and ask a woman who keeps her eyes and ears open and who likes to talk. It always worked. It was no use asking men; they simply were not interested enough in other people and the ordinary doings of people.¹

Women's diaries and personal records have been a rich source of information for historians and other scholars because they contain details of everyday life in different times and places that may otherwise have gone unrecorded. Diaries have been called many things – pillow books, journals, commonplace books – and have been defined in many ways. This chapter will discuss these definitions and the diary's relationship to other genres of records, and establish a definition of the diary for use throughout this thesis. The influence that postmodernism, gendered historical analysis, and theory relating to autobiography have had on how women's personal records, including diaries, are understood will be addressed. This chapter will also explore the reasons that people write diaries, the forms that these records take, and the roles that they fill in their

¹ Alexander McCall Smith, *The Kalahari Typing School for Men* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2002), p. 170.

creators' lives, illustrating this discussion with reference to a selection of women's diaries held in Manitoba archives.

Increasingly, archivists are acknowledging the value of personal records and the importance of preserving them in archives. Diaries are a particularly valuable and intriguing, if troublesome, genre of personal record. Personal records differ from institutional records in a number of ways that have an impact on how they should be understood, appraised, and collected. American archivist Fredric Miller points out that although the term "archives" is generally used to include manuscript collections, strictly speaking, "archives are the noncurrent but still useful records of an organization or institution *preserved by that organization or institution.*" Government, university, or business archives, each sponsored by the records-creating entity, are well-known examples. Manuscript collections, in contrast, are "the records created or gathered by an organization or individual but transferred from the original custodian to a collecting repository."² Personal papers are a sub-category of manuscript collection that consists of private documents accumulated or created by an individual or sometimes family grouping.

Diaries, Gender, Postmodernism, and Autobiography

The first question this chapter must address is one that sounds straightforward: what is a diary? The answer is not so simple, however. Australian archivist Michael Piggott writes that part of the reason diaries have received so little attention from the archival community is the difficulty of defining, and lack of agreement surrounding, what

² Fredric Miller, "Archival Description," *Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts*, Laura B. Cohen, ed. (New York: The Haworth Press, Inc., 1997), p. 56 (emphasis in original).

distinguishes a diary from other types of document.³ The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines a diary as “a daily written record of events, feelings, or thoughts.” A journal is defined as “a daily record of events; a diary.” These terms are derived from the Latin *diarium* and *diurnalis*, which both contain the root meaning “day.”⁴ Some writers choose to use these terms interchangeably, while others use “journal” to imply a more sophisticated, mature type of personal record than that of a diary. Manitoban author, playwright, and poet, Betty Jane Wylie, writes that as a teenager she kept a diary, but “[a]s I grew older, I found out that serious diaries were usually called ‘journals.’”⁵ Kathryn Carter, the editor of a work on Canadian women’s diaries, argues that such distinctions are spurious and arbitrary, because “[i]n practice, both terms are applied to such a variety of texts and styles that attempts at categorization prove fruitless.”⁶

There are many variations on the personal diary, its form and content, but as its etymology suggests, all are daily, or at least fairly regular periodic, accounts of a life, created and arranged chronologically. One can define the genre based on its form, function, and addressee. Irina Paperno, a Russian history scholar, defines a diary as “a text written in the first-person, in separate installments, ideally on a daily basis, and ostensibly for the purposes of giving an account of the writer’s personal experience in a given day, which is not necessarily addressed to someone other than the diarist.” But she also believes that it is important to remember that “the diary is not merely a genre, but a cultural artifact existing within a social context ... emphasis on form and genre obscures

³ Michael Piggott, “The Diary: Social Phenomenon, Professional Challenge,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 31, no. 1 (May 2003), p. 85.

⁴ Katherine Barber, ed., *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 388, 762.

⁵ Betty Jane Wylie, *Reading Between the Lines: The Diaries of Women* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1995), p. x.

⁶ Kathryn Carter, *The Small Details of Life: 20 diaries by women in Canada, 1830-1996* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 7-8.

the workings of diaries as intimate writings and intimate records – an archive that situates self in history.”⁷

Some diaries span a lifetime, while others are kept to document a specific time period or activity, such as a journey or retreat. Many diaries contain other items interleaved with their pages, such as newspaper clippings, recipes, photographs, or mementos of events, blurring the lines between diaries and another genre of personal record: the scrapbook. In a recent article, Canadian archivist Karen Simonson discusses the differences between these two types of records. The first distinction she makes is that diaries are mainly textual, while scrapbooks include a variety of media, especially the visual and graphic. The second difference she notes is that diaries “might provide personal detailed descriptions of events, relationships, and ideas,” while the contents of a scrapbook are better described as “memory triggers.”⁸ Often, scrapbooks contain items of importance to their creator, but very little information to explain their meaning or significance to another reader. However, the same can often be said of diaries; certainly an entry can help its writer bring back memories of much more than is actually written. Diaries and scrapbooks are closely related genres of record, and the distinctions between the two are often blurred, but the key difference is that diaries are *primarily* textual records written, rather than collected, by their creator on a daily, or periodic, basis, incrementally, chronologically, whereas the scrapbook, while it can be on-going and open-ended, is usually a project that is started and completed, and often thematic in orientation (documenting a wedding, student life, a special trip, and so on). If diaries have

⁷ Irina Paperno, “What Can Be Done with Diaries?,” *The Russian Review* 63 (October 2004), pp. 562, 569.

⁸ Karen Simonson, “Memories Resurrected in Context: Gender and Remembrance in Charlotte Black’s Scrapbook,” *Archivaria* 62 (Fall 2006), p. 185. See also Juliana M. Kuipers, “Scrapbooks: Intrinsic Value and Material Culture,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 2, no. 3 (2004), pp. 83-91 for further discussion of scrapbooks as a genre of record.

their near-equivalents in a weblog, or blog, the scrapbook may be considered analogous to a personal website.

With an idea of what defines a diary thus broadly set, the next question to be addressed is one of particular concern to archivists: is a diary a record? Again, traditionally at least, archivists only collect records in context that offer some evidence of human activity, not decontextualized information scraps. Australian archivist Sue McKemmish addresses this issue by asking if diaries can be considered “communicated transactions, captured and maintained in context, and kept as evidence of the related social or business activity.” She argues that diaries are records, whether one views them as “communications/transactions with the self” or takes the moment of their inscription as the creation of a potentially communicable document, regardless of the writers’ intention to keep the contents private or share them with others. McKemmish decides that “[t]he key to the diary’s potential quality of recordness lies in whether it has been captured by processes that fix it in time and space, link it to its transactional context ... and carry it forward in context through time.”⁹ Adrian Cunningham, another antipodean archivist who has written extensively on the issues surrounding personal records, questions this transactional basis for determining “recordness,” stating that this “counter productively narrow concept of the record ... skirts the slippery concept of the evidential nature of records and excludes such non-organizational material as personal diaries and literary drafts, the ‘recordness’ of which to me is defined by their evidential qualities.”¹⁰

⁹ McKemmish, “Evidence of me...,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May 1996), pp. 44-45.

¹⁰ Adrian Cunningham, “Beyond the Pale? The ‘flinty’ relationship between archivists who collect the private records of individuals and the rest of the archival profession,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May 1996), p. 22.

Postmodern archival theory takes a different view, arguing that because of the active, creative role played by the archivist, and the changing context in which documents are understood, the interpretation of a record contributes more to its “recordness” than the physical object itself or its qualities as strict evidence. Canadian archival theorist and educator Tom Nesmith suggests that “[a] record is an evolving mediation of understanding about some phenomena – a mediation created by social and technical processes of inscription, transmission, and contextualization.”¹¹ Nesmith points out that women’s records, including diaries, were not widely considered archival documents until relatively recently. It is “[t]his new recognition,” he argues, that “changed the context for understanding these records, and thus changed what they *are*.”¹²

Postmodernism has influenced not only our understanding of records, but also of the archivist’s responsibility to society. As Canadian archivist Terry Cook states in his discussion of what postmodern ideas bring to the archival community,

Postmodernists seek, in short, to de-naturalize what society unquestionably assumes is natural, what it has for generations, perhaps centuries, accepted as normal, natural, rational, proven – simply the way things are. The postmodernist takes such ‘natural’ phenomena – whether patriarchy, capitalism, the Western canon of great literature, or the working of archives – and declares them to be socially or culturally ‘constructed,’ and thus in need of deconstruction and reformulation to reflect better the diversity of the present time.¹³

The archive is coming to be seen as “the site where social memory has been (and is) constructed – usually in support, consciously or unconsciously, of the metanarratives of the powerful, and especially of the state.”¹⁴ In response, many archives are making

¹¹ Tom Nesmith, “Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the ‘Ghosts’ of Archival Theory,” *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999), pp. 144-145.

¹² Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *The American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002), p. 33 (emphasis in original).

¹³ Terry Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), p. 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

special efforts to collect and preserve records that reflect the experiences of not only the influential and well-known, but also the marginalized members of society.

The emergence of cultural studies as a discipline has influenced the way in which archivists and others view records, giving academic respectability to the study of the creation and context of records that were previously seen as valuable primarily as a source of their surface, informational or factual subject content. The diverse areas of study that fall into this category, in general, “signal a move away from privileging ‘high’ literary forms and towards the reading of all kinds of cultural production as textual” and have thus “open[ed] flexible spaces for the serious explorations of alternative modes of self-writing”¹⁵ Personal records, including women’s diaries, are increasingly recognized by archivists and academics as a valuable resource for learning about society, struggle, and the creation of identity.

There are two main reasons that this thesis focuses specifically on women’s diaries. The first is that, since the 1970s, gender has come to be seen as an important category of historical analysis, and women and women’s personal records have been recognized as a legitimate area of study. Historian Joan W. Scott defines gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes,” and “a primary way of signifying relationships of power.” By examining history from a gendered perspective, scholars are able to “disrupt the notion of fixity, to discover the nature of the debate or repression that leads to the appearance of timeless permanence in binary gender representation.” Intertwined with issues of power and gender representation in society are questions of identity. Evidently, such gendered analysis is

¹⁵ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds., *Women, Autobiography, Theory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 32.

very complementary to the postmodern sensibilities discussed earlier. Scott states that historians need to “examine the ways in which gendered identities are substantively constructed and relate their findings to a range of activities, social organizations, and historically specific cultural representations.”¹⁶ Women’s diaries are a critical resource for historians undertaking this task.

The second reason that women’s diaries are an important topic of study is that they have been doubly neglected in the past, both because they are created by women, and because diaries have often been viewed as a “feminine” genre of record. There are a number of explanations for this perception. Thomas Mallon, author of *A Book of One’s Own*, a seminal work on diaries, notes that the diary is “a genre to which women have always felt especially drawn.” In part, this is because the diary was a form of writing open to women when other expressions of their creativity, such as writing a novel or play, would have been considered presumptuous and inappropriate.¹⁷ Diaries are also a practical way of keeping track of events for many women. In their introduction to *Inscribing the Daily*, English professors Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff write that “the very repetitiveness and frequent interruptions of a day’s work for most women make diaries a logical mode for women writers to choose to pen their life stories.” The nature of diaries as private and daily records ties them to the feminine; Bunkers and Huff note that “[t]he gendered construct of [mainstream Western epistemology’s] mind-body

¹⁶ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 9, no. 5 (Dec 1986), pp. 1067-1068.

¹⁷ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own: People and Their Diaries* (New York, 1984), p. 19.

separation places women squarely within the daily,” as opposed to men, who are associated with the public sphere, the universal, and the national.¹⁸

“Femininity” is a set of characteristics that, like gender, are both culturally and relationally defined. Rebecca Hogan, an English professor and autobiography scholar, has examined the features of diaries’ structure and language, as well as the motivations of their creators, to address whether the diary is a feminine type of record. She finds that diaries privilege detail, often including small day-to-day events alongside momentous occasions without granting the latter any more significance. This attention to detail gives the diary form “a structure and perspective which have been culturally and historically seen as feminine.”¹⁹

Hogan compares a number of prominent French feminist theorists’ descriptions of “l’écriture féminine,” a distinctly feminine style of language usage, with common perspectives of the diary. She finds that similar words are used to describe the two: open, non-linear, unfinished, cumulative, and having multiple voices are just some of the ways that both feminine stylistic tendencies and diaries are often described. Psychoanalytic feminists such as Nancy Chodorow have described the ability to cross boundaries and fill multiple roles as distinctively feminine.²⁰ Diaries, notes Hogan, are “elastic, inclusive texts, which mix chronicle, historical record, reflection, feelings, descriptions of nature, travel, work accomplished, and portraiture of character rather haphazardly together.” This

¹⁸ Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 5.

¹⁹ Rebecca Hogan, “Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form,” *Autobiography and Questions of Gender*, Shirley Newman, ed. (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1991), pp. 95, 99.

²⁰ See Rosemary Putnam Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 130-172, for an introduction to psychoanalytic feminism.

blurring of “text and experience, art and life,” makes the diary a feminine form of writing.²¹

Writers have many different motivations for keeping diaries, but regardless of their actual content, they are widely perceived as an outlet for the writer to express her innermost feelings, impressions, hopes, and dreams. However, this has not always been the case; this view of the diary as a private document is relatively recent. Hogan states that “[t]he establishment of ‘privacy’ as one of the generic features of the diary form coincided with the increasing consignment of women and their work to the private domestic realm by industrial civilization.”²² As the idea of an “inner life” of thoughts and emotions became more closely tied to the private sphere, the realm of women, the modern conception of the diary emerged and culturally the diary became predominantly seen as a feminine genre of record.

The many ways in which diaries are tied to the feminine have led some scholars in the fields of English and women’s studies, including Judy Nolte Lensink, to argue that “in both form and content [the diary] comes closest to a female version of autobiography.”²³ Diaries are undeniably a form of autobiography, when we understand the word literally; its origin is found in the Latin words for “self,” “life,” and “writing.” Another academic, Geneva Cobb-Moore, argues that many (primarily male) academics have excluded diaries from the study of autobiography “because [diaries] follow a ‘nonmasculine’ pattern of fragmentary and sporadic writing. The diarist can see no coherent, linear pattern emerging in the world and consequently is stuck irrevocably in

²¹ Hogan, “Engendered Autobiographies,” p. 100.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²³ Judy Nolte Lensink, “Expanding the boundaries of criticism: the diary as female autobiography,” *Women’s Studies* 14 (1987), p. 40.

the immediacy of the moment,” whereas, “in autobiography proper there is a coherent ‘masculine’ shaping of events.”²⁴ However, as a growing number of studies look more closely at women’s diaries, it is becoming clear that although “women’s life stories generally do not fit the individualistic, linear narrative form of men’s... they do move forward with a subtle sequence of relational cycles.”²⁵

Autobiographer Jill Ker Conway, who has both written and studied autobiography as a genre, has made this same observation, and posed the question, “[g]iven that Western language and narrative forms have been developed to record and explicate the male life, how can a woman write an autobiography when to do so requires using a language which denigrates the feminine and using a genre which celebrates the experience of the atomistic Western male hero?”²⁶ One answer to this question is that she can keep a diary; however, there are undeniable and important ways in which diaries differ from traditional autobiographies. These differences must be kept in mind when reading these texts, or one risks doing an injustice to the diarist by holding different genres of writing to one literary standard. The most obvious difference is perspective. English professor Harriet Blodgett writes, “[w]hereas the autobiographer can recall (if she wants to), the diarist cannot foresee.”²⁷ Other forms of writing, such as the autobiography or memoir, tell a story from a point in time after the events have occurred. The diary, in contrast, “is created in and

²⁴ Geneva Cobb-Moore, “When Meanings Meet: The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké,” *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 140.

²⁵ Lensink, “Expanding the boundaries of criticism,” p. 42.

²⁶ Jill Ker Conway, *When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography* (New York, 1998), p. 1.

²⁷ Harriet Blodgett, “Preserving the Moment in the Diary of Margaret Fontaine,” *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 168.

represents a continuous present.”²⁸ In the introduction to her study of American women’s diaries, feminist scholar Margo Culley notes that the author of autobiography proper “knows what happens next and directs the reader’s response at every point,” whereas diaries consist of “a series of surprises to writer and reader alike.” Novels, autobiographies, and other forms of literature may be thought of as complete works, “artistic wholes,” while the diary “is always in process, always in some sense a fragment.”²⁹

A final difference between autobiographies and diaries is purpose. Conway argues that the driving force behind autobiography is that “[e]very autobiographer wants to persuade others to learn from her or his life ... to convince their readers to take up some important cause, follow a new spiritual path, be aware of particular hazards, develop a new moral sense.”³⁰ In some cases, diarists may have similar motivations behind their writing, but in many others, as American academic Amy Wink states, “a journal is not some form of assignment written for critics, but rather a form designed to fulfill the writer’s desire to explore her world with writing.”³¹ The influence of postmodernism has changed the way that many critics view autobiography, and the possibility of representing the self. Bunkers and Huff note that as postmodern ideas become more pervasive, “[t]he solidity of a consistent model and the construction of the self as a distinct entity give way

²⁸ Margo Culley, “Introduction to *A Day at a Time: Diary Literature of American Women, from 1764 to 1985*,” *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 220.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

³⁰ Conway, *When Memory Speaks*, p. 16.

³¹ Amy Wink, *She Left Nothing in Particular: The Autobiographical Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Women’s Diaries* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), p. xxii.

to increased emphasis on the multiplicity of self-construction, varying textual strategies, and the location of the diary within cultural frameworks.”³²

Because diaries are seen as less constructed than autobiography proper, there is the temptation to believe that they reveal the untainted “truth” about women’s lives. This tendency can be seen in Lensink’s article about the diary as female autobiography. She compares reading a diary to watching a child playing, writing that “[i]f you can catch her in a private moment, you come close to hearing her real voice; once she knows you are listening, however, that voice becomes adulterated... It still poses as a child, but the private voice was much better.”³³ While the value judgement that Lensink makes about women’s public and private voices is a somewhat troubling one, also questionable is the idea that any writing is a pure and true reflection of reality. As Culley points out, “we must remember that diaries and journals are texts, that is, verbal constructs,” and, as with formal autobiographies, the reader must consider questions of “audience (real or implied), narrative, shape and structure, persona, voice, [and] imagistic and thematic repetition.”³⁴

Postmodernism, autobiographical theory, and cultural and gender studies have opened the door to a serious re-examination of women’s diaries and what scholars in many disciplines can learn from them. All of these areas of study suggest that, while the “factual content” information that women’s diaries may contain about life in a specific place and time is valuable, these documents can also tell the researcher much about what it meant to be a woman, how identity was constructed, and the human need to leave a record, tell a story, and make sense of a life. With this theoretical background then in mind, this chapter now turns to a discussion of why people create diaries and what the

³² Bunkers and Huff, *Inscribing the Daily*, pp. 4-5.

³³ Lensink, “Expanding the boundaries of criticism,” p. 44.

³⁴ Culley, “Introduction to *A Day at a Time*,” p. 217.

researcher or archivist needs to know in order to best understand and interpret these records.

Understanding Women's Diaries

No two women are alike, and neither are their diaries. The type of information that diaries contain ranges across the spectrum of human experience, and can include such areas as history, economics, politics, gender relations, medicine, and culture, to name a few. Thomas Mallon writes that “[t]he history of women is being written as much from their diaries as anything else. And the social history of all people is more detailed than it would otherwise be because of women’s attention to the texture of the everyday.”³⁵ Many researchers find diaries rich and valuable sources of information about the past. They are useful to genealogists and biographers, providing information about families and individuals, and are increasingly studied from a literary perspective as a form of autobiography. There are more potential uses for diaries than archivists can account for, or imagine. It is the responsibility of the archivist to preserve or record as much information about a diary’s context as possible, because it is impossible to predict what aspect of the diary future researchers will consider valuable information.

Although no two diaries are the same, some broad trends relating to the reasons people create diaries, the pragmatic and psychological purposes these records serve, and the forms that they take, can be identified. A researcher’s interpretation and appreciation of a diary can be aided by gender, autobiographical, and postmodern theory, as well as archival theory, including the archival principle of provenance. This principle dictates that all records produced by an individual or organization should be kept together,

³⁵ Mallon, *A Book of One's Own*, p. 19.

eliminating, as American archival educator James O'Toole states, "the necessity of imposing on them predetermined subject categories that may not be entirely fitting."³⁶

While the principle of provenance is certainly very important to archivists for this reason, there are other aspects of provenance that are equally important to understanding records.

The traditional and rather narrow view of provenance, which archivists have typically used, is organizing and describing records so that they are linked to "the single individual or family (for personal archives) or the particular office (for institutional archives) that inscribed, accumulated, and used a body of records."³⁷ However, Nesmith and other archivists have begun to argue that "the origin of records is much more complex," and includes such factors as "the societal and intellectual contexts shaping the actions of the people and institutions who made and maintained the records, the functions the records perform, the capacities of information technologies to capture and preserve information at a given time, and the custodial history of the records."³⁸ The expanded concept of the provenance of a diary therefore includes the individual who created it, her background and social context, and her reasons for keeping a diary. Other important contributions to a diary's provenance are whether it was intended as a public or private document, how it came to be in an archives, and how it is represented by the archivist. Knowing the provenance of a diary will help archivists to judge its authenticity and reliability and help people using the record to better understand and interpret it.

This discussion will be illustrated by references to several diaries held by the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, the Archives of Manitoba, and

³⁶ James M. O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1990), pp. 65-66.

³⁷ Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," p. 35. See also Tom Nesmith, ed. *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*. (Metuchen, 1993) for additional perspectives of the principle of provenance.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. The earliest diary of the examples chosen was written by Englishwoman Emma Caffin Jeffery in 1833, and the most recent by Canadian author and poet Thecla Bradshaw in 1960. The authors come from a variety of backgrounds, both privileged and working class, and include a lady's maid, a missionary, two farm wives, an artistic, unmarried daughter, and a professional writer. Some of the diaries chronicle journeys and life in unfamiliar surroundings, while others describe the daily activities of their writers' households. These diaries differ from one another in form and content, and to best interpret these differences a researcher, or archivist who is appraising or describing these records, needs to consider the reasons why this might be the case.

To understand and make use of a diary in any type of research, one must know something about the person who inscribed the document: who wrote the diary, where did she live, and with what types of activity was she involved? Without this type of background information about the life of the person who wrote the diary, as well as the type of society in which she lived, the reader will have difficulty understanding the significance of what is written. The events, social expectations, or conventions that influenced the writer are often reflected in both the experiences of its creator and the style and content of the diary. The writer may accept or embrace his or her situation, or may use diary writing as a means of resisting otherwise unchangeable circumstances. Awareness of the larger socio-political context in which a diary was written allows the reader to better understand whether the diary is a typical example of life in a certain place and time or if the diary and the life it chronicles are somehow extraordinary.

Emma Caffin Jeffery was a young English woman. She worked as a milliner and dressmaker in London for a few years before being engaged, in 1830, to travel to North America as a lady's maid. She served Catherine Turner McTavish for five years while her husband, John George McTavish, was Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company post at Moose Factory. At Moose Factory Jeffery met John McKay, whom she married in 1835. The couple lived on a farm in Quebec until 1847, when McKay died, leaving Emma with six children under the age of ten. Jeffery's date of death is not known, but a copy of her will is dated 1894. It seems Jeffery made short diary entries on unbound paper daily while at Moose Factory, unfortunately only fragments of this diary from 1833 survive. They are held by the Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), along with several scraps of Jeffery's correspondence and various legal and land documents.³⁹

The University of Manitoba Archives holds a photocopied transcription of Isabella Cooper Coates' diary, which covers the period spanning the days surrounding her twenty-sixth birthday, from 24 September to 28 October 1879. During this time she travelled from York, England, to meet her husband in Manitoba and kept a diary chronicling the journey to her new home.⁴⁰ No further information has been provided about Coates or her life before or after coming to Canada.

Welsh-born Augusta E. Morris journeyed to Canada in 1881 and kept a diary of her experiences over the next two years as she worked for the Church Missionary Society in two remote northern outposts. Morris was the third eldest child in her family; her beloved older sister died in 1878 and her older brother was away at sea. Her father wrote and published hymns for the Anglican Church in Wales. Morris' diary begins with her

³⁹ Hudson's Bay Company Archives (hereafter HBCA), Emma Caffin Jeffery fonds, E.381.

⁴⁰ University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections (hereafter UMA), Isabella Cooper Coates fonds, MSS SC 123, Box 1, Folder 1.

sailing from Liverpool in May 1881, describes her arduous journey to Fort Norman, and her daily life working there as an instructress for one year and at Fort Resolution the next. The diary ends in 1883 when Morris was forced to return to Britain due to ill health. The HBCA holds this one bound volume of Morris' diary, along with some of her letters to her father, and a typed transcription of the records.⁴¹

Mary Louise Kennedy was born in St. Andrew's, Manitoba, in 1861, to a prominent Red River settlement family. She lived with her mother, Eleanor (Cripps) Kennedy, her father, Captain William Kennedy, and her brother, William. She received her early education at home, attended Ms. Davis's School for Young Ladies, and in 1873 was sent to England, where she studied languages and painting. She returned to Manitoba in 1877 and continued her training at the Winnipeg School of Art. She lived with her parents in St. Andrew's until after her father's death, when she and her mother moved to Virden, Manitoba. Kennedy worked as a legal secretary and court reporter there until moving to Winnipeg after the death of her mother in 1908. She passed away in Winnipeg in 1945. The Archives of Manitoba holds a diary that was begun by Mary Kennedy during her holidays in 1882 and 1883, and filled in 1890. This diary is part of the Kennedy Family collection, which also includes correspondence, notebooks, articles and stories, newspaper clippings, photographs, and artworks created or collected by Mary Kennedy and other members of her family.⁴²

The seven volumes of Jennie Maud Little's diaries, which form part of the Archives of the Agricultural Experience collection at the University of Manitoba, contain daily entries between 1 January 1935 and 21 April 1949. The archives has provided

⁴¹ HBCA, Augusta E. Morris fonds, E.78.

⁴² Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AM), Kennedy Family collection, P2343-P2348, MG2 C1-C2, MG14 C1.

researchers with both a family tree and a biographical sketch that describes Little's life, from her birth in Maine in 1866 until her death in Manitoba in 1955. She came from a privileged background, attending a private college in Boston, earning a degree in music, teaching music, and running her own store before moving to Manitoba in 1884. The next year she married Nathan Little of Cypress River, Manitoba. The couple lived in a number of towns and had three children: Harry, Lulu, and Grace. Upon her husband's death in 1920, Little moved in with her daughter Grace's family on the Cameron farm at Neepawa, and her diaries provide a glimpse into daily life in this household.⁴³

Thecla Jean (Robbins) Bradshaw was born in Toronto, where she studied music at the Toronto Conservatory. She moved to Winnipeg in 1946 with her husband, Henry, and two daughters until Henry's death in 1960. After her husband's death, Bradshaw began writing professionally, producing scripts for the National Film Board and Canadian Broadcasting Company, publishing a book of poetry, co-authoring two other works, and becoming editor of *The Northian*, a magazine dedicated to educators working in Aboriginal and northern communities. Bradshaw worked at the University of Saskatchewan, in Saskatoon, for most of the 1960s before returning to Manitoba to take a position with the Department of Tourism. She donated her private papers, including decades worth of diaries, correspondence, research materials, manuscripts, and unpublished poetry to the Archives of Manitoba in 1981, on the condition that some personal material not be available to researchers until after her death. Bradshaw passed away in 2005.⁴⁴

⁴³ UMA, Jennie Maud Little Diaries, MSS SC 125, Box 1, Folder 1.

⁴⁴ AM, Thecla Bradshaw fonds, P288-298, P4072-4074, P5375-5377.

Motivations for Keeping a Diary

In addition to learning all one can about the person who created the diary and the social context in which she lived, understanding the diary as a type of record will help the researcher or archivist appreciate the nuances of the information it contains. One of the most important questions to consider is why a diary was created. People keep diaries for an endless number of reasons, which can vary from author to author, as well as for one author over time. On the surface, many women use their diaries “to record the transactions and processes of their lives,” keeping records of illnesses, menstrual cycles, sales and purchases, and other important daily chores and occurrences.⁴⁵ This is undoubtedly an important function of the diary, but there are less obvious functions that it may serve as well.

Mallon organizes his study of diaries and diarists, which spans continents and centuries, into seven main categories of writer, each with her or his own distinctive motivations for writing a diary. Mallon summarizes these reasons by stating that,

Some [diarists] are chroniclers of the everyday. Others have kept their books only in special times – over the course of a trip, or during a crisis. Some have used them to record journeys of the soul, plan the art of the future, confess the sins of the flesh, lecture the world from beyond the grave. And some of them, prisoners and invalids, have used them not so much to record lives as create them, their diaries being the only world in which they could fully live.⁴⁶

Other authors focus more specifically on the psychological aspects of diary writing, and the roles that this activity can play in helping its creator construct or maintain his or her identity. Gayle Davis, an American professor of Women’s Studies, identifies five primary reasons that the diary writing process was so important to many

⁴⁵ Baiba Berzins, Review of “Spaces in her Day: Australian Women’s Diaries of the 1920s and 1930s,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 26, no. 1, p. 133.

⁴⁶ Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own*, p. xvii.

nineteenth-century American women as they settled the Midwest. The first function diaries served was as a form of “mediation between the past and the present.” Writing in a diary was a way of preserving a record of events for the future. Secondly, these frontier diaries helped women come to terms with their self-perception and fears about a loss of identity in strange and wild surroundings. Whatever “unladylike” work had to be done on a day-to-day basis was easier to tolerate if a woman was able to confirm her Victorian ideals in her private writing. Thirdly, diaries functioned as a substitute for personal contact with other women, whose friendship had been left behind. Writing helped to fight feelings of loneliness and isolation by allowing women to express their thoughts and feelings. Fourthly, Davis sees writing in frontier diaries as a technique that women used to preserve their mental equilibrium. In addition to being a place for women to express themselves, recording events, thoughts, and emotions in a diary helped some women to impose a sense of order and control over their situation. Finally, diary-keeping helped these women to reconcile “feeling insignificant and feeling important, and ultimately ... being forgotten and being somehow remembered.”⁴⁷

In line with this analysis, the form and contents of the diaries written by the women introduced above suggest that they too were created for differing purposes. Jennie Maud Little’s diary entries include information about the weather, planting and harvesting crops and vegetables, buying and selling horses, cattle, and poultry, daily chores, birthdays and other celebrations, and illnesses and deaths. The diaries also contain notes on income and expenses, several newspaper clippings, recipes, home remedies and

⁴⁷ Gayle R. Davis, “Women’s frontier diaries: writing for good reason,” *Women’s Studies* 14 (1987), pp. 6-12.

hints, and addresses of friends and family. The entries are brief and straightforward, and do not provide much detail about particular events. One typical day reads like this:

March 1937

Friday 5

40° above in Winnipeg + last year 5 below on this date. Charlie is driving in to get Mabel to-day. The roads are in bad shape as the snow is going fast. Churning to day + cleaning all the fish left (Jack fish + Red fins).⁴⁸

This style of writing suggests that Little used her diary mainly to record events for her own future reference. Every day has an entry, and on the rare occasion when she has missed writing for a day or two, she has gone back and filled in her activities. There are parts of the diaries where Little has made corrections or added information at a later date. This suggests that for Jennie Little writing was part of her daily routine, and she may have used her diary to help her maintain a sense of control while living as part of her daughter's household. Well accustomed herself to farm life, and surrounded by friends and family, Little did not feel the need to describe her emotions or "inner life" in her diaries.

Emma Jeffrey also describes day-to-day events with little flourish, despite living in severe conditions far from her friends and family. Her entries are brief and often repetitive, describing the weather, arrivals and departures of guests, supplies, and mail, and her activities for the day. A series of days in April, 1833, reads as follows:

Friday 14th

Wind N Thermometer 48 delightful day we are busy preparing the House for visitors Gordy caught a large Sturgeon. Thermometer 42 at Night

Saturday 15th

⁴⁸ UMA, Jennie Maud Little Diaries, MSS SC 125, Box 1, Folder 2. Please note that quotations from diaries are being reproduced as they were originally written, without [sic] being added to note every idiosyncrasy or error in grammar and spelling.

W SE Thermometer fine day we are looking out for the Inland Canoes. Thermometer at night rose between 4 and 5 and made 14 lb. of Butter

Sunday 16th

Wind N Thermometer 65 warm but rather cloudy Thermometer at noon, 67 I took a walk to Mrs. Gladman's and spent 2 hours there after dinner we sat a while at the end of the Lanch looking at some Canadians in a Canoe they were singing alltho' Sunday Thermometer at Night, 62

Writing in her diary may have helped Jeffery maintain a daily routine and given her a sense of control over her life in Moose Factory, but primarily it seems to have served as a record of events for her own future reference.

Isabella Cooper Coates' diary describes her arduous solo journey to Canada in detail, including her thoughts and emotions about events throughout her voyage. In a number of entries, Coates expresses her loneliness and longing for other women with whom she could talk. Writing in her diary seems to have been a substitute for female companionship and a way of expressing herself that may have made her voyage easier to bear. She also is clearly attempting to maintain her self-image as a Victorian lady in unfamiliar, frightening, and rough surroundings, as evidenced by this passage she wrote upon spending a night at a neighbour's cabin:

1879

Oct 23rd

I wasn't sorry when morning came though I couldn't get up till nearly 9 o'clock – though I hadn't undressed at all – I wanted a wash not having had one since we left Winnipeg but the men didn't get out of the house till after 9 ... Mrs. Clink managed down about nine to get our breakfast ready and her little daughter brought me some water in a tin basin to wash in and a torn duster to wipe with. And had to wait about half an hour before I could get a comb to do my wig with.⁴⁹

Thecla Bradshaw kept a daily diary, with entries usually typed on her typewriter late at night, for many years. The Archives of Manitoba holds several volumes, the earliest being from 1960 when she was living in Winnipeg with her children and husband

⁴⁹ UMA, Isabella Cooper Coates fonds, MSS SC 123, Box 1, Folder 1.

in the year before he passed away. Her diary seems to serve a number of purposes in her life; indeed, she says as much in her first entry:

11:30 p.m. Thursday, March 3, 1960

A diary can be many things but it is too late to list them. It is a listening Ear and I care not who the ear belongs to. But the ear is attached to a being infinitely perceptive. I address it daily, momentarily.

Bradshaw's entries include details about the day's activities, the people she met and talked to, her frustrations and fears, and her thoughts on faith and human nature. Sometimes they include poems. Some of her entries read like miniature essays on the human condition. For example, on 7 March 1960 she wrote:

Again and again I am reminded of two poets as I watch Carol's two pet finches in their cage. Isn't it incredible how quickly we (or I) learn through observation of human or animal nature, so slowly otherwise.

People argue over such things: are poets born or made? Is a particular human "born" a carpenter, or an artist, or a religious, a poet, a writer, a musician? I believe so with all my heart. Today most people deny it. And I think those who deny it have denied their own inheritance and settled for jobs as male hairdressers and beauticians, as female executives and judges, as full-time employees doing part-time jobs between coffee breaks and sedatives.

The finches were born (not made) to nest, to reproduce, to sing.⁵⁰

For Bradshaw, her diary was an outlet where she could express emotions without judgement. It seems to have helped foster her creativity and given her a place to get partially developed ideas and poems into paper.

The purpose of some diaries is unclear, or may change over time. Augusta Morris' diary entries begin as relatively brief accounts of daily events as she begins the voyage to Canada and across the country to what is now Northern Ontario, but gradually become longer and more descriptive, although less frequent. Entries made early on in Morris' diary include information about the weather, her travel arrangements, people she met, and

⁵⁰ AM, Thecla Bradshaw fonds, P295, Folder 5.

things she saw. A typical example of her entries while travelling are those written during the journey to Fort Norman in 1881:

July 23rd

We arrived at Green Lake this morning, a week from the time we left Carlton. We have to wait here a few days until the other waggons come on. We are all tired after our long drive over rough roads. They are indeed frightful & scarcely deserve the name. The corduroy bridges are particularly uncomfortable things to drive over. I thought many times that our old buck board would have capsized. I shouldn't like Papa to have seen some of the places I drove through, & across. We are not sorry to rest for a few days, even in our tents. We passed such a pretty lake yesterday. The water was so beautifully clear. We passed a great many small ones & saw lots of loons Wild pigeons, Pelicans &c.

28th

The carts which we have been expecting for some days arrived this morning, & we shall soon be setting off in the boats. Mr. McIntyre has taken us out every day in a canoe which we have enjoyed very much. I bathed one day in the lake. It was not very nice as I didn't fancy the water very much, being full of peculiar green stuff.

After Morris and her female travelling companions part ways, she confesses that she “felt dreadfully lonely without Mrs. S. & Miss Reid particularly as there were no other ladies near me.” She soon reaches her destination, and the form of her diary entries changes. They often go on for several pages, describing her surroundings and activities in great detail. This could have been Morris' way of coping with her seclusion, and the reality that she would be spending the next few years of her life in the wilderness with few comforts or companions. But the changed format could also have been a result of settling into a routine, improved health, and having more time and better conditions under which to write. The entry that Morris wrote on Christmas Day, 1881, gives the reader a clue to her reasons for keeping the diary. It begins, “I am going to write an account of today perhaps in a few years time, if I live, I may like to remember how I spent my first Xmas in the Far North. I have been thinking a great deal of them all at home all day & also of dear Mary & Harry & I am longing very much to hear from them all.”⁵¹ Although

⁵¹ HBCA, Augusta E. Morris fonds, E.78/1.

she states that her reason for writing is to help her remember the events of the day, these lines also hint at her homesickness, fear of dying, and need to leave a written trace of her activities.

The style of writing in Mary Kennedy's diary also changes dramatically between the beginning and end of the volume, which were written nearly eight years apart. Kennedy's early entries were written while she vacationed with her friends, the Bannatyne family, in Portland, Maine. They are carefree, light-hearted accounts of her daily activities, written seemingly for her own amusement and future recollection, or perhaps to help her tell her parents and friends about the vacation when she returned home. Kennedy's writing is small and neat, with two lines of her text fit into each lined space on the page, as though she thinks the volume will not be large enough to hold all she has to say if she takes up any more space. In August 1882, she wrote this way:

Wednesday 9

A lovely, rather sultry day I ran down to the sands as soon as I was dressed + found Annie + her father watching the fisherman hauling in his boat load of crabs + lobsters. After breakfast Laura the children + I walked down the wood road past where Mr. Hinckley + a lady were sketching the little old house on a hill. We bowed to him very coolly + sat down at a little distance in the forest to sketch + write. All three of the others soon dropped off + I was left alone. I tried two or three different spots + returned home back of the old house - where I sat a while then I sat not far from the sketchers where the raspberry bushes were thick - I wrote a while then went in. Mrs. Bannatyne lectured me on going alone into the woods. When I got home we went in for a good bathe. We idled about all afternoon. I wandered out on the rocks alone and picked some shells, tho, there are not many pretty ones here.

Kennedy's daily entries end on 7 September as she leaves Portland to head back to Canada. There are two weeks of entries written between 30 September and 14 October 1882 while she spent some time in Toronto, but upon her return to Manitoba the entries taper off; November and December 1882 are summarized on one page, and January to November 1883 on the next. The entries begin again in June 1890, and the content and

style of writing is now very different. The handwriting is larger, taking up a full line, and less careful. Most entries are relatively brief and deal with daily chores, visitors, and events at the church. Others reveal the emotional turmoil Kennedy was experiencing. In June 1890 she wrote as follows:

Monday 30

Up at 7.30. Both cows waiting for me. It rained during the night. Such a refreshing shower. I went out and gardened for some time. It grew oppressive. After dinner I went over to the churchyard + put some [portulacia?] on dear Papa's grave. Went into the church + prayed for some time + felt much refreshed. For the last month I have felt so very alone + forsaken. Surely it is my own fault. Ah me I cannot write my thoughts coldly down they are struggling for light + air. Sometimes it feels enough to send me almost beside myself.

Less than a week later, on Sunday 6 July, part of her diary entry read that “[t]his has been one of the happiest days of my life, at least the most blessed, quietly happy. Christ has come so near me. I do pray to be better. To forget myself. I am too unsatisfied + discontented + I have so much.” It seems Kennedy was struggling with her faith, and possibly a crush on the local Minister – she makes a note of the days she sees Mr. Barber and writes about him often. A line in her entry of 10 July makes the reader wonder what exactly was taking place in Kennedy's life that was not being written in the diary, but was clearly causing her anxiety. She wrote, “Woke up feeling most lonely. A suffocating feeling ... Went into the Grove a little then over to the church where - - - I prayed + asked earnestly for grace.”⁵² The personal character revealed in the diary's later entries is virtually unrecognizable from the untroubled young woman writing several years earlier. The diary has become her confessor: a place for Kennedy to recount her “sins,” her fears, and her shortcomings. If the diary itself is not judgemental, its writer certainly is.

⁵² AM, Kennedy Family collection, P2347, Folder 7.

The Audience of a Diary

The audience for whom a diary has been written will have an impact on the style of writing: what is included, and just as importantly, what is not. Australian archivist Adrian Cunningham examines some of the issues surrounding the publication of personal records such as diaries and letters in “The Mysterious Outside Reader.” He considers “the possibility that the dictates and expectations of posterity are an integral influence on the recordkeeping practices of many individual recordkeepers.” Cunningham rejects the eminent British archivist Hilary Jenkinson’s dictate that records, in order to be authentic and thus worthy of being considered as archives, must in their creation be “spontaneous, natural and impartial and must never be created with a view to posterity,” arguing that “records are rarely so unselfconsciously pure ... and that many records are consciously created for audiences which may not be immediately apparent.” According to Cunningham, perceiving these hidden motivations and intended audiences is one of the reasons that archivists must preserve and provide as much context for the record as possible. The hidden purposes of the record-keeper do not lessen the value of the record, but must be taken into consideration when the record is being interpreted.⁵³

In “‘I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” English professor Lynn Bloom examines the differences between truly private diaries, and those that are created with an audience in mind. She argues convincingly that, despite the popular conception of diaries as private documents, “[v]ery often, in either the process of composition over time, or in the revision and editing that some of the most engaging diaries undergo, these superficially private writings become unmistakably

⁵³ Adrian Cunningham, “The Mysterious Outside Reader,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May 1996), pp. 133-134.

public documents, intended for an external readership.” This audience is not always made explicit, but the form and scope of a diary will often make it clear whether or not the writer was making entries with a real or imagined reader in mind. In terms of purpose, scope, and style, truly private diaries are those “written with neither art nor artifice” to help the author keep track of things like the weather, receipts and expenditures, visits with friends and family, and both routine and exciting events in the community. The form of private diaries tends towards relatively brief dated entries, which include similar information day after day. According to Bloom, in the truly private diary, most events go “largely uninterpreted except for such comments as ‘had a nice evening.’”⁵⁴

The structure of this type of diary is chronological, with no foreshadowing and little retrospection, and no intentional integration of theme, subject, or character. The author is not concerned with presenting any particular image of herself, and does not analyse or describe in any depth the character of the other people who are mentioned in the diary. Private diaries often lack enough detail to make them understandable to a reader unfamiliar with their context. “Someone else has to identify the people, places, and allusions, explain the meaning of actions and events,” states Bloom, “for the authors do not.”⁵⁵ This type of additional context is necessary to enable the reader to make sense of truly private diaries; this is what distinguishes them from private diaries that are created with a “public” audience beyond the self in mind.

Jennie Maud Little and Emma Jeffery’s diaries are truly private accounts of daily life on the farm and at Moose Factory, written primarily for their own reference. The

⁵⁴ Lynn Z. Bloom, ““I Write for Myself and Strangers”: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 23-26.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

entries are written in a straightforward manner and contain the same type of information from day-to-day, notes on the weather, daily chores, and visits made and received, because these are the things that Little and Jeffery found important to record. There is no sense of story-telling; neither author engages in character or plot development, and what the reader can learn about their personalities has to be inferred from the actions they describe. From Jeffery's entry of 7 August 1833, and other details she has written in her diary, the reader can surmise that she had a strong constitution and was not easily shaken by events, or was perhaps used to Mrs. McTavish suddenly taking ill:

Wind SW Thermometer 31 64. fine morning. After breakfast Mrs. McTavish proposed going to the swamp behind the Factory berry picking. We were not long gone before a heavy shower came on which wet us through. This was followed by many more. Mrs. McTavish began to find the ill effects of wet clothes and feel so suddenly ill that it was with difficulty she could walk home with my assistance... I am happy to say she recovered after an hour.

Without the background information provided by the archives, we would know virtually nothing about the people who are mentioned in Jeffery or Little's diaries and most of the entries would be very difficult to comprehend. For example, on 29 March 1939 Little wrote this:

The boys plowed up the snow in the lane to make it melt faster. Ed + Mr. Burnash went to a sale of farm machinery + horses near Eden this afternoon. The boys are bringing loads of sheaves from the stacks. Mabel washed to-day. Mrs. Cameron and I was quilting this morning + after dinner. It is hard to do this one. So thick a blanket in between + sugar sacks for the back of blocks.

In contrast to these records, Bloom argues that many seemingly private diaries are "essentially freestanding public documents, artfully shaped to accommodate an audience." The scope of this second type of diary is much wider than the truly private diary; it can include an enormous variety of subjects, as it is a record of the writer's reactions to the world around her. The form and technique of "public" private diaries is much more varied, and they are often written with an overall narrative structure in mind.

There is a frequent emphasis on themes, characters, and scenery that helps provide enough context for the reader to be able to understand the entries. A final difference between the two types of diary is that “in public private diaries, the author creates and presents a central character, herself, as seen through a central consciousness, also herself.”⁵⁶ This self-conscious or psychological dimension adds critical value to the diary, even if, as Cunningham notes, such self-consciousness flies in the face of traditional Jenkinsonian notions of pure or uncontaminated archives.

The diary kept by Isabella Cooper Coates has many characteristics that suggest it was created to be (then or eventually) a public document. It is nicely written in a conversational style, and it seems that it was intended to be shared with friends and family back home or passed on to Coates’ descendants as a record of her journey. The diary contains the writer’s reactions to what she sees around her and her reflections on events that have occurred. Coates’ writing conveys a strong sense of her self-image and the way she interprets others’ reactions to her. The diary distinctly tells the story of a young woman undertaking a voyage and overcoming illness and hardship to finally arrive at her destination and begin her new life. Her surroundings are described in some detail, and the reader, without knowing anything about the author, can get a sense of what she was going through and how she must have felt. One example of this is an entry written as she took the train from Montreal to Emerson:

Oct 10th

My cough has been dreadfully bad all night but my chest is not so bad this morning. It’s a very fine day after yesterday – It was dreadfully hot and close – everybody with fans both men and women. But it rained last night so it makes it nice and cool. Nearly everybody travels in the Pullman car. There are 8 or 9 at least with every train and each car has 26 or 28 double berths in and all the cars are full. I was determined not to come in a Pullman car to save that expense but the Nobles wouldn’t hear of it. They said it wasn’t safe or fit for

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 28, 31.

me to be alone in the train. They walked through with me just to see what it was like. It's worse than the third class railway carriages Huddersfield way. The fearful language we heard the few minutes we were in was something dreadful, so many men drunk and most of them smoking and spitting – so what would it be like when I was by myself at night. There are never more than one or two cars to a train – all the others are Pullmans. We got to St. Paul and Pacific about one o'clock. Have had to wait till 5 o'clock for a train. It has seemed a long day having such a miserable waiting room and always a lot of squealing babies. I counted 6 in long frocks never mention all the others. Whatever else they lack in America they are overstocked with children – that's what I think.⁵⁷

Thecla Bradshaw's diary also seems to have been created with posterity in mind. She introduces the "characters" who appear in her entries, and also establishes a strong narrative identity through her writing, giving the reader a good sense of how she saw herself. One entry, that of 4 March 1960, demonstrates both of these qualities:

Last night Harry and I went to the symphony concert with the Laidlaws and the Longs. Truly, they are among the only "nice respectable neighbours" I find interesting. They are happy people, happy in their family lives. They do not lose their vitality in their day to day existence as most suburbanites seem to. They have enquiring minds but do not disdain [sic] those who have not. Gordon Laidlaw uses his crutches with ease, almost with humour. He says he has been reading about "hidden splendour" and he has it always in his eyes. They seem to share a secret, the Laidlaws, one without smugness or conceit. Is it happiness in love? I think so.

... I write of what I have seen and experienced. And that is why I must travel since I learn only through seeing and experience. My pen is dry, my money limited. How may I travel to other countries? Grants, donations, scholarships? Never. I'm too lazy to apply for them. By writing, earning, saving and determination only. I've not the brains or wit to tussle with the scholars who hold the whip. I cannot haggle and I never learned young how to "make money." How does one make money? By learning young what to avoid and what to demand. By being courageous, I suppose. I am only courageous when I am desperate and desperation dogs my days continuously. But desperation does not make money.

Faith is my ruination and my salvation; faith in Providence who provides me with a tent, a grub box and feet that will travel where angels fear to. If I had less faith perhaps I would use my wits and apply for scholarships. But I am not envious of those with wits whose faith is slim.⁵⁸

Bradshaw creates a picture of herself as an intrepid journalist, who is willing to fight for the underdog and resist conformity. Her diaries tell the story of her life, with major

⁵⁷ UMA, Isabella Cooper Coates fonds, MSS SC 123, Box 1, Folder 1.

⁵⁸ AM, Thecla Bradshaw fonds, P295, Folder 5.

themes being her struggle to succeed as a writer, despite all the obstacles thrown into her path, her need to travel, and the feeling of suffocation that develops when she cannot. Bradshaw donated her papers to the Archives of Manitoba, on the condition that access to the diaries and correspondence be restricted until after her death, so it is likely that even as she was writing her entries she imagined them one day being read by others.

As the format of their entries evolves over time, the potential audience of Mary Kennedy and Augusta Morris's diaries seems to change as well. Mary Kennedy's diary entries from 1882 and 1883 are not explicitly addressed to anyone, but provide a good deal of detail about her activities and surroundings and do not contain any deeply personal information that she would have wanted to keep private. A portion of her entry of 12 August 1882 reads:

Saturday 12

I was as usual up early + out on the sands for a walk before breakfast it was a delicious morning + I enjoyed it thoroughly. No one was out + I walked almost as far as Harriet Beecher Stowe's. Laura, Bob + I drove in the tram to Old Orchard to buy books etc. Laura went in to see Mrs. Clarke while Bob + I took a turn on the beach then waited on the balcony for Laura. Old Orchard is full of people, they just swarm. Ladies + gentleman run down from the hotels in their bathing costumes + plunge right in. Some gentlemen swim splendidly. Hundreds stand on the sands to see them + phaetons drive up and down. Altogether it is a very gay scene. The ladies dress beautifully Mr + Mrs. B the same morning drove to Saco + Biddeford in a phaeton. Mrs. B was enchanted with the scenery + lovely road. They only returned as we had sat down to dinner. Half an hour after Laura + I went in + had a lovely bathe. I wore a green bathing costume trimmed with white braid. Very short tunic + tight trousers. I always wear my waterproof down to the water's edge then leave it on the beach till I come out.

A reader can imagine Kennedy coming home from her vacation and reading or showing this entry to her friends or her parents as she told them about her summer adventures. This is not so with her 1890 entries, some of which contain her deeply personal thoughts and feelings. It seems Kennedy struggled even to write them down, and would have been unlikely to allow anyone else to read this later portion of the diary.

Augusta Morris' diary entries at the beginning of the volume are short and contain relatively little detail about the places she passes through or the people she meets. They are not addressed to anyone, and seem to be written for Morris' own recollection. This suddenly changes on 8 September 1881. On that day, Morris' long description of Fort Norman and the Aboriginal population who live nearby and visit the fort is clearly written for someone else. She states:

The Indians came in large numbers, with their furs, dried and fresh meat &c., to the Fort at the end of September & for a short time the place was rather more lively, as they kept coming to the house at all hours of the day to trade or to look at pictures. They dress principally in skins, generally Moose, sometimes very prettily made & elaborately trimmed with bead or porcupine quill work, both of which they do very nicely. When new these moose skin garments look very pretty, but when they have been worn for sometime, & seldom if ever washed I can't say that there is much to be admired in them. Their white sheepskin jackets also look very nice & comfortable. You musn't think they are like English sheepskins, for they are not covered with wool, but with rather long white hair. Their Moose skin jackets, without scraping the fur off are also very much worn & look very nice. While they were here they lived, of course in their camps & there was one very sick man & a boy whom Mrs. B. used to visit & give medicine [sic]. I went too once or twice. I need not describe because you have often seen pictures & read descriptions of them. They have a fire in the middle, & are generally very smoky & there the family or families sit or lie down all round dogs included.⁵⁹

Perhaps Morris planned to mail her diary back to her family and friends in Wales when it was complete, or to give it to them when she returned home. She also could have decided to use it to keep a record of the work she was doing to show to the Church Missionary Society upon her return, although her inclusion as well of personal thoughts about her family and departed sister make this a less likely possibility. Perhaps she viewed her extensive reflections as a first or rough draft to summarize in reports or letters, written later.

⁵⁹ HBCA, Augusta E. Morris fonds, E.78/1.

The Custodial History and Representation of a Diary

The custody that a diary passes through on its way to an archives and any other material that accompanies it, or indeed which is not passed along, also forms part of its provenance. This is because the record that arrives in the archives is not necessarily the same as the record that was originally created. The custodial history of records “may result in many reorderings, winnowings, and even doctorings of them.”⁶⁰ If a diary is passed from generation to generation, it will likely be read repeatedly and become part of the family history, and the book itself may be seen as a treasure. The family of the writer may not wish to part with the original and may decide to provide an archives with a transcript or photocopy instead. If knowledge of its provenance is incomplete, the record that ends up in an archives may raise more questions than it answers and be open to misinterpretation.

The diaries used as examples in this chapter each have their own custodial histories and have arrived at archives in varying conditions and with differing amounts of accompanying material. Jennie Maud Little’s seven diaries were donated to the University of Manitoba Archives (UMA) by her grandson, Charles Cameron. The diaries begin fifteen years after Little moved in with her daughter and end six years before her death. This raises the question of what happened to the diaries she kept before this time, because her habit of writing seems firmly entrenched in the first volume available. There is also no indication of whether or not she continued writing diary entries after 1949, and if not, why she stopped. The diaries are the originals, are continuous for the extended time period that they cover, and the small volumes are in a condition that is likely similar

⁶⁰ Nesmith, “Seeing Archives,” p. 35.

to that in which their creator left them, with no pages visibly removed, no sections made unreadable, and no annotations added.

The version of Isabella Coates' diary held by the UMA is a photocopy of a transcript made by Joyce Van Koughnet, who donated the fonds along with her husband. The description of the diary does not indicate the relationship of the donors to Coates, or describe how they came to have the diary. The three diary entries written after Coates has moved in with her husband are very brief, and then stop completely. The reader has no way of knowing if Coates stopped keeping a diary altogether, if her style changed from a travel diary to the type of record-keeping system kept by women like Little, or if future diaries were lost or destroyed, or her descendants have others but considered them unworthy of an archives. Because this diary is a transcript of the original, there is no way of knowing if its contents are complete or accurate. This raises serious issues for a researcher depending on this document as evidence, because the archivist cannot verify its authenticity or reliability. If archivists were more cognizant of the value of having answers to such questions, they might ask them more often of donors when the information might still be available, and record the results in archival descriptions and finding aids.

Augusta Morris' diary was given to the HBCA in 1945 by the National Provincial Bank, Ltd. of London, the sole executor of Miss Morris' estate. It is accompanied by some of her correspondence with her father, written while she was in North America, and a typed transcript of the diary and letters. There is no record of whether this transcript was prepared by the Archives, a researcher, or Morris herself. It is interesting to compare the transcript with the handwritten diary to see what the researcher would miss if he or

she was only provided with the copy and not the original. The researcher working only from a transcript would not see the handwriting or spacing of the original, or the browned edges of the pages, and occasional ink and water spots. She or he would also be unaware of the places in the later diary entries where Morris crossed out what she had written and rephrased it, and would have no idea that between pages at the back of the volume were wildflowers pressed in a scrap of newspaper and labelled “June 6th 1882 – Fort Norman – The 1st flowers.” Also not included in the transcript are Slave dialect translations of the Lord’s Prayer and Apostles’ Creed and a short Aboriginal vocabulary that Morris wrote in the back of her diary. One wonders whether Coates’ diary may have contained similar additions that were not included in the version presented to the Archives.

The custodial history of Thecla Bradshaw’s diaries is the most completely known, as she herself donated them to the archives, but these records are, paradoxically, also the ones most likely to have been edited before coming to the archives. Because her diaries are typed on loose paper or hole-punched and inserted into binders, individual pages could easily have been removed without leaving a trace that would alert readers to these omissions. Bradshaw was aware she was writing for posterity and her diaries would one day be read by others, and this may have shaped what she did and did not include.

A final, but not unimportant, aspect of a diary’s provenance is how it is represented by the archivist. As Nesmith states,

In description and reference work, archivists, in effect, help decide what of this extensive and complex body of information about how the records came to be counts as meaningful context for launching readings of the records by archival researchers, or what contextual information counts as meaningful to an understanding of the evidence.⁶¹

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 36.

Archivists also interpret the significance of the records they acquire and pass this judgement along to those using the archives. Inevitably, the archivist plays a role in “creating” the record through these interventions, through the questions she or he asks, and does not ask, and thus contributes to its provenance by creating new knowledge about the record and its history. By thinking about who makes, keeps, and sometimes destroys diaries and why, by placing diaries in their context and describing their provenance in greater detail, and by being aware of how archival intervention shapes the record, archivists can better fulfil their roles as custodians and creators of social memory.

As the preceding examples demonstrate, the diary is a highly adaptable genre of record. Yet the diary is now evolving in response to changes in society, technology, and women’s lives. Electronic communications have become pervasive in society, and in many situations digital versions of traditional media exist alongside, or have replaced, paper-based forms of communications in day-to-day life. Michael Piggott recognizes this change, where writers now often “instantly share their diaries with the world,” and that this challenge “awaits a serious and coordinated response,” from archivists.⁶² To this problem, the thesis now turns.

⁶² Piggott, “The Diary,” p. 88.

CHAPTER TWO

WEBLOGS AND THEIR CREATORS

We will remain numbed and paralyzed by our merciless, automated, electronic media if we go on thinking that all we have there are bits of a jigsaw, the same old text and image moving a bit faster and taking up rather less room, to which we must make some technological adjustments to stay in business.¹

Archivist Hugh Taylor's words seem as relevant now as they were when he wrote them almost two decades ago. Archivists have yet to fully come to terms with electronic records, and this is perhaps more starkly the case in the area of personal records than it is in institutional and governmental contexts.² What Taylor suggested was not a technical adjustment while maintaining the strategies of paper-based record keeping, but a complete shift of the archival mindset if the profession were to flourish in the then on-coming digital age. The idea of the archives as a jigsaw puzzle no longer serves where archivists find a finite number of stable fixed pieces (documents) and fit them into a firm,

¹ Hugh A. Taylor, "Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?" *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88), pp. 13-14.

² Adrian Cunningham, for one, comments on the marginalization of personal records in archival practice in general, and particularly in the area of electronic records discourse. See Adrian Cunningham, "Beyond the Pale? The 'flinty' relationship between archivists who collect the private records of individuals and the rest of the archival profession," *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May 1996), p. 22.

single frame (archival fonds or series). Now the pieces are far from stable, ever changing, existing in multiple orders, with no set frame in which to fit. Taylor asserted that the digital world is not simply a more complex or faster puzzle, but something entirely new.

In this new digital reality, one issue that has received almost no attention in the archival community thus far, although it is much debated in technology and media circles, is the weblog, usually shortened as “blog.” A few archivists have recognized that weblogs are a growing phenomenon and have begun to consider possible ways for archives to face their distinctive challenges. In 2005, American archival studies student Catherine O’Sullivan published an award-winning paper that lays out some of the issues surrounding blogs, and suggests possible roles that archives might play in their preservation, and the implications that the failure to do so would have for society.³ This chapter will explore further the challenges introduced by O’Sullivan, while also examining issues of gender and societal value in relation to weblogs and suggesting that these factors have additional implications for how archivists should approach their archival appraisal. Hugh Taylor’s words ring true; archivists will remain numbed and paralyzed if they attempt to manage weblogs with methods developed in the world of paper-based diaries.

Archives preserve diaries for many reasons; they can “be mined for information about the writer’s life and times,” or used as traditionally by historians “as a means of fleshing out historical accounts.” Increasingly, however, as noted in the last chapter, diaries are being used by many different disciplines in new ways. They have become more than “a research tool for historians;” diaries can also serve as “a therapeutic

³ Catherine O’Sullivan, “Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them,” *The American Archivist* 68 (Spring/Summer 2005), pp. 53-73.

instrument for psychologists, a repository of information about social structures and relationships for sociologists, and a form of literature and composition for rhetoricians and literary scholars.”⁴ In the twenty-first century, these dimensions of diary-making and subsequent uses are being transformed as a growing number of people are creating their diaries electronically and posting them online to the internet as weblogs.

Defining Weblogs

As with traditional diaries, there is some disagreement over how to define a weblog.⁵ The most basic definition, and the one it seems most scholars have accepted, is that weblogs are “frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence.”⁶ It is also generally accepted that weblogs “are funny things,” because, “[l]ike no other communicative form, they blur the distinction between what is public and what is private, between the individual and the group, between fact and fiction.”⁷

Weblogs can be created a number of different ways. The first weblogs, created in the early 1990s, were hand-coded by their creators using HTML (HyperText Markup Language) and posted online, similar to other webpages. This is a time-consuming and tricky process that effectively prevented anyone without technical expertise from

⁴ Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds., *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 1.

⁵ The term “weblog” was first coined by Jorn Barger in December 1997. Hugh Hewitt, *Blog: Understanding the information revolution that’s changing your world* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), p. 67. It was popularized in an essay by Cameron Barrett in January 1999, and shortened to “blog” after Peter Merholz began pronouncing it “wee-blog” later that year. Rebecca Blood, *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining your Weblog* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 2002), p. 18.

⁶ Susan C. Herring, Lois Ann Scheidt, Elijah Wright and Sabrina Bonus, “Weblogs as a bridging genre,” *Information Technology & People* 18, no. 2 (2005), p. 142.

⁷ Robert MacDougall, “Identity, Electronic Ethos, and Blogs: A Technologic Analysis of Symbolic Exchange on the New News Medium,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 4 (December 2005), p. 575.

publishing a weblog. Around the mid-1990s, several commercial web authoring applications, such as Adobe SiteMill, Microsoft FrontPage, and Macromedia Dreamweaver, became available. This made the creation of weblogs somewhat easier, but they still required more time and effort than most people were willing to invest. In 1999 the weblog-creating environment was revolutionized with the launch of a weblog-hosting service called Pitas. This software allowed people to create their own weblogs quickly and easily by entering text into a box and clicking a button. This was followed shortly by Blogger, and many other similar, easy-to-use, online weblog-editing programs. Today, weblog authors can choose from around one-hundred different weblog-editing programs, which take two basic forms: hosted and stand-alone. The first type consists of software that resides on a centralized blog server controlled by the hosting service. Weblog creators can access the host website from any computer with an internet connection to update their blog. The second type of weblog-editing program is similar to those used to create traditional websites, with the weblog creator installing the blog-editing software, either on his or her own computer server or on a commercial web-host's server. Basic modes of each type of weblog-editing program are often available for free; Blogger, LiveJournal, and MySpace all offer free, hosted, weblog-creating services, and Movable Type and Wordpress.org are two popular free stand-alone programs. Weblogs created using either type of software will have a distinct domain name (*myweblog.com*), which sometimes also incorporates the hosting program's name (*myweblog.blogspot.com*), and serves as the weblog's "address" on the internet. Weblog editing and hosting programs have paved the way for anyone with access to a computer and the internet to create very

easily their own weblog, and led to an astronomical jump in the number of weblogs in existence.⁸

Some commentators see weblogs as an electronic version of the paper diary, while others view them as something altogether new and different. Rebecca Blood, author of *The Weblog Handbook*, argues that weblogs are a genre unique to the internet rather than an extension of traditional diary-keeping. This has to do with her perspective and definition of weblogs. In addition to the basic definition above, Blood asserts that weblogs are distinguished from other types of publishing by the inclusion of links to other material on the web.⁹ She sees the precursors to weblogs in static internet homepages and their evolution in the mid-1990s to include lists of links to other websites that their creators found interesting or informative. This enthusiasm for posting links happened as the internet grew and it became increasingly difficult to find reliable information, before the existence and then acceptance of powerful search engines like Google.

Blood identifies three different types of weblogs: filter weblogs, blogs, and notebooks. The first type to develop was the “filter” weblog, in which the editor collects links to other information on the internet and occasionally provides his or her commentary about the link. Some of these filter weblogs focus on a specific subject, like the warblogs that sprung up around the time of the invasion of Iraq or the poliblogs that flourished during the run-up to the American presidential election in 2004, while others provide links to whatever their creator finds worthy of sharing: music, news stories,

⁸ For a discussion of the pros and cons of different weblog-editing programs, see Suzanne Stefanac, *Dispatches from Blogistan: A Travel Guide for the Modern Blogger* (Berkeley: New Riders, 2007), pp. 105-116.

⁹ Rebecca Blood, *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining your Weblog* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 2002), p. 18.

shopping bargains they find online, other weblogs, or an infinite number of other possibilities. Some filter blogs are collaborative efforts, with a number of contributors adding links and providing their views.

One interesting example of a collaborative filter weblog is called *Dust My Broom*. It has been in existence since May 2004, and is contributed to on a daily basis by four people from diverse backgrounds living in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario who seem to share a love of nature and an animosity towards mainstream politics. Most posts contain a link to or excerpt from a political news story, along with a brief commentary by the person who posted it. Others contain links to video or audio clips, often of a political nature, but sometimes to an Anne Murray song or a playlist of classic blues tunes. Occasionally contributors will post photographs that they have taken of snow-covered landscapes, freshly-baked brownies, or attempts at home plumbing repair (and its bloody aftermath).¹⁰

A second type of weblog gradually developed, as people began posting pieces that were not centered around links to other information on the web, but rather related to their own lives. These are what Blood, and many others, refer to as “blogs.” This is somewhat confusing, since blog is a subcategory or type of weblog, which are also generically called blogs. This type of weblog became popular in 1999, when the aforementioned weblog-editing and hosting programs were first introduced. Some blogging programs provide a static page where authors can include a profile with information about themselves and their interests. These pages, along with “tags” – subject descriptors assigned to posts by their author – help people searching for blogs find those that are of the most interest to them.

¹⁰ *Dust My Broom*, www.dustmybroom.com (accessed 24 March 2007).

An illustration of a “typical” blog in this second category is that created by a 31-year-old former Winnipegger who writes under the pseudonym Sarcasma. Her blog, *Caterwauling for Dollars*, can be found on the popular weblog-hosting site, LiveJournal. In her profile, Sarcasma jokes about just how average her blog is, noting “I tend to go on about work, music, pop culture, books, the idiocy of people in general -- and see, that just sounds like *every other human who ever had a journal ever in the history of the Internet.*”

The average entry is something like the following:

13 March 2007 @ 11:23 pm

Food wars

I made tapioca pudding yesterday, because I had really been craving some while I was sick and because tapioca pudding is delicious. Unfortunately, tapioca pudding also involves standing by the stove going *whisk whisk whisk* for 15 minutes, so I had to wait till I was better to make it. Irony!

However, it turned out really weird. It's really solid. There's more pudding base than tapioca bits, and the pudding base is strangely gluelike. I don't know if I screwed it up somehow or if it's because I bought a different brand of tapioca than the one I'm used to, but it's very sad.

In happier news, I made old-fashioned icebox cookies the other day and spiced them with the usual suspects (cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger) plus a ton of freshly-ground cardamom and they were delicious. They stuck to the pan like a mofo, though, and they spread out way more than I would have expected, so really what I made was a delicious cardomom-flavoured giant flat pan thing. But it was tasty! Next time less butter.

I've been reading Questionable Content archives and breakfast foods come up a lot. I'm really jonesing for a freezer waffle with shitloads of butter and syrup right now. That's a mighty specific craving, and even though I have a waffle iron I doubt I could recreate the eggy chewiness of a freezer waffle if I tried.

God, sometimes I wonder why I have a mild case of "food issues" and a tendency toward chunkdom all the way back to childhood, and then I look at paragraphs like the above and wonder no more. Mmmmm, freezer waffles.¹¹

Sarcasma generally updates her blog three to four times a week with stories about her days, her cats, the occasional recipe, and the subjects mentioned in her profile. Like many

¹¹ *Caterwauling for Dollars*, <http://sarcasma.livejournal.com/> (accessed 24 March 2007).

other bloggers, she occasionally posts her answers to “memes” – lists of questions that circulate from one person to another around the internet – through email or weblogs.

“Notebooks” are the third type of weblog that Blood identifies. This type of weblog is similar to the blog, in that the writer’s personality and his or her reaction to the outside world are the primary focus, but the entries in notebooks tend to be longer, more focused, and more carefully edited than blog entries. Notebooks read more like a series of essays than a collection of off-the-cuff remarks. Like filters, both blogs and notebooks are interactive; writers link to one another to form virtual communities, and many host sites allow readers the option of commenting on the original postings, or in turn continually on preceding and on-going commentaries.

One notebook weblog worth attention is that written by Flying Gypsy on the popular networking site, MySpace. She is a 28-year-old woman who lives in Winnipeg and is devoted to several New Age movements; at the top of her interests list are “[w]riting, Reiki, organic living, smudging, the electric feeling in the air before a storm, guilt free naps, inspiring literature, art & music.” Here is one short example that illustrates how the posts in notebooks differ from those written by bloggers like Sarcasma who was cited earlier.

Thursday, July 27, 2006

first kiss...

Current mood: nostalgic

I remember my first kiss...I think I was 5 or 6. His name was Charles. He wasn't from around here but was visiting a relative on my street. We were playing hide and go seek with neighborhood kids, he found me and stared at me for a long time before moving closer. I took steps backwards until my back was against the fence. He looked so serious and intense as he moved right up against me and kissed me. When Charles left I wrote about him in my diary a lot. I drew red hearts on pink and blue paper. Still to this day, I find

myself falling for men who are unavailable, who are leaving soon, who can make me want to take steps backwards.¹²

Flying Gypsy's entries are often poetic, introspective, tell stories from her past, or are written in the form of letters to an unnamed addressee.

Blood distinguishes blogs and notebooks from online journals, which have been posted on the internet since the late 1980s, and thus considerably longer than the weblog form has been in existence. Online journals, she states, do not contain links and "are analogous to paper journals, with the sole difference that they are published for the world to see. Online journalers may keep a record of events, explore their inner world, or do any of the things that journalers have traditionally done with pen and paper." She contrasts this to blogs, where the entries are shorter and the blogger is "seemingly striving for communication more than self-enlightenment," and notebooks, which "tend to be less a record of external events than a record of ideas," and are less likely to be arranged chronologically, and of course blogs and notebooks are interactive, with commentaries and discussion between readers and creator, whereas the original web journals were one-way monologues.¹³

These distinctions, which Blood acknowledges are somewhat arbitrary, nonetheless betray her narrow understanding of how and why people keep diaries and as a result lead her to overemphasize the differences between paper diaries and their online counterparts. She believes that "the weblog is infinitely malleable and may be adapted to almost any end,"¹⁴ but does not seem to understand that the same can be said for aspects of the traditional diary. Diaries can be a record of external events or of the writer's

¹² *Epic Spew*, http://www.myspace.com/make_herbal_tea_not_war (accessed 24 March 2007). This MySpace user's profile has since been set to "friends only" and is no longer visible to the public.

¹³ Blood, *The Weblog Handbook*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

innermost thoughts and emotions. They may help the writer solidify her self-identity, maintain her mental equilibrium, and battle feelings of loneliness and isolation, but they can also be a purely practical place to record the weather, business transactions, births and deaths, and other important or mundane events. Perhaps most importantly, Blood assumes that traditional diaries are private documents, whereas weblogs are starkly public. This is a common assumption, but is not necessarily always the case. Most weblog publishing programs have privacy options so that the creator can control who is able to view his or her blog. Some of these controls require readers to know a password to unlock hidden blog content, while other programs give blog authors the option of listing email addresses or screen names of readers who are allowed to view their posts. While millions of blogs are publicly available, many of these have a very limited number of readers, or what one study refers to as “nanoaudiences.”¹⁵ As for traditional diaries, as discussed in the previous chapter, Lynn Bloom has put forward a strong argument that many should actually be considered public documents, whether they are to be shared with friends and family or read by descendants after the writer’s death, whether that was the intention of the writer or not.¹⁶

Blood’s assertion that the weblog has no paper antecedent is thus left to rely solely on the distinction that weblogs must contain links. Even this distinction is tenuous; as discussed in the previous chapter, many diaries contain newspaper clippings, programs of events, recipes, and references to items that the author read or lectures or sermons that she attended. While these are not hypertext links in the technological sense that Blood

¹⁵ J. Henning, *The Blogging Iceberg* (4 October 2003), <http://www.perseus.com/blogsurvey/thebloggingiceberg.html> (accessed on 4 November 2006).

¹⁶ Lynn Z. Bloom, ““I Write for Myself and Strangers”: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 23-37.

intends, they do link the diary to other sources in the outside world, and may be considered a prototype of, or analogy to, the hypertext link.

Another study of weblogs explicitly disagrees with Blood's assertion that they grew out of web pages containing "hotlists" of links and thus are a unique genre. Herring *et al* conducted an analysis of 203 randomly selected weblogs and concluded that they "are neither unique nor reproduced entirely from offline genres, but rather constitute a hybrid genre that draws from multiple sources, including other internet communication genres." This study found that the majority of weblogs (70.4 per cent) are personal journal blogs, rather than the proto-typical filter-style weblogs that have received so much media attention. Blogs in large part do not resemble the lists of links that Blood claims are their precursors; rather, it makes more sense to assume they evolved from the online journals with which they have so much in common. These online journals, of course, have their origins in the traditional paper diary. Herring and her colleagues also note that weblogs that filter and comment on news stories appear themselves to be very similar to editorials, op-ed essays, and letters to the editor found in paper-based newspapers. Their similarity as well, for their longer entries, to *Reader's Digest*, *Utne Reader*, and other paper-based publications that bring together articles and news stories from many different sources should also be noted. In terms of their online characteristics, the study found that weblogs could be placed on a continuum between static HTML documents (e.g. personal homepages) and constantly updated computer-mediated communication (CMC) sites (e.g. newsgroups).¹⁷

Looking at diaries and weblogs from a broader perspective, it becomes apparent that the distinctions Blood makes between traditional diaries, online journals, blogs, and

¹⁷ Herring *et al*, "Weblogs as a bridging genre," pp. 144, 151, 159, 161.

notebooks are far less stable than they appear. Indeed, the lines between weblogs and several other forms of online digital records are fuzzy, to say the least. Online photo management and sharing sites such as Flickr have become more user-friendly and begun providing basic services for free. YouTube allows anyone to upload and post videos to the internet, and people around the world to watch them, again for free, and without downloading any software or registering on the site. Social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook give people a place to tell the online community about themselves, allow individuals to connect with people who have similar interests, and make it easy for friends located all over the planet to stay in touch. All of these websites have characteristics in common with blogs: they provide places for people to tell their stories and narrate aspect of their lives; allow individuals to post their personal records in the form of text, images, or audio-visual materials; and make it possible to “broadcast” what before was private, or shared in analogue formats with a very limited and local audience, to billions of people worldwide over the internet. The influence and the potential of personal digital records on the web prompted *Time* magazine to announce that “for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game, *Time*’s Person of the Year for 2006 is you.”¹⁸ The “you” is the digital-savvy person, in the millions, embracing this new record-creating and records-sharing communications medium. And of course the “you” is a personal, private entity, creating personal records.

Many weblogs incorporate several media, including photos, video clips, and music, with varying amounts of related text, and could legitimately be considered

¹⁸ Lev Grossman, “Time Person of the Year: You.” *Time, Canadian Edition*, 128, no. 26 (December 25, 2006/January 1, 2007) p. 15.

analogous to the scrapbook rather than the diary. D, a 27-year-old Winnipeg woman, has maintained a humorous and well-written weblog since September 2004. Her blog has evolved from what was initially an annotated photo gallery to periodic posts that move fluidly from weather reports, to commentary on news stories, celebrity gossip, stories of her days and her travels, and links to amusing YouTube videos.¹⁹ This blog, like many others, blurs on a daily basis the distinctions between linklogs, blogs, notebooks, and online journals.

In addition to the three types of weblogs discussed above, some people choose to keep an online photo or video diary. Photo bloggers may or may not include text with the images that they post. Many video bloggers post their entries directly to YouTube and bypass text and weblog-editing or hosting sites all together. All of these diverse forms of digital personal records are posing new and important challenges for archivists. Blogs are a distinctive genre of record because of their incremental nature; they are updated often and the newest postings appear first; and of course, like all digital media, entries can be altered or deleted without trace. This thesis focuses specifically on primarily text-based weblogs, with the hope that insights gained into the archival issues surrounding these records may also shed light on how archivists can cope with other forms of digital personal records. Describing weblogs as “text-based” does not preclude these blogs from having photographs, videos, sound, or maps as part of their substance, but implies that their character is overwhelmingly textual, in appearance and content.

¹⁹ *a round peg in a square hole*, <http://denes.blogspot.com/> (accessed 24 March 2007).

Who Creates Weblogs?

Several studies have confirmed that most weblogs are personal blogs, and that this trend is growing. The estimates of the number of weblogs currently in existence, and the rate at which new ones are being produced, do vary, but it is clear that after 1999 the number of weblogs increased dramatically and after 2003 they began increasing exponentially. In 2004, Blog Census estimated the number of sites calling themselves weblogs at over 2.1 million,²⁰ while a 2003 study by Perseus Development Corporation placed the number at 4.12 million, and estimated that it would exceed 10 million by the end of 2004. More of these blogs are being created by teenage girls than any other demographic group.²¹

In spite of this fact, Rebecca Blood is not the only author to downplay the personal and more impressionistic blog and to focus instead on the filter blogs. Hugh Hewitt, conservative talk-radio host and blogger, shares Blood's bias towards "serious" filter-style weblogs. He argues that the new technology that makes blogging possible allows for the decentralization of information and power, and is undercutting the mainstream, in his view liberal-biased, news media. The weblogs that Hewitt references are mainly news or political filters, the vast majority of which are edited by men, many of whom have backgrounds in law, journalism, or politics.²²

Journalist Lisa Guernsey noted this trend in a 2002 *New York Times* article entitled "Telling All Online: It's a Man's World (Isn't It?)." When she began exploring the blogosphere,²³ she found that most of the sites she visited, and most of the sites

²⁰ NITLE Blog Census (2004), www.blogcensus.net/?page=Home (accessed 29 March 2007).

²¹ Henning, *The Blogging Iceberg*.

²² If the reader disagrees with Hewitt's perspective on mainstream media, she or he is advised to "go buy Al Franken's or Michael Moore's latest and miss the revolution." Hewitt, *Blog*, p. 88.

²³ This term is widely used now, along with "blogspace," to describe the totality of weblogs available on the internet.

referenced in the media, were created by men. She found this an odd situation, because much of the appeal of blogging lies in the fact that one does not have to be a well-known journalist or writer to voice his or her opinions and that weblogs can be written anytime, from almost anywhere, which makes them flexible enough to be convenient for busy women and mothers and attractive and inexpensive enough for teenage girls. When she looked into the situation, however, she found that women are creating as many weblogs as men; they are just less visible and less publicized. She states that “[p]eople who track blogs hate to make generalizations, but many acknowledged that female bloggers often have more of an inward focus, keeping personal diaries about their daily lives,” while “[m]en want to talk about anything but.”²⁴

In a more empirical study, researchers confirmed Guernsey’s suspicions. Tracking 357 randomly selected weblogs, they found that 52 per cent of bloggers were male, 48 per cent female, and 39 per cent were teenagers, 10 per cent between 20 and 25 years of age, and 51 per cent over the age of 25.²⁵ Interestingly, they found about three times as many of the teenage bloggers were girls than boys, the male-to-female ratio was equal for the 20-25 year-olds, and men made up more than twice the number of adult bloggers than women. The authors also found that gender and age were closely related to weblog type, with girls and women over-represented in the personal journal-type “lifelogs” and adult males predominating in the filter, or “linklog,”²⁶ and mixed categories. The study also confirmed that most of the mass media attention that weblogs had received was directed

²⁴ Lisa Guernsey, “Telling All Online: It’s a Man’s World (Isn’t It?),” *New York Times*, 28 November 2002.

²⁵ Susan C Herring, Inna Kouper, Lois Ann Scheidt, and Elijah L. Wright, “Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs,” in L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman, eds., *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs* (2004).
<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/> (accessed 29 March 2007).

²⁶ The terms “lifelog” and “linklog” were coined by Frank Schaap, and are described in José van Dijck, “Composing the Self: Of Diaries and Lifelogs,” *Fibreculture* 3
http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue3_vandijck.html (accessed 29 March 2007).

towards those maintained by adult males, and filter-style linklogs received the most coverage, despite over 70 per cent of all weblogs being personal journals. They concluded that “[w]omen and young people are key actors in the history and present use of weblogs, yet that reality is masked by public discourses about blogging that privilege the activities of a subset of adult male bloggers,” reflecting society’s view that “the activities of educated, adult males are... more interesting and important than those of other demographic groups.” The authors call for more attention to be paid to “‘typical’ blogs and the people who create them in order to understand the real motivations, gratifications, and societal effects of this growing practice.”²⁷ This is also good advice to archivists, and the central argument of this thesis.

Why People Blog

A 2004 ethnographic investigation of blogging attempted to address the reasons people blog through conducting in-depth interviews with “ordinary” bloggers. This study discovered that people cited five main motivations for keeping a blog: to record activities and events and keep family and friends informed of one’s activities; to express opinions and points of view; to have an outlet for thoughts and feelings; to encourage creativity and sharing ideas with others; and to forge a link to a virtual community of like-minded people.²⁸ Each of these motivations is evident by investigating a small selection of weblogs written by Manitoba women.

Some blogs are created primarily to share information about one’s life and activities, with friends and family as well as complete strangers. Many bloggers see their

²⁷ Herring *et al*, “Women and Children Last,” pp. 4-5, 10-11.

²⁸ Bonnie A. Nardi, Diane J. Schiano, Michelle Gumbrecht, and Luke Swartz, “Why We Blog,” *Communications of the ACM* 47, no. 12 (December 2004), pp. 43-45.

activity as an alternative to sending frequent individual or mass e-mails or maintaining a homepage, a way to let others know what has been going on in the bloggers' life without forcing this information on anyone who is not interested.²⁹

Often this type of blog is created by women travelling or living abroad, or who have moved to a new city. One 26-year-old Manitoba woman has been writing a blog since November 2005 about her life and experiences teaching English in South Korea. The blog is written primarily for her friends and family in Canada, and many of the references in her posts are not explained for outside readers, but she also provides some information about herself in early posts for any readers who do not know her personally. In her second month of blogging, she posts a picture taken from her apartment window and writes:

Friday, December 02, 2005

constant construction... just like home (and a little more about me)

well, i woke up this morning to the sound of a jack hammer. again. every couple of weeks, they rip up my street for some reason. i wanted to get up early anyway, so it's not too bad i guess. but they're blocking my street pretty effectively, usually they leave a little patch where i can drive my bike, but i don't know today. i'll try though. the guys are usually pretty helpful to the strange foreign girl with a bike :) on that note, maybe i should put up some more info about me.

I came to Ulsan, Korea a year and a bit ago (arrived on July 1st, that was a fun canada day!) and had the typical (??) first year abroad. culture shock, lots of new friends, and at the end of it all, i fell in love with the expat lifestyle. it's amazing what you can learn about yourself in this strange environment. and the korean culture is fascinating, lets not forget about that. it's got warts, but they're different warts than i'm used to, so it's interesting.³⁰

Other posts describe road trips, holiday parties and weddings, martial arts lessons, and mild cases of culture shock. Overall, this weblog paints an interesting and often insightful

²⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

³⁰ nicole in korea, <http://nicoleinkorea.blogspot.com/> (accessed 24 March 2007). Please note that quotations from weblogs are being reproduced as they were originally written, without [sic] being added to note every idiosyncrasy or error in grammar and spelling.

picture of what life is like for a young Canadian woman immersed in a very different culture.

Some women keep a weblog of their lives and activities even when living in their hometown, surrounded by the people who would be most likely to care about what they have been doing. A *jill story* is one such blog; Jill is a young Winnipeg woman who writes about her daily activities as she embarks on a career, buys her first new vehicle, looks for a house, and avoids jury duty. She has been posting a few times a week on her Blogger account since January 2006. A typical weekend post might include photographs of Jill and her friends, and begin as follows:

Saturday, February 10, 2007

What goes on at the King's Head will inevitably appear on someone's blog

Joined Rob and friends at The King's Head on Friday night to celebrate Rob's alphabet birthday (why alphabet you ask? He turned 26!). Joanna came with me and she drove which meant I could actually drink. I don't know why but people get very determined to "get Jill drunk". Drunk Jill really isn't much different from fun and sober Jill. She's just a little bit louder and she bounces. On the way home she'll sing. Badly.³¹

Most of Jill's readers are likely the friends featured so often in her entries, but her charm and engaging writing style make her blog an enjoyable read even for complete strangers.

Another primary motivation for many bloggers is the ability to express their ideas and points of view on subjects that they consider important. Rebecca Blood states that certain weblogs are directly analogous to opinion or analysis pieces of traditional journalism. For these authors, the weblog is "above all an opportunity to pronounce their opinions on politics, world events, and the opinions of others," a platform for "directed self-expression."³² One such weblog is *The Blonde Conservative*, written by Carolyn Gardner, a self-described "Winnipeg girl living in Ottawa." She has been maintaining her

³¹ a *jill story*, <http://ajillstory.blogspot.com/> (accessed 24 March 2007).

³² Blood, *The Weblog Handbook*, p. 22.

weblog since July 2006, expressing her right-wing political opinions on subjects ranging from the beef industry and health care system to scripture and the Middle East, and of course Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal politics. Her second post established the format that most subsequent entries have followed:

Monday, July 17, 2006

My Beef About the Beef Industry in Canada

Where's the beef?

I'm a city girl, but my father was born and raised on a farm in Lenore Manitoba with 7 of my uncles. I have been blessed to be able to live a city lifestyle and yet still be able to understand the plight of the farmer here in Canada.

When the BSE crisis took over, the current NDP provincial government (whom I like to refer to as "economic poison") decided that in order to combat the border closure to the US, they would simply rebuild slaughtering facilities that incidentally, closed down in the 1970's because it became more cost-efficient to have animals processed in the US. Another example of the backward-thinking that is still prevalent in Canadian politics. What ever happened to forward thinking? What ever happened to innovative ideas?

Are we all brain dead here in Canada? It is no wonder that we are doing a bang-up job making ourselves invisible on the world scene.

The problem with the beef industry in Canada extends much further then the fact that we do not have sufficient slaughtering facilities... it is because Canada as a country has become re-active in policy making rather than pro-active. Since the days of confederation, there are still barriers in regards to inter-provincial trade! What's more curious is that the federal government has the constitutional right to over-ride the provinces in regards to inter-provincial trade decisions. This is in-fact a federal jurisdiction. **So why does the government twiddle it's thumbs?** Good question.

There is an increasing world market for "organic" and "natural" meats. Environmental concerns are high on the list as well. One amazing option is mobile slaughtering units. These are ideal for small scale farmers wishing to access a market niche. I could go on and on about it, but I won't. Basically it causes the animal no stress, is "clean" environmentally speaking, and would comply with the strictest health regulations allowing access to markets Canada has been trying to tap into for years.

Let's not step backwards into oblivion... let's move forward with new ideas, let's remove inter-provincial trade barriers, and let's show the world we still are number one.³³

Gardner often introduces issues with reference to recent news items, poll results, or political statements, provides links to her sources or a bit of background information for

³³ Carolyn Gardner, *The Blonde Conservative*, <http://theblondeconservative.blogspot.com/> (accessed 26 March 2007).

her readers, and then argues her position. Even (or especially) if one does not agree with her viewpoint, her weblog is worth reading; she is intelligent, articulate, well-informed, and feels strongly about the issues she addresses. She also expresses opinions shared by many Western Canadians, and being a young woman gives her a perspective and experience of political life in Ottawa that is still unusual.

Many women use their weblogs as a place to convey their thoughts and feelings, a way of getting things off their chests, and a channel for coping with stress. Double Trouble, a 33-year-old single mother from Winnipeg, posts a few entries a week on her MySpace blog. Her entries sometimes take the form of funny stories about her days or inspirational quotes she has come across, but she also uses her blog to express her worries and fears, perhaps in hope of lessening them.

Tuesday, February 20, 2007

Basic Math...

A) Me+2 kids-car= challenging weekend and difficult days ahead!

B) Me+very sick dad-any ability to do anything to help= lots of tears!

C) Me+someone special-that special someone= aching heart

A+B+C= Fetal position....

At least one would think so anyway.... but somehow I do manage to get out of bed every morning and try my hardest to be the best mom I can be for my kids, the best daughter I can be for my dad, and just simply the best me I can be in the face of these circumstances.... I'm trying! I really am! There are times when I feel I can barely breathe as the pain of it all is overwhelming... there are other times when I'm tempted to call that 'someone' but don't there are so many things that I could do at this time that might numb my pain for a moment.... but instead... I find myself embracing the things that really matter.... God, family, friends and last but not least... myself. Much TLC required! Ouch! I know that

there are people with much greater problems than me... but right now.. .I just need to focus on me and getting thru this!³⁴

Several authors have described how the act of keeping a diary has been a coping mechanism for women, and helped them to deal with injustice, hardship, physical illness and abusive relationships.³⁵ Some bloggers find the same value in posting blog entries, and the therapeutic act of writing in these cases may be just as important as knowing their voice is being heard.

Another reason women create weblogs is that many identify the act and process of writing in their blog as an important way of fuelling creativity.³⁶ Blogs give their writers a chance to experiment with ideas and force them to consider what exactly it is they have to say. Posts may later evolve into more fully developed articles or stories, or inspire a new line of thinking. Even if an idea does not stretch beyond a single entry, the process of “thinking by writing” is a commonly cited reason for maintaining a weblog. Creativity can take an infinite number of forms. Ariel Gordon, a Winnipeg-based writer and editor, includes her poetry, book reviews, gorgeous photography, and aching beautiful descriptions of everyday occurrences on her weblog, *The Jane Day Reader*. Or, as Gordon describes it, “[i]ntended as a repository of photos, poems-in-progress, and news, The Jane Day Reader will blare and babble, bubble and squeak, semi-regularly.” Sometimes she ruminates on the act of creation, or its products; a portion of her 7 March, 2007 entry reads:

³⁴ *dddoutrouble*, <http://www.myspace.com/dddoutrouble> (accessed 26 March 2007). This MySpace user’s profile has since been set to “friends only” and is no longer visible to the public [ellipsis marks presented as in original text].

³⁵ Suzanne L. Bunkers, “Diaries and Dysfunctional Families: The Case of Emily Hawley Gillespie and Sarah Gillespie Huftalen,” *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 220-233.

³⁶ Nardi *et al*, “Why We Blog,” pp. 44-45.

These books made me gritty-eyed with fatigue (making me stay up late), they made me crabby in the face of banal conversation (when I could have been reading...), but most of all, they made me glad.

To be so completely possessed by a character, a setting, a story is to be reminded why I enjoy literature - the reading as well as the writing of it, both of which are capable of taking me up out of the tangle and dust of my day to day life.

In a similar vein, I often find myself returning to the comfort of much-loved books, though recently it's been much-loved authors.

The practice is much like re-upholstering a favorite chair. You need to paint and paper yourself with the particular arrangement of words and ideas that distinguishes each writer and to enter these books is akin to sitting at your table at your cafe - the landscape is familiar and still somehow different every time.³⁷

Other women express their creativity differently: through rolling sushi, curing pork, boiling lobsters, and wrapping a variety of food items in bacon. Since September 2006, a Winnipeg woman who identifies herself as froddard has been documenting her culinary experiments and adventures through stories and photographs posted on her weblog, *Planet Borshht*. She also posts her thoughts about food, reviews Fall Suppers across Southern Manitoba, and explains the finer points of Manitoban cuisine to outsiders. For example, on 9 October 2006, she wrote in this vein:

Distinguishing between the Ukrainian perogy and the Mennonite vareneki is a little tricky. Ultimately, they come from the same tradition with the main difference that Mennonites fill their dumplings with cottage cheese and Ukrainians fill them with potato. (Although my Oma used to sometimes make fruit vareneki filled with cherries or apricots...)

Here in Winnipeg, the typical perogy is a pan-fried potato and cheese filled dumpling served with sour cream on the side. They are strangely ubiquitous in this part of the country - you can find them in diners, in mom n' pop family places, chain restaurants as a regional add-on, fried chicken places... They've become the ultimate starchy side dish for Winnipeg.

However, the perogies I've had at all the Ukrainian fall suppers are never pan-fried - always boiled, served with a cream gravy, sometimes on the side. I grew up thinking that only the Mennonites put cream gravy on their vareneki but I'm starting to realize that it is more of a restaurant vs. home-cooking thing instead. There are only a handful of actual restaurants

³⁷ Ariel Gordon, *The Jane Day Reader*, <http://janedayreader.blogspot.com/index.html> (accessed 26 March 2007).

that I know of that make good Mennonite-style vareneki, and they are all in Steinbach. Seek them out, and you shall be satisfied.³⁸

Blogs seem an ideal outlet for women to find an audience and express their creativity, in whichever way they find most satisfying. Diary writing has also been commonly valued as a means of creative expression. Amy Wink writes that “[w]hile journal writing may be an act of self-creation, it is, perhaps more importantly, an act of creation.” She goes on to state that “[j]ust as quilts have become a standard symbol of women’s everyday art and their expressions of creativity, women’s diaries are similar examples of women’s artistic agency.”³⁹ Clearly for many women, their blogs serve the same purpose.

Weblogs, Communication, and Community

Finally, weblogs are sometimes described as a way of forming communities and connecting with other people who have similar interests or backgrounds. This can happen in many different ways: through the communal creation and maintenance of a blog; through web rings, which provide links to many blogs on a specific subject; by individual bloggers providing links to other blogs that they read regularly; or through discussions that take place in the comments sections of personal weblogs. Similar to listservs, blog communities can provide information on a specific topic as well as a forum for discussion and a sense of belonging for their members, but without needing the large computer server power, technical infrastructure, or human resources for daily monitoring that a listserv often entails.

³⁸ *Planet Borscht*, <http://planetborscht.blogspot.com/> (accessed 26 March 2007).

³⁹ Wink, *She Left Nothing in Particular*, p. xvii.

Prairiegirl, a mother of three living in Winnipeg, has become part of an extensive on-line community of knitters. She updates her blog frequently with news of her knitting-related activities, including photographs, descriptions of yarn, and knitted works-in-progress. Her entry from 13 November 2006 is fairly typical of many knitting bloggers' postings:

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2006

Great knitting weekend!

For once (it's been so very long!) I had a quiet, relaxing weekend with nothing pressing to get done! I didn't have anything scheduled so I spent the weekend knitting! I felted my mitts, finished baby nephew's socks, finished the scarf for N (just have to do the embellishment now), and dyed my yarn for my Irish Hiking Scarf.

As for Kool-aid dyeing. Well, I wasn't as successful as I'd hoped. I bought two skeins of aran weight natural wool and followed the instructions that I had. Using the ratio of one package of kool-aid to one ounce of wool seemed to be ok. Where I went wrong was doing the two skeins at once. Next time (and I will try it again) I would do one skein at a time in the microwave probably rather than both on the stove in a big pot. Tonight I'm going to wind the wool into two balls and then I'll start my scarf interchanging the two balls as you would with a handpainted yarn.

(BF)G thinks I'm crazily obsessed with knitting. Somehow this seems to have come as a surprise (!?!!) to him. Oh silly man... were the four boxes of yarn and the regular trips to Camille's not a dead give away? He's pretty good to me though and doesn't complain. Just gets a bemused look and shakes his head as he glances at the twenty sets of needles on the end table. As a kindness to him, I no longer keep various balls of yarn lying about because Hollycat's obsession with carting wool around in her mouth and making the most annoying chirpy noise in the wee hours of the morning was driving him slowly mad.

So here's my revised list of projects (and this time in order - or at least I think!):

- 1) Block and finish embellishment for N's anarchy scarf
- 2) Cast on for Irish Hiking Scarf
- 3) Cast on for my red sweater for the Red Sweater KAL
- 4) Start either mitts or hats for the little ones for Christmas
- 5) Felted purse? Yorick for J? Socks?⁴⁰

Prairiegirl also provides links to other knitters' blogs, receives comments on her posts from other knitters all over the world, and contributes to several communal knitting weblogs. Prairiegirl is one of twenty women involved in the *Stash and UFO Bust-Along*,

⁴⁰ *Prairie Girl Knits*, <http://prairie-girl-knits.blogspot.com> (accessed 26 March 2007).

where participants report their progress in completing unfinished objects (UFOs) and using up yarn that they have been stockpiling, and one of sixty-one knitters participating in the Red Sweater KAL (knit-along), which features photographs and descriptions of knitters' woolly, red projects.⁴¹ Other online knitting groups take the form of gift exchanges, where participants get to know one another through their blogs and online questionnaires and then each member sends one other person a specially selected parcel of knitting related items; Prairiegirl recently participated in the Knitters' Coffee Swap and International Tote Exchange III.⁴² All of these online groups are an enjoyable way for knitters to connect with one another, make new friends, and get advice and inspiration relating to their favourite pastime.

Other online communities of bloggers act as a support group for their members during difficult periods of their lives. Just as many soldiers serving overseas have begun writing weblogs to expose civilians and politicians back home to the harsh realities they are facing, many women with husbands in the service have begun writing weblogs to tell their side of the story. These blogs serve several purposes at once: they are a way for women and families to keep in touch with far-away loved ones and help them feel closer; they allow the writers to express their hopes and frustrations; and they are a way to connect with others going through the same powerful, often emotional experience. Tiffany, a young mother who lives at CFB Petawawa, includes this message on the homepage of her weblog, *My Life as a Military Wife (ROTO3)*:

This page is here for people to see what a military family has to go through during a deployment, and to help other families who are going through the same thing. Please be

⁴¹ *Stash and UFO Bust-Along*, <http://bustalong.blogspot.com/>; *Red Sweater KAL*, <http://redsweaterkal.blogspot.com/index.html> (both accessed 26 March 2007).

⁴² *Knitters' Coffee Swap*, <http://coffeeswap.blogspot.com/>; *International Tote Exchange III*, <http://internationaltotexchangeiii.blogspot.com/> (both accessed 26 March 2007).

respectful and remember that these are my real emotions, thoughts and feeling here. Thank you⁴³

She writes about her children and her days, posts pictures, and counts down the days until her husband comes home on leave, and until his deployment will be over. At the end of their first month apart, she posted the following entry:

THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 2007

I need a break

I have no idea why i decided to quit smoking this week, but am already getting the feeling that i made a mistake picking this week to do it, my kids have been just pushing and pushing my Patience, and things with my husband are getting more and more difficult with being separated, we argue about the dumbest things and i have no idea why. Ohhh this tour stuff sucks!!!! i am feeling so drained right now emotionally. and it has only been one month tomorrow i still have to go through 5 more months of this HELL. My poor friend Katie has been having to hear about all of this stuff i just feel so bad having to vent to her but i have no one else to talk to about how i am feeling, i would talk to my mom but, she just doesn't understand what i am going through even though she has been through deployments before, she just has the suck it up and deal with attitude which is fine if that works for her but i am more emotional and i can't just suck it up and deal with it. I need to talk about how i am feeling or i will burst.⁴⁴

Tiffany's weblog provides her with an outlet for her emotions, and may also reassure other women that their similar feelings are normal and understandable. She provides links on her weblog to Troop Support, The Military Wife Website, 2 RCHA Support group, Married to the Canadian Forces, and CFB Petawawa's Wives Chat. This online community of support is very valuable to women who are often physically isolated from their families and are feeling alone and afraid.

Traditional diary-keeping has often been considered an outlet for thoughts and feelings and a way of fostering creativity. It has also often been seen as a way of documenting events and activities, possibly to share with others, and as a place where writers can express and refine their opinions on a variety of subjects. The idea of diaries

⁴³ *My Life as a Military Wife (ROTO3)*, <http://missingmyartillerysoldier.blogspot.com/> (accessed 26 March 2007).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

as a communal activity is less commonly thought of, but not without historical precedent. José van Jijck writes that the diary “has often been deployed as a communal means of expressing and remembering,” and points to the practices of many religious congregations where devotional diaries are “a semi-private record, shared within but never outside a community.”⁴⁵

Yet it is as a means of communicating with others that the differences between weblogs and traditional diaries stand out most clearly. It is not that paper diaries cannot serve some of the same communicative purposes, but that they lack the immediacy and convenience of blogs to reach across wide distances or large audiences. Van Dijck points out that “the ability to expose oneself to a wider audience of unknown readers was something for which a paper diarist used to be dependent on a publisher who would print and distribute the diary, usually resulting in a considerable time lag between the moment of writing and of publication.”⁴⁶ The act of sharing a diary with a specific community, or with far-away friends and family members, is complicated by the record’s physical nature as a recorded artifact. Mailing a diary can be costly and time-consuming, and it can only be read by a very limited number of people at one time. Weblogs have none of these limitations; they can be read immediately, by any number of people, anywhere there is computer and internet access available, and they are produced spontaneously, by their authors, entry by entry, not held back until the paper-based diary “book” is full.

This chapter is not attempting to write the history of women by looking at their blogs. Rather, the aim has been to demonstrate the significance of weblogs as a type of record, what these records reveal, when one looks through a gendered lens, about human

⁴⁵ José van Jijck, “Composing the Self.”

⁴⁶ Ibid.

characteristics, communication patterns, uses of technology, and new social mores, and thus to suggest that it is necessary for archivists to address these issues if they wish to document the broad range of human experiences.

Challenges of Weblogs

Despite significant differences between weblogs and paper diaries, it seems lifelogs, whether one calls them blogs, notebooks, or online journals, serve many of the same purposes for their writers as diaries once did. As journalist Suzanne Stefanac states,

At their best, diaries teach us about ourselves, each other, and the world. They teach us about our own boundaries as well as the comfort zones of those around us. Today's online journals incorporate text, audio, photos, and video logs—often instantaneously via cell phone or other handheld devices, providing both present and future observers with a phenomenal level of detail about daily life in the early twenty-first century.⁴⁷

Diaries, no matter how poorly written or self-absorbed, are usually taken seriously (at least once they enter an archives) as a reflection of the writer's personality, ideas, and emotions, and of their place, time, and circumstances; however, lifelogs, when they receive media attention, are often viewed derisively as inconsequential productions of egocentric or eccentric nobodies, except of course, as noted, the male-produced "public" blogs on "serious" issues. A typical example of this tendency is provided in the introduction to Laurel Clyde's *Weblogs and Libraries*, which points to these examples:

An exchange student in Sydney, Australia, provides a record on his blog of everything he ate or drank (forget the school work); a Seattle couple write about walking the dog and going to the supermarket; a teenage girl agonizes over which of two invitations she should accept for Saturday night; a bank clerk records daily confrontations with 'the boss'.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Suzanne Stefanac, *Dispatches from Blogistan: A Travel Guide for the Modern Blogger* (Berkeley: New Riders, 2007), p. 46.

⁴⁸ Laurel A. Clyde, *Weblogs and Libraries* (Rollinsford, NH: Chandos Publishing USA, 2004), p. xvi.

Clyde concedes that “some personal weblogs, particularly those that are thoughtful, interesting and well written, attract an ongoing readership in much the same way as paper-based ‘zines.’” She also indicates that information filters and personal weblogs that are focused on covering developments in a particular subject field are the value-redeeming side of the blogosphere. In terms of personal lifelogs, however, Clyde states that they “are probably more important for their creators than they are for any ‘reading public’; the act of creating the blog is often the whole point.”⁴⁹

This idea is common to both traditional diaries and weblogs, and has been recognized by other academics studying both genres. Van Dijck put it eloquently by stating that “[I]like the writing of paper diaries, blogging is a process that helps express and order thoughts through rituals... diaries and lifelogs are both acts and artefacts.”⁵⁰ If it is the act that is important in the present, it is the artefact that is important to future readers of both paper and electronic diaries. Much of what researchers have learned about the past, particularly about the historical experiences of women and other marginalized groups in society, has been gleaned from the pages of diaries containing “the private, the everyday, the intriguing, the sordid, the sublime, the boring – in short, a chronicle of everything.”⁵¹ As a growing number of people create weblogs, it is likely that many people who choose to spend their time and energy writing blog entries will not duplicate this effort by recording their lives on paper as well, and thus the number of people keeping traditional diaries will decrease. Weblogs documenting the alleged minutiae of ordinary peoples’ mundane daily lives may eventually be considered crucial evidence for future historians’ studies of the early twenty-first century. That is, they will be *if* they are

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. xviii-xix.

⁵⁰ Van Dijck, “Composing the Self.”

⁵¹ Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own: People and Their Diaries* (New York, 1984), p. 1.

identified through appraisal, acquired, and then preserved by archivists across generations of hardware and software changes.

Personal digital records on the web are providing new challenges for archivists, and the techniques that are employed for managing these records will necessarily be different from those used to deal with paper records. As electronic records expert Margaret Hedstrom states, “the methods that archivists use to select, preserve, and provide access to archival electronic records must... change in response to the challenges posed by electronic record keeping. In the network environment, decisions about which records warrant retention must be made much earlier in the records’ life cycles.”⁵² Or to return to Hugh Taylor, it is not just a matter of adjusting the technology that archivists use in order to manage digital records, but a whole paradigm shift, or “transformation,” that is necessary if the profession is to cope with the record-making changes now rapidly taking place.⁵³ Archives could not possibly save all of the millions of weblogs in existence and so must decide which are the most relevant, useful, and worthy of preservation. The challenge of developing an appraisal methodology to apply to weblogs must be addressed before the technical means of preserving them can be applied. Archives need to develop collecting policies that include personal digital records and formulate appraisal criteria appropriate for weblogs or, as O’Sullivan states, the loss of weblogs to archival collections and thus to history “will be inevitable.”⁵⁴

⁵² Margaret Hedstrom, “Electronic Archives: Integrity and Access in the Network Environment,” *American Archivist* 58 (Summer 1995), p. 318.

⁵³ Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives,” pp. 13-14.

⁵⁴ O’Sullivan, “Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives,” p. 71.

CHAPTER THREE

ARCHIVAL APPRAISAL, ACQUISITION, AND PRESERVATION OF WEBLOGS

The weblogs that society has so far judged – or “appraised” – as valuable, as suggested earlier, are the filter weblogs created by educated adult males. It is vitally important for archives to recognize this societal trend, document it to be sure, but also complement it by systematically seeking out other kinds of blogs for a fuller archival record. Blogs, like diaries, are a way for marginalized individuals, who often lack access to traditional publishing methods and will probably not create extensive documentation of their lives, to have a voice and leave a record of their experience. Appraisal needs to consider the importance of these records of ordinary lives when deciding which weblogs are worthy of preservation. The blogs that receive a lot of public attention – those that document “important” people, or are written by “authorities” on topics that society deems “interesting” – are not necessarily representative of society as a whole, and might not be the most important to researchers in the future. The lives of people creating these

“important” weblogs are likely already well documented and their creators have other ways of making their voices heard and activities known. Archivists must remember that, as the shapers of society’s collective memory, they have a duty to document the (electronic) voices of the silent, unknown majority, as well as the voices of the influential and powerful.

To date, most of the theorizing and research on the subject of archival appraisal has taken place in the context of governments and large corporations; very little has focussed on personal records. This chapter will briefly examine the concept of archival appraisal and its historical development, and discuss the traditional archival appraisal values and their application to diaries and weblogs. It will then address the different types of value that weblogs hold for their creators and contemporaries, and how these values could be incorporated into a discussion of appraisal value. This chapter will conclude by discussing the technical, legal, logistical, and theoretical challenges that blogs pose for archivists and suggesting a possible approach to developing specific appraisal criteria and formulating an acquisition and preservation strategy that archives could apply to weblogs.

Appraisal of Personal Records: Evidential and Informational Value

With an understanding of diaries and weblogs established in the previous chapters, this thesis can now address the question of what types of value these records may hold, from an archival perspective, for documenting society for future researchers. Archival theory, unfortunately, provides little guidance when it comes to appraising personal records. According to American archivist Riva Pollard, the archival literature on this subject is “both scant in quantity and lacking in specific guidelines for addressing key theoretical

questions.” In her extensive literature review, she finds that almost no archivist has addressed “the underlying theoretical question of what in regards to collections of personal papers might constitute ‘enduring value’ to society.”¹

Canadian archival theorist Terry Cook asserts that, until recently, appraisal theory in North America has rarely stretched beyond “a systematization of various ‘values’ of records (such as evidential and informational, legal and fiscal, primary and secondary, etc.) and of various characteristics relating to records (their uniqueness, age, authenticity, manipulability, time span, extent, etc.).”² The first appraisal theorist, T.R. Schellenberg, pioneered this approach in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s when it became apparent that archivists could no longer simply function as passive guardians of inherited archival records. As a result, appraisal became an important archival function. Schellenberg stated that, when records are no longer of use to their creators, they should be assessed and selected based on their evidential and informational value for subsequent users. The evidential value of records is reflected in how well they document “the functions, programmes, policies, and procedures of the creator.” The informational value is based on the subject content of the records as it relates to people, events, ideas, conditions, and anything else that the archivist believes will be of use to future researchers.³ Appraisal decisions, since Schellenberg articulated his ideas and until very recently, have been made by archivists discerning the evidential and informational value of records, and their perceived usefulness to researchers, particularly academic historians.

¹ Riva A. Pollard, “The Appraisal of Personal Papers: A Critical Literature Review,” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), pp. 140, 146.

² Terry Cook, “Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal,” Barbara Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, Association of Canadian Archivists, Ottawa (1992), p. 41.

³ Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), pp. 26-27.

Archivists have found it relatively easy to justify the archival value of traditional diaries based on the important, often unique, information content they contain. Some archivists approach the appraisal of private records by evaluating the evidence they provide about their creator, much like they would the appraisal of government or organizational records. American archival educator Richard Cox asserts that individuals create and maintain records for the same evidential reasons as organizations: “to capture transactions, document activities, serve legal and administrative functions, and provide a basis for memory.” Because of this, manuscript collections “possess evidence, and it is from this evidence that most of the value for culture, history and community stem.” Cox disagrees with the commonly held view, implied in manuals on description and arrangement like that written by Fredric Miller, that personal papers may or may not reflect the activities of their creator in a systematic way. He contends that “[t]he vast majority of personal and family papers are records with the same organic, orderly nature deriving from functions and activities as institutional records,” and that the reason that this order is sometimes difficult to discern is frequently the result of “the lengthy alienation of the records from the custody of their creators prior to coming into an archives.” For those private papers that lack order because “they are artificial accumulations or loose odds and ends, fragmentary remnants of the documentary heritage,” archivists must consider whether or not these items actually qualify as records and if they belong in an archives.⁴

Sue McKemmish, a prominent Australian archivist, agrees with Cox’s view of personal papers as evidence, and emphasizes their value in providing evidence of socially

⁴ Richard J. Cox, “The Record in the Manuscript Collection,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May 1996), pp. 52, 48.

assigned roles and activities, individual relationships, and thus of society in general. She also believes that individuals are motivated to create records by “issues of competencies and related rights, obligations, responsibilities, [and] the need to continue to function effectively in a particular role.” However, McKemmish also recognizes that the creation of private records can have more to do with “fundamental needs relating to a sense of self, identity, a ‘place’ in the world.”⁵ This acknowledgement of the role of self-narrative in personal record keeping distinguishes McKemmish from many other archivists who before her had defined the value of private records in strictly transactional and evidential terms, or for their informational content about important persons, places, things, or ideas. Both McKemmish and Cox point by the mid-1990s to the need for further study of the nature of personal record keeping and its role in society.

The informational value of traditional diaries is widely recognized by archivists, as is their importance to historians. This becomes particularly germane when the personal information being sought is not widely available from other sources, such as letters, accounts, or autobiographies. Ordinary lives, particularly those of women, have traditionally not been as well or as systematically documented in archives as the lives of the famous, the influential, or the privileged. The informational value of diaries is, of course, not limited to historical and biographical studies; the contents of diaries range across the spectrum of human experience, and can provide researchers with clues about economics, politics, gender relations, medicine, and culture, to name only a few examples.

Weblogs, research seems to suggest, contain a good deal of the same type of information that scholars find so valuable in archived or published hard-copy diaries.

⁵ Sue McKemmish, “Evidence of me...,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 24, no. 1 (May 1996), pp. 31-36.

Personal thoughts, observations on local and world events, and daily routines and occurrences all appear in people's blogs, providing millions of unique perspectives on the world for any researcher who cares to read them. One group of weblogs that is commonly cited as providing valuable information of this type are those written by members of the military posted overseas; *Time* magazine quotes Lee Kelley, one American military blogger, as stating that "[i]f they are archived, blogs will give the best account of this war... No one knows what's going on better than the soldiers on the front lines."⁶ Blogs created by their wives, husbands, friends, and children at home will give yet another perspective on such international conflicts, the results of political decisions, and the cost of war. Catherine O'Sullivan argues that weblogs hold the same informational and evidential value as traditional diaries, and "open numerous possibilities for enriching the future researcher's understanding of life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries."⁷

While this may certainly be the case, archivists need to take into consideration the overwhelming amount of information available today, on-line or in print, about every conceivable topic. In discussing informational value, Schellenberg asserted that "archivists need not concern themselves with documenting the creating body, only with the subject content that the records contained about people, places, activities, and ideas."⁸ Archivists must consider whether the information provided by a record is already available in other forms or places because, when it is, it becomes unnecessary to keep a

⁶ Lev Grossman, "Power to the People," *Time, Canadian Edition*, 128, no. 26 (December 25, 2006/January 1, 2007), p. 21.

⁷ Catherine O'Sullivan, "Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives; or, Blogs and the Blogging Bloggers Who Blog Them," *The American Archivist* 68 (Spring/Summer 2005), p. 69.

⁸ As explained by Paula Warsaba, *Organizations, Organizational Theory, and Archival Appraisal Theory*, University of Manitoba, M.A. Thesis (2006), p. 89.

record solely for its informational content. While many blogs contain information that could benefit future researchers, realistically, in our information-saturated world, very little of this informational content will be unique.

Additional Values for Personal Records

A growing number of archivists have recently begun to express their dissatisfaction with appraisal criteria based exclusively on determining the possible evidential and informational value that records may hold for present and future researchers. South African archivist Verne Harris has responded to McKemmish's discussion of personal archives by praising her for entering this relatively unexplored field, but questioning her adherence to the traditional notion of the "functionality" of personal record keeping in terms of making and keeping records in order to live life more efficiently and effectively: the person operating in effect as a mini-business or government. Harris states that the resistance to functionality in this area, through behaviours such as destroying records or keeping fragments of documents in scrapbooks, is another dimension of personal record keeping that should be investigated. He appreciates McKemmish's recognition of the role of narrative in personal records, because it acknowledges that these records are "contaminated by the human instinct to tell story and create identity." Memories, according to Harris, are inescapably "shaped by the dance of remembering, forgetting, and imagining," and he feels that McKemmish's notions are still too tied to traditional archival concerns about evidence of transactions and do not focus enough on memory, narrative, and story-telling.⁹ People in their personal lives do not just transact the

⁹ Verne Harris, "On the Back of a Tiger: Deconstructive Possibilities in 'Evidence of Me'," *Archives and Manuscripts* 29, no. 1 (May 2001), pp. 16-17. For McKemmish's response to Harris' critique, see Frank

“business” of living, they tell stories, create personas and identities, and dream, imagine, and shape (or try to) the world around them.

That personal papers contain not only evidential and informational value in the traditional sense, but such narrative and psychological value as well, is also elaborated by Canadian archivist Catherine Hobbs. While personal records may certainly reflect the functions and relationships of their creators, they stand apart from records created by individuals in organizational contexts because they often “contain glimpses of the inner soul as well as its outer manifestation in public activities.” Private records have the potential to “eclipse both evidential and informational value by their narrative value: they are in many senses creations of the self and participate in a process of storytelling and de facto autobiography – of the self presenting or representing the self.”¹⁰ Authors can tell many kinds of stories: they can be factually true accounts of events, versions of “real-life” occurrences that have been exaggerated or elaborated upon, fictional but based on something that really happened, or pure works of the imagination. With adequate contextual information, all of these forms of narrative can be valuable to future researchers trying to understand society. While they may not provide the type of transactional evidence that Richard Cox or Sue McKemmish have in mind when they discuss the value of personal records, storytelling of any variety can tell a perceptive researcher much about its author, and the environment in which she or he lived. Even works of absolute fiction can provide evidence of their author’s beliefs, individual and societal values, and inner human needs. It is for this reason that, as Hobbs has astutely

Upward and Sue McKemmish, “In Search of the Lost Tiger, by Way of Sainte-Beuve: Re-constructing the Possibilities in ‘Evidence of Me’,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 29, no. 1 (May 2001), pp. 22-42.

¹⁰ Catherine Hobbs, “The Character of Personal Archives: Reflections on the Value of Records of Individuals,” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), pp. 126, 131.

pointed out, personal records call for different concepts and appraisal treatment by archivists.

Archivists are beginning to understand the distinctive nature of personal records, or at least that they are fundamentally different from institutional records, even if sharing some of their surface characteristics around evidence and authenticity. This is because of the role personal records can play for creators in constructing identities and making sense of private lives, and the value that they can have for researchers through the revelation of some part of the creators' inner self, the psychological textures of living, dreaming, making sense of one's existence.¹¹

Both Riva Pollard and Catherine Hobbs advocate basing the appraisal of personal records on the value attributed to them by contemporary society and their creators. This idea was first put forward by German appraisal theorist Hans Booms, in "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage." His approach, although developed in relation to government records, holds potential for the appraisal of personal records because it is based on the value that records hold for their creators, their contemporaries, and the society in which they are created. Booms initiated a change in thinking about archival appraisal when he asserted that:

the question of the value ascribed by those contemporary to the material should become the most fundamental of every archival endeavour to form the documentary heritage. Measuring the societal significance of past facts by analysing the value which their contemporaries attached to them should serve as the foundation for all archival efforts towards forming the documentary heritage.¹²

¹¹ One could similarly argue that institutional records may reveal the organizational dynamics, work cultures, management styles, and other information about the "inner life" of their creating institution, but such "values" have rarely been considered in appraisal theory and strategy for institutional records, and such a discussion is well beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹² Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), p. 104.

This implies, in terms of this thesis, that archivists must look beyond what evidence or information personal records can in retrospect provide researchers, and address the personal values of why people create diaries and weblogs in the first place, and how such records are valued by their creators and their contemporaries.

Upon examination from this perspective, it becomes clear that weblogs hold several distinctive values, which relate closely to the reasons why people create weblogs. Some of these values are (consciously or unconsciously) ascribed to blogs by their creators and involve satisfying various psychological needs, while others relate to both the creator and readers of a blog, and involve communication and relationships. Weblogs can also have commercial value, possibly for the creator and a wide variety of other parties. All of these types of value have implications when considering the overall archival value of weblogs and questions of preservation, and to this analysis, the thesis now turns.

Values of Weblogs

The value that life-writing holds for individuals is widely recognized and has been widely discussed by authorities in many fields. Michael Piggott, an Australian archivist, addresses the complexities surrounding the apparent human need to create records in his article entitled “Human behaviour and the making of records and archives.” Many scholars, including novelists, psychologists, philosophers, and archivists such as Sue McKemmish, Verne Harris, and Catherine Hobbs, have argued that humans are, by nature, story-telling animals. If this is true, it implies that people possess some fundamental psychological drive to create narratives explaining both individual lives and

external occurrences, or at least they have a deep, inner need to witness, record, and preserve traces of events and their reactions to them. Piggott notes that other academics dispute this theory, but argues for the importance of a broad, interdisciplinary effort to understand the human motivations behind record creation.¹³ Many efforts have already been made, as introduced in the last chapters, to explain why people create diaries and weblogs, and what values these acts of record creation hold for individuals.

One of the primary psychological needs linked to diary writing is the construction or maintenance of one's identity. Although the activity of daily writing as self-reflection or self-creation can be performed by anyone with basic literacy skills, it is most commonly discussed as a way for women to find their voice in societies where it has persistently been de-valued.¹⁴ Diary writing can help people make sense of their lives by allowing them to define their experiences and reactions in a way that creates a coherent life story. As Amy Wink puts it, "[t]he creative act of writing is a way of seeking meaning and understanding through the power of language."¹⁵

The same has been said of blogging: "[l]ike the writing of paper diaries, blogging is a process that helps express and order thoughts through rituals, thus defining a sense of self in relation to others."¹⁶ Many bloggers identify self-expression as a primary reason for their writing, recognizing that it "serves the intrinsic self-disclosure functions of both self-clarification and self-validation, enhancing self-awareness and confirming already

¹³ Michael Piggott, "Human behaviour and the making of records and archives," *Archives & Social Studies: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* 1, no. 0 (March 2007), pp. 237-258.

¹⁴ See Judy Nolte Lensink, "Expanding the boundaries of criticism: the diary as female autobiography," *Women's Studies* 14 (1987), pp. 39-53; and Elizabeth A. Peterson and Ann M. Jones, "Women, Journal Writing, and the Reflective Process," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 90 (Summer 2001), pp. 59-67.

¹⁵ Amy L. Wink, *She Left Nothing in Particular: The Autobiographical Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Women's Diaries* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2001), p. xvi.

¹⁶ José van Jijck, "Composing the Self: Of Diaries and Lifelogs," *Fibreculture* 3 http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue3_vandijck.html (accessed 29 March 2007).

held beliefs.”¹⁷ Yet, conversely, the opposite can be true as well. Some scholars view the internet as a site where identities can be destabilized, through experimentation with different personalities and multiple identities. Other commentators note, however, that bloggers “seem less interested in role playing than in locating, or constructing, for themselves and for others, an identity that they can understand as unitary, as ‘real.’ The blog thus seems... to be a counter-movement to postmodern destabilization.”¹⁸ Both of these tendencies, the discovery or creation of one’s own identity and the trying-on of different identities, find expression in the creation of weblogs. The anti-identity, or fake or hoax-identity is still part of the creator’s own identity, of her need for expression, adventure, experimentation, or fantasy.

The value of the content information or trustworthy or “true” evidence provided by blogs, given issues of provenance, fictionality, and authenticity, is a major concern for archivists and researchers. Even the seemingly simple question of a weblog’s authorship is not always straightforward. One survey of weblog characteristics found that 31.4 per cent of blogs provide the author’s full name, 36.2 per cent give only a first name, and 28.7 per cent use a pseudonym.¹⁹ Even if a name and personal details about the writer are included, they are not necessarily true; the nature of the internet makes this information unreliable without further background research. In one widely publicized example of a weblog hoax, for two years an attractive young woman named Kaycee Nicole maintained a blog chronicling her battle with leukemia. She attracted a large number of loyal readers

¹⁷ Carolyn R. Miller and Dawn Shepherd, “Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog,” in L.J. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L. Johnson, C. Ratliff, & J. Reyman, eds., *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs* (2004). <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/> (accessed 7 November 2006).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Susan C. Herring, Lois Ann Scheidt, Elijah Wright and Sabrina Bonus, “Weblogs as a bridging genre,” *Information Technology & People* 18, no. 2 (2005), p. 150.

and made many new friends over the internet, but eventually Kaycee succumbed to her illness and her posts ended. Fellow bloggers who had been following her story became suspicious when they could not find any information about the funeral arrangements, and it was later discovered that “Kaycee” was actually Debbie Swenson, a middle-aged mother from the Midwest.²⁰ While this example may not provide future researchers with details about the life of young cancer patients, it does say something about the psychological needs that led Swenson to create her fictional alter-ego.

Hoaxes, along with varying degrees of fictionalization, are certainly not limited to internet-based genres of writing. Postmodern theorists have interrogated the barrier between fact and fiction that was once commonly seen as black and white. Referring to traditional diaries, scholars Steven Kagle and Lorenza Gramegna state that “the line between an accurate rendering of events and a creative manipulation of reality is not always apparent even to the diarists themselves.”²¹ Yet, without a physical document and its materiality evidence that might allow a weblog to be reliably linked to an author or place, it becomes much more difficult for the reader to determine, even approximately, where this line lies.

The authenticity of a weblog and the reliability of the information it contains can be nearly impossible to establish. Archivist Heather MacNeil defines an authentic record as “one that can be proven to be what it claims to be and that has not been altered or corrupted in essential respects.”²² Even if the identity of a blogger is reasonably certain,

²⁰ Miller and Shepherd, “Blogging as Social Action.”

²¹ Steven E. Kagle and Lorenza Gramegna, “Rewriting her Life: Fictionalization and the Use of Fictional Models in Early American Women’s Diaries,” *Inscribing the Daily*, Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 42.

²² Heather MacNeil, “Picking Our Text: Archival Description, Authenticity, and the Archivist as Editor,” *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005), p. 265.

and their posts are not overtly fictional or are recognized as works of the imagination, there is an additional difficulty in authenticating weblogs that is built into the software of many blogging programs. To protect a record's authenticity, its integrity must be preserved over time; many blogging programs allow users to modify earlier entries without these changes being recorded. According to the results of one survey, 75 per cent of bloggers admit to having erased or edited previous entries.²³ Unless a copy of a blog is preserved each time it is modified in any way, readers have no way of knowing whether the version they are seeing is identical to versions available in the past. Despite these complications, weblogs certainly have the potential to provide future researchers with evidence of lives and information about the societies in which they were lived, provided that archives authenticate and preserve these records in a reliable manner.

As discussed in previous chapters, diary writing and blogging have been valued as a coping mechanism to help people deal with events beyond their control. As Heather Blakey explains, as the webmaster of a popular group blog for writers and artists, “[c]athartic writing is like releasing the gauge of a pressure cooker. It enables you to ventilate and let the steam out, providing all important emotional release... The good, the bad and the ugly all come pouring onto the page when you make cathartic writing a practice.”²⁴ The act of writing can be a form of control or of letting-go of control, and both can also be a form of creation. Whether one is releasing negative energy or fostering creative potential, the ability to express oneself in writing and related images and sounds is a key value for individuals who keep a diary or weblog.

²³ Fernnanda B. Viegas, “Bloggers' Expectations of Privacy and Accountability: An Initial Survey,” *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 10, no. 3 (April 2005).

²⁴ Heather Blakey, “Catharsis,” *Soul food café*, <http://www.dailywriting.net/catharsis.htm> (accessed 16 April 2007).

For those writers who create journals or blogs mainly as a way of expressing their thoughts, emotions, or creativity, the act of writing is often more important than the possibility of it being read by others. Chinese artist Song Dong has created an art installation that embodies this concept. Called “You Can Write Anything with Water on Stone,” it consists of pieces of shale, paint brushes, ink pots full of water, and cushions where visitors can sit and write “a journal that evaporates as soon as it is written, leaving only the memory of the action.” The artwork’s description states that it offers “the catharsis of self-expression without fear of consequences... Such moments of private epiphany have far-reaching resonance.”²⁵ The evanescent nature of a diary written in water may be matched by the impermanence of digital records on the internet; they can exist one moment, and be gone the next.

Many writers recognize the value of diary writing as a way of memorializing a life, and diaries as objects that trigger feelings of nostalgia and transport readers back to times past. José van Jijck expresses this concisely when she notes that “[p]ersonal notebooks are often treasured as stilled moments of a forlorn past, and kept in safe places to be retrieved many years later – much like photographs – as precious objects of memory.”²⁶ Thomas Mallon observes that re-reading one’s diaries can also help people avoid the trap of over-sentimentalising the past.²⁷ Weblogs lack the physicality of diaries, and it may seem that they would not elicit the same type of emotional response in their creators, but memories are still captured and stored in a blogger’s “archive” to be revisited and reflected upon. Indeed, the power of blogs to recall memories and trigger

²⁵ Royal College of Art, London, *Do Not Interrupt Your Activities*, <http://www.cca.rca.ac.uk/donotinterrupt/song.htm> (accessed 16 April 2007).

²⁶ Van Jijck, “Composing the Self.”

²⁷ Mallon, *A Book of One’s Own: People and Their Diaries* (New York, 1984), p. xv.

emotion may be even greater than that of paper-based diaries, as in many cases text is enhanced with images, videos, music, or voice clips. Some bloggers, wisely, also store their blog entries on their personal computers to ensure that they are not lost if their host website disappears²⁸ (as happened to roughly three thousand blogs when weblogs.com unexpectedly ceased operations).²⁹ Van Dijck states that the choice to use writing as a mode of expression “indicates a desire to secure these symbolic exchanges in some retrievable form, as [bloggers’] entries gradually turn into interesting memory objects of past experiences.”³⁰ Perhaps one day Jill, whose blog was discussed in the previous chapter, will look back on her entries from 2006 and 2007 and gain some pleasure remembering the excitement of buying her first truck, the nights she spent packing to move out of her parents’ house, and even the very bad day when she spilt her extra-hot latte with a shot of almond all over herself on the Osborne Street Bridge.³¹

These values that life-writing holds for individuals – self-actualization, self-preservation, creative expression, and memorialisation – were first identified in relation to paper diaries, but they are also commonly present in the creation of weblogs. They are not dependent on an audience, but gain their value through the act of writing itself and the ability to re-visit the result of that activity at a later time. Diary writing or blogging may be interpreted as acts of communication, but in these cases, they should be viewed primarily as communications to or with the self rather than with an outside reader.

As discussed in chapter two, it is as a means of communicating with others that the value of weblogs diverges sharply from the values associated with traditional diaries.

²⁸ Bonnie A. Nardi, Diane J. Schiano, Michelle Gumbrecht, and Luke Swartz, “Why We Blog,” *Communications of the ACM* 47, no. 12 (December 2004), p. 45.

²⁹ O’Sullivan, “Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives,” p. 70.

³⁰ Van Dijck, “Composing the Self.”

³¹ *a jill story*, <http://ajillstory.blogspot.com/> (accessed 24 March 2007).

The value that creators attribute to their weblogs in these cases depends on the existence of an audience; the purpose of the author is not simply to express his or her views in writing, but to inform, persuade, or provoke a reaction from others. Of course the readers of these weblogs also derive value from them; otherwise, they would choose to spend their time differently. Many commentators have focussed on blogs as an alternative to the mainstream media, or as a filter that helps readers access the most pertinent information on a specific topic. Others provide readers with entertainment, advice, insight, or simply a distraction from everyday concerns.

Many bloggers see their weblogs as a way of developing relationships with other members of an online community. A paper-based diary, even if shared with others, is a one-way communication, or monologue, whereas many blogs invite dialogue which fosters communities and increases the value of what was initially written. Many knitters who blog, such as Winnipegger Prairiegirl, have their technique questions answered, receive suggestions for patterns and projects, and are alerted to online yarn sales by comments from their readers – all very useful information for any other knitters reading those discussions.³² Online relationships are fostered and managed through establishing links with other sites and receiving and providing commentary on blog postings, activities which Miller and Shepherd identify as “forms of social control, signs of approval, acceptance, [and] value.”³³ The pervasive tendency of bloggers to value this type of interaction, considered alongside the importance of self-discovery in many blogs, lead Miller and Shepherd to conclude that the success of the weblog genre is related to “some widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self.” Knowing that

³² *Prairie Girl Knits*, <http://prairie-girl-knits.blogspot.com> (accessed 26 March 2007).

³³ Miller and Shepherd, “Blogging as Social Action.”

one's knitting know-how is appreciated and being able to share it with unknown numbers of kindred spirits online, when these skills often go unnoticed in everyday life, is likely a pleasant experience for those readers who take the time to leave comments on Prairiegirl's blog.

One final form of value that cannot be overlooked, even if it is far from the minds of many bloggers, is the role that commercial interests play in the creation and popularity of weblogs. Many of the weblog-hosting sites on the internet make a profit, even when they provide free basic services to their users. Some sites provide the option of paying a fee to upgrade to a premium account with more advanced features, while others make most of their revenue from selling advertising spots. The authors of weblogs created on these commercial sites are rarely looking to profit directly from their writing; they do not receive any of the revenue generated by visitors to their blog. They may, however, be hoping to gain a wide audience and achieve recognition for their work in other ways – through awards, paid employment, or a publishing contract, for example. It is conceivable that some bloggers may receive payment for agreeing to certain “product placement” of name brande – say of wool yarn on a knitting blog – if their blog were well viewed, but then that kind of possible commercialization is part of history too, and should be preserved, in context. More explicit sponsors and advertisers on individual weblogs or weblog-hosting sites hope to recover their investment (and then achieve some profit) by selling their products or services, and the creation of commercial websites that pose as individual blogs is a marketing tool with which companies are highly likely to experiment. Newspapers, magazines, and television stations often promote weblogs by their reporters and journalists along with other online content as a bonus for maintaining

paid subscriptions to the sponsoring medium. Blogs can also be used to sell merchandise, endorse brands, or solicit donations. An increasing number of musicians, artists, and other public personalities are using blogs for self-promotion and as a vehicle for selling their products. Certain bloggers have been able to make money by selling ad space themselves on popular, and thus often-visited, blog sites. These are only a few examples of the monetary value that can be associated with weblogs; archivists should be aware of the possible economic motivations behind the creation and promotion of weblogs when they are assessing the other values they may hold for their author, readers, and future researchers. Does the blogger write what is in her heart and soul, or what she perceives will generate a greater number of visitors and thus increased revenue?

Implications for Archival Appraisal

In examining the values that archivists, writers, and contemporary readers have attached to weblogs, it becomes clear that traditional appraisal methods of evaluating evidential and informational value alone as the basis for archival acquisition are insufficient to deal with this complex genre of record. This traditional approach would overlook some of the most important roles that blogs have begun to fill in society, as well as the ways in which they are fundamentally different from other types of records, including traditional diaries. With the explosion of information available on every subject today, from a wide variety of media, the informational value of the actual content of most weblogs becomes negligible. They can, however, provide important and unique evidence about the life of their creator, including her or his relationships and social roles, as long as archives ensure that additional contextual details are provided and special preservation measures are put

in place in order for the record to be relied upon as authentic. Weblogs often document people's search for, creation of, and experimentations with identity and capture the ways in which people cope with experiences and react to events. They provide records of individuals' expressions of both opinions and creativity. Blogs also can illustrate the formation of virtual communities, which in many cases are replacing or supplementing in people's lives traditional networks such as church and extended family. Catherine O'Sullivan hints at the value weblogs hold for future researchers by stating that:

Like their pen-and-paper predecessors, they serve multiple purposes and, thus, reflect many facets of life in a particular time and place. They reveal the effect technology has had on the diarist's sense of self (construction and representation) in the computer age. They reveal shifts in cultural norms of privacy and ideas of community. Not to mention, they often provide interesting, insightful, or humorous perspectives on contemporary events. But these are just a few, obvious suggestions.³⁴

By looking more closely at what values creators and their contemporaries attach to weblogs, we can begin to understand how they function to document many different aspects of people's lives. Catherine Hobbs captures the significance that this insight holds for archivists in her pithy declaration that "the personal record should not be treated as if it contained only straightforward evidence, but as the site of multiple constructs – of a person upholding and struggling with ideas, of self and of others, while simultaneously contradicting, convincing, and contriving." This brief exploration of the evidential, informational, individual psychological and communicative values that weblogs hold for their writers, readers, and future researchers fully supports Hobbs' assertion that archivists should "select records from a myriad of ideas about what they might document about private character as much as public activities."³⁵

³⁴ O'Sullivan, "Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives," p. 69.

³⁵ Hobbs, "The Character of Personal Archives," pp. 132, 134.

Strategic Lessons from Macroappraisal and Documentation Strategy

Canadian archivist Leah Sander concludes her Archival Studies thesis by stating that:

It is in studying not only the form of records, nor their informational content, but the reasons for which they were created and then maintained by their creators, that archivists will have a deeper sense of the worth of the records, and of what is being documented in their preservation. In this way, they will, in their appraisal criteria for personal records, value not only records that capture famous careers or noteworthy achievements in the public sphere, but also records that give evidence of basic human experiences, including celebrations or grief, giving birth, or growing old.³⁶

Two different appraisal methodologies, Terry Cook's macroappraisal and Helen Samuels' documentation strategy, both of which were influenced by Booms' ideas of societal value, could help guide archivists appraising personal records in appreciating their full worth and meeting the goal of documenting human experience that Sander puts forward. Riva Pollard concludes her overview of the archival literature on the appraisal of personal records by briefly discussing the potential contributions of these two appraisal methodologies, and arguing that they could provide a framework for the appraisal of personal records, because they "appreciate the social context in which records were created and used, and the underlying personal functions, roles, and processes driving records creation."³⁷

Macroappraisal is a combined theory, strategy, and methodology for doing archival appraisal that was developed at the National Archives of Canada in the 1990s. Although it was first adopted as a means of appraising federal government records, its premises and processes may help guide private records archivists in deciding which records to target for acquisition and preservation. As its originator Terry Cook states, macro-appraisal is "a provenance-based approach to appraisal, where the social context

³⁶ Leah Sander, *Collecting our Thoughts and Re-collecting our Stories: The Collection of Personal Records in Archival Institutions*, University of Manitoba, M.A. Thesis (2004), p. 107.

³⁷ Pollard, "The Appraisal of Personal Papers," p. 149.

of the record's creation and contemporary use (not its anticipated research use) establishes its relative value."³⁸ The focus of appraisal is not on individual records, or the value they may hold for researchers, but on the context in which they were created and the functions and activities that they document. The macroappraisal process involves conducting extensive research to establish the relative importance of various functions, programs, and activities carried out by the institution whose records are being appraised, determining where in the institution these functions and other significant interactions with society take place, and forming a hypothesis of where the most important records are created and what they will document. It is "by understanding the functioning of the organizational culture of the creating institution and of its related citizen-state interaction, [that] the archivist is able to reflect societal values because they will be evident and made manifest through that functioning."³⁹ Once archivists have decided where the most significant records are likely to have been created, they must determine if and how these records can be acquired and preserved. It is at this stage that documentation strategy can provide ideas and guidance to private records archivists.

A documentation strategy, according to American archivist Helen Samuels, is "a plan formulated to assure the documentation of an ongoing issue, activity, or geographic area."⁴⁰ Like macroappraisal, documentation strategies begin with an in-depth investigation of the topic to be documented and the kind of information required to round out archival holdings on some subject, region, or activity. Samuels advises that archivists consider all available forms of documentation, not only those traditionally collected by

³⁸ Terry Cook, "Macro-appraisal and Functional Analysis: documenting governance rather than government," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 25, no. 1 (2004), p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Helen Willa Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49, no. 2 (Spring 1986), p. 115.

archives, and acknowledge that sometimes archival materials are not the best source of information on a subject: a publication or artifact may be the most succinct and telling evidence. She also encourages archives to cooperate with one another and coordinate activities to avoid duplicated efforts and wasted resources, and to ensure the best possible documentation of a topic, area, or activity across a broad spectrum of cooperating archival institutions. This chapter now turns to a discussion of how these ideas may be put into practice in Manitoban archives for identifying and collecting weblogs.

Suggestions for Archives: Appraisal and Acquisition of Weblogs

Many of the paper-based diaries now held in archives were preserved by chance; they were stored somewhere safe, perhaps forgotten, and later rediscovered, or fell into the hands of people who recognized their value and took care of them, in both cases eventually being donated to or purchased by an archival institution. This occurs after a significant passage of time, usually at least near, or past the end of, the lifetime of the creator of the diary. Unfortunately, changing technology and the nature of electronic or digital records mean that this will not be the case for weblogs. If archives are to save weblogs for future readers and researchers, it will require the active intervention of archivists much earlier in the records-creation and records-preservation processes. Having established an understanding of weblogs in relation to traditional diaries, discussed the motivations behind weblog creation and the values that weblogs hold for various parties, and described the methods archivists use to appraise records, this thesis now turns to what implications these observations have for archives that decide to acquire and preserve weblogs.

This type of project has two crucial parts; one is the stark technological challenge of preserving electronic information over decades and centuries so that it is understandable and accessible for future users, and the other is addressing the myriad legal, moral, and resource issues that weblogs and other digital records raise. It seems that most of the discussion surrounding digital records has focussed on the first challenge, which is considerable; however, developments in technology, growing pressure from governments and major corporations for solutions for long-term preservation of critical business data, self-interest of software developers to provide a solution, and expanding knowledge of migrating digital data across changes in software and hardware, or converting it to “open code” software- and hardware-independent formats, will likely make overcoming this hurdle in the near future almost a certainty, possibly by trial and error and the development of workable “best practices,” later by their codification (already begun) into national and international standards. The second challenge, which has thus far received less attention from the archival community, will also require a considerable amount of effort, discussion, and cooperation before all aspects of the problem will be adequately identified and then addressed. Historian Roy Rosenzweig, in examining the preservation of digital records, argues that “[w]hile these technical difficulties are immense, the social, economic, legal, and organizational problems are worse. Digital documents—precisely because they are in a new medium—have disrupted long-evolved systems of trust and authenticity, ownership, and preservation.”⁴¹

The first step in a weblog preservation project is to determine broadly what the archives is hoping to document. The collection mandates of most archives are limited in

⁴¹ Roy Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (June 2003), p. 743.

scope by geographical or topical boundaries. If an archives decides to acquire personal electronic records, such as weblogs, the choice of records to target for acquisition will be based on a specific selection criteria. For example, the National Library of Scotland has recently announced that it will preserve the electronic records of a number of prominent Scottish literary figures including Ian Rankin, J.K. Rowling, and Alasdair Gray.⁴² Archivists in Manitoba, similarly, could decide that their goal is to document the lives of women in the province during the early twenty-first century. Although the context of private records creation is different from the institutional environments in which macroappraisal and documentation strategy were developed, both methodologies suggest that archivists should begin the appraisal process by researching the topic or community that has been chosen (whether this is defined geographically, chronologically, or topically by such social factors such as gender, ethnicity, or profession). They can then make informed decisions about what aspects of their subject's existence should be documented and where such documentation might be found. The Centre du patrimoine franco-manitobain in St. Boniface makes just such a decision by focusing on ethnicity and language for all its acquisition targets.

For the argument of this thesis, the appraisal and acquisition research would be on the lives, activities, and records of women in Manitoba. One possible approach to documenting the experiences of Manitoba women would be to collect weblogs created by women at different stages of their lives. Historian Veronica Strong-Boag takes this "life course approach" in her influential work, *The New Day Recalled*, which attempts "to capture the essence of what it meant to be female in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s by

⁴² "National Library to store blogs," *The Sunday Times* (10 September 2006) <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2090-2351051,00.html> (accessed 4 November 2006).

focussing on crucial periods and activities in women's lives."⁴³ The book is divided into six sections: childhood and adolescence; waged employment as young adults; courtship and marriage; housekeeping and early married life; childbirth and childrearing; and mature adulthood. Women's life histories have changed significantly since the early twentieth century and a rethinking of the most appropriate way of defining the stages in a woman's life would likely be necessary, but this model could be one starting point for archivists.

If the archives decided to use a life-course framework, the next step would be to compile a pool of weblogs from which to select a specified number of individual blogs for preservation created by women at each such defined step in life. There are two possible ways that this could be done: archivists could search the internet for blogs by women in Manitoba, or they could request the cooperation of the public and ask women who would be willing to have their weblogs preserved to contact the archives. For several reasons, the latter approach is preferable.

One compelling reason, as noted earlier, is the difficulty finding weblogs based on the characteristics or physical location of their creator. There are many different weblog-hosting-sites and weblog search engines, each with different capabilities for narrowing down a search. Often it is possible to search for blogs by their creator's interests, but not by her or his personal background or location. For security and privacy reasons, weblog-hosting sites do not allow users to search for blogs written by people under the age of 18. Another complicating factor in searching for weblogs is the number of abandoned or very infrequently updated blogs in existence. According to one study there are some 200

⁴³ Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada 1913-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1993), p. 4.

million inactive blogs on the internet.⁴⁴ An archivist could literally spend months combing the internet for just Manitoba-based weblogs fitting a specific collecting mandate, look at thousands of blogs, and find very few that are updated on a regular basis and would warrant preservation by an archives. If archivists were able to locate some weblogs that documented the aspect of society they were targeting, they would still face the daunting task of trying to locate the weblogs' authors to verify their identities and provide enough contextual information to make the record useful to researchers.

Any plan to “harvest” material found online, without the owner/creator’s permission, raises legal questions relating to copyright and whether archives can legally preserve and provide access to material found on the internet, after the creator has taken it off the net, whether intentionally or de facto by death. Rosenzweig explains the problem, stating that “[t]he digital era has not only unsettled questions of ownership and preservation for traditional copyrighted material, it has also introduced a new, vast category of what could be called semi-published works, which lack a clear preservation path.”⁴⁵ According to the *Copyright Act*, the creator of any original literary, dramatic, musical, or artistic work holds the sole right to produce, reproduce, perform or publish that work.⁴⁶ There are exceptions to this rule, however, that may open the door for archives to preserve web-based material. Non-profit libraries, archives, and museums are allowed to copy entire articles, productions, or works, subject to certain restrictions, as long as the copy is used only for private study or research purposes. At the national level, the recent Library and Archives of Canada Act of 2004 explicitly states that,

⁴⁴ Omar Gallaga, “Blogging Jumps the Shark,” *National Post*, 10 March 2007, WP4.

⁴⁵ Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance?,” p. 744.

⁴⁶ For a comprehensive introduction to Canadian copyright law, see the Canadian Intellectual Property office’s web publication, “A Guide to Copyrights: Copyright Protection,” available on-line at http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_mrksv/cipo/cp/copy_gd_protect-e.html#2 (accessed 16 March 2007).

for the purpose of preservation, the Librarian and Archivist may take, at the times and in the manner that he or she considers appropriate, a representative sample of the documentary material of interest to Canada that is accessible to the public without restriction through the internet or any similar medium.⁴⁷

Unfortunately, this provision does not apply to provincial institutions, or make it clear in what ways Library and Archives Canada can legally provide access to material that it has so harvested from the internet. In order for archives to avoid running afoul of copyright regulations, to maintain the trust and respect of the public, and to ensure that adequate contextual information can be provided, projects targeting weblogs or other web-based records for preservation will require the archives to contact and enter into a legal agreement with the creator of the weblog.

For these reasons, a far more practical approach to collecting weblogs would be to solicit the community's involvement and ask individuals with weblogs who are interested in participating in the project to contact the archives. Archivists could approach specific sections of the population that they are hoping to document. Schools, social and political organizations, professional organizations, and rural community organizations are only a few examples. Notices could also be placed in newspapers and on community-based websites. This approach to collecting weblogs does not prevent archivists from also identifying – through internet searches, links from other blogs, or word of mouth – additional weblogs that they wish to target for preservation. The archives could then approach the author, either by posting a comment on the blog itself or by email where an address is provided, and ask if she or he would like to participate in the weblog preservation project and grant the archives permission to preserve the weblog in question. By allowing individuals to volunteer their weblogs for preservation, or make contact with

⁴⁷ Library and Archives of Canada Act (2004), available on-line at http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/showdoc/cs/L-7.7/bo-ga:s_7/en#anchorbo-ga:s_7 (accessed 16 March 2007).

the archives if they so choose, the archives will also be able to collect important contextual information about the creator and the weblog's provenance without the labour-intensive process of identifying that person from information available on the internet. It also assures that the individuals are willing to cooperate with the archives and the archives will likely be able to negotiate a legal agreement giving it permission to make these weblogs available to the public for the indefinite future.

Many archivists, having internalized the Jenkinsonian ideal that archival records should be created without any self-conscious view to posterity or any sense of their being part of "history," will object that the very fact (from such contact and agreement with the archives) of the creator knowing that one's weblog is being preserved in an archive would inevitably change the nature of subsequent postings. Australian archivist Adrian Cunningham has strongly argued for just such "pre-custodial intervention" with record creators to ensure that personal electronic records are created in such a way that archivists are better able to identify, appraise, preserve, and provide access to them, in meaningful context and with ensured authenticity of the data content. In the face of criticism by neo-Jenkinsonian purists, Cunningham stands his ground simply because archives do not have any other choice; as he states, "archivists cannot afford to be the passive recipients of records that are no longer required by their creators. The traditional post-hoc approach to recordkeeping, which has probably always been unsatisfactory, is patently inadequate in the electronic environment." Cunningham's response to the Jenkinsonian critique of the results of pre-custodial involvement by archivists is that, "[w]hile the self-consciousness of the recordkeeping behaviour of the records creator needs to be discerned and understood by anyone using such records, it does not make them non-records – nor does

it make them any less valuable as evidence, it is simply a different kind of evidence.”⁴⁸

When it comes to the preservation of weblogs, archives simply have no practical alternative to acquiring the consent of the blog’s creator, despite the fact that after such archival intervention, the blog creator may start writing more with one eye on history and one on the present-day subject of the blog.

Another strong argument for archivists to meet and sign a legal agreement with the creators of weblogs relates to issues of provenance, fictionality, and authenticity. The provenance of a traditional diary is often readily ascertainable, at least to a point, given its material nature, knowledge of its chain of custody, and an understanding of the time, place, and spirit in which it was written, even of inks, images used, and the varying formats of commercial diary styles. Gaining an understanding of a weblog’s provenance and the authenticity of its author may prove significantly more difficult. The more background information about the creator, and contextual information about the creation, of a weblog an archives is able to provide through contextual research, the better researchers will be able to interpret and understand the record, and of course the better archivists will be able to appraise its value for possible inclusion in the permanent holdings of the archives.

Once archivists have so targeted a selection of relevant and reliable weblogs, depending on the number that they have located and their preservation goals, they then will have to appraise them and decide which ones will be preserved or identify areas where additional documentation is needed. It is at this stage that an understanding of the appraisal values associated with weblogs is crucial. Archivists should appraise weblogs

⁴⁸ Adrian Cunningham, “Waiting for the Ghost Train: Strategies for Managing Electronic Personal Records Before it is too Late,” *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1999, pp. 55-64.

based primarily on the values that their creator and readers attach to them, either consciously or unconsciously. This means that blogs that capture their writers' construction of or struggle with identity, expressions of creativity, building of virtual communities and networks of support, or need to document their lives or act as a witness to events occurring around them would be selected for preservation, while those that exhibit less psychological depth and are relatively straight-forward chronicles of day-to-day events, or compilations of information readily available elsewhere, would not. A few other qualities to which archivists would likely attach value are the longevity of the weblog and the regularity with which it is updated, the richness of the descriptive details provided, and any circumstances of its writing that provide a distinctive view of society or of authorship itself in this new technological world. Archivists performing the appraisal of weblogs might create a "checklist" of various values that they are hoping to document, and rate each blog that they examine against the checklist; later, they could compare these summary sheets to determine which blogs should be preserved and ensure that blogs representing an assortment of values for women at each lifestage are included. Such appraisal-value checklists, beyond the obvious "informational values" about important persons, places, ideas, and things or events would, for blogs, should include the personal or interior values outlined in this thesis: for example, articulation of ideas and opinions; identity construction or development; psychological coping; expression and fostering of creativity; community building; richness of description; longevity and frequency of writing; and any distinctive perspectives of society.

One drawback of this approach to the archival appraisal of weblogs, from an historian's perspective, is that the blogs selected for preservation will not necessarily, or

likely, be an accurate representation of the blogosphere as a whole. Brewster Kahle's Internet Archive is currently preserving all weblogs indiscriminately, and as long as this resource is available historians will be able to construct an appropriate (for their research project) representative sample of people's life-writing from that whole on the internet. Archivists may decide, however, to address this concern by preserving all of the blogs submitted by donors, or even all blogs created on a weblog-hosting site of particular geographical or topical relevance to the archives, or all for a particular domain, and then only devoting additional time and resources for further contextual research and description to those appraised as having the greatest value.

Preservation of weblogs

Many people have come to realize that the long-term preservation of electronic records is one of the most pressing issues facing archivists, and society, today. The three properties of a record that must be preserved are its content, structure, and context. These properties are all represented on the physical medium of a paper record; the content of a diary is what is written in its entries, the structure is the format – dated entries made over time on pages perhaps ruled or designed in a certain way, allowing so much space, and so on – that the genre typically takes, and the context is at least partially demonstrated by inscriptions, signatures, labels or titles, and the characteristics of the physical object itself that place it in a certain time and location, such as the type of paper or binding. Weblogs, however, “exist not as physical artifacts, but as intangible hypertext documents stored digitally on a server often far removed from their diarists and readers,”⁴⁹ and this lack of physicality poses challenges for archivists. The content of an electronic record may be

⁴⁹ O'Sullivan, “Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives,” p. 70.

roughly analogous to that of its paper-based counterpart, but “the structure and especially the context of electronic records are not apparent when retrieved from the text only.”⁵⁰

The nature of digital records is also a preservation challenge in a purely physical sense.

Rosenzweig provides a sobering look at today’s reality, stating that

Print books and records decline slowly and unevenly—faded ink or a broken-off corner of a page. But digital records fail completely—a single damaged bit can render an entire document unreadable. Here is the key difference from the paper era: we need to take action now because digital items very quickly become unreadable, or recoverable only at great expense.⁵¹

The challenge of establishing standards and guidelines for creation of digital records and their ongoing preservation is beginning to be addressed by archivists in cooperation with stakeholders in many other fields. Private records archivists can learn from the results of the studies, experiments, and large-scale research projects that are being conducted on the electronic records of big corporations and governments, and adapt some of the best practices that they establish to the preservation of private electronic records and their relevant metadata. However, Margaret Hedstrom points out that technical standards alone are not a solution, because they “work most effectively in well-established, structured organizations that have an identified interest in keeping electronic records” viable and readable over time and “will not ensure continuing access to archival sources for the diverse and unpredictable questions raised by humanities scholars.”⁵²

Catherine O’Sullivan describes web crawlers as one promising method by which weblogs can potentially be saved as “permanent” records.⁵³ One prominent example of

⁵⁰ Terry Cook, “It’s 10 O’Clock: Do You Know Where Your Data Are?” *Technology Review* (January 1995), pp. 51-52.

⁵¹ Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance?,” p. 741.

⁵² Margaret Hedstrom, “Electronic Archives: Integrity and Access in the Network Environment,” *American Archivist* 58 (Summer 1995), p. 318, 322.

⁵³ The concept of permanence is problematic; the actual lifespan of electronic records saved in the manner O’Sullivan is suggesting is uncertain, but the records will be *closer* to permanent than if no action is taken.

this technology has been used to create the Internet Archive. The Internet Archive is an online database that was launched in 1996 by the American philanthropist and billionaire, Brewster Kahle. His vision is to offer long-term access to a large collection of archived web pages, including their changes over time, that his sophisticated web crawlers identify, capture, and transfer back to his archive. Institutional, organizational, and personal web pages can be retrieved from the Internet Archive by entering a URL and selecting a date range in the site's "Wayback Machine" search engine. The Wayback Machine is itself an automated web crawler that saves mirror images of all currently available websites, as long as it is aware of them and they are accessible to the public. While many weblogs may be preserved in the Internet Archive, O'Sullivan points out that one of the reasons archivists cannot rely on this "Archive" for preservation of on-line diaries is that without sufficient documentation of the context in which they were created, the blogs would be of limited use to future researchers.⁵⁴ For example, the Internet Archive would capture without comment or context the alleged blog of a fifteen-year-old Manitoba girl expressing her hopes and fears of an emerging sexuality, that was in reality being posted by a fifty-nine-year-old male predator from the other side of the world.

Another reason that archivists should not abdicate the responsibility for preserving web-based records relevant to their jurisdictions or collecting mandates is that the Internet Archive is run by a private organization, largely from the financial support and enthusiasm of one person. Brewster Kahle, who became very wealthy in the 1990s after creating one of the internet's first search engines, has dedicated his energy (and a good part of his fortune) towards the goal of preserving digital information and making it

⁵⁴ O'Sullivan, "Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives," p. 71.

accessible to everyone.⁵⁵ Kahle's philanthropic ideals are admirable, indeed visionary: he hopes to capture the entire print heritage of humankind and make it available free to every corner of the globe to revolutionize education and enhance opportunity, especially in less economically developed countries. Nevertheless, Kahle obviously has no legal obligation to continue supporting this project, and he or his estate could one day decide to stop providing access to or funding for the database, or indeed to destroy it. The current situation is troubling because, as historian Roy Rosenzweig states, "[i]t has put the future of the past—traditionally seen as a public patrimony—in private hands."⁵⁶ It also preserves that past without the professional mediation of archivists (or librarians for the printed, published portion of Kahle's project) to determine, by appraisal, where are the valuable needles in this awesome digital haystack, and, by research and description, what is the context, reliability, and authenticity of the actual data holdings.

However, inspired by Kahle's model, public archives could use similar web crawler technology on an archivally dedicated system, programmed by the archives, to ensure that copies of selected weblogs are saved on an ongoing basis to create a "local archived mirror of the on-line diary."⁵⁷ Capturing images of the weblogs on an ongoing basis would make it evident if the writer went back and changed earlier entries. The web crawler would also archive links that are included in the weblog, and could be programmed to alert the archivist if there is a problem preventing a link from being included. This simple description, of course, vastly oversimplifies the scale of such a project. Rosenzweig points out that the nature of the internet is such that, to save a single

⁵⁵ Gary Wolf, "The Great Library of Amazonia," *Wired* (December 2003), <http://www.wired.com/news/business/1,60948-0.html>. Accessed 16 March 2007.

⁵⁶ Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance?," p. 737.

⁵⁷ O'Sullivan, "Diaries, On-line Diaries, and the Future Loss to Archives," p. 72.

webpage with hypertext links, “could ultimately require you to preserve the entire web, because virtually every web page is linked to every other.”⁵⁸ That, of course, is what Brewster Kahle concluded as well, and then did. Regardless of the difficulties inherent in using a programmable web crawler to preserve an archive of weblogs on a particular topic or theme or for a specific geographical area like Manitoba, this approach holds considerable potential and should be explored by archives entering the world of weblog preservation.

A number of archives and libraries around the world have already begun internet preservation projects. In 2003 the national libraries of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, The British Library (UK), The Library of Congress (USA) and the Internet Archive (USA) chartered the International Internet Preservation Consortium (IIPC). The IIPC’s mission is “to acquire, preserve and make accessible knowledge and information from the Internet for future generations everywhere, promoting global exchange and international relations.” To support this objective, the Consortium states that its goals are to “enable the collection of a rich body of Internet content from around the world to be preserved in a way that it can be archived, secured and accessed over time;” to “foster the development and use of common tools, techniques and standards that enable the creation of international archives;” and to “encourage and support national libraries everywhere to address Internet archiving and preservation.”⁵⁹

In Canada, LAC approved a Digital Collection Development Policy in February 2006, which applies to websites as well as other forms of digital records created by both

⁵⁸ Rosenzweig, “Scarcity or Abundance?,” p. 742.

⁵⁹ International Internet Preservation Consortium, <http://netpreserve.org/about/index.php>. Accessed 20 May 2007.

private individuals and organizations and government institutions. Currently, the collection of websites falls under the purview of the Library side of the LAC mandate, because “LAC operates on the basis that anything that is made available to the public on a communications network, such as the Internet, can be considered ‘published’ for the purposes of collection.” The selection and acquisition guidelines for Canadian websites are based on the provision in the Library and Archives of Canada Act that allows LAC to take “a representative sample” of documentary material available on the internet, which LAC notes “is quite separate and distinct from other provisions in the LAC Act which govern the legal deposit of publications, including electronic publications.”⁶⁰ LAC has decided to take a “two-pronged approach” to the selection and acquisition of websites, harvesting large web domains (such as those Government of Canada sites with the suffix “.gc.ca”) as well as capturing websites on an individual basis.

Preserving web-based digital records will involve the investment of considerable time, effort, and money on the part of any archives developing such a program. If the Archives of Manitoba, the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, and the City of Winnipeg Archives, to name but three of the province’s archival institutions, all decided to undertake such a project, there would be a high potential for duplication of cost and overlap of the records preserved. Similarly, the collecting mandate of Library and Archives Canada could include online records that would also be targeted by archives in Manitoba. To avoid such a result, archivists would need to follow Helen Samuels’ suggestion that any archives documenting a specific community or subject communicate and work together with other institutions to avoid duplication of effort and wasted

⁶⁰ Library and Archives Canada, “Digital Collection Development Policy,” <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/collection/003-200-e.html>. Accessed 20 May 2007.

resources. LAC has acknowledged the necessity of inter-institutional cooperation, stating that it “is committed to develop with others national collaborative strategies and initiatives for the collection of digital materials.”⁶¹ Indeed, there is a distinct possibility that one weblog could be targeted for preservation by several archives embarking on projects to collect online digital records documenting different aspects of society. For example, documentation strategies for women, Mennonites, Ukrainians, community activists, and knitting in Manitoba could all target one woman’s blog, if she was part of each of these subsections of society. Likewise, each of these documentation strategies would be duplicating the efforts of another institution if the Archives of Manitoba had already decided to preserve all weblogs written by Manitobans or Library and Archives Canada had decided to do the same for all Canadian blogs.

Perhaps the best response to these concerns would be to consider the physical preservation of web-based records, that is, the storage of the actual data, separately from the contextual information provided by archives. Weblogs and other types of digital records could be stored in one digital repository, maintained by a single institution such as LAC, while archivists at any number of associated archives provide the contextual research, analysis, appraisal, and description that make records meaningful and valuable to researchers. It is possible that many archives may decide it is unnecessary to take on the burden of physically preserving web-based records if, in the near future, a means of continuing support is established and a reasonable guarantee provided that Brewster Kahle’s Internet Archive, expanded by the recent international consortium of archives and libraries, will remain accessible, readable across software changes, and free in perpetuity.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Theories surrounding archival appraisal have begun to change dramatically over the past two decades, and they will continue to do so as archivists adapt their ideas and practices to include digital records. The appraisal of personal records, in particular, will need to be (re)considered, as the amount of documentary material available relating to the lives of individuals today is far greater than that to which archivists have had access in any previous generation. As an increasing number of people are de facto documenting their lives by posting their stories, photographs, music, and videos online in personal weblogs, archivists will need to begin preserving these records, and the contextual information surrounding their creation, or risk having them disappear forever. This would be a great loss, as weblogs hold some of the same values as traditional, paper-based diaries in terms of the information and evidence that they can provide for future researchers, as well as other values relating to the various needs and desires of their creators and readers. Archival appraisal theories and methodologies will need to take these many different types of value into account if archivists are to fully capture the potential of weblogs to document different aspects of lives, personalities, societies, and human nature. The technological challenges of preserving weblogs are gradually being overcome, and libraries and archives around the world are working together to understand how best to deal with the legal, moral, and resource issues raised by online digital records.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

On 7 January 1882, Augusta Morris wrote that “one of the [Aboriginal] wives had her baby christened last S. week & I began a little petticoat for it last night.” In the following months she teaches the girls at Moose Factory to turn a heel and works diligently at completing a knit lace collar.¹ More than a century later, Prairiegirl blogged about finishing a pair of green socks, working away at a lace scarf, and knitting cell phone cozies for herself and her friends.² Technology and modes of expression have changed, but many of the reasons that women create records of their lives and the values that they find in these personal records have not. This thesis has demonstrated that, like personal diaries before them, weblogs hold significant value for their writers, readers, and future researchers. When appraising weblogs, archivists should look beyond the traditional appraisal methodology of assessing the informational and evidential value that the records hold and also consider their societal value: the important roles that weblogs play

¹ HBCA, Augusta E. Morris fonds, E.78/1.

² *Prairie Girl Knits*, <http://prairie-girl-knits.blogspot.com> (accessed 26 March 2007).

in helping their creators construct and maintain their self-identity, cope with difficult circumstances, promote creative expression, share ideas and opinions, and build a virtual community.

Postmodernism, gendered historical analysis, and theory relating to autobiography have all had an important influence on how society views personal records created by women. Over the past several decades, women's diaries have begun to be recognized as archival records of great value, not only for the information they provide about life in different places and times, but for what they can tell readers about the construction of identity, the notion of femininity, and resistance to society's dominant narratives. Likewise, weblogs have the potential to document everyday existence in a specific environment, but can also tell a researcher a great deal more about both the author and society. Unfortunately, unlike diaries, weblogs that are not sought out and preserved by archives (or other institutions) are unlikely to survive for future generations, or if they do, they will lack the contextual information that is necessary to make them reliable and useful historical documents. Computer technology is one of the last sectors of society in which women are consistently marginalized, in both the media and public perception. Women create as many weblogs as men, but because these blogs tend to focus more on personal subjects and activities they are often ignored or treated derisively by commentators. Archives, if they are to be representative of the society they serve, should make an effort to seek out and preserve the stories and voices of members of the community which would otherwise go undocumented.

To begin a weblog preservation program, archives must first decide the scope and focus of what they will document and then compile a pool of weblogs from which to

select examples for archival preservation. For practical, legal, and ethical reasons, this is best done through involvement with the community: explaining the project and goals, and requesting donations of weblogs. Once a collection of weblogs has been gathered, archivists must appraise these records to determine which should be preserved and where further contextual documentation may be necessary to make them more valuable as historical sources. In appraising weblogs, archivists should draw on the appraisal theories and methodologies defined and described by Hans Booms, Terry Cook, and Helen Samuels, because these approaches recognize and weigh the societal value of records, that is, they investigate the context of the records' creation and contemporary use. Weblogs selected for preservation can be captured and saved on an on-going basis using a programmed web crawler on a dedicated system, similar to that used by the Internet Archive. To avoid the duplication of effort and overlap of results, institutions preserving digital online records must work together to coordinate their activities. It may be that the most practical and resource efficient way of approaching weblog preservation is to have the physical preservation, that is, the storage of the actual data, performed by one institution with the necessary resources, technology, and expertise, while archivists working at any number of collaborating institutions contribute contextual research, analysis, appraisal, and description of the records.

Limitations of this Study and Recommendations for Future Work

Given the time and space limitations of this study, it was necessary to focus on one type of personal digital record. The text-based digital weblog was chosen because of its increasing popularity over the past decade and the possibility of comparison with the

paper-based diary as a near-equivalent type of hard-copy or analogue record. Further research should be undertaken to understand the values and issues surrounding the preservation of video- and photo-based weblogs, and how these relate to weblogs that are primarily textual. Similarly, other forms of online digital personal records, such as YouTube videos, Flickr photograph galleries, and social networking accounts are areas that are worthy of further exploration. It is hoped that some of the observations about the values of diaries, weblogs, and personal records in general made in this thesis will assist researchers in understanding and appreciating the worth of these other kinds of digital records as well.

The focus of this thesis was restricted to suggesting ways in which Manitoba archives might approach the appraisal, acquisition, and preservation of local women's weblogs. Other studies could build on this foundation by examining similar issues surrounding the documentation of other distinctive groups in society: which techniques advised in this study would be appropriate to use in most situations and where different approaches might be necessary. Just as broad trends in women's creation of weblogs and other personal records have been identified, patterns are apparent in the records made and maintained by men and this is an area that should be studied further based on its own merit, and to gain a better understanding of gender-based differences in record keeping.

Extending the scope of this research from a local to a global scale would also be immensely valuable. Establishing an international weblog preservation program is something that the archival community should carefully consider, as valuable life-writing is being created each day by people world-wide. This type of program would be difficult

to implement, especially given issues of determining provenance and authenticity, but the findings of this thesis support both the value and technical possibility of such a project.

The technical aspects of appraising and preserving online digital records were not dealt with in great detail in this study. The decision to focus instead on the challenges of assessing the values and coping with the moral and legal issues raised by these records was intentional. Many governments, corporations, and institutions of social memory world-wide are devoting extensive resources to dealing with the technical side of digital record preservation, while the other issues surrounding these records have received relatively little attention. Despite the efforts being made to overcome difficulties surrounding digital record preservation, this issue is far from being solved and further research in the field is necessary.

As stated earlier, much of the research and theorizing about archival appraisal has focused on records created by governments and large corporations. Some of this work has resulted in methodologies such as macroappraisal and documentation strategy, from which ideas for the appraisal of personal records can be derived. Relatively little attention, however, has been directed towards what value institutional records can hold beyond evidence of transactions and information for future researchers. It is possible that these records will also reflect much about the individuals that inscribe them and the organizational context in which they are created. Archivists studying the appraisal of these records could benefit from an understanding of the narrative value that personal records often hold, and perhaps find similar themes of story-telling and identity formation in organizational records.

This study has argued for the archival preservation of weblogs, especially those personal lifelogs created by women, because these records have not received much critical attention from the media or society in general, or from archivists. It is hoped that this thesis will inspire archivists to promote the creation of online records preservation programs, and investigate the possibility of undertaking this type of project within the institutions where they work. It is also hoped that this study will help archivists responsible for appraising personal records recognize the importance of considering the values that these records, particularly those created electronically, hold beyond their traditional evidential and appraisal values for researchers.

The internet has great equalizing potential – every literate person with access to a computer and internet connection has the ability to share their voice with the world. As one blogger, a woman named Barbara Banta, states, “[b]logging has been an amazing growth experience ... The possibility, make that probability, that people will actually read what I’ve written is enticing, while the actuality of connecting with others and receiving their comments is encouraging beyond belief. As a woman with a disability, the sheer luxury of being able to communicate ideas and opinions to a worldwide audience is a dream come true. There’s a good chance no one will ever read the manuscript in my desk, but thoughts can now be shared, memories passed on, and my fiction enjoyed.”³ Perhaps no one would have heard Barbara’s voice a generation or a decade ago, but today they can, and preserving voices such as these is an opportunity that archivists should embrace.

³ Quoted in Heather Blakey, “Potentiate Using Blogger,” *Building Niche Virtual Communities*, <http://heatherblakey.wordpress.com/potentiate-using-blogger/> (accessed 27 July 2007).

Like diaries before them, weblogs may contain rich details of day-to-day life in the early twenty-first century and a glimpse into the inner life of their creators. The preservation of these records will be of immense value to future historians wishing to understand today's society and the perspectives, challenges, hopes and dreams of those living in it. Women's lifelogs may be particularly important and informative records because of the role that women have traditionally played in preserving the memories of families and communities. The personal records that women keep of their lives document a viewpoint that has often been overlooked; preserving these records for generations to come will ensure that women's stories and voices are heard. It will also contribute to a deeper understanding of societal roles, modes of expression, uses of and reactions to technology, and the construction of identity, femininity, and life narratives at a moment in history when it seems society is undergoing so many transformations. And certainly not least of all, the preservation of women's weblogs will help future historians recreate "the texture of the everyday."

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