Chapter 15. The Next Anthology: The Personal Essay in the Digital Age

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Over the past few years or so, during which the essay has seen a renaissance, new platforms and technologies for publishing and disseminating them have emerged. Attention to marginalized voices and efforts to center those voices resulting from the radical activist movements of the 1960s have likewise contributed to the newer relevance of the personal essay and the first-person voice to students of writing and to school curricula.

Given these two historical trends, how do we understand the essay's present moment and what does that moment call on those of us who write and teach essays to do?

The Essay Renaissance

In 1976 Edward Hoagland bemoaned the fact that "though two fine anthologies [*Best American Short Stories* and the *O'Henry Prize Stories*] remain that publish the year's best stories, no comparable collection exists for essays" (24–25). A decade later Houghton Mifflin launched the *Best American Essays* series under its Ticknor & Fields imprint with Robert Atwan as series editor. The series experienced immediate and continued success, which has led its publisher to add related series (science and nature, travel, spiritual, and sports writing, and "nonrequired reading") that feature essays. At the time Hoagland published his piece, New Journalists such as Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, and Tom Wolfe had already been working for the better part of a decade to invigorate feature writing by importing techniques from fiction: a strong first-person point of view, thick description, figurative language, sustained dialogue, and dramatized scenes. Wolfe offered a theory of and rationale for this approach in four manifesto-like introductory chapters to the 1973 anthology *The New Journalism*. Work by the New Journalists soon found its way into essay anthologies, stretching the boundaries of the genre and challenging the still prevalent view of the essayist as "a middle-aged man in a worn tweed jacket in an armchair smoking a pipe by a fire in his private library in a country house in England, in about 1910, maundering on about the delights of idleness, country walks, tobacco, old wine, and old books" (Good vii).

Out of the political movements of the 1960s came not only calls for more relevant curricula and the establishment of African-American and women's studies programs, but also for new courses and curricula. Development of these

programs and others like them led to the recovery of silenced, ignored, and lost texts, an opening of both the composition and literature canons, and a more engaged, process-oriented approach to the teaching of writing. One of the resulting developments was growth in creative writing programs: according Mark McGurl, in *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing,* their numbers went from a "handful . . . in the 1940s [to] some 150 graduate degree programs (offering the M.A., M.F.A., or Ph.D.)" in 1984, and "as of 2004 . . . more than 350 creative writing programs in the United States" (24).

As McGurl's subtitle suggests, the new creative writing programs emphasized fiction (though poetry was generally there from the outset as well). The essay, on the other hand, was relegated institutionally to first-year writing and composition classes. In schools where such courses were staffed by adjuncts and graduate assistants, beginning teachers were supplied with "readers"—textbook anthologies filled with model essays, discussion questions, and exercises designed to walk them through their first teaching experience. The situation was not new. According to Lynn Z. Bloom, the essay had suffered a "fall from canonical status to school genre" around 1900 ("Once More" 25).

In the 1980s things began to change for the essay. By 1986, the year Houghton Mifflin launched the *Best American Essays* series, the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) already noted that "the fastest growing creative writing programs are in nonfiction" (Rose 238). Of the 388 graduate programs in creative writing that AWP now lists (as of 2022), 267 of them offer degrees in creative nonfiction, with memoir and essay dominating, all under the unfortunate umbrella of "nonfiction," which, as Scott Russell Sanders has pointed out, is

> an exceedingly vague term, taking in everything from telephone books to *Walden*, and it's negative, implying that fiction is the norm against which everything else must be measured. It's as though, instead of calling an apple a fruit, we called it a non-meat. (123)

Up until the early 1990s, the essay had been an afterthought in most literary magazines, often appearing as criticism or discussions of craft. Suddenly, it seemed, a number of journals appeared that were devoted exclusively to the essay, many holding onto the nonfiction tag: *Creative Nonfiction* (1993), *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* (1999), *River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative* (1999), *Under the Gum Tree* (2011), *Hippocampus* (2011), and *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* (2014). The *River Teeth*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and NonfictioNow conferences are all focused exclusively on the essay, and the AWP conference, attended each year by upwards of 12,000 writers, teachers, publishers, and students, began to host more panels on the essay. Creative nonfiction, as Wendy Bishop put it in a 2003 issue of *College English,* was "suddenly sexy."

The history of the University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program is representative of both the essay's late arrival and its improved status within the

academy. In 1922, Iowa became the first university in the United States to accept creative work as the thesis for an advanced degree. In 1936, the university set up the Iowa Writers' Workshop, the nation's first degree-granting creative writing program. Focusing exclusively on fiction and poetry, the Workshop pioneered the now-ubiquitous workshop approach, a pedagogical technique in which an experienced writer-teacher guides a discussion of a student manuscript, relying heavily on comments from the student's peers. The Workshop's graduates have won dozens of Pulitzers, National Book Awards, MacArthur Foundation grants, and other honors, and it has consistently ranked as the top program in the country.

In 1976, 40 years after the Workshop was founded and the year Jix Lloyd-Jones became chair of the English Department at Iowa, six of the department's professors founded the Nonfiction Writing Program that offered what was called a Master of Arts in English/Expository Writing, or M.A.W. degree. Students tailored their final projects to fit their interests, doing everything from research-based feature writing to memoirs to film criticism. In 1984, Carl Klaus became the director of the program, helped change the degree to a Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.), and brought in published essayists as visiting faculty. In 2004, Robin Hemley became director, set up the biannual NonfictioNOW Conference; established the Overseas Writing Workshop (which enabled students to write and study in countries such as Cuba, the Philippines, and Australia), hired new faculty, and continued to bring writers to campus as visiting faculty. The program has been prominent since, its graduates publishing scores of books, landing strong teaching positions, and winning Guggenheim, Whiting, Lannan, and MacArthur Foundation fellowships as well as numerous awards.

The Essay in the Digital Age

The digital transformation has changed the way we read and write. Books, magazines, copyright, research methods, libraries, the whole publishing industry—all of these are different now, as is the way we read, write, collect, and teach essays.

In 1984, Phillip Lopate announced on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review* that "The Essay Lives—In Disguise." In fact, it has always been, as Hoagland put it, "a greased pig" (25), sometimes camouflaged as a column, a feature story, an op-ed, or a profile. The essay is not so much a genre as a "galaxy of subgenres," the word "essay" preceded by one of a "passel of adjectives: *personal, formal, informal, humorous, descriptive, expository, reflective, nature, critical, lyric, narrative, review, periodical, romantic,* and *genteel*" (Stuckey-French). Digital technology has compounded the problem—or alternately, it has increased the essay's possibilities.

Essayists have experimented with multimodal composition for years. John T. McCutcheon illustrated George Ade's *Stories of the Streets and of the Town* during the 1890s. A couple of decades later, Don Marquis drew cartoons for his "archy and mehitabel" columns. Radio essays date to that medium's origins. Nonfiction

writers as different as James Agee, W.G. Sebald, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Michael Lesy have used and meditated on photography. But the proliferation of digital technologies in the early 2000s has set off an explosion of new forms. The transformation from film and video provides an especially stark example of what is happening.

In 1992, Lopate published "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film." It examined the work of filmmakers, including Americans Orson Welles, Ross McElwee, and Michael Moore and French filmmakers associated with the New Wave such as Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, and especially Chris Marker, and then offered a five-part definition of the essay-film. This hybrid genre must, he argued, "have words, in the form of text either spoken, subtitled or intertitled"; "represent a single voice"; "represent the speaker's attempt to work out some reasoned line of discourse on a problem"; "impart more than information" (for Lopate, the domain of the documentary) and instead advance "a strong, personal point of view"; and finally, its "language should be as eloquent, well-written and interesting as possible." Lopate also worried the question of why there were so few examples of the essay-film. He attributed the scarcity to, among other things the "intractable nature of the camera," which tends to capture more in its "promiscuous images" than the filmmaker anticipated or perhaps wants. People who are drawn to movie-making, Lopate asserted, seem to be those who "revere images, want to make magic, and are uncomfortable with the pinning down of one's thoughts that an essay demands."

Film critics immediately took Lopate to task for what they saw as a logo-centric view. Paul Arthur pointed out, for instance, that because "film operates simultaneously on multiple discursive levels—image, speech, titles, music—the literary essay's single determining voice is dispersed into cinema's multi-channel stew" (59). While this debate simmered, the digitization of the film industry proceeded apace. Home video moved from VHS to Blu-ray to DVD to streaming. Webcams became standard in laptops and then in mobile devices. In a 2010 issue of *Blackbird,* Virginia Commonwealth University's online literary journal, John Bresland introduced a "suite" of six video essays with a defining piece titled "On the Origin of the Video Essay." He spoke to Lopate directly, arguing first that the "promiscuity of film isn't a weakness of the essay-film," but is instead "a feature" or "complication" in the way "that pianos complicate singing." And as for the hybridity of Lopate's centaur, Hollywood's hegemony, and the problems of distribution, Bresland argued that they were fundamentally a thing of the past:

> Film is visual; the essay is not. Film is collaborative; the essay is not. Film requires big money; the essay costs little and makes less. Essays and film, Lopate notes, are two different animals, and I agree with him on one condition: that it's 1991. That's when Lopate wrote "In Search of the Centaur" for Threepenny. The internet was just a baby then, nursed by dweebs. Then, financial

considerations reigned. If you wanted your film made, you first needed grants, financing, distributors. Today, to make a small-scale personal film, you can shoot the thing on an inexpensive digital camera and upload it to any number of free video sharing sites . . .

Today artists have access to video editing tools that ship free on computers. A generation ago, such capability didn't exist at any price. Now all it takes for a young artist to produce a documentary is an out-of-the-box Mac, a camera, and the will to see an idea through to its resolution. The act of writing has always been a personal pursuit, a concentrated form of thought. And now filmmaking, too, shares that meditative space. The tools are handheld, affordable, no less accessible than a Smith-Corona. You can shoot and edit video, compelling video, on a cell phone.

Brave new world, right? But what do we call it?

We're calling it the video essay. ("On the Origin")

Bresland argued from the position not just of theorist but also practitioner. His suite included a breakthrough video essay of his own titled "Mangoes," a provocative meditation on gender, parenthood, and class that utilized quick cuts, voiceover narration, reenactments, found footage, interviews, and black-and-white photography. In his introduction to this (now widely taught) piece, Bresland revealed,

> My own modest obstruction in "Mangoes," self-imposed, was to acquire video, record sound, and compose a score using only a cell phone. In the end, I cheated. But just a bit. For the most part, "Mangoes" is authored on an iPhone.

Over a decade ago, Bresland's touchstones were YouTube and the iPhone, and the digital revolution has continued to accelerate. Many digital natives who arrive in our classrooms each fall are already proficient, to varying degrees, in assemblage and multimedia composition: text, sound, image moving and still, links as sources or illustrations Many of them are already blogging, podcasting, designing games, creating videos and Instagram essays.

A decade ago at Florida State University where I teach, we launched a new track for our undergrad English majors, an alternative to our existing literature and creative writing tracks. We called this third concentration editing, writing, and media (EWM) and summed up its mission with the (now antiquated) tag line "Writing for 21st Century." It was meant to be a pilot project with a soft rollout, but students loved it and within two years it was the most popular of our three tracks. EWM majors take a core set of traditional literature and writing courses but supplement those with courses (some required, some electives) in areas such

as visual rhetoric, digital design, line editing, and the history of text technologies. They work in our two digital studios and create e-portfolios. Most do an internship and pursue careers in book and magazine publishing, public relations, advertising, and arts administration. Many go on to graduate school. The EWM track is currently home for more than half of our approximately 1400 undergraduate English majors.

Florida State is hardly alone in developing a program like this. Some colleges and universities have established them as independent departments or programs: University of Kentucky's Writing, Rhetoric, & Digital Studies, Bentley University's English & Media Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Department of Comparative Media Studies & Writing, and Seattle University's Digital Technologies and Culture. Others offer something similar as a concentration within English or another major: University of Massachusetts Amherst, Mount Mary University (WI), Emmanuel College (MA), Auburn University, University of Massachusetts Boston, Miami University (OH), St. Edwards (TX), New Mexico State, University of Rochester (NY), and University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Among graduate programs, the digital essay has had a slower uptake. Important work is being done by Claudia Rankine at Yale University, Eric LeMay at Ohio University, Ira Sukrungruang at the University of South Florida previously and more recently at Kenyon College, Joe Wenderoth at the Univeristy of California at Davis, Ander Monson at the University of Arizona, Brian Oliu at the University of Alabama, José Roach Orduña at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), and Kristen Radtke at UNLV's Beverly Rodgers and Carol C. Harter Black Mountain Institute. But creative writing seems so far to have left much of the work in program and course development to colleagues in film, journalism, and media studies, even as it has developed online venues for creative work that employs new media. Journals such *Ninth Letter* at the University of Illinois, *DIAGRa.m.* at the University of Arizona, *Tri-Quarterly* at Northwestern University, and *Slag Glass City* at DePaul University are among some of the magazines publishing digital essays. Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program has sponsored much of this work. Bresland (and his wife Eula Biss with whom he collaborates), Radtke, and Orduna are all Iowa graduates. Robyn Schiff, Nick Twemlow, and Jeff Porter have done multimodal work.

The Next Anthology

Program and curriculum development are essential to the genre's development and growth but so too is publication, including historically through anthologies, which have long played a critical role in helping define the canon and did so again during the essay renaissance.

As Lynn Z. Bloom has persuasively argued, the post-World War II essay canon had been constructed primarily in first-year writing anthologies. These collections emphasized shorter, more accessible essays that could be used by beginning

teachers to model familiar modes of writing (exposition, narration, persuasion, description) for beginning writers. According to Bloom this made for a canon that was primarily pedagogical rather than critical, historical, or national. But as the essay renaissance began and nonfiction worked its way into burgeoning M.F.A. programs, essay writers and scholars of the essay began to create anthologies that were organized historically and that included more complex essays by more diverse writers.

A multitude of print anthologies helped fuel the essay renaissance. Important examples of the period included Carl Klaus, Rebecca Faery and Chris Anderson, eds., *In Depth: Essayists for Our Time* (1989; 1993); Gerald Early, ed., *Speech and Power: The African-American Essay and Its Cultural Content from Polemics to Pulpit, Vols. I and II* (Ecco 1992, 1993); Sandra Tropp, ed. *Shaping Tradition: Art and Diversity in the Essay* (Harcourt 1992); Phillip Lopate, ed., *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present* (Anchor Doubleday 1994); Robert Sayre, ed., *American Lives: An Anthology of Autobiographical Writing* (U of Wisconsin P 1994); Joyce Carol Oates and Robert Atwan, eds., *The Best American Essays of the Century* (Houghton Mifflin 2000); John D'Agata, ed., *The Next American Essay* (Graywolf 2002); D'Agata, ed., *The Lost Origins of the Essay* (Graywolf 2009); Michael Martone and Lex Williford, eds., *The Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Nonfiction: Work from 1970 to the Present* (Simon and Schuster 2007); Richard Labonté and Lawrence Schimel, eds., *First Person Queer: Who We Are (So Far)* (Arsenal Pulp Press 2007); Carl Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French, eds., *Essayists on the Essay: From Montaigne to Our Time* (U of Iowa P 2012); D'Agata, *The Making of the American Essay* (Graywolf 2016); and Marcia Aldrich, *Waveform: Twenty-First-Century Essays by Women* (U of Georgia P 2016).

These anthologies introduced readers to new voices by reaching back historically—even beyond Montaigne to the classical period—and by being more attentive to gender, ethnic, and racial diversity than most earlier anthologies had been. In some instances, they crossed national borders to explore the genre in its global context. In addition to broadening their content they also curated the material differently. Traditional first-year writing anthologies had usually organized their tables of contents by genre or rhetorical mode, theme or topic, or alphabetically by author, and offered editorial apparatus that emphasized writing prompts and discussion questions (see Bloom "Once More"; Root). The new anthologies were more likely to organize their contents chronologically, include multiple essays by individual essayists, offer headnotes that gave substantial biographical and historical context, include a full bibliography and index, and provide a scholarly introduction.

The digital revolution that has captured imaginations and spawned many new literary forms has at the same time played havoc with textbook publishing. Many writers teaching nonfiction prefer to have students buy multiple essay collections by single authors or to create ad hoc anthologies for their courses. Blackboard, Canvas, and other online platforms make it easy, indeed de rigueur, for teachers

to set up password-protected classroom sites where they can easily and legally create their own digital course library. These innovations have hit the whole textbook industry hard, but have posed particular problems for print anthologies aimed at classrooms. Publishers push editors and authors for new editions every two or three years in an attempt to outmaneuver used booksellers. They raise the prices with each new edition to shore up their margins against sagging sales. At the same time, authors' agents raise permissions costs. Editing an anthology, which had never done much to help one's case for promotion and tenure, has become even less attractive. Faced with an accelerated editing process, dwindling advances, and the moral dilemma of textbook costs to students already burdened by high tuition and student loan debt, many would-be editors find less incentive than ever to take on this task—and increasingly fewer opportunities to do so.

Despite these pressures, anthologies continue to be published (often as trade books rather than text) used in classrooms, and play a role in forming canons. But new conditions call for new anthologies. How might we collect and curate essays in formats appropriate to the digital age? How can print and electronic texts complement each other?

My focus here is not on the question of print versus screens per se. Both are here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. We know the pros and cons. Text on a screen is easily customizable; it allows you to carry thousands of books in your pocket, access databases like Project Muse, follow links, take screenshots, do searches, and make annotations. Print, on the other hand, is better for reading longer works and for reading deeply with retention. Print books don't come with distractions like social media or limitless surfing. You carry the whole of the material book with you rather than face single contextless virtual pages. My concern is with how we might construct an essay anthology that straddles the two realms, combines valuable aspects of print and electronic books, makes full use of today's technology-enhanced and virtual classrooms, offers students classic essays from the past and also cutting-edge digital work, and perhaps even leads textbook publishers into the new age. Such an anthology might exist in a print form but be supplemented by a digital component that can be accessed from a mobile device, as publishers are doing with composition textbooks

To be honest I'm not sure that what I have in mind should be called an anthology. When I show students a new book trailer or mash-up or animated memoir or bit of film criticism full of quick cuts, they ask, "But is this a video essay?" And I'm not sure, but it leads to a good discussion that gets us talking about genres as lying along a spectrum rather than as a set of pigeonholes in a fixed cabinet. It is hard to find names for things that are truly new. So perhaps this thing I am talking about is a new kind of anthology, but it might feel more like a set of concerns and ideas about anthologies in the digital age. In any case, here are some the problems and questions that face us.

The Teach Act of 2002 (in particular, section 110) allows instructors at accredited nonprofit institutions of learning to use digital materials, including video

and PDFs that have not been bootlegged, in distance-learning classrooms and on password-protected classroom sites, such as Canvas and BlackBoard. Instructors can use these for the duration of the class as long as they make it clear to students that the work is protected by copyright and is not to be copied or shared beyond the classroom.[1]

Understanding this, instructors have long shared links, PDFs, and other materials. At present instructors use crowdsourcing calls on Facebook and other social media platforms to gather ideas and links, but a more systematic approach would be helpful. Libraries, online literary journals, and those of us who teach the essay might begin to create digital archives that collect some of these materials for use in our courses and research. The curation role is central. Anthologies are important for both their inclusion and their exclusion. With the now billions of websites on the internet and the soaring use of YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, finding examples to use in class presents a nearly paralyzing array of choices, requiring vast amounts of time. Options are wonderful, but an editor-curator function is, too. More sites like Fandor, where Kevin Lee, a great video essayist and curator of the form, posts would be a help with this Sisyphean task.[2]

Crowdsourcing can often seem like a catch-as-catch-can way to find new essays online or share teaching ideas but they remain necessary and Facebook pages such as Creative Writing Pedagogy and the late William Bradley's Essaying the 21st Century make possible the platforms for such calls.[3] Sites such as Dinty Moore's, *Brevity's* Nonfiction Blog and Ander Monson's Essay Daily provide links, craft advice, podcasts, "visual essays," posts from conferences, roundtable discussions, reviews, and news about contests and calls for submissions.[4] As literary magazines publishing essays put their archives online, sometimes for a subscription but often free, readers and teachers can move among several of them and create their own anthologies.

Collection and anthology sites are essential and invaluable for creating a community of writers, scholars, and teachers, but they are not exactly anthologies. A digital archive, which attempts to preserve materials in a readable, searchable, and contextualized format, is more akin to an anthology. A few digital archives of essays exist. Most notably there is Patrick Madden's Quotidiana, which contains scores of essays by dozens of essayists beginning with Seneca.[5] Compiled and updated over several years by Madden and his graduate students at Brigham Young University, Quotidiana is beautifully curated with biographical notes, searchable and downloadable files, and even portraits of each essayist. The essays all date from before 1923 and so are in the public domain. This archive is an invaluable aid

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1. https://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#110
2. https://www.fandor.com/browse-movie
3. https://www.facebook.com/groups/509120669155567/
4. https://brevity.wordpress.com/ and https://www.essaydaily.org/, respectively.
5. http://essays.quotidiana.org/

for scholars and teachers focused on the classical essay. Quotidiana emphasizes the Anglo-American tradition but tries to introduce African, Asian, and Native American voices as well and includes 33 women essayists.

With the help of my graduate assistants and undergraduate interns I created a digital archive, Essays in America, of more contemporary essay materials. It contains 32 essays by 20th- and 21st-century American essayists ranging from Randolph Bourne and W.E.B. Du Bois to Maxine Hong Kingston and Jo Ann Beard. The entries include a short biography of the essayist, discussions of the form of each essay and of its subsequent appearances in collections and anthologies, a bibliography, and scans of each essay as it first appeared in magazines, as well as surrounding ads, illustrations, cartoons, contributors' notes, tables of contents, subsequent letters to the editor, and other materials that might help inform readers about the essay's original rhetorical context. When possible, there is a link to or PDF of the essay in its entirety, but copyright provisions have not always allowed that.

Another site that offers important digital archives that focus primarily on print essays is *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies.* Founded by Karen Babine, *Assay* is published twice a year; each issue contains articles and conversations about essays and the teaching of essays. The site also contains two important archives that are continually updated. The first of these is a syllabus bank and the second is a searchable archive of all the titles that have appeared in the *Best American Essays* series since its inception in 1986. Again, because of copyright provisions, one cannot link to the essays themselves, although the archive is searchable by author, title, and year.

But what about new digital essays? Here the archives are scattered and this is where scholars, teachers, and students could really benefit from an archive that collects some of the most innovate work or at least links to it. Currently one must either search online journals, such as *Tri-Quarterly Online*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Blackbird* that often publish such work, or go to the individual artists' websites. Important video essayists such as Claudia Rankine (who often collaborates with John Lucas) and John Bresland (who often collaborates with Eula Biss) collect their work at their websites, but also upload work at Vimeo.[6] Similarly, Brian Oliu's groundbreaking video game essays might at first seem only to be scattered among various online magazines before one discovers that he has his own YouTube channel, Uploads from Brian Oliu.[7] Scripts of video essays that have been created as video essay are rarely available online, though they would be of tremendous use in the classroom. The best substitute is to view video adaptations of print essays. Two good comparisons that help illuminate the adaptation process involve essays by Brian Doyle and Ryan Van Meter. Doyle's essay "His Last Game"

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6.   http://claudiarankine.com/ and https://bresland.com/, respectively.

7.   https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=UUbiRmDQKiTDa89z9faDxeNg

appeared originally in *Notre Dame Magazine*,[8] was later made into ten-minute film by director Avery Rimer, and is available online at hislastgame.com. Van Meter's essay "First" appeared in *The Gettysburg Review*[9] and a video adaptation of it by Sarabande Books served as a book trailer for his first collection, *If You Knew Then What I Know Now.*

Two accomplished graphic essayists and memoirists, Alison Bechdel (dykestowatchoutfor.com) and Kristen Radtke (KristenRadtke.com) have exquisite websites that showcase their work. Both regularly update their sites and link to interviews, YouTube videos, and blog posts in which they discuss their creative process. Two innovative digital essayists, Eric LeMay (ericlemay.org) and Ander Monson (otherelectricities.com) do something similar at their websites, where they collect their work but also link to scattered podcasts, interviews, videos, and craft pieces. These craft pieces and discussions of process, like the scripts of video essays, can be very helpful in learning how to create these new subgenres. An especially illuminating example of this kind of back-and-forth between print and digital is the history of Monson's essay "Solipsism," which appeared first on his website. Then Wendy Sumner-Winter worked with him to redesign the piece for *The Pinch,* a print journal she edited at the University of Memphis. The print version caught the eyes of editors Robert Atwan and Adam Gopnik, who chose it in 2008 when it became the first online piece to be included in the *Best American Essays* series. Monson's original essay and the version he and Sumner-Winter created for *The Pinch* are both online.

This to-and-fro between print and digital gets only more complicated when we begin to consider podcasts, mashups, and Instagram, Google Maps, and various hermit crab essays that inhabit other forms such as online syllabi, BuzzFeed listicles, and who knows what else. The goal is not to contain or limit the diversity of the internet within a few or, heaven forbid, a single online anthology, but what I hope to propose here (and perhaps even enact here) is the idea that an online clearing house or anthology or some such animal is needed and even possible.

How do we cultivate a respect for traditional forms while leaving ourselves and our students open to innovation and the possibilities digitization offers? What can we learn from people who are digital natives? What is multimodal composition? What is a digital essay? And what might an essay anthology look like in the digital age? Embedded in that last question are several others. For example, what purpose can or should anthologies serve? Teaching convenience is one rationale, reading pleasure a second, canon formation a third. It may be that professors would rather pick and choose their own works, that readers are plenty happy either with Best American series or reading favorite periodicals, and that canon formation is best left to critics or social circulation. Perhaps anthologies in a digital age are largely going the way of, say, *The Reader's Digest*, in the age of

8.   https://magazine.nd.edu/stories/his-last-game/
9.   https://tinyurl.com/ss38pxvs

print. Still, to the extent that their remains a combinatorial or curatorial role for anthologies—an anthology function—especially in the still emergent period of digital/multimodal essays and all their affordances, it seems desirable to embrace some means of identifying works that deserve attention, even acclaim.

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