



Archiving  
is the New  
Folk Art

Excerpts by Kenneth Goldsmith  
Designed by Lucy Nguyen Pham







**Archiving in the New Digital Age**

**Pinterest as a Duchampian Archive**

**YOLK ART**

**Pinterest as Renewal**

**Geo's Bend Quilt**

**Archiving as Quilting**

**Archiving as a Long Form Article**

**CASSETTE**

**Archiving as an Illusion of Control**

**APRIL 23rd Day of the Quilter**





Birds of Paradise Quilt  
(1800-1863)  
via the American  
Folk Art Museum



**Archiving as a...**  
 The history of archiving is a long and varied one, with roots in the ancient world. In the early days, archives were often the domain of the church or the state, and they served as a means of preserving important documents and records. Over time, the role of archives has expanded to include a wide range of materials, from books and manuscripts to photographs and digital files. Today, archives are essential for the preservation of our cultural heritage and for the study of history and society.



**CASSETTE**

**Archiving as an Illusion of Control**

Our archiving impulse arises as a way to ward off the chaos of overabundance. And yet even in the prodigal age, the collector could never actually consume the sheer volume of cultural artifacts that could be collected.

The Harvard historian Ann Blair relates how Kant (1724-1804) and Wordsworth (1770-1850) were among the earliest authors who described an experience of temporary mental blockage due to "sheer cognitive exhaustion." Blair charts the rise of various indexing systems—as well as the invention of commonplace and reference books—as a way to order the impending chaos of overproduction and underconsumption.

The managing and sorting of information became an industry hinged on the illusion of control, which grew alongside increasingly codified systems of knowledge and rhetoric. Eventually, it evolved into a booming and lucrative industry, with the rise of everything from Johnson's Dictionary—for which he was paid roughly the equivalent of \$350,000 in today's money—to the current crop of paywalled archives such as











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Plains  
Duchampian

Gee's Bend Quilts

The digital theorist Rick Prelinger has proclaimed that evolving is the new folk art, something that is widely practiced and has unconsciously become integrated into a great many people's lives, potentially transforming a necessity into a work of art. Now, at first thought it seems wrong: how can the storing and categorizing of digital (or analogue) data be folk art? Isn't folk art the opposite, something predicated upon the subjective handcrafting of an object into a unique and personal statement, often times one that expresses a larger community ethos?

One need think of, say, the magnificent quilts of Gee's Bend produced over many generations by a Group of African American women who live in an isolated Alabama town. Each quilt is unique, while bearing the mark of that specific community. Or the spectacular cosmic visions of someone like Rev. Howard Finster, whose obsessive, emotional hand-rendered religious paintings and sculptures could only be sprung from the unique genius of Finster himself.





FOLK ART

American Sampler (1945) by Margaret Barsholt via the Cooper Hewitt

Pettway and mother Bill with the quilt, Jorana Gear & Bond 1997 (via Library of Congress)



