

**Uses for Fan Envelopes from the Grateful Dead Archive
as Digital and Traditional Primary Research Sources**

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Research Methods

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BACKGROUND

That fans of The Grateful Dead (1965-1995) were passionate about the band and the community they created around the music has been established in scholarly literature in recent years (Reist 183). University of North Carolina sociology professor Rebecca Adams goes so far as to argue that the band “was as well known for its fans as it was for its music” (Adams 1). Continued free exchange of The Grateful Dead’s recorded performances (Internet Archive or archive.org) demonstrate a strong fan following of the band even nearly fifteen years after the end of the band as such.¹

What can we learn from ephemeral evidence that The Grateful Dead and fans, labeled Deadheads, compiled over three decades? By all accounts the band did well when they hired Eileen Law² in 1972,³ whose duties included archiving material documenting concerts, the band’s unique business ventures, and correspondence with their fan base that was encouraged by the band via an address provided on the back of an album cover (Pattacini 2). In 2008 these materials were donated to The University of California - Santa Cruz (UCSC) (McKinley) with ambitious plans to digitize the entire collection and eventually allow for user contributions, a recent idea in archival management adopted from the success of social networking internet

¹ Remaining band members played during and after the Grateful Dead years as The Other Ones, The Dead, Bobby and the Midnites, Ratdog, Phil Lesh and Friends, Mickey Hart and the Heartbeats, and now as Furthur.

² “Law...was...hired...to take care of the Deadheads, the casually formed fan club born after the band invited fans to write to a San Rafael post office box on its 1971 eponymous album, popularly known as ‘Skull & Roses.’ That opened the floodgates for a fan base whose devotion was unprecedented and remains unmatched in the history of rock ‘n’ roll,” according to a *San Francisco Chronicle* writer on SFGate.com (McMahon).

³ At the announcement of the Grateful Dead’s donation of its archive to UCSC, drummer Mickey Hart brought Law up to the podium to thank her and aid in answering questions from the press (Press Conference 2008).

sites (Huttner). In September 2009, the Grateful Dead Archive received a grant of over \$600,000 from the Institute of Museum and Library Services to proceed with this plan (Walsh).

THESIS

Decorated fan envelopes (see Appendix)⁴ from Deadheads writing for concert tickets are some of the first digitized items to appear on the Grateful Dead Archive website, established in 2008. What can we learn from investigating these envelopes? Why did people create these particular items? What terms will we use to identify and analyse them? Are they art, folk art or fan art? Should they be classified simply as “ephemera”?⁵ Should any other terms be used? What can a study of the envelopes tell us as research objects? How might they be used in the broader study of American culture, subcultures, or counter-culture? Could the model we use to study these items be applied to other similar items, such as fan mail to other bands of a similar era in the United States?⁶ In other countries?

⁴ Thousands of such envelopes were saved by Law (McMahon), all now at the Grateful Dead Archive. A scholar-member of the self styled “Grateful Dead Caucus” at the Southwest/Texas Popular Culture conference where I subsequently presented a version of this paper, told me of an additional significant collection of the envelopes.

⁵ ODLIS, the Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science, defines “ephemera” to be “‘something short-lived.’ The printed materials of everyday life, generally regarded as having little or no permanent value because they are produced in large quantities or in disposable formats for a specific limited use...includes...bumperstickers...greeting cards...leaflets...pamphlets...playbills...postcards, tickets...etc. Ephemeral items are sometimes retained and exhibited for their graphic qualities or for their association with a specific person, event or activity.”

⁶ Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart anticipates this in the question and answer part of his discussion at the announcement of the Archive donation to UCSC. He also delves into issues of preservation and access, more versed in the vocabulary of librarianship than one might expect from a professional musician (Press Conference 2008). This may come from his work with the Library of Congress’ American Folklife Center starting in 1989 (McKee) in preparation of *Planet Drum* (Hart). Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh also has a library connection, it was fun to discover in the preparation of this paper. During junior college in San Mateo, California he held a part time position in the college library’s music department working with LP records, where he “couldn’t wait to get to work every day” (Lesh 13).

The Grateful Dead Archive's current recruitment of an archivist has garnered national press (Cohen, Gustin, JamBase, University of California Santa Cruz, Wall Street Journal, The Daily Show with Jon Stewart). Just weeks from my Master of Library and Information Science degree, I have added my name to the crowd of potential candidates for employment there, visualizing the opportunity for participation in this creative new endeavor, trailblazing in archival management strategies that blend traditional finding aids and digital finding aids⁷ with brave new social networking promotion and expansion of the Grateful Dead Archive collection via user participation. A recent Society of American Archivists conference presenter stressed that "archives 2.0" incorporating user interactions are "not a passing fad" (Theimer).

I became curious about the interest level of Deadheads, known for their "long history of taking up residence in online venues" (Burnett 697) and for being "obsessive" about the band's recordings (703), to the idea of a communal archive. I wondered whether the participatory archive approach has worked for other institutions. Will all digital donations be accepted?⁸ Will user-donors of Grateful Dead ephemera form online communities similar to those that have formed around what scholar of information studies Gary Burnett calls the "deep-seated Deadhead culture committed to the sharing and trading of live recordings" (699)? Will users post digital items anonymously or with their real names attached? Will owners of valuable⁹

⁷ The finding aids developed for the archive will be incorporated into the Online Archive of California, according to UCLA university archivist Charlotte Brown and UCSD university librarian Brian Schottlaender in their 2001 article on the OAC (Brown 97).

⁸ This question was also asked in the 2008 press conference when The Grateful Dead donated the archive to UCSC.

⁹ I do not mean to infer that the only items of "value" are those that might have related insurance policies for monetary purposes. As one LIS scholar points out, "the value of materials and collections is not primarily defined by how librarians view them, but is a function of users' worldview; materials perceived to be trivial and unimportant by some may be extraordinarily important and meaningful for others" (Burnett 708).

ephemera, such as artwork by Jerry Garcia, have the same approach as those posting photos of their favorite tie-dyed Grateful Dead t-shirt?

In the spirit of full disclosure as discussed early into this course,¹⁰ I will acknowledge that I am a seasoned Grateful Dead fan. Indeed some of the envelopes may be from my own ticket requests.¹¹ I will draw upon popular culture and other research articles, library and information science literature, and my own knowledge of the mail order ticket system and culture surrounding the band in the 1980s to anticipate how one might put the envelopes into context and use them in research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND POTENTIAL THEORETICAL APPROACHES

This semester we covered several models for qualitative scholarly research, from textual analysis to annotated bibliographical approaches to research, to the significance of scholarly book reviewing. A theoretical backdrop was provided by a collection of essays by Roger Chartier, a French historian who “dances with theorists,” according to scholar-librarian professor Jennifer Burek Pierce (class notes). Chartier’s *On the Edge of the Cliff: history, language and practices*, is “a conversation with and among the dead,” to include “texts devoted to Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Louis Marin, Norbert Elias, and Phillipe Ariès” (Chartier

¹⁰ Our full examination of the extensive Oklahoma network of Louise Robbins in her expert preparation of *The Dismissal of Miss Ruth Brown: civil rights, censorship, and the American library* (Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 2000) revealed many research techniques valuable to gaining the full perspective on the story that Robbins was able to attain.

¹¹ By comparison, it was anticlimatic when I placed an online order last spring with a college friend to meet in Chicago and take in a show by The Dead, featuring the surviving Grateful Dead members, with Warren Hayes of Allman Brothers fame on lead guitar in deceased Jerry Garcia’s spot. It wasn’t at all like the shared cultural experience of mail ordering via the Grateful Dead Ticket Service.

1). Chartier argues that this group, to include himself and other living authors such as UCSC professor emeritus and Stanford professor of comparative literature Hayden White, “tried...to shift cultural history’s line of questioning and its approaches” (Chartier 2). Though these authors “differ profoundly,” Chartier asserts that “walking awhile in their company helps us formulate more clearly the crisis (or at least the uncertainty) of history often announced today” (ibid). Certainly applying Foucauldian notions of power to a study of Deadhead community building within the American and European countercultures of the 1960s and 70s would be fruitful. The Grateful Dead fan envelopes, while creative works of joy, may be studied as a reaction to the dominant culture, and an expression of otherness.

The 2009 book, *Re-figuring Hayden White*, a festschrift celebrating White’s eightieth birthday, will be interesting to compare with Chartier’s 1997 collection, as the dialogue about interdisciplinarity marches on. The publisher notes that the book in honor of White is a “major reconsideration of the historian’s contributions...by an international group of leading scholars from a variety of disciplines....” In that it will discuss, among other things, “his role as a historian and teacher and apply his ideas to specific historical events,”¹² it may inform a study of hippie counterculture to include Deadheads.

My assignment in this paper is to simply begin to move toward investigating ways in which the envelopes as primary sources might be used in scholarship. One of Chartier’s steps toward resolving the crisis in historiographical scholarship speaks to this:

¹² <http://www.sup.org/book.cgi?id=10862>

In the face of the retreat of the great explicative models, a first, strong temptation was to return to the archives and to the raw document that registers the upwelling of singular instances of speech, which are always richer than what the historian has to say about them (3).

Again, as the Stephen Jay Gould quote goes, from the course syllabus as we set out sixteen weeks ago, “The primary rule of intellectual life: when puzzled, it never hurts to read the primary documents.”

Appropriate broad areas included from our class discussion of Charles Busha and Stephen Harter’s *Research Methods in Librarianship* that are appropriate for this investigation include the following:

Who will use the library? Among the population of possible users, who does not use the library? What kinds of uses are made of the library and by whom?...What kinds of factual information can be provided to justify the library’s existence? (22)

To those queries we may begin to answer with some reports regarding scholarly inquiry into The Grateful Dead and Deadhead culture. “The study of popular culture has become an important focus in the academic disciplines of the arts, humanities, and social sciences,” notes head of special collections at UCSC Christine Bunting, in a campus news release about the donation of the archive by the band (Rappaport). Regular panels on all things Dead have been held at the last few Southwest/Texas Popular and American Culture Association annual meetings, and an academic conference exclusively about the band and fans was organized in 2007 at The University of Massachusetts at Amherst (Blixt). UCSC music professor Fred Lieberman “has taught a class in the music of the Grateful Dead for years” (McMahon) and

UMass offered a graduate history seminar and undergraduate course on the culture of the band in fall 2007 (Blixt).

Scholars, then, will have an interest in the archive. By which methods they will access the envelopes and other materials remains an interesting question as the project moves forward. How many far-flung researchers will trek to Santa Cruz to study the envelopes in person? How will that number compare to online views?

How the now popular trend of user generated feedback and submission to web content will continue may play out in new ways. Wikipedia, the unprecedented online participatory encyclopedia experiment begun in 2001 has, after several years of rapid growth, seen participation slow significantly. A *Time* magazine critic anticipates it to soon be “the Web’s first ecosystem collapse” (Manjoo 50). Studies about the rise and fall of Wikipedia may help establish Grateful Dead Archive best practices.¹³

Fans have posted over 15,000 Grateful Dead related videos on YouTube (Steel). Will fans study and pursue virtual exchange of Grateful Dead memorabilia such as the decorated envelopes with near to that kind of zeal? Band members, in the press conference announcing the gift of the archive to UCSC, alluded to their own interest in reviewing archival materials once they are cataloged and finding aids are created. Guitarist and vocalist Bob Weir mentioned that he will “need to spend some time” at the Grateful Dead Archive if he writes a book about his

¹³ For example, only 13% of Wikipedia content was generated by women, according to *Time* (Manjoo).

experiences. Weir and Mickey Hart thought that fans might want to look up their own ticket-request envelopes (Press Conference 2008).

Currently the return addresses of envelope senders are blurred on the web photos. Will only in-person researchers be able to determine who sent which envelope? Or are all addresses blurred on the actual documents? Certainly demographics of fans would be one use for the envelopes. If a fan used the same name and moved from town to town, that might be notable. Which geographic areas produced the most or least fans could be an interesting city by city or state by state (or any other division) study.

Women's studies and gender studies scholars might find the envelopes, if return addresses are intact, research fodder for studies of women Deadheads. Carolyn Adams Garcia¹⁴ presented a session on women in the counterculture at the Unbroken Chain: The Grateful Dead in Music, Culture and Memory Conference. According to a post on dead.net, "Mountain Girl's reflections on gender and the early scene was definitely the highlight ...She recalled having to shop and cook for the band, playing house mother." I wonder whether women, as traditional caretakers (willing or not), were more often the ones to organize a group of friends, front the ticket money, and submit ticket requests to the Grateful Dead Ticket Service via decorated (or not) envelopes. The image of a woman depicted on at least one envelope already digitized in the collection may serve for another kind of gender role analysis.

¹⁴ A.k.a. "Mountain Girl" of the Merry Pranksters led by Ken Kesey, a.k.a. Jerry Garcia's first wife.

Additional questions posed in Bupha and Harter table, titled “Some Suggested Broad Areas and Subareas for Research” that may be utilized for study of Grateful Dead Archive fan envelopes and the environment in which they are housed continue thus:

Do cooperative projects among libraries increase the availability of materials? What information should be included in the catalog record of a book or other medium of communication (especially in modern, computerized catalogs)?... What catalog record is required so that patrons can most effectively utilize library collections?... How important is browsing to library clientele? How does browsing function?... What are formal criteria for abstracting or indexing a document? Can a computer be programmed to recognize “significant” words or phrases in the full texts of documents? How? (22-23)

Though their text predates the usage of such current buzzwords as “metadata,” Busha and Harter ask many relevant queries that researchers would do well to consider when thinking about uses for Grateful Dead Archive collections, to include the fan envelopes. What metadata will need to surround each envelope so that it is of utmost utility to users?

Fortunately the Grateful Dead Archive already has a collaborative environment in which to work, that will facilitate access to their collection. The Online Archive of California, a consortium so named since 1998, now has more than 150 contributing institutions (About OAC). It was built upon the earlier California Digital Library, which was “a collaborative venture with the ten UC campuses” (Burns 6). The Grateful Dead Archive is already listed there, though the collection is noted as “unprocessed and unavailable for research” (OAC Grateful Dead Archive page). The OAC, “whose finding aids are integrated into a single, searchable database which describes the contents of primary source collections throughout California” (Brown 97) will help researchers find relevant items in the Grateful Dead Archive, and those

who do not know that Grateful Dead Archive holdings might facilitate their research may come upon their data while browsing the OAC.

Two librarians from UC-Irvine wrote about their experiences building a digital collection, published in the *VRA (Visual Resources Association) Bulletin* in 2002. They noted the “daunting task of engaging faculty and students in the use of digital images” (Burns 7) and lamented that their resources were not being utilized as much as had been anticipated (4). I do not envision the Grateful Dead Archive having such a problem with this as they have had so much publicity. There is great anticipation for the release of digitized Grateful Dead artifacts to the public.

Certainly there are challenges for the Grateful Dead Archive, as noted by UCSC librarian Ginny Steel in her February 2009 conference presentation, to include “vexing intellectual property issues” such as determining ownership and obtaining releases (Steel). Steel showed slides of the huge amount of cargo transported from the Grateful Dead offices and warehouses to UCSC, how archival documents are currently stored as they wait to be cataloged, as well as photographs, bumper stickers, and business files. One slide shows a large box of the fan envelopes, and several more slides highlight individual envelopes.

INVESTIGATION

Ticket ordering by mail began sometime in the 1980s, as far as I can determine. The change from a waiting-in-line-at-a-ticket-office system may have come due to a perception that tickets only went to those able to camp out for them, as noted in the citation to an article compiled in

a large bibliography of the band (Dodd).¹⁵ “Anywhere from one-half to all the tickets for a given concert will be made available by mail order only,” writes a student of ethnomethodology at The University of Houston in 1987 (Pearson 428). “This is to allow equal access for Deadheads living in different parts of the country, and to discourage the scalping of tickets, which could otherwise be a problem” (ibid).

In those days, a fan would call the unlisted Grateful Dead Hotline phone number (Reist 183), passed on by word of mouth and get the band’s tour schedule and ticket ordering instructions,¹⁶ then buy a money order, include for which date/s tickets were wanted and how many, and follow the recorded instructions regarding when the order needed to be postmarked. As I recall, those who got tickets during that time were drawn by a “lottery” of all submitted envelopes. Perhaps some Deadheads viewed this as a competition, and that decorating the envelopes in the funkiest way possible might help theirs to be picked for tickets!

Anticipation regarding ticket lottery results was great at the coffeehouse scene and at Grateful Dead cover band performances.¹⁷ If one person was in the end not able to make the trip to whatever location tickets were secured for, there was always a waiting list of friends that would happily fill in.

¹⁵ Snyder, Susan and Craig Snyder. “What a Long, Strange Trip It’s Been....Sleeping Out for Concert Tickets.” *Kaleidoscope (Philadelphia)* 1.1 (November 1978-December 31, 1978): 28.

¹⁶ Instructions included “write your name, address, area code and phone number in the upper left hand corner of a 3x5 index card,” notes Nancy Reist in her 1997 study of myth, ritual and The Grateful Dead (201).

¹⁷ Madison, Wisconsin had a band called Insect Fear in the 1980s, for example, that covered many Grateful Dead songs and also wrote original material.

The decorated envelopes that Hart called “masterpieces” in the 2008 press conference, showed what he called the “love” between the band and fans. Together these two groups had a “communion,” Hart explained. The lines between band and fans continue to blur as lead guitarist of Grateful Dead cover band Dark Star Orchestra and arguably Garcia “understudy” John Kadlecik has played with the Furthur tour consisting of several Grateful Dead band members this fall.¹⁸

As to whether there might be interest in user generated data as the Grateful Dead Archive anticipates (not to mention potential physical artifact donations to sustain the archive), I conducted a token trial sample, following the assignment to “begin the work” that I propose in this paper. I contacted one Bay Area Deadhead reputed to have invested in a substantial Jerry Garcia artwork collection. Via a friendly Facebook message dialogue, I was able to ascertain that he would “absolutely” be interested in uploading digital photos of his collection to the Grateful Dead Archive, not anonymously as I had anticipated due to privacy and security issues, but as one actively interested in sharing his artifacts with others as part of a communal archive.

Beyond answering “not at all” to whether he might fear for the safety of his collection when exposed so publicly, he went on to say, in what the literature and my own experience would label as quintessentially Deadheadish fashion, “The only place that I know of that I’ve been ripped off by Heads was in parking lots where I was buying stuff I probably shouldn’t have been anyway!”

¹⁸<http://www.darkstarorchestra.net/NEWSITE/HTML/dso.php?sec=news&page=2>

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Deadheads share many ethics and philosophies, such as free music trading. Though my current daily routine does not include listening to Grateful Dead music, about a year ago at a Martin Sexton show in Iowa, another attendee I had never before met and I got to discussing the Grateful Dead, and he insisted on giving me a set of CDs he happened to have in his car to share of Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh and Friends with guest Trey Anastasio of Phish. While generously passing on the music with no anticipated reciprocation from me—except his joy at discussing the band as he does not know many Iowa Deadheads these days—this fellow apologized that he was not sure if all the tracks on the CDs were in the correct show order. That is the spirit of Deadheads. Also when I inquired of my Bay Area contact about his Garcia art collection, his first response included an offer to send me any concert recording I would like from his wide selection.

Because of this passion and connectedness, I expect the Grateful Dead Archive to have active user participation and support. They have already received numerous donations from fans as they protheletize in the significant parking lot scene outside¹⁹ the Furthur shows. Perhaps the ticket-requesters that created the fan envelopes will now have a place to identify their artwork and provide a favorite Grateful Dead memory as part of the metadata surrounding them as an online reunion-of-sorts.

¹⁹ See *Outside the Show* by Hoffman and Cosgrove for further discussion of this phenomenon.

CONCLUSIONS, IDEAS FOR FUTURE STUDY²⁰

Envelopes from fans of The Grateful Dead requesting tickets may be studied in and of themselves with a variety of qualitative and quantitative research questions in mind. They may also speak to the psychology of band fandom. They may illustrate a faction of a subculture or a counterculture which in turn may inform us on the nature of American culture in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond into our current millenium as this fan community still maintains strong connections.

Returning to The Grateful Dead as a researcher was like a homecoming of sorts. Scholar of museum studies Melissa McCray Patticini explains that it is a common feeling for Grateful Dead fans to “need to stay in touch...the equivalent of writing letters to friends at summer camp. It is a need to catch up and reaffirm that they experienced something special together” (12). I enjoyed it!

²⁰ Since submitting this paper, UCSC’s McHenry Library has put together a Grateful Dead Research Guide, found at <http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/grateful-dead-research-guide>

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APPENDIX

All images from Steel presentation; most may be seen in a slideshow at:
<http://library.ucsc.edu/gratefuldeadarchive/previous-samples>







