

Metaphors of Compilation

This special issue of *English Language Notes* invites interdisciplinary perspectives on the poetic and metaphorical possibilities of compilation, a word both ubiquitous and lacking a single, agreed-upon meaning. From Latin *compilatio* (“a raking together, pillaging, plundering; hence, concr., sportively of a collection of documents, a compilation”), “compilation” can describe poetic composition, physical construction, and the artful orchestration of those domains by means of page-layout, indexing, and comparable readerly aids. Both action and result, compilation figures an object in terms at once material and literary.

As the turn in Lewis and Short’s definition above suggests (“hence, concr., sportively ...”), metaphor inheres in compilation: the palimpsest, dig-site, mix-tape, kaleidoscope, cartograph, and family tree are but a few analogues that scholars of the book have used to describe what compilations are like. What then are the poetics of compilation? What are the stakes of the metaphors we use to think through the problems and opportunities that compilations create? What are the limits of description in the interpretation of compiled texts? Which and what kinds of compilations generate useful similitude, and to what ends? How can compiling a text, a book, or an archive make and unmake meaning? We invite textually and/or materially grounded attempts to think through such questions from scholars working across disciplines and cultures.

The co-editors are medievalists but aim to cast a wide net in terms of period, place, language, dialect, genre, repository, and archive, so as to compile fresh perspectives on materiality and textuality within the broad remit of “book history.” Too often, “book history” is taken as a proxy for “print history,” which centers the Western printer and publisher; other forms of bibliographic making become inherently marginalized. Medievalists know well the exclusionary force of normative practice, so we envision this special issue as a forum for descriptive language that may be strange or even inimical to the tropes of book-historical description most familiar for Eurocentric study.

Please send ca. 300-word abstracts for short essays of ca. 4-6k words to metaphorsofcompilation@gmail.com by 1 June 2024. Solicited essays will be due on 10 January 2025 and will receive double-blind peer review, undertaken by *ELN*. Publication is slated for Spring 2026 (volume 64.1).

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