

This is a transcript of the video clip "Selfe Interview: Part 2" from the interview with Dr. Cynthia Selfe in Samuel Head, "A Scholarly Legacy: Professor Cynthia Selfe and the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives" published in *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy*, 22(1), available at <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/22.1/interviews/head>.

**Sam:**

What made you think up this idea of digital archive?

**Dr. Selfe:**

I'm not real certain exact impetus for the idea, but I do know that when I came to Ohio State University, just about 10 years ago now, one of the things that was happening in our culture was the Story Corp project for NPR. Right? So I knew about that project, and I also knew that our profession did not have a central repository or even a public repository of narratives about literacy practices, values, understandings, experiences, activities, that everybody in the profession had access to. So we had no shared resource that we could use to examine literacy and to understand collectively what we were looking at or talking about.

So I was a very small University, Michigan Tech in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, right upper peninsula right there, and Michigan Tech is right up right up at the very top right. So and it had moderate resources available for faculty, and certainly because it was an engineering institution humanities faculty have even more moderate resources. When I came to Ohio State, I knew I was going to a large flagship institution with a lot more resources and resources available to humanists in English Studies. And also knew that I was going to a place where there were people like Louis Ullman and Scott DeWitt, Kay Halasek and Nan Johnson, Beverly Moss, Brenda Brueggerman, all of whom had an interest in what I would call literacy -- and Graff, Harvey -- and so to me it seemed a natural activity to want to study literacy. I already like stories I just like telling them and I like listening to them.

And I wanted to put the resources of the University behind a project that would benefit the entire profession, something that would give every English teacher, every student of English access to narratives about literacy, so that literacy could be studied more systematically and so that we could have like a common corpus like linguists do. Linguists often operate out of a common corpus, and we didn't have a common corpus of literacy narratives, so I wanted to build one. I wanted to make it available to the profession for the benefit of the profession

**Sam:**

So why digital? Explain a little bit about why you decided on a digital archive.

**Dr. Selfe:**

Well everything almost I do is based in in digital contexts, and the digital networks then and now provide, to my way of thinking, such expanded, extended, amplified, reach and scope of projects. So many more people can get involved in participating and contributing and also accessing these narratives because they're in a common public digital archive, and that's what I knew a digital context would bring. But in order to do that I needed more expertise than I -- that I had, and that's why Louis Ullman was my partner in crime on this digital archive. Louis had all the experience necessary to think about some of the technical aspects of that digital context forming it, shaping it, structuring it. And he also had a lovely grasp of

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preservation methods from his work with libraries. So -- but he's married to an award-winning librarian. And he managed to combine those two things in a very artful way when we were talking about and planning the digital archive of literacy narratives.

**Sam:**

Tell me about a story about an early experiencing creating the DALN.

**Dr. Selfe:**

Well, I can tell you a couple of stories, I can tell you about the hardest time we had creating the DALN was getting the Institutional Review Board, the IRB, approval for that particular project. We had to get a project IRB so that the project of the digital archive could be done at various sites. And that was a very difficult effort; it was an effort I think that challenged my own impatience. And I am not good at persevering when I think people want me to go through certain set steps. I'd rather do an end run or, you know, something that would get there quicker. I'm impatient when I do projects Louis Ullman is the antithesis of that: he is absolutely patient and systematic and very cool and collected. And during that first year, it took us an entire year to get IRB approval, and there were times when I was about to leap across the table and, you know, grab a hold of the lapels of the people on the other side: attorneys and people in the IRB office. I was just not ready to hear "no" for this project or do this first that second. I was ready to roll. So Louis, fortunately, took us in a much more systematic way toward the final conclusion. And it was a good thing he was there, and he was such a terrific co-director of this project. It wouldn't exist today without Louis Ullman's insight and perspective and tenacity and intellectual like approach to the whole thing. I would have been banned from the University I'm sure within a week of trying. So that was one story, it was the difficulty of getting IRB.

And the other story I can tell you is when we finished constructing the digital archive, after we got the IRB approval, we had to have seed the collection -- the archive -- with certain collections of narratives so that there would be something there for people to look at; it wouldn't be just like an empty bucket. Right? And so my idea would be to go to scholars that I knew, Brenda Brueggerman, Beverly Moss, I went to Brenda and I asked her if we could do deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens, and if she'd help us with that effort, which we did. It's a still collection in the digital archive, and it's used all the time by people because it includes not only the question-- the interviewer -- plus the participant, but a translator -- a signer and translator -- and there was simultaneously voice and signing. So that was a terrific exercise for us. We learned a lot about how different populations need to be accommodated with both the technology and the setting and the, you know, what different kinds of questions are prompted, what kinds of involvement that prompted, who might be involved, how we might go about doing it.

And then the second question -- the second incident -- was when I went to Beverly Moss, and I thought we should do black women academics because Jackie

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Jones Royster was here, Valerie Lee was here, there were many people I knew would be terrific participants. And so I started this effort by sending out an email to all the black women academics on the campus of I knew, and I sent out this email asking for their involvement. And I didn't get a single blessed email back. None. Zero. I was -- it was busted. It was nothing. I got nothing back. And I was just discouraged, and I went over to Bev's office, her office is right down the hall. And I said "Bev! What's happening here? What is happening here?" And she was very patient, and explained to me how often these women were approached because they are, in a sense, so rare within the academy, so rare within our culture in some regards, so many duties and obligations devolve to them, and they have so much on their plate. And they, for good reason don't trust all the people who come to them asking for involvement, for very good reason. And so Beverly schooled me a bit on that, with great kindness and generosity, and then she sent out a similar email message, and within like two minutes got back all sorts of responses. And as a team we went back and we interviewed people, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone, black women academics, and I had another population with which to seed the DALN. So I learned a lot from Beverly and from Brenda about what it takes to actually carry through a project like this, and how different populations will approach the task of telling a story and thinking about what it means to tell a story in very different ways, and that the DALN had to be -- had to not just accommodate, but seek all those different voices, and be ready to adjust its practices and its collection efforts and its -- project to all those different voices because every single voice that we listened to had something need to tell us about literacy.