

What are the affordances of digital literacy narratives as opposed to traditional ones?

Ulman: To answer the question, it depends a little bit on what you mean by traditional ones, but narratives in the past or in a print publication regime, even when they're shared in excerpts or quotations it's usually a transcription prompt, so if a researcher has recorded them with audio or video what they're presenting to their readers is typically a transcription and the video and the audio versions ...the audio captures tone of voice, right...

Selfe: pace, rhythm, accent...

Ulman:...All of those various kinds of information. And the video obviously captures how someone performs themselves. What do they chose to wear in front of a camera, where do they choose to sit, what do they want to have behind them?

Selfe: Paralinguistic gestures, any kinds of facial expressions, all of those things might well be made invisible or edited out of a transcript and so the version of the narrative passed along to readers or viewers or audiences is, I don't know, it seems to me now very flat and very one dimensional unless it is represented in the way it was recorded.

Ulman: So that's the reason to put them online, the other affordance is perfectly lined up with that and it is that's the way we can get them into people's hands, if they're on a worldwide network, and they are. I mean, the most recent one that I uploaded, I saw the person a week later and I said, oh by the way your literacy narrative has been downloaded 45 times on four continents, and that's like a week later. That just wouldn't happen in another context. So that's an affordance and it comes into play in lots of different contexts from scholarship to showing your brother who is serving in the Middle East right now.

Selfe: Here's another teaching and scholarly affordance, students are doing more and more composing in digital media in their classes, we can't either study or share those narratives in the form that they were composed unless we have a multimedia platform to store them, preserve them and look at them and then share them. So without something like the DALN, those narratives are limited to a classroom or to a student and a teacher and all that becomes invisible to us, so the DALN makes things visible that we have not had access to before. I think that's important.

Ulman: Another, and this has taken a while for me to be fully aware of, only because I'm not a teenager or a twenty something, I think the digital literacy narratives really make these narratives more intelligible frankly to a generation that places, I forget how many gigabytes of video online, on Vimeo and YouTube, every day or every minute, every hour. Vernacular video is so commonplace that...

Selfe: ...and so important and such a channel for expression...

Ulman: That I think it really does help literacy narratives as an important genre for our culture, really makes them more intelligible to a broader range of people.

Why is it important to collect and preserve these narratives in a digital space?

Ulman: Ever since the Web appeared people have been debating about the ephemeral of electronic texts and saying things like books that are five hundred or six hundred years old are still readable. My feeling about that from the beginning has been...those books are there 99 percent ... and I'm making that up, made up number, pulled it out of the air, but some vast percentage of everything that's been printed we don't have because it wasn't cared for. Yes, in a culture of preservation we can keep books around and in good condition for a long, long time-paper is very durable. But there's no particular reason why electronic texts, in a culture of preservation, could not also last almost forever, because they can be renewed just as books when they wear out we have book conservators who can fix those books, restore them. And I think that the argument really needs to be turned around. It's important to preserve these narratives in a digital space because they're already digital; it's important to record them digitally, it's important to use that medium for this kind-of project and therefore you should pay attention to how they can be preserved because they are a cultural heritage rather than saying let's not do this because it's ephemeral. I don't think there's anything, digital texts are not immaterial, they exist...you have to have a material record, it's recorded on some material thing.

Selfe: They're no more or less ephemeral than paper.

Ulman: Right, and so that...I guess I'm trying to turn the question around and say – they're digital already, therefore, it's important to preserve them digitally.