Selfe Interview: Part 1

Sam:
Do you mind introducing yourself?

Dr. Selfe:
No, I'm Cynthia Selfe and I'm Distinguished Humanities Professor in the Department of English at Ohio State University.

Sam:
Thank you, and thank you for being willing to participate in this interview. To start off, would you mind telling me a little bit about your background and how you got interested composition, literacy, and digital studies?

Dr. Selfe:
Yes, when I left the University of Wisconsin, I was, as an undergraduate student, I thought it was going to be an English teacher in public schools, and so I went to Scotland and I did a little bit of teaching there in a coal mining district.

And then when I came back to the United States I had forgotten to look for a job. So I went out, I lived in Houston at the time and I went to all the school districts around Houston, but this was in August, late August, and there were no jobs to be had, you know. They had all filled their jobs except for one school district, and that was North Woods, right? And they were so happy to have me that I should have the understood what the situation was. That was an all-black school district, and the poorest school district in the entire area, and the only one that Houston hadn't annexed because the tax base was so low. So I got a job at the very best school for me because it gave me a chance to learn with populations that I had never even imagined teaching and never understood how much I could learn from working with. And that was where I got my first job.

So I taught at North Woods Junior High for three years. And it taught me so much that I understood by the end of that that I needed to go back to graduate school and learn more about teaching, that I was woefully prepared. Not that the University of Wisconsin had tried to prepare me poorly, but they prepared me to teach in nice white middle-class schools.

And I knew that I wanted to teach at schools that were very different, and so I needed to go back to the University of Texas and learn how to do this, learn what I could bring. And so I went back to the University of Texas and started my studies and English education. And my application was so pathetic to the University of Texas that they didn't accept me. And then the day before classes were to start, a woman had to drop out, one of the TAs had to drop out because she was pregnant. And I was the first person they called you could come.

So I went to Austin. I started studying, and it was a golden time because of at that particular moment, at the University of Texas, Jim Kinneavy was there, John Ruszkiewicz, Maxine

Hairston, Steve Witte, Lester Faigley came, a whole host of people that specialized in rhetoric and composition and brought a very broad and extensive imagination to the field and help shape the field in those early days of, you know, the late 70s going into the 80s.

And so while I was at the University of Texas, when it came time to write my dissertation, I didn't have enough money to pay a typist. And in those days you would pay a typist. You'd write your dissertation out longhand and you pay a typist to type it up, and they had to use like five or six different layers of carbon paper. And then if they made a mistake, every letter that they made a mistake, they had to scratch off with a razor blade and retype it. It was a very laborious process, and I didn't have the money to do it, I wasn't good enough typist myself. So one of my friends at the time was Hugh Burns, who is known as, in our profession, as one of the pioneers of computing in English Studies. And Hugh knew how to use the mainframe computer at the University of Texas. And he thought, and I thought after he told me about this, that I could type it on the main frame, and then get the printout, and then we could revise or I could revise using the computer, and get a cleaner printout until the whole dissertation was done and fairly clean. And that's how I started using computers. And because so few people in those days, this was 1979-80, used computers, that particular experience made me an absolute expert in English Studies, and from then on that was the area I chose to work in.

Sam:
So tell me a story about a personal literacy experience and maybe one that's impacted your view of literacy.

Dr. Selfe:
Well I've told many stories for the DALN. I told stories about learning how to read, reading cereal boxes, and singing songs that my mother taught me. But the most recent experience with the literacy that has opened my eyes to how difficult and complex the endeavor can be, has been learning the ukulele. And it's an instrument that I just took up a couple of years ago, and I've been in several small clubs learning how to play, and learning how to read music and musical notation, and how to formulate chords. And it has opened my eyes to both the discipline that's required and the practice that's required to become better at this effort of reading a symbolic system and communicating what that symbolic system conveys, composing, in other words, but also how attitude has to figure into that process. If it weren't for the fact that I really enjoyed learning how to play the ukulele, that I took some delight in it, some pleasure, I don't think I would be able to go through the discipline of learning how to play. So that reminds me of just how similar that particular process is and that complex of factors is for people who are learning to read and compose alphabetically.

Sam:
So, what would you say is your definition of literacy?

Dr. Selfe:
Well, my definition of literacy is the activities, the events, the understandings, the values, the experiences that are associated with reading and composing using shared symbolic systems,

either mathematical notation, musical notation, alphabetic notation, so using all of those systems or any of those systems. But also understanding that the practices and the values of literacy, because values are a part of literacy, are shaped by the cultural context, the historical context, your economic context, your linguistic context, the geographical location, your geographical location in the world. And that literacy varies widely, those experiences, those understandings, those values, those practices, those events, they all vary widely depending on the context within which they're practiced. So I don't see literacy as one thing, but I see it as a whole complex of factors and events and practices and values that surround reading and composing in different systems.

Sam:
So would you say that you have a metaphor that guides you or gives you direction in this view of literacy?

Dr. Selfe:
To me, literacy is not a thing but it's, I would liken it to the Particle, Wave, and Field Theory, that is, you can have a literacy practice that's a particle, an event that's a particle, but that event or those practices change over time and place so it's a field. And then finally the practices and experiences and values happen in a context so it's also a field, literacy is a is a field, a context. So to me, literacy is both a particle, a wave, and a field, and in that not bounded by one time or one place or one context.

Sam:
So as you teach your students about literacy, and as you have them go and interview people about literacy, you often ask your students to invite people to "tell a story." What do you feel is the significance of personal narratives in regards to literacy?

Dr. Selfe:
Yeah well, you know, a personal narrative is sometimes the most natural way or genre for communicating. Right? And it's not that I think that that genre that we all do of telling his story has any capital "T" truth value, but when you tell a story, it is just laden and laced and sedimented with personal understandings of what literacy is, what the expectations for literacy are, what your values surrounding literacy are, what your economic class, gender, considerations, familial expectations are. All these things are layered into stories. They're just there, they're part of the fabric of the story. So you can get such perspectival glimpses into people's literate lives through the telling of stories, that it provides a marvelous lens through which we can discern some of the personal experiences and values and understandings of literacy, not always directly, but sometimes indirectly.

Sam:
Why do you feel like literacy is important, and why should we be studying it as a field?

Dr. Selfe:
Well, I mean it's what makes us different, it's what makes us human, and it is the activity and

understanding that makes us that ties us one person to another person. So it's the—literacy is a way of staying in touch, and sharing what we know, being human. And for that reason alone I think it's well worth studying.

Selfe Interview: Part 2

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 StoryCorps 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 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 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.

Selfe Interview: Part 3

Sam:
What a rhetorical significance do you feel the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives has made?

Dr. Selfe:
I'm not sure this is a rhetorical difference, I can tell you what I'm proudest of about the DALN and what I think it's a accomplished within our field. I think we now have, as a profession, a common corpus of literacy narratives that anybody can study, and that everybody can study, and that we can come at from so many different angles. Because those stories are there, and they're recorded for history, and they're preserved and they're available to people who want to use those or to contribute to the to the collection. And that, in itself, is an important professional contribution, I think. I'm very proud of that particular contribution.

But even more important, I think it gives the profession an understanding of what can happen when you take on these big humanities projects, where the effort of creating them, and the burden of creating the project, not just the money, but the effort of maintaining it and creating it and contributing to it and then using it is shared by many people in the profession. And it shows what we can do when we put our heads together in a collective effort to create something that everybody can benefit from if they have a connection to the internet. And to me, that's a tremendous lesson, and I'm not sure that people really understand the importance of that lesson. I think people like Sondra Perl understand. She was—after we started the DALN, for instance, the Writing Tree project that she started was also a crowdsourced project. And she came to me and

asked what had we learned from doing the DALN that would translate into success for their Writing Tree. And I think she understood the importance of that model of big humanities, what can we do together, collectively, that the whole profession can benefit from. And I think that people at the 4Cs, especially I might say the staff members of 4Cs, the people like Jackie Biddles, who were conference organizers, or Eileen Maley, who have always made a place for the DALN, because they understand that that historical record that we're sedimented right now will be available for study and years to come. And I think that is key, I think it's absolutely key. If we don't do it, who is going to do it? And if we don't do it now, when are we ever going to start an effort like that?

So I guess the last thing that I'm happiest about is that somebody like Ben McCorkle and Michael Harker, Ben at Ohio State Mansfield and—I'm sorry Ohio State Marion and Michael Harker at Georgia State, will be the new directors of the DALN and take that forward in time. So that the effort goes on because we never know who's going to use those archives—these archives—who's going to use it in the future, what benefit it's going to bring, what contributions it can make. And I think that that—I think carrying forward it's going to become increasingly valuable

Sam:
So do you have any stories about experiences where you see the DALN has made an impact?

Dr. Selfe:
Yeah I have a story of the class I'm teaching this term that you're in, because every time we teach the Literacy Narratives of Black Columbus class here at Ohio State, what we do is get undergraduate students, graduate students, and community members together on teams. And they go into black Columbus communities, and they provide an opportunity for citizens to tell stories about their literacy, and how literacy has impacted their life, and how their lives have impacted their literacy skills and understandings and values.

And the teams get to choose an area of interest. We've done black churches in Columbus, and it's given congregations and pastors and citizens, individual citizens, an opportunity to think about how the black church has encouraged, sustained, and supported literacy in the United States going forward in history. That's a big opportunity, and I think it makes a big change in the lives of individuals to understand just those connections. In the class that we're teaching right now, for instance, we have a team going out to the LGBTQ community, and providing an opportunity for citizens to tell their stories about literacy and sexual orientation, the intersection of those formations. And we have your team going out into the Somali community and talking to Somali immigrants about how literacy and the challenges of acquiring literacy and a new language, a new culture, a new environment has shaped their lives and their understandings and their values over time from generation to generation, and within the very complex context of a brand new cultural setting at a time in history when they have experienced all the turmoil and violence of a war in their homeland, bringing that experience to the United States.

We can learn a lot from that experience, and so I think that makes a big difference too, just

providing people the opportunity to tell their stories, and to tell a story that might run counter to some of the more accepted narratives that we get through the media. These are individual people's experiences and values, and sometimes they adhere to the larger stores and sometimes they depart from it, but they always are instructive in so many ways.

Sam:
So what are some of the directions the DALN has gone? Did it go into directions you thought it would go? Has there been any surprises? And where do you feel like it will be headed?

Dr. Selfe:
Well one of the surprises with the DALN, and I thought when we started it, when Louis and I were working on it's logical structure, I thought that the best way would be to make a structure that asked the same questions of everybody and gave them a controlled vocabulary for responding. So I would ask things like "What state do you live in?" and then I'd give 50 or so opportunities, and they'd have to choose, you know, Alaska, Nebraska, Ohio, whatever. Louis, however, in all his brilliance talked us, talked me into thinking about this is a folksonomy, that is, you might ask the question but there was no controlled vocabulary for responding. So if I would were to ask something like "What is your sexual orientation?" or "Would you like to self-identify with regard to your sexual orientation?" If I had forced choice it would have been gay, straight, you know, maybe I'd have two or three different choices. But with a folksonomy individuals put in their own identifying term, and because they use their own identifying term, and because they are located in time and space, the terms that they choose also become data for anybody thinking about how to look at the narratives and the literacies that happen. For example, if we'd had a controlled vocabulary, we might have chosen to a question like "What is your race?" we might have had "African-American," "Caucasian," you know, four or five different selections. But because we opened it up to people's own description we find out that some generations preferred to talk—to use the term "African-Americans," some generations and some people "blacks," some generations and people "African oriented," you know, there are, there might be 20 terms for race in the DALN. It might be 20 terms for sexual orientation in the DALN, and all of those terms, all of those choices provide us data about how people self-identify and then carry that self-identification into some connection with literacy.

Selfe Interview: Part 4

Sam:
I would like to ask you if you could tell a story about an experience where you've learned something about literacy from creating this archive.

Dr. Selfe:
There is not a day that goes by that I don't learn something from looking at the narratives in the DALN. Literacy in so varied in all its human manifestations: people learn how to read from cereal boxes, and by reading the Bible, one by bedtime stories, and by going to school, and by attending Sunday school, by reading in church, you know, by reading instructions. They read in their homes, they read in hardware stores, they read under work benches in the garage, they read

in libraries, they read on playgrounds, in trees, you know, in forts, they read everywhere. And they're taught by mothers, and fathers, and brothers, and sisters, and they're taught by peers, they are taught by Sunday School teachers. They read to dogs, and people, and classes. There's so much variation in the practice and the valuing of literate experiences, that you can't help but learn something new every time you listen to one of those stories.

And so it's the variation on literacy that most intrigues me. How the activity of signing shapes your literate expressions, values, understandings, ASL signing. Or how the experience of reading music shapes your understanding of what it means to communicate Or how the experiences and the values surrounding alphabetic reading or multimodal reading and composing shapes what you think of his communication... shapes what you think of as composing or reading. All that remains fascinating to me because of its variability.

Sam:
So this archive, it's a *digital* archive of literacy narratives, and you've mentioned why having this digital archive has provided this great access and collaboration. But how do you feel the worlds of digital studies and literacy intersect or collide?

Dr. Selfe:
Yeah, from the time when the first fully assembled micro computers came on the market, the popular market, I don't think from that time forward we could really talk about literacy practices and values without talking about digital contexts, because digital contexts changed and altered and shaped literacy practices and values so dramatically from the very first. It was speed, reach, extension. It was the velocity with which communications went different places. And that's not to say that everybody had access, or that everybody has access to this day because they don't. Access is differentially aligned along existing social formations like age, race, class, sometimes gender still in different places in the world. But nonetheless computers have, it's opened up all kinds of environments and networks within which communications can circulate, and be distributed, and delivered, and interpreted, and composed in different media, using different modalities, and then exchanged with different people. I think that if you, today, if you think you can talk about reading and composing without talking about digital environments, you'd be missing a huge swath of the literacy practices and understandings that people are engaged in during the 21st century.

Sam:
What do you think people can learn about digital media and technology from the DALN?

Dr. Selfe:
Well, I think, first, people tell stories about using computers and computer environments to read and compose, just like they tell stories about reading and composing in libraries or at home or anywhere else. And so, I think at this point in time we're at a very interesting point in history where we're making the transition from... making "a" transition from print and alphabetic literacy to digital literacy. I mean that's happening at many levels and in many cultures around the world. Computer networks are one of the factors that contribute to globalized sharing of

knowledge, right? Not that they're... not that computers are available to everyone, but it's one of the factors that reaches across conventional geopolitical, linguistic, cultural borders. So, it seem to me that if you don't study that transition, you'll lose the sense of what it was like before, what it's like now, and what it's going to be like in the future. If nobody is collecting narratives about that, how do you remember, and then how you compare, and then have you understand changes that are going to be going forward. And I think that's the value of a project like the DALN. It exists in a point in history where there's a lot of change in the way we compose, and the way we read, and the environments within which we do so, and the purposes for which we do so.

Sam:
So how does your work with the DALN fit into your other scholarly work?

Dr. Selfe:
[Laughs] Here's what I would say, I would say that at this point my career, I'm going to retire in May of this year [2017], and what I was able—what I've been able to do with the DALN is to do a project that's not for me but that's for the profession at large. And I like doing that kind of project. And the same thing with the Computers in Composition Digital Press: if you can do projects that are for the benefit of the profession at large, there's a great deal of satisfaction in that. And I think it leaves a legacy that—I hope it leaves a legacy—that far out lives the more conventional scholarly work that I've done, the articles I've written, and, you know, I've written enough journal articles to kill a horse, and books and the whole thing. Those things are important, but those things, I think, pale because there's always new research coming out, there's always new work coming out, those books are going to get old, the journal articles are going to get old, etc. But institutions like the DALN that benefit the profession can live on if there are people to look after them and sustain them and contribute to them and participate in them. And the same with the Computers and Composition Digital Press. I would say that it is up to the next generation of scholars to contribute to those efforts. And I like to think that every scholar will do a little bit of tending of the communal garden, looking after things like the Digital Archive, looking after things like new presses, because each of those projects takes a lot of work. Sondra Perls' Writing Tree. They don't persist and evolve on their own, they require input and effort, and the ideas of individuals. And while young scholars are busy writing their own articles in their own books because they have to do that for tenure and promotion, I hope they save a little bit of time as well to contribute to those more those communal projects that provide ground for the whole profession to prosper.

Selfe Interview: Part 5

Sam:
What pedagogical implications do you feel the DALN has?

Dr. Selfe:
Well that the whole object of the DALN is to be a resource that can be used in multitudinous ways by different teachers, in different classes, for different purposes. So, there's no one set of pedagogical outcomes for the DALN. Different classes can use it. Different disciplines can use it.

Different teachers can use it. Different levels of instruction can use it. And I think the best description of what's been done pedagogically with the DALN is in Michael Harker and Katie Comer's 2015 article in Computers and Composition, about where they surveyed people who use the DALN in their classes and talk about the strengths and weaknesses of that use. Krista Bryson has also done an article on the DALN. And then there have been dissertations done on the DALN. Deborah Kuzawa work on the Digital Archive and especially the work she did with GBLTQ narratives is useful. And then the Computers and Composition Digital Press book that Louie and Scott and I and all the contributors did, called "The Stories That Speak to Us," provides something like fifteen or sixteen different curated exhibits of how those narratives can be used both in and around classes and classrooms. So I think there's so many of these different examples. People could go to Google Scholar, use "DALN" and find a lot of pedagogical description. There's also a book that Ben McCorkle, Michael Harker, and Katie Comer are working on aimed at the Computers in Composition Digital Press. And it will be a born digital book, and it will look specifically at how the DALN is used in different classes. So there's plenty of examples for people to dig into in the scholarly world.

Sam:
So tell me a story about yourself using the DALN in teaching. You mentioned the Black Columbus class that you've done…

Dr. Selfe:
Yeah, you know, I think… It's funny, the DALN, the presence of the DALN as a resource, changed my teaching because it led to the course on the Literacy Narratives of Black Columbus. Without the DALN I would not have done the course, and I think that course for me is probably the most important course that I teach because it takes me outside the university and into places that I don't know well enough. And so it's through the DALN that it was possible for me to do what I consider my best teaching, and that's another thing I'm very happy with in that regard. And I hope that class continues here at OSU as well.

Sam:
So what advice would you give to teachers about ways in which they can incorporate the DALN into teaching?

Dr. Selfe:
I would say that whatever their purpose in teaching about reading composing practices and values, they can find a way of using the DALN to that end. But they have to think in inventive ways and aim at uses that really meet the teacher's and the students' values and ends. So the DALN is infinitely flexible, and the teachers and students need to be imaginative and inventive in their thinking about how to use the resource.

Sam:
What would you say were experiences in your life that best prepared you and helped you in a career in digital rhetoric and composition?

Dr. Selfe:
Well, it was that first effort to type my dissertation into a mainframe computer. That provided me the space to learn how to use technology as a tool for composing. I would also say that Michigan Tech, where the emphasis was on the use of computer technology, that was my first job. And because there was so much interest in digital technology and there were lots of computer… there were lots of machines, there were lots of networks, there were lots of different ways of using computers at Michigan Tech, I was able to play a great deal in those digital environments, because I had an excellent, Chair, Art Young. And he gave me the space to experiment and play and investigate, and supported the Center for Computer-Assisted Instruction that I ran for so many years. So that was part of it.

And then the other part of it was working with really talented graduate students, because each time you meet a graduate student, each generation of graduate students have different ways of communicating with and around digital tools and environments. And you can learn something new from every generation of graduate students, every graduate student you meet. And the pleasure of learning new things every year, every term, with every student is really a joy for me.

Sam:
What advice would you give new scholars in the field of digital rhetoric and composition?

Dr. Selfe:
Well I would tell them, I know that many new scholars are worried about tenure, promotion, and the way digital works are currently valued in departments of English, which tend to be a little bit more conservative, and sort of attached to the notion of the printed book, but they're changing pretty rapidly, and so I would encourage young scholars not to be bounded by the imaginations of the people who went before them, and not to be overly cautious in in their approach to digital work. I would say play and invent and experiment and follow your passions in that work, and if the work is good work, it will be valued by the time you get to tenure and promotion. And the more you try and suss out what's going to be the value in six years when you go up for tenure and promotion, the less successful you're going to be. So do the work that you know to be good work, in the form that you know how to do it, and in the environments both digital and non-digital that attract you. And by the time you get to tenure and promotion that work will be valued. Now it might not be valued at the same place you think it's going to be valued, but it will be valued if it's good work and you will find a place where you can continue to do that work and experimentation and make your own contributions.

And I think I would encourage them to be bold. I mean it is—when Gail Hawisher and I were involved in doing work in digital environments, there were a limited number of people doing that work, and it was a risk. But if we had been too careful and not engaged in that work, I think that would have been a loss to us. If we had decided that the profession was not keen on collaborative work, for instance, and we had done our individual work, that would have been a loss to us. So I think that you can't predict where the values of the field necessarily are going to go, but you can predict where you're going to do your best work and how you're going to do your best work. So be bold and do it and hold yourself to high standards, in doing so.

This is a transcript of the full 5-part 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:
If you could pass along only one story about literacy, what would it be?

Dr. Selfe:
[Pauses and balks] Hmm... well you know, Sam, I don't think there is one story about doing literacy. I think that there are... Everybody has multiple stories. I think I must have four different narratives in the DALN: one about the songs my mother used to sing to me; one about, you know, learning to read and write; and one about the ukulele today. You know, there are so many different stories I guess I'd encourage people to think in multiples rather than in ones because every story is really cool and sheds light on that infinite variety of human understandings, and values, and activities that we term "literacy" at this point in time, in this culture, in this environment

Sam:
Now that you are ending your career, what are you planning on doing once you retire? What is the thing that you are most excited for in retirement?

Dr. Selfe:
Well, I want to read and write. I want to put my feet up at the lake on the railing and gaze out on the lake, and read my, read the books that I want to read, and learn more about playing the ukulele, and travel, and learn more in that way as well. I think that those are the—I would like a little more time to do the kinds of literate activities that please me and that I'd like to, I'd like to invest more of my effort in.

Sam:
So we've talked a lot about a lot of different things: digital studies and literacy. But is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't talked about?

Dr. Selfe:
I don't think so. I think the next… Here's what I would say to people were starting the profession: the next 10 or 20 years are going to be so totally exciting, so open and full of possibility for scholars. And there's so much to do and so many neat projects to take on, that I would encourage people to dive in, dive in and enjoy what they find and follow their passions and make their contributions that they can be proud of when they turn around and 20 or 30 years and somebody asked them, you know, "What did you do?" I want them to be able to be proud of the projects they've taken on, they've contributed to, and they've done within the profession.

Sam:
Thank you so much for this interview.

Dr. Selfe:
[Moves her hands into the shapes of the letters] O-H-I-O. That's great Sam.

This is a transcript of the full 5-part 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:
Thank you.