

Social Media Narrative:
Issues in Contemporary Practice

hosted by The Rutgers Camden Digital Studies Center and Judy Malloy
and the Rutgers Camden DSC Class in Social Media Narrative:

Lineage and Contemporary Practice
Facebook, November 16 - 21, 2016

Transcript: Cathy Marshall



Cathy Marshall

November 21 at 12:58am

Hi all, and thanks, Judy, for inviting me! Sorry I've arrived to the party so late--I'm not much of a Facebook user, so posting to a group like this makes me even more nervous in these nervous times.

Ironic, that, because one of my major projects has been to investigate possibilities for archiving social media (beyond the Library of Congress's effort to archive Twitter).

In particular, an odd biographical investigation of the life of Joan Vollmer, the common-law wife William S. Burroughs (the woman he accidentally shot and killed in Mexico City in 1951) has driven me to speculate about the archival value of Facebook. I've needed to consult all kinds of ephemera to do this research, to reassemble her life from the scant traces someone who is not famous leaves behind.

Reactions to archiving Facebook are mixed. Should Facebook (and its kin) stay ephemeral and always mutable? Is it private and too personal? Is it just too much, too uncurated and uncuratable?

As a longtime hypertext writer and researcher, I've watched even published digital works disappear (sometimes because we're too busy creating more), let alone some of the more transient and particular forms we're talking about on this panel (Deena brought up the realm of marginalia and notes, two of my favorite forms of ephemera).

I don't know how else to jump in, as late as I am to the party and as unaware of etiquette on this planet as I am...

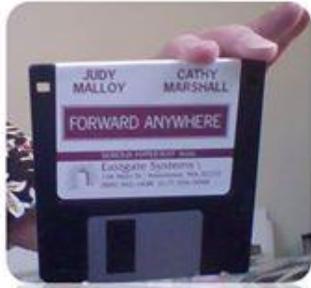
Comments



Judy Malloy Hi Cathy! Welcome to this Facebook panel on issues in contemporary social media narrative. Until the lab's closing , Cathy Marshall was a principal researcher at Microsoft Research, Silicon Valley. She is currently an adjunct professor in the Computer Science Department at Texas A&M University

Visit

<http://www.narrabase.net/socmedianarrative.html#cathy>



November 21 at 7:27am



Judy Malloy Cathy and Frank Shipman address the issue of archiving Facebook in a not-be-missed paper: Marshall, C.C. and Shipman, F.M. An Argument for Archiving Facebook as a Heterogeneous Personal Store <http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=2740772>

One of the things this paper does is to in-great-detail document the difficult process of uncovering Joan Volmer's life by traditional methods, then in the conclusion, they bring up some of the issues....

Now we can speculate about the role of Facebook in an imagined future project analogous to the one we describe in Section 4. Archiving Facebook will doubtlessly be a balancing act. On one hand, people have legitimate concerns about the threat to privacy and loss of control of one's own digital footprint that such a collection represents. On the other hand, a Facebook archive may provide a rich historical resource that documents a time period in the way that fast-disappearing resources like local newspapers, city directories, and personal correspondence did in the past.

Marshall, C.C. and Shipman, F.M. "An Argument for Archiving Facebook as a Heterogeneous Personal Store"

November 22 at 9:19pm · Edited



Cathy Marshall Thanks, Judy! What I've noticed when I give this talk is that there are always a couple of people (sometimes colleagues I've known for years) who become angrier and angrier. Frank and I looked into this--it seems that people value the ability to curate their digital selves. Saving Facebook implies the ability for someone to get at an out-of-date version of oneself...

November 22 at 2:26am



Deena Larsen I love that you posted the floppy from Eastgate. So many of our works now can not be read or accessed. I had this conversation with Stuart in 2010 as we realized that over half our works could not be read on "modern" computers. We are all artists/researchers/hypertext addicts with full time careers. So we have limited time. Do we want to spend our time reinventing works or creating new ones?

I have chosen to reinvent Marble Springs 3 times now. I will have to do so again when the wiki goes. If I am still alive. Why that work? because Marble Springs is my baby. She is my one true child and I enjoy being in that world. Also, that is the one that morphs the most and reflects the most of the incarnations. In the Hypercard versions, I used Hypercard features. In the wiki version, I used wiki versions. And the marginalia, the ephemera, is lost each time once again.

November 21 at 6:24pm



Judy Malloy Actually it was me who posted the Forward Anywhere disk, mainly because the work was created by a very basic social media platform -- email. I like the images of Cathy on her homepage at <http://www.csdl.tamu.edu/~marshall/>



Home Page for Cathy Marshall

After one look at this planet, any visitor from outer space would say I WANT TO SEE THE MANAGER" -- William...
csdl.tamu.edu

November 21 at 6:46pm



Tara Woolfolk I don't have as much guidance to provide as the others-but I wanted to thank you for provoking the thoughts that your entry sent me into. Hope to hear more from you. (For the sake of context, I'm a social psychologist and can think of a lot of reasons I might be tempted to archive or study content analysis of fb entries at some point too. Hopefully **Robert A. Emmons Jr.** or **Jim Brown** would be willing to vouch for my existence. 😊

Like · Reply · 2 · November 21 at 11:03pm



Cathy Marshall I'm deeply torn about the permanence of digital ephemera, and about the ability to access what were local resources (neighborhood news, e.g.) across place and time. It's made such a profound change in what we can easily know...

November 22 at 2:12am



Judy Malloy Cathy is working on two books, I'm in the midst of moving. As Cathy wrote about our collaboration on Forward Anywhere --

<http://www.eastgate.com/catalog/ForwardAnywhere.html>

"Closure was never a goal of this piece."

From FORWARD ANYWHERE: NOTES ON AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN INTERSECTING LIVES, which introduces the Eastgate version of Forward Anywhere:

Cathy

Long term collaborations are based not only on subject matter or the work to be done, but also on the relationships that form among the collaborators. These relationships emerge over time, through conversations, through stories and anecdotes, through imperfectly remembered and half-imagined bits of the past. The fabrics of communities are woven from their members' mutually constructed pasts, until the past becomes shared.

...We could have met in a MOO, or used digital video to tell each other our stories; these technologies would have had some cachet, especially in the technologically charged environment at Xerox PARC. But instead, we chose to work in email, a medium so familiar and by now so ordinary that it was almost invisible -- a part of our everyday lives.

For the duration of our project, we avoided face-to-face meetings, fearing that just the stuff we wanted to capture would leak into our conversations. Judy had an office in the Xerox PARC building for more than a month during our two-plus year collaboration; we had lunch together only once in this span, in addition to two brief meetings at the project's outset. In retrospect email was a perfect medium for working this way; during our collaboration, we each moved several times, and worked from home, hotel rooms, guest offices, and airplanes using a variety of computer equipment. We often worked asynchronously, at different hours of the day and night.

In the original collection of screens, the only structure came from the associations we held in our minds. Themes emerged organically, both from the periphery of our stories (for example, a screen that mentioned old beer cans evoked several memories that centered on old beer cans) and from the central threads of our conversation. From the start, in September of 1993, we agreed that living and working in basements was a element common to our experiences: basements would be a central thread and a starting point. Later, we decided to make other means of navigating through our process available to a reader, although we agreed that we would not introduce standard hyperlinks.

Judy

...We met to plan our project in October 1993 in a backyard on the Albany-Berkeley border. It was a Sunday afternoon. We sat on white plastic chairs. I remember Cathy's reassuring blue jeans, and the coffee and beer on the white table with the faded oilcloth cover.

Like those conversations that occur in coffee house or bars between people meeting for the first time, the work would be an exchange of details about our lives. By electronic mail we would look for the links in our artists/researcher existences -- basements, brothers or sons studying history, the assuming of persona, the playing of multiple roles.

...There was something of the expectant anticipatory pleasures of reading fiction in our process -- where we were each both reader and writer. Once I had emailed my response, I could anticipate that unfolding of small details that cumulatively builds a work of literature. In her response to my doughnut/wonton soup screen, for instance, Cathy related a conversation at an Asian market with a man about whom I knew very little. The incidental details in her response aroused my curiosity, but I had no idea when or where he would surface again.

rsnail & jud'

ard
/here

[Forward Anywhere](#)

From that inauspicious meeting came an exchange of electronic mail replete with the ideas and stories that...
[eastgate.com](#)