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ENGL 877

Reading Response 5

Jeff's Working Digital Humanities Mission Statement

In my leadership classes, I always have students write their mission statements at the beginning of the term and revisit them two or three times before their final day.  There is an emphasis on creating a living, breathing, and constantly ongoing/updated version of this work because that's how life works.  So I chose to do this with my own work in most of my classes, which has been helpful.  The reason I'm sharing this is because a true mission statement should be brief, no more than one or two sentences.  But for this particular assignment, that isn't enough to fully unpack (or reach the word count), so I'm going to do a traditional mission statement followed by a lengthier explanation immediately after.

**Work in the digital humanities is a constantly-changing field that encourages collaboration and innovation in order to further connect the world, placing as much emphasis as possible on continued education, outreach, and lifting up the voices of the oppressed, forgotten, or misrepresented.**

That being said, there is still much work to be done.  Last week, we started synthesizing about the direction of this course and the overarching themes and goals affecting the world of digital humanities.  First and foremost, I am going to give credit where it is due and thank Lyette, Arka, Brett, Andrew, Greg, and Jun for their thoughts and engaging discussions in our small groups.

Some of the issues and ideas we covered were similarities across various colonial locations, definitions and portrayals of missionary work versus colonization (more specifically internalizing colonial systems and ideologies), and two other big concepts I want to further discuss.  The first major takeaway is the idea of the nuclear versus the extended family.  We have a western definition of success that simply is not applicable to a large majority of the southern hemisphere.  In the United States, we are caught in this vicious cycle or "I have to have this type of family, so I need this type of technology, which makes me use such-and-such electronic device, which helps or hinders my family plan" etc. etc. into infinity.  The video we watched also tackled this idea of being able to supply extra money to family versus being able to become an entrepreneur and actually make a decent living in what is essentially other countries' (quite dangerous) trash.  I am also starting to realize as I synthesize this idea how interconnected it is to my second major takeaway, which is the religion of technology.

In my first group, we discussed the idea of planned obsolescence for almost all of our tech (smaller therefore harder to fix without breaking, pushed updates that track but also kill your battery, the fact that we simply throw things in a drawer or drop them off without actually wondering where they will eventually end up, etc.) and in my second group, we discussed the fact that here in the United States, we are torn between the polar extremes of "nothing matters because all of our information is everywhere already" and "we should never save passwords, always shred our mail, and never give out even our address to anyone without knowing them directly."

It was mentioned that the nihilistic approach in some is necessary to keep the masses sane, but the paranoid approach in some is necessary to keep the masses safe.  Big tech has been proven, countless times, to be "the enemy" (whether it's their collection and sharing of the consumers' data in order to maximize profit, or influence elections, or stir up controversy which will correlate to higher sales, or even help commit an actual genocide).  Yet we still take advantage of them in order to make our lives easier and, in the immediate, maybe even better.  I won't lie, I love the idea of social media being free and when my professors and colleagues share something to read that is open-access.  But I try my best to use my various audiences to promote my friends and followers in their academic and creative endeavors and if I read something I really connect with online, I try to find an avenue to purchase a physical copy of the text.

This week we learned and further complicated (in an effort to simplify and rectify) matters by diving into the concepts of minimal computing.  Many think that minimal computing is not only part of the answer, but the answer itself.  While others are hesitant to adapt for reasons of academic pressures, monetary setbacks or barriers, or simply not having the necessary amount of education needed to do something so complex.  But we are on the right path.  Again, I feel like I've raised more questions than given answers, but I am very excited to see where this discussion heads throughout the rest of the term.