Assignment for ENGL 877 (Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities: Digital Project Development). Reading response to Glass, Erin Rose. “Reprogramming the Invisible Discipline”.

Response 2

This week's article takes a wider view of the current digital landscape and how it interacts with education. The article begins with a brief write-up on current events in relation to digital technology. Author Erin Rose Glass then argues that academics have an obligation to address the current, dystopic state of the digital landscape. She does so by outlining three myths that some academics use to distance themselves from technological discourse. The myths are 1. There is nothing to worry about the current state of the digital landscape; 2. The academic world has no business commenting on digital technology; 3. There is nothing an ordinary academic can do to address the problems. All of these myths are buttressed by technological passivity in education where new technologies introduced into classrooms are accepted on face value and students are rarely taught to critically examine the platform introduced.

The phenomenon of technological passivity has allowed digital technology companies to extend surveillance capitalism into the classroom. One might argue that many students today already willingly participate in surveillance capitalism via participation in social media. The difference is that participation in social media is consensual but not in the classroom and the extension goes beyond the classroom, take UNL for example. Students, staff, and faculty of UNL are required to have an Outlook email while staff are required to use Microsoft services from OneDrive for cloud storage to Teams for chatrooms. The university frequently encourages students to stay within this ecosystem because of digital security, but this comes with the price of personal choice and privacy. Tech companies encourages such behavior from education institutes because they hope to retain the students within their ecosystem and becoming loyal customers.

Prior to reading this article, I have never thought of technological passivity and its influence on how we interact with the digital space, which proves the point. It instills a sense of complacency with digital infrastructure around us and to not question technological advancement as long as its immediately beneficial. This mindset has roots in the Enlightenment where progress is seen as inevitable, hence it would be foolish not to embrace advancement. Glass said as much when she said, "a rejection of popular digital tools and the important time-saving, collaborative, and networking affordances they offer may feel equivalent to professional suicide." Therefore, we should educate ourselves to be smarter and critical citizens of the digital space. To aid with this effort, education institutions and by extension academics have a responsibility to educate students and the public on the matter.

Glass offers two ways where academics and educators can address the issue. First, open-source and community driven platforms can be introduced into classrooms as alternatives to corporate products. This can aid in giving students an alternate perspective on digital learning environments which leads to the second point. Students can be taught to question technology more critically. As digital literacy improves, this task should become easier to achieve. Hopefully, a new generation of critical digital citizens can bring change to the current digital landscape and uphold the lofty goals that the Internet can bring to our society.