Assignment for ENGL 877 (Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities: Digital Project Development). Reading response in the form of a mission statement draft. to Leterme, Cédric. “Africa’s Digitalization: From the Ecological Dilemma to the Decolonization of the Imaginary” and Boyles, Christina. “Intersectionality and Infrastructure: Toward a Critical Digital Humanities”.

Response 4

Before starting on the discussion post, I would like to thank Andrew Johnson, Brett Berg, Gregory Payne, and Karmen Browitt, for the fruitful small group discussions as well as others through general class discussion for helping me formulate my thoughts.

As mentioned in class earlier today, society has largely moved away from viewing the internet as a place to build utopia. Today, the internet and its infrastructure has taken on problems of the wider world. Commodities are built with planned obsolescence in mind, leading to more waste and artificially induce consumption. In line with driving consumption, digital goods increasing take on a live-service model (subscription). How does this all relate to digital humanities? Digital humanities projects ultimately rely on current internet infrastructure, and it is tempting to build a site without thinking much about its long-term sustenance. If you pay a service fee to keep your website alive, once the money dries up you will lose everything, including the labor put into it the first place. If you institute a paywall to sustain your site, you risk alienating certain people from your content. So how do we avoid such pitfalls?

Part of this problem is the adherence to "high tech", status-quo affirming solutions. It's the price for easy integration into the digital space. Digital humanists should therefore look for "low tech", open-source solutions. Having a low-tech, open-source-built website, also theoretically aid in accessibility by being free and easier to handle by older devices. This alternative does come with an edge of having a higher learning curve. However, this learning curve is a result of the tool's modularity. Once mastered, the modularity of the tool can even be used to enhance accessibility by building accessibility features.

Embracing low tech solutions can also led to a more sustainable website and labor practices. Having fewer moving parts to a site means lower odds of breaking and when things do break, it is theoretically easier to fix. Once the digital tool has been mastered, the digital humanist can be the one sustaining the site which can help with the site's longevity. If outside help is needed, communities surrounding the open-source platform can be a good starting point before reaching for more expert help. On the point of website longevity, digital humanists should always see their project as more than just preparing a website for public interaction. Such mindset can lead to disposable websites and a waste of labor.

Digital humanities projects must be viewed as medium to long term projects. When crediting, labor of those involved in building the site as well as sustaining the site must be acknowledged. While on the subject of the site's long-term health, there will come a time where sustaining the site is simply no longer feasible. Using low tech solutions can prove useful again as it's theoretically easier to prepare that content for migration to a new site. To conclude, digital humanists should look for innovative ways to use low tech, open-source solutions for their work for it promises better accessibility and conceptually breaks away from the capitalistic impulses of the internet.