Assignment for ENGL 877 (Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities: Digital Project Development). Reading response to Risam, Roopika, and Alex Gil. “Introduction: The Questions of Minimal Computing” and Dombrowski, Quinn. “Minimizing Computing Maximizes Labor”. The response is a refinement of Reading Response 4.

Response 5

Before starting on the manifesto, 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.

Title: Minimal Computing: The Yet-to-be Promised Land

Minimal computing has been lauded as the promise land for Digital Humanities (DH). Many have sung its praises, from its potential to lower environmental impacts to being a more accessible entry point for potential DH practitioners. While the potential of minimal computing is true and promising, caution must be exercised to not overselling the potential. To get to this promise land, we have to pave the way and for now, the road to it is still treacherous. The manifesto will attempt to address the promises and traps of minimal computing.

Embracing minimal computing can 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. However, before embarking on a minimal computing project, DH practitioners should be prepared for a steep learning curve. Poor labor practices can seep into a minimal computing project if practitioners "outsource" technical work to others. As for its environmental impact, practitioners should also be aware that the learning process for minimal computing can be just as ecologically harmful as "high-tech" projects.

On the subject of longevity, minimal computing introduces an unsettling idea for many practitioners, which is DH projects can be made with the full intention of abandoning the site after several years. Long term projects come with labor and ecological costs, through the work required to keep the site and server up and running. Alternatively, the practitioner can be the sole person in charge of keeping the site up, fulfilling minimal computing's labor-saving promise.

Ultimately, minimal computing is a method of practicing DH that challenges the practitioner to break from norms associated with technology, such as expecting "high-tech" solutions and data longevity. With that said, minimal computing is still capable of achieving those goals.  Minimal computing projects also widen the scope of what constitutes DH. This point circles back to the title: paths are needed to get to the promised land. Projects that guide other practitioners to create their own minimal computing projects is part of minimal computing. These infrastructure-based projects can take the form of a mock website with guides and examples to a series of code typed up on a Words document shared around through USB drives counts as minimal computing work. These infrastructure-work help make the promised land of minimal computing easier to reach for all.