UNL Spring 2023 Digital Humanities Class Reading Responses for the first half of the semester

Sociology within Digital Humanities

This is more of a mission statement than a manifesto. When I think of a manifest I think of something much more emotionally charged and driven, whereas a mission statement is more of a checklist of things I think are important to keep central.

Colonialism and neocolonialism are important considerations within digital humanities. The resources we are working with in this class were produced under colonialism, so it is valuable to consider the structural implications of someone in the minority’s writing surviving for us to examine it 100-200 years later. In my seminar on stratification in education we read an article on international students choosing where to go for their studies, which explains the effects of neocolonialism on digital humanities research, specifically the dominance of the English language (With international enrollments slowing or declining in some top destination countries, a look at trends across the Globe). Thara, Karmen, and I discussed the implications of the literature we are engaging with for this class have all been translated into English because Britain was such a powerful colonial empire. We are not learning a new language to engage with the text, nor are we exploring the nuances of what particular words could have meant in their original language to determine if the translations are correct, we have the neocolonialist luxury of assuming they are.

I think another theme I need to centralize is what I consider world literature. Because of colonialism, the British understanding of the novel is the standard (Neumann, Birgit, and Gabriele Rippl). When I was examining some of the books on OMV, I had to recenter my expectations because I kept trying to discount the idea that some of the works were actually books because they were not the structure, I associate with what a book is. Acknowledging that there are other ways to write books than what I am used to, and I am working with some of those ways is important to ensure I do not continue perpetrating the ideals of colonialism.

Relatedly, Greg, Angela, and I discussed the surveillance state of capitalism as an important consideration when doing research for this class and engaging with the materials. As we have seen in the readings the past few weeks, what we do, and we do is surveilled. I think there can be some moderate parallels we can draw from the writers writing under colonialism, knowing they are being scrutinized and othered, and writing as academics, knowing we are being evaluated and our data sold to the highest bidder. It is not the same, but it is caused by the same mechanisms of capitalism and control.

Sustainability and accessibility are central themes of the digital humanities work we are doing. Today in class, Dr. Wisnicki told us a brief story about a group of students who used a platform for their project that was behind a paywall and that this project is no longer accessible. The work was still done, and the energy was still spent, but the repository holding it is not allowing its continued publication, making it an unsustainable and inaccessible way to publish research. Similarly, the machines we use to do digital humanities are important (Leterme). The idea of minimal computing remains important in this mission statement. I think the discussion of hacking was really eye-opening, so I think it's important to realize the upkeep to protect the data and integrity of websites associated with research.