Digital Colonialism: Electronic Literature as Resistance

Leonardo Flores
Appalachian State University
floresll@appstate.edu

Abstract

In my essay titled "Third Generation Electronic Literature" I describe this new wave of electronic literature as one "based on social media networks and widely adopted platforms and apps" which is less interested in the Modernist, avant garde, or experimental poetics of 2nd wave elit. In 2019, I described that relationship between generations as analogous to popular culture versus high culture divides. More recently Nacher ("Weeding" 2020) and Berens ("Decolonize" 2020) initiated a conversation that connects 3rd gen elit to decolonization of the field, and I elaborated on that idea in my 2021 lecture, titled "Technological Imperialism and Digital Writing," by discussing the history of digital technologies, their spread throughout the world, and how they establish an imperialistic and colonial relationship with the world, situating the US and its allies at the center of a global digital empire.

My proposed paper will examine key open and proprietary platforms-- such as programming languages, the Web, Unicode, Flash, iOS, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram-- focusing on their spread, access, cultural and ideological underpinnings, potential for electronic literature, audiences, and adoption. It will advance the claim that all these technologies are hegemonic, historically privileging and centering the US and its allies in an uneven relationship to the rest of the world by creating dependence on the platforms they develop and profit from. This analysis will be supported by the research and critiques of digital infrastructure, search engine platforms, the semantic capitalism of interfaces, and digital colonialism by Domenico Piermonte, Safiya Noble, Christian Ulrik Andersen and Søren Bro Pold, and Herbert Shiller, respectively. In highlighting some of the dependencies and varying barriers to access these platforms create I will interrogate the notion that open platforms like the Web or programming languages are less complicit than private commercial platforms in creating and perpetuating digital colonialism.

The essay will expand on the work of Eugenio Tisselli, Rui Torres, and Claudia Kozak's by exploring how electronic literature uses, engages, and challenges digital technologies enacting strategies of resistance against the political, commercial, and cultural underpinnings of digital platforms. I conclude by discussing how electronic literature-- of all generations-- helps advance the common goals of widespread adoption of digital writing practices and decolonization of the field while interrogating the usefulness of generational frameworks when considered in a global context.

Note

This paper is still a work in progress and will not be ready for the ELO conference. My apologies to the community for not being able to deliver on that. For an elaboration of these ideas, please see my recent lecture [Technological Imperialism and Digital Writing](#).