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Electronic Literature

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Brief presentation

Electronic literature is an umbrella term for various literary art forms that employ the affordances of digital media (Rettberg 2014: 169; Chetcuci 2020). It encompasses computer-generated literature, hypertext fiction, interactive fiction and literary video games, kinetic and interactive poetry, network writing, and literary works that utilize virtual and augmented technologies, among other forms (Rettberg 2018). The denotation “digital literature” is often used synonymously, but the term “electronic literature” has a longer, institutional history. Today, almost all works of literature rely, to some extent, on digital technologies for their production, distribution, and consumption. Therefore, researchers in the field of electronic literature usually distinguish “digital literature” from “digitized literature”. As N. Katherine Hayles makes clear: “More than being marked by digitality, electronic literature is actively formed by it” (Hayles 2008: 43). Thus, electronic literature is “‘born digital’, a first-generation digital object created on a computer and (usually) meant to be read on a computer” (2008: 3). This means that e-books – works of print literature that are made available on digital devices – are generally not considered electronic literature.

The extent to which a work of literature is “actively formed” by digital media is, of course, a matter of interpretation. Technically, the concept of the “digital” refers to “that which can be subdivided into discrete elements” – because binary code consists of discrete elements (zeroes and ones), it is a “digital” system. As such, “digital” is often understood in relation to its antonym: “analog”, which refers to variants on an undifferentiated scale. This designation, however, does not offer a solid basis to distinguish electronic literature from other forms (Cramer 2014: 15). Most works of electronic literature use modalities like sound and movement, which are, in a technical sense, “analog”, as they cannot be divided into discrete elements (Simanowski 2009: 13). It is thus more meaningful to understand electronic literature in relation to a “colloquial” understanding of the digital. This means that the word functions “metonymical[ly], so that anything connected literally or figuratively to computational electronic devices [...] can [...] be called ‘digital’” (Cramer 2014: 20). Florian Cramer has argued that such a use of “digital” is “uncritical” (20). However, the everyday meaning of “digitality” allows us to consider the ways in which the concept of electronic literature gains different meanings in different periods and in various techno-cultural contexts.

Since many works of digital literature are multimodal, the extent to which they can be considered a form of *literature* is up for debate. In general, electronic literature can be distinguished from contiguous art forms that employ the affordances of digital media, such as net.art (Bosma 2011), because of its emphasis on language. This distinction is not strict, however, since some works that are institutionally recognized as electronic literature lack (spoken or written) words altogether. N. Katherine Hayles proposes to use “‘the literary’ [...], defining it as creative artworks that interrogate the histories, contexts, and productions of literature, including as well the verbal art of literature proper” (Hayles 2008: 4). A digital work of art can be

considered electronic literature, for instance, when it paratextually refers to the field of literature, when a literary author is involved in its production or when it explicitly uses literary genre-demarcations. Electronic literature comprises the full variety of literary genres: poetry, short stories, graphic novels, et cetera.

Throughout its more than fifty-year history, there has been a strong connection between electronic literature and the neo-avant-garde. Several neo-avant-garde artists have produced electronic literature, and scholars have emphasized that electronic literature employs strategies and techniques associated with the neo-avant-garde, such as montage, interactivity, proceduralism, and aleatorism. In addition, electronic literature can be linked to the neo-avant-garde because of its transmedial, transgeneric character, and its innovative and creative use of (relatively) new media. In recent years, however, the assumed connection between electronic literature and experimental literature has become a topic of debate. Scholars have argued that the avant-garde no longer offers a productive framework to understand new forms of electronic literature that have emerged in the wake of recent technological and cultural developments.

Historical aspects

Electronic literature emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as both a concept and a field of study. In the decades before, however, there were literary works that already exploited the affordances of the computer. In his aptly titled book *Prehistoric Digital Poetry*, C.T. Funkhouser offers a chronology of the earliest works of electronic poetry, starting with the “Stochastische Texte” [A Text Generator], which was created by computer scientist Theo Lutz in 1959 (2007: xix-xxiv). Funkhouser’s study makes clear that the history of electronic literature can be traced back to the early days of the electronic computer. Before personal computers were available, computers were only accessible for people working at universities or large corporations. The Dutch author Gerrit Krol is an example of an artist who had early access to computers. As a trained mathematician he worked as an IT-programmer for the multinational oil company Royal Dutch Shell. This allowed him to create *APPI: Automatic Poetry by Pointed Information* (1971), a collection of poems that were (co-)created by the computer. Similar examples of such early computer-generated works were collected in the international anthology *Computer Poems* (Bailey 1973).

When the personal computer first made its way into the home in the 1980s, hypertext fiction became popular. This form was pioneered in the seventies with the first text adventure games – the forebears of modern computer games. In 1986, Mark Bernstein founded Eastgate Systems, the first publisher of electronic literature, which sold works of hypertext fiction as well as the software program StorySpace, which allowed users to create their own hypertext works (Pressman 2014: 6). The first theoretical works about electronic literature focused on this form. Scholars drew parallels between hypertext fiction and poststructuralist theories, which was gaining a foothold in (American) universities at the time (Bolter 1991; Landow 1992). They argued, for instance, that electronic literature dissolved the division between reader and author, since the reader was responsible for how the story progresses. In the words of Marie-Laure Ryan: “Hypertext was supposed to implement the ideas of Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze, Eco and especially Barthes on such topics as intertextuality, rhizomatic organization, openness and self-renewability, and the disappearance of the distinction between reader and author” (Ryan 2016: 336).

When the desktop computer evolved from a text-editing machine to a multimedial system, the field of electronic literature expanded with it. Because of the significance of this shift, N. Katherine Hayles (2002; 2008) has argued it is useful to distinguish two “generations” of electronic literature. The first generation predates the internet and is characterized by text and hyperlinks. The second generation makes use of the audiovisual possibilities of the personal computer and the affordances of the World Wide Web. These works are characterized by the use of (moving) images, sound and kinetic typography. Hayles’ categorization of the form into generations suggests a clear break between hypertext and other forms of

electronic literature. However, as Funkhouser argues, electronic literature's foundations "mechanically and conceptually built in the decades before personal computers, were firmly established by the 1990s – before the WWW came into existence" (Funkhouser 2007: 1).

With the advent of the second generation of electronic literature, a second wave of scholarship around the phenomenon emerged, which culminated in the establishment of The Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) in 1999. The ELO organizes yearly conferences, and publishes book series, journals, and the quinquennial Electronic Literature Collections (Volume 1: 2006; 2: 2011; 3: 2016), which offer an overview of the most important works of literature. The ELO – alongside comparable organizations, such as ELMCIP, NT2, Literatura Electrónica Hispánica, and CELL (Pablo & Goicoechea 2014) – has played a decisive role in the recognition of electronic literature as an art form.

In the wake of recent technological and cultural developments within digital media – in particular the rise of social media and smartphone applications –, Leonardo Flores (2019) has proposed that we can now speak of a "third generation" of electronic literature. This most recent generation is characterized by the use of social media such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. These platforms offer new possibilities for the production and consumption of electronic literature as hardly any technical skills are needed to create and disseminate these works. In addition, third generation electronic literature is often collaborative, as users repurpose and reimagine other people's work (Cramer 2014: 11). Instagram poetry aptly demonstrates how third generation electronic literature can reach large audiences. While second generation literature is often understood as literature that is created with and for "new media", third generation literature concerns works that are made "by and for contemporary audiences for whom digital media has become naturalized" (Flores 2019: n.p.). Additionally, this third generation no longer "aligns itself with the literary tradition formed by the print world [...] and the art world", but rather "with electronic and digital media in terms of its formats and publication models" (2019: n.p.). This conception challenges prevailing notions about the relationship between electronic literature and the avant-garde, as we will explore in the next part.

Theoretical aspects

To make sense of the artistic and technological innovations of electronic literature, scholars have resorted to theories and concepts drawn from the world of print literature. Experimental literature and (neo-)avant-garde works have been the dominant framework to understand electronic literature, in particular concrete poetry, Oulipo, and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E (Rettberg 2008, Wardrip-Fruin 2009; Rettberg 2019). Scott Rettberg even goes so far to say that "[e]lectronic literature is fundamentally experimental literature" (Rettberg 2018: 5). Similarly, Espen Aarseth understands electronic literature as a form of "ergodic literature", which he defines as literature where "nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text" (1999: 1-2).

Such scholars argue that many of the affordances that digital media offer for literary expression have been imagined before the modern computer was (widely) available. Early forms of electronic literature, such as Krol's *Appi* (mentioned in the previous section), follow a procedural logic: the computer generates or changes textual lines, based on a set of instructions by the author/programmer. Similarly, the members of Oulipo employ strategies that concern permutations and transpositions, such as the procedure "N+7", in which every noun or verb in a poem or a prose text is replaced by the seventh word that follows from the original word's entry in the dictionary. This procedure is applied in Georges Perec's "neues Hörspiel" *The Machine [Die Maschine]* (wdr 1968), for instance. In this radio play, a computer subjects Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's famous poem "Wandrers Nachtlied II" to various operations or "protocols".

Another work that is often regarded as a forebear to electronic literature is Raymond Queneau's *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* [*Cent mille milliards de poèmes*] (1961). This book presents a sonnet with ten alternatives for every line. The reader is able to compile a total of 1014 (a hundred thousand billion) unique sonnets from these possibilities. According to Rettberg (2018), this work is related to electronic literature because it introduces a characteristic mechanism of this art form: interaction. Likewise, "A Story as You Like It", or "Yours for the Telling" ["Un conte a votre façon"] (1982 [1967]) by the same author and graphic artist Sheila Bourne, Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* [*Rayuela*] (1966 [1963]), and *Dictionary of The Kazhars. A Lexicon Novel* [*Hazarski re?nik: Roman leksikon u 100 000 re?i*] (1988 [1984]) by Milorad Pavi? can be considered analog forms of hypertext fiction *avant la lettre*, as the reader can make choices as to how the story unfolds.

In a similar manner, scholars have resorted to avant-garde works that predate the age of the computer to understand electronic literature. In the words of Funkhouser: "Stéphane Mallarmé's late-nineteenth-century poem 'A Throw of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance' (1897), is unquestionably an artistic antecedent that directly impresses upon the disruption of textual space and syntax found in digital poetry" (Funkhouser 2007: 11; cf. Glazier 2002).

For scholars of electronic literature, the tradition of the avant-garde offers a framework to read individual works as well. Maria Engberg and Jay David Bolter, for instance, consider Brian Kim Stefans's *The Dream-Life of Letters* (2000) as a continuation of neo-avant-garde poetry from the sixties and seventies, which Stefans's Flash poem seems to "complete" (Engberg & Bolter 2012: 10). They write that Stefans "seems to have sought out the ultimate goal of their aesthetic 'dream' of letters that words should be 'set free' from their static prison on the printed page and that their metaphoric freedom through experimental visual layout should and could be realized in digital media" (Engberg & Bolter 2012: 10).

Another reason why the (neo-)avant-garde offers a compelling framework to understand electronic literature, is the avant-garde's rejection of institutions (Bürger 1984; Foster 1994). Digital media allow creators of electronic literature to create, disseminate and discuss avant-garde works outside of the framework of official institutions, such as publishers and museums. The non-profit websites Monoskop and Kenneth Goldsmith's Ubuweb, for instance, sidestep traditional institutions by making videos, images, and texts of avant-garde works available for free (under the condition that the works are removed if artists make a complaint) (Goldsmith 2020).

This does not, however, mean that electronic literature escapes institutionalization. Electronic literature is institutionally framed because its infrastructures are largely shaped by commercial forces (Baldwin 2009). As James O'Sullivan points out: "Much digital art and electronic literature has emerged through the use of black-box standards whose existence is dependent on corporations whose agenda is entirely capitalist – if electronic literature is written on computers for computers, then it is literature that is subject to constraints established by Google, Apple, Adobe, Microsoft, and Sony" (O'Sullivan 2019: 14). Artists working in the field of electronic literature have employed these constraints artistically. Alexandra Saemmer and Jean-Pierre Balpe, for instance, have used the algorithms of Facebook to develop fictional characters on the platform.

In addition to being subject to commercial forces, works of electronic literature are largely dependent on (traditional) institutions for their material and symbolic production. As Yra van Dijk points out in her review of a selection of electronic literature from the Netherlands, many works of electronic literature are "not autonomous, in the sense that they are in fact funded and sometimes initiated by some institution, mostly in the end by the government itself" (Van Dijk 2012: 2). Such institutions leave their mark on electronic literature, for example because they emphasize a clear division of roles: a literary author is responsible for the text, a developer takes care of the technical realization (Fourmentreaux 2010).

Electronic literature is dependent on institutions for its symbolic production as well. Scholarly institutions in particular play an important role in this regard, as Van Dijk makes clear: "Due to the absence of traditional

gate-watchers [sic] like publishers and newspaper critics, the function of selection, distribution, and reception of this work has been taken over partly by anthologies, reviews and criticism that are produced in an academic climate” (Van Dijk 2012: 1). Especially in the United States, scholars of electronic literature are often also creators of this art form. This leads Florian Cramer to conclude that “electronic literature ha[s] established itself as a field in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense, i.e. as an area of production and discourse with intrinsic distinctions and authorities” (Cramer 2012: 1; cf. Cayley 2018: 6-7).

Due to its specific institutional framework, experimental and “high-brow” works of electronic literature are often privileged. Arnoud van Adrichem and Jan Baetens understand the involvement of literary institutions with electronic literature as a means to gain control of a phenomenon that potentially undermines the gatekeeping functions that these institutions traditionally hold (2009: 21). As stated above, the affordances of the internet allow anyone with a connection and some knowledge of coding to create and disseminate electronic literature. Van Adrichem and Baetens argue that literary institutions reinstate a notion of “scarcity” by emphasizing that some digital literary works are “proper” literature, while others are not.

This institutional framework was fundamental for electronic literature to establish itself as a field of study. In recent years, however, scholars have pointed to its limitations. According to Florian Cramer, the electronic literature field hampers the avant-garde potentials of this art form. In a 2012 article, he addressed the field of electronic literature by asking:

Does electronic literature stand for the culture of fast, almost cost-free, globalized publishing on the Internet, i.e. the Maciunas model of avant-garde popularism? Or does it represent the opposite: a digital boutique and gated community of literary writing inside a sea of digital ephemera, a fine art white cube safely shielded from the digital trash? (Cramer 2012: 4)

In addition, “third generation” electronic literature, such as Instagram poetry and similar forms, puts pressure on prevailing ideas about the relation between electronic literature and avant-gardism. In the words of Spencer Jordan: “In a world where computerisation is fundamentally normalised, any understanding of the digital as subversive and radical becomes redundant” (Jordan 2020: 16). He adds: “Running alongside [the] tradition of the avant-garde and the experimental [electronic literature], is a more recent condition which, rather than responding to digital technology’s novelty and originality, is instead a recognition of its overwhelming presence in everyday life” (Jordan 2020: 10).

Jordan’s words are an indication that the relationship between electronic literature and the avant-garde is shifting. On the one hand, the connection between digital technologies and the avant-garde is perhaps stronger than ever. In his introduction to *Against Expression. An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, Kenneth Goldsmith argues that the Internet has had an impact on literature that is similar to photography’s impact on painting (Goldsmith 2011: xvii–xviii). He claims this impact has led to a new mode of avant-garde literature that can be labelled “conceptual” or “uncreative” writing. The latest “generation” of electronic literature shows characteristics of such “uncreative” writing as well, as Flores points out: “[t]hird generation works are less interested in originality (a digital modernist characteristic), and more willing to create remixes, derivations, copies, and outright plagiarism of works, frequently adding personal touches and customizations” (Flores 2019: n.p.).

On the other hand, however, avant-garde strategies and techniques have become entirely mainstream in the digital age. Works of electronic literature challenge borders between user and creator, media, countries, and languages. As some scholars have pointed out, however, these characteristics are not reserved for works of electronic literature; they are inherent to the digital age. Marie-Laure Ryan, for example, writes that social media narratives “are much better at challenging the distinction between

authors and writers than the avant-garde ‘writerly’ texts extolled by Roland Barthes” (Ryan 2016: 332). Similarly, Lev Manovich claims that the avant-garde strategy of collage is paradigmatic for the digital age. Digital media continuously allows users to bring together heterogeneous materials through the functions of copying and pasting. “One general effect of the digital revolution”, Manovich writes, “is that avant-garde aesthetic strategies came to be embedded in the commands and interface metaphors of computer software. In short, the avant-garde became materialized in a computer” (Manovich 2001: xxxi). These developments have recently led scholars to argue that the avant-garde no longer offers a viable framework to understand electronic literature (Cramer 2012: 3). In his introduction to *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Electronic Literature*, for instance, Joseph Tabbi states that the postdigital world “is no place for avantgardes” and instead argues that it is from its newly found mainstream position that electronic literature should seek to be transformative (Tabbi 2018: 7).

Cases

As Funkhouser states, “no masterpieces or ‘works for the ages’ emerged to lodge the genre in the imagination of a larger audience” (Funkhouser 2007: 6). One of the reasons for this is the problem of “digital erosion”: electronic literature is often made with hardware and software that is no longer available or accessible (Moulthrop & Grigar 2017). That said, anthologies such as ELO’s Electronic Literature Collections have contributed to establishing something like a canon within the subfield of electronic literature. In this canon, Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* (Eastgate, Storyspace version, 1995) and Michael Joyce’s *afternoon: a story* (Eastgate, Storyspace 1990 [1987]), take a prominent place, since these works were among the first to gain elaborate academic attention. They are considered as paradigmatic examples of how electronic literature realizes postmodernist notions about subjectivity and authorship (McHale 2015: 130; Landow 1997: 198-205; Bell 2010: 107-49).

One of the prominent names in the field of electronic literature is J.R. Carpenter, a Canadian author who has consistently published widely acclaimed works of electronic literature since the early 1990s. In addition, Carpenter has published print works that are informed by digital media, such as *GENERATION(S)* (2010), a collection of code narratives. Her works *The Cape* (2005), *Entre Ville* (2006), *In Absentia* (2008), and *Along the Briny Beach* (2011) were included in the Electronic Literature Collection Volumes 1-3. A common theme throughout her work is spatiality. Indicative for this theme is *The Mythologies of Landforms and Little Girls* (1996), one of Carpenter’s earliest works made for the World Wide Web. The narrative is organized around a map of Nova Scotia, one of the places in Canada where European settlers first set foot, and where the author was born. In *Mythologies*, Carpenter investigates the history of Nova Scotia by juxtaposing childhood memories with found images. Unsatisfied with her own earlier attempts to convey this narrative in print, Carpenter took inspiration from Choose Your Own Adventure novels and paper placemats that are commonly found in restaurants (Carpenter 2020, n.p.). The work employs the affordances of HyperText Markup Language (html) to present the narrative on history and memory in a non-linear fashion.

A more or less canonical work of the “second generation” of electronic literature is the Flash poem *Dakota* (2001) by Young Hae Change Heavy Industries (??????), an artist duo working in Seoul, South Korea. This poem is made with Adobe Flash, a commercial computer program that was designed for animated advertisements on websites (known as banners). Young Hae Change Heavy Industries have used this program to create narrative poems. The words of *Dakota*, rhythmically cued to a frantic solo by jazz drummer Art Blakey, flash rapidly on the screen. The poem tells the story of a group of young people driving around and getting drunk. The main character wanders off and is visited by ghosts from his past, resembling friends and acquaintances that have passed away years ago.

The creators of *Dakota* have stated that the work takes its inspiration from Ezra Pound's Cantos I and the first part of Cantos II (Pressman 2014: 81). Significantly, these first two parts of the Cantos are based on a scene from Book 11 of Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus and his men descend into Hades to gain knowledge about their future. Jessica Pressman has read *Dakota* in relation to these intertexts. According to her, *Dakota* engages with Pound's famous motto "Make it new", and with modernism's relation to tradition more generally. The Flash poem places itself in relation to the literary tradition, while it also introduces a break from it. "*Dakota's* adaptation is both an ironic and an earnest attempt to 'make it new' by rearticulating the past" (82).

Pound's Cantos, which consist of 116 parts that were released between 1915 and 1962, form a high mark of modernist literature. As such the work is heavily discussed among literary scholars. In Pressman's view, the references to Pound evoke this scholarly tradition, which suggests that we should read *Dakota* with close attention. The work frustrates such a reading practice, however. The text flashes by so rapidly that it is hard to take in everything at once. In addition, the narrative becomes increasingly fragmentary as the poem progresses. Since the reader cannot pause or rewind the Flash poem, they are subjected to the tempo of the poem (Pressman 2014: 79). For the reader who wants to follow the story, the experience can be frustrating. According to Pressman, this frustration is the result of a reading practice that is connected to the world of the printed book: "The flashing text promotes speed-reading while its literary content demands an opposite response. The resulting paradox is the cornerstone of YHCHI's digital literature and my interest in it" (Pressman 2014: 79). This leads Pressman to conclude that "the Flash-based onscreen performance presents a montage-like aesthetic remix of modernist poetry that challenges conceptions of what it means to 'read' literature" (80).

As stated in the introduction, scholars often distinguish electronic literature from literature that has been "digitized" (e.g. e-books). A project that investigates and challenges this distinction is *Wonderlijke vlek* (2005) by the Dutch poet F. van Dixhoorn. This work, which was published on the website wonderlijkevlek.nl, presents a collection of poems. In its design, *Wonderlijke vlek* unmistakably references the world of the printed book. The website uses the sixteenth-century serified typeface Garamond, the user can manually turn the "pages", and the website displays how many pages are left.

Due to its limited use of the affordances of digital media, such as animation and interaction, *Wonderlijke vlek* appears to be not that different from the average e-book and other forms of "digitized" literature. That impression is reinforced by the fact that these poems have been published before in printed poetry collections. Just like most e-books, *Wonderlijke vlek* relies on reading conventions that have been established over centuries of print culture. Because of this, the text is easily accessible to the reader – it is not a form of "ergodic literature". However, the work remediates the printed book to such an extent that the website's design draws attention to itself (in the words of Bolter and Grusin (1999): its *immediacy* gives way to *hypermediacy*). The typeface and the amount of white space do not correspond to the conventions of online media but to that of printed poetry. Because of its emphatically minimal design, the reader is asked to reflect on the ways that digital media adopts strategies and conventions of older media.

Explicit remediations of older media are integral to more recent works of electronic literature as well. The work of Tyler Knott Gregson (@tylerknott) is indicative of this. Gregson is a Montana-based poet who has gained a massive following by publishing his poetry on social media such as Tumblr, Instagram, and Twitter. Like many other Instagram poets, he uses (digital filters emulating) analog photography, handwriting and typewriters (e.g. his Typewriter Series) to graphically present his poems. Paradoxically, these references to analog media are a characteristic feature of social media platforms like Instagram. Equally characteristic of social media is the fact that these poems are easy to consume. They do not require a lot of effort to read or understand because of their aesthetic appeal, and their accessible, often sentimental, or clichéd, content. Gregson's work illustrates how some works of the most recent generation of electronic literature employ the affordances of digital media without relying on avant-garde poetics.

An example of “third generation” electronic literature that explicitly takes its inspiration from Oulipo and Surrealist procedures is the poetry bot *Pentametron*, which was created by Ranjit Bhatnagar and has been active since 2012. The program scans Twitter for tweets that happen to be written in iambic pentameter. It then combines these tweets to create a variety of nonsensical Shakespearian sonnets. Bhatnagar has published a selection of these poems in print, and on Twitter and Tumblr. *Pentametron* stands in a long tradition of computer-generated poetry, such as Krol’s *APPI* (mentioned above). It employs avant-garde strategies, such as the juxtaposition of found materials, remixes, randomization, and the ironic use of traditional artistic forms. At the same time, however, these poems cannot be understood through the lens of the avant-garde alone. Like Gregson’s poetry, *Pentametron* is significantly marked by the conventions of commercial social media platforms, since it is integral to the project that its outcomes can be easily shared. This project thus shows that the line between the avant-garde and the mainstream is significantly harder to draw.

Avenues for future research

Historically, most research on electronic literature has focused on works from the United States, Canada, and Europe. In recent years, however, this focus has shifted to other parts of the world. Studies have been published on electronic literature in Latin America, for instance, such as Claire Taylor’s *Electronic Literature in Latin America* (2019), and *Technology, Literature, and Digital Culture in Latin America: Mediatized Sensibilities in a Globalized Era* (2016) by Matthew Bush and Tania Gentic. Giovanna di Rosario, Nohelia Meza, and Kerri Grimaldi (2021) provide an historical overview of the most important developments in Europe, North America, Latin America, and the Arab World respectively. These authors state that more information is needed about electronic literature from Asia in particular.

Another avenue for future research is electronic literature’s relation to the avant-garde in the “postdigital” age. As outlined above, the proliferation of digital media has put pressure on the notion that electronic literature is able to offer radically new reading experiences. This prompts the question of to what extent electronic literature still offers opportunities to “make it new” in (no longer) new media (to riff on the Poundian subtitle of Jessica Pressman’s book on “digital modernism” (2014)). How can electronic literature go beyond the paradigm of “innovation” that is commonly associated with the term “new media”? Can works of electronic literature employ technologies that have become everyday aspects of our lives in profoundly new and defamiliarizing ways, and thus offer a window on our postdigital condition?

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