Mapping Spanish e-lit: Networks, Readings, and Communities

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In this essay we would like to present part of an ongoing research that deals with the system, or the network, in which digital literature is housed and developed, more specifically the field of digital literature in Spanish with its artifacts, its agents, communities and relationships. We will focus on the analysis of the network as a form of organization, constructing the reticular map of the field of Spanish digital literature with a special focus on the relationship between peripheries and centers.

Taking into account that any map or constellation that we draw will be, in turn, an interpretation and a knowledge model, we will focus on the study of movements and strategies that serve to expand and connect artifacts, individuals and processes. This approach will focus on the circulation of digital literature in the Spanish speaking context, from a distant reading perspective, analyzing digital literature as information, and its pieces as global artifacts in circulation. The aim is to discover how local processes co-exist and dialogue in a global network that is changing the way texts are distributed and accessed, and it is modifying the very essence of texts themselves. Perhaps motivated by this "cartographical turn" (Moretti; Juvan; Guasch)[1], I propose to analyse the circulation and distribution of digital literature in Spanish on the Internet, in an effort to discover whether these works have a truly global reach, and whether their circulation and reading are creating global communities of digital readers.

1. Spanish Electronic Literature: The Map and the Territory of the Field

Electronic literature itself in its digital possibilities has transformed its forms to overflow them. Not only electronic literature is a global product because it is an ambassador for technological globalization and the Internet revolution (it is born digital), but also, as a cultural construction, contributing to the configuration of the global imaginary and discourses, and the changes in relation to culture, their movements and their translations. The e-lit, as a global practice, allows us to think in terms of circulation, identification and recognition, helping the formation of new forms of community, affections or shared memories as Dolores Romero pointed out (Romero, 1). Also it

provide us with data about so-called "digital reading" in the Spanish-speaking context. The study of the field itself, thinking about e-lit as information, networked readings and readers, will help us to focus on the context that frames the works and its constructive process that favors the network, moving from the focus on the object to the decentralization of the context as a cultural system that participates in the construction of the work's

ONLINE: Archives, collections, communities, platforms or sites where to find spanish e-lit or discussions about it	OFFLINE: Conferences, festivals, exhibitions, research groups or cultural institutions
Ciberia: biblioteca de literatura digital en español [http://repositorios.fdi.ucm.es/ciberia/index.php]; Hermeneia [http://www.hstudies. net/]; Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes [http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/bib/portal/literaturaelectronica/; Centro de Cultura Digital [https://centroculturadigital.mx/]; Cultura Digital Chile [http://culturadigitalchile. cl/]; Palabras Corrientes CVC [https://cvc.cervantes.es/artes/p_corrientes/]; NETespaña [http://meiac.es/net-spainintro.php]; NETescopio [http://netescopio.meiac.es/obras.php]; Turbulence MEIAC [http://meiac.es/turbulence/archive/netartistindex. html]; NetArt Latino Meiac [http://meiac.es/latino/index. html]; Ludión [http://ludion.org/home.php]; Iloveepoetry [http://iloveepoetry.org/]; Hipertulia [https://webs.ucm.es/info/especulo/hipertul/otras_re2.htm]; Rizhome [https://rhizome.org/]; Electronic Literature Collections [http://collection.eliterature.org/]; CELL Consortium [http://cellproject.net/]; Electronic Literature Directory [http://directory.eliterature.org/]; Electronic Literature Organization Repository [http://elo-repository.org/]; ELMCIP [https://elmcip.net/]; Nt2 [http://nt2.uqam.ca/]; E-poetry [http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/]	ELO's conferences and festivals [https://eliterature.org/]; E-poetry festivals [http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/e-poetry/archive/]; Galleries and museums exhibitions such as Paraules pixelades [http://artssantamonica.gencat.cat/es/detall/Paraules-pixelades]; Cibergeografías [http://meiac.es/cibergeografias /]; No Legacy [https://nolegacy.berkeley.edu/]; Lorem Bitsum. Literatura Electrónica en español[http://www.mataderomadrid.org/ficha/9421/exposicion-lorem-bitsum.html]; Lleom exhibitions with Laboratorio de literaturas extendidas [https://lleom. net/portfolio/plata formas-de-la-imaginacion-escenarios-de-la-literatura-electronica/]; El hilo de Ariadna [https://issuu.com/javiermaseda/docs/elhilodeariadna]; Research groups and cultural institutions: Hermeneia [http://www.hstudies.net/]; LEETHI [https://www.ucm.es/leethi], USAL [http://medialab.usal.es/portfolio/humanidades-digitales/]; Trans–nar [http://www.nar-trans.com/]; CCDmex [https://centro cultura digital.mx/], Ludión [http://ludion.org/home.php]; Cultura Digital Chile [http://culturadigitalchile.cl/]; Medialab-prado [https://www.medialab-prado.es/]

meaning. Although there were not many studies like this in the field of e-lit theory, recently they have emerged some that are framed in a distant reading perspective and data visualization of the electronic literature field. In consequence this study is framed among others such as Scott Rettberg, "Electronic Literature Seen from a Distance: The Beginnings of a Field"; Rettberg, "Visualising Networks of Electronic Literature: Dissertations and the Creative Works They Cite"; Rettberg, Scott; Seiça, Pablo, Goicoechea, María; Pawlicka; da Silva; Tabbi). With this, we do not pretend to make an exhaustive study of data (because that would exceed the intent of this essay) but to show how a distant reading can mean a better understanding of how the field of e-lit works, how it is constructed and how it is developed.

Digital literature in Spanish for years has been linked to university research centers or experimental artists or writers who found examples housed in large international repositories. Let's see an overview of the main specialized e-lit communities and platforms[2], that I have divided between online and offline examples. The online ones are, in theory, accessible from all parts of the globe, being the main spaces of concentration, visualization and distribution of these works. But we cannot forget that some of these virtual spaces are born within real institutions, research groups, or galleries, linked to the real and physical territory they belong and to the social and cultural agents that are involved. Many of these examples are duplicated, overlapped or branched out, exceeding the intention of this work.

It seems relevant to ask in what way, however, the virtual space of the circulation of e-lit affects the physical and ubiquitous space it overlaps with and how do virtual and real spaces relate to each other and affect each other. To be more precise, should we analyse this map in isolation or is it better to link it to territory?

In this sense we have critical traditions that analyze and think about this virtual and physical relationship like those of digital ethnography and the connective point of view (Christine Hine, *Etnografía virtual*; Hine, "Ethnography for the Internet. Embedded, Embodied and everyday") or the postdigital theories (Berry and Dieter), that would come to point the obsolesce of the physical/virtual dichotomy since in our days the digital is not longer a domain apart from everyday life.

But it is still interesting to establish those connections to better understand and draw the field and the meaning-making practices that constitute it. For example, how many people from Spanish speaking context attend the ELO's conferences? Probably the volume of works and presentations of Latino-American, Spanish, or non-English researchers and artists, will depend on the place where these conferences are celebrated and all changes will depend on it. Let's think about something that may seem obvious but sometimes we forget when times passes and data stays in virtual world, for example, the Spanish speaking participation at e-poetry festivals[1], where we can see obviously a the importance that the place, and the context has with the

origin of the attendees. We could also think about how this real event can encourage and activate the creation of works in a particular context, as it happened in Barcelona (11 Spanish speaking participants) or in Argentina (22 Spanish speaking participants), compared to other festival editions such as London 2013 (6 Spanish speaking participants) or London 2005 (just 1 Spanish speaking participant). It seems obvious that these events marked an increase in the Spanish works production.

If the virtual space of Spanish e-lit circulation affects the physical and ubiquitous space with which it overlaps, the "real" territory, how do they affect each other, how can we measure it? Both, map and territory, are temporalities that coincide and coexist: the local and the global rubbing shoulders with each other. So the questions we can ask are greatly expanded. How do technological infrastructures affect us? What about wifi connections? What frictions arise having a piece of e-lit in a peripheral setting? Should authors participate in the global context of transnational dialogues or should they remain in their local context?

We can not forget that the much hyped digital literacy or even the extremely well known digital inequality, is nothing more than, as Martín Barbero (31) point it, social, cultural, economic inequality and so on. As Claudia Kozak points we need to make critical approaches understanding digital creation as a global located practice[2]. In this sense we have notice an increase of studies dedicated to Latin American as a place of enunciation, to its anthologies and its own critical apparatus that arises from the mixture between the imported referents from Anglophone tradition with its own critical tradition linked to the Latin avant-garde (Kozak; Gainza; Correa-Díaz, Weintraub). In this sense the Spanish and the Latin American, help the construction of a global and contemporary field.

> Equally important is the construction of international and contemporary art and culture in a true international way: in differences and from differences. That is, enacting difference rather than representing it, thus actively fashioning 'international art language' in multiple ways. (Mosquera 169)

For instance, the exhibition *Cibergeografías* curated by Gustavo Romano[3], speaks precisely about how new communities and artists have managed to build a new global topology beyond the geographic: the cybergeographic. This exhibition that reconsiders virtual maps as a theme, as a strategy and as a network (with works from Belen Gaché, Antoni Abad, Eduardo Kac, Ciro Museres o Mario Santamaría) could be also mapped in its interaction with the real space in which it is contained: La paz, Paraguay, Santiago de Chile, Montevideo, Córdoba, Rosario, etc. How to measure the intangible? How to draw the fickle? How can we draw boundaries where there are only moving flows towards unpredictable directions? Curatorial exercises like that brings up issues like how to draw a map without north or south or how we could speak of centers and peripheries.

Digital literature is born as an experimental object and a work laboratory by its nature as support as well as a medium, and emerges as a combination between critical object and creative object (Bouchardon 40). This self-reflexive character, metatechnological, metalinguistic, is what allows it to rethink from itself, the very system in which it is immersed and its digital nature. It is an image of itself. The Juan Pintabona work *Buenos Aires world* (2005), an online text processor that plays with the images and typography of the public space of the city of Buenos Aires, is a good example of a work based on the ubiquitous and concrete but that can be understood at a global level (see fig. 1). The text ends up being a construction by common images that we all recognize and that could exist in any city in the world. The global imaginary of urban space. It seems a clear example of how even the local imaginary can be decentralized trough multiple decontextualizations and recontextualizations until we are unable to linked to any particular source. We find the global in the national. An example of the use of the image as a globalizing agent favouring the collective construction of imaginaries. These strategies, such as code used as global language, data visualization, virtual and digital distribution, or translanguages, are used as global strategies that speak not only about the artifacts but also about the contellations they belong to: the virtual space and the Internet. That is the metatechnological nature of digital works.

The assertion of the local must result from the acceptance of the new meanings that the local is acquiring as something full of contradictions and that has little to do with the colonial idea of the original, the native or the authentic. Digital Literature also faces the challenge of being a "non-English" production. However, in terms of its potential audience, digital literature in Spanish has an enormous playfield.

I think its interesting to analyze if the past existence of conceptual and experimental movements in a specific culture, such as concretism, visual and sound poetry, kinetic art, etc., is related to the "health" of the subsequent e-lit community in the said culture, or, on the other hand, if the presence of e-lit in certain communities is a bit of "a bubble", generated in an artificial manner by main institutions (Cramer "Post-Digital Writing"). Universities continue to be centers of knowledge, whose research institutions and departments provide the economic foundation to many of the artists involved in e-lit. Also housed in these institutions are the platforms, collections and repositories where people interested tend to read and find novelties and works. We should ask ourselves what's the point of having a strong field, if society does not participate, if reading is not a means of social learning and if the field does not grow on its own without help of critics, researchers and institutions that are pushing the field. In this sense it is in which the third generation e-lit discussion takes place (Flores "Third Generation Electronic Literature"), arguing that it will be not only a "chronological" division but has to do also with "seek to reach audiences" and "the line between

modernism and postmodernism and their respective affinity to (highbrow) literary culture and (lowbrow) popular culture."

2. The Spanish Electronic Literature as a Generator of Global Communities[6]

Beyond the obvious importance of the agents for the promotion of the field I will like to focus now on actual readers and their affectivities. Reading generate affectivities and thus feelings of belonging and of exclusion. The Internet stimulates emotions around shared interests, favouring identification and cohesion, and strengthening subjectivities that go beyond the ethnic or the territorial to identify with the cyberculture. The latter is one of the new ethnicities that Appadurai refers to, which now differentiate themselves by cultural areas that do not correspond to cartographical determinisms, but instead to affective transcultural, transnational and global movements.

In the next sections we would like to ask ourselves the following questions: Around what affectivities have virtual communities of e-lit readers meet? To what degree is the Spanish a good unifying agent for the readers of digital literature? To what subjects, genres, or specific works are they grown to? Are repositories responsible for creating culturally active reading communities?

In order to explore further the concept of a virtual community and be able to understand what type of communities of readers are formed on the Internet and how they operate, it is relevant to refer to the study carried out by María Goicoechea de Jorge in her thesis *El lector en el ciberespacio: una etnografía literaria de la cibercultura,* about the reader in cyberspace[2]. In it, Goicoechea applies Wallerstein's discussion of cultural forces to the creation and development of virtual communities in cyberspace. As in any human community, we can identify two opposing forces: the convergent and homogenizing, which agglutinates around an identitary centre defined in opposition to an external alien or other; and the divergent and heterogenizing forces that tend towards social differentiation and the establishment of hierarchies in absence of an external threat. These convergent and divergent forces not only apply to communities and cultures, but are also innate forces within global processes of circulation and cultural consumption.

Using Goicoechea's three definitions of cybercommunities of readers: the linguistic, the discursive and the interpretative (Goicoechea 159), we can thus analyse on the one hand the formation of linguistic communities of readers of digital literature as those which are formed or promoted, based on the concept of "Spanish" as a unifying agent, aiming to be centripetal, embracing the heterogeneity of a transnational Spanish. On the other hand, we can analyse the formation of more specific communities (discursive communities) based on professional groups, certain institutions, and on useful taxonomies or interests to tag the corpus of digital literary offer, or even, in some cases based on geographical territories or nationalities And, we can also find communities

of readers more centred on specific works or authors (interpretive communities), giving rise to interpretation communities or even the extraordinary phenomenon of fan fiction.

I will analyse these types of communities focusing on two large groups, removing the division between discursive and interpretive communities, since, ultimately, both are divergent in nature in opposition to Spanish as a linguistic community, which we consider as a convergent community.

3. Spanish as a Linguistic Community

Although digital literature is a hybrid artifact because it combines different languages (natural and technological) We would like to take into consideration the role that the Spanish language plays in constituting an e-lit community of readers, if by sharing the same language they understand each other, or, if Spanish is a global language and linguistic communities "constitute the relevant groups on a global scale in the context of cultural flows" (Warnier and Guerrero 10). It makes sense to talk about digital literature in terms of language of production? Is there something beyond the Spanish language that is needed in order to be able to talk about a community of readers?

Koinonía: máquina de palabras (2007), a work by Ricardo Iglesias, uses an interactive web in which we are allowed to play with the meaning of words, constructing expressions with Mexicanisms terms. It is interesting to note how this work, so concrete in a cultural or linguistic way, acquires new meanings by being available online and collected in several repositories of digital literature in Spanish. The irony of this peace is that even though it can be accessed globally it can only by completely understood by Mexicans. Ricardo Iglesias work precisely reflects on the creation of meanings through social agreement making the global/local theme the centre of the work.

The problem with Spanish, as well as other transnational languages described as linguistic communities, is that it encompasses many different types of Spanish belonging to diverse cultural areas. Let us suppose that these different types of Spanish, belonging to heterogeneous cultural areas are not really the ideal linguistic community that can generically be referred to as the Spanish e-lit community, because they cannot fully understand each other. We can not talk, as we have been seeing at Ricardo Iglesias peace *Koinonía*, about a single Ibero-American space. That's why is so necessary to specify the country of origin of a peace for its accurate classification and contextualisation. But who wants to speak about origins, "nationalities" or countries if at the Internet, without territorial borders, the language is the new nationality? Are the repositories valuing that question? Is that question important at all? The only collection for the moment that includes this information is the 3rd collection form ELO, the last and the most global one. In the previous collections, [1] the volume 1 and 2 the nationalities did

not appear and even languages other than English were directly tagged with "non English work" or even "multilingual or non English".

In this sense, Spanish, as a place of enunciation considering the translinguistics issues is the starting point from which to study and analyze e-lit. Research groups like LEETHI[2] in Spain that have promoted the development of *Ciberia: Literatura Digital en Español*[3] based on the language of works no matter where it comes from. In a digital context without borders, Spanish is the new "virtual nationality". Among the sixty-three works of Spanish e-lit included in the repository, we can find eight nationalities, but they are not "registered". The nationalities or origins of the works are not a tag or a searchable category in Ciberia but we can compare that with five Spanish speaking nationalities included at ELO's 3rd collection.

There are numerous studies that mentions terms like "Spanish", "mapping", "Latin American" etc., with the intention of giving a general or panoramic view of the e-lit under these enunciative umbrellas[4]. We take into account that:

> Numerous authors and critics claim a post-national way of not only understanding writing, but of posing Hispanism and the study of these texts, in [a transatlantic] orbit (…) in that sense, the most interesting current Spanish narrators are post-Spanish, or perhaps better trans-Spanish, since they have not stopped being Spanish, but they are beyond that limited definition, to which their glocal books do not fit.[5] (Mora 339)

In the Spanish speaking context we also find a proliferation of platforms dedicated to e-lit creations linked to a particular region, that understand creation as a "located practice" (Läufer and Kozak): Chile (Cultura Digital Chile)[6], or Mexico (Centro de Cultura Digital de México)[7] or even Latinamerican researchers and authors that come together in a network (LiteLat)[8] which aims to serve as support and community for those interested in the Latin American context. This could be an example of how the Spanish speaking context works as a multicentral field, maybe we can talk not about a centralized network, neither a distributive one, but a decentralized network.

4. Readers and their Interests as Discursive Communities and Communities of Readers

What happens when bookshops, libraries and local agents that distribute and promote readings, arts and exhibitions, become virtual meeting places developing communities of cyber readers? The main communities of e-lit readers are concentrated around platforms as we have seen before. Reading is increasingly being transformed into what Goicoechea calls an "activity learned at the heart of a community" (Goicoechea 6). Platforms that advocate social and shared reading, are beginning to prove successful collaborative reading, favouring a social tagging, and even collaborative writing, terms that no longer sound strange to us.

There are audiences that form themselves around affectivities, around specific authors or readings. In the case of e-lit platforms, We can find e-lit group together at a more general level (ELMCIP, Nt2 or ELD are good examples)[9], but which is then cataloged or tagged, so that allows applying filters based on genres, authors or taxonomies searching in order to filter according to specific interests. In the 3rd ELO collection, under the Spanish language category, the most repeated tag is poetry (8 of 16) but does not fit with the results thrown by the NT2 (where poetry, under the Spanish language, has 20 of 219 results, far behind "narration" with 46 results.) Is poetry an important genre in Spanish compared to other languages of creation? At Ciberia the most used categories are interactive fiction (11), poetry (14), generative (11), interactive (32), cinetism (23), conceptual (19), audio (26). In the case of ELO 3rd collection we have generative (45), poetry (54), javascript, (34), hypertext (20) or remix (17).

We can also find specific groups or communities based in interactive fiction, (like *Libros juegos[1]* the main Spanish interactive fiction online community) a genre that has a parallel life outside the e-lit field. Also, we could see examples of communities and works that grow up around specific softwares like, Twine, Digital narrative Literatrónica por Juan B. Gutierrez and Mark Marino[2], or the example of Flash works, with a great tradition in e-lit community wich the most important example is the one of Belén Gache *Wordtoys* works (*Wordtoys* 1996-2006), (*Góngora Wordtoys* 2011). We have also the example of communities that grow up around an specific author or work, as is the case of the blognovel "Más respeto que soy tu madre"[33] by Hernán Casciari that has been able to achieve a strong community that follows him and awaits the announcement of each of his publications and it ends up being a successful play. Patricia Tomaszek in the volume *Electronic Literature Communities* suggests that there is a relation between creativity and community through the works and the innovation (Tomaszek 1). In this volume edited by Scott Rettberg, Patricia Tomaszek and Sandy Baldwin in 2015, declare:

> What you will not find here—yet—is a sweeping theoretical analysis or decisive conclusion about the function and formation of community in the production of creativity. There is no unified field theory of creativity to be found here. These case studies, which describe and consider e-lit communities in a number of different ways, rather provide materials for further reflection, research and post-processing. As such, this collection presents a starting point for broader theoretical analyses of creative communities. (Tomaszek 5)

Precisely this volume don't reflect the community-centered studies based on national or language localization, instead it focuses on the cases in which certain creative practices have influenced and generated community within the e-lit, such as Flash e-lit or interactive fiction.

As we have seen in this work in progress, the Spanish e-lit field is characterized by the fragmentation and dispersion of the sites where digital

literature is located and although we go to the global, the data indicate that there is still a lack of representation of differences, critical differences and aesthetics ones. We have to keep working on making the difference visible to understand and enrich the field. Spanish can be a powerful weapon used for antagonistic and incompatible ends: a post-colonial flag or a place of difference and resistance to the hegemonic discourse.

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Notes

[1] I am referring to the spatial and geographical turn that has dominated the change in critical analysis in the course of globalization. The map becomes the protagonist in the specialization of content and interpretation. For spatial and global studies of literary or artistic systems see Franco Moretti, Marko Juvan, Vilashini Coopan, Miriam Llamas, Amelia Sanz, Anna María Guasch, José Luis Brea or Joaquín Barriendos, among others.

[2] The following list is not an exhaustive one, and it is under construction and will be addressed in more detail in futures publications. We apologize for any missing information.

[3] E-Poetry festivals are an international digital poetry festival organized every two years: http://writing.upenn.edu/epc/e-poetry/archive/

[4] Claudia Kozak and Milton Läufer present at ELO Cork 2019 conference, a study focused on the relationships between politics and digital aesthetics from the perspective of Latin America regarding geo-cultural location within globalization, as a "located reading" (Läufer y Kozak).

[5] The information of this exhibition can be found here: http://meiac.es/cibergeografias/index.html

[6] In this essay, the study of e-lit reader communities is based on a previous study dedicated to the ebook circulation in Spanish speaking context (Sánchez Gómez).

[7] We have already used this thesis for our approach in other studies such as "E-books in Spanish: A Global Object in Circulation" (Sánchez Gómez), to analyze readers communities.

[8] Collections can be found here: http://collection.eliterature.org/

[9] https://www.ucm.es/leethi

[10] Ciberia http://repositorios.fdi.ucm.es/ciberia/index.php is a pioneer collection of electronic literature works in Spanish that is part of The Consortium on electronic Literature (CELL) http://cellproject.net/

[11] We give some examples here but due to the extension of this study we leave a deeper insight for other future publications. We highlight the Spanish Language

Collection at ELMCIP made by Maya Zalbidea Paniagua https://elmcip.net/research-collection/spanish-language-electronic-literature; and Dolores Romero studies such as "La literatura digital en español: estado de la cuestión" (Romero).

¹² This quote has been translated by myself, the original one is "numerosos autores y críticos reivindican un modo posnacional no ya de entender la escritura, sino de plantear el hispanismo y el estudio sobre estos textos, en la órbita del profesor peruano Julio ortega y sus congresos transatlánticos. en ese sentido, los narradores espa-ñoles actuales más interesantes son posespañoles, o quizá mejor transespañoles, puesto que no han dejado de ser españoles, sino que están más allá de esa limi-tada definición, a la que no se ajustan sus libros glocales."

¹³ http://culturadigitalchile.cl/

¹⁴ https://centroculturadigital.mx/

¹⁵ http://litelat.net/

¹⁶ https://elmcip.net/; http://directory.eliterature.org/; http://directory. eliterature.org/

¹⁷ http://librojuegos.org/tag/ficcion-interactiva/

¹⁸ http://www.literatronica.com/src/initium.aspx

¹⁹ http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/mas-respeto-que-soy-tu-madre/

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