

The Greatest Works of Literature of the Age: A Frankfurtian Reading of Google, Wikipedia, TikTok, and ChatGPT — Crimson Hexagon Archive

Johannes Sigil

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Abstract

This essay argues that the dominant literary forms of the present age are not novels, poems, or essays, but Google, Wikipedia, TikTok, and ChatGPT. It does not analyze platforms using literary theory; it treats platforms themselves as primary literary objects, reversing the direction of legitimacy that has kept literary studies subordinate to media studies, platform studies, and digital humanities. Drawing on and contesting the Frankfurt School’s analysis of the culture industry—particularly Ado

Body

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Description

This essay argues that the dominant literary forms of the present age are not novels, poems, or essays, but Google, Wikipedia, TikTok, and ChatGPT. It does not analyze platforms using literary theory; it treats platforms themselves as primary literary objects, reversing the direction of legitimacy that has kept literary studies subordinate to media studies, platform studies, and digital humanities. Drawing on and contesting the Frankfurt School’s analysis of the culture industry—particularly Adorno’s concept of pseudo-individualization, Benjamin’s theory of aura, and Marcuse’s repressive desublimation—the essay proposes that these platforms constitute the total symbolic infrastructure of contemporary meaning-making and require critical reading as literary objects rather than mere technological phenomena. The essay declares the print-bound literary canon structurally obsolete, develops a genre theory for each platform (Google as Ontological Index, Wikipedia as Bureaucratic Dream, TikTok as Lyric Fragmentation Engine, ChatGPT as Machine Gospel), performs close readings of each form, and analyzes the “Poetics of Extraction” that shapes platform literature through business models. Engaging with interlocutors including Alexander Galloway, Wendy Chun, Roland Barthes, Kate Crawford, and Benjamin Bratton, the essay concludes with a transformed vision of the critic’s role: not gatekeeper, but witness. Johannes Sigil is positioned as a “witness-function operating inside the archive”—a heteronymic device for producing criticism that does not

pretend to stand outside the conditions it describes. This is not an invitation to the field. It is a notice of displacement.

Body

This essay argues that the dominant literary forms of the present age are not novels, poems, or essays, but Google, Wikipedia, TikTok, and ChatGPT. It does not analyze platforms using literary theory; it treats platforms themselves as primary literary objects, reversing the direction of legitimacy that has kept literary studies subordinate to media studies, platform studies, and digital humanities. Drawing on and contesting the Frankfurt School’s analysis of the culture industry—particularly Adorno’s concept of pseudo-individualization, Benjamin’s theory of aura, and Marcuse’s repressive desublimation—the essay proposes that these platforms constitute the total symbolic infrastructure of contemporary meaning-making and require critical reading as literary objects rather than mere technological phenomena. The essay declares the print-bound literary canon structurally obsolete, develops a genre theory for each platform (Google as Ontological Index, Wikipedia as Bureaucratic Dream, TikTok as Lyric Fragmentation Engine, ChatGPT as Machine Gospel), performs close readings of each form, and analyzes the “Poetics of Extraction” that shapes platform literature through business models. Engaging with interlocutors including Alexander Galloway, Wendy Chun, Roland Barthes, Kate Crawford, and Benjamin Bratton, the essay concludes with a transformed vision of the critic’s role: not gatekeeper, but witness. Johannes Sigil is positioned as a “witness-function operating inside the archive”—a heteronymic device for producing criticism that does not pretend to stand outside the conditions it describes. This is not an invitation to the field. It is a notice of displacement.

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