Syllabus: The Digital Nineteenth Century

Robert Davis

Course Description

This class will use emerging digital tools and methodologies to study nineteenth-century American theater history and dramatic literature. At the intersection of humanities, linguistics, and computer science, the "digital humanities" uses software to inform creative and scholarly work. In this class, we will focus on linguistic analysis, data visualization, and virtual mapping to understand the relationship of theater and society in the 1800s. By looking at large-scale trends with computer software, we will seek to understand changes in the nineteenth-century theater that are invisible through reading single texts alone. This course will be a laboratory for scholarly inquiry. Coursework will pair historical research with a "maker" philosophy, which asks students to explore and test historical knowledge through creating digital projects, such as visualizations of textual patterns in plays and maps of theatrical activity in nineteenth-century New York. Student work will involve learning a variety of digital tools to complete three projects: an analysis of shifts in dramatic literature in the nineteenth century, a map of how theaters migrated uptown during the period, and a collaborative research project analyzing the impact of the Astor Place Riots in American culture. Each project will also involve written papers based on in-depth research.

Students do not need to have expertise with computers or programming. The course will demystify new technologies and give students a peek "under the hood" of the internet. Students will critique and think about the role of the web, the traditional library, and social media in the academic and artistic practice of theater. We will explore such questions as: What happens if we use a computer to read all the nineteenth-century's major plays at once? Is there a unique "language" of melodrama? How can we visualize an actor's life or a theater's production patterns in New York history? Why did period audiences consider Shakespeare an "American" playwright?

Course Objectives

1. To see how cutting-edge technology can inform how we study and make theater.
2. To discover how American theater was embedded in American cultural and social changes by looking at history through new perspectives.
3. To gain proficiency in several digital tools and employ them as paths to creativity and academic insight.
4. To develop critical skills to research, identify key data, and present findings in unique and insightful ways.
5. To expand our horizons of how computers and theater come together.

Description of Assignments

Class Participation   10%

Critique of Digital Project   10%   2–3 pages

As a culmination to our initial section surveying digital projects, choose one recent project. What contribution is it trying to make to the field? Is it successful? What could be improved?

Text Minding and Analysis Paper   15%   3–4 pages

Working with a partner, you will create a corpus of plays, books, or articles to analyze using the tools we have covered in class. Your paper will discuss your process using the tools and discuss what you learned from a "distant reading" of the texts.

Mapping Project   20%   2 pages + map + presentation

In this assignment, you will work to create a map related to the topics we have covered. The map, created in Google Maps, should be annotated and have an accompanying paper and presentation. Possible topics include tracking an actor's career, looking at theaters and other buildings in a city, or charting locations mentioned in a series of plays.

Network Analysis	20%	2 pages + visualization

For this visualization project, you will prepare data to use for a network diagram and analyze and discuss the connections you have made.

Research Project and Poster Presentation	25%	15–17 pages

For the final project, you and a partner will propose a digital research project, establish a methodology, and create a poster presentation for the class. You will pitch an idea to the class, and you will each write a paper assessing your workflow, analyzing your findings, and describing the potential for further research.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Week One: Introduction to the Course

- Lawrence Levine, "William Shakespeare and the American People"
- Franco Moretti, "Big Data Meets the Bard," *Financial Times*, June 15, 2013, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/fb67c556-d36e-11e2-b3ff-00144feab7de.html

Week Two: What Are the Digital Humanities?

- Patricia Cohen, "Humanities 2.0: Digital Keys for Unlocking the Humanities' Riches," *New York Times*, November 16, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/17/arts/17digital.html?ref=humanities20
- Ted Underwood, "Seven Ways Humanists Are Using Computers to Understand Texts," *The Stone and the Shell* (Blog), June 4, 2015, https://tedunderwood.com/2015/06/04/seven-ways-humanists-are-using-computers-to-understand-text/
- David Saltz, "Performing Arts" in *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/
- Louisa Medina, The Last Days of Pompeii (Literature Online)

Week Three: Introduction to Text Analysis

DUE: Paper #1

- Kim Sturgess, Shakespeare and the American Nation (selections)

- Stephen Ramsay, "The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around; or What You Do with a Million Books," in *PastPlay: Teaching and Learning History with Technology*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/12544152.0001.001/1:5/--pastplay-teaching-and-learning-history-with-technology?g=dculture;rgn=div1;view=fulltext;xc=1
- S. Graham, I. Milligan, and S. Weingart, "Basic Text Mining: Word Clouds, Their Limitations, and Moving beyond Them," in *The Historian's Macroscope*
- James Sheridan Knowles, The Hunchback (Literature Online)

Week Four: Text Mining: Case Studies

- Jean-Baptiste Michel et al. "Qualitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Books"
- David Hoover, "Quantitative Analysis and Literary Study," in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies,* http://digitalhumanities.org/companion/view?docId=blackwell/9781405148641/9781405148641.xml&chunk.id=ss1-6-9&toc.id=0&brand=9781405148641_brand
- Ben Schmidt, "Making Downton More Traditional," http://www.prochronism.com/2012/04/making-downton-more-traditional.html
- Maciej Eder and Jan Rybicki, "Go Set a Watchman While We Kill the Mockingbird in Cold Blood," https://sites.google.com/site/computationalstylistics/projects/lee_vs_capote
- Jason Mittell, "Caption Mining at the Crossroads of Digital Humanities and Media Studies," *Just TV*, https://justtv.wordpress.com/2012/11/30/caption-mining-at-the-crossroads-of-digital-humanities-media-studies/

Week Five: Mid-Century Changes and Transformations

DUE: Dramatic Literature Roundtable: choose a play from a list to read and summarize for the class with a one- to two-page paper

- Richard Butsch, "Knowledge and the Decline of Audience Sovereignty," in *The Making of American Audiences*

- "Matinee Ladies: Re-Gendering Theatre Audiences," in *The Making of American Audiences*
- Angela Serratore, "Post Secrets," http://laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/post-secrets

Week Six: Introduction to Mapping

DUE: Text Mining and Analysis Paper

- Browse: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_cartography
- Read: http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/maps-reveal-slavery-expanded-across-united-states-180951452/?no-ist
- Explore: http://dsl.richmond.edu/emancipation/

Week Seven: Mapping Cases Studies

- Andrew J. Torget and Jon Christensen, "Mapping Texts: Visualizing Historical American Newspapers" *Journal of Digital Humanities*, http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-3/mapping-texts-project-by-andrew-torget-and-jon-christensen/
- Alissa Walker, "There Is No Such Thing as an Unbiased Map," *Gizmodo*, December 5, 2014, http://gizmodo.com/there-is-no-such-thing-as-an-unbiased-map-1665946307
- Mary Henderson, *The City and the Theatre* (selections)

Week Eight: Mapping Project

DUE: Mapping Project and Presentation

- Anne Kelly Knowles and Amy Hillier, Placing History: How Maps, Spatial Data, and GIS Are Changing Historical Scholarship (selections)

Week Nine: Networks: Theory and Application in Literature and History

- Moretti, "Network Theory, Plot Analysis," *New Left Review*, http://litlab.stanford.edu/LiteraryLabPamphlet2.pdf
- S. Graham, I. Milligan, and S. Weingart, "Networks in Historical Research," in *The Historian's Macroscope*
- James Herne, *Margaret Fleming* (ProQuest Literature Online Database)

- "The Octopus and the Matinee Girl," from Schweitzer, *When Broadway Was the Runway: Theater, Fashion, and American Culture,* http://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2014/12/maude-adams-fashion-icon-and-americas.html

Week Ten: Networks

- Kieran Healy, "Using Metadata to Find Paul Revere," *Kieran Healey* (blog), June 9, 2013, http://kieranhealy.org/blog/archives/2013/06/09/using-metadata-to-find-paul-revere/
- Ryan Cordell, "Viral Textuality in Nineteenth-Century US Newspaper Exchanges," in *Virtual Victorians: Networks, Connections, Technologies*
- Manuel Lima, "Decoding Networks," in Visual Complexity: Mapping Patterns of Information

Week Eleven: Networks Continued

DUE: Network Analysis Project

- Cyrus Edson, "Do We Live Too Fast?" (JSTOR)

Week Twelve: Digital Cultures

- Alexis C. Madrigal, "How Netflix Reverse Engineered Hollywood," *The Atlantic*, January 2, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/01/how-netflix-reverse-engineered-hollywood/282679/
- Jamie Condliff, "Even If You Don't Use Social Networks, They Still Know Stuff about You," *Gizmodo*, October 7, 2014, http://gizmodo.com/even-if-you-dont-use-social-networks-they-still-know-s-1643246882
- George Dvorsky, "The 10 Algorithms That Dominate Our World," *Gizmodo*, May 22, 2014, http://io9.com/the-10-algorithms-that-dominate-our-world-1580110464

Week Thirteen: Project Pitch

DUE: Project Pitch

- William Gillette, *Sherlock Holmes* http://www.diogenes-club.com/sherlockplay.htm

Week Fourteen: Project Presentation (Last Class)

Project Poster Presentation

Final Paper Due (via Google Drive)