Travels in the Digital Humanities

<lg type="stanza">Climbing cliffs and fording torrents Here we are at last in Florence . . .</lg>

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A Journey to Italy

This course will focus on digitally reconstructing a journey to Italy in the early 20th century. We will begin our investigation with a mysterious black box which gathered dust in a faculty office for decades. Its fragile contents revealed ghostly images of an Italian journey, images captured by an obsolete and obscure technology.   Over the course of thirteen weeks, we will explore the mysteries of this box, identifying and mapping its photographic travelogue. We will learn about the technology neccessary to document the journey and we will examine the historic and literary context of similar travels to Italy. Students will scour special collections holdings for clues, and they will be encouraged to carry out extended individual projects based on their investigations. We will then assemble our knowledge in a collaborative digital recreation of this journey.

> Is this a humanities course? Or a course in the use of digital technology in the humanities?

Required Texts

Douglas Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed*
Charles Dickens, *Pictures from Italy*
Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*
Henry James, *Italian Hours*
Edith Wharton, *Italian Backgrounds, Roman Fever and Other stories*
D.H. Lawrence, *D.H. Lawrence and Italy*
Other readings available in online course packet

Ultimately, what sets the digital humanities apart from many other humanities fields is its methodological commitment to building things as a way of knowing.

—Matthew K. Gold

> It is both! But no prior programming experience is needed.

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A mysterious black box

The image on the right is a newly digitized reproduction of a glass lantern slide from the early 20th century. The slides gathered dust for decades in a black box forgotten in the corner of a campus office, their technology obsolete. Today, when we speak of a "black box" in relation to technology, we often understand it as the way in which scientific and technical work is rendered invisible by its own success. When a machine such as a computer runs efficiently, we tend to privilege its inputs and outputs rather than focusing on its internal complexity. Paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become. This dusty "black box" will allow us to gain a better critical understanding not just of its own contents, but of current digital tools and practices available to the humanities.

The photographs were taken during several grand tours of Italy between 1904 and 1912 and provide a unique perspective on the history of Anglophone tourism in Italy. They also provide precious historical documentation of cultural heritage sites in cities such as Florence, Venice, Assisi and Rome. Finally, the technology employed to reproduce these photographs indicates that their use was a public one: whether in the classroom for the undergraduates or at public lectures, the lantern slide was the technology of choice for projecting images for a large audience. Their extensive use in education at the turn of the 19th century is also evinced by the large number of lantern slides found in a number of repositories in university libraries.

These slides provide an interesting visual counterpart to other European travel ephemera from the late 19th and early 20th century, such as guidebooks, postcards, letters, maps, diaries, periodicals and an excellent pretext for an exploratory journey in the digital humanities.

Course goals

By the end of the semester, you should:
- be able to articulate some of the benefits and the drawbacks of using digital tools to approach the humanities
- be able to situate developments in digital technology of the past several decades within the broader historical context of textual technologies
- possess a working knowledge of scholarly technologies for examining and publishing texts
- be able to critically interrogate the way you use the internet to get information, produce content and interact with others
- have attained a high degree of digital literacy, including the ability to critically evaluate online sources and navigate efficiently through large amounts of information

Transferable skills that you should develop:
- the ability to express yourself across a range of written genres (eg. informative prose suitable for an encyclopedia entry; scholarly argument; writing appropriate to informal online discussions)
- create original, public digital reasearch projects using archival materials
- a familiarity with a range of IT skills (including TEI, text mining applications, georeferencing applications, organising information using tags, using a blogging platform such as WordPress)
- the ability to work with others in a digital environment (through collaborative activities such as co-constructing a digital edition)

When human beings acquired language, we learned not just how to listen but how to speak. When we gained literacy, we learned not just how to read but how to write. And as we move into an increasingly digital reality, we must learn not just how to use programs, but how to *make* them.

In the emerging, highly programmed landscape ahead, you will either create the software or you will be the software. It's really that simple: Program, or be programmed. Choose the former, and you gain access to the control panel of civilization. Choose the latter, and it could be the last real choice you get to make.

For while digital technologies are in many ways a natural outgrowth of what went before, they are also markedly different. Computers and networks are more than mere tools. They are like living things themselves. Unlike a rake, a pen or even a jackhammer, digital technology is programmed. This means it comes with instructions not just for its use, but also for itself. And as such technologies come to characterize the future of the way we live and work, the people programming them take on an increasingly important role in shaping our world and how it works."

Douglas Rushkoff, *Program Or Be Programmed. Ten Commands for the Digital Age.*

This is the shortest route from Florence to Rome. . .a diligence performs the journey in thirty-six hours; the courier's carriage is still more expeditious. The vetturini require at least five days and generally six. With post-horses it may be done in four days.

(Murray's Handbook of Central Italy and Rome)

WEEK		READ/WATCH/MAKE
One	Unpacking the digital humanities: goals, methods, materials.	*Read* "The Humanities, Done Digitally" Kathleen Fitzpatrick *Watch* Michael Wesch, The Machine is Us/ing Us
Two	Preservation and sustainability: from analog to digital Special Collections visit	*Read* Alison Byerly, *Are We There Yet?* (excerpts in course packet) *Make* Collaboration #1: Artifact analysis
Three	Picturing Italy Workshop #1: Postcard Description Text Mark-up Language as an instrument of Humanities Scholarship	*Read* *The Innocents Abroad by Mark Twain, Preface and Chapter 1-2*
Four	Introduction to TEI	*Read* *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain, Chapters 3-4 "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph" by Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Atlantic*, June 1859 "A rapid diorama" in *Pictures from Italy* by Charles Dickens *Make* Select postcard from Beinecke
Five	Workshop #2: TEI markup Postcards	*Read* Electronic Textual Editing Guidelines for Editors (extracts) *Make* Critical assessment post on blog
Six	Touring Italy Online exhibits: Omeka	*Read* *Italy: A Handbook for Travellers* by K. Baedeker (e-book available here) *Make* Omeka proof of concept
Seven	Touring Italy Making historic maps spatial with Arc GIS	*Make* Finish Omeka proof of concept Critical Assessment post on blog *Read* *Italy: A Handbook for Travellers* by K. Baedeker (e-book available here)
Eight	Touring Italy Making historic maps spatial with Arc GIS	*Read* *Italy: A Handbook for Travellers* by K. Baedeker (e-book available here) Kelly Johnston, Georeferencing Step by Step *Make* Georeferenced historic map

Course Requirements

Course blog

Throughout the term, we will engage with the ideas of the course through public writing on a course blog. The success of a blog is due to the collective energy and engagement of an intellectual community. You should post both your own written responses before coming to class and comment on the posts of your colleagues. Think of this as another dimension of your class participation. Posts should demonstrate your understanding of course topics and should be tagged appropriately. When you discuss a particular course text, you should quote and cite that text. Use your posts to develop questions you would like to address in our discussions in class. As the blog develops, you may also want to link back to previous posts. You are required to write eight posts and at least six comments over the course of the semester. Both comments and post are expected to be substantive and should advance our discussions in meaningful ways.

Digital Project

Central to this course will be a collaborative digital project that you will develop over the course of the semester using materials from the special collections at Yale. This will include you participating in four types of projects and assuming responsability for one of these for our final collaboratory:

- A TEI-encoded edition of a postcard
- An Omeka exhibit
- A georeferenced historical map
- A project of your choice (to be agreed upon by the fourth week of class - http://dirt.projectbamboo.org/)

In addition, you will contribute a final critical assessment that reflects on your endeavors and presents the scholarly value of your work to a broader audience. This writing (together with the collaborative digital project) will be presented in our community presentation at the conclusion of the semester.

WEEK		READ/WATCH/MAKE
Nine	"Reading" Italy: from search engines to topic models to reading machines Library visit	*Read* Excerpts from *Mornings in Florence* by John Ruskin (online course pack) N. Katherine Hayles, "How We Read: Close, Hyper, Machine"
Ten	"Reading" Italy: from search engines to topic models to reading machines	*Read* *Roman Fever* by Edith Wharton (course pack)
Eleven	Collaboratory	Douglas Rushkoff, *Program or Be Programmed*
Twelve	Collaboratory	Critical Assessment post on blog
Thirteen	Community Presentation	Collaboratory assessment

Grade Breakdown

Participation (including blog posts): 20%
Critical Assessments: 10%
Collaborative Evaluation Paper: 10%
Collaboratory Assessment: 10%
Community Presentation: 10%
Digital Project: 40%

"It is not irrelevant to note that the tropes of virtual travel that the Victorians developed as they grappled with the new art forms of their day continue to resonate in our descriptions of the new media of the twenty-first century. When we use a web browser called Internet explorer to "nagivate" our way to a new "site," take a "virtual tour," and then return "home," we are using geographic metaphors that have their origins in [travel]."

- Alison Byerly, *Are We There Yet?*