


# Program in Digital Humanities and Social Science

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INTERNSHIPS  / SUMMER 2019

## POLONSKY DIGITAL HUMANITIES SCHOLARS SUMMER 2019

### NET ART CONSERVATION: FLASH MIGRATION PROTOTYPES FOR LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON'S AGENT RUBY

**Sasha Arden, Institute of Fine Arts**

#### Biography

Sasha Arden is the Rachel and Jonathan Wilf/Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Time-Based Media Conservation at the Conservation Center, Institute of Fine Arts at NYU, pursuing an MA in the History of Art and Archaeology and an MS in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. During their former career installing and managing time-based media at the Oakland Museum of California and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Sasha became committed to maintaining the integrity of artworks as they are stewarded over time in collections. Non-traditional artistic practices require a deep engagement with those artworks to determine preservation needs, and Sasha's research examines the intersection of technical capabilities and the philosophical and ethical questions arising through the conservation process.

#### Project Description

*Agent Ruby* (1999-2002) is a web-based artwork by Lynn Hershman Leeson in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), using early artificial intelligence technology to give life to the character of Agent Ruby, who chats with visitors through a text portal running in the Adobe Flash Player, a

proprietary multimedia format that will no longer be supported by 2020. Applying principles and tools of time-based media conservation, this project prototyped migration methods for the Flash-based digital files to HTML5 and JavaScript, current open standards that recreate the behavior and aesthetics of the original artwork and ensure continued public access to it. Because the only available sources of *Agent Ruby*'s animation and chat interface are compiled Shockwave files (.swf) and the performance of the website itself, the project first tested decompiler software to extract assets such as images, vector graphics, embedded animations called sprites, audio, fonts, and ActionScript code. The prototypes were assessed for accuracy of aesthetic and behavioral reproduction, workflow feasibility, ethical implications, and technological sustainability to inform SFMOMA's decision-making process for conservation treatment of this artwork.

## **BANNED BOOKS BEHIND BARS: PROTOTYPING A DATA REPOSITORY TO COMBAT ARBITRARY CENSORSHIP PRACTICES IN U.S. PRISONS**

**Kate Cauley, XE: Experimental Humanities & Social Engagement**

### **Biography**

Kate Cauley is a dual-degree graduate student at New York University and Long Island University, where she's earning a Master's in both Experimental Humanities & Social Engagement and Library & Information Science. Kate works as the Media Archives Coordinator at NYU School of Law. Her academic interests include information science, the carceral state, and the digital humanities.

### **Project Description**

"Banned Books Behind Bars" is a social justice project that aims to shed light on the complex problem of information access in prison and to explore potential prototypes

for possible solutions to some of these obstacles, in particular access to books and printed information. The United States is home to five percent of the world's population but a staggering twenty-five percent of the world's total prisoners. For many inmates, access to information is a struggle: censorship, book banning, and lack of adequate library facilities or collections are common.

Over the duration of the Polonsky Fellowship, this project evolved through the research process of ideation. Qualitative interviews with volunteers from banned books organizations helped to identify potential digital tools, meant to aid in the fight against the First Amendment violations that incarcerated individuals face daily. Furthermore, the interviews clarified that the first step toward creating an impactful digital project involves converting various forms of *unstructured* data, including newspaper articles, prison censorship forms, and state published banned book lists, into *structured* data. Through this discovery, "Banned Books Behind Bars" became an endeavour to standardize practices of data aggregation amongst banned books organizations throughout the country. Gathering concrete data about the practice of banning books within prisons requires an elevated level of transparency. Incarcerated individuals, their families, and prison reform activists need a platform for reporting data on censorship practices, and, ultimately, for bringing awareness to the arbitrary application of censorship guidelines within the complex world of incarceration. The final prototype is a digital repository, created with AirTable software, which offers authoritative dataset consolidation for activists and organizations working to deliver books to prisoners.

# **MAPPING THE MARINERS' CHURCH: FINDING COMMUNITY IN 19TH CENTURY NEW YORK**

**Emily Fenster, Department of English**

## **Biography**

Emily Fenster is an M.A. student in English Literature at New York University with research interests in 19th century American poetry and book history. She earned a B.A. from Barnard College with a major in English and a minor in Classics. Her interest in manuscript studies and the use of urban space in 19th century New York led to her current research on the diary of a preacher for a maritime community on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the 1820s and 1830s.

## **Project Description**

In 1821 Henry Chase began a diary to record his experiences as an urban missionary for the Mariners Church in Manhattan. Each day he summarized where he went, who he encountered, and the details of his interactions, often listing the addresses of the families he visited. House by house, the missionary moved throughout the seventh ward of Manhattan, encouraging families to attend the church; Chase's movements reveal new historical perspectives on working class domestic life in the city and evangelical religious outreach to a vulnerable population. Through his work, the community of the Mariners' Church becomes visible. This project created an interactive map of this diary, drawing historical addresses and textual data from the original manuscript, currently held at the New York Historical Society. It used ArcGIS and ESRI StoryMaps to plot this data on a digitized historical map pulled from the New York Public Library's MapWarper, opening this primary archival manuscript to researchers in various fields and offering new contexts for analyzing and interpreting this source's significance.

## **GENRES OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY VALUE: CORPUS DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS**

**Ryan Healey, Department of English**

### **Biography**

Ryan Healey is a doctoral student in English at New York University. His research concentrates on the financial and fictional literature of the eighteenth century, primitive accumulation, corpus analysis, machine learning, and quantum information theory. He holds a B.A. in English and Philosophy from McGill University and an M.A. in English from the University of Cambridge. His essay, “The Uses of Genre,” is forthcoming in the Winter 2020 issue of *Representations*.

### **Project Description**

This project built and excavated a corpus of over a thousand eighteenth-century titles on economic subjects—not only Adam Smith and James Steuart but primarily the overlooked and self-serving texts that Schumpeter called the “quasi-systems” of pamphleteers, projectors, and “cranks with pet ideas”—in order to map the landscape of eighteenth-century value across genres. Critics have usually investigated the instability of eighteenth-century genres through the conspicuously hybrid genre of the novel. The early novel’s indifference toward distinctions of “fact” and “fiction” seems to coincide with the emergent value structure of financial capital, namely what Mary Poovey identifies as “deferral, slippage, substitution, obscurity, and abstraction.” To depict a broad image of genre-specific value, this project pulled thousands of texts using a reinforced predictive model of title metadata from Eighteenth Century Collections Online, cleaned the results with a bespoke post-OCR correction dictionary, and evaluated the texts with corpus analysis and topic modeling tools. A large corpus of economic texts allows us to compare lexical co-associations and topics in order to situate the give-and-take relationship between eighteenth-century finance and fiction.

## **CHINATOWN TENANT'S UNION DIGITAL ORAL HISTORY**

### **Yu-Shih Huang, Archives and Public History**

#### **Biography**

Yu-Shih Huang is a current graduate student in the Archives and Public History Program at NYU and received her BA degree in history from National Taiwan University. With a strong interest in community history, she and her classmates have created a demo role-playing video game and a website about the lives of patients with leprosy at Taiwan Lo-Sheng Sanatorium in 1962. She has also created a StoryMap based on the oral history of a former patient with leprosy.

#### **Project Description**

Committee of Against Anti-Asian Violence, known as “CAA AV: Organizing Asian Community” today, was founded in 1986 in response to increasing violent crimes against Asian people in the US, and now concentrates on housing justice for Asian American communities. As one program of CAA AV addressing structural prejudice, Chinatown Tenants Union (CTU) was created in 2005 to organize low-income tenants from Manhattan Chinatown who are under the threats of harassment or eviction. Through oral history and digital humanities methods, this project seeks to help CTU to recruit members and to train them to testify at an annual Rent Guideline Board Hearing. By sharing their memories of hometowns, experience in Manhattan Chinatown, and achievements with CTU, these tenants can learn public-speaking skills, create their own narratives, and encourage residents to ally with them. By creating a prototype for an online oral history archive, this project has forged new means of interacting with tenants outside of campaigns and protests, and a community resource. Built on the digital content management system Drupal, the prototype includes sample interviews with both transcripts and translations. It also features an online archive that will be accessible and sustainable for grassroots activists, a guideline for interviews that can be practiced by the staff, a user-authorized platform where volunteers can translate the transcriptions of the oral histories, and a multilingual interface.

## **DIGITAL PRESERVATION: DOCUMENTING AND DISSEMINATING SANAM TEMPLE**

**Peter M. Johnson, Institute of Fine Arts**

### **Biography**

Peter Johnson is a M.A. candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, focusing on Ancient Egyptian and Nubian Art with a specific interest in the ontology of Ancient Egyptian visual culture. His research interrogates canonical practice and how variance and development in canonical representation can elucidate Ancient Egyptian social history, specifically with regards to the construction of identity. A graduate of Brown University with a B.A. in Egyptology and Assyriology, he has held internships at the RISD Museum, Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago. He previously conducted fieldwork in Iraqi Kurdistan and is currently a member of the Sanam Temple Project in Sudan. Prior to moving to New York City, he was an LGBTQ activist and advocate who raised funds, garnered support, and built coalitions on behalf of Chicago's LGBTQ community. In his free time, he volunteers at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art and works with the NYU LGBTQ+ Center.

### **Project Description**

*Documenting and Disseminating Sanam Temple* returned to unprocessed data from the first two seasons of the Sanam Temple Project (Winter 2018 and Winter 2019) in preparation for the upcoming third season in Winter 2020. The Sanam Temple Project, directed by Dr. Kathryn Howley, revisits a 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty temple of Amun built by King Taharqo in Sudan (ca. 675 BC), which was hastily excavated in 1912 and published in 1922 to poor present-day standards. Besides accurately recording and documenting the temple, which has degraded precipitously since its initial excavation 100 years ago, the project aims to examine local execution of Egyptian practices, and the extent to which such practices adopt native customs in a period marked by foreign Nubian rule over Egypt. Under these broader goals, *Documenting and*

*Disseminating Sanam Temple* focused on implementing a number of digital interventions to enhance documentation of this site with regards to accuracy and ease of dissemination. Using GIS software, maps of past seasons trenches were created and linked with previously collected geodetic measurements and photogrammetric data. These maps conform to publishable standards in archaeology and their richness in data allows for researchers to independently examine them. Furthermore, using the application Balsamiq, a wireframe UX was created for a data collection app which will be used in the trenches and laboratory on site, a tool tailored to the unique conditions of working in the sun and sand of Sudan. The project concluded with the creation of a public facing presence, including social media handles and launching a project website which appropriately provides the public with access to project data and updates.

## **THE SPEECH WITHOUT DOORS (1644-1769): AN OPEN ACCESS SCHOLARLY EDITED EDITION**

**Ruby Lowe, Department of English**

### **Biography**

Ruby Lowe is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at NYU and a visiting student at The University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation addresses the significance of print oratory in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. Reaching back through Renaissance Humanism to the manuscript publication of speeches in Ancient Greece and Rome, Lowe's research explores the history of oratory as a print medium that influenced early modern education, poetry and the English Revolution. Her interests in comingling of orality and print extend to contemporary Australian Aboriginal literature. She is the co-editor of *Kim Scott: Readers, Language, Interpretation* (University of Western Australia Press, 2019). Lowe is interested in the development of open access scholarly publishing.



## Project Description

Inaugurated by George Wither, the gregarious and wildly successful poet and pamphleteer, the Speech Without Doors genre played a significant role in the history of freedom of speech. This genre of pamphlets publicly challenged Parliament's traditional right to privacy and secrecy of political deliberation and the status of freedom of speech as an oral privilege limited to the MPs. The most famous work in the genre is John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), which is regarded as a seminal argument for freedom of the press. Born in the political debates of the 1640s, the genre of the Speech Without Doors persisted until the mid 18th century when reporting parliamentary speeches and debates became legal for the first time in English history.

As the first scholarly edition of The Speech Without Doors genre, this digital humanities project brings together established editorial practices with the developing field of open access scholarly publishing. Joseph Black's *The Martin Marprelate Tracts: A Modernized and Annotated Edition* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) applied meticulous editorial practices to the form of pamphlet. Developing Black's editorial model, this edition embraces the possibilities of electronic publication to reach beyond the enclosure of the academy. This edition employs a combination of TEI encoding, open source software and Wordpress to make The Speech Without Doors genre freely available to academics, students and anyone interested in the history of freedom of speech.

## **MAPPING THE ILLEGAL SLAVE TRADE IN 1850S NEW YORK CITY**

**Katherine Platz, Department of History**

### **Biography**

Katherine Platz is a master's student in World History in the Department of History at NYU. She also completed her bachelor's degree at NYU last May as part of the CAS-GSAS Bachelor's-Master's track. Her research interests include the history of migration, imperialism, and U.S. expansionism during the nineteenth century.

### **Project Description**

Although the foreign slave trade was officially abolished in the United States in 1808, minimal levels of government prosecution enabled the continuation of a thriving illegal slave trade with bases in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century. During the 1850s, in the years leading up to the U.S. Civil War, New York City became a major base for U.S. nationals to participate in this illegal traffic. Their forms of participation included owning and outfitting slave trading ships, serving as captains and sailors on slave trading voyages, and working as lawyers and insurers for slave trading syndicates. This project uses ArcGIS software to create a digital map of businesses and individuals implicated in the illegal slave trade in New York City during the 1850s, and to document their dates of involvement. The map uses data from the New York Public Library's digitized city directories to locate addresses of slave traders, and integrates these addresses' coordinates on a modern-day map with rectified digital historical maps. This map provides a spatial visualization of slave trading networks in Manhattan during this late period of the illegal slave trade. Through the map and its presentation in Esri StoryMaps, this project seeks to serve both as an aid to scholars working on the history of New York City's involvement in the illegal slave trade, and to members of the public who are interested in the history of the slave trade in the economic life of New York.

## **INVENTING AND DEFINING “RELIGION” IN JEWISH NEWSPAPERS, 1843-1893**

**Yitzchak Schwartz, Department of History**

### **Biography**

Yitzchak Schwartz is a cultural and intellectual historian focusing on nineteenth-century religion and popular religious thought. He is currently a doctoral candidate at NYU studying American cultural and intellectual history. His research focuses on the history of American religious and political thought, philosophies of history, and conservatism. Much of his work approaches these subjects through architecture and material culture. His dissertation explores attempts to define and redefine the nature and purpose of Judaism by American Jews during the mid-to-late nineteenth century and what these tell us about popular American notions of religion during that period. Yitzchak’s work has appeared in both academic and popular forums. In addition to writing, his passions include museum work and teaching.

### **Project Description**

How do the ways we define religion retroactively structure and define our own religious belief systems? This project uses two methods of digital textual analysis, topic modeling and word distribution, to create a case study of how nineteenth-century American Jews engaged with the developing category of “religion.” In its current iteration, the project focuses on two American-Jewish newspapers from this period, *The Occident* (1843-1869), published by Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia, and the *Jewish Messenger* (1857-1902), published by the Isaacs family of New York. It traces how the lay and clerical writers in these papers, working at a time when Americans began to think about religion as an abstract concept rather than as a synonym for Christianity, defined the parameters of that category and how those parameters impacted the way they defined Judaism. Looking to these newspapers rather than the elite sources that have been the focus of previous research, this project affords a new perspective on how nineteenth century Americans understood religion. Doing so also reveals how definitional approaches to Judaism common today were formed and debated in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

## **“FLUID NETWORKS: MAPPING SÃO PAULO”**

**Emma Young, Department of History**

### **Biography**

Emma Young is a doctoral candidate in the History department at New York University. She received her Bachelor’s degree with honors from NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Her dissertation, “City of Water: Urban Political Ecology in Industrializing São Paulo, 1877-1945” examines the urbanization of water and environmental inequality in São Paulo, Brazil. She is particularly interested in spatial and urban environmental history. In addition to the Polonsky Foundation, she has received support from the Conference on Latin American History and the Fulbright-Hays program.

### **Project Description**

In 1886, a group of North American and Brazilian geographers, engineers, naturalists, and industrialists ventured into the Atlantic Rainforest surrounding what would become the megacity of São Paulo, Brazil. Though it had existed as a relatively small regional outpost when the group—the Comissão Geográfica e Geológica, or the Geographic and Geologic Commission (CGG)—first embarked on their mission, the city would rapidly become one of the largest in the Americas, considered an engine of industrial growth. “Fluid Networks: Mapping São Paulo” uses ArcGIS to create a digital map that visualizes the urbanization of São Paulo’s river systems during this crucial period of transformation, from the late nineteenth into the twentieth century. Using HGIS (Historical Geographic Information Systems) as a methodology for doing spatial history, the project combines archival documentation with spatial visualization to interactively emphasize the broader social and environmental contexts in which major urbanization projects and political changes took place. Accessible in both Portuguese and English, the project is a work of public history, combining data

analysis with storytelling about the CGG and its members while equally emphasizing the roles played by extra-human nature, such as rivers and floods, in these historical processes.

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**Accessibility**

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