

From Distracted to Distributed Attention: Expanded Learning through Social Media, Augmented Reality, Remixing, and Activist Geocaching

Marina Hassapoulou <mh193_at_nyu_dot_edu>, New York University

Abstract

With the increasing proliferation of digital technologies into our daily routines, long-standing debates have resurfaced on the potential of prosthetic devices to extend our cognitive capacities and distribute intelligence across human and non-human agents. This article will propose ways in which we, as educators, can harness the distractions that new technologies can pose to teaching and research towards productive models of distributed attention and collective intelligence.

By reflecting on the relationship between play and pedagogy through critical theory, as well as on the benefits of hyper-connected and collaborative learning, this article hopes to expand the branch of Digital Humanities that Holly Willis terms as the “cinematic humanities.” Remixing, recontextualization, and the non-linear/non-sequential reconfiguration of information can provide us with new modes of distributed attention and critical making in the digital age.

This article focuses on low and no-budget process-oriented collaborative projects for Cinema, Media Studies, and Digital Humanities courses (adjustable to other subject matters) that incorporate remixing, social and locative media, and augmented reality into experimental modes of connected and collaborative learning. The first assignment is a live film scoring remix, where students collectively brainstormed on picking sound clips/samples to add new soundtracks to early silent films. Remixing practices can offer new insights into cinema’s legacy and challenge ocularcentric notions of film spectatorship by, in this case, reversing the conventional hierarchy of image-sound into sound-image and reflecting on how our minds attempt to process the impulse of sensory synchronization in cinema. The second sample assignment proposes new ways of using easy-to-learn and accessible GIS (Geographic Information System) and AR (Augmented Reality) tools to create projects related to civic engagement and local/online activism.

The drifts from pre-determined learning outcomes are meant to be active disruptions to any prescribed limitations that delimit what digital humanities should or should not be, and other issues that often undermine the potential contributions to digital humanities that derive from the intellectual and material labor that happens in the networked, expanded and distributed classroom. The remix aesthetic, the “unfinished” and makeshift nature of these projects is something that I find adds value to this kind of process-oriented pedagogy because it remains in touch with the pre-institutionalized experimental ethos that prompted the formation of the digital humanities and other disciplinary cross-pollinations.

Introduction: Gamifying Learning

With the increasing proliferation of digital technologies into our daily routines, long-standing debates have resurfaced on the potential of prosthetic devices to extend our cognitive capacities and distribute intelligence across human and non-human agents. In this article, I will propose ways in which digital humanities pedagogy can harness the distractions that new technologies pose to teaching and research towards productive models of distributed attention and collective intelligence. I will focus my analysis on some collaborative class assignments for Cinema and Media Studies courses that incorporate social media, remixing, GIS tools, and augmented reality into new modes of connected and collaborative learning. By reflecting on the relationship between play and pedagogy through critical theory, as well as on

the benefits of hyper-connected learning, this article hopes to expand the branch of digital humanities that Holly Willis terms as the “cinematic humanities” — an interdisciplinary field that embraces critical media practices that are “immersive, embodied, gestural, and virtual,” and produces modes of inquiry that emerge from the creative experimentation with the affordances of new media platforms [Willis 2015, 74].

In the context of higher education, distraction often goes hand in hand with the idea of play, and both of these are sometimes dismissed as counterproductive in terms of learning, partly because it is difficult to evaluate their outcomes within traditional and standardized models for assessment [Stommel, Rorabaugh, and Morris 2013]. Pre-industrialization, work and play were not as compartmentalized and segregated as in post-industrialized capitalist societies (see for example [Imre 2009]). In recent years, however, there has been a widespread trend towards the conflation of work and play in various industries. While play used to be historically regarded as a subversive response to capitalist ideology by activist artists and intellectuals, it is now being standardized, institutionalized, and packaged for mass marketing. Gamification — a neologism referring to the convergence of gaming mechanics (such as scoring, competition, and rules) with non-gaming contexts particularly related to labour production and product consumption — has become a massive corporate buzzword in several industries, ranging from advertising to education. And yet, the principles behind gamification should not simply be condemned as what Ian Bogost calls “marketing bullshit” that profits on the popularity of videogames and the billion-dollar gaming industry [Bogost 2017]. In education, there have already been numerous case studies that demonstrate the productive outcomes of gamification in terms of student engagement and learning motivation (e.g. [Kapp 2012]; [Huang and Soman 2013]; [Petrucchio and Agostini 2016]). Non-profit educational technology association Educause even goes as far as arguing that gamification “is most effective as a pedagogical tool where it forms part of a well-planned strategy to encourage research, inspire creativity, teach basic principles, or hone problem-solving skills” [Educause 2011]. While I do not wish to overstate the educational value of game-oriented learning, I consider playful experimentation and distracted acts of reading integral components of pedagogy and critical thinking/acting in the digital age.

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Productive Dissonance: Remix as Hybrid Historiography

The most challenging courses to teach are those where students feel they cannot contribute anything original to canonical discourses, which, in this case, includes classes on film history and theory. In this section, I will focus on a two-part collaborative experiment I performed with my Film Theory graduate students, with the objective of exploring pop cultural connections to film historiography and creating new types of collaborative amateur archives that enable younger generations to productively engage with the past. The idea for this project began through a problem-oriented approach centered around a methodological and phenomenological issue: in the field of Film and Media Studies, sound is usually analyzed in relation to moving images and, conversely, mainstream film audiences are habitually conditioned to think of sound and image as synchronous and interdependent. Accordingly, in film theory, sound is mostly treated as an element that is dependent on the reception of the image rather than critiqued in its own right. As film theorists Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener assert, “in classical cinema sound is usually analyzed strictly in relation to (and in dependence on) the image” [Elsaesser and Hagener 2015, 154]. The privileging of visual-oriented approaches to media is further indicated by the fact that sound studies is still regarded as an under-developed subfield within Film and Media Studies and, by extension, the digital humanities (as noted, for instance, in [Elsaesser and Hagener 2015]).

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The first project I will analyze is a live film scoring remix, where students collectively brainstormed on picking sound clips (as audio samples) to add new soundtracks to early films. Remixing practices can offer new insights into cinema's legacy and challenge ocularcentric notions of film spectatorship by, in this case, reversing the conventional hierarchy of image-sound into sound-image and reflecting on how our bodies attempt to process the impulse of sensory synchronization in cinema. For this collaborative film (re)scoring assignment, I wanted to challenge students to reverse this sound-image relationship — that is, to inverse the typical hierarchy of image-sound into that of sound-image, with sound being at the forefront of their cinematic experience, in order to propose different ways of analyzing acoustics in cinema and other media. The project had an open-ended investigative component that was not fixed on a single predictable outcome: it challenged the students to consider whether and/or how spectatorship changes when images are understood in relation to sound. Further, the students were asked to reflect on whether the class could collectively come up with our own version of an *acoustic visuality*, where sound subverts the ocular-centric primacy in audiovisual

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analysis.

With these thoughts in mind, I challenged my students to spontaneously brainstorm for a new score for a transitional sound film from 1930 titled *Tomatos Another Day* (or, *Tomatoes Another Day/ Tomato is Another Day/ It Never Happened*) by James Sibley Watson Jr. and Alec Wilder^[1], which centers on a love triangle between a married couple and the cheating wife's lover. I consider this rather historically neglected film to be an appropriate case study for analyzing intertextuality and referentiality in cinema, and for considering the historicity of parodic works in a contemporary context. Before I describe the remixing activity, I would like to explain why I picked this particular film, and how it helped forge a connection between film history and modern-day spectatorship. It is important to provide students with the necessary critical background prior to introducing unconventional learning activities so that they are able to effectively connect theory to practice.

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The original film itself is an excellent example of early sound experimentation at a time when cinema was entering a transitional phase brought about by the introduction of synchronized film sound. The title is a play on the phrase "tomorrow is another day," with the *Tomatos* actors phonetically approximating this phrase in the way silent cinema actors would visually mimic the sound of words. *Tomatos* conveys an ambivalent critique of the use of sound in transitional sound films of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Innovations in sound-on-sound film led to the first mainstream synchronized movies in 1923. Similar (but far less documented) debates had occurred in the early years of cinema about the use of intertitles in narrative films; once text was incorporated into filmic narratives, cinema had arguably ceased to be a universal medium because of the language-specific intertitles that added layers of meaning to the then-silent moving images. The question at the time *Tomatos* was made was whether synchronized sound was the next step to rendering spectators less active by attempting to shape – in more sensory ways than before – their response to moving images. Film theorists such as Andre Bazin, Sergei Eisenstein, and Hugo Münsterberg had offered diverse insights into the impact of synchronized sound on cinema's recording capacities and its status as an art medium, particularly in relation to notions of realism, montage, and audience reception. Although some early film theorists cautiously regarded sound as a potential asset to the cinematic experience, it is fair to say that the introduction of synchronized sound was initially largely regarded as a hinder to the expressive qualities of the medium. *Tomatos* reflects on this widespread anxiety about sound cinema in a humorous manner that was, unfortunately, too close to home for its contemporary audiences to fully appreciate its nuances.

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Upon first viewing, *Tomatos* seems to criticize certain conventions of the talkies, particularly in its exaggerated and unnecessary use of sound to state the obvious. It seems as though the incorporation of sound into the love triangle of *Tomatos'* narrative only serves to highlight what the moving images make plainly obvious, and to unnecessarily describe the emotional state of the characters, which is already exaggerated through their dramatic performances. However, the directors manage to turn what initially seems to be an overt critique of cinematic clichés (going beyond the talkies and also critiquing narrative and performative conventions) into avant-garde experimentation and, ultimately, a meditation on the productive uses of sound in cinema. Acoustic and temporal experimentation is particularly manifest in moments in the film that highlight the disjunctions between what is shown (and how) and what is heard, such as an extreme close up on a match that throws off the rhythm and temporal linearity of continuity editing. Disjunctive temporality, reflected in conspicuous editing and visible/shock cuts, is especially noticeable when the husband shoots his gun in the direction of his cheating wife and laments on what he has done, while a few seconds later his wife appears on the screen unharmed, as if the shooting had never occurred. The temporal disjunctions in the narrative necessitate an active viewer and listener, thus suggesting new modes of participatory spectatorship.

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The film's rebellion against the conventions of sound and continuity editing resonates even more strongly, as Andrew Grossman argues, "in a media age intolerant of aesthetic 'dissonance' and intent on madly synchronizing nearly every aspect of thought, culture, and behavior" [Grossman 2014]. The incongruity of sound, image and temporal sequencing in *Tomatos* suggests productively dissonant uses of sound, for instance with the objective of subverting mainstream ideologies and transcending industry confines. *Tomatos'* dissonance lends itself well to remixing and audio sampling, which I chose as the main critical practices through which students would interact with the film in the class activity. By treating *Tomatos* as a remixable database, students spontaneously proposed several songs to re-score the film in class, and I assembled them into a makeshift YouTube playlist that would serve as the film's new score. We re-played the film

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on mute, and layered the new audible soundtrack alongside the muted version of the film, with students giving me cues whenever they wanted me to switch to the next track. The audio samples chosen by the students ranged from classical to Korean pop (K-pop) music, and reflected the diverse musical tastes of the multicultural student cohort. This participatory mode of spectatorship has resulted in some interesting moments of re-synchronization between the sound clips and the moving images, and encouraged students to think of other inter-relations between sound and image that surpass ocularcentric paradigms.^[2]

Since this collaborative activity was enthusiastically received by the class, we tried a second, more elaborate and pre-meditated version using a different film, an early silent film called *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Wallace McCutcheon and Edwin S. Porter, 1906). This time, students had more time to collectively brainstorm on picking the sound clips for the new soundtrack in an online forum. The online forum also helped me quantify participation (since each student was using their name under their contribution) and dissect in more detail how students' creativity works individually and collectively. I then assembled their choices into a flowchart visualization (Figure 1). Using a visualization for audio samples is far more challenging to do when working with sound, so I decided to use the film's timecode and a screenshot from the beginning of each segment to visually and temporally cue the corresponding audio transitions; this can be easily done with a free online timeline flowchart program such as SmartDraw Cloud. The second version of this sound remix ultimately escalated into a live DJ performance in class, where the student DJ had downloaded mp3s of all the chosen songs using KeepVid [set to mp3 download for sound-only audio files] and brought his mixing console to class (Figure 2).^[3] While the more pre-meditated version of this assignment helped me keep better track of participation and encouraged some quiet students to contribute more online, the first version was also useful in terms of providing a more spontaneous example of collective intelligence in the classroom.

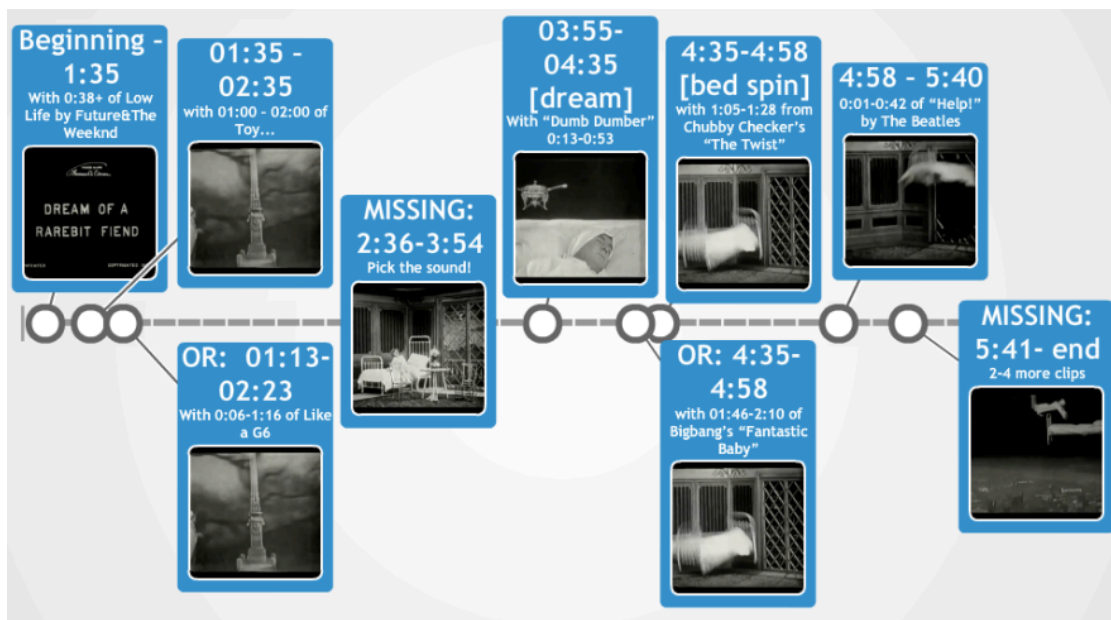


Figure 1. Flowchart visualization of audio sampling



Figure 2. Live DJ performance in class

While remixing practices usually result in context collapse, I wanted students to alternatively explore remixing as an active act of recontextualization, and as a process of building new connections between the old and the new. In the case of silent film history, Paolo Cherchi Usai argues that the producers and contemporary audiences of those films, and today's viewers, are separated by "too many material and historical variables, and our patterns of perception of moving images have remarkably changed in the meantime" [Usai 2010, 166]. New engagements with older media can therefore revive student interest in "that rich and intimidating legacy of the past" [Hutcheon 1985, 4]. Remixing and sampling as active modes of critical engagement with media require familiarity with the contexts and contents that are being remixed in the first place. Watching the remixed version inevitably evokes comparisons between the original film and the altered version, and establishes more intimate connections to films that are of the distant past for younger generations of viewers. In retrospect, it became even more apparent that the different sound clips the students picked were not arbitrary: they demonstrated familiarity with the filmic narrative (e.g. the love triangle in the film), and awareness of each film's historical and technological contexts, as well as a sophisticated understanding of each film's fluctuating dynamic between visual aesthetics and acoustics.

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In re-watching the recordings of the remixes, students felt a special connection to the film and said that by watching their remixed version they simultaneously and comparatively thought of the original version as well as the personalized experience of watching the film. Blair Davis has also observed this process of thinking of the past and present simultaneously – or, in new media terms, hypertextually – when he screened silent films with anachronistic soundtracks such as techno music [Davis 2008, 92]. Anachronisms become contemplative and self-reflexive for students, and compel them to carefully consider other compositional elements in these films, as well as become more aware of the films' variable materialities, their diverse exhibition/distribution contexts, and media ecology at large. As Katherine Groo argues, deviations from the original work can serve as an act of "metahistorical thinking" that "productively counters the [perceived] stability of film historiography with the possibility of manifold and imaginative alternatives, each of which produces new forms of historical knowledge" [Groo 2012].

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In addition, the resulting remixes indicate the students' shared ability to think of narrative as recombinatory elements in a remixable database, a process that is consistent with the non-linear and/or modular logic of the various media they interact with on a daily basis, and something that opens up new multimodal possibilities for audiovisual studies in the digital age. Several media theorists, including Douglas Rushkoff, have argued that modern popular culture and/or new media stimulate a new cognitive and sensory "evolutionary leap" in their younger consumers, and many behavioral psychologists have claimed that modern audiences have shorter attention spans [Rushkoff 2006, 36]. While in education shorter attention spans are typically regarded as counterproductive, Rushkoff and Davis posit that new cognitive skills have emerged from this, such as the ability to process information more rapidly as a result of a less

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linearly-constrained and more interactive thought process [Rushkoff 2006, 38–9] [Davis 2008, 91]. Moreover, moving beyond ocular-centric paradigms of media reception challenges our bodies to, literally, make *sense* of mediated information using other modes of perception besides vision or, at least, alongside the culturally dominant visual paradigms we are conditioned to unquestionably internalize.

The Augmented Classroom: Geocaching, Urban Drifts, and Activist Pursuits

Multimodal ways of processing information is also at the core of this next digital humanities project I will analyze. GIS (Geographic Information System), GPS (Global Positioning System), and AR (Augmented Reality) technologies have helped forge new connections between locality, spatial navigation, and remote access. Consequently, some neologisms have emerged to conceptualize our relationship to a technologically-assisted sense of place, such as *net locality*, defined by [Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011] as ubiquitous networked information that surrounds our everyday life (at least for those living in the so-called Global North), and *hyper-locality*, a term that alludes to the relationship between specific localities and/or temporalities, and the ways in which they are socially mediated and remotely experienced individually and collectively [Hu, Farnham, and Monroy-Hernández 2013] [Hochman, Manovich, and Yazdani 2014]. Hochman, Manovich and Yazdani consider the applicability of Umberto Eco's 1980s writings on the "hyper-real world" in discussions of social media, where simulations and audiovisual mediations of an event acquire greater significance than the actual site where the event took place [Hochman, Manovich, and Yazdani 2014]. These notions of socially mediated, hyper-local and networked places provide a useful foundation for thinking about our social and phenomenological relationships to not only geography, but also to cartographic and navigational tools.

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Since GIS technology and other cartographic tools are widely used in digital humanities research, I wanted to create a group project for my graduate course on Interactive Cinema and New Media that would inspire students to think beyond the computational and impersonal aspects of these tools. Through experimental critical practice, I wanted students to consider the human aspects of digital interfaces that are typically regarded as universal and standardized in related theoretical discourses. I also wanted to challenge them to repurpose those geolocate tools towards playful critique and activist objectives. The following assignment proposes new ways of using augmented reality (AR) apps to expand collaborative and experiential learning beyond the classroom through a type of educational geocaching. Geocaching refers to the process of hiding and finding objects with the help of geolocate devices such as GPS technology. AR enables the combination of physical and digital information through the use of different electronic devices. With the use of a mobile AR app, for instance, users can use their cell phone to superimpose digital images and other data onto real locations. For this collective geocaching project, the class were asked to "hide" AR messages in specific New York City landmarks and/or cultural events that relate to themes covered in the course (e.g. expanded cinema, street art, feminist media-making, gentrification, gamification, urban architecture, activism, and historiography) and then share clues online (hinting at the location of their AR) before embarking on a quest to uncover each other's virtual hidden messages in real locations. In order to receive participation credit, each student had to contribute at least 1 AR to the project, accompanied by a brief rationale of their choice of location and landmark. The app we chose through trial-and-error was walla.me (after trying out other AR apps like Aurasma and Blippar), which is a free and easy-to-use locative AR app that has the added feature of enabling its users to connect and monitor each other's walla.mes on a digital map, and also alerts users when there are hidden ARs in nearby locations (Figure 3).

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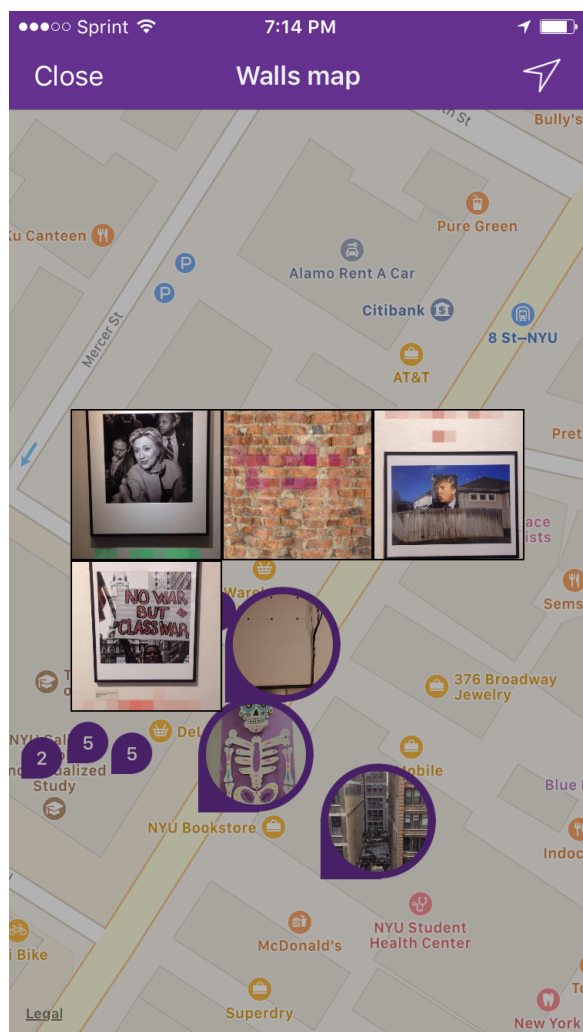


Figure 3. Creating connected cartographies: locative walla.me map with thumbnails of some the students' walla.mes

The AR class project provided students the opportunity to foster new conceptual connections to place, and to transform the physical into a virtual-material space with emotional and historical resonance. Student Karen Sadler was inspired by the idea of AR as a disruptive practice that subverts spatiotemporal boundaries. The site of her AR was a locked bookcase that showcases pioneering books written by Cinema Studies professors in NYU's Cinema Studies department. Karen hinted at the location of her AR to her classmates by dubbing it as a container of "dangerous books," since the books showcased deal with subversive forms of cultural critique. Karen created her own virtual graffiti that included the access date and the abbreviated address of the bookcase's physical location. [Figure 4]. The use of graffiti-like AR text transformed the notion of automated geo-tagging into something playful and subversive. AR provided a phenomenological and subjective dimension to otherwise impersonal cartographic modes of urban navigation. The act of virtual defacement through AR was meant to metaphorically "unlock" the books from their fixed and protected physical location, and to emphasize the transcendental value of the revolutionary ideas expressed in these books. Instead of using AR to distract from the significance of the physical location, Karen used it to amplify and virtually disseminate the value of this locale that ultimately transcends its physicality. Using AR at school gave Karen the chance to reflect on the ethical implications of her virtual intervention, and to regard the concrete consequences of using AR to virtually alter private, publically displayed intellectual and material property.

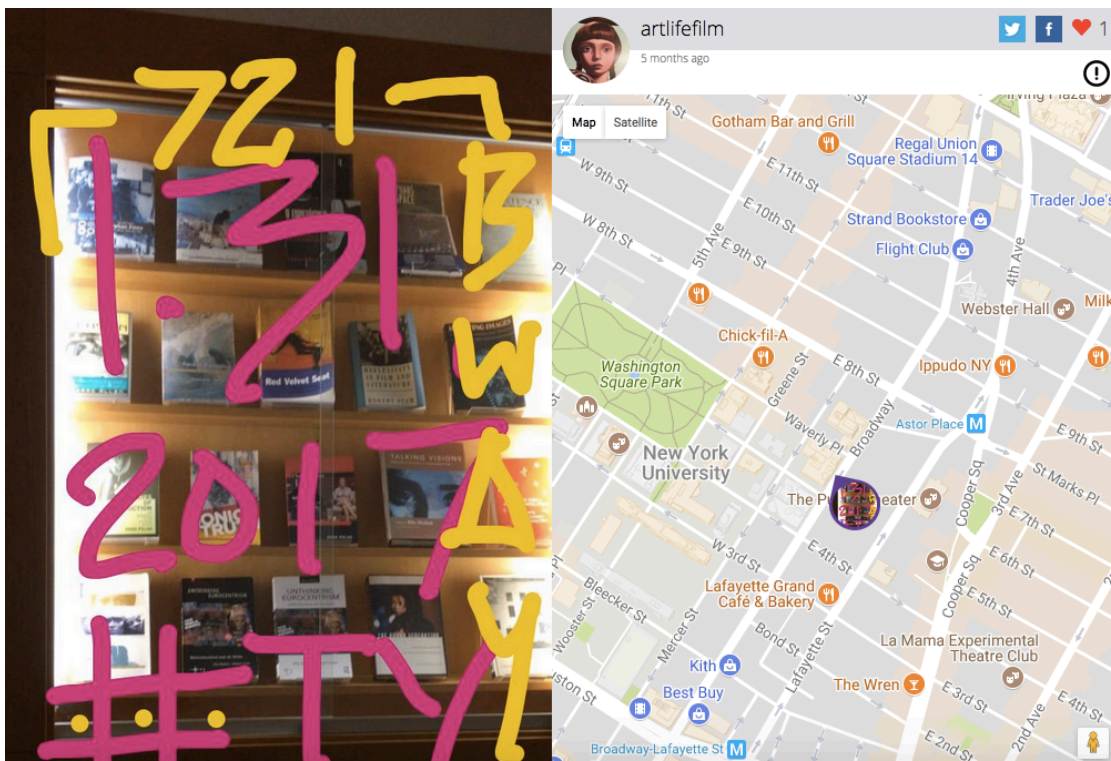


Figure 4. Karen's DIY graffiti tag juxtaposed a screenshot of its location on the walla.me map

Student Shirley Ogolla chose to explore the potential of AR as a tool for political activism, after our class discussions on digital democracy and cyber-ethics. The desire to utilize technology for political activism became even more pressing for many students in the wake of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and several members of my class found it cathartic and liberating to repurpose the technology at their disposal for sociopolitical reflection. Shirley used as her AR site a politically themed photography exhibition in NYU's Tisch School of the Arts to provide her own virtual critique of the two main presidential candidates. Shirley's most effective walla.mes centered on the theme of walls and boundaries. For instance, she focused one of her walla.mes on a photo collage of a Donald Trump poster on top of a picket fence (visibly alluding to the proposed building of the U.S.-Mexico wall), and added the caption: "I don't even know where to begin..." (Figure 5). Shirley's own AR annotations to the photographed images ironically convey her inability to adequately verbalize her post-election shock. By using additional wall and fence-related objects and locations on campus, Shirley's AR interventions on physical boundaries suggest the irreversible associations our culture now attaches to such images as symbols of oppression and segregation.

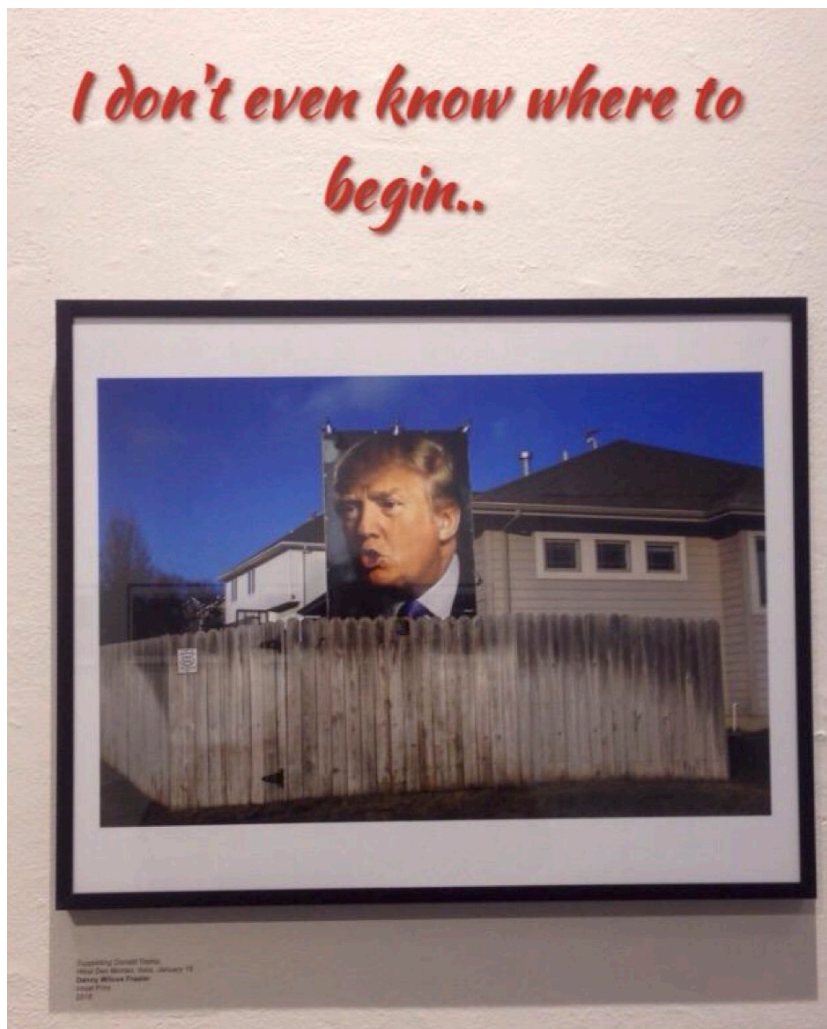


Figure 5. One of Shirley's political walla.mes

Inspired by the empowering potential of AR as a tool of social critique, Shirley went on to use AR in her final, multimedia project of tracing gentrification in her Williamsburg neighborhood in Brooklyn (Figure 6). Shirley's final project focuses on virtually preserving pre-gentrification memories of Williamsburg by layering digitized archival and resident-submitted photos onto the newer architectural façades of the area. The subversive use of AR for social critique and historical preservation is becoming more commonplace as an artistic counter-cultural practice, as evidenced, for instance, in projects such as *Mi Querido Barrio* (My Beloved Community, Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute, NYC, 2016), an augmented reality tour of East Harlem that aims to make visible gentrification's unseen implications of cultural erasure. Thinking of emerging technologies as tools for cultural critique and activism – rather than as obstructions to meaningful interactions – gives students the chance to produce meaningful interventions that connect real locations to memory, history, culture, and collective identity.

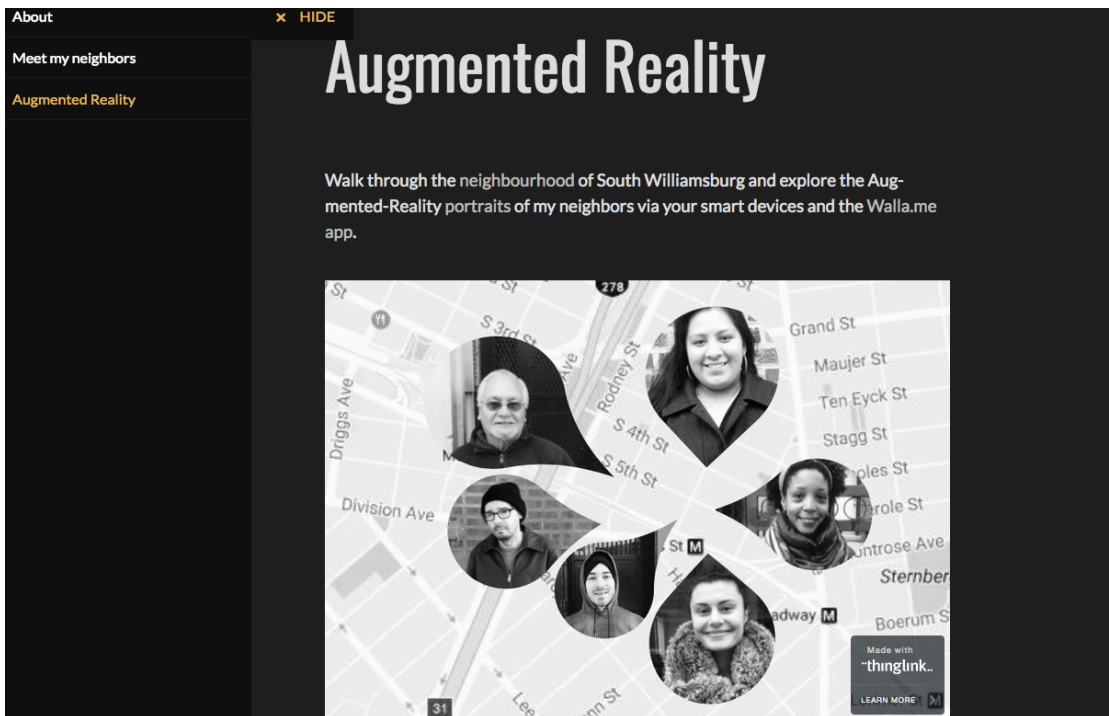


Figure 6. Screenshot from Shirley's AR component to her project, which can be accessed here: <https://methegentrifier.wordpress.com>

Another student, Elyse Singer, picked the Brown Building on the NYU campus as the physical location of her AR. The Brown Building is the site of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory, where the worst industrial disaster in New York City occurred in 1911. Elyse used the keyword “palimpsest” and three emojis to hint at the location of her AR online: a triangle, a shirt, and a factory (Figure 7). She utilized AR to pay tribute to some of the victims of the factory fire by superimposing some of the immigrant workers’ photographs onto the physical location of the memorial plaques (Figures 8 & 9). When this location is visited with a walla.me enabled smartphone, the impersonal memorial plaques come to life through the virtually superimposed photographs of some of the victims that spring up like ghosts from the distant past. AR here possesses a historiographical and commemorative function that serves to experientially connect visitors to the legacy of that specific location. Furthermore, Elyse wanted to particularly highlight and memorialize the labor performed by the young immigrant women (mostly Jewish and Italian) who died in the fire – an act that gained even more significance in the context of the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the impending threats to the rights of women and immigrants. The virtual superimposition of images and text onto real places evoked a palimpsest aesthetic. As Elyse observed, the palimpsest – an effaced piece of writing or manuscript on which later writing has been superimposed, with traces of the older form still visible – served as an apt metaphor for AR (Figure 10).

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esinger616

October 20, 2016 at 10:33 pm Edit

First hint: Palimpsest. Second hint: △👕🏭

Figure 7. Elyse's AR geocaching clue

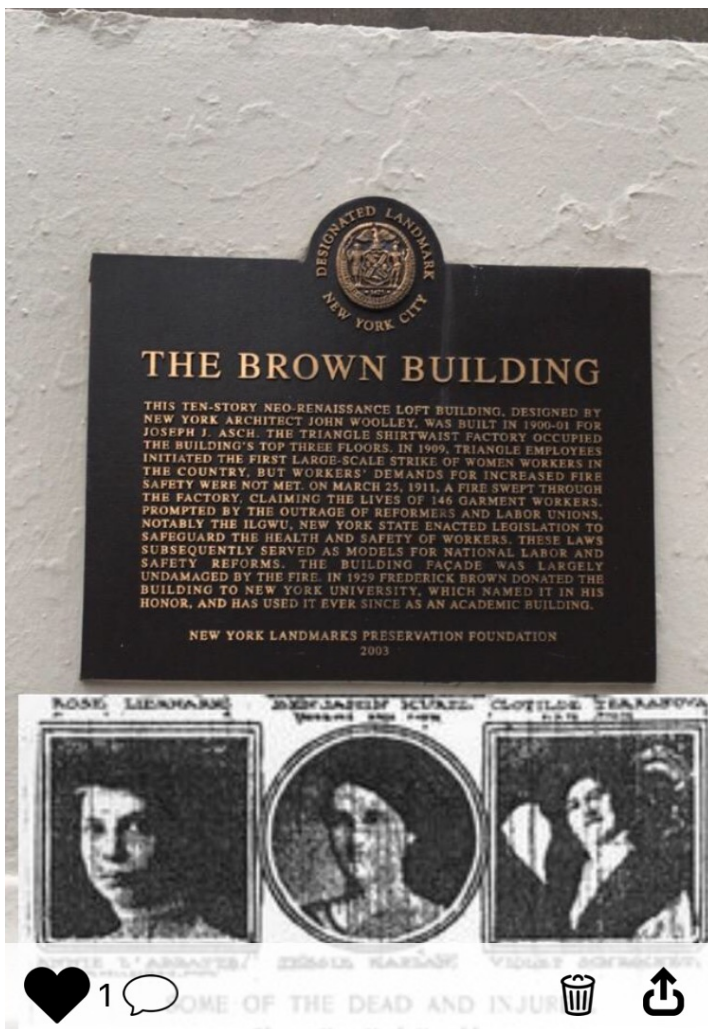


Figure 8. The Brown Building description and memorial plaques, with archival photos of the victims superimposed in AR



Figure 9. The Brown Building description and memorial plaques, with archival photos of the victims superimposed in AR

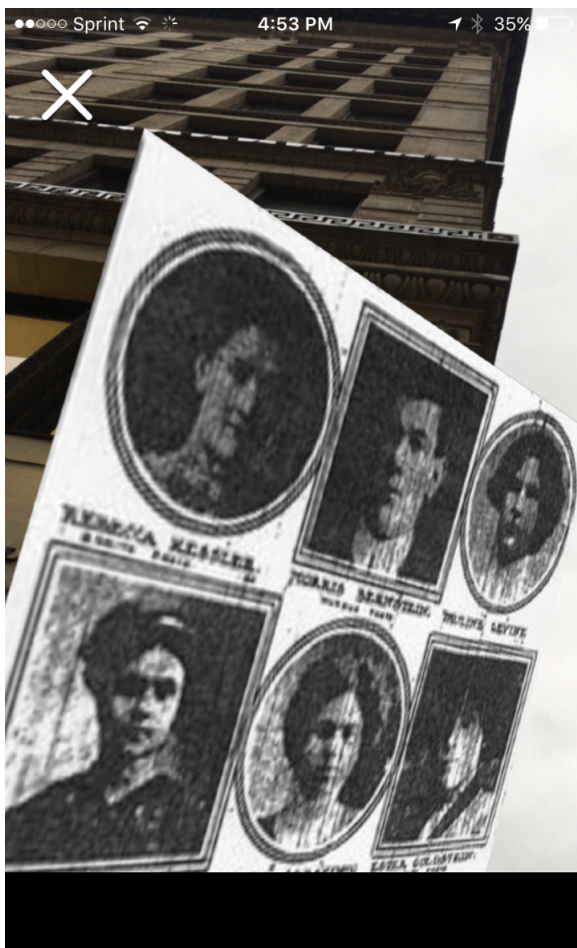


Figure 10. The palimpsest in full effect: tilting the phone upwards towards the top of the Brown Building brings up a new pop-up of more photographs of the victims

The palimpsest, “something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form,” provided a lens through which to examine diverse interactive works throughout the semester that collapse distinctions between past and present to propose new modes of participatory historiography [Oxford Living Dictionaries]. The evocation of the palimpsest metaphor and its layered aesthetic in the students’ AR creations was thus a productive extension to, and practical application of, some of the concepts studied in the course. Further, the composite aesthetic resulting from the palimpsest-like intermingling of visually inassimilable physical objects and virtual interventions provides a suitable metaphor for the experience of simultaneously navigating virtual and real locations. Larissa Hjorth and Sun Sun Lim observe that the different modes of mobility and intimacy afforded by digital media have enabled “multiple cartographies of space in which the geographic and physical space is overlaid with an electronic position and relational presence, which is emotional and social” [Hjorth and Lim 2012, 478]. This overlaying is not only mediated virtually, but also mapped out cognitively: individuals navigate electronic-social spaces while cognitively and experientially relating them to the experience of being present in their material-geographic equivalents, and vice versa. Contrary to the argument that “hyper-local social media data is actually a manifestation of [the] temporalization and de-territorialization [of visual experience],” this class project actually de-temporalized and re-territorialized our experience of virtually augmented real space by maintaining connections to site-specificity [Hochman, Manovich, and Yazdani 2014]. Such participatory uses of AR and other locative media challenge the notion that digital technologies disconnect and alienate their subjects from the physical experience of space.

The ability to see each other’s contributions on a single map is a feature that, up to this point, very few free AR apps offer, and I found this feature useful in not only connecting students to the history and legacy of their urban environment,

but also to each other's subjective connections to the "same" physical locations. Eric Gordon and Adriana de Souza e Silva argue that, historically, the practice of geocaching has been "effective in connecting people to locations, [but] it has been less effective in connecting people to each other" [Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011, 66]. In light of this, the AR group project aimed to assist students in not only forging a one-on-one connection to the urban landscape through AR, but to also gain a multimodal understanding of social space as experientially interconnected. Even though the sense of net locality is now more technologically disseminated, it is important to remember that it is primarily socially and subjectively, rather than technologically, determined. The multilayered navigation of space puts Guy Debord's idea of psychogeography into new contexts of techno-cultural mobility. Debord uses the term psychogeography to allude to the emotional and psychological effects of geographical locations on individual behavior [Debord 1989, 139]. AR can potentially create new modes of psychogeography by allowing individuals to prescribe their own unconventional ways of navigating their environment that diverge from the ordinary ways we are socially and architecturally conditioned to experience modern space.

The use of AR provided a playful way of "testing" and extending students' applied knowledge of the course material, and its use was contextualized through our cinematic exploration of psychogeography, urban drifts (*dérives*), misappropriations/urban hijacks (*détournements*), and locative media. The multiple distractions of the urban landscape, something that my students had become accustomed to, became de-routinized and re-examined in a new light. I would also add here that the urban milieu might have been more instrumental than technology in training students on how to navigate, multitask and re-focus their attention, since some of the students did not consider themselves as "digital natives" (either due to their age or their minimal interactions with technology). This offers an expanded perception of distracted reading, beyond it being only digitally and/or generationally-conditioned, and might provide some encouraging cross-generational counterpoints to the so-called "digital divide."

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Furthermore, AR gave students the opportunity of exploring the connections between new and experimental media practices, and their relationship to the urban landscape and long-standing Expanded Cinema and avant-garde traditions in NYC. As with any new tool introduced in the classroom, I find it crucial to provide students with examples that illustrate its potential uses. Therefore, students became familiar with some creative approaches to cinematic uses of AR and GPS technology through the work of groundbreaking artists such as activist Amir Baradaran, Heidi J. Boisvert, and the Blast Theory collective. These artists utilize geo-locative tools to explore, as Baradaran's FutARist manifesto states, "the experiential, conceptual and legal shifts suggested by the advent of AR within the modalities of contemporary art, its practice and reception" [Baradaran]. With the intention of exploring the subversive subjectivities that emerge when AR is utilized to virtually alter and deface public space, students were challenged to interrogate first-hand notions of ownership, surveillance, social agency, and urban architecture through this new form of virtual graffiti.

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Locative Media as Participatory Archives of Civic Engagement

The concepts of psychogeography and its provocative premise has helped me structure assignments for other courses, including a group project for a graduate seminar on Digital Humanities and Cinema Studies. Even though psychogeography did not play a significant or long-lasting role in the history of the Lettrist International and the Situationists, its "pleasing vagueness" has stimulated diverse and politicized adaptations of unconventional and imagined cartographical explorations of space [Coverley 2010, 89]. Debord's definition of psychogeography has been criticized for its apolitical and frivolous nature, yet many of its subsequent reincarnations embody "the spirit of political radicalism, allied to a playful sense of subversion and governed by an inquiry into the methods by which we can transform our relationship to the urban environment" [Coverley 2010, 14]. This transformation of play into subversive and transformative practice is in line with Adeline Koh's argument that "play and games have tremendous rhetorical power that can be harnessed for a plethora of unexplored social, political and pedagogical purposes" [Koh 2014].

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The idea of creating an educational psychogeographic scavenger hunt thus seemed like an effective way of repurposing GIS and other locative platforms to create new participatory archives and alternative cartographies that connect students to their immediate environment. The main tool for this class project was Fulcrum, which is an easy-to-use mobile data collection platform. Even though Fulcrum is not open-source, institutional access allows for students to all contribute data (such as photos, videos, and location information) on the same map in real-time, and edit them easily;

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the data can then be exported and publicly published on other platforms like Esri's ArcGIS Online (AGOL). Fulcrum is both a web-based platform and a mobile app. Users can customize the online data collection form for the mobile Fulcrum app with the information required for specific projects, such as a description of each data point and extra fields for audiovisual location-based data.

The objective of my class scavenger hunt was for students to use the customized data form on their mobile Fulcrum app to document examples of ongoing activism/resistance and civic engagement on and near the NYU campus, and to archive those in the form of videos, photos, audio, hyperlinks and participant interviews. With the assistance of NYU technology expert Kyle Greenberg, we added some required fields to the customizable mobile Fulcrum form builder, such as a mandatory field for a description of the data point (with the prompt "What do you see?"), a classification of the type of activism (reductively labeled as either "Active" for ongoing protests and current events, or "Passive" for more subjective interpretations of activism/resistance), a justification ("Why is this activism/resistance?"), and a field for uploading at least one form of audiovisual data such as photographs, video, or audio. The option of incorporating mandatory fields that students need to fill out is useful in terms of prompting more on-the-spot critical reflection whenever students enter a new data point, and making sure that every addition to the database has a specific and thought-out purpose. To stimulate some healthy competition among the students, I set up a points system to award each finding. For instance, 10 points were awarded for data on active acts of resistance (such as a live protest march or demonstration), 5 points for passive activism (such as activist posters or signs), 3 points for interviews, 3 points for uploading more than one form of media documentation (video, audio, image), and -3 points for returning to class after the 1 hour deadline that was assigned for the scavenger hunt.

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By adding these categories and requirements to the scavenger hunt, students were able to approach data as more than just singular bits of information in a database (Figure 11). This helped them visualize the real-time data points that were added on our Fulcrum map as referents to multiple media and social relations, and gave them the opportunity to reflect on their individual and collective trajectories as alternative modes of thematically and psychogeographically mapping their surroundings. The abstract space on the map and the information in the Fulcrum database thus became endued with heterogeneous points of social difference and possibilities for personal intervention. In navigating the campus and surrounding areas with the objective of documenting signs of resistance to the status quo, students were able to collectively re-imagine their surroundings as vibrant hubs for everyday acts of activism and social engagement. Furthermore, the resulting data formed an archive of ephemeral and ongoing activities that are testament to the changing post-election climate in present-day NYC. Their findings included multimedia documentation of a pledge to collect signatures for turning NYU into a sanctuary campus (a cause close to the students' hearts), a campus leadership initiative for students of color, artistic forms of resistance, and inspirational quotes etched on nearby landmark sites. The images below show an annotated compilation of some of the media contributed by the students (Figures 12-14).

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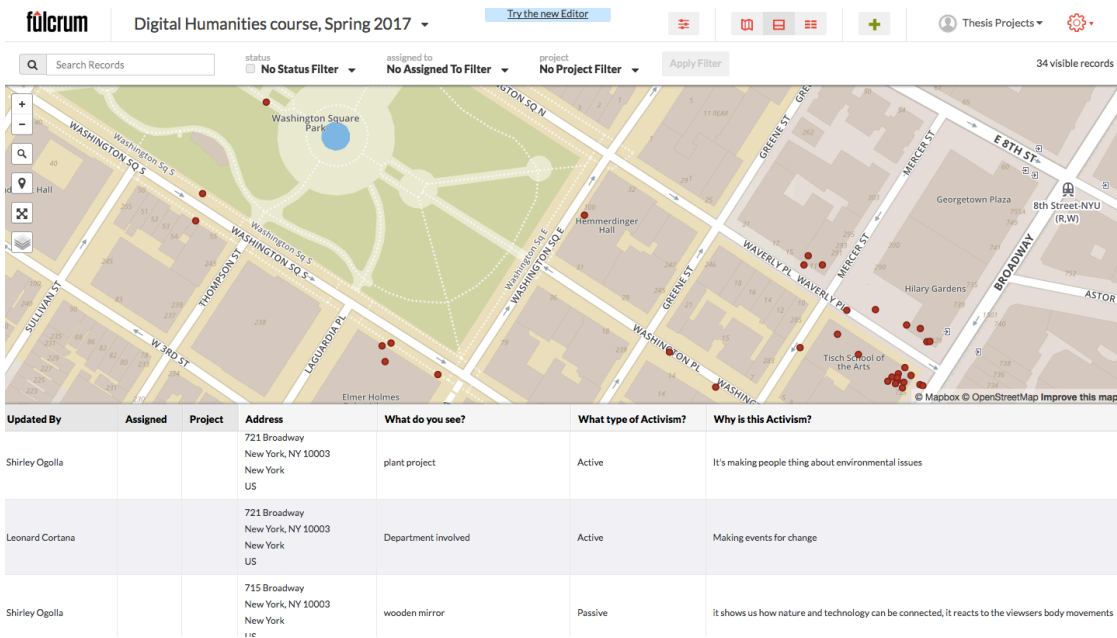


Figure 11. Fulcrum database of student data, updated in real-time and plotted on an area map

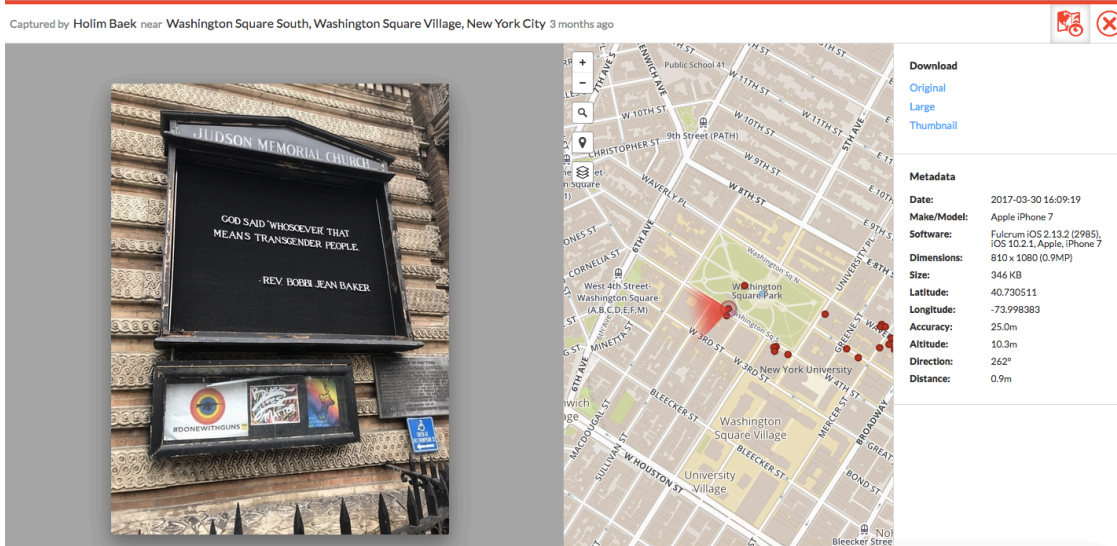


Figure 12. A call for inclusive religion by Rev. Bobbi Jean Baker, outside the Judson Memorial Church near campus,



Figure 13. One of the many stickers found on campus promoting the pledge for NYU becoming a sanctuary campus.

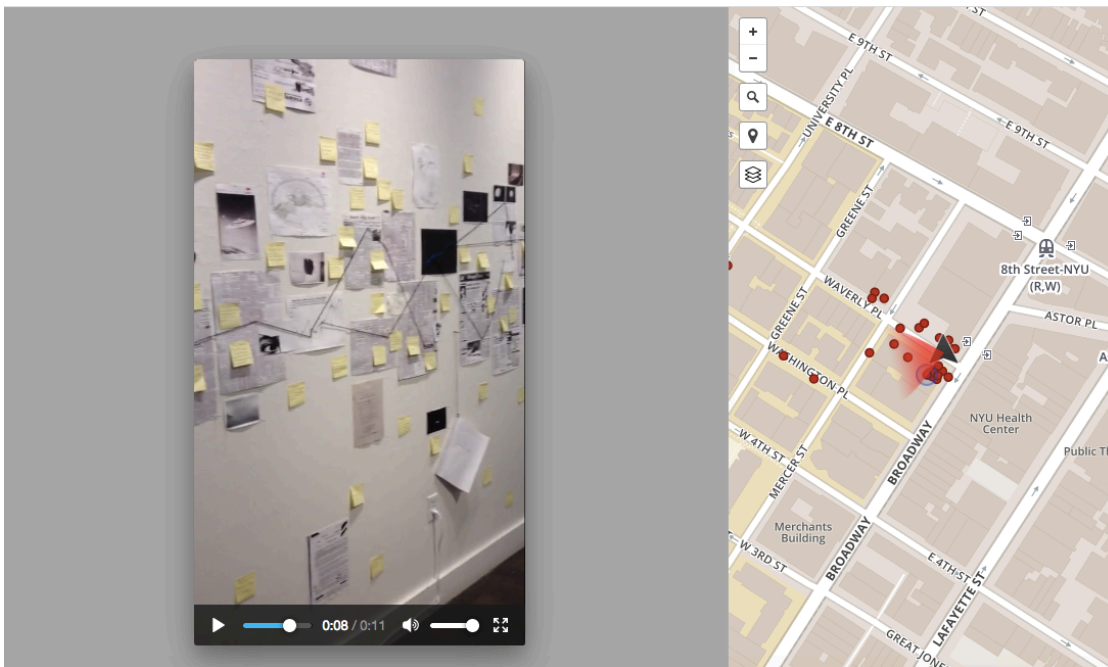


Figure 14. Video of Louise Boatwright's data bias visualization installation, "Deviations and Interference," NYU Department of Photo and Imaging Senior Thesis show.

The requirement of having to describe and explain why each data point qualified as activism/resistance motivated students to provide concrete accompanying arguments for their chosen data, especially in cases where it was not immediately apparent why they chose that particular site or artifact. For instance, student Leonard Cortana took a photograph of a defaced Chaplin poster in the Tisch building, and tagged it as a "mash up" with the data description "not my dictator" (Figure 15). Adding further explanation, Leonard uploaded an audio recording of himself explaining why the

defaced Chaplin poster – which is significantly from Chaplin's 1940 film *The Great Dictator* – resonates with his own experience of the current political climate in the U.S. The classification of the poster as a political mashup also demonstrated the student's ability to relate this example of DIY mashup graffiti to the historical exploration of subversive practices of resistance covered in the course. Olusola Babajide-Kassam, a Nigerian student invested in issues of everyday racial discrimination, uploaded a series of images from a Black Lives Matter photo exhibition on campus, and described it as a pronouncement of “the essence of our lives as blacks...[who] have been undermined in several facets of the community...[by] whites not in the sense of color but in terms of mentality” (Figure 16). Olusola also contributed audio with his own commentary on Black Lives Matter, and recorded video and audio-only interviews with predominantly white NYU students. In the audio-only files, the color of the interviewees becomes apparent through the challenging questions about race posed by Olusola; the choice of using only audio to document these interviews helped illustrate his idea of an internalized “white mentality” that transcends external appearance. In his video interviews, Olusola documented the rather typical responses to Black Lives Matter by white students, who stated solidarity with the cause but could not further elaborate on what needs to be done to practically ensure racial equality. Despite the young students' expected responses, though, Olusola's confrontational questions caused them to actively acknowledged their own racial and class privilege, and to reflect on deep-set and institutionalized forms of racism that cannot easily be reversed. Going beyond the objective of documentation and reflecting on calls to action, several students in the class uploaded resources on how to make a change. The Political Resources poster in the Cinema Studies department lounge, for instance, was an image that most of the students chose to include in hopes of turning the documentation of civic protests into an active tool for multiple modes of organized civic participation (Figure 17).

Captured by Leonard Cortana near Broadway, NoHo Historic District, New York City 3 months ago



Figure 15. DIY Chaplin mashup.

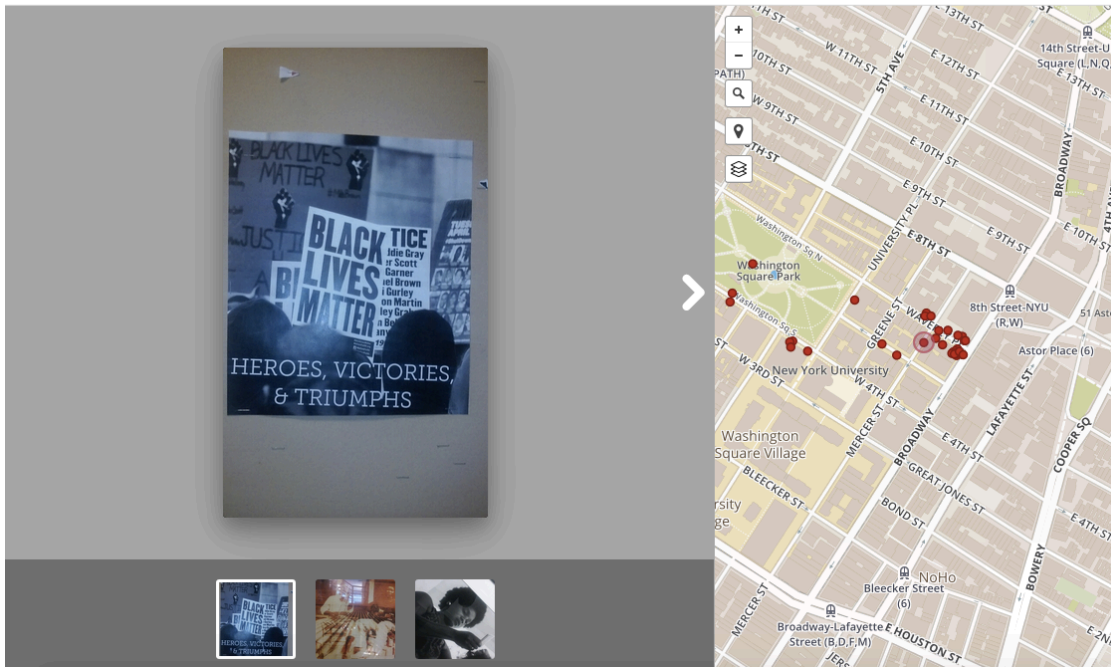


Figure 16. Black Lives Matter photo exhibition in Tisch lobby.

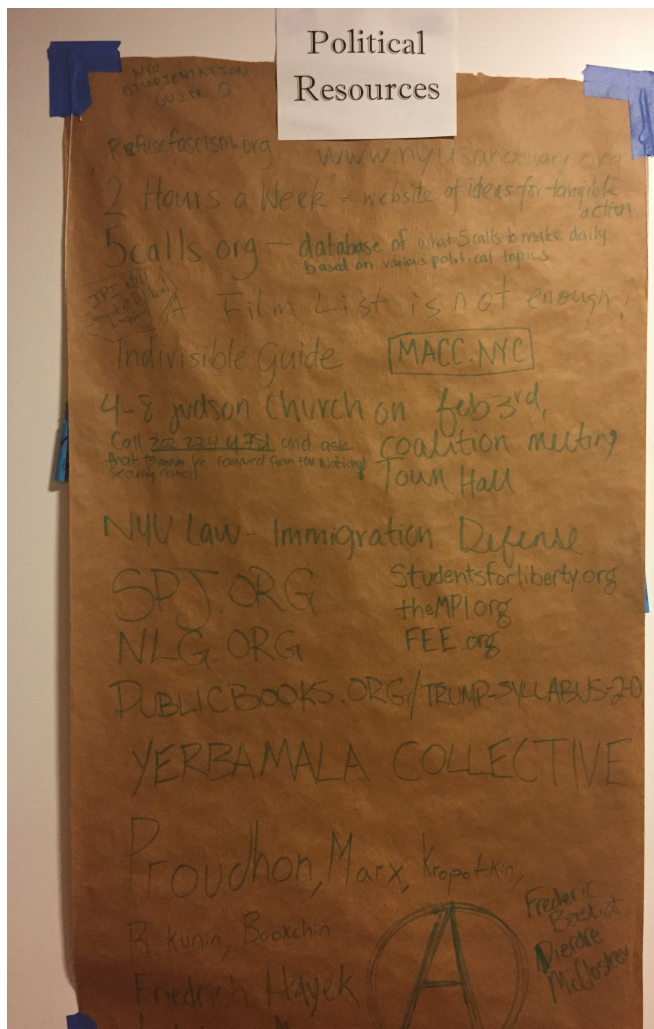


Figure 17. Political Resources poster in NYU Cinema Studies department

During the turbulent post-election period, students found the scavenger hunt to be a positive and encouraging experience in terms of the future of critical thinking and the defense of human rights. Being able to witness and document the many instances of civic protests made students feel part of the shared struggles for equality, and this experience also made them reflect on other potential uses of social media tools beyond their so-called distracting and trivializing aspects. Through this project, not only did students learn more about locative media such as GIS and GPS through practice, but they also created their own archive that makes visible and virtually permanent the multiple efforts for civic participation and free speech. The ability to capture ephemeral moments of protest further added to the meaningful aspects of the project, and helped the students experiment with different ways of documenting and sharing transient experiences. The scavenger hunt also gave the class a chance to interact with their community (e.g. through interviews with protest organizers and participants) and become more aware of how their seemingly neutral surroundings become politically charged in times of crisis. I decided to leave this project open-ended even after the end of the course since students are still periodically adding to it whenever they encounter something worth adding to the database. The next step to this project would be extracting the stored Fulcrum data into an Esri platform such as StoryMaps for an interactive and publicly accessible visualization of the students' collective cartography of local activism.

Conclusion

As Marion Thain has historicized, distracted acts of reading and short attention spans have been historically dismissed as frivolous and counterproductive, dating back to, for instance, early 20th century debates on long-form prose poetry [Thain 2016]. Instead of resisting and rejecting emerging technologies and their (debatably) new cognitive demands,

this essay has proposed some strategies for adapting pedagogy to embrace innovative modes of inquiry and practice (both in terms of technology and methodology), while at the same time maintaining and amplifying certain standard learning objectives such as critical thinking. These digital humanities group projects provide examples of expanded learning tools that can be modified for teaching other subjects, and also enable students to make contributions to cultural research, participatory historiography, and civic engagement through experimental critical practice. The drifts from pre-determined learning outcomes are meant to be active disruptions to any prescribed limitations that delimit what digital humanities should or should not be, and other issues that often undermine the potential contributions to digital humanities that derive from the intellectual and material labor that happens in the networked, expanded and distributed classroom. The remix aesthetic, the productive distractions from predictable learning outcomes, as well as the “unfinished” and makeshift nature of these projects is something that I find adds value to this kind of process-oriented pedagogy because it remains in touch with the pre-institutionalized experimental ethos that prompted the formation of the digital humanities in the first place.

The author would like to thank all the students from “Interactive Cinema and New Media” and “Cinema and the Digital Humanities” courses; without their willingness to experiment and keep an open mind, these projects would not have been possible.

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Notes

[1] Some sources, such as the DVD anthology *Unseen Cinema: The Devil's Plaything* (Anthology Film Archives, 2005), credit Watson and Wilder as the directors of the film, while other sources like Andrew Grossman (cited below) credit Watson and Webber as the film's directors, and others like the Internet Movie Database only credit Watson as the director. The film has also been indexed under different variations of its title, which might partly explain why it has escaped critical attention, in addition to Watson's alleged dislike (and subsequent neglect) of his film after it was unsuccessfully screened.

[2] You can watch the remixed version on Critical Commons: <http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/marinahass/clips/tomatos-another-day-live-scoring-sound-remix-final/>

[3] For part 2 of this live scoring experiment, see video: <http://www.criticalcommons.org/Members/marinahass/clips/dream-of-a-rarebit-fiend-live-film-scoring-remix/view>

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