Exploring the Past in the Digital Present

A course of the LUDCH Digital Humanities Minor,
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Platform Criticism: Design

• History
  • What history does it explore?
  • What understanding?
  • From what angle?
  • Whose history?

• Design:
  • What tools for exploration does this platform offer?
  • Users (intended audience)
  • User Interface: What does it look like?
  • User Experience: What is the actual experience of using the platform?
    • “Feel” (emotive)
    • “Ease of Use” (systems)
  • How does this platform shape the history that it seeks to provide access to?

• What is this platform’s ‘theory of change?’
Platform Criticism II: Values and Context

• Who financed it development?
  • Why?
  • How?
• Who maintains/edits the platform?
• Who created the data-set underlying the platform/which sources does it draw from?
• Who can make use of this platform?
  • Legal
  • Ease of use
  • User Interface/Experience
  • Technological (bugs?)
  • Language
• What (meta-)information does this platform (not) offer?
• “Materiality” vs. Digitality
Assignment 1.2

• Find a publicly accessible digital exploration of the past that excites you
  • Direct historical link (same period, event, figure, process)
  • Theoretical (speaks to similar problems/opportunities)
  • Approach (uses an approach that you think would work really well)

• Review (max. 500 words).
  • History
  • Design
    • Optional: Best Practices (what you really liked)/Pitfalls (what you do not like)
  • Context
  • How it relates to the past you pitched
Digital History Platforms and the Encounter

- Portal de Archivos Españoles (PARES)
  - The Archivo General de Indias
- Relación del oro y las joyas del almirante Colón
2020 is a unique Leap Year.

It has 29 days in February,
300 days in March,
and 5 years in April.
Prague’s Astronomical Clock
Time: cultural metaphors for an experienced concept

“Since metaphorical expressions in our language are tied to metaphorical concepts in a systematic way, we can use metaphorical linguistic expressions to study the nature of metaphorical concepts and to gain an understanding of the metaphorical nature of our activities.”
~ Lakoff and Johnson 1980

• Time Metaphors:
  • as a resource ("Time is money", "I am out of time")
  • as a moving object ("The time will come when…", "Time flies")
  • as a container ("They did it in 10 minutes")
Visualizing Time

• Meirelles (2013):
  • Time as locational
  • Container-like
  • Direction of movement: e.g. linear & cyclical time
"Damage to property" in the Old Bailey Online

- 1910s*
- 1900s
- 1890s
- 1880s
- 1870s
- 1860s
- 1850s
- 1840s
- 1830s
- 1820s
- 1810s
- 1800s
- 1790s
- 1780s
- 1770s
- 1760s
- 1750s
- 1740s
- 1730s
- 1720s
- 1710s*
- 1700s*
- 1690s*
- 1680s*
- 1670s*
Time is on the line

“Damage to Property” in the Old Bailey Online

A Timeline of Social Media
Source: venngage

Time & Space:
Joseph Priestley's A New Chart of History (1769)
- **Timescale**: uniform and represented as integers.
- **Time indicators**: Dates are inscribed at the top and bottom and connected by lines or other demarcations.
- **Thematic sections**: Separated by horizontal (perpendicular) lines.
- **Line indicators**: Line lengths are used to depict duration.
- **Line differentiators**: Levels of uncertainty are depicted by the quality of the lines (i.e., solid or broken lines).
- **Color code**: Color can be added to encode noncontiguous entities (e.g., empires in Priestley’s map).

See also [The Time Online project](#).
Time in the Ground

Archaeological stratigraphy at the Iron Age site of Goosehill Camp on Bow Hill, West Sussex in Southern England (source: wikimedia)

Artistic impression of a gaming stratigraphy
By Alexander Ariese

A trade network stratigraphy (Mol 2014)
Who’s got the time?

God of Death and Life and 26 days in the Codex Yoalli Ehécatl/Borgia
Source: Wikimedia

Roman sundial in Side (Turkey)
Source: Wikimedia

Colonial era explanation of the Aztec calendar (1792)
Source: Wikimedia

Schematic, non-indigenous depiction of Piaroa (Upper Orinoco) time
Shaman
Humans
Before Time
Present
Spirits

Petroglyps on Hawaii’s Big Island, telling the history of indigenous people and their ancestors as part of a landscape
There’s a lot of time! (timescales)

• How many generations holding hands?
  • Napoleontic Era: 8
  • Ptomelaic Egypt: 80
  • Upper Paleolithic: 400 (From Lipsius to Leiden CS)
  • Homo Sapiens: 12,600 (to Rotterdam suburbs)

• Chronozoom
Pan-Caribbean Interaction Patterns in the Late Ceramic Age (AD600/800-1492)

Courtesy of Prof Dr. Hofman
Greater Antilles, 1492

- **First Landfall on San Salvador on the 12th October**
- **Reconnaissance in Cuba, October 28**
- **Shipwrecked on reef, Christmas morning, Founding of La Navidad**
- **Bay of Arrows**
- **First Indigenous/Spanish Battle in the Caribbean, January 13, 1493**

The map shows key events and locations during Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the Americas.
Greater Antilles, 1493

Second Arrival in Lesser Antilles, November 13, 1493

Arrives at La Navidad, November 22, 1493

Founds La Isabella, November 22, 1493

Founds La Vega, Early 1495

Concepción de la Vega

Bay of Arrows, 1493

La Navidad, 1492

La Isabella

Greater Antilles

Dominican Republic

Puerto Rico

Lesser Antilles
Greater Antilles, Colonization

La Navidad 1492
Concepción de la Vega 1492
Bay of Arrows 1492
La Isabella 1492
Knight Lab’s TimelineJS

• [http://timeline.knightlab.com](http://timeline.knightlab.com)

• Use a Google Sheets template to **make a timeline**
  • Example:
    • [Encounter 1492 sheet](http://timeline.knightlab.com)
    • The [Timeline](http://timeline.knightlab.com)
    • Embedded in [a blog](http://timeline.knightlab.com)
  
  • Pro-tip: use **html tags** to create more versatility in the template.
  • e.g. a link: `<a href="dahi.luchd.nl"> Digital Approaches to Historical Inquiry</a>`

• Uses a [JSON file](http://timeline.knightlab.com), with **css styling**, and [JavaScript](http://timeline.knightlab.com) coding.
Assignment 1.3: Showing History

• **Hand in by 22 February, 23:59**

• Create a simple visualization of (one aspect of) the past you pitched in assignment 1.1.

• You are free to choose whatever visualization tool and format you feel comfortable with, but one suggestion is to use the digital storytelling tools available on Northwestern University’s Knight Lab website. An alternative is Tiki-Toki’s [timeline tool](https://www.tikitokicreativesources.com/timeline-tool) (signup required and freemium).

• Provide a **working** link to the visualization in the same text file as assignment 1.1 or 1.2 or, if not available online, include the visualization as a file in the zip folder.