

data fiction

naturalism, narrative & numbers

9:15 Opening Keynote

Jennifer Fleissner (Indiana University)
“The Vital and the Statistical”

10:45-12:15 Panel 1: *Data Epistemologies*

Regina Schober (University of Mannheim)
“‘A Problem in Small Boat Navigation’ – American Literary Naturalism, Ocean Metaphors, and Emerging Data Epistemology”
James Dorson (FU Berlin)
“Big Fiction, Brute Data: Frank Norris and the Function of Scale”

14:00-15:30 Panel 2: *Data Aesthetics*

Katherine Fama (NEH Research Fellow at Winterthur Library)
“(Re)Counting Women’s Labor: Budgeting for Collaboration and Cohabitation in the American Working-Girl Novel”
Thomas Dikant (FU Berlin)
“Utopian Calculations: Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*”

15:45-17:15 Panel 3: *Data Continuities*

Florian Sedlmeier (FU Berlin)
“Data and Literary Histories 1900/2000”
Laura Bieger (University of Freiburg)
“*The Wire* as Neo-Naturalistic Data-Fiction”

17:30 Closing Keynote

Jason Puskar (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee)
“Hypereconomics: Thomas Piketty and Naturalist Economies of Scale”

John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies
January 30, 2015, Room 340

From the N.S.A. scandal to Google Ngram and the Digital Humanities, debates over the transformative power of “Big Data” are all the rage at the moment. While the mass collection and deployment of “data” made possible by new technologies has been alternately hyped, hailed, and criticized in the media and research, few contest that “[t]he era of Big Data has begun” (boyd and Crawford, 2012). The aim of this workshop will be to explore how it began. By turning to a period in U.S. literary history that coincided with the radical expansion of quantitative methods into social and psychological phenomena, we will examine what role fiction played in the construction, circulation, and negotiation of data as a form of social knowledge. While literature is usually considered antagonistic to quantification, naturalist writing in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries was not only sympathetic to scientific methods but was even conceptualized by Zola as an instrument for the generation of social data on its own accord. How did American literary naturalism reflect the contemporaneous zest for numbers: for counting, measuring, classifying, and categorizing? How did the logic of aggregation in the social sciences influence narrative strategies in naturalist texts? And to what extent did such strategies function to interrogate or disseminate a modern epistemology of data? Addressing these questions and others that bear on the relationship between data and fiction, the goal of the workshop will be to shed light on the literary and social fictions underlying the construction and application of “data” in society.

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