HIST 3814 Week 4 notes

* Make notes of what you expect to find before your analysis

Listen

* How patterns relate to each other
* Clean exposition and simple visualizations can do a lot
* See broad patterns to do a cycle of close and distant reading
  + Zoom out to see patterns
  + Zoom in to find out why those patterns exist
* Readings discuss some of the problems of making arguments through this process (macroscopic to microscopic)
* How to tease out when we’ve actually learned something
* Think about the cycle of changing scale
  + What does it do?
  + What does it do for your historical sense?

Digital History and Argument by Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media

* Incorporate digital history to historiographical conversations
* Not just a new methodology
* How to identify, analyze, and construct arguments in digital history
* Historians often use digital primary sources but rarely cite them; often cite print or archival versions
* Recognize arguments in forms of digital history
* Dedication to persuasive accounts of the past provides a framework for understanding the connections between history and digital history
* Historians must select, synthesize, arrange, contextualize, and compare sources
  + Contextualization often takes the form of asking about scale or periodization
* Historians must communicate their ideas to a chosen audience
* Selecting and excluding material makes an argument about what sources are important for understanding a topic
  + Choosing an archive to reproduce s an argument for its important, and the importance of considering it as a whole
  + Collections itself can be an argument
* Historians make an argument when describing sources by making choice about which categories of information to include, which controlled vocabularies to deploy, which metadata schema to employ, and the language and word choices used to describe the item
* *When looking at digital history ask how is it categorized? How is it presented? What does it tell us about the sources that it has?*
* Historians make an argument by choosing which stories to tell, which sources to rely on, and how to organize and arrange different stories
* Digital public history:
  + Facilitate engagement with arguments by incorporating bibliographies that show the historiography underlying their narratives
  + Digital public history should be reviewed in scholarly journals
  + Can create different forms of narrative in and across multiple media
  + Different relationships between argument and evidence like annotating images, data visualization, inline audio or video, and hyperlinking to primary sources
  + New ways of engaging with the public
* Making decisions about how to deal with OCR errors, how to organize or split the text for analysis, deciding which algorithms to use, and choosing how to visualize and interpret the results of those calculations
* “Mining and Mapping the Production of Space” pg 11
  + *Reminds me of anthropological research? Could be applied in the context of anthropology?*
* Online medium as default for historical argument would allow for the development of forms that interweave method and narrative
* Methodological discussion would be a required feature
  + Has implications for showing your work in analog history—think of the difference between searching for something in a database vs looking through microfilm or print
* Historical sources are changed into data (transformed) and reduced to a model (simplified)
* Identify patterns through correlation, resemblance, or proximity, but not causation and experience
* Every search depends on an algorithm, which can be studied and reviewed
* “the historian can apply computational methods to describe complex behaviours in a network, including change over time, that are difficult or impossible to see at the level of individual document or biography”
  + But visualizations can be counterproductive because of how hard it is to render them meaningfully
* Quantitative history
  + Computational transparency
* “A clear description of how a dataset was created needs to accompany a dataset”
* Can visualizations be arguments on their own, or must they always be only evidence in support of an argument?
  + Visualizations can argue with one another
* Maps
* “The reliance of computational methods on a single type of input runs contrary to historians’ traditional willingness to use any and every kind of source. This reliance also limits the explanatory power of those methods”
* A single kind of digital source can lend itself to many kinds of digital historical analysis

Big Data for Dead People by Tim Hitchcock

* Danger of asking only the kind of question that computers can answer
* Distance reading
  + Sometimes distance reading seems to tell us what we already know
* “The current collection of digital material that forms the basis for most of our research is composed of the maudlin leavings of rich dead white men (and some rich dead white women).”
* How to find new objects of study rather than applying new methodologies to the same old stuff
* Choose a different starting point
  + Distant reading: See a trial account in the context of millions or billions of words
  + Close reading: see Sarah in her geographical and social context
* Reading should include the haptic: the feel and heft of a thing in your hand
  + Aural: the world of sound on which we continually impose the order of language, music, and meaning but is in fact a stream of sensations filtered through place and culture
* Is technology defining the questions we ask?
* “I kept on doing what I had always done - which basically involved reading a bunch of stuff, tracing a bunch of people and decisions across the archives of eighteenth-century London, and using the resulting knowledge to essentially commentate on the wider historiography of the place and period.”
* while we can know and touch the leavings of the dead, the relationship between a past 'reality' and our understanding of it was essentially unknowable - that while we used the internal consistency of the archive to test our conclusions, and in order to build ever more compelling descriptions and explanations of change - actually, we were studying something that was internally consistent, but detached from a knowable reality.
* Don’t study text alone
* Culturomics
* “problem closure” –the tendency to reinvent the problem to pose questions that are available tools and data allow us to answer
* Practice as humanists and historians is being driven by technology rather than being served by it
* Do not forget that the object of study is an emotional, imaginative, and empathetic engagement with people of the past

Confabulation in the humanities by Matthew Lincoln

* Are we actually learning anything new by using quantitative approaches to historical questions?
* Is the visualization used to confirm previously held ideas?
* Is the data (from a certain region, sample, class, archives, etc.) representative of true historical trends?
* If I can come up with two perfectly plausible historical scenarios to explain *opposing*, *hypothetical* trends, then we clearly don’t have a settled answer to the question already, and it was entirely worth my time to try and run that humanistic experiment to at least find the actual trend before I began to formulate any conclusions.