

Discussion

Rachel Seiler-Smith: I open the floor for discussion.

David Alff: Sure... Yeah, thank you. Those are really great, provocative questions, including the question of what it is I'm ultimately seeking to critique when I tell the story of projects. In thinking about facts and facticity, I think Mary Poovey lays out a really interesting dichotomy and a really helpful one in this case where the facts can be that which enables us to make enquiries or that which is the result of those enquiries. I think for projects and projectors, facticity is a destination: it's what they set out to become, and I think of that "happening" as taking place across different stages. For me there's a rhetorical component in which one proposes what should happen, that rhetoric circulates in the form—usually written form of pamphlets in the period—and then it's undertaken. Undertaking we might think of as something synonymous with projects today, but I think in the seventeenth and eighteenth century it was the *enactment* of projects. And it is ephemeral and it takes place outside of archives because it's the moment in which intentions leap off the page and become labor or speech or something that we can't find in a library: so that's where I've leaned on performance studies to try to think about how to work with this absence. So, that's what I think "happening" happens to be in this setting.

Manushag Powell: Alright, to go back to the question of the counterfactual: yes, that, that is a continued problem. So, well then, what is a "fact" if you are going counter the facts? And so the—I mean this in the most respectful way possible—the problem is that as I was working on this project (and, more specifically, on my book) what I thought was a fact and what historians working on piracy thought were facts often were not the same thing at all. I kind of just kept running into that as a, you know, frustrating problem. And so, that's the thing with counterfactual thinking: lit people are just now starting to steal it from historians who have been using it for, you know, since the eighties anyway or since the eighteenth century (depending on who you talk to) and it gets used in psychological circles; it gets used now, really by physicists doing a certain kind of work. But, I mean, lit people really aren't quite sure what to do with it, so you get the very kind of narrative counterfactual, like: What if Percy Shelley hadn't died? Like, how might that have changed Mary Shelley's career? And, that does ... it makes a certain kind of work possible. That's different from what I'm doing here which is (like): let's once again move back the origin of this thing that we think of as shiny and new because the predominant thinking now is that counterfactual writing, you know, became a thing in the nineteenth century, and of course, nothing actually ever became a thing in the nineteenth century, we know that it was always earlier. [laughter]

You know this is an interdisciplinary problem that we're wrestling... especially because as you read, you find that people are defining "counterfactual" in different ways. Some people use it as near synonymous to alternate history or al-historical, whereas some people make it very, very specific. And so even like "What does 'counterfactual' mean?" is not a matter of fact, but a matter of interpretation. And it is just, you know, counterfactuals all the way down. But that's how I... how I ended up kind of leaning into "counterfiction," which is the other term I'm using in the essay. I didn't initially set out to do that. What you have are stories that get told on top of stories on top of stories and they each resonate powerfully in different moments. And, and to me that ended up being a legerdemain that I had to use to make any kind of sense of what I was looking at.

To your second question, I guess this is a second answer to your first question. In, in trying to get at pirate facts... Like, even if we can all agree on (you know) *when* Blackbeard was in the Carolinas, right? That's a pretty factual fact, you know. We don't know if he really set his beard on fire, right, and if he really set his beard on fire, *what* psychological traumas made him do that. And so, like to kind of enter the narratives trying to fill that in. So the problem is like, even about someone like Blackbeard (whose history is fairly well documented), we always want to know more than the historical record is ever going to yield. And so these fictions kind of become necessary. And so, did readers want to see more of themselves in pirates? Like, yes, maybe that's where some of that narrative impulse is coming from: that we want to see something that's recognizable as a psychologized human (or a materialized human) in a pirate about whom we only know, like, these bits and pieces and fragments. So, yeah, there is kind of like a pirate "project" going on. We would like to have facts about them, but I don't think it's ever really going to happen to the extent that people would like them because the way we've been trained to read pirate narratives has given us an appetite that is not ultimately satisfiable. And yet because pirates really existed there is a yearning to have these stories somehow rooted in fact, and so it's very easy (I find) to trick people into thinking that anything you tell them about a pirate is true. [laughter]

Joanna Stalaker: I don't know, were you planning to respond?

Seiler-Smith: I was not.

Stalaker: Okay, okay, so I have two questions for David. The first one: I want to bring us back to Mercier just one more time [laughter] because they talk about projects. The Englishman—so this is on page twelve and thirteen in the Mercier (page 112 of the reader)—the Englishman complains and so the Frenchman says, you know, maybe you should come back. Well, I'll just read it: "if they shall accomplish, in their full extent, the different projects that have been proposed. So, maybe you should come back, you know, when we've finished our projects. 'Ah! he replied, there is the foible of your nation; projects forever!'" [laughter] So, I was, I would just be interested in you talking a little bit about the Englishness of projects versus, you know, here it seems to be something specifically associated with the French. Of course, we're in a much later period, so what is (sort of) the future of the idea of an English project versus this, you know, association with the French—a very negative association with the French as project makers but, perhaps, in a slightly different way than some of the negative associations that you look at in your paper.

And the second question has to do with the place of literature in your project as a whole. So you said you have a few things to say about that in what we've read here with respect to, you know, the question of these projects often appearing in works that "we would classify as literary with a big L" (you say at a certain point). But, I would be very interested to hear you talk a little bit about how your work on these sort of actual projects that you're looking at might lead us to think differently about literary projects that themselves sort of pose themselves as unrealizable projects or virtual projects (and that's part of their self-definition as a literary work). So, just to give an example which I know takes you completely far afield from the kind of thing that you're thinking about, but, for me, Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* is... you know, he puts out this project of describing this "self" and he also puts out a sort of virtual, descriptive project of describing all the plants on the island of Saint Pierre where he's walking around. But, the project is already sort of foreclosed by the time he even starts because he started it too late, and so the

entire work seems to exist in this state of projection... but it's already finished by the time it's started. So, you know, it seemed to me—I was real excited reading your piece here and thinking about your broader project, to think how would these much more concrete, actual (you know), pamphlet projects cause me to think differently about the literary project that sort of poses itself as such.

Seiler-Smith: Want to hook in before he responds?

Rebecca Spang: Hook really fast on that. The beginning of Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*: where he defines the state of nature as “does not now exist, will not exist, and may never have ever existed” and yet we need to know about it anyway. So, there's a way in which the counterfactual as a condition for knowledge is actually quite central to certain forms of eighteenth-century reasoning.

Stalnaker: And I would just add to that a condition not just for knowledge, but for *judging* the actual state of affairs.

Spang: Judging. That's the word, yes, yes.

Alff: In terms of Mercier, I was wondering to what extent, to what extent the satire or the joke was at the expense of the English speaker? I mean whose, you know, alleging or, you know, imagining the French as being obsessed with projects coming from England in the eighteenth century. I mean something that I see repeatedly in discourses of proposals are often times jealousies: jealousies regarding institutions like the French Academy for sponsoring improving endeavors, for standardizing improving endeavors, whereas things are very ragtag and ad hoc on the English side, you know. The history of projects in England is a really varied and weird EEBO search, you know, where one goes through and is drawing out all of these different documents. So, I can't speak a great deal to the factual history of projects on the French side. I know that the term itself is *projeter*—I mean it is one of the roots for the English term.

In terms of thinking about unfinishable or unfinished literary enterprise: I'm not sure that it's helpful. I'm trying to think of other examples, you know, from my period that I know a little better. It's just something that I'll kind of keep thinking about as we're talking....

Christine Zabel: Very small hook on the Englishness of projects. I told you yesterday about this book in French about projects or *projets* and I just know that in French a project or *projet* or *projecteur* is not exactly the same as in English. It's much more... For example, John Law, which is like the example for a projector, is not necessarily called (or, is *not* called) a projector. It's *Système Law*.

Spang: Yeah, système.

Zabel: It's a system. And even later, I mean, also the English word entrepreneur is a French word, and I think that is much more used in the French case, to be an *entrepreneur*. And so, I would say there is *projet et projeter*, but it is used slightly differently and not ubiquitous as in the English language.

Alff: Although Adam Smith called John Law a projector.

Zabel: Yeah, but—

Spang: Yeah.

Alff: So, when it comes to English he writes it into the vernacular, right.

Seiler-Smith: Jesse.

Jesse Molesworth: This may end up being more of a comment than a question; I hope that's okay. I love this pairing and I love it so much because I absolutely hate this claim, you know, made by Gallagher and others that there is no counterfactual before the eighteenth century.¹ I mean" there is. The counterfactualism that David's describing, the counterfactual that, you know, Nush has traced out, and I'll give you more. I mean you cannot convince me that Hogarth is not a counterfactual thinker: you know, that's what *Industry and Idleness* is—it's the imagination of industry taking *this* path but, you know, "what if industry had, you know, followed this other path of idleness and so forth?" you know, we wouldn't get to this position of Lord Mayor and so forth. *Tom Jones*, *Tom Jones* is, you know, utter, you know, counterfactualism. You know each version of the characters that he encounters is a version of himself, you know: Lieutenant Northerton, the Man of Mazard Hill, Nightingale—they are all versions of himself. And, therefore, he is the counterfactual (you know) sort of character that emerges precisely in this (what is described as a) history. You know, this is, you know, to me utter counterfactual thinking, and, you know, I am absolutely flummoxed and horrified by the claim that, you know, we don't have this in the eighteenth century. We do, you know, it just exists in different forms, and so: thank you.

Powell: You know it's actually been keeping me up at night that *Oroonoko* is a really good example, and like I feel like I somehow have to work this in and there's no way it will fit in, but it's just... Yes, exactly Jesse; we agree on novels! [laughter]

Zabel: Yeah, I have two questions for David as well, maybe for both of you. But, I'm interested in... I have mainly two questions: one is around the open future and the other around objectivity. I was... maybe first to the objectivity aspect. You mentioned the future realism and the disinterested testimony, and I was interested in when—in the history of business planning, for example, or political arithmetic there is this kind of showing numbers in order to make it less about the author and show the objectivity of numbers and of the analysis of the situation. And when, for example, in the course of the earlier eighteenth century it was much more invoked, like, the reputation of the author, and like, "I know these guys, so I know about the situation. And so, you can invest in my business because I have this kind of reputation. I have the back up of all these people." And then by the end of the eighteenth century, it was much more the kind of, "I analyze the situation, and I have numbers. And, I show you also all kind of possible scenarios and, like, try to show you numbers in it." And, so that would relate also to Martin's work on business planning, and there is also Will Deringer's work from MIT about objectivity of numbers and political

¹ Editor's note: Catherine Gallagher, "What would Napoleon Do? Historical, Fictional, and Counterfactual Characters," *New Literary History* 42:2 (2011)

arithmetic in the 1710s and 20s.² And so, I was wondering how (or if) you would say that what you're calling "disinterested testimony" and "future realism" and the rhetorical strategies applying to that—if you would call that a try to objectify this fictional aspects of your...—what you call the projecting fiction or language? So, I would be interested in that.

And then, something that I am personally also interested in, or am struggling with, in my speculation project, but I think it's even... in the projects what is interesting is that there are possible future scenarios, but there is also a concrete plan in a given moment. And so, the future is—although there are certain, there are multiple possibilities?—the plan kind of makes a plan for *one* future, and so the future (the open future) is closed up in the plan. And, so, I'm interested in: if you could talk a little more about the aspect of projecting which kind of implicates an open future, but then it's not at all an open future and how you deal with this ambiguity?

Alff: Well, I mean, something I kept asking myself yesterday is: Does the project presume an open future, you know, to begin with? And then, in thinking about our discussions today, I would say: does the future need be open or closed? Can it be closed, but there's a "meantime" that can still be constructed usefully? So that even if time is going to end and it's not, you know, stretching on into open space, is there virtue to handling five years of that period differently than it might have gone otherwise if you had not established a plan for it?

So, yeah, I think that the project in some senses imagines a future as constructible, manipulable... to the extent that it can close it off. But then there's some schemes that are trying to anticipate contingency, that are trying to deal with the unknown (schemes of defense, protection against invasion, weather), so I don't think all projects kind of lead to one end. I think some are trying to deal with an array of possible futures.

Zabel: But the objective is still the same. I mean I know the business plans that go through the contingencies of the situation. If there is war? How does it change in the Du Pont powder industry if there is a war or peacetime? So, they go through these kind of these contingencies, but it is still the same objective: to show that this business plan would work out and is believable. And so, the contingency that is implied in the business (or in these plans) is actually not a *real* "open" contingency. It is a possibility that you have to think through, but it's still closed up in the same objective. Is that clear what I'm saying?

Alff: Well yeah, and I mean I think it's true if you look at one instantiation of a proposal, but many of these proposals if you look at their media history or their print history: there are multiple editions of certain proposals and they'll be sometimes anthologized, they'll be reworked, they'll be plagiarized. So, sometimes we can track plans that shift their sense of what the future will be through these successive iterations.

I just wanted to say one thing about the authorial objectivity, which is that oftentimes what a lot of these writers I'm studying did would be to try to completely obliterate their own identity, to say that I found this proposal or this is given to me by a trusted friend. So, oftentimes I think that the identity of the author could be a great liability because then that introduces the problem of self-interest.

² [Editor's Note] William Deringer, *Calculated Values: Finance, Politics, and the Quantitative Age* (forthcoming).

³ Editor's Note: Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (2004).

⁴ Editor's Note: Peter Leeson, *The Invisible Hook: the Hidden Economics of Pirates* (2009); Peter Linebaugh and

Zabel: Exactly.

Seiler-Smith: Fritz.

Fritz Breithaupt: Oh, that was quick! Wonderful, thank you. My question is inspired by David's paper, but I'll address it to Nush. And the question is a question that applies to both, and the question is: Really what is the measure of success for either the project, the hypothetical, or the counterfactual? Now, David actually is clever enough he answers this he says, "there's a gain to be given." And, I still wonder about that in the case of Nush's paper, so we had the case (we just talked about it briefly) that there can be an intellectual gain out of the counterfactual. But I think the case here of the pirate stories, and I think actually in general the larger case is a different one. I want to make a proposal (but you can rebut it) and that is: actually, what you gain from it is the category of the interesting. The counterfactual story is only then successful or the counterfactual history is only successful if it's interesting. You could come up with a lot of different scenarios and they're boring, and so we would not even think about them. So, there's something about, at least...; I mean Hitler has to win the damn war or something. I mean it has to be really radical or interesting and some other thing. A simple kind of... that wouldn't work. And that's already true (I think of all the examples Jesse gave us, too) here in the eighteenth-century and even before. I mean I think I would even go to the sixteenth century.

But, now if it's "the interesting" we are dealing with we are dealing with an interesting affect, one of these affects of attentiveness, of excitement, and so on and so on. Which means that suddenly with the category of the counterfactual, the past becomes itself something like a spectacle; we are suddenly focused on the recipient who sees this, who's interested in and newly interested in it. And the flip side of this, and this is what I really want to get to, is then, of course, the future side. Once we focus on the recipient, the future also becomes a spectacle. It is something that is not just the dark future—we talked about the dark future mostly—but no, there's something that makes the view to the past, but potentially also to the future, interesting again. There's something happening that's exciting: maybe Trump gets elected, something crazy will happen. [laughter] So, it's interesting. So it's interesting, and that's important because that is different from the project. The project I still think is driven by nervousness. You're holding off the other uncontrollable future with your plan. The plan is still driven by dark future, open future is closed: I mean, that was the last discussion between Christine and David. The project, yes, you want to close the open future because you're afraid of it. But this potentially... I think this is what the counterfactual is... that's how I mean, what I'm inspired here, it's about the interesting. And pirates, what is more interesting than pirates?

Powell: Very little. No, I think that's...—that feels very right to me and thanks, that's good fun. And actually to bring the counterfactual and the project together once again: like, there were lots of projects to repatriate the pirates of Madagascar who... (like), there weren't that many pirates in Madagascar. [laughter] Like, there ... it was already always counterfactual, and Defoe wrote an important one, which if you don't have the reference and you may because you know how to research, but if you don't, I can send it to you. But, like, the premise of it was, like, "Okay, you've got all this money. You're a wanted man. You can't spend it. So, you're sitting in Madagascar on top a pile of gold wishing you could come home and spend all of the gold, so how about we offer you amnesty and we bring the gold and you inject it into the economy: win, win,

win, win.” The problem is (like) there weren’t that many pirates in Madagascar and they didn’t have that much gold. And so there are all these (like) schemes getting picked up to repatriate these people with their wealth and—you know, really they’d be happy to take the wealth and leave the people—but that wasn’t there, and yet it keeps coming up again. To, you know, take something that is, you know, kind of disappointing and an unknowable end to the pirate career and make it a hopeful future again, right?

But, yeah. Like you say: what’s more interesting than a pirate? Joe Roach’s book *It*, the last chapter is on pirates. *It* is the study of things that are—like, what’s the phrase he uses?—“abnormally interesting,” right. “Pirates steal dreams”: like there’s something about the pirate in and of itself, right, that is always going to be abnormally interesting. So, the question becomes: if the pirate himself is always interesting, why is that not enough? Why do we have to make the pirate *more* interesting? Because I think you’re right; I think that’s exactly what the counterfactual pirate thinking is doing, is adding this twist, making it, you know, new, and giving it that frisson again, but, like, why is that also necessary? And, you know... I guess my best answer goes back to Hillis Miller—we’re really going into old theory here, right, on narrative. Like, why do we need stories? Why do we need the same story over and over again? But, why is our need for stories never satisfied? And, you know, it’s the same question three times, but it’s also different questions. Like because it’s interesting we need to keep creating differences because those are kind of how we make sense of the complications of our own lives. So, basically: all of fiction can be explained by pirates. [laughter]

Molesworth: I disagree, Nush. [laughter]

Powell: Jesse!

Seiler-Smith: Helge.

Helge Jordheim: Yeah, sorry for being late. Two terrific papers, I loved reading them so much, and I have two things. One for David, which is about Holberg again. Ludvig Holberg [1684-1754]: his whole work is on project and projectors, and there’s this specific kind that you allude to when you quote John Brewer, saying that there are these people who make proposals for government reform. So, he has written like ten dramas that are all about these people making projects for government reform and how...—and he ridicules them every time, right?—and even at the level I referred to the other day, if you propose a project, and it doesn’t work out, you kill them. So, the idea that projects are (and projectors are) the most dangerous [people] for political stability is extremely strong in Holberg. And, he has this term “project makers” that pops up everywhere, and then they’re the worst. I mean you could be a tyrant, but if you’re a project maker, you’re just like [oof]; you don’t want that.

The other thing that goes to both of you is to bring in another term, which is conspiracy. Because, and I kept thinking about this because of Nush’s—you have this ... Johnson refers to (he has) secret informations about something that historians don’t have.

Powell: Right.

Jordheim: And it seems to be that counterfactuals are very often linked to different forms of conspiracy thinking, and the same goes for certain forms of eighteenth-century projects. The pro-

ject was something that you can't see, but people still did them. So, there's someone projecting behind your back. So, both these counterfactuals and projects may have this element of conspiracy that you find in the eighteenth century and that we still sort of have very present in today. So, I just wanted to hear your thoughts about that.

Alff: Well I think this goes back to Daniel's paper yesterday. I mean about who possesses *prudencia politica*; who is perceived to have the authority to try to prescribe what the future should be? And, I think that's often times recursively a reflection on what you've pitched in the past and whether it's worked. And, I think this also goes to the question of when is a project successful? When does it end? And, I think that those who would be the most successful at proposing things are those who put forward endeavor that creates a reality that we come to take for granted. The best projects aren't called projects; they're just reality, they become invisible. In fact, when we call something a project today we're gesturing toward its incompleteness. You know we call a "housing project" a "project" because it fails to live up to the social ideals behind it; otherwise it would just be a neighborhood or place.

Zabel: Or it might [still] come, rather than [be] failed; that would say that it's already passed.

Alff: Right, that it's passed its expiration date.

Zabel: But the project could also be something that can still be achieved, also nowadays.

Alff: Right.

Seiler-Smith: Sam.

Samuel Baker: Yeah, another word that might be useful is "experiment" because, right, there's a relationship between the rhetoric of projects and the rhetoric of experiment.

Seiler-Smith: I'm also going to hook and say I think "conspiracy" and I also think of "plot," which also has literary and landed terms: a plot of land that you build upon, a plot that you write about in literature, and the Popish plot, other plots, you know. Plots: some fail and some succeed and are conspiratorial, you know.

Powell: Yeah, to go back to the idea of conspiracy. This is one of the places where I find myself butting heads with historians, and I go against Rediker a little bit.³ Sorry... Did you want to?

Spang: Nope.

Seiler-Smith: There are two hooks, but go ahead.

Powell: Should I just stop talking? [laughter] You know, Peter Leeson is another example, or Peter Linebaugh.⁴ ... Like, there's a desire to see piratical thinking as more organized and cohe-

³ Editor's Note: Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (2004).

sive than I think it was, to see them as anti-capitalist warriors and to be able to theorize them into hydrarchy. And, it's like...

Jordheim: Cuba, Cuba.

Powell: Nineteenth century, though. And, and, yes, absolutely, and that has directly to do with Napoleon. But, and in fact, nineteenth-century Cuban piracy is quite different to eighteenth-century Golden Age piracy—but (I mean) the problem is it inflects a lot of modern thinking because that's most Americans' (and I'm here as an American), that's most Americans' more immediate experience of piracy. So, that's why like Stevenson in *Treasure Island* he sets it in the eighteenth century, but his pirates are out of the nineteenth century (you know), because I mean that's what he grew up aware of, right? So... We're back into these weird slippages of time, like butting up against each other. But, so, yeah, piracy was (you know) it's a mode, it's something that you do. And then, to go back to our discussion this morning, thereby you're like kind of invoking this kind of anti-capitalist ethos, absolutely, but I think in only rare cases was it ever very deliberate or deliberative, you know. Mostly piracy is something that you fall into out of a sense of desperation: that it's the least bad of evils.

And, by the way, when I teach this to my undergrads I start with a clip from *The Princess Bride* where Westley is explaining about the Dread Pirate Roberts “and I am not the Dread Pirate Roberts” (like, that was four pirates ago) and he's living a like a king in Patagonia, that he has not been marauding for twenty-five years. Pirates did not maraud for twenty-five years (one to three years tops) and then you were dead or retired. Like prostitution, like you didn't do it that long because it was dangerous. And it was something you would kind of dip into because of a labor shortage, and then get back out of again. So, it's not, it's not this, you know, “way of life” that in different ways [unintelligible] try to make it. Or, I mean, it is a way of life, but a temporary, interstitial one for most cases. (Less interstitial if you end up hanged at the end of it.) But... Okay, I'm wandering afield now. My point is... so that's what interesting to me about Misson's narrative is that it's kind of the best example of this pirate conspiracy that becomes a really, like, kind of philosophically cohesive way of life and it's absolutely so clearly fictitious, and so many historians have hooked onto it as though it were real. I mean (like) look at the Wikipedia page for Libertalia today and it's still like, yeah, a real place (and I'm like: ha-ha). And, sorry, just one last thing I wanted to say: treasure maps?!

Seiler-Smith: Tracey and then Rebecca have hooks.

Tracey Hutchings-Goetz: Yeah, I just wanted to quickly throw out the term sideshadowing (which David brings up on page 244) in relation to conspiracy in particular? And I think that one way to maybe think of pirates, in particular is that they cast their own sideshadows, like from the beginning. That they always kind of, like—and that's part of their problem, right?—that they're these figures that, like, kind of, spread out (right?) into possibilities that are sometimes marked as patently false and sometimes marked as possible, right? And at *this* point we now always see as possible, right? And, that's what conspiracies do, is that they sideshadow an event that happened,

⁴ Editor's Note: Peter Leeson, *The Invisible Hook: the Hidden Economics of Pirates* (2009); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Atlantic* (2000).

right, so you can imagine, well these same sort of facts exist (like, right, [President] Kennedy died), but it's how did that happen, right? How did you get there?

Spang: When you said that you don't call it a "project" if it actually comes to fruition, I suddenly realized that project is the inverse, 180 degrees, from a "cause." You only call for a cause if it does happen, right? *Something* happens, and then you go and look for a cause.

Seiler-Smith: Next we have Dan.

Daniel O'Keefe: Yes, I had a question for you, David. So, so far we've been talking mostly about counterfactuals, but I was interested also in your use of fictionality a little bit. And, specifically you have this one point where you say that, where you talk about the counterfactual world that the project has become, right? When a project fails it becomes a counterfactual, but it didn't start out as a counterfactual; it started out something kind of more like, like a fiction, in that it is like a story, but it's something that is actually meant to cause action. And so, I'm just kind of interested in this idea you had that that both projects and (say) novels start out as fictions. One of which begins...you know, the novel begins as a story presumably in the past tense about something that's happened, whereas a project begins as a fiction about the future and only afterwards becomes a counterfactual. So, just wondering if you'd elaborate a little about that. It does seem like an interesting way in which these two different forms of fictionality are oriented towards time in different ways.

Alff: Yeah, I mean it seems like... So if a proposal is a representation of the future that seeks to become fact—I mean I think it kind of remains fact after it, after it "expires," because then at that point we know what to do with it; it's a plan that doesn't go anywhere. In terms of thinking about the relationship of fictionality to, to something like the novel—I'm trying to think about when it is that we think of a literary project as finished? I mean to go back to Joanna's question, like when is it that, you know, a piece of writing is finished? And is it when a novel becomes a print artifact? Is it when it is something that can receive, that can be received, that can be discussed as an article of culture? But, no... I'm not sure if I'm answering your question very well.

O'Keefe: No, that's getting at part of it, because I think part of what's interesting about the idea is: if a project is something that's meant to compel action in a way that we normally think of a fiction as not doing, but we also have, you know, when people talk about—I suppose using Latour or new concepts of agency—to talk about books as agents then we have this notion which... Well, we're starting to think about the idea that something like a novel can be a cultural agent in a way; so it's performing a certain kind of action, but one that's very different from how we imagine projects, usually.

Alff: Right, I mean in the projects instead—

Christina Lupton: I'll hook in...

Seiler-Smith: Any other hooks? And you have the next question, Christina, as well.

Lupton: Oh, okay. Well I'll use it as a hook because I want, I want... The question I want to ask hooks directly to what (how you're asking it) Dan, but in terms of an example. So, I've had this example on my mind ever since Michael [Cooperson]'s paper about time-travel yesterday, so what I want to do is just... it will take me a couple minutes to spell it out, but it's an example of a text and a sort of case study of the way I think these categories slide around in time. So, this is, this is what I want to talk about: so, okay, throughout the 1770s there are lots of fictions that discuss balloon travel, alright, so in all kinds of genres, but balloons don't yet exist, alright? So, I'm gonna get all the dates wrong, but, there's lots of historians, someone who knows: 1789, right, I think?

Jonathan Sachs: That's right.

Lupton: So, 1789 the first balloon lifts off. So, these fictions—so this will be the first part of my question—you know, were these fictions counterfactual, were they projects, were they fictions, and do they change when the balloon takes off, right? But now comes the tricky bit: okay so, then in 1790, the year after the first balloon takes off, an anonymous it-narrative is published which takes the perspective of a balloon which talks about the fact that it can't yet be visible—this balloon, it's a kind of, you know, alienated balloon. [laughter] It exists, it carries someone around, but it can't yet really land because people aren't yet ready to experience the wonders of an air balloon. Now in order to facilitate this fiction, the publication date that is given for this publication (when it comes out in 1790) is 1781, right?

So, is this time travel? Is this (again) is this counterfactuality? What is... I mean how does it relate to the causality project because obviously causality is important here, right? Like the fiction of the publication date allows the author to project its own, kind of, the air balloon narrative in a very different way in relation to the fact that air balloons have now existed. But, of course, it's not going to be read in 1781, it's going to be read in 1790 *as if* it had already been written in 1781.

So, I just want to throw all of this out here because what I—although I love these categories—I think this is a case study in what we're actually dealing with, when we start looking at print history and literary genres and some of these questions about their relation. I mean because this is actually the sort of archival stuff that we're dealing with, and somewhere in there is a fact (which is that a balloon was invented). But, I have no way to explain, you know, what the relationship of the invention of that balloon to this constellation of narratives about the invention of the balloon would be in terms of the vocabulary that we're being given here. And, obviously, temporality is important because it's about how you situate the “before and after” of fiction in relation to the actual event.

Seiler-Smith: Just before you guys respond, I'll give you guys a second. Nush has a hook, Lara's next, and then I have Samuel, John, and Helge.

Spang: Just a footnote: the first balloon is 1782-83.

Lupton: Sorry.

Spang: So, the '81 date is—

Lupton: The '81's important.

Spang: Yeah, '81's important.

Lupton: Because the '81 is the first point you can be before the arrival of the actual balloon, yeah, yeah. I knew I'd get the dates wrong.

Seiler-Smith: Nush you can respond. We'll go to you, and then we'll go to Lara.

Powell: Well, just, you know, a very brief response. The changing of the date there makes—to me at least—that particular example a really good example of counterfactual.

Lupton: Yeah, yeah, it is, yeah.

Powell: Yeah, that's absolutely what it is. The more general case where they're writing about hot air balloons which are (like) a nascent, but not yet realized, mode... Well that's hard sci-fi. I don't know what else to call that.

But, the point I wanted to make earlier—I'll make it really briefly—is I think in some respects it's easier to talk about counterfictions than counterfactuals because of that, that problem of facticity. Like, so many things can't be agreed upon as a fact, but we know exactly how many novels Jane Austen wrote. And, those novels are not—and, you know, for a long time (because it was more historically based) the most popular counterfactuals had been “what if Hitler won the war” and “what if the South won the war?”, right? I mean those are still major arenas of, like, counterfactual entertainment. But for counterfictions: Jane Austen, oh my goodness gracious. So, so, so, so many “if”... You know, Darcy cheated on her or if she cheated on Darcy or if, like, she solved mysteries while boning Darcy happily or, like—I mean, it is this huge industry of Jane Austen counterfictions—and it's interesting to me that there's such an explosion there off of (you know) a more limited canon than (say) all of what we know about the Civil War. But, I think it's precisely because it's a limited canon, and so it makes it much easier to pick a point of departure and then just go! Because then you don't then have to wrestle with what is my secure point of departure. Those fictions can be agreed upon at the origin point. And, when we're dealing with a counterfactual, the origin point itself is gonna keep being slippery, and I think that's some of the problem with the projects as well: that, that slippage every time you're trying to get hold of something to talk about, it's wanting to move away.

Alff: For me, the metaphor that comes to mind is just a kind of nodding, you know, before and after that makes it impossible to tell either apart, you know, in the range of texts and events that you're talking about. I mean—and I think in my deliberately loose definition of what a proposal is or what a project is, it would depend upon what the author was seeking from the reader: were they soliciting action? Were they trying to bring a balloon into being somehow through that work? I'm not sure what to do with the one that was written after balloon travel, but that imagines being prior. It sounds like sci-fi.

Seiler-Smith: Lara.

Lara Kriegel: Yeah, so we've been... This really interesting discussion has revolved (I mean, as it should at a workshop on eighteenth-century futures) around the ways in which the counterfactual and the project sort of, you know, mediate time and temporal change. And as I was reading your really interesting papers I was thinking a little bit about the ways in which these categories contain tensions or help to kind of work with tensions around the relationship between, say, the individual and the collective. So, we could think of that as spanning over time, but we could also think of that as something that, you know, works in a moment. Like: is a project about social good or is it about individual ambition? Counterfactuals often, you know, "what if X person did this?" but it's really about a *social* effect. So, I don't know if you guys have thought about your categories in (you know) this way; kind of thinking about individual and social? I'd be curious to hear if you have.

And then I was just wondering if—this is a weird kind of academic counterfactual or counter-question—so why do, why do nineteenth-century scholars (of which I am one, but I haven't written on the counterfactual), why do nineteenth-century scholars think that the counterfactual begins in the nineteenth century? I don't think—I mean especially with someone like Catherine Gallagher, I mean—I don't think it's because they're stupid. [laughter] I mean is there, is there some idea either about time or about individual and social? (because I've often heard it talked about in relation to character) that is informing their idea that this happens in the nineteenth century. So, it's a kind of second question, but I think it might relate to the individual-social question that I'm putting on the table here.

Seiler-Smith: Do you want to hook before?

Hutchings-Goetz: Yeah, just really quickly, Lara. When I've heard it framed it's often (and maybe this is Andrew Miller's fault) framed in terms of the psychological, right?

Kriegel: Right.

Hutchings-Goetz: The optative.

Kriegel: And the individual, right, right; so there's an idea of character and individual that's informing it in that case.

Seiler-Smith: Did you want to hook in?

O'Keefe: Oh, yeah, just one of the other possibilities could just be sheer facticity, also. Does... Is the nineteenth century the beginning of idea that facts are such a, you know, distinct, concrete thing that counterfactuals then become more distinct as a realm in response to that? Just as another reason why people might imagine that the nineteenth century is where this begins.

Powell: Quite honestly, I think a lot of it has to do with neo-Victorianism in popular media. That there's been such a rash in the last like decade and a half of interest in, you know: steampunk. That it's, it's something—those horrible people in Brooklyn that are running around in corsets—... but it's such an aesthetic preference on so many different levels of popular media that I think it kind of was in the ether to lend itself comfortably to people that were already thinking about the kind of strange way that the nineteenth century is being reimaged; that it's a logical beat to

me to then see that basis of that in the nineteenth century itself. Like I think—I don't think this is like a deliberate confusion—but I think it's something that made it kind of comfortable for Victorianists to start looking into the question of, you know, Victorian counterfactuals as kind of an origin point.

Kate Blake: Just to sort of throw something in there... I wonder if it, if, you know, what we know about the way that people conceived of literature in the period has anything to do with this as well? Because I'm thinking about Shakespeare and about, well particularly *Antony and Cleopatra*, but a lot of his plays are, you know, rewritings... And *Antony and Cleopatra*, in particular, Plutarch and the love story and sort of imagining it as "What if these characters sort of embodied the gender stereotypes that we believe in in the sixteenth century?" you know.

Powell: And, you know, Dryden rewrites *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Blake: Yeah.

Powell: And was more popular in the eighteenth century than Shakespeare for doing that.

Blake: Sure, and so what I wonder about though is just that... is that counterfactual or is it counterfiction, right? I mean so how did they interpret Plutarch, in particular, you know, and how did Shakespeare? And we don't really know, you know, but I mean it's sort of up in the air, right? So...

Powell: Yeah, like I do think for me... I'm sorry. Okay, it's easier to answer these questions if we maintain a narrower definition of like counterfactual and counterfiction, which (I don't know that that's the right thing to do) just makes things easier. But, for me, what's kind of special about the counterfactual versus the alternate history, right, is that there has to be an awareness on the part of the audience that you're changing things, right? The reader *knows* that you've made a hypothesis that something was different, right. And now I'm sort of changing my mind in the middle of this... but I don't know how much, like, people go to *Antony and Cleopatra* in the seventeenth century and think, "This is an interesting take on Plutarch," right? Like I think that that is what it is, but I don't know that that's necessarily built into the immediate reception. I do think that in the case of Dryden you can expect—at least for a certain echelon of the audience—a stronger awareness of "And Shakespeare did a different version of this," and so, then you can move more clearly for me towards the realm of counterfiction.

Seiler-Smith: Do you have a brief response to the individual-collective comment before we move to Sam?

Alff: Yeah, I'll just say that I think sometimes—as we were saying earlier about people putting forward ideas for enterprise seem to repress their individuality by affiliating with organizations—I think the Royal Society was in some ways an institutionalizing effort to do away with the (you know) the kind of ugliness, the stink of projection. And then, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* comes back and reduces everybody to their discredited individuals, each in their own chamber doing their own ceaseless scientific experiments.

Baker: So I would stipulate that I quite like Marcus Rediker and his body of work.

Powell: I do, too.

Baker: Yeah.

Powell: But I disagree with him on this thing.

Baker: But, I'm about to complain... so I thought I'd say that first. I'm grateful for it. One of the things I'm grateful for in your paper is it's helping me kind of figure out my really strong ambivalence about that and actually map it out. I'm going to try to do this indirectly. Do you know about the Richard Brodhead hoax in the 1990s? Before he was President of Duke?

Powell: Yeah, I was at Yale when he was the Dean of Students there, which... remind me?

Baker: So he... In the 1990s, he and some of his friends, cronies put together a job application packet.

Powell: Yes, yeah, yeah.

Baker: So it was, you know, a job letter and a dissertation abstract and list of references that was Jonathan Arac, Laura Brown for, you know, for a student with a project about pirates, right? And it was at the height of New Historicism and it was supposed to be like a (you know) debunking of, like, New Historicism and its kind of coterie circles? And, the joke was that it wasn't unless you read through the whole dissertation abstract that you got to like chapter four on how the *Pirates of Penzance* is actually based on a whole real pirate colony and so forth... It was supposed to be obviously, you know, impossible.

Powell: Right.

Baker: So, at the time that that happened, I was working on pirates. [laughter] I have to admit, I kind of... that was the death knell of pirates in my maritime project, because it just... I felt like I was not all that happy with the hoax, but I felt like it [research on pirates] was being ridiculed because it was in some way ridiculous. And, I feel like there's a way in which Rediker's, Rediker and Linebaugh's project is so attractive, and at the same time it's not. I can't justify it as an alternative history, I have to... I justify it as like a historical counter-narrative, if not like a counterfactual just from the point of view of literature. So, then the question is: is there a way to recuperate it on those grounds, and could you extend that strategy of recuperation to a recuperation of certain kinds of like Marxist historiographical projects? You know because (of course) they are closely tied to Hobsbawm, you know, like whole schools of thought. Certain kinds of utopian historical projects that we like as fictions, even if (you know) our like Foucauldian scruples give us problems with them as history.

Powell: Yeah, that's really helpful. And, I remember the Brodhead hoax, but I had forgotten until you just reminded me that it had involved pirates, which... Thank you for that. Oh my goodness and I liked Dean Brodhead.

Alff: Just to add—to draw out the conversation of form and mode that we were having earlier today—speaking as a job-placement coordinator: those materials to a point are, like, pretty good. And I think it makes a strong point about the formal expectations about materials that one makes an intervention. I don't think it's a surprising that this fake person got interviews.

Sachs: Changing my question to a hook to build off Sam's because you've introduced the idea of hoax. And that was going to be my question. What do you do in the context of projects and counterfactuals with the idea of forgery? In the sense that something like Chatterton and something like Ossian (especially Ossian), I mean these, these... You could call Ossian a project, right, but then—it would've become, it becomes a project only after the hoax is revealed, right? Or maybe. And similarly something like Chatterton, right? I mean these are both counterfactual ideas: *what if* there were a second-century epic that told the story of the Celts, right? What if there was, I think, it's a fifteenth-century monk who wrote this amazing, amazing poetry?

So, so... but this gets back to what Nush was saying about how, for you—and you started to retreat on it—but for you a counterfactual becomes a counterfactual when your audience is in on the joke. And in the case of forgery and in the case of Ossian and Chatterton these both seem to be particularly liminal cases, right? That it's unclear the degree to which there was an audience that might've been in on the joke. Who of the circle would've known that these things were forgeries, if anybody, and how does that change our understanding of them as either a project or a counterfactual?

Seiler-Smith: Johannes has a quick, yeah.

Johannes Türk: Yeah, quick... I would've had a question in a similar direction, and the example that I find striking is that in Argentina, there is an early twentieth/late nineteenth-century debate on the problem of faking certain qualifications. Because the problem is there are large streams of immigrants, some of them say, "look I have a degree as a violin player from the school of Milano, okay?" and they are accepted into an orchestra, but it turns out they don't have it. And so, finally, you know in a way, as far as... if I remember correctly actually, there is legal solution for it, and that is that if someone can pass for being good enough to participate in an orchestra you just, you kind of... you know, you disregard the fact that the qualification is a forgery, simply because the qualification exists irrespective of the legal authority of a certificate with the right seal on it, right. And I think that is a very interesting case because it shows that (you know) it's to a certain degree an arbitrary distinction, right, in some cases to decide between fiction and, and like the reality of something. When it comes to abilities, it's more the fact of being able to make it real, rather than to, to, to know that it's authenticated that is decisive, right. So, I think it's a very... I'm not certain I was clear enough, right, but I think it was an interesting case.

Seiler-Smith: We have two other hooks and then we have several other people. So, I'm going to have to start getting tart.

Baker: Just to take it real quick back to the balloon, because Tina did an amazing job sketching out like a tableau of possible forms for narrativizing temporalities including the future, but thinking... It's important to think about all these things as future oriented. So that, for example, with

Ossian, Ossian could just be a historical narrative if it's all, if it's all understood by Macpherson to be true. But the extent to which Macpherson knew what he was doing is making up a false, a false, a false Scottish set of myths that were going to establish "what if the Scots had been, had had a kind of authenticity?" that was actually due to the Irish. The extent to which he was doing that, it's actually a counterfactual. But in both cases it's producing the grounds for a different future, what might be a different nationalist future.

Seiler-Smith: Nush has requested to jump in.

Powell: I just was not quite finished responding to Sam, and things like kind of got, but... Like to quickly to go back to Sam's and Jonathan's question. Yeah, so, like, forgery is not counterfactual—it can't be. But, Ossian is an interesting case because even during the debates there were a number of people who were like, "this is BS, but it's not bad poetry, right. As poetry, it's good poetry, it's just that it's a fictional persona." And to me, that like actually works with the second of your questions, like can we recuperate the kind of stuff that Rediker is doing? Like it's not a bad story that he's telling, and it's not one that doesn't have good and important points to make about the way labor markets inflect other narratives, right? So, like... I think if you can have enough of a conception of factuality to label what is a forgery or what is a counterfiction, like then we can go back to sort of (you know) the good parts and begin to talk about recuperation.

Seiler-Smith: Rebecca's hook and then we'll give Dave a chance to respond.

Spang: Johannes's story made me think of something that universities are anxious about these days: competency-based learning.

Powell: We just started our first new program.

Spang: Yeah. And so I think the missing category in Johannes' story was the different *institutions* that, well (as we would say) give credit. In other words: make something a fact.

Powell: No, they give badges, not credit.

Spang: [Chuckles] Well, make something a fact within their own terms. And so, there are institutional contexts that haven't been part of these stories, and institutions have ways of creating facts in order to keep the institution going into the future.

Alff: To that I'd add that individuals sometimes put forward ideas for endeavor to be able to join those institutions. Which is to say that I think a number of the proposals that I've read in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are attempts to audition for a regulatory power, to join a board of trade, to actually have the power to not just be able to project—actually make your language performative. In terms of forgery, there are like all sorts of people who write these satires of proposals. My favorite is somebody who writes a proposal to drain the Irish Sea, so as to facilitate colonizing Ireland and uncovering sunken treasure and whales who could be fed to the inhabitants there. But, I think with those works, you know, I keep thinking about how satire has its own social project in that it's trying to clarify or cleanse the public sphere of this kind of reckless scheming. So, you know, even something like *Gulliver's Travels*, which is anti-projecting litera-

ture, is putting forward its own maybe conservative view of what science should look like, what the state's relationship to ambition should be.

Seiler-Smith: John?

John Han: With all the mention of hoax, I wanted to come back to Captain Hook.

Powell: Yeah.

Han: So I thought about the way Barrie... I mean, because *Peter Pan* is kind of a counterfactual, right? I mean it's what would happen if during this historical period people could fly. [laughter]. The link between that and sort of getting back to counterfiction and, again, I'm reminded of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* for some odd reason, but I'm not certain if... Have you read? So J.M. Barrie wrote a prequel to Captain Hook, James Hook in which he gave a speech at Eton.

Powell: Yeah.

Han: And he gave an entire, so he gave a speech on Captain Hook (James Hook) and he was an Eton grad and he had like yellow blood, kind of weird. The degree to which the pirate figure somehow, there seems to be some kind of friction between counterfiction, counterfactual, and the move toward believability, to make it seem real. Like to, you know, if (you know), if you believe in fairies then they're still alive, and I think that's, that's... I just wondered if you'd thought of that and sort of, yeah.

Powell: Yeah. I like that and it also takes us back to conspiracy, right? Because initially Barrie is coy about Hook.

Han: Right.

Powell: If I told you who he really was it would cause unrest in political circles, right. He looks a lot like Charles II. [laughter.]

Han: Well-educated and he's—

Powell: And he's also, like, there's this other stereotype that gets transported forward from Bart Roberts: he's well-dressed; he's got that red coat.

Han: Right, right, right, right.

Powell: Yeah, well, actually that's kind of a Disney thing. It's a blue coat and bearing.

Seiler-Smith: Are you cutting yours; you're removing yourself? Helge?

Jordheim: Okay. I wanted to see if this wonderful juxtaposition of pirates and projects could make us, help us think about historicity and our own moment and maybe the future of eighteenth-century studies. For a certain reason: what does it mean to be of the moment, to be con-

temporaneous? And I'm saying this because in my feeling (I guess it is), there's nothing as non-contemporaneous as pirates. Pirates are *so* of the past.

Richard Nash: Somalia.

Powell: I was going to say! [laughter.]

Jordheim: That's exactly the point; that's what I'm getting at. So, the moment for me when I felt that (sort of) that it was true, that we're living in a moment that is desynchronized... and where the nonsynchronicity and the catching up with our moment came is when we suddenly had pirates in Somalia. And they were called pirates and they went out dressed as pirates and they did what pirates used to do. And so I suddenly felt like we were entering that moment.

And the other thing at the opposite example is projects, with nothing as contemporaneous as "projects." I mean we see this maybe better in, in Scandinavia—because we've been a culture of institutions, and now we're *moving away* from institutions to projects. Everything is defined in terms of projects. So, it's a neoliberal, if there's one neoliberal successful slogan that we all adhere to at the moment—and you have it at the end of your paper also, you gesture to it—it's projects. So we have this sort of two indexes of historicity: the incredible contemporaneity of the project and the incredible non-contemporaneity of pirates that I think it's really interesting to think about when we... this is our moment and our role in that.

Powell: It's really interesting that you say that because I like feel that is correct, and yet, factually, I think it's not. [laughter] That's one of the things that is going on in Johnson's *General History* is he's trying—like, at the point that he writes this, piracy is hard on the decline in the Caribbean. And by the time like the fourth edition is out there's still a couple of pirates floating around like you know harassing colonists here and there. But as a major force that's an economic problem, like, they had been contained—but the popularity of that book does not at all wane. So, what Johnson's trying to do—and he starts us with Avery who hasn't been heard from in thirty years—is to make it seem present again and to make it seem more of a present problem than it really was. And, he starts with an introduction that's you know urging the British government to take a stand, get control of these pirates, give them jobs as fishermen because there are no Dutch pirates—he asserts because the Dutch have a thriving fishing industry there—and none of that was true. But, like, you know, it doesn't... I don't think he meant that to be counterfactual, I think he just didn't know what he was talking about.

But there's this whole project, that the whole—I just said "project" [chuckles], but actually that's like the right word—there's an attempt and, by and large a successful one, to kind of capture a reading market by bringing pirates more close to the present than they in fact were. And I agree that we tend to read pirates with this lens of nostalgia, but I think that has to do with the way that the *General History* has become the ur-text about pirates. When we think pirate, we think eighteenth century. That's what Stevenson thought he was doing, even when he was thinking nineteenth century.

Seiler-Smith: Johannes has a hook.

Türk: Yeah it's kind of a hookish thing. [laughter]

Seiler-Smith: It has to be quick, Johannes, I'm being tart. It has to be quick.

Türk: Yeah, so it seems to me that... I mean, the Somali guys, I'm not certain why and how they can be pirates. I think part of the story of pirates is that they inhabit the seas before the sea becomes a legal space?

Powell: No, that's wrong.

Türk: Or at the transition, right?

Powell: No, you're wrong. You're wrong. You're incorrect. You cannot have a pirate without the sea being a legal space.

Türk: Okay, so it's the other way around.

Powell: That's exactly the legal definition of the: *hostis humani generis*, a man with no nation. You have to have nations in the seas, or there are no pirates. The nation state is a precondition for piracy.

Türk: Okay, so, then—

Zabel: So then there's only after Hugo Grotius.

Powell: Exactly. [laughter.]

Türk: Okay. No, that's great, then... Right? Then it's more interesting than I thought in a way, right because— [laughter].

Seiler-Smith: Dave did you want to respond to Helge?

Alff: Just very quickly. It ties projet contra projet. What are other ways of moving forward, but through projects even when we seek to resist them? I mean it's hard to imagine alternatives, this is obviously... I mean I'm very self consciously aware of it being a project of projects that has it's own horizon and hopeful conclusion, and it is that inescapability is one of the critical challenges that I've faced since writing this as a dissertation.

Seiler-Smith: We have ten minutes left and we have three people, so I'm going to sort of close the comments if I may. We have Christine, then Joanna, then Christina. So go ahead, Joanna, okay, yeah. Christine?

Zabel: Which Christine?

Seiler-Smith: Christine.

Zabel: Christine?

Seiler-Smith: Yep.

Zabel: Yeah, sorry, I'm coming back to like kind historical comments, just very quick: in Germany there was a Pirate Party, like a political party that called themselves Pirate Party. [laughter.]

Powell: When?

Zabel: Last election they actually came into the Bundestag, yeah.

Powell: Oh my goodness.

Zabel: They were elected, so that might be interesting as a presentist—

Nash: Did they steal the election? [laughter]

Zabel: They are now like completely forgotten, but for like one—

Jordheim: What do you mean completely forgotten? [laughter]

Zabel: Almost forgotten. [laughter] I mean it was actually one platform, it was about cybersecurity. So... and one very little remark about fictionality and factuality. A dispute I came across was that in 1676 a guy named Georges Guillet writes an account of ancient and modern Athens, and says that this account is—he says he has the account from his brother who is a captive of the Ottomans and in Athens. And, then two other guys, Jacob Spon and George Wheler go to Athens and get his book and like show all his mistakes and find out that there has never been a brother and he has never been to Athens, but he really, like, made it seem factual and there was a whole dispute between them if it's important if it's factual or if it's fictional. But, Guillet still publishes a lot of books, and he gets republished and translated into English. So, there was this dispute.

But, one other thing I wanted to say—sorry to come back to this Englishness in the engagement with the future—but I was just thinking... and I'll try to explain very quickly. That Defoe, for example, who's... Or the problem is: projector... or you can only fail if you have a project, you can only get divorced if you were married [laughter], and if you don't have a project you cannot fail. And the thing is, which might be interesting in a guy like Defoe (who was running from a bankruptcy trial when he was writing his *Essay Upon Projects* where he tried to display very virtuous projects), that in the English bankruptcy law there was only the kind of law where there was no distinction between a moral fraud or not. If you're bankrupt, you're bankrupt. You lose your civil rights and you get imprisoned. The French by contrast had a distinction between *faillite* and *banqueroute*, and *faillite* was the insolvency that was not your moral fault and bankruptcy was your moral fault and there were very different courts that judged it. The *faillite* courts were the merchant courts. They were private courts, and you couldn't (or you didn't necessarily) lose any civil rights. You could have prolongation of payments. And the bankruptcy was really the... you were trialed at the Royal Court and you would lose all your civil rights and it was a really bad thing and also didn't happen very often, like twenty times in the Ancien Régime.

And so, the French had a notion of an exposed kind of dealing with failure that the English didn't have. And so, the projects—and also all continental Europe tried to make it easier to deal

with bankruptcy for example or failure—and the English made it even more severe (the bankruptcy laws). And I'm just wondering how projects are actually an engagement with the future? In a sense it's an immunization against failure because there is no other exposed dealings with it and... but also, in a sense, that they are counting on that you can actually fail. So, it is, it is making a plan for the future, with the acceptance that it cannot come to this future. And, that was just my historical comment on how that plays into—

Alff: Defoe knew about that distinction.

Zabel: Yeah.

Alff: That's why one of his projects is for a bankruptcy court—

Zabel: Yeah.

Alff: —that he proposes while running from bankruptcy.

Zabel: That makes maybe a difference with why this is such a notion in England, and there's so many novels about projects (many more than in French). Because the French had a dealing with failure that was very different and hadn't exposed and English had only these other dealings with failure.

Alff: Many, many of the, the essays in *Essays*, I mean *Essays Upon Projects* seems like it could be this kind of triumphant vision of a future, but really it's about like homes for maimed seaman; it's about taking care of widowed women and their children; it's about anticipating bankruptcy. So many of Defoe's projects are colored by an anticipation of failure or in which failure seems inevitable (especially if you're a Québécois farmer, brickmaker, you know, in later novels somebody like Daniel Defoe for whom failure was always present).

Zabel: And I think there's a very practical reason to why the projects are so English.

Alff: Yeah.

Powell: He also proposed a copyright law at the time when he was getting his work pirated all over the place.

Alff: Right.

Seiler-Smith: I would like to ask Joanna and Christina to pose their questions back to back, and then end with our authors responding—if that's okay?

Stalaker: Okay yeah. So, I... David, I wanted to ask you to speak a little bit concretely, elaborate on your research and search methods for delimiting your corpus and finding, finding these projects. So, we understand from what you've written why certain difficulties...—in that the card catalogue doesn't really work, right, because the word might not be in there or they wouldn't be classified as such. More cutting-edge keyword searches and things of this kind don't

seem to fully work either. So do you have some sort of model for future research-search methods for eighteenth-century studies that would try to deal with some of those problems when you're trying to localize something that can't be done through, can't be found through keywords or—

Alff: No. I mean it's an idiosyncratic muddling through. I think in the sense of like... you know, James Scott in *Seeing Like a State*. I think that over time I've tried doing it—I'm sorry we were going to have back-to-back questions.

Seiler-Smith: If it's quick enough, you can go.

Alff: But I'll just say... I mean it's a kind of muddling through, and then looking back and trying to figure out which of these proposals seemed to matter, which had a posterity in its period, which were most talked about. And then, reading more and more by brute force accumulation, trying to come up with laws for describing them. But nothing so systematic or nothing that I could give to somebody else.

Lupton: Which is nice because I was also going to ask a sort of “state of the discipline” question. So, I've been sitting here troubling about the idea that failed projects, that projects only become evident when they fail... and I've been thinking about Helge's question or comment on the fact that projects in Europe at least are the sort of currency with which we conceive of our own place in history. And, it seems to me... I mean for me this is a very vivid paper because going, leaving a sort of decade of teaching in North America and going back to being an academic in Europe has been, for me, very much about fulfilling the...—everything in Europe, in academia, in particular, is about projection of a certain kind that involves people having to, you know: make bids for all kinds of institutional forms of existence, personal grant money, collective group projects. I mean this *is* the way, this is the language we speak, and I do not believe that it's quite right to talk about the invisibility of those projects in terms of their success. Because I feel as if I also live these days in a kind of infrastructure of at least half-successful or half-realized projects to which people are answerable in all kinds of odd ways. Where it is in fact about a forward backwardness that comes about when people in different scales project something into the future for their own work, and then get caught up in the trap of that succeeding.

This is a fairly sort of accurate description, I think, of what it feels like to be an academic in Europe who is caught in a sort of terminology that you... I mean I'm sure everyone... I'm sure Christine: her speculation project began in a projection for that project which (you know) you now feel more or less, kind of you know indebted to as a description of your future. But you also probably wish that it wasn't there in the form that it was originally. I mean all of us, we... This is how it works, so I would just like to say that I'm not sure... Insofar as I think the project thing is beautifully current and makes this a fantastic book that will be much *fêted*, I'm also not sure that it's right to think about the sort of disappearance of projects at the moment of their realization where they just become causes or something. It doesn't seem viscerally right to me as a description of where we're at in history as Humanities academics. Which may or may not be because if you (to link to Joanna's question)—I mean, David, if this had been a European book, you would've had to get grant money for it in the form of a project where you really would've had to say what you wanted to do methodologically, and you couldn't now sit in response to Joanna's question, and say, “Well, I just kinda muddled through.” [laughter.] Because you would've had to describe five years ago what your method was and what you could now say, “Well, oops, I

didn't quite use the method I set out to do," but you couldn't say "I just muddled through" because there would be a transcript in existence for what...

Sachs: There is going to be a transcript of this! [laughter.]

Zabel: And then, after, you have to say why you didn't do it.

Lupton: Yes, and then you have to write a long report about why you—

Alff: Stop! Stop! [laughter.]

Powell: You just have to say "My original proposal was a counterfactual."

Lupton: Yeah. [laughter.]

Alff: Okay, so I mean... I can think of... The Manhattan Project is always the thing that I come up with as (you know) project-that-succeeded and we refer to as such. I still think projects that succeed are less conspicuous than those, and usually graduate to other names. And, I'm sure we can think of more examples together, and maybe it's not complete invisibility.

Sachs: I can think of one. I was once told by my research office, "Okay, look, you've got to change this project thing, just call it a program every time. 'Cause program, a research program is more encompassing than a research project. Your book project can be part of your research program."

Lupton: Canadians. [laughter]

Jordheim: They're only half-way European.