

## Discussion

**Rachel Feder:** Sure, thank you. Thank you for all those questions. So I'll just start with a point of clarification, which is to say that I don't have an investment in a particular definition of infinity and in fact in the Romantic period and in the eighteenth century there's no definition of infinity that works, mathematically. So they really didn't have a stable mathematical definition until Georg Cantor in the late nineteenth century, which is kind of my ploy. And so what I'm doing in the project is I'm reading through *Lyrical Ballads* to look at infinity and the sublime not as two monolithic concepts but as two sort of categories for sets for formulations, of aesthetics, of divinity, of identity. And so I look at a range of papers on infinity and then I show how their formulations kind of come up in Wordsworth, and Wordsworth is a very convenient figure because he really is kind of working through all of these different philosophical influences without necessarily adhering... You know, he's not, "Oh, I agree with Hume, I disagree...." So for [Thomas] Malthus I'm really kind of—and Mal—... Okay, so I say in this that I have had a "Malthus problem" for a long time. I've been working on this project (this is my dissertation now sort of completely reimagined since I decided to do a different project first)—I've been, you know, in a relationship with this book for a decade—and everyone has always said, "Oh, you work on infinity, what do you think about this, right? What do you do with Malthus?" And I just kind of avoided Malthus and so in part I did this workshop as a way to make myself deal in some fashion with Malthus and to hold myself accountable. And in fact what I do, right, is I just kind of triangulate Malthus with Maureen McLane and Mary Poovey and Frances Ferguson, so I have this feminist shield to protect me. So you know it makes... it is what it is. And when I—so on page 178 at the top I kind of situate Malthus in contrast to someone like Locke in terms of thinking about infinity and what it means to approach infinity as a limit (which is coming from Newton but which is, as, you know, Berkeley will tell you is heretical in Newton, it doesn't really—well, the calculus is unfounded, mathematically unsound in the early eighteenth-century). So the way I make the contrast is to say, "Okay, for Locke, infinity is this sort of process that's at the very base of the pyramid. So how do I know that I'm still me? Well, it's because I was talking a minute ago and I'll be talking the next minute and my voice and my sense of self and my body all seem to be in the same place and I *imagine* I could always be myself for one more minute and then if I have sort of a belief in the afterlife and in the divine, then I imagine that even after I die I could sort of continue to have continuity." And so the limit of infinity becomes not only eternity but also identity for Locke. So the way that Locke sort of works through believing in infinity and the way he works through believing in identity are these really parallel processes.

For Malthus there are these... you know, "We're headed toward something bad, we're about to crash into this limit" ideas but, as Ferguson argues, the point of the essay is to sort of undermine the axioms of that mathematics and say, "But we can adjust, can be—right?" There's a way to avoid this, there's a way to change the trajectory. So that's how I'm kind of situating Malthus with these other people who are thinking about infinity... but I agree that calling this Malthus's investment in infinity or something like that is problematic, and I think that's part of the problem that I'm working around. Yeah.

**Justin Roberts:** A couple of things for these questions. I'm going to start with a broader question, going to give you some numbers. I came to this project—or came to what I'm discussing here—as a young historian of slavery, and as a graduate student I remember poring through long lists of numbers and punching them into Excel sheets, what this meant about productivity and reproduction rates and the exact amounts different slaves labor on different tasks and so on... And I became increasingly interested as I was going through these numbers with why I had them, where they had come from, and why they were being produced and with the categories that were being used, the ways that people were being conceptualized. I tried to do a little bit of work with that in the first chapter of my book and ever since then I've been bothered by that and returning to that, and this was I suppose some effort to sketch that out a little bit more, think through that. I started becoming much more interested in categories of cells [in a spreadsheet] and the way numbers were being used, the things we're missing, what they're trying to calculate. And so that's kind of a broader question.

So I'm really coming at this as someone who once used numbers unquestioningly as a way of understanding what's happening on the ground in slave plantations—I used them to argue in more detail than anyone has ever done. Now I say, “Well, I'm not sure what exactly what I'm understanding,” because I started becoming very concerned with parodying the planters on some level ... that I was actually sort of becoming ... that I was coming to the same conclusions that they were doing, as if I was working for them and analyzing their own data—and that's a bit of a problem for me! So I still think I found out quite a bit about sugar plantations and how they work but I keep wondering, “To what end?”

As far as individual planters and their conceptions of humanity... I spent years reading through the business correspondence of plantations, the agricultural advice literature, [and] one of the things that struck me is that there was some talk in the Caribbean context about the “amelioration movement”: these sugar planters responding to abolitionist protests by saying: “Well, things aren't that bad in the Caribbean; the abolitionists are overblowing this, overplaying this, and we're making efforts to improve the situation and mitigate the violence of slavery” as if that's ever possible. And they would say this and they would also talk about how those increasing abolitionist protests and they'd realize that this was coming to an end and they would need some way of replacing their laborers because they were killing them off faster than they reproduced... One of the things that was going through all of this was that much earlier, around in the 1740s and 1750s, in the business correspondence and the published agricultural literature I started seeing both internal and more public discussions of how slaves should be treated and visions of the master/slave relationship that were very different from what I was seeing earlier. And I was struck by how often the words [*sic*] “humane” were being used and personally recoiling, as “This is madness! What are you talking about? The sugar plantations was [*sic*] a violent worksites in the Atlantic world. How can you talk about being ‘humane’? How can you talk about being ‘benevolent’? How can you talk and use words like ‘fair’ and ‘just’ and ‘benevolent’ and ‘these are your children, these are your dependents’?” And I never quite know what to call that, and in my book I call it “amelioration.” I've been working on another article with a colleague of mine now and we're trying to connect a little bit to the older idea of paternalism as in U.S. historiography. We're not quite sure what to do with it; it's there and historians haven't talked about it before, and it doesn't

really seem to have a—well, it's tricky to say if it has much effect on plantation management. Clearly these slaves are still being brutalized, malnourished, overworked, destroyed, but we're not quite sure what these planters are doing with it and why they're so insistent on saying it not only to each other and not only to their staff, but on a larger public scale. I really think that this is not just a gloss to defend their monstrous actions. I mean, their actions are monstrous, but for them I think they really do envision themselves somehow as being these enlightened, genteel, "humane" managers, and I can't figure out what that is and what their concept of humanity is.

So one of the things I was looking at here was I was starting to realize that for them the measure of humanity is whether or not slaves are reproducing or how quickly they're dying, and that's all it has to do with. And so they can sort of develop technologies for assessing their humanity as managers, but then this is also very self-serving because of course it's their property. This is the capital stock of the plantation and they are escalating slave prices... you know obviously it's really problematic. So I don't know what to do. I'm at—and on some level, I want to keep exploring it, but on another level I'm just horrified by diving into some of this material and seeing as I've seen on the ground how brutal these conditions can be. kind of a diary Thomas, this overseer, and that sort of thing, you know, this brutalization of slaves and thinking about these distance managers saying, "Well, we're doing wonderful things," you know? I've certainly looked at ... One sort of classic example I'll leave off with is Nathaniel Phillips who writes to his plantation manager in 1789. He says, "How are my black friends doing? Tell them 'howdy' from me, and I'm sending some presents for them from London." The manager writes back and he says, "Your black friends say 'howdy.'" They're working very cheerfully. They miss you, and they were very excited to see their presents." And I thought, "This is just—this is absurd on so many levels. How can they be saying this? This is—" ... One of the ways they kind of sketch this out—and I think one of the conclusions I've tried to cover in this paper—was this realization that there's this emphasis on humanitarianism that was being espoused at the expense of the individual, right? So the individual is somehow disappearing in these planters' visions of what it meant to be humane, and I was fascinated with that.

**Ryan Sheldon:** So I want to come back to those two final questions that you asked but I sort of want to try to build off what's been said already, especially on the question of humanity; that's sort of something that's come up a few times even in this panel. And one thing to consider—and this is something that those of you who are French historians or Americanists can probably answer better—is to sort of think about where we get the notion of human rights, because you have someone like Lynn Hunt saying, "You don't really have human rights until the American and French Revolutions." And so thinking about that...—and this is sort of, I'll try to go back to political arithmetic via this route—this is one of the things that I became interested in. [*to Rachel Seiler-Smith*] I don't know if you're interested in this? (I just found out that Rachel and I have like at least twin chapters, we might have twin dissertations.) But one of the things that's really interesting is that you have these situations where people are being counted as persons or bodies but we're in a political window for much of the eighteenth century where they're not, they don't necessarily have human rights (because those aren't theorized yet). And so a lot of history and statistics tends to focus on the nineteenth century; you know, Ian Hacking

loves that window in the 1830s when he's talking about this avalanche of numbers that was produced, but we have these single instances where numbers begin to be applied to people. You start getting the transference of actuarial and commercial logic onto—or the development of actuarial logic via the transference of commercial logic—onto social questions. And so ... you know, there's a way in which a lot of the history of statistics elides this large moment *where you have people being counted before they are human beings*. That's sort of one reason why I think it's important to focus on political arithmetic, which is sort of this overlooked discourse that's sort of appended to the beginning of political economy.

But as for the question of disorder, I think that's right, and that comes back to this idea of interpretation. And if you think especially about someone like William Petty, whose argument for political arithmetic is that you're using a system which doesn't involve communication, it doesn't involve rhetorical strategy to evaluate by weight or number or measure. So his goal with this entire sort of mode of political reason is to create a system that's ostensibly perfectly rational, that doesn't involve affect or rhetoric or persuasion. But it's really, really dubious because as Mary Poovey elucidates, that's a really rhetorical claim: to say that the numbers are value neutral and therefore they're argumentatively superior. And so to come back to Malthus because, yeah, Malthus is sort of bookending my project with Graunt, and I think that there is a connection between the two of them and I was sort of struck by this line in Rachel [Feder]'s paper—it's on 178—or this phrase—“Malthus simultaneously extracts and abstracts mathematics from real-world scenarios and sinks mathematics into human animality,” which I think really does capture... and Graunt's up to something similar. You know, with his case he's saying, “The bills of mortality aren't going to capture the reality of plague on the ground with total accuracy, but they're good enough; they provide us with a basis for doing calculations that enable us to assay the population, for instance.” And Malthus is doing something similar where he's sort of mapping this geometric/arithmetic dyad onto the situation of subsistence and saying, “Well, you're gonna have a population that's expanding faster than food infrastructure, you know, it can do, and that's a huge problem.” And I think that what's interesting in both of them—and particularly interesting about Graunt, who's, you know, working in the seventeenth century—is that he's able to identify a redundant labor population. So there's this moment where he reasons that it's actually more cost effective just to pay beggars to go away. Basically to get them out of the street, because, you know, working them or incorporating them into an extant labor structure just makes the labor less efficient. And so it's worth just sort of giving them a basic income that allows them to sort of recede. That's not a Malthusian take as a political strategy, obviously, but I think that identifying—the identification of sort of a surplus population in the seventeenth century—is really interesting on Graunt's part, and it does sort of take us back to Malthus. So that's what I'll say about that.

**Sarah Knott:** Lovely. It feels like the perfect moment, actually, to start talking about the non-enchanted numbers, actually; [inaudible] I think this is the panel (to my mind) that most explicitly helps us answer the question, “What does the eighteenth century *teach us* about the digital humanities or about temptations of numbers in our present?” And it asks us to be more skeptical, perhaps, than any previous panel. So I actually wanted to pick up on the numbers talk in the eighteenth century in Justin's work, because those are the ob-

vious records we have—right?—for thinking about the eighteenth century. And I wondered if... —I wanted to think about the ways in which the social history of slavery, right?—a social history that is grounded in eighteenth-century slave narratives and early 1930s WPA narratives—so social history of slavery to speak back to both the records that you are critiquing and the contemporary stance that you have adopted to critique. Right? So it's can you use them both to speak to those records and your stance of critique for the present day? To be more concrete about that: those wonderful tables—wonderful?!—those *astounding* tables of increase and decrease, you describe as being about reproduction, right, and that seems right—I mean, it seems to echo our understanding that slavery was about production and reproduction and about assets, right, which is shown in these sources. But I think part of what those records elide are the many other forms of care that were sustaining these slave communities, right? So a social history of slavery might ask us to think not just about birthing and not smothering your child, right (in that one amazing image you showed us), but also healing practices, right, and all the women on estate plantations taking care of the children, raising those children who've been birthed. And so I think there's a way in which you can use that social history literature to talk back to these records even more powerfully than you already do. And then the second part of that would be to observe that in some ways the analogy you draw out between the planters' failures to individuate their slaves and their propensity for describing their slaves as these organic masses, part of what that misses is an interim conceptualization that at least these slaves had, which was the enormous importance of families, right? And that social history literature would say "How do these slaves want to narrate themselves? They want to narrate themselves as parts of families that were torn apart, right, torn apart in West Africa or torn apart by being treated like assets, and that individuation itself was a problem, right, that the individuation is the move of the slave owner." So there you go.

**Roberts:** Yeah, that's interesting, and there's so much to say there. I feel like I could talk for a good half an hour on this, but I'll start with the social history of slavery. And one of my colleagues said to me recently—she's a twentieth-century Canadian women's historian—and she said "It strikes me that every time I see you talking about slavery and the people I see you bring here to speak: they're obsessed with the details and the numbers and exactly, you know, the size of slave houses and how much they're eating and exactly how much they're working." There's something about the history of slavery that's still very connected and deeply entrenched in—cliometrics is one way it's been described—it's deeply entrenched in the kinds of social history we were discussing yesterday. That 1970s social that hasn't left slavery entirely, particularly in the Caribbean context. I think it's almost being reinvigorated a little bit with this "new history of capitalism" in the nineteenth century U.S., where people are beginning to use those kinds of numbers again... And a different, a different "semantic" approach: they're more, they're emphasizing more sort of violence and exploitation, but they're still using those numbers, and uncritically in a lot of ways we see, you know, and I guess part of the problem is that when it comes particularly to the Caribbean, the slaves themselves leave no records. There's not a single surviving firsthand account from a slave on a sugar plantation anywhere. At all. There are seven surviving accounts of slaves from the Middle Passage. And so on some level in order to understand *their* experiences we are forced to move beyond these rare and individual slave narratives that we might see from the nineteenth cen-

tury or those very problematic set of 1930s WPA records—and particularly in the Caribbean context we can't use those at all—and we have to ask these kinds of questions: “All right, what is the standard experience for these people?” And we have to make those really speculative leaps that almost require different standards of evidence in the history of slavery: if you want to uncover the history of these people you have to start imagining them on the ground. And I think one of the most productive and interesting elements maybe—hopefully—in all of this is that there's been an interdisciplinary merging of archaeology and history in the Caribbean context. So historical archaeology has become very important in the study of slavery, to try to get at slave experience. But of course again we can't really ask those really interesting cultural history questions. It almost seems like we're *mired* in a social history and we can't move beyond that for these people. And what we're left with of course is this really troubling problem that if we want to understand slavery at all, we have no choice but to go to plantation owners. If we want to understand the sort of the experience of these people, because that's the only records we see surviving—maybe some travellers' accounts, but no one really seems to pay any attention, until slavery starts getting critiqued at the end of the eighteenth century and then you get reform-minded people coming in and paying attention. But for the earlier period in particular we have virtually nothing. One of my colleagues was pointing out to me recently this sort of passing observation published in the *AHR* by Jack Crowley about how there were no eighteenth-century *visual* depictions of slaves working on plantations.<sup>1</sup> None! It's completely effaced; no one paid any attention to this. It's only in the nineteenth century, post-abolition, you start seeing some of that. So there's some interesting problems there, [and] I'm not sure what to do about it. Does that answer some of your questions there? Was there something—

**Knott:** It does... Although I just think that there are other parts of scholarship that you can use to thicken your critique—the critique is nail on, no one's going to dispute with you that these are dehumanizing documents—but it seems like there are many points of access that might help you hone and demarcate what these records are and are not.

**Roberts:** Right. Right. And as far as your comments about healing practices and other ways to sort of encourage reproduction, I think there's this interesting convergence at the end of the eighteenth century of slave values and planter values that you don't see before then. Because at the end of the eighteenth century the planters become very interested in keeping children alive and having slaves reproduce and the biggest part of that is because the price of slaves rises so rapidly at the end of the eighteenth century, there's a specific point that economic histories identify at which it becomes cheaper to raise a child than to simply buy a slave. And at that point you do start seeing a lot more emphasis on amelioration, and so you see pro-natal strategies and so on; that's when there's a real attention to trying to keep these populations alive and to, for example, exempt enslaved doctoresses or nurses from other kinds of labor. So as I'm looking through plantation records I'll see someone whose task or whose job is to be a doctress, and it's this tantalizing little reference and you think, “Oh, well this is remarkable because they don't have necessarily a productive role anymore.” Their role year round is to treat other slaves and I don't see

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Crowley, “Sugar Machines: Picturing Industrialized Slavery,” *American Historical Review* 121:2 (2016), 403-436.

that in the records earlier... so there's something going on there that's really interesting in terms of production. And say the other point of this—and I said this to a colleague of mine recently—“You know, there's some historiography of ameliorations.” She said, “Well, some of this might have worked because the slave population decline isn't so rapid at the end of the eighteenth-century, so there may be some efforts on the part of planters.” And I increasingly think that's a lot of horse shit because I think maybe what's going on is slaves themselves are learning their own survival strategies. They're becoming a Creole-ized population. They're building networks on the ground; they're developing knowledge for keeping themselves and their families alive increasingly in this context, and we don't give enough credit to that. So we talk about the agency of the enslaved [and] I think that's what we're seeing. And it's an agency that supports the planters' goals of amelioration, but we're not paying attention to it, and I actually think that feeds into productivity levels as well. So Trevor Burnard and I are going to be co-authoring a paper on this, and one of the things we want to talk about is how there's an increase in productivity over the course of the eighteenth century in slave plantations, and one of the things that's going on isn't necessarily increased violence; there are other measures at play, one being these technologies of surveillance. But another is that this Creole-ized, enslaved populations are becoming more productive workers... for whatever reason. And that might mean that they themselves are learning how to improve their own health to be able to produce more each day, or they're not becoming sick quite as often or—there might be some aspect of that... But I don't necessarily think it's planter-driven; I think it's coming from the ground up, and I'm not sure what to say about that. We're sort of working on the early stages of a project like that, yeah. Does that answer your question?

**Nick Valvo:** I have a hook. To speak slightly embarrassingly in my own name a little bit, I'm wondering... You mention this very striking vocabulary of amity, of like amity and so on in planters talking about their slaves with their employees, managers... And I wonder, we tell this story—and of course Chris Brown's book is so important on this—we tell this story about sentimental anti-slavery, but it's always important to remember that there's also a sentimental pro-slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. And that there's this way that I feel like—and again, to slightly embarrassingly speak in my own name—that the account of sentiment (if I'm right about sentimentalism and it's about separating, purifying the humane from the instrumental and thereby constituting them)... I'm wondering if there's something about appropriating this vocabulary of humanity for, you know, a pro-slavery project and [if] there's some sort of aesthetic interaction there that you could then see in like, I don't know, a plantation novel from the 1840s or something that... I don't know, I've never read all that stuff, but I know it's there. I don't know anything about that.

**Roberts:** Yeah, I think you're right, and one of the things that's always struck me about this is that they're using the same Enlightenment language that the anti-slavery reformers do at a later point. So—and Christa Dierksheide has written a really interesting book about this recently where she says, “Look, this whole notion of ameliorating and reforming slavery, it has anti-slavery and pro-slavery wings, but they all have the same intellec-

tual roots and intellectual origins.”<sup>2</sup> And so all of these people think they’re somehow improving humanity and the question is how does that improve humanity (by maintaining slavery and keeping hierarchy and maintaining discipline, if that’s the route to improving humanity)... Because at the heart of the Enlightenment is this emphasis on discipline and on how the unenlightened will never be enlightened without discipline and keeping them under wraps... You know, so there is a sort of deep hierarchy behind this. So I think you’re right, I think that’s there, and one of the things that struck me when I tried to do more of my own work is that that’s there for Caribbean planters before the anti-slavery movement really takes off and it’s something they’re developing independently.

**Valvo:** So maybe the appropriation would be from them?

**Roberts:** Yeah, yeah, that’s one of the things I’ve wondered. So I argue in my own work that what they have is they have in the 1740s and ’50s an improvement movement that’s about improving the entire plantation, including the livestock, the people, the productivity... everything. And they’re convinced that moral, social, and economic improvement are all one and the same, that that’s the key to keeping these people disciplined and civilized and they’re rationalizing slavery as keeping them working, and that can be done morally. And they keep saying in all their plantation manuals, “Humanity is not inconsistent with discipline. Humanity is the route to profit.” And so there’s something going on there. And then what happens is when the anti-slavery activists come in (in the 1770s and 1780s), that amelioration talk is transformed and instead of being about the improvement of the plantation as a complete, organic structure it becomes about the reproduction of slaves. Yeah.

**Seiler-Smith:** John?

**John Han:** Yeah, so I fear that I’m going to do the sort of “How does  $x$  have an impact on  $y$ ?” thing—and in mathematical terms, which makes it far worse— ... But through all the three papers it seems like the concepts “limit,” “infinity,” and “tipping point” seem to be lurking around in there somewhere and just in a purely mathematical vein. And I thought Ryan’s paper—I really enjoyed the paper—the line where you talked about how numbers have a descriptive value that words do not... I’m wondering the extent to which you’re all talking about the *failures* of number, and maybe a different way to talk about it instead of arithmetic is ... instead of geometry, calculus. Like, the limit as  $x$  approaches—and this is to borrow your [Feder’s] term—infinity. I got that, I don’t remember the fucking derivative equation.. but it seems like by using that kind of metric, that kind of system it creates a way to narrativize numbers, right? It’s kind of like the graphs you [Roberts] see. It’s not numbers on tables like that you show in your weird sort of charts... And in terms of infinity I’m just wondering the way that—at this particular moment, it’s all talking about crowd control, and the only mathematical way that I can see to come to grips with it is not arithmetic/geometric but rates of change, right? It’s that asymptote and that tells a story. Like, when you saw all those various graphs and the next thing, it narrativized—like, numbers can be narrativized with the existence of this imaginary number

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<sup>2</sup> Christa Dierksheide, *Amelioration and Empire: Progress and Slavery in the Plantation Americas* (University of Virginia Press, 2014).



that we call infinity that allows numbers to have some sort of semantic structure, theoretically.

**Feder:** Yeah, totally. And that is how, I think that's exactly right. But it's also important to remember that in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, calculus has a very different status than it has now. So one thing that I talk about very early on in the book is this idea of "the fluxion" that you have in the calculus, which is this placeholder. So later, you know, late in the nineteenth century once you have a stable mathematical definition of infinity, then you can take this sort of idea of fluxions out and have things go to zero and other things go towards infinity. So when one thing approaches... You need infinity to get to zero. So when one thing approaches infinity as its limit and the other thing will kind of follow it, it will become relatively accurate. But before you get that, before it gets built... so calculus is kind of like the castle in the clouds and then with mathematical analysis they're building the foundation all the way up to the castle. ... (You know, it's late afternoon, that's a terrible visual; but...) So until you have kind of the development of the analysis you have sort of instead ... you have these things called fluxions, which are things that can kind of just "flux out." And, attacking Newton shortly after his death, Berkeley calls these "ghosts of departed quantities." He did not like them. I think though... So my answer is not an answer exactly to your bigger question, but this idea of limits that we have now is a very different proposition and sort of category.

**Sheldon:** I mean, so one thing that I want to sort of... to think about especially in the late seventeenth century context is kind of—I think it's a direct quote from your introduction to the Workshop, Rebecca —"to talk of numbers is to talk of signs," and thinking about the significations of numbers in the seventeenth century is really weird and really difficult. And this is another one of Poovey's great arguments is sort of historicizing the emergence of numbers as recognizable cultural artifact, not just for mathematicians. And it's something that comes about through the innovation of double-entry bookkeeping. And so before that you have numbers which are associated with things like necromancy and are greeted with tremendous superstition. And so one of the things that's interesting to me about Graunt and his account and the moment of his account is there's this sort of transitional period where numbers are beginning to be sort of normalized as a mode of representation, but it's also a moment in which most people don't understand them, and, yeah, most people are not proficient in basic arithmetic. And you have the production of textbooks, which are designed to help you do this, but they work based on examples. And so you get people who, you know, can do a particular problem that they've practiced, you know, ten times or whatever, but they don't understand the principles. So if you are not a mathematician and you're not a merchant the odds that you understand this are very limited. And so one of the things that's interesting to me, and this comes through Pepys [and] I think it comes through in Defoe and he sort of plays with it strategically is the way in which numbers are supposed to be and are sort of culturally understood to be, you know, translucent in that they represent an account effectively, but they're also sort of, you know, at a very visceral level kind of opaque.

And so you have, I think, in the *Journal of a Plague Year* and in Graunt's account of what the bills of mortality do for most readers, a kind of, yeah, a sort of unstable semiotic force to number. They work as signs; they don't necessarily convey information in per-

fectly comprehensible terms for most people even though they're supposed to be doing that, because they're so integral to this accounting system that has theoretically made bookkeeping possible, even if most of that is performative.

**Han:** Right, and I think that—and I don't mean to historicize calculus into your account—the chart, the inset of mortality, like, at one point you talk about how he lowballs the numbers, like, “Well, it's good enough that it's this amount to get the effect of response.” And that seems to be a moment where it's like, it's more the area, it's more the rate of change than the geometric line that can be a little bit fuzzier, abstract.

**Sheldon:** Yeah. It's like you're looking at a curve, right? Yeah, even if you can't calculate the derivative at a particular moment. Yeah, so for Defoe it's his—or rather, for H.F., Defoe's narrator—the line is like, “The official statistical record is always lowballing me and because I know there's this problem with the composition of the bills I can provide a *reasonable* estimate. Right, I can use reason to adjust the number.” So it's not necessarily mathematical, but it's this point where you sort of apply reason to this new emergent vocabulary. So yeah, calculus is sort of a nice way of thinking about that. But yeah, Rachel, as someone who actually understands calculus, I don't.

**Feder:** But you don't have to understand calculus in this period because calculus is an unfounded theory. That's what they think in the period. It worked.

**Richard Nash:** Can I hook onto that? Because there's no stronger Whig history than the history of mathematics and especially this history of calculus. And I just want to say that—and I don't argue this too heavily because I know he's a very small figure about whom I have way too much investment—but the companion to *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* would be *The Mathematical Principles of Christian Theology*, the second half of which is on quantifying uniform pleasure infinitely increasing. It's about quantifying the infinite and [its author John] Craige additionally wrote for his cousin George Cheyne the second half of *his* book, which is explicitly on comparing infinities.<sup>3</sup> And there was a discourse surrounding Newton, among Newtonians of those who were attempting to deal with the question of how you can arithmetize the concept of infinity prior to the set theoretical notions and the limit theory that comes later that makes Cantor work. And so there is a discourse there... but it tends to always get erased as “Berkeley dismisses the concept of infinity and then we have to wait for Cantor,” but there is a tradition in the eighteenth century that I think would be worth recovering.

**Feder:** That's what my book is doing, so that makes me really happy to hear. Yeah, I call that “infinity discourse,” and I think that while we have a really strong investment in intellectual history—and maybe this goes back to your comment about questioning number and questioning math and the sort of patina of objectivity—we tend to lose mathematical history because, from the perspective of mathematics, mathematics is real and true and pure, and so calculus was real even though we didn't know why it worked. Right? The fluxion theory kind of placeholder: Newton never tried to prove that that was mathemati-

<sup>3</sup> *The Philosophical Principles of Religion Natural and Revealed*, 1705 (Part I) and 1715 (Part II).

cally sound. He knew it wasn't mathematically sound. It was a placeholder notion that did the work that infinity would do in the calculus when later people figured it out. Right? So there's this kind of "evolution of knowledge about mathematics" idea in mathematical history that kind of takes as axiomatic that math is of the world. Right? It's real; it's of the universe. And so the various sort of interactions of these debates got erased. But for me, from my perspective as a Romanticist it's incredibly important to recover infinity discourse, to recover this discourse field, because it's still all too common to think about something like the Romantic sublime as sort of this rupture or eruption that pushes back against the objectivity of Enlightenment thought. When in fact various formulations of the Romantic sublime are just sort of the latest incursions into infinity at this point.

**Seiler-Smith:** I have Mary, then Brad, and ... is it Mike?

**Mark Vareschi:** Mark.

**Seiler-Smith:** Mark. Mary?

**Mary Favret:** I think I have a question for the panel, but before that I just want to ask Justin about the Humane Society. I just think the humane treatment of slaves might be like the humane treatment of animals, you know, that there's no discontinuity between that notion that we're treating our animals to mainly atone for our sins. I'm just wondering when that understanding of the treatment of animals as a humane practice emerged?

**Roberts:** They're concurrent. Well, they're not quite concurrent, but they're close.

**Favret:** Yeah, so in that sense ... it's not surprising at all to hear them talking about the humane treatment of slaves as they treat their pets and livestock "humanely."

**Roberts:** Yeah. It is... once you start really getting into the records and start seeing these planters trying to figure out how little food they can feed their slaves and how much they can keep them working, you get down to the plantation level and realize how often these slaves are being raped and abused and beaten and families being sold apart. Just this disjunct for me is so remarkable, and I don't think it's even just me coming from a modern liberal perspective, but I think it's a disjunct they would have seen. I think part of what's going on is that these plantation managers are distanced from their own slaves and it's very easy to start talking about, "I'm a humane and benevolent manager." These owners are increasingly absentee; they're writing from Britain to their managers, although what's interesting about that is Genovese's old argument about paternalist ideology for slavery stories insists that the whole rise of paternalist ideology for slaves—to be more benevolent to slaves and stress reciprocal obligation between slaves and masters is predicated on a close relationship—that that's what causes it. That when masters are around their slaves all the time they see the humanity of their slaves and thus become more paternalist. And I decided that's horse shit. I think what we're seeing here is a very interesting Caribbean variant where the greater the distance the more they'll talk about these concepts.

**Favret:** Yeah. But my question for the panel—and I think this goes back to Rachel’s initial remarks that there’s an assumption that numbers are necessarily dehumanizing, abstracting, blah blah blah—and I’m wondering if maybe we’re too quick to go there and if there aren’t moments when (rhetorically and otherwise) numbers actually are quite effective in humanizing or reminding us (or I should say “me”) of mortality. And so I go back to the Wordsworth and I’m glad to have an occasion to talk about meter because for a poet it’s not the same thing. When a poet starts talking about numbers, you can’t separate that from the particular mode that he’s wielding and he’s gonna call Poetry “writing in numbers.” Right? It is always magical to them. It is a form of measure and Wordsworth will theorize on this and there’s a way... So “The Mad Mother,” if you go look at the stanzas you’ll see it has a perfectly even meter. You know? So the numbers of that poem are absolutely regular, right, and tied to human breath. So we’re back to the *tactus*, you know, in a sense, from yesterday. So I think about that, and then I also think about when numbers are written as words (as opposed to given to us as numerals) right, and whether there isn’t a semantic difference between when numbers get mobilized one way or another. So it’s a general sort of question that, you know, maybe numbers aren’t so bad or evil? But also an invitation for you, Rachel, to think about how poetry has its own relationship to number that might impinge on just reading *about* numbers.

**Feder:** Yeah. Well, in counting systems... You know, in *The Lyrical Ballads* counting systems are really bad news, and sometimes counting systems are an incredibly powerful way to assert power in a world in which the figure lacks power. So I think that “We are Seven” is the best example.

**Favret:** “The Last of the Flock” too.

**Feder:** “The Last of the Flock,” yeah, absolutely. So in “We are Seven” you have the argument between the man who’s traveling and the rustic girl he encounters about how many kids there are: Are there five or are there seven? And she wins the argument. And so, yeah, I agree with you. I don’t think that numbers are inherently dangerous. I think they are valued. On their own they’re value-less... but by looking at the long eighteenth-century roots of the way we sort of categorize information, particularly in something like the digital humanities, I think we see that they are based on a smaller worldview. It’s a very broad, diverse time.

**Brad Pasanek:** She doesn’t win the argument; she distorts the last stanza. She gets a couplet in, right?

**Favret:** He’s just “throwing words away”—that’s what he says.

**Pasanek:** But you don’t get the valid sense that it’s just a couplet jammed in.

**Tim Campbell:** Does everybody know “We are Seven”? So five of them are alive and two of them are dead. Right? So she’s doing the columns but she’s also insisting on both the columns are actually one column. She’s not counting incorrectly; she’s classing them.

**Feder:** Right, yeah so I mean, in my book I think about sort of the ways in which the environmental humanities are looking at the Romantic or Romanticists as what my colleague calls “Enlightenment hangover,” right, revivifying the discourse of the person. In my reading of “We are Seven” in the book I think about it in terms of object-oriented ontology. And so those bodies are in the ground and so for the girl they’re still there, whereas for the man they’ve sort of become objects that are no longer people. And so it helps to do it ... when you’re counting you’re always thinking in categories.

**Favret:** But can I just say: When you say “the way we use numbers,” what if “we” are poets? The notion that we are all political economists and always, you know... So I’m just thinking about that “we,” and maybe some of us use numbers differently. Some of us aren’t always, you know—

**Nash:** “We are five plus two” scans differently than “we are seven.” [laughter]

**Favret:** Yeah, exactly. But I mean: I think it’s really important to recognize that there are other ways that numbers are alive and move us and, you know, can be....

**Michael Gavin:** Yeah, the idea that numbers are, like, objective? I don’t see how you can work with numbers and still sustain that as even a useful straw man.

**Nosh Powell:** Have you met any engineers?

**Spang:** [aside] Says the woman from Purdue.

**Gavin:** Why?

**Powell:** I have an answer; do you want me to answer? We’re having a battle at the graduate level of my school [Purdue] right now because we have done some good studies and we have data that suggests we need to raise the minimum TOEFL scores in a particular way for international students to guarantee that they come out of the graduate degree with job-ready skills. You know, essentially we had people who were coming in and don’t speak English and are not acquiring English over the course of their education and then, you know, graduate here and then speak no English. And we’re getting strong pushback from a particular engineering department who maintains that engineers don’t need words, they “math” at each other... And they’re very, very—I’m paraphrasing, she didn’t actually say “math at each other”—but this has been going on all year and they’re very set that, “No, it is not necessary.” Like, yes it is. So I would dispute that there are people who work with at numbers and think that that is its own objective language, in and of itself. Although... that’s not the hook I had, actually.

**Seiler-Smith:** But we have a hook on *that*....

**Bret Rothstein:** There’s a distinction that still gets struck among the engineers and mathematicians that I’ve met in the last few years and that comes from people like Pacioli and that’s the distinction between things that are invented and things that are discovered, and

for a lot of those people entities that we call numbers or numerical or mathematical are frequently qualified as “discovered”: they pre-exist the human observer and somehow are absolute. I mean, I see your point... but I think there are certain subcultures where the number is somehow objective.

**Seiler-Smith:** Interestingly enough, that’s the seventeenth-century definition of “objective.” To be “objective” is when something exists on its own in an external way, and that developed in the 1760s to 1830s to be what we now know to be sort of “objectivity” as something for sure.

**Powell:** I’m sorry to go backwards because I had one hook earlier that went to Mary [Favret]’s comment, and it’s just—this’ll be brief—I, because of the squirrel thing (which those of you who follow me on Twitter are aware of) I have some information at hand about the animal cruelty stuff which is [that] you’re essentially correct. You don’t start seeing organized pushes for, like, legislation until the 1770s and you don’t get any actual legislation ’til the 1820s, and at that point initially it’s really sporadic, the stuff we’ve seen in the eighteenth century, but initially it’s all about livestock. The first anti-cruelty act was Cruelty Against Cattle—Cruelty Against—Something Something Cattle Cruelty Act,<sup>4</sup> and then there’s one that follows in the 1830s about livestock more generally,<sup>5</sup> and you don’t even get to, you know, the Anti-Vivisection League starts picking up, and so you don’t start getting wide, right, anti-cruelty legislation until, like, in 1845<sup>6</sup> and then more powerful in the 1870s<sup>7</sup> and it carries on even later. But the legislation was very much about animals used for livestock and for scientific purposes. The idea of kind of, like, preventing cruelty to pets is just not there. And very rarely, at least in the eighteenth-century, do accounts of cruelty to animals focus on an individual pet. So they’ll kind of take us back to this issue of numbers; it’s more like the vast, you know, scores of cattle being mistreated [and] not, you know, Betsy’s squirrel being flung into the fireplace.<sup>8</sup>

**Favret:** Well, and just to say that “humane treatment” isn’t about treating the object as if it were human. Humane treatment is reassuring myself that I am human in my treatment of this creature.

**Roberts:** That’s interesting. There’s a thing in the plantation advice literature of the 1740s and 1750s you start seeing improving planters say, “Treat your cattle the same way you do your slaves.” So treat your slaves humanely, but treat your cattle just as, you know, kindly: don’t lash them, feed them well, give them rest and so on. And the comments will echo exactly what they just said about slaves. They’d begin with slaves and say, “Everything I said about slaves applies to the cattle too—do that.”

**Feder:** Can I jump back into a different part of Mary’s question? I was just thinking I should have said—I think I said in my head, but didn’t articulate—which is just that the

<sup>4</sup> The Act to Prevent the Cruel and Improper Treatment of Cattle, a.k.a. Martin's Act (1822).

<sup>5</sup> The Cruelty to Animals Act (1835).

<sup>6</sup> An Act for the More Effectual Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1849).

<sup>7</sup> An Act to Amend the Law relating to Cruelty to Animals (1876).

<sup>8</sup> See Eliza Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751).

poetic question to me... the book has become a book about *Lyrical Ballads* because ... because I think this is the first book of experimental poetry in the modern sense.

**Favret:** He says: “These are experiments.”

**Feder:** Yeah, so of course not to say that prior literature is not experimental, but yeah, the ways in which they’re kind of experimenting within the poems is very much part of the inquiry system.

**Vareschi:** I have, I hope, a teeny tiny question. It’s about Locke and infinity.

**Feder:** I can probably answer it.

**Vareschi:** So you suggested a parallel in the theory of infinity with Locke’s theory of identity, but of course the critique of that theory of identity has been that it’s finite. So we think of Thomas Reid’s “great soldier” paradox. So a boy’s whipped at school. He grows up to be this brave general who captures the flag. If he remembers being whipped he’s the same; if he forgets that he was whipped, he’s not. This is the paradox. ... So that suggests that there’s a way to understand Locke’s theory of identity as very finite, and in fact we could go back earlier in the essay to his account of memory, which is the basis for the Lockean theory of identity. It’s something that goes away, it’s, our memories are “laid in fading colours,” he says at one point,<sup>9</sup> and then he gestures at the possibility that amnesia upsets the entirety of the spirit of identity. So how do we get to infinity?

**Feder:** So, I mean, infinity—identity’s a thorny problem for Locke because you have to account for all sorts of things: talking parrots; what about when you’re drunk?; what if you’re in someone else’s dream?; what if you amputate a limb? You know, there are a lot of sort of caveats, right, to identity for Locke. So, I mean, I think that it’s a very messy, thorny topic, and I would never try to sum up exactly what Locke thinks identity is. There are two moments in the essay that I really wish I had in front of me that... I’ll try to sort of do them from memory, one that has to do with how you come to believe in infinity and then a sort of parallel sentence about how you come to believe in identity. And I think the latter is something like, “Identity of man consists in”—

**Vareschi:** “—in the continuity of the self-same thinking thing at”—

**Feder:** “—successively united to the same body.” Or something like that.

**Vareschi:** “different times and different places”; awareness of the same consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Chapt. X, Section 5

<sup>10</sup> Actual quote: “This being premised, to find wherein personal identity consists, we must consider what person stands for;— which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and, as it seems to me, essential to it: it being impossible for any one to perceive without perceiving that he does perceive.” Chapt XXVII, Section 9

**Feder:** And so this kind of maps onto, though, onto the way that Locke formulates infinity, which is to say, “You count, and then you realize you could keep counting, and then you realize you could keep counting, and then infinity kind of”—I don’t have the quote in front of me, but it sort of rises up for you as something you can’t—you can’t conceptualize it. You can’t hold the concept of infinity in your mind, but you can kind of believe in it—because of counting and because of your sense of counting. And so infinity is this thing you can’t grasp, you can’t fully conceptualize, but counting lets you sort of believe in or touch it. And the counting of the moments that you are yourself is in a different part of the *Essay* thinking about ... Locke; I wish I had Locke with me.

**Vareschi:** Oh, I have it handy if you .... [laughter]

**Favret:** ... strangely ominous tone!

**Pasaneck:** Locke’s in the *OED* under “infinity.” I was looking earlier, and it’s not that passage, but it’s the one “you think of yourself and then extend yourself in all ways, that’s how you can have an idea of God.”<sup>11</sup> So that’s the illustration the *OED* takes for “infinity.” We end up having the idea—I mean, he kind of gives it and takes it back, as an empiricist.

**Feder:** Right. And so I think the important thing is that there is no stable definition of infinity in theology, in mathematics, in philosophy. But people are kind of chewing on it and mulling it over, and it’s food for thought. And it’s as food for thought that these different sort of moments of formulating it or thinking about it are influential...

**Nick Paige:** This question is more, I guess, for Ryan and Justin. I just kind of wondering where in these various, in these alternate takes on, you know, on kind of biopolitical questions, how do people—how do you and people, you kind of intersect with, think about old man Foucault in all this? I mean, where—and I guess that ... other people could chime in too, I think—what do people think now about, about him? [Laughter]

**Sheldon:** I like old man Foucault.

**Roberts:** I think in my own field it’s become hackneyed to cite him; I don’t see it anymore. In fact, I’ve had friends of mine who’ve done dissertations and been told by others to take it out for the books, so—

**Nash:** That’s always been true. [Laughter]

**Paige:** So you don’t feel then—

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<sup>11</sup> This appears to be a merging of two quotes from Locke’s *Essay*. The first, cited in the *OED* under “infinity” reads: “It is Infinity, which, joined to our Ideas of Existence, Power, Knowledge, &c. makes that complex Idea, whereby we represent to our selves the best we can, the supreme Being.” (II.XXIII.148). The second, “as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that Person” (II.XXVII.9).



**Roberts:** I mean, I cite him...

**Paige:** —You don't feel that there's, you don't feel that your field... Is it just that you don't put your questions in the same way that Foucault used to put them? I don't ... or is it because you've already kind of internalized...? It's like, accepted? What—or is it a way in which it's not satisfactory? His paradigm is not satisfactory?

**Roberts:** I'll answer this a couple of different ways. One is my own—and again, I cite Foucault—one is my own sense that history is increasingly, at least among slavery specialists, becoming a kind of anti-theoretical discipline. We're not resorting to theorists to explain phenomena; they're focusing on sources as much as possible. And that seems to be the trend, the fashion. I don't know why. And my second answer might be, "Yeah, perhaps we've internalized the ideas to such an extent that we no longer are." That's my sense.

**Sheldon:** Yeah, so to sort of speak in Foucault's defense: I like him. The thing is that, and I tried, this is the only time I've mentioned biopolitics. Like, in the chapter that is about three times the size of this paper I only biopolitics the once, and I think that's because biopolitics is a very useful framework but it's also a very overused framework, and it's so capacious, and if you want to sort of think about biopolitics on its own terms you need to think about Foucault's legacy and then, like, Agamben is probably especially—you know, like if you're thinking about something like the plantation or the colonies it's probably more useful to talk about Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics*, for instance. But one of the things that I like about Foucault is I like Foucault's structures of thinking. I think that he is probably, he is much more willing, in a way that someone like Ian Hacking is, to foreground the nineteenth century when discussing biopolitics, and so the things I don't like about his work on it mostly have to do with ignoring what I think is, if a less visible, you know, a similarly robust and alarming tradition of trying to create infrastructures for categorizing and managing life based on those categories. So Hacking's notion (and I'll associate them) that "counting is hungry for categories" I think actually maps onto the eighteenth century and the seventeenth century much better than they might think about it. So I think... yeah. Also, Foucaultian governmentality is still a useful way for thinking about the emergence of something like political arithmetic rationality. You know, the moment where Graunt sort of goes further than Bacon and sort of contests, you know, what I'm thinking of as sort of a Hobbesian typology of the state and starts talking about learning the natural laws of population so as to enable a sovereign to manage and to rule rather than super-overthinking the sovereign authority, I think, is interesting and a critical moment that Foucault's work on governmentality still illustrates or articulates very well.

**Rob Schneider:** Just briefly: I mean, I think it goes back to Sarah's point that Foucault—but I think also someone who's a very powerful figure but less subtle than Foucault, which is James Scott, in *Seeing Like a State*—all of those I think really tell us something very useful and to me very convincing, but it's set around a view of reality, which itself can be mistaken. It's so convincing that we could sometimes mistake that ascription of a

utilitarian or instrumentalist sense of knowledge as what's actually happening on the ground. And I think we have to combine that with another perspective (perhaps "bottom up"), working with the context to see what in fact the real contours were that those perspectives are trying to homogenize. And I think that's... I think you're right: we've internalized Foucault to the point where we can sort of go "under" him in a way and see what the dynamic is between that prism, that homogenizing description, and what the dynamics were as social forces and the rest were impinging upon it and reacting against it.

**Seiler-Smith:** I'll hook on that and say I have undergraduate training as a psychologist, actually, and I often compare my experiences with Foucault in my graduate career to my experience of Freud in my [undergraduate] Psychology Department. In that... practicing psychologists tend to appreciate and understand sort of Freudian notions of the unconscious and of structured therapy, right, as something that they ultimately owe and still subscribe to, believe in, with Freud. But other ways in which Freud operates are largely rejected by psychologists until the odd patient comes in who actually has an oral fixation. I worked with a clinical psychologist who said that this girl came in and she was like, "She literally had oral fixation in the classic Freudian sense, and my mind was blown" because of course they really don't think about it in these terms anymore. I think that with Foucault it tends to be the case where we sort of acknowledge that what he did was usher in a certain set of questions which we are now ever sharpening, but I'll admit that when I started at least writing my dissertation prospectus, Foucault was everywhere. Foucault fo' sho', right? He was everywhere, and then by the end he's really almost... I mean, he's not "a footnote," but he's essentially a footnote because what was so much more interesting was the way in which the seventeenth and eighteenth century actually talked about this stuff (as opposed to the terms that he gave it). So whereas Freud gave term to the "unconscious," before Freud how they thought about the mind was also interesting. Right? It had its own textures. And so I think what we like to do is maybe groove in the textures a little more than what Foucault does even as we acknowledge some of the sort of meta-usefulness of what he's doing.

**Roberts:** I'd like to add a layer to that as well, and I think you've articulated much better than what I've said what the issue is here, but I think also among slavery scholars is there's a real effort to make what we're writing more accessible to a general public, whatever that means. And so making it accessible means not including this kind of theoretical language. So a lot of prominent works on slavery—think of something like Edward Baptist's recent book—they're not just being marketed to scholars, they're being marketed to the general public, so they do not include theoretical discourse.

**Powell:** I'm interested in how curiously ungendered the discussion has been so far, particularly since maternity or reproduction is a major topic in all three papers and certainly present in, you know, *Plague Year*; he has that funny comment about, "Well, how do you tell if it's an abortion or a stillborn?" "I dunno." And I think I'm just going to be really general about this, but I would like to hear kind of more about it because it does seem like there's some sort of pseudo-Aristotelian connection between these vagaries of the infinite and the problem of paternity that Wordsworth is working through (not very well in my humble opinion?). What's the statistic? Through most of the eighteenth century, one

in eight women died of childbirth or its complications. That's a fucking plague right there—but it's not talked about that way and those numbers are not charted that way; it's just a thing that happens. I don't want to be too *Handmaid's Tale* here, but it does seem to me sometimes [that] it becomes a plague when men are dying; or it becomes a plague when so many women are dying that you can't keep up the labor force. Or, you know, there's so many men missing that you can't inseminate the women (but you have to be missing a lot of them before that happens). So given the way that this is kind of all turning around this odd axle of reproduction, I just would sort of like to hear more about numbers and gender because they're, you know, numbers are not objective; they're not objective. And, of course, Swift for me is really present in all these discussions without being brought up.

**Feder:** So something that's kind of in this key is ... So my committee kind of read through and picked up a promise that I put it in there about a side project on Mary Shelley and motherhood as monstrosity in feminist theory. So I was working on those two projects simultaneously for a long time and then [I needed to finish the side project first because of the 2018 *Frankenstein* bicentennial] So, I have a really strong interest in motherhood .... And that's sort of coming out in my reading of all the—I mean, I'm not the first person to think about motherhood in *Lyrical Ballads*. I mean, it's a pretty standard thing... But that's become this kind of obsession that is definitely influencing my reading, so I think bringing in Wollstonecraft here... I mentioned before that I kind of got around that. So I, my Malthus problem is not just for me; it's also for Romantic poets not really liking Malthus, and I didn't just triangulate three contemporary scholars—Poovey, Ferguson, and McLane—but I also kind of bring in Wollstonecraft as opposed to Godwin as the way to kind of get out of the matrix. So ... This isn't an answer to your question exactly, but just to say that “yeah, I'm on the same page” in terms of I guess the connection, I guess what I want to say is that in writing this motherhood-and-Mary-Shelley project the thing that really stands out for me is the false distinction that we make between intellectual and bodily history. And to cite something that my advisor once said on a panel—so Marjorie Levinson was on a pedagogy panel and she said, “The body is a mind mechanism.” And that really kind of stuck with me as—so, okay, so to me that sort of sum of the feminist practice comes in, is in thinking about: there's not such a clear distinction for me between the intellectual history and the history of being a person in a body. And I think maybe, Justin, I want to kick that question over to you.

**Roberts:** Well, I have a lot of interesting things here. I'd like to start with the gender question for the moment. There are so many different ways that you can come at this; I talk more about this in my book. But if we're going to talk about (objectively or empirically) the health and the mortality rates, morbidity and mortality rates on sugar plantations... Sort of an interesting aside: in general I work with this stuff and women live longer than men on sugar plantations.

**Powell:** Women live longer than men in most cases.

**Roberts:** But there's an enormous number of women dying in childbirth—enormous. And I actually think that's the leading cause of death in enslavement particularly.... So

we look at this sort of classic age pairing, you see the sort of thinning out in the 20s and 30s of women and the sort of ballooning out again in the 40s and 50s and 60s and men just steadily petering out. So it's sort of fascinating to me and yet, you know, the planters desperately want to bring in male slaves, are always trying to bring in male slaves, until this amelioration movement comes into play. And the vast majority of women labor in fields; the vast majority of slaves who labor in fields are women. Sixty to sixty-five percent of any field gangs are women. Men do all the supervisory work, and men do all the skilled—even the male slaves, so there's sort of hierarchies there. I talk in my—

**Powell:** I grew up on a working farm and when we were hiring farmhands, if you can get them, my parents' preference was always for teenage women because they couldn't, you know, lift as much, but they could work harder, longer hours without complaining (versus teenage males).

**Roberts:** Yeah. You know it's funny, I remember saying to my supervisor once, I said, "So outside of childbearing years, how is it these women are surviving this experience?" She says, "Well, women are just tougher than men; that's what it is." And there's one scholar who actually argues that maybe part of the reason is is [*sic*] that men and women are fed the exact same amount of food, but women have lower caloric requirements.

**Gavin:** Are other...are a lot of other—are other men killing each other? Are they fighting?

**Roberts:** Oh, are the men fighting and killing each other? So I've written about this in a different context, about the enormous amount of violence within the slave community. And so men are killing each other; women are killing each other; families are killing each other. There's just this tremendous amount of violence, and there's a recent book on the nineteenth century that's come out, it's award-winning, about plantation violence as well and so you do see a lot of that. And sort of one more interesting aside: When I was talking about the sort of humanitarian reconceptualizations of the master-slave relationship, one of the things I was puzzled by a lot was despite the fact [that] the vast majority of people in the field are women, what I find always tough in the master-slave relationship is they [planters] always use "him." You know? So "treat him well." So it's conceptualizing a male slave in a master-slave relationship, and I'm just fascinated.

**Seiler-Smith:** There's a Rebecca "hook" and a Jesse "hook"...

**Spang:** So when Rachel [Feder] made her point about not strictly distinguishing intellectual and bodily history, I was reminded of Bret's comments about the relation between sensation and number, and then quite fortuitously I came to a passage in Rousseau's *Emile* in which he says, "Comparative ideas, great or smaller, like number ideas, one, two, *et cetera*, are not—are certainly not—sensations, but my mind only produces them when my sensations occur." So you've got to be sensing something in order then to count it or to say that one is bigger or smaller than the other.

**Feder:** And in your opening remarks to the Workshop you called counting “multi-sensory.”

**Seiler-Smith:** Well it’s really empirical.

**Jesse Molesworth:** To Nush’s comment, the gendering of risk was actually something that became important to me as I was writing my book on chance. And that’s, you know, something that [Lady Mary Wortley] Montagu acknowledges very strongly. That is to say that the risk of smallpox is much greater to a woman because, you know—men and women have an equal risk of getting it, but a woman sacrifices her beauty which makes her unmarriageable.

**Powell:** And even her racial identity.

**Molesworth:** I actually, she, if you look at Montagu’s letters, she modifies Pascal’s Wager when describing the marriage market and introduces this category of “limbo,” you know, which is between infinite sadness and infinite happiness to describe a kind of marriage that’s “ehhhh.” It’s this gendering of Pascal’s Wager which, Rachel [Feder]... I think there needs to be an important intellectual component for your project as well, Pascal’s Wager. But, you know, Montagu herself is very interested in the gendering of risk and of the universal.

**Feder:** Yeah, that’s good.

**Roberts:** If I can make one sort of final, quick comment on the issue of gender, I describe in my paper that every sugar plantation had a group of “inefficient slaves.” That’s what they were described as over and over again. I’ve seen the slave inventories; they’re 95% women. Most of the women are in their 40s; I imagine it’s women who’ve suffered through childbirth [and] have been damaged somehow. They’re just described as “inefficient,” “inefficient slaves” in general.

**Sheldon:** One more comment on gender: Just to answer your question on *Journal of a Plague Year*, I mean there is actually a very specific and interesting answer, and it’s probably not the one most people expect, but it has to do with the composition of the bills of mortality and the gendered labor that goes into them. So the people who do the searching and the identification of the bodies are always women. Yeah, so Paula McDowell has written about the way that there’s this oral component to the knowledge-making process that’s discounted or marginalized.<sup>12</sup> Right? That’s the part where all of the uncertainty is; it’s in the identification of the cause of death. And so it’s gendered labor that’s producing a kind of gendered knowledge that then becomes the sort of constructed or incorporated uncertainty. And then yeah, I mean... so this is something I haven’t really sort of figured out how to reckon with, and it’s sort of a strike against the project, I think... but, right, there’s this sort of, this problem seems to demand this sort of deep labor history going back, you know, 350 years, and that’s something I don’t know how to do. Right? That’s

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<sup>12</sup> Paula McDowell, *Print Commerce and Fugitive Voices in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

not in my training. Right? I don't know if it's possible to do that, but that's sort of like this interesting sort of like alarming labor problem that's built into the whole process. And then you have this question that's an epistemological problem, epistemological bias.

**Seiler-Smith:** Well, in both the actual, like, seventeenth-century plague texts that Defoe is borrowing from—like the orders and instructions that he cites as well—it's not just women, but they particularly seek out elderly, poor women and poor people in general—vagrants, etc.—because they don't want to get close to the disease. Right? So they particularly employ people who are otherwise (outside of plague) the unemployable. So these people stay in the city and they have... they're incentivized to stay, so that they [elites] can actually manage plague at a distance while they employ these people. I mean, it's essentially in many ways the same way in which caretaking now is gendered, racialized, and classed. Right? And they utterly exploited these people, which Defoe points out with much... he's not very happy about that. But also, it's putting the most vulnerable at risk while extracting—I mean, the king was, like, over in Oxford. Right? “I'm here with you in body and spirit” is what he said. You know, “The king has two bodies and my *other* body is with you.” [laughter] So yeah, absolutely there's also a classed element to that as well.

**Tracey Hutchings-Goetz:** So I want to ask a kind of rather broad formalist question, sort of inspired by what Mary [Favret] asked earlier about poetry and number, and it's to just sort of invite the three of you to speak about the relationship of narrative to number in your primary sources—because I think you see kind of different things going on. So if you look at the kind of slave accounts, right, you have number and narrative put kind of literally in separate columns. Right? This slave is counted as one, but we have this little story about, you know, she smothered her baby to death. Right? But I think we also have a much more complicated thing going on in *Journal of a Plague Year*. Right? Is number belying narrative? Is it inspiring narrative? Is it displacing narrative? So I would love to hear the three of you talk about that as a way of bringing together all of the texts that we are discussing now.

**Sheldon:** Yeah, I'll take this step because I think that one of the things that's really interesting about *Journal of a Plague Year* is that you get this sort of metanarrative of textual accumulation in the way that the bills sort of accrete. And as that record develops it sort of works as a self-producing context, and it's one that Defoe can use to make these conjectural revisions and so to establish a superior narrative of plague mortality. To say that, you know: “This bill wasn't right. This is how many people must have died.” And he can sort of keep doing this again and that's sort of, so I think that numbers actually, they're what enable the narrative to function in this text, and that's sort of how I think about the sort of, the ambivalent status of number in the novel. Right? Because you have a narrator who's ostensibly so skeptical and so hostile to these numbers but he keeps repeating them and reproducing them in the book all the way through. And yeah, so in that way you get a narrative about textual production and you also get textual production that's enabling the narrative to function and to sort of become coherent because as you were saying earlier it is very disordered. Right? It's a confusing book to read in a sort of... you know, it makes it sort of impossible to locate where we are in the city, but the numbers also help with

that. Right? You get to see the plague as it's moving not only through time but through space, you know, when it's going from one parish to the next.

**Roberts:** I'm often struck when I read through these "increase and decrease" accounts (because I've read through more than I probably will ever want to remember) that the descriptions (these narrative accounts)... two things: one, they're never mentioned in plantation management account records; it's only the number, so I've never understood why they're there. There's no reference to them. I mean, it's "Six slaves died and five were born, so maybe we'll buy more in a couple of years," but you never see the owner or the manager referencing the specific story as to what's happened *unless* there's a plague happening of some sort. You'll notice there's a whole bunch of slaves dying of "the gnaws." They'll say something like that. And then what strikes me about their explanations of death is they elide what's really going on. Right? They're fictitious. It's remarkable. You know, you don't see "the slave died after being beaten to death," or "this slave died for whatever reason; they're ill because they've been underfed." You know? "The mother has rolled over on her baby because you're working her around the clock and she's exhausted" and, you know, et cetera, et cetera. I can imagine all sorts of other circumstances. There are really interesting sort of issues with that, and that way they're almost even more problematic to me than the numbers themselves. They died, yes, but it doesn't matter [how]. At one point early in my graduate training I remember going through and trying to calculate the causes of death—because I was young and naïve and thinking, "Well, okay, maybe I can really get at some sense of how many slaves have died of malnourishment or how many slaves have died from plantation accidents." And I became so frustrated I gave up on it and I just didn't bother.

But there's sort of this interesting relationship going on there. And then when it comes to the sickness accounts, and I mentioned this in my paper, it's never an explanation of why someone's sick ever. They're just sick. They can't work. You know? Sick could be they sprained their wrist or they've got the flu; it doesn't matter. Right? And then one of the things I include in my book (and many of you will never have the chance to read it, but if you're ever interested) is the description of some plantation hospitals that are going up in this period that I find really fascinating. It's one of the amelioration movements. So after the 1750s, 1760s, the largest plantations all sort of came up with these hospitals, they say this as an aside, and what the hospital is—and I finally realized this doing these inventories—is it's literally a box in the middle of the plantation that you go into and you get locked into until you agree that you're well again. And the slaves are told they have the right to report ill whenever they want, and that's one of the amelioration techniques: If you're sick, you're welcome to not work and to go to the hospital. But they lock them into the hospital, they give one slave a key—who presumably the overseer trusts, or sometimes the overseer will do it themselves—and they lock them in, and the windows are barred. I've actually seen descriptions of these hospitals, and there's stocks in them, and the slave's punishment is that if they go into the hospital they lose their one Sunday off. All the slaves get one Sunday each week. They go to the hospital and they have to stay through until the following Monday. So it's this really sort of fascinating calculation of how to increase productivity without necessarily increasing violence. Right? It's striking.

**Hutchings-Goetz:** I'll just respond quickly; the narrative being sort of potentially fictitious in some ways might be the moment precisely where the paternalistic discourse and the kind of attempts at utility are, like, cutting against each other. Right?

**Roberts:** Definitely, definitely. That's a good point.

**Feder:** Kind of a sharp pivot from that to poetic form... but... yeah. So the answer kind of could be from the perspective of my project to the question of "how to correlate narrative and number?"... So there was a different—there have been a lot of incarnations of this project—and there was a moment when it seemed like there would... it seemed the direction it was going had to do with the Romantic long poem, which is a kind of interest in the line in the long poem and the way that these long poems sort of simulate endlessness or activate passive accounting and then ironize that and do that in all sorts of ways. So, you know, the alexandrine line at the end of each Spenserian stanza in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, it seems like an epiphany or a moment of synthesis and then you just get another epiphany and another epiphany and another epiphany and so on. So that was one way that I was sort of angling... in my mind this idea. You know, right now, because I really do want to think about kind of Romantic infinity discourse and the poetics of infinity as a kind of space or source for the environmental humanities that seems like one of the most, that seems like the most useful way I can kind of approach the project right now. I'm zoomed in on *Lyrical Ballads*, and in terms of narrative and number there are, you know, as we mentioned before but we really didn't talk about, it often has to do with, you know, "What's the story that you're telling yourself about number versus what someone else who's in the same poem as you?" So in "The Last of the Flock" you have the authorities, you know, telling the man, "Well, sell your sheep so you can feed your children." And that's just everything because, you know, the rates of change that he is using to structure his life, his family, his business don't correspond with the rates of change that he's sort of told to impose. And if you really kind of close read the poem formally in light of those kind of clashing rates of change it really kind of looks like he kills all his children. So the connection between narrative and number in the *Lyrical Ballads* I think really has to do with kind of counting theories and different theories of counting as different sort of expressions of—and this goes back to something we discussed yesterday—different questions of values and commitments and pressures in that way.

**Seiler-Smith:** Rebecca? Mike, and then Rebecca.

**Gavin:** Yeah, I have a question about the relationship between slavery and other kinds of work (in your work). It seems like one of the things you're doing is you're trying to break down any really clean binary: that slave plantations were almost like this corporate entity where workers are being managed and managed to the effect of principles of management, and that it's useful to think about slavery in that way rather than thinking of it as just pure horror, that we can learn a lot about it as a labor history. I wonder, does your work ever go in the opposite direction; like, what can we learn about corporate structures as a result... and what can we learn by thinking about this as a model?



**Roberts:** The closest I come... there are two things I want to say here. One is in the conclusion I draw some comparisons between the process of industrialization and slavery, and I see a lot of parallels as well. These are very similar processes of exploitation going on. One is clearly far more grueling—slavery allows violence, mortality, coercion—than other systems of labor, but I like to think of them as on a spectrum, not as some sort of binary comparison. The other thing I'm doing is I'm re-doing this some (and actually writing a paper for a conference now) that goes into some more detailed comparison and trying to draw on some of that historical archaeology I mentioned earlier, so looking at some of these historical archaeologies of early factories in Britain, and looking at some historical archaeologies in slave plantations as these sort of proto-industrial sites in sort of the way they're being designed. So is that what you're—

**Gavin:** Yeah, I guess I was just wondering: Is there a kind of link, you know, [between] people who are describing factory labor, who are borrowing techniques developed in the eighteenth century for managing plantations. Is there a link there?

**Roberts:** I wish I could find that. I haven't found that smoking gun yet, and I don't see factory managers referencing sugar plantations. I do see sugar planters *often* referencing what's going on in England in agricultural management or detailed discussions of how feeding slaves should follow the management of the poor in workhouses. So there's some really interesting observations there. I don't know. It's clear to me this process of industrialization or proto-industrialization in the Atlantic World is going on first in the Caribbean at sugar plantation sites. It's preceding what's going on elsewhere. It's fascinating, and I wish I could see more connections between them. But that is one of the things that I stress in my book about slavery is that it's a sort of labor history—that's the point. We sometimes make these caricatures of slaves as political activists sort of, you know, constantly battling and resisting tyranny, oppression, and the institution. What I stress in the book is I really want to try to understand the day-to-day experience of their lives and their working lives on the ground and what that working situation allowed them to do, what it creates... And what I end up finding is just slaves having less opportunity than slavery historians have allowed; they're in the day-to-day exhausted and malnourished. They have no energy. These people are just... their lives are, all ... these opportunities are denied. There's almost—there's all this talking about an “economy of time” on plantations and how if slaves had their own free time they could build their own lives, and what I also suggest in my book is that there's also an “economy of energy” at play. It doesn't really matter how much free time they have if they're exhausted in the only free time they have. So I think that might answer some of your question. The one thing that came to my mind in this discussion of plantation hospitals and Sarah's comment earlier about how to get at slaves' experience... Just to give you little tidbits that leak through: the plantation hospital was very rarely actually called a hospital in the records, although I know it was, it was compared to the hospital several times. For the most part, they called it a hothouse because, quote, “that's what the Negroes called it.” And so the managers themselves start using the slaves' terminology for a building that they will say is “the hospital, or the hothouse.” And so they see those as interchangeable. The slaves themselves don't think of this as a hospital; they won't call it a hospital. It's “the hothouse” for whatever reason—

I'd imagine presumably because it was boiling hot in the middle of a field. So you get these wonderful little tidbits that slide into the documents from time to time.

**Seiler-Smith:** Nush had a hook?

**Powell:** Really quick, not exactly what you were looking for, but: the shipboard practice of making people walk the plank as punishment, that was not piratical. It was developed for slave ships.

**Sheldon:** Also not entirely answering, I think, your question, but—and this may be perfectly obvious... But if you think about someone like Cedric Robinson and the idea of “racial capitalism”: it's argument is that basically you have race built into capitalism from its inception even in Europe and it's something sort of exacerbated through the erection of a plantation economy. But there's really no getting away from it, and so there's a way in which he's sort of doing the work of thinking about capitalism in terms of slavery (and see C.L.R. James for that). And then also just, you know, thinking about this notion of exhaustion, right, the idea when you're thinking about capitalism for the first time and you're looking at capital and you have to envision how surplus labor is extracted. Right? And there's this fraction that doesn't go to you even though it's yours. There's a way in which there's sort of like an infinite theft or a theft of surplus labor that ...I guess “infinite” is a weird slippage in the context of this panel—that is almost immeasurable. Right? And then to think about this in a way that's slightly removed from labor you could have someone like Orlando Patterson suggesting that it's natal alienation that defines the category of slavery. Right? That it's not necessarily reducible to labor because people are effectively made for recorded history. And this comes back to the idea of the individual case as problematic, right, not having a social history that you can belong to and thinking about what's made in the wake of that.

**Pasaneck:** I'm still thinking about Nush's question about gender, maybe, and this involves something you said about nonproductive labor... So in part about a kind of like Marxist or feminist Marxist category of, like, reproduction of the ability to labor, but then also just reproduction. So I'm just wondering about how economic historians even think about this. The doctoresses, this new role, you describe this as a nonproductive role, right? And...

**Roberts:** I'm adopting sugar planters' language there....

**Pasaneck:** Right. So I don't mean that as a gutshot at all, but I think it's really interesting then, ... like, what counts as reproduction versus production? And that's an interesting question. I mean, there are certain ways in which the laboring body probably needs to be prepared for reproduction of the bodies, so it's all about gender.

**Roberts:** So one way to explain that—I'm sorry, do you have another—It's one way to explain for me is (and perhaps I am too unconsciously using the language of the planters there)... but when I talk about the appearance of the doctress, before 1750 I never see that, because planters didn't allow that. They didn't value reproductivity at all because

they could always just purchase new slaves. And so suddenly they place a value on reproductivity and then in that sense that's perhaps why it appears, because it does have a value in that period. But it wouldn't have had a value in other periods. That wants a distinction.

**Seiler-Smith:** Rebecca.

**Spang:** I noticed we were losing some of our number, so I just wanted to highlight that we had said we would go to 5:30 since we have three papers, but I don't want to exhaust people's energies. I actually wanted to take Tracey's question about numbering narrative and turn it around and ask it of Nick [Paige] and Mike and Elizabeth and Melanie because it's a sticking point—I probably shouldn't say it when he's absent—but I think it's a sticking point between Simon [DeDeo] and me: How are we going to *write* this? What will it look like? And we start to, like, have a slightly tense conversation about that... and then we think of something else we find interesting...and we go around it. But I'm wondering now, everybody who counts things but is—I mean, we've got three literature people and a historian—what is the relationship between the numbers and the narrative?

**Melanie Conroy:** One thing I'm fascinated by working on elite French people, and then hearing about the way numbers are used in slave history is I think to some extent what I'm doing is treating the members of the *académie* more in the way in which slaves have previously been counted. And I do, I mean, hearing this discussion is very troubling to me ... Because of course previously, like, with the *académies* you have a given number of people who are in the *académies*, they have seat numbers that French people are very interested in, that they inherit from one another. There's a whole system of counting that serves to individualize, to add prestige, to add a history. Like, not only are you in the sciences but you inherited the chemistry chair from this illustrious person, and you gave an homage when you took the chair over. And I do think to a larger extent I'm trying to look at them as a group and that's very alienating, and I can certainly see why.

**Spang:** That's very interesting.

**Paige:** So I mean, I guess I, I hope I already answered this actually in my paper in the sense that I... it depends what you mean by narrative. I mean, if you mean something with a beginning, middle, and an end, I'm not following a narrative.

**Spang:** But you're writing a *book*.

**Paige:** I'm writing a book that charts a series of ups and downs going from 1601 to 1830, but those endpoints are chosen for some practical reasons but also because the phenomena that interest me (as a seventeenth-eighteenth-century specialist) are over by the time you get to 1830. But is there?... there's not a, there's not one narrative... and that's, it's not, there's not something happening in this period that brings us to a steady state that we will call essentially "now" or "us" or... so—

**Spang:** I understand that, but you're using the numbers to craft a story that isn't about continuous change over time but is nonetheless itself a story that, as you said, starts in 1601 and ends in 1830.

**Paige:** But why are you calling it a story? There's something I guess I don't understand here. I guess... Why? I'm not saying there's a story that starts in 1601. I'm just saying, I mean I, that's my slice.

**Spang:** Okay, so you are specifically—when you write the book—saying to your audience, to your readers: “This is not a story. Dear reader, I found it. It isn't dated.”

**Paige:** That is actually the beginning of my introduction. I say, “I am not telling a story.”

**Feder:** Are you not telling a story *at all*? [laughter] No, I think I want to challenge what you're saying because I think you are using numbers to tell a narrative about literary/historical methodology.

**Seiler-Smith:** Could you say “qualification” instead of... like, a useful alliterative opposition is quantification and qualification. Right? How you qualify quantity, i.e., how you actually use linguistic description—if you don't want to say “narrative.” If you're thinking narrative in terms of, like, it has to have a particular plot, and plot also has numerical resonance ... then would “qualification” also work? You're writing a qualitative thing about quantity.

**Pasaneck:** In another way you could call it a “chronicle.” [laughter]

**Seiler-Smith:** Jonathan?

**Jonathan Elmer:** Yeah, to the extent that Rebecca's question is focusing on scholarly rhetorics, which I think it is... So, I mean, one of the amazing things about our visit with Moretti was we were all bathed in Moretti for a while, and that's always an interesting thing. And he has a very powerful rhetorical style and a way of responding to your question. There's not one trait to it, but a number that I think anybody who's read any Moretti will recognize. It's discontinuous: so it's not at all—I mean, right down to the sentence fragments. He loves the sentence fragment. He talks about his illustrations. He explains them and then he moves away from them to go back to the question of “why he chose (or why they chose) to pursue this thing?” and that particular question section framing is always informed by real, real [*sic*] fast shorthand by scholarly consensuses or things that people already know or things that he's already written. So, “There's this thing we all have though for a long time. Well, well, let's find out.” And he does some scatterplots and says, “Ehhh, maybe not so interesting.... One thing here.” And I think that's a really successful rhetoric for doing this kind of work, for doing qualitative-quantitative work—and I recommend it to everybody. [laughter]

**Seiler-Smith:** Max, did you have a hook or a question?

**Max Nagano:** A little hook. We've been talking a lot about number, but I don't know if anyone has explicitly distinguished between cardinal numbers and ordinal numbers, ordinality. Basically, if you're doing probabilistic stuff you have to distinguish, that's your order, right? That's numerical kinds of systems, so the argument for that ... I kind of, it's, you're talking about numbers, not talking about it in the sense we'd normally, "one, two, three, four." You're ordering things, right? And any kind of diction that involves character with preferences that change into preferences, and we were talking about economics, economic actors having different preferences... these are all, this is order. Right? Order is a type of number, and I just wanted to throw that out there. And I think people have been crossing this, right, when we've talked about this, but I don't know.

**Feder:** I have a response to that and then I will try to walk back to my hook. I think that that's really important. And something that's very fascinating: when Cantor finally comes up with a mathematical definition of infinity, the way that he got around all the logic problems is to distinguish different kinds of infinity. So there's countable infinity and there's, you know, uncountable infinity. So the values between zero and one, that's an uncountably infinite number of values, but the integers between one, two, and infinity, you know, [can be counted]. So it's a kind of dividing up of different ways of conceptualizing infinity that really interestingly gets kind of anticipated in infinity discourse that's not strictly mathematical, you know, in the Enlightenment (in thinking about different ways of conceptualizing infinity).

I can't connect this back, but I have to go back... I'm sorry, then I promise I'll let this drop. It seemed to me—to kind of jump back into Rebecca's question, and I promise this is the last question I'll ask for the rest of the workshop (for the rest of the day!)—it seemed to me that there maybe is a sort of metacritical narrative. I'm wondering if your use of the numbers that you're using in your digital-humanist inquiries are in fact being used to tell a story about how we draw on canonical, exceptional examples of the novel to sort of talk about the rise of the novel and you're telling a counter-narrative. Are you not? I mean, did I misunderstand you?

**Paige:** I mean... It's a counter-*account*. [laughter] I mean, I think I may be taking this word "narrative" too literally, but it strikes me that actually, I mean... the dominant methodology in the history of the novel *is* to tell it as a story. I don't want to tell it as a story. So that's... but it's not a counter-narrative because I'm not proposing a different story in its place. But that doesn't mean I don't have a point to make!

**Hall Bjørnstad:** Rebecca's question is a version of my question yesterday about whether you have to be Moretti to do Moretti and do you have to be Nick Paige to do Nick Paige and of course it's not a counter-narrative, it's an anti-narrative. But, or in the sense that there is... doing digital humanities comes with some demand for coherence that precludes the traditional narrative.

**Paige:** I don't know. It seems to me that Moretti generally tends to impose the same narratives on his data. I mean, for Moretti it usually turns out to be about the rise of market culture and the bourgeoisie all over again. So it seems to me that there, there is a kind of powerful system.

**Nash:** My brother physician is not here<sup>13</sup>, and I feel an obligation to speak up on his behalf. Because I think, Nick, when you say that you're not telling a narrative he would definitely have your back and say: "That's exactly right. You are not telling a narrative." And when you say but you do have a point, that's when he would say, "No, that's where you're mistaken." [laughter] Precisely because—and we were actually talking about this earlier—because there is a conception of criticism, and it's one that Jesse, I think, really takes to heart, which is structured by narrative, in which some notion of narrative surprise is necessary to generate the forward trajectory of the account you're offering. Narrative account does require that surprising moment, something happens unexpected[ly]. And you're interested in offering an account that's counter to that, and therefore Jesse says, "What's surprising?" And you insist there's still a point.

**Paige:** Yeah... I mean that's a little different because that's a question of how I structure the exposition itself. So for me, you know, I start with one graph and then I start to pick that graph apart in ways that (because of my experience dealing with the material) I see interesting and surprising things that were surprising for me, and then I try to frame it in a way that will make it perhaps surprising for the audience or, at least, interesting. So that is to say there's a certain *techne* in the way that I structure the *release* of the information that I've discovered, which I... I don't discover it in this order. Right? So to give it in that order, that's a sum, that's a decision. Right? And so there's something Aristotelian in that—I guess there's a beginning and perhaps an end, but that's not the same thing as saying that I have a story to tell about the novel. Right? So maybe there's two different levels of that happening. Does that make sense?

**Nash:** I buy that. And, I mean, I accept that you're offering something that's not a narrative. I have no problem with that.

**Campbell:** Jonathan already said this, but to Moretti the novel is a system of genres, right? You guys are working really hard not to say "system" right now. I don't know why.

**Paige:** Oh, I'm happy to say "system."

**Campbell:** Right—that's what I thought! But you're somehow not.

**Paige:** Yeah, I would, I mean, I would call, my thing is I'm not calling them "genres," unlike Moretti, in terms of genre.

**Campbell:** I would just, I would say it's a system, right?

**Seiler-Smith:** Whitney: the *last* question.

**Whitney Sperrazza:** Oh, I don't know if it's—

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Nash and Jesse Molesworth both played the part of "physicians" in the previous evening's dramatic reading of *Tom Thumb*.

**Seiler-Smith:** Heavy burden.

**Sperrazza:** Well, I guess what I really want to do was hook onto Rebecca's original question here because I think it's really important to this panel and to what Sarah said at the beginning [of this panel] and what we haven't gotten yet because Nick [Valvo]'s project is on objects, politicization of objects; Mike's project is on, you know, place names in books—but these papers are talking about people and counting people. Right? And I think some of the tensions that we're coming up against as we try to talk about scholarly rhetorics and the right kind and appropriate kind of way to tell a story is in this sort of age-old tension between the anecdote about this social history and the sort of larger object-oriented counting chronology, or something like that. Right? And I just wanted to throw that on the table and make sure we were keeping that in mind.

**Elizabeth Bond:** I think my impulse about this is to try and think about Defoe, to suggest that there are signs that function, schemas for organizing, ways of counting that function in the eighteenth century—to see what that allows us to do and then critique that as well: “What does this eliminate in its existence?” Right? So that's part of... that's when you do, like, when adopting an organizational schema of people over time. Right? And then, that doesn't tell us a lot. How can we then access that to answer your question. And I kind of think that DH [Digital Humanities] allows us to do some of, I think, it tells us certain things but it doesn't tell us other things. And I think a lot of that is structured by our sources. I don't know. To me, like, being able to do both is the ideal.

**Sperrazza:** I agree, I totally agree, but I think why I want to bring Moretti into the conversation is he's so uninterested in the anecdote. Right? I mean, he says that over and over again. And yet, like, when we “put up feminist shields,” like, the anecdote is king, right? I mean, that's the method. And so I absolutely agree. I just, I'm really interested in hearing from those who are doing this sort of thing at the table. I mean, how does that work? How do you deal with it?

**Conroy:** I think one thing is that the tool isn't going to make the decision for you. Right? So even if you decide that you're going to create a network, and you're going to have people as nodes or something like that—you're still going to use that network in order to identify certain people and whether you're going to choose to find people who are marginal or central, it's not going to be the computer that tells you to do that. So you still have to, I think, take agency in the questions that you're asking and, of course, be highly aware of the things that the data can't tell you. And that's definitely one of the main problems with visualization, because people do tend to take visualizations as the sort of ultimate truth and they often get circulated without the descriptions and all the qualifications that you want to put on them. But I think the general rule is that, you know, a visualization makes an argument, and you have to be careful to know what argument you're making.

**Gavin:** Yeah, one thing that's interesting about this...so like I have my little confidence intervals of numbers and stuff. Well, that matrix is built over the entire, or something like the entire vocabulary in *EBBO*, and as you create one of those kooky word clouds around

“woman,” the result is actually really interesting. You get—I mean, like—you get the Latin word for “woman,” but the big words that jumped out, that are, like, head and shoulders the most similar words are the words “Samaria,” “Samaritan,” “Canaanitish,” and “Endor.” These are all, when you think about it, these are all Biblical *anecdotes*: the Samaritan woman. . . . And they’re all stories of women who are in a dangerous relationship, are in some kind of relationship with some larger power. And so Endor is the Witch of Endor, who is confronted by Samuel? —well, anyway, it doesn’t matter. It’s anecdotes, actually, that are the most semantically important instances of “woman.” The semantic profile of “woman” is completely different from the semantic profile of “wife” or “mother” or “daughter.” It’s really interesting.

**Paige:** And what is an anecdote, exactly? I mean, what difference is there between an anecdote and an example? I would say an anecdote is an example where you don’t know the context. So you don’t know what it’s an example of—an anecdote is contextually marooned somehow, right? Whereas a proper example, it seems to me, is when you know the rest of the class of objects, have an idea of what the class of objects look like and can say that’s an example *of* it. But anecdotes have this very kind of . . . it just seems so fertile precisely because you’re unburdened with knowing about the context so you can—that’s why they all of a sudden function as signs. I mean, especially in new historicist accounts.

**Valvo:** It’s active resistance to any kind of similarity, this thing that allows you to disclaim—in a different way than you just were a minute ago—that you’re, like, producing a new master narrative here. It’s the very sacrifice of exemplarity that allows the new historicist narrative to function as such—

**Paige:** Yeah, I mean . . . by exemplarity you mean, like, the status of the exhumable.

**Valvo:** In the same way that you just said: as being a representative example of a class. Right. You’re saying, “This one is distinctive.”

**Paige:** Yeah, because you . . . I mean, I’m always . . . What I presented is, you know, coming out of a special issue of *New Literary History* on examples. Right? So I did start thinking about this in terms of that. You know, it’s just so interesting . . . this calls me back my fictionality obsession, but, you know, when Cathy Gallagher says, you know, “What we see in this moment in *Joseph Andrews*, we see a conception of fiction here popping its head up where it didn’t exist before.” It seems like . . . I mean, we’re tempted to say that that is an “example” of a new fictional novel, but it’s a weird example because no one would ever ask Cathy Gallagher, “How do we know that it is representative?” because that’s not how that type of argument works. That type of argument works because . . . because we’re all willing to take that as a *sign* of something else happening. So the idea of, like, asking, “Well, how many of Fielding’s contemporaries make the same move? Do they do it if they’re writing a comic novel as opposed to a sentimental novel?” No one would ask that kind of question. It’d be a stupid question to ask, because that’s clearly not how the argument works.

**Seiler-Smith:** I do have to be tart; it’s 5:30.