

Final Summary Report on “Infocraving” (Dr. Ida Pugliese)

Dr. Ida Pugliese’s project Infocraving explored the uses of questionnaires in the development of historical, cultural, and economic information in the eighteenth century, focusing on major figures like the Scottish historian William Robertson, the politician, philosopher, and American president, Thomas Jefferson, the French philosophe, Denis Diderot, and the French exponent of Enlightenment philosophical history, the abbé Raynal. The project demonstrated how questionnaires function as a method of research, as a way of gathering information from distant authorities that exploited systems of patronage and prestige, involving personal relationships, cascading sets of contacts, and ‘Enlightened values’ that transcended national boundaries and confessional difference, while exploiting different networks of communication. But the project also showed that questionnaires represent more than just a method. They encode forms of knowledge, reveal epistemic assumptions, and they show the limits of ‘information’, particularly in the composition of narrative history.

The project has produced important results that will influence thinking about the Enlightenment in general, about the writing of history, and the role of the colonial system in sourcing data. Research on William Robertson – the leading historian of his age, with a major European reputation – has been especially fruitful in defining a new picture of his historical method, how he obtained correspondents with colleagues and contacts in Spain and the New World, and the problematic status of the information he acquired, insofar as it tended to confirm his existing views rather than challenging him to revise or revisit his analyses, especially in his landmark *History of America* (1777). Thus the Infocraving project has achieved a more complex understanding as a result of its inquiries, and a more nuanced and historicized analysis account of the concept of the information age.

The work conducted in order to develop this argument has been extensive, in a range of archives and institutions. Substantial work was done in France at the Archives des Affaires étrangères at Courneuve, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes. In the UK she worked at the British Library, and in the US she conducted research at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, Harvard University Library, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, Massachusetts Historical Society, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Maryland Historical Society. These research visits led to important discoveries of respondents to questionnaires. In terms of institutions, Dr. Pugliese made significant connections with Harvard, Stanford, and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and with leading academics internationally, including Prof. Ann Blair (Harvard), Prof. David Armitage (Harvard), Prof. Dan Edelstein (Stanford), Prof. Paula Findlen (Stanford), Prof. Howard Hotson (Oxford), Dr. Silvia Sebastiani (EHESS), and Prof. Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire (University of Nice Sophia Antipolis).

Forms of dissemination included the delivery by Dr. Pugliese of 12 papers on the project at international conferences and seminars, including events at Columbia

University, Harvard, the European University Institute, the Summer Academy of Atlantic History (Hamburg), Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies (Paris), and the Fourth European Congress on World and Global History (Paris). In March 2015 she organized a conference on 'The Republic of Letters Goes Digital' at NUIG with international participants from Oxford, Cambridge, Stanford, the Huygens Institute, and Nice. Internally she published a report on her project in the NUIG publication "Research Matters" in December 2014.

Dr. Pugliese published 'From Antagonism to a Common Fate: Abbé Raynal and William Robertson', in Cecil Courtney and Jenny Mander (eds.), *Raynal's 'Histoire des deux Indes': Colonial Writing, Cultural Exchange and Social Networks in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment, 2015), 163-74, and completed two articles on William Robertson's questionnaires and on the reception of Robertson's *History of America* in Spain. Her book manuscript, *William Robertson's America: Writing the New World in the Enlightenment*, has been accepted by the prestigious series Oxford University Studies in the Enlightenment (formerly Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century), published by the Voltaire Foundation, the foremost publisher on the Enlightenment. This will be a major contribution to the field and an essential work for scholars of Enlightenment history and the Scottish Enlightenment.

The digital dimension of the project was developed in the training course attended by Dr. Pugliese, the Oxford Digital Humanities Summer School (summer 2013); collaboration with the NUIG research technologist in the Moore Institute (David Kelly); and the organization of the conference noted above, 'The Republic of Letters Goes Digital' which brought together leading experts working in topic modeling, database construction, and network analysis.