# Ryan Healey

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## Appointments

2025– Postdoctoral Researcher, Universität Basel (University of Basel)
Digital Humanities Lab / contralab

## Education

2025 Ph.D. English Literature, New York University
Committee: Clifford Siskin (Chair), Lisa Gitelman, Wendy Lee, Leif Weatherby, Peter de Bolla, and Cameron Buckner
Examination fields: Eighteenth-Century Literature and Critical Theory

2017 M.Phil. English Literature, University of Cambridge
Supervisor: Peter de Bolla
Advanced German (C1) (CEFR Certification)

2012 B.A. English Literature and Philosophy, McGill University
First Class Joint Honours
Minor in Middle Eastern Languages (Arabic)

2015–16 Volkshochschule Neukölln – Berlin, DE
Accreditation in German Language (A1–C1) (November 2015–September 2016)

## Publications

### Peer-Reviewed Articles

- "The Anxiety of Structure: Attention without Aesthetics in Large Language Models," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 35, no. 72 (Fall 2026), special issue, "Quantifying the Sensible."
- "The Uses of Genre: Is There An 'Adam Smith Question?'" with Peter de Bolla, Ewan Jones, Paul Nulty, John Regan, and Gabriel Recchia, *Representations* 149, Winter 2020.

### Book Chapters

- "Generative AI" in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and AI*, eds. Sangam MacDuff and Helen Thaventhiran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2027).

### Reviews and essays

- Review of Erich Kästner's "Going to the Dogs." *Bookforum*, January 10, 2013.
- Essay on the *quenelle* for *Maisonneuve*, March 19, 2014.
- Review of Annie Baker's "Vermont Plays." *Maisonneuve*, December 27, 2012.

- Two essays for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. On Enrique Vila-Matas (August 31, 2012) and Bernard Comment (December 16, 2012).
- On the Quebec student strike at McGill, *The New Inquiry*, June 20, 2012.
- "Cruise Control." *Harper's*. November 2011, p.18. Translation from the Arabic.
- Review of Thomas Glynn's "The Building." *Tin House,* Fall 2012.
- Review of Amara Lakhous's "Divorce Islamic Style." *Bookforum*, April 26, 2012.

## Fellowships and Awards

Swiss National Science Foundation Scientific Exchanges Grant (2026, 10,000 CHF)
NYU University-Wide Outstanding Dissertation Award for Arts & Humanities (2026)
NYU Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Dean's Outstanding Dissertation Award (2026)
NYU Center for the Humanities Doctoral Fellowship (2024–25)
Halsband Fellowship for 18th-Century Studies, Department of English, NYU (2024–25)
Dean's Conference Fund, NYU GSAS (2024)
Halsband Fellowship for 18th-Century Studies, Department of English, NYU (2023–24)
Summer Dissertation Writing Fellowship, NYU Berlin (2023)
Conference and Travel Grants (x3), Department of English, NYU (2023, 2024)
Provost's Global Research Initiative Fellowship, NYU London (2023)
Halsband Fellowship for 18th-Century Studies, Department of English, NYU (2022–23)
ASECS/Clark Fellowship, Center for 17th- and 18th-Century Studies, UCLA (2022–23)
Mainzer Summer Fellowship, NYU GSAS (2020)
Polonsky–Brine Digital Humanities Fellowship, NYU GSAS (2019)
MacCracken Fellowship, New York University (2018–2024)

## Teaching

**University of Basel**

Artificial Intelligence and the History of Writing (Fall 2026)
Introduction to Digital Studies (Spring 2026)
The Digital and the Literary (Fall 2025)

**New York University**

Lead Instructor, Department of English, New York University
The Digital and the Novel (Summer 2024)

Teaching Assistant, Department of English, New York University
Text & Ideas: Systems (Fall 2020)
Literatures in English II: 1660–1900 (Spring 2021)
Text & Ideas: Objectivity (Fall 2021)
Literatures in English I: Medieval and Early Modern (Fall 2022)

## Work

**IBM Research (May–August 2025)**
Yorktown Heights, New York
Doctoral Research Scientist Intern, AI

**David Graeber Institute** (**March 2022–Present)**
Editorial Director
(titles include David Graeber, *Pirate Enlightenment* [2023, FSG])

**Verso Books (May 2012–Present)**
Brooklyn, New York
Copyeditor
(titles include Walter Benjamin, Fredric Jameson, Rosa Luxemburg, and others in theory, history, and political economy)

**Harper's Magazine (May–August 2011)**
New York, New York
Editorial Intern / Translator (Arabic)

## Invited Talks and Workshops

"Allegory at Scale: Vector Space, Value, and the Limits of Interpretability." King's College London, June 1, 2026.
"Vector Knowledge." The State of Knowledge in the Age of AI, the Re:Enlightenment Project. King's College, University of Cambridge, May 29–31, 2026.
"The Problem of Monosemantic Moralism." IBM Research, AI. Yorktown Heights, New York. August 4, 2025.

## Conferences and Presentations

"The Axis and the Throw: Selection and Sampling in the Language Model." Contrefactualité, IA et Temporalités Alternatives. Centre des arts d'Enghien-les-Bains, Paris, November 23–24, 2026.
Moderator for panel "Circular Systems" with Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Ranjodh Singh Dhaliwal. Mesh Festival of Art, Technology and Science, Basel, October 17, 2026.
"The Unexplained Surprise: Information at the Edge of Knowledge." An "Error Correction Seminar." Digital Humanities Lab, Universität Basel, October 2, 2026.
"Queries, Keys, and Value-Forms." Fredric Jameson and the Future of Critical Theory. Duke University, April 10–12, 2026.
"A Physics of Value?" Historical Materialism 22. SOAS University of London, November 6, 2025.
"Creativity or Instability in Machine Knowledge." The Re:Enlightenment Project. Universität Basel. October 7, 2025.
"The Collapse of Interpretation: The Grounding Crisis in Language Models," Center for the Humanities. New York University, April 1, 2025.
Chair for panel with Lydia Liu, Sarah Pourciau, and Leif Weatherby. Vernacular AI. Remarque Institute, New York University, February 7, 2025.
"The Value of Error: On Mechanistic Interpretability." Techne & Humanities in the 21st Century. ICCT Winter Institute, University of Tokyo, January 8, 2025.
"Noise and Transformation." Provocations of the Machine: Intellectual History of Human-Machine Relations. Technische Universität Darmstadt, May 24, 2024.
"Large Lockean Models." Roundtable on Artificial Intelligence and the Eighteenth Century. ASECS Annual Meeting, Toronto, April 6, 2024.
"Fictionality and Attention." Chair for panel "Eighteenth-Century Machine Learning." ASECS Annual Meeting, Toronto, April 4, 2024.
"Abstraction and Genre in Deep Neural Networks." AI+ DH Webinar: Finding Convergence between Literary Theory & the Theory of Data. New York University, March 13, 2024.
"AI and Culture." Ripple Effects of Modern AI seminar. AI for Scientific Research and Digital Theory Lab. New York University, March 5, 2024.
Respondent to Cameron Buckner, book launch for *From Deep Learning to Rational Machines*. Center for Mind, Brain, and Consciousness and Center for Data Science. New York University, January 26, 2024.
"Self-Attention and Genre." Large Language Models and The Writer. MLA Annual Convention, Philadelphia,

January 4–7, 2024.
"Backpropagating Locke's Triangles." Graduate Research Institute. NYU Berlin, July 10, 2023.
"Literary History after Machine Learning." Large Language Models and Culture. NYU Prague, June 13–16, 2023.
"Abstraction from Locke to Large Language Models." DH Benelux 2023. Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels, May 31–June 2, 2023.
"Civility-Money: Locke, Clipping, and Abstraction in the 1690s Recoinage Crisis in England." The Uses and Abuses of Civility, 1500–1700. Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland, May 26–27, 2023.
"Engineering Abstraction: A Literary History." Digital Theory Lab. New York University, November 18, 2022.
"Humanities+: Collaborative Research" discussion with Leif Weatherby. NYU Center for the Humanities. New York University, April 20, 2022.
"Deep Learning, Deeper States: Eighteenth-Century Adversarial Networks." Technologies of Bureaucracy: Before and After the Digital Turn. Stanford–Leuphana Winter Academy. Stanford University, Berlin campus, December 13–18, 2021.
"Transformational and Real Abstractions." Digital Theory Lab. New York University, March 23, 2021.
Concluding Discussion with Lisa Gitelman. Reading McLuhan Reading. New York University, March 5–6, 2020.
"Genres of Eighteenth-Century Value: Corpus Development and Analysis." Polonsky/Brine Digital Humanities Showcase. New York University, September 10, 2019.
"Genres of the Moral Economy: A Computational Approach to the Adam Smith Problem." Digital Theory Summer School. Kings College London, May 28, 2019.
"Bills of Credit: Quantification in Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* after the South Sea Bubble." Stranger Danger: Literary Explorations of the Nation, Self and Other. University of Cambridge, April 28, 2017.

## Academic Events Organized

University of Basel (further details available on contralab.online)

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| October 2026 – "The Unexplained Surprise: Information at the Edge of Knowledge": an interdisciplinary "error correction seminar" on LLMs and the problem earmarked by "creativity": David Deutsch (Oxford), Roberta Raileanu (Google DeepMind), Richard Jozsa (Cambridge), Clifford Siskin (NYU), Nouha Dziri (Ai2), Peter de Bolla (Cambridge), Maya Ackerman (Santa Clara), Ryan Heuser (Cambridge), Juan Luis Gastaldi (ETH Zürich), Paul Nulty (Birkbeck), and others. – Workshop with Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (SFU). |
| May 2026 – STS-CH Lecture Series. "Toward a Media Technoscientific Study?: STS and Media as Intersecting Lines." |
| March 2026 – *Digital Theory* book discussion with Leif Weatherby (NYU), Alexander Galloway (NYU), Matthew Handelman (Michigan), and M. Beatrice Fazi (Sussex). – Workshop with Seb Franklin (KCL) on metonymy and automation. |

## Professional Service

Peer Review*: The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, *Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society*

**Languages** German (fluent), French (C1), Modern Standard Arabic (B2), Modern Greek (B1)

**Skills** *Computational Text Analysis and NLP*: Python; transformer architectures and embedding models (Hugging Face, PyTorch, sentence-transformers); vector-space semantics and corpus

construction; LLM evaluation, prompt design, and retrieval-augmented pipelines; classification and clustering methods (scikit-learn); fine-tuning and adaptation of small language models.
*Interpretability*: mechanistic interpretability methods; activation and probing analysis; circuit-level and feature-attribution techniques.
*Digital Bibliography and Archival Infrastructure*: OCR and corpus digitization (ECCO-TCP, EEBO-TCP, HathiTrust data); TEI and XML/XSLT encoding; IIIF-based image archive construction; bibliographical database design and metadata standards (METS/MODS).
*Quantitative and Network Methods*: statistical modeling in R and Python; network analysis (Gephi) for imprint, citation, and paratext networks; topic modeling and distant-reading methods.
*Data Visualization*: matplotlib, seaborn, Plotly; D3.js for interactive web-based visualization.
*Digital Publishing*: Markdown and Pandoc-based publishing workflows; static site generation; version control (git).

**References**

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Peter de Bolla
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