INLS 690-245: Data Criticism
Spring 2022

Basic information

Date and time: Tuesdays 2:00 to 4:45 p.m.
Location: Manning 303

Instructor information

Instructor: Melanie Feinberg
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Office: Manning 024
Student hours: Thursdays 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. (in the office) or by appointment via Zoom

Introduction

This course approaches criticism as a practice: as a way to describe the expressive and functional qualities of human artifacts. Often, this critical practice involves the interpretive analysis (or "reading") of selected works with reference to the historical traditions from which those works emanated, using analytic vocabularies developed within those traditions. For instance, film critics may look at the "shot"—a continuous segment of film as captured from a single camera—and the "cut"—transitions from one shot to another—as one mechanism to understand how a film achieves particular artistic effects. When it comes to data, however, similar analytic vocabularies are not ready to hand. In this course, we will attempt to derive such an analytic vocabulary, so that we might "read" data with both power and precision. Together, we will attempt to understand what data criticism involves and how to do it.

Learning objectives

At the end of this course, you will be able to:
- Articulate the function and value of criticism, and situate criticism in relation to associated concepts such as "evaluation" and "theory."
- Apply techniques of critical interpretation to data.
- Envision a comprehensive practice of data criticism: what it involves, how it might be done, who does it, to what end.
- Identify and describe unanswered questions and research gaps related to the practice of data criticism.
- Engage in substantive discussions of wide-ranging scholarly material.
- Propose, pursue, and complete an independent project that constitutes an example of data criticism or argues for an approach to it.

Course structure

This is an in-person course, meeting once a week. It is a seminar-style class: a small group that explores a topic together. Our class sessions will consist of in-depth discussion of weekly readings, supplemented with practical exercises in critical interpretation.

Important: **As of January 5, SILS has decided that all courses will be delivered remotely for the first three weeks of the semester. Zoom information will be provided in Canvas.**

For each class, you will arrive prepared with 1-2 questions relating to one or more of the week's readings, along with a sentence or two that explains what you hope to learn, debate, or inspire from this question

(that is, why you are interested in talking about it). For some classes, also, you will be asked to complete preparatory data work in advance, for us to discuss together.

This class will use the Canvas learning management system, rather than Sakai. Each week's readings and other materials will be available via its own module in Canvas.

The Semester Calendar (below) provides an overview of each week.

Flexibility in Uncertain Times

Due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19, SILS has decided that in-person classes will be delivered remotely for the first three weeks of the semester.

We are planning to resume in-person instruction on January 31. But uncertainty has been the rule of late, and we may need to adjust rapidly as the semester proceeds. Simply put, we will all need to do our best to adapt as circumstances require. I know that this is challenging for everyone, and I appreciate your forbearance.

With our seminar format, remote interaction is perhaps especially difficult, but we can make it work!

Requirements

To pass the course, you must:
- Satisfy participation requirements.
- Complete an independent seminar project.

Participation
Attendance, preparation, and active engagement are necessary for a successful seminar.

Participation requirements
- Attend class regularly.
- Complete readings and any other preparatory work before class.
- Have at least one question ready per class session.
- Contribute actively to discussions:
  - Initiate conversations.
  - Volunteer your thoughts, feelings, impressions, and examples.
  - Where appropriate, support your opinions and claims with evidence.
  - Speak up when you are confused or uncertain.
  - Retain focus on matters germane to the course.
  - Maintain confidence that your contributions are valuable, no matter your background or level of previous knowledge or expertise.
  - If you refer to something that we have not read in the seminar, be sure to explain and contextualize your reference. Do not assume that anyone else knows what you are talking about.
- Listen carefully and respond thoughtfully.
  - Maintain respect and compassion for your classmates.
  - Demonstrate that you value others' contributions.
  - If someone else's perspective is different from yours, attempt to understand it rather than dismiss it.
  - Disagree constructively.
  - Be attentive to the flow of a conversation and help to manage transitions from one topic to another.

- Monitor group dynamics, and adopt the Step Up/Step Back principle:
  - *Step back* if you've been talking more than your share.
  - *Step up* if you haven't been contributing as much.

Remember: the goal of a seminar is to learn through discussion. Don't be afraid to speak because you don't have it all figured out.

Attendance requirements
Everyone is entitled to two unexcused absences per semester. This rule applies whether we are meeting in person or whether we are meeting remotely.

If you need to be absent from class and you haven't already used your two unexcused absences, you don't need to inform me or do anything at all.

If you need to be absent from class and you have already used your two unexcused absences, you will need to inform me of the reason for your absence via e-mail (before the absence if possible). Examples of acceptable reasons include:
- You are experiencing ill health (physical or mental) or you are concerned about risks to your health as a result of attending class (e.g., we have returned to in-person classes, but you do not feel safe in a classroom).
- Caring for family members or other family emergencies.
- Accidents and unanticipated disasters (your apartment floods, your car is stolen, etc).
- Religious holidays.

Seminar project
In the project, you will sythesize what we've learned in the seminar and apply it towards the creation of your own original work.

Some options for the project include:
1. *An example of data criticism.* Perform a critical reading of
   a. A small dataset or excerpt of a dataset.
   b. A component of data infrastructure (such as a controlled vocabulary of potential data values).
2. *An approach to data criticism.* Argue for what data criticism should be: its object and methods, what kind of expertise it requires, who should do it, its audience and significance, and so on.
3. *A critical intervention.* Design or redesign a dataset or component of data infrastructure as a mode of inquiry into what data can, should, or might be.

Doctoral students are encouraged to adapt the project to fit your own research interests, in line with the themes of the course.

Complete instructions and success criteria will be available in Canvas.

Project milestones
In Week 8, we will discuss preliminary project ideas in class. Everyone will have up to 10 minutes to share your initial brainstorming and invite suggestions from the seminar. (This will be very informal and is just an opportunity to get started.)

In Week 9, you will submit a 1-2 paragraph project proposal, which I will read and provide feedback on.

In Weeks 12, 13, and 14, we will spend part of our class "workshopping" your projects. When your project is being workshopped, you will have up to 20 minutes to share your thinking so far and invite the seminar to help you in any way that would best facilitate your progress. You can direct our attention to examples if you like, but this is not a presentation—it's just informal sharing.

Assessment

During Week 6 and Week 12, you will review your own participation by providing a brief self-assessment of your performance, including a set of goals to achieve in the next section of the course. I will respond to these self-assessments with brief written feedback.

Semester projects will receive written comments. My review of the project will focus on the documented criteria for success.

Should a project be incomplete or significantly misaligned with the documented criteria, you will be invited to revise and resubmit the project. (What I'm saying here is merely that, should there be some misunderstanding where what you submit isn't what I consider to be passable work, I'll tell you what the problem is and ask you to fix it.)

Grading

All graduate students who satisfy participation requirements and complete the course project will receive a P. (Undergraduates will need to consult with me.)

Due dates

Participation assessments	*Due date*
Participation interim assessment #1	**Tuesday, February 15**
Participation interim assessment #2	**Tuesday, March 29**

Seminar project milestones	*Due date*
Share project ideas in class	**Tuesday, March 1**
Submit written project proposal	**Tuesday, March 8**
Workshop project in class	**April 12, 19, or 26 (signups in class)**
Seminar project	**Thursday, May 5, at noon** (per UNC policy,

projects are due at the date and time of the scheduled final exam)

All assignments should be submitted as a PDF document via Canvas.

Late work

There are no penalties for late work. However, because UNC has strict deadlines for final grade submission, late seminar projects may necessitate that you receive an IN (Incomplete) grade.

Semester Calendar

This calendar is subject to modification as the semester proceeds.

All readings and preparatory work are to be completed before that week's class.

All readings will be available in Canvas.

Week 1, January 11 **Introduction**	
Readings • Syllabus	
Week 2, January 18 *What is criticism? / What is data? Part 1*	
What is criticism? readings • Scott, 2016 (p. 1-42, 167-268) • A few reviews by Scott and others *What is data? readings* • Furner, 2016	*Preparatory data work* • What is this dataset describing?
Week 3. January 25 *What is criticism? / What is data? Part 2*	
What is criticism? video and readings • Houston, 2013 (p. 1-22, 82-131 • Esplund, 2018 (section 1, p. 21-105) • Berger, 1972 (two 30-minute episodes) • *What is data? readings* • Rosenberg, 2013	*Preparatory data work* • Describe the formal elements of this dataset.
Week 4, February 1 *What is criticism? / What is data? Part 3*	
What is criticism? readings • Barrett, 2021 (1-13, 45-145) • Houston, 2013 (132-157 (optional) *What is data? readings* • Martin and Lynch, 2009	*Preparatory data work* • Describe 5-10 everyday things in a spreadsheet
Week 5, February 8 *What is criticism? / What is data? Part 4*	
What is criticism? readings • Bardzell, 2011 • Lowgren and Stolterman, 2004 (p. 15-42) *What is data? readings* • Drucker, 2011	*Preparatory data work* • Describe 5-10 abstract things in a spreadsheet
Week 6, February 15 *Techniques: close reading (and distant reading)*	
Readings • Poirier, 2021 • Smith, 2016 • Loukissas, 2017	*Preparatory data work* • DPLA (based on Loukissas, 2017)

Week 7, February 22 *Criticism and "theory"*	
Theory in the visual arts readings • Barrett, 2021 (p. 14-44) • Houston, 2013 (p. 134-148) *Theory and literary criticism readings* • Ransom, 1937 • de Man, 1973 • Gallagher, 1997 *Theory as liberatory practice readings* • hooks, 1994 (p. 59-75) • Gunn Allen, 1986 (p. 334-368)	
Week 8, March 1 *Project ideas and...*	
Readings, if any, TBD based on what the class is interested in.	
Week 9, March 8 *Reading critical readings 1*	
A theoretically informed reading of an element of data infrastructure: • Delgado and Stefancic, 2017 (p. 1-43) • Furner, 2007 • Beall, 2009 *A theoretically informed definition of a data object:* • Lawrence, 2021	*Preparatory data work* • Use Lawrence's understanding of diverse books to describe and interpret the Diverse Book FInder
Week 10, March 15	
Spring break	
Week 11, March 22 *Reading critical readings 2*	
Readings • Adler, 2017 (p. ix-xvii, 27-62) • Noble, 2018 (p. 134-152)	*Preparatory data work* • Perform your own version of Noble's ArtStor analysis.
Week 12, March 29 *Techniques: critical design*	
Readings about critical design in human-computer interaction • Bardzell and Bardzell, 2013 • Bardzell, Bardzell, and Stolterman, 2014 *Examples of data-oriented critical design projects (read two)* • Clarke and Schoonmaker, 2020 • Elseden, et al, 2017 • Fox, Lampe, and Rosner, 2018 • Fox et al, 2019	
Week 13 , April 5 *Techniques: critical technical discourse analysis*	
An example of the technique and its more general explication • Brock, 2012 • Brock, 2018 *Background readings* • Day, 2007 • Gates, 1988 (introduction) • Agre, 1997	•

Week 14, April 12 *Provocations and inspirations/workshopping projects 1*	
Readings • Latour, 2004	
Week 15, April 19 *Provocations and inspirations/workshopping projects 1*	
Readings • Love, 2013	
Week 16, April 26 *Provocations and inspirations/workshopping projects 1*	
Readings • McKittrick, 2021 (p. 1-34, 168-185)	

Course policies

COVID-19 community standards and mask use
As specified by current UNC community standards, all enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community —your classmates and me —as we learn together.

If you choose not to wear a mask, or if you wear your mask improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the Office of Student Conduct. At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. (Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception.) For additional information, see https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/community-standards/#chapter-2

Respectful class environment
Learning requires an atmosphere of respect, care, and empathy for each other. This does not mean that we can't disagree; understanding the nature of our disagreements can help us all grow. But disrespect for any person or their identity will not be tolerated.

Asking for help
Should you encounter barriers to your learning—whether it's something that I'm doing or not doing, or challenges in your personal circumstances—I am here to help. Please set up an appointment so that we can work together towards your success.

The work that we will be engaging with this semester is difficult, and most of you will be unfamiliar with some or all of it. It is normal to feel confused or lost sometimes.

Additionally, we are living in challenging times, and we are all grappling with chronic stress and anxiety. It is common and natural to feel overwhelmed. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness or failure.

No busy work
No one wants to do boring things for no reason, including me! From my perspective, everything that we do in this class has a purpose that requires thinking. If anything seems like busy work, I probably haven't articulated the purpose well. Be sure to ask for help, so that I can better explain what the task is supposed to achieve.

Instructor communication
For specific, concrete questions, e-mail is the most reliable means of contact for me. If you do not receive a response after a few days, please follow up. It is always helpful if your e-mail includes a targeted subject line that begins with "INLS 690."

For more complicated questions or help, come to student hours (no appointment necessary) or make an appointment to talk with me at a different time.

You are welcome to call me by my first name ("Melanie"). However, you may also use "Dr. Feinberg" or "Professor Feinberg" if that is more comfortable for you.

Student hours
During student hours, I am available to talk with students about anything, without an appointment.

You can use student hours to ask questions, seek help, consult about project work, obtain more information about course topics, or just say hello. You're not bothering me if you attend student hours! I've dedicated this time to talk with students.

During student hours, my office door will be open; simply come in! If I'm talking with someone else, make sure that I know you're there.

Inclusive learning and accessibility

I want everyone to do well in this class. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know. We'll work together on strategies to meet your needs and satisfy the requirements of the course.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Web site (ars.unc.edu) for details.

Mental health resources

All students have access to counseling and other resources through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to caps.unc.edu or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building.

Basic needs

If you are navigating financial, health, or housing challenges that may have an impact on your ability to thrive at UNC, one resource is the Dean of Students, which also oversees the Dean's Emergency Fund: https://dos.unc.edu/student-support/student-emergency-and-hardship-funds/

If you are struggling with food insecurity and you are in the Chapel Hill area, you can get assisstance through Carolina Cupboard, an on-campus food pantry: http://carolinacupboard.web.unc.edu/

Academic integrity

The UNC Honor Code states that:

It shall be the responsibility of every student enrolled at the University of North Carolina to support the principles of academic integrity and to refrain from all forms of academic dishonesty...

This includes prohibitions against the following:
- Plagiarism.
- Falsification, fabrication, or misrepresentation of data or citations.
- Unauthorized assistance or collaboration.
- Cheating.

All scholarship builds on previous work, and all scholarship is a form of collaboration, even when working independently. Incorporating the work of others, and collaborating with colleagues, is welcomed in academic work. However, the honor code clarifies that you must always acknowledge when you make use of the ideas, words, or assistance of others in your work. This is typically accomplished through practices of reference, quotation, and citation.

If you are not certain what constitutes proper procedures for acknowledging the work of others, please ask the instructor for assistance. It is your responsibility to ensure that the <u>honor code</u> is appropriately followed. (The <u>UNC Office of Student Conduct</u> provides a variety of honor code resources.)

The UNC Libraries has online tutorials on <u>citation practices</u> and <u>plagiarism</u> that you might find helpful.

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