2019 Syllabus Part 2 ANALYSIS v1 (Jan 13)

The contents of this document are valid for all classes I am teaching Spring 2019

Instructor: John R Wallace

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1. What will be analyzed: constructed "texts"

"Texts," for the purpose of this course, are the mental objects we create in our own minds as interpretations of code* we encounter.

> *Code is probably words on the page, but multimedia image/sound sequences in film is another type of code that is common for my courses.

We interpret this code, making a story of it or otherwise attributing meaning and significance. Since humans have shared models of interpretation, and since the code itself is limited by the rules of language including other instances of the code, the "text" each of us creates in our mind is indeed similar to the texts of others. We can have meaningful conversations with the sensation that we are talking about the same thing. Yet, because humans also have interpretive biases, that text is never exactly like that in the minds of others (including of course the original writer) and, at times, might be significantly different.
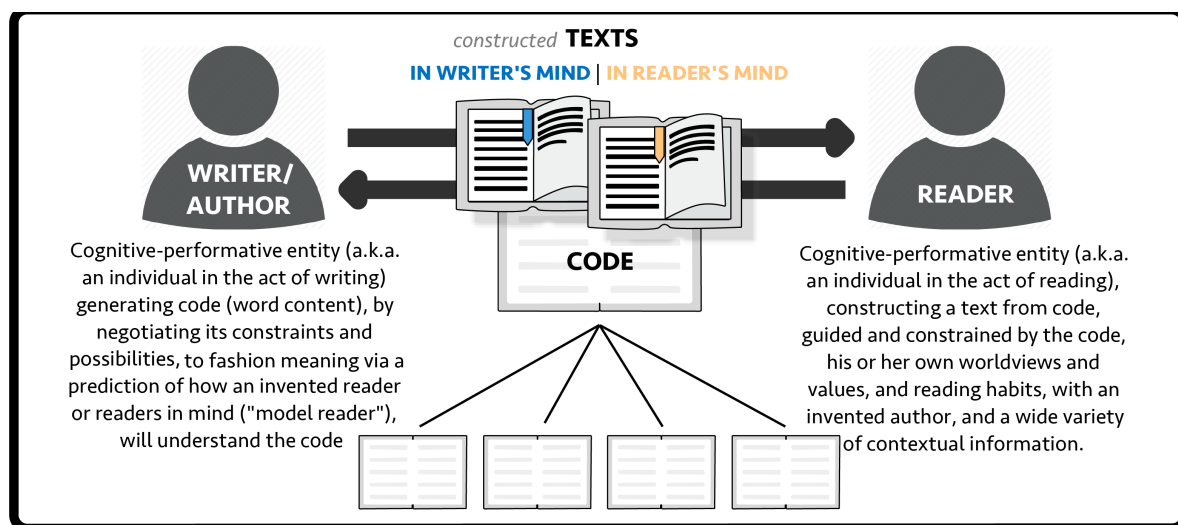
The author-reader-text triangle

CODE AND TEXTS DERIVED FROM THEM

In fact, through dialogue, there is a third type of text born which floats among us, one which is neither purely the one in our mind or the one in others' minds but instead is one generated by an interaction of the these. It is ephemeral to some degree, and can evolve, and the specifics might not be precisely defined. Yet such third texts arise all the time and take a life of their own. Over the centuries, *The Tale of Genji*, or *The Story of the Stone (Dream of the Red Chamber)*, or *Macbeth*, or any highly discussed and debated text, has "*emerged" texts that become entities with substantial stability in their own right. Communities build about the contemplation and interpretation of it have solidified for themselves a text, one less rooted it its original code and

more rooted in a social context (where society means the communities that have interpreted, defined, and decided it content).

> *Emergence" is an epiphenomenon or derivative from multiple elements that is none of those elements nor simply the combination or sum of those elements, but something more.

Also, "texts" are not faithful models of a "real" world that has been simply and perfectly encoded into language. It can resemble or mimic or evoke the real world because we use our understanding of the real world to generate credible interpretations of code, interpretations that have meaning to us beyond the experience of reading or viewing. However, we should not forget that we are working in a constructed environment, and, in the case of literature, the relevant "world" will have intentional differences from the real world—some small, some very large. A more accurate way of describing the process of deriving meaning from code is that when we construct texts, **we blend our understanding of the real world with our understanding of the textual world at hand, bringing all sorts of contexts into play to guide our interpretations.** For example, if we know a statement occurs within a comedy show we are likely to interpret it differently than if the exact same statement was made during a presidential "State of the Union" address. Or, closer to home, even if your friend and parent says the same thing, it is quite possible you will interpret it differently.

Further, **our interpretations are vulnerable to implicit bias** of all sorts. (Often part of an exercise has to do with the attempt to notice, name, and look beyond those biases.)

If we can offer a credible understanding of code to another person and that person accepts it, we have, in a sense, caused our text to be reborn within the mind of that other person. **This is the basis of "credibility"** as defined in this course.

It is often the case that interesting people create interesting texts. Having broad and lively interests can be an advantage when the goal is to produce interesting analysis.

Finally, **"texts" as cognitive entities can be multiple and undergo change, even constant change**. We read a book once and it means one thing to us. We read it ten years later and it might be a very different book. But this came happen even when just between two instances of reading it, one hurriedly and one slowly, or when the reader is in a good mood compared to when in a bad mood. Our cognitive, constructed **texts has stable and unstable elements** in it.

During the course, let us remember that we are talking about texts and they will be similar in some ways and different in others, that they have come from code, and that it is each of us who has given birth to the text, and that it resides not on the page but in our minds and in the space between us, when we are discussing it, and that it is stable in some ways and open to change in others.

2. Type of "analysis" in this course

Developing or polishing a specific set of **analytic skills is a key component in all of my courses**.

The analytic methods taught in my classes are meant to give the student the opportunity to produce knowledge for others ("**useful**"), knowledge that is "**credible**," and that is likely to have fresh lines of thinking or bring to the reader's notice aspect under-noticed but worth considering ("**interesting**").

This overall plan means that the core work of any analysis done for one of my courses might differ from what you are used to submitting as an essay or other type of written response.

First, this type of written work is not meant as a vehicle to show me that you have encountered, learned, or mastered certain facts. In other words, it is not a document to show "this is what I have learned" nor is it a summary report of what you have learned along the lines of "XXX 101 / Basic information about XXX." **The fact that you have learned certain things is the *start point* of informed analysis in this course**. The goal of the analytic essay or response in my courses is to do something with (=analyze) the information you have learned.

Second, the analytic goal is not to convince the reader that she or he *must* think in a certain way (strong argumentation), but rather **to explore the object under analysis with an ultimate intention of perhaps offering readers opportunities to notice or think more clearly about something or to rethink that something**. In order to satisfy the reader's self-interested curiosity, your work should be credible, and either interesting or useful, or both.

It is important to learn good rhetorical skills. And it is very important to base your opinions on facts when they are available and hold the arguments of others accountable to facts. Please graduate from this university with a high level of skill in both of these areas. Nevertheless, it is equally important to be able to enrich the thinking of others with your own credible, creative thinking. This is how problems are solved and how living can be more joyful and wondrous. My courses practice this type of analysis. If you have not done this before, **set aside your usual practices and learn this new type of analysis**. Add it to your repertoire of discursive argument and exploration.

3. Course definition for "analysis"

Our course definition of analysis is:

> **Analysis, for the purpose of this course, is the investment of time in the informed and disciplined consideration of an object(s) to develop interpretations, observations, and/or tentative conclusions that are credible, and either interesting or useful or both to you, the writer, and your targeted readers, by affording clarity to the object, drawing attention to under-noticed but note-worthy aspects of the object, or offering new ways to think about it.**

investment of time: The target values of this type of analysis—credibility, interest, and usefulness—all require the investment of time to achieve. Credibility requires good research and effective use of it, a thinking through of the analytic problems confronting the writing, and a reconsideration and rewriting of the analysis before finished. Interest will rely, at some point, on the "5 minute rule," that is, your observations—because of the time put into getting to know your object and the time put in to contemplating it—will reach a higher or deeper level than the average well-educated reader could do on her or his own, given five minutes of thinking about your topic. If the reader can achieve the same conclusions on her or his own so easily, your work has little interest or usefulness to that reader. My expectation of time investment is meant to short circuit the essay method of "find a feature of the text that is fairly obvious then support those conclusions with evidence (usually quotes)." That is a good exercise in learning how to write argument, but doesn't meet the expectation of the course essay. Usefulness is achieved in part by offering something the reader wants—data or interpretation—and this can in part be a function of you having done the work for the reader. For example, how often does Izumi Shikibu send a poem to her lover without waiting for him to first write her? This is against the rules in Heian Japan but she took control of that relationship. I don't want to review all 144 poems myself. If someone else did that work for me, fantastic, I'll use the results if they seem credible. Scholarship has a basic asymmetry: it takes a long time to produce something (sometimes years), but it is designed to be consumed in a very short period of time (sometimes minutes). In other words, you get to know your object well, noticing things that might have gone unnoticed. Scholarly work, like most work, is asymmetrical. It takes time to create a good product. Time invested toward making the product is process time that is rich in learning, too. Consumption of the product is usually rapid: an excellent dinner, eaten in ten minutes; a book that took ten years to write, looked over for some ideas for 10-30 minutes, a class presentation that took an evening to make and 5 minutes to give, and, so on. Time well spent increases the value of the scholarship. That is graded. Time invested increases the likelihood that there was learning that occurred beyond what the product evidences to me. That is noted.

informed (consideration): You are aware of the course themes, goals, and immediate purpose of the assignment. You have read or observed your object with care. You have probably carried out good research using academically credible sources, and thought how this research might adjust your own understanding of the object.

disciplined consideration: You have deployed the course method of analysis. You have used good critical judgment when evaluating and using secondary sources. You have reviewed your work and rewritten it when your objective, critical eye discovers issues.

interpretations: You have converted code to your text, attributing meaning or a range of meanings to it, and deciding possible significances of those meaning, too. "Meaning" works at many levels from the basics of "what happened" to the "meta" messages of the text such as theme, tone, and so on. For example, "*Snow Country* ends with the line, 'As he caught his footing, his head fell back, and the Milky Way flowed down inside him with a roar.' I would suggest that we should understand this as the definitive statement that Shimamura is not one to accept responsibility for his actions but rather wants us to conclude that 'beauty' causes him to feel and think and do things for which he is not responsible, including his irresponsible treatment of Komako."

observations: Your consideration of the object identifies aspects (items, patterns, connections within and beyond the text, and so on) of the text. For example, "It is interesting to note that every time a character in this novel resists the advice of a friend, something bad happens to that character."

tentative conclusions: For the most part, literary analysis offers what the writer things are relevant details about the object, and will the reader think about the object in a new way. This type of analysis is less likely to insist that it is the only way to think about it. Our work is, generally, to enrich the text by adding possible readings rather than focus on entirely occupying the interpretive space by our own conclusions. "Tentative" is also often a more honest position in many cases (helping with credibility), since students are usually working in unfamiliar territory and are not really experts in the field. While the above should be kept in mind, you are certainly invited to take a strong position when this seems warranted. It is just that you are not graded on the strength or conclusiveness of your argument and, please note, when it is conclusive where is should not be, this can be a grade negative (because it suggests you have not yet given your own position of full, critical evaluation). We are not practicing strong argumentation in this course. We seek careful, disciplined analysis that brings interesting things to light.

credible: Credibility is one of a scholar's core qualities. Credibility can simply derive from the scholar's name or status, for better or worse. However, for those who are not yet famous credibility is likely to turn on the written work itself. Did the author show intelligence in the selection and use of sources? Is the author well informed? Has the author put time into the various twists and turns of her or his argument, understanding the implications of what is being claimed? Are the claims themselves more or less reasonable? (Pushing the envelop can be good.) Are the assertions supported (through argument or authoritative sources) at those places in the work that call out for support?

interesting: Does your work explore new perspectives or develop the significance of certain textual features rather than proving something that would be already obvious to the supposed readers of your work?

useful: Does your work answer interesting questions, or offers new information, or organize in highly useful ways at-hand information, or lays out ideas. In other words, does your work enables others to think further on the topic in a meaningful way?

4. Situated analysis

Analysis that is meant not for oneself but for others and includes the analysis of others will have the four elements below. Each brings to the situation enabling factors as well as constraints. Good analysis will strike a balance among them.
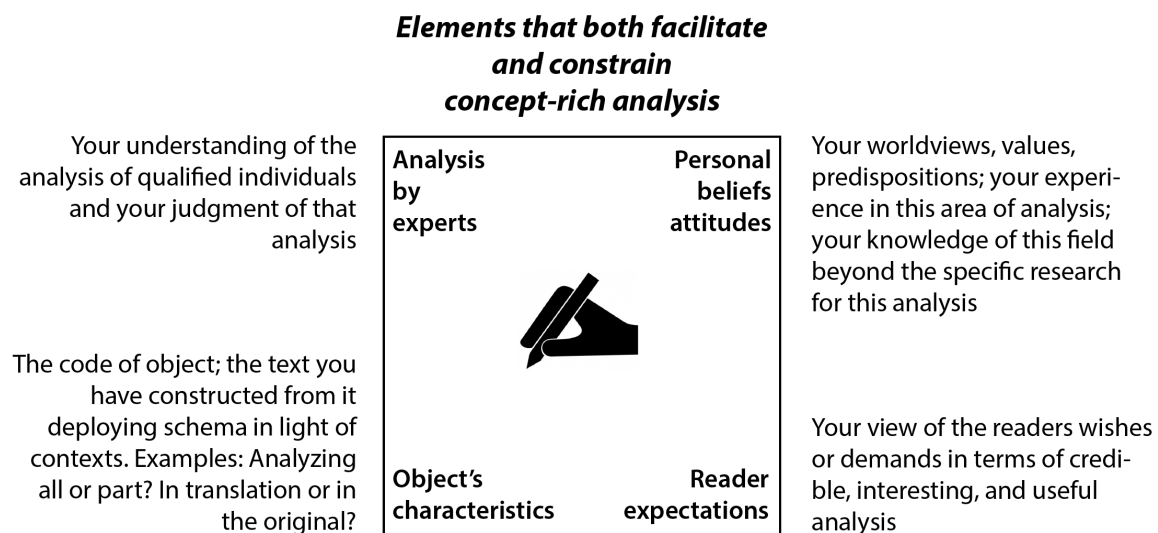
If there is very little of "you" in the work, in the case of the literary analysis for which I ask, it won't be interesting or meaningful to you and that lack of interest will translated to others as well, making the text likely to be boring.

If you have not done research and been exposed to the analysis of others, your comments might lack sophistication or not seem credible, especially to readers who know something of that other scholarship.

If you do not consider what might be interesting and useful to the reader then you cannot gain the reader's attention.

If you don't know well the object you are talking about you will be uninformed and definitely not convincing.

Doing all of this is the ideal. In practice, rarely will something succeed on all fronts. Writing is a performance that sometimes succeeds and sometimes doesn't. But the goals are good ones to keep in mind.

Elements that both facilitate and constrain concept-rich analysis

Your understanding of the analysis of qualified individuals and your judgment of that analysis

Analysis by experts	Personal beliefs attitudes
Object's characteristics	Reader expectations

Your worldviews, values, predispositions; your experience in this area of analysis; your knowledge of this field beyond the specific research for this analysis

The code of object; the text you have constructed from it deploying schema in light of contexts. Examples: Analyzing all or part? In translation or in the original?

Your view of the readers wishes or demands in terms of credible, interesting, and useful analysis

NEGOTIATING A BALANCE IN YOUR SUBMISSION

5. Report-analysis-opinion: a 3-cornered spectrum

It might be helpful to visualize the possible content of an essay as falling somewhere within a triangle were the reporting of facts takes the lead ("1" below), or the expression of one's personal opinion is instead the key element ("3" below) or that analysis be the primary component ("2" below). As sentences march across the page, the balance point will shift around within the below triangle. Additionally, on the whole, the completed work will fall somewhere within the triangle.

If, on the whole, the balance falls near the letter "A" then the work is primarily analysis and opinion and is untethered from facts. It might even be that the author is uninformed of the facts. Or that the author is more interested in making theoretical statements than discussing the text that is purportedly the object of analysis.

If, on the whole, the balance falls near the letter "B" then perhaps facts are known and shared but the opinions offered seem undisciplined with the writer just spouting personal opinions that may or may not seem (to the reader) to be well-connected to the facts.

"C" and "D" would be appropriate submissions for my course: some facts are known, some rigorous analysis is carried out, but there is also a personal component or feel to the interpretation.

Reports / data analysis or essay / opinion

1: DATA CENTERED—Report, Research Paper, Scientific Paper

2: ANALYSIS ORIENTED—Analytic Report, Analytic Essay (analysis of data)

3: WORK UNTETHERED FROM DATA OR DISCIPLINED ANALYSIS OF THE OBJECT: Journal Entries, Blog Entries, Op-Ed, casual expression of opinion
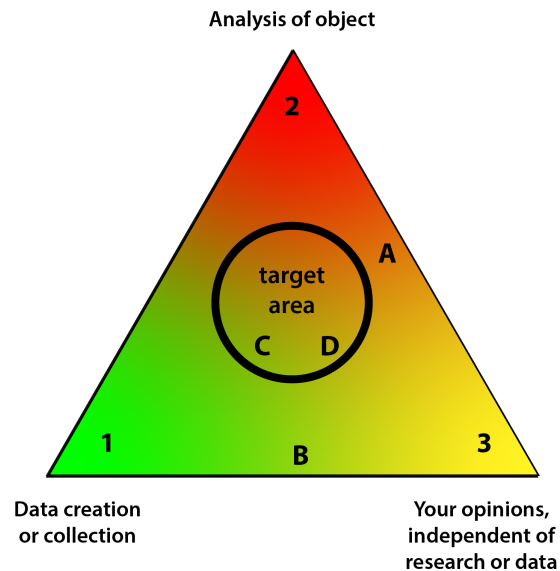
DATA-ANALYSIS-OPINION BALANCES