

# STSO 6962 – Interpretive Methods

Syllabus, Fall 2022

Thursdays, 4:00 to 6:50 PM

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Office: West 403, Office Hours: Mondays 1-2 on Webex and by Appointment

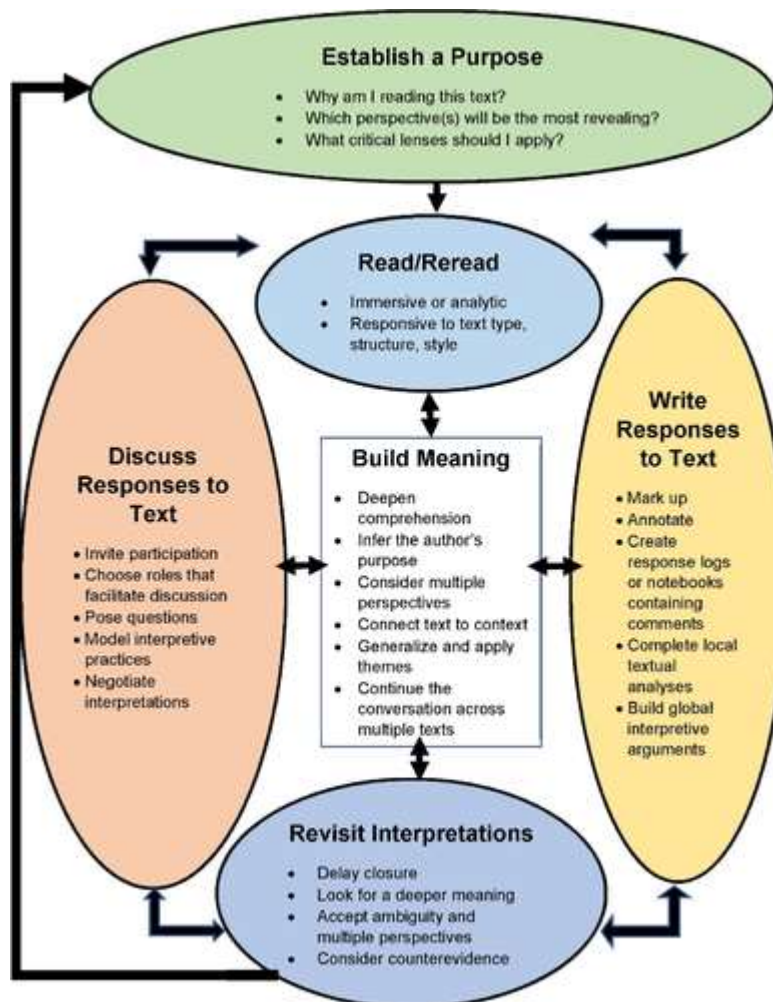


Figure 1: Morocco, C. C., & Hindin, A. (2002). The role of conversation in a thematic understanding of literature. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 17(3), 144–159. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5826.00041>

This class will introduce STS graduate students to textual, interpretive, and situational analysis methods developed and used by scholars in the Humanities. While many of these approaches were developed as tools for hermeneutic, poetic, or literary criticism, interpretive approaches have been deeply synthesized with the analysis of policy documentation, technologies, social phenomena, and cultural and reflexive research, with considerable use in feminist, queer, and decolonial scholarship (among others). Though this class will often use the word “text” to describe an object of analysis, we will also read and understand the boundaries of a text in

broad and multiple ways (including technology as text, scientific practice as text, policy as text, among others).

One of the key foundations of STS is that the interpretive act is present in all knowledge practices—just as there is no data which comes from nowhere and speaks “for itself,” and just as there is no scientific or technological apparatus not entangled among the threads of society, history, and power, there is no research practice that is not imbricated with moments of scholarly and interpersonal interpretation. This stance dovetails well (and shares a heritage with) with poststructuralist and other literary research developed since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. As such, interpretive approaches and stances are sometimes folded in as a part of quantitative and (especially) qualitative research methodologies and classes across STS and the social sciences. While there are good reasons for this, it can also at times serve to flatten the varied debates, schools, and threads of interpretive literary and textual research practices into single moments of scholarly analysis. We will highlight the disciplinary and institutional histories Humanities textual and interpretive approaches draw from, as well as focus on using research methods to resist interpretive closure. We will also undergo a specific examination of how literary theory, interpretive methods, and Humanities analysis intersect with STS historically and today, including exploring subfields like Science & Literature and interpretive communities like SLSA and SCMS.

In interpretive work, reading (or, more broadly, engaging with your object of analysis) and writing operate together and recursively—the act and sharing of writing becomes a key part of how we work through our ideas and get feedback. Writing is not the end result of research—i.e., “thinking a lot and then submitting a final paper”—but rather a community effort of constant pushes, pulls, and tweaks, out of which (sometimes) the kernels of publishable material will fall. This class will embody this method, and will feature a consistent communal writing process for you to develop your interpretive projects throughout the semester.

The goals of this class are threefold:

- To develop a better understanding of textual and interpretive scholarship in the Humanities and social sciences, including foundational texts, theories, and histories.
- To develop your own writing and interpretive techniques, including developing and arguing hermeneutic and textual evidence, in a modality and topic that advances your research interests,
- To examine some histories of and impacts upon STS that interpretive scholarship has had, as well as to examine potential futures for interpretive methodologies and approaches in STS

The class will feature student led-discussion of an assigned text and two major writing prompts.

At the beginning of the semester, students will sign up for a discussion leadership week, where they will lead the class in an analysis and deconstruction of an interpretive STS text. While there

will be wide latitude given to the student on how they want to conduct their discussion, each conversation should touch on:

- The major argument(s) of the reading
- the various methods by which the author got to that argument
- how they use textual evidence and in combination with what other lenses or data
- the intervention the paper attempts to make in the field (both inside and outside of STS) writ large
- Alternative/broader/opened interpretations of the text

There will be 5 memos of varying length throughout the course of the semester. The memos are intended to structure students' pilot research and readings toward the construction of their final paper, as well as provide material for in-class collaboration. At the end of the semester, students will submit a 6000-word paper, formatted to the style of a journal of their choice, that builds on these memos and makes a well-researched interpretive argument.

#### **Required Text:**

Most readings will be made available on the class LMS page. Texts that students will need to purchase or find externally will be listed below:

- Dvora Yanow (1999) – *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*
- Norman K. Denzin (2014) – *Interpretive Autoethnography*
- Adele Clarke, Carrie Friese, and Rachel Washburn (2018) – *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory After the Interpretive Turn*

#### **Assignments:**

**Developmental Memos: 5 Memos Total, due at varying times mid-semester**

**Project Shareouts: Due at the start of class with each memo**

**Final Paper: 6000 words, Due December 14**

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#### **Developmental Memos (5, 10 points each)**

Length will Vary

At the beginning of each memo discussion class, students will bring printed out copies of their memos for each student and the instructor (as of the time of writing this syllabus, that would be 6 copies). There will be no presentations this week—rather, we will work together to go over each student's materials, ask questions, brainstorm resources, and provide critique and direction for next steps of the essay. While not required, students are also encouraged to provide materials that can help us better understand the content and context of their memos (this may include readings that inform their interpretive lenses, copies or images/videos of their primary materials, or just story-sharing of their experiences with their materials). In general, the

more specifically we all understand each other's projects, the more insight we can provide one another.

Memos (Assigned weeks, length will vary)

1. **Pilot 1:** What text (or network of texts) will you be reading for your final paper? Give a short summary of the text. Why and in what contexts do you think this text is important? Provide background information for the text; depending on the specific form of your text, this background info may include: where does it come from, who are its multiple authors, what are the historical and social contexts through which the text was produced, what are other key texts or paratexts that you believe are necessary for more fully understanding your text's situation? (~500 words)
2. **Pilot 2:** Have other scholars have analyzed this text before? If so, what are the ways they have done so, and what interpretations or statements have they made about it? If not, what are examples of similar relevant texts that scholars have studied, and why do you believe these texts are relevant to yours? What have scholars said about these relevant texts? (~750 words)
3. **Research Design 1:** What new thing/new interpretation do you want to bring to the text? What will help inform your interpretation? Think about the multitude of elements that you will bring to your text: social or cultural theory; autoethnographic experiences; other "empirical" texts (for, say, a comparative analysis), including texts of the same or different genres; historical or archival materials (primary or secondary). To start, there should be more than a few, but less than many, elements you are bringing—think 5 to 7. In about a paragraph each, summarize each element, and what research questions that element could inform about your text. (~1000 words)
4. **Research Design 2:** Based upon the above memos, what are your formal research questions/research goals for this paper? Research questions in interpretive research can differ in goal and scope than those in quantitative or qualitative research. For example, while each research question/goal (for a single interpretive paper, you might have anywhere between 1 and 3, and I would encourage sticking to the low end), should ask an answerable question, the goal of interpretive research is often to combat closure, rather than seek it. As such, the focus on narrowness and concreteness is less important (though interpretive RQs can still be too broad or vague). From Purdue, here are some overall frames that might be useful for scaffolding your own RQs/RGs on:
  - a. A discussion of a work's characters: are they realistic, symbolic, historically-based?
  - b. A comparison/contrast of the choices different authors or characters make in a work
  - c. A reading of a work based on an outside philosophical perspective (Ex. how would a Freudian read Hamlet?)

- d. A study of the sources or historical events that occasioned a particular work (Ex. comparing G.B. Shaw's Pygmalion with the original Greek myth of Pygmalion)
- e. An analysis of a specific image occurring in several works (Ex. the use of moon imagery in certain plays, poems, novels)
- f. A "deconstruction" of a particular work (Ex. unfolding an underlying racist worldview in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness)
- g. A reading from a political perspective (Ex. how would a Marxist read William Blake's "London"?)
- h. A study of the social, political, or economic context in which a work was written — how does the context influence the work?

Again, while the “texts” in this class will be broadly defined, these literary examples are useful starting kernels for the general interpretive approach to any material. We could see similar questions posed of technology (“How would feminist technoscience read the Unreal Engine?”), policy (“How might the goals of this legislation reflect the worldviews of the dominant culture?”), or an event (“Are there Freudian implications to this Uniqlo storefront opening?”). (~150 words)

5. **Hypotheses:** Based upon your early research and work, what argument(s) do you think you be making in your paper, and how do they relate to your research questions? What specific supporting evidence will you be pulling from in both your texts and your surrounding interpretive materials? Using bullet points and your evidence, walk your reader through a step-by-step journey of each argument. (~1000 words)

## Final Paper

### 6000 Word Final Paper Due December 14 (50 Points)

Students will write an interpretive paper on a text(s) of their choice. Students are free to select any text, broadly understood, as well as any interpretive approach within the boundaries of the class. It is suggested that students select a text that is relevant to their broader research interests, as extensive external reading and situating of the text will be required for this paper.

To help with narrowing your choice, here are some examples of (though not the limits of!) potential paper archetypes that you might pursue that are relevant to the fields of STS and Science/Literature:

- A sociotechnical imaginary interpretation of a literary or cinematic text featuring science or tech
- An interpretive book review of an STS work
- An author-audience analysis of a policy document
- A situational analysis of a particular technical or scientific development or use
- A deconstruction of an allegorical poem or text commonly referenced in a scientific or technical community
- A rhetorical analysis of a major speech or writing of an important figure in science or tech

- A feminist reading of archival correspondence or debates between developers or researchers

As this paper will be treated as the foundations of a peer-reviewed manuscript, students should spend some time examining journals relevant to their field and text to identify publishing norms, such as citation style and paper structure. Given the varied nature of your research interests and subfields, it is likely that the papers in the class will all be different from one another. That being said, there will be some common elements and goals.

The final paper will leverage the previously written memos to develop a polished first draft of a rigorous interpretive argument. The argument should include a description and relevant contextualization of the text and argument, a description of the tools (lenses, other texts, theories, archival research, etc) used for interpretation, a narrative enumeration of the research question/problem statement (note: this rarely means bullet-pointing out your questions; rather, make sure you let the readers know your driving questions/goals clearly in the body of the text), and detailed exploration of your arguments with evidence drawn from the text. Your paper should conclude with an examination of how this interpretation opens up important new understandings of the text, of your relevant field, or both.

## Units

Readings memos for each unit are to be completed prior to the start of class for that Unit Discussion of readings labeled **(DL)** will be led by the weekly student discussant; all students should come to class having read the discussant reading, however.

### Unit 1: Introduction (September 1)

- Stanley Fish (1982) "Part II" from *Is There a Text in this Class?*: "Is there a Text in this Class?," "How to Recognize a Poem When you See One," "What Makes and Interpretation Acceptable?," and "Demonstration vs. Persuasion"

### Unit 2: Encoding/Decoding (September 8)

- Stuart Hall (1973) "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse"
- **(DL)** Megan K. Halpern, Jathan Sadowski, Joey Eschrich, Ed Finn, David H. Guston (2016) – "Stitching Together Creativity and Responsibility: Interpreting *Frankenstein* Across Disciplines." *Bulletin of Science, Technology, and Society*
- Weekly Discussant: \_\_\_\_\_

### Unit 3: Paranoia and Repair (September 15)

- Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2002) – "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You" from *Touching Feeling*
- **(DL)** Abraham Geil (2017) – "Paranoid Critiques, Reparative Reductions: Leys, Sedgwick, and the Productive Opacity of Affect." *Polygraph: An International Journal of Culture & Politics*, 26, 36-64
- Weekly Discussant: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Unit 4: Autoethnography and Narrative(s) (September 22)**

- Norman K. Denzin (2014) – *Interpretive Autoethnography*
- **(DL)** S. Lochlann Jain (2013) “Living In Prognosis: The Firing Squad of Statistics” from *Malignant: How Cancer Becomes Us*
- Weekly Discussant: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Unit 5: Technology as Text (September 29)**

- Keith Grint and Steve Woolgar (1997) “Configuring the User: Inventing New Technologies” from *The Machine at Work: Technology, Work, and Organization*
- **(DL)** micha cardenas (2022) “The Stitch” – from *Poetic Operations: Trans of Color Art in Digital Media*
- Weekly Discussant: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Unit 6: Art History and Science Studies (October 6)**

- Daston, Lorraine and Peter Galison (1992) ‘The Image of Objectivity’, *Representations* 40: 81-12
- **Memo 1 Due at the Start of Class**

#### **Unit 7: Theories of the Inscription and Context in STS (October 13)**

- Bruno Latour (1986) - “Vizualization and Cognition: Thinking with Hands and Eyes” from *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*
- Pasi Valiaho (2014) – “Emergent Present: Imagination, Montage, Critique” from *Biopolitical Screens: Image, Power, and the Neoliberal Brain*
- **Memo 2 Due at the Start of Class**

#### **Unit 8: Policy Interpretation (October 20)**

- Dvora Yanow (1999) – *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*
- **(DL)** Dodge, Jennifer and Tamara Metze. (2017). "Hydraulic fracturing as an interpretive policy problem: lessons on energy controversies in Europe and the USA." *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*
- Weekly Discussant: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Unit 9: Assembling Reality through Texts and Legal Interpretation (October 27)**

- Jasbir Puar (2007) - *Terrorist Assemblages*, “Introduction” and Chapter 3, “Intimate Control, Infinite Detention: Rereading the Lawrence Case”
- **Memo 3 Due at the Start of Class**

#### **Unit 10: (Jim Away November 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting)**

- -NO CLASS

#### **Unit 11: Situational Analysis Part I: Positionality and Theory (November 10)**

- -SA Part I (Intro and Chapters 1-3)
- Mara Dicenta (2021) “White animals: racializing sheep and beavers in the Argentinian Tierra del Fuego.” In *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*

- **Memo 4 Due at the Start of Class**

**Unit 12: Situational Analysis Part II: Mapping and Visual Materials (November 17)**

- -SA Chapters 4, 5, 11, and 12
- **(DL)** John Law (2002) – “Aesthetics” from *Aircraft Stories: Decentering the Object in Technoscience*
- Weekly Discussant: \_\_\_\_\_

**Unit 13: Thanksgiving (November 24)**

- -NO CLASS

**Unit 14: Materializing Ideology through Text and Machine (December 1)**

- Ranjodh Singh Dhaliwal (2022) – “On Addressability, or What Even Is Computation?” in *Critical Inquiry*
- **Memo 5 Due at the Start of Class**

**Unit 15: 4S (December 8)**

- -NO CLASS

**Final Essay: December 14**