Cultural Analytics

ENGL 64.05

Fall 2019

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Replication vs. Reproduction

- **Replication** is an exact duplicate: re-running the prior experiment with same data and exact same methods. An an ideal but also limited.

- **Reproduction** means trying the experiment again. Perhaps with slightly different data or methods.

Reproducing Research: Midterm Assignment

Description: This project involves the reproduction of one of the products of digital humanities research covered in course readings. The field of digital humanities/cultural analytics/computational literary studies/etc is still emerging and there have been some questions raised (within and without the field) about the value of the methods, the ability to reproduce the results, and overly broad claims. The project has two components that when combined will enable you to better evaluate published research in the field and design your own project (the second major assignment).
Due: Friday, October 18, 2019 at 11:59PM (Canvas).
Instructions: You will select one of the following essays/chapters from the course syllabus:

- Andrew Piper, "Plot (Lack)"
- Laura B. McGrath, "Comping White"
- Jack Elliot "Vocabulary Decay in Category Romance"
- Ted Underwood, "Do We Understand the Outlines of Literary History?"

Attempt to reproduce this study. You may use a slightly different archive, if you cannot access the original, but make every attempt to reproduce the results using the same or similar methods. You may use JupyterHub or software on your own computer but you must upload the final workflow to Canvas (the Jupyter ipynb file would fulfill this requirement).

You will then write a short critical paper (5 – 7 pages) describing methods used along with a critique of the original project. You should reference several of the theoretical and critical readings that we've discussed in class and place your argument within the academic conversation concerning cultural analytics.

Here are some guiding questions for the developing your critical response: What was the original inquiry question? How well did these methods fit that inquiry? What was the major argument in relation to these methods and the inquiry question? Was the selected archive appropriate for these questions? Were you able to reproduce this study? If so, do you think the findings were robust? If not, what problems did you encounter?

STS: Technology and Politics

- One approach is to say that it isn't the technology but the social systems in which these technologies are embedded.
- Another is to ask about the characteristics of technical objects and the meaning of these characteristics.

Example: Bridges

Langdon Winner examines the bridges of Long Island in "Do Artifacts Have Politics," *Daedalus* 109, no. 1 (1980): 121-139:

"It turns out, however, that the two hundred or so low-hanging overpasses on Long Island were deliberately designed to achieve a particular social effect. Robert Moses, the master builder of roads, parks, bridges, and other public works from the 1920s to the 1970s in New York, had these overpasses built to specifications that would discourage the presence of buses on his parkways. According to evidence provided by Robert A. Caro in his biography of Moses, the reasons reflect Moses's social-class bias and racial prejudice. Automobile owning whites of "upper" and "comfortable middle" classes, as he called them, would be free to use the parkways for recreation and commuting. Poor people and blacks, who normally used public transit, were kept off the roads because the twelve-foot tall buses could not get through the overpasses. One consequence was to limit access of racial minorities and low-income groups to Jones Beach, Moses's widely acclaimed public park. Moses made doubly sure of this result by vetoing a proposed extension of the Long Island Railroad to Jones Beach."

Big Data as a Phenomenon

(boyd and Crawford 2012)

1. *Technology*: maximizing computation power and algorithmic accuracy to gather, analyze, link, and compare large data sets.
2. *Analysis*: drawing on large data sets to identify patterns in order to make economic, social, technical, and legal claims.
3. *Mythology*: the widespread belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy.