

“Mapping Ideas”

Take a walk...

When engaged in research, we often have to evaluate and handle conflicting claims. In this assignment, we will be looking at what is often a more vexing dilemma, and one with which you will certainly be familiar: namely, the experience of having some kind of conflict within our own awareness, understanding, or position on a given issue of personal concern. While this kind of conflict can indeed be unsettling, I want to look at this phenomenon as potentially a more healthy experience, especially when this tension fuels our curiosity and wonder. Just as Thoreau provides us with an image of three chairs as a way to communicate the three conflicting claims found within his own identity, here we will see that “conflict” itself has many faces. Let us begin by addressing conflict as it can be found within and between three aspects of the “self”: **desire, imagination, & memory.**



Part I. Conflicting Desires

“I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society.”

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Part I: *Desire*

Desire is a threshold power, and is therefore liminal: by its very nature, desire points beyond itself to something “other.” This “beyond,” sensed within the experience of desire itself, may be something intellectual, emotional, erotic, or any number of other ‘subjects’ (or ‘objects’) of enormous range and significance. Desire can point beyond itself to something external, but it can also point to something “other” within, such as a dream that we may have about our future which we have yet to fulfill. By their very nature, most desires point both outwardly and inwardly in some manner or form.

Conflicts of desire can be extremely complex, and there are several reasons why this is the case. For our current project, we will have the decided advantage of limiting our conflicts of this sort to how they relate to writing, but you would be wise to keep this broader complexity in mind as you work.

Subjects, Activities, & Themes: For this part of the portfolio, I would like you to think about the various subjects, activities, and themes that we have addressed this semester, and to find ideas that you would like to pursue and engage through further research and writing. By this, I mean that I would like you to find and think about the “thing” which has left you most curious, and which you would like to approach in light of your own life and experience. To begin, you will need to create an *interest inventory*. This will help you to *re-search* much of what we have done this semester, and to narrow down your list to just those “things” or combinations of “things” which you would like to know more about. Look to the *FieldWriting* book, class reading and film assignments, course notes, and your first portfolio work for ideas. List as many terms as you can, so that you will have a lot to draw from.

“Mapping Itineraries” Portfolio II Part One
Due Thursday, November 1st, 2012

Interest Inventory Focus: Once you have thought about our work this semester and created some lists, look for subjects and themes which might possibly spark some interesting ideas, and about which you have a working knowledge at this point in the semester. For instance, you may look to **places** such as the UML Campus, **activities** such as walking, or the idea of **home** as Chantal Akerman understands this, and decide that “**artistic observation and representation**” is an interesting subject to expand upon through research. Once you have decided upon an angle of interest, you should be able to speak about this without notes for a period of one minute without repeating yourself. You might want to try to do so with a friend or family member before moving on to the discussion of imagination. When you are sure that you have something to work with, write it down as your tentative subject or theme of interest.



Conflicting Imagination

“In my films I follow an opposite trajectory to that of the makers of political films. They have a skeleton, an idea and then they put on flesh: I have in the first place the flesh, the skeleton appears later.”

Chantal Akerman - *Moving Image Source*

Part II: *Imagination*

Imagination, like desire, is a threshold phenomenon, and in their workings desire and imagination are allied. Desire sends us in search of ourselves and what is other, and imagination allows us to articulately express the shape of that search. Here you will have an opportunity to make use of these powers of your own imagination, as you shape your *ideas and desired knowledge*, thereby increasing your working knowledge of your research choice.

Conflicts of Imagination frequently result from the fact that it is often quite difficult to decide which avenue to take in the shaping of our desires, as the imagination presents us with various possibilities for doing so. However, a more fundamental conflict can arise as we attempt to navigate our choices in relation to those made by others. We can “copy” or “imitate” others, but imagination is fundamentally original, in that it originates within the individual. In our present context, as we are attempting to shape our desire to develop our chosen subjects and themes, we will see how imagination allows us to develop a *tentative thesis* by first exploring several *working hypotheses*. This will help us to summarize our own ideas and those of others in a manner which will guarantee that our thesis will be our own.

Working Hypotheses: Before knowing just what you will be saying about (thesis) your chosen subject or theme, you will need to ask several focusing questions. Doing so will allow you to both sharpen and develop some tentative hypotheses regarding your choice, and provide some avenues for further inquiry as you move towards more focused knowledge. This focused knowledge will not come if you skip this stage of inquiry. Knowledge and judgment are related activities, but they are not the same. For now, please remember that one of the primary causes of error is making a judgment before being in possession of adequate knowledge.

“Mapping Itineraries” Portfolio II Part One
Due Thursday, November 1st, 2012

Focusing Questions: Just as you used an interest inventory to focus on a subject or theme of interest, here you will ask three focusing questions to develop your working knowledge. You should do so with certain working hypotheses regarding your topic in mind. In other words, you probably have some idea of why you are interested in your subject or theme, and perhaps what you would like to say about it more specifically (thesis). Give this some thought, do a bit of exploratory writing, and then compose three questions regarding your own desire to work on your angle on what you have chosen. While it might not be obvious to an outsider at this point, these questions should be posed in light of all that we have done this semester. For instance, if you were curious about the function of memory, you might ask about how we rewrite memories of our childhood homes, with Chantal Akerman’s film *News from Home* in mind. Of course you can make explicit references to these works in your questions if you so desire. After you have crafted three questions, please devote a paragraph or two in a thoughtful response to each. Once you have accomplished this, you may move on to the next section of this portfolio.



Conflicting Memory

“I feel that with regard to Nature I live a sort of border life, on the confines of a world into which I make occasional and transient forays only, and my patriotism and allegiance to the state into whose territories I seem to retreat are those of a moss-trooper.”

--- Thoreau, “Walking.”

Part III. Memory

Take a stand...

Desire and imagination mediate ideas and our relation to them, but this activity cannot continue *ad infinitum*; we must ultimately consolidate our work. This does not mean that we finish with something once in for all, but instead indicates that just as we have purposes for writing, we must remain true to these purposes by saying something about our chosen topic. Hence in addition to desire and imagination, **memory** is absolutely crucial. While engaged in research, we should trust our memories, and indeed as we move from our interest inventories through the narrowing activity of proper focusing questions, we need to consolidate our growing knowledge properly. This appropriation of the material should result in focused knowledge, and more importantly, in judgments that can lead to saying something about our topic. This is where the thesis lies; the thesis is a conclusion about or of our earlier work, which in fact can appear in the guise of a resolution. As we shall see, this reference to memory communicates something elemental in this regard.

Thesis (stated and/or implied): In the last section I made note of the fact that we often judge before having adequate knowledge, but we can also make the opposite mistake, which is holding back from making proper judgments when required. Often papers that I read let me know immediately that this fact has not been adequately understood by their writers, because the first sentences of the paper

“Mapping Itineraries” Portfolio II Part One
Due Thursday, November 1st, 2012

telegraph that this is the case. By this I do not mean that I expect papers to provide an explicit thesis statement from the outset, or anywhere else for that matter. But what I *do* need to see is an indication that the material has been thought through, and that something is being said about the topic at hand. This is different than simply providing a theme or subject for discussion, as it requires evaluation and judgement by the writer. In this, we see that in some senses memory is primary. By this I don't mean the memory of this or that fact, but rather that both the desire to say something and the imaginative activity spent in doing so are always *someone's*. The fact that I have a desire to say something and engage my imagination in order to do so would be meaningless if I did not ultimately recognize these activities as *my own*. Hence, as you complete the following, which is the last task of this portfolio, please keep in mind that in some ways, all of the writing that you do, research or otherwise, requires this element of self-awareness and self-analysis (perhaps this is why it is called *re*-search).

Focused Knowledge: With the above discussion in mind, please write three leads or ways into a *hypothetical* paper discussing what you have discovered regarding your chosen subject or theme. In these leads, please write in such a way that I will be able to discern what you are communicating *about* your subject or theme, and *about* your relationship to your subject or theme in your essay as imagined. Your leads should each be one or two paragraphs in length. Once finished, see the checklist below.

Portfolio Checklist

Your Portfolio should include the following items:

1. **A typed “Interest Inventory.”** This should be a page or so in length, and should consist of at least four or five categories. Much of what you include will be from class, but you can add other related thoughts as well if these help at all.
2. **Three focusing questions and your responses to each.** This section does not have to be long, as you will be able to answer each question with one or two paragraphs. However, it should be very clear and concise. In other words, it should give me an indication of how accurate you were at this point of the assignment regarding your own working knowledge of your subject or theme at this point in the process. Please remember that you must have a least three questions.
3. **Three leads to a hypothetical research essay** which state or imply a thesis regarding your chosen theme and your relation to this theme as chosen and evaluated in and through this portfolio assignment. These leads can be one or two paragraphs each.
4. **Your final work should be typed,** and contained within a thin, two pocket folder. Please include all of your work, including early drafts and notes.

