

*“Topics of Composition”*  
Portfolio I  
Due Monday, February 23rd, 2015

*“Red, black, and grey - the image of a road, framed by sidewalks and reddish-brown brick buildings, appears in front of me. A car pulls out from a side street on the left and drives across the screen, exiting to the right. Another car pulls out from the kerb and drives into the foreground towards me, yet it does not seem to come closer. Cut to another image where a car appears from the forefront of the screen and drives off into the distance without losing its definition as a locus of interest in the static frame. A strange space is opening up, one that appears deep yet seems to flatten all that traverses it into abstract blocks of color and light. Traffic, both human and mechanical, stratifies the surface of these blocks of color and light, creating passages in which “I” move, tracing lines and building up density, intensity in the image. Above the din of traffic, a woman’s voice erupts offscreen: ‘Dear Chantal’, it says, ‘When are you coming home? We miss you very much.’”*

- Maria Walsh

**“Exploratory Workshop”**

The following two-part assignment has been designed with our various “Topics of Composition” projects in mind. It should help you to begin the task of interweaving the various themes we will be addressing this semester, and to gain confidence in your ability to effectively generate and pursue complex theses and original essay ideas. In successfully completing this assignment, you will be well on your way to developing the skills required to move beyond a basic awareness of these themes and methods, giving you a far greater appreciation of the sophisticated activities necessary in developing a personal, confident, and original authorial voice.

**Portfolio Objectives & Learning Outcomes**

As you move through the experience of taking proper field notes, interpret these field notes relative to your understanding of fieldwork proper, and observe yourself moving through this process, you will begin to develop a greater appreciation of the following:

- The importance of *constantly developing* your powers of observation and description.
- The importance of *applying these powers* of observation and description to your own engagement of ideas and rhetorical strategies throughout the entire writing process.
- The importance of *using proper rhetorical techniques* in unifying these distinct, yet related types of observation and description, and doing so with various academic audiences in mind.

**Evaluation Criteria**

Every aspect of this assignment should display **hard work** and **creativity**. As discussed in the syllabus, your portfolio grade will be based upon the quality of your writing (60%), your adherence to assignment directions (20%), and your personal initiative and creativity(20%). In this particular assignment, I ask that you pay a great deal of attention to your mechanics, diction, and grammar. I also ask that you proofread carefully as you write, concentrating on transitional ideas and language as you do so. Please avoid any use of the second person (you, your, yours).

**IMPORTANT:** All of your work for this portfolio should be included within a thin, two-pocket folder of some kind.

## PART I: "Collection & Reflection" (already completed in class)

### Step 1: Ten to twenty minutes (To be done in class)

Please watch the first shot of Chantal Akerman's film, *News From Home*, carefully observing *all that is presented to the viewer*. Open your senses, and use every one of them. When you have finished viewing this material, please divide a piece of paper into two columns, and on the left side of the page, list five to ten things which stood out to you while watching this opening shot of the film. Next, to the right of this list, please spend about five minutes commenting upon your initial observations, and include some remarks regarding your experience of what you have viewed of the film thus far.

*Do not censor yourself.*

### Step 2. Ten to twenty minutes

Once again, please watch this opening shot of the film, *this time making a mental note of anything that you may have missed during your initial viewing*. When you have finished, list your new observations in the left hand column of a fresh piece of paper. In the right hand column, please devote five more minutes to commenting upon what you saw the second time through, and include some remarks regarding your reaction to what you may have missed the first time. Does this experience surprise or intrigue you? Do you find it disturbing or perhaps a bit unsettling? If so, why? *Once again, do not censor yourself.*

### Intermission

At this point of the assignment, I would like you to think about possible ways to "tell the story" of your experience with this film thus far. In your notes, jot down a few thoughts about how best to communicate what you have done in step 1 & 2, imagining that your reader has not yet had any experience with this film. Please draw heavily from your notes as you write.

### Step 3. Twenty to thirty minutes

With all that you have accomplished in this assignment thus far in mind, please watch the first ten minutes of Chantal Akerman's *News from Home*, once again observing *all that is presented*. As you do so, I ask that you do two things. First, please relax, and surrender to the unusual nature of this work. Second, pay attention to any and all personal associations that come to mind as you "take in" the first few scenes of the film. When you have finished, once again divide a fresh piece of paper into two columns, and on the left hand side, list the associations that came to mind, and whether or not these associations were sparked by images, words, or both. Next, to the right of this list, please spend about five minutes commenting upon how the weaving of images and words in the text of the film might have brought the "text" of personal associations that you have listed to mind, and whether or not these personal associations seem to recommend or form any kind of narrative structure at this point. In other words, could you imagine *yourself* putting together a personal representation of these associations as Akerman has done in her film?

### Step 4: Ten minutes

Take some time to look over all that you have written in your notes for step 3, and make sure that your writing is clear enough for you to understand at a later time. This is essential, as you should be able to make sense of all that you have written later in the semester, and there should be enough substance to this work to pursue each and every aspect of your experience in a larger work of some kind. When you are through, please include these notes with your other work, and begin your work on Part II.

## PART II: "Selection & Reflection" (to be completed on your own)



### Step 1: The Ethnographic Essay

For this section of the portfolio, I'd like you to draw upon your observations of the world around you. Choose an environment on campus you are unfamiliar with, outside of your usual surroundings. This could be an academic department, an art gallery, a club meeting place, a cafe, or even a bus stop (this seems to be a favorite). I only require that your place of choice be populated by people. Observe the scene and take copious field notes. Next, write a two page report describing the place, the people, and their actions, *so as to convey the spirit of the place and offer some insight into the impact of the place on the people*. This assignment asks you to use observation as your primary resource for writing. It is meant to be grounded in immediate, close observation, so don't rely upon a long-ago memory. Go somewhere interesting and open your senses - use all of them. Please do not use second person (this means **YOU**). **This typed report should be two pages in length.**

### Step 2: The Auto-Ethnographic Essay

For this section of the assignment, I'd like you to draw upon your self-observations in response to Part I of this portfolio assignment. Once you have completed your ethnographic essay, find a quiet place to think about the impression that the spirit of this place and its people has made on you as an observer. Once again take copious notes, being careful not to censor yourself as you write. Then write a two page report describing the effect that this observational exercise has had on you, *so as to further convey the spirit of the place, and offer some insight into its impact on you*. This assignment asks you to use self-observation as your primary resource for writing. It is meant to ground the immediate, close observation of Step I in and through the mediating activity of self-observation and writing, and so while once again your work will not be reliant upon distant memory, it will by its very nature be an act of constituting memory of some sort. Once again, avoid the use of second person. **This typed report should be two pages in length.**

### Portfolio Guidelines:

Once again, remember that all of your work for this portfolio should be included within a thin, two-pocket folder of some kind.

## Portfolio Checklist:

### I). Completed in class:

- Your double-entry notes from Part I, Steps 1 & 2.

### II). Completed outside of class:

- Your copious notes from Part II
- A two page place observation report of your chosen campus location, as described in Part II - Step 1
- A two page personal observation report, as described in Part II - Step 2

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In class, we have been discussing the often 'serious' nature of 'play,' as well as the importance of this type of playfulness in generating ideas linked to the close reading of a text. Please keep these discussions in mind throughout this assignment, use your imaginations, take your time, and have fun! I believe that you will be pleased with what you discover.

Tom