What do I want to do?

Start considering options, ways forward – predominantly regarding areas of study, projects, and programs to consider. What would I want to study? What would I want to write? What is important to write? What is assessable to the reader? Who is the reader, teacher, audience, student, public, politic, organization, town hall, club, class, cooperative.

It seems to have something to do with politics, media, communications, digitizing, networking, news, social media, plugging into the network, the Internet, science fiction, Donald Trump, Donald Trump, Donald Trump. Steve Bannon. Jonathan Winthrop. W.E.B. Dubois. Frederick Douglas. Toni Morrison. Deleuze and Guattari. Jasbir Puar. Spivak. Heidegger. Nietzsche.

I am motivated right now by the current political climate. It provides a great weight, heft to the situation. Having spent many years considering a path forward in my own life, the severity of the current situation, particularly Donald Trump and the quickly right-moving political field, conversation, interface, culture.

I have considered academics for many years. I remember going to Dana Burgess my senior year of college and telling him I wanted to go to graduate school. I gave him a list of authors and topics and told him I was not sure what field to pursue that would best allow me to study these things that interested me and somehow felt connected. He admonished me, pointing out to me that I had not approached him saying I wanted to study a *field* – politics, philosophy, English; I had just walked in with a list of things to study. I felt chastised and defensive, and have clearly not forgotten in.

For several years following that I drifted academically. I did not feel I was done studying yet, and having been swept up in international romance, I did my MA at Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany. I studied American Studies, and true to form I continued an interdisciplinary approach on a disperse topic. I studied cultural studies comprised of literature, politics, and film. Much of it revolved around critiques of injustice – economics, class, race, gender – and systems of violence.

I returned to higher education administration. Over the next 4 years I practiced a different set of skills. I learned how to leads teams and manage projects in an educational environment. I supervised 7 Resident Directors and implemented the training and management of 37 student Resident Assistants. I taught students how to be residential leaders for the peers and how to create educational environments outside the classroom. I managed mental and physical health crises, contributed to multi-million dollar college projects, and provided vision for learning communities that focused on social justice and civil rights. I designed in led workshops on identity, social justice, and engaging college students in difficult conversations. At the same time, national politics in the United States were escalating into less seemingly less predictable and potentially dangerous ways.

Two years into my time working in Student Affairs I attended a faculty training on Universal Design. The session focused more on incorporating Universal Design into pedagogy rather than physical space, which is often the central focus of the area. At that session, I was able to introduce myself to Professor Jackie Woodfork, who was teaching in the history department at the time. I told her I had studied American studies in graduate school. She had quipped a response about how her nephew had gone into American studies now, but she had told him it was a bad idea – “You’ve got to ask yourselves the question,” she said, “what’s your *methodology*?” She emphasized the word “methodology,” strongly suggesting that methodology was something that American studies lacked, or at least did not clearly establish. Months later, still replaying the moment in my head, I fantasized about witty retorts in which questioned the validity of her own field or redirected her critique to the area of academics in general. I suppose at the time her certainly had left me off balance, and my lack of experience left me speechless – she was a professor after all and I a *mere* staff member. Nonetheless, her words stuck with me, and I knew that if, hypothetically, I was ever going to pursue academics I would need to have a clear answer to her question – what was my methodology?

On November 9th 2016, Donald J. Trump was elected as president of the United States. Trump’s election was no out of the blue; right-wing extremism has persisted through the history of the United States and had certainly been noticeably percolating as the Tea Party movement since Obama’s first election in 2008. However, it foregrounded something that had for many Americans, especially white financial-secure Americans, become normalized (see article on white disillusionment). It caused a massive portion of the population (check numbers of people who don’t like Trump) to confront much of the violence systemic to American economics and culture – its classism, its racism, its sexism – its layers of disempowerment, disenfranchisement, and hatred. This massive gasp rippled across the country and across national and international media. This collective gasp was caused by a promised increase in forms of violence that, while in many ways already normalized in society, were unpalatable to many observers of the political drama. Trump promised to ratchet up these concerns, and his first few weeks in office proved that he was not joking.

As I mentioned earlier, I have considered academics for many years. Now, at a pivotal moment in time, a time when networked media has slide American society toward dictatorial control, I am finally returning to what Dana Burgess told me about academic disciplines and what Jackie Woodfork asked me about methodology. The political climate of 2016-2017 seemed to have grounded me and returned me to the world of scholarship. It had provided me a subject and hinted at what would evolve over time as a methodology.