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 it.

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.

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Projects

What topics should they cover?

How should they be written? Could it alternate between narrative and more traditional academic scholarship? Perhaps alternate by chapter – i.e. a chapter about political climate followed by a story about the graveyard in a small town on the Arizona-Sonora border.

What data is it offering? Certainly citing other works and analyses. Should it go so far as to include sociological research? Survey data? Qualitative interviews?

Would it be worth situation research in the American West or Pacific Northwest somehow? Perhaps looking at political responses in rural towns, both progressive and conservative?

What kind of project could include researching social media “texts” (the kind of thing that can “trend”) that reflects and reinforces political statements, particularly surrounding the 2016 US-Presidential election? What patterns arise over the course of the primary and general elections? How does audience implicit preferencing via automatic social media platforms create echo chambers of ideological thought? How does this both stymied and galvanize political activity? How does it affect how we think about news and politics? For that matter, what’s the difference between *politics* and *news*?

But social media may not actually be the focus, but rather one aspect of the focus. It seems that the primary focus should be, in part, an academic discourse around the rise of American fascism, or at least the threat thereof in the form of Donald Trump (we shall see where the future takes us – a dark thought at the moment).

In that case, the dissertation should focus on Donald Trump and the Rise of American Fascism. It should cover: 1. The polarization of American politics, how and in what ways; 2. Structures of 21st century American Neoliberal Capitalism incl. finance, debt, crisis, resource capitalization, privatization and cost of education, and incarceration and racial segregation; 3. The narrative of terrorism post 2001. 4. Social media, immediacy, audacity, living in the network; 5. How we watched the 2016 election and how we let it happen; 6. What is fascism and why does it matter?

Primarily areas of research:

The polarization of American politics

Social media, immediacy, and networked life

Neoliberal American Capitalism and financial systems of oppression (and crisis)

Donald Trump and American Fascism

Secondary areas of research:

Science Fiction and Dystopia (in film and literature)

Early American Literature

American Film History and Analysis

Holocaust Studies (incl. pop. cultural depictions, interpretations, and effects)

Intersections of American and German Philosophy (Emerson, Whitman, Dickinson, Nietzsche, Heidegger)

Higher Education (how does this fit in? most likely on a political level, how do politics affect higher education and how do institutions of higher education navigate themselves within a neo-technological political landscape?)

Tertiary areas of research:

Victoria!

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Structure Ideas:

Goal: 220-295 pages

OUTLINE ESTIMATE: 220 pages (BOOM DIDN’T EVEN TRY TO DO THAT)

INTRO 10 pages

This book has an agenda. This book has an opinion. If academics should welcome all ideas, then this book is not academic.

What does politics mean? Polis, Plato, and Aristotle

PART ONE 63 pages

Politics in the United States (Pre-Donald)

Hegemony: American Progress 8 pages

White middle class understanding of the world, pop culture, post-racial, Race Barrier Broken Obama, March Towards Progress

Sean King’s Better Technology Does Not Mean Better Society

Race (and Gender, GLBTQ, and other oppressed groups) 20 pages

Race as conquest (Battalora), Violence and Freedom, Represent and Destroy, Incarceration, Immigration, Images of the Oppressed, Necropolitics (which lives matter), Microaggressions, Changing Demographics, Racial Segregation, White Fragility, (White) Disillusionment

Class/Finance 20 pages

Economic, WWII and Keynesian Economics, the Right Turn at Reagan, Deregulation, Economic Neoliberalism, Inflation/Stagnation/Debt/Financing/NickleAndDimed, Housing Market and Financial Crisis, Paying Off Banks, Dodd Frank and It’s Failures

Educational Segregation and Keeping Poor Schools Poor

International Exploitation, NAFTA, Trade Deals, Third World Exploitation, Jamaica, Oil, Iraq and Afghanistan

Politics (Bush, 9/11, Obama) 15 pages

Yes, We Can and No We Can’t, Stalling Progress

Progressivism

Remember when Bush won and we all thought the world was ending? Ha Ha.

Occupy Wall St., Black Lives Matter, Dakota Access Pipeline

Climate Change???

PART TWO 157 pages

Trump as Fascism

A Brief History of Fascism 15 pages

The United States and Fascism (Andrew Jackson vs. Hitler), Holocaust Horror and Cultural Nightmare, Definition of Evil, Proves Morality Anecdote, Majdanek anecdote, American Aren’t Fascists, Right?

The Network 12 pages

Images (what was propaganda, technology makes the concept of propaganda glib), Social Media, Technology, the Internet, Birthing the Meme, Tweeter

Rational (as opposed to irrational) Conservatism 10 pages

Obama and the Tea Party 8 pages

Indivisible, Already a Violent State (See Part One!)

The Donald 15 pages

chapter about who he is, starting with Obama making fun of him, then working backwards to his life, and then how he came to run for office, and how he might have experienced becoming president and why he was making the decisions he did, include the moment when Trump has the press conference with Obama, paint a dramatic scene, include data

The Election 25 pages

Bernie Sanders vs. Hillary Clinton and the DNC

The Reality Show and How Trump Won #ThePresidency, the Republican Party was splintered

Necromancer Steve Bannon, the Apocalypse, and the Power of Racist, Bigoted, Populism

Did he mean to win?

Trumpism 20 pages

What’s the Goal Now? Money, Power, Twitter, T.V., and Bigoted Masculinity

The Man Wrestling the Bear is a Russian Spy

The Transition

Executive Action, Testing Loyalties, Eruption

The Promise of Violence, How ironic? He’s a man of his word.

On the Edge 12 pages

So now what?

The Courts and Constitutional Exceptionalism

When a Republic Fails;

How do we know, what is the metric? Violence? Genocide? What is American 21ist Century American Fascism?

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Continuing to think about how to structure my further education, I am often returning to the need for specificity. The previous exercise outlining a dissertation on the Trump presidency covers too much ground and does not clearly state a specific area of research.

I am mulling it over.

Lately I have returned to the topic of

Crisis and Apocalypse

This area of research focuses on US political crises in the early 21st century and cultural manifestations of the apocalypse as responses to these crises. Okay, that is too vague. Maybe it needs to be more specific. Yes it does. What crises? When I think of crises, I’m thinking primarily of global climate change, financial crisis, and rhetoric of partisan political crises (the ways in which the opposition party is dooming us).

Topics:

Cultural Representations of Crisis in 21st Century America.

Financial Crisis (2007-08) and its cultural responses, predominantly looking at films (*Inside Job*, *Margin Call*, *The Big Short*, *The Wolf of Wall Street*).

Crisis and Apocalypse: Film and Science Fiction’s Response to Political Crises of American 21st Century (*Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Interstellar*, blah end-of-world films *Day After Tomorrow*, etc., …

Climate Change and Financial Ruin

*House of Cards* and responses to political

Note:

Two academics working on contemporary forms of ignorance (agnotology): Robert Procter Science Historian at Stanford and David Dunning at Cornell University.

Dunning-Kruger Effect, “cognitive bias in which low-ability individuals suffer from illusory superiority, mistakening assessing their ability as much higher than it really is” (Wikipedia, “Dunning-Kruger effect” 2-22-17).

What if the topic of inquiry were Crisis, Agnotology, and Technology: forms of misrepresentation in the 2016 presidential election. In what ways is false information perpetuated in political media.