

FLOW ~ or Finding (and Keeping!) Joy in Academic Writing and Research ~

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*that elusive
sense of
FLOW –*

*-space/time to connect
here and now at the
Obermann Center*

-sustaining practices

O yes!
This is why I
do this ~

- **demands of knowledge production**
 - words, ideas, contributions, interventions, publications, winning grants, *knowledge*. **All. Right. Now.**
- **research time as “catching up”**
 - (vs catching breath, deepening of work, connecting and sustaining)
- **cultivating pleasure in our work**
 - can enhance its rigor and meaningfulness to publics ~ (breadth and impact)
 - can enhance work *flow* ~ (in final version and in our process)
- **aim:** craft plans for approaching project(s) with a sense of curiosity, intellectual commitment and possibly (!) joy.



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Writing Through Writer's Block:

Race, Gender and Knowledge Cultures in the American Academy

MS in process

introductions !

- your name!
- something you are curious about in a project right now OR
- something you are hating about a project right now
- (if possible in a single sentence! 😊)

land acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that we are present here on the homelands of the Ho-Chunk, Meskwaki and Otoe nations. We acknowledge their claims, along with those of the Ioway / Báxoje, Missouriia and indigenous people from many nations, in this region.

if people would like, we can discuss land acknowledgement as part of our embeddedness in the colonial history of the American academy later ~

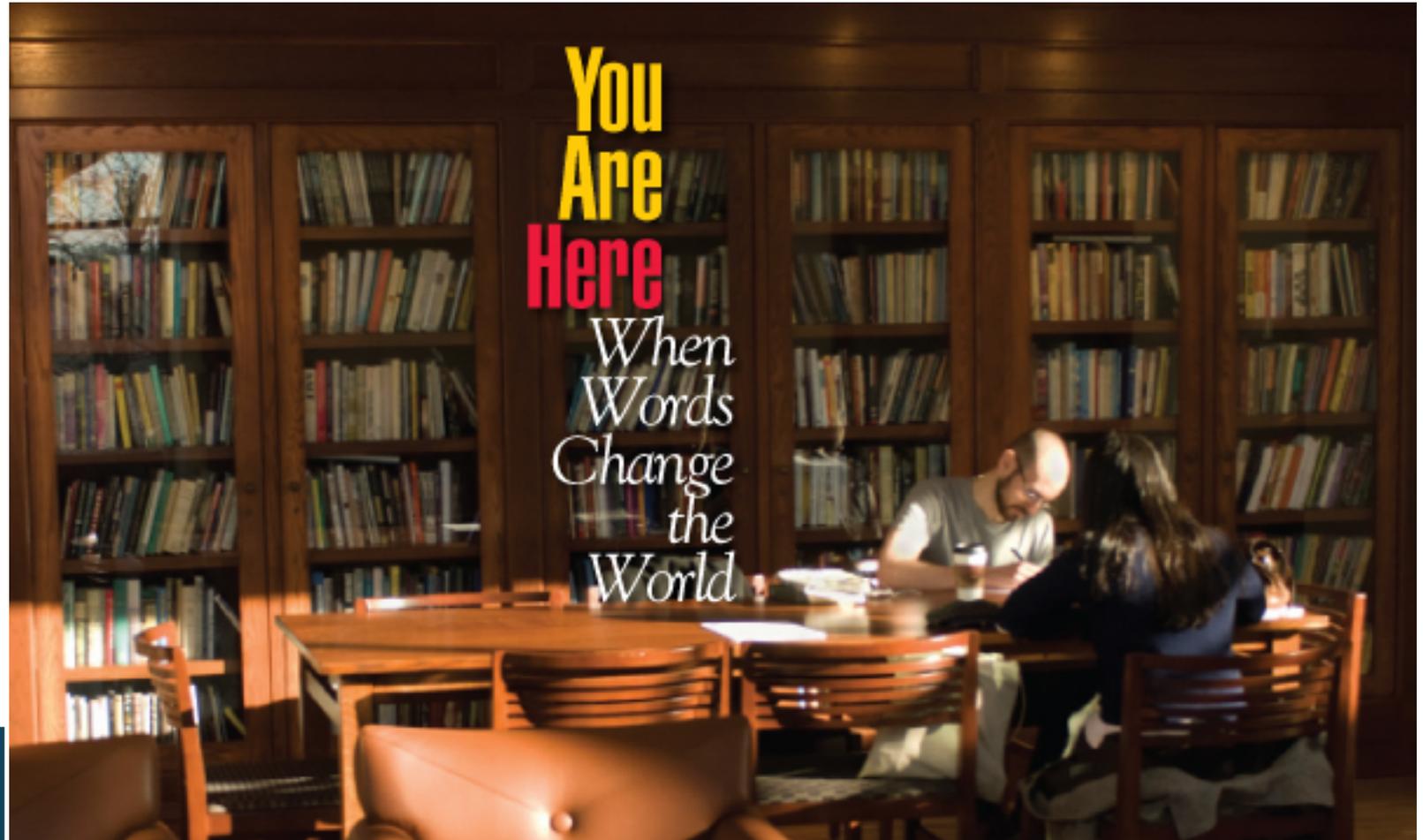


overview



The WRITING
UNIVERSITY }

writing as craft, art form, honed process



legacies of place felt as inspiration / burden

Part 1 – writing & flow

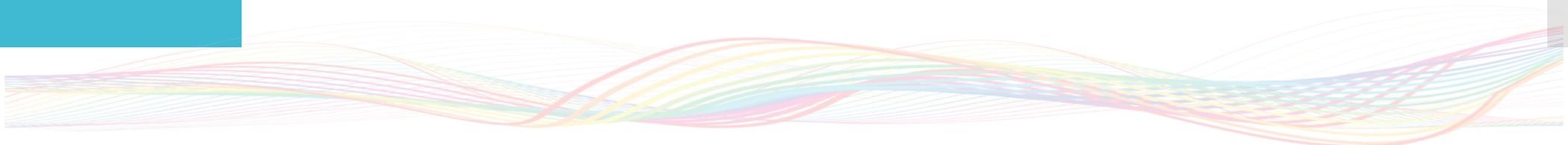
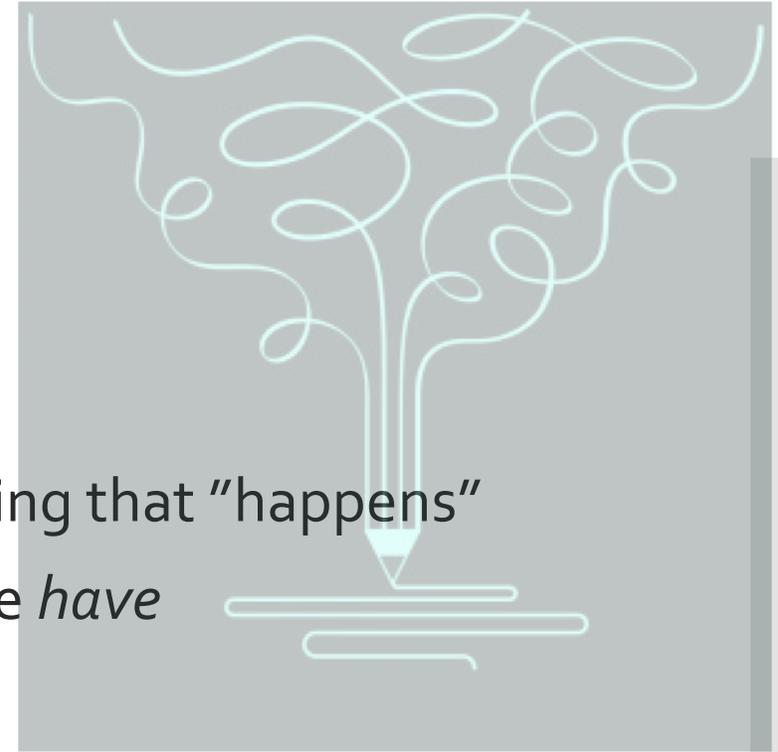
“Because I had assumed that Anzaldua’s words flowed effortlessly and perfectly from her pen and keyboard, I was startled to realize the extent of her revision process. Her approach to writing was dialogic, recursive, democratized, *if you find that writing is hard, that’s the curse of its control.* (William Zisser 2009)

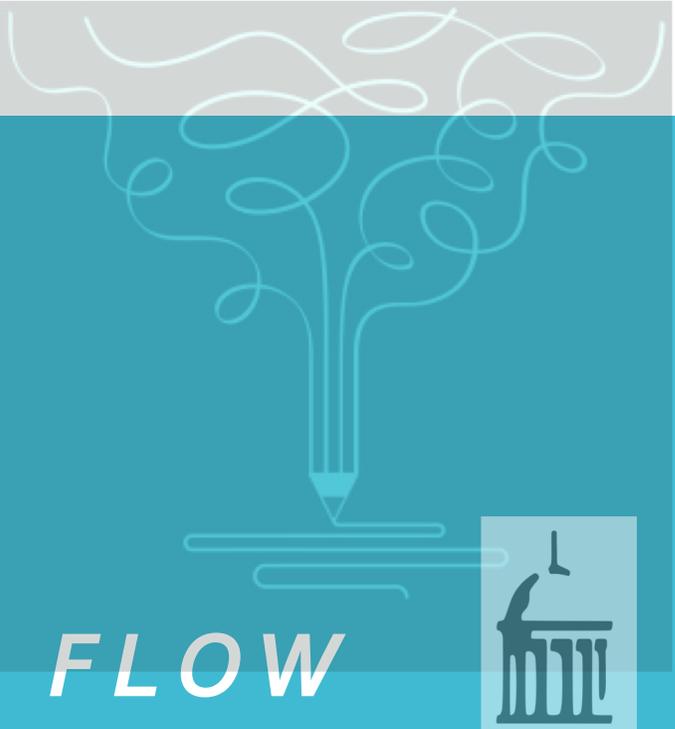
mystifications

- flow as desired, elusive – something that “happens”
- flow as something (other?) people *have*

paradox of productivity

- counter-productive: writing as *too* slow, anxiety-provoking
- “dead-lines” – double-edged sword





FLOW

FLOW : harmonious sense of balance between challenge and skill
(Mihály Csíkszentmihályi / positive psychology)

- intersectional understanding of flow / friction in academic research
- *What can be asked and studied, said and taught – how and by whom?*
- **for especially underrepresented faculty :**
 - accounting for histories of speech, silence and silencing
 - **content:** materializing ideas, arguments, terminology, research design
 - **form:** presentation, dissemination – *sense of authority*, feeling believed, respecting our selves
 - **institutional blocks:** disregard, pushback, “casual” devaluation

flow | friction | block –

- access to authority, legitimacy, recognition in field / profession
- **TRUST: creativity as freedom to reinvent as well as reproduce**
 - walking as repeated act of falling and catching of self ~
 - creative, “inferential LEAP” –can be scary and exhilarating)



flow

I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To convince myself that I am worthy... Finally I write because I'm scared of writing but I'm more scared of not writing. (Gloria Anzaldúa 1981)

"Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar."

"Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks."

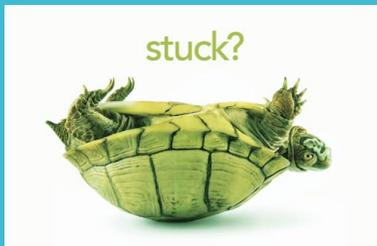
Gloria Anzaldúa



<https://geanzaldua.weebly.com/about-gloria.html>



slow & fast joy & frustration



slowness can be a privilege ~

- B + S note it is often the privilege of the tenured.
- But! the professionally secure can help set a pace from faculty, regardless of the consequences for education and scholarship.

slowness can be a curse

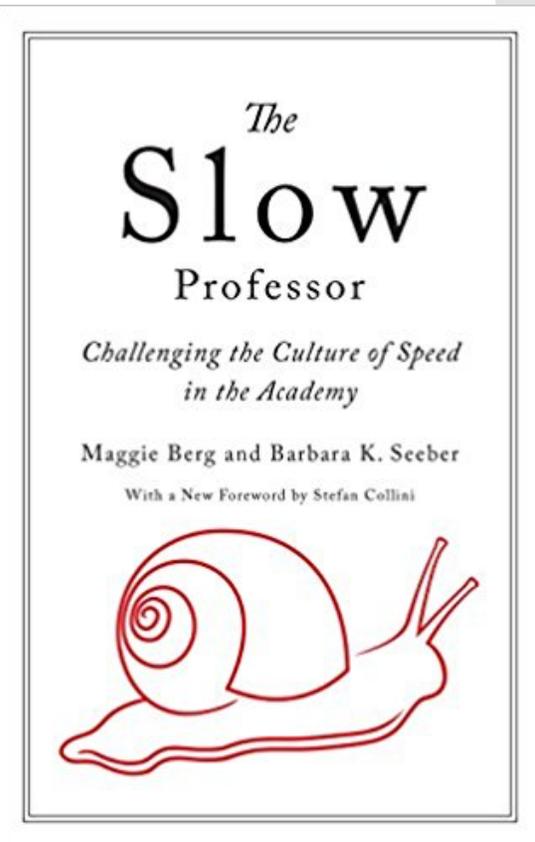
- sometimes we want to move swiftly

speed can be a curse too!

- rushing tends to be bad for knowledge

practices in ways that enhance teaching, research and collegiality. slowness and quickness in writing are *relationships* to time, not purely a matter of words per day, publications per year.

- "timelessness" or periods of deep thought, creativity and problem-solving
- How can we work *with* as well as *within* time?
- How can we calibrate focus and cognitive-emotional states to be more at ease during the time we devote to our research?



Part 2 – invitations to pleasure

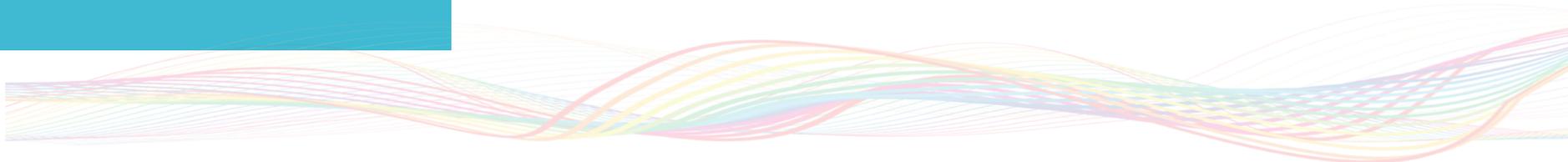
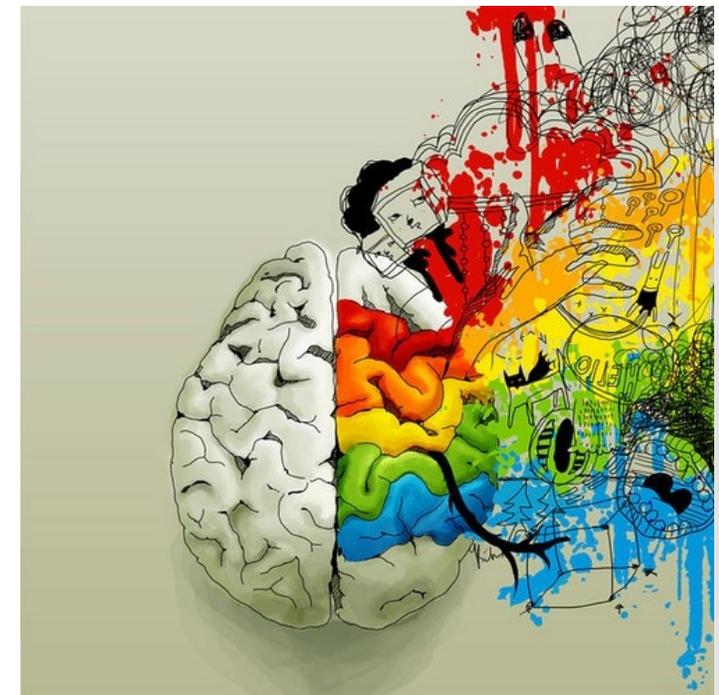
invitations to
(ebb and) *flow*

- **practices**
- **prompts**
- **orientations**
- **springboards**

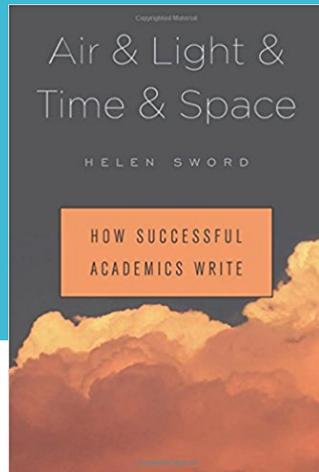
invitations to direct our thinking, invigorate energy into a project, troubleshoot, discover, explore, clarify ~

repertoire (not steps we would follow with every project!)

intellectual, sensorial, political



writing rituals: pleasurable writing environments



- **COMPANY:** solitude/ whom do we prefer to be around when we write?
- **PLACE:** where do we like to write?
- **TIME:** when do we like to write?
- **DURATION:** for how long do we prefer to write?
- **EMOTION:** what tasks best match our cognitive state that day/time?
- **SENSES:** what do we want to hear, taste, see when we write?
- **AUDIENCE:** whom are we writing for? Inviting out and inviting in
 - wishlist readers
 - scarier readers
 - trusted readers

crafting a writing ritual

purposefully evoke the senses, modulate environments, focus through imagery and words (writing beacons or mantras).

possible prompt: what brought you to your current project, why is it important to you?



the forest & the tree

why do I want to write about this--?

from FOREST to TREE

1. Select a "tree" you know you want to write about.
1. Select an argument you want to make in the project
 - data set / result
 - historical artifact
 - ethnographic interview
 - art installation
 - methodological proposal
 - framework, theory, stakes
 - rant 😊
2. Linger over it, describing it thickly for someone unfamiliar
2. Unfamiliar it, describing it thickly for someone unfamiliar
 - What is it? What does it look like?
 - What is its backstory? How was it made, why, by whom?
 - How does it work? What has motivated you to create this intervention/proposal/rant?
 - What are its impacts, meanings? How do we know?
3. How do you know that your argument matters?
3. Why do you want to include this tree in the project?
 - example of something
 - What would be missed if it were left out?
 - What evidence would you like to generate for our argument - where will we find it? What can't it tell us?



literature reviews:

feeling out the field, situating our interests and attachments

PART 1

~~PART 2~~

- short synopsis of a study in field
- annotate 4-5 books or articles
- **I feel**
 - gut responses as we read –
 - tracking emotions
 - have love, appreciation irritation, boredom
- **I say** list main patterns to compile the project's investments
 - comments and arguments in relation to the study
 - amend, extend, critique, shift the study
 - open, tighten, loosen, bend, reverse
- write a paragraph situating our project's aims, methods, (potential) findings in relation to work in the field.
- **we learn**
 - knowledge gained for our field(s)
 - valuable why and for whom?



turning the
editorial
volume down

turning the
editorial
volume up

-
- turning it down: super super simple tasks
 - turning it up: record critical voice's thoughts and comments in margins

min

max

unlearning and unknowing

“what I’m writing myself out of is what I’m writing right now”
(Fred Moten 2018)



1. Name *one place* where you are stuck. Try to be *specific*

- places where our work feels thin
(it could be with method, argument, framing, data wrangling– what point feels extra hard about the work right now?)

- places where we fall into rehearsing tired phrasing

2. Briefly describe your challenge

lay out the difficulty and feel free also to note any emotions attached to it (frustration, weariness, curiosity, shame, etc.). You are allowed to say “I hate X,” if you do!

- places where we feel unsatisfied

3. Why is this *particular* point in your work challenging?

try to answer this question without falling into self-accusation – consider your challenge a knowledge problem *for the field*, not for you alone and personally

- places where we feel unsure

→ **Can you integrate, an open, exploratory, intellectual discussion of the knowledge problem you are facing into your project...?**

→ **sitting with unknowing = the hardest and maybe coolest part of being an academic.**

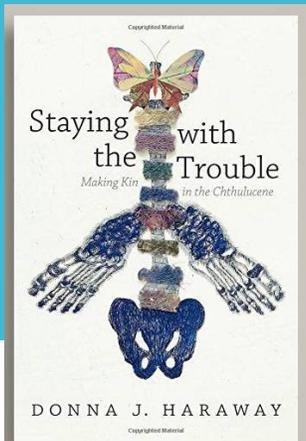


connecting affect with inquiry

- **irritation or delighted skepticism**
 - what is wrong with ____? Like seriously - what is wrong with them/it?
- **curiosity**
 - what is interesting, weird, problematic about ____?
- **engagement**
 - what are we paying attention to today, and why is it important?
- **generosity and gratitude**
 - who inspires us and why?
 - what do we like and appreciate about that person's work?
 - How does their research support our own - and can we carry the spirit of their work into your own in ways that are true to *your* project?
 - coupling critique with collaborative creativity

method:
invitations to
pleasure

invitations to
(ebb and) *flow*



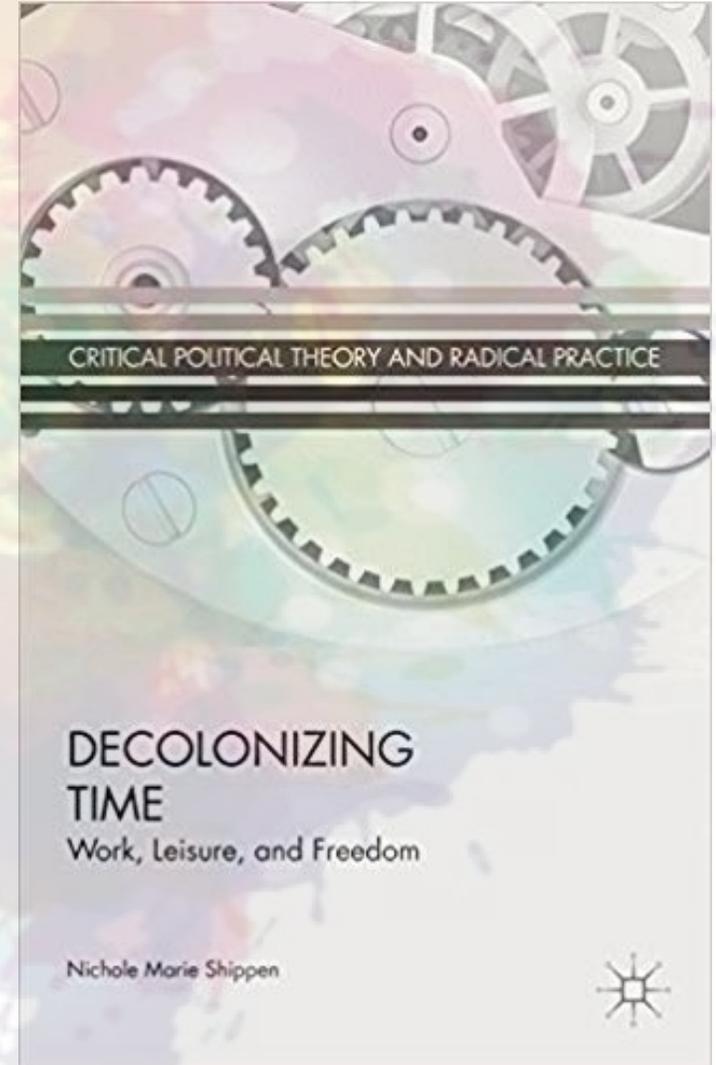
practices and cultivation of *flow*

1. disciplinary training – method, history, theory, praxis
2. knowledge of fields – secondary sources
3. knowledge of objects of inquiry – primary sources

→ 4. **our responses as we write are research data:**

- interest, concerns, boredom, surprise, delight
- writing toward the interesting
- wondering about the boring or the aggravating
- “staying with the trouble” (Haraway 2016)

Part 3 –
crafting plans,
calibrating
focus,
decolonizing
time



small picture:

SMART goal
that is
appealing



^ Approachable or appealing

30-60 minutes of writing ~

completion-based goals:

Where will you begin your next work session?

turn a completion goal into an inquiry-guided goal.

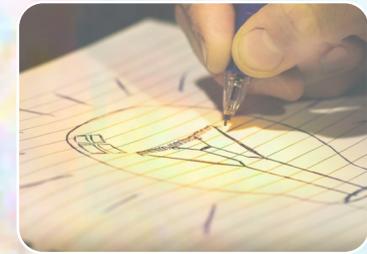
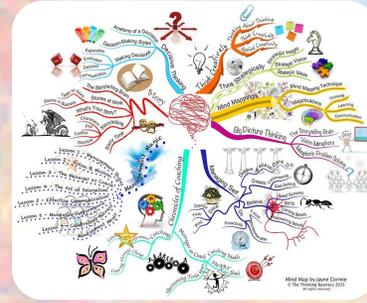
- "finish results section"
- "work on introduction"
- "sketch three sequences"

inquiry-guided goals:

- "how are my results different from others? How are they similar? What are their implications for x + y groups, my work?"
- introduce archive ~ "why have I selected *this* material? What can it tell us about <topic>, and how do I know? What questions does it raise?"
- "what characters do I want to invite into this scene, and how do they look and feel? What action best captures *this* moment?"

big picture:

plans that calibrate the **experience** of inquiry



to do list:

- completion
- product
- deadlines
- productivity*



research program:

- interests
- commitments
- process
- questions
- *contributions, discoveries, problem solving*



summer plan:

- aims *and* goals
- process *and* product
- questions *and* discovery
- labor and support
- what do you need to do this work?*



big picture plans:

- working from/toward
interests, commitments

- avoiding the paradox of
productivity

- 1. What aspect of your project(s) seems most appealing or engaging?**
 - *offers entry points to begin a research program*
- 2. What aspect of your project seems especially challenging to you at present, and why/how?**
 - *place to springboard, troubleshoot, experiment with and own*
- 3. What are you most interested to discover and *figure out* as you work this term?**
 - *list to keep on desktop, in studio or on wall in office*
- 4. What brought you to this project, why does it matter to you?**
 - *freewrite to revisit periodically, esp. on stuck days*
- 5. What do you need to do this work?**
 - *springboard sessions, breaks, water, exercise, research support, music, tea, visit to archives, time w friends, time in nature!*



go us...!

Wishing everyone a beautiful, enriching, sweet week of thinking, writing, work, play, and time with friends and (chosen) family...!



Discussion :)

- *What do you all want to talk about??*