SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT 1: COMING TO TERMS

For the “Coming-to-Terms” essay, students read “Footwork,” an essay by Rebecca Solnit in which she describes a walk through a landscape, theorizes particular kinds of walking (e.g., pilgrimages), historicizes /culturally situates walking practices, links walking to thinking, and connects political import to the acts of walking and thinking, finally labeling “walking” as “a cultural act.” (All in about 3200 words.)

To work on their reading, students annotate, create a word cloud, discuss the “keywords” of the text; identify (and discuss) the aims, methods, and materials the text presents; and then use the word cloud to craft a “rendered summary” of the text.

Then, once a summary is completed, the students go on to do an analytical piece (mostly like a rhetorical analysis) essay in which they begin to imagine ways of engaging with the text. Note that there are a variety of ways to define a “coming-to-terms” essay, and you might consider using the “loosely defined” genre as an opportunity to discuss genre, and, then, as a group, define some of the goals (and reader expectations) of this CtT essay. Groups define genres, and the features of a genre begin to cohere, but they also are not ever completely stable. Think in terms of the “performativity” of genre: performative doesn’t mean that something is just “enacted”; rather, performing a practice (here, “genre”) is meant to stabilize while at the same time those stabilizing moves make visible that the practice is unstable (or it wouldn’t need stabilizing through reiteration). It is in the instability that change is possible.

During the drafting, students walk through their own town (using AllTrails web [or smartphone] app or Google Earth to situate themselves in the landscape) and try to engage with the landscape as Solnit does with hers.

- What sort of thinking does your walking produce?
- What are the points in your own landscape?
- What are your own personal histories of those points? (not taking them to cultural histories quite yet)
- What other sort(s) of walking has/have been done in this area ( Is it instrumental?--like shopping or getting from one point to another [suburb to city] for work? Is it leisure? Is it religious [a shrine])?