Essay in Miniature: A Probative Instrument

> The word *Versuch*, attempt or essay...thought's utopian
> vision of hitting the bullseye is united with consciousness of its
> own fallibility and provisional character.
>   Theodor Adorno, "The Essay as Form"
> I cannot keep my subject still…If my mind could gain a firm
> footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is
> always in apprenticeship and on trial.
>   Michel de Montaigne, "Of Repentance,"

This is an approximately 90 minute assignment: Compose a draft of an essay (a form of considering, questioning, musing, puzzling, conjecturing, arguing by means of the act of writing), drawing from our work on texts—writing and discussion—in class to-date.

Do the following in an order that makes sense to you:

1. Looking over the texts you've read (along with the writing you've been doing this week). Note passages you find of particular interest in relation to what you now consider the most significant ideas in the texts we've been reading.

2. Choose one or two passages and consider the following:
    Why is this important to this author?
    How does it relate to the various other texts we've read?
    Why do I care about this?
    Why should others care about this?

Note: You may find that your thinking at this point has superceded the writing you did earlier. If that's the case, begin with new exploratory writing that moves you toward these questions.

3. Frame a question (ideally: a surprising, intriguing, even playful—seriously playful—question) with which you'll title and begin your essay.

4.a) Identify portions of the texts that help you think about your question.
  b) Note other potential sources (to be consulted later or referenced in your draft from memory) that might contribute to your thinking.

5. Elements and Constraints:
        Draft an essay in two or, at most, three pages.
        Begin with your question.
        Use material from texts we've been reading.
        Include direct quotations with citations.
        Use material from your notes on class discussions.
        End with a new question or cluster of questions.