

## ***Plot Projects***

*I have no clear goal in mind for the notes I take, other than to help myself remember the intensities of the day, the mix of sensation and thought as it rises and falls with the swells. It's possible that in the notes some form will announce itself, and they will lead to a poem or an essay. It's possible they will not. But taking them forces a kind of attention that makes the experience richer, and attention is central to both artistic and spiritual practice.*

Alison Hawthorne Deming, *Writing the Sacred into the Real*

*The way I would begin a poem like that would be the way I would begin any poem. I would start with the senses and I would start with my sensual pleasure in what I was experiencing; or I would describe a physical object very carefully and then see if anything else rose out of that. That to me is the salvation. Salvation is in the physical object, whether it's my body, a locust, an egret, an iris, or a man-made object in space. In the particular object lies all that I discover.*

Pattiann Rogers, *The Dream of the Marsh Wren*

*A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.*

Walt Whitman

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A plot is a place, and we'd like you to learn and express one plot on St. Olaf's campus in the course of this semester. Choose one natural place on St. Olaf's campus and visit it several times in the course of the semester (at least once a month). And figure out how to tell that place to other people, so that they can understand and feel it too.

A plot can be a chart or a diagram, so we'd like you to map this place on earth in relation to other places at St. Olaf and in the bioregion. These plots may be conventional (like a map) or unconventional (like a diagram or flow chart). They may include GIS images or Google Earth images (or not). But they should give us a contextual sense of this place on earth.

A plot is also a story, and we'd like you to place the story of this place in time, describing changes and continuities from February to May, and from the 1850s (the time of first white settlement in the area) to now. We'd also like you to describe the communities—both human and natural—of this place. What's the ecological niche of this place? How is it a part of larger flows of nutrients and energy, including flows of human energy? What's the story of nature and culture in this place? Is global warming, or suburban development, a part of this place's story?

How, too, is the story of this place part of larger flows of ideas and images? Who else has written about places like this? Is there prose or poetry about the nature you see?

Besides this verbal expression, we'd like you to give visual expression to your plot—in two ways. First, we'd like you to sketch it, seeing if you can say what you see using the conventions of visual communication. Second, we'd like you to photograph it in different lights and moods, and as it develops in the course of the semester. We'd like you to try close-ups and panoramas, to give a viewer a comprehensive sense of your place in campus ecology.

Finally a plot is a scheme, a plan to accomplish something, so we'd like you to plan(t) the future of your plot, imagining its development over the years. What's the future of this place? And what's your future? And how are they related (or not)?