Dr. Joshua Masters’ Mountain of Notes

* Pre-writing exercise
* Can be done with written texts, visual texts, films, music, talks, stand-up—basically anything that can be analyzed
* Exploration of your own reactions and thinking concerning the primary text you will be working with
* A good way to see how several different elements or quotes might be connected to one another, often in surprising ways

Steps:

1. Pull four to five quotes or elements from your primary text. These should be things that catch your attention and interest you.
2. For each of the quotes or elements, establish the context within the larger text. (Answer who, what, when, where concerning the quote’s or element’s placement in the text.)
3. For each of the quotes or elements, establish any connections that you see with the rest of the text, and/or with larger ideas from class discussions.
4. For each of these quotes or elements, pose at least five theoretical questions or observations concerning what it does, how it works, why it works that way, etc.
5. Once you have assembled your mountain of notes, look for questions/observations that either occur repeatedly or are similar to other questions/observations that you’ve made. This will help you focus on an overarching idea for your thesis.