

Correspondences

Portfolio I

Due March 2nd

Please complete the following four-stage portfolio assignment, addressing each section in order. Take a break between each stage to “collect” yourself and your ideas. Your final work should be five to four to seven pages in length, and contained within a thin, two-pocket folder.

IMPORTANT: You can not successfully complete this assignment if you have not read or viewed the texts assigned this semester thus far.



1. In the first chapter of his book *Six Names of Beauty*, Crispin Sartwell discusses ‘beauty’ as “the object of longing.” Here he makes several claims about this experience of the beautiful, and perhaps most provocatively, he states that longing is inherently related to both life and death.

Interestingly, Sartwell begins this chapter with a description of his first crush, Dianna Rigg. As I mentioned in class, my first experience of this kind was not a crush, but a moment of attraction accompanied by a sharp pain that seemed to be at the core of my being – seeing Nastassja Kinski on the big screen when I was 15 years old. I didn’t know what to make of it then, and I still find it a bit mysterious, yet I remember the experience in all of its ambiguity quite vividly.

For the first section of this portfolio, I would like you to think about your own experience, and to write about a personal encounter with beauty as the “object of longing” as described by Sartwell that seemed to be significant to you at the time. You don’t have to be as predictable as my 15 year old self, but feel free to discuss any similar experience that you have had if that is what comes to mind. While doing so, please draw from this chapter in Sartwell’s text as a whole, and draw from other sources and discussions from class if doing so will help you in any way (feel free to include an image in your essay as I have above).

This should be one to two pages in length.



2. In his essay “Nature,” R.W. Emerson states that “Truth, and Goodness, and Beauty, are but different faces of the same All.” For this section of the portfolio, I would like you to keep this claim in mind as you write yourself a personal list of “things that quicken the heart.”

- First, I would like you to create a list of twenty “things” that quicken your heart.
- Next, I would like you to narrow your list to five items.
- Finally, I would like you to evaluate each item on your list according to beauty, truth, and goodness. In other words, I would like you to think about whether these things quicken your heart primarily because you find them beautiful, true, or good.

Once you have finished, please provide me with an account of your experience, describing what you have discovered about yourself in the process. As part of your account, please comment upon Emerson’s claim, and let me know whether or not you believe that his claim about truth, goodness, and beauty has helped you with this exercise, or if this exercise has helped you in your comprehension of Emerson’s essay.

This should be one to two pages in length.



3. I think that it is quite interesting to look at Thoreau's essay "Walking" and Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* side by side, and not just because these works are seen as premier examples of the essay form. What I find most intriguing about comparing these works are the various ways that each looks to its own medium in light of its central concerns. We have seen this with *Sans Soleil* where Marker attempts to repair the web of time, whether that of personal history or individual memory. In the film, Marker tells us that his "constant comings and goings are not a search for contrasts; they are a journey to the two extreme poles of survival." In the literature about this film, this statement is usually taken as a direct reference to the crisscrossing between Africa and Japan that Marker throughout the film, but I don't think that that is an accurate interpretation. Perhaps Henry can help us understand just what Marker is up to with this description of his "coming and goings."

Henry makes a similar comment in the "Solitude" chapter of *Walden*, where he describes how he would "come and go with a strange liberty in Nature." In "Walking," I believe that this discussion of his coming and going in nature again appears in his description of wildness as it relates to civilization. I think that it is here that we find at least one example of what he might consider his "two poles of survival." Another example of these poles might be found where he famously ties the experience of wildness to the preservation of the world, and describes adventuring in this regard as a form of "persevering." These two aspects of wildness provide us with the possibility of looking at both of his poles of survival as being within the "wilderness." In each of these examples, he allows himself the opportunity to shape his writing accordingly.

For this section of the portfolio, I would like you to consider some possible "poles" of your own "survival," and how the various ways that your personal "comings and goings" between these poles might give you some ideas for your writing. Here are a couple of possibilities for thought:

- I am a very social person, but I also love to spend long periods alone. I don't think that I would be healthy if I were to neglect either of these "poles" of my survival. I believe that this is similar to the way that I like to think about most things on my own, or develop my own take on things, but also how this is balanced by my great love of engaging with the ideas of others. Do you do something similar in your own thinking?
- I love nature, and I like to camp and hike, but I also have lived in cities and enjoyed every minute of my time there. In addition, I lived in Europe for several years, as well as here in America. Again, I could find parallel "poles" in my writing and intellectual approach to just about everything that interests me.

Once you have found some examples like this in your own life, try to come up with a few ideas of how best to express this in your writing. In other words, think about how to either explain this to your reader (me) in a straightforward manner, or about how to write about an activity that will allow you to "enact" these poles in the form and content of your writing, much as Thoreau does in his essay "Walking." – This should be one to two pages in length.



4. On Page 9 of *A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, Timothy Corrigan discusses the importance of the “screening report” as a “preparation for class discussions and examinations.” I believe that analogous benefits can be derived from this approach in other fields of inquiry and essay writing as well, which is something that we will return to throughout the semester. What is wonderful about film in this regard is that its imagery and narrative tendencies immediately lend themselves to specific, concrete language, which often carries more weight than more abstract, general accounts which often tempt us as we begin our writing projects.

Throughout this semester, we have been discussing the importance of representation (mimesis) and narrative (diagesis), both thematically and as a context within which to understand the works that we have been studying. For this section of the portfolio, I would like you to provide me with a screening report of the film that you have been assigned for the semester. In your report, I would like you to follow the *Badlands* screening report that is provided in the book. For example, if your film is *The Spirit of the Beehive*, you could structure your report like so:

1. *The Spirit of the Beehive* as coming of age story: Narrative:
2. *The Spirit of the Beehive* as coming of age story: Compositions:

However you choose to approach your film, make sure that your choice will allow you to address both narrative and compositional elements in your report. I am aware that we have yet to look at much film terminology this semester, so just do your best to describe your film as accurately as you can with your own words. If you would like to look ahead to some of the terminology that we will be using later in the semester, take a look in chapter 3, beginning on page 38.

This should be one page in length.

Please use your imagination, and have fun!