



HARTFORD HERITAGE PROJECT

“Re(discovering) Hartford through Susan Bordo”

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Suggested Partners: Downtown Hartford, including areas within walking distance of the Hartford Times Building; alternatively, East or West Hartford.

MULTIMODAL

The following is an assignment I use every semester in my Writing Seminars at UConn-Hartford. It asks students to venture out into Hartford in search of the ideas that animate whatever text we’re using at the time and document them via camera. A couple things to note before I delve into the minutia of the assignment itself. The reason I don’t use it at CCC is because we’re a night class and I don’t feel comfortable sending students out at night after many have logged an 8-hour workday. But for the daytime instructors, I can’t recommend this assignment enough.

Students love the engagement with Hartford itself, partly because it forces them to apply a critical eye to details that routine have otherwise blinded them to. Secondly, this assignment also helps student form a bridge from the text being used to their own reality, which at times can seem distant from what we’re asking them to read.

In this case, the text is Susan Bordo’s “Beauty (Re)discovers the Male Body” which examines the effects of images and advertisements on the viewing public and the creation of societal norms and standards (for beauty, masculinity/femininity, etc.). But this assignment could be modified for just about any text – scholarly essay, short story, novel, film, etc.

Parameters for the Assignment: While everything is clearly listed and numbered in the Assignment Prompt – Re(discovering) Hartford through Susan Bordo, let me cover the four basic steps here.

Step One: Students are asked to find a spot in Hartford where the ideas of the text-in question can be visually observed, documented, distorted, reimagined, etc. Their primary objective is to establish a link between, in this case, Susan Bordo’s claims and their immediate surroundings. *In other words, to see the city of Hartford through the lens of Susan Bordo.*

Step Two: Students are asked to document said spot with camera! They can do so by taking a series of snapshots with their phone camera or even shooting a short video. I make sure to remind them that this doesn’t need to be invasive or a form of cultural espionage. It’s simply a way of bridging the gap between, in this case, Bordo’s beast of an essay, written 20 years ago, this doesn’t need to be invasive

or a form of cultural espionage. It's simply a way of bridging the gap between Bordo's essay and your day-to-day realities. and their day-to-day realities.

Step Three: Students are asked to post their "fieldwork" discoveries in a Blackboard Discussion Thread and accompany them with 250-500 words.

Step Four: Students come to class the following week prepared to share their work with one another.

INSTRUCTIONS

For our initial foray into the Writing Hartford initiative, you will be venturing out into Hartford and conducting fieldwork with the ideas at the heart of Susan Bordo's essay in mind. What does this entail? Consider the following step-by-step guide, as this assignment has several objectives, and then allow inspiration to determine the rest.

Step One: Find a spot in Hartford where Susan Bordo's ideas can be visually observed, documented, distorted, reimagined, etc. Ideally, your choice in locale should be within walking distance of the Hartford Times Building – or anywhere in downtown Hartford– but if you have a specific spot in mind in, say, West Hartford or East Hartford, that works as well too.

As for possibilities, consider one of the local coffee shops, restaurants, the cobbled alley of Pratt Street, the Riverfront area, Bushnell Park, etc. The choice is really up to you. Just remember the objectives – to establish a link between Susan Bordo's claims and your immediate surroundings. *In other words, to see the city of Hartford through the lens of Bordo.*

Step 2: This is where the fun begins. You will need a camera of some sorts – your phone camera is perfectly fine – and a healthy dose of initiative. Because once you settle upon a location, the next step will be to document it with your camera.

You can do this in several ways. One possibility would be a sequence of snapshots of the place itself, both inside and out. The other possibility – and this is where creativity could potentially come into play – would be to document the very reason why you chose this spot.

In other words, to capture on camera the living, breathing embodiments of Bordo's claims, the very people where Bordo's ideas can be visually observed, distorted, reimagined, etc. This doesn't need to be invasive or a form of cultural espionage. It's simply a way of bridging the gap between Bordo's essay and your day-to-day realities. And yes, a brief video works just as well, although I'd like each of you to take at least one pic of your choice spot.

Step 3: Post your pics on HuskyCT (Discussion Thread 2) and accompany them with 250-500 words detailing the fruits of your labor – why you chose the location; what you discovered; how it connected back to Bordo, etc. I will repost all this on HuskyCT as well, but again the focus here is on quality rather than quantity.

You're conducting research and reporting back to us on your findings. There is no right or wrong answer. It should be meaningful to you. And whether that is conveyed in one festively plump paragraph or three will be determined by the task at hand.

Step 4: Come to class next Monday (February 3rd) ready to share your work with the rest of the class. Pics, videos, personal narratives detailing your adventure – all of it is welcome! We will focus on what you deem important and culturally relevant.