

WAC 100A – Winter 2018

Art as Social Action

Professor Peter Sellars

Final Paper Assignment

When faced with injustices, outrages, betrayals, disappointments, and unfairness, most of us have a tendency to respond in somewhat exaggerated terms. We magnify the unjust traits of our opponents and tend to airbrush some of our own behaviors from our personal, internal accounts, to say nothing of what we describe to other people. In a reactive state, we tend to inflame moments of violation with the sense that they are surprising and explosive, but underplay longer term processes that could have let us recognize difficulties that were already underway and perhaps could have been resolved at an earlier point of intervention. Once a state of injustice becomes ingrained and more or less a permanent part of our lives, the complex question of how to dismantle oppressive and incorrectly conceived structures and relationships becomes more intricate. Movement towards real solutions requires subtle and shared points of mutual recognition and achievable gestures that can be made in reciprocity and good faith.

An artist who confronts systemic injustice must respond with insight, flexibility, fluidity, and generosity. A situation that reflects political paralysis needs to be treated in a way that doesn't harden the forces of opposition but that is able to move across them and offer all sides new possibilities and new roles that result from deepened and expanded senses of mutual identities. Propaganda in any form simply intensifies and repeats the failures of communication that have led to violence and impasse.

With the above in mind, please watch Sanjay Kak's film, *Jashn-e-Azadi: How We Celebrate Freedom*, across the next two weeks. The film will probably provoke some unusual reactions and a wide range of feelings across its length, which is the purpose of a work of art. It resists an occupying army, but it also resists closure or simple narratives. And the very length of the film begins to suggest the length of the military occupation of Kashmir, and your experiences of the film might begin to mirror in some small way the shifting and layered feelings, strategies, and understandings of the people who are both living under and perpetuating the occupation. After you have seen the film, please begin your final paper assignment.

FINAL PAPER TOPIC

This term we have focused on student movements in Syria, Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, Kashmir, Los Angeles, and South Florida. We have read, heard about, and followed young people who have made huge sacrifices for what they believe in, for equal justice, and a commitment to move attitudes and the whole society forward.

Describe a situation or a moment in your life when you realized that it was necessary for you to make a sacrifice. Describe the realization, describe the necessity, and then describe the sacrifice that you made, or are now making, or that you will make in the future. Try to write about the experience with a level of detail that causes you to see your responses and your next steps in a new light.

Guidelines

- 1) This paper is for you and is intended to mark an important moment of arrival, departure, or transition in your own life. Please write the paper that you need to write at this time in your life, a paper that can serve you as a guide, a reminder, a moment of vision, a period of reflection, assessment, regrouping, reaffirmation, revitalization, and renewed commitment.
- 2) Please write this paper for yourself. This paper will be important for you to read in 10, 20 and 30 years from now. You are writing at a formative moment in your life and the act of writing this paper will be a significant contribution to the formation of your future. This paper is an act of self-empowerment. Take the time to write beautifully.
- 3) Academic language is completely unacceptable, as it tends to falsify, inflate, deflect, routine, or otherwise calcify the nature of your actual experience. You are the only person in the world who has had your experiences. You, therefore, are the expert and the authority, and your search for your own words to understand and describe your experiences, and the aspirations, values, belief systems, and personal standards that are a result of those experiences, is itself an act of courage and care and is a gift to the world.
- 4) The paper should address issues or situations that you have dealt with in the past or are in the process of dealing with right now in your life. It must also look forward, and become an occasion for you to project yourself into your own future, and create a scenario in the life that you would like to live.
- 5) It is important to be very clear about motives, their complexities and contradictions, and to deal as accurately as possible with the layered personal, political, social, economic, psychological, or religious contexts of the environment in which you are acting. Those tensions, and their repercussions, create the need and opportunity for leadership, honesty, attentiveness, mutual recognition, divergence, and skill. The more honest you are, the more surprising and helpful your writing will become.
- 6) All narrative is "multiple" -- voices, time frames, and points of view. Experience is both intensely personal and shared. A deeper look into the intensely personal side reveals that you yourself have many voices and conflicting selves. And, an acknowledgment of shared experience leads to the awareness that so does everyone else.

- 7) Many people spend a lot of time doing things that do not need to be done. This paper, in contrast, should be something that needs to be done. This paper should be something that helps you and the people around you, a moment in your life which you can focus your attentions and intentions unselfishly. As with the creation of any work of art, this paper will require you to deal with what you do not understand as well as with what you imagine you understand. The struggle towards understanding is your own story of complexity, subtlety, skill, tenderness, insight, persistence, and humility.
- 8) Infinitude. Open-endedness is one of the most important aspects of your life. It is important to be conscious of ongoing processes and continuously transforming experience. In fact, your life has no fixed points; experiences are lived and relived, always with new meanings and new possibilities. Even as you are writing, talking, and acting, things are changing.
- 9) The paper should be 8 - 10 pages.