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Spring 2016 James Slevin Assignment Sequ

We are pleased to invite applications for the James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize. This prize of \$500 will be awarded to the graduate student instructor submitting the best sequence of writing assignments for a First-Year Writing Seminar (second place winners, if any, will receive \$150).

Assignment sequences in a writing course are built around a series of essay topics. These sequences probably represent work assigned during a portion of the course rather than all of the essay assignments distributed over an entire semester. Submissions should include a rationale and a description of your plans for eliciting and responding to student drafts and revisions, as well as a description of how you prepare students for each essay assignment, for example by engaging them in preparatory writing exercises, including informal writing designed to help students understand the material on which they subsequently write formal essays. Reflections on what worked well, and why, and what you would change another time, are welcome.

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To facilitate future searching of the Institute's archive, we ask that you provide a brief descriptive abstract (about 75 words) of your document, and a short list of appropriate keywords that might not appear in the text. Examples might include terms like "rhetorical situation," "style," "citation," etc. **Any borrowings such as quotations from course texts or handbooks must be cited properly in the document itself.**

Submissions are due in 101 McGraw Hall by Tuesday, May 24. No exceptions can be made.

Spring 2016 James F. Slevin Assignment Sequence Prize Application

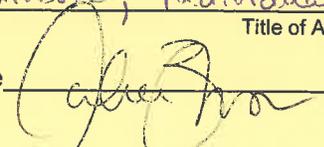
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Instructor's name Andrew Zhou

Department Music Course # and title MUS 1701-103 SOUNDING Together: Music, Diplomacy & Imagemaking

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Persona, Synthesis, Individual: Sequence for Essays 3, 4, and 5 for "Sounding Together"
Title of Assignment Sequence

Instructor's signature  Date 5/20/16

Music 1701-103: Sounding Together: Music, Diplomacy, and Imagemaking | Andrew Zhou

Persona, Synthesis, Individual: Sequence for Essays 3, 4, and 5 for “Sounding Together”

Abstract: This assignment sequence consists of the preparatory work for three major essays (nos. 3, 4, and 5) in the central weeks of the FWS “Sounding Together: Music, Diplomacy, and Imagemaking.” Students wrote a paper adopting a historically based persona specifying a musical program to be sent on a cultural diplomacy tour abroad, then one synthesizing major units covered in the course, and then an artist’s profile based on in-class interviews of two musician diplomats.

Keywords: assignment sequence, synthesis, preparatory writing, hermeneutic circle, artist profile, music writing

This assignment sequence consists of the preparatory work for three major essays (nos. 3, 4, and 5) in the central weeks of the FWS “Sounding Together: Music, Diplomacy, and Imagemaking.”

The third paper (5-6 pgs.) asked students to adopt a fictitious, historically based persona, writing a letter of commission specifying a program to be sent abroad by the US government during the Cold War. The fourth paper, the “capstone” paper (>7 pgs.), was promptless, but asked students to relate thematically at least four of the (very disparate) units we had hitherto studied in the course. For the fifth paper, we went microcosmic: the students interviewed two musician diplomats who undertook cultural diplomacy tours and wrote a magazine-style artist’s profile that could not exceed 800 words.

The sequence was designed to get students to produce papers intended for various audiences, adopting a variety of rhetorical strategies, of various levels of complexity. All the while, several unifying threads remained throughout. Students needed to include musical description in papers 3 and 4. They observed that an “argument” need not be merely an academic thesis—even an artist’s profile needs to have a point. They saw that the relationship between the reader and the “text” (be it a secondary source, a piece of music, or an interviewee) is always present, always in negotiation. Finally, they noted that lively, tight prose need not ever be sacrificed, even in the face of complicated argumentation.

I intentionally assigned the capstone fourth paper early (the start of April) because I wanted students to spend the last three weeks reflecting on the themes of the course, knowing they would revise this paper for their final portfolio. By the time the fourth paper was due, we had already covered so many modules—J-Pop, the Cold War, global hip-hop, Bono and Bob Geldof’s Band Aid and Live Aid, music education, and “musicking” as social practice. I told the students early on that I would intentionally front-load the readings (though I managed to avoid exceeding the 75-page/week limit). By getting them to synthesize several modules through the course, without a true “prompt,” they would have the chance to spend the remainder of the semester to recover(!) and plan revisions for their portfolio, while applying their new understandings of the course’s themes to further case studies whose relevance may not have seemed immediately obvious (like music in US military ads, our final unit).

For the fifth paper, students interviewed Becky Lu, a graduate student in the music department who did two small cultural diplomacy tours abroad, and Betsy DiFelice (via Skype), pianist for the New York Philharmonic when they visited North Korea in 2008. As you will see from the preparatory work, we spent a class and a half agreeing upon the format of the group interview, as

well as discussing what each student considered to be a “good” artist’s profile, using models from the *New Yorker* and *Elle*. The challenge in the fifth paper was deliberately to get the students to write what I called “lean protein” prose—prose that doesn’t waste space, that delivers facts and values simultaneously, that has honesty and voice. I encouraged students from the start of the semester to ask questions of their texts, and now the interviewees were “texts” who could finally answer back! Coming off what many students considered to be an extremely complex fourth paper, the difficulty now lay in getting to a point in a brutally *short* amount of space.

Paper 3

In weeks 5-8, students looked at one of the best-documented case studies of music used for diplomatic purposes available: when the United States government sent classical music abroad at the dawn of the Cold War as a means of combatting Soviet propaganda that portrayed the United States as “cultural barbarians.” Presented with a complicated story with many key individuals, students read about the status of classical and avant-garde music domestically and abroad, about a period in the late 19th century when everything symphonic and German was the hippest thing in America, and also about composers with very specific tastes who sat on the board of the Music Advisory Panel (MAP) for The American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA), which selected musical acts for cultural diplomacy tours.

By this point, students had already completed two papers in rapid succession, one contrasting various definitions of “diplomacy” and one using a case study of their own selection to examine the intricacies of soft power. The third paper, consisting of a choice of two prompts (perhaps the longest the students had ever seen so far in their college careers!) asked students to adopt the persona of an impresario choosing a work to send abroad for diplomatic purposes, either by forming a program or commissioning a composer and theater director for a new work. They could, for example, adopt the conservative, neo-Romantic tastes of a Juilliard-trained composer who sat on the MAP, or they could argue against the narrow views of the board for various reasons (e.g. the exclusion of people of color, of women, of jazz influences, etc.).

The major challenges of this assignment included understanding how music was thought to “signify,” and how these significations were relevant to the projection of America’s image abroad (i.e. what was American up against and how did these significations help reform these?). The following represent the types of in-class preparatory activities with which the students engaged. In the “music writing chart,” students were asked to describe what they were listening to on the basis of simple categorizations. This was, I believe, a crucial step in giving the students, particularly non-musicians, a “toolkit” to feel comfortable with describing music in prose, arming them with vocabulary to put into words the types of things they had perhaps already been hearing.

Keep a list of names clear!

In the third to fifth weeks, you will be immersed in the American Cold War, listening to an incredibly wide variety of musics, and meet a few colorful characters along the way. Keep track of your readings by being organized *before* you start! I would keep a list of: composers, institutions (super...important), and other figures, noting how they relate to one another.

Facts and Values exercise: After reading the chapters by Richard Taruskin on serialism and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, make two columns in which you list instances in which Taruskin or his cited sources (Leibowitz in particular) present “facts” and those in which they present “values.”¹ Then, in two or three paragraphs, ask yourself why these values were placed on serialist music. On what musical bases did these values arise? Is there any point at which “fact” and “values” are conflated? Taruskin is arguably musicology’s most refined rhetorician: his diction and argumentative structure are unparalleled. Where does Taruskin stand on the issue of serial music

¹ Richard Taruskin, “Zero Hour,” in *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, in *The Oxford History of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

as the Congress for Cultural Freedom used? How does he construct his argument? [For myself: ask students about the employment of certain words, “orthodoxy,” “militant,” and the subtle argument he makes about why Schoenberg’s music was banned.]

Music signifying: Discussion: What makes a “glee club” and works like Appalachian Spring sound “American?” How can something sound like it belongs, in Virgil Thomson’s words, to “middlebrow commercial ventures?” We will discuss how your values, and the values of the subjects in your texts, might have been constructed. *Assignment:* revisit some of the descriptions in your readings: how do you think some of these values were formed? There were not simply *sui generis*.

What does get accepted? This activity is merely an inverse of the prompt, by getting students to think about why certain pieces *did* get accepted? It asks students to think like the subjects they have encountered in the assigned texts, and therefore serves as a good review of the readings. Students will be broken up into groups and asked to be either 1) the Music Advisory Panel under American National Theater and Academy (ANTA) or 2) Nicolas Nabokov or 3) a non-specific music advisory panel who will need its members to set its own agenda. [The idea here is that students will have read about 1) and 2) and their specific predilections and agendas.] After listening to a short list of pieces or musical acts and taking notes on them, they will be asked to select two to recommend to the presenters of an upcoming tour or exhibition.

Peer review focus: As this is, like assignment 2, based on case studies that might be completely different for each person, I will ask the peer reviewers to keep a “real-time” log of their reading process. How did you read it? What was your initial impression upon reading the paper? What were points of confusion that were later cleared up, or were never cleared up? Where did you expect the paper to go at certain points?

Paper 3

Assessed version due: **Tues., Mar. 8**

Length: 5-6p/1200-1400 wds, on Blackboard AND hard copy at the start of class

Tues., Mar. 1: >3p of "mumbo jumbo" due in class

Thurs., Mar. 3: complete draft; peer-review time will be set aside. **Bring TWO hard copies.**

Basic requirements:

- One-inch margins (for draft; you can refer to the format I suggested in the syllabus)
- Numbered pages
- Proper use of Chicago Manual of Style citations (footnotes, no Works Cited needed)
- Proper headings in upper right hand corner (name/date/course/paper) and Title
- Proofread text

Pick one of the following choices, which are both in the form of letters. Whichever you use, your paper will still need to contain the elements of an argumentative paper. The best papers will be driven by an arguable, nuanced thesis and contain a "so what." In both prompts, it is up to you to specify what group are representing, to whom you are writing, what year you are writing in, and what potential countries/cities your tour will include. There is a lot of potential wiggle room here you can take.

Choice A. The newly-commissioned work

You adopt the perspective of an impresario who happens to have ties to the higher-ups of the Advisory Committee on the Arts (ACA) or the Music Advisory Panel of ANTA, or another body of the CPP (you specify). You have already agreed to commission a hypothetical composer and musical theater/opera director for a dramatic work containing music (e.g. opera, musical theater work, dramatic work contain music, etc.) to be performed for a cultural diplomacy tour abroad (you specify). Now, you are writing a prospectus letter in which you specify to the composer and director the larger concept of this work and the details you wish to see in it, keeping in mind past experiences with tours and the firm image and message you want to project and send abroad. You should integrate fluidly into this letter the following specifications for the director:

- A well-known story or text that you want to use as the basis for the piece, including any crucial emendations you see fit. You should be able to summarize this story succinctly. What I am interested in is why you chose the story and why you may want to amend certain things in support of your arguments about what your piece should do.
- Any notable aspects about staging in the realization of this piece.
- A description of the personnel. What types of people do you want to have involved? Specify any crucial details about singers, actors, and musicians (do you want a pit orchestra? a quartet? what genre? what instruments?).

For the composer, you should specify clearly:

- At least a full paragraph (or equivalent) description of the soundworld and why you have that request. (*Possible* questions: do you want it to be Gershwin-esque? Copland-esque? Or

can you describe it in your own words? What instrumentation would you like to use? What do you wish to avoid at all costs? What do you want to emulate?)

- How do you want the music (perhaps independently from the story) to communicate your intended message.

Further considerations (this is, of course, not exhaustive):

- Your "thesis" might be presented slightly more broadly than normal given the scope of the paper. But your subarguments, which should feed into the thesis, will best address why you want all of these things, taking evidence from relevant readings.
- What kind of an impresario are you and what are your aims? What tone are you setting? Are you willing to cooperate? Are you really not knowledgeable about music? Are you fearful or apprehensive? Are you at odds with certain other members of your committee? (Believe it or not, you can write excellent, rigorous, and entertaining letters adopting any of these personae.)
- Keep this central idea in mind: how is this going to make America "attractive," or how is this going to successfully be a wielding of soft power?
- The presence of citation will likely be one of the few things that break the temporal "illusion" of the letter. How can you properly cite from Fosler-Lussier, Abrams-Ansari, or others (i.e. be academically responsible and utilize evidence) without explicitly mentioning their names or breaking the fourth wall of scholarship?
- While the situation is hypothetical, you would do well to consider it as a plausible part of the real world. So you could request real singers with real histories. Or, if you are lacking those, you could make up hypothetical ones. But specify (in a gentle footnote to your reader) when you make up hypothetical ones, please!

Choice B. "Get With the Program"

You are an impresario and you have chosen one of the following:

- the Cornell Glee Club and/or Chorus, or another vocal group (you could make it up!) that might have existed in the late 50s and 60s OR
- the Cornell Symphony Orchestra or comparable group

to perform on tour as part of a cultural diplomacy mission sponsored by the CPP, with support from the Advisory Committee on the Arts (ACA) or the Music Advisory Panel of ANTA. You are expected to help **compose a program of three songs or pieces for this tour**, having a lot of prior knowledge about how tours have played out and what the mission of the groups are. Now, you are writing a letter to the managers of these groups, keeping in mind past experiences with tours and the firm image and message you want to project and send abroad. You should integrate fluidly into this letter the following specifications for the manager:

- At some point, the three pieces are under discussion and their composers, and why they have been chosen. You don't necessarily need extensive knowledge of repertoire--you can base this off historical discussions from the texts we've read, since there are plenty of examples of songs and pieces. Or, you can feel free to extrapolate if your knowledge of repertoire is deep enough to allow you to do this.
- A description of those three pieces by you, based on listening, and why they have been chosen. You may supplement your description of the pieces with outside information if you feel the need to do so, but I'm primarily interested in your own thoughts. **Note if you include descriptions from other sources, you must properly cite them, and you should, in your writing, at least imply justification why you included that description, as with any other quotation.**
- The demographic makeup of the group, and why this is important.
- A brief outline of potential extra-musical behaviors or activities--anything that has to do with the expected conduct of the tour.

Further considerations:

- You will likely need to consider the same aspects listed above for prompt A.
- As with prompt A, your "thesis" might be presented slightly more broadly than normal given the scope of the paper. But your subarguments, which should feed into the thesis, will best address why you want all of these things, taking evidence from relevant readings.

Paper 4

The preparatory work for paper 4 consisted of a multitude of readings ranging from jazz diplomacy to celebrity diplomacy to music education, in addition to the readings from before paper 3. I knew the sheer number and diversity of texts I asked the students to incorporate would be overwhelming, but I was confident that with enough preparation, they would find the process rewarding.

To start, I asked the students to bring to class a list of five juicy quotations from across the readings that really spoke to them. I proposed that this might be the basis of a subsection; after all, there must be a reason they chose that quotation! Then, I asked them to ask a series of questions about the quotation: what does this help me answer? What questions does this quotation raise? Where might I find the answer? I did this primarily to get the students to start small, rather than begin with the examination of an overgeneralization, which I learned by now was often their first instinct. I then asked them to write a paragraph treating one or more of those quotations as an object of analysis. “Experiment,” I said, with writing *outward* from your texts. What can you say about this? Might this lead you to other possibilities and other connections?

By this time, I was deep into teaching them a variant on the “hermeneutic circle” as a means of generating a final thesis. The idea here was that students needed to come in with an initial attempt at a thesis (or a topic, even), and that each case study could elucidate more and more about this thesis, so the thesis is constantly undergoing revision and further nuancing. This new test thesis, in turn, informs the next case study, and so on. In revising, the thesis the writer arrives at is then treated as the basis for the rest of the paper. This idea was brand new to every student, and was disturbing to some—many admitted to me the residual high school principle of “cherry-picking” evidence to support an initial thesis at all costs. In several final reflections, students noted how this was single-handedly one of the most mind-blowing ideas they learned. One even wrote “the hermeneutic circle will forever be burned into my memory!”

Another activity I had them do was to organize their quotations into an outline for a hypothetical paper, as a means of giving them a preliminary structure for their paper. Like the previous exercise, I tried to get students to find alternative ways of approaching the writing process for larger papers by emphasizing the acceptance of *ephemerality* of working theses and structures. Students expressed that this concept was completely novel to them—they had no idea theses could be revised! This helped greatly when I asked them to incorporate pieces of counterevidence. What we concluded was that counterevidence was something not to be afraid of, but rather something we should prize, because it really helps make our arguments more nuanced.

After I handed back their third (previous) paper, I spent one class session going over a “post-mortem,” a list of general trends I noticed in that batch of papers, presented as a list of propositions that we would discuss. We would then use that as the basis for one peer review in paper 4. It only made sense to me to do this as a means of learning from previous mistakes. The peer review for paper 4 is provided after the prompt.

Music 1701-103: Sounding Together | Instructor: Andrew Zhou

Paper 4 (~15%) - Assessed version due: Tues., Apr. 12

Write an argumentative paper of approximately 7+ pages (>1700 words) that synthesizes and draws (a) specific, cogent, thematic connection(s) between readings, listenings, and viewings from at least four of the units we have looked at. Please include at least two of your own descriptions of music.

The units, which are distinguished by time period and place include:

- J- and K-pop
- America's relationship to the symphony
- America's Cold War and Classical Music
- America's Cold War and Jazz²
- Bono, Bob Geldof, and Celebrity Diplomacy (Th, 3/17, 22)
- Daniel Barenboim, Edward Said, and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (Tu 3/22)
- Music Education, Empathy, and Social Practices of "Musicking" (Th 3/24)
- Hip-Hop Diplomacy (Th 4/5)
- Your own experiences as musician, listener, etc., however they might relate.

And you are free to draw upon other "texts." It is not necessary that you include outside readings, but you are welcome to if you feel it will enhance your paper.

Excellent papers will contain a nuanced, yet cogent argument. They will draw really novel connections between a diverse array of texts, define specific terms in necessary places, contain close readings of textual evidence, and summon successfully contradictory pieces of evidence (counterarguments). The conclusion will not only contain a "so what," but look towards the future, suggesting possible expansions on your argument. Excellent papers will also seamlessly integrate fanfares (and transitions) and interpretations of texts. They will also utilize artful diction and be entertaining to read! Finally, they will have a real, specific title!

Basic requirements:

- One-inch margins, numbered pages, proper headings (name/date/course/paper)
- Proper use of Chicago Manual of Style citations (footnotes; be sure to use footnotes, *not* footers!) Please include a "Works Cited" list.
- Proofread text

Timeline (briefly)

Tu 3/22: Bring in two prompts and at least *five* juicy quotations *for each prompt* across the readings you can use in the service of your prompts. The more contradictory, the messier, the better! We will brainstorm topics and refine your prompts in class.

Th 3/24: Bring in your initial intro and "thesis" and pages of mumbo-jumbo. **Don't delete anything from this! Save anything you might discard from this paper in a separate file.**

Tu 4/5: Bring in essay for peer-review (to be done outside of class); further work on Th 4/7

² To encourage diversity, please pick at least three main texts dealing *outside* of the Cold War.

MUS 1701-103 Sounding Together | Paper 4 peer review | Apr. 7

Comment on the paper with respect to the following. Either highlight moments where you thought this was particularly strong or where you felt there could be more clarity. (30 min.)

Hermeneutic circle (sustained relationship between the author and the text): strongest moments?
Weakest moments?

Does each paragraph or section or case study advance the author's thesis, or are there moments of circling around arguments "superficially"? State (in bullet points) the thesis and how you think each study has or *could* advance the argument.

Hot dog vs. lean protein moments: are there moments where you found particularly “dense” sentences packed with a blend of facts and values? Moments of “pink slime?”

Are there strong moments where the author makes good, effective use of footnotes? Are they formatted properly?

Are there any terms that need to be defined?

Paper 5

Coming off of the mammoth task of paper 4, I thought it was important to provide a change of pace for paper 5. I wanted it to be short, but still, I wanted to make it clear that short papers came with their own sets of difficulties. Students were asked to read various pieces of advice from writers on and critics of popular music. These were mainly drawn from *How to Write About Music*.³ Included in this was a profile written by Lizzy Goodman on Kim Brown from Sonic Youth. We discussed how writing for this occasion compared to that of traditional argumentative papers. Students were quick to point out that the anecdotes about, say, Brown making a chicken for her family illustrated how she complicates traditional notions of what it means to be a feminist, even as Goodman gushes about the model Brown has offered her regarding her own views of feminism.

In preparation for the interview with Becky (Tuesday, in person) and Betsy (Thursday, via Skype), students read excerpts from Bruno Nettl's *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*, which raised issues of ethnographic methods.⁴ How representative do we want an individual to be of a group? How much can we extrapolate based on an individual's experience? Students also read information on Cultures in Harmony, one of the organizations through which she completed one of her tours. For their preparatory work, I asked them to complete the following homework assignment:

Prepare a set of questions for the group interview (~30-40 min.). What would be the best format to use in interviewing Becky as a class? Should she begin by talking about her experiences and then open it to Q&A? How can we assure equity in the questions asked? What issues might the Bruno Nettl reading raise? How does the paper assignment affect the types of questions you'd be asking? What interview strategies out of the list mentioned would you like to adopt?

Likewise, for Betsy, they read an article she wrote for the Oberlin Alumni magazine about her tour, as well as a New York Times about the event.⁵ After the students agreed on the format of the interview and the progression of questions, I let them take the reins, save for picking out certain, quieter students to speak. The results were fascinating.

Many students were, frankly, awestruck by Becky. Several took the initiative to search for her online and were blown away by the biography found on her personal website. (One student wrote in her profile, "I expected her, based on her resume, to be a god.") But in person, she was nonchalant and seemingly dispassionate about any potential impact she would have made on these cultural diplomacy tours. (This is not to say she was apathetic at all to the interview—quite the contrary, as I later pointed out.) The experience was sobering to many students, and rang dissonantly with the case studies they read over the course of the semester. (The same student continued later, "Becky Lu was, in the end, not a god.") As for Betsy, many were also disturbed by her descriptions of North Korea and by her viewpoint that no large-scale change really occurred.

³ Lizzy Goodman, "Kim Gordon Sounds Off," *How to Write About Music*, edited by Marc Woodworth and Ally-Jane Grossan (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 117-121.

⁴ Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 143-48, 172-79.

⁵ Daniel J. Wakin, "North Koreans Welcome Symphonic Diplomacy," *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/27/world/asia/27symphony.html>; Elizabeth DeFelice, "A Portrait of Pyongyang," *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, Vol. 103, no. 4, Summer 2008, <http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/summer2008/features/portrait.html>

After the interviews, I introduced a further in-class preparatory assignment on a *New Yorker* article written in the wake of Prince's death:

In-class preparatory assignment

Please take 5-10 minutes to read Vinson Cunningham's 700-word tribute to Prince from the *New Yorker* (from the May 2, 2016 issue).⁶ Answer the following questions:

1. How would you describe the tone of this article? Does Cunningham ever use "I"?
 2. How does Cunningham structure the article?
 3. What do you think is the main argument of this article? Can you go so far as to identify a so-what?
 4. Can you identify moments of prose you find particularly compelling?
-

This in-class assignment, surprisingly, generated some of the most heated discussions from the whole semester. Students debated whether or not the article had a real "so what," whether the author's references to people we didn't recognize by name indicated some sort of "insider status," and whether his conclusion was compelling or whether it felt tacked on. Many students fell in love with the prose, and one astute student pointed out that the opening paragraph set up a "they say" (in the spirit of Graff and Birkenstein, that Prince was a "genius"), while the remainder of the very short piece revealed Cunningham's own views ("yes, but that undermines what he actually managed to accomplish").⁷ One important question I asked them was whether we learned more about Prince or about Cunningham. This helped them understand the role of the interpreter in "awakening" texts—sure, there are "objective" facts, but the profile can only be done through the lens of the writer. By discussing these in tandem with a piece by William Zinsser on the challenge of concision,⁸ many students felt at the end that they had a good sense of what *they* found to be a good profile.

⁶ Vinson Cunningham, "Prince," *The New Yorker* (May 2, 2016).

⁷ Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).

⁸ William Zinsser, "The 300-Word Challenge," in *The American Scholar*, Mar. 11, 2011, <https://theamericanscholar.org/the-300-word-challenge/#.Vxks9fkrLNA>.

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Paper 5 (~10%) - Assessed version due: Tues. Apr. 26

Approx. 3-4 pages (~800 wds)

Footnotes in Chicago style. No Works Cited needed.

Write an artist profile for Becky Lu and/or Elizabeth DeFelice on the basis of two group interviews you will be conducting. The profile should be in prose, synthesizing interesting parts of the interview, similar to Lizzy Goodman's profile on Kim Brown from *How to Write About Music* (p. 117-21), rather than in a format in which you recount what was asked and said verbatim. While not a traditional argumentative paper, the profile should integrate previous material from class, and should connect Becky and Elizabeth's experiences with themes from earlier readings.

Further information:

While an argumentative thread is still important to have here, much of what counts in this paper is "style" and high-quality, lively, and creative prose. Keep the main focus on Becky and/or Elizabeth. Imagine that your profile is written for a magazine or blog like *The New Yorker*, *Elle*, *Slate*, *The Atlantic*, etc. Effectiveness of word choice (diction) and sentence structure here will count more than normal, perhaps. Still, your paper should have a point and unifying thread.

Reflections

The submissions for paper 3 were, in general, incredibly fun to read, and students with a more creative writing background relished the opportunity to adopt various personae in their formal writing. One student wrote in his final reflection, “I really enjoyed the creative freedom with this one, and felt less hindered by the typical essay structure because of its perspective and a lack of requirement to incorporate evidence as directly.” In fact, this was one of the most difficult parts of the assignments for the students to incorporate. I emphasized that although there was some leeway allowed in the ideas presented by the fictitious characters, students needed to have their arguments enter in dialogue with the core readings. Some of the most inventive papers focused on issues we did not discuss in class, such as the women’s rights movements in the Soviet Union, while others came up with elaborate plot points for their proposed commissioned works in order to address the shortcomings the texts described in the American imagemaking mission abroad.

There were a few specifications that, in retrospect, needed to be made clear from the get-go. I should have required students to explicitly situate the letter in a specific period of the Cold War. Because we had not yet dealt with the next main unit, Cold War jazz diplomacy, and because the ANTA completely changed personnel in 1961 with the Kennedy administration, some of the timeframes did not completely jibe with historical fact, even if within the “historic fiction” realm the paper made sense. Another issue was making clear not only the distinction between “they say/I say,” but the triply complex “they say/my persona says/I say!” I alerted some students that if they found the distinction between “my persona says” and what they *really* wanted to say difficult to make, that they could indicate this in a footnote.

Many found paper 4 to be one of the most challenging papers they have ever had to write, for reasons both anticipated and not. Some indicated they were not used to writing papers without prompts. Others found the sheer amount of material difficult to control and organize. Still others found they had difficulty incorporating counterarguments. In my own assessments, I made one unexpected observation: students were too quick to judge this as a “long” paper. I told them: “actually, most of you still could’ve chosen a narrower thematic focus for a 7-page paper!” This proclamation came as a shock to most students, even though I reiterated throughout the semester the importance of choosing a scope for the paper that was appropriate for the prescribed length. I met with students after papers 4 and 5 for individual conferences, and for the final portfolio, made revisions of paper 4 mandatory (paper 4 also had a hefty post-mortem). The improvements in the final portfolio were, in general, quite staggering, and many drew sophisticated, novel connections between the topics that I never thought of. Several students ended up commenting in their final reflections how proud they were of this paper in particular, while many others commented on how much hair they lost as a result of it.

Paper 5 was a joy to read. About half wrote about Becky and half on Betsy. Many students composed prose that was colorful, lively, and highly engaging. It became clear to me as I read through them that the most successful profiles revealed more about the author of the profile than the profilee. All the while, what I found most interesting was how I could relate issues here to those found in traditional writing. For example, many students took a comment Becky made about Chinese music education as fact—not a single student cared to challenge it. Some related it in such

a way as to make it impossible to tell whose idea it was. I viewed this as a teachable moment. It soon became clear when I raised the point in our post-mortem discussion that while style and content may differ, there are some pretty consistent priorities we can trace across nearly all modes of writing.