**Critical Essay #1**

**Mario Savio**

**Sit-in Address: Sproul Hall at the**

**University of California - Berkeley**

**Michael Mann**

**California State University - Sacramento**

**Coms 100B**

**Dr. Mark Stoner**

**November 5, 2013**

**Context Described**

Berkley was an ever changing place in 1964. That change was resisted by the ones who stood in power, but fought for by those who wanted more for their lives. The University of California, a state-operated organization, was the battle ground between the established governing body and the students who attended. A slow build of coalitions by students, who, wanted to do more and be more to the world, started to meet and cooperate with each other on social and political platforms. An early example of this was the SLATE group, which started to be involved in student elections and demonstrating in and around campus in order to educate young adults in their community (Kitchell, 1990). These issues were greater than simple campus issues. These were human rights, equal employment, and by 1964 the Free Speech Movement (FSM).

By 1964, the resistance to the cause of speaking freely, in and around state property, began to rise from the University president Dr. Clark Kerr and other board members. An environment was created by these men, that the University was seen as a training ground for students in order to become an adaptable piece to the American workforce. All things that would degrade that process would be seen as disruptive. The Board of Regents voted to ban “Political and social advocacy” in a specific entrance to the campus. Students were forced off campus, which they perceived as a violation of their First Amendment rights. Students were also threatened with suspension, expulsion, or even arrest for simply handing out flyers or running informational booths on campus that supported such political or social ties.

Tension reached its peak in the Fall of 1964. Demonstrations and protests were popping up in Sproul Plaza on the Berkeley Campus. Five students were suspended indefinitely in September for running informational booths and fundraising on school campus

(Friedman, 2000). Over 1,000 gathered on Oct. 1 and arranged a sit-in of Sproul Hall in spite of the administration’s opposition to it (Lunsford, 1965). Discussion between the protest leaders and the board would continue without resolution between the two sides. This would continue into November, when the board decided to allow demonstrations and handouts, but not any that would advocate unlawful activity (Kitchell, 1990). This would ultimately put a hindrance on any type of free speech, which was seen by the protestors as another atrocity by the University. On December 2, 1964, another FSM rally was held in Sproul Plaza, in which Mario Savio was a speaker that addressed the crowd.

**Text Described**

The audience that Mario Savio addressed was students participating in the sit-in, those in observation of the protest, and to those who would later hear him via radio or through news avenues. Savio’s tone was emphatic and persuasive in nature, speaking in order to influence action among those who were listening. Savio frames his speech in a way that, first presents what he sees as the overlying problem with the university, and second, gives the solution that the students can take in opposition to that problem. The problem comes from the administration that is in place at Berkeley. President Kerr is named specifically as one associated with the problem. Some other names that are defined to them are: *Manager, Arbitrary, Autocracy, Employees, and the Machine*. Savio makes a plea to the crowd to consider the university as a firm, picturing Pres. Kerr as a manager, the faculty as employees, and defining the students as *Raw materials*.

The administration is assigned by Savio as running themachine, and is perceived as the main focus to the problem. This analogy is defined more deeply as being “odious” and “makes you so sick at heart.” Savio turns attention to the raw material definition of the students and states that it “Does not mean to be – have any process upon us…made into any product…bought by some clients of the University…We’re human beings!”

Savio calls to action for a possible solution to the conflict on campus. First, Savio calls for action to “Put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus – and you’ve got to make it stop!” Savio then calls the crowd to again arrange a sit-in of Sproul Hall. He gives optimistic examples that appeals to students engaged in the protest, that he calls “Freedom schools.” The students will learn by doing, rather than the traditional ways done previously.

Walter Fisher states that, “The most basic human response to rhetorical exigencies is storytelling (Stoner & Perkins, 186).” This is part of a style of analysis he developed called the narrative paradigm. Fisher holds to the notion that storytelling is animalistic in nature, something that is woven into us (Fisher, 1984). There are elements of a setting, character and plot found in everyday lives. These are the same features that Fisher uses in a narrative analysis. Although the speech by Savio was not meant to be presented as a “story,” the elements of narrative are still present. By looking at the content beyond Savio himself, there is a larger purpose that is being served. It will also show to be rational, both through narrative probability and fidelity.

**Analysis**

By looking at Mario Savio’s speech through this narrative lens, the listener is able to grasp a different sense of what he is saying. The speech itself is considered episodic, only showing a snapshot to the entirety of what was going on in Berkeley at the time. But Savio reveals characters to the audience that unfolds through a plot. *By showing the elements of characters and plot that is used throughout the speech by Mario Savio, I will attempt to show that an unjust law cannot be tolerated.*

Characters in movies, television shows, and books are something that people are able to relate to. By applying the narrative to the Savio speech, the audience can start to see the depth of characters that are presented.

The first set characters to look at are the ones specifically identified, like President Kerr, the Board of Regents, and Sproul Hall. Both Kerr and the Board of Regents hold the power to make decisions and control what happens on campus. Sproul Hall is merely a building, but has significance as a character because it is the headquarters of the administration. It could be compared to the Death Star in Star Wars(Lucas, 1976) or Mordor in Lord of the Rings(Jackson, 2000) as an actor of power. A real example of power in the United States is Washington D.C., or Sacramento in California. These are places where power is delegated and executed from. Ultimately, these characters are all seen as being agents by Savio and serve a greater power identified as *The Machine*. This is a single name given to the group in conflict with the students. The machine, to Savio, is the all-encompassing power that is running through the University. This side or character would be viewed in literature as the antagonist (Roanne State Community College, 1995).

The other characters that do not have a particular name in the text, but are significant are those who are committed to the protest. Savio, himself is one of them and defines this group as *Raw Materials*, *Human Beings*, and *We*. In a literary sense, this group or character would be known as the protagonist (Roanne State Community College, 1995). They are made up of students on campus or anyone sympathetic to the FSM. Savio also uses 2nd person perspective to reach these individuals personally by saying phrases like, “Makes you sick,” “You can’t take part,” or “You’ve got to make it stop!” These phrases signify that the group is united and mark them as the main opposition to the machine.

The second element that Savio weaves into the speech is the use of plot. Plot is defined as the “Underlying structure or patterns of action and causality in the narrative (Stoner & Perkins, 187).” Plot is important to a narrative because it helps the reader frame the story and makes sense of its pattern. To further understand the narrative of Savio’s speech, it is helpful to look again at a literary perspective.

First, Savio gives the example of an autocratic and managed administration that exists on campus, one that a person “Can’t even passively take part [in].” This is to relate to the listeners all that have taken place before the rally, the laws and suspensions, in order to somehow censor the FSM. This is known in literature as an *Expositional Phase*, the giving of essential background information that deems it necessary for the story to exist (Roane State Community College, 1995). Next, Savio moves the plot forward to a *Moment of Realization*. This is what moves a story forward. Savio wants the listener to understand that the machine needs to be stopped. They must “Indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it - that unless you're free the machine will be prevented from working at all!” Finally, Savio specifically gives the order to perform a sit-in of Sproul Hall. This is known in literature as the *Crisis*: “A significant turning point in the story that determines how it must end (Roane State Community College, 1995).” They will conduct their lives there in order to show the administration that they will be heard and taken notice until something is changed. In essence, the use of characters that Savio has portrayed to the reader and the plot that serves the framework of the piece found in the text serves a broader scope of more than what they are. It opens the door to what they can mean from a rhetorical sense.

**Interpretation**

Savio presented two characters that were on opposite ends of the conflict. The administration would go to many lengths to keep the pristine campus the way they received it and the students were in an uproar to have their rights taken away, for even speaking out against it. The rallies and sit-ins before December 2, 1964 only helped to create more distance between the two sides. The relationship was therefore broken. It shows that there was a sense of power in place by the character of the machine before the ordinance. It was assumed and uninterrupted. But when the power was threatened by the students, either indirectly by political advocacy on campus or by directly protesting, the machine would show its power.

The character of the students represented the innocent in the story. These were students entering into the adult world and assumed freedom like other adults in society. But having their first amendment rights censored showed the true colors of the machine. It brought to light the stratifying difference between the weak and the mighty. The students could simply go with the administration’s decisions and do nothing about it. But Savio calls the audience to more. He makes the argument that an unjust law cannot be tolerated and the way to oppose it is with civil disobedience.

Savio states, “Sometimes, the grievances of people are more – extend more – to more than just the law, extend to a whole mode of arbitrary power, a whole mode of arbitrary exercise of arbitrary power. And that's what we have here. We have an autocracy which – which runs this university.” The problem extends further than just an ordinance, but is representative of the machine in motion. Savio argues that if there is not a stand at this point, it will continue. The rules will continue to be enforced and their rights will continue to be censored. But if they resist, they will ultimately affect change throughout the system.

**Evaluation**

Savio uses both character and plot to show that the unjust laws in place will not be tolerated at UC Berkeley. The FSM will not allow the machine to continue its ways of processing the students into models of the professional world. Savio ultimately shows narrative rationality to the rhetoric by displaying both probability and fidelity (Fisher, 1984).

According to Stoner and Perkins, “At its most basic level, one can understand narrative probability as the degree to which events of the story follow one because of another (Stoner& Perkins, 191).” In other words, causality measures probability. Savio is successful in narrative probability because of who he is delivering the speech to. The audience understands the context that surrounds the situation and why Savio would be speaking in the first place. The chronology of the plot is structured to where each event leads to another and makes sense to the audience. In this case, the administration’s actions lead to student’s questions, which lead to enforcement, and to protest, etc.

In regards to fidelity, Savio shows good reason for trying to persuade the audience to perform a sit-in. Narrative fidelity is the quality of truth found in the narrative (Stoner & Perkins, 196). The purpose of his speech was to appeal to the highest value of the FSM and all students on campus. These were ultimately civil and human rights. The ordinances placed on the campus by the administration were viewed as a violation of these rights and needed to be stopped in order to have a functioning and peaceful campus. Savio is successful in relating this to the audience. He furthers this by demanding that it is a duty to protect it and to resist if necessary. Again, he calls to “Put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels…,” to “…Indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it – that unless you're free the machine will be prevented from working at all!”

**Conclusion**

In closing, Mario Savio delivered a speech on the steps of Sproul Hall as a part of the Free Speech Movement. He used emphatic and persuasive tones in order to convince a crowd of students to perform a sit-in at the administration building of the Berkeley campus. Savio was more than just a speaker on this day, performing something that was bigger than him alone. By using the narrative paradigm along with aspects of literary analysis, I showed that Savio used the elements of characters and plot to show that an unjust law cannot be tolerated. Further, I explained that Savio showed dissonance between the two sides and that civil disobedience was the only option in order to affect change. Finally, I displayed that Savio showed both narrative probability and fidelity in his rhetoric by following simple plot structure and showing the value in his purpose. This will hopefully bring to light other situations in rhetoric that display signs of oppression and censorship that are overlying reasons to the conflict itself.

**References**

Fisher, Walter R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of

public moral argument (pp.1-22). Communication Monographs 51. Retrieved from

<http://ftp.cleary.edu/6%20credit%20classes/MGT%20485/Narration%20as%20a%20Human%20Communication%20Paradigm.pdf>

Friedman, S. M. (2000, November 14). History of Cal: Berkeley in the 60s. Bancroft Library. Retrieved from <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/CalHistory/60s.html>

Jackson, P. (Director) (2001). Lord of the rings: The fellowship of the ring [Theater].

Lucas, G. (Director) (1976). Star wars: Episode iv - a new hope [Theater].

Lunsford, T. F. (1965). The "free speech" crisis at berkeley. 1964-1965: some issues for social and legal research. Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, doi: California Digital Library. Retrieved from <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/kt9r29p975/>

Kitchell, M. (Director) (1990). Berkeley in the sixties [Theater]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omw36-ntBws>

Roane State Community College. (2014). Literary analysis: Using elements of literatur*e*. Retrieved from <http://www.roanestate.edu/owl/elementslit.html>

Stoner, M., & Perkins, S. (2005). Making sense of messages: A critical apprenticeship in criticism. (pp. 186-188). Boston, MA. Houghton Mifflin Hartcourt.