

## BOOK REVIEWS

Garoian, C.R. (1999). *Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Softcover, 248 pages.

Garoian begins *Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics* with a look backwards. In his argument to prove that academic endeavors need not be disconnected from personal meaning and history, he delves into the recesses of his own cultural background, enticing readers to travel with him through childhood experiences on an Armenian raisin farm, toward his mother's struggle to survive the cultural genocide of 1915. Taught never to forget the past, Garoian revisits the experience of cultural domination through the performance of memory. Only through this process, was he able to make sense of education. He explains:

By learning to apply who I was and where I came from in school, I was able to understand my relationship to schooled knowledge. I learned to critique what I read in books with the knowledge I brought from my cultural background. Moreover, I was able to create new cultural representations based on my memory and history. (p. 225)

Garoian wants to create this same opportunity in art classrooms today. He hopes to enable students to learn the curriculum of academic culture from the perspectives of their own personal memories and cultural histories.

It has certainly been argued earlier that "there is no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves" (Connelly & Clandin, 1988, p. 31), but this text lends further support to curriculum reconceptualists and their efforts to shift an understanding of curriculum from structuralist concerns to an understanding of curriculum as text, words, and ideas. In his efforts to know, encourage, and teach curriculum as autobiographical text, Garoian stands upon and reaches from the strong shoulders of curriculum theorists the likes of Cherryholmes, Grumet, Pinar, and Pratte; progressive educators, Freire, Giroux, Greene, and McLaren; and performance theorists, Artaud, Boal, and Schechner.

While conservative curriculum scholars have attacked autobiographical text as "solipsistic and purely personal" (Gibson,

1991, p. 498), postmodernists have also problematized the method, claiming identity is a fiction. Yet Garoian playfully encourages us to struggle with the determinations, abiding more to a discursive understanding of identity and the Foucaultian process of genealogy. His work seems a hinge between understanding curriculum as autobiographical, political, and aesthetic text. His book defies the tension which existed between political and autobiographical theorists in the 1970's and suggests instead that autobiographical work is indeed political as it is intellectual work devoted to the process of transformation of self and education.

Garoian specifically advocates a medium of performance which allows students to think and act critically. He defines a pedagogy for education which empowers students to challenge the historical and cultural assumptions they have been taught, which enables them to "de-realize the social markings inscribed on their bodies by the body politic," which encourages them to create "new aesthetic and political codes significant to their lives" (p. 73). A pedagogy founded on performance art, he offers, while representing the postmodern ideals of progressive education, will lead student-spectators to facilitate political agency and to develop critical citizenship. It is a pedagogy which decentralizes the authority of the speaker, repositions the roles of the artist, teacher, and student, facilitates the expression of multiple subjectivities, and assumes that identity and ideology are not fixed.

Such a transformative pedagogy, the author-artist-teacher assures, will provide "safety" in having and expressing various points of view. Student perspectives will collide, allowing for agreement and disagreement. It is this safety, however, which I sometimes question. While Garoian acknowledges Foucault's influence on performance art and specifically, the performer as situated in an ultimate position of authority, I wish for further elaboration. The pedagogy of performance art advocated in this text calls for a baring of thoughts which, when subjected to others, provides those surrounding with an opportunity for exploitation and control. Foucault (1982), in his discussion of pastoral power, has written of a "form of power which cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it" (p. 214). Knowing this, I do wonder how the safety of students might be insured.

Nevertheless, Garoian convinces of the importance and benefits of interweaving performance art pedagogy into the curriculum. Drawing once again upon personal experience, he assures readers that the aesthetic dimension of art is the site of inquiry which allows for radical critique, identity construction, and political agency. Through the ethnographic, linguistic, political, social, technological, and ecstatic strategies of performance art students can learn to challenge preexisting discourses and practices of art and culture. In the "contested zone" (p. 66), in those liminal, contingent, ephemeral spaces of performance art where cultural codes and binaries are intentionally challenged and reconstituted, multiple discourses can exist and serve as multiple strategies for learning. Multicentric, participatory, indeterminate, interdisciplinary, reflexive, and intercultural practices can be created.

Abundantly illustrating and supporting this text are photographs, graphics, performances, examples, and details. Varied contexts for performance art pedagogy are interwoven for curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. Vivid descriptions of the work of performance artists, Robbie McCauley and Suzanne Lacy, an art collective, Goat Island, as well as student performers and productions clearly define the relationship between performance art making and performance art teaching.

Garoian concludes his text – again with memories, leading us through three of his own performance art works to illustrate how personal memory and history inform his work as an artist. All six stages of production are revealed. Then readers journey with him to an art classroom at Los Altos High School, where he shares the experience of teaching art and his 17 year struggle to transform the hegemony of education into emancipatory practice. Ever richer from personal experiences, Garoian shares his own classroom pedagogy that provides students with historical, social, and aesthetic foundations of art and the means to rupture and disrupt that pedagogy with their issues and concerns of contemporary culture.

*Performing Pedagogy: Toward an Art of Politics*, similar to the work it includes, is a provocative text. Just as performance art might incite thoughts about past and present, this book prompts thinking about the relationships between art and teaching. It leads readers to wondering. Performance art teaching as a new pedagogy need not be limited to the art classroom. Aesthetic knowing and aesthetic experiences, as well as opportunities for spectator-students to read and interpret from their respective cultural vantage points, might

exist in any classroom. Teachers can involve students in the physical, emotional, and conceptual exercises described within these pages in order to transform bodies into those that challenge cultural categorization. Classrooms can become sites of “happenings” (p. 144) or “talk abouts” (p. 106). Boundaries between arts and other disciplines may be blurred through a pedagogy such as the one described by Garoian.

#### REFERENCES

- Connelly, M., & Clandinin, J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. New York: Teachers College Press.
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Fenwick, T. & Parsons, J. (2000). *The Art of Evaluation: A Handbook for Educators and Trainers*. Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishers. Softcover, 246 pages.

Fenwick and Parsons' many years of experience in evaluating learners show in this book. They have each been teaching for more than 20 years at a variety of educational institutions, most recently at the University of Alberta. *The Art of Evaluation*, a product of that experience, has 15 chapters, on topics as varied as purpose, philosophy, and strategies for evaluation. If I were teaching a class on evaluation or even a segment on evaluation in an educational program I would refer my students to this book. Its strong, practical approach to evaluation, makes this a useful and reliable reference tool for educators at all levels, including those in K-12, community, and post-secondary situations.