

Utilizing an Aesthetics of Destabilization to Read the Public Pedagogy in Young People’s Community-based Social Justice Artworks

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“The opposite of war isn’t peace. It’s creation.” (Jonathan Larson, 1997, *RENT*)



Image 1. Remembering Ravenswood: East Palo Alto's Educational Sacrifice. The Mural, Music and the Arts Project, 2002. Located at the Boys and Girls Club of the Peninsula, East Palo Alto, CA.

Encounter One: I sit at my computer searching for images produced by young people about social issues. I find the Mural, Music and the Arts Project in East Palo Alto, California and search their gallery of mural photographs, selecting *Remembering Ravenswood*. I am struck by the direct confrontation of the young peoples’ gaze in the painting, as well as their somber, dissatisfied mood. The blue path and contrasting bright colors wind around the characters,

further emphasizing their emotional response to what happened at Ravenswood. I wonder: Why are the young people in the painting hurting? Why was Ravenswood an educational sacrifice? Why do the muralists need to remember it? Why do they want *me* to remember it?

Encounter Two: I click on the youth artists' statement that the website provides. It reads:

Ravenswood High School: East Palo Alto's Educational Sacrifice explores the roots of the modern institutional obstacles to East Palo Alto educational attainment and community vibrancy through a representation of the former Ravenswood High School, originally situated across the street from this mural location...

The mural is dedicated to Ravenswood High School and the students that attended there. The three figures in the center of the mural represent the unity and diversity of the youth in East Palo Alto. The four protestors in front of Ravenswood High School are young people actively inspiring social change. They make reference to the actual student protests that occurred during the 1970's in an effort to keep Ravenswood High School open. The San Mateo Union High School District closed the school in 1976, forcing East Palo Alto high school students to this day to be bussed for up to two hour rides each way to attend other high schools in the San Mateo Union High School District:

The blue lines winding throughout the mural are the winds of change, from past to present, carrying three cultural symbols from our community's roots: a Tongan breast plate, a Mayan symbol of a scribe, and a sankofa, an African bird that represents wisdom, flying forward while looking back at the past. (MMAP Website, "Remembering Ravenswood")

Encounter Three: I need to know more about the history of Ravenswood, why it closed down and what was lost in the process. In doing further research, I learn that the young people from MMAP created this mural in 2002, six years after the reunion of the last graduating class from Ravenswood. In the *Palo Alto Online*, graduates recollected the demographics of Ravenswood, which were increasingly African American by the time of its closure in 1976. One graduate said, "At the time, Ravenswood was not a success in terms of integration because America wasn't changed by the experiments in an obvious way...We did not integrate. We made the school multicultural but didn't make it a melting pot" (Jan, 1996). The former principal said,

Learning doesn't only take place in the classrooms, but also on the playgrounds...Ravenswood fulfilled the expectation that learning can take place in an environment of peace, contentment, harmony and enthusiasm. Our society hasn't progressed as far as we could have...but we proved at Ravenswood that it doesn't have to be that way (Jan, 1996).

I realize that the young people who painted about this occurrence at Ravenswood have built an interrelationship of struggle and hope that raises more questions than provides answers. There is unity within the painting and within the struggle of the students at Ravenswood in that they are both concerned with how equity is contingent, even transient. Yet, this aesthetic unity destabilizes the audience...it does not make me feel complete, whole or content. I want to know more.

Encounter Four: I learn from MMAP’s executive director Sonya Clark Herrera that in 2008, MMAP led another group of young people to look at “Remembering Ravenswood,” to discuss its history and meaning, and respond to it through writing and performing hip hop. She emails me their lyrics, a selection from which is printed here:

We was there, the youth was on the scene
 But we had to say din really mean a thing
 So like the Sankofa, we flew into the future
 Lookin’ back on the past so we already know the truth bruh’

Encounter Five: I receive comments back on this article and began to reflect on its structure and overall contribution to the field of curriculum studies. I begin thinking about the importance of the interpretive moves that audiences make upon their encounters with politically-charged artworks. I think about the lyrics above, acknowledging my limited understanding of “Sankofa.” The artists from MMAP had mentioned that it was a bird, but I had not investigated its power as a metaphor. Now, I learn that it is a concept in the African language Akan that means one must go back and retrieve the past to move forward in the present and future (Tedla, 1995). I realize again that my own journey through social justice struggles is constrained by white privilege. In my own efforts to go back into the past to inform my work in the present and future, I had not thought Sankofa related to me.

Encounter Six: At AERA 2010 in Colorado, Morna Stone Hanley reads her poem “Resisting Sankofa” as part of her autoethnographic work on the war of racism. She comments on the ways that the academy is both disinterested and resistant to addressing racism and their effects on learning and living (they are “resisting Sankofa.”) In this poem Hanley paints a picture of how her own life is affected by racism and classism, ending each stanza with “oh, yeah, but you don’t want none of this.” I listen, enlivened that I had recently made myself aware of the cultural and emotional meaning of Sankofa. But I am also reminded of my own complicity in not wanting none of this. The journey I began with finding *Remembering Ravenswood* online has brought me here, into the rhythm of relating past, present and future.

The encounters I relate above are my effort to portray what Thompson (2002) calls the act of “threeing,” a performative, critical, creative pedagogy in which actors (teachers and students, artists and audiences) analyze and generate possibilities based on a multiplicity of perspectives. As the actor embraces ambiguity in aesthetic meaning, any certainty forged through institutional inequities is destabilized, such as viewing marginalized youth as victims. But “threeing” complicates a critical pedagogy’s notion of agency. It contextualizes agency within an historic context and asks the audience to actively name their own subjectivity in a reading, but not simply by disclosing identity group memberships, such as acknowledging I am a white, middle class woman teacher. Instead, by “threeing” one’s aesthetic responses, one becomes an active spectator, as Ranciere (2009) suggests, reading artworks in a way that “puts every conclusion in suspense” (p. 123). In the encounters above, I focused on the qualities of emotion, rhythm and unity, thinking about their impact on me as an active spectator. I also actively investigated my relationship to the causes and effects of the dilemma posed in the artworks and the subsequent texts to which my investigation brought me. Yet, I will suggest in this paper, it is the aesthetics

within the artworks themselves that, in part, educate a desire (Thompson, 1977) for the audience to become active, to be destabilized from contentment or complacency into investigation.

I am particularly interested in the ways that aesthetic qualities in artworks raise political questions and destabilize audience responses in their operation as works of struggle and hope. In particular, the qualities of emotion, rhythm and unity created destabilizations in me that asked me to think relationally (Springgay, 2008, 2009; Bourriard, 2002). I wanted to know more about how the aesthetics of an artwork function pedagogically, both within the languages of the artwork themselves and in the principles with which such artworks ask audience members to engage. For example, *Remembering Ravenswood* features young people's portraits actively confronting the viewer, yet with a mood that is not exactly confident. Their eyes are sad and still, but the movement of the ribbon of color is vibrant and active. As I looked, I felt a collapsing of dichotomies in my responses (up/down, more/less, young/old, oppressor/victim, reproduction/agency). These destabilizing encounters constructed possibilities for me based in both believing and doubting: I believed in the power of these young people to help affect change because they painted a mural, produced public poetry in front of it, and asked me through such actions what I would do as I result of what I saw through them.

Thompson (2002) suggests the acts of feeling discomfort and embracing ambiguity are central to unlearning privilege based on (among others) race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. For artworks to be critical and for a spectator to be emancipated from the trappings of historical and contemporary oppressions (including, for example, that of pure catharsis), a political critique cannot be propagandistic or promote a singular, certain truth. Instead, the work must raise questions, dismantle simplistic hierarchies, and build relationships instead of divides (Barone, 2000, 2001; Bourriard, 2002; Ranciere, 2009). For Thompson (2002), dismantling privilege and working toward just relationships means "appreciating ambiguity and 'excessiveness' as possibility, savoring unexpectedness, and focusing less on one's morality and more on the possibilities of response itself: on responding to the situation" (p. 447). The specificity of knowledge and the possibilities of relationships are built on such ambiguity (moving away from limiting dichotomies, such as oppressor/victim) and excessiveness (the possibilities of meaning and solutions to problems are endless, both known and unknown, answerable and unanswerable).

With destabilization at the center of the relationship between artwork and audience, play can be both critical and hopeful. Thompson suggests that play is active and performative, in that it is active, embodied, and generative of alternatives to current oppressive systems and relationships. In this way, an aesthetic act (that of appreciating, perceiving, and enjoying the arts) may lead to critical action if it is at first felt through destabilization, as the artwork engages audiences' experience and empathy with the narratives of struggle in the works themselves (Dewey, 1938; hooks, 1994).

In the remainder of this paper, I work to play with the meanings of young people's artworks and the aesthetic of destabilization they utilize. Specifically, I will continue the act of "threeing," unfolding my pedagogical encounters with a destabilization of destabilization and engaging multiple perspectives and stances. I will analyze three additional artworks by young people from community-based US organizations: Free Street Theatre in Chicago, Illinois; Youth Movement Records in Oakland, California; and the Yollocalli Museum also in Chicago. Each of these organizations works with youth predominantly from racial and cultural minorities in low income areas and are focused on a variety of social concerns.

I am interested in how an aesthetic pedagogy of destabilization functions in these artworks through three artistic operations: emotion, rhythm and unity. I think about how *emotion* compels

co-experiencing and empathizing with the characters in the artworks and, by extension, the artists themselves. I think about how *rhythm* constructs a dynamic movement between stability and change. Finally, I think about how *unity* brings the audience into an understanding of how artworks function to achieve balance and counterbalance, resistance and acceptance in a social criticism process. For me, this process should be *unfinalizable* in that each artwork and the experiences of viewing it are unrepeatable, open-ended, and vulnerable to new subjective, political readings (Haynes, 1995). Any unity that the artwork achieves and that an audience experiences contributes to an individual's subjective transportation or transformation, but it does not reflect an objective fullness or completeness of perception. In the final section, I theorize about the different purposes of destabilization as a pedagogical process based on the different themes these encounters offered.

You Will Always Be My Daughter

Encounter One: I sit in front of my laptop, earphones in place in order to not wake my sleeping baby as I watch the youth-produced film *Without* (2007) by Free Street Theatre, Chicago. I hear a young woman's voice-over and watch as the camera travels in extreme close up along a series of abstract, blurred shapes and textures in shades of purple, black and slate blue.



Image 2a. Extreme close up of the tire swing. *Without*, 2007. Screen shot. Future Perfect Project, Free Street Theatre. Chicago, IL.



Image 2b. Tire swing. *Without*, 2007. Screen shot. Future Perfect Project, Free Street Theatre. Chicago, IL.



Image 2c. Final portrait of young woman who is presumably the narrator. *Without*, 2007. Screen shot. Future Perfect Project, Free Street Theatre. Chicago, IL.

The young female narrator talks directly to her unborn daughter, who she is worried may have the physical disease she has, a disease she had contracted genetically from her own mother:

Dear ____. I can't even name you. Giving you a name would make you too real. I will always wonder what my life would have been with you. I would have someone to look out for, other than my own body...You see, I want to, but I can't...my body has problems, real, deep problems...I don't want your body to go through all that. I just want to live my life without worrying about you too..., I would be so proud of you all the time, and hang your report cards on the fridge. For the longest time, I didn't know what to do about you. But now, I would rather deal with a blank refrigerator door than pass this pain

on to you. I don't want to see you suffer and hate me and everything in this world. Even though I am not going to bring you into this world, remember you will still be in my heart. You will still be my daughter. No matter what.

Love, Mom

The camera pulls back to an empty tire swing still swaying slightly. The final image is a still, silent shot of a young woman in a hooded sweatshirt standing in front of stained glass windows, wiping a tear from her face.

Encounter Two: I am still crying as I write this. It hurts that such a young person needs to make such a difficult decision. I want her youth to be protected, to be innocent. I want her refrigerator door to be full like mine will be in a year when my own daughter learns to hold a crayon and make marks on paper. Yet, in thinking this, in writing it here I see my own re-performance of a particular normative construction of childhood (Higgonet, 1998; Lee, 2001) based on a Western dichotomy of purity/corruption. I am judging her as I pity her, and I am uncomfortable even acknowledging it.

For Dewey (1938), “emotion is the conscious sign of a break, actual or impending. The discord is the occasion that induces reflection. Desire for restoration of the union converts mere emotion into interest in objects as conditions of realization of harmony” (p. 14). An active spectator does not allow a complete realization of harmony, but feels unsettled by the emotion conveyed in/through the artwork. Then an inquiry process must begin. Dewey suggests:

When excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of attitudes and meanings derived from prior experience. As they are aroused into activity they become conscious thoughts and emotions, emotionalized images. To be set on fire by a thought or scene is to be inspired. (p. 65)

Encounter Three: I watch the film again. I want to hear the courage of the young woman's voice as she talks to her unborn daughter with the knowledge that she will end the pregnancy soon. I remember being pregnant just three years ago, and walking through the quad at Arizona State where I did my doctoral work, seeing the anti-abortion protestors hold signs with gruesome depictions of fetuses. I remember rubbing my belly and taking deep breaths to stay calm. I am painfully aware of the body inside of my body, and the bodies on those placards. I remember seeing her first ultrasound, her profile with that little nose visible in the first trimester. I wonder when life begins, and who decides. Now, I hear my daughter's sleeping sounds and listen to the young woman in *Without* again. I want to fill up my body with her voice, with her love for the child she won't have, yet will always be fully present in her.

There is a lack of a child body in the film, particularly in the presence of the (moving) swing. This could be any “body,” any woman going through pregnancy and disease. This could have been me. In my first encounter, I saw loss in the young mother character. But the emotional juxtaposition of presence and absence in the film compelled me to listen again. Now I see her strength as she thinks through her decision, carefully imagining her world both with and without her child. She must deal with a tremendously difficult decision because society does not have the medical technology to prevent the passage of this (unnamed) disease from mother to fetus/baby.

Yet, when the young woman at the end of the piece wipes away a tear, I felt hope for her happiness, since she has the knowledge that the baby will always be her daughter in memory.

Encounter Four: How can I allow multiple views about life and death exist inside me? How can I actively perform the struggle for women's civil rights?

I will show this film to my daughter

And continue to break silences.

This is the Land of Milk and Honey

Encounter One: I sit atop a high stool in the new café of our public library, listening to “Change the Nation” (The Faculty, 2006) from Youth Movement Records. So much isolated observation in these first encounters with the youth artworks: just me sitting, listening alone to a group of young people sharing the space of art-making. At first I have trouble understanding all of the words. I listen repeatedly in order to transcribe them onto my laptop. I sip iced tea and eat a muffin, enjoying the drum beat propel the lyrics about growing up in the violence, poverty-ridden inner city of Oakland, California. Although I grew up in the 80s, during the wave of popular rappers like Run DMC and Public Enemy, I did not personally listen to it. As I replay the song over and over to accurately record the lyrics, I understand that language variation, culture, and power intersect in my own white, middle class, suburban context of privilege as an audience member (Cahnmann, 2006). I ask a couple of young men from Youth Movement Records to transcribe the lyrics for me.

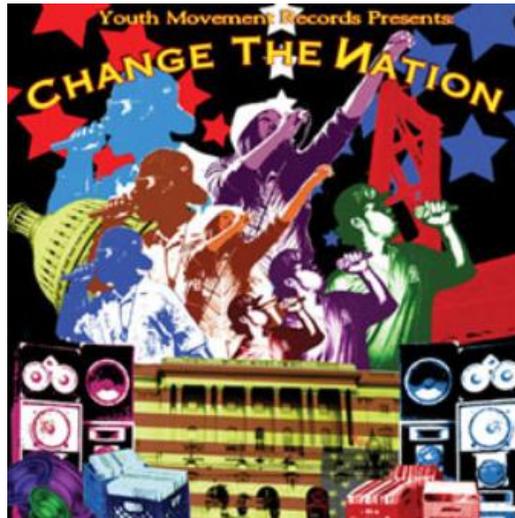


Image 3. Change the Nation. Album cover by Ryan Espinosa, age 18. Youth Movement Records, 2006.

In thinking about the relationship between power and change, I am struck by this set of lyrics, rapped by Chuck Webster:

This the land of milk & honey
 the land of spliffs and money
 they aint wanting to change, clap pistols while tears runnin
 yeah my house got busted at, better days id love that
 i admit i do dirt, almost above that
 everybody would be breaded, thats my new world order
 go to the store & never be short two quarters
 & no borders cause all races deserve the raw earth
 & people wouldnt get murdered 4 being on the wrong turf
 in this nation of mine it would get better with time
 cold nights writing rhymes sippin Carlo Rossi wine
 no AIDS epidemic, no clinics & little dying
 & tha nations capital would be top of Mount Zion
 it would be worldwide the peace that I would provide
 who better than I—I seen hell with these eyes
 tryin to change rearrange have this world, customize
 my only wish is pursing my lips and kiss this nation goodbye
 [a kiss smack ends the song]

Whose land of milk and honey are the young people referring to? Are they criticizing the public imaginary of a sweet “American dream,” or are they constructing their own version of that place which they would like to realize?

Encounter Two: I listen to the song again, focusing on the serious proposition Webster and the Faculty suggest, that young people who have been dispossessed and marginalized can and will change the nation. What is that change? How is it created and sustained?

For Webster, change means kissing the nation goodbye. He places the capital of this new world on “top of Mount Zion,” a reference to the area of Old Jerusalem in Israel. Mount Zion is a synecdoche, or a single aspect of a whole that comes to represent that whole. It becomes a symbol for the kind of world that Webster hopes for, a vision that stands in stark contrast to the “hell” he has seen with these eyes. It is not from this place (is it an imagi-nation?) The kiss smack at the end of the verse echoes and then passes the song over to the chorus, a call and response of multiple singers echoing each other’s line: “If I could change the nation...If we could change the nation.”

Aesthetically and ethically, this polyvocal call and response builds a rhythmic sense of collective desire, reminding me of the civil rights struggles of the past and present. Yet, I am haunted by the kiss. Is it one of resignation and despair, or ironic hope? Where could the speaker escape, lost in his own mind, or in flight from the physical place of the US as he kisses it goodbye? What happens when change does not come as fast as we would like, or ever at all? Is the song the only change, staying at the level of metaphor? I have spiraled out of hope myself as I feel guilty about my own relative inaction and privilege. But I do not want to stop listening. The call and response builds momentum even as I feel inadequate to help.

Encounter Three: I have been destabilized by this song, but not in a way I wanted or imagined I would be. How did the rhythm of this song transport me here? For Dewey (1938):

All interactions that effect stability and order in the whirling flux of change are rhythms. There is ebb and flow, systole and diastole: ordered change. The latter moves within bounds. To overpass the limits that are set is destruction and death, out of which, however, new rhythms are built up... Contrast of lack and fullness, of struggle and achievement, of adjustment after consummated irregularity, form the drama in which action, feeling, and meaning are one. (p. 16)

Both the music and the lyrics make order out of chaos. I imagine a swirl of demons flying through Webster's mind as he recalls the pain and fear of being short two quarters, clapping pistols, AIDS, dying: the hell he has seen with his eyes. Yet, placing these experiences into rhyme and meter prevents such emotion from pounding down in an overwhelming way. And, it generates a visceral, embodied sense of power as the artist creates them and the audience listens.

This rhythm generates an integrated physical, mental and emotional response in me similar to that which I felt watching a youth slam performance called "Culture" (Bartolini, Dorantec, & Miller, 2005). In my graduate course of second languages, a student selected "Culture" to share with the class on the topic of language variation, community and the power. In this spoken word performance, three young men shout out in unison:

Y'all need to take a second glance
 A non-stop group of videos using women's asses to promote rap
 Hip hop does not say that honeys have to shake it for radio air play
 It's the women who bus like Aretha Franklin, Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday
 Fuck back up. Hip hop women take center stage
 Because hip hop is already spelled with great beats.
 It goes back to the elements.
 This is a culture and we are its residents living in the rhythm
 Like my crew, a Caucasian DJ scratching on the corner with Chicano, Afro-Cuban, Filipino freestyle while
 A Black woman passing by stops to drop sixteen bars on politics without missing a beat.
 Because hip hop ain't about misogyny, bigotry, violence or greed
 Hip hop never held a gun. Hip hop never rode on spinners
 But the beat rolls on. The beat will always roll on so long as we keep moving
 So long as we keep moving this music forward.
 Hip hop will teach. Hip hop will preach.
 Can I get an aaaaaa-men?
 Can I get an a-woman!

"Change the Nation" and "Culture" ignite a charge in me as they address inequity and propel it into analysis through the beat of spoken word. These young people have amassed a new form of cultural capital in which vernacular discourses of hip hop issue social critique (Delpit, 1995). These artworks based in rhythm, repetition, and sound have shown me alternative means for articulating the state as it is, and as some young people would like to build it (Prashad, Vijay, & Neal, 2006).

As the young men mention Aretha Franklin, Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday in their performance, the audience goes wild snapping, clapping, and chanting. They respond similarly

during the chant, “Can I get an a-woman!” I wonder about how destabilization occurs in sympathetic and hostile audiences. And how does this affect the public pedagogy built around the exhibition and performances of young people’s overtly political artworks?

The Declaration of Immigration

Encounter One: What happens when the audience is not hospitable or already friendly to these critiques and proposals for change? If an aesthetics of destabilization is core to pedagogically engaging spectators to think and act on the problems they re-experience through the artworks, then how do social justice-focused artists and educators address when action prompted by viewing an artwork becomes hostile? The final artwork I discuss in this paper is a mural entitled *A Declaration for Immigration* (2009), created by youth from Yollocalli, an initiative of the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. It is a two-story high mural painted on the shared wall of the Yollocalli/Radio Arte building, that the artists assert is “a visual dedication to all immigrants and allies who have marched hundreds of thousands of miles to advocate for fair legislation for immigrants and who have stood strong in the face of anti-immigrant rhetoric” (National Museum of Mexican Art, 2009, screen 2).





IMAGES FOUR-FIVE. *The Declaration of Immigration Mural*. Yollocalli Arts Reach, The National Museum of Mexican American Art. Chicago, IL, 2009.

During the process of its installation, the mural was defaced with spray painted “lies” and “Mexicans are racist.” Yollocalli youth leader Vanessa Sanchez responded:

From my point of view, it’s just sad. We’re just trying to share our own point of view about our own people, about other immigrants throughout the nation, and I don’t how the mural relates to what these people [put on the mural]...It’s sad to think that people would do that to a mural, a work created by youth, and to a community organization. We’re here for the community. People just don’t know who we are or what’s going because they didn’t take the time to read a statement that we have posted on our door that talks about the mural. (Gilmer, 2009, screen 2)

In the midst Arizona passing anti-immigration and racist social policies in 2010, this response to the Declaration mural saddens but does not surprise me. Other instances of overt racism continue. In May 2010, muralist R. E. Wall was asked to lighten the skin of a Hispanic boy on the mural he painted at an elementary school in Prescott, Arizona. The muralist recounted hearing passersby yelling to him, “You’re desecrating our school,” “Get the ni---- off the wall,” “Get the sp-- off the wall.” In response to the public outcry over the mural, Prescott councilman Steve

Blair said, “Art is in the eye of the beholder, but I say [the mural] looks like graffiti in LA” (Alfano, 2010).

As an educator who focuses on teaching about social justice issues, I want to believe that there is hope that most people can understand their importance. I want my students and the general public to reflect on why a young person would paint, “Document Me” on a wall, or why devaluing graffiti in LA ignores the political stance of the street artists who create it. Yet, these oppositional, degrading responses to the *Declaration of Immigration* and Prescott murals indicate that hostile audiences may not be willing to listen. I wonder what audiences are required for more equitable recognition and resources to be redistributed in different social spaces, and how the responses of more friendly audiences might respond to hostile audiences in order to further dialog.

Encounter Two: Both hostile and friendly audiences desire to control the script over the future of social issues, in this case, immigration and race relations in the US (Schechner, 2010). Both kinds of audiences are caught in the sensation of experiencing the artwork, their bodies responding to the colors, images, and language of the mural (Ranciere, 2009; Springgay, 2008). Audience responses prevent an aesthetic unity from being finalized, in the sense that some spectators resisted feeling a sense of completeness when looking at the murals. Dewey (1938) says that unity is a singleness whose order and tone of energy allow further activity to stir in the audience, “when the resistances create a suspense that is resolved through cooperative interaction of the opposed energies” (p. 161). Yet, any perception of unity, Haynes (1995) suggests, is contextualized by human beings’ finite experiences and knowledge. In this way, “what we apprehend are constructions, and inevitably conflicts arise over these constructions... We simply cannot see the whole—everything that is” (p. 19).

As a friendly audience to the Declaration mural, I am unsettled by my complicity in the power structure that has created such adversity for (certain) immigrants. I know that when the criteria for police stopping people to check their country of origin is color, race, and language in Arizona in 2010 (SB 1070), the police won’t be stopping me. Even if there is a completeness to the artwork, a resolution of opposing energies through technical choices of color, font size, and selection of image, the unity that resides in me is unfinalized. I am left with questions that haunt me. How can I create further pedagogical opportunities to publically raise questions about the institutions that structure racism, linguistic erasure, and classism? In this way, the artwork created dilemmas left in contradiction or intentionally unresolved so that audiences can enter the gaps actively.

Iser (1980) suggests that through the process of reading (or experiencing),

If the blank is largely responsible for the activities described, then participation means that the reader is not simply called upon to ‘internalize’ the positions given in the text, but he is induced to make them act upon and so transform each other, as a result of which the aesthetic object begins to emerge. (Counsell, 2001, p. 119)

Yet, these gaps might be filled with speech and action that social-justice minded artists and educators find as intolerable as the social inequities that prompted the initial creation of the artworks themselves.

If the viewing of an artwork already engages a communal sense of knowing, whether the audience is friendly or hostile, then perhaps the artwork has destabilized the hostile audience

toward productive change as well. Perhaps the act of writing on top of the Declaration mural already indicates that the aesthetic and social content of the mural had penetrated that actor to the point of action. And if the actor felt so destabilized that the mural might disrupt his or her “truth” about immigrants and immigration, then maybe the questions in that person will remain long after the defacement had been painted over. Ranciere (2009) suggests that viewing artworks engages the tension of “being apart” and “being together” both in the act of communing with the artwork and in the self-awareness of being in that state (p. 59). An aesthetic break occurs in that the audiences no longer experience their reality, but their reality in relation to the mediation of this artistic text. Ranciere explains:

Aesthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations. What it produces is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are equipped to adapt to it. (p. 72)

The mural destabilizes this audience from “knowing” with certainty who is at the center of power, asking audiences to re-imagine the center, to question their assumptions as they experience the emotions, rhythms, spaces, and relationships of those whose voices are often ignored (Williams, 1977). The youth voices construct a new destination for the country so that the hostile spectator might realize how ill-equipped s/he is to integrate such a disruption or redistribution of power.

Final Thoughts

Ranciere theorizes that an audience moves apart and together in social consciousness as they experience sensory ruptures within the logic of an artwork’s narrative. This framework enables me to understand what happens in both friendly and hostile audiences, a play that may be outwardly divisive. But aesthetic intervention is not a simple act of public pedagogy. Artists must attend to multiple kinds of audiences, from friendly to hostile. Audiences may not know how (or want to) explicitly reflect on what they see in a way that “threes” their perspectives, in a way that destabilizes dichotomies and propels new inquiries into their own learning toward social betterment.

In his aesthetic of destabilization, Ranciere (2010) suggests that dissensus is a necessary mode of intervention in a critical public pedagogy of the arts. A new consensus about what is right, good and true cannot be assumed. Instead, in the study of critical youth development, scholars, educators and youth themselves must ask how we can move from being conscious of the social inequities around us to critical of them in acts to change them (Noguera, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2006; Reyes, 2010)? What are the qualities of this critical state of being/becoming? How does this knowledge construction happen? How do these qualities affect those witnesses and spectators of young people’s critical cultural action? What will such change look like depending on the audience members and their shifting contexts?

In this paper I have been interested in the interrelated reflection and action (Freire, 2003) that takes place both through art making and art criticism as aesthetic languages (elements and

principles of the arts discipline) work in relationship across the artist, artwork, and audience. I suggest that destabilization is a key pedagogical process in social justice-based work with young people. In the case of working in and through the arts, destabilization occurs through methods the artists use to tell their stories and through the social and emotional processes experienced by the audience as they engage with the artworks. The aesthetic qualities circumscribe the experience through which audiences pursue an understanding of the felt dilemma in the artwork. And through the act of re-encountering one's own responses to the artwork, such active reflection can reveal our own assumptions and see the artworks from new perspectives.

In my encounters with the artworks *Remembering Ravenswood*, *Without*, *Change the Nation*, and the *Declaration of Immigration*, I felt destabilized in a number of ways. My interactions with the artworks became a purpose for performing active investigations to learn about that which I did not know. The artworks compelled me to be reflective about the ontology of embracing ambiguity and contradiction. They raised questions in me about my responsibility to act when I don't see the change coming that marginalized young people hope for, or when those hopes are defaced. I used a pedagogy of "threeing" (Thompson, 2002) in order to move beyond dichotomies of oppressor and victim, empowered and disempowered, I wanted the reflective content of this threeing to move beyond simply celebrating the accomplishments of marginalized youth or mastering the art of analyzing oppressive social practices reflected through the artworks. Thompson (2002) suggests that threeing means "seeing how what counts as 'the point' shifts, depending on what we assign as a possible response" (p. 448). I wanted to actively perform a search for new possibilities, as the young artists had begun themselves.

This mode of arts criticism has strong implications for education at all levels interested in the body of knowledge constructed of and by young people themselves, or the outside curriculum as Schubert (2009) calls it. Textual products created by young people about their lives and their relationship to the world should not be a static set of materials to be consumed by researchers or in classrooms in order to give us a certain truth about what young people experience. In particular the artworks featured here perform acts of social criticism as they construct visions for more equitable relations and access to resources. Such performances actively destabilize audiences through aesthetic operations in ways that allow for pedagogical encounters. The artists behind these artworks ask us to take a stance, or multiple stances. I can almost hear them say: So what will you do with this (mural, film, song) now that you have it in your hands? How will you share it, interact with it, open new possibilities because of it? For me, a university professor of elementary and bilingual education focusing on diversity issues, these are my most important questions. And toward them, I reflect again.

A Possible Response

I hear a judgment echoing in the voice of my head and I shiver
 push it down
 Those parents, these kids, their problem
 Where did that come from?

But I am within these four walls
 Teaching and learning about how to be
 anti-racist

culturally responsive
a learner of a second language

I tap dance in front of my students
Trying to convince them with my enthusiasm
About how we *can* do it
make it better
And get those ugly thoughts out of our heads
Our books
Our schools
Our laws

Someone said that if you were raised in the US
You were raised on racism
The invisible white norm
Silent but asserted
Not just through the policies and omissions in textbooks
Not just through the thoughts in my head
That I work to dismantle with reason and feeling
But through my presence as their teacher

But my students don't all ride on my charisma
Probably very few
Some prefer the doubting game
which I also play
because they too presuppose the wrongness of the inequity that
undergirds the system

But most respond to the dialog
The spaces
The gaps and perspectives
not all equal, but heard

And in the process of re-experiencing

Through story
image
song
movement

A destabilizing process happens

How do I teach desegregation in the 1960s–70s (for example)
In the context of hyper-segregation that still exists (for example)
With/for/by
Latino/a

African American
Bilingual, immigrant, refugee
Poor
Children
(for example)

I ask the students to form a physical picture,
each becoming a different person
in that moment
for a moment
contemplating beyond dichotomies
all the actions
when Ruby Bridges walked into her new school.

I ask them to write an “I am” poem
in the voice of a girl who hates English
because through school
She learns “covered wagon”
but doesn’t have the phrase for it
In her native Chinese.

And then I ask them to write in another voice
of the teacher who just wanted her to talk
In English and did her very best to connect
With the girl as a person

We must imbibe, embody, feel the past
To change it

How do we become emancipated spectators?

I cannot answer but will consider it
collide with it

through art

About the Author

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