

And What Will You Do with It?

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—for when a nation loses its poets it loses access to the meaning of dwelling...for when a nation ignores its poets it becomes a nation of the homeless. Roger Pogue Harrison, *Forests*, 1992, p. 238.

THIS TITLE comes from Sharon Chappell's article. Yet this question can be found in each of these essays. Each article deals with the meaning of art, imagination, creativity, and public space. Sharon's article, "Toward an Aesthetics of Destabilization: Understanding the Public Pedagogy in Young People's Community-based Social Justice Artworks," focuses on the public space of a high school and her own intellectual endeavors in art and curriculum studies. Daniel Friedrich in his article, "The Memoryscape in Buenos Aires: Representation, Memory, and Pedagogy," takes us into the recent past when dictators brutally ruled Argentina, and Abraham DeLeon travels a little further in time in his article, "From the Shadows of History: Archives, Educational Research, and Imaginative Possibilities," to HemisFair68 at the San Antonio World's Fair in 1968. What will you do with these articles? Will you ignore them because they lack curriculum star power? Will you read them and regurgitate their words and thoughts faithfully and diligently, creating nothing in the process because of your perfect faithfulness and due diligence? Will you create something the authors never contemplated or intended? Or, as they have done, will you invent something from their creations that fit your needs, interests, cultures, and histories? As you please the choice and potential is yours. But if you choose to create something remember where your thoughts began or from whom they began to coalesce.

Sharon utilizes poetry, in part, to create her public space. As a curriculum scholar she is a home builder for a nation of homeless minds we often refer to as The United States of America. For Roger Pogue Harrison, this nation, built up from a revolution, originally promised "a poetic freedom" in which individuals could invent who they are and what this nation could be. Instead of, sadly, creating "a nation of poets," we "became a nation of debtors, property owners, shopkeepers, spectators, gossipers, traffickers in rumor, prejudice, and information—capitalists who in their strange uncertainty about life pursue the delusions of recovery in their appropriation of everything" (1992, p. 231). In our delusional trips to covet everything that is unimportant we have lost our way and as a result most Americans have become homeless on their "own" property. We have lost more than just ourselves along the way. Harrison continues his thinking and suggests that "[d]emocracy is a particular kind of shelter grounded on the earth." A homeless

people cannot be grounded and free. “People are free,” Harrison believes, “only when they are housed; and they are housed only when their abode unfolds rather than enfolds itself” (1992, p. 235). In her article Sharon tries to reclaim her unfolding abode and the poetry of this life. I think she succeeds in her quest and as a result she finds a home filled with young people wishing to create their own homes. What will we let them do with it?

Daniel’s piece keeps us in this hemisphere but we travel to the Southern half of our earth to come to grips with the haunting aftermath of a brutal dictatorship. How does one create a pedagogical site out of a historical but still raw site of torture? This is what Daniel focuses his creative attention on in his article. The people of Argentina, of course and unfortunately, are not the first people to have to pick up the remains in the aftermath of an era in which self-proclaimed civilized people brutalized fellow humans. Daniel’s task, as well, is not unique either. How do we create a public space, a term often implying democracy, on the remains of authoritarianism? How do we construct memories that etch substantive meanings into our collective souls? Too often we do not. James Young suggests our yearnings to memorialize are veiled attempts to forget and to distance ourselves from an unbearable past. This is what people in the United States try to do in regards to slavery and Jim Crow segregation. This is what the United States will try to do decades from now when it denies any memory of discrimination against gays and lesbians. Young believes this intense desire to forget is a sign of our times. “In this age of mass memory production and consumption,” Young writes, “there seems to be an inverse proportion between the memorialization of the past and its contemplation and study...we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember” (1993, p. 5). I invite you to join Daniel in his attempts to invent ways to invest ourselves in a destructive, ugly, disgraceful past so that we can find ways to contemplate a better way to interact and govern our planet.

Finally, Abraham’s essay draws our attention to the public space of project Y from HemisFair68 at the 1968 San Antonio World’s Fair. How can we foster the spirit of democracy again? Not a false democracy built on the illusion that capitalism is the truest form of freedom and expression. Capitalism is the very thing that undermines democracy and perverts freedom. Freedom to suffer, be poor, and miserable is tyranny at its most cynical. We live in a very cynical world. Abraham presents an alternative to cynicism. He presents an opportunity to reclaim public space and revitalize democracy. This opportunity begins with a (re) invention, a (re)imagination of what can be and should be in the name of freedom and democracy. Abraham’s project is similar to Bernard Stiegler’s. For Stiegler democracy is dependent on two things: care and play. First, care:

taking care, strict senso, means to cultivate what it means to take care, to make it productive...To take care also means to pay attention, first paying attention to taking and maintaining care of oneself, then of those close to us, then of their friends—and thus, by projection, of everyone: of others whatever they may be, and of the world we share with them. (2010, pp. 178–179)

Then there is play.

To play with a child is to take care of the child, opening the paths by which transitional spaces are created, paths that stimulate the origins of art, culture, and ultimately of everything that forms the symbolic order and the “dream language of myths. (2010, p. 14)

Abraham has taken care of his project and plays with meaning in the name of imagination, creativity and by extension a democracy worth living.

So what will you do with these articles? What will you do with poetry in a homeless society? What will you do with museum memories in a brutal world? What will you do with public space desperately needed in a democracy faltering at its foundations? I hope you join these scholars and create something good and beautiful.

References

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- Young, J. (1993). *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

