

# International Journal of Education & the Arts

Editors

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<http://www.ijea.org>

ISBN 1529-8094

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Volume 9 Number 2

February 17, 2008

## Teacher as Performer: Unpacking a metaphor in performance theory and critical performative pedagogy

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Citation: Prendergast, M. (2008). Teacher as performer: Unpacking a metaphor in performance theory and critical performative pedagogy. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 9(2). Retrieved [date] from <http://www.ijea.org/v9n2/>.

### Abstract

This survey paper explores the interdisciplinary literature of performance theory and critical performative pedagogy in an attempt to consider metaphorical applications of performance to pedagogy. This exploration involves looking at teaching as performance in the broadest cultural sense of the word – interested more in *efficacy of communication and mutual empathetic understanding* – than in the more commonly-held economic, technological and political senses of performance which are more interested in *setting, raising, and maintaining standards of efficiency and effectiveness* (see McKenzie, 2001). In examining these issues in both performance studies and education, the conclusions are that educational researchers and teacher educators can benefit significantly from a critical awareness of the proliferation of metaphors for teaching as performance that highlight both aesthetic and socio-political challenges inherent in a life in the classroom.

## **Introduction: Tracing a Metaphor**

Teaching quite easily lends itself to performative metaphors; the 'captive audience' of students in a classroom, the teacher onstage at the front of the room, charged with the tasks of engagement and enlightenment, even (in Egan's [1986] model) storytelling. However, as someone who moved from the professional theatre into teaching practice many years ago, I have become increasingly troubled by the seemingly fashionable appropriation of the performance metaphor – more broadly construed and understood in the relatively new and hybrid field of performance studies – and its at times, haphazard and narrowly-focused application to pedagogy. The aim of this essay therefore, is to step back from the staged spectacle of *teaching as performance* as it has appeared in recent literature within education, in order to both survey how this metaphor has been applied, both judiciously and perhaps less so, and to offer some potentially new ways of seeing the work of teaching and learning through performance lenses. It is hoped that the latter task of this essay might have some resonance with those in educational research and/or teacher education who might be further encouraged to think through the vibrant and complex interconnectivity between pedagogical and performance practices.

The essay is organized into three sections. First, I will introduce performance theory and studies by highlighting the work of major theorists in this field whose work is judged to be particularly germane to pedagogical practice. Second, I move to an overview of how performance has been applied to education, specifically in the area of critical pedagogy, sometimes now called *critical performative pedagogy* (Pineau, 2002), thus confirming the impact performance theory has had in this sphere, albeit at times somewhat unrigorously applied. Finally, I conclude on a strong note of caution in reminding readers that performance is a very slippery, ephemeral, and contested term that intentionally poses as many, if not more questions than it answers when asked to serve a master other than its own. Educational researchers and teacher educators who are drawn to the *teaching is performance* metaphor will be well-served by attending more closely to the field of performance studies and its theories.

### **Part I**

#### **Performance as Metaphor for Pedagogy Ways of Seeing Teaching in Performance Theory**

This first section presents the work of three significant contemporary American performance theorists – Bert O. States (1996), Richard Schechner (1988/2003, 2002), and Jon McKenzie (2001) – as a way of both introducing the field of performance theory to those unfamiliar with it and to explore the metaphorical ways performance concepts might be applied to pedagogical practices.

### Bert O States: Performance as Metaphor

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) argues that we perform our everyday lives, and his work has had great effect on the development of performance theory. So, the broadest metaphor we can apply to performance is *as life*. This, of course, is mimesis. But this is also a very broad metaphor indeed, and one that needs some fine-tuning, some focusing, in order to become clearly useful in the context of this essay. Fortunately, performance theorist Bert O. States (1996) has written on performance as metaphor in a way that helps achieve this tighter focus as he offers a number of distinct theoretical metaphors for performance that have been employed, including Schechner's contributions, in the establishment of the field of performance studies over the past thirty years or so. Each of these metaphors is examined and problematized by States. He concludes with his own metaphor of *performance as a way of seeing*.

Bert O. States' article in *Theatre Journal*, "Performance as Metaphor" (1996) is essential reading in performance theory, as it troubles many of the assumptions, clothed in metaphor, that have guided the development of the field. I offer a diagrammatic summary of this work below, because to cover this lengthy material more comprehensively would be to carry my reader away from my central mission; that is, to explore the metaphor of teacher as performer. This chart shows how States lays out and questions the roots and values of a number of metaphors for performance found in theory.

Note: The INSIDE/OUTSIDE heading refers to States' delineation of whether or not a theorist is an 'insider' or 'outsider' of performance theory.

| THEORIST         | INSIDE/OUTSIDE           | METAPHOR  | QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS  |
|------------------|--------------------------|---|---|
| Raymond Williams | Outside/Cultural Studies | Performance <i>as</i> Keyword                       | How can we be clear about defining keywords when they are "inextricably bound up with the problems [they are] being used to discuss", both ideologically and methodologically (Williams in States, p. 2)? |
| Erving Goffman   | Outside/Sociology        | Performance <i>as</i> Social Behavior/Everyday Life | What are the ways in which we repeat ourselves (p. 5)? What <i>isn't</i> performance in this definition, and therefore somewhat meaningless (p. 5)?   |
| Victor Turner    | Outside/Anthropology     | Performance <i>as</i> Social Conflicts/Dramas       | How do we resolve the "metaphorically vacant" tautology of performance as social conflict as drama as performance (p. 5)?   |

|                      |   |   |   |
|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Peggy Phelan         | Inside/<br>Performance Art &<br>Performance Studies | Performance <i>as</i><br>Appearance/Disappear-<br>ance/Presence/<br>Performativity                    | Where does Phelan’s metaphor<br>move us beyond “evoking a<br>principle that has a long history in<br>aesthetics and does not define<br>performance or performance art<br>any more than it defines any other<br>kind of art” (p. 13)?  |
| Richard<br>Schechner | Inside/ Theatre &<br>Performance Studies            | Performance <i>as</i> Restored &<br>Twice-behaved behavior  | When do qualities such as<br>“immediacy, ephemerality,<br>peculiarity, and ever-<br>changingness” apply to more than<br>performance, as in almost <i>any</i><br>process or action (quote from<br>Schechner in States, p. 13)?<br>When any behavior is <i>learned</i> , is<br>it then not also possibly <i>restored</i><br><i>or twice-behaved</i> as well?                                    |
| Robert P.<br>Crease  | Outside/Philosophy                                  | Performance <i>as</i> Science<br>(Presentation/<br>Representation/<br>Recognition)/<br>Transformation | How do the science and<br>performance of <i>transformation</i><br>provide “the fundamental pleasure<br>at the very core of mind and<br>memory” (p. 21)? How do<br>Crease’s four categories of<br>performance – “failed, mechanical<br>repetition, standardized, and<br>artistic” (p. 22) – become usefully<br>applied to the task of defining the<br>field of performance?                    |
| Bert O. States       | Inside/Theatre &<br>Performance Studies             | Performance <i>as</i> Way of<br>Seeing  | Where is performance located if<br>defined as “seeing that involves<br>certain collaborative and<br>contextual functions (between<br>work and spectator) which are<br>highly elastic” (p. 12)? How does<br>defining performance as “the<br>simultaneity of producing<br>something and responding to it in<br>the same behavioral act” work as a<br>phenomenological understanding<br>(p. 25)? |

Table 1: Summary chart of Bert O. States’ “Performance as Metaphor” (1996)

What becomes clearer for me, from this text and the summary chart, is the danger that performance can easily slip into becoming an over-generalized term, like ‘culture’, that tries to

be all things to all people at all times and thereby tends to lose its force and become diffuse. Small wonder that it has so often been described as an “essentially contested concept” (Strine, Long & Hopkins, 1990, cited in Stucky & Wimmer, 2002, p. 10; Carlson, 1996/2004, p. 1)! The enthusiasm on the part of these writers to embrace performance as a metaphor for such broad-ranging comparatives as listed above gives me a welcome sense of caution as I proceed. However, these metaphors can also be critically examined for their utility within this present paper, in that they offer multi-faceted views of performance that may be usefully considered in metaphorical relationship with pedagogy. In other words, how may we begin to think about teaching as acts of: social behavior, social conflict, appearance/disappearance, presence, restored or twice-behaved behavior, transformation, and pleasure/desire? While examining all of these metaphorical resonances with pedagogy lies beyond the reaches of this essay, anyone interested in this metaphorical analysis would be well-served by following States' path and surveying the broad range of theorists who have approached performance in so many diverse ways.

What I also see here is a metaphorical pattern in all of these performance theories where performance is compared to something larger than itself. I suggest that this may be symptomatic of a somewhat defensive posture, often taken by a relatively new and therefore marginal field attempting to establish itself within academia. As such, I begin to see that these larger-than-life metaphors for performance offered up by both 'inside' and 'outside' theorists need to be approached with caution. These interdisciplinary boundaries must be held with some care, as it becomes quite easy (as seen in States' critique) to fly off the surface of the planet when enticed into embracing all-encompassing metaphors. This being said, I do see much value in laying out these metaphors for examination and reflection in this present context. Certainly, they serve my purpose in arguing for the importance of reading broadly in performance theory before drawing on the word 'performance' and applying it in education. To raise the status of performance, through metaphor, to the level of being enacted in everyday life, social conflict or even *science* itself, creates space for performance as a method to more deeply understand pedagogy.

States himself is a phenomenologist, thus his own metaphorical definition of performance as *a way of seeing* is one rooted in the sense of essential experience that makes up the condition of performance. May this notion not also be effectively applied to teaching—that we as teachers are always performing the way we see the world through our own lived experiences—for and with our students? We, as States goes on to suggest, are engaged in performative activities of pleasure and desire (psychoanalytic terms mostly absent from educational discourse), and of transformation (from lesser to greater knowledge, developing understanding and agency in the world) that happen in simultaneity with our students in the pedagogical acts of teaching and learning.

### **Richard Schechner: Performance Studies**

I move on to examine more closely the work of field-founder Richard Schechner, one of the key theorists included in States' critical survey discussed above, and a scholar who writes with a voracious and capacious appetite for performance in all its forms. The primary reason for selecting Schechner over any other of the theorists covered by States (including States himself) is that Schechner literally 'wrote the book' on performance theory (1988/2003) and therefore is deserving of our attention in this introductory section. Schechner has the added validity, in my eyes, of being a renowned theatre artist as well as performance theorist, which cannot be said of all in this field. It is a daunting task to summarize his contributions here, so I will simply attempt to sketch out his more broadly-based understandings of performance in art, culture, society, politics and everyday life.

Schechner has written papers, editorials, and books over the past 35 years that have served to create the interdisciplinary field of performance studies [PS]. PS draws on drama and theatre studies, cultural studies, anthropology, oral interpretation, and various critical theories, or what Schechner calls the “broad spectrum” or “continuum” approach to performance (1990; 2002, p. 2). His main argument is that seeing the world we live in *as a performance* allows us to understand more keenly the roles we play, and the roles that are played for us, in all aspects of our lives whenever we engage in “twice-behaved” or “restored” behavior; that is, any human behavior that can consciously be repeated over time for various purposes (Schechner, 1985, p. 35). Influenced by sociologist Goffman (1959) and anthropologist Victor Turner (1977, 1986), Schechner's early anthropological studies to India, Asia, and elsewhere enriched his understanding of the deep connections between ritual and performance. Schechner's own theatre directing practice in the American avant-garde theatre from the 1960's to the present also informs his philosophy of performance that he sees, in a postmodern way, as uniquely situated and context-driven aesthetic/ritualistic forms of experience. He says in the preface to the third edition of his key text *Performance Theory* (1988/2003) that in his journeys as performance anthropologist and theatre director he “did not abandon the performing arts but placed them in active relation to social life, ritual, play, games, sports, and other popular entertainments” (p. xi). Research in PS, led by Schechner's long-held editorship of [The Drama Review](#), has examined and analyzed a wide range of performance practices, with a special interest in intercultural practices, avant-garde theatre, and performance art.

In the context of this present paper, I am interested in drawing on the contributions of PS and applying them specifically to pedagogy (see also Stucky & Wimmer, 2002). An important aspect of Schechner's work is his undying radicalism. Schechner often prefaces his writings with concerns about the state of the world: “A long neomedieval period has begun” (Schechner, 1993, p. 19); “The current means of cultural interaction – globalization – enacts extreme imbalances of power, money, access to media, and control over resources” (Schechner, 2002, p. 2); or:

We live under terrible stress. Politically, intellectually, artistically, personally and epistemologically we are at breaking points. It is a cliché to say that society is in crisis. But ours, particularly here on the North American continent, seems gripped by total crisis and faced with either disintegration or brutal, sanctioned repression.

(Schechner, 1988/2003, p. 31)

Thus, his project in creating the field of PS is to apply the critical lenses that allow us to see many aspects of existence *as* performances. This then allows us to see that performances are created, constructed, and coded for very specific socio-political purposes—be they reactionary or revolutionary in nature. From this politically resistant stance, Schechner's work is resonant with the scholarship of critical pedagogy, to which I will later return.

Schechner's (1993) theories metaphorically applied to teaching allow teachers and teacher educators to consider performance (of pedagogy) as involving “four great spheres: . . . entertainment, healing, education, and ritualizing . . . in play with each other” (p. 20). While Westernized culture often sees performance solely as entertainment, Schechner pushes performers and spectators (or teachers and students within pedagogical practices) to reflect on what they may be doing and witnessing as potentially healing (to selves and to society), educational (that is, geared towards growth and change), and connected to ritualistic practices of diverse cultures, including—historically—our own. Schechner studies the interconnections between play, games, sports, and sacred and secular rituals as forms of performance. How might these interconnections apply both metaphorically and pragmatically to pedagogy? To consider pedagogy as involving intertwining performance processes of entertainment (aesthetic engagement), healing (therapeutic practices), and ritual (cross-cultural practices) that are incorporated into education (curriculum and pedagogy interested in transformative processes) seems a good place to begin. From Schechner's foundational work, I now move on to a third key contribution to performance theory that focuses explicitly on performance's metaphoric qualities and applications.

### **Jon McKenzie: Grand Theory**

The third and final performance theory study presented here examining performance as metaphor is Jon McKenzie's (2001) 'grand theory' of performance, which looks at how performance is understood in the domains of culture, technology and economics. *Perform or else: From discipline to performance* is an audacious attempt “to rehearse a general theory of performance” (p. 4).

McKenzie traces the use of the word *performance* in three distinct fields of contemporary society: culture, economics, and technology.

*Culture.* In culture, he tracks the development of PS over the past thirty years. He suggests that cultural performance is centrally concerned with issues of *social efficacy*; that is

to say, how performance positively assists us in understanding ourselves, seeing ourselves, reforming ourselves in relation to the culture that surrounds us, and/or transforming the culture itself through performative actions (pp. 29-54).

*Economics.* Next, McKenzie sees the term “performance management” (p. 55) used in relation to questions and standards of *efficiency* as they apply to economics. Organizational theory looks at the efficiency of individuals and organizations within a capitalist society that is concerned with “the bottom line: maximizing outputs and minimizing inputs” (p. 81). This economic model of performance and efficiency has recently come to carry more and more influence in the field of education. Students complete standardized tests that measure their academic performance. Teachers and schools, in their turn, are judged and rated according to the relative success or failure of these performances. Young people are taught that they are preparing themselves to enter an adult world where, as McKenzie’s title dictates, they must “perform – or else”.

*Technology.* The third field McKenzie surveys is that of technology, where he sees the primary challenge of performance being that of *effectiveness*. After listing over seventy products and companies that include the word performance in their title (pp. 104-106), McKenzie states that: “This use of ‘performance’ to market everything from carpets and computers to mops and manifolds indicates one thing: for specialists and nonspecialists alike, *technologies perform*” (p. 106). “Technological performance, as engineered and evaluated by Techno-Performance researchers, refers to the behaviors and properties that technologies exhibit while executing specific tasks in specific contexts” (p. 130). Computers, missiles, and cars are all subjected to trials that measure their respective performances. Billions of dollars, for example, have been invested since the early nineties in the development of “high performance technologies” and networks—super-fast and super-smart ways to successfully compete in a global market (p. 98).

In his next theoretical move, McKenzie draws comparisons among these three fields, noting how, although used in different ways (as scripted narrative, as theatricality, as self-reflection, as social criticism and/or action), the metaphor of theatre can be found in each one. More importantly, he sees the notion of *challenge* to be at the core of performance, however and wherever it may be used and found. The challenges of social efficacy, organizational efficiency, and technological effectiveness are global, transnational challenges that must be faced and met with success or failure on all of our parts. The threads he pulls between and among these disparate fields of performance lead him to “a speculative analogy” (p. 176) that:

Performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

What discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth:

An onto-historical formation of power and knowledge.



My interest in McKenzie's general theory of performance, which he names *performance* (p. 203), lies in its relevance to pedagogy. If McKenzie is right, and I think he is, his voice is a strong cry for a seismic-level shift in education. If young people can learn to perceive and interpret the world and themselves in it as an interconnected series of performers, spectators, and performances at multiple levels of society, is there then a possibility for them to gain more agency to resist the powerful forces that push them to perform for military-industrial, consumerist, and technocratic ends? If we think about how teaching as performance has been applied within teacher education, for example, it does not take much effort for us to see how most often performance is situated in contexts of technological effectiveness and economic efficiency rather than cultural efficacy. This leads directly to a quite hidden but equally potent message delivered through teacher education programs that teachers are charged with producing and reproducing performances of efficiency and effectiveness, both in themselves and in their classrooms. This essentially anti-aesthetic position taken toward how we think about teacher performance goes a long way to explain the estimated 25 to 50% attrition rate in trained teachers never entering or leaving teaching in the first five years of their careers (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 168; Heyns, 1988, p. 25). If someone enters teacher training with any aesthetic sensibility in their background or philosophy toward pedagogy, it becomes intensely difficult to hold onto and maintain that stance within a system that views performance in such profoundly different ways; as challenges that involve performing. . . or else. This is my personal story, and I suspect it is a shared story with many others who began and left careers in classroom teaching because of these irreconcilable differences around the question of how pedagogy is to be performed.

To conclude this first section, we have examined three prominent performance theorists who see performance as complex processes of: entertainment, education, healing, ritual, social behaviour, social conflict, appearance/disappearance, presence, restored or twice-behaved behavior, transformation, pleasure/desire, ways of seeing, efficiency, effectiveness, efficacy, and challenge. Each of these definitions offers possible pathways for consideration as metaphors for pedagogy, as follows:

Teacher as

- entertainer
- educator
- healer
- ritualizer
- social behaviorist
- social conflict instigator/resolver
- apparent/disapparent
- present
- restorer of twice-behaved behaviours
- transformer

- pleasurer and desirer
- seer
- challenger (in efficacy/efficiency/effectiveness)

Questions leading from this list include: How are each of these performance characteristics made manifest in the act of pedagogy? What metaphors are more or less troubling or challenging than others? How do each of these metaphors provide an efficacious response to understandings of performance in education that are more rooted in economic or technological notions of efficiency and effectiveness?

I now move to an overview of how teaching as performance has been theorized in the field of education itself.

## **Part II**

### **Teaching as Performance: Performative Pedagogy**

To begin, teaching as performance is a metaphor that has had some life in educational scholarship, primarily over the past twenty years. Elyse Lamm Pineau's 1994 essay, "Teaching is performance: Reconceptualizing a problematic metaphor" (recently reprinted in Alexander, Anderson & Gallegos, 2005, pp. 15-39) gives an effective historic and theoretical overview of this metaphor at work, much like States' contribution in performance studies. She cites much of the literature on this topic: "Classroom artistry" (Barrell, 1991); "Teaching: A performing art" (Dawe, 1984); *The Educational Imagination* (Eisner, 1979); *Teaching as Storytelling* (Egan, 1986); and, *Artistry in Teaching* (Rubin, 1985). While many of these earlier contributions address teaching artistry and educational poetics, few of them move beyond views of *teacher as actor or artist* and there is little or no interdisciplinary dialogue with the then-emerging field of PS. In an important and much-needed move in this direction, Pineau herself discusses performance theorist Dwight Conquergood's (1989) four qualities of performance and applies them to education; *poetics, play, process, and power*. These qualities help Pineau highlight performative aspects of teaching practice that she delineates as *aesthetic, innovative, subversive, processual, and critical*. She then "invites interdisciplinary research into the nature of *educational performance* and the development of *performative pedagogy*" (Pineau, 1994/2005, pp. 36-37, emphasis added).

In the over twelve years since Pineau's essay first appeared, there has indeed been some scholarly attention paid to questions arising from both these areas of investigation: How and what does education perform? And when and where may pedagogy be seen as performative? Four key contributions on these topics will be addressed in this section; schooling as ritual performance by Peter McLaren (1986/1993) from an even earlier study, Charles Garoian's (1999) study on performing pedagogy, Bryant K. Alexander (2005) on pedagogical

interactions as performance, and R. Keith Sawyer (2004) on teaching as improvisational performance.

### **Peter McLaren: Ritual Performance**

Probably the earliest educational study to draw on performance theories is Peter McLaren's (1986/1993) *Schooling as a ritual performance: Towards a political economy of educational symbols and gestures*, an ethnography using a ritological framework to present a detailed portrait of a Toronto Catholic high school. McLaren draws on the field of ritual studies, primarily the work of Ronald Grimes and Victor Turner, in order to begin to see the ritualized aspects of daily life in schools, especially those liminal or marginal spaces that are “[t]he state and process of mid-transition in a rite of passage” (Turner, 1979, cited in McLaren, p. 300):

Liminars [participants in a ritual] are stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and leveled to a homogeneous social state through discipline and ordeal. . . . Much of what has been bound by social structure is liberated, notably the sense of comradeship and communion, or *communitas*. (Turner, 1979, cited in McLaren, p. 300)

McLaren outlines three metaphors for teaching that arise from his fieldwork: *teacher-as-liminal-servant*; *teacher-as-entertainer*; and *teacher-as-hegemonic-overlord* (p. 113). From the standpoint of critical pedagogy (McLaren's location), the first metaphor is the most desirable; this is when a teacher is capable of conducting an “authentic ritual of instruction” wherein students become “co-celebrants of knowledge with [the] teacher” in a “liberatory pedagogy” (p. 114). This process is “shamanic”, according to McLaren: “A sanctified curriculum 'moment' during which students bore witness to the universal wisdom embodied in the rites of instruction” (p. 114). Needless to say, these moments are quite few and far between in all but the most exceptional of teachers and McLaren notes that he most often witnessed the teacher-as-liminal-servant in religion classes where students were invited to consider the mysteries of the Catholic faith in relation to their own lives (p. 117). Interestingly, later on in his concluding chapter, McLaren notes that: “Considering the dramatic qualities of ritual, it would appear instructive for both drama theorists and ritologists to begin to forge connections between ritual and drama applicable to the creation of improved curricular programming” (p. 243). This metaphor of teacher-as-liminal-servant has indeed shown influence in my own field of drama/theatre education, primarily in the work of Cecily O'Neill (1995) and her book *Drama worlds: A framework for process drama*.

The second metaphor for teaching as performance offered by McLaren is that of teacher-as-entertainer that he describes as:

When students were actively engaged by the instructor, but . . . remained isolated viewers of the action, then the students were being entertained. The classroom was transformed into a theatre and the students became an audience. In this instance, the

teacher lost her shamanic function and encountered students in a number of roles: as a priestly pedagogue or propagandist—or, even worse, an evangelist—for the dominant culture. (p. 114)

While I can agree that this metaphor for teaching holds unfortunately true for a lot of teaching practice, I have to take exception to McLaren's anti-theatrical prejudice (see Barish, 1981) in defining entertainment as theatre. Surely the rich history of theatre across cultures and over thousands of years cannot be reduced to this simplistic and negative metaphor? Theatre is itself a form of ritual that often draws on the very ritualized and liminal practices that McLaren values. And just as surely, the idealized teacher-as-liminal-servant must also be an effective entertainer in order to engage and draw students “from the confines of social structures to the seedbeds of creativity located within the antistructure” (p. 115).

Finally, in McLaren's third performative metaphor for teaching, the teacher-as-hegemonic-overlord, “students were not provoked to respond to the teacher's instruction—either verbally, gesturally or silently in their heads” (p. 114):

The teacher was reduced to a hegemonic overlord and knowledge was passed on perfunctorily—as though it were a tray of food passed under a cell door. In such a situation—one that is all too common in our classrooms—the few feet surrounding the student might as well have been a place of solitary confinement: a numbing state of spiritual and emotional emptiness. (p. 114)

Again, while I cannot argue with the basic truth represented in this metaphor, I feel uneasy about the lack of dialectical movement between and among these three teaching as performance metaphors. It may be difficult to acknowledge, but even the most effective teacher-as-liminal-servant remains in a power-over relationship with her students; this power may be suspended in an act of *communitas*, but it is never entirely absent. As McKenzie (2001) reminds us in his study, performances of any kind are always centred in some kind of challenge, whether it is the challenge of creating change or that of maintaining the status quo. This criticism aside, McLaren's study is groundbreaking in the attention he pays to the rich and deeply rewarding metaphor of education as ritual performance.

### **Charles Garoian: Performative Pedagogy**

I now move on to the notion of *performative pedagogy* and the work of Charles Garoian (1999). Performative pedagogy (also called critical performative pedagogy) is an area that is just beginning to be addressed in educational scholarship (Conquergood, 1993; Giroux, 1997; Mackinlay, 2001; Schutz, 2001). Charles Garoian's (1999) book *Performing pedagogy: Towards an art of politics* describes his teaching of performance art in an American secondary school as a process that, “enables students to learn the curriculum of academic culture from the perspective of their personal memories and cultural histories” (p. 1). Some of the questions he poses in his study are:

How would students' learning be affected if its form and content were determined through a community discourse? What role does art play in the development of community-based curriculum? Is there an aesthetic dimension to curriculum production? How does curriculum function as performance art text? (p. 14)

He describes his performance art curricula as “transgressive” (p. 40) and “disruptive” (p. 201), and as a “reflexive pedagogy that would transform my classroom into a space where my students could discuss openly the cultural issues that mattered to them most, to play with ideas, metaphors and images, and to create art that represented their cultural struggles” (p. 202). Clearly, Garoian is responding to McLaren's performative challenge to become a teacher-as-liminal-servant and defines his performance art curriculum, in direct response to McLaren, as “counterhegemonic” (p. 37).

Garoian's curriculum model for teaching performance art in secondary school places 'The Body' as its central principle (pp. 46, 73-74) and is thus concerned with consonant theories of embodiment and embodied practices (see Butler, 1993; Pelias, 1999; Schneider, 1997; Stucky, 2002), or what Peter McLaren (1988) calls “enfleshment”. Pineau's (2005) recent essay on critical performative pedagogy also posits that those who are committed to critical performative pedagogy need to focus on the body as the centre of curriculum in three different ways; as the *ideological body* (pp. 43-46), the *ethnographic body* (pp. 46-49) and the *performing body* (pp. 49-53). These are three interdisciplinary theoretical foundations, rooted in embodiment, of performative pedagogy, and the resulting metaphor of *teacher as performance artist*.

What I value so much about Garoian's study, from the perspective of PS, are the strong connections he makes between his own pedagogy and the work of physical theatre and performance artists such as Guillermo Gómez-Peña (pp. 64-66), Goat Island (pp. 69-97), Robbie McCauley (pp. 99-124), and Suzanne Lacy (pp. 125-157). It is this kind of research in performing arts education—in the form of an engaged critical conversation with practicing artists—that leads to the vital performance art curriculum Garoian theorizes, implements, and assesses.

*Bryant K. Alexander: Pedagogical Interactions as Performance.* Anderson and Gallego's work (2005) is one other recent text which resonates with the authors presented above. This anthology of essays includes a reprint of Pineau's 1994 essay and an essay by co-editor Bryant Alexander entitled, “Critically analyzing pedagogical interactions as performance.” Alexander reflects on his own teaching practices, both successes and failures, in a performance theory framework that helps him recognize the power relations and identity formations at play in his classroom. He concludes:

The classroom is a space of social and political negotiation, a tensive site with

competing intentions. These competing intentions are not about the perceived benefits of education (i.e., jobs, employment, self-elevation, self-actualization, and so forth). These intentions focus on the performative processes of education and the struggle of teachers and students to either gain or retain the authority of their own understandings as imbued by, with, and through differing cultural insights and experiences. (pp. 58-59)

Alexander is responding to the metaphor of *education as spectacle* that he defines (quoting communication theorist F. E. Manning) as, “the principle symbolic context in which . . . societies enact and communicate their guiding beliefs, values, concerns and self-understandings” (Manning cited in Alexander, pp. 58-59). It is my argument here, in agreement with Alexander, that teachers and students need new and more critically performative ways to interact with and respond to the omnipresent and continuous spectacles of culture, politics, economics, and education. Thus Alexander's implicit performance-based metaphors for teaching are those of *teacher as socio-political negotiator*, *teacher as creator/critic of spectacles*, and *teacher as cultural mediator*.

### **R. Keith Sawyer: Improvisatory Pedagogy**

One final metaphor for teaching as performance—*teacher as improvisational performer*—is found in R. Keith Sawyer's (2004) theorizing of teaching as improvised (as opposed to scripted) performance:

Teaching has often been thought of as a creative performance. Although comparisons with performance were originally intended to emphasize teacher creativity, they have become associated instead with contemporary reform efforts toward scripted instruction that deny the creativity of teachers. Scripted instruction is opposed to constructivist, inquiry-based, and dialogic teaching methods that emphasize classroom collaboration. To provide insight into these methods, the “teaching as performance” metaphor must be modified: Teaching is improvisational performance. Conceiving of teaching as improvisation highlights the collaborative and emergent nature of effective classroom practice, helps us to understand how curriculum materials relate to classroom practice, and shows why teaching is a creative art. (p. 12)

Sawyer's metaphorical analysis of teaching heightens our awareness that pedagogy requires a high level of improvisational ability, involving performative processes of collaboration and creativity. McLaren (1986/1993) also acknowledges the importance of improvisational ability as a key aspect of teacher-as-liminal-servant:

The liminal servant understands teaching to be essentially an improvised drama. To fully understand the subtext of the student, the liminal servant must 'become' the student as part of the dramatic encounter. While in the thrall of such a drama, the liminal servant knows that the results will often be unpredictable; that understanding, like play, has a spirit of its own. (p. 117)

No class is ever the same way twice, just as no live performance can be. This inherent aspect of liveness and improvisation that links teaching and performance strengthens the case made implicitly herein for the introduction of both performance studies and improvisational skill development into teacher education (see also Lockford & Pelias, 2004). A deeper understanding of performance processes combined with opportunities to 'perform pedagogy' in more critical, collaborative, and improvisational ways could become a significant aspect of teacher education that might potentially support emerging educators entering the field more successfully than currently seems to be the case.

To conclude this section, it appears that critical pedagogues have been interested in taking some key concepts from performance theory and applying them to pedagogical praxis. Metaphorically speaking, as the focus of this present essay, these understandings can be represented as follows:

Teacher as

- aesthete/artist
- innovator
- subverter
- processor
- critic
- liminal servant
- entertainer
- hegemonic overlord
- performance artist
- transgressor
- disrupter
- embodier
- socio-political negotiator
- creator/critic of spectacles
- cultural mediator
- improviser
- collaborator

How does this list of metaphors compare with the one offered in Part I of this essay? What seems clear to me is a lessened focus on poetics in favour of politics. While critical pedagogues seem to recognize teachers as artists and performers, these metaphoric visions are constructed as very specific *types* of artists and performers; namely, those who are allied with movements interested in social justice and social change. Performance theory shares this interest, certainly, but is broad-based enough in its interdisciplinary foundations and interests to not necessarily conflate performance with resistance. Much of performance, as McKenzie

(2001) reminds us, is about conformity and the status quo and critical pedagogy ignores these larger theoretical views of performance in favor of appropriating what 'works' within that sub-field of education. The risk here is a reductionist metaphor of *teaching/performance as politics*, and a consonant risk of a devaluing of the all-important aesthetics of both teaching and performance.

### Conclusion

I end on a cautionary note. While I am personally and professionally in solidarity with the various writers I have surveyed here in critical performative pedagogy, I am somewhat concerned with the rather narrow usage of performance theory that I see in their writing. The bibliographies I have examined seem to feature far more critical pedagogy than performance theory as source material. While Conquergood's work, and some of Schechner's does appear, there has, to date, been little focus on drawing as widely as possible on the field of performance theory and PS. This problem is particularly apparent in the anthology *Performance theories in education* (Alexander et. al, 2005) where a brief glance at the Author Index reveals a ratio between those in critical pedagogy and related fields and those in performance studies of approximately 20 to 1 (pp. 263-268). This essay is intended as a small corrective in this regard, although it is limited in its scope as well. New texts on performance are consistently emerging, and many of these studies will contain within them potentially significant interdisciplinary applications to education.

While my criticism of critical pedagogy's use of performance theories may seem somewhat like setting up a 'straw man'—of course critical pedagogy focuses on the socio-political aspects of teaching, and thus does so with its application of performance theories—my aim is simply to call attention to the complex ways that performance has become understood and theorized in the field of PS. This complexity embraces a broadly-based conception of performance that weaves itself through everyday life as ritual, sociology, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, politics, and performance art and into the range of cultural practices that we name artistic or aesthetic performances (theatre, dance and music) (see Carlson [1996/2004] for an excellent survey on this topic). To limit the understanding of performance to its more socio-political aspects is, in my view, to weaken the potential interdisciplinary and metaphorical applications of this rich discourse.

I have attempted here to draw together some key studies in the field of performance theory and critical performative pedagogy that highlight a wide range of metaphorical understandings of *teacher as performer*. These metaphoric understandings of pedagogy offer the beginnings only of new ways of seeing teaching as much closer to artistic processes concerned with cultural efficacy than to economic or technological processes concerned with efficiency and effectiveness (McKenzie, 2001). These metaphors create a welcome space in teacher



education for the study of both performance theory *and* critical performative pedagogy. Teachers must be nurtured and supported to see themselves as interpretive performers of curriculum and as critically interactive spectators in their students' performance of learning. Educational research needs to attend more closely to root metaphors of cultural performance as templates for curriculum and to encourage the exploration of power, identity and community as vital pedagogical practices.

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