

BOOK REVIEW / COMPTE-RENDU

WONG, Y.-L. R., & BATACHARYA, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Sharing Breath: Embodied Learning and Decolonization*. Edmonton: Athabasca University Press. 398 pp. \$41.99 (Paperback). (ISBN 978-1771991919).

Increasingly, the academic sphere is turning towards the body as a means of disentangling the legacies of hierarchical, settler-based knowledge and structures of hegemonic control. *Sharing Breath: Embodied Learning and Decolonization* is one such attempt. In a sprawling exploration of embodiment, this collection, co-edited by Yuk-Lin Renita Wong and Sheila Batacharya, delves into the complexities of felt experience as both a process of inquiry and product of it. The writing itself serves as an example of the theory of embodied inquiry it espouses, introducing a series of supple personal narratives grounded in rigorous academic thought.

Sheila Batacharya and Yuk-Lin Renita Wong, with experience in education and social work respectively, bring to bear other disciplinary practices which are reflected in the essays in this collection, namely Wong's experience in mindfulness meditation and Batacharya's experiences in teaching and practicing yoga. Other contributors to the collection include academic and extra-academic practitioners from a variety of backgrounds such as sociology, women's studies, the arts, religious studies, Indigenous education, and martial arts, all of which come together in a shared interest in social justice, decolonization, and embodiment.

Among the essays in this collection, there is available a wealth of perspectives expressed through myriad cultural and interpersonal lenses. There is a particular emphasis on practice throughout the anthology, with a focus on culturally significant practices and philosophies. Topics range from Qigong and Traditional Chinese Medicine, Martial Arts pedagogies, *nininawemagidog* or "All Our Relations" pedagogies, cultural appropriation of South-Asian practices of Yoga, to the Yoruba concept of Ori, Mindfulness Meditation, poetry, disability and pain narratives, and embodied experiences of social class. Each author situates their subject in relationship with their own lived experiences, lending a lived authority more grounded than scholarship alone. Nixon and MacDonald in their essay "Being Moved to Action: Micropolitics, Affect, and Embodied Understanding", wield Deleuze's concept of the "body without

organs” (p. 111) which could be seen as an apt portal into the ways the body is discussed throughout the collection. Traditional narratives of the body are disrupted in favour of new reconfigurations, towards new embodied perspectives. Roxana Ng — an influential thinker and teacher in the lives and work of several of the contributors — passed in 2013. Her work in traditional Chinese medicine elevates approaches to the body via alternative explanations of material realities such as the lack of an understanding of limbic and circulatory systems, yet the potential remains to come to a relevant and practicable understandings of the body, including the maintenance of its health. Through a multiplicity of understandings, we are presented by Ng with a new way of looking at the body, not simply as an object with particular cultural meanings but rather as a vessel for the subjective experience of being.

In the collection as a whole, we encounter a challenging of Western thought, and its rigorous, linear, and objective formulations. Offered in its stead are simultaneous layered meanings, none of which assert an ultimate ground of meaning. This is especially evident in the way personal narratives are entwined in the articulation of ideas. The narratives give context, laying the groundwork for an interweaving sense of felt reality as contingent upon personal and social experiences. The notion of social reality becomes especially pivotal to both the construction of the body in relation but also to the work of decolonization, which challenges the independent self in favour of a communal self, a self in relation.

Each chapter contains within it an approach towards decolonization, speaking from and through experience towards praxis. Through diverse perspectives, there is an opening of possibilities under the diversity and complexity of the work being done. In each new approach, a subjective worldview shows us the ways our differences allow us to be bound up in and with one another. The varieties of expression and understanding present an underlying thread of dignity and care. The volume offers evidence that in our struggles, our pain, and our triumphs, human beings have the ability to come together in solidarity for a common cause, linked by an embodied yearning for freedom, honesty, authenticity, and the ability to dwell in the imperfect expression of each of these.

Due to the subjective nature of the text, notions such as spirit, spirituality, resistance, and freedom can take on multitudinous meanings not only from text to text but within the texts themselves. For example, the notion of spirituality in Young and Nadeau’s “Embodying Indigenous Resurgence” is directly tied to the inhabitation of the land, whereas in Mucina’s “The Journey to You, Baba” spirituality is expressed through the notion of Ubuntu, which is defined as “a person is a person through other people” (as quoted in Mucina, p. 85). In Batacharya’s “Resistance and Remedy Through Embodied Learning” it is expressed as a way of locating the self through practices of Yoga in relation to the greater web of relations. This inter-weaving of meaning allows for an open-ended kind of prose. As readers, we are not given conclusions, but the impetus

for further questions. This eluding of definitive conclusions allows for a depth that might not be otherwise possible. The tone of the writing invites a feeling of intimacy and within this intimacy, readers (like myself) may find themselves relating to concepts (like spirituality) in ways that speak to them as individuals. The narrative, intimate, confessional quality lives best through a generous reading, one in which each essay is lovingly poured over.

The unique perspectives carry with them a specificity of experience that may bolster one's teaching and/or personal exploration. This allows for applications wherever the body may be present, enriching one's understanding of the many ways the body's reality may assert itself in one's work through an examination of the interweaving narratives of embodied experience. We need every voice, every story because it is through the multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and experiences that we begin to see the course towards decolonization as happening in more than one way.

It is through our differences that the strength of our communities and our movements takes hold, and it is through the acceptance first and, later, the celebration of our differences, that we will begin to untie the knots of our legacy of colonial oppression and interpersonal hegemony.