

New possibilities in experience. We choose to do this by nurturing imaginative and reflective encounters with works of art. Imagination is the ability to reach beyond what is to what might be or should be, to open the way to the possible. To be reflective where the arts are concerned is to be able to think about one's thinking in the presence of art forms, to be conscious of what it signifies to have an aesthetic experience, to realize that an object or a performance only becomes a work of art when experienced as such. Aesthetics, the study of art and aesthetic experience, is no longer conceived as a body of abstract knowledge; nor is it believed to be the same in every culture. The aesthetics of any culture--like its beliefs, symbol systems, traditions, its history--are fundamental to a culture's identity. The diverse modes of expression that exist are indications of the various ways people view themselves in relation to the demands of the culture and in relation to the human condition as well.

It is common knowledge that many young people complain about the boredom they feel in school and the sense of futility that accompanies it. We realize also that it is sadly true about teachers trapped by test requirements, community surveillance, and the fear of accountability. There are those, however, who can imagine new possibilities; and they are often the ones who organize communities, initiate drama performances, painting exhibitions, and neighborhood concerts. It is at least likely that they have taken part in workshops that focus on aesthetic education.

There are, of course, myriad open questions about what happens where arts are concerned in a culture as diverse as ours, continually forging an identity out of sometimes discordant, sometimes synchronized conceptions of art, values, and the religious or moral life. Confronting newcomers from Africa, South Asia, Polynesia, the Middle East, we are continually reminded of the importance of clarifying what we mean by the aesthetic and the artistic. There is a danger of positing an absolute or universal approach both to conceptions and practices. For one thing, those reared in other cultures may find it impossible to learn the idiom of our culture's aesthetic if it is presented as an absolute hostile or resistant to integration of other points of view. Also, given the apparent decline of interest in classical music, given domination of minds and spirits by media, we confront a possible erosion of our traditions if we do not open ourselves to immigrant traditions and, at once, try to initiate some of them into our cultural aesthetic with sensitivity to and knowledge of theirs.

It is the case that we have drawn from what we understand to be aesthetics as we have from that part of our educational traditions marked by regard for the power of imagination and at once by a view of education as transformative. In our lectures and workshops we speak of education as a process of becoming different, of choosing the self. Given such a perspective, the relevance of imagination cannot be ignored. Nor can the meeting of imaginations as participants work in their workshop communities,

In the course of our workshop activities, we may try to convert a commonplace studio into an aesthetic space in order to acquaint participants with the importance of qualities.

Under ordinary inspection, the walls, the folding chairs, the piano, the chalkboards are viewed in terms of their use value. But if we alter our way of perceiving and uncouple the room and its components from their practical roles, we may find ourselves seeing the slants of light through the dusty windows, the dancing reflections in the mirrors, the glints of polish on the piano, the green chalkboard with chalk framing blue sheets of paper. And then, if other participants move slowly into the space with their distinctive gestures their colored T-shirts or startling Guatemalan skirts, the room becomes rich with qualities; and, while not composing a work of art, the qualities transform "The material of art," wrote Dewey "consists of qualities." When, for instance, an experience has emotional quality, it is due to an internal integration "and a fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement" Most experience, ordinary experience, he said, is inchoate. What we see and what we think may be at odds.

We want to marry, but we desire--against our better judgment--to remain uncommitted and free. These are ordinary experiences; extraordinary experiences are those in which each part "flows freely, without seam or unfilled blanks into "what ensues". There is no sacrifice of the self identity of the parts. And at the end there is a culmination with each part realized within the seamless whole.

This does not necessarily mean the attainment of a lasting harmony or coherence-- a barring of the disruptive, the ugly, the horrifying They too are qualities. We have only to recall Medea, for example, the "parts flowing freely" culminating in a catharsis for the audience, an extraordinary experience for participating audiences through the centuries.

Qualities feed into our appreciation and intensify it if they are intrinsic to a work as the shape of the Noguchi sculpture is to the Martha Graham dance, as the iron grey of the tomb is at the end of Romeo and Juliet. But qualities do not determine the meaning of a work of art.

Aesthetic education concentrates on works of art-- objects, musical sounds, literature, dance, films created by men or women intending to address themselves in particular ways (verbal or non-verbal) to those able to and willing to attend. The obligation of the aesthetic educator is to make clear what it means to enter a created world. That world must be entered by acts of imagination, the faculty to summon up an 'as if', a vision or

a conception of things as if they were otherwise. To be grasped as a work of art the poem or the painting cannot simply be, opening itself automatically to any passerby. There ought to be an involvement of the perceiver in a series of questions that promote enhanced seeing, listening, rhythmic movement--an engagement of the perceiver against the background of her/his situatedness, funded meanings and transactions in the world.

It may be helpful too to pose questions having to do with participants' own notions of art and the artistic. How do they explain the feeling of transcendence that may come while hearing a Bach cantata or one of Beethoven's blast quartets? Why is it likely that someone from India would have a different experience? Was Elizabeth Bishop revealing events in her own life in *The Art of Losing*? What is the difference between a poem about grief and abandonment or an ode to dejection and an individual's weeping or sobbing account of the death of a friend? What is the difference between a newspaper article and Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night*, about a protest against the Vietnam War described a "history as a novel"? In what sense do the qualities make the difference? In what way might a work of art inspire people to fight for a cause--civil rights, peace, the autonomy of Tibet, legalization of immigrants? We lay stress on the open, even the unanswerable in aesthetic education. Why and in what way?