

Carpe Diem: The Arts and School Restructuring

MAXINE GREENE

Teachers College, Columbia University

Active learning, meaning-making, critical questioning, storytelling, authentic assessment—these are among the hallmarks of the present-day efforts to restructure public schools. With their challenge to passivity and rigidity, their concern for new openings in experience, contemporary reformers present suggestive contexts for both art education and aesthetic education. The values being articulated are very like the values sought by those seeking experiential transformation through encounters with the several arts. I mean persons involved with enabling the young to express perceptions and feelings and ideas through reflective shaping of media: paint, clay, musical sound, spoken or written words, bodies in movement. I mean also those particularly engaged with nurturing the kinds of informed awareness that may lead to significant experiences with works of art: Cézanne's landscapes, for instance; terra cotta pots from ancient times; Benin sculpture; Bach cantatas; Billie Holiday songs; *Romeo and Juliet*; Martha Graham's *Appalachian Spring*; Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. In both domains, participatory learning is required. People (old or young) must be personally present to what they are doing or what they are attending to; they must lend what is before them some of their lives. Only conscious, active moves toward the work at hand can lead to the opening of new perspectives or the breaking through of crusts of conformity.

Art experiences, aesthetic experiences, are intrinsically valuable, many of us would say; they do not have to lead to further goods or measurable outcomes to be justified. Even so, it may not be too much to say that the wide-awakeness, the thoughtfulness, the sense of the unexpected associated with such experiences may be precisely what are needed to stimulate the kinds of reflective practice and reflective learning all of us hope to see. No encounters can release imagination in the way engagement with works of art or aesthetic enactments can release it. Imagination, as is well known, is the capacity that enables us to move through the barriers of the taken-for-granted and summon up alternative possibilities for living, for being in the world. It permits us to set aside (at least for a while) the stiflingly familiar and the banal. It opens us to visions of the possible rather than the pre-

dictable; it permits us, if we choose to give our imaginations free play, to look at things as if they could be otherwise. A poetic imagination can be fostered if we can set aside, now and then, our desire for answers, our hope for possession. Richard Kearney writes:

It is the willingness to imagine oneself in the other person's skin, to see things *as if* one were, momentarily at least, another, to experience how the other half lives. Is this not what occurs in drama or fiction, for example, when we are transported into another person's mind and body existing in another time and place, in another culture and society? Then we experience the world as if we were Oedipus, Hamlet, Anna Karenina. But not just the world of heroes and heroines. The poetical imagination equally empowers us to identify with the forgotten or discarded persons of history. It invites excluded middles back into the fold, opens the door to prodigal sons and daughters, and refuses the condescending tolerance of the elite . . . , the saved towards the damned. The poetical imagination opposes the apartheid logic of black and white.¹

When this kind of imagining occurs in classrooms with regard to particular works—paintings, films, dance performances, music, as well as drama and fiction—the very sharing of the encounter may well give rise to a community of distinctive people, each entering from his or her own location, against his or her own lived experience. If that experience includes creative or expressive adventures in any of the art forms, understanding and the ability to notice, to respond, can only be enhanced.

Pondering such enhancement and such heightening of experience, I cannot but reflect on the amazing seasons we have lived through where the arts are concerned in New York. There are few centers in the world, we must admit, where so many opportunities are offered, where diversity exists at such a pitch; and talking about what happens here, we can only hope that it becomes suggestive, if not paradigmatic, for places where the options are fewer and the performance and exhibition spaces scarce. There was the luscious, forever memorable Matisse retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, for instance, which attracted great crowds of people, many of whom came because the museum was offering a "sight." For some, of course, the images remain in memory, along with the odd questions that accompany them and make them somehow more enticing. Was Matisse a purely decorative painter, or was there a whole realm of being below the complex surfaces that we can only sense? How do his preoccupations with voluptuousness and luxury relate to the sudden upsurge of emptiness, of solitude, on the beaches and in the silent rooms? At about the same time, there was a Magritte exhibition in the city; and we had to

cope with his soul-shaking silences, his renderings of anxiety. The swathed heads haunt most viewers, the reiterative paintings (within paintings) of white clouds against blue skies, the frames of nothingness, the bowler hats and anonymous faces, the women's bodies segmented, split, made into objects or things. Can we like—*how* do we like—what perplexes or shocks or offends? The questions, for some of us, feed into the experience, making it more powerful, more palpitant. And nothing is “explained.”

Following these, there has been a splendid showing of nineteenth-century painting; and there has been a revealing view of Latin-American painting, widening our horizons, provoking us to look through other eyes, even at an earth we share. Something similar and more consuming may have happened to those who saw the musical play *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, which some of us recalled from its first embodiment in the Puig novel, others from the film version. Now there was this, enticing us into the worlds and demi-worlds of South American revolutionaries, homosexuals, prison guards, mothers whose children had been “disappeared.” We may have reached back to recapture the experience with the written text, with the film, even as we now found new modalities being touched. How, indeed, does the art of theater compare with literary art or cinematic art? Are these forms truly translatable into one another? What *is* the nature of their appeal?

I could go on; any one of us could go on. We might move from Garth Fagan's translating Maya Angelou's inauguration poem into dance movement, to Twyla Tharp's beginning with the unique centering of Martha Graham choreography and going beyond, making something of her own. (And anyone who saw a performance finds it hard to forget Tharp's dancers dancing to Frank Sinatra's songs. What is the connection between what might be called “high art” and popular culture? What happens when they merge?) David Mamet's *Ole anna* still fascinates and disturbs, as the talk mounts about sexual harassment, as the feeling of the Clarence Thomas hearings still survives. It is a play that has to do with a charge of harassment that may or may not be warranted and what happens when someone looks hard at the taken-for-granted, righteous and generous and liberal as the chief character in *Ole anna* feels himself to be. What does a play like this do that a political argument, no matter how reasonable, cannot? What does an argument accomplish that drama cannot?

Anyone can make his or her own list in the light of what captured his or her attention. It is true enough that the works already listed disclose almost an infinity of different details about human existence, about women, about transcendence and brutality, about what it means to look through the windows of the actual into realms of unfamiliar possibility. It is also the case that none of the works can be “read” in precisely the same way by every-

one, for all the shared membership in an audience or an educational community. I spoke of personal presentness earlier, being *theras* selves always in process, caught up in skeins of intertextuality, in intersubjectivity, but consciously, reflectively in an encounter with a work—an encounter that cannot duplicate precisely any other that has occurred in the world. Trying indirectly to relate this to “active learning,” I also stressed the importance of moving toward a work, pouring energy into it. We have aesthetic experiences, actually, when particular works (Tharp's dance, Cézanne's landscape, Frida Kahlo's portrait) become objects of experience; and we may conceive experience as transaction, as the way in which we are actively in the world. John Dewey, writing about what is required to perceive a painting aesthetically, showed very clearly the need to break with norms of merely passive receptivity. He said very clearly that the enemies of the aesthetic are “the humdrum; slackness of loose ends; submission to convention in practice and intellectual procedure.”² Aesthetic perception could not be an affair for odd moments, he asserted.

The eye and the visual apparatus may be intact; the object may be physically there, the cathedral of Notre Dame, or Rembrandt's portrait. . . . In some bald sense, the latter may be “seen.” They may be looked at, possibly recognized, and have their correct names attached. But for lack of continuous interaction between the total organism and the objects, they are not perceived, certainly not aesthetically. A crowd of visitors steered through a picture-gallery by a guide, with attention called here and there to some high point, does not perceive; only by accident is there even interest in seeing a picture for the sake of subject matter vividly realized. . . . There is work done on the part of the percipient as there is on the part of the artist. The one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear. His “appreciation” will be a mixture of scraps of learning with conformity to norms of conventional admiration and with a confused, even if genuine, emotional excitation.³

We speak of attentiveness and active engagement in other connections as well; but it is undoubtedly clearest in the domains of the arts that created things depend for their very existence in human time and in the human world on a certain mode of reflectiveness and awareness. A text carelessly removed from the library shelf and glanced at for a moment cannot come into being as a work of art, even if the author is Emily Dickinson or Henry James. A picture incidentally heeded, as Dewey commented, cannot be realized as a work of art, even if it were painted by Rembrandt. A Bach cantata cannot be realized as a work of musical art if the listener slips into reverie after the first fingering of the strings.

Jean-Paul Sartre, discussing literature, made a very similar point. He saw reading as a synthesis of perception and creation (even as looking and listening involved a synthesis of the same kind). “The object is essential,” he wrote, “because it is strictly transcendent, because it imposes its own structures, and because one must wait for it and observe it; but the subject is also essential because it is required not only to disclose the object (that is, to make *there* an object), but also so that this object might *be* (that is, to produce it). In a word, the reader is conscious of disclosing in creating, of creating by disclosing.”⁴ And, soon after, he made the point that the inattentive, tired, or thoughtless reader would not be able to grasp the relations within a text; that a writer expects a certain generosity of the reader: a gift of the whole person, with his or her passions, sympathies, sexual temperament, and scale of values. If the reader can be generous in this fashion, the writer will address himself or herself to the reader’s freedom and, by so doing, transform his or her sensibility. Readers, then, aroused to undertake the *act* of reading, will rouse themselves, will reach beyond where they are. It may be that way with other informed, active encounters with works of art: People may be released, as we want students to be released, to become different, to strive to be.

Given the interest in narrative today and in the ways in which experience is shaped and given meaning by being given narrative form, we are more and more aware of how meaning is created, as we are of the contingency involved in human seeing and creating meaning. We are beginning to acknowledge and even celebrate the ways in which children’s narratives and sense of themselves are functions of early experiences, of family lore and neighborhood history, of contacts with elders, of what is given as the past or heritage. This has helped to atune us to diversity and make us increasingly skeptical of a unitary, objectively discernable, “normal” text.

Reflecting on the film *The Crying Game* know that adolescent and adult responses are greatly affected by prejudgments, feelings, familiarity with earlier films and their genres, conceptions of Irish heroism (or terrorism), judgments about class and color and gender identification. Much has to do as well with the care and sophistication with which they look at the cinematic techniques, the atmospheres devised in which the action takes place. Similar things may be said of Susan Sontag’s *The Volcano Lover* with its play of fiction against recorded history (and fictionalized history), with Emma Hamilton and Lord Nelson breaking the molds of idealization, thrusting the past into the present, making new demands. Few readings will be identical, nor should they be. Yet it is clear that most persons strive thoughtfully to decode accurately, to recognize the structures of the work, to attend to figurative language, to inhabit the as/if, to ponder perspectives and achieve meanings sequentially, gradually, as their viewpoints move.

Gender will affect them, as must memory and history, links to other texts, notions of fiction and metaphor. Again, no interpretation can be identical with any other, not if readers are in good faith.

Always recognizing our engagement with others, we try to see through our own eyes; and, doing so, we often find our experience defamiliarized. We take a different attitude toward “reality”; we begin to know through projects we devise (teaching, art-making, connoisseurship). And there remains the possibility of dialogue on the part of persons who are themselves looking at their own lives from new angles, even as the art forms they are encountering are urging them to see and hear anew.

With Judith Burton’s work in mind, I realize I am probably speaking as much of art with a “small *a*” as I am of art with a “large *A*.” I am in no way suggesting that the arts should be enclosed in enclaves to assure their accessibility against tampering. Nor do I regard them as refuges from the confusions and sufferings of life. The problem of relativism in interpretation can be met by creating conditions for more and more expansive conversations about the works in question—conversations that include voices once silenced or incomprehensible. Multiply encountered, the works themselves cannot but become more many-faceted, richer, more complex. Most of us know that works of art are inexhaustible in any case: No fixed number of readings can use up or even tap every conceivable dimension. Presuming the existence of certain norms to govern the readings, we can anticipate finding textures thicker than before, signifiers more numerous than before, vistas more various, visions more encompassing.

It remains important to remind learners, however, as well as ourselves that this cannot touch our own experience unless we are sensitive to the need to open, to move to unexplored spaces. There are always new patterns to be made, new connections to be found as the search for meaning proceeds. There is often a sense of expansion, a consciousness of consumption. This might suggest an unfamiliar space in which we can live if we try to, which we can choose. Denis Donoghue suggests that this is the space encounters with the arts provide—domains where we can live in freedom:

Think of it as a page. The main text is central; it is the text of need, of food and shelter, of daily preoccupations and jobs, keeping things going. This text is negotiated mostly by convention, routine, habit, duty, and we have very little choice in it. So long as we are in this text, we merely coincide with our ordinary selves. If the entire page were taken up with the text, we would have to live within its conventional rhythms, even in our leisure hours, because those too are subjected to convention.⁵

A moment later Donoghue says without apology that the arts are on the margin of that page, and the margin “is the place for those feelings and

intuitions which daily life doesn't have a place for and mostly seems to suppress. It's enough that the arts have a special care for those feelings and intuitions which otherwise are crowded out in our works and days. With the arts, people can make a space for themselves and fill it with intimations of freedom and presence."⁶

The metaphor of the page must be kept in mind; Donoghue is describing the margins of the page of ordinary life, not something in a wholly different realm than that of the everyday. It would seem, in any event, that if the arts were submerged in the "conventional rhythms" of the text (as they far too often are), they would lose their power to open up alternative visions, to subvert mere banality. There are those who speak of persons becoming "brain-dead." For me, that suggests people confined to a place or a page on which they do coincide with their ordinary selves. Liberating pedagogies, wherever they take shape, most often are intended to enable learners to become different as they make increasingly adequate sense of their lived worlds. To coincide in Donoghue's sense signifies to me a bland resistance to the kind of unease that moves even young learners to question, to reach impatiently beyond themselves and even the supportive adults around them. I am hopeful enough to believe that it has become a policy matter to find ways of cultivating situations that provoke learners to dare encounters with the margins so that they will experience moments of freedom and presence, the kinds of moments in which they will choose to break with mere convention and (speaking together when they can) proceed to find their own way.

I must return to mention of the imagination, since it is largely imagination that makes all this happen. It is a matter of listening to the "blue guitar," Wallace Stevens's lovely metaphor for imagination. The blue guitar refuses to "play things as they are" where convention rules, and "a million people" are on "one string." And then:

Throw away the lights, the definitions,
And say of what you see in the dark
That it is this or that it is that,
But do not use the rotted names.
How should you walk in that space and know
nothing of the madness of space,
Nothing of its jocular procreations?
Throw the lights away. Nothing must stand
Between you and the shapes you take
When the crust of shape has been destroyed.

You as you are? You are yourself.
The blue guitar surprises you.⁷

Here it is again: the imaging of space; the need to break through the crust. Only now there is the indirect challenge to abandon a falsifying language, to say it in our own words, to look through our own eyes. Just as importantly, the idea of surprise is mentioned. Surprise and the unexpected are aspects of a realm of freedom, where quantifying and prediction have little part to play. And, indeed, they are an aspect of a story-in-the-making, of discovering who we might become. Saying that, I am reminded of one of the moments of discovery I attribute to a second reading of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, which we discussed in one of my classes not long ago. I cannot say I can explain the novel completely, although I think I understand it in a fashion that does not always translate into words. For one thing, the narrator never reveals herself, even as she offers a summary—more specifically an intimation—of what is to come in the book:

Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen-year old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. She ran, then, through all that snow, and when she got back to her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, "I love you."⁸

Perspectives keep opening; windows keep opening on New York City, on jazz and jazz musicians, on secret messages disguised as public signs, on violence, on an eviction in the South and a woman tipping forward on a chair, on lost mothers and orphan children, on solitary journeys, on forgiveness, on a "whispering old-time love." Obviously, we are going to find different things in *Jazz* (as the members of my class did, as the conversation expanded and deepened), turn different corners, discover diverse resonances in lives that are not Toni Morrison's or Violet's or Dorcas's or Joe's. Most readers, I am sure, are going to see more in their own lives because of it, grasp more, realize what is possible—and, perhaps, what is not. In a not too dissimilar language, we might interpret Matisse's *The Red Studio* with the pictures hanging on the red walls, those images of past works in an empty room, perhaps steps on the way to what John Gilmour calls his "vision."⁹ Those images, like the frenzied red dance, urge me on to grasp somewhat better my relationships to the accumulating meanings in my life, or to the ground, or to others' grasping hands, and the ways in which my

embodied life has been changed, in part (surely) by having encountered Matisse's *Dancers* somewhere on my way.

Of course we have to attend to the levels, as Judith Burton and Margery Franklin remind us.¹⁰ We have to know what to expect of six-year-olds or nine-year-olds. I would not be inclined to recommend *Jazz*, or Magritte paintings, or serial music to the very young; but I would withhold nothing if I were asked. I would, whatever was chosen, make the same point about the ways in which experience can open, once the codes are cracked. I would talk about what it means for young readers, too, to lend their lives to the characters in the wonderful children's books now available for them to read. I would urge young painters and sculptors and dabblers in *papier-mâché* to "read" as well as they can paintings and statues and photographs in galleries and museums, to take perceptual journeys of their own in what they find. I am not arguing for classes in traditional art appreciation or art history, which so often asked for a passive if not awe-struck kind of mastery. In the mode of the educational reform of our time, I am arguing once again for the posing of the kinds of questions that make encounters with art forms more significant than mere acknowledgement would do. I am asking for an active involvement, for a pursuit of more and more unexplored perspectives, for an attentiveness to all sorts of forms in their concreteness and particularity.

In the various institutes associated with the Lincoln Center Institute where I have worked over the years, we have stressed the continuity between informed attending and actual explorations of choreographies, styles of painting, musical composition. We may hope that, in restructured schools, there will be expanding opportunities for young people to work with artists and writers as well as art teachers and English teachers—with dancers, musicians, painters, poets, filmmakers, as well as those artists who have chosen to become professional teachers and spend their career lives in schools. There are all sorts of men and women who can make the languages of art accessible in different ways. There are many who can make the symbol systems of the various arts available to the young at different stages of their lives. There can never be too many proficient enthusiasts devoted to helping others discover what it signifies to attend existentially to a Paul Taylor dance, say, after finding out what those out-flung gestures feel like, and how Taylor dancers create distinctive patterns in time and space. And so it is with Martha Graham's work, and that of Mozart, Picasso, Tennessee Williams. Possibilities proliferate; teachers of all sorts begin choosing to choose.

They keep finding, *we* keep finding, how marvelous it is to listen to a sonata after working to shape the medium we call "sound." We know, as people in the whole-language movement are reminding us, about the con-

nections between writing a poem and coming in touch with a "real, live poem" by an actual poet. In childhood, I used to hunt for the right words and sounds, the figures of speech, in my efforts to make poems. And I remember the moment when I came to recognize (or thought I did) what Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay had actually accomplished, had magically brought into the world. Many of us have had such experiences and we know the connections between our trying and our coming to recognize and appreciate what artists succeeded in doing.

If I had the opportunity, I would insist that every teacher (like every student) should have an opportunity to work with at least one medium to mold, to carve, to detail, to embody feelings somehow. No matter what the degree of insufficiency, the very effort to say how it was, how it is, by means of words, to transmute a startling perception into an image, to express a feeling through an arrangement of chords, somehow brings us into the heart of the artistic-aesthetic. We may not succeed. We may not complete what we want to complete. But *we know* in some measure; and we rediscover what it is to move beyond, to question, and to learn.

If restructuring our schools is intended as a means of releasing the young to pose their own questions and to be empowered to pursue solutions, I cannot but view informed encounters with the arts as anything but paradigmatic. In addition to that, significant experiences—in making and attending—very often provide occasions where something radiates throughout a school. We have seen that happen when an art teacher combines an *atelier* with journal keeping, when poems and drawings fill the bulletin boards, when improvisations spill out into halls and corridors, when young men and women cluster in the hallways to create one-act plays about their own shared lives. We speak much today about portfolios and exhibitions and apprenticeship, but very often what we are attempting to tap when we speak that way is inherent in the art experiences and the creative encounters that can occur whenever we open the space.

One of the signs of what is called postmodernism today is a consciousness of and sensitivity to multiplicity: multiple ways of knowing, of seeing, of being in the world. We are aware, for example, of the various communities of knowing, of "how meaning gets moved, or does not, reasonably intact from one sort of discourse to the next; about intersubjectivity, how separate individuals come to conceive, or do not, reasonably similar things; about how thought frames change."¹¹ For Clifford Geertz, reaching in that fashion toward an "ethnography" of thought, there is no general culture any longer, no universal framework in which all differences can be overcome. Like many other scholars, and certainly like those involved with the arts, he is drawn toward particularism, not toward large abstract generalities. "The problem of the integration of cultural life becomes one of mak-

ing it possible for people inhabiting different worlds to have a genuine and reciprocal impact upon one another. If it is true that insofar as there is a general consciousness it consists of the interplay of a disorderly crowd of not wholly commensurable visions, then the vitality of that consciousness depends upon creating the conditions under which such interplay will occur."¹²

If this is the present situation in the worlds of scholarship and education (and many people believe it is), those skeptical of the role of the arts in education can no longer argue in terms of dualisms or familiar hierarchies. They can no longer oppose the "cognitive" to the "affective," identifying the cognitive with the useful and necessary subject matters, the affective with painting, film, music, and other disciplines long considered "frills," merely decorative or recreational elements of curriculum. Nor can they argue in terms of abstract hierarchies that bring purely formal disciplines (mathematics, logic) closest to some preexistent Truth, the exact sciences (physics, chemistry) a bit lower down, the social sciences lower still, and the arts a distance away from the formal, the conceptual, the abstract, signifying what is Real and True. We know now that there are multiple realities, each contingent on distinctive modes of looking on and thinking about the natural or commonsense world.

The consciousness of multiplicity also accompanies the discovery of what is called "multiculturalism" or the heterogeneity of voices and backgrounds and heritages now confronting us in our own society. For one thing, this recognition has made it ever more difficult to assume the priority of a universalist, generalized, patriarchal world view. It has certainly made increasing numbers of people sensitive to alternatives in the worlds of aesthetics and the arts. The Renaissance ideal, for instance, so long considered the source of paradigms in the visual arts, is now viewed as one of many norms of representation. We are gradually becoming accustomed to and to some extent knowledgeable about Chinese landscape paintings, Japanese theater, Afro-American stories, Jewish folktales, Native American carving and quilt-making, Latino constructivist art, Irish folk dancing—and each contact represents an opening into a diverse kind of beauty, a startling way of shaping medium, a wholly unexpected sound. In a school-restructuring movement undertaken at a moment of new immigration, with thousands upon thousands of newcomers arriving in our schools, we are learning how acquaintance with the art forms of other cultures can help us attend to those who arrive as strangers. Metaphor, images, melodies: All these can build bridges, as Cynthia Ozick writes, between ourselves and "the familiar heart of the stranger."¹³ We are finding out that the more sensitive persons can become to what is entailed in direct encounters with works of art, the less likely they are to rely on predefined

categories in making multicultural curricula and the less likely they may be to generalize and obscure, to bring into being a new kind of "invisibility" that leaves the individual stranger unheard and unseen.

Not only do engagements with making and attending in the fields of the arts move people to greater and greater concern with particularities; so does the growing interest in particularism feed interest in the several arts. One of the important contributions of feminist thought in the past two decades has been the emphasis on the distortions caused by preoccupations with abstract and general forms to the neglect of the particular, the immediate, and the concrete. Carol Gilligan's revelation of the "different voice" on the part of women and girls has led gradually to recognition of different ways of attending to as well as speaking about the world.¹⁴ The examples of feminine insights and contributions have become manifold: Naomi Schor is pointing to the significance of the detail in literature, painting, and philosophy, a concern for the particular due to women's ways of seeing and knowing; Julie Kristeva has written of a semiotic in poetic language, of a musical space underlying the written that "is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation"; Susan Bordo speaks about the "flight from the feminine" marking the history of ideas since Descartes, and develops a conception of "individuation and locatedness" that cannot but open new landscapes for the arts.¹⁵

Not only are we provoked, with the growing audibility of women's voices and the expansion of what "culture" can mean, to move from fixed, formalist standards to a consciousness of the experiential and organic. We are being urged to challenge the metanarratives or master stories, like the myth of progress or the myth of rationality, that blinded us to what was actually happening among living beings in a changing world.¹⁶ We need only recall for a moment the ways in which the "Dick and Jane" primer and the image of Shirley Temple hung over the very different lives of little African-American girls in the South. Toni Morrison is but one of the many, including Tillie Olsen, to indicate how truncating, how falsifying it was to impose such generalized, hegemonic frames on persons in their vulnerable particularity.¹⁷

We have begun to learn that, if the educational reformers are to respond to a postmodern world caught in whirling and changing realities, contingent on unending perspectives, we have to begin to think in terms of "situated knowing."¹⁸ That has to do with living beings, aware of being located specifically in the world, making diverse kinds of sense against their own landscapes and reaching beyond them to constitute something they might call, along with others, a common world. Because works of art can only be brought into being by situated consciousnesses, encounters with them must be against lived horizons. It becomes less and less likely, then, that

experiences with the arts can be trivialized, not if postmodern revelations are taken seriously.

Like my colleagues here, I feel justified in asking that occasions be created for more and more persons to engage personally with more and more works from an increasing number of cultures, in the realization that each one has a public and historical presence, and that it has found and will find as many other consummations as the number of persons willing to open themselves *in* its presence. I hope to see more and more people engaging in the always unfinished dialogue to which works of art give rise in their marvelous incompleteness, in their opening to indefinable possibilities. Again, it is a matter of awakening imaginative capacities and of appealing to people's freedom. Free human beings can choose, can move beyond where they are, can ascend to places of which, in their ordinari-ness, they could have had no idea. I am moved to end with some lines from Li-young Lee's "Furious Versions," from his book *the city in which I love you*

I wait for shapeliness
limned, or dissolution.
Is paradise due or narrowly missed
until another thousand years?
I wait
in a blue hour
and faraway noise of hammering,
and on a page a poem begun, something
about to be dispersed,
something about to come into being.¹⁹

He is turned toward possibility, as we are in this confusing time. These are blue hours for us as well. Something indeed may have begun.

Notes

- 1 Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Towards a Postmodern Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 368–69.
- 2 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Blach, 1934), p. 40.
- 3 Ibid., p. 54.
- 4 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1965), p. 3. Emphasis in original.
- 5 Denis Donoghue, *The Arts without Mystique* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), p. 129.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Wallace Stevens, "The Man with the Blue Guitar," in his *Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), p. 183.
- 8 Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 3.
- 9 John Gilmour, *Picturing the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 5.

10 See Judith M. Burton, "The Arts in School Reform: Other Conversations," *Teachers College Record* (Summer 1994): 477–93; and Margery B. Franklin, "Art Play, and Symbolization in Childhood and Beyond: Reconsidering Connections," *Teachers College Record* (Summer 1994): 526–41.

11 Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 154.

12 Ibid., p. 16.

13 Cynthia Ozick, *Metaphor and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p. 283.

14 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

15 Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Julie Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 96; and Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 59–83.

16 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

17 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970); and Tillie Olsen, *Silence* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978).

18 Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 158–59.

19 Li-young Lee, "Furious Versions," in his *the city in which I love you* (Brockport, N.Y.: B O A Editions, 1990), pp. 14–15.