

I want to talk about the arts, imagination, and practice in full awareness that I am not an expert observer, analyst, nor student of pediatrics. I 'do' philosophy of education, and what we call aesthetic education in contexts of metropolitanism and the marvelous diversity that characterizes it. I ponder these, keep exploring them, and try to teach from a Deweyan point of view, meaning one grounded in understanding of experience, and from an existential perspective, focused on acts of consciousness---very much including perception and imagination. Both philosophies consider the arts as central to the life and growth of a culture; and both see the human significance of the arts deriving from reflective personal engagements with the visual arts, works of literature, dance performances, and music.

When I think of pediatrics, I obviously think of the several sciences underlying the discipline and of its place in the general practice of medicine. Naturally, I am most interested in the relationship between the child and the physician in health and in various moments of illness, serious or mild. And I think of both child and physician in relation to mortality. I am a mother with memories of encounters with neurologists and surgeons, with oncologists and psychotherapists in the childhoods of my children; and my attitudes towards your profession are tinged with admiration and., at once, much affected by the recognition that there are no guarantees of success in anyone's practice, that all of us must live with uncertainty and a hope that may well be absurd.

I feel honored by your choice of a title for this conference, whether it was deliberate or coincidental. I feel honored, too, to be accompanied by two cherished colleagues, both central to our work at the Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education: Scott Noppe-Brandon, who is our Executive Director, and Judith Hill, a remarkable musician and teaching artist. My particular desire today is to share with you, not only our convictions about the significance of art experiences for human growth and fulfillment, but our interest in the power of imagination---released, we believe, by authentic personal encounters with paintings, works of music, dance performances, enactments of drama, poetry, and fiction.

Imagination, as most of you know, is the capacity to break with the ordinary, the given, the taken-for-granted and open doors to possibility. One way of describing it is as a "passion for possibility." It is simple enough to contrast it with predictability, or with controlled attempts (through experiment or testing or the use of case histories) to make reliable predictions. But even the soundest predictions have to leave room for possibility, for moving beyond the merely factual, For John Dewey, facts are mean and repellent things until imagination opens intellectual possibility. That seems especially important to me because of the way in which it challenges the old dualisms, the separation of imagination and cognition, body and mind. Another philosopher has gone further, saying; "For it is through the imagination, that realm of pure possibility, that we freely make ourselves to be or what we are, that we freely and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process preserving the freedom and possibility to be yet otherwise than we have become and merely are." It is often said that imagination is the capacity to look

at things as if they could be otherwise; and, surely, if we ourselves might come to a point of being yet otherwise than we have become, our altered perspective might well enable us to break with a fixed and one-dimensional view and look at things as if they too could be otherwise. I turn to two poets who know better what this might mean. One, Wallace Stevens, wrote that "Imagination is the liberty of the mind and hence the liberty of reality." Another, Emily Dickinson, wrote: "Imagination lights the slow fuse of possibility". And who know better, after all, than the poets?

Now it seems clear enough that, of all human creations, the arts have the greatest potential for stimulating or releasing imagination. That may be because, when attended to, when interpreted on any level, a work of art brings into existence for a reader or perceiver an alternative 'reality' (or, we might say, it transmutes the ordinary by means of imagination). When we encounter a great work of art (the walls of the Sistine Chapel for example; the opening scenes in *HAMLET*; the chapter on "the whiteness of the whale" in *MOBY DICK*, the Verdi *REQUIEM*) our way of seeing the world widens; we see in a different light. What we see and feel is not like a foreign universe, however. We become fully present to ourselves in part because we bring so much of what we are and have within to the experience. Imagination and the transformations it makes possible are what defamiliarize the familiar taken-for-granted and allow us to see it in a different light. So does the way the artist forms or shapes the reality she or he is creating. I think of Degas' backstage paintings of ballet dancers--tying their shoes, practicing gestures, standing still and staring ahead--painting from an angle wholly at odds with the usual rendering of the corps de ballet which erases individuality in the interest of design. I think of the film, *MOTORCYCLE DIARIES*, and the images of two young men riding their motorcycles against the vast and changing landscapes of Argentina, Chile, and Peru. They are, in fact, two young medical students on a vacation meant to be carefree; but the very shaping of the film, moving from a middle class apartment entrance in Argentina to a leper colony, transforms what might visually be a travelogue into Che Guevara's transformative moment of moral and political awakening long before his going to Cuba to join Fidel Castro. All of you can think of such examples if you reach back in your experiences. Recalling experiences at or related to the Lincoln Center Institute programs, I can summon up Anna Deavere Smith's enactments of *TWILIGHT* (on Los Angeles riots a few years ago) a one-man rendering of a Toni Barbara work, *GORILLA MY LOVE*, a performance of a tango, an enactment of *ANTIGONE* a while ago, more and more, each one pushing back the horizons of my awareness. I have been lucky enough to teach workshops on Literature as Art (sometimes linking the selected work to a film or a photography exhibit). We have read and explored *MRS DALLOWAY*, *THE HOURS*, *THE DEAD*, *AUSTERLITZ*, and a number of other works--multi-layered, mysterious, startling as many other works of art, suggesting many of the questions about the aesthetic and the artistic as Ibsen, Miller, Balanchine, Monet, Debussy might do, once their works are authentically and reflectively encountered.

We honor individual responses at Lincoln Center; we respect what we think of as the situatedness of each participant--meaning dwelling place, community, background

traditions, all that contributes to a person's being in the world. At once we realize that responses to the arts are not 'natural' or 'automatic'. All of us have watched tour groups rushing through a museum or a gallery, glancing for a moment or two at what they feel is the work of a great painter (conveniently reproduced on a postcard), fearful of commenting on a painting by someone with an unfamiliar name. I do not mean to sound cynical or elitist; but we keep discovering how important it is to combine a respect for a person's original, spontaneous response (so long as it arises from a situated, lived life) with the realization that there is always more and that the more one knows, the more one sees and feels--and, yes, is enabled to imagine.

An array of gifted teaching artists take the responsibility of awakening the educators who come to our workshops. Many teachers and administrators have been deprived of contact with the arts, either because of the neglect of the arts during their schooling, or because of family poverty, or because they simply were not wanted in the concert halls or in the museums' marble corridors. Many of us are familiar with the old upper class view that the codes needed to make works of art accessible should be kept secret from the lower class; because sensitivity to the arts was a mark of class superiority, as purchases of great works are today, not to speak of the cost of theatre tickets in New York. There are today different reasons for the apparent gulf between less privileged members of the public and the institutions still identified by some with 'high art'. They have to do with the expansion and availability of popular culture, with the money invested in it, with the part played by television, computers, and other instances of technology. Few people are now insulted by exclusion from the marble halls, given the wide acceptance of rock and rap and salsa, given the absorption by products of 'high' art of what were once thought of as dross, not worthy of concern.

Many of our teaching artists take such issues into account, not only when they work with teachers but when they move, along with specific works of art, into urban classrooms. It should be clear that what we call aesthetic education is quite different from art appreciation, even as it differs from art education. Art appreciation ordinarily means a presentation of finished works of art (painting or works of music) with pointers to specific qualities, with some discussion of art history and the contexts in which the work existed. The response of the perceiver or listener is seldom taken into account. To be appreciated is the work as objectively and expertly described and interpreted. Art education usually has to do with teaching the elements of the craft to the end of enabling students to know enough to initiate their own creative works and to engage knowingly in a practice that is their own.

Aesthetic education is concerned with empowering individual educators and those they teach to engage actively with works of art. The works chosen for study are as central to aesthetic education as they would be to courses in art appreciation. The difference lies in the view of the relation between the work and the perceiver, listener, or reader. Rather than attending, say, to the Edward Hopper painting of "Sunday Morning" as critics and historians have described and categorized it, the perceiver is encouraged to see through

her/his own eyes. Yes, the use of color and shading may be pointed out, the movement of lines, the brushwork; but the perceiver, asked to notice as many particulars as she/he can, may be encouraged to study the composition or consciously to compose the various parts into a whole. Entering it, in effect, allowing it to be grasped by and to infuse her/his experience, the perceiver cannot but feel what he knows and remembers about cities become richer and more complex. The redness of the brick walls may come as a surprise; the flatness, the uniformity, the emptiness of the street, the sense of absence, some would find, the silence before people awaken, the pervasive loneliness.

People look differently, see differently; the requirement is that they look long enough in order to see, that they support the meanings they make by referring to the painting itself in several of its aspects. Frequently, the teaching artist will offer opportunities to explore the medium, to work with line and color, just as the teaching artist in dance offers opportunities to create patterns in time and space, to invent expressive gestures, movement metaphors, mirroring possibilities. The effort is to move beyond mere 'looking at' or to turn attention away from imposing a story that make invisible the aesthetic qualities of a work. There is an awakening involved, I believe, when we learn to notice what is there to be noticed, when we attend to what cries out to be attended to. It has been said that the opposite of aesthetic is anesthetic--being numb, passive, blankly indifferent. Wide-awakeness frees us to see more--the grass, the trees, the city streets, the abandoned ones, the homeless ones, the broken windows, the redesigned museum, what is absent, what is realized. To be enabled to activate the imagination is to discover not only possibility, but to find the gaps, the empty spaces that require filling as we move from the is to the might be, to the should be. To release the imagination too is to release the power of empathy, to become more present to those around, perhaps to care.