

Releasing the Imagination

Essays on Education,
the Arts, and Social Change

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by those of us hoping that we do not all have to be strangers to each other in our schools but that we can strive to interpret our new and many-faceted world. Some lines from one of Rainer Maria Rilke's verses ([1905] 1977, p. 3), capture the power for knowing others that resides in how we choose to see things and that I will be exploring:

There's nothing so small but I love it and choose
to paint it gold-groundly and great
and hold it most precious and know not whose
soul it may liberate. . . .

My interpretations are provisional. I have partaken in the post-modern rejection of inclusive rational frameworks in which all problems, all uncertainties can be resolved. All we can do, I believe, is cultivate multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same. All I can do is to try to provoke my readers to come together in making pathways through that world with their students, leaving thumbprints as they pass. Our "fundamental anxiety" one writer has said (Schutz, 1967, p. 247) is that we will pass through the world and leave no mark; that anxiety is what induces us to devise projects for ourselves, to live among our fellow beings and reach out to them, to interpret life from our situated standpoints, to try—over and over again—to begin. In a sense, I have written *Releasing the Imagination* to remedy that anxiety. It grants a usefulness to the disinterest of seeing things small at the same time that it opens to and validates the passion for seeing things close up and large. For this passion is the doorway for imagination; here is the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise. This possibility, for me, is what restructuring might signify. Looking at things large is what might move us on to reform.

Chapter Two

Imagination, Breakthroughs, and the Unexpected

Transformations, openings, possibilities: teachers and teacher educators must keep these themes audible as "Goals 2000: The Educate America Act" is debated and as we assess the practicality of the goals associated with it. This act has now been legislated into federal law. It sets forth national goals for education, intended to be achieved in five years. Five of them are generalized and unarguable: all children must be prepared when they enter school, graduation rates from high schools will be 90 percent, all Americans will become literate, the teaching force should be well educated, and parents should be involved in children's learning. The last two are more problematic: all students in the academic disciplines should meet world-class standards and rank "first in the world in science and math achievement," and a national assessment should be created to ensure that students can demonstrate competency over "challenging subject matter." This is presented as the new national agenda for education, and the presumption is that it is realizable, poverty and inequality notwithstanding. One problem has to do with the implication that standards and tests can simply be imposed; another has to do with the so far untapped diversity among American youth today—its still undefined talents and energies, its differentiated modes of expression. The familiar paradigms seem still to be in use; the need for alternative possibilities in the face of economic and demographic changes is repressed or ignored.

This chapter concerns the ways in which we and our students might come to use imagination in a search for openings without which our lives narrow and our pathways become cul-de-sacs. I also

begin to seek out ways in which the arts, in particular, can release imagination to open new perspectives, to identify alternatives. The vistas that might open, the connections that might be made, are experiential phenomena; our encounters with the world become newly informed. When they do, they offer new lenses through which to look out at and interpret the educative acts that keep human beings and their cultures alive.

In many ways, school restructuring does, indeed, mean breaking with old quantitative models; but countering this break is an anxiety that is driving people into what John Dewey called "the quest for certainty" (1929). Present-day economic uncertainty has much to do with this anxiety as does the current challenge to traditional authorities. In response to school changes, many parents yearn not merely for the predictable but also for the assurances that used to accompany children's mastery of the basics. Talk of tapping hitherto untapped possibilities and exploring unexplored alternatives serves to intensify the unease of those who want perhaps most of all to recover the simpler world of a time long past. At the same time, parents and educators are becoming more and more aware of the changes in technology and communication that are making unprecedented demands where training and education are concerned. They are told by official spokespersons that material success can only be guaranteed for those able to master a whole range of novel and unfamiliar skills. There can be, it is suggested, no turning back to the days when elementary verbal literacy alone was a basic goal in itself, anymore than there can be a return to the fabricated world of the "Dick and Jane" basal reader. The contradictions continue to multiply between what it is said the schools must do and what parents understand education to be, especially for families feeling the powerlessness of impinging poverty and change in their own lives.

There is no question but that some students face fearful obstacles due to inequities in this country. The facts of race, class, and ethnic membership need to be taken into account along with the necessity of extensive social and economic restructuring. There are, as most of us have learned, objective as well as subjective realities to be considered; we cannot simply fantasize the disappearance of joblessness, homelessness, fatherlessness, disease. It may be, however,

that a general inability to conceive a better order of things can give rise to a resignation that paralyzes and prevents people from acting to bring about change. An accompanying ebbing of the sense of personal and communal efficacy may submerge people in the given, in what appears impervious to protest and discontent. To call for imaginative capacity is to work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise. To ask for intensified realization is to see that each person's reality must be understood to be interpreted experience—and that the mode of interpretation depends on his or her situation and location in the world. It depends as well on the number of vantage points a person is able or enabled to take—the number of perspectives that will disclose multiple aspects of a contingent (not a self-existent) world. To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or "common-sensible" and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably *is*.

Recall Wallace Stevens's "Man with the Blue Guitar" once again.

They said, "you have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are."

The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."

And they said then, "but play, you must,"

A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,

A tune upon the blue guitar

Of things exactly as they are" [(1937), 1964, p. 165].

To play upon the blue guitar is to play upon the imagination, and the sound evokes listeners' ambivalence. Many want (yet do not want) a song that celebrates the ordinary and the comfortable. After a long poetic dialogue on whether the guitarist should or should not play "the rhapsody of things as they are," he tells his audience:

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.

He calls on them to look through their own eyes, to find their own voices, to avoid the formulations devised by official others. Do you, he asks the listeners, see

You as you are? You are yourself.
 The blue guitar surprises you [p. 183].

Others determine "exactly" what "you are" and use fixed names. To be yourself is to be in process of creating a self, an identity. If it were not a process, there would be no surprise. The surprise comes along with becoming different—consciously different as one finds ways of acting on envisaged possibility. It comes along with hearing different words and music, seeing from unaccustomed angles, realizing that the world perceived from one place is not *the* world.

Moreover, to learn and to teach, one must have an awareness of leaving something behind while reaching toward something new, and this kind of awareness must be linked to imagination. As John Dewey saw it, for example, imagination is the "gateway" through which meanings derived from past experiences find their way into the present; it is "the conscious adjustment of the new and the old" (1934, p. 272). A reflective grasp of our life stories and of our ongoing quests, that reaches beyond where we have been, depends on our ability to remember things past. It is against the backdrop of those remembered things and the funded meanings to which they gave rise, that we grasp and understand what is now going on around us. Surely, for example, a woman makes sense of the professional or the political context differently than does a man, especially if she was brought up in a time when involvement in the public world was thought unwomanly, somehow wrong for her sex. A young person trying to become a ballet dancer is affected in her or his conception of a life in dance by the way those immediately around her or him in childhood talked about such a choice as worthy or impractical, as romantic or somehow suspect. Yet there is always a gap between what we are living through in our

present and what survives from our past: "Because of this gap all conscious perception involves a risk; it is a venture into the unknown, for as it assimilates the present to the past it also brings about some reconstruction of that past" (Dewey, 1934, p. 272). Most of us can recall the enclave mentality of our early lives and their odd provincialism. We were probably convinced that normal people, "nice people," lived precisely as we did, observed the same rituals, and reacted to events in the same way. It took time before we became acquainted with—and were able to accept—the enormous variety of human lives, the multiplicity of faiths and ways of believing, and the amazing diversity of customs in the world. To come to terms with such additional realities always involves a risk, one many adults are still unwilling to take and to see their children take. If those children do have the imagination to adjust to what they gradually find out about the intersubjective world as they move further and further from the views of their original home, they are bound to reinterpret their early experiences, perhaps to see the course of their lives as carrying out the possible (among numerous possibilities) rather than the necessary.

It is this kind of realization, Dewey believed, that renders experience conscious and aware of itself. Without such realization, "there is only recurrence, complete uniformity; the resulting experience is routine and mechanical." Consciousness always has an imaginative phase, and imagination, more than any other capacity, breaks through the "inertia of habit" (1934, p. 272).

When nothing intervenes to overcome such inertia, it joins with the sense of repetitiveness and uniformity to discourage active learning. New beginnings become unlikely, yet it is only in the experience of a beginning that persons feel themselves to be the initiators, the authors of what they are doing or intending to do. Hannah Arendt writes that "it is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings" (1961, p. 169). Her words hark back to what Stevens calls surprise and Dewey a venture into the unknown. She goes on to say that the new always happens "against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which, for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle,"

something that could not be expected. And, indeed, when we look out at it from the vantage point of our old framework, the new always appears improbable. This is because the view from a bureaucratic or any other distance makes us see in terms of trends, tendencies, and theoretically predictable events. Whenever we are shown a report or a statistical account of what is happening within a school district or the system as a whole, this becomes evident. It is as if automatic processes were at work; it seems impossible to look at things as if they could be otherwise.

When, however, a person chooses to view herself or himself in the midst of things, as beginner or learner or explorer, and has the imagination to envisage new things emerging, more and more begins to seem possible. As Emily Dickinson puts it, "The Possible's slow fuse is lit, / By the Imagination" ([1914] 1960, pp. 688-689). She knew, like Dewey, Stevens, and Arendt, that imagining things being otherwise may be a first step toward acting on the belief that they can be changed. And it would appear that a kindred imaginative ability is required if the becoming different that learning involves is actually to take place. A space of freedom opens before the person moved to choose in the light of possibility; she or he feels what it signifies to be an initiator and an agent, existing among others but with the power to choose for herself or himself.

Mary Warnock, as I have mentioned, speaks in the same vein when she emphasizes the importance of our believing that there is more in our experience of the world "than can possibly meet the unreflecting eye, that our experience is significant for us, and worth the attempt to understand it" (1978, p. 202). I connect this, for example, with the women who, after years of having their understandings dismissed, are now affirming that their experience is as significant as men's. Continuing to focus on how imagination breathes life into experience, Warnock goes on to speak of our imagination's intuition that "there is always *more* to experience and *more* in what we experience than we can predict. Without some such sense, even at the quite human level of there being something which deeply absorbs our interest, human life becomes perhaps not actually futile or pointless, but experienced as if it were. It becomes, that is to say, boring." For Warnock, it is a primary purpose of education to deny people the opportunity for feeling bored or for "succumbing to a feeling of futility, or to the belief

that they have come to an end of what is worth having" (pp. 202-203). For Warnock, too, it is imagination—with its capacity to both make order out of chaos and open experience to the mysterious and the strange—that moves us to go in quest, to journey where we have never been.

In my view, the classroom situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is the one in which teachers and learners find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation. The search might begin with a deliberate attempt to break through "the cotton wool" of "non-descript" daily life, which Virginia Woolf thought marked by repetitions and banality. Each of us characterizes daily life in a distinctive way; Woolf's way was to emphasize activities "not lived consciously": "one walks, eats, sees things, deals with what has to be done; the broken vacuum cleaner; ordering dinner; writing orders to Mabel; washing; cooking dinner; bookbinding" (1976, p. 70). She associated all these with "non-being." Another person might associate such activities with the habitual, the taken-for-granted, the unquestioned. Young people might describe their daily round in terms of stuffy, crowded bedrooms, jangling noises in the halls, lines in public agencies or clinics, overcrowded swimming pools, and libraries closed before dark. Or an unquestioned day might be perceived in the light of the shopping mall culture: fast-food counters, clothing stores, fake plants, skating rinks, video games, and MTV. The point is not to posit an immorality in non-being or to say it is wrong to live unconsciously. My argument is simply that treating the world as predefined and given, as simply *there*, is quite separate and different from applying an initiating, constructing mind or consciousness to the world. When habit swathes everything, one day follows another identical day and predictability swallows any hint of an opening possibility. Only when the given or the taken-for-granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is—contingent on many interpretations, many vantage points, unified (if at all) by conformity or by unexamined common sense. Once we can see our givens as contingencies, then we may have an opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to make choices.

Albert Camus had much the same opportunity in mind when he

wrote of what it means when "the stage sets collapse" and everything we have taken for granted about our routines suddenly becomes questionable: "one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. 'Begins'—this is important. Weariness comes at the end of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness" (1955, p. 13). If there is to be a beginning out of weariness—and consequently active learning initiated by those choosing to learn—there has to be an interrogation. There has to be a why, and I would add, in order to investigate this why, the capacity to imagine what is not yet.

Similar in mood is Walker Percy's work *The Moviegoer*. The narrator is desperately bored and submerged in the everyday until he gets the idea of the search that "is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life." As I have mentioned, he describes it as feeling "as if I had come to myself on a strange island. And what does such a castaway do? Why he pokes around the neighborhood and he doesn't miss a trick. To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair" (1979, p. 13). To see oneself on a strange island, clearly, is to imagine oneself in another space, looking at an unfamiliar world. To poke around is to investigate that world, to pay attention to it, to think about it.

The difficult task for the teacher is to devise situations in which the young will move from the habitual and the ordinary and consciously undertake a search.

We are becoming privy these days to the stories of persons so disabled by illiteracy that they can scarcely chart their paths through the world. The stuff of life seems formless and blank to those who are, in Paulo Freire's sense, "oppressed" (1970), who have to be aroused to a consciousness of how the real is constructed and who have to be challenged to "name" their lived worlds and, through the naming, to transform those worlds (p. 78). Freire also speaks of individuals' incompleteness, "from which they move out in constant search—a search which can only be carried out in communion with others." He finds that "hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. . . . Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait" (p. 80). Dialogue, that is, cannot be carried

on in a climate of hopelessness. People trying to be more fully human must not only engage in critical thinking but must be able to imagine something coming of their hopes; their silence must be overcome by their search.

There are, of course, many kinds of literacy. But as an object of hope and desire, any literacy will be associated with a yearning to make some sense and to leave that thumbprint on the world as Schutz said. Imagination will always come into play when becoming literate suggests an opening of spaces, an end to submergence, a consciousness of the right to ask why. I think of Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* and of Miss Celie writing halting, helpless letters to God: "I am fourteen years old. I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me" (1982, p. 11). There is pathos in her cry for understanding, a tragic dimension in her inability to say, "I am." Through living and through finding a sister-teacher in blues singer Shug Avery, Celie finally begins to find a language she can use (her own "sign," perhaps). She can interpret what she sees; she can interrogate; she can imagine. When Shug tells her that everything—trees, flowers, people—wants to be loved, Celie says, "Well, us talk and talk bout God, but I'm still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from?). Not the little wildflowers. Nothing. Now that my eyes opening, I feels like a fool" (p. 179). As Celie realizes what she did *not* know or even question, Shug advises her to imagine, to "conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock." Such conjuring is a struggle, not just in itself but because what is imagined is still partly shaped by past oppression, and Celie reports, "Every time I conjure up a rock, I throw it." Yet by finding her imagination, she has found a way out of oppression. She is beginning to look through her own eyes, name (in her own voice) her lived world.

The point of acquiring learning skills and the rudiments of academic disciplines, the tricks of the educational trade, is so that they may contribute to our seeing and the naming. Feeling the human connection, teachers can address themselves to the thinking and judging and, yes, imagining consciousness of their students. A person's *consciousness* is the way in which he or she thrusts into the

world. It is not some interiority, some realm of awareness inside the brain. Rather, it must be understood as a reaching out, an intending, a grasping of the appearances of things. Acts of various kinds are involved: perceptual, cognitive, intuitive, emotional, and, yes again, imaginative. A perceptual act, for instance, enables a person to take a perspective on aspects of things in the sounding or appearing world. By attending, listening, gazing, a perceiver structures what presents itself. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts it, perceiving entails a return to the "there is" underlying the abstract conception, to the "object-in-general" or "to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body" (1964, p. 160). The way things are for our life and body allows us only a partial view of things, not the kind of total view we might gain if we were godlike, looking down from the sky. But we can only know as situated beings. We see aspects of objects and people around us; we all live in the kind of incompleteness that Freire identified and there is always more for us to see.

Once again, this is where imagination enters in, as the felt possibility of looking beyond the boundary where the backyard ends or the road narrows, diminishing out of sight. For a parallel, think of the way the lanes and roadways in Constable or Chardin landscapes evoke viewers' imaginative leaps. These paths are promises about where we might reach if we tried, if we kept, for instance, moving our pencils or tapping our word processor keys. Consciousness, I suggest, is in part defined by the way it always reaches beyond itself toward a fullness and a completeness that can never be attained. If it were attained, there would be a stoppage, a petrification. There would be no need for a quest.

If teaching can be thought of as an address to others' consciousness, it may be a summons on the part of one incomplete person to other incomplete persons to reach for wholeness. It may be a challenge to pose questions, to seek out explanations, to look for reasons, to construct meanings. It may be a provoking of dialogues within the classroom space: What has to be done to find out why Haiti has been under totalitarian control for so long? What can be done over time to document the phases of the moon? What kinds of studies are required to make sense of the immigration crisis today as compared with the crisis of 1900? How can we determine the validity of first-person accounts? What can be done to grasp a per-

sonal meaning while reading a novel like *The Scarlet Letter* and to make it significant in contemporary terms? How can we learn to listen to serial music or to look at abstract painting if we were brought up in reverence for traditional forms of music and painting?

Virginia Woolf writes about having felt powerless when unable to find explanations for fearful or particularly stirring phenomena in her life. When she found a reason for something "and was thus able to deal with the sensation, I was not powerless. I was conscious, if only at a distance, that I should in time explain it" (1976, p. 72). Woolf also finds that "as one gets older one has a greater power through reason to provide an explanation; and . . . this explanation blunts the sledgehammer force" of the blows one inevitably receives in the course of one's life. Yet she also finds value in these "sudden shocks," because the "shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; . . . it is a token of some real thing behind appearances, and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole, and this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me . . . a great delight to put the severed parts together." Without imagination, Woolf would have been unlikely to reach out for the delight of making the things behind the blows real; she might instead have submitted, as so many do, to the force of the blows that came upon her.

Acknowledging the difficulty of moving the young to bestir themselves to create their own projects or find their own voices, I nevertheless believe, as I argue in more detail later, that we must make the arts central in school curricula because encounters with the arts have a unique power to release imagination. Stories, poems, dance performances, concerts, paintings, films, plays—all have the potential to provide remarkable pleasure for those willing to move out toward them and engage with them. But that pleasurable does not mean the arts are to be used simply to "balance" what is thought of as the cognitively rigorous, the analytical, the rational, and the serious. Nor should the arts be used as motivation. For one thing, participatory encounters with particular works may demand as much cognitive rigor and analysis as they do affective response. For another, works of art cannot be

counted upon to have beneficent, consoling, or illuminating effects. Soul-chilling instances are multiple: we can all recall *Oedipus Rex*, the Japanese film *Ran*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the play *Marat/Sade*. Images of horror and distortion still emerge if we sum up memories of paintings by Zurbarán, Velázquez, Goya, Géricault, Picasso. From the instances of heartless violence in *The Iliad* to the murder of the little princes in *Richard III* to the transgressive energies of Blake's challenge to Locke and Newton (indeed to anything measurable and "moral") to modern novelist Kathy Acker's sleek obscurities, the arts have not centered on depicting solely what is right and good. Awakening imagination, they have brought our bodies into play, excited our feelings, opened what have been called the doors of perception. Yes, there have been lovely moments marked by blooming daffodils or children's laughter or the shimmer of water, and yes, there has been and will be a sense of wonder at moments of consummation, moments when the last chord finds a resolution. But the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected. The arts, as Denis Donoghue says, are on the margin, "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. . . . With the arts, people can make a space for themselves and fill it with intimations of freedom and presence" (1983, p. 129).

If it is indeed the case that the arts occupy the margin in relation to the conformist, the respectable, the moralistic, and the constrained, and if that marginality can be affirmed, the problems raised by multiculturalism may take a different form. Even mainstream art forms may then be viewed as something other than carriers of messages from men in power and norms of the majority once we go below their surfaces and act for ourselves on those intimations of freedom and presence that we find. Art from other cultures—South Indian dance, Mayan creation myths, Chippewa weaving, Balinese puppets—may be given honored places on the margin, as individuals are gradually enabled to bring this art alive in their own experience, as they are gradually freed to let imagination do its work. In time, as many of us know, these works of art may radiate through our variously lived worlds, exposing the darks and the lights, the wounds and the scars and the healed places, the

empty containers and the overflowing ones, the faces ordinarily lost in the crowds.

Imagination allows us to particularize, to see and hear things in their concreteness. There are so many examples that everyone will have her or her own preferences. Here is one of mine—Denise Levertov's poem "The Gaze Salutes Lyonel Feininger While Crossing the New Jersey Wastelands" (1984, p. 8). Feininger was an artist who, among other things, was a remarkable painter of New York City bridges, anchored simultaneously in the city and the New Jersey wastelands, which were for a long time stretches of swamp, garbage dumps, and abandoned machines. In her poem, Levertov's view of the real bridge and wasteland are colored by her knowledge of Feininger's painting:

A certain delicacy in the desolation:

olive-green the polluted
stretches of grass and weeds, the small
meres and sloughs dark with the darkness
of smoked glass,
gray air at intervals slashed with
rust-red uprights,
cranes or derricks,
and at the horizon line,
otherwise indeterminate,
a spidery definition of viaducts and
arched bridges,
pale but clear in silverpoint.

The wasteland remains a wasteland; it is not in any sense re-deemed, except by the language and its occasional metaphors. Reading the poem, however, whatever our situation, we see, and most probably we feel, something new about desolation, about nature, and about human making. Levertov's words summon up other paintings of the city—Joseph Stella's, Edward Hopper's, even (going backward in time) George Bellows's, John Sloan's, Georgia O'Keeffe's. We ourselves may now look at that horizon line from different angles; we may view those uprights, viaducts, and bridges as emergent from the polluted stretches, from the green and gray, and the image may become like music or like a drama of color and

line. It is imagination that draws us on, that enables us to make new connections among parts of our experience, that suggests the contingency of the reality we are envisaging. Yes, Levertov is a modern Western poet and a woman; she writes here also as a city poet, gazing at the city from a distance but possessing it nevertheless. Of those who read the poem, some will be New York City dwellers who have never seen their city from the New Jersey side; others will be workers coming exhausted into the gray air, seeing the shapes before them only as markers on the way home; still others will be dwellers in other cities, perhaps without rivers, without bridges; still others will read through the defeated eyes of desolation.

When teaching, responding to the grasping consciousness of a young student in her or his distinctiveness, we can only continually combat life's anaesthetics, moving individuals to reach out toward that horizon line. The Levertov poem, if made accessible to the young, is one that may well function as Herbert Marcuse says art often functions: it "breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle. . . . The encounter with the truth of art happens in the estranging language and images which make perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life" (1977, p. 72). In contradicting the established, or the given, art reaches beyond what is established and leads those who are willing to risk transformations to the shaping of a social vision.

Of course, this does not happen automatically or even naturally. Dewey, in *Art as Experience*, talks about how important it is for people to plunge into subject matter in order to steep themselves in it, and this is probably more true of works of art than other subject matters. There must be an answering activity if we are to perceive what presents itself to us; we must reach out toward the object or the text or the performance through an act of consciousness that grasps that which is presented. In our engagements with historical texts, too, with mathematical problems, scientific inquiries, and (not incidentally) the political and social realities we have constructed along with those around us, it is never enough simply to label, categorize, or recognize certain phenomena or events. There has to be a live, aware, reflective transaction if what presents itself to consciousness is to be realized.

Dewey asked for an abandonment of "conformity to norms of conventional admiration" in approaching art; he asked that we try to avoid "confused, even if genuine emotional excitation" (1934, p. 54). The beholder, the percipient, the learner must approach from the vantage point of her or his lived situation, that is, in accord with a distinctive point of view and interest. I would suggest again, however, that it may well be the imaginative capacity that allows us also to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours. Imagination may be a new way of decentring ourselves, of breaking out of the confinements of privatism and self-regard into a space where we can come face to face with others and call out, "Here we are."