

The background of the cover is a light yellow-green gradient. It is decorated with several stylized, dark green leaf motifs that appear to be floating or falling from the top left towards the bottom right. These motifs are scattered across the entire page, with some appearing near the top and others near the bottom.

OPEN CONVERSATIONS

David Carr

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OPEN CONVERSATIONS

Public Learning in Libraries and Museums

David Carr



LIBRARIES UNLIMITED

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PREFACE

These essays have challenged my confidence as I wrote and rewrote them and reconsidered their purposes. As a writer I often find it difficult to live up to the ideas that move me. It may take months to be articulate, yet I am likely to remain unsure. Two observations remind me of this daunting fragility and my obvious limits.

It surprises me first, though it shouldn't, to find that the intention of this collection extends ideas in my previous work, especially the concept that our cultural institutions are both places and not-places. It surprises me to find that I write from an unfinished space inside my life, exposed in the process of writing itself. In the title essay of my 2006 book *A Place Not a Place*, I wrote,

We will discover our answers only when things are happening, and when we have made places for new things to happen: places where words can be heard that help us to live up to ideas; places where we can contribute our gifts to civic culture: our time, our resources, our ideas; places where we can volunteer and assist; places where we can observe and experience the energy of each other.

When a community has created the right kinds of institutions, its citizens can discover in themselves what de Tocqueville called “the habits of the heart”—the ways that prove and shape our common character. (Carr, 2006)

The museum or the library *as a place* is a beginning, a grounding and a situation that inspires thought. As *a place not a place*, it leads us into a world we

cannot find elsewhere, because it is created by the mind in response to experience and knowledge. We carry and sustain it in mind. It is a transaction between a present life and the continuities of the past, a negotiation between living cultures and their futures. While it is a conversation, it is also a silent collusion, a form of promise made. However brilliant and immediate the evidence in a cultural institution, I think that our best responses take us away from the artifact, book, or exhibition. What emerges for us transcends where we are and what we see. We go somewhere behind our eyes, where the real work of art, or science, or fiction, or music, happens within us. Each institution resonates with the worlds it summons for us, and we respond to the resonance by entering an imaginary but equally resonant place.

I think it is also a truth of practice: our places evoke the shadows of writers, artists, inventors, historians, philosophers, scientists, clerics and ancestors, all living still in the resonant traces left to us of their works and days. Among the perfunctory, routine acts and assumptions of libraries and museums, it remains possible to evoke the astonishing and moving voyages taken by others. We often need to draw back the dense veils of scholarship and didacticism for these things to happen, for us to imagine the unassuming thing itself as something new, to see its power, and allow it to break through.

It is further daunting for me to write about this kind of resonance and feeling without immediate doubt and doublethink that tell me to be more grounded, less vaporous, and to write about the steady immediacies of virtuous practice, not momentary awakenings of insight. The doublethink leaves when I recollect myself. We who have worked and thought in museums and libraries, and who have observed our users, will understand the momentary awakenings, the sudden epiphanies of practice: this is the unexpected moment I have taught my students to recognize and live for in their work.

The second and more immediate challenge I feel follows from the unrelenting political news that never seems to include a generous thought. I write these words just before an election of such disappointing character and vituperative discourse that I feel whatever I write will be far too small to change the great empty meanness of our civic culture. I ask if I am needed. Do I have useful words for the culture surrounding me? And yet: this is what I have written, and this is what I believe. Admittedly, I am also unaccustomed to feeling that what I write might have relevance to our national life. My life work has been limited, unfocused, and only intermittently visible: to educate and encourage perhaps a thousand librarians as their teacher, a small number in a large and vibrant generation. In the museum world, I have accomplished even less. I remain outside there. Writing of the kind I am doing now has come to me late. And yet the privilege of teaching and advising about libraries and museums continues to be a fire for my thinking. I am grateful to have slowly become an educator over four decades, to have studied and written about the ideas hidden in great museums, and to have

imagined the undervalued, unexplored capacities of libraries and other cultural institutions. I know they can make differences by redefining themselves, and so I remind myself to trust myself and say my beliefs. The idea that libraries and museums have a central place in the articulations of democracy is certain to me.

Although it is a small theme in this book—captured in Susan Jacoby’s title phrase, “the age of American unreason”—I am concerned about a wide public disdain for intellect, for reasoned discussion and compromise, and a preference for shallow vacancy when far greater depth and content is required by our challenging and complex society. Commerce, education, entertainment, the Web, desperate media, minor celebrities, vulgarity and flash are all part of this daily world. Yet more sinister, and more erosive to our character as a nation and a democracy, are the forces of greed and power that seem to be (in the Orwell phrase) “more equal than others.” I am thinking of oligarchs, heavy with both wealth and bias, who have the resources to command the fascinations and political notions of people who feel themselves distant, ignored, and unheard.

What could bring these passionate but discouraged people into libraries and museums, to engage in a balanced discourse, a conversation about values, an examination of ideas and analysis from multiple points of view? Libraries and museums exist so all people who think can think with information and knowledge they have discovered and collected for themselves. What part of cultural institutions might evoke their enduring trust and inspire their best, most open questions? I will hope for a long enough life to address this possibility. At the end of this political season, and the start of another one, I feel that we live amid limitless arrogance of this kind, and so there is more to be done.

I hope that many people share my feelings about the meanness and the cynicism driving a bleak, barely political, landscape. As a teacher, my worry is about what people will learn from these events. As a man of age who now worries over ideas like legacy and continuity, my great concern is about how and where fresh generations will come to understand discourse, caring, deliberation, reflection, and the constructive acts democracy makes possible. How might new professional generations understand the possible reaches of their institutions? I have sought not to write a political book, but the issues of public knowledge and understanding have arisen on their own. We are in need of smart and careful, thoughtful and empathic people. Democracy depends on intelligent citizens, on readers and thinkers. But I am now no one’s teacher, only the author of small books such as this one and am left to wonder about the future of learning and thinking in the world.

Consequently, to the daunting themes I address in this book—the great power of cultural institutions in our communities and erosions of civility in the nation’s life—I can certainly add a few more that my book and I are unable to match: the struggle toward inspired public education, our

imperiled literacies, our love of mindless technology, shallow social networks, and school testing. There are more, but I will stop with the hope that other books are being written now to assess the effects of these phenomena on the curiosities and imaginations of children and the horizons of their families. And I will also hope that there are educators who dream of great, human alternatives to what is dominant in the present, remembering that the future of our lives always dwells in a place Maxine Greene has called “the not-yet.” And so we will wait. Perhaps the inadequacies of this book will inspire another writer to advance the promise of open conversations in our generative institutions, including public schools. They too are agencies of democracy. But there is no simple remedy to deepen shallowness, no electronic remedy to populate emptiness, and no virtual response to dissolve isolation and silence.

Since I have listed my second (and third) thoughts as I prepare this manuscript for submission to a patient publisher, I will also mention an inspiration for hope in the bands of principled and earnest people and organizations I have found who have taken up the cause of rescuing public conversation and intelligent public discovery. I find more each day. I have cited several in the middle chapters, but since every search reveals yet another promising source, I am confident that there are more collective minds, resilient and positive, who invite a good conversation for the sake of clarity, understanding, and the grace of becoming something together. I trust that we all require that grace and might move together toward it.

Open Conversations is a book for Carol Carr, my brightest and most open partner in conversation over a lifetime. She helps me to be generous and kind, and to survive my fears; she alone gave me the abundant possibilities of a human life I would have otherwise lost. No book is large enough to say what I need to say to her.

David Carr
Carrboro, NC

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Parts of Chapter 5 are adapted from “Confluence,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 51, no. 3 (July 2008). Parts were also presented in the keynote address to the annual conference of the Visitor Studies Association, July 29, 2010, in Phoenix, Arizona. The full text of that talk, “Valuable Thinking, Variable Knowing,” appears in *Visitor Studies* 14, no. 1 (April 2011). The title of Chapter 8, “Look at the Unknown,” comes from the mathematical problem-solving heuristic in G. Polya, *How to Solve It: A New Aspect of Mathematical Method* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960). An earlier version of Chapter 10 first appeared in a different form under the title “Mind as Verb,” in H. H. Genoways, ed., *Museum Philosophy: For the Twenty-first Century* 11–18 (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2006). I am grateful to AltaMira Press for permission to adapt this essay, and for permission to quote from page 131 of my book, *A Place Not a Place* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2006).

Some content in Chapter 2 is my interpretation of the inaugural poem read by Elizabeth Alexander on January 20, 2009, as published in the *New York Times*. Some content in Chapter 12 is my interpretation of material published by James Fallows on his blog at the website of *The Atlantic Monthly*, where he is an admired national correspondent. The reader is encouraged to seek out the original texts in these places.

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INTRODUCTION: THINK WITH ME

A great civilization is a drama lived in the minds of a people. It is a shared vision, shared norms, expectations, and values. . . . Societies that keep their values alive do so not by escaping the process of decay but by powerful processes of regeneration. . . . [T]he great ideas still beckon—freedom, equality, justice, the release of human possibilities.

John W. Gardner (1999)

Ancient Greek democracy was inseparably linked with the institution of the agora, the square, a place where political decisions were reached through dialogue as citizens enjoying equal rights talked to one another directly, face to face. . . . The modern era has reached a point of culmination, and if we are not to perish of our modernness we have to rehabilitate the human dimension of citizenship as well as of politics. This is what I consider to be the principal challenge of our time, a challenge for the third millennium.

Václav Havel (1993)

My hope is to remind people of what it means to be alive among others, to achieve freedom in dialogue with others for the sake of personal fulfillment and the emergence of a democracy dedicated to life and decency.

Maxine Greene (1988)

Consider the tsunami, deadly and devastating as it is in actuality, as a metaphor for something that has happened to us everywhere. In little more than a decade, electronic information tools have ineradicably reshaped our awareness, books, civil society, commerce, communication, community, content, culture, dating, education, encyclopedias, entertainment, friendship, government, information, institutions, learning, leisure, literacy, memory, music, news, play, politics, publishing, reading, research, schooling, social participation, visual images, writing, and more.

In little more than a decade, the capacity of a mindful civic life has come to include global AIDS, al Qaeda, ambiguity, ambivalence, avarice and corruption, climate change, crumbling national infrastructures, domestic terrorism, drug trades, earthquakes and tsunamis, economic collapse, electric cars, educational breakdowns, emigration, faith-driven politics, famines, fears, foreclosures, genocides, hurricanes, international jihad, internecine war, joblessness, lasting drought, massive national debt, nuclear meltdowns, plutocracy and technocracy, political revolutions, politicized news, redefined families and genders, 9/11, and more.

In these contemplations it may be useful to remember that we cannot download, curate, or collect any of the following things: altruism, artistry, attention, authenticity, cognition, collaboration, consideration, courage, critical thinking, curiosity, democracy, empathy, esteem, expectations, freedom of thought, generosity, hope, imagination, inquiry, integrity, kindness, patience, respect, responsibility, or wisdom. These things come to us from elsewhere. Where? *When the continuities of our lives are swept away, as we have seen happen around the world, what is our future? How do we feel, how do we think, when our world is in motion? When in the path of a tsunami, what is our relationship to knowledge? What shall we give to each other? Why do we cling to each other? In a tsunami, if we are capable of rescuing others and ourselves, what is the most useful thing to do? What parts of our lives can we understand in new ways? What shall we do for each other now? Which of our losses, which of our strengths, shall we discuss first?*

I advocate the importance of cultural institutions helping people to increase their capacity to grasp, negotiate, adapt, and respond to change in their lives. We are always challenged to do this, at every age, in every era. Unless we live forward with change we become its victims, locked in silence, detached and invisible. We will always be ambivalent and unwilling. There will always be fear. And when the tsunami recedes, our lives are farther away from us, disassembled in the fragments and wreckage of where we used to live and how we used to think. The structures that contained our lives have collapsed. The conversations that informed our lives are impossible. The transmission of continuities that have shaped us stops. We have nothing left of what defined us. How do we change and learn when we lose these things? How do we rediscover and restore ourselves without these things? How do we think about these things after the tsunami?

I contend that there is no one to help our citizens to think about our tsunami, or our choices, or our strengths and losses, other than cultural institutions. There is no one, no other institutions, and no other agencies of democracy that will help us to become something together as people, even in small places of respect and generosity, other than us. It is in fact only in the small places of respect and generosity that this can happen. We have the capacity to survive, the intellect to guide our continuity, and the will to become different.

Several ideas construct the foundations of this book: the potential for cultural institutions to assist their users to think about public issues; the complexities of knowledge and objects and their interwoven contexts; the unknowns that shape us; the intangible traces of experience, and its evidences in language and memory; and the need, if we are ever to know the importance of our institutions, to move our understanding toward the interiors of lives. The human interior is a daunting place, but it is where we have to begin our discoveries of what institutions make possible in private and public ways. I am most interested in what is difficult to explain even as it happens to us: how our intuitions and our aspirations leap toward whatever knowledge we next require, and how we respond, how we think.

Think with me about the user in the art or history museum today, or in a branch of the public library, especially in a large city, where collections are extensive. Think with me of that intentional experience, of going to this place or that for something to know. It is not a perfunctory moment. The choice to know something fresh represents a deep and essential aspiration: a striving for some missing part of the past, or an exploration of some indefinite wanting. The person who seeks details or revelations, an expanded view of the past or an unpredicted insight, needs a bridge to new awareness, to trusted intuition or purposeful reflection, something that cannot be experienced elsewhere and cannot be found without actively wanting knowledge or change.

Even the casual user or traveler will go to the institutions of a city or town as a way to stand in the center of its mind, at the center of its possibilities. Each great library or museum in an inspired city is a concentration of common wealth, a public recognition that the city and its people have dreams, a place where people go to experience the secular ecstasy of standing outside themselves, becoming part of another emerging world. We feel drawn there, to break through, to trade our common experiences in a place that invites transformation, exhilaration, and exchange.

Of libraries and museums—even in small towns, where horizons are closer to common memories and local thinking—we might say they are the centers of that knowledge held by the city for its people. They are also the centers of public aspiration, where private dreams emerge to take shape, and possible actions become real through reflection. The people of a place—even its emigrants and people in transition—can discover themselves and become stronger and different in such places.

This is part of what I believe: intentional experiences of this kind—simply going to the library or the museum and thinking with ideas found there—are forms of promise and design. At their best, our experiences imply the promise of thinking anew, privately and fearlessly; and then, designing an experience of one's own. Every cultural institution is in its own way about courage and fear; it invites us to use the first to reduce the second. It is for breaking through to new experiences: breaking out of routines and somnambulism, and out of stagnation and ignorance. We are, I believe, at our strongest when we trust ourselves to think anew amid confusion and ambiguity; when we trust and renew our questions; and when we open our lives to the unknown, to experiences we have not yet lived. At such times, we are made of courage and fear—and dreaming as well.

We are thinking now of purposeful users: people who ask and reflect. We think of people engaged by complexities, questions, and unknowns that remain unfinished, always open. These are the users who *complete* a cultural institution by their presence; later they continue the influence of the institution by the examples and continuities of their lives. Think with me about what the presence of this user in the cultural institution implies: an intention to experience something new; an anticipation of engagement and, perhaps, immersion in something deep and unpredictable; a repertoire of previous experiences and memories evoked or newly awakened; and adult knowledge, arrived at as an experience of adulthood without schooling. Embedded in the user, these implications compose the energies of use. Intention, anticipation, openness, memory, and knowledge are the principal variables of cultural experiences.

Abundant cognitive energies are essential to rich experiences and intellectual change; there is no need to create fresh motives, for they are embedded in us. Our work is to evoke and nurture. If we can understand and respect these personal engines, we may make a difference in cultural places. Lives bring complexity; we might want to know something about the user's formative educative style and continuing interests, some of the passions and unfinished issues of one life. We might want to hear these expressed because they are the indicators of a progressive life, a life moving forward. And in this way, the user—with energies awake, dimensions in change, and possibilities unknown—enters the place for thinking.

The user enters this place, library or museum, and finds it to be a kind of floating world where experiences are brief, evanescent, and public; most likely gentle, certainly edifying, often quite dreamlike; intense but momentary; puzzling, variable, transient, and in most ways solitary. Experiences matter in the moment, yet may matter more when they are over. What does it mean, to contextualize the intellect of this user in this floating situation of serial experiences, each potentially different from its predecessor? How does each of us rework a fabric out of all we know and discover, all we have been, and all we want to be when we are in the presence of something new?

A life rises to itself through anticipation and awareness, trying out and taking in multiple experiences. The rising life needs trusted resources, mentors, living exemplars, and a repertoire of instrumental behaviors and strategies. A person needs to be comfortable with ambiguity and risk, flexible, adaptive, and willing to respond to both advances and setbacks with reflection and self-renewal. A life that gradually emerges from routine requires energy, persistence, motive, and the courage to see and listen, to think and act. The evolving life rises toward the possible.

Think with me about how we fold our lives over and over intentionally—almost like origami, to make something recognizable out of something plain—and the delicate, invisible work of problem solving in a cultural institution, where the problem is the construction of an aware self. The user negotiates and improvises in an uncharted world, keeping questions open. This working mind at work in a collection is ultimately what cultural institutions are challenged to study, to ask about, to illuminate. We study the interiors of our institutions, but we also need to study the interior lives of men and women in their times, human beings making lives among all the formidable yet tacit dimensions of the complex social and intellectual space that the institution provides.

That word “uncharted,” above, is perhaps a generous way of saying we are adrift. There is a reason for our popular culture to feature television programs about people lost on an island with scary others, in an accidental situation that cannot be explained; or playing out false roles as survivors in a fabricated and deeply meaningless contest. Not just vapid entertainments, they may also constitute self-help training, reminders that whatever world we have cherished in the past no longer exists in the present. We are ourselves increasingly insular, living through a series of accidental events. A program televising simulated social fear and desperation, it turns out, is a tutorial for life amidst wreckage, vapid competitions, and the fading promise of rescue from somewhere else. Often I too believe that we all need rescue from such shame, but that we must do it ourselves, and with luck we will have the agency of people we trust.

Think with me. To enter a strong cultural institution is to experience a place so deeply in motion that it necessarily puts *us* in motion. Our thoughts are both here and not here, moving among objects and tools and yet also within an idea or an image of our own. This is one way to understand cognition in the situation provided: it is an uncharted, moving territory, a situation for thinking, an experience of elevation and surprise. Responding to great works and concepts, discovering new paths, we are less tangible to ourselves. We think; we combine and adjust our thoughts; we try out what we tentatively see and have the words to capture. We negotiate and improvise our passage, pausing for insights to take form.

And yet, beneath these elevated sensations and hidden dimensions is our need, the true engine of the human path. What is it we need? What is it we

want? What do we need or want to become? What is this wanting we have? We might know it in a slightly parallel form when we read. Our wanting and desire for complexity and experience to appear to us and engage us are proven each time we open a book. One of my students, after a discussion of reading groups, wrote to me, “All people who read the story become part of the story forever, just like the story becomes part of them forever.” She continued, “In the same way, when lots of people read a story and especially when they talk and write and think about that story together they become something together.” Her words pervade this book.

Think with me. What if the museum, the library, the zoo, the history collection, the children’s art studio, the science and the natural science collections, what if they are all about becoming something together—becoming thoughtful together, and striving to imagine together? What if our collections could be seen as structured situations, even maps, for finding our way together into the unknown and back, ways for sorting the contextual intangibles we all recognize in our lives, so we might imagine and understand the possible difference a single idea might make? What if we could hold an idea before us, exploring its meaning among other people and other minds? The idea before us also has its origins, and a place among other ideas, other interpreters, other forms of knowledge, other memories central to other lives. Context is an inevitable confluence of different voices in the continuing fabrication of experience. These voices say no context is identical to another.

Each context has its own energy and its own surrounding themes. When we try to understand or isolate one context from another, we are at a loss. One contextual nuance has meaning only among others. Each context evokes potential ambiguity or disintegration. We experience our lives through these tensions: I am a man, a husband, a parent, a librarian, a professor, a writer, a reader, a photographer, and other things all at once, responding to my life as a construction of perpetually undernourished contexts. Librarians know better than others that such contextual abundance means an abundance of new information and knowledge, each adding new energy and new ambiguity to the flow of problem solving. In a difficult cognitive journey, there is nothing to do but to think your way forward, to negotiate a balance among the contextual intangibles that present themselves, and to work toward coherent thoughts. When we think at our best, contexts enrich each other and how we see the great complexity of things. Museum or library use, it seems to me, is not about learning, but about experiencing and thinking—organizing, connecting, always under the uneasy tensions of multiple contexts. At times we may be like witnesses to a conflict or a rescue, or survivors who live on to think, remember, and testify from the truths we craft for ourselves.

Think with me, the place must say. Museums and libraries, any or all, are not about learning anything; they are about thinking anything, experiencing anything. They work well in response to questions, but they are not

examinations and they are not schools. They derive their integrity from knowledge, but they are not judgmental of people who know nothing. They inspire scholarship, reading, inquiry, communication, community, engagement, writing, drawing, and conversation, but they are not curricular. They assist every form of literacy, but they are not schools. We may be in the museum or the library because we went to school, and we may think of ourselves as having been schooled; we may be educators and scholars ourselves, but cultural institutions are not schools.

I have come to believe that our most important professional questions ought to be about the thoughts of the user, about the interior, wordless experiences, the pauses, the interpretations, the conversations with the situation, the times spent engrossed in confusion—working a way out of it by thinking. I will always aim my attention toward the things we cannot see: the invisible actions, the invisible traces, that place that is not a place except somewhere in the mind, the thing that has not happened yet, the people we have not yet become, the immanent aspect of the infinite.

And so, in both the library and the museum, I am most engaged by the idea that our experience is a process occurring under our eyes but not visible to us, its effects not immediately apparent, a dreamlike and intangible thing that constructs and alters us. However, there are sometimes visible, sometimes audible artifacts of thought in our institutions, and they are typically associations and questions, indicators of wanting to know more, to know what it is possible to know, and to know where and how knowledge might be found. People observe and speak; consult directories, maps, and catalogues; pay attention; and take their time. Our experiences in these places will always be unfinished. In a museum or library, the question “What more do you need to know about what you have seen?” will help us to understand a great deal. When we ask this question, we ask, “What kind of thinking has taken place for you here? What new unknowns did you discover? What kind of thinking do you need to do tomorrow? What possibilities has this experience opened for you?”

Frank Smith, whose work I admire greatly, categorizes important critical thinking acts. Classifying, comparing, and conceptualizing are among them, as are differentiating, evaluating, grasping, questioning, recognizing, searching, verifying, and weighing—these are just a dozen critical-thinking operations from his list of forty (Smith 1990: 95). The list comprises what we actually do when we are thinking well. Smith says we apply these operations to such issues as accuracy, ambiguity, arguments, assumptions, authenticity, and authority—and those are merely the first six words that lead his list of sixty-four critical dimensions (96).

The brain is not an information-processing device, any more than it is a passive, reactive device. The brain does not seek or respond to information in the world—the brain imposes meaningfulness on the world.

It is an active, experience-seeking, reality-creating organ. The enormous quantity of knowledge that we accumulate as we go through life is not the purpose of life but a byproduct of experience. We learn the worlds we create. The brain is constantly generating possibilities of realities that may or may not exist objectively, and our experience of these realities constitutes our life and our identity. (Smith 1990: 47)

Smith says, "The brain does not respond or react to the world; it creates the world. . . . Imagination is not something to which we must deliberately turn our mind; it is the fundamental condition of the brain" (Smith 1990: 46). And this: "The brain is more like an artist than a machine. It constantly creates realities, actual and imaginary; it examines alternatives, spins stories, and thrives on experience" (12). This is why we ought to study thinking, remembering that John Dewey said the word "mind" is principally a verb, perhaps most importantly and most invisibly a verb. Dewey says mind is not something we have, but something we do; we attend, we care and feel. To mind leads us to see, and engages us in "active looking after things that need to be tended; we mind our step, our course of action, emotionally as well as thoughtfully" (Dewey 1934 [1987]: 268). Minding is questioning. For Dewey, the infinitive "to mind" is defined by intellect and applied attention. It signifies memory and purpose.

We need to worry about mind in all its uses, noun or verb. Think with me about the present moment in our national life and its meanings for cultural institutions. Educational evaluation has been tied to tests, not to curiosity or invention, nor to the subtler forms of literacy and interpretation. Imaginative, flexible educational policy must overcome a polarized and uncivil public arena and accountability demands. Compromise and patience are rare or invisible. The abbreviated cognitive processes that characterize the World Wide Web cause me to wonder what kinds of young scholars, thinkers, learners, and readers are we now creating? What kinds of adult learners will they become? How will they learn to think critically in the ambiguous parts of life? Have our children been compromised and narrowed by our schools? Have we, and their parents, been diverted from the construction of living minds?

Whatever your response to these questions, perhaps you will agree with me that a generation prepared for the test in a culture of shallow competition is not likely to be a generation that trusts complex personal experience as the basis for learning. Nor will an insular generation easily understand the perspectives of others, nor will it fully grasp the importance of cultural institutions to civic society, and to democracy. Nor will it easily respond to my questions "How do we think and trust in times of fear? How do we come to understand American variances in culture, knowledge, and context? How do we speak and think together with others?" Educational arrogance, no