

Keynote Address

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A Care for Particulars

Prelude, a dance —

[Walk to stage,—place Address on the podium. Walk to center stage front facing students, faculty, parents, and colleagues. Pause, see all, hold the moment; hold them eye to eye. The Ritual: kneel slowly, gently touch forehead with fingertips; then lower hand to touch the ground with an open palm; stand slowly, uncoiling like a feathered fern. Repeat the gesture in full, facing all four corners of the Earth: West, North, East, South. Return gaze to behold honorees].

Among many indigenous practices around the globe, the dance, *dancing*, is a way of knowing and being in the world; it is a way of carrying the people's knowledge in one's own body. Dancing is also a marker of life's momentous occasions, and is one of the most notable ways of rising to and sharing such occasions and committing them to memory: birth; death; and when we turn 12 or 13, 15, or 16. The dance celebrates our unions in marriage as much as it punctuates peace after the ravages of war. And most certainly, dancing is a way to honor the occasion of student graduations. Indeed, *not to dance is not to rise* to the occasion. And so we—all of us—are gathered today to rise to an occasion, and this dance is for you,—the graduating students of 2018.

When I graduated with my classmates from California Institute of the Arts, each of us were expected to dance across the stage, paying homage to our teachers, our parents, and the community-at-large for our reaching the pinnacle of having our diplomas placed into our hands. That was a long time ago and, it was California,—and as

we all know, California is another country. So not to worry,—I will not expect each of you to dance here across the stage today. Nevertheless, for me, dancing across that stage then always held certain meaning,—a kind of *gravitas* settled in my consciousness and I found myself, over and again, revisiting that time as I prepared this offering for you.

As we danced through the space between our chairs and our professors, we entered an ‘in-between’ place where, *what was* was no longer, and what was *to be* hovered all around in suspended anticipation. We danced ourselves into a place of transition; in fact, the dancing itself was the concrete manifestation of the transition making us.

This day asks us to consider that in-between place. Here we gather together that we may, all of us, take pause alongside you. And like Janus, the Roman god of entrances and exits, endings and beginnings, we hold this moment so that you may look back to where you’ve been and, simultaneously, imagine the steps you wish to take ahead. This two-way seeing can only take place from situating ourselves in-between. It is a place that harbors a time for mixing it up and suspending decision-making. It is a place for internalizing and integrating not only *what* your teachers and mentors gave you, but *how* they journeyed with and for you,—how they were your witnesses, your watchers,—how they became your familiars. Like dancing across the stage, you transition, becoming your own witnesses, your own watchers,— your own best familiars.

This is a time to pause, when you are made anew: from a student to an informed citizen, you dance yourselves toward the teacher within, and take note of *how* and *by what measure* you will participate in a world to which you belong. And those of us who have functioned as your witnesses see a fulfilled awakening process taking place. It is in

such transitional moments that the University itself remembers its own name and its essential *raison d'être*.

Transitions, dancing in the pauses, in-between the beats,—this is the place where, in music, grace notes punctuate the central melody. Here in this place abides a different kind of knowledge, a different kind of knowing,—what author Toni Morrison calls "deep knowing."

In the pause, we are made a little bit more malleable, a little bit more flexible, and more sensitive for the less crude edges of things. We are brought perhaps, to being a bit off-balance for the uncertainties of a shifting transitional ground. Yet here we stand. And it is my hope that you will often return here in order to achieve an unusual kind of balance in the spinning world,—continuing to learn how to balance with your unique strides and with aplomb; it will be how you sustain relationship to this world. As a place that is both generative and constitutive, the pause, the movement of transitions, embody certain values that serve to cultivate a consciousness toward a *care for particulars*: to note the *how* of your knowing; to discern the *conditions* that yield your best self. Here in the pause you are able to consider how to engage *all* of your intelligences, to harness and ignite the rich, integrated complex of your bodies, minds, and souls,—to deeply care for the most indwelling self, where your animated and worldly being finds root.

From this rarefied place you will find the whisperings of a language all your own, vital to your own being. It is this language alone that carries a capacity to imagine a future. And it is for this reason that we are here today: to occupy and hold this place as no other, for each of you, as a *present and a future*, is the occasion for whom we rise.

Lastly, I wish for you the care and presence of mind that it takes to be responsive to how your dance in the world will change, how it will alter alter in order to serve your needs and the needs of the world to which you belong. Given the rigors and tempers of our time, I hope for you to remain clear, become more nuanced along the way; and that you are able to cultivate your moves on this Earth with joy and camaraderie and share it with dignity and grace. And may you take equal care to lift the souls of those you meet along the way, for if we do not try to lift the soul, we will not be unable to imagine how to transform it. After all, is this not a task that stands before all of us?—to imagine how to transform our shared world that it would yield *its* most magnanimous consciousness for the fulfillment of all its creatures?

This is my wish *and* my charge to you—to the live with an endurance for a care for particulars throughout the whole of this life-time given you.

CONGRATULATIONS GRADUATING CLASS OF 2018 —