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FROM THE HOMESTEAD TO THE CITY: TWO FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION¹

BERND JAGER

ABSTRACT

The metaphor of progress as it applies to education refers to the steps taken (Latin *gredi*) by students on a road leading from one way of understanding or misunderstanding in the direction (Latin *pro*) of another, better understanding. This process of acculturation, understood in the light of the metaphor of progress, is thought here as connecting two *commensurate* realms. This metaphoric mode evokes a technical, natural, scientific way of understanding education. The cultural metaphor of a rite of passage as it is used by preliterate societies presents acculturation as a transcending movement between *incommensurate* realms. The root metaphor for the rite of passage is that of dying to one way of life and being reborn to another. The metaphor of progress, like that of *homo faber*, leads to an understanding of acculturation in terms of becoming *literate*. The metaphor of the rite of passage and of transcendence leads to an understanding of acculturation as essentially a process of becoming *inscribed*. The rite of passage places human learning and understanding within the context of *human suffering and mortality*; modern progressive theories place our thirst for knowledge within the context of everyday *usefulness* and the *practical* desire to improve our life. It is possible to think of the young child's passage from the home environment to the grade-school environment in terms of progress; the world of the home and that of the school are then thought of as commensurate realms, as together forming one unproblematic

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whole. The child's problem in moving from the one environment to the other is then seen as a problem of adjustment. If we look at this transition in terms of a rite of passage, it can then be thought of as a radical personal and individual transformation or conversion that cannot be accomplished by purely technical means. This mode of understanding casts in high relief the essential differences that mark the incommensurate realms of the *home* and the *school*. An investigation concerning the essential differences between the incommensurate realms of home and school brings to the fore the more fundamental differences between the incommensurate spheres of *the private* and *the public*, each of which has its own specific structural and ontological characteristics that determine the characteristic manner in which these realms are inhabited.

FREUD AND VAN GENNEP: EMANCIPATION AND RITES OF PASSAGE

Van Gennep's path-breaking anthropological study *Les Rites de Passage* appeared in 1908, three years after Freud's *Three Essays on Sexual Theory* (van Gennep, 1908/1969; Freud, 1946, vol. 5). This seminal work on the various cultural practices attending the passage from one stage in life to another can serve to place Freud's central discoveries in a new light. If these two texts are read each within the light of the other, it is possible to understand the course of human life as intersected by particular, critical, cultural thresholds that must be crossed or overcome on the way from infancy and immaturity to full humanization.

Van Gennep's brilliant conceptual framework has made it possible for us to come to a coherent understanding of the ritual practices that attend the passage from one stage of life to another among various preliterate populations studied by anthropologists. Such fateful crossings of important thresholds always contain an individual as well as a collective moment, and they cannot be accomplished without the assistance and full support of family, clan, or tribe.

Van Gennep's work makes it possible to understand group identity in terms of the values enshrined in particular rites of passage. And we understand personal identity in both anthropology and psychoanalysis as referring to the manner in which a person has crossed or has failed to cross particular significant cultural thresholds. Van Gennep's exemplary case of such a cultural threshold is that which divides the life of sexually immature children from that of sexually maturing young adults. The so-called puberty rite in all its myriad manifestations appears designed specifically to assist adolescents in their passage from a world of

childhood to one of responsible young adulthood.²

Nevertheless, the two truly paradigmatic examples of a rite of passage are undoubtedly those of birth and death. The traditional anthropological crises that evoke a rite of passage are birth, initiation into manhood or womanhood, marriage, and death. All these crises bear the imprint of birth and death, of entering and of leaving a human community, and all make the demand that the initiate leave behind one way of life, one way of being human and one particular world, while stepping over into another. All rites of passage repeat the pattern of a struggle past a narrow threshold that leads from one world into another.

Both Freud and van Gennep approach the attainment of adult sexuality and the achievement of full humanity as both personal and social accomplishments; neither theorist mistakes these achievements as inevitable outcomes of a natural process or as the result of some technical intervention: Humanity can neither be "grown" nor "produced."

We see this illustrated in the manner in which both authors approach the mystery of human sexual identity. Neither author approaches the attainment of such identity in terms of an automatic biologicotechnical progress or as a preordained and "natural" unfolding of a biological fate. Both understand human femininity and masculinity as the uncertain outcome of a great collective, social, and individual effort. Both authors stress the determinative role of the family or the clan in the cooperative process by which an initially sexually indeterminate or polymorphously perverse infant gradually ascends, cultural step by cultural step, to a fully human sexual maturity. It is by the grace of such communal efforts that the individual becomes eventually capable of fulfilling specific, culturally assigned roles in a community.

In searching Freud's work for the closest and most detailed description of what it means to undergo a rite of passage, I find it difficult to overlook the psychoanalytic cure itself. It would be possible to approach psychoanalytic therapy as a particular ritual designed to assist the analysand in a cultural effort to leave behind a childish bondage to parental figures and to step across a difficult threshold into a more adult form of life. Freud's decisive move away from the biologicotechnical model of healing that is inherent in medicine and his embracing an ancient therapeutic model, restricted to an exchange of words alone, point clearly in the direction of a logic of the rite of passage and away from a logic of natural growth and of technical progress.

The conception of a rite of passage effected by words alone is at

² Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 65-68.

least as old as Socrates, who, according to Plato, understood his philosophic discussions with Athenian youths as a "maieutic" kind of activity; that is, as one akin to the work of a midwife assisting mother and child at the time of birth.³ Socratic discussions can be understood as leading Athenian youths away from the narrow sphere of the parental home and a familiar world in the direction of a larger public world. Socratic discussion can thus be understood in terms of a rite of passage modeled on the birth experience, which leads from one way of being human, one way of dwelling, into another.

Freud's often misunderstood stages of development can be approached in an illuminating way in terms of such a rite of passage. From that anthropological perspective these stages make their appearance as a series of existential crises in which the child is guided past a difficult threshold that divides two very different modes of being in the world.

In the psychological literature these stages are often misunderstood as natural phenomena and as crises provoked by biological growth. Recast in that manner, Freud's insights are substantially deprived of their intellectual coherence and force. These stages are not so much natural events as they are historical interactions between parents and children that leave their fateful imprint on the moral and emotional character of the child. Moreover, passage from one stage to the next constitutes a cultural achievement. The failure of such passage, which invokes a new register of pathology, does not bring into play the technical power of medical or biological science but rather, according to Freud, gives rise to a new rite of passage in the form of psychoanalytic therapy.

Understood in this way, the transition from an "oral" to an "anal" stage shows itself as a particular existential crisis in which a world entirely centered on the mouth and dominated by the theme of incorporation must make place for a very different world design in which the anus and the function of elimination stand central and where the new themes of giving and withholding, of soiling and purifying, of doing and being done to, come into prominence. It is also possible to approach the Freudian stages as themselves the scenes for significant ritual transitions which, in the oral phase, may be thought to lead from breast feeding to eating at the table, or, in the anal phase, from passive soiling to active, disciplined, toilet and toilette habits.⁴

In Freud's work these various painful passages through the various stages of development are overarched by the central humanizing task of

³ Plato, *Theaetetus and sophist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970).

⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke* (London: Imago, 1946), 98ff.

the Oedipus complex. That task is to transform the child's emotional life, which at one time centers entirely on parental figures, and to guide the child beyond the small world of the present and the same toward a future in which there is place for others. We recognize in the transitions from a pre-oedipal to an oedipal to a post-oedipal phase a qualitative and existential leap that bears the full imprint of the ancient rites of passage leading from one incommensurate realm to another. All these fateful transitions resemble, in turn, the two paradigm transitions of birth and death.

The imprint of the ancient rite of passage as movement between incommensurate realms can be seen with particular clarity in the case of the child's withdrawal from maternal breast-feeding. Freud's thinking was no doubt in large measure influenced by the particular manner in which the German language represents this withdrawal. The word *Ent-wöhnung* refers both to infantile weaning in particular and to the unlearning of bad habits in general.⁵ *Die Wohnung* refers to a house and *wohnen* translates as "to inhabit," "to dwell." The prefix *ent* indicates a negation, a reversal, or a removal, so that a literal translation of *entwohnen* would read "to move from one house to another," or rather more completely, "to get used to the move from one house to another."⁶

Actually, the case is not so very different in modern English, where the same metaphor is used to describe the same event. The verb "to wean" is related to the Old English *wunian*, which is cognate with the German *wohnen* and refers equally to "dwelling," "remaining," and "becoming used to."⁷ We see how in both English and German this "first" infantile crisis is understood in terms of a painful transition from one place of dwelling to another.

Our Latin forebears made use of the more forceful metaphor *depello* (*infantem lacte depellere*). *De-pello* means, besides "weaning," "to drive away," "to remove," or "to expel." Latin also makes use of the verb *de-doceo*, literally "to lead away," which refers to the same process of "un-learning" and "forgetting" that we already encountered in Freud's German *entwohnen*

⁵ Freud used a number of descriptive terms to refer to weaning, such as "die Entziehung der Brust" (the withdrawal of the breast) and "das Verlieren der Mutterbrust" (the loss of the maternal breast). In the twenty-third chapter of his *Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis* he makes use of the term *Abgewöhnung* for "weaning."

⁶ We should take note here of the English "habit," which clearly refers to a mode of dwelling or inhabiting, and of the metaphor "losing a habit" or "getting rid of a bad habit," which repeats the associative chain of *Entwöhnung*.

⁷ Ernest Klein, *Comprehensive etymological dictionary of the English language* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1971), see under "Weaning."

(Cassell and Simpson, 1968; see under *depello* and *dedoceo*).⁸

EDUCATION AS A PASSAGE LEADING FROM HOME TO SCHOOL

Our first day at school always appears to us in retrospect as an important milestone. For some, this day retains the glow of adventure while for others it casts long shadows over the early years of childhood. Almost no one remembers it without emotion. To think of this day within a psychoanalytic framework means to understand it as a difficult, emotion-laden transition from the safe haven of a family home, where each child has his assured place, to the more challenging social space of a school-room, where such a place must be won anew.

Within the sphere of psychoanalytic thought, the crisis of the first day at school lends itself to being reformulated within the context of a crisis of weaning, which confronts the child with a similar psychological task. In both cases a child is confronted with the demand of having to leave a familiar place in close proximity to the mother and of having to get used to an unaccustomed place at some greater distance from her person.

It would appear, then, that the anthropological concept of a rite of passage and a psychoanalytic concept of weaning, understood in the light of the metaphor *entwohnen* and *wunian*, could further our understanding of the crisis of transition experienced by the young child moving from the intimate realm of the family circle to the public realm of the classroom. At the very least, such an understanding would keep us from making the mistake of understanding this important cultural transition as a mere physical and spatial displacement from a point A to a commensurate point B. This fateful journey from the parental sphere of the home to the public sphere of the school can thus be approached as already encompassing and revealing the mission of education itself, understood as passage from the private sphere of the home to the public sphere of the school.

Education, understood as a path connecting two separate realms, can be approached in terms of two very different logics depending on whether we understand the two realms as commensurate or as incommensurate. A natural scientific and technological logic of learning or development starts from the premise that the two spheres are commensurate and that education is essentially a process of orderly acquisition (of skills, information, maturity).

An existential and phenomenological logic of inhabitation starts from the premise that the familial and the public sphere are

⁸ D.P. Simpson, *Cassell's new Latin dictionary* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), see under *depello* and *dedoceo*.

incommensurate, so the path linking the two cannot be one of orderly progress but requires a more radical personal transformation such as is implied in a rite of passage. Within this context education refers to the difficult process by which a child must learn to integrate two very different ways of being at home in the world. To be educated means here to be at home both in a private, familial sphere of life and in a public one.

This structural transformation resembles in all important respects the transformation described by Freud in terms of an Oedipal crisis. To understand the difference between the logic of gradual progress and development, which dominates natural scientific thinking, and the logic of transformation or conversion, which dominates thinking in terms of a rite of passage, we need to explore two fundamentally different experiences of our bodily being within our everyday experience.

When we are submerged in routine everyday tasks, our body serves us as a quiet basis for all our enterprises. While absorbed in our work we pay scant attention to our bodily being until the point when we grow tired or feel ourselves crowded out of the workplace by a persistent headache or some other insistent bodily need. This quality of silent support of the body is transferred in the workplace to all manner of human productions; we come to experience such manufactured tools as typewriters, computers, or automobiles in a similar way, as virtual bodies that, like the human laboring body, serve as silent foundations for subsequent tasks. The central issue in the workaday world is that of providing for our necessities. It requires repairing and maintaining all those instruments and organizations that support and protect our life and render it tolerable or agreeable within the fold of nature. The central metaphor in this realm is one of progress by which we mark the degree to which our various tasks have been accomplished.

It is only when the human body grows weary and needy, or when the quasi-bodies that are tools break down, that the sealed-off world of work breaks open upon the prospect of a very different way of being in the world. At that point of breakdown we are placed before the choice of either closing off that possibility by repairing the breach through which it made itself manifest or by stepping through it into a different modality of being human. This stepping through no longer belongs to the world of incremental progress or development but assumes the form of an existential leap, of a transformation or conversion.

In the world of work we transform a surrounding nature to secure a place for ourselves on earth. The human body assumes here the form of a silent basis and foundation. Beyond this world of work appears a different world in which the human body itself becomes a central issue. We think

here of such activities as eating and drinking, of resting and sleeping, of recreating, conversing, dancing, singing, and making love. In all these activities the human body stands central in an infinite variety of ways. Activity may take the form of tending or nursing, of restoring to health and vigor, or it may appear in the form of displaying the body, of arousing or giving in to love and admiration. Within this world in which the human body makes its appearance in its myriad transformations, the central metaphor is that of birth and death.

If we think of education as passage from a private and familial domain to a public domain, we must keep in mind these two very different worlds, each founded on a different experience of the human body. Duties of the private sphere-housekeeping, tending a garden, repairing the roof, gathering wood for the winter-all are translated in a public sphere as industry, commerce, and governmental functions. These are ruled by a secular technoscientific reason that remains entirely ignorant of birth and death and that is ruled by the central metaphor of progress and development.

The private familial world in which the body stands central becomes translated in a public world of religions, the arts, sports, and festivals. We can thus trace the transformation of private eating into public sacrifice, of lovemaking into dancing or fertility-cult practices, of private conversation into public oratory, of paternal authority into public kingship, and of a private match of strength between brothers to a public contest between athletes. In all these instances we think of education as the means whereby we move from the private realm of our life toward the public sphere and back.

When we think of the public realm primarily in terms of workaday realities, which are governed by a technoscientific reason based on a metaphor of progress and on a particular manner of experiencing the human body in the performance of tasks, then we think of education essentially as a matter of acquiring information and of reinforcing habits that promote the execution of particular useful economic tasks. When we think of the public realm primarily as one in which the human body stands central and in which the private familial way of dealing with birth and death assumes the form of a public ritual and in which the local, familial manner of wondering about the transformations of the body gives rise to a public spectacle, then education begins to assume the form of a rite of passage in which the initiates, who are barely acquainted with death or procreation, are introduced into the public mysteries of the human body.

A technoscientific approach to education promotes the cultivation of a human body that will serve as a quiet support for daily tasks. Only

well-rested, well-fed, healthy bodies can serve in this approach, and all counsels regarding bodily activities stress a healthy acquiescence to all bodily needs. Those who advocate this approach remain utterly uncomprehending in the face of self-denial, ascetic practices, and religious proscriptions in so far as these cannot be linked to a rational maintenance of optimal bodily functioning.

Education understood in terms of a rite of passage assumes a very different stance in respect to the human body. The central issue in this rite is that of bringing the initiates face-to-face with bodily birth and death so they will absorb the public teaching about these difficult matters. With this approach we do not seek the docile body slumbering beneath its daytime tasks but the body driven from the world of routines by pain, hunger, and cold and by the lack of sleep.

A technoscientific education promises that cleverness and plenty of information will set us free from the strictures of nature. Education as a rite of passage inscribes us with the knowledge that only an accepted suffering and deprivation can bring us closer to a truth about the mortal human body.

When psychologists speak of development or learning, they have in mind a technoscientific pacification of the body that can serve as a quiet foundation for secular tasks and that as such gives entrance to the vast public complex of natural science, technology, industry, commerce, and government. The metaphor *development* steers our thought in the direction of a quiet unfolding of a course of events that has been assiduously prepared beforehand and that must be shielded from undue interference if it is to unfold in the right manner. We think here of the contrasting Latin pair *involvere* (to roll up, wrap up, envelop) and *deolvere* (to run down, to roll down) to yield an image of development as a kind of winding down or unfolding of what previously had been "rolled up" or "wrapped up." This image is particularly suited to describe biological growth such as from the acorn to the tree or from the fertilized ovum to the newborn child. But this image does not fit the very different context in which a child takes the cultural leap from breast-feeding to *eating* at the table, from exclusive oedipal attachments to a post-oedipal form of socialization, or from being a newly born "natural" baby to one who has been given a name and has received the tribal markings (circumcision or baptism) as signs of inclusion into an established cultural world. In the latter case it may be better to speak of consecration or conscription or conversion, or in any case of a transition or transformations. The Latin *trans-ire* for "going across," "going over," permits us to think in terms of passage past a threshold and of communal participation in children's progress as they

make their way from one manner of being human to one that is qualitatively different.

It appears quite evident that Freud's so-called pre-oedipal stages of development do not fit the model of a natural or technical progression; instead of speaking of stages and development, we might use such words as *transitions* or *conversions*. It is true that Freud contributed to the confusion by making use of the metaphor *development* (*Entwicklung*), but he at least avoided the term *stages of development*, except when he wished to evoke a very different biological context.⁹

If we now return our attention to the child's crisis of transition experienced on the first day of school, we realize that at home the child feels safe and comfortable among the members of her family; she dwells among them, and this dwelling summons her to a way of being that is specific to that familiar place. The transition from the home to the classroom confronts the child with a new environment that is structured in an unfamiliar way and that invites her *to dwell and to be in a different manner*. The question of transition is then not simply one of adjustment or of adding a new item to a repertoire of behaviors but rather one of breaking up a primitive unity of self and of initiating an internal and external dialogue between different ways of being oneself.

From the child's perspective, there is at first no discernable path connecting the home environment to that of the school. Finding and traversing this path constitutes not only a first educational, but also an existential, task. What the child learns in this instance is not merely how *to do* a particular thing but rather how *to be* in a different manner. It is thus not simply a matter of one's finding a path connecting two regions but of one's becoming a link between two different ways of dwelling and being at home in the world. The path to be discovered is therefore both external and internal, both a task of finding one's way in the world and of becoming human in a fully differentiated way.

Standing before the threshold, the child faces a point of radical discontinuity where she is forced to find her own way across uncharted territory. The manner in which she accomplishes this task is therefore at the same time also a manner of realizing her own being. This crisis at the

⁹ Freud made use of the term *Entwicklungsphasen*, which can be literally rendered "phases of development." Besides *Entwicklungsphasen* he used *Sexualorganisation* and *Genitalorganisation*. Usage of the German *Phase* differs little from that in English: In both contexts it refers especially to the moon; like phantom and phantasm, it belongs to the realm of appearance (Gr. *phasis*, "appearance"). The English expression "stages of development" should be rendered *Entwicklungsstufen*, a term Freud used only to refer to biological development (Freud, 1946, Vol. 13, p. 19)

threshold constitutes the central issue in the education of the child, because the manner in which she manages to step across the threshold, and the way she learns to interrelate two worlds and two distinct ways of being will determine her character and particular outlook on the world.

We find here, at the very heart of the process of education, a problem that cannot be mastered by technical information and that refuses to be overcome by expertise. The accumulated experience of countless previous generations can help guide the child only part of the way, but in the end each of us is required to stand alone before a threshold that divides both our being and our world and to face up to the choice, on the one hand, of failing, of falling back, or of falling apart or, on the other, of stepping across the threshold into a different way of being oneself and of creating a new synthesis between this new manner of being in public and at school and the older way of having one's place at home.

The distance between the home environment and the school environment cannot be entirely bridged by technical information or filled in by natural growth. This distance between the two incommensurate realms evokes an anthropological rite of passage or a psychoanalytic "working through." It presents us with a phenomenon akin to weaning or to mourning; it opens upon an amorphous suffering that can be relieved only by the superimposition of a cultural form.

The individual's crisis before the threshold also affects the collectivity; both the individual and the supporting cultural community are led in extremis before a problem that cannot be solved or handled by technical advice or by means of delegation. Neither parents, teachers, nor any experts in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, or medicine can shield a child from the inescapable suffering that attends the crossing of difficult cultural thresholds.

As members of a highly developed twentieth-century technological civilization, we remain as powerless as were our neolithic ancestors when it comes to helping our children cross their first cultural thresholds. And like these ancestors, we can do no more than watch from the sidelines and cheer on the children as they slowly wend their way past painful trials and as they advance from the realm of nature to that of culture.

In the necessary absence of all useful technical know-how and of ready-made patterns, the child must draw on her own resources and form herself into a bridge connecting two very different ways of life. Failure in this regard inevitably leads to fixation, neurotic repetition, and insufficient access to a shared cultural world. Such failure does not simply limit what a child can have or use but it determines who and what a child can be.

THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND THE RITE OF PASSAGE

The history of Western education shows a progressively more evident bias toward technical expertise and information as the only matters of true consequence in the child's journey from the private to the public realm. This emphasis is in keeping with a progressively stronger and more exclusive Western identification of the public realm with the production and distribution of goods and services. As Hannah Arendt has pointed out, this contemporary, nearly exclusive identification of the public realm with manufacture and commerce represents a most unusual cultural configuration.¹⁰ We would expect that this contemporary understanding of the public realm would give rise to a corresponding understanding of education as progress and development and as transformation of the human body into a quiet basis supporting daily tasks. This strategy of education runs counter to what we know of ancient cultures practicing the rites of passage in which the initiates are made to experience the human body in its mortal frailty and its capacity to transcend its own limits. It is for this reason that the initiates of Stone Age cultures would be subjected to painful ordeals, to frightening spectacles, to beatings, hunger, cold, and sleeplessness.

If we keep to our understanding of education as a transport between a familial and a public realm, we come to understand that neolithic rites of passage differ so greatly from contemporary Western education because the conception of a public realm is so utterly different in the two cases. For these older cultures the primary function of the public realm was to give expressive cultural form to the transformations of the human body and thereby to permit communal contemplation of endurance, pain, anguish, and the mysteries of birth and death.

Physical punishment, which to us moderns is but a reprehensible and barbaric practice, served at one time the function of inducing marginality, of forcing the initiate to inhabit and embody the very margins of human existence and thereby to force an experience of human birth and human death. Such a metamorphosis of the body, induced by fright or pain and experienced at the edge of human life, is clearly of a different nature than the one instilled by modern education. In this painful metamorphosis one does not have access to technology or economic life but experiences the mysteries of a human body capable of being born, of giving and inducing birth, and of succumbing to death. Progress refers in this context to an advance that refuses an incremental approach, that cannot be accomplished step by careful step, that refuses the logic of daily tasks, and

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The human condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 22ff.

that comes about in a sweeping transformation. And most fundamental of all, the human body does not serve here as an instrument inscribing its will on nature but is itself being inscribed; it is not as much *agens* as it is *agendum*, not so much action as it is passion.

Education can be understood as introducing young initiates to the mysteries of human corporeal life. Western educational practices in the form of schooling transform the human body into a silent foundation for action. Neolithic educational practices in the form of rites of passage teach the realities of a human body subject to pain, disease, and the frailty of age, counseling forbearance and the maintenance of human dignity in the face of inevitable suffering. The fundamental difference between the cultures of schooling and the cultures of rites of passage is ultimately the difference between *literate* cultures and cultures that practice *inscription*.

THE HISTORY OF PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT IN EDUCATION

One of the tenuous links connecting the ancient neolithic rites of passage with the practices of Western education can perhaps be traced through the extensive historical record of physical punishments that extends from the beginning of schooling in ancient Sumeria up to the very recent age. This form of punishment clearly was not tied to any specific circumstances or to particular religious practices, philosophies, or forms of government, and we find evidence of it in civilizations as widely different from each other as those of Egypt, imperial Rome, and Victorian England.

The more we study this strange historical record, the more anomalous it appears within the light of the stated goals of Western education. We offer here the hypothesis that this record of mistreatment that so clearly runs counter to the goals of Western education can best be understood as a vestige of an older and alien culture of education that did not develop along the lines of schooling but that practiced the rites of passage.

Historian Stanley Bonner has addressed this strangely insistent pattern of physical abuse in his valuable observations on Greek and Roman education: "Throughout antiquity, from the time of Socrates to that of St. Augustine and beyond, across the whole Mediterranean world, from Egypt to Bordeaux and from Carthage to Antioch, corporal punishment was a constant feature of school life."¹¹ Bonner mentions an entire arsenal of beating instruments, from the *flagellum*, or common whip, to the *scutica*, or tufted leather whip, and from the *virgae*, or rods, to the *Jerula*, or cane.

¹¹ Stanley Bonner, *Education in ancient Rome* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 143.

Teachers were described in such terms of endearment as Plagosus (the Whacker) and Scythobrachion (Old Leather Arm). The fourth-century Latin poet Ausonius, who traveled widely within the Western world, reported that from the schoolrooms of the era came the constant din of "multo verberere" (many floggings).¹²

Nor is this pattern restricted to the Mediterranean world or to civilizations contemporaneous with ancient Greece or Rome. One of the earliest portrayals of school life, dated 2000 B.C., gives us a very similar impression of physical violence in the classrooms of ancient Sumer:

My headmaster read my tablet, [and] said: "There is something missing." [He] caned me.

The fellow in charge of neatness said: "You loitered and did not straighten up your clothes." [He] caned me.

The fellow in charge of silence said: "Why did you talk without permission?" [And he] caned me.

The fellow in charge of the assembly said: "Why did you stand at ease without permission?" [And he] caned me.

The fellow in charge of the gate said: "Why did you go out without permission?" [And he] caned me.

The fellow in charge of Sumerian said: "Why didn't you speak [proper] Sumerian?" [And he] caned me.

[And so] I [began to] hate the scribal art, [began to] neglect the scribal art.¹³

The realistic novels and diaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries give us an accurate impression of school life in many parts of Europe where the beatings continued unabated. It was only during the second half of the present century that the traditional link between education and flogging was finally broken.

We might be tempted to understand this harsh treatment of children purely in psychological terms and attribute it to the difficult financial circumstances of educators, as some have done, or we might, with others, point vaguely to a lack of "social development" or blame the general cruelty of an age. But if the latter argument were to persuade us, how then would we account for the fact that the practice ended in one of the most violently destructive centuries since the beginning of time and, in any

¹² Simon Somerville Laurie, *Historical survey of pre-Christian education* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 343.

¹³ Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 238.

case, during an era that can not possibly be thought of as less cruel or barbaric than the ages of Pericles, Augustus, or Queen Victoria.

It might be more instructive to read this violence as a misplaced and unconscious remnant of the ancient rites of passage that survived in the schools of the succeeding literate societies of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Christian Europe in a misappropriated form as tyranny and cruelty. If this were indeed the case, it would be possible to understand the inherent contradiction between rational education and primitive violence in terms of a conflict between two very different ways of understanding the process of a child's humanization.

Within the context of the ancient rites, the initiates experienced the appropriation of their culture as an inherently mysterious and awesome adventure. By contrast, Western educators understand this appropriation in a much less dramatic fashion, as either a biological process or as a technical problem. Whereas the ancient rites were an attempt to bring the initiates face-to-face with the perennial problems of human existence, school-based educators gradually began to understand their task exclusively in terms of transmitting useful information.

LITERATE CULTURES AND INSCRIBING CULTURES

So far we have identified two fundamentally different approaches to education, understood as passage from the private home environment to that of the public school. We have identified these two radically distinct approaches to education as either a passage between commensurate realms that is governed by the metaphor of progress or as a passage between two incommensurate realms that is governed by the metaphor of the rite of passage.

We notice that progress between commensurate realms evokes a human embodiment that is very different from that evoked by the rite of passage. Progress between commensurate realms defines the sphere of work, and work ultimately defines which realms can be commensurate. To work means to find a path that will link one state of affairs to another; with work we can find a way that leads from a barren, uncultivated piece of land to one that is fertile and cultivated. We can find a path leading from a disordered and uninhabitable place to one that is well regulated and that invites inhabitation.

Work, understood as progress between commensurate realms, has its own characteristic forms of human embodiment. Within the sphere of work the human body serves as a quiet foundation and support to the tasks at hand and it draws as little attention to itself as possible. Within the realm of work we become aware of our body only when we grow tired and

when it is no longer possible to postpone tending to our physical needs. Both work and progress, as we understand it in this context, transform the human body into an unobtrusive resource that remains quietly subordinate to the task at hand until it becomes depleted and needs to be replenished.

A rite of passage concerns a passage that cannot be accomplished by skill or force or by any other quality elicited by the workaday world; what is evoked instead is a transformation of the body on the model of birth and death. What we have said about the mutual implications of work and the communicable realms it links together is also true for the rite of passage and the incommunicable realms. The rite of passage ritualizes an impossible passage, the paradigm of which is that of passing from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead, or passing from the realm of the unborn to the realm of the living and the realm of the tribe.

The human body stretched between these incommensurate realms no longer is the quiet and subordinate resource that it is in the realm of work. Locked between the worlds of the living and the dead, between the realm of the unborn and the born, the human body is a suffering, agonizing body living its own impossibility in the form of confusion, pain, and unconsciousness.

Human work was at one time confined to wandering; the tribe searched for a path that would lead away from a cold or infertile area toward a milder, more fertile land abundant in game. Work remains to this day essentially a matter of "finding a way" and of traveling that way from the beginning to the end; work remains a sustained effort, a "making our way" that leads from a less desirable to a more desirable state of affairs. But there always comes a time when it is no longer possible to continue on the way. Our neolithic ancestors would have to interrupt their progress at regular intervals in order to rest, to eat, to sleep. And at times it would be necessary to linger for a longer time because someone was about to give birth to a child, because someone fell ill or was dying, or perhaps because someone grew mad. At such points of crisis all progress would come to a halt, the world of commensurate realms would disappear to make place for the very different world of incommensurate realms. Here, the human body would no longer quietly bear its burden of supporting progress and instead would become a place of turmoil and struggle, stretched between the two opposing, incommensurate realms of life and death, Eros and Thanatos.

It is the body stretched between these poles that struggles with demons, that feels tormented, that agonizes, yawns, laughs, cries, or grows mad, that feels hunger and thirst and the leaden weight of sleep, that feels bliss and ecstasy, that gives birth and ejaculates and that gives up the ghost. The rites of passage should be approached as a neolithic attempt to

humanize this world, to draw it within the daily life of the tribe and to assign it a legitimate place.

Freud is the only Western theorist to have fully grasped the unity of this world of incommensurate realms and to have begun the task of describing the forms of human embodiment that are appropriate to it. Besides the embodiment of dying and giving birth, of orgasm and ejaculation, Freud has included suckling, urinating, and defecating as part and parcel of this same world. And he has shown us that all these phenomena concern bodily transformation structured on the model of giving life (procreation, Eros) and surrendering life (dying, Thanatos).

In following this train of thought, we can see with clarity that the body that stands central in the process of contemporary education is one that differs radically from the body that stands central in neolithic rites of passage or in psychoanalytic theories of early humanization. The one serves as a ground of action supporting progress, the other is in the throes of passion while serving as a link between the incommensurate worlds of life and death.

If we think of human existence as movement within a temporal continuum leading from birth and early childhood to adulthood and from there to old age and death, we observe that mid-life shows us the human body in its maturity and strength and as capable of quietly disappearing beneath its tasks. Both the beginning of human life in infancy and the end in feeble old age are marked by the same inability of the body to remain quietly in the background in support of tasks; in contrast to mid-life, the periphery of infancy and old age evokes the embodiment addressed by the rite of passage. Conversely it can be said that when the body turns irrepressible it necessarily evokes the themes of birth and death.

We see here with particular clarity the incompatibility between bodily punishment and modern education. At the same time we also see that the rite of passage requires a marginal embodiment that is congruous with the experience of pain, terror, and other forms of bodily suffering. These rites necessarily stand under the sign of *pathei mathos*; learning is here unalterably intertwined with pain and suffering.

Part of the suffering evoked by the neolithic rites of initiation comes in the form of symbolic mutilations that are inflicted upon the participants in conformity to the regnant tribal traditions. Van Gennep lists a dozen such symbolic mutilations performed on the initiates at the time when they ritually move from childhood to unmarried young manhood or womanhood. These include circumcision, the pulling or filing of teeth, the cutting of the little finger above the last joint, the perforation or removal of earlobes, the perforation of the hymen, the excision of the clitoris, the

scarifying or tattooing of the face or body, and the cutting of hair in a particular fashion.¹⁴

We may approach the practice of such ritual mutilations, together with ritual beatings and various forms of painful deprivations, as specific neolithic techniques of forcing bodily marginality upon the initiates. This experience of marginality, in turn, is designed to provoke an encounter with the human realities of birth and death. Such an understanding could then shed light on the historical practice of child-beating in the schools, where it could have survived as a mere vestige of neolithic rites of initiation.

Although it is true that suffering drives us away from the productive center of life and forces upon us a bodily marginalization, we should not overlook the fact that a rite of passage is, after all, first and foremost a ritual rather than an actual reality. We should, therefore, not regard these mutilations as in any sense equivalent to the passive imprints left on the body in the wake of violence. These deliberately inflicted marks are quite the opposite of accidental cuts and bruises and should be understood as cultural attempts to master and regularize the violence of nature and thereby to humanize mortality.

We may think of these mutilations as a kind of writing superimposed over a surface cracked and scarred by exposure to the elements. Such writing rescues the scarred surface and what it represents from nature and draws it within the enclosure of human artifacts and human relations. The marks left on the body by the rites of passage should be read as we read the traces left on the land by the plow or the path cut through the jungle with a machete. In all these cases we know ourselves in the presence of a human community that is holding its own against the encroachment of nature.

We may think of the paintings on cave walls in a similar way, not as pure mental projections on a blank piece of canvas or paper but as a kind of idealization and humanization of what the painter dimly perceived in the weathered surfaces of the wall. Painting would thus represent human mastery of a natural occurrence; it would constitute an appropriation of nature that is completely isomorphic with hunting the depicted animals. The tribal sages who conduct the rites of passage can be compared to painters, and the young initiates resemble in that case the weathered surfaces of cave sanctuaries. In both cases the artists draw into the human circle something or someone lingering on the border between mankind and raw nature.

¹⁴ Van Gennep, *The rites of passage*, 71f.

We notice here the difference between a preliterate rite of passage and a literate, school-bound education in the manner of their use of the written sign. In education, mastery of the mark is seen in terms of *literacy*, as an individual ability to "leave a mark" on the surfaces of nature; in the rite of passage, the emphasis is on *inscription*, on the power of drawing initiates further within the boundaries of the community and of conscripting the younger generation to its cause.

We might understand this difference also in terms of differences in embodiment evoked by schooling and by the rites of passage. Trained by schooling, the body supports the world of work and progress; the first requirement of educators is that they train *inscribing bodies* that will leave their mark upon the world. Such bodies belong evidently to a literate culture. The passionate body of the initiate undergoing a rite of passage is first and foremost *a body to be inscribed* and as such it belongs to a *nonliterate culture*.

Perhaps writing was used by the earliest humans as a way to designate themselves as human, to set themselves apart from nature, to mark themselves as standing outside that vast enclave in distinguished solidarity with others. Eventually this practice of inscribing and of setting apart was also applied to household objects and to articles of use in the form of decorations. Our practice of giving a name to the newborn is a remnant of the rite of inscription.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz notes the following concerning inscription among the Yoruba of Nigeria:

It is not just their statues, pots, and so on that the Yoruba incise with lines: they do the same with their faces. Lines of varying depth, direction and length, sliced into their cheeks and left to scar over, serve as a means of lineage identification, personal allure and status expression.¹⁵

He notes further that the Yoruba associate the mark left by an instrument, and most particularly the continuous line, with civilization. Our word *civilization* is rendered in Yoruba as "a face lined with marks." A cultivated piece of land is described as "earth that has linear marks on its face."¹⁶ The activities of cutting and plowing by which a piece of jungle is transformed into a cultivated field are thus metaphorically repeated in the ritual scarification of the face; in either case an instrument like a knife or a plough draws a continuous line. The passage of a piece of land from the

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, *Local knowledge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

uncultivated ensemble of nature to the human domain of cultivation and domestication remains thus linked to the ritual transformations by which an untutored child is gradually transformed into a cultivated young adult. The gesture that "opens" the human face to the responsibilities and realities of civilized adult life remains continuous with the one that "draws" virginal nature into the orbit of the tribe and that prepares it for productive incorporation.

This process of drawing someone or something within the human sphere always contains an aggressive, if not violent or destructive, component. If we approach the ritual practice of scarifying as a form of writing, we come to think of it as an act of drawing someone or something away from one context and into another. We may characterize the course of a rite of passage from the perspective of the initiate as a confusion and violence that gradually yields to understanding and to a sense of truly belonging.

The word *writing* meant at one time something closer to tearing and scratching. The Old English *writen* meant to engrave, scratch, draw, and write. The related German *reizen* means to tear, pull, tug, sketch, draw, design, and *Risz* refers to tear, gap, plan, and design.¹⁷

If we were to understand the rite of passage in terms of reading and writing, we might distinguish a "rite of separation" that tears us apart from a known context and that thereby defaces us and makes us suffer a kind of death. In the rite of transition we receive new inscriptions and are marked by new relations that then open upon a new social space to which we are born again. At first we pass through a dangerous no-man's-land where we are full of confusion and unable to read the signs; we are then reinscribed with wounds that, when they heal, become intelligible and legible designations that give us access to a new position in life.

The experience of confronting difficult writing can at times erase the fine line that exists between being inscribed and reading, between being subjected to painful confusion and disorientation and entering a new realm of intelligibility. There clings to reading and to writing a primitive and secret bliss and terror that remains largely unsuspected by modern pedagogy.

Freud concentrated his investigations of childhood on the period prior to that in which we learn to read. He thought that a child should enter the realm of schooling and learn to read and write only after having passed through the oedipal crisis. This latter crisis conforms to the ancient pattern of the rite of passage. Freud identified the completion of this passage with

¹⁷ Klein, *Comprehensive etymological dictionary of the English language*, see under "Writing."

the onset of latency. We may identify latency with a form of embodiment capable of supporting work and progress.

KAFKA'S PARABLE OF READING AND WRITING

Kafka's enigmatic story "The Penal Colony" collapses together the two very different worlds of the ancient rite of passage and that of modern schooling in a manner that is all at once ironic, comic, and tragic. He describes a distant land that is in the throes of modernization and ready to cast off its ancient customs. A recently arrived traveler is shown a precious relic of the old regime in the form of a huge typewriter that inscribes its sentences not on paper but directly upon the body of the reader. These sentences invariably spell death to the reader while they enlighten those who have come to watch the execution.

In a final demonstration of the virtues of this machine, the traveler is made to witness such an inscription of a sentence of death upon a hapless, witless prisoner found guilty of insubordination. We learn that the sentence to be inscribed on his body is Honor thy Superiors.¹⁸

The traveler is given a detailed explanation of the workings of the writing machine. It is equipped with writing needles that steadily penetrate deeper below the skin of the victim, who lies strapped down in the machine and who very slowly begins to decipher what is being written upon his body. The entire process is timed in such a way that the moment of the victim's understanding coincides with his death. Passage from life to death is here at the same time also passage from dumb suffering to understanding; writing becomes a mortal wounding, reading an agony, and enlightenment a final darkening.

Kafka describes this process of "enlightenment" in haunting and macabre detail. He tells us that after the first six hours of needle torture the victim begins to lose his vitality. He surrenders all appetite and no longer can gather the strength to either protest or scream. It is at this point of exhaustion that the victim begins to discern a pattern in his pain and for the first time becomes capable of reading.

At just about the sixth hour enlightenment comes to the most dull-witted. It begins around the eyes. From there it radiates. A moment that might tempt one to get under the Harrow oneself. Nothing more happens than that the man begins to understand the inscription, he purses the mouth as if he were listening. You have seen how difficult it is to decipher the script with one's eyes; but

¹⁸ Franz Kafka, *The penal colony* (New York: Schocken, 1961), 179.

our man deciphers it with his wounds. To be sure, that is a hard task; he needs six hours to accomplish it. By that time the Harrow has pierced him quite through and casts him in the pit.¹⁹

During the first few hours the initiate grasps the act of writing as a natural event, as an unceasing stream of hardships and calamities that slowly grind him down. It is only after he has been considerably weakened by the natural cruelties of life that he ceases to be distracted and begins to discern a pattern in his wounds. But this discernment bears no fruit in life and does not truly make him capable of understanding his situation. The movement from ignorance, understood as refusal of the signs, to understanding, understood as yielding to the signs, is overtaken by another movement that transports beyond the reach of any possible yielding or refusing of signs.

The mocking, parodic, and expressionist tone of Kafka's tale nevertheless should not tempt us to overlook its profound insights into the tragic and comic nature of our relationship to reading and writing and, hence, to meaning. Reading is a quintessential transcendent process in which a scratched or marked surface yields to our discernment to become a portal through which we enter into another life. Moreover, we cannot read until we are marked; the signs will not yield to us, will not grant us access to another until we have broken the chains that bind us too closely to a merely natural, vital, and self-absorbed life. Only a creature who knows himself to be mortal can be a passionate and truly observant reader.

Such an understanding of signs and wounds informs every aspect of the ancient rites of passage. What from the outside looks like cruelty or sadism is meant to break the cocoon of what is natural, self-absorbed, and virginal and that as such obstructs our access to a fully human life. Only a life emerging from the broken cocoon of nature can desire and be capable of fully embracing culture.

These insights were already lost by the time the first Roman *magister ludi* began to box the ears of his hapless students in an effort to teach them reading. But whereas the Roman schoolmaster with his whip staggered awkwardly and blindly in the vicinity of an ancient truth, the glib modern educator is lost beyond repair in his haughty conviction that writing is but a means to conveying information, and reading but a manner of getting hold of it.

A writing that has lost its link to wounding, a reading that is out of touch with death, or an education that knows nothing of the rite of

¹⁹ Ibid., 204. My emphasis.

passage, all are hopelessly lost in a workaday world of progress and information, in which it is not possible to achieve one's full humanity.

THE PRIVATE HOMESTEAD AND THE PUBLIC REALM OF THE CITY

The realm of progress steadily dissolves the differences between the homestead and the school, between the public and the private, the divine and the secular. The rite of passage, however, is in essence always an exploration of viscerally experienced, vital differences and a humanizing struggle with the mysteries of life and death. The rite of passage locks the initiate into a confrontation with those irreconcilable differences that are the very sources of our love life and the mainstay of our humanity.

We may think of Oedipus's journey from Delphi to Thebes as a rite of passage that was transformed into an upward, onward road of progress on the crossroad where he slew his father and at the point where he gave his ready, clever answers to the Sphinx. If we approach education as a rite of passage traveled by the child as he makes his way from the private family dwelling to the public space of the school, we come to understand his task as one of separation and differentiation. His journey no longer can be understood here as merely a displacement in geometric space from one point to another but needs to be grasped as an existential crisis poised between two very different ways of being in the world.

From the perspective of the rite of passage, the private family dwelling and the public school each organize life in very different ways. We are not thinking here merely in terms of such superficial differences as those in furniture or in architectural arrangements but rather of such truly pervasive differences as those in the styles of conversations, in the tone of voice, the sentence structure, the manner of walking, sitting, and standing and in the characteristic ways of feeling and thinking.

The way leading from home to school, and from the school back to the home, presents the child not so much with a technical and informational as with a truly existential task. This path simultaneously links two very different places of inhabitation and two very different invocations of the child's being.

Within this understanding, education makes its appearance as an elaborate rite of passage or transition that forges a path leading from a purely familial, *private* existence, to the inhabitation of a *public* sphere of life. Under these terms, an educated person would be someone who had mastered the transition from a family-oriented life to one of public life and who, as a consequence, would be competent and at ease in both realms.

Such an educated person would not need to hide from public life in the family sphere or from family life within the public sphere and would therefore be capable, in the famous words of Freud, of both "lieben und arbeiten," of loving and of working.

The most important structuring characteristic of the home environment is that of the circle. We speak of the family "circle" and of a "circle" of friends. At home we sit "around" the table, the fireplace, or the television set. At school, however, the child is taught to stand "in line" and to sit "in a row." At first glance, such differences hardly seem significant, yet we shall see how they can instruct us concerning the essential character of public and private life.

The round world of the homestead, the family, and the clan is ordered by the cycles of the day and of the year; it moves within the circle of a rising and falling sun and responds to the recurrent pattern of the seasons with a recurrent pattern of its own: plowing, seeding, and harvesting. Human existence itself is understood here in terms of seasons, of the vigor and beauty of youthful spring, of the busy and productive summer, of the reflective years of autumn and the slow withdrawal of wintery old age, followed by the spring of a new generation. All life is marked here by the round sweep of daily, seasonal, and generational time as it moves around the semicircle of the heavens and the round dial of the clock. Daily life in this private and domestic world is governed by a cyclical pattern of growing, of waning and then of waxing again; of slowly appearing and disappearing and then of reappearing again. It is a world of meeting and of meeting again, of doing something and of doing it over and over again. Work assumes here the form of "looking after" someone or something, of "keeping an eye" on it, and of giving "round-the-clock" care. The fundamental pattern of doing chores around the house is one of going around in circles and of "making the daily rounds."

We might locate the hypothetical birth of this private round world of the homestead somewhere between the eighth and the sixth millennium. This was the time when the first hunters and gatherers of Southwest Asia began to renounce a mobile mesolithic life of seasonal wanderings centered on hunting and gathering food and embarked on the new adventure of a neolithic existence that revolved around the production of crops and livestock.²⁰

This momentous shift from a nomadic life of hunters and gatherers to the settled life of food producers brought our neolithic ancestors into a radically different existential relationship with their world. The old lore of

²⁰ Jacques Dupuis, *Au nom du père; Une histoire de la paternité* (Paris: Le Rocher, 1987), 54.

hunting, trapping, and fishing had to give way to a new knowledge about the domestication and breeding of animals and the cultivation of plant crops. This taming of crops and animals formed but a part of the larger pattern of the domestication of humankind itself. In this process, it appears as if the large circular and seasonal paths traveled each year by nomadic hunters and gatherers were scaled down to fit a new pattern of a daily "making the rounds," of chores of farm and homestead.

This same circular pattern thus came to inform all aspects of life on the homesteads. It not only affected the pattern of doing household chores but it also gave rise to a new domestic attitude of gentle and circumspective vigilance, which transformed the neolithic homestead into a true refuge for the very young, the sick, and the old. This new cultural attitude of circumspection, of "looking after" and "looking out for," which made possible the cultivation of crops and the raising of livestock, also created a first truly human site where the sick could be nursed, the hungry fed, and the weary restored to new vigor. For the first time the home became a human haven and a true refuge in the midst of an untamed nature.

This neolithic change from an itinerant life of perpetual searching for fair weather and natural bounty to a settled life throughout the seasons brought in its train many other profound cultural and psychological transformations. Whereas in an itinerant culture one might associate human and divine existence with breath and wind, in a settled culture one's imagination might rather turn to images of field and garden and to the mysteries of fertility and procreation. And whereas the imagination in migratory cultures would find inspiration in the sight of swift-footed and winged creatures, in a settled culture the imagination would be captivated by the sight of tall and sturdy trees, by waving fields of grain and the silvery flow of water.

Moreover, a settled culture no longer thinks about the human body exclusively in terms of animal strength and cunning, of qualities associated with the hunt, conquest and evasion. The human body now evokes also the image of a tree withstanding storms and the house resisting and thwarting the forces of nature. The body now appears as something *subjected* to external circumstances that it can no longer flee but must withstand, outwit, or confront. This subjection, in turn, subjectivizes the human body and divides it into an agile, protean inner core and a resisting, persisting outer shell: The body becomes a complex of house and inhabitant, of body and soul.

Moreover, this bodily solidarity with what persists and resists comes to include a particular landscape and locale and lays the foundation

for the diverse forms of loyalty that still mark our life and among which we may count not only the love of native habitat and country but also committed love and friendship and such human virtues as patience, persistence, and endurance in the face of adverse circumstances.

The first identification with a delimited place, this first exposed "standing of one's ground," constitutes a sacrificial self-limitation that forms the basis for all subsequent forms of human subjectivity. Such a subjectivized existence necessarily assumes a particular shape and belongs to a particular time and place. Human existence becomes here truly fateful; it shares a fate not only with neighbors but with a particular surrounding, with the waxing and waning of a creek, with the sprouting, turning, and falling of leaves, with the rhythms of sun and moon as they affect a particular region. It is with the beginning of settled existence, with the first fateful "taking of a stand" that it can be said that the bell that tolls for season, bird, and tree now tolls also for you and me.

This new relationship between the human being and the particular site where it takes a stand provides the paradigm for our understanding of the soul's relations to the mortal body. This site where the settler takes a stand and that becomes the ground of the settler's existence constitutes also a first comprehension of the human body; it is the place where, for the first time, we discover our body as our very own. The human body is a metaphor that names our carnal self as the earthly site to which we are committed and that, in turn, serves us as support. The human body becomes, subsequent to neolithic settlements, the circumscribed place and time where the mobile soul has taken its stand.

We may think of the subsequent theories of idealism and materialism as different ways of understanding these first settlements. The idealist approaches settlement as a form of imprisonment and remains full of nostalgia for what is thought of as an earlier carefree roaming. The materialist has lost all memory of tribal wandering and misunderstands "taking a stand" as a natural occurrence.

ON THE BIRTH OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE

This early world of the homestead is as yet not truly a private one that stands in a relationship of opposition to a public world. It is at first but an island of settled familial and tribal life that stands in a certain relationship of opposition to more primitive forms of existence such as that devoted exclusively to hunting and gathering.

We may think of the birth of *the public realm* as that extraordinary moment in human prehistory when people belonging to different kinship

groups but inhabiting a common area moved beyond the boundaries of their private lives circumscribed by family and clan in order to create a new cultural formation in which each person would stand *aligned with others* under the leadership of a king. Public space always constitutes a variation on a basic cultural pattern that places people in orderly *successive rows* from where they await word from a commander.

We may think of the birth of this prototypical public space as having taken place in the valley between the Euphrates and the Tigris at some time during the third millennium. In particular, we might think of the land of Sumer, adjacent to the Persian Gulf, where an energetic and intelligent people began to tame the mighty Euphrates and Tigris in an effort to transform the adjacent marshland and the drier higher grounds into productive agricultural fields.

We might think of the emergence of a new public order as intimately related to the nature of that particular project. That project required that a number of canals be dug in order to drain the water from the marshland and to guide it toward the distant drier fields. Such extensive reclamation and irrigation works as were accomplished in the land of Sumer would have required organization and labor power beyond the means of any single clan or kinship group. Those who first envisioned such labors would also have had to grasp the possibility of a new social order within which such works could be accomplished. This new social order, based on the principle of the row, would form the foundation of all subsequent forms of public space.

This new social order came about when the eligible members of the various kinship groups learned for the first time to stand in line with others. Such standing in line entailed a collective sacrifice by which all the participants surrendered, for the time being, their own unique positions within their respective kinship groups and accepted in its stead a place within the public realm where they would be equal with all those who shared their rank. A distinctly public place was thus made possible by the voluntary or coerced sacrifice entailed by the exchange of a unique and assured position within the circular familial realm for a position of equality, of "one among many" within a lineup of rows. This dramatic transformation of a barbarian tribesmember into a public citizen entailed a change from a unitary, single identity exclusively centered in clan and homestead to a dual identity, which now included a position within the linear ranks of public life.

This sacrifice and this transformation constitutes the essence of a new rite of passage in which the barbarian tribesmember distances himself from the comfortable enclave of the clan in order to make his way to a

public square where he is placed in a row, stripped of his identity, and clothed in the new social nakedness of equality and of being interchangeable with others.

This temporary sacrifice of a personal and tribal identity constitutes a metaphoric death, and the new identity gained by joining the public, supratribal ranks can be understood as a resurrection. This personal and social metamorphosis, this death and rebirth within life, made possible a powerful new human organization capable of taming rivers, building cities, and, alas, of turning tribal clashes into the wholesale slaughter of national wars. This new public social organization based on the principle of the row would, after thousands of years of cultural transformation, give rise in Greece to a novel democratic form of self-government that forms the basis of our own.

ROWS, RULES, AND RANK IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ORDER

Perhaps the very first thing a child notices on first entering a classroom is the orderly arrangements in rows of the chairs or benches and the manner in which these face the blackboard and the teacher. This characteristic arrangement seems to have been a constant aspect of educational practices, and we find evidence of it as far back as history can provide us with evidence of schools and schoolrooms. Some recent archaeological explorations in the Mesopotamian Valley west of Nippur have uncovered a classroom lined with rows of benches made of baked brick and capable of seating one, two, or four pupils.²¹

We might ask ourselves why this particularly rectilinear character of the classroom has persisted throughout more than four millennia of educational history. In Aristophanis' "The Clouds" there is specific mention of this peculiar linear structure operative in the educational sphere. It occurs in the famous dialogue between Right Logic and Wrong Logic in which they quarrel about the virtues of an old-fashioned (*dikaios*) education that emphasized abiding by the law. Right Logic recalls with relish how in the "good old days" young students "had marched to school in rows, while discipline and absolute silence prevailed. The students stood in rows [*eutaktoos*], rigidly at attention, while the master rehearsed them by rote, over and over."²² This humorous reference to discipline and "good order" evokes the metaphor of the row and the lineup as

²¹ Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 236.

²² Aristophanes, *The clouds* (Chicago: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1982), 936-969.

constitutive of the public realm. The ancient Greek verb for behaving well and being orderly was *eutaktoō*, and *discipline* would be translated as *eutaxia*. Both these expressions refer to the basic metaphor *taxis*, or row, order, arrangement. Moreover, it is certainly revealing that this same noun also was commonly applied to a body of soldiers and a division of the Greek army.

We see this same metaphor of the row reappear in the international vocabularies of biology and linguistics in such words as *taxo-nomy* (arrangement in rows according to set rules) and *syn-tax* (the proper lineup of words and of sentences). The Greek *syntaxis* means literally a putting together in a row or arrangement, but it also refers specifically to a contingent of soldiers.²³

If we move from the sphere of influence of the Greek language to that of Latin, we encounter the same fundamental Western metaphor that associates order in the public sphere with a particular lineup of people in successive rows. The Latin *ordo* referred first of all to a seating arrangement in rows such as we find in public buildings of all description from the theater, the arena, and the courthouse to the schoolroom. A child's first experience with "being lined up" can thus properly be understood as a first introduction to a public sphere defined by a public order. It is for this reason that we came to regard the child's first step across the threshold of a public space in the light of a rite of passage.

As we have seen, such a rite of passage would subdivide this first step into a leave-taking from the familial sphere followed by a dangerous passage of transformation through a liminal no-man's-land and ending in a rite of incorporation into the new world of public assembly. Within the context of such a rite it makes sense to think of this difficult psychological passage as a form of *ordination* whereby an inchoate group of children, each belonging to their private family groups, are lined up in rows and *ord-ained* into a public domain.²⁴

One of the profoundest of Western metaphors for transforming a wilderness into an inhabitable place is that of creating or bringing order. Besides referring to a seating arrangement in rows, the Latin *ordo* can also be translated into English as "a straight row," "a regular series," "order," "class," or "rank."²⁵ The founding metaphor *ordo* appears in the verb *ordior*, which can be read as "to lay the warp," "to begin a web."²⁶

²³ HG Liddell and R Scott, *Greek English lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), see *taxis*.

²⁴ Compare the Latin *ordinatio*, "a setting in order," "a placing in rank," an "a-(r)-range-ment" (Simpson, *Cassell's new Latin dictionary*, see under *ordinatio*).

²⁵ Simpson, *Cassell's new Latin dictionary*, see under *ordo*.

²⁶ Klein, *Comprehensive etymological dictionary of the English language*, see *order*.

All such words as *order*, *ordering*, *prim-ordial*, and *ordi-nary* can be understood in reference to this laying of the warp in which the weaver aligns the threads parallel to each other in preparation for the act of weaving proper in which the parallel threads are crossed by the threads of the woof.

Within the field of force of this metaphor, the expression "to order a space" would mean to gather the scattered objects found in an uninhabited space and to place these in rows at the disposal of those about to inhabit the place. Such gathering or ordering would transform mere scattered matter into an available resource; it would thereby open up a cluttered, uninhabitable terrain and make it ready for true inhabitation.

The act of bringing order into a place would metaphorically repeat the act of laying the warp, understood here not so much as a literal laying the basis for a weaving project but as a metaphorical laying the basis for in-habitation. The preliminary act of ordering a place would mean to make that place ready to be inhabited in the same way that *ordiri*, understood as "laying the warp," would mean "to make the warp ready for weaving."

Approached in this way, the fundamental metaphor of ordering refers to *an essential and preparatory step* that makes possible the execution of a project or, in the most general sense, that opens a place to inhabitation. Ordering opens for us a world; it brings within our reach, it makes available for our use; it lays out those materials, instruments, forces, that had remained hidden within a disordered, unworkable, or uninhabitable place.

We find this fundamental metaphor repeated in a number of common everyday expressions. To order the tool shed or to bring one's papers in order means in actual practice to line up the various items, the tools or the papers, so that these can again be made to respond to our plans and initiatives. Such acts of ordering make again available to us something that was lost in disorder.

If we apply this metaphor of the parallel threads of the woof to the rowlike arrangement of the Western public realm in general, and to the schoolroom in particular, we come to understand the public realm as essentially a place of social reorganization where the isolated members of various distinct family groups are first gathered and then lined up in parallel rows and made ready for a new form of social action that bears a metaphorical relationship to weaving. In this manner a kind of giant human instrument is created that then awaits the initiative of a new type of artist or craftsperson capable of setting it in productive motion.

We might think here of a military formation and of the aligned troops awaiting orders from their commander. But we may also think of a similar lineup of workers awaiting their instructions to perform public works, or of

rows of children in their classrooms looking for guidance from their teacher.

This public arrangement can thus be seen to consist essentially of two complementary parts, that of an ordered body of people and that of a leader or commander. This dual arrangement is reflected in the dual meaning of the verb *to order*, which from the perspective of the formation of the group means to arrange, to make ready for use or in-habitation, and which from the perspective of the new artist or craftsman means to command, direct, instruct.

If we apply this model to a contemporary musical performance, we notice first that the seats in the concert hall conform to a characteristic public realm pattern. An audience comes here to attend an authoritative interpretation of a great public work and to be "played upon" by the musicians. The choir or the orchestra on the stage shows a similar configuration for the purpose of transforming the assembled musicians, their instruments, their varied skills and talents into one giant public instrument that awaits the initiative of the conductor, who, by means of his lively gestures, "orders" the musical performance into a characteristic and revealing pattern.

Within this context we may think of the classroom as a public site where the younger members of the several families living in homesteads scattered over the country site are brought together to be "lined up" and to be "con-formed" to a public space. We find such a conception of the ancient schoolroom confirmed in the following description of a Roman schoolmaster as he faced his young charges:

Conspicuous in the room sat the master in his high-backed chair (cathedra) which the Greeks called his throne, placed as it was, on a dais (pulpitum). Beneath his feet was a footstool. Clad in a Greek mantle or Roman toga, he had a cylindrical book-box, containing his papyrus rolls, beside him. Equipped with the menacing ferule as his "sceptre," he was the monarch of all he surveyed.²⁷

This image stresses the authoritarian aspect of an education understood essentially as a painful subjection to a public configuration. This subjection is painful for two reasons: It means entrance into a difficult new world governed by unfamiliar rules and regulations and it means exodus from the trusted world of the family and the clan. We therefore must understand the word *e-ductio* itself to refer within this context to two interrelated but separate actions: It refers to the child as being led (*ductus*)

²⁷ Bonner, *Education in ancient Rome*, 126.

out from (*ex*, *e*) the realm of the family; but it also refers to the child as being led (*ductus*) toward (*ad*) the public realm.

It should be clear that the general pattern of public space can be elaborated in both an authoritarian and a democratic direction. It is possible to stress the differences between the commander or leader and the rank-and-file citizens in an authoritarian direction. It is also possible to rotate the role of commander among the rank-and-file members as the Greeks learned to do in their public assemblies.

THE CIRCULAR DOMESTIC AND THE LINEAR PUBLIC REALM

To summarize our understanding of education as a rite of transition between two realms and two modes of being, we need to revisit briefly each realm in turn and determine the principal mode of its functioning. We have described the private sphere as a realm of domestication and as a first environment truly adapted to human needs. This circular world draws an enviroing world of plants and animals and raw materials toward its center, all the while adapting and transforming these to serve human needs. This world is formed in such a way that whatever might appear in need of maintenance or support at the periphery, whatever might look frail or ailing, is drawn toward the center of its attention.

Within the realm of the homestead, family members concentrate their attention on a leaking roof, on sagging supports, a crying baby, sick animals, a crop attacked by pests, a harvest threatened by rain, or on a garden needing watering. A child experiences this world as one in which problems, needs, questions, injuries draw him inward toward the warm center of the *domus*, while health, independence, desire for challenge and adventure irresistibly draw him outward toward the periphery.

An entirely different dynamic pertains in the public realm, where the weak, the sick, the injured, the immature, or the very old are barred from occupying the center of attention. If they are tolerated at all in the public realm, they are relegated to the periphery or, more likely, sent back to the familial realm where they can be properly cared for. The public realm lavishes, under the best of circumstances, its love and attention on those most capable of aligning themselves with a public purpose, and it bans all those who, for one reason or another, cannot take up their places within ranks.

To be immature or ill or in great pain puts one at variance with a public order and a public purpose, because to be suffering means all too often to have no other purpose than oneself. Part of the difficulty inherent in the transition from the familial to the public realm is in accepting the

structural integrity of each and of not confusing the one with the other.

The path leading from the home to the classroom connects two incommensurate realms; the nature of that path therefore cannot be a literal, substantial, technologically perfectible bridge, and the nature of progress on that road cannot be one of literal progress. That path resembles most closely an impasse or aporia, and it evokes the kind of passing that links life to death.

The fundamental problem of education in a preliterate society is to confront the growing child with the mysteries of birth and death and to mark her with that knowledge in the form of healed wounds. The fundamental problem in a literate society is that of confronting the growing child with the mysteries of birth and death and to provide her with the means to mark her world with a proliferation of inscriptions that both hide and proclaim her insights in that mystery.

On a more mundane level, education leads the child to explore the duality of the familial and the public world, to discover the possibilities inherent in each realm, and to reject a complete identification with either the home or the public forum. The most favorable result of the process of education would be a child who understands the public realm as necessarily complementary to the domestic realm in the same sense that the sacred forms a complementary counterpresence to the world of the profane or that a masculine mode of existence forms a necessary complement to a feminine one. Behind all these complementary dualities the child would come to discern those that link human life to death.

We should therefore not misunderstand the public realm as constituting by itself some form of progress over the domestic realm. It is only on the basis of a dual identification with the public and the private realm, and as a consequence of a dual commitment, that the interdependent spheres of life can be maintained and passed on from generation to generation.

We can only speculate about the precise circumstances that made it possible for a public realm to emerge out of a collectivity of households and clans. We should note, however, that a public realm can be made to emerge out of a private one by means of a simple reversal of the relevant terms.

The familial and private realm emerged in human history when the first neolithic households began collectively to draw a surrounding nature within the circular sphere of their influence. The enduring dynamism of the familial realm consists in the fact that the raw materials of nature can be drawn within its orbit and then further drawn inward by shaping, guiding, caring hands that fit these materials to the contours of domestic life.

The evolution of the public realm came about through an inversion of the terms operative in the private realm. Within that latter realm the members of the household functioned as true subjects, lavishing their care on the various objects. Within the public sphere there was at first but one true subject, who as king or commander shaped the unformed mass of humanity before him into rows and columns. The former subjects of the familial realm found themselves thus reduced to the level of mere objects at the disposal of a king. From the very beginning, entering into the public sphere required the subordination of private concerns and demanded the complete submission to a common purpose.

It gives us pause to think that this new form of human life could have come into being only at the price of a great self-renunciation and self-denial. We gain access to the public realm only by making the sacrifice of standing by others as equals within our ranks while submitting to a law that recognizes no particular faces and that makes no exception for the sake of our name. This harsh law governing the public realm opens for us a path to our full humanization, but at the price of our tolerating a loss of identity and submitting to an effacement that foretells of death.

The path leading from the homestead to the public realm leads past a threshold that divides us and then joins us as we pass. And in this passing we lose what is virginal and ignorant of division and death and we gain access to the metaphoric. A metaphoric path, traversing the distance between incommensurates, forces upon us the realization of the poet and the translator, who know that the greatest treasure to be carried over from one side of the divide to the other is ultimately nothing more literal or substantial, or less essential, or more glorious, than what Edmond Rostand once described so profoundly as "panache." Within the vocabularies of Plato and Freud we would speak here of Eros.

NOTE

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