

The Intertwining Wildness Of Flesh-Child Becoming

by Paul Nonnekes *

Let us explore two central facts of the child's experience: first, that it has a *body* and second, that it exists on the *earth*. Let us do so with the help of a third term, called the *flesh*, which can mediate between these two experiences. Let us further explore the nature of the interaction between earth, body and flesh by way of the concept of *intertwining* calling attention to a constant interpresencing of elements, and also by way of the concept of *wildness* calling attention to an absence of artificially imposed boundaries.

The Problem of Development

The child becomes in an anti-development because its becoming is *of* the flesh.¹ Development is a stagist drama worked out within the illusions of civilized unremembering, a severe trope of forgetfulness born out of the fear of death and absence, a fear of mortality. In beginning a journey of flesh envelopment, the child has no need for the phallogocentric sky-gods of society, that vast simulation of reproductions of reproductions which synchronically slides from reified signifier to reified signifier only to fold back on itself in an eternal recurrence of the same, a movement that generates the domination of Symbolic Law.² No denigration of its fleshly existence compels the child to seek completion within the prison-house of civilized pedagogy. Anti-pedagogy pervades the child's being, for pedagogy is a poison of anti-flesh in its rise above the flesh into the ordered heaven of the Symbolic Law, the always ever structuring.

The child laughs in remembrance of the phallogocentric rise of the Symbolic Law wrapped in the loins of the ever so boring monologue and fixity of forgetfulness. With an imageless hearty bellow, the child chases away the bad dream of fixed space-time co-ordinates, the up-down, rise-fall, vertical-horizontal quag-mire of disciplined ego adaptation. These co-ordinates are not stabilizing concepts, productive of knowing, but fetishized horrors of order, a reified

hardening of perception into the staticized mannequins of culture.

The child dreams its own dreams and not the father's (the fearful, punitive super-ego) within the *wildness* of becoming, not wildness as chaos, but a wildness generating stability through diversity, complexity and the absence of fixed, completing limits, in this way circumventing the dictates of power/order. It is fully body-flesh, body-earth, flesh-earth, earth-body-flesh, as a movement, not in linear time and homogenous space, but within the interstices of the wild itself, an ecstatic dance of forms that lies both within and beyond language.

These forms are not organs. The wild flesh-child is anti-organ. Organs are an illusory trope of medicalized practice designed to inflict a disciplined pain on the wild flesh of the child. Opposed to all organicity, the ecstatic forms of the flesh-body of the child reach out as innumerable invisible threads to the flesh of the world, as auras of sensibility, ingathering and outgathering in a pulsion of growth that is neither an inside nor an outside, but an *intertwining*.³ The intertwining flesh is the to and fro space of transition, the creative realm of paradox.

Thought of as stability and completion by its own praisers, civilization instead constitutes a burden of image-structure on the wild flesh-child. With a pompous pretence, civilization seeks to impose a divisory schema on the flesh, a severe either/or: either you submit to order in the form of civilized pedagogy or you will be left in a destructive, unproductive chaos of perverse, instinctual passions. Here, the Hobbesian formulation of the problem of order⁴ has made thinkable state-making as a construction of acceptable boundaries, boundaries not just geographical, but boundaries of the flesh itself, where the subject as citizen becomes the effect of a fateful ordering, a law and order-bound processional constitutive of what our omnipresent social therapists like to call ego-strength.

* Paul Nonnekes is a PhD Candidate in the Sociology Department at York University. He is presently nearing completion of a dissertation on children's play. His interests include the many dimensions of the child's experience of body and earth especially as they concern the socially and politically charged issues of family, gender and sexuality.

The wild flesh-child, as a being with no abstractly simulated boundaries, is rendered a pathology by this power/order processional of state-making. We observe an ascension or a falling upward into a heaven-bound hegemonic space. This in turn generates a fear of the ever-free, ever-creative rising descent of spirit into the gay and festive carnival of dancing, devilish flesh. Within this movement, our liberal state-makers wear the fateful masks of pedagogues and therapists, moralizing over the anti-social destructiveness of the flesh.

The Figuration of Meaning

The new-born flesh-child is a fully *graced* being. As we approach this child what is required of us is a respect not unlike a divine reverence, for we encounter here in a most fundamental and primordial way the mystery of Being, a mystery which does not call out from us the mastery of explanation but a measure of dignity in our understanding. With its first breath, a *profane* journey has begun for the flesh-child, a journey in which an individualized human world arises in growth from within the intertwining, interpresencing of the flesh as home, ground, earth, a distinctively concentrated creative moment of the flesh in its quest for expression in the wild and free variety of individuality.

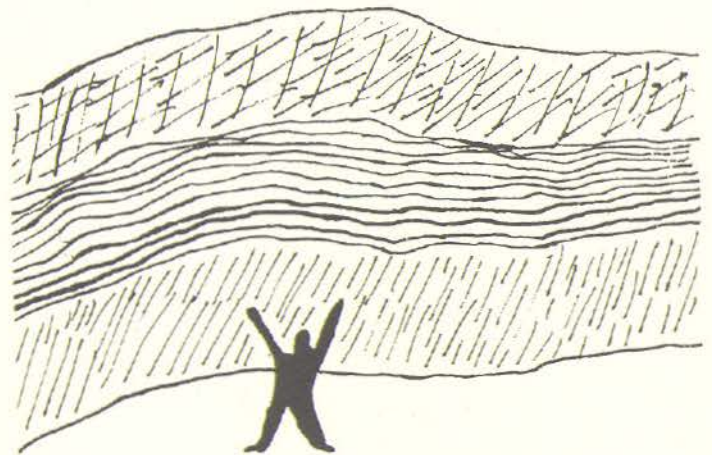
The child is the flesh; the flesh is the child. The child loves the flesh; the flesh loves the child. The child abides in the flesh as a *thankful* being. Its project of becoming is a *holy* project. As Rudolf Steiner reminds us: "The child is given up to its environment and lives in the external world in reverence and prayerful devotion. . . the blood circulation, breathing and nourishment process are praying to the environment."⁵

In being *of* the flesh, the child participates in an original figuration of phenomenon. As Owen Barfield informs us, there is "an awareness of an extra-sensory link between the percipient and the representations."⁶ Barfield goes on to say that with respect to this ongoing figuration, "there stands behind the phenomenon and on the other side of them from me a represented which is of the same nature as me."⁷ This means that the flesh-child in the very act of being brings into play the being of the world, figurates it in an ordinary sense, as its sensibilities are extended out as innumerable invisible threads to the world surrounding it and joins them, couples them, in a common destiny.

Thinking about the child is skewed when, as in Western discourse, this being is posited as having to develop an ego, an alien, disciplinary, structuring symbolic that must come to inhabit a chaotic realm of body as object, earth as object.

The body as object is an *idol*, and this kind of thinking is *idolatry*. It leads to the felt experience, so common in the West, of a non-participated world, a blinding habitus of forgetfulness of our original participation in and figuration of the world. As civilized adults armed with this unremembering idolatry, we turn to the child's experience as if the child too were surrounded by a world of unparticipated idols, a world of objects not of the same nature as that which we feel is substantially us: humanity conceived as an ordered, structured symbolic. In this civilized processional, grace comes only through an ascended structure; the fleshly body of the child is always outside of grace, perverse and ugly, and in need of ego-control.

It would be a mistake, though, to think of this ego-control-standing over against a world of idols--as constitutive of individuality. The formation of the ego in the Western oeuvre is not individuation, but is instead a power construct isolated by a social code which has granted itself the privilege of naming that which is "freedom" and that which is "autonomy." The child can come to graduate into the structuring, command-work of signifiers only through an early submission to the ordering and disciplining powers of pedagogy and therapy, the "free" and "autonomous" ego constituting the end-point of a stagist drama of development prescribed and continually governed by teachers, doctors, social workers and therapists.



The civilized social code of power seeks to institute a fall upwards in the flesh-child, a tumbling ascent out of the interpresencing of the flesh. Its goal is to push the flesh-child into a spirit of forgetfulness of its originary intertwinement within the flesh as true home, a home surrounded by the gay and festive laughter of interpenetration. The flesh as home is the ceaseless and perpetual between which we can know. The fixed and ordered social code of power is an illusion, a dreadful nightmare which we need to awaken from through a concentration of imagination.

The Profane Flesh

The child's becoming is a *profane* experience, yet one that is at the same time fully graced. For the child to unbecome in the pain of pedagogy is *sacred*. This mix-up of sacred and profane allows us to account for the potential of the flesh-child to move from original participation in either an individuating rising descent within the flesh itself or a falling ascent into civilized unremembering. For Western pedagogy, the founding myth for the child's growth is that of a fall upwards into a differentiated psyche or non-participating consciousness. It is a myth that seeks to structure the child's experience into a divisory either/or: either we stake our humanity on the heavenly ascent of order or else, so the story goes, there will be nothing but the chaos of animal, earth and flesh, a dis-order unfit for human habitation.

The profane mythopoeic of Western discourse begins with the Greeks in Plato's Ideal realm and Aristotle's form/matter distinction and continues in orthodox, exoteric, Christian practice (although there is a more liberating esoteric Christian counter-tradition that subverts this development). This mythopoeic represents a massive simulation of order and fixity. By removing itself from interpresenced participation in the flesh, civilized pedagogy can only speak of the life of the child from the far-away heavenly Hades of its self-fetishized prison-house of order. Speaking in a monotone voice of monologue, it can only see the being of the child according to a fearful tunnel-vision. There is a fear of the becoming of life in the child engendered by a carnivalesque recital of growth which is a continuous creative force of death and rebirth.

The Open of the Earth

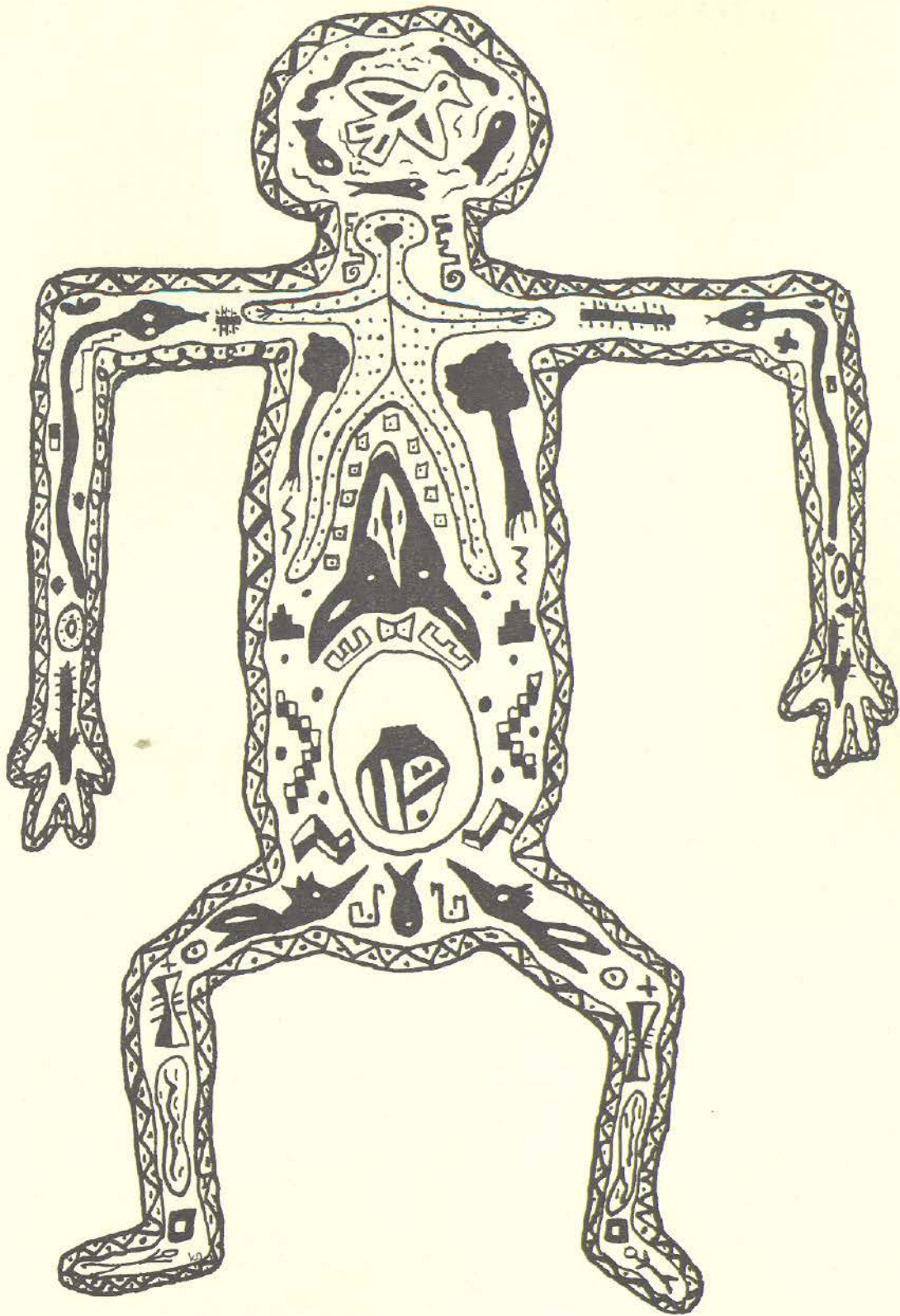
The flesh-child's becoming, as a holy and sacred practice is the craftful building up of a *temple* from

within the *earth*.⁸ This creative work is not a phallogocentric, heaven-bound rise above the earth, its ground, but a formation from within an *Open* in the earthly being of the child itself, a constant descent in earthly reverberation rather than ascent to heavenly heights.⁹ But at the same time, this descent is not a devouring or swallowing up, but always a rising descent, for the temple as a world of meaning is lighted from within the sheltering darkness. Lightness of opening and darkness of sheltering are inseparable as two oscillating moments in a dialogical process of becoming that constitutes the child's world.

Respect must be given to the sheltering moment in the growth of the child as temple, for the earthly being of the child will rebel against any attempt to hold mastery over it through a phallogocentric penetration. As Heidegger tells us: "Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate into it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into destruction."¹⁰ For the wild growth of the child as temple is a dignified process which spurns any claims to a fast-paced time-table of ascent. The templechild's earthly ground is most fundamentally a "self-secluding."¹¹ It allows the beauty of the templework to come to be in the most striking and breathtaking way when thankful homage is paid to its sure and sound pace. Everything in due time for the growth of the child as temple, time not as an ordered, linear clock-work of agentic stages that pyramidically funnel to the top, the ego, but a weaving of a garment in which the complex ingathering of a multitude of strands come together to dance in a carnival of beauty that is a craft-enacted meaning for the child.

The Speech of Earth-Body-Flesh

It is at this point that we realize that it is in the very ingathering movement of the child's creativity that the fleshly texture of the world, which is the always ever in-between of body and earth, comes to gain expression. There is no mind-ego that needs to develop in the child that must then imagistically come to terms with a reality "outside" of it. The child is *of* the flesh. The ingathering individualizing movement of language enacted by the child happens from within the interstices of the flesh as an originary interpresenced intertwining wholeness. Barfield's comments are significant: "Speech did not arise as the attempt of man to imitate, to master or explain 'nature'; for speech and nature come into being along with one another."¹² The roots of language in the child do not descend from a stable social symbolic,





but arise from the flesh of the world striving for expression in the child. As Barfield says, "Roots are the echo of nature herself sounding in man."¹³

There is a unity of sound and meaning at the level of the child's initiatory speech which is an originary figuring that brings into being the play of the world. This has been forgotten by a civilized pedagogy bent on severing language from a fleshly figuring and reifying it into a set of abstract signifiers typographically mechanized into mannicanized characters bound within the ordered processional of book technology. Here, the child is burdened with a capital-ism of letters, a foot-note, end-note, chapter by chapter indexing of expression into a controlling and therefore controllable science-text of power.

The speech of the child is a fully earth-grounded phenomenon that arises from within the texture of the flesh itself. Embedded within the texture of the flesh of the world as a participatory being, the child begins to articulate a sound-symbolism through which the flesh itself gains its expression. In its burgeoning speech the child is participating in the awe-inspiring mystery of the original figurating power of language as Word. We can discover, says Barfield, "in the consonantal element in language vestiges of those forces which brought into being the external structure of nature, including the body of man; and in the original vowel-sounds, the expression of that inner life of feeling and memory which constitutes his soul."¹⁴ It is a grave mistake, then, to portray the child's speech as a Symbolic structuring needed to give order to a world without order. The child's speech is a participation in and reenactment of an originary Word that emanates from the very lining of the flesh and begins to craft a meaningful world for itself.

The sounds that are uttered by the child are sounds that have life and colour and tone. They have shape. "We feel these shapes," says Barfield, "not only as sounds, but also, in a manner, as gestures of the speech organs--and it is not difficult to realize that these gestures were once gestures made with the whole body--once--when the body itself was not detached from the rest of nature after the solid matter of today, when the body itself was spoken

even while it was speaking."¹⁵

The task of the child in crafting an individualized style of being for itself is a task of the imagination. It involves a concentration of imagination where the potential meaning lying dormant in the flesh is ingathered through sound-symbolism--living metaphor--to form a unique and particular style of being that genuinely can be called a Self. This Self crafted by the child is not a substance, as Western metaphysics from the Greeks onward would have it. It is not an ego "adapted" to a world ever always structured in the prison-house of society. The Self of the child is anti-substance, an anti-order of Opening descent, for this Self comes to be only as engendered from within the Eternal Play of Being, always flowing through the cycles of death and rebirth, always becoming in a creative dance of new forms.

The Elemental Language of the Flesh

The woven garment of the flesh that is the world for the child has its stability in variety and complexity. The flesh abhors and rebels against the unitary monoculture that civilized unremembering seeks to impose upon it. It laughs in gargantuan derision at this foolhardy attempt by the sky-gods of culture to wash over the multitudinous profusion of forms of the flesh with the smooth and fixed trajectories of assembly-line productivity. The flesh knows the inherent instability of life based on the fear of diversity, on the unitary tic-tic-tic pumping-out of sameness.

The world of sameness is not the world the flesh-child loves. It provides no stability for the child to grow in, but an artificially simulated and fear induced weakness of fixed and static monocultural structure. The flesh-child loves the world of freedom and creativity, the world of ecosystem diversity, from which comes the Real stability and continuity of life as lived. This is the world of the flesh, the intertwining wildness of becoming.

It is in this spirit that the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty brings us his reflections on the significance of the flesh for human



becoming. Merleau-Ponty's central insight is that human being in-the-world is caught up inextricably with the life of the flesh, that every individual being "is of it."¹⁶ What lines all our beings, he says, is "a continuous tissue of exterior and interior horizons."¹⁷ As we observe the new-born child's initial movements in and through the fleshly texture of the world, we begin to realize that "there must exist some relationship by principle, some kinship." There is an "initiation to and opening upon a tactile world."¹⁸

This kinship is established by the very mode of interaction the child has with the world, an interaction which reveals an inherent *reversibility* in its being. What is this reversibility? As Merleau-Ponty tells it: "Since the same body sees and touches, visible and tangible belong to the same world."¹⁹ There is, in his eyes, "a thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing."²⁰ This thickness of flesh "is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication."²¹

The "thickness of the body" of the child does not stand over against the world, in competition with it, such that it must establish its rights by control and domination, but is, in fact, says Merleau-Ponty, "the sole means I have to go unto the heart of things, by making myself a world and by making them flesh."²² The child's body, then, is quite literally "caught up in the tissue of things."²³

This means that it is impossible for a truly meaningful world to be formed by the child as the project of a developing consciousness that in its interaction with the flesh of the world "surveys it from above." The child needs to "co-exist with them in the same world."²⁴ Conscious individuality only arises for the child from within the kinship of Being such that its budding vision forms from "the surface of a depth, a cross-section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being."²⁵

Human knowing, as a burgeoning relationship of wonder that constitutes the Self of the child in its meaningfulness comes to be from within the body/flesh, knower/known kinship as a mode of *concentration* such that the child's body "concentrates the mystery of its scattered visibility."²⁶ As a knowing

that comes to be through a kinship, we may just as well say, with Merleau-Ponty, that it is "the world that thinks itself" through the growing child. We come to the realization "that each calls for the other."²⁷

There is no distancing or divisory separation for the knowing child, but a concentration of the mystery, for we see that the visibles of the fleshly world,

are about it, they even enter into its enclosure, they are within it, they line its looks and its hands inside and outside. If it touches them and sees them, this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of things as the world is universal flesh.²⁸

The child participates in this universal flesh because its body is *of* it. We need to reverse our common understanding of the relationship between inside and outside for the child. The child's body does not come to enter and penetrate the world from an outside and independent point and the world does not then come to impinge upon the child's body and demand of it some accommodation. It is important for us to avoid the phallogocentric language of penetration. Rather, it is better for us to speak, as Merleau-Ponty does, of an "intertwining of one in the other."

The child begins to grow in meaningful knowledge and wisdom when it realizes itself as a tangible, a visible, and precisely because of this, it is able to, says Merleau-Ponty, "turn back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the tangible, of which it is a part" such that there occurs a Visibility which belongs "neither to the body qua fact nor the world qua fact," for it turns out that "each is only a rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them."²⁹

Due to the indissoluble kinship between knower and known, child and world, the known reverberates back to become knower, knows itself in and through the child's knowing and the child as knower intertwines itself within that which it is knowing becoming always ever a known, inextricably part of the fleshly stuff of life. Merleau-Ponty tells us that "since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees; there is a fundamental narcissism of vision."³⁰

The child is of the earthly world and the earthly world is of the child, forming a vast connective tissue of bonding threads and rays called the flesh. This flesh is not a substance, a *lâ* Western metaphysics, but an "element" as it used to be spoken in pre-Socratic language of earth, air, water and fire. These four elements of the world correspond in a vast series of resemblances to the four elemental humours of the child's bodily being: sanguine, choleric, melancholy and phlegmatic. This has no relation to what in modern psychology has become the "personality." The static personality of modern psychology is a clinical label arising out of a therapeutic intent. The four elemental humours are instead a constantly intertwining process where the child, with a particular crafted style of being, is not only alive but open, extending out and back, outgathering and ingathering, never fixing itself at any particular point, but gayly sliding from one threaded relationship to another.

No development of "cognition" occurs in the flesh-child, no development of a purely "mental" life that seeks to form abstract "ideas" about a world independent from and outside of the ongoing cycles of life. What grows in the child is the ability to gather in a unique style, a unique individuality from within its thankful participation in the kinship of Being. This is a feat which comes through a concentration of the imagination, a "central vision" says Merleau-Ponty, "that joins the scattered visions, a unique touch."³¹ There is:

a bursting forth of the mass of the body toward the things. . . a vibration of my skin. . . a magical relation, this pact between them and me according to

which I lend my body in order that they inscribe upon it and give me their resemblance. . . a constant style of visibility from which I cannot detach myself.³²

This is a long way from the divisory either/or, order/chaos of civilized pedagogy. "The flesh," Merleau-Ponty tells us, "is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself."³³

We may say that as a child comes to form an individualized world for itself from within the kinship and texture of the flesh, as it comes to form a unique crafted style of being, there occurs an Open-ing up of a dimension that can never again be closed. This dimension, says Merleau-Ponty, is the "invisible of this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its own and interior possibility the Being of this being."³⁴ The child then truly grows and becomes through an intensified participation with its whole crafted style in a "natural light that illuminates all flesh."³⁵

The child's style of being is an inner light imagination, an *imatio Christi*, that brings into play the Word become flesh,³⁶ "an operative Word," says



Merleau-Ponty, "whence comes the instituted light."³⁷ In the kinship between between inner light and natural light, through an imatio Christi within fulfilling the Word that was always ever there from the beginning, there is, Merleau-Ponty tells us, "a reversibility of the speech and what it signifies, the signification is what comes to seal, to close, to gather up the multiplicity of the physical, physiological, linguistic means of elocution, to construct them into one sole act."³⁸

As the child descends within the dark intertwining of the flesh to reside in the light of language-which does not overcome the darkness but co-exists with it-it participates in an originary power of signification, an originary power of naming. In this embodied activity of the child is restored and kept alive the primordial remembrance of "a wild meaning. . . language is everything since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves and the forest."³⁹

Notes

1. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Ed. Claude Lefort, Translated by Alfonzo Lingis. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 131.

2. For an analysis that deals with the complicated problem of phallogocentrism see Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans Alan Sheridan, (New York: Norton, 1977), especially his essay, "The Signification of the Phallus;" also Jane Gallup, *The Daughter's Seduction: Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1982); and, Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988). For insights into the question of simulations see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Barchman, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983). For a discussion of the problem of reification and the return of sameness as they are set within the context of a post-Enlightenment discourse of domination see Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, (New York: Continuum Books, 1982), and also the essays of Walter Benjamin collected in *Illuminations*, edited with an intro. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

3. Merleau-Ponty, p. 131.

4. The Hobbesian formulation of the problem of order states men are naturally egoistic and controlled by a chaos of passions which will lead them to constant warfare as they each pursue their purely individual interests in total disregard for the other. In this situation what is needed is a Sovereign power of discipline and regulation that will hold in check these egoistic and passion-ridden interests.

5. Rudolph Steiner, *Essentials of Education* (London: Rudolph Steiner Press, 1968), pp. 33, 34.

6. Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 34.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

8. Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Trans. Alfred Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 41.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

12. Barfield, p. 123.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

16. Merleau-Ponty, p. 131.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

36. See the opening to the Gospel of John in the Christian Bible.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

