HUMAN INFANCY AND THE LANGUAGE OF BEGINNINGS.

The Wild Child (F. Truffaut, 1970) & *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (W. Herzog, 1974)

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Habit has not yet done its work. As we start to find our bearings, all of a sudden the landscape vanishes like the façade of a house as we cross the threshold. The façade has yet to achieve dominance as a result of repeated, ultimately habitual exploration. Once we have begun to feel right in a place, the original image can never be reconstituted.

Walter Benjamin, One-way street.[1]

In September 1799, at the end of the French Revolution, a feral child of around twelve years of age was found naked in a southern forest of France. The boy, who had lived in the woods since the age of four or five, was believed to have been abandoned by his parents due to an irremediable malady of the brain. Unable to articulate a word or walk on two legs, the Savage of Aveyron, as he was known back then, was examined by medical experts and diagnosed as mute and suffering from mental idiocy. Doctor Philippe Pinel, the forerunner of French psychiatry and member of the *Société des observateurs de l'homme*, speculated that his illness, once examined in Paris, was innate and incurable (the reason why, he presumed, the boy was thrown to the forest in exile) so that any attempts at rehabilitation were doomed to failure. Younger members of the group, however, sceptical of Pinel's medical hypothesis, suggested instead that a child removed from all human contact since an early stage of life would shed new light on the workings of the human brain and provide relevant insights to unlock an old metaphysical dilemma: 'to determine what would be the degree of intelligence and the nature of the ideas of an adolescent, who, deprived from his childhood of all education, had lived entirely separated from individuals of his own species.'[2] Doctor Jean Marc Itard, the appointed physician at the *Institute National des Jeunes Sourds*, the public hospital in Paris where the boy resided, believed that the answer to this question, to a great degree, consisted in showing the capacity of the boy to understand rational ideas. A minister of state, hoping to secure an important scientific discovery for the burgeoning French Republic, decided to entrust the child to the young doctor Itard. First examined at the hospital and later on at his private house in the outskirts of Paris, Itard and housekeeper Madame Guérin gave the boy the name of Victor, in response to his ability to pronounce the letter 'o'.

A few years later, on the east side of the Rhine River in Germany, another strange boy of around seventeen years of age was found in the town of Nuremberg holding a letter in his left hand. The document was addressed to the Cavalry Captain of the Fourth Squadron, Sixth

[1] Walter Benjamin, *One-way Street and Other Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).

[2] Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, *The Century Psychology Series: The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, trans. George & Muriel Humphrey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1932), 7.

Schwolische Regiment, dated 1828, unknown destination. It reads as follows:

> I send to you a boy, who might, as he wishes, serve faithfully the King; the boy was left with me, 1812, the 7th of October … I have brought him up like a Christian; and have not, since 1812, let him go [out] from the house… I have already taught him to read and write…and when we ask him what he will become, he says he will be a light horseman as his father was.[3]

In an addendum from the same letter, the identity of the boy is ambiguously described: '[he] is already baptized … his name is Kaspar [but] you have to give him a name yourself.'[4] To uncover Kaspar's solitary past, just as in the case of Victor, naturalists and doctors from Germany tried to categorise his condition among the animal taxonomy to determine whether or not he could be classified under the rubric of the human genus.

The public interest awakened by the lives of Victor and Kaspar has catalysed a sensible and intellectual curiosity through the arts, travelling from the Enlightenment period to our current postmodern times. Adapted many times in the form of novels (Jill Dawson's *Wild Boy*; Jakob Wassermann's *Caspar Hauser or The Inertia of the Heart*); poems (Mary Robinson's *The Savage of Aveyron;* David Constantine's *Caspar Hauser: A Poem in Nine Cantos*); non-fiction books (Harlan Lane's *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*; Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson's *Lost Prince*); opera librettos (Solomon Epstein's *The Wild Boy*; Elizabeth Swados' *Kaspar Hauser*); and theatrical performances (David Holmon's *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*; Peter Handke's *Kaspar*), Victor and Kaspar's stories, along with those of other feral children found in eighteen and nineteenth century Europe,[5] seem to never exhaust the enigma of what it means to be us, the animal who says 'I'. The central question, however, taken up by the intellectual impetus of cinematic thinkers, remains largely the same: Where does the origin of human language reside? Can there be a human subject without the discursive destination of their rational voice?

By examining two New Wave films: Francois Truffaut's *The Wild Child* (1970) and Werner Herzog's *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974), this article explores the role of the child as a model for intensive thinking.[6] It is suggested that the screen characters Victor of Aveyron and Kaspar Hauser demonstrate an intuitive capacity to shatter the perceptual habits of adult subjectivity by experimenting with the rational minds of their respective masters. Similar to how a poet reveals new dimensions of meaning by playing with the functioning of language in the symbolic, I claim that the gestures and movements of the child are capable of interrupting dominant ways of thinking about reality by presenting visions that break with habitual modes of engagement. Such vivid gesture, I conclude, is preserved from a perspective that both filmmakers derive from anthropological findings as much as cinematic innovations.

To address this question—that is to say, to think about a certain infancy of human language through the lenses of the cinema—I look at Truffaut and Herzog's films which interrogate and break with the rational conventions of the Enlightenment European mind. New Wave filmmakers both in France (*La Nouvelle Vague*) and in Germany (*New German Cinema*) represent here an important epistemic rupture with previous modes of thinking about the a priori of perception that, in his work on cinema, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes as the collapse of a Kantian image of *adaequatio*: 'Characters no longer "know" how to react to situations that are beyond them, too awful, or too beautiful, or insoluble.'[7]

Following the basic outline of Itard's memoir *The Wild Boy of Aveyron* (1801)[8] and Hauser's writings found in Feuerbach's *Kaspar Hauser: The Foundling of Nuremberg* (1832), I look at each filmmakers' page to screen adaptation to rethink—that is to say, to think again—the process of language acquisition, by mapping out the journey from the 'wordless animal' that the child represents to the rational speaking subject that we become in adulthood. To respond to the question: how to treat a young person who is living outside of speech? Both films propose, in my view, the possibility to reconsider the bare experience of an early animal language (*languae*) via a mode of expression that is other than rational or discursive. Because Victor (played by the non-professional actor Jean-Pierre Cargol) and Kaspar (played by the street-singer Bruno S.)

[3] Paul Johann Anselm Feuerbach, Kaspar Hauser: *The Foundling of Nuremberg* (Cambridge: Harvard College Library, 1832), 12-13.
[4] Gerd Gedmünden "The Enigma of Hermeneutics: The Case of Kaspar Hauser", *Reading after Foucault: Institutions, Disciplines, and Technologies of the Self in Germany*, 1750-1830, ed. R.S Leventhal (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 128.
[5] An exhaustive list of wild European children can be found in Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1735), Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inegalité parmi les hommes* (1755) and, more recently, in Lucien Malson's *Les enfants sauvages: mythe et réalité* (1981).
[6] The concept of intensity, which I examine under my PhD thesis on *The Intensive-Image: Re-thinking Deleuze´s film-philosophy*, is claimed to be an essential feature triggering forms of conceptual creation and sensation originating from both philosophy and cinema. In this article, intensity points more specifically to the differential character inhabited by Victor of Aveyron and Kaspar Hauser—two screen characters who problematise the classical (a priori) definition of humanity as "being in language" for a more processual understanding of the human agent as "becoming in a language being". A model for intensive thinking, in this sense, represents an image of difference and of the different that responds to the variabilities of our human existence (in its process of becoming), rather than to the fixed, taxonomical definition of our being (in its transcendental form of identity).
[7] Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 59.
[8] Itard's memoir and subsequent report on Victor (1806) are found in the appendix of Lucien Malson's book *Les enfants sauvages: mythe et réalité* (1981) from which Truffaut is said to have reconstructed the story.

are foreigners to these logics of speech, hence no different from other children who remain confined to their self-referential voice, both stories problematise the entry into the symbolic system of signification by posing, as Giorgio Agamben suggests, 'an experiment with language'.[9] As the character of Doctor Itard (Francois Truffaut) and Professor Daumer (Walter Ladengast) observe in each film, it seems that the only way for these adolescents to access the realm of reasoning, and thus humanity, is through the acquisition of the language of men. However, as stressed by Truffaut's Itard, crossing this threshold constitutes Victor's biggest despair: 'Now, ready to renounce the task I had imposed upon myself … I condemned the curiosity of the men who had wrenched him away from his innocent and happy life.' Kaspar also symbolises this lamentable position, a person who remains, as Herzog states, 'without concepts…a yet to be studied kind of human.'[10]

The Undomesticated Mind of the Child: Vividness, Intensity, Animality …

In the nineteenth century, the influence of Immanuel Kant's epistemology was felt everywhere in European philosophy. In the examinations of Victor and Kaspar, this meant that the prerequisite for being recognised as human was their capacity to acquire language; the test of whether the wordless child can turn into a fully thinking agent. 'Being in language' was thus understood as the famous Kantian category of pure reason—what Kant had described as the 'unitary form of consciousness',[11] which brings about an understanding of the environment by way of organising particular impressions into general concepts or categories. In Kant's view, this is a transcendental form of consciousness, that presupposes and thus predetermines our relation to experience by conceiving of reason as an a priori conception. ('A priori' means, precisely, that which precedes, or does not depend on, experience. Kant's transcendental form of consciousness is then equivalent to a universal attribute that is not dependent on sensible encounters.) Without language, the identity of the 'I' would be inevitably disjointed in a chaotic 'rhapsody of perceptions',[12] like Kaspar's intuitively lived life is ('nothing lives in me except my life') or Victor's animal gratifications untouched by the instructions of formal education. So, to transcend sensible experience via language—and thus reasoning—constitutes, in Kant's view, the primary locus of our ontological freedom. Hence Kant's *sapere aude* (dare to think for yourself) as the condition for which both adolescent characters must be 'subjected' to and be trained for on-screen: not actions subordinated to affective exteriors but actions determined by their internal—transcendental—mode of reasoning, made possible through formal education. As Kant notes on his *Lectures on Pedagogy*:

> Savagery is independence from [rational] laws. Through discipline the human being is submitted to the laws of humanity and is first made to feel their constrains … Thus, for example, children are sent to school initially not already with the intention that they should learn something there, but rather that they may grow accustomed to sitting still and observing punctually what they are told, so that in the future they may not put into practice actually and instantly each notion that strikes them.
> Now by nature the human being has such a powerful propensity towards freedom that when he has grown accustomed to it for a while, he will sacrifice everything for it … Therefore, the human being must be accustomed early [on] to subject himself to the percepts of reason.[13]

For Victor and Kaspar, however, such rational percepts are not necessarily linked to Kant's experience of freedom. In fact, the more they adapt to civilisation, the more they seem to suffer. Victor, for example, who represents an entity devoid of discourse, is never able to master that principle of Kantian reasoning—that is, of decoding the world into words. He remains, as Itard's original report observes, somewhere between 'the precarious life [of an] animal [and] the moral superiority [of] man'.[14] Such rigid demarcation between animal and human is nonetheless negotiated by Truffaut's on-screen Itard, who is shown caressing Victor's hair toward the end of the film, telling him: 'You're no longer a savage, even if you're not yet a man…' Something similar occurs to Kaspar, who, trying to retreat from his cultural assimilation, becomes an exotic subject for the film's adult characters. Herzog's epigraph at the beginning of the story anticipates this drama under Kaspar's discursive rupture: 'Don't you hear that screaming all around us, that screaming men call silence?' Neither Victor nor Kaspar are, in short, full participants of the symbolic field. But isn't their failure an altogether different approach to the question of language and its

[9] Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* (London: Verso, 2007), 1.
[10] Jonathan Romney, "The Man Who Fell to Earth (Werner Herzog's The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser)" *Sight and Sound*, 10 (2000), 25.
[11] Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*. (London: Everyman's Library, 1934), 236.
[12] Kant, *Critique*, 236.
[13] Immanuel Kant, "Lectures on Pedagogy", *Anthropology, History, and Education* eds. G. Zoller and R.B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 438.
[14] Itard, *Wild Boy*, 50

relation to 'human nature'? Wouldn't it be appropriate to shift from Kant's a priori conditioning, like his 'being in language', to a more processual understanding of the human agent, such as what Agamben refers to as the 'becoming in a language being'?[15] In what follows, and to keep a sense of the philosophical context in which the two real-life events unfolded, I wish to bring into discussion David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1738) and confront it with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), two references that are imperative for Deleuze's model of transcendental empiricism.

The central question informing Deleuze's reading of Hume in his *Empiricism and Subjectivity* is to determine how the subject is constituted inside '*the given* of experience' without simultaneously being reduced to 'the *impressions* and *associations*' of that experience.[16] Deleuze's connection, in other words, is between the phenomenological multiplicity of the environment with which we all enter and engage, and the singularity of the self which arises from those relations—a self which cannot be entirely deduced from the accidents and material conditions of that experience. Echoing Aristotle, this would be to say, on the one hand, that the whole (self) is more than—and in fact, different from—the sum of its parts and, on the other hand, that Kant's a priori reasoning is overturned by a particular—a *posteriori*—experience which Deleuze identifies as the empirico-transcendental principle. In Deleuze's words:

> *The mind is not subject; it is subjected*. When the subject is constituted in the mind under the effect of principles, the mind apprehends itself as a self, for it has been qualified. But the problem is this: if the subject is constituted only inside the collection of ideas, how can the collection of ideas be apprehended as a self, how can I say 'I', under the influence of those same principles?[17]

Hume provides a response to this difficult question, proposing to think of reason (the mind) as:

> … *nothing but a wonderful and intelligible instinct in our souls*, which carries us along a certain train of ideas, and endows them with particular qualities, according to their particular situations and relations. This instinct, this true, arises from past observations and experience; but can anyone give the ultimate reason, why past experience and observations produces such an effect, any more than why nature alone should produce it? Nature may certainly produce whatever can arise from habit: Nay, habit is nothing but one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from that origin.[18]

For Hume then, the answer to how the subject transcends the given of experience is by way of habit—that is, the customary effects by which we start to arrange our mind into a daily network of associations and ideas. This behavioural pattern is what endows the early human subject with a unitary form of consciousness which, unlike Kant, is not presupposed outside of experience, but is rather immanent to experience. In other words, Hume's claim, similar to Kant's, is that knowledge can never be formed outside of sensible encounters, but unlike Kant, whose conditions for experience are always universal, Hume wants to demonstrate that the mind is rather singular and formed through our habits. Childhood, in this sense, is anything but habituation—anything but the schematisation of their sensible impressions into rational ideas. A similarly undomesticated grasp can be derived from Truffaut's and Herzog's films: neither Victor nor Kaspar can organise their worldviews clearly and coherently, for as long as they are not formed into a unitary ego, as their respective societies want them to be, they will remain in a pre-discursive, animal state. Infancy, in this sense, can either be read as the Freudian oceanic self or the Lacanian *hommelette*—two psychoanalytical forms of 'perceptual rhapsody', to employ Kant's terms. For Hume, quite similarly, it is 'vividness', or what I call elsewhere 'intensity',[19] that signifies the early state of a mind not yet qualified by the ego's habitual associations. These latter terms specify that rather than as preconsciousness, infancy be read as a vital form of the imagination. Vividness, or intensity, is an active state of mind akin to Baudelaire's poetic deliriums and Benjamin's trips with hashish in Marseille—a conscious state in which the ego, yet not the mind, diminishes in front of the hallucinatory powers of the imagination. 'Hashish is capable of persuading nature to set free in us,' says Benjamin in describing his own psychedelic voyages, 'Images and sequences of images, long-buried memories loom up, whole [new] scenes and situations enter [into] the mind'.[20]

So, to summarise: it is only under the effects of 'habit' that the imagination adopts the form of reason and the mind stabilises into a unitary form of consciousness to which we give the name 'ego'. In Deleuze's words:

[15] Agamben, *Infancy*, 15-72.
[16] Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity, An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 105-121.
[17] Deleuze, *Empiricism*, 31.
[18] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 179.
[19] Ongoing PhD thesis. *The Intensive-Image: Rethinking Deleuze´s Film-Philosophy*.
[20] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 132.

> In itself, the mind has two fundamental characteristics: *resonance* and *vividness*. Recall the metaphor that likens the mind to an [string] instrument. When does it become subject? It becomes subject when its vividness [intensity] is mobilized in such a way that the part characterized by vividness (impression) communicates it to another part (idea), and also, when all the parts taken together resonate in the act of producing something new.[21]

The ego, in other words, appears as the contingent crystallisation of its relations, a kind of external territorialisation within the mind. With this in mind, the intensive field of early childhood should also account for its own process of maturity and actualisation, the aforementioned habit of saying 'I'—the ground by which the wordless infant turns into a fully speaking character. However, as regards the cases of Victor and Kaspar as portrayed cinematically, a question immediately problematises this semiotic/semantic split: How are we to equip the child whose qualities and relations are not exclusively derived from the human environment and its rational habituation? Again, if the subject (the mind) is what transcends the background of its identity relations, how can we define the phenomenological structuring of Victor, whose early life was influenced by animals other than humans? Or the enigmatic consciousness of Kaspar, whose language is still alien to his teachers? Are they potential creatures—yet to be human—agents? Or are they already human subjects that have been constituted outside of the realm of speech?

It seems to me, at least from Deleuze's reading of Hume, that the answer to these questions relies exclusively on Victor and Kaspar's early field of relations having been a differential ground constituted outside of the human network; that is, a domain of existence that is not derived from the percepts of reason but from an undomesticated—foreign and animal—experience of the imagination. This means that if Victor and Kaspar are the product of a customary conjunction with nature, then the way to understand their identities—their self-formations—should be derived from the Hume principle of a mind that, while connected to its environment, remains autonomous in its operations. The question is thus not only to unveil how Victor and Kaspar interact with their immediate field of relations but also to show how a new type of consciousness (Victor and Kaspar) emerges from this non-human, or pre-human, network. Finally, I would also like to stress, as I hope to show in my analysis of the two films, that our id/entity formation cannot be located under the Kantian rubric of an entity 'possessing language' but is rather of an entity that requires of other humans to be trained into language and thus become, from this ensemble, a rational speaking subject. Human language, as Agamben persuasively maintains, should then be read as a mixture of both our 'endosomatic' inheritance (that is, the genetic make-up that allows us to speak) and our 'esosomatic' experience (our environmental structuring). In the cases of Victor and Kaspar, there is no doubt that the two boys are well equipped with the first physiological element. The problem rests with the latter circuit, where the subject requires of other humans to encircle it with language so as to induce its becoming a fully discursive being. In Agamben's words:

> Certainly, in contrast with what occurs in the majority of animal species … human language is not wholly written into the genetic code. [Hence], in the human individual, exposure to language is indispensable. It is a fact whose importance can never be overemphasized in understanding the structure of human language that if a child is not exposed to speech between the ages of two and twelve, his or her potential for language acquisition is definitively jeopardized. Contrary to ancient traditional beliefs, from this point of view man is not the 'animal possessing language', but instead the animal deprived of language and obliged, therefore, to receive it from outside of himself.[22]

Let us now begin to examine how Truffaut and Herzog's films reflect upon this notion of human infancy by following feral children who are obliged to enter into civilisation. I will first claim that Truffaut's *The Wild Child* introduces discontinuities to the possibility of a boy becoming-man. Then, as regards Herzog's film, I will claim that Kaspar represents a vivid character of the imagination who never detaches from his beginning.

What is to become?

Itard's memoirs on Victor are structured by four succeeding aims held for the mental and moral education of the child.[23] These developmental stages are also employed by the filmmaker to map out Victor's passage from his animal state in the forest to his more rational behaviour later in the doctor's house. Patricia Pisters, in *The Taming of the Wild Child*, describes Victor's passage as one of 'becoming-human'.[24] She focuses, on the one hand, on Deleuze's 'intensive proximity' that Victor and all children seem to share with the animal world and,

[21] Deleuze, *Empiricism*, 132.
[22] Agamben, *Infancy*, 65.
[23] Itard, *Wild Boy*, 11-51.
[24] Patricia Pisters, *The Matrix of Visual Culture: Working with Deleuze in Film Theory* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 156.

on the other hand, on the potential room for becoming that doctor Itard, with his instructive and familial environment, provides to the child.

In the first period, as described by Itard in his memoirs, Victor is a brute animal—a wolf-child. Drawing on the work of John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Itard declares that humankind is not free in a state of nature, and that in such a condition 'the individual, deprived of all the characteristic faculties of his kind, drags on without intelligence or without feelings, a precarious life reduced to bare animal functions.'[25] Human freedom is perceived as the outcome of a formal education, which makes of Itard's 'moral man', like that of Kant's rational being, the greatest achievements of civilisation. In *The Wild Child*, the mobilisation of such an image is put forward by the scene in which Doctor Pinel (Jean Dasté) examines the boy in the hospital and concludes that while the child's sensory stimuli are able to satisfy bare animal functions, his intellectual capacity is insufficient to embrace the more sophisticated workings of the mind. Pinel, unlike Itard, refers to the boy quite derogatively as an 'inferior being' and a 'naturally born idiot.' Upon these words the film cuts to an image of Victor, swinging in an animal posture under the rain in the gardens of the clinic. Through the window the two doctors watch the child, who, since arriving in Paris, has been exhibited as a scientific curiosity, an ethnographic freak. However, it is also at this moment that Itard declares to Pinel, his superior, that he intends to educate the boy in his villa near Batignolles. (Unlike Pinel, Itard believes that the child's abnormality is indeed treatable; that his condition is not the product of an incurable brain malady but the result of a long-isolated sojourn in the forest).

The second period thus begins, as Itard states in his diaries, '[in] a more pleasant place to stay and learn … [with the love of] … a patient mother and the intelligence of an enlightened teacher.'[26] The new task set by the doctor is to render the boy's physical strength weaker in order to develop his other senses, especially that of hearing and seeing. Here, Truffaut's page to screen adaptation follows almost to the letter the recommendations proposed by Itard in his report, from the physical stimulants he utilises to awaken Victor's senses (Truffaut's Itard gives Victor long hot showers and dresses him up to make his skin more sensitive to temperature; they play drums together with the boy's eyes covered to develop his sense of hearing), to the more emotional stimulants he deploys (such as Victor's experiences of pleasure and irritation through having or not having a glass of milk) in a bid to awaken his mental functioning. Such methods prove to be effective in the taming of the wild child. As Pisters tells us, Itard and Guerin's enclosure becomes 'the parental site' where the 'human [boy] is born.'[27] Indeed, it is here that Victor gets his name.

The next step is to introduce the child to the domain of rational ideas. In the film, this passage is followed by Itard's highest aim: to awaken the mental operations in Victor necessary to make him speak. To do so Truffaut's Itard uses a strict system of rewards and punishments that make the boy, from time to time, go mad. He turns 'his only pleasures' as Madame Guerin says, 'into exercises': 'His tantrums are your fault [Doctor Itard] … he works ten times more than a normal child.' But the doctor ignores Guerin's observations; he is blinded by the fact that Victor is not only capable of activating connections between words and things but is also developing a sense of justice by differentiating what is fair from what is not. Itard wants to induce in Victor the judgement of a moral man, and to do so, quite inevitably, his own instructional success relies on his pupil's distress. As Itard's voice-over commentary narrates towards the end of the film, after Victor has bitten his hand in an act of rebellion:

> I wish that my pupil could have understood me at this moment. I would have told him that his bite filled my soul with joy… I had evidence that what is just and unjust was no longer alien to Victor's heart. By provoking the sentiment, *I had elevated the savage man to the stature of a moral being* by the most noble of his attributes.

Itard's 'moral being' is thus the becoming man of Victor. But what is it to become? According to Deleuze and Félix Guattari, 'becomings' are always minoritarian, molecular relations rather than molar formations. Becomings express collective singularities instead of individualised forms of being. Like an owls' parliament or a children's pack, they lack a central point of domination, such as that of man: 'Why are there so many becomings of man, but no becoming-man?' ask the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*: 'First [and foremost] because man is majoritarian par excellence, whereas becomings are [always] minoritarian.'[28]

In Truffaut's film, a clear intersection is revealed between two characters or paths: there is Itard who follows the road of man, the educator-judge who draws straight lines on the board. Then there is Victor who takes the course of nature, the wild child who messily draws spirals. I believe that the only possible minoritarian encounter in Truffaut's film is that of Itard becoming

[25] Itard, *Wild Boy*, 47-8.
[26] Itard, *Wild Boy*, 20.
[27] Pisters, Matrix, 157.
[28] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 339.

Victor and not Victor becoming Itard. However, it is the boy who is forced to learn his teacher's language and the teacher who realises that the boy won't be able to live freely again in the woods. Already habituated to the human environment, Victor has to cope with Itard's lessons in order to enter into society and the symbolic.

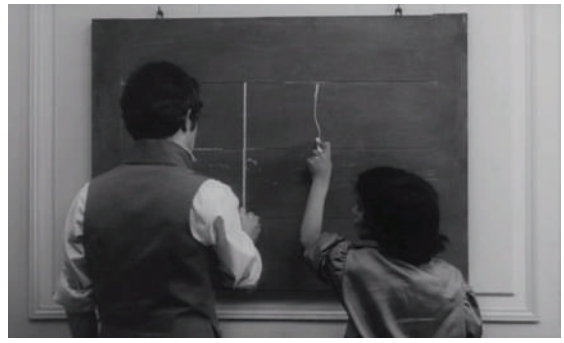

Figure 1: The figures of Victor and Itard in *The Wild Child* (F. Truffaut, 1970)

Put differently, like the language of an adult-child, Truffaut's film collides the wordless, vivid gestures of Victor with the narrative cohesion of his mentor Itard. Such a split separating the two modes of existence is also quite helpful in illustrating the processual ontology of the human entity in its becoming a language being. As suggested before via Deleuze's Hume as well as via Agamben, the human subject should not be understood in terms of the Kantian entity 'possessing language' but as the entity who requires of other humans to be trained in language; thus becoming, out of this network, a sovereign language being. Moreover, it is in crossing that bridge—one that separates the infant's voice from the adult's *parole*—that Agamben's 'historical being' is born. After Aristotle, who endorses the capacity of *languae* to all animal species, the Italian philosopher indicates that the child is not an entity constituted outside of language (for we are all inside the Aristotelian *animal languae*) but someone who must break with their early voice in order to acquire speech. This is the moment when Agamben's '*(in)fancy* of experience',[29] or Benjamin's 'original image'[30] can never be reconstituted. Being habituated to mankind, in other words, is to announce the 'I' as an entity separate from our early animal life. 'Man is a distant being' says Nietzsche in a loud voice.[31] Distant not only in relation to the rest of the living but also in relation to his own animal being. In essence, man is the animal who has lost contact with his own beginning. In Agamben's words:

> Imagine a man born already equipped with language, a man who already possessed speech. For such a man without infancy, language would not be a pre-existing thing to be appropriated, and for him there would be neither any break between language [*languae*] and speech nor any historicity of language. But such a man would thereby at once be united with his nature; his nature would always pre-exist, and nowhere in it would he find any discontinuity, any difference through which any kind of history could be produced. Like the animal, who Marx describes as 'immediately at one with its life activity', he would merge with it and would never be able to see it as an object distinct from himself.[32]

Herzog's Kaspar: A man of beginnings

Such a man—a man united with nature, a man who does not seem to exist—resembles Kaspar Hauser; a person who lives outside of history and who speaks outside of speech. In effect, if humanity begins with history—once the wordless experience of the child has been overcome—then Kaspar is like that infant who never detaches from his beginning, and remains, already in adult form, forever in that beginning: 'I know a story about the desert', he says to housekeeper Katy (Brigitte Mira), '… but only the beginning.'

What do we see at the film's beginning? Is that the face of Kaspar's mother leaving her baby in the river? Hard to tell really. The image is as blurry as the next shot where Kaspar seems to be arriving at his castle in Nuremberg. Now we see a labourer washing white clothes in the waters of the city. She stares at the camera for a moment, seemingly witnessing something odd, perhaps something miraculous (something like the arrival of Moses). The film certainly begins with

[29] Agamben, *Infancy*, 13-72.
[30] Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 84.
[31] Friedrich Nietzsche quoted in Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* trans. Sophie Hawkes (Michigan: Zone Books, 2004), 35.
[32] Agamben, Infancy, 60.

Figure 2: The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser's opening scene (W. Herzog, 1974)

an ambiguous as much as a sublime atmosphere—it imbues the image with the promise of a visionary character to come, like baby Kaspar floating in the river just before entering into the castle where he will remain trapped for many years.

Herzog's blurry overture also brings to mind Deleuze's modern approach to filmmaking, which produces not only an encounter with images that are 'too strange' or 'insoluble' but also immersive viewing experiences in which time runs eternally in its present moment and space is lived without any horizons or constraints. In conversation with Paul Cronin, Herzog recalls a personal experience similarly un-delimited by contours. In describing his childhood days as a ski jumper, he comments that:

> When taking off from a ramp you would hold your head back when falling, but we would thrust our heads forward like when taking a dive … It is like someone who takes a suicidal jump from a great height, and then regrets his decision when he realizes, midway through *empty space*, that no one can help him. It is the same with filmmaking. Once you have started, there is no one to help you through.[33]

In the light of Herzog's aerial vision—as a sort of filmmaking style suspended on air—the coming of Kaspar into the world represents, in his words, 'a terrible hard fall'. The fall is, first of all, his own: like most children, Kaspar makes sense of things out of his own undomesticated imagination, not quite understanding the categories imposed by the mind of adults. He believes, for example, that apples are conscious entities, but Professor Daumer 'reminds' him that they don't have lives of their own; he solves riddles by means that are not logically deductive, thus mathematicians cannot accept his reasoning; he thinks that to build a tall tower you need an equally tall builder, and that the room inside the tower must necessarily be bigger than the building itself, because 'wherever I look in the room', as he says, 'there is only room. When I look at the tower, and I turn around, the tower is gone.' Kaspar thus concludes, *a la* Borges, that the room is bigger than the tower itself.[34] Unlike Victor, who is unable to talk, Kaspar already possesses speech. His language, however, does not constitute the ideal syntax imposed by his tutors but instead represents a poetic contestation to their commands. As Nietzsche states in regards to the romantic poet, Kaspar too 'raises [his] voice from the bottom of the abyss of being; [his] subjectivity is the pure imagination [of the

[33] Werner Herzog interview with Paul Cronin, Herzog on Herzog (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 101.

[34] I'm thinking here of Jorge Luis Borges's short stories 'The Library of Babel', which describes a vast library containing all possible books ever written as well as those yet to be written, and 'On Exactitude in Science', in which a quixotic cartographer sets off to construct the map of the Empire on a scale of 1 to 1 to that of the territory.

mind].'[35] Indeed, in experimenting with this (in)fancy of the human intellect, Kaspar stands for the romantic lyricist who recovers his imagination from an original, vivid mind. He plays a childish game where language opens up spaces through phonetic actions, further complicating the grammar of his teachers' discourse. For such reasons, as the spectator may presume, Kaspar is more compatible with those characters who are also foreigners to the official mode of reasoning in the film (Kaspar gets sick in the house of her highness and is easily disturbed by people 'howling' in church. His friends, on the contrary, are those living outside of patriarchy, like his young friend Julius, his wooden toy horse, the blind orphan Mozart, or housekeeper Katy). In short, Kaspar's terrible hard fall into this world represents the inadequacy of a poet who, as expressed in the circus of Nuremberg, becomes 'the greatest riddle of all.'

The second hard fall, however, is that of Herzog's film descending into a solid narrative plot. *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*, as Kaja Silverman remarks, imposes a coherent formula—unusual in Herzog's cinema otherwise—to tell a story that clearly 'exceeds that coherence,' thereby contradicting Herzog's own anti-narrative fantasies (in the character of Kaspar) with a film that partially follows a classical sensory-motor plot. In Silverman's words: '[The film] does make some preliminary gestures in the direction of a non-narrative cinema,' but for its most part, she continues, 'it adopts the format of a chronicle, a format in which casual and linear values play an especially conspicuous role.'[36]

Herzog's chronicle, like that of Truffaut's *The Wild Child*, paradoxically tells the story of a boy without a chronicle; its protagonist is a person of becomings rather than a man of history. Such a portrayal of alterity, quite common among New Wave filmmakers, brings us an image of a child-poet who, in resisting the meanings imposed by his social situation, is nevertheless trapped in a chain of cohesive narrative events. The German director, like his French contemporary, not only chooses to impose a rational formula to portray a boy whose marginalised life emancipates him from the film as a whole, but at the same time Herzog identifies with this character, whose enigmatic visions have become his own: 'What constitutes poetry, depth, vision, and illumination' he says in regard to those films that 'stunt' him, 'I cannot name.'[37] This means, paradoxically, that

Figure 3: Kaspar's final vision while lying in his death-bed (W. Herzog, 1974)

[35] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (London: Continuum Press, 2015), 144. 36 Kaja Silverman, "Kasper Hauser's 'terrible Fall' into Narrative", *New German Critique*, 24 (1981), 92.
[36] Kaja Silverman, "Kasper Hauser's 'terrible Fall' into Narrative", *New German Critique*, 24 (1981), 92.
[37] Darren Ambrose, *Film, Nihilism and the Restoration of Belief* (London: Zero Books, 2003), 1.
[38] Agamben, *Infancy*, 13-72.

the role of the child in Herzog and Truffaut's films might counter-actualise the aprioristic meanings of a classical—rational—image at the gates of a new mode of realism. But at the same time these depicted experiences of infancy are echoed by another beginning: that of the cinema, for it is in borrowing devices and conventions from the early grammar of film that each filmmaker puts forward their origin/al language and perspective. In the case of Truffaut, this is observed by his choice to shoot the film in black and white, which closely aligns the film's style with early *actualité* documentaries, and his extensive employment of the iris device. In the case of Herzog, Kaspar's flickering dreams and fading visions are reminiscent of 16mm pictures from the early days of cinema. So, whether it is in the form of a modern—new—image, or in its preceding sequence as a classical—old—image, the authenticity of the child relies exclusively in the two films on cinema's capacity to manifest a reality devoid of normative customs, as for what matters in their '(in)fancy of experience'[38] is to reconnect with the origin/ality of an early voice.

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At the climax of Herzog's chronicle, while on his deathbed, Kaspar is finally allowed to share one of his elapsed stories. It is a vision about the desert that takes us back to the beginning of his/story: 'I see a large caravan coming through the desert, across the sands. This caravan is led by an old Berber tribesman, and this old man is blind.' Through voice-over commentary, Kaspar concludes his prophetic tale accompanied by the hypnotic tunes of a flute:

> The caravan stops; some of them believe that they are lost because of the mountain in front of them. They look at the compass but it's broken. Then their blind leader picks up a handful of sand, turns his face towards the sun, and tastes it as if it were food. 'My sons', says the blind man, 'you are wrong. Those are not mountains in front of you, it's only your imagination. We must continue northward.' And so they fol dissociation low the old man's advice, and reach the city in the North. That's where the story begins, but I don't know the rest…

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