

## Thoughts of Deleuze, Spinoza and the Cinema (*The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*)

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In this paper I will analyse a sequence from Werner Herzog's film *The Enigma Of Kaspar Hauser*. In this sequence the film's protagonist, Kaspar, has what appears to be a profound vision. Such a moment will be explored as the instance of a certain mode of *thinking*, and what I hope to put forward in this paper, from a semiotic point of view, is the possibility of the passage, revealed by this particular sequence, towards the highest kind of thought in the cinema.

In other words, I am hoping to use Herzog's film as a way of tracing a modern image of thought in the cinema. As opposed to the classical mode of thought, a modern image would be the kind of thinking Gilles Deleuze describes as *non-representational* in nature. Bearing this opposition in mind, the vision sequence is particularly important because it testifies to the tension within thinking to go either way: for one either to be constrained within the *doxa* of representation or moved by the *violence* of the faculties. Narratively speaking, we will see that with the apparent ambiguity of the vision (in terms of its relation to the film as a whole), the sequence is all too easily written off according to some kind of ideological significance: the delirium of a madman, a hallucination, an epiphany, a spiritual awakening or a prophetic foreshadowing. What I want to suggest though, based on Deleuze, is that the vision is a process of meaning *creation*, an act of thinking in-itself where the absolute power of thought is motivated through the creation of Ideas rather than the recollection of concepts.

Finally though, I want to cast these ideas within the context of what I see to be Benedict De Spinoza's influence on Deleuze. This is because I have interpreted Spinoza's philosophy of univocal substance to be the driving force behind Deleuze's cinematic project. With this in mind then, and in terms of Deleuze's equation of the image with matter, an idea of non-representation will be described in terms of a certain relation between images and the realization of what Spinoza would call essence or an "adequate" knowledge of substance. By posing a notion of thought in this way, I hope not only to suggest the potential of the cinema, but to explicate this potential by synthesising certain aspects of Deleuze's cinema philosophy, therefore at the same time outlining an overarching theory of Deleuze's semiotic project as a pragmatics of *force*.

## Thought and Image

Herzog's film in a lot of ways concerns itself with the typical issues that could be grouped together under the theme of what I will call an 'assimilation' narrative. *The Enigma* is about the appearance of a young man, Kaspar, who after spending the better part of his life locked up in a cellar, turns up in Nuremberg in 1828 barely able to speak and walk. He is clutching a note written by his captor, addressed to the local general of the army, expressing the wish that he become a soldier. Thrust into society, what unfolds is a story in which Kaspar is forced to learn the language, customs and movements of a culture, and like other similar narratives (for example, a protagonist may blunder in a foreign culture or even suffer amnesia), this film brings into play questions of what is *innate* and what is *learned*. From this, the relationship between ideas of being and the social arise in terms of the salience of the social in shaping our thoughts. Of concern for this paper then is the *adequacy* of language as a mode of expression and understanding.

With Kaspar's assimilation comes his attempt to learn the bodily configurations everybody else takes for granted; for instance composing himself in order to walk, speak, eat and write. In a scene in which Kaspar is taught by a child how to eat from a bowl and drink from a cup, we see Kaspar's initiation into a notion of language as a conceptual tool of representation and recollection. Like a child who's linguistic gestation has been radically accelerated, Kaspar, with great difficulty, learns this is 'beer', this is 'soup', this is my 'arm', 'eye', 'mouth' ... Chastised repeatedly, we see his frustration as he fails to recollect some words, a frustration continually made noticeable throughout the film by the strained pace of his voice and the pensive way he punctuates his sentences with the clamped thumb and forefinger of his right hand.

Also within this learning process or assimilation, an element of fear appears with Kaspar's confrontation by something he cannot *think*, with something that lies outside the boundaries inscribed by this simple thought process. On one occasion, having immobilized a chicken by placing it upside down on the ground with a chalk line drawn from its head, we watch while a group of young hoodlums laugh hysterically at Kaspar who hides in the corner of his room. Here, Kaspar can recognize a chicken, but his thought process is upturned when the actions of the chicken do not correspond to the recollection he has made. On the other hand though, and in another sense of what it means to think and act, this upheaval of Kaspar's thought process is *positive*, forcing him into a new, more motivated, and inevitably more creative mode of thinking. Here Deleuze would say that Kaspar is made active by the uncertainty of his thoughts, a power of experience novel for an 'assimilated' subject.

Kaspar is an interesting character because of these moments where he thinks what *Difference and Repetition* would describe as the *unthinkable*. *The Enigma* is riddled with moments where a violence disrupts the continuity of Kaspar's ability to think in a straightforward way. By 'straightforward' I mean what Deleuze calls the *classical* image

of thought. This is the model of *recognition*, described in *Difference and Repetition* as “the harmonious exercise of all the faculties upon a supposed same object: the same object may be seen, touched, remembered, imagined or conceived.” Like the kind of recollection Descartes describes in his experience of a piece of wax, society demands of Kaspar a similar mode of thinking, a mode in which concepts are applied and objects are subordinated to a negative concept of difference. Such a mode of thinking is essentially what Deleuze and Guattari describe as *ideological* in nature. Despotic in its reign, the ideological or *representational* mode of thinking is fundamentally restrictive because thought is limited to the narrow band of recollection and recognition, and therefore with the search for a *solution* to what is experienced.

Alternatively though, Deleuze writes that a process of thinking can arise within the representational capacity of ideological doxa. The ability to think, to truly *think* thought’s maximum potential, is something Deleuze describes as a process necessarily *awoken* in thought. For thinking in this way is not a natural exercise, but must be motivated. From Artaud, Deleuze quotes, “Underneath grammar there lies thought, an infamy harder to conquer, an infinitely more shrewdish maid, rougher to overcome when taken as an innate fact. For thought is a maiden who has not always existed.” True thought is awoken by the violence of the senses, and in its capacity to think beyond representation, or what Paul Patton describes as certain “timid and conservative presuppositions,” experience becomes a boundless process of *meaning creation*. *The Enigma* is an interesting film because it posits this experience of the unthought with Kaspar’s visions, or more accurately, the unthought *itself* becomes realised by his visions.

In the cinema studies however, one must consider this category of non-representational thought in terms of the relations of *matter*. This is because the cinema studies is most importantly a semiotics of matter in movement. In *Cinema I*, Deleuze describes the image as an expression of the *plane of immanence*, that primeval soup or state of matter “too hot for one to be able to distinguish solid bodies in it... a world of universal variation, of universal undulation, universal rippling...” It is my claim that the plane of immanence is Spinoza’s “substance,” both of the same absolute and infinite nature, answerable to no higher power: there are neither “axes, nor centre, nor left, nor right, nor high, nor low...” The plane produces as it exists, it exists within an immanent time and space and its objects are expressions of an *immanent* causality. The concept of *expression* then is this process of immanent causality, a process Deleuze alludes to when he writes in *Cinema I* that the image appears as a result of the opening of the plane onto an interval of time, an interval most importantly *not* “a factor of another nature.” As Deleuze describes in the first chapter of *Cinema I* though, it is because of the mechanical process of reproduction and the fact that the cinema gives movement as an invisibly inherent part of the image’s projection that he equates the image with matter, thereby introducing the plane of immanence. It is with such an equation between the image and matter that Deleuze bases his semiotics on images and their combinations rather than linguistic constants, and so for an instance of non-

representational thought to occur, it must be within the framework of, and a response to, the relations of matter.

As *matter*, images are expressions of the plane of immanence. Substance is expressed in different ways, and so these images are diverse expressions of substance, however this is not the identity of the same or a *negative* difference. For Deleuze, images form clusters or image types, the main categories described in *Cinema 1* as the “perception,” “affection,” “action” and “relation-images.” Furthermore, from these image-types different *signs* are formed. However, the relation of images in this way and the formation of the sign is only one polarity of the cinematic image. In other words there is also what Deleuze describes as an image’s “genetic element:” its “integral and constituent parts.” Such is an aspect of matter that can possibly be teased out dependent on the relations of images. This paper will suggest that in *The Enigma* the relations of images in Kaspar’s vision realizes this genetic element, and based on Deleuze’s use of Spinoza, this genetic element would be what Spinoza would describe as the “essence” or univocity of substance in the image. To return to the question of non-representational thought, for Spinoza the realization of univocal substance is a realization of all there is, of the *absolute*, and so in terms of this realization according with what he calls *the highest kind of knowledge*, it is my claim that the clarity of thought borne out of the “adequacy” of this type of thinking clears the way for Deleuze to posit the possibility of a non-representational model of thinking in the cinema.

In this sense, then, representational thought would be what Deleuze describes in *Expressionism in Philosophy* as the *inadequate* idea. With the relationship between matter, an inadequate idea is a knowledge of another body that does not depend on an understanding of that body as a modification of infinite substance. Based only on an *affective* understanding of another body, inadequacy is like the representational model of language since it is determined by the same kind of approximate understanding of something that arises out of the recollection and recognition of concepts. It is not an *immanent* understanding. This then is the same sense of an ideological determination of things, such a determination typified in *Expressionism in Philosophy* through the understanding of God according to God’s Word as it appears in the Scriptures.

As a story of assimilation, Kaspar is dominated by the inadequate idea in Herzog’s film, apparent through its pigeon-holing of him into different varieties of the same social role. To begin with, he is described by the other characters in the film as the “foundling.” As a foundling he is on the edge of society, but on the edge ripe for socialisation: he has been *found* and is ready for the process of assimilation. But when this integration proves difficult, Kaspar becomes a spin-off from society, a renegade, a freak, or what Deleuze and Guattari would call a *negative line of flight*. Asked by the town elders how he is going to earn his keep, the issue of his assimilation becomes like a debt which must be paid, and so Kaspar, next to the “shrinking king,” becomes a full-time feature of the nearby freak-show. It is not until later, with the visions, that Kaspar begins to think more clearly: to think for himself.

With representation comes a level of thinking according to the application of

concepts. When Kaspar moves through the different degrees of the social (foundling, freak, martyr, genius) there *is* a sense of what Deleuze calls *detrterritorialization*. However, the detrterritorialization of the subject is not *absolute*. In other words, the subject has not yet exceeded the bounds of the concept totally, Kaspar has not reached his “absolute limit” in the same way thought has not reached its “absolute limit.” Absolute detrterritorialization or a realization of difference in-itself occurs only with a “combustion:” when thought and the subject are no longer an expression of *any* kind of content.

Kaspar is an interesting character because within the story of his assimilation he demonstrates the tension between representational and adequate thinking. His attempted socialization suggests the guises of representational understanding, and not only does the film hint at the potential for the highest kind of thought (to move beyond the concept to an absolute detrterritorialization), but also the ease with which this kind of thought can be brought back to the level of representation. It must be remembered then that regardless of whatever social roles he blunders through, Kaspar is always his own man. As a human being, *as a mode of substance*, there is always the potential for him to exceed *inadequacy*. And an image has the same ontology; before it is any kind of sign, it is matter in movement (a *movement image*), and Kaspar and the image are both extended substance. Therefore both Kaspar and an image have a content and an expression, a substance, or deeper level whereby *inadequacy* is only one variability of their determination. An image is a quality or actuality before it is a sign of anything particular, and Kaspar is a mode of extension and thought before any of the social moulds he encounters.

## Combustion

- Do you want to say something Kaspar?*
- You may express what is inside you...*
- I have only life. There is nothing else in me.*

When asked to ‘perform’ at a society gathering, Kaspar answers that there is nothing inside him to express. However, it’s not that there’s *nothing* there, rather what’s there refuses to be expressed in the language of music: there is no form of content willing to be subordinated to yet another socialized form of expression. Instead, *inside* Kaspar—beneath the gazes that define him—is ‘only life’, “beating out a dark cosmic rhythm.” Such is an allusion to Kaspar’s *essence*, that component immanent to all bodies and matter, the *realization* of which reveals the clarity of thought I’m describing.

This is what draws *me* to Spinoza—“thinking things through and connecting everything up, if you’ll go along with that.” In terms of Spinoza’s influence on Deleuze, the act of thinking things through and connecting everything up is the very clarity of thought I’m referring to. And so “thinking things through” would be a *thinking through to a thing’s matter*, through to the life that flickers beneath the surface of Kaspar Hauser, and through to the matter flickering beneath the surface of the image. In other words, this is a thinking things through to essence. “Connecting everything up” then is the situation one finds oneself at while *thinking things through*. That is why one ‘thinks things through’ and ‘connects everything up’. Therefore a realization of essence and an understanding of infinite substance as that through which all is *connected*, results in a clarity of thought.

*Essence in Expressionism in Philosophy* is a degree of power of infinite substance. When I speak of ‘realizing essence’ then this is not the realization of a certain point, a certain material thing: it is not really a *subjective* realization of any thing at all. With Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza, I would claim that it seems to be more of an *understanding* of the world, of God as *absolute*. As Brian Massumi suggests in *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, essence is a kind of “meaning,” but I would prefer to describe it more as an *absolute* meaning of all things. Like Deleuze’s description in *Proust and Signs* then, it is a kind of “immaterial” meaning. When the distinction between content and expression is no longer valid, *thinking* is a thinking of life itself, and thus the clearest kind of thinking there is.

As such, it is a non-representational kind of thought and a non-representation of all kinds. In cinema substance is grasped through essence, and for Kaspar this understanding is made possible in his vision, in the way the sequence is constructed and the particular relation of images. However it’s not just any relation of images, rather, it’s more of a non-relation or disjunction, the nature of which *leaves only substance*. This is when an image’s matter exceeds any kind of subordination to expression and is simply *matter in movement*.

Kaspar’s vision is the climax of Herzog’s film. While on his death-bed, it is during his last rites that he is allowed to speak. However, with this *ritualization* of death (another social role) and therefore with the *token* respect he receives, Kaspar’s acquaintances are prevented from really listening: from the kind of clarity of understanding I described above. While he narrates, his voice-over accompanies the flickering images of what he sees. He says,

*I see a big caravan,  
which is moving through the desert.  
Through the sand.  
And this caravan is led by an old Berber.  
And this old man is blind...*

Kaspar’s words flow from his death-bed into this sequence as his narration progresses.

It's easy to dismiss this vision as the rantings of a mad-man or the pathetic last-words of a martyr. Searching for an idea of what these images mean, of the significance of the desert, the caravan and the old man, it is reasonable to attribute them *conceptually* to Kaspar. But also, does this sequence not testify to the tension in thought I described above? Therefore, unsure whether it's a vision, a dream or some kind of epiphany, and being unable to pinpoint exactly what this sequence means in the film as a whole, couldn't the ambiguous relation between Kaspar and the vision be thought also to sever the relationship between content and expression? In this sense we are simply left with the vision as an affirmation of Kaspar's life, a testament to the life that persists while Kaspar lies on his death-bed.

Furthermore, the vision is not a *story*, as Kaspar emphasizes, since he doesn't know how it ends. Moreover, it's not even the *beginning* of a story, but a reference to the instances the beginning of a story presupposes. For Kaspar's vision takes us to the beginning of a story. He concludes his narration with:

*... And they move on,  
quite willingly now  
until they reach the town in the north.  
And that is where the story takes place,  
but I do not know the real story which happens there.*

Neither beginning or end, Kaspar's vision describes the deeper level that fuels the story. As such, the vision makes a realization of essence possible, and to return to my interpretation of Deleuze's account of Spinoza, this is the same essence which underlies all things in different degrees of positive difference. It is an understanding of this essence or deeper level which fuels knowledge based on its inadequate or adequate realization. This level of essence is not achieved through a *progression*, or what Deleuze and Guattari call a "spiritual evolution," but is immanent to all bodies and matter. Essence is all around, "it constitutes the prehuman soup immersing us. Our hands and faces are immersed in it:" the edges of our body are always touching it.

This is a potential always there, with matter and bodies. Furthermore, it is also a potential in cinema if one bears in mind that an image is moving matter: it is a *movement image* before it is a signifier with the addition of movement. Therefore this potential depends on a rethinking of movement in the cinema. It depends on an understanding of things in terms of their essence, and from a semiotic point of view, depends on an understanding of linguistics as only one variability of an image's significance. And so in the cinema it depends on a relationship between images that is not subordinated to ideology. To be more specific, for Deleuze this depends on a disruption of the continuity of images, and in terms of Herzog's film, an ambiguous relation between Kaspar and the vision sequence. The possibility is always there for an image to be a pure image of matter, a pure instance of itself in movement, or as Deleuze would suggest in *Cinema 2, a pure image of time*.

## Anomaly

Non-representational thought is a semiotic potential in cinema. It relies upon the ability to move beyond the concept, and so, in cinema anyway, it relies upon an understanding of the image as matter in movement and mode of substance. This then is a semiotics of *force*, of bodies and their relations. As such this semiotics involves at its heart what Deleuze and Guattari call *pragmatics*: it is an *uncovering* of the types of relationships possible between matter, and linguistics is only one variability of this relationship. In this sense, a project like Christian Metz's for example, whereby the signification of the image is taken to be primary, leaves semiotics a bit high and dry, accounting only for the least important aspect of an image's significance.

Herzog's film is such an interesting example because aside from the theme of assimilation which sets up the tension between ideology (Kaspar's *definition* according to some kind of social role- nature's child, freak, genius, martyr) and non-representation (the "*I have only life. There is nothing else in me...*" which forces thought to think itself), the vision sequence posits the possibility of the latter without losing sight of its polemical relationship with the former. This is a tension Deleuze is constantly aware of, prevalent for example when he describes the "despotic" ideology of the signifier, the "doxa" of representation, and in *Cinema 2*, the battle between the image and language. Here the image is

a plastic mass, an a-signifying and a-syntactic material, a material not formed linguistically, even though it is not amorphous and is formed semiotically, aesthetically and pragmatically... It is not an enunciation and these are not utterances. It is an *utterable*. We mean that, when language gets a hold of this material (and it necessarily does so), then it gives rise to utterances which come to dominate or even replace the images and signs...

With this in mind, the tension between representational thought and non-representational thought is extra relevant in Herzog's film because of the novelty of the vision sequence. In other words, within the film as a whole, this sequence is a kind of anomaly in what is otherwise quite a straightforwardly linear narrative. And so, although I am not refuting the *possibility* of non-representational thought with this sequence, we must return to Deleuze and consider the significance of this sequence as an anomaly in the film. In short, as a peculiarity in the film, how strong is the sequence's representational determination as a vision, hallucination or dream?

Deleuze addresses the effects of this distinction between the vision and the rest of the film when he writes of *The Enigma* in *Cinema 1* that the image is "*partially*" opened up through "vast hallucinatory visions of flight, ascent or passage." From this, and bearing in mind the *absolute* potential of non-representational thought, Deleuze is suggesting this sequence as limiting because of its status as an anomaly. As a seemingly

bizarre twist in the narrative, or the obscure vision of the protagonist, the grasp of representational thought is strengthened because the sequence is posited in such close subjective proximity to Kaspar, suggesting only a partial deterritorialization.

However, I don't think that Deleuze is denying the possibility of non-representational altogether here. A discussion of this vision as limiting is important because it reveals this sequence at the crossroads between representational and non-representational thought. In other words, in charting the historical terrain of thought in the cinema books from the classical to the modern, the overt tension between the types of thought in Herzog's film, as revealed by the vision as anomaly, posits the *transition* from the classical to the modern. Herzog's film is not abstract enough to be non-representational or modern, and too modern to be classical. With the sequence as anomaly, and although the potential of realizing essence is still apparent, the claws of representation are still in force to tear the image back into the realms of the concept. In *The Enigma* one could say that Herzog merely *reflects* on these possibilities of the image rather than making them his primary concern, thus determining his films according to Deleuze's criteria of the "reflection-image."

In conclusion, then, Herzog's film could be thought more accurately to *tackle* the issue of non-representational thought. This is made possible by the vision sequence, dependent on our ability to think beyond this sequence's ideological or conceptual significance. In terms of this sequence as a kind of anomaly and in terms of the historical critique of thought that one can interpret Deleuze to be constructing in the cinema books, Herzog's film demonstrates the tension in thought perfectly, marking the crossroads from which Deleuze later describes a more refined conception of the image whereby all aspects of ideology are totally left behind.

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