

Kaspar Hauser – Perceiving the unfamiliar human

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Introduction

In the history of curative education, the figure of Kaspar Hauser is given much prominence in both philosophical anthropology and psychology. The observations made about him offered plentiful food for thought as to the conditions of language acquisition as well as the social and cognitive development of the child. From his first arrival in Nuremberg on Whitsunday of 1828, Kaspar Hauser's enigmatic fate famously attracted an unusual degree of public attention, and still does to this day. Many artists made him their subject matter, both in fact and in fiction, through poetry, novel, drama and film. He is portrayed as the epitome of man, or rather of a particular human condition: In many ways, he is the abandoned stranger with no knowledge of his past or control of his own destiny. For Karl König, curative pedagogue and founder of the Camphill movement, Kaspar Hauser, Victor von Aveyron and others stood at the very beginning of curative education, representing the fate of children who are, for a multitude of reasons, prevented from developing their individuality and participating in social life.¹

Controversial debate in the public arena focused on Kaspar Hauser's alleged aristocratic roots, with political motivation behind his childhood incarceration and eventual assassination being suspected by some while questioned by others. Despite Hauser's own comments on the subject, both his origins and his life prior to his arrival in Nuremberg remain obscure. There must also be some doubt as to whether or not his account of events was perhaps influenced by a leading style of questioning. Certainly Anselm von Feuerbach, Hauser's mentor, presumed as much.² Still, the many documents that cover Kaspar Hauser's brief public life, as well as his own accounts, show that he was forced to spend a considerable time in captivity under conditions of social isolation.³ His physical and mental condition and his ensuing development give vital clues as to the understanding of childhood development altogether, especially in the context of other cases of maltreated or so-called feral children. Surviving documents also show us examples of how society dealt with such children. Above all, they bear witness to extraordinary personalities and their impact. It is these aspects - rather than the question of his ancestry or the circumstances of his violent death - that are the focus of this paper.

1. Cf. König, 1950/2008; see also Müller Wiedemann, 1981/1994.

2. "The accounts of his incarceration and transportation to Nuremberg are, in part, unbelievable or mysterious, and some are probably even untrue. He was questioned at a time when he had almost no notion, no concept of nature or human matters, least of all the proper words to describe them. He often spoke in his confused, dark gibberish, saying things he did not mean to say, or leaving the questioner enough scope for reading their own thoughts, opinions and hypotheses into his answers." Feuerbach in a letter to the Countess von der Recke, September 20, 1828, quoted from Pies, 1966, p. 37.

3. This was certainly the view taken in psychological literature, e.g. by Lucien Malson, 1976, Uta Frith, 1989 and Inge Seiffge-Krenke, 2004.

Observations, hypotheses, judgments - perceiving the unfamiliar human

As obscure as his childhood and youth may have been, his arrival in Nuremberg instantly made him a very public matter. He drew hundreds of curious onlookers, was questioned by representatives of the city and the police, thoroughly examined by physicians and teachers who subjected him to numerous experiments. There are other examples of such overwhelming interest: Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron, attracted attention from far beyond his native France. The fate of Amela and Kamela, the Wolf Girls from India, gave rise to similar levels of interest (Malson, 1976). Another example is the 13-year old girl Genie who, in 1970, was freed from captivity in her parental home (Curtiss, 1976; Frith, 1989). Finally, Helen Keller should be mentioned even though her social isolation was due to her deaf-muteness. In her particular case, it was the overcoming of this condition and Keller's further life that captured the public interest and, on occasion, aroused suspicion.

In Kaspar Hauser's case, the curiosity had a multitude of motives: Sensationalism as well as concern for what was seen as his cruel fate, scientific interest and the question of 'human nature', a charitable attitude such as the impulse to give the child what it clearly had been deprived of, i.e. care and interest, nurture and education. At the heart of the initial reports however, is the way the public was touched by Hauser's personality. Excepting curiosity, all of the motives expressed played a key role at the very beginnings of curative education. Another striking phenomenon in this climate of assumptions and hypotheses is - effectively as a counterpoint - people's struggle for a description of what they saw that is precise, detailed and as 'objective' as possible, one that is consistent with the spirit of a scientifically minded century.⁴ Similar efforts are manifest in Jean Itard's reports about Victor von Aveyron, as well as the thorough documentations of Heinrich Maria Deinhardt and Jan Georgens in their 1858 *Levana* yearbook.⁵ Kaspar Hauser's chroniclers evidently tried to distinguish between their descriptions and the assumptions based upon them, ensuring that the latter were clearly recognisable as such.⁶ They and many other observers were not only mystified by the child's ancestry and history but also by the image that presented itself to them. It lacked consistency. They were familiar with tramps and neglected people and those 'backward in their development'. Hauser's appearance did not fit any of these patterns, though. Here was a young man who seemed unable to stand upright but could write, who was showing completely incomprehensible reactions and had the manner of "a barely two or three-year old child inside the body of a youth" (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 9), without appearing to be childlike. His accounts, appearance and manner left his contemporaries unable to form any clear picture or categories. Hence they are left with assumptions and speculations: Is he a feral or semi-feral child? Is he neglected, a maniac or imbecile? Or even a fraud making fools of the people of Nuremberg? (Feuerbach, 1832) During his entire lifetime and beyond, Kaspar Hauser is labelled with extreme and contradictory attributes: imposter, pure soul, suicide, heir to the throne deprived of what is rightfully his. Also, Kaspar Hauser's abilities or manner of expression did not amount to a consistent picture, either. Especially during his first few weeks and months in Nuremberg, people around him thought he had great mental potential. In retrospect, Baron von Tucher, probationary judge and later his guardian, said: "[...]For his mind completely resembled a tabula rasa, absorbing with limitless receptivity the whole world of concepts, and doing so with an intense, reproductive energy that left everyone in awe and attributing this to extraordinary mental powers" (Tucher, 1834, quoted in Pies, 1966, p. 35). Anselm von Feuerbach also saw in him someone who was "full of the most splendid natural talent, gifted with the fastest comprehension and a most admirable memory⁷[...]. The speed of his progress is extraordinary. He acquires in a matter of days what would take others months or years." (Feuerbach, 1828, p. 36). It was exactly this pace of progress - inexplicable to many - that aroused the suspicion of some. From where we stand, this phenomenon can only be explained by a relatively normal early childhood (Seiffge-Krenke, 2004). The girl Genie who was found in 1970 after

4. It should be noted that descriptions following a systematic format only started a few months after Hauser's arrival.

5. Itard, 1801/1976, Itard, 1806/1976, Georgens, Gayette, & Deinhardt, 1958.

6. See e.g. Fuhrmann, 1833/1983 and Feuerbach, 1832/2004.

7. Daumer wrote in his notes: "With regard to virtually anything that concerned him, he was able to remember how many days or weeks ago it had happened. He knew how many times he had had his soup, his hot chocolate or his porridge. Of the checkers or chess matches he had played, he could remember how many and with whom he had played them. Of five games of checkers he had played he could remember every single move in the right sequence. Of each of the all the gifts he had received he knew exactly who gave them to him. Even with coins he could tell who they came from on account of the various smudges on them." Daumer, 1873/1984, p. 246.

13 years of extreme physical and social deprivation, had spent the first two years of her childhood under relatively normal circumstances. She too acquired speech very rapidly (Curtiss, 1977, quoted from Frith, 1989). Their accounts also show similarities with regard to more subtle aspects: Four weeks after being freed, her look changed. She appeared to be “alert and familiar with known and unknown adults (p. 33)”. About Kaspar Hauser it is said that: “After a few months, his facial features changed completely. His look became expressive and lively [...] and his old physiognomy was barely recognisable.” (Feuerbach, 1832 quoted in Daumer, 1823/1983, p. 40.) In this respect, they both differed from Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron’. He made relatively slow progress in acquiring speech and developing social relationships as he probably lacked the foundation of a normal early childhood (Itard, 1806/1976; Frith, 1989; Seiffge-Krenke, 2004).

Still, the development of both Genie and Kaspar Hauser had its limits. Hauser’s impression on his contemporaries changed significantly. In 1830, his guardian Baron von Tucher put on record that “he does not [lack] mental abilities, although they are not brilliant”. (Tucher, 1830, p. 90). On the same subject, Feuerbach wrote in 1832: “His mind is not that of a genius, and neither does he have extraordinary talent. Whatever he does learn is due to tenacious, stubborn diligence [...]” (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 68). Yet it remained difficult to gauge his abilities and limitations. Heinrich Fuhrmann gave a powerful testimony to that effect. He gave Kaspar Hauser a personal immersion course in religious education during the foundling’s last year.⁸ Fuhrmann perceived in him an odd mixture of “the maturity of youth and the naivety of a child [...]. He now talks surprisingly well about a subject, displaying a proficient grasp of subjects altogether, when suddenly the oaf appears” (Fuhrmann, 1833, p. 18). Fuhrmann summarises: “I had to judge with great care as to whether or not he had actually grasped what I was trying to teach him. All too often, I had to recognise that while, at times, the youth in him appeared to speak sense, the child told me that he had not quite understood me.” (Fuhrmann, 1833, p. 20)

There is a trace of an initial uncertainty about this and other opinions. Kaspar Hauser’s life was constantly in the public focus. This suggests that many aspects of these discussions would have left their mark on him.⁹

Less convincing than the above descriptions, with room for many more attributions, is an almost poetising characterisation by an otherwise quite prosaic von Feuerbach:¹⁰ Hauser’s initial and complete ignorance of everyday objects and activities as well as most foodstuffs made him appear like an “inhabitant of another planet who was transplanted down to earth by some miracle, or for one of Plato’s beings, born and raised below the earth, and only in maturity ascending to the light of the sun to join the world of the living” (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 16). This description is remarkable in more ways than one. It is also critical for the understanding of exceptional humans or behaviours. Feuerbach is not judging past or present. He is considering the hypothetical question as to under what circumstances the behaviour he observed would appear reasonable or ‘normal’. At the same time, he is using an image. Thus, he achieves a new level of understanding that is poetical in its density and vividness but still comprehensively fact-related. It enabled the existential unfamiliarity that Kaspar Hauser perceived as his surroundings to become vivid. As will be shown later, this description is linked to Kaspar Hauser’s own experience in as far as he was able to relate it.

The more gaps which remain in understanding Kaspar Hauser, the more powerful the impact of his personality appears to be; normally the attributes of a personality are formed by a framework of social perception: parents and family, nationality, social and cultural background, corresponding socialisation and education - all of these give meaning to the encounter structure. Under these circumstances it is no surprise that artists took this situation as an opportunity for describing the human situation per se. Feuerbach himself

8. Five to seven hours weekly between October 1832 and May 1833, cf. Fuhrmann, 1833/1983, p. 29.

9. “There is no doubt that Hauser knew of the existence of such writings, especially of one published in 1831 by Police Superintendent Merker. It was quite often discussed in his presence, and I have heard him say that he thought it hurtful that people took him for a fraud. He was also well familiar with the name of Merker as the most eminent representative of this opinion. Whether or not he read one of these writings himself I cannot say with certainty. It seems very plausible, however... I also know from his bills that he bought Feuerbach’s publication... for the purpose of sending it to the mayoress’ sister. While I am not certain whether Hauser merely knew of the existence of Merker’s more recent writings or whether he actually read them, I think it likely he did read them. As Hauser remarked himself, this publication lay open in teacher Meyer’s living room [...] while [Hauser], in late September, lodged at my home for eight days and was accidentally shown the room in which I keep my books, among which was the latest of Merker’s writings.” (Hickel, 1834/1966, p. 120).

10. Frith, 1989, p. 30 and Malson, 1976, p. 59f also view him in much the same way.

formulates a quintessence that is capable of imagining the individual in radical ways: He is neither child nor youth, “without motherland, without parents or relatives - the only creature of his species [...]” (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 69). It echoes the opinion of Dacier, one of Jean Itard’s colleagues, on Victor: “Where Victor is concerned, one must first and foremost consider from whence he came and where he has arrived. For if this young man is to be judged fairly, he can be compared to himself only” (quoted from Malson, 1976, p. 93). Those thoughts are rooted in a fundamental theme of the 19th century, i.e. the completely new question of the development of man as a nature and spirit being - with regard to the species and becoming of the individual as well as the question as to how the two are linked.¹¹ In 1841, Ludwig Feuerbach characterised man as the only being capable of making a subject of its own species, the universally human.¹² Max Stirner thinks humans capable of pushing the boundaries of their own species by their acts of volition.¹³ His view is clearly juxtaposed to an image of man limited to a framework of biological facilities and their evolutionary origin, as it emerged in the 19th century along with the subsequent standardising and measuring of the human being, e.g. by way of the first intelligence tests.

Remarkably, in their pioneering work on curative education, Georgens and Deinhardt also delved deep into the question of the individuality, based on ‘abnormal’ children. They characterise the ‘peculiarity of the human individual’ in the cultural nations as “each representing its own species, as it were [...]”.¹⁴ In their opinion however, individuality is not without its problems: It can be too pronounced or addressed educationally in an exaggerated manner.¹⁵ Individuality is seen as potentially in conflict with society or the universally human. At the same time, the accounts of Dacier, Anselm Feuerbach and Georgens/Deinhardt illustrate how the encounter with unique human beings can sharpen the focus even if the link between being and appearance, individuality and species, remains open. In 1904, 45 years after Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species*, Rudolf Steiner formulates such a synthesis based on the concept of the human biography: “*Anyone who reflects accurately on the essence of biography becomes aware that in regard to spiritual things each man is a species by himself*” (Steiner, 1904/1976, p. 57).

Understanding the human being while reflecting on borderline cases

With the age of enlightenment came the task of redefining the relationship between man and nature, and man and society (‘civilisation’). Against this background, ‘wild’ and ‘neglected’ children acted as welcome objects of interest and a touchstone for pertinent theories. By fostering Victor, Jean Itard tried to reinforce the philosophical concepts of empiricism (Locke, Condillac, Diderot) which signified that rather than being based on ‘innate ideas’, mental development is chiefly the product of sensual experiences and social influences, namely education. According to Itard, his records were intended to demonstrate for the first time “the sum total of knowledge and ideas that man owed to his education”¹⁶ (p. 116). From another point of view, the conception of ‘natural education’ according to Rousseau, with its corruptive influence of society, was also at issue and to be tested on the feral children. These and similar questions also come into play when assessing Kaspar Hauser’s moral situation. Which abilities are acquired and which inherited? To what extent can shortcomings of emotional and mental development be made good? Following his first encounter with the foundling, Feuerbach thought that ‘in regard to morals [...], Kaspar Hauser [is] a living rebuttal of the doctrine of original sin. The purest innocence and kind-heartedness was in everything he did and said, even though he lacked even the slightest notion of right or wrong, good or evil” (Feuerbach, 1828, pp. 36.).

11. Already K. König pointed out that, around the time of Kaspar Hauser’s arrival, the first essay on embryology by K. Ernst von Baer was published, cf. König 1960/2012, p. 28.

12. Cf. Feuerbach, 1849/2011, pp. 37., pp. 41.

13. Cf. Stirner, 1844/1972.

14. Georgens, 1861/1979, p. 40. (This reference is also found in the essay *Ästhetische Kraft in der Heilpädagogik*.)

15. loc. cit., p. 40., see also p. 19, pp. 108.

16. “Cast on this globe without physical strength or innate ideas, unable of his own accord to obey the constitutional laws of his organisation, which destine him for the first rank in the system of beings, it is only in society that man can find the eminent place reserved for him in the natural order, and without civilisation he would be one of the weakest and least intelligent of animals.” Cf. Itard, 1801/1976, p. 114.

He also thought Kaspar Hauser disproved the concept of God as something inherent and demonstrated that it was indeed acquired by education or study of nature (Feuerbach, 1828, p. 36). In discussions during his religious lessons, Heinrich Fuhrmann concluded “that while the sense for religion was inherent in man, knowledge of it remains something to be acquired” (Fuhrmann, pp. 34.). In contemporary adoption, these philosophical issues have been replaced by more specific thoughts on social and speech development.¹⁷ All are insights into the nature of man and his education as reflected in borderline cases.

Developmental-psychological aspects – approaches to childhood consciousness?

The biographies of Victor and Kaspar Hauser, as well as those of Helen Keller and Genie, imply the existence of ‘sensitive’ or ‘critical’ phases both during normal speech acquisition and social development. The documents about Kaspar Hauser also contain clues about other areas of development. There is some uncertainty however, in how far these observations may be applied generally. The reports quote impressive accounts of his incredible sensitivity of perception and the structure of his consciousness, in as far as this was conveyed to his contemporaries by his remarks. The resulting overall impression is that of an imbalance between a childlike and a more mature side of his personality, as indicated by the above quoted voices. The phenomenon is not so much suggestive of retardation as of different developmental stages taking place at the same time.

The accounts of Kaspar Hauser are impressive both because of their similarities with and differences to Victor. The latter showed a high degree of ‘adaptation’ to life in nature. He was insensitive to cold and heat as well as many smells, yet sensitive to specific sensations to do with the intake of food, e.g. cracking a nut, while seemingly ‘deaf’ to hearing impressions. Perceptions and movement reactions were one, and he was constantly in motion (Itard, 1801/1976, pp. 117., pp. 128.). By contrast, Kaspar Hauser displayed a high sensitivity and discernability within the overall range of perception, while lacking any ability to protect or distance himself from stimuli.

Both Victor and Kaspar, immediately after being freed by his captors, had no conscious self-awareness, evidenced by their reaction to seeing their own reflections (Malson, 1976; Feuerbach, 1828). Despite these contradictions this demonstrates that, even at the level of sensory perception, an educational process needs to take place within which sensory perceptions and social experiences form a unity. Initially, Victor could not abide wearing clothes or being touched. The initial connectedness of physical perceptions and social experiences developed into an intuitively structured and integrated social perceptiveness. An observation Anselm von Feuerbach made reveals how, initially, Kaspar Hauser recognises faces. Feuerbach mentions an occasion where Kaspar Hauser was introduced to a number of dignitaries: “Whenever such an introduction took place, Kaspar would step up very closely to the party opposite, stared at him, scanned with a quick, piercing glance every feature of his face and finally, as I was able to observe very clearly, assembled all the thus gathered parts of the person’s physiognomy into its entirety” (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 36). This is reminiscent of the way autistic people recognise faces, i.e. in an analytical rather than a holistically intuitive fashion (Joseph & Tanaka, 2003). In Kaspar Hauser’s case, this manner of perception was - probably - due to a lack of human interaction in his early childhood,¹⁸ and the available records give no indication as to whether his behaviour changed during his years in Nuremberg and Ansbach. Quite remarkably, Kaspar Hauser admitted he initially distinguished between different people by random features such as their clothes and had to be prompted to look at the actual person instead. Consequently, he looked at a person’s hands which he managed to recognise well. This came more naturally to him than differentiating between people’s faces.¹⁹

17. The first to do so was the physiologist William T. Preyer. In 1870, he published his work *Die fünf Sinne des Menschen*, cf. Daumer, 1873/1984, pp. 48.

18. Ute Frith demonstrated rather convincing reasons as to why, in Victor’s case, autism was a distinct possibility, while the condition can be ruled out for Kaspar Hauser. Cf. Frith, 1989, pp. 32.

19. “When I entered the big world I recognised people by random features. Namely, I noticed in the presence of Mayor Binder that I recognised Madam Ryss by her red corals which she usually wears around her neck. Mayor Binder rebuked me for this and instructed me to observe a person carefully by his own appearance and not by any random features. This I did henceforth and found by careful observation that no man’s hand is like that of another. You will find that nails, the parts of the fingers and the back of the hand all show special features, and I deem this observation more reliable than the recognition of faces, as the appearance of the latter

Many observations mentioned in the reports about him are reminiscent of those characteristic in small children, e.g. the fact that infants would initially refer to themselves in the third person. It should be noted however, that, in contrast to Victor, he had no actions - unlike Victor, whose motor abilities were adapted to life in nature - or concepts to handle his universal sensitivity of perception. Thus, perceptions hit him 'hammer-like'. In addition, Kaspar's development was sufficiently advanced to allow him to inform us of his situation, albeit in a piecemeal fashion. He describes an individual in whose consciousness, perception, imagination and concept are out of balance, leaning very strongly toward his perception. Impressions break in upon him with great force and almost tangible vividness. When he first arrived in Nuremberg, Kaspar Hauser seemingly lacked any ability to assimilate these stimuli by way of cognitive structuring and appropriate behavioural responses. This led to a dramatic increase in the pathic momentum inherent in any perception, especially as he was unable to rely on a sensorily and motorically developed bodily experience to counteract this tendency.

The question is, does this constitute an experiencing that approaches 'pure perception'? At the same time, this must not be romanticised - after all, it is not unlike being flooded with stimuli. Essentially, it describes a traumatic situation. Following the first weeks and months of his appearance, Kaspar Hauser's reactions to touch, noise and smell were those of utter defencelessness and helplessness toward these sensations, which he perceived as aversive and painful.

At this early stage of his development, Kaspar Hauser lacked awareness of his own person as well as that of his mental processes - he was as yet unable to differentiate between dreams and reality (Feuerbach, 1823), and he was also unaware of other people's mental processes.

In his consciousness, the layers of the impressions, moods and emotions all merged into one living entity, one that resembled the mythical world experience. Kaspar Hauser's early remarks suggest childlike thinking structures, where objects and beings are alive and animated and magically linked to his own consciousness. A number of developmental psychologists claim that a child's consciousness is organised in detaching stages or those that blend into each other. The earliest stage is what J. Perner calls *primary representations*, Ph. R. & Ph.D Zelazo refer to as *minimal consciousness* and D. Bischof-Köhler the *world of the encountered* (Bischof-Köhler, 1998). How this experience of the world is for an infant, or what it is like to be an infant, remains as yet unanswered. William James famously speculated about a state of 'blooming, buzzing confusion' in which the infant lives. Others assumed a world as that in pointillistic paintings (Cohen & Younger, 1984, from Keller, 2011), or an overall condition of primeval sensitivity, [...] uniform and structureless like a mass of fog".²⁰ In light of extensive research into early-childhood differentiation in a broad variety of areas of perception, such speculations can now be considered disproved, even if they can naturally only examine the surface of the reactions to different stimuli or stimulus scenarios. In accordance with findings from developmental psychology, Daniel Stern tried to retrace this earliest stage of world experience - which is beyond the reach of autobiography - and identified an amodal synaesthetic perception and a physiognomic experience of the world characterised by an intense dynamic and vitality (Stern, 1994). It should be noted however, that the other side of such a vivid consciousness makes for an extremely strong learning ability.

Hauser's own descriptions from his early days in Nuremberg indicate such a consciousness which, while barely conceptually penetrated, is still uniquely capable of introspection. He recalled how, looking out of a window, he was unable to see the surrounding landscape as something differentiated, neither with regard to its constituent parts nor its perspective arrangement²¹, he also recalled creating his first categories during that

can easily change by passage of time, illness and other random events [...]. I have seen people from Hungary, France [...] whom I may not recognise by their faces. There is no doubt in my mind however, that I would recognise them by their hands, according to the power of my impressions and by virtue of my memory." Hauser, 1829/1966, p. 69.

20. W. Stern, quoted from Keller 20114, loc. cit.

21. "When I looked out the window it always seemed as if there was a board right in front of my eyes, and on this board a painter had splattered his different brushes in white, blue, green, red - all mixed up. I was unable to differentiate between separate things, like I see them now [...]. It was only when I went for walks outside that I realised what I had seen were fields, hills, houses, and that things which appeared to be larger than others turned out to be smaller, some big things much smaller." (Feuerbach, 1832/2002, p. 42).

time.²² Many of his descriptions show how areas of perception overlap. Additionally, his mental and motor activities were still directly linked, which is another phenomenon typical of early childhood. According to Feuerbach, whenever encountering something that caught his interest or that he could not grasp, Hauser started twitching and froze (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 36).

Over time, his consciousness changed and with an increasing ability to make sense of his perceptions, the strength of his sensitivity faded. Kaspar Hauser developed spatial and temporal imagery and learned to distinguish between thoughts and dreams.

This also condenses the stages of the development of consciousness. Within a relatively short period of time, Kaspar Hauser learned to differentiate between image and reality. He also learned to comprehend the difference between perceptions and thoughts - or dreams - a process that normally takes a child four to five years.

These developmental stages were accompanied by a fading of his incredible ability to remember which had fascinated the people of Nuremberg when he first arrived in the town. His often described progress also involved a loss of his formerly special relationship with the world around him. The overabundant, painful perception was scaled back by his developing ability to form concepts, resulting in a distancing and his growing self-awareness. In as far as a generalisation is permissible at this point, this demonstrates that the development of consciousness structures is not a linear process that steadily progresses, overcoming existing deficits as it unfolds. Rather, progression means giving up or overcoming certain types of world experience. If we take Kaspar Hauser's statements about himself seriously, this must have been a rather ambiguous process for him.

Isolation and trauma

“[...]to have dropped off. Somehow off the earth [...] a space outside the world [...] you never leave the basement behind.” These words, describing the experience of being incarcerated, are not Kaspar Hauser's, even though it is said he used very similar ones. Rather, they are quoted from the diary of Jan Phillip Reemtsma, victim of an abduction lasting 33 days.²³ During that time, Reemtsma was chained to a basement wall. His diary gives insight into his thoughts and experiences during the time of his capture. His records are especially significant due to the fact that Reemtsma, a sociologist and founder of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Hamburg Institute for Social Research), had researched the effects of violence and traumatisation extensively. While his situation was very different to Kaspar Hauser's in every way, there are some remarkable similarities in the way each describes their situation. Reemtsma gives a powerful depiction of how his time in the basement lies outside the *continuity* of his biography: “This event, which I do not want to refer to as experience because experiences are to do with the continuity of life, while what I am about to describe is something that befell me from extreme discontinuity [...]” (p. 45). He states that it is a “fact that there is no ego continuity from my desk to the basement that I will have to write about” (p. 46). “To drop out of the world” - this is what best encapsulates Reemtsma's experience as he refers to himself in the third person: “To have fallen off, somehow out of this world. “He had repeatedly chosen the metaphor ‘to fall out of the world’ when describing what others had to go through. Now he was learning the hard way how this metaphor conveyed very precisely the emotion that, from now on, would seize hold of him” (p. 72). “[...] in the same way that he was ‘out of the world’, his emotions were not of the world but emotions in the basement” (p. 194). Reemtsma had ceased to feel like a person - this experience requiring social interaction - but rather like an “empty space through which emotions were merely passing. They came, lingered and went, only to be replaced by others” (p. 201). And, “It was not that *he* was wanting anything - *he* was just not there” (p. 202). Kaspar Hauser referred to the time following his incarceration as “in the world” (Feuerbach, 1832) and his appearance in Nuremberg as the beginning of his life,²⁴ as he had had no knowledge of the world during

22. “[...] he told me that, originally, he thought the white geese in my yard were horses, too [...]” (Wilhelm von Rumppler, Kaspar Hauser's riding instructor) Rumppler, 1829/1966, p. 51.

23. Cf. Reemtsma, 1998, pp. 17, 72 and 103.

24. Fuhrmann, p. 35; another testimony is quoted as: “As soon as I awoke into life [...]”, Feuerbach, 1829/1966, p. 67.

his imprisonment.²⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, philosopher and son of Anselm von Feuerbach, once commented after an encounter with Kaspar Hauser in 1828 on Hauser's attempts to remember: "On these occasions, as generally during conversations relating to his past situation, he appears to want to remember something, to search for something he cannot find, and appears to be as if shrouded in darkness" (Feuerbach, 1828, p. 163). Within his seemingly brief captivity, for Reemtsma too, the "space outside the world into which you were, turns into a piece of world of its own. The walls grow familiar" (p. 103). When he was rescued, he experienced the "overwhelming scent of moist soil, grass, fresh leaves" (p. 151) – natural sensations his senses were deprived of and which were now intensified. Even after his release he has flashbacks of the basement, and, even more significantly, Reemtsma somehow feels at odds with the world: "The ability to experience joy is tainted. But that is only one aspect. Another is that you feel as if you no longer really belong in the world into which you are released" [...] "everything is as it was but I no longer fit in [...]", "The world and I no longer match" (pp. 209, 220 and 221). Again and again he feels as if he is "getting lost, losing touch with the surrounding world [...]" (p. 203). Reemtsma even tells of moments of longing to be back in the basement, however paradoxical this may seem: "The basement stays in my life, and yet will not be made a part of it. There are moments of something like a longing for the reduced state it represents. When life seems difficult and, on balance, these difficulties outweigh the benefits, a desire may grow inside you to be back in chains in that tiny room that feels more familiar than anything else in the world" (p. 221).

Similarly, there are numerous accounts of Kaspar Hauser longing for the days of his captivity. There, he never lacked anything, while now he was increasingly becoming aware of what had been lacking: Parents and a family, a happy childhood and youth that he missed and a past he did not know. Back then, things were so much better than in the world where he suffered so much (Feuerbach, 1832). "At home in his hole [...] he never felt so much pain in his head and people did not torment him the way they do now" (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 38).

It is touching how often and in how many ways Feuerbach mentions this longing in his accounts, as in this one which was most likely quoted from memory: "I imagine how many beautiful things there are in the world and how hard it is for me to have lived so long and yet never to have seen any of it. How lucky children are for being able to see all this from an early age and to still do so now. I'm so old and still have to learn everything children already know. I wish I had never left my cage [...]. I wouldn't have known about any of this or missed it. I wouldn't be sorry for not having been a child and coming into the world so late."²⁶

While Daumer mentions that Hauser gradually lost this longing²⁷, the impression of an individual who feels overwhelmed and also threatened remains.

Reading the accounts of the treatment Kaspar Hauser received following his release, one cannot help but see this as yet another trauma, albeit an unintentional one. It starts with the constant stream of visitors and spectators to which Kaspar Hauser was exposed in his first weeks in Nuremberg. As full-fledged pilgrimages descended upon him, he was gazed at like an exotic animal.²⁸ For many years, there was also a never-ending chain of more or less well-advised interviews, questionings and experiments aimed, on the one hand, at establishing Hauser's origins and whether or not he was an imposter, and also to get to the bottom of what was an extraordinary phenomenon, both physiologically and psychologically. Experiments with food and substances, trials testing and clarifying his heightened sensitivity, e.g. with regard to metallic effects – "misguided and not particularly humane experiments", as Feuerbach matter-of-factly remarks.²⁹ Many of his visitors also tried

25. Daumer, 1832/1983, p. 55.; this phrase appears in many of Hauser's accounts as it does in one of his self-descriptions: "As I was always locked up in this jail, I felt quite content as I did not know about the world..." Hauser, 1828/1983, p. 55; another phrase he used was: "[...] when I entered the big world", Hauser, 1829/1966, p. 69.

26. Feuerbach, 1832/2003, pp. 71; see also p. 26, p. 38, and Daumer, 1832/1983, p. 52 as well as Daumer, 1873/1984, pp. 190.

27. Daumer, 1832/1983, p. 52: "Only once he had physically somewhat recovered at my house did he lose his longing for the cage and the man and saw it as cruel fate to have been locked up for such a long time." Feuerbach, 1828/1966, p. 37; Feuerbach, 1832/2003, p. 21, p. 59; Daumer, 1832/2003, p. 21.

28. Feuerbach, 1828/1966, p. 37; Feuerbach, 1832/2003, p. 21, p. 59; Daumer, 1832/2003, p. 21.

29. Cf. Feuerbach, 1932/2004, p. 38. Daumer e.g. mentions an experiment carried out by Hauser's guard, Hiltel. Hiltel lets him hold a sponge and sets it on fire. Hauser only drops the sponge after having burned himself. Cf. Daumer, 1873/1984, p. 188.

to lecture and instruct Hauser, not least of them a host of theologians on the subject of religion. All in all, Feuerbach mentions, “an hour would not pass without someone or other inflicting something new on him” (Feuerbach, 1932, p. 43). All of these accounts are, of course, of a fragmentary nature.

What is more, the activities surrounding Kaspar Hauser became the subject of continuous public debate and writings such as public announcements, essays and books covering his situation, his character and later on also speculations about his past. Some of these had their own agendas, e.g. his reaction to homeopathic substances was supposed to prove their efficacy, with similar claims being made about his sensitivity to ‘metallic radiation’.³⁰ Thus, Hauser’s situation changed from one completely separated from the world to one so public that, as early as 1832, Feuerbach referred to him as the ‘Child of Europe’ (Feuerbach, 1932, p. 38). This was not lost on Hauser, even if it remains unclear to what extent he was able to follow the debate about himself.³¹ We know for certain, however, that he acknowledged Feuerbach’s writings and, in all probability, also saw writings that accused him of being a fraud.³² He complained about being thought a coward due his life-long fear of being assassinated³³ and for his integrity being questioned.³⁴

His education remained piecemeal, in part due to his frequently changing teachers. Feuerbach regretted that Hauser’s education fell short of what was “appropriate for his peculiarities and common humanity”. Instead, the young man had to work through Latin exercises at a grammar school, something Feuerbach referred to as a new incarceration.³⁵ More crucial for Hauser’s development, however, was the fact that he had been placed with four different families in the five years since his release, with at least two of these situations causing some tension and making life rather miserable for him. Also Count Stanhope, his second guardian, had made sweeping promises he never kept.³⁶ Meanwhile it should be remembered that, since his release, Hauser lived in constant fear for his life, as he said, and he especially feared being killed by an assassin (Feuerbach, 1832, 1829). This description would not be complete, however, without considering the other side - the care and support that Kaspar Hauser received, and not least his own resources.

Self-healing forces and their support systems

In his notes regarding the history of curative education, Andreas Möckel points out four factors that converge in the founding of this branch of pedagogy: neglect, compensation, language and self-healing. In a situation of neglect that may stem from social or physical causes compensatory measures are adopted. These are based on a human’s universal language skills which in turn can form the basis of specific language skills such as signing or Braille. At the heart of this struggle, however, lies the power of self-healing together with its inherent antimony: Self-healing forces stem from the individual but also need an outside trigger (Möckel, 2011, pp. 198-206). When Kaspar Hauser first appeared in Nuremberg he received a considerable amount of attention and care. The town’s representatives – from policemen to prison officers and all the way to the mayor – were touched and endeavoured to help him, even though some of the methods they applied were potentially detrimental. The accounts e.g. by Daumer, Feuerbach and Fuhrmann testify to a high degree of dedication, reflectivity and the continual endeavour to understand the ‘stranger’ and to meet his needs, and to the fact that they continued for many years. There were people who offered to house and help him. Also, the initial public response was often characterised by empathy and compassion, and the abundance of presents he

30. Daumer mentions that “[...] if homeopathic therapy owes its successes not merely to diets and the conducting of medical abuses of the organism but that those infamous and much ridiculed small doses really are at the heart of healing, there is no better subject to show this more clearly than this [...] uniquely sensitive Hauser. He continues: “It is as much proof of the possible effectiveness of small homeopathic doses as can be achieved by observation and experience.” Daumer, 1832/1983, p. 82.

31. In 1833, his guardians estimated his intellect to be that of a 10 to 12-year old boy; cf. Tucher, 1830/1966, p. 90, and Meyer, 1833/1966, p. 111.

32. See annotation 24.

33. “As soon as I came into the world I feared the man who had brought me here [...]. If I mentioned something like that in Nuremberg people called me a coward.” (Feuerbach, 1929, in Pies, 1966, p. 67).

34. Questioning by Joseph Hickel on 31 January 1834. In Pies, 1966, p. 120.

35. “Much like the prison walls of his childhood, the dusty walls of his classroom shut him off from nature and life itself.” Feuerbach 1832/2002, p. 70.

36. Cf. Feuerbach 1873/1984, pp. 285.

received came from the heart. Much of what may easily be criticised from today's perspective stemmed from people's genuine goodwill and honest efforts. None of this would have escaped Kaspar Hauser's sensitivity. As is often the case, if rarely fully appreciated, however, the unexpected, the random also played a part in his development, one example being Hauser's interaction with the children of prison officer Hiltel. They were most likely the only people to meet him unselfconsciously, and through whom he was able to learn many things, according to Hiltel.³⁷ Another incident of probably great significance was a police officer's idea to give Hauser, who kept mentioning the word 'horse', a wooden toy horse. This seemed to have an instantly transforming effect on the boy. Feuerbach later wrote that it was as if Hauser had been reunited with an old friend. Hauser starts to attach to this horse all the presents he has been given but so far ignored. Suddenly, they gain significance.³⁸ The wooden horse becomes a kind of 'transitional object' between the two hitherto unconnected chapters of his life. It becomes a vehicle to integrate the impalpable past in a playful way, and to build a bridge to his very separate present. It is also thought that Hauser's reminiscences which he wrote down at Daumer's suggestion played a part in this integrating process. They help him regain a measure of authorship over his own history that he had so completely lost. Perhaps it is an over-interpretation but the reminiscences Daumer relates always start by stressing this authorship: "The story of Kaspar Hauser, I want to write myself how hard I've had it [...]" or "This story of Kaspar Hauser I want to write myself. How I lived in this jail and describe what it looked like and all the things that were in it." And finally, "This biography of my former state, written from memory."³⁹ As with any of Kaspar Hauser's statements and accounts, the extent of Daumer's influence remains unclear. Daumer's intentions were quite documentary, however, as elsewhere in his accounts he makes it very clear where he commented on Kaspar Hauser's descriptions.⁴⁰ The diction indicates that Daumer did not edit Hauser's text itself. Feuerbach mentions how Hauser felt proud of his authorship, perhaps without fully grasping its meaning.⁴¹ This also signifies another parallel to J. Ph. Reemtsma's description which he pens in order "to reclaim [his] own story that is being told by everyone." (Reemtsma, 1995, p. 15). Natascha Kampusch, who was freed after seven years' captivity, expressed the same need.⁴² With the support of his mentors, Kaspar Hauser tries to reconstruct the continuity of his biography as far as possible, not least by way of the often employed comparisons between his two 'lives'. Daumer mentions how Hauser told him a few months prior to his death how he wanted to live with him and write down his own story (Daumer, 1873, p. 82). Despite all his gentleness and vulnerability, in his years in Nuremberg and Ansbach Hauser displayed a strong will, 'eagerness and perseverance' (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 38), and, despite all his intellectual limitations and readiness to assimilate, the ability and also the courage to think independently.⁴³ Notably, the records show that the innocence, openness and vulnerability of his character brought out the best in many - if not all - of his contemporaries.

Projection surface and myth

In an essay in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* marking the 200th anniversary of Kaspar Hauser's birthday, Roman Bucheli characterises Hauser as the perfect hollow vessel for everyone to fill with their own story - the

37. Cf. Hiltel's account in Feuerbach, 1832/2002, pp. 21.

38. "Only now that he could decorate his little horse with them was he able to appreciate the proper significance of these objects." Cf. Feuerbach 1832/2004, pp. 18.

39. Cf. Daumer, 1832/1983, pp. 55.

40. Daumer, 1832/1983, p. 60. Here he writes how he criticised a different start.

41. "This first attempt at representing his own thoughts for himself - even if, to be sure, it could only be taken as evidence of his long suppressed development and the poverty and clumsiness of his childlike mind - he looked upon with the eyes of a young writer who watches the first product of his quill pen coming off the press." Masson, 2010, p.135.

42. In an interview recorded immediately after being freed she said: "Everybody wants to influence you in one way or another. They mean well but ... The first few nights they tried to make me sleep. At first, they wouldn't understand why I was awake at four in the morning and wouldn't go to sleep until eleven or so." When asked whether she would read the publications about herself she said: "Basically, I don't want to burden myself with such disparagements, defamations and humiliations right now. That would be too much.", and, "Yes, I may or may not write a book about myself. What I definitely don't want is for someone else to pass themselves off as an expert on my life. If anyone writes about me it'll be me. (Interview of Austrian TV channel ORF with Natascha Kampusch from 6 September 2006)

43. See also e.g. Fuhrmann, 1834/1983, pp. 33; Feuerbach, 1832/2004, p. 55: "His awakened and soon also pondering intellect would admit nothing that was not firmly based in his sensory awareness [...]"

archetypal innocent victim, the abandoned human par excellence. Bucheli evokes the myths of Moses, Oedipus and Parzival, and points to the likelihood of elements of Kaspar Hauser's own story having been suggested to him during his early questionings. Thus, accounts by later-born artists would have incorporated their themes and motifs in this story which, increasingly, tells more about the narrator and less about the narrated. For example, Jakob Wassermann, who himself had lost his mother, incarnated his own childhood trauma in a novel about Kaspar Hauser; or the imprisoned Verlaine ("Gaspard Hauser chante"), who wrote his own fate into that of Kaspar Hauser. This phenomenon is therefore much like a reflective projection screen, able to absorb everything (Bucheli, 2012). Feuerbach already concluded in 1828 that Kaspar Hauser's original story contained inconsistencies and was - at least in part - the result of the suggestive questioning which the defenceless and vulnerable Hauser had been subjected to.⁴⁴ Also, Hauser's guardian, Freiherr von Tucher, thought his ward had been told and suggested much that was incorrect, leaving him unable to distinguish between fact and fiction with regard to his own story (Tucher, 1830, p. 88). It has also become apparent that many of his contemporaries sought to see and indeed did see their philosophical, religious, medical and other opinions confirmed by his example, not to mention the question of his origins and the political theories associated with it. In addition to the general feeling of sympathy, the 19th century also saw a growing awareness of the significance of the childhood as a developmental phase in its own right and the condemnation of the long-established practices of abandoning children and child abuse.⁴⁵ The fact that such sympathy can also be an act of projective denial has been described by Natascha Kampusch in her own story.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the available evidence of Kaspar Hauser sheds light on a multitude of phenomena which were critically observed and well documented. In their entirety, they form a consistent picture of the time of his appearance and his further development - even if some questions remain. Many accounts also let the reader differentiate easily between observations and interpretations (Feuerbach, 1832, p. 43, p. 72). Remarkably, the image of the *mirror* or the *tabula rasa* already appears in contemporary descriptions. Feuerbach saw Hauser's consciousness as a 'clean slate' and "a soul void of any conceptions but equally so of any prejudices or superstitions". Tucher calls it a 'tabula rasa' that absorbed a world of concepts with endless receptivity [...]" (Tucher, 1834, p. 35). This concerns particularly Hauser's initial time in Nuremberg, and these accounts match many other observations. They can be reconstructed as a specific consciousness under special circumstances, accompanied by a special 'openness' and 'innocence' as it is repeatedly referred to. Perhaps these phenomena and their language should not be dismissed too hastily because of the romanticisms and projections associated with them. It is in fact within these phenomena that the image of a human being with symbolic significance manifests itself, as Jakob Wassermann noted.⁴⁷ This core has also been taken up and given shape by a number of artists: Verlaine in the 'belonging to a different era' of a lonely person, and the open question as to their destiny; Georg Trakl in his poetic portrait of the 'unborn' which refracts what Hauser experiences as an ambivalent 'coming into the world'; and Wassermann himself by showing how society and the individual reveal their moral substance by the way they treat Kaspar Hauser. Peter Handke, on the other hand, stages the overpowering of the mute youth by the force of the language pummeling him in his play, while Dieter Forte addresses the role of the myth serving as a stand-in when embracing the fate of many others. These and many other attempts characterise the fate of Kaspar Hauser in his symbolism as the Myth of Man, in his forlornness and vulnerability. It is not by chance that the experience of being thrown into the world becomes a defining phrase in the philosophy of the 20th century which fleshed out the basic approaches of the 19th century in all spheres of life.

44. "The accounts of his incarceration and transportation to Nuremberg are, in part, unbelievable or mysterious, and some are probably even untrue. He was questioned at a time when he had almost no notion, no concept of nature or human matters, least of all the proper words to describe them. He often spoke in his confused, dark gibberish, saying things he did not mean to say, or leaving the questioner enough scope for reading their own thoughts, opinions and hypotheses into his answers." (Feuerbach, 1828/1966, p. 37).

45. Cf. Cunningham, 2006.

46. "Society needs perpetrators like Wolfgang Priklopil in order to put a face to its inherent evil and then separate itself from it." Society needs images of dungeons in order not to have to look at all the homes and front gardens that are the suburban and bourgeois fronts of violence. They use people like me, victims of spectacular cases, in order to absolve themselves of the responsibility for the many nameless victims of everyday crime who receive no help, even when they ask for it." (Kampusch, 2012, p. 194).

47. "[...] the figure becomes a symbol", Wassermann, 1908/2005, in the opening lines of the novel.

As has been shown, only one side was emphasized with regard to Kaspar Hauser himself. His extraordinary readiness to accept his own situation, his perseverance, his self-will and search for his own way, combined with a generous goodwill toward others - despite his negative experiences - all remain unmentioned. It is likely that his willpower was in part nurtured by a great longing that he took to his grave: to find his parents after all. With his fate, his qualities and the impact he had on other people, Kaspar Hauser is a representative for the many children and young people who require a special kind of concern and support.

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