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The “savage” is a major theme in Western intellectual history. From the Middle Ages to modernity, the European imaginary has been inhabited by various representations of “Wild Men.” They can be found in art, literature, and folklore. The “wild” appears, for instance, as a motif represented by satyrs and fauns. In science, the savage is present in the conceptualizations of naturalists and physicians of the 17th and 18th centuries, as is the case of the primate *homo sylvestris*, which was introduced to the public by anatomist Edward Tyson (1651-1708). There is also the *homo ferus*, which appeared in the 10th edition of Carl von Linné’s (1707-1778) influential work *Systema Naturae*. In philosophy, the most well-known approach to this theme can be found in elaborations on the *bon sauvage* by philosophers such as J.J. Rousseau.

Circumscribed to this broad historical and conceptual context involving an imaginary savage and the 18th-century quest for a “science of human nature” were two influential medical reports by French physician Jean Itard (1774-1838). These reports described the case of Victor of Aveyron, a boy found in a forest in the south of France in 1798. Due to his circumstances, Victor of Aveyron was characterized as “wild.” This is the theme of the book organized by researchers Luci Banks-Leite, Izabel Galvão, and Débora Dainez titled *O garoto selvagem e o dr. Jean Itard: história e diálogos contemporâneos* [The Wild Boy and dr. Jean Itard: History and Contemporary Dialogues].

Dr. Itard’s reports were first translated into Portuguese in 2000 and published under the title *A educação de um selvagem: experiências pedagógicas de Jean Itard* [The Education of a Savage: Jean Itard’s Teaching Experiences]. The publication was the result of meetings and debates among Luci Banks-Leite and Izabel Galvão and other collaborators from Brazil and abroad on Dr. Itard’s writings. In this sense, the book publicized the results of almost two decades of constant debates and reflections among pedagogues, linguists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, philosophers, and historians regarding the meaning of Victor of Aveyron’s case.

Underlying the discussion about *O garoto selvagem e o dr. Jean Itard* [The Wild Boy and dr. Jean Itard] is the relationship between language and thought, which is particularly articulated through analysis of Victor’s case. The book is divided into two parts. The first includes seven essays, while the second presents two historical documents. The authors first analyze the work from different perspectives on the latent

epistemological problems surrounding Victor. The reader is then given two texts (a *mémoire* and a report) that were translated by Dr. Itard, which, together with a film by François Truffaut (1932-1984), serve as a documentary basis for analyzing the first part of the book.

The first essay is titled O selvagem do Aveyron: aspectos históricos e debates para o século XXI [The Savage of Aveyron: Historical Aspects and Debates for the 21st Century]. It was written by Luci Banks-Leite and Izabel Galvão, two of the collection's editors. The essay presents both the contextual and conceptual approaches (i.e., intellectual and scientific) to Victor's case, including information on the spatial location (i.e., the place where the boy was found and where he was (un)treated and (un)educated). The ambiguous terminology precisely indicates one of the book's central discussions. That is, the epistemological dimensions of the success/failure of Dr. Itard. The authors also present material that served as the basis for the book's analyses. This includes (1) the first report (*mémoire*) from 1801, which sets out the guiding objectives of Dr. Itard's teaching program, (2) a report from 1806 that provides an account of Victor's situation to the Minister of the Interior of France, and (3) Truffaut's film.

The second essay, titled O silêncio do homem natural [The Silence of the Natural Man], was written by Carlos R. Luis, who discusses a variety of philosophical problems debated during the 18th century (e.g., the nature of language and thought). These problems also surrounded Victor, who was only one of many children found in "wild states" during that time. Luiz identifies a group of 17th-century scholars (mainly Christian Wolff, JJ Rousseau, and Condillac) who informed the medical and scientific debate about the status of the "savage" in the context of problems such as the relationship between "nature" and "society." These intellectuals specifically influenced the scientific practices of Dr. Itard and Philippe Pinel (1745-1826). According to Luis, these scientists disagreed about the *sensualist* or *innatist* character of human nature. These concepts served as broader theories to ponder the relationship between *nature* and *society* during the general formation of human character and for Victor's case in particular.

Luci Banks-Leite wrote the work's third essay, O projeto científico de educação do selvagem do Aveyron: perspectiva histórica e reflexões para o presente [The scientific project for the education of the savage of the Aveyron: historical perspective

and reflections for the present]. In it, she articulates concepts such as sensitivity, speech/thought, and learning as they applied to Victor's case. These concepts were articulated in the intricate and complex political and philosophical contexts of late 17th-century France. Banks-Leite thus analyses some of the parametrizing figures of the "science of man" as discussed during that period. Along with Dr. Itard and Pinel, Banks-Leite discusses the contributions of Pierre Cabanis (1757-1808), Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), and the Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné. Banks-Leite thus demarcates the conceptual field within which the broader debate on the relationship between nature and culture was structured. This underlies the specific case regarding the nature of Victor's deficiency (i.e., whether it was innate or acquired).

Banks-Leite thus highlights two of Dr. Itard's goals, as follows: (1) To stimulate Victor's nervous system, and (2) lead him to the act of speech. These objectives were based on a contemporary theoretical discussion involving *sensualism* and *innatism*. From the physiological point of view, the author emphasizes the relationship between nervous stimuli (i.e., the physical) and speech. This was not only examined as a sign of cure, but as a way to foster debate on the relationship between civilization, language, thought, and the formation of ideas as discussed by authors such as Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715-1780).

The fourth essay *A educação de Victor do Aveyron: do isolamento da floresta ao isolamento em sociedade* [Victor of Aveyron's Education: from the Isolation of the Forest to Isolation in Society] uses Victor's case as a platform to analyze the relationship between social contact and human development. In this sense, Izabel Galvão and Heloysa Dantas highlight the opposing visions of Pinel and Dr. Itard. For instance, Pinel believed that Victor possessed an organic weakness. This entailed the view that Victor was incapable of both education and socialization. On the other hand, Dr. Itard believed something closer to the empiricist-sensualist epistemology of Condillac, entailing that the socialization process was privileged in Victor's case. The authors introduce a secondary division of Dr. Itard involving his capacity as a scientist and educator, arguing that he failed at both. As a scientist, Dr. Itard "reified" Victor, thus exempting their relationship from subjectivity. This led to his primary flaw as an educator.

The fifth essay *O selvagem poderia ter falado? Ou das condições estruturais de uma educação* [Could the savage have spoken? Or the structural conditions of an education] was written by Leandro de Lajonquière, who introduces an important reflection on the scientific context in which a search of the “natural man” was conducted. Victor temporarily satisfied this quest, but the essay’s primary intent was to draw parallels between the medical and pedagogical procedures conducted by Dr. Itard in Victor’s and those conducted by Anne Sullivan (1866-1936) in Helen Keller’s case (1880-1968). In this sense, Lajonquière discusses what he calls the “necessary conditions” or “structural conditions” for success of the educational enterprise in both cases. Lajonquière believes that Dr. Itard’s enterprise was unsuccessful because he never abandoned the idea of moral medicine (i.e., that he was rescuing Victor from both a wild state and *tabula rasa*). It follows that the opposite occurred in Helen Keller’s case, which seemed successful due to Anne Sullivan’s strong emphasis on her affective bond with Keller, who was deaf and blind. This created the necessary conditions for speech to emerge.

In the sixth essay, *Itard e Vygotski: um diálogo possível* [Itard and Vygotsky: a possible dialogue], Ana Luiza Smolka and Débora Dainez stress one of the book’s underlying themes, that is, the relationship between culture and nature, particularly directed at (a) the problem of the genesis of psychological functions and, (b) one of the core ingredients of this problem, human language. In this sense, the authors allude to two sides of a contemporary debate on the issue. One is led by linguist Noam Chomsky, who conceptualizes language as an innate device. The other is led by psychologist Michael Tomasello, who advocates a view in which phylogenetically produced social cognition is a condition for the emergence of language.

The authors also analyze the relationship between Dr. Itard and Vygotsky through their points of academic convergence (e.g., “humanization” is only acquired through culture and education) in addition to their divergent views (e.g., speech as a condition of thinking and knowing). In this sense, the authors explore some of the book’s cardinal problems. For instance, “How does the sign, the word/language affect and constitute the human psyche? How do the functions of language relate to

psychological functions?” (p.115).¹ From historical, scientific, and philosophical viewpoints, the problem seems to be more feasibly elaborated upon than answered. Regardless, the authors press on the issue by drawing parallels between the cases of Victor and Guilherme (a public-school student with Down syndrome during the 2010s who, like Victor, did not speak). Thus, the same questions remain: “If it is impossible to speak, is it impossible to think? To understand? To signify?” (p.118).²

The seventh essay, *Olhares cruzados sobre a educação de um jovem selvagem: Itard (1801) – Truffaut (1970)* [Crossed sights on the education of a young savage: Itard (1801) - Truffaut (1970)] relates an analysis of Truffaut’s film to Dr. Itard’s writings. Authors Anne Goliot-Lété and Sophie Lerner-Seï examine the film titled *The Wild Boy* as appropriation and reinterpretation of Victor’s case. In this sense, the authors explore Dr. Itard’s knowledge through a semiotic mirroring of his texts and the film, thus demonstrating how certain images in the film enunciate a complex psychic picture that mirrors Itard with Truffaut, Victor de Aveyron with Jean- Pierre Cargol, and actress Françoise Seigner with Madame Guérin (the governess who assisted in Dr. Itard’s educational project). This creates a point of convergence between two analytical viewpoints. That is, the authors analyze the prominence of different persons involved in Victor’s education and the limits and advances that the film presents as an interpretation of Dr. Itard’s writings.

O garoto selvagem e o dr. Jean Itard: história e diálogos [The Wild Boy and dr. Jean Itard: History and Contemporary Dialogues] presents a methodological proposition that is both bold and, from a point of historical analysis, potentially limiting. The limitation springs from questions such as, “Could the savage have spoken?” (p.79)³ and statements such as “Itard failed” (p.77).⁴ Both the question and assertion presuppose a comparative view of the present with the past and is thus informed by contemporary theories of truth. In that sense, while it is tempting to ask whether Dr. Itard may have adopted different medical and educational procedures, the answer to this question appears to be limited to the knowledge regime of that time.

¹ In the original: “Como o signo, a palavra/língua(gem) afeta e constitui o psiquismo humano? Como as funções da linguagem se relacionam com as funções psicológicas?”

² In the original: “Se há impossibilidade de falar, há impossibilidade de pensar? De compreender? De significar?”

³ In the original: “O selvagem poderia ter falado?”

⁴ In the original: “Itard errou.”

In addition to this potential limitation in approaching Victor's case (i.e., stressing the methodological historicism indicated by historians of science such as Georges Canguilhem), we must resume with the provocative methodological aspect of the book. That is, it involves analysis of a historical case ingrained with educational and scientific projects as well as the effort to comparatively reflect past and present epistemologies, particularly those linked to the relationship between language and thought. Deeply intriguing and inexhaustible reflections thus arise throughout each of the seven essays. They further incite the reader to the examination of the second part of the work, Jean Itard's writings.

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