

Magd (KA III 342).

⁸ Of the thirteen *Geschichten vom lieben Gott* only four do not contain some variant form of 'zittern.'

⁹ Lou Andreas-Salomé describes the experience Rilke and she had of seeing a 'derwischartig-heilig' monk have a seizure in *Rodinka*, 68-69.

¹⁰ Bahr attempts here to define 'Symbolismus' in contrast to traditional symbolism as "Stellvertreter und Zeichen nicht des Unsinnlichen, sondern von anderen ebenso sinnlichen Dingen" (136).

¹¹ See *Faust II* ("Klassische Walpurgisnacht / Am untern Peneios"), 222.

¹² Goethe is also referred to by name later in the dialogue.

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'Mißgestaltet und Mißverstanden': The Representation of Disability in Twentieth-Century German-Speaking Theatre

Birte Schulz

With the growing number of books written about disability and an increasing number of courses using this term in their names, it can be difficult to understand what disability studies actually is. One of the most comprehensive explanations as to the nature and the aims of this relatively new academic discipline is offered by Simi Linton's *Claiming Disability*. Assuming that educational institutions shape cultural knowledge and meaning, she sees disability studies as an academic project aiming to correct the way disability is currently dealt with in the academics and "to hold academics responsible for the veracity and the social consequences of their work" (1-2). Disability, according to Linton, is commonly viewed as a medical phenomenon, which means that it is not usually studied in the Humanities, but only in the specialised applied subjects, such as rehabilitation, special education and health (132-56). The idea that disability is a medical problem that needs to be solved with the help of special institutions is a discourse which, in the view of disability studies, forms part of the oppression of people with disabilities. For J. I. Charlton the shift away from the traditional view of disability as a "sick, abnormal, and pathetic condition" is a key element in the struggle against this oppression as "it sees disability as normal, not inferior and demands self-determination over the resources people with disabilities need" (10).

The themes of self-determination, self-definition and subjective experience, all intended to contest the objectification of disabled persons implicit in traditional social and academic practices, are at the heart of the project of disability studies.¹ People with disabilities are objectified wherever they are still marginalized, wherever they have no say in the way resources are allocated to them or they are excluded from the discourse that defines their social identity. According to Linton the four main objectives of disability studies are the theoretical construction of disability as a complementary social identity, the exposure of oppressive mechanisms and their

implications for the nature of society by making disability the central category of research,² the building up of a knowledge base about disability in the field of the liberal arts and the critical study of the representations of disability in cultural products to reveal dominant attitudes towards disability.³

This effectively places disability studies within the ideological context of postmodernism, which has been defined by J. F. Lyotard as an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (482). By ‘metanarratives’ he means totalising concepts of knowledge that, as John Storey explains, “always attempt [...] to silence other voices, other discourses, in the name of universal principles and general goals” (346). Normality can be seen as a metanarrative in this sense as it, by its very definition, marginalises certain discourses and marks them as less important or even dangerous and subversive.

These concepts constitute the theoretical framework of my analysis as it will try to counteract the objectification of people with disabilities and, thus, the presumption of normality, in two different ways: First, in a general way, by adding the perspective of a disabled researcher to the vast base of knowledge produced by traditional criticism. Second, in a more specific way, by analysing how disability is used in selected plays by four of the best-known German-speaking playwrights, namely Bertolt Brecht’s *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *Der Blinde*, Max Frisch’s *Andorra* and Peter Handke’s *Kaspar*.

In this context it is vital to remember that representations of disability occur in the context of some form of communication. As for the specific case of theatre, I would agree with Erika Fischer-Lichter’s understanding of it as “der institutionalisierte Prozeß der theatralischen Kommunikation,” some of whose components she identifies as “allgemeine und besondere Bedingungen der Produktion und Rezeption, Konstitution einer theatralischen Sprache, Struktur und Wirkung der Aufführung/Performance” (10). This approach to theatre is useful, as it extends the original argument of this study to the effect that the canon of German-speaking twentieth-century dramatic theatre⁴ objectifies people with disabilities because it is essentially a discourse where non-disabled dramatists, producers and actors use disabled people in their communication with non-disabled audiences. This is not to say that people with disabilities

are deliberately excluded from theatre. Rather it means that the lack of awareness of disability shapes theatrical practices in such a way that people with disabilities are effectively excluded from this communication.

A helpful tool in this context is Keir Elam’s semiotic approach to theatre and drama.⁵ He identifies as the main signification systems used in dramatic and theatrical communication, which make it clear that the implied audiences consist of nondisabled people, rather than people with disabilities, as the latter would not have sufficient knowledge of all the codes considered to be part of the competence of an average spectator.⁶ Moreover, where theatre does not exclude audience members with disabilities it ‘innormalizes’ them.⁷ By ‘innormalisation’ I mean the way it invites all spectators, including people with disabilities, to identify with an active nondisabled (main) character and/or to conform to ways of responding to a play that expects the audience to have all the normal channels of sensory and cognitive perception available.

However, the laying bare of the objectification process, which is the main aim of this study, should reveal not only the restrictions placed on and the injustices committed against people with disabilities, but also the generic possibilities for their correction. Due to the fact that for each work two texts exist, namely the dramatic and the theatrical, the dramatic genre offers the unique chance to add ‘subjectivity’ and the “active voice[s]” of disabled producers and actors (Linton 134). Thus it would be possible, in the sphere of dramatic theatre, to realise the claim of the Disability Rights Movement: “Nothing about us without us” (Charlton 3).

**“Die Menschen schweigen, der Stein hat beschlossen zu reden”:
Disability in Brecht’s *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder***

Brecht’s concept of epic theatre aimed to dispose of the idea that there is something universally and eternally human that transcends all differences in the human condition (*Schriften zum Theater* 59). Instead, his plays were intended to illustrate that, due to these differences, people have different views on the same events.⁸ Thus he divides the audience, rather than assuming them to be a

homogeneous collective. In his writing, however, there is an obvious emphasis on social difference with clearly Marxist connotations. His way of explaining the individual as an effect of their time tends to neglect people's other differences. In Brecht's dramatic theory disability, like gender, race, et cetera, does not constitute a category of analysis in its own right. His concept of theatre still sees the audience as a collective in the sense that it assumes audience to be normally abled. Furthermore, it claims dramatic characters for a system of signification, which means that Kattrin becomes part of a communication process from which people with disabilities are excluded.⁹ Her muteness is not only reduced to an effect of the milieu, in this case the Thirty Year's War, but also to a means of communication. Disability is used to express not its own content, but one that is prescribed by the author. It is, for Brecht, a means to get the message across ("Über Mutter Courage" 49).

In his play Brecht uses both theatrical and literary techniques, such as her gestures, the sounds she makes and the comments by her mother to make Kattrin understood (White 103). When Mother Courage first tells the cook about her children she says about Kattrin: "Die Tochter ist nix. Wenigstens red sie nicht, das ist schon etwas" (23). This statement shows a typical pattern in Mother Courage's attitude to her daughter. It is actually because of Kattrin's muteness that in the eyes of her mother she is (worth) nothing, but this 'flaw' is then interpreted as a desirable side-effect. Later in the play her mother even goes as far as calling her disability a gift from God: "Sei froh, daß du stumm bist, da widersprichst du dir nie oder willst dir nie die Zunge abbeißen, weil du die Wahrheit gesagt hast, das ist ein Gottesgeschenk, Stummsein" (33). The idea that the loss of one of the senses is a welcome escape from reality and/or personal responsibility is a recurrent theme in the representation and criticism of disabled characters.¹⁰ It is also typical that the failure of normal sensibility is seen as the chance of finding a new, different way of relating to the world. Aside from the critics that attach symbolic value to Kattrin's muteness, others only mention it in passing. In their writings Kattrin is a "victim [...] of [her] mother's guilt" (Speirs 98-9), "ein rührendes Opfer der Gewalttätigkeit der Soldaten" (Ewen 335) or simply "a disabled girl" (Leach 134). There is no further discussion of why she is mute or what that implies.

Mother Courage herself is hardly 'politically correct' when she speaks about her daughter to other people. On one occasion she calls her a 'Krüppel' (42) and expresses dismay at the sounds Kattrin makes, mainly because she does not want the preacher to hear them (44). Indeed, the attitudes expressed by the preacher and the cook, associates rather than family members, are not very flattering. The preacher thinks that Mother Courage's "erwerbsunfähige Tochter" is a burden to her (50). This is actually quite ironic as Kattrin works harder than the preacher. The cook is even more reckless in his assessment of Kattrin's prospects: "Wie soll die einen Mann finden? Stumm und die Narb dazu! [...] Und das ist auch ein Grund, warum ich sie nicht in der Wirtschaft haben kann. Die Gäst wolln so was nicht immer vor Augen haben" (92-3). He sees Kattrin's disability and her scar as offensive to normal people.¹¹ Although Kattrin's mother is somewhat more sympathetic, she comes to a similar conclusion: "Mir ist ein historischer Augenblick, daß sie meiner Tochter übers Aug geschlagen haben. Die ist schon halb kaputt, einen Mann kriegt sie nicht mehr, und dabei so ein Kindernarr" (74). Yet, Mother Courage is the character in the play that knows Kattrin best, and although she cannot appreciate her daughter's feelings, she has a fair idea about how the war makes her suffer.¹² Her assessment of her daughter, as far as her love for children, her compassion and her fear of war are concerned, seems to be confirmed by the way Kattrin behaves. She attacks her mother with a wooden plank when the latter does not want to sacrifice any linen shirts to dress the wounds of the injured farmers, and she also saves their baby from the burning house.¹³ Later she throws a basket full of bottles on the ground when she hears that the war is going to continue. It is interesting to note that Mother Courage interprets Kattrin's reaction to the war's continuation as annoyance about having to wait even longer to get a husband.¹⁴ Kattrin's longing for a husband and children could be viewed as one of the few things that are genuinely part of her nature. When she borrows Yvette's shoes and imitates the prostitute's manner of walking, it is a spontaneous act, motivated by a mixture of curiosity and desire that is normal for her age. Mother Courage takes the shoes away as she is worried that Kattrin will end up like Yvette, but she gives them back to Kattrin to comfort her after she has been assaulted by the soldier.

Both Mother Courage and the audience have to draw conclusions about Kattrin's inner life from her actions. This means that ultimately Kattrin's identity is one that is, to an extent, imposed on her. Due to her linguistic affliction she cannot reply to anything that is being said, and thus cannot correct or modify what is assumed to be true about her. This lack of self-definition on her part makes it difficult to tell to what extent her actions reveal her true nature as she might simply be conforming to a role assigned to her by others. Kattrin's fate is, in this respect, emblematic of the experience of people with disabilities. She has to rely on her mother, who admits that really she has no idea what Kattrin is thinking: "Wenn ich wüßte, wie es in ihrem Kopf aussieht!" (73). This remark shows the difficulties normally abled people in general have in dealing with those who do not share their own perception of the world, as is also the case in the next play, Dürrenmatt's *Der Blinde*.

"Die 'Augen des Glaubens' sind blind": Disability in Dürrenmatt's *Der Blinde*

Complaints about the unrealistic and reductive portrayal of blind characters have been made since the early twentieth century when a systematic comparison began in Germany between the social existence of blind people and its literary representation (Merkle 21). Many people thought that the characters produced did not reflect the growing competence of people with a visual impairment which enabled them to integrate into society to a greater extent (Merkle 21). Dürrenmatt's remarks about the relationship between a play, its characters and their beliefs suggest, however, that the blind duke in *Der Blinde* could be an exception to this rule. Dürrenmatt maintains that his characters are first and foremost human beings and that what they think and believe is an expression of what they are, rather than being the intended message of the play ("*Theaterprobleme*" 29). The conception of the dramatic character as a human being implies a certain individuality, a well-roundedness that does not reduce it to a single feature or a mere type. In his *Anmerkungen zu Der Blinde*, written in 1980, he explains that, despite what most people thought, the play is not simply an allegory of faith (256). The question is if this opens the possibility for a more individualistic and realistic

representation of the blind duke, especially as the title suggests the exact opposite.

The play shows the duke in the ruins of his castle which has been destroyed by war. He believes, however, that the life he knew is still intact, which raises the question of what is actually true and real. The dilemma that defines the scope of the duke's character as well as giving structure to the play is described by the author as follows: "Der Herzog in *Der Blinde* befindet sich in einer existenziellen Position, wo er zwischen dem Glauben an die Sehenden und dem Zweifel an den Sehenden zu wählen hat" (*Anmerkungen* 256). The duke must make this choice as he cannot check whether or not what people tell him about the world is true. Thus, his blindness is associated with trust and faith as an antithesis to the reality of those who can see. To experiment with these two conflicting realities that exist within the same dramatic space was Dürrenmatt's main concern with regard to the play ("*Theaterprobleme*" 42). The spectator is seen as part of the normal reality of the other characters, a reality that is dominated by images rather than words. This means that the audience can, in every sense of the word, see through the lies and charades that form the basis for the duke's reality due to his 'willing suspension of disbelief.' The fact that Dürrenmatt assumes the spectators to be able to see, hear and generally sense what is happening on stage becomes even more obvious when he emphasises the importance of the theatrical dimension of drama: "Ein Theaterstück wird durch das Theater, indem man es spielt, etwas Sichtbares, Hörbares, Greifbares, damit aber auch Unmittelbares" ("*Theaterprobleme*" 34). It would be foolish to accuse Dürrenmatt of deliberately discriminating against people with disabilities when he imagines his audience as well as most of his characters to be normally abled. There is a natural bias in the way nondisabled authors think of others: they presume normality. It would be impossible for Dürrenmatt not think of his audience as consisting of 'normal' people when he essentially creates it in his own image: "Der moderne Autor kennt kein bestimmtes Publikum mehr [...]. Er fingiert sein Publikum, in Wahrheit ist er es selber" ("*Theaterprobleme*" 39).

The contradiction between what the duke believes and what the audience and the other characters know becomes obvious from the beginning of the play. The first scene shows the duke sitting

in front of his ruined castle that has been destroyed in the course of the Thirty Year's War. His remark about "den Frieden meines Landes und den Frieden meiner Seele" seems rather odd as the spectator does not yet know about his blindness (151). The Italian soldier Negro da Ponte, who is passing by the duke's castle, is equally surprised when asked why he does not greet the owner of such a 'splendid' castle. Negro da Ponte then realises that the duke is blind and the latter confirms this: "Ich bin blind. Die Krankheit, von der ich genesen bin, hat mich blind gemacht" (152). He proceeds to describe the portal of the castle to Negro da Ponte, who plays along, and then the duke praises God, who has bestowed peace on his country and his soul.¹⁵ The duke's clinging to faith is an act of self-preservation: "Mit dem Augenlicht hat der Herzog den Sinn für die Wahrheit verloren: er sieht die Wirklichkeit nicht mehr. Um nicht zu verzweifeln, greift er nach dem Glauben als rettendem Strohalm" (Arnold 30).

Negro da Ponte and Palamedes, the duke's son, however, interpret the way in which his blindness has allowed him to substitute the reality of the senses with that of faith in a slightly different way. They view his escape from their reality as a blessing for him. Negro da Ponte tells him: "Für einen Sehenden gibt es keine Gnade" (155). Palamedes views it as divine intervention that prevented his father from witnessing the destruction of his realm: "Der Himmel hat ihm die Augen zugehalten" (160). Again, here we find the notion that disability protects the individual from the reality of a world that is too grim to deal with,¹⁶ or as Gerhard Knapp states: "Den Herzog, der in die (reale) Blindheit geflohen ist, bewahrt sein Glaube (die metaphysische Sicht) vor der Konfrontation mit einer unerträglichen Wirklichkeit" (34). Similarly, Armin Arnold claims that this aspect of the play shows Dürrenmatt's critical attitude towards God: "Dürrenmatts Anklage an Gott bleibt dieselbe: man muß schon blind sein, um an Gott glauben zu können" (30).

Yet the duke does not only have to trust in God, he also must rely on other people for information about the world that surrounds him: "Ich bin blind. Ich muß dem Menschen vertrauen, um zu sehen" (156). Therefore, Negro da Ponte decides that the duke is the perfect victim for a scheme that is intended to test his faith. Da Ponte and his "Getier der Nacht" design a play around the duke that pretends

to restore his former glory while actually taking away everything the duke holds dear (169). Da Ponte tells his 'cast,' consisting of soldiers, whores, actors and other dubious figures, that the duke is the best audience anybody could wish for: "Ihr könnt ihm vorspielen, was ihr wollt, und er wird alles glauben" (163). This assessment seems correct, and it is exactly what presents the challenge to Da Ponte. If he can make the duke doubt anything in the play he can make him doubt his faith at the same time or, as Mathias Mayer relates: "Indem das Nicht-sehen hier physisch als Blindheit verkörpert wird, muß sich der Glaube mit dem blinden Vertrauen ins Verhältnis setzen und entweder alles oder nichts glauben" (118). Da Ponte's plan is to take the game as far as is necessary to crumble the duke's faith. This, he thinks, will only be a matter of time, for as long as the duke believes his words he has power over him: "Was ich denke, geschieht an ihm. Den Weg, den ich ihm weise, muß er einschlagen. So häufe ich Qual über Qual auf ihn, eine Hölle über die andere" (186-7). Once this game has broken the duke, the truth about human nature will be revealed: "Dann werdet ihr sehen, was der Mensch ist: ein schreiender Mund, zwei gebrochene Augen, in denen sich nichts spiegelt" (186).

Da Ponte, however, underestimates the duke's determination to believe him and thus keep his faith by subjecting himself to the reality Da Ponte is creating for him. Dürrenmatt described the effect of this determination as terrifying: "Indem er den Glauben an die Sehenden wählt, wird er für diese schrecklich und auf eine gespenstische Art unmenschlich: er nimmt sie beim Wort" ("Theaterprobleme" 42). He even strangles the court poet, Gnadenbrot Suppe, because he wants to tell him the truth about what is going on. The death of Palamedes can also be viewed as a result of the duke's refusal to learn the truth. The suicide of the duke's daughter Octavia makes him triumph over Da Ponte finally, as it makes the lie that his daughter is dead true and thus confirms the duke's faith, rather than disproves it.

What does this tale of faith and deception mean for the representation of blindness? It certainly does not show a realistic blind character. Not only is the portrayal of the duke full of clichés: his blindness is seen as a prerequisite for and a symbol of faith, a gift from heaven to shield the duke from the terror of reality and a

chosen condition that is defended at any cost. Moreover, it reduces blindness to the single dichotomy needed for experimenting with the notion of blind faith, an experiment which, according to M. Mayer leads to the following conclusion: "Die 'Augen des Glaubens' sind blind, insofern sie nicht mit den sinnlichen Augen sehen, aber zugleich hellsehtig für die Absurdität des ersprungenen Glaubens" (118).

"Er nickt und grinst": Disability in Max Frisch's *Andorra*

When Max Frisch describes theatricality as the interaction of the imagination evoked by the text with the perception by the senses of its manifestation on stage, he thinks of himself, and presumably any other person in his position, as naturally possessing certain mental and physical abilities ("Tagebuch" 570). This presumption of normality, which could also be seen in the writings of both Brecht and Dürrenmatt, is even more evident in his ideas on illusionistic theatre. He observes that theatre relies on the physical proximity of the audience ("Expose" 273). Even though he points out the limiting nature of perception in the process of theatrical communication, the ability to see and hear is still taken for granted and, thus, viewed as a prerequisite for illusionistic theatre to have its full effect on the spectator. The desired effect of this kind of theatre is to create a perfect illusion of reality. Frisch experienced this himself in his youth: "Es war oft, als spiele das eigene Leben auf der Bühne, während man selber zum Zuschauer verdammt blieb, ein Mensch ohne Arme, ohne Tat" ("Theater ohne Illusion" 332). The described side-effect of illusionistic theatre, i.e. the fact that it renders the spectator passive, clearly reflects Brecht's influence on Frisch's concept of theatre (Geißler 104-5). More significant, however, is his comparison of this passivity to being "without arms" (332), thus using an actual physical disability to illustrate chosen inactivity. Metaphors like this, according to Harry Merkle, are typical examples of nondisabled thinking: "Sie dokumentieren die Unaufrichtigkeit einer bestimmten Art nichtbehinderten Denkens, das behinderte literarische Personen oder persönlichkeitsbildende Eigenschaften von behinderten Menschen zu Metaphern verdinglicht" (29). This

means that Frisch's metaphor not only objectifies disability in this sense, but that it also marks it as negative in a moral pattern of personal initiative and apathy. Moreover, to a disabled person the action on stage does not necessarily appear as "das eigene Leben" due to the fact that their experience is essentially different (332), but also because their disability would probably disrupt the illusion-creating process in the first place. If people with disabilities were to identify with a dramatic character and be drawn into the reality of the stage, in most cases they would only be able to do that by ignoring their disability and its implications for their experience. Hence, they are either innormalized or excluded.

This is not only true for illusionistic theatre, however, since Frisch's alternative, the playful theatre, is a paradigm for the consciousness "daß alles, was die Bühne geben kann, bestenfalls ein Vergleich ist, ein Zeichen, das Zeichen bleibt" ("Theater ohne Illusion" 335). Even if the audience is not supposed to identify with the action on stage, but rather to understand it as a 'sign,' the presumption of normality still remains. The notion of theatre as a sign also has certain consequences for the portrayal of the characters. According to Frisch, in *Andorra* they should be played as types ("Anmerkungen" 561). This prescription is not conducive to a realistic representation of disability, especially as the idiot, as he is referred to, is only a marginal character, appearing in only three episodes of the play. He makes his first appearance when the soldier Peider is raving on about the alleged courage of the Andorran people: "Hinzu tritt ein Idiot, der nur grinsen und nicken kann" (22). As he is limited to nods, smiles and silence, he is essentially a puppet, both in terms of expressive scope and function. He is at home in the world of stage directions, a prop in the hands of the director. In this particular scene he nods and smiles four times. Peider, in a drunken state, accuses Andri of insulting him and, thus the army, seeks confirmation from an imaginary crowd (22). The role of the idiot here is to represent the crowd and answer Peider's question, but also to mock him, for what Peider claims Andri said about the Andorran people turns out to be true. His next pantomimic comment occurs when Peider, in turn, accuses Andri of being a coward: "Andri: Wieso bin ich feig?/ Soldat: Weil du Jud bist./ Idiot grinst und nickt" (22). Here, however, the irony refers to the fact that the soldier is

wrong, as the play reveals that Andri is not Jewish at all. The idiot's agreement could also be viewed as criticism of the mindless way the people of Andorra believe such stereotypes. The last two times he nods and smiles are when Peider asks: "Was hat er gesagt?" and "Ein Vieh? Ich bin ein Vieh?" (23). Again, in an ironic manner, the idiot seems to answer the second question in the affirmative.

The second time the idiot appears on stage is when the foreign senora comes to visit the teacher. The idiot's function here is slightly different. He performs menial tasks that push the action forward, such as bringing in the senora's suitcases (Cf. 68). He brings in another suitcase and later a coat, and each time the arrival of one of the senora's belongings causes the characters present in front of the pub to speculate on the purpose of her visit. In the course of this their prejudices against her become apparent. She is suspected to be a spy, and whenever the idiot comes in with another item, her hostile intentions seem confirmed (Cf. 68-9). The idiot also delivers a note to the teacher, informing him of the senora's arrival. Thus the idiot's function in this scene is a rather practical one in the context of dramatic composition. He is a good solution for problems that arise in the course of the action.

The last scene in which the idiot plays a part is that of the 'Judenschau': "Der Idiot erscheint./ Wirt: Wieso hat der kein schwarzes Tuch?/ Jemand: Dem glauben sie's, daß er keiner ist./ Der Idiot grinst und nickt, geht weiter, um überall die Vermummten zu mustern und zu grinsen" (110). His behaviour shows the whole procedure as a farce. By going around looking at everybody, he is mocking the 'Judenschauer,' who is supposed to tell all the Jews apart simply by their feet and the way they walk. This is clearly ridiculous, just as ridiculous as the fact that the idiot does not have to take part in it. There is no logic in assuming that a mentally handicapped person is most likely not a Jew or does not lie, and the question seems to be who is actually mad in Andorra. The idiot's willingness to comply with the orders of the soldier anyway makes for considerable tragicomic effect: "Der erste! / Niemand rührt sich. / Los, vorwärts, los! / Der Idiot geht als erster. / Du doch nicht! / Angstgelächter unter den Vermummten" (115). It might seem strange that the idiot, who, in the context of the play and this scene especially, is an outsider like Andri, suffers positive discrimination by the Andorrans, whereas

Andri is the victim of suspicion and cruelty.¹⁷

Frisch seems to reverse this hypocritical view of minority groups. From the three scenes the idiot actually appears in it becomes clear that, in this play, he serves two purposes: He acts as porter and messenger and in so doing solves practical problems in the plot's development. More importantly, he provides an ironic commentary on what is going on on stage. His function is, therefore, a purely dramatic one. Thus, Frisch subjects people with mental handicaps to the very treatment that he is trying to highlight in the case of Andri. By marginalising the idiot and reducing him to little more than a dramatic mechanism, he reinforces the objectification of people with disabilities, but also the dominance of presumed normality. Frisch creates an image of disability that is fixed and arbitrary.

"Ich möchte ein solcher werden, wie einmal ein anderer gewesen ist": Disability in Peter Handke's *Kaspar*

The treatment of disability in Peter Handke's play *Kaspar*, which traces the personal development of an individual who becomes self-aware and learns to conform to social norms through the constant exposure to language, is not quite as straightforward as in the cases of Brecht, Dürrenmatt and Frisch. One could argue that Kaspar does not have a disability in the strict sense of the word, that he is simply a 'Jedermann' character undergoing behavioural therapy. He is not permanently disabled, according to what Hahn calls the "functional-limitations paradigm," which defines disability in terms of "functional impairment and vocational limitations" (172). In fact, the whole purpose of his being bombarded with words and sentences by anonymous voices is to make him a functional member of society. Alfred Barthofer has commented on the social relevance of plays like *Kaspar*, whose dramatic concept is intended to help the spectator understand their own position in society:

Handke bezieht sich oft auf die Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen Theater und Gesellschaft und betont, daß es in seinem theatralischen Modell nicht darum gehe, die Wirklichkeit darzustellen,

sondern dem Zuschauer zu helfen, über sich selber, seine alltägliche Wirklichkeit und seine Beziehung zum Mitmenschen ins Klare zu kommen" (474).

Despite the anti-illusionistic aspect of Handke's theatre, however, the conclusion that it must be the vehicle for the author's moral message, as in the cases of Brecht and Frisch, for example, would not be entirely accurate. According to Rolf Renner, *Kaspar* is based on the idea of theatre that is outlined in Handke's first play *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (45-6). This 'Sprechstück' pretends to blur the distinction between the actors and the audience: "Diese Bretter bedeuten keine Welt. Sie gehören zur Welt" (17). In fact, the communication going on in this play is so self-referential that it seems to take the disruption of the theatrical illusion to its logical extreme. Theatre is not seen as a perfect imitation of reality, but as an integral part of it. It *is* reality, at least according to the model, so that the question as to the representation of disability and the role of the audience seems irrelevant.

The fusion of theatre and reality is, of course, only theoretically possible. The *Publikumsbeschimpfung* is a mental trick, a model of the transcendence of theatre, but it does not actually transcend it – it only temporarily creates the illusion of total disillusionment. It would not be fair, however, to dismiss the model due to the limiting aspects of practical necessity. Handke's attempt to liberate the theatre from its conventions might not get rid of them completely, but it could open up a space for self-reflection and more awareness of other perspectives. Theatre could, thus, become a general corrective effort, which is how Handke describes it:

Ein Theaterstück ist dann immer das Mittel, zu versuchen, zumindest eine Fiktion von Objektivierung herzustellen, eine Art Balance zwischen dem Leben, das man selber führt – das man immer geneigt ist, als Absolutes zu sehen, wenn man Prosa schreibt – und den anderen Menschen: wenn auch nur als Fiktion, aber doch als Anstrengung, die man für sich selber benötigt. (qtd. in Arnold 20)

The idea that other people's perspectives are necessary to achieve an increased objectivity and that this could be done as part of the dramatic communication process should have some impact on Handke's portrayal of Kaspar and his ideas about the audience. Thus, in the following I will determine the strength and the quality of this impact.

As soon as Kaspar, supposedly by accident, finds his way onto the stage it becomes clear that there is something odd about him, that he does not fit into what the spectator would perceive as the normal social order. This effect is intended as Peter Handke wants Kaspar to appear like "Frankensteins Monster (oder King Kong)" (91). It is not surprising then that at the beginning Kaspar's dress defies any convention: "Er sieht pudelnärrisch aus" (95). The way he walks is equally strange: "Sein Art zu gehen ist eine sehr mechanische, künstliche, eine, die es nicht gibt. Er geht freilich auch nicht wie eine Marionette. Seine Gangart ergibt sich aus dem dauernden Wechsel verschiedener Gangarten" (96). Furthermore, his linguistic ability is rudimentary. When he starts to speak it is clearly without any understanding of what he is actually saying. "[H]örbar ohne Begriff von dem Satz," he keeps repeating: "Ich möchte ein solcher werden wie einmal ein anderer gewesen ist" (97). This sentence as well as the dress and the walk is based on Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach's account of the personal development of the historical Kaspar Hauser, who is supposed to have said: "ä sechtene möchte ih wähn, wie mei Vottä wähn is" (121).¹⁸ Despite the fact that Handke borrowed extensively from Feuerbach's psychogram for his representation of Kaspar the play, according to the author, does not show "wie ES WIRKLICH IST oder WIRKLICH WAR mit Kaspar Hauser. Es zeigt, was MÖGLICH IST mit jemandem" (91). Handke's Kaspar is, thus, less a realistic than a theatrical figure, an example of what happens to a human being when it is subjected to language.¹⁹ The theme of the repressive nature of language is presented as an experiment, in which Kaspar is the guinea-pig. In a first step the voices, coming from several speakers, try to make Kaspar aware of his sentence and its importance for his relationship to the world around him: "Schon hast du einen Satz, mit dem du dich bemerkbar machen kannst. Du kannst dich mit dem Satz im Dunkeln bemerkbar machen, damit man dich nicht für ein Tier

hält" (99). With his sentence, so the voices claim, he cannot only distinguish himself as an individual by linguistically separating himself from everything that surrounds him, but he can also establish a hierarchy, that is the subject-object relation: "Mit diesem Satz gehören alle Gegenstände dir" (101). This is not possible, however, as long as Kaspar is unaware of himself and his sentence, which, ironically, expresses his desire to be initiated into society and occupy a prescribed slot in the social identification system. In order for this to happen, the voices subject him to a kind of language exorcism until they have driven the sentence out of him like an evil spirit: "Kaspar ist endlich zum Schweigen gebracht. Der Satz ist ihm ausgetrieben" (110). In the following he learns the systematic use of language and is shown what proper sentences are. Hand in hand with the increasing knowledge of the structure of language goes a growing awareness of order in general: "Seit ich sprechen kann, kann ich alles in Ordnung bringen" (115). Subsequently, Kaspar first tidies his clothes and then the stage. As he is doing this his movements become more and more synchronised with the speech of the voices. Moreover, he is now taught how language structures thought: "Der Raum ist klein, a b e r mein. Der Schemel ist niedrig, a b e r bequem. Das Urteil ist hart, a b e r gerecht" (132). These simple statements, according to Mechthild Blanke, contrast something that is seen as undesirable with a social value, so that the former is redeemed by the latter, and she concludes: "Jedoch wird bereits im dritten Satz die Fatalität dieser Satzstruktur deutlich, indem sie zwanglos die Legitimation von Sanktionen erlaubt" (267).

In this context it is interesting to note that one of the model sentences used to teach Kaspar how to relate things and values to one another is: "Der Krüppel ist bedauerenswert, aber a u c h ein Mensch" (133). Obviously, one of the hierarchized binary oppositions through which society operates is that of (normal) human being vs. (defective) cripple. This is not to say that Handke agrees with this assessment. On the contrary, he presents it as part of the repressive system of language and thought that he is trying to expose.

The principle that social identity, interpreted here as normality, is learned through a mechanism of difference is even more apparent in the scene that shows the last stages of his emerging societal intergration: "Du bist aufgeknackt" (146). Whenever the voices tell him something about himself, the way he is or should become,

another Kaspar comes on stage, whose condition is in contrast with the voices' description. When they demand "Aufmerksam werden, daß du dich bewegst," a Kaspar enters the stage on crutches: "Der vierte Kaspar ist sehr stark gehbehindert. Er bewegt sich auf Krücken, die Beine mitschleifend, sehr, sehr langsam, fast unmerklich" (148). Again, disability is seen as dysfunctional and undesirable. The other Kaspars on stage represent something similar to a collective subconscious: everything society does not want to identify with and thus marks as the 'other.'

Kaspar even attempts to use the same training that turned him into a normal human being on the others, who do not respond to his efforts at all, but produce "seltsame Laute" (173). As soon as Kaspar shows that he has become an integrated member of society, he tries to impose his newly-found values on others, only to suddenly start falling apart again himself. He cannot remember any of the phrases he has just said, as their meaning is now lost on him: "Was habe ich doch gerade gesagt?" (179). He comes to the conclusion that "[j]eder Satz ist für die Katz" (177). He recapitulates what has happened to him and realises that his initiation into reality through language has been quite a violent act: "Ich bin zum Sprechen gebracht worden. Ich bin in die Wirklichkeit übergeführt" (187). The implication is that the development into a social being necessarily involves self-alienation, which is what is happening to Kaspar, "der seine Selbstentfremdung um so deutlicher manifestiert, je mehr er redet" (Valentein 63). Indeed, his elaborate speech at the end of the play becomes more and more nonsensical until it disintegrates completely and ends with the monotonous repetition of the phrase "Ziegen und Affen" (190).

The question remains what exactly Handke considers to be disability. The most useful definition of disability, which seems to do justice to Handke's portrayal of Kaspar, is that of Hahn, who thinks it should be viewed as "the product of the interaction between people and their environment," an environment that is not suited to their needs and abilities (172). This notion of disability is not primarily concerned with the question of what exactly caused the difference in physical, mental or linguistic ability, and neither I would argue is Handke. His main interest focuses on the mechanisms that mark something as a dis-ability, that is as something that is different from the norm. This is echoed in the representation of Kaspar's socialisation process, in which disability is seen as that against which normality is defined. Therefore, these terms are shown to

be relative and arbitrary. In fact, Handke seems to suggest that everyone is potentially both normal and abnormal. Handke's play shows that our perceived normality is actually abnormal as it does not reflect who people really are; without the awareness that notions of normality and abnormality are social constructs that can be called into question, there cannot be true pluralism. This new presumption of abnormality still implies, however, that the audience is seen as normal, which is quite obvious in the *Publikumsbeschimpfung*: "Ihnen wird nichts vorgespielt. Sie sehen keine Wände wackeln. Sie hören nicht das falsche Geräusch einer ins Schloß fallenden Tür" (17-8). The same is true for *Kaspar* where, in the stage directions, Handke frequently refers to the effect a certain action or prop should have on the audience: "Die Zuschauer erkennen immer deutlicher, daß jemand durch den Vorhang auf die Bühne will [...] die Zuschauer hören das Geräusch des Vorhangs als auf ihn eingeschlagen wird" (95). Thus, it becomes clear that even Handke, whose representation of disability is not as reductive and simplistic as that of the other dramatists, cannot fully escape the presumption of normality.

Conclusion: On plays that are still missing

The analysis of the plays by Brecht, Dürrenmatt, Frisch and Handke shows that they do to a large extent objectify people with disabilities. Judging from the dramatic concepts of the different authors this seems to be linked to a shift in the twentieth century away from illusionistic theatre. The purpose of this new anti-illusionistic theatre is not primarily to imitate reality, but to communicate the author's ideas about reality. According to Honnef and Honnef-Harling this shift can also be seen in the visual arts where it leads to a similar result (12). The fact that this shift seems to make theatre, like other forms of art, more prone to objectifying its subject matter should not, however, lead us to dismiss it as reductive and unfair due to its tendency to avoid realistic representation in favour of the conveying subjective reality or truth. One must bear in mind that theatre is art and no political agenda can afford to ignore that. As Harry Merkle comments: "Dennoch sollte sich auch soziales Engagement nicht der ästhetischen Einsicht verschließen, daß die Struktur eines fiktionalen Textes sich prinzipiell von der außertextuellen

Wirklichkeit unterscheidet" (35). With regard to the representation of disability, the aim should not be to dismiss all representations by authors without a disability as flawed and oppressive, which would simply substitute one discourse with another equally exclusive one. Rather the aim should be to establish a dialogue and to qualify those representations by adding the subjective experience of people who have a disability.

The problem is not that unrealistic representations of disability occur. It is a problem, however, if these representations show certain common characteristics that constitute a trend in the portrayal of disability. While one would need to study more than four plays to develop a comprehensive understanding of the patterns in the way disabled characters are used in twentieth-century German-speaking theatre, it can be argued that a pattern is already emerging in the way disability is represented in the four plays selected here. As soon as objectification, marginalisation and reduction are no longer isolated instances, but form a trend, corrective measures ought to be taken, for "[d]er Feind jeder Individualität ist das Klischee, das Stereotyp. Man braucht eine bestimmte Sichtweise nur oft genug zu wiederholen, damit sie an Wirklichkeit und Wahrheit gewinnt. Und wer die Wirklichkeit oft genug reproduziert, stabilisiert sie und nimmt ihr jede Chance zur Fortentwicklung" (Zirten und Heinrich 19).

One of the ways to counteract how certain inappropriate images of disability influence the social reality of this phenomenon could be to follow the example of an exhibition that took place in Dresden from 6th September to 8th October 2000. This exhibition, entitled "Bilder, die noch fehlten. Zeitgenössische Fotografie," showed pictures that were not part of the collective inventory of mental images with which we make sense of the world. It featured physically handicapped people in the pose and attire of supermodels, as well as pictures by a blind photographer. It presented images whose content had been determined or influenced by the experience of people with disabilities and by the way they view the world and themselves. These images are an important addition to the vast number of images that structure our perception of disability, as they constitute the creation of a self-determined image which is desperately needed in the world of mass media: "Je mehr Bilder

unsere Wirklichkeit beherrschen, desto wichtiger wird es, dass sie uns Spielräume zur Entwicklung eines individuellen Selbstbildes lassen oder [...] dass sie diese Spielräume sogar erweitern oder schaffen" (Zirden und Heinrich 19).

In the same way it would be necessary for disabled dramatists, producers and actors to explore the theatre for ways of self-expression. This would counteract the objectification of people with disabilities as it would add their own perspective and familiarise both disabled and non-disabled audiences with images and ways of representation that they are not used to. The attempt to correct misconceptions and misrepresentations is not an intellectual exercise from which non-disabled people are excluded. As Lyotard states: "Postmodern knowledge [...] refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable" (483). The rehabilitation of minority voices should not result in further segregation, but in more tolerance and understanding of all the different ways of experiencing the world.

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Notes

¹ Cf. Linton 120-31.

² Cf. Charlton and Doyle.

³ Cf. Merkle, Mitchell and Snyder and Norden.

⁴ As opposed to other forms of theatre, such as dance theatre, music theatre or puppet theatre.

⁵ He distinguishes between the text "composed for the theatre" (dramatic text) and the one "produced in the theatre" (theatrical or performance text), a distinction, however, that does not prove very practical in the context of this analysis (Elam 3).

⁶ Cf. 57-62

⁷ I use this term as an analogy of the feminist idea of im-mas-culation, as explained in Fetterley and Schweickart.

⁸ R. Leach has shown this for *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*. The techniques used in the play, he argues, suggest that "Brecht confronts the spectator not with reality itself, but with attitudes towards reality" (138).

⁹ J. J. White has analysed Brecht's work in terms of its semiotic nature and he argues that, apart from more obvious things such as props, "characters

themselves are also "Zeichen" (97).

¹⁰ R. Geißler, for example, interprets Katrin's speechlessness as the only possible reaction for a sensitive and humane individual to a world that is dominated by terror and cruelty (Cf. 30). Cf. also Mennemeier 146.

¹¹ This view was also criticised by Felix Mitterer in his 1977 play *Kein Platz für Idioten*.

¹² Cf. 93.

¹³ Cf. 62-3.

¹⁴ Cf. 68.

¹⁵ As the portal shows, the story of Job the duke is associated with this biblical character and his fate.

¹⁶ The authors of *Krankheit als Weg*, for example, view illness as the manifestation of a person's 'shadow,' that is, everything they are not conscious of, and they maintain a cataract indicates that a person is running away from something that they do not want to see.

¹⁷ Although Frisch denied that there was any historical dimension to this play, it is interesting to note that this corresponds to the way Jews and handicapped people were viewed in the Third Reich. Cf. Honnef and Honnef-Harling 10.

¹⁸ For a detailed study of the way Handke used Feuerbach's account in his play cf. Blanke 269ff.

¹⁹ For a study of how Handke uses the historical material for this purpose cf. Blanke 274.

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