

The Reluctant Subject: *Kaspar* and the Frame of Representation

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Behind the backdrop, something stirs . . . gradually becoming more vehement and more rapid . . . The audience realizes more and more clearly that someone wants to get through the curtain onto the stage . . . After several futile tries at the wrong spots--the person finds the slit that he had not even been looking for. . . . With a slight movement the figure comes on stage . . .¹

Michael Hays, who interprets this incident, suggests that: "Handke's *Kaspar* is 'born' onto the stage . . ."² Most critics, including June Schlueter, Linda Hill and Rainer Nagele, adopt Hays' reading and view the remainder of the play as a nonrealistic narrative following an imaginary *Kaspar* through his tortuous process of language acquisition, ending in his schizophrenic demise, and, in some accounts, his death. This attempt to devise a narrative for Handke's play is done despite the author's claim that he is "Making people aware of the world of the theatre--not of the outside world . . ."³ and his insistence, in the description of the setting for *Kaspar*, that "The stage represents the stage." (60) If Handke's call for a non-illusionistic theatre is taken literally, then the audience is not a witness to *Kaspar*'s birth but his entrance onto the stage and, therefore, into the frame of representation.

Soon after *Kaspar* enters onto the stage, the frame of representation, he utters his first words: "I want to be a person like somebody else was once." (65) According to the stage directions he understands neither the meaning of

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the words nor the sense of this enigmatic statement. He uses it indiscriminately. Whether bumping into a chair or getting his hands stuck between two cushions of a sofa, the same words are repeated. However, while the phrase remains unaltered, the paralinguistic messages change signifying different emotional reactions. It gradually becomes clear that while Kaspar has a range of affective responses, he is unable to differentiate between them or the experiences which give rise to them. The inability to articulate different verbal reactions, signifies to the audience, though not to Kaspar, that he has no access to language.

Nevertheless, a close reading of Kaspar's sentence does indicate an unconscious tension within the figure of Kaspar. His desire "to be a person" announces a teleology that immediately obstructs itself. To enunciate the "I" is to nominate oneself a subject, thereby reducing the aim to tautology: he is a person. This statement is then qualified by the dependent clause, "like somebody else once was." The reference to an undefined other disperses the focus of the desire, reducing the syntactical meaning of the sentence to: I want to be other. The conflation of the subject with the object position unveils a drive for a unified self, a description which approximates Kaspar's original state--unable to differentiate between himself and the exterior world. This reification of an already existing state is complicated by the unexpected reference to the past, "once was." This nostalgia for the past can be read as a desire for an originary state--an unconscious yearning for a coherent "I". That he has failed to achieve this goal is apparent in the clumsiness and undeveloped motor skills with which he moves about the stage.

Kaspar comes on stage in an attempt to unite with this "Ideal-I;" but his path is obstructed because his quest requires a crucial psychic displacement. The desire for the "other" of this projected image is replaced by a desire for the "Other" of the symbolic.⁴ As soon as this shift into representation occurs, an impenetrable barrier is erected between Kaspar as presence and as being. Jacques Derrida describes this event in his discussion of Artaud. "As soon as I am heard, as soon as I hear myself, the I who hears *itself*, who hears *me*, becomes the I who speaks and takes speech from the I who thinks that he speaks and is heard in his own name . . ."⁵ Kaspar is caught in the double-bind of wanting to become the image of the ideal-self and yet acceding to the necessity of entering the symbolic which will forever frustrate that desire.

The opening image of Kaspar's entry onto the stage and the implications of his first line define a field of exploration central to the debate between modernism and the postmodern: the relationship between the constitution of the subject and the frame of representation. In this paper I engage in this discourse by taking Handke's claims at face value, and examine Kaspar's induction into language, and relating it to concepts of subjectivity. When approached from this perspective the play loses coherence as a single narrative, and three discrete sections appear. The first is an abstract narrative that describes Kaspar's acquisition of language (I-XXX); the second compares two

distinct models of the subject (XXXI-LXIII); and the third examines a particular strategy for change (LXIV-LXV). The operation of introducing Kaspar to the languages of representation is carried out by the prompters (translated by Christopher Innes as the "indoctrinators"⁶), and requires separating Kaspar from his one sentence and filling the resulting void with a promise.

Kaspar's Induction into Language

The exorcism of Kaspar's only phrase is necessary because it signifies the desire for an undifferentiated self, while language is based on an analysis of differentiation. In order to comprehend an experience, the impression created by sensations must be broken down into contingent perceptions, allowing for articulation in linear form. The primary analytic required in this process is the determination of differences. Michel Foucault discusses the need for this activity in *The Order of Things*. . . .

if one element of a perception is to become a sign for it, it is not enough merely for that element to be part of the perception; it must be differentiated *qua* element and be distinguished from the total impression with which it is confusedly linked; consequently, total impression itself must have been divided up.⁷

The indoctrinators focus Kaspar on the need to distinguish qualities by insisting that words-as-difference offer freedom from pain: "The shoelace hurts you. It does not hurt you because it is a shoelace but because you lack the word for it, and the difference between the tight and the loose shoelace hurts you because you don't know the difference between the tight and the loose shoelace." (72) Kaspar is being taught that a *Gestalt* resulting from overly tight or loose shoelaces must be deconstructed and presented in symbolic form--in words--if there is to be conscious knowledge of the event.

The fragmentation of experience for Kaspar is not limited to external objects, but applies to the self as well. Kaspar cannot know himself or the experience of himself unless he is objectified in language. This requires the naming of specific qualities through the creation of signs that can signify aspects of the self. But, as Rosalind Coward and John Ellis point out in *Language and Materialism*, this is only part of the process: "The fixed relationship of signifier and signified which is the object of linguistics is shown as only one moment of a process. It becomes fixed when the conscious subject is constructed in a certain position in relation to the signifying chain."⁸ Kaspar's original sentence offers the opportunity for viewing himself as a subject in relation to an other, but he is incapable of comprehending the words, or of relating them to each other. For Handke's protagonist to nominate himself as "I," he must re-present, or distance the perceptual experience. In order for the

cognition of self to take place, he must locate himself within the analytic process of differentiation.

The representation of experience to the self entails separating the subject from the signification; but the signification is always an expression of the self. The result is alienation, deferring yet further the desire to be whole. Derrida describes the process that leads to Kaspar's dilemma: "all speech fallen from the body, offering itself to understanding or reception, offering itself as a spectacle, immediately becomes stolen speech. Becomes a signification which I do not possess because it is a signification."⁹ Kaspar resists this dispossession and tries to satisfy his yearning for unity by deflecting the impact of the voices with his sentence. But the onslaught is overwhelming. His attempts to maintain his sentence falter and finally fail, reducing him to silence.

The loss of his sentence exposes a gap between perception and the possibility of response, a chasm created by the analytic of representation. However, it is not a void, for within that space has appeared the subject, as yet undefined but revealed as consciousness. When Kaspar next speaks, he says: "Me./Nothing./Although./How./Because me here at least already." (76) He not only recognizes the fledgling self, but assumes that the "me" was already there, prior to consciousness. This epiphany brings with it a promise, however illusory, that self-recognition will permit a re-integration with the self, and provide the satisfaction of the deferred demand for unity.

To obtain this ideal Kaspar must overcome the internal turbulence that signifies the distance between the mirror-image and the physical sensation of self. The prompters intimate that such a victory is possible given the ability to articulate the components of a *Gestalt* through the analytic of language.

You have a sentence to bring order into every disorder: . . . with which you can declare every disorder an order: can bring yourself into order: . . . You have a sentence . . . which will exorcise every disorder from you. (69)

This aspect of the promise is analogous to Foucault's definition of Classical thought in *The Order of Things*:

The ordering of the empirical is thus linked to the ontology that characterizes Classical thought; indeed from the very outset, this thought exists within an ontology rendered transparent by the fact that being is offered to representation without interruption; and within a representation illuminated by the fact that it releases the continuity of being.¹⁰

The prompters view the subject as such a continuous being; a continuity that can be revealed through the ordering principles of representation. This orienting process requires a grammar for the relations of being, in other words

the complete definition and location of each element and relation of the constituted subject.

Inherent in this process of articulation is the act of nomination, which the prompters assure Kaspar removes the obstacles to order. "Name everything that comes in your way and move it out of your way." (68) Moreover, by naming things Kaspar will be able to create sentences with them, and thus own them. "You can make all objects into *your* sentence. With this sentence, all objects belong to you. With this sentence, all objects are yours." (68) By naming Kaspar can create order out of chaos, and through the articulation of differences gain possession of what he names. This process inevitably involves the privileging of phenomena, creating a hierarchy of value. According to this logic, Kaspar can possess himself and understand his "value" by defining who he is. The promise of language lies in the power to control language; or, more precisely, it is the unity of self obtained through the ownership of differences articulated according to the syntax of structural relations.

Having become aware of himself as other, as separate, Kaspar begins to organize the world around him. But that world does not have an external referent, it is the stage and its properties--the frame of representation--that Kaspar is ordering. The actions seen by the audience represent the articulation of Kaspar's personal, perceptual experience of the world. The process is not naive, since Kaspar is aware of the relativity of his resulting structure. "It is untrue that the representation of the conditions is the only possible representation of the conditions: on the contrary, it is true that there exist other possibilities of the representation of the conditions." (96) The uncertainty is not daunting because in the creation of order Kaspar is able to recognize himself. "Everything that is in order is in order because I say to myself that it is in order, . . . everything that I say to myself is in order because I say to myself that everything that I say to myself is in order." (89-90) Kaspar has become immersed in the solipsism of power, where every construction gains authority by an infinite return to the "I." The assumption on which he bases this confidence is the promise that through every ordering will come further knowledge and possession of the self, diminishing the distance between himself as other and himself as subject.

Indeed the construction of the frame of representation through the differentiation and the valorization of perceptions permits the hypothesis of a coherent subject. It is the "I" that determines the perspective according to which every representation is organized. The resulting image of a totality permits Kaspar to recognize himself, past and present, within and through the syntax of articulation, allowing him to conclude with the prompters:

KASPAR	PROMPTERS	
	you	
called		
	you	
was and is		
	you	
recognized me.		(100)

Transposed into a linear form, these lines can be read: "you called you; was and is; you recognized me." In the last phrase, "you recognized me," "you" refers to Kaspar, and thus can be read: "I recognized me." He can imagine himself unified within the frame of representation. However, Kaspar can enunciate this realization only after an extensive exploration of the relationship between self and existence within language.

When I am, I was. When I was, I am. When I am, I will be. When I will be, I was. Although I was, I will be. Although I will be, I am. As often as I am, I have been. As often as I have been, I was. . . . I became because I will have become. I will have become because I became. I became because I will have become. I will have become because I am. (101-102)

This chain of diverse tenses, used to locate the subject within a temporal order made coherent by the repetition of the subjective pronoun, concludes with an affirmation of the self in the future perfect tense: "I will have become." This return of the promise for a unified self permits Kaspar to declaim with seeming confidence: "I am *the one* I am." (102, my emphasis). This proclamation announces Kaspar's assimilation into the symbolic. No longer the bumbling clown, he has the skills to organize his perceptions of the world with confidence. Kaspar now believes he can become a unified subject because he is able to represent himself to himself, and thus to differentiate himself from other as a unique being.

Kaspar's faith in the promise of integration is not discovered in isolation but results, in large part, from the indoctrinators' examination of differences, a process that proceeds from differentiating inanimate objects to an analysis of Kaspar himself. Initially, the indoctrinators assault him with language, never directly responding to what he says. This convention is disrupted when Kaspar accepts language and is marked by a crucial sequence in which the prompters and Kaspar speak simultaneously (96-97). This dialogue signals both his success in acquiring language, and the success of the prompters, since Kaspar's linguistic skills seem to make them redundant.

But the prompters do not disappear. In a pivotal sequence, everything that Kaspar says is reflected back to him, "someone quiets you; someone explains you; you rush yourself; you explain yourself; you disquiet yourself ..."

(97) The relegation of responsibility for emotional states onto the individual forces Kaspar to assume a position of authority as the origin of meaning. The shift is illusory, however, since in an epilogue to their efforts the voices admit to the now quiescent Kaspar that what he says and thinks is actually determined by language.

You think what you are saying, that means you can think what you are saying, that means it is good that you think what you are saying, that means you ought to think what you are saying, that means, on the one hand, that you may think what you are saying, and on the other hand, that you must think what you are saying, because you are not allowed to think anything *different* from what you are saying. (100-101)

Kaspar has been operating on the assumption that language is subordinate to the articulation of the *Gestalt*, or that the signified determines the signifier. The voices invert this claim by positing that what he thinks is determined by language absolutely. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis explain this reversal:

the signifier cuts out, articulates, a certain space which becomes through this articulation, a signified, that is, meaning. The linguistic signifier in isolation has no intrinsic link with the signified: it only refers to meaning inasmuch as it forms part of a system of signification characterized by differential oppositions.¹¹

The tools which Kaspar has been given to define himself, and therefore gain possession of himself, are inadequate to the task because their meanings and syntactical relations are ideological. Therefore, what Kaspar can learn about himself is determined by the limitations inherent in the modes of representation utilized by the community in which he exists.

The irony and pain of Kaspar's induction into language lies in this recognition. The desire for a unified self has led him to acquire language because he believes that every linguistic construction he devises gains authority and value in defining his presence, who he is. However, as long as faith remains in the promise of language, the inability of his sentences to represent him completely requires an increasingly extensive analysis of the self--more words. As the search is protracted and the number of words required to define the subject mount astronomically, it gradually becomes clear that language does not allow for the unification of the self, but the infinite dispersal of the self into language. Rather than approaching an undifferentiated proximity, the "I" is alienated, and the distance from presence distanced.

In fact, the appropriation of language negates the integration of the self. Linguistic constructions are determined and overdetermined by the conventional denotations and connotations ascribed by a particular social matrix.

Therefore, in devising a specific syntactical structure, Kaspar is not defining himself, but is being defined by the grammar of representation. Rather than revealing himself through language, he is being created by language. The known subject exists only in representation; and the dream of a unified self is an illusion.

Two Models of the Subject

The division between the first and second section of the play is heralded by the appearance of the Kaspar doubles and an unexpected proclamation by the prompters. The function of the voices has been, until this point, the induction of Kaspar into language and, therefore, to bring about a sense of self-contentment in their student. Their success is apparent when Kaspar abandons his resistance, becomes quiet, and apparently embraces the illusion of power over self provided him by language. Immediately upon achieving this calm, however, the prompters violate the quiet by stating simply: "You have been cracked open." (103) This statement contradicts their earlier project, indicating a major change in focus. The first section of the play explored Kaspar's education in the processes of organizing perceptions, or his relationship to the external world; the proclamation of the voices implies the investigation will shift to Kaspar's internal landscape. The relocation of the discourse is further indicated by the appearance of Kaspar's doubles, figures dressed and wearing masks identical to Kaspar, who represent the "others" of the subject/object split.

The move from an examination of exterior to interior relations requires a change in representational form. An abstract narrative line was useful in the discussion of language acquisition, but chronology is inappropriate to an examination of synchronic models of the subject. The form utilized in the second part of *Kaspar* can be described as a comparison of "gestalts" that occurs in three phases. The first phase presents an "optimistic" image of the subject within language, while the third replaces this "rosy" view with a less positive, though by no means pessimistic model of the subject. The second facet, or the intermission, involves the audience in an experience that defines the inadequacies of the first and provides a preview of the second model.

Kaspar sits quietly in the rocking chair apparently unaware that the voices have announced he has been cracked open. Meanwhile, the doubles perform choreographed sequences that embody the content of the declarative statements made by the prompters. For instance, "You become sensitive to dirt" (103) is followed by a double who sweeps the floor; while "A tone" (107) results in a double creating a tone by snapping a rubber band. In most instances, Kaspar neither acknowledges the presence of the doubles nor engages them even when involved in the same activity. The implication is that the "other," necessary to the process of conceptualization and signification, is a coherent construct controlled by Kaspar and the Prompters, by the subject

and language (in so far as they remain distinguishable). The optimism lies in the faith that through language "everything falls back into order of its own accord." (106)

The belief that a correlation exists between language and the doubles, i.e. the ability of language to objectify and order experience, permits Kaspar to have faith in his self-image, to define himself for himself as complete and without contradiction. This ideology is represented in *Kaspar* during a sequence of eight semiotic moments (108-109) in which the prompters remain silent and Handke's hero first confronts a double. In the first moment Kaspar forcibly opens his fist revealing an empty hand. The struggle to wrench open his hand parallels the statement: "You are cracked open." There is nothing in the hand, however, only the hand, only Kaspar. In the next moment, he sees and recognizes a double for the first time; while the next four moments involve standing alone in front of the closet, looking down at himself, trying to catch himself, and again standing alone in front of the closet. Having recognized the existence of an "other," Kaspar tries to gain control over it, but each attempt results only in his seeing or seizing himself. He cannot objectify the other because it is part of him. Kaspar is his self-image; and he can remain secure in that image as long as nothing disrupts the unity. In the seventh moment Kaspar closes the closet doors (that have been open throughout the play), and in the eighth stands in front of the closed doors. In closing the doors Kaspar attempts to seal the frame of representation in order to guarantee a unity of self; and, for the first time since Kaspar stepped through the curtains, the stage "looks harmonious." (108)

Harmony within this model of representation is possible for Kaspar because there appears to be no discrepancy between what is said and what the double does, between what he, as the manipulator of language, wants and what occurs. Therefore, while he recognizes its presence, the other functions as a pure reflection of himself and his desires as articulated in language. In other words, he believes there is no distance between himself, the other and language; that seeing the double or hearing the voices is identical to seeing or hearing himself. The mythos of the closet as a place where potentially destabilizing facts are secreted, in concert with the central location of it on the stage, is sufficient to make the gesture of closing the doors particularly significant. The harmony occurs because this aperture has been closed, because the doubles have been united without seam in the subject. Kaspar's first words after closing the doors are: "I am . . ." (110), giving voice to the signification of the semiotic sequence.

The adoption of this ideology, with its implicit trust in the faithfulness of representation, allows Kaspar to re-assess his position. He no longer wants "to be a person like somebody else was once." (65); but states: "now I do not want/to be someone else any more . . ." (111) Content with who he is, capable of organizing and representing his perceptions in what appears to be a totalized form, Kaspar believes his self-image defines him without excess.

Repeatedly walking to the side of the stage, Kaspar returns as if "he still had something more to say." (112), only to leave the stage silently. The image Kaspar communicates, merely through his presence, is complete; no words are necessary. The absurdity of this model, that there is an irreducible correlation between subject, other and language, is acknowledged shortly after Kaspar exits: "On the now uninhabited stage the closet doors gradually open." (112)

The fallacy of the first, triadic model is explored after the intermission, and an alternative described. Kaspar, rather than thrashing his way onto the stage, now "comes on stage as he did at first, but without having to look for the slit in the curtain." (120) He wears a mask that communicates contentment, and proceeds immediately to the microphone downstage center. He recapitulates his induction into language, but now in a voice that "begins to resemble the voices of the prompters." (120) This similitude is significant, because the vocal qualities adopted by Kaspar link him to a system of representation, much the same way dialects can identify cultural heritage. In other words, Kaspar has adopted the ideology of the prompters, developing a self-image based on the values peculiar to that linguistic system. Furthermore, when Kaspar begins to speak the prompters fall silent, allowing him to be their spokesperson. This position of authority is reinforced by the presence of the Kaspar doubles who, also wearing masks of contentment, had entered the stage earlier and sit quietly on the sofa. The prompters have explained the docility of the "others" by comparing the ordering process to an act of torture. Syntax, we are told, is coercive, occurring at the expense of an other: "in the process/of putting-into-order/for better or worse/one makes others sing . . ." (118) The doubles, having been forced to render up their "meaning," are now powerless, or at least appear content. The first model is restated, with focus placed on the complicity between the constructed subject and language that results in the sublimation of the "other" under the umbrella of the self.

The efficacy of this tyranny is questioned when the doubles begin to rattle paper and make noises, disrupting and contradicting the discourse presented by Kaspar. For instance, shortly after Kaspar extols the virtues of language by saying "I learned to fill/all empty spaces with words/and learned who was who/and to pacify everything that/screamed/with sentences . . ." (124), the "audience hears [from the doubles] . . . a single sharp scream." (127) He has been unable to pacify, or repress the screams; the power of the subject and language to order experience is illusory. In fact, there is a crescendo of noise as the doubles reveal "contents" that cannot be contained within language.

the shout that the articulations of language and logic have not yet entirely frozen, that is, the aspect of oppressed gesture which remains in all speech, the unique and irreplaceable movement which the generalities of concept and repetition have never finished rejecting.¹²

There is always an excess.

This critique of the triadic model of signification is further complicated by the recurring image of the closet door and the concept of desire. The system that tames Kaspar is based on the assumption that language can define the subject, that the subject can be represented to consciousness in its entirety. However, the "others," through which he defines himself as a subject, resist complete articulation and remain hauntingly outside of knowledge. There is a distance between what can be represented and that which seeks expression. It is this difference within the realm of representation that makes problematic the concept of the "other" as a construct of the self and language. Rather this excess indicates that the "other" precedes the self, and that the subject is a construct devised to represent its precedent. This implies that the frame of representation is never sealed, that there is always that which is unknowable and, by definition, unavailable for linguistic formulation. The closet door that refuses to remain closed is emblematic of this energy, this desire, that defies definition.

The subject is defined by language, but language cannot define the subject. Instead language manipulates desire and experience into patterns determined by the laws governing the system of representation, ruthlessly repressing energy that is not commensurate with the parameters of the syntax. The perceptual and unconscious forces do not disappear, however, but remain within Kaspar finding modes of expression that contaminate and disrupt the stream of signification. The audience is given a simulation of this experience during the intermission. As they engage in conversation or observation, experiencing themselves as consistent subjects, their thought processes are continually being violated by the "noise" bombarding them over the house speaker systems, following them even into the streets (112). The collage of noises, and partially recognizable statements and quotations, imitates the repressed energy that is denied expression by the individual in the processes of articulating experience. The cacophony they can only partially screen out represents a quantum landscape without dimension--a field that resists structuring, but which, we believe, is continually and accurately being ordered by consciousness. By forcing the audience to participate in a "schizophrenic" activity (listening and not listening simultaneously) they are made aware of the excess that they habitually ignore when organizing their frames of representation.

Strategies for Change

The inability of subjects to fully represent their experience to themselves in the attempt to define the self describes a tension between modes of representation and the force of presence. The relative rigidity of the organizing systems offers the promise of subjective understanding, but the undifferentiated force of desire denies the possibility of self-knowledge. Kaspar

confronts this contradiction in the final section of the play when he realizes the distance that exists between the content of his words and what he wants to say.

What was it/that/I said/just now?/If I only knew/what it is/that I said/just now!/If I only knew/what I said/just now!/What is that/that I said/just now?/What/was I/actually saying just now?/What was it/that was/being said/just now?/If I only knew/what I/said/just now!/What/ was that/actually/that I was/saying/just now? (131-132)

The speech is not the monotone repetition of a single idea but a crescendo, demanding a return to the moment before speech--expressing the always-already frustrated desire to know that which escapes representation.

Indeed, the remainder of the play is an attempt to find a way back to the moment before speech, to break with the syntax of order. Kaspar "began only with the last sentence of the story to ask what the *others* had said, the others who were ignored while I said my sentence." (133) The recognition that what the others had to say may be more important than what he says leads Kaspar to recognize the distance between the signified and the signifier, and to question not only the word but the referent.

But finally I reached the point where I no longer believed not only words and sentences about snow, but even the snow itself when it lay there in front of me or was falling, did not believe any more and held it neither for real nor as possible, only because I no longer believed the word snow. (135)

Ironically, his attempt to define himself through language leads him to doubt his experience, to deny himself. "Already with my first sentence I was trapped." (137) Nevertheless, Kaspar believes he can regain himself by escaping the frame of representation, returning to the state prior to his first entrance onto the stage. But he cannot leave the stage, he cannot "rid [him]self of [him]self anymore." (139)

Explicating this section of the text as a narrative is both dangerous and inaccurate. It is dangerous because there is latent within this description the assumption of a coherent agent pursuing a tragic action, i.e. Kaspar's attempt to break with representation. This formulation is problematic because Kaspar remains standing at the microphone, and makes no effort to leave the stage, which has been defined in the play as the frame of representation. And it is inaccurate because despite the prevalence of the narrative elements outlined, the stage picture simultaneously presents a synchronic image of Kaspar through the presence of the doubles. An examination of the activities of the doubles, therefore, may mitigate the danger and correct the inaccuracy.

During Kaspar's "recognition" speeches, the doubles become increasingly disruptive, interfering with the central character's ability to communicate clearly. "The other Kaspars squeak, bark, make the sounds of rain and storm, blow up bubble gum till it bursts, etc." (131) The image is identical to Artaud's concept of sonorization, which in the theatre of cruelty "is constant: sounds, noises, cries are chosen first for their vibratory quality, then for what they represent."¹³ Although the intensity of the noise fluctuates during the remainder of the play, it disappears only for brief periods; even during Kaspar's final recapitulation of his experience the "audience hears two or three of them filing their nails." (132) As the play comes to a close the quality of the sounds made by the doubles changes from disruptive to irritating and violent.

The sound produced by the filing is of the kind that drives one wild. All the Kaspars wear some kind of material which, if a file, knife, or nail is applied to it, produces all manner of excruciating noises. . . . The noises now become increasingly more frequent and louder. (136)

In addition, the doubles move in on Kaspar ridiculing and satirizing him, interfering with the microphone, and physically abusing him. The force of the others gradually overwhelms Kaspar causing him to collapse in a heap, as the curtain closes. The others destroy Kaspar's ability to communicate.

If this final section is a narrative, and it does have those qualities, it is not that of a single being, but of all the figures on the stage. The voice of the primary Kaspar may be attempting to articulate a certain desire to transgress the limits of representation in order to return to the experience of presence; but it is the doubles who represent the implications of that desire to the audience. Immersion into the self is the attempt to merge consciousness with unconsciousness, but the success or failure of this operation can never be known because it cannot be represented. The doubles do undermine the coherent subject, the speaking Kaspar, not as an intentional action, but as the unrestrained free play of desire--an approximation of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty:

If the essential theater is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized.¹⁴

And the effect on stage depicts, as Artaud predicts will happen when a truly "cruel" theatre is achieved, a state "so intense and so absolute that we sense,

beyond the tremors of all music and form, the underlying menace of a chaos as decisive as it is dangerous."¹⁵

But *Kaspar* is not Theatre of Cruelty; it is a play and the curtain closes, as it must, at the precise moment when the transgression is complete, when the frame of representation is dispersed in a return to the undifferentiated. The *Kaspar* we have been watching must disappear, because we have never seen him; instead the stage has been inhabited by a constructed subject, defined by the articulations of language. Moreover, it would be equally wrong to suggest that the doubles are *Kaspar*, rather it is a combination of the coherent image, the refracted others and that which is beyond the closet doors.

More important than any definition of the subject that may arise from this investigation are the implications for a theory of change. If the subject is constructed in language, defined by the forms of representation available, and if that construct is ideologically contaminated, is there a way to effect change? To move beyond the limits of representation? In the course of *Kaspar* one avenue is examined, that of the return, the transgression of the limits of consciousness. But, as the *Kaspars* experience, such a return is doomed to failure since it means the negation of self and the end of knowledge; it is an ideology of chaos, of madness. Furthermore, to succeed would be an act of extreme solipsism, changing nothing--since it would be impossible to communicate the experience. Read in this way, Handke's text is a negative critique, ultimately occupying the reactionary position of helplessness.

Such an interpretation is, however, dependent on an analysis of content and is based on the construction of a narrative line. Consideration of form suggests an alternative strategy for positive action. *Kaspar* operates by perturbing the frame of representation. Handke exploits the representational structures of theatre in order to challenge the authority of language. By laying bare its mechanisms he reveals the operations through which we are constructed as subjects. To resist that interpolation into representation may be impossible, but by disrupting the conventions of representation it may be possible to fracture the complacency inherent in the illusion of the coherent subject, and free the voice of the other.

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Notes

1. Peter Handke, *Kaspar and Other Plays*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1969) 60. All citations from the play are from this edition.

2. Michael Hays, "Peter Handke and the End of the 'Modern'," *Modern Drama*, Vol. 23, no. 4 (January 1981) 356.

3. Peter Handke quoted by June Schlueter, "'Goats and Monkeys' and the 'Idiocy of Language': Handke's *Kaspar* and Shakespeare's *Othello*." *Modern Drama*, Vol. 23, no. 1 (March 1980) 25.

4. In the writings of Lacan, the Other of the symbolic is the Father, the Phallus, the absolute subject that replaces the Ideal-I encountered in the mirror phase. Lacan holds that the Phallus cannot be enunciated, but is always veiled—a concealment that allows the subject to enter the symbolic. That Handke's *Kaspar* is entering the symbolic is supported by Handke's rewriting of history. When the original *Kaspar Hauser* appeared in 1828, his sentence was "I want to be a horseman like my father once was." (Innes 243), markedly different from that enunciated by Handke's *Kaspar*. In displacing the father with the indefinite simile, "like somebody else," Handke veils the phallus, making entry into the symbolic possible.

5. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978) 177.

6. Innes 243.

7. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) 60-61.

8. Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977) 8.

9. Derrida 175.

10. Foucault 206.

11. Coward and Ellis 13.

12. Derrida 240.

13. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1958) 81.

14. 30.

15. 51.



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