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### Original Citation

Barnett, David (2000) Dramaturgies of "Sprachkritik": Rainer Werner Fassbinder's "Blut am Hals der Katze" and Peter Handke's "Kaspar". *The Modern Language Review*, 95 (4). pp. 1053-1063. ISSN 00267937

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DRAMATURGIES OF *SPRACHKRITIK*: RAINER WERNER  
FASSBINDER'S *BLUT AM HALS DER KATZE* AND PETER  
HANDKE'S *KASPAR*

Twentieth-century literature has been fascinated by language, more precisely, perhaps, by the disjunction of word and meaning. Few literary works, however, have attempted to approach these problems from the perspective of their linguistic foundations. The dramatic medium, with its possibilities of contrasting text with image, might suggest itself as particularly well suited for such an investigation. Peter Handke's *Kaspar* (première 11 May 1967, Theater am Turm, Frankfurt and Städtische Bühnen, Oberhausen) is probably the best-known example of a play about the mechanisms of language.<sup>1</sup> Ever since its first performance it has generated interest and stimulated much critical comment. This major play is not the only one to make linguistics its focal point. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Blut am Hals der Katze* (première 20 March 1971, Städtische Bühnen, Nuremberg) also focuses on the figure of the linguistic *tabula rasa*, yet it engages the medium in a very different way. To my knowledge, only one scholarly article has been published on the play.<sup>2</sup> In this article I examine the dramaturgical structures that support a comprehensive *Sprachkritik* in both plays, with a particular emphasis on the tension between stage and auditorium.

*Kaspar* now has the status of a modern classic and is a staple of many modern drama courses. By virtue of this I have assumed that its plot and the figures of Kaspar and the Einsager are familiar to the reader. *Blut*, on the other hand, has drifted into obscurity, and I shall thus spend some time outlining and analysing its defining dramaturgical moments, with a view to contrasting them with those of the better-known *Kaspar*. A couple of reasons may account for this discrepancy in reception (I should not, however, like to link any of them with the plays' aesthetic qualities, as should become evident later). Handke's profile at the time was far higher than Fassbinder's; he had achieved prominence through both his association with *enfant terrible* director Claus Peymann and his own much publicized attack on the *Gruppe 47* in Princeton, in 1968. Fassbinder, by contrast, had yet to develop as a 'media phenomenon'. He was known in the South (*Blut* was commissioned by the city of Nuremberg for the *Düreejahr*) but his work was not as widely propagated as Handke's (the *antitheater* had no publishing deal with a firm such as Suhrkamp either). In fact, in certain reviews he was considered an epigone of the young Austrian.<sup>3</sup> His theatre work also seems to have been eclipsed by his films. It is not untypical to find remarks such as 'Fassbinder learned to make films in the theatre',<sup>4</sup> which see the cinematic output as the culmination of his apprenticeship at the *antitheater*.

<sup>1</sup> In Peter Handke, *Stücke 1* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), hereafter *K*.

<sup>2</sup> Erik MacDonald, 'Rainer Werner Fassbinder and the Politics of Simulation: Two Plays', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 5 (1990), 131–50.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ernst Wendt, 'Dramen über Zerstörung, Leiden, Sprachlosigkeit im Alltag — auf der Flucht vor den großen politischen Stoffen?', *Theater heute*, 5 (1971), 32–40 (p. 32).

<sup>4</sup> Christian Braad Thomson, *Fassbinder: The Life and Work of a Provocative Genius*, trans. by Martin Chalmers (London: Faber, 1997), p. 45.

*Blut* is about an alien, Phoebe Zeitgeist, who has come to Earth to find out about democracy. The character is in fact taken from an American comic-book series written by Michael O'Donoghue and Frank Springer. Her name, as will become evident, is ironic. As Fassbinder puts it in his introductory remarks: 'Phoebe Zeitgeist hat aber Schwierigkeiten, sie versteht die Sprache der Menschen nicht, obwohl sie die Worte gelernt hat.'<sup>5</sup> From the outset, then, a tension is established between the situations Phoebe encounters and the way in which she processes them linguistically. The tension between Saussure's *langue* and *parole* are signalled early. The same can be said of *Kaspar*, yet the way in which the material is treated by Fassbinder reveals a complex dramaturgical method that changes over the three phases of the play.

The first phase presents the spectator with the typologized characters who recur throughout the play (for example, *Der Polizist*, *Die Frau des toten Soldaten*). They either deliver monologues by themselves or address monologues to Phoebe, who is present but mute. The two scene types alternate. There are eighteen short scenes in the first phase. A symmetry emerges in that the first character to have a scene with Phoebe, *Der Polizist*, is the last to have his *solus*. Correspondingly, *Der Metzger*, the first *solus* (and the second scene), appears in the seventeenth scene with Phoebe. The only exceptions to this mirrored scheme are Scenes 9 and 10, which would have featured *Die Geliebte* and Phoebe, and *Die Geliebte* on her own. Instead we see *Der Liebhaber* and Phoebe, and then *Die Geliebte solus*. One assumes that this was so that *Die Geliebte* was not seen in some way as the central character. All the same, Fassbinder is still interested in maintaining the symmetrical structure for the most part, something that constructs a sense of order and cohesion to the spectator. The importance of this device within the dramaturgy of play as a whole will be addressed later.

The second phase consists of a further thirty-six short scenes. All feature two of the nine typologized characters and Phoebe, who observes the vignettes before repeating lines that she has heard within them at the end of each scene. The lines she chooses follow no ostensible pattern; she does not favour beginnings, middles, or endings (which might tell us something about her mind-set with respect to those of both the characters and the audience). Each character has one (and only one) dialogue with each of the others in the cycle.

The third phase is a party attended by all the characters, including Phoebe. It is here that Phoebe deploys the language she has learned in phase two. Towards the end of the party Phoebe starts to bite the necks of the party-goers, one by one, until she is the only one left alive.<sup>6</sup> Having done this she recites a section of Hegel's *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1812–16).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Blut am Hals der Katze*, in Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Sämtliche Stücke*, ed. by Michael Töteberg, (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Autoren, 1991), p. 498, hereafter *B*.

<sup>6</sup> The alternative title of the play, which appeared in the programme of the world première, was *Marilyn Monroe contre les vampires*. What seems to be happening, therefore, is that Phoebe has observed the mutually parasitic behaviour of the characters and has become a vampire herself, reproducing her surroundings once more.

<sup>7</sup> She recites the first paragraph of the first chapter of the section entitled 'Die Subjektivität' from the second part of the work (*B*, p. 239). I shall return to an interpretation of this concluding speech later. Both Denis Calandra, who has translated a selection of Fassbinder's plays, and MacDonald, who, I assume, read Calandra's introductory remarks to the volume of translations, name Kant as the intertext's source (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Plays*, ed. and trans. by Denis Calandra (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 11). MacDonald is keen to point to Kant as a symbolic father-figure, in Lacanian terms (p. 145), whereas

From this brief outline, one can see that the central figures in *Blut* and *Kaspar* differ greatly, although they play similar roles as language learners. One of the main interests in *Kaspar* focuses on whether the protagonist is figuratively tortured<sup>8</sup> by the three Einsager (that the process of acquiring language is made painful by their mendacity)<sup>9</sup> or that pain is a prerequisite when learning a language, regardless of who is teaching it.<sup>10</sup> Such fundamental issues do not arise in *Blut* in that Phoebe is never really exposed to the pain of language acquisition in the play. *Kaspar* has to have the sentence with which he enters the stage driven out of him to make him receptive to the Einsager. Phoebe is more an imitator and is never required to have language beaten into her (we assume that this process has already taken place on her own planet). Her problems with language are based far more in the assembly of words into sentences. In both plays, however, the playwrights employ the central character as a means of investigating the structures of language in society by dint of the characters' linguistic artlessness.

The three phases of *Blut* treat the social personae of the typologized characters very differently. In the monologic first phase identity seems fairly cohesive. The nine give their individualized pictures of violence, suffering, and/or oppression. *Der Metzger* in Scene 2, for example, tells of a girlfriend he once had, who made his dreary working life and the regular blows received at the hands of his 'Meister' seem bearable. She left him, and now he buys sex every Friday and continues the cycle of violence, for he is now the 'Meister'. Glimpses of personal tragedy and repeated inhumanity pervade the first phase. The characterizations appear to represent standard psychological-realist fare. The speeches paint bleak pictures of everyday life and the characters never break frame with metatheatrical discourse. In the second phase the potted biographies that provided the audience with stable points of contact are radically called into question. If we follow the plotting for *Der Metzger* we find the following scenarios: he plays a dog to *Das Modell's* dominatrix; he tries to calm *Die Frau des toten Soldaten* after having hit her; he is a cellmate in prison with *Das Mädchen*; he boasts of his earnings to a former football team-mate, *Der Soldat*; he is the sceptical investor in a car-wash that *Der Lehrer* is trying to set up; he is the other man in a love-triangle featuring *Die Geliebte*; he is a hard-nosed creditor when *Der Liebhaber* discovers his wife has run up huge debts; he is a worker who will not strike because he has his own capital, by contrast with his more sympathetic workmate, *Der Polizist*. The variety of roles and personae is highly disparate. It would be difficult to identify a single character or personality within the diversity. Even if one were to impose such an interpretation, by viewing the short vignettes as scenes from a life, their sheer break-neck speed refuses the actor the depth of interiority to sustain a character. The spectator is denied the consistency

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Hegel could be seen as one of the bastard sons, self-confident and iconoclastic. Calandra may have identified Kant as the source because of the language and categories employed in the speech. Hegel, however, is a more controversial choice of philosopher. The associations with Marx, a figure still looming large at the time in the wake of the upheavals of 1968, are hard to avoid. Hegel is thus more provocative as the provenance of the final text; Kant, in comparison, is authoritative and untouchable.

<sup>8</sup> This concept is taken from Handke's much-quoted preface to the play, in which he says he could have called *Kaspar* 'Sprechfolterung' (*K*, p. 103).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, M. Read, 'Peter Handke's *Kaspar* and the Power of Negative Thinking', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 29 (1993), 126-48, or Jeanette R. Malkin, '"Think What You Are Saying": Verbal Politics in the Early Plays of Handke and Kroetz', *Modern Drama*, 33 (1990), 363-79.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Christa Dixon, 'Peter Handkes *Kaspar*: Ein Modellfall', *German Quarterly*, 46 (1973), 31-34, or Bettina Soestwöhner, 'Kaspar oder das Theater der Sprache', *Colloquia Germanica*, 22 (1989), 137-50.

required to promote the identification that was possible in the first phase. As a result, the spectator is prevented from developing the relationship established in phase one and is forced to re-evaluate basic 'realist' categories and to adjust to a more active form of spectatorship.

The range of texts each actor is made to speak undermines a coherence in characterization. The order in which they are spoken also frustrates the spectator's ability merely to digest the performance and encourages a reconsideration of the more conventional mapping of one actor onto one part (or of one actor onto doubled, yet psychologically consistent parts). The structure of phase two is also at odds with a unifying sense of character. The near-symmetrical distribution in the first phase is severely disrupted by the apparently random set of encounters between the figures in the second. The order in which the characters take the stage and interact with each other follows no pattern; there is no numerical series that determines when or with whom a particular character appears. This is a deliberate device (by virtue of the fact that each character meets the other once and only once) to attack the cohesion of the characters of phase one and thus openly to challenge a set of psychological and dramaturgical assumptions. 'Characters' are replaced by 'figures' that are too contradictory to be reduced to helpful shorthands for either the actor or the audience.

The apparently random distribution of the second-phase scenes and the larger structure that exposes an underlying organizing principle signal two important points. First, they fail to privilege any one actor, so that potential meanings may not emerge through overexposure. The process of de-centring the individual affects all equally; none of the human subjects can stave it off, regardless of the social roles he or she plays. Second, the presence of enforced equality points back to the constructed nature of the piece. The paradox of 'controlled haphazardness' confirms the play's artifice and acknowledges its limits. Individuality, carefully crafted by the (almost perfect) symmetry of the first eighteen scenes is exposed as a dramaturgical ruse. Thus, the organization of the second phase not only allows the spectator to assess a discrepancy between actor and role but also contextualizes this strategy within the play itself.

The scenes themselves are also of interest because they have no stage-directions: all is suggested by spoken (and body) language. It is also fair to assume that because of the speed of the thirty-six scene changes there would be little by way of stage set to indicate where the scenes were taking place. Even costume might be ruled out as an interpretative sign, for reasons of expense and time required to change. The spectator has to find his or her way into the brief situations without the help of the usual visual signs. There is also no continuity of a distinguishable character, as was noted above, and no 'epic banner' to set the scene, which also frustrates the process of easy comprehension. Thus, by virtue of *the audience's* ability to decipher meanings from the short scenes, it becomes implicated in the short bursts of action. The spectator's recognition of the unpleasant situations betrays a familiarity that by extension becomes disturbing. This mechanism of tacit identification is then ironically checked by the character who does not understand; Phoebe digests the scenes only in so far as she repeats certain lines or phrases at the scenes' respective conclusions.

In a short period of stage time the scenes' contexts are imparted without any direct verbal reference to them. In this sort of whirl, the spectator has to work

quickly to make sense of the vignettes. Actors whose characters were at the receiving end of an act of oppression might become the oppressors themselves, only to return to the role of the victim once more later. The spectator is forced to realize that meaning is being generated by his or her recognition of linguistic and kinetic signs. The status of sign as indicator and not substance (and not, therefore, as inevitable) is attested in the closing line of each short scene. Its language is wrenched out of the context that was so familiar to the audience by the silent observer. Phoebe takes her linguistic material from phrases spoken by any of the characters involved in the scene from any moment in the scene and then forms a new sentence. Language that already required active input from the spectator in order to create meaning is put into a new sequence. The *langue* is given a new *parole*. The process calls the scene into question by undermining the semantic and syntactic basis that gave the spectator access to it in the first place. Fassbinder's critique of the clichés that oppress his figures extends into the auditorium.

At the party, which forms the third phase of the play, Phoebe goes on to reuse the language she has distilled in phase two. The characters who were introduced in the first phase, and were shattered into various personae in the second, return in the third as a similarly fragmented mixture. The party displays a fluid set of human traits within the social contexts already presented. The major interest in this phase is the relationship between what Phoebe says and how it is interpreted by the others. Töteberg defines the third phase as 'Dialoge mit Phoebe, wobei sie die gelernten Sätze falsch anwendet'.<sup>11</sup> MacDonald contends that her speech is 'a series of non-sequiturs' and that she 'shatters the structures necessary to maintain the other characters' narratives' (Macdonald, pp. 144–45). Phoebe is not, however, quite as out of step as the two critics may believe, rather her function here is altogether more challenging.

Phoebe's lines at the party are peculiar in that they seem to follow a pattern but then occasionally diverge from it. The pattern is quite straightforward: Phoebe delivers her lines at different points during the party in the order in which she has learned them, which seems to indicate a lack of discrimination. However, there are points where a line that should follow does not, and there are a couple of other discrepancies as well. The lines 'BIST DU WAHNSINNIG?' (*B*, p. 518), 'DU BIST GEMEIN' (*B*, p. 520), 'SIE SIND GEMEIN' (*B*, p. 521), 'DAS HAB ICH NICHT GEWOLLT' (*B*, p. 527), and 'ICH WAR KRANK' (*B*, p. 532) are all missing at the party. The lines do not differ greatly in content from other utterances made by Phoebe in the phase, yet the attempts to experiment with language learnt by omitting it betokens conscious agency. In addition, the original Phoebe lines 'EIN KIND, DAS HAT MAN DOCH SICHER. WENN DU KEIN VERTRAUEN HAST, DANN IST ALLES ZUVIEL' (*B*, p. 528) are inverted at the party (the second sentence comes first in *B*, p. 546), and the lines 'DIE ZEIT MACHT DICH REIF UND DABEI VERGEHT SIE. GEGEN KRANKE GEDANKEN GIBT ES GEBETE' (*B*, p. 530) appear in the party scene with an extra 'DIE ZEIT MACHT DICH REIF UND DABEI VERGEHT DIE' after them (*B*, p. 546). Again, the decisions seem arbitrary, none the less they signal an impulse to experiment and a certain playfulness. These modifications demonstrate that Phoebe is being selective; there is no reason to doubt her memory, because she is able to deliver all the other lines

<sup>11</sup> Michael Töteberg, 'Rainer Werner Fassbinder', in *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, 9 vols, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: text + kritik, 1986), III, p. 6 of the entry.

both in the correct order and with accuracy. This consciousness signals an attack on the dominant *parole* of oppression and thus functions more dynamically and purposefully than Töteberg's and MacDonald's contentions. The linguistic structures that confronted the spectator in the second phase and were revealed as insidious are consciously attacked by the usage of an outsider. Of course, Phoebe is met with incredulity and bemusement (for example, LIEBHABER: Du hast zu viel getrunken (*B*, p. 541), or METZGER: Seltsam, diese Person (*B*539)), which is the audience's initial reaction, too. Yet more often than one would expect, her 'random' contributions evince curiosity or agreement (LEHRER: Ja, das ist die Weisheit des Volkes. Ich würde nicht wagen, das zu verachten (*B*, p. 538), or POLIZIST: Die hat Phantasie. Ihr Arschlöcher. Der fällt was ein, der Frau, im Gegensatz zu euch lahmen Enten (*B*, p. 546)). Not surprisingly, both Der Lehrer and Der Polizist later grow weary of her linguistic challenges and join the others in dismissing her. What is important is that she injects a vitality into the proceedings with her peculiar gambits. Vitality is something conspicuous by its absence throughout the play. To a certain extent this is because of the unimaginative and tired use of language throughout the play (which finds an analogue in the familiarity of the scenes in the second phase and the familiarity of their violence).

Clichés crop up throughout as ready-made solutions to or ways out of the many problems that arise in phases two and three. Phoebe's sometimes sententious lines have such qualities, too, yet seem to engage the characters in phase three because of their freshness in the of the banal chit-chat. Phoebe can only quote: she holds a mirror to the mannerisms and behaviour of the nine figures and distortingly reflects them back in unfamiliar contexts. This is contrasted with the use of cliché and dead metaphor (as well as the repetitious cycles of language-encoded oppression) by the nine figures. The discrepancy between Phoebe's usage and that of the others opens up new discursive possibilities and offers a language-based response to the recurring language and motifs in the short scenes.

Here it might be well to turn to *Kaspar*, where there is also a figure who is taught language by repetition and who then combines words out of context at the end of the play. The main preoccupation of *Blut* is clearly the role of language as a social phenomenon. The various speech acts to which the spectator is witness are a central factor in the course and outcome of each oppressive situation. *Kaspar*, too, introduces and then goes on to develop the social implications of language, here through a clever parody of Ludwig Wittgenstein's linguistic theories. References to the philosopher's *Logische-philosophische Abhandlung (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus)* are placed at judicious points of *Kaspar*'s speech-training. Handke prefaces what will become evident as Wittgenstein's thought with a modified quotation that Wittgenstein used to preface the *Tractatus*. In Scene 20 we hear from the Einsager, 'für einen ordentlichen Gegenstand brauchst du nur einen Satz mit drei Worten' (*K*, p. 127).<sup>12</sup> By Scenes 23 and 24 one finds direct evidence of the famous 'picture theory' of language, when the Einsager say, for example, 'jeder Gegenstand muß ein Bild von einem Gegenstand sein', or 'ein Tisch ist ein wahrer Tisch, wenn ein Bild von Tisch mit dem Tisch übereinstimmt' (*K*, pp. 129, 130). Handke sets up a

<sup>12</sup> The quotation comes from a fellow Austrian, Ferdinand Kürnberger: 'Und alles, was man weiß, nicht bloß, was man rauschen und brausen gehört hat, läßt sich in drei Worten sagen', in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus/Logische-Philosophische Abhandlung*, trans. by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 25. This appears as the work's motto.

method, through which Kaspar is to be indoctrinated, that superficially seems 'natural' or 'common-sense': that is, that language is directly derived from an objective outside world. As Malkin puts it, 'Kaspar is taught that speech is prior to, and the limits of, thought' (Malkin, p. 374). We perceive objects or events and find a useful shorthand, a word, to refer to them. The simplicity of the process is vouchsafed by the transformed Kürnberger quotation. A world of order is created in which each word represents an ideal, essential, or Platonic version of the object or event. Thus a table that has been knocked over is no longer 'a table'; it is 'a table that has been knocked over'. Even in the most un-ideological of objects, a covert, orderly meaning is predicating its overt semantic one. The word no longer describes its object (because, for example, a table is no longer a table when it is not standing on its legs), it imposes a desired state upon that object, too. Human influence modifies the word considered a shorthand and creates a 'non-natural' meaning. The social implications of Handke's critique of Wittgenstein are enormous. The dominant ideology creates its own standards and then seeks to hide such artifice under the naive defence that language is merely a reading-off of the external world. *Kaspar* then deploys the 'transparent' vocabulary in a series of loaded slogans in Scene 25, such as 'Jeder ist für seinen Fortschritt verantwortlich', or 'Jede Neuordnung erzeugt Unordnung' (*K*, p. 131, 132). The frequent use of 'jeder' and its other forms, as well as a sententious use of verbs, help to bolster the universalizing tone of the pronouncements and to hide the loaded nature of the slogans. As spectators, however, we can appreciate the dramatic irony of the scene: there are sixty-six such phrases, which become all the more self-parodistic as the scene progresses. Also, Kaspar's actions during the scene (he tidies up the untidy stage, he makes it orderly) ironize the texts through his blind obedience. It is telling, and indeed a final nod to the audience, that by the scene's conclusion, one object, the wardrobe, will not bend and remains defiantly open. The transition from household objects (Scenes 21, 23, and 24) to social prescription (Scene 25) illustrates the pernicious divisiveness that underlies the 'picture theory'.

The linguistic and social critique of the play is highly theatrical. A cursory reading of the text makes one aware that there are almost always two texts at work in the play. Down the left-hand column are Kaspar's lines and stage-directions, on the right those of the Einsager. What the spectator sees, therefore, is a constant interaction between the two sides, which is sometimes in tandem, but mostly apart. The contradiction between the two texts pushes the spectator away from the events on stage because he or she is continually being made to contrast two differing sets of signs. The interpretation of meaning is the product of the audience's critical judgements with respect to the dialectical tension of the material. In this sense, the dramaturgy is solidly Brechtian. However, the audience is brought back to the quotidian during the interval: the conscious artifice of the theatre is contrasted with a collage of extracts from 'the real world'. The 'Pausentexte', which comprise Scene 59 and are to be played in the foyer, are only a suggestion for a text. Handke writes that whatever words are used, they should be '*zusammengesetzt aus Bandaufnahmen der Einsager, Geräuscheinschüben, Originalaufnahmen von echten Parteiführern, Päpsten, öffentlichen Sprechern jeder Art, auch von Staats- und Ministerpräsidenten, vielleicht auch von echten Dichtern, die zu Anlässen sprechen. Die Sätze sind niemals vollständig*' (*K*, p. 166). This shift of frame allows the audience to play Kaspar's role to the tapes' Einsager. The spectator is exposed to the intertextual construction of views, opinions, and 'the



natural', too. Yet words are not the only object of the critique. The 'Geräuscheinschübe' (*K*, p. 166), mentioned in the introduction to the 'Pausentexte', make us aware of the commodified nature of noises and sounds too. The most profound example of this is at the end of the scene, where a cacophony of bells, buzzers, gongs, sirens, and rattles signifies that the second part of the theatrical event is about to begin. The use of the traditional sign, the bell, and its *Verfremdung* within the gamut of aural signs, points to the conventions taken for granted and to a possible escape from them. (This possibility, and its attendant problems, will be discussed in connection with the use of intertexts and quotations later.) Consequently, the actor-audience dynamic in *Blut* is almost the reverse of that of *Kaspar*. In the former, the audience is drawn into naturalistic vignettes before it is distanced by Phoebe; in the latter it is critical from the outset because of the foregrounded theatricality, only to be confronted with its own insinuation in the signifying chain at the interval. The pronounced and enforced transformation of the audience's role in these plays is both didactic (in their *Sprachkritik*) and dynamic (in their changes of dramaturgical cadence).

Both plays criticize language as a means of social control by pointing to the restrictive contexts of language deployment. The repetition of oppressive situations points to an intertextual cycle, where each power relationship quotes another. The sense of language as quotation is important in *Kaspar* as well as in *Blut*. In *Kaspar* one finds a range of quotations and intertexts. As well as the intertexts from the *Tractatus* and 'the real world', there are (sometimes modified) lines and echoes from Goethe, Feuerbach and Daumer (see below), Horváth, Shakespeare, the Bible, and Büchner. Such employment of foreign texts leads Read to assert that *Kaspar* is able to go beyond the 'world of rational discourse and the purely functional use of language' (Read, p. 133) of the Einsager to investigate and experience the other, which unconsciously replaces the father figure in *Kaspar*'s first sentence. The historical *Kaspar Hauser*, as described by Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach and G. F. Daumer, was supposed to have appeared in Nuremberg with the sentence, 'ein Reiter möchte ich werden, wie mein Vater gewesen ist'. Handke changes this to 'ich möchte ein solcher werden wie einmal ein anderer gewesen ist'. This distinction, which desires a state of otherness, is an important modification. Not only does it situate *Kaspar* somewhere between a past ('einmal') and a future ('möchte [. . .] werden'), it also calls his individuality into question, and I shall show why this is crucial presently. The other, however, is a peculiar category in *Kaspar* because it is not original. It is taken from a source just like the rest of his language, yet it is the only means of liberating language from its present context.

A Shakespeare quotation used by Handke will explain the paradox. *Kaspar* concludes with a quotation from *Othello* ('Ziegen und Affen', *K*, pp. 197-98, compare *Othello*, iv.i.259). It comes at the end of a speech that seems to form disparate nouns into pairs. By this time there are several other *Kaspars*<sup>13</sup> on stage, 'challenging' the objects on stage, such as the table or the chairs, by laughing at them, costuming them, imitating them, and pulling them offstage. Action and

<sup>13</sup> Originally they had served the Einsager in Scenes 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, and 43 by illustrating ideal ways of dealing with situations suggested by the Einsager. After the interval they become more rebellious and anarchic. They also represent an attack on individuality, similar to that in *Blut*. The *Kaspar* of the first part of the play can no longer be separated from the others. His idiosyncrasies are reproduced by the other *Kaspars* and we are shown a world of faceless uniformity.

language seem to mirror each other: both try to make their objects, their referends, 'UNMÖGLICH' (*K*, p. 196). By now the Kaspars are indistinguishable (a theatrical critique of 'the original'), so the text directs the Kaspar furthest downstage to speak the final speech. His free combination of random words gets stuck at the Shakespearean intertext, which is then repeated a further eight times. Critics have responded to the curtain line in a variety of ways. Jeffrey Herrick detects a tragic resonance by tracing the intertext back to its source. Othello recalls words earlier used by Iago and has thus accepted Iago's distorted ideas on human behaviour. Gay McAuley looks to the content of the line itself and says Kaspar 'reiterates the animal nature that language was supposed to free him from'.<sup>14</sup> Both ideas point to a negativity, that Kaspar is unable to escape from a suffocating world created by language. Read, as I have already noted, suggests a more positive reading: that the intertexts offer a way of frustrating the linguistic oppression of the play through a poetic use of language. By making language do what it has not previously done, the speaker can postpone a final denotation and continue to connote. The obvious problem is that Kaspar's escape-route employs words already coined by another. He has not formed his own solution, he has reactivated an older phrase.

Handke's intertextual tactic is also worthy of further comment. Almost all the quotations in the play are neither that well known nor instantly identifiable. It would seem that Handke uses his intertexts to allow the audience to believe that unexpected linguistic usages can question the dominant context, only to discover afterwards, maybe from a volume of criticism, from the press, or by word of mouth, that that is not the case. The play can be seen to have a time-delayed effect: an idea for an evasion of the oppressive forces in the play is set up, only to be disappointed at some unknown date in the future. The spectator then has to reconcile this discovery with his or her experience of the lines in performance. Context is the only temporary escape, yet its emphasis marks the shift from the strictures of the 'picture theory' to the relative freedoms of Wittgenstein's later concept, the 'language game'.

Phoebe's final quotation from Hegel plays a similar role in that it presents familiar words in an unlikely context, but in this case the quotation also sheds light on all that has gone before it. Phoebe, of course, has been presenting learned lines in odd places for the whole of the third phase. She is, by virtue of this, a perfect vehicle for the final speech. For those unfamiliar with the text, I reproduce it here in full, in Fassbinder's capitalized letters:

DURCH DEN VERSTAND PFLEGT DAS VERMÖGEN DER BEGRIFFE ÜBERHAUPT AUSGEDRÜCKT ZU WERDEN; ER WIRD INSOFFERN VON DER URTEILSKRAFT UND DEM VERMÖGEN DER SCHLÜSSE ALS DER FORMELLEN VERNUNFT UNTERSCHIEDEN. VORNEHMLICH ABER WIRD ER DER VERNUNFT ENTGEGENGESETZT; INSOFFERN ABER BEDEUTET ER NICHT DAS VERMÖGEN DES BEGRIFFS ÜBERHAUPT, SONDERN DER BESTIMMTEN BEGRIFFE, WOBEI DIE VORSTELLUNG HERRSCHT, ALS OB DER BEGRIFF NUR EIN BESTIMMTES SEI. WENN DER VERSTAND IN DIESER BEDEUTUNG VON DER FORMELLEN URTEILSKRAFT UND DER FORMELLEN VERNUNFT UNTERSCHIEDEN WIRD, SO IST ER ALS VERMÖGEN DES EINZELNEN BESTIMMTEN BEGRIFFS ZU NEHMEN. DENN DAS URTEIL UND DER SCHLUSS ODER DIE VERNUNFT SIND SELBST ALS FORMALES NUR EIN VERSTÄNDIGES, INDEM SIE UNTER DER FORM DER ABSTRAKTEN BEGRIFFSBESTIMMTHEIT STEHEN. DER BEGRIFF GILT ABER HIER ÜBERHAUPT NICHT ALS BLOSS ABSTRAKT BESTIMMTES; DER VERSTAND IST DAHER

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Herrick, 'Peter Handke's *Kaspar*: A Study of Linguistic Theory in Modern Drama', *Philological Quarterly*, 63 (1984), 219, and Gay McAuley, 'The Problem of Identity. Theme, Form and Theatrical Method in *Les Nègres*, *Kaspar* and *Old Times*', *Southern Review*, 8 (1975), 63.

VON DER VERNUNFT NUR SO ZU UNTERSCHIEDEN, DASS JENER NUR DAS VERMÖGEN DES BEGRIFFES ÜBERHAUPT SEI. (*B*, p. 550–51)

Hegel's dense style and unqualified use of philosophical terms makes the text difficult to comprehend at first. Its stockpiling of ideas in such a short space also adds to its perceived difficulty. This, I believe, is part of its theatrical appeal to Fassbinder. The text requires work on the part of the audience if it is to make any sense. It re-presents the linguistic problematic that has run through the play. The process of decoding and making sense of the lines refers back the themes of the play as a whole. Language has been revealed as a powerful means through which one character can oppress, cheat, humiliate, coerce, or disown another. Its instrumental function has routed all others. By calling language into question both by Phoebe's odd juxtaposing of learned lines and by the final speech, Fassbinder is able to criticize both the language of the three phases and the situations they depict. The partial explanation of this is found in the Hegel text itself. Understanding, 'Verstand', is primarily set against Reason, 'Vernunft'. But Hegel goes on to qualify this distinction. The interpretation of the Notion, 'der Begriff', is sanctioned by Understanding. Yet the Notion does not come from the abstract realm (some eternal, mystical site of universals), it is more material than that. The Notion becomes more contingent on its contexts.<sup>15</sup> Understanding and Reason are thus more flexible and are, in fact, closer to each other than the original opposition presumed. We can conclude, with respect to *Blut*, that the Notions, with which we are confronted in the many scenes, are only manifestations of a particular, historically dependent configuration of Understanding and Reason.

Contingency is a central theme in *Blut*. The social vignettes with which the audience is bombarded are to be found very much within its experience. The swiftness of recognition on the audience's part points squarely to the contemporary, through familiar situations and accessible colloquial forms. In this way Fassbinder takes up Handke's social critique and attempts to historicize it within the frame of situations the audience recognizes. Yet the spectator is able to recognize them only because of their language (and their translation into body language). Fassbinder, like Handke, acknowledges the difficulties of breaking out of ossified social structures that are reinforced by equally rigid linguistic and semantic ones. Because language helps construct social relations (as noted in Handke's critique of the 'picture theory'), language must become a central consideration if one wants to change them. The playwright's employment and foregrounding of intertext points to the potential for liberation as coming from a playful and challenging use of language, which none the less does not conform to a spurious bourgeois notion of originality.

In conclusion, then, one may register the similarities between Fassbinder and Handke. Both exploit the dramatic medium to expose the artifice of language (and to oppose its status as 'natural') in order to suggest the possibility of social change. Through a conscious reuse of intertext both signal the primacy of context over content: the words themselves may be familiar, but it is their deployment that opens the possibility of *Sprachkritik*. The most marked difference in their strategies is their

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that there is a confluence of ideas between Fassbinder and Handke here. In Handke's *Bücher-Preis-Rede* of 1973, he rails against the abstraction of ideas, preferring to oppose it with the complexity of experience and memory.

manipulation of the actor–audience relationship. Fassbinder introduces the audience to recognizable scenes of everyday oppression. The scenes never directly announce their subject-matter and require input from the spectator to generate meaning. This task is not too testing, yet its continual repetition points to the tacit collusion between stage and auditorium. Phoebe makes this collusion overt by throwing the trusted words back at the spectator and thus causes irritation in the audience, which may lead to raised awareness of the linguistic issues. Handke, on the other hand, uses a conscious theatricality from the outset. Meaning is generated out of a contradiction between Kaspar and the Einsager. The mechanisms of signification are laid bare before the audience's eyes. The interval thus comes as more of a shock, when the audience is made to confront its own acceptance of linguistic commonplaces. Only once the spectator has experienced the prison house is the potential for escape presented in the form of poetically protean intertexts. Handke's dramaturgy moves between distance (Scenes 1–58) and proximity (Scene 59) and then returns to distance (Scenes 60–65) in a journey that demarcates the elements of its dynamic quite clearly. For Fassbinder, the process is one of a gradual awakening of curiosity in the spectator. The first phase sets itself up for its fall in the second. The rapid succession of second-phase scenes highlights the part played by the audience in the generation of meaning, and the spectator oscillates between spectacle and involvement. By the third phase, the audience is primed for Phoebe's attempt at bucking the system and exposing its foundations. Both plays require strategies to activate the audience to effect their *Sprachkritik*. Handke creates the context for criticism from the outset before confronting his audience with the 'real' examples of the processes explored on stage. Fassbinder uses a more covert technique in that he shams a more conventional dramaturgy in order to turn it back on the spectator later. Fassbinder ambushes the audience Handke treated with more respect with a subtle dramaturgy that ends up accusing the spectator of collusion in the acts of oppression that seemed confined to the stage.

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