

## THE IDEA OF MEDIATION IN HANDKE'S *KASPAR*

*Savas Patsalidis*

How is the self to be defined? How does it interact with the world? These questions certainly "bear no gifts to Athens." They have been central to world drama since the time of Aeschylus. Starting with the hypothesis that characters are coherent subjects, psychologically grounded in perceptual reality, playwrights throughout the ages have repeatedly tried to elaborate a system of stable oppositions (self/other, slave/master, inside/outside, I/you, signifier/signified) to theatricalize the plight of their characters vis-à-vis culture and its institutions, to create the illusion that theater is composed of spontaneous speech. Recently, however, in the theater and in theories of the modern, there has been profound unrest over the image of the unified self that freely chooses his/her channels of communication with the world. Many contemporary artists have increasingly questioned the humanist, self-centered significations and promoted instead a new notion of the self where the pure entity, the uncontaminated sign and the undivided origin come forth as fiction. People, according to these artists, work in a linguistic and cultural system which they can never dominate or avoid. By virtue of their "already-thereness" language and culture constitute people's limits and possibilities. In *Kaspar* Peter Handke exposes the system of semiology's binary logic (either/or) to make us see the cultural forces that shape the self and determine its position vis-à-vis culture.



What all critics of Handke have in common is that they notice that this is a different kind of theater. This is a theater, they claim, that obeys no rules of decorum, no regulations governing dialogue, character, structure. Constructed from numerous conflicting cultural codes, Handke's discourse prevents the viewer from approaching the performance text from a specific theatrical point of view. It rather invites a plurality of readings, not the illusion of totality and reunification.

Handke is very eloquent when he speaks in his own voice. Expanding on his ideas about the politics of reception he notes: "The viewer who awaits in the theater the resolution of every word and every action, the thematic sense, the story, will be left with the action alone. Every utterance is *made*; no action results naturally from the preceding one; no utterance means anything

other than itself — it signifies itself." In the face of this unfamiliar kind of dramaturgy, the viewer, Handke continues, "becomes increasingly self-conscious and tense, almost to the point that the socially protective adhesive tape with which everyone wraps himself is ripped, is no longer visible, not only without, but also within, in the consciousness of the viewer" (1974: 174-75). Like a Foucauldian genealogist Handke wants to make people aware of the fact that what they have traditionally assumed to be "natural," "archiko" (original), or "spontaneous," is actually an artificial, mediated product of the social and artistic norms generated by the dominant groups in a given society at a given time.

In *Offending the Audience*, for example, Handke deliberately unsettles the stage/audience relationship (inside/outside, art/praxis), shattering the frames of the theater of trance to make us see more clearly, to be more aware of the theatricality of our life, of the interpretations that have been created and imposed upon us. As he says early in the play, "you will hear nothing you have not heard before. ... You will hear what you usually don't see" (7). Everything in the play is designed to disturb the spectator's comfortable sense of the relationship between actor/character, stage/audience, life/art, signifier/signified, logos/writing. All signs and oppositional structures, Handke argues, are arbitrary. History (and along with it theatrical history) is just the story of violently (or cleverly) imposed (mis)interpretations. To unsettle the myth of semiology's "versus" and at the same time affirm the "here and now" of the event, Handke allows the aesthetics of the stage to pour onto a topos beyond the well-guarded frames of the theatrical event. This deliberate undoing of the limits of representation has as its aim to force the spectators to see the event no longer from without but from within. "The time on stage is no different," one of the Speakers proclaims, "from the time off stage. We are in the same location" (10). "Only now and a now and a now exist here. ... The time here is your time" (15). This "now-ness," reminiscent of similar experiments conducted by The Living Theatre (*Paradise Now*) and Luca Ronconi (*Orlando Furioso*), among others, challenges the illusion of the first time typically created by the fourth wall and plunges the spectator into a specific theatrical rhythm and time in which s/he becomes part of the making and unmaking of its imaginary. Handke's Speakers "hammer away at the very impulse to signify, the desire to see something as anything other than itself," Roger Copeland argues (35). That is, they put "under erasure" ("*sous rature*," according to Derrida) everything the theater stands for, namely its "unmediated otherness." "The emptiness of this stage," we hear the Speakers argue, "is no picture of another emptiness. The emptiness of this stage signifies nothing. This stage is empty because objects would be in our way. It is empty because we don't need objects. This stage represents nothing. It represents no other emptiness. ... You don't see any objects that pretend to be other objects. You don't see a darkness that pretends to be another darkness. ... You don't see a room that pretends to be another room" (10).

In *Kaspar* Handke once again develops innovative, self-reflexive theatrical strategies to illuminate the conflicts and paradoxes inherent in the individual's discovery of the nature and limits of identity and expression. To put matters differently, Handke foregrounds a series of fundamental questions related to the rules of formation and transformation of discourse. For example: What is it possible to speak of? What is repressed and what is validated? Which individuals have access to discourse? How are human relations institutionalized? How are bodies locked in space, distributed in relation to one another for hierarchical organization, and for the efficient disposition of centers and channels of power?

The play itself is modelled on the real story of an illiterate youth, Kaspar Hauser, who appeared in the streets of Nuremberg in May of 1828, helpless and terrified and capable of uttering only one sentence: "I want to be a horseman like my father was once" (Bance 199-210). He was imprisoned for vagrancy and later on turned over to a guardian. In 1833 he was mysteriously murdered. There are many versions of the Hauser story, all of which seem to agree that the youth was kept for about sixteen years in a dark room, without any contact with the world outside and without a proper education. There have been numerous literary treatments of the story, dealing with a variety of motifs. Handke finds the material for his play in the theme of linguistic education, implicit in the story from its earliest phase.

While in his previous plays Handke, to involve his viewers, used to address them directly, calling their attention to and encouraging their participation in the stage event, in *Kaspar* he resorts to a less direct stage/audience correspondence: he turns to a popular story with which a great part of the audience is already familiar. This familiarity, Handke believes, would enable his spectators to become conscious observers of the theatrical event as well as conscious collaborators with the creator, striving to contribute to an event that cannot fully exist without their participation. Thus, by relying on his audience's foreknowledge of the story and ability to "fill-in," Handke is able to reduce the play's action to a bare outline. As he himself clearly points out, *Kaspar* does not show "how IT REALLY IS OR REALLY WAS with Kaspar Hauser. It shows what IS POSSIBLE with someone" (1986: 11). It shows how someone can be made to speak through speaking.

*Kaspar*, like Orwell's *1984*, is the story of an "Every/man" enslaved by his institutions, trapped by his culture and made visible through it. Handke, explaining at some length the nature of his project, observed: "In Kaspar Hauser I discovered the model of a sort of linguistic myth. ...To me, this Kaspar Hauser seemed a mythical figure, interesting not only as such, but as a model of men at odds with themselves and their environment, men who feel isolated. ... For me, this was a model of conduct, building a person into a society's course of conduct by language, by giving him words to repeat (1970: 60).

Instead of origins or explicit intertextuality Handke finds in *Kaspar*'s story force relations — precisely what Foucault finds in social institutions.

Foucault advises in his *Discipline and Punish*: "Look not to the stable possession of a truth, or of power itself; rather conceive of them as a strategy which leads you to see that its effects of domination are attributed not to appropriation but to disposition, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity" (26). And this is more or less the task Handke sets for himself: to study the question of subjectivity and how it emerges on a field of battle and plays its role, there and there alone.

The process of Kaspar's indoctrination is essentially a theatrical one, arranged in sixty-five short scenes which illustrate and develop sixteen "propositions." Supervising Kaspar's brainwashing are the Einsager, the mediators who can validate or invalidate knowledge through performative statements like "this can/not be considered" etc. They are the ones who determine who is an outsider and who is an insider, who is part of the culture and who is not. In Handke's play all the activities and exchanges originate from the Einsager and are subordinated to them. They are the voice, impersonal and detached, that takes on intonations of domination and omniscience. They seem to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Like Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*, Handke in *Kaspar* foregrounds his Einsager as the privileged founding and controlling principle that insures balance and coherence. They are the play's center, the authority that undertakes to form through methods of "dressage" (Foucault's word for "training") Kaspar into a socially acceptable role, and thus limit the disintegrating play of opposing elements. Like Godot, they remain invisible, yet strongly felt within the performance space where they act like directors of a play-within-a-play, providing Kaspar with a script and a predefined part.

When the curtain rises the stage is stripped of any unnecessary fictions. As it was the case in *Offending the Audience*, the "here and now" comes to replace the more traditional "there and then" of the signs and the story. The props, with no historical significance, with "no appeal to some grand narrative," to use Lyotard's phrasing (xxiii), are instantly recognizable as props (and not as signs of signs). Handke writes in his stage directions: "The audience does not see the stage as a representation of a room that exists somewhere, but as a representation of a stage. The stage represents the stage, the objects on the stage look theatrical: not because they imitate other objects, but because the way they are situated with respect to one another does not correspond to their usual arrangement in reality. They have no history ... nor should the audience be able to imagine that the props on stage will be part of a play that pretends to take place anywhere except on stage" (11-12). It is obvious that Handke does not want his stage to be characterized by the presence of a strong metaphorical or representational image — the "pretty picture," with its singular quality and unity — what Adolphe Appia termed years ago an "organic unity" that would reflect "a unique vision of the world ... as unmistakable as your fingerprint" (Jameson 17). Handke, like his

contemporary Robert Wilson, is here inviting us with his stage directions to quote theater out of context, to shatter conventional narrative. It is a challenging innovation, no doubt. Yet, before we turn our attention to the purpose of this innovation — and its sociopolitical intent (if there is any) — let us first see how Handke presents his protagonist.

Kaspar's appearance — a mask with heavy theatrical make-up, a Punch-like, Kasperl figure, with a commedia-dell-arte-like costume, wide-brimmed hat, light-colored shirt with a closed collar, colorful jacket, clumsy shoes — is neutral. Handke does not frame his subject within rigid boundaries that privilege and exclude around the categories of race, gender and ethnicity. He deliberately uses Kaspar to indicate that he is an artifact, a histrionic invention. Nothing on him matches: neither the color or style of his jacket and trousers nor his words and movements. The actor's appearance and the arrangement of the stage throw askew their semiotic understanding. What reigns supreme in the early scenes of the play is the enjoyment of difference, the erotics of arbitrariness.

Kaspar enters society and its culture with one and only sentence: "I want to be someone like somebody else was once." In other words, he enters the world of signs and opposites through his own "other" language that speaks his Being. This de-centered and de-centering utterance reveals Kaspar's relation to the objects on and off stage and to his internal sensations. Everything is encompassed by his sentence. Without discriminating, Kaspar applies it to a chair, a table, a wardrobe, a broom and so on. It is a gender-free, a class-free, even an ideology-free statement. It does not reproduce relations of dominance and subordination, it rather proclaims their arbitrariness. Kaspar utters his statement with an expression of perseverance, utters it as a question, exclaims it, scans it as though it were verse. He utters it as a greeting, as an invocation in a litany, as an answer to a question, as an order. He even sings the sentence or simply screams it. Like Pirandello's six characters who once placed on the stage try to get rid of the author's dictates, Kaspar momentarily defies filiation, mediation and framing. Drawn to the side of the signifier rather than the signified, he breaks down the legitimate distinction between words and their meaning. He unconsciously undermines the traditional hierarchy between speech and gesture. Without realizing it he causes an infinite deferment of the signified to the point where his *mise-en-scène* becomes the *mise-en-valeur* of his own (auto-erotic) performance. As Richard Kearney has noted, performances like this challenge constricted and egocentric levels of selfhood and allow us to move toward a greater understanding of the other. "The ex-centric characteristics of the play paradigm may be construed as tokens of the poetical power of imagination to transcend the limits of egocentric, and indeed anthropocentric, consciousness — thereby exploring different possibilities of existence. Such "possibilities" may well be deemed impossible at the level of the established reality" (366-7).

And indeed, this "ex-centric" game generates a reaction on the part of the

Einsager who undertake to eradicate Kaspar's "otherness" and disruptive confusion of the mind and body, to silence his de-centering performance of difference and to reduce his text and his "self" to a single homogeneous and universal reading — in accord with the humanist notion of the subject as a free, stable and coherent self. Kaspar must be brought to speech by speech, and thus to a particular kind of knowledge that, to use Lyotard's statement, "serves some program inherent in society" (xxiii). Kaspar must be dispossessed of his capacity to situate himself as an "I," a linguistic subject in a dialogical relation to a "You." His performance text, to be valid at all, must be brought within the communally ratified world of discourse, must conform to an entire system of cultural rules that determine the production, distribution and consumption of discourse.

The principal medium of their intervention is, as mentioned, language. Language, instead of being the space of confrontation between diverse socio-linguistic consciousnesses is here foregrounded as the topos of uni-accentual signs. After all, acquisition of language is the first and most significant stage in the process of socializing whereby the individual assimilates modes of perception and value systems which determine his/her own historicity. Thus Kaspar has to develop through the social rather than against it.

From the start the invisible Einsager, speaking through loudspeakers placed above the stage, bombard Kaspar's individual picturing of states of affairs with linguistic material endowed with an eternal, supra-class character. They want to confuse him and bring him to dumbness. Since their utterances are isolated from context, they have sense, but rarely meaning. And this is so because Handke wants the spectator to turn his/her attention to the words and expressions themselves (their presence/physicality), to scrutinize more closely the language which s/he has customarily taken for granted and see its hidden affiliation with the game of power and control.

The Einsager claim that existence can be known only through language: "a sentence you can play dumb with," they tell Kaspar (19), a sentence "you can assert yourself with," a sentence "with which you can pretend you are crazy: with which you can go crazy," (20) "take a walk with," "become aware" (22); "learn other sentences, and learn to learn," they say, "and you learn with the sentence that there is an order and you learn with the sentence to learn order" (23). The language provides the linkage between the individual and the surrounding world; individuality is hearing and assimilating the words and discourses of others (mother, father, representatives of religion, education, political institutions, mass media), those who claim to be able to instruct and teach through their possession of the keys to interpretation.

The Einsager of course do not indicate any difference between word and object: "Make all objects into a sentence with the sentence," they advise Kaspar. "You can make all objects into your sentence," they proclaim. In the process of eradicating Kaspar's sentence, they become more aggressive,

grow stronger, more implacable, invading all domains and implanting their own mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. They apply their own specific coherence and hidden meanings, fixity and essence to signs. In other words, to compensate Kaspar for the loss of his previous state they create new metanarratives that empower an effective mapping of ideological and affective relations in reality; that is, they posit a centered linguistic enclosure that minimizes the inexhaustible possibilities of interpretation and the futility of logical ordering. "You cannot defend yourself against any sentence," they conclude (24).

Kaspar naturally feels the terroristic pressure exercised on him and desperately tries to defend himself, to maintain his sentence "Was I./ Somebody else like else./ Somebody else someone./ Be like I./ I be I" (24). He resists all the more vehemently but to no avail. "One./ Be./ Somebody./ Was./ Want./ Somebody else" (25). Finally, he is totally confused and powerless: "Olce ime kwas askwike lein" (26); and then silenced. The beginnings of his indoctrination bear the first fruits. Now that his individual sentence has been exorcised, Kaspar is gradually needled into speaking speech material based on acceptable middle-class social models, gender-ideological behavioral material that fixes, inscribes, records and incarnates an already prepared utterance. "Kaspar utters a very large ... utters an nb," writes Handke, "a shorter s ... a p ... a t ... a d a" (27). He tries with all his strength to produce a single sound using his hands and feet. He fails. The Speakers continue stuffing him with enervating words, a method which Linda Hill describes as the "ultimate application of the immersion technique" where "instead of merely treating the pupil as a baby they begin by literally reducing him to infantile speechlessness. ... The prompters do not simply talk to Kaspar and wait for him to develop simultaneous habits ... but present uniform groups of words" (174-75).

So, just as a speechless infant is induced by suitable means to react regularly to a particular stimulus, Kaspar is indoctrinated to perform certain actions and understand certain coded situations in a predetermined fashion. Language produces the awareness of a world that can be touched by words. The validity of these words is always judged by a "public tribunal," as Lyotard says, under the pretense of enforcing communication (31). "Every object," the Einsager proclaim, "must be the picture of an object: every proper table is the picture of a table" (35). "Every house must be the picture of a house" (35). "Good order is the foundation of all things" (83). "One of the most beautiful things in life is a well-set table" (39). In "an orderly room the soul also becomes orderly" (40). Whereas a house that "tumbles, smells, burns, is vacant, is haunted, is not a live house" (35). "A room should be like a picture book" (41).

It is all too clear that the tyranny of the referent is everywhere in the Einsager's instructions. The aim of disciplinary technology, comments Foucault, is to forge a "docile [body] that may be subjected, used, transformed

and improved" (136). In brief, discipline can make an individual out of a person. Thus: "You need homely sentences," the Einsager advise Kaspar, "sentences as furnishings: sentences which you could actually save yourself" (35). The Einsager' logos is the specific technique of power that uses Kaspar both as an object and later on as an instrument of its exercise (Foucault 170).

And while the idea of housekeeping is projected as the physical counterpart of language, the stage itself is gradually structured with astonishing strictness, according to the new principles of gesture and visual linguistic image and in terms of the general behavior of the hero. The anarchic design of the opening scene is now gradually producing an image of unity and coherence. It embodies more and more statements on order and locality. It acquires narrative continuity. The audience is slowly falling back on more traditional aesthetic pleasures. The visual and semantic manipulations and juxtapositions become less and less striking. After all, the ideal sentence-norm that Kaspar is taught is the one that does nothing to upset the order of things, to problematize the legitimacy of the "grand narratives" and their clichés. The Einsager say: "you are normal once your story is no longer distinguishable from any other story: when no thesis about you provokes an antithesis" (33). And this: "All objects about you which there are still questions to be asked are disorderly, unpretty ... uncomfortable ... irksome, ruthless, irresponsible ... bad taste. Every sentence ... which doesn't disturb, doesn't threaten, doesn't aim, doesn't question, doesn't choke, doesn't want, doesn't assert is a picture of a sentence" (35-36). The Einsager never raise questions that bear on the ontology of the world: like, what kinds of world are there, how are they constituted and how do they differ? There is no room for ontological plurality. Their totalization of historical experience imposes on Kaspar's text structures which limit and arrest play, reduce its diversity to an one-dimensional, all-encompassing logic. By forcing him to see things not as they are but as they have determined they ought to be, they turn him into a data bank of institutional practices bearing on family, class, gender, order, work, individuality, competition. They try to impose self-consciousness and feelings of guilt upon him: "If you see the object differently from the way you speak of it, you must be mistaken: you must say to yourself that you are mistaken and you will see the object: if you don't want to say that to yourself, then it is obvious that you want to be forced, and really want to say it after all " (59).

In passages like this the tie of knowledge to its social context is crucial. In strengthening the consensus that legitimizes knowledge, the Einsager are somehow guaranteeing the "truth" of the system's statement at the expense of what Derrida calls "floating signifiers" and "*différance*." Power and knowledge directly imply one another; as Foucault says, "there is no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (27) — which means there is nothing outside this network. The



Einsager's text is all there is. It is the only presence; its "trace-structure" will always be there to question Handke's "presence-structure" (Derrida xix).

The power the Einsager exercise on Kaspar is very calculating. It operates through hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and their combination. Thus: "All suffering is natural" (37). "Disorder outrages all decent-thinking men" (39). "The more happily you work, the more quickly you find a way to yourself. The further South you go, the lazier the people" (48). "Poverty is no disgrace" (50). "You're not in the world for fun" (42). "Every industrious person is liked everywhere" (49). "A State is not a gangster organization" (50). These are all maxims drawn from an entire historical and cultural matrix that precludes any form of critical awareness; they are maxims that do not threaten, deconstruct or question. They rather facilitate Kaspar's coercion into shaping a self-image and modes of expression and technics of performativity based on the interests and values of those who wield power. "Everything that is bright is peaceful," Kaspar says at one point, moving in rhythm to the sentences from the prompters. "Everything that is quiet is peaceful: everything that is in its place is peaceful: everything peaceful is friendly: everything friendly is inhabitable: everything inhabitable is comfortable: everything comfortable is no longer ominous ... everything that is in order is beautiful" (43). Kaspar learns that power over words gives him power over objects too; instead of adjusting his sentences to fit his movements (and thus his own authority), he adjusts his movements to fit his/their sentences: "Every sentence helps you along: You get over every object with a sentence" (44-45). Language appears to be the only source of knowledge. It has a powerful foundation role that constitutes the (prison) house of being. It engenders people and their reality. Irreducibly, the world is text. Extralinguistic or extratextual reality is an illusion. Language in this particular case is the only authorial presence that speaks beings and things into being. It precedes thought. A thing is what it is named. "Say what you think," the Einsager advise Kaspar; "When you begin to speak you will begin to think what you speak even when you want to think something different" (55). Kaspar is taught that speech is prior to, and the limits of, thought, and that his individuality must bend to its pre-conditions. The regularities of context obviously channel Kaspar's text. This reductive rehearsal, this catechism, stages Handke's idea of culture in order to highlight its all-encompassing textuality. In Handke's account, evidently nothing precedes discourse and nothing escapes it. Everything comes to us in discourse. Only in some imaginative realm can there be a pure state free of discourse. The only temporary way out, Handke seems to propound, is the installation of fissures in traditional notions of reference which would have the effect of loosening language's ties to concepts and referents and call into question all stabilizing notions of unity, presence, coherence, voice, structure, and center. To this end Handke underlines the Wittgensteinian tenor of his play to alert the audience to the realization that language can magically negate disorder,

and by doing so it can teach order and how it can be maintained.

The process of defining Kaspar's role inevitably brings him to a state of "cooperation" (68), having first subjected his body to a machinery of power that broke it down and re-arranged its parts. Once the sociopolitical anatomy of the sort Foucault talks about in his *Discipline and Punish* is complete, Kaspar enters the dynamics of phonocentric politics where the sense of loyalty and obedience reign supreme: "I am honest and frugal," he confesses to us. "I am conscientious. I am industrious, reticent and modest. I make no demands. My ways are ... natural. Everyone likes me. My love for order and cleanliness has never given reason for complaint. Everything I am asked to do I do perfectly. ... I am calm, dutiful, and receptive" (68). He feels proud of what he has achieved thus far; a new life is now waiting for him (68); he no longer desires to be someone else (68). "Now I know what I want to be: I want to be quiet and every object that I find ominous I designate as mine so that it stops being sinister to me" (69). His departure from "nature" toward culture is complete. Kaspar mistakes his newly acquired verbal agility for proof of his individuality. He now thinks that he has the qualifications required of the speaking subject, the gestures, behavior, circumstances, and the whole set of signs that must accompany the discourse. This self-assertiveness is of course deceptive, for Kaspar has not become an individual, but merely a puppet of his teachers. By giving away his text and by accepting the Einsager's intentions as his single "ontotheological" meaning, Kaspar acquires a final signified and thus closes the writing. The old individual self is dead. Caught in a world of all-inclusive frames, Kaspar cannot take up a different position in relation to his surroundings. Like the heroes of Strauss, Beckett and Müller, Kaspar cannot but lose his identity within an archival network. As Patrice Pavis comments, "The human being appears no longer as an individual historically placed by a radical stage treatment, by a sociohistorical explanation which answers all questions. S/he is also not a number, a cipher, an alienated being, or an absurd mode of behavior — as in the theater of the same name — suffocated, epigonal, and finally didactic, but rather a machine for discharging text without being involved in a plausible situation" (10). And that statement applies also to Kaspar's audience.

Note how Handke structures his "intermission text," for example, piped through loudspeakers into the auditorium, into the lobbies, and even out on to the street. Handke's text(s) consist "of tapes of the prompters' speeches, sheer noise, actual taped speeches by party leaders, Popes, public speakers of every kind, presidents and prime ministers ... statements by writers and poets speaking at official functions" (69). Handke subjects his audiences to the same verbal torture Kaspar suffers on stage. The dramatic model of language's manipulative power is taken out of the theater into reality. Demonstration replaces literary efficacy and urges us toward recognition of and protest against the voices which control and afflict us (Malkin 367-79).

This avalanche of cultural debris poured out onto the audience is "always already there;" everywhere, all the time. It does not give us the choice of accepting, rejecting or selecting. It composes a political field that has "an immediate hold upon [our body and mind]." Without realizing it, it invests, marks, trains, tortures and forces us to "carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 25). Like the Einsager's discourse, the "intemission text" does not provide words for questions. Everything is given in advance, in which there can be no practice but the endless recombination of fixed pieces from the generative machine, an invisible machine that deprives the individual of his/her capacities to locate him-/herself, to organize his/her immediate surroundings perceptually and cognitively to map his/her position in a mappable external world (Jameson 25). As Baudrillard claims, "the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory ... it is the map that engenders the territory" (2). Finally, Derrida commenting on the idea of the authentic self grants that its presence is always shot through and tarnished with traces of absence, of that which is somewhere else. Derrida writes: "Through the sequence of supplement there emerges a law: that of an endlessly linked series, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary mediations that produce the sense of the very thing that they defer: the impression of the thing itself, of immediate presence, or originary perception. Immediacy is derived. Everything begins with the intermediary" (226).

Handke dramatizes what Derrida and other theoreticians claim: there is no such thing as a preverbal or nonverbal state of perception. Nor is there a self-present being, pure being of the kind phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl talked about. Reality is never unmediated; it is "always already reproduced." Within the confines of contemporary society the individual cannot select a mode of action commensurate with his beliefs. Kaspar, like Beppi in Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Farmyard* or Hamlet in Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* or the rock stars of Sam Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime*, unable to find a system of his own upon which to act, becomes a computer memory at the very end of the play, that stores cultural references each one of which, as Pavis points out, "behaves like a rapidly stored and immediately available formula" (15-16). He inherits scraps of information channelled out daily by the media or banal everyday discourse and reproduces them as his own reality, which is nothing else than a reproduction of a reproduction ad infinitum — just like the many Kaspars who flood the stage before the final curtain. One print-out of Kaspar after another appears on stage reminding us of the mass-production of Kaspars through the manipulation of language and other coded systems. His cry at a rare moment of intense self-consciousness, "Why have I been cut off from everything that belongs to me," (92) does not amount to anything. The one Kaspar becomes interchangeable and expendable. The death of the humanist, autonomous-subject-hero-adversary is complete. "What was it," Kaspar stutters, "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?" (90-91) Caught up in a system of subjection Kaspar comes to admit the simple fact: "I have been made to speak. I have been sentenced to reality" (92). He can no longer go back to his previous, supposedly innocent, natural state. As Roger Copeland remarks, "one thing is certain: The balance between what we glean about the world directly through our sense and what we absorb vicariously through the media has been irreversibly tipped in the direction of the latter" (42). Within the conditioned pattern of his existence, the non-referential linguistic and somatic freedom Kaspar experienced earlier can only lead to chaos. He is fully aware now that speaking, like writing, is not a private or unmediated creative exercise of the linguistic signifier; rather it activates, or should activate, a complex cultural archive that effectively delimits the flight of the signifier. It is a kind of ritual that claims to temper and prevent the violence that would supposedly exist without its civilizing constraint. In this fabricated universe Kaspar naturally loses access to himself. "I am who I am only by chance," he confesses in the first version of the closing scene. In the second and final version Handke closes the play with an allusion to Iago in *Othello*: "Goats and monkeys." The allusion is accurate for it shows Kaspar's complete social flattening-out. June Schlueter correctly draws the parallel between the two texts: "just as Iago implanted ... words in Othello's mind, suggesting Desdemona's infidelity, and watched them profoundly affect Othello's perception of reality, so also do the Einsager use language to alter radically Kaspar's relationship to both external and his own internal reality" (26). They are the mediators who manage to render his presence absent. Once they complete their task, Kaspar shares the actor's involvement; he is one with the mask. He thinks and speaks through the discourse of others. In short, he is produced by what he is studying and he is acted upon by what he acts. Consequently he will never stand outside, distance himself. He will always be regimented by a language that denies him access to any other language, which means he will remain prey to the socializing demands of linguistic and ideological structures.

To sum up: With his *Kaspar* Handke clearly mounts a political project. He exposes the ideological dimension of all style and representation. He also shows that both subjectivity and its capacities for self- and social determination can no longer be situated within the guarantees of transcendent phenomena or metaphysical essences. That means reason cannot be separated from the terrain of history, place and desire. Reason and science can only be understood as part of a broader historical, political, and social struggle over the relationship between language, subject position and power. In this sense, Handke argues, political critique is possible because it can rewrite history within the politics of difference — that substitutes for totalizing narratives of oppression.

Aristotle University

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Πώς ορίζεται ο εαυτός; Πώς δρα μέσα στον κόσμο και με τον κόσμο; Αυτές οι ερωτήσεις σίγουρα δεν κομίζουν "γλαύκας εις Αθήνας." Η θέση τους στην παγκόσμια δραματολογία, από τον Αισχύλο και δώθε, ήταν πάντοτε πολύ σημαντική. Με αφητηρία την υπόθεση ότι οι χαρακτήρες είναι "ενιαίες" οντότητες, οι συγγραφείς επανειλημμένα προσπάθησαν να θεατροποιήσουν τον αγώνα του ανθρώπου ενόπιον της κοινωνίας και

να προβάλουν παράλληλα, μέσα απ' αυτό τον αγώνα, την ψευδαίσθηση ότι το θέατρο είναι προϊόν "αυθόρμητου" λόγου. Πρόσφατα όμως, πολλοί σύγχρονοι συγγραφείς έχουν αμφισβητήσει την ουμανιστική θεώρηση του "ανθρώπινου είναι" και αντ' αυτής προβάλλουν μια νέα εικόνα του εαυτού, όπου η ιδέα του "αυτοτελούς" υποκειμένου εμφανίζεται απλώς ως μύθος. Κατά τους καλλιτέχνες αυτούς, ο άνθρωπος είναι δεσμώτης γλωσσικών και κοινωνικών πρακτικών. Ένας απ' αυτούς, ο Αυστριακός Peter Handke, με το έργο του *Kaspar*, προσπαθεί να εκθέσει αυτή την παγίδευση και όλους τους μηχανισμούς που την προκαλούν.