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A Study of the Developing Use of the Extreme
in the Plays of Franz Xaver Kroetz

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Submitted for the Degree of Ph.D.

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A Study of the Developing Use of the Extreme
in the Plays of Franz Xaver Kroetz

- Abstract -

The subject of this thesis is the identification, delineation and analysis of the depiction of the extreme in the dramatic work of the Bavarian playwright Franz Xaver Kroetz. This aspect is considered central to Kroetz's literary activity because of the light it sheds on the political implications of the plays, which ultimately merit as much attention as their literary value.

This theme may be approached in a number of ways. The present study attempts to demonstrate its contentions in the context of a threefold division of the contents of Kroetz's plays into action, language and characters. This division is necessarily artificial: it has been chosen in order to illustrate that the same trends are visible and consistent in each of the three fields under analysis and thereby constitute an adequate reflection of a general development valid for the whole of Kroetz's literary activity.

The early notoriety enjoyed by Kroetz was due almost entirely to the element of the extreme in his portrayals of acts of violence, inarticulacy and characters from the fringes of the social landscape; Kroetz was widely dis-

qualified as a depicter of pornographic and irrelevant excesses. At all times, however, these alleged excesses have stood in the service of his political goal of revealing the brutality of the social system of which they are the products, thereby activating the insight and energy required to improve this social order.

The elements of the extreme which characterise his early plays, however, were soon recognised as potentially inimical to this goal, in so far as they obscured their political statement by repelling or distracting their viewers. Aware of this inherent danger, Kroetz began to modify his depiction of the extreme in significant ways.

In each of the fields under discussion there is a clear movement away from the depiction of the extreme, tempered by a reluctance to abandon it completely. The elements of the extreme either diminish in frequency and intensity or are accompanied by features emphasising their representative value and sociological significance. The demonstration of this development and the exposition of its implications form the substance of the three central sections of the present study.

This central body of material and exegesis is framed by an introductory and a concluding chapter. In the introduction, following some brief autobiographical information, Kroetz's literary activity is outlined as a

surrogate for political action, an undertaking which must be seen to be fraught with difficulties. By dint of its oppositional nature, Kroetz's literary production is destined to meet with massive resistance, in forms ranging from direct boycott to continual condemnation and patronising toleration at the pens of allegedly objective critics. These practical obstacles raise the question -- not unique to Kroetz -- of whether literature can ever be adequate as an instrument of political change.

In conclusion to the three central chapters, which trace Kroetz's efforts to endow his literary work with maximum political efficacy, the final section attempts to apply conventional literary criteria to his work and to allocate it a place in dramatic taxonomy.

Comparisons are drawn with Brecht, Horváth, the "Zeitstück" and the "Dokumentartheater": predictably, there are points of contact and divergence. Common to all phenomena is the urge for political commitment and change in an unjust social structure. In questions of dramatic form they differ substantially. Kroetz's own position may be defined as the attempt to retain features of the so-called "Aristotelian" theatre, in his insistence on the fundamental value of emotional appeal, while devoting equal energy to the delineation of social context, so that the lives of his realistically -- or even naturalistically -- depicted

characters are never allowed to hover in a vacuum, but appear firmly rooted in a particular historical situation, of which these characters are the products and not the architects. The aim of this theatre is the amendment of the depicted historical reality to create a humanitarian social order based, for Kroetz, on the tenets of Marxism.

In conclusion, Kroetz's attempted synthesis of dramatic forms is described as the endeavour to create a "Zauber-spiegel" -- the realistic and passionate depiction of segments of life which reflect reality in such a way as to provoke insight into the laws and mechanisms that govern it and to inspire its improvement.

Nevertheless, while the political intention behind Kroetz's literary activity is simple to identify, the ultimate effectiveness of his endeavour remains in question. The reasons are not to be found merely in his oppositional stance -- despite the obstacles it undoubtedly throws up --, much less in his lack of dramatic talent. And while occasion may be found to question certain details of his political vision, this aspect of his work falls outwith the scope of the present study. The comparative failure of Kroetz's literary endeavour -- if success is to be measured by the degree of actual change it produces -- derives from the basic unsuitability of literature as an instrument, at least on its own, of political activity.

As indicated in the framing quotations from Erwin Piscator, the two essential contentions of this thesis therefore remain the unswerving political commitment that sustains Kroetz's entire literary production, coupled with the inevitability of its relative failure.

Key to Abbreviations

For the sake of convenience the following abbreviations are used throughout the footnotes to refer to the works of Franz Xaver Kroetz. Full bibliographical details are given in the bibliography at the end of the thesis.

- GS : Gesammelte Stücke
- WA : Weitere Aussichten...
- CG : Chiemgauer Gschichten
- dns : Drei neue Stücke
- dialog : Franz Xaver Kroetz -- Stücke
- DS : Drei Stücke

Unless otherwise specified, all references to Brecht are to the werkausgabe in 20 Bänden und 2 Supplementbänden, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1975. This edition is referred to as GW, together with the specification of the appropriate volume in each case.

Finally, attention is drawn here to the irregularities of Bavarian orthography, grammar and punctuation which are frequently reproduced in quotations. So numerous are such eccentricities -- and so inconsistent -- that they have not been annotated individually in the thesis, as they scarcely affect understanding. Verification can be obtained by reference to the original text.

"Wir fassen das Theater nicht nur auf
als einen Spiegel der Zeit, sondern
als ein Mittel, die Zeit zu verändern"

ERWIN PISCATOR ¹

1. Piscator, Erwin; Das politische Theater, Rowohlt
Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1979,
p.175.

1. THE AUTHOR AS POLITICAL AGENT

"Die Einsicht, daß Literatur politische Konsequenzen hat, ist inzwischen gewachsen; aber wie weit sich mit Literatur Politik nicht bloß zeigen, sondern machen läßt, bleibt ungeklärt."

Urs Jaeggi ²

"ERSTER ARBEITER:

Abers Theater ist nicht für die dreikigen Stände sondern für kostbare Kleider und gepflegte Hände wir dürfen nicht rein denn was man KunstWerck nennt wird nur verstanden von dem der die Regeln kennt"

Peter Weiss ³

In 1971, with the performance in Munich of his two one-act plays, Heimarbeit and Hartnäckig, the Bavarian dramatist Franz Xaver Kroetz was catapulted into the public eye. The "scandal" which accompanied this performance and to which the explosive emergence of the author on the German literary landscape is largely due has in the meantime become merely an historical footnote to a literary career of indisputable success. Over a decade has passed since his breakthrough, and during this time he has consistently been among the most performed German-language dramatists in Europe and remains today one of the most widely translated and performed contemporary playwrights altogether.

To date, his considerable output includes almost thirty plays, four radio plays, three "Texte für Filme", one novel,

2. Jaeggi, Urs; Literatur und Politik: Ein Essay, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1972; p.87.

3. Weiss, Peter; Hölderlin, in Stücke II/2, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1977; p.317.

a prose report on social and agricultural conditions in the GDR, a compilation of interviews with inhabitants of the provincial district in Bavaria where he now lives, and numerous critical, political and polemical essays. A trained actor, he has also appeared in and directed productions of his own plays and works by other authors for television and the stage. In bulk and in scale it is an impressive list of literary achievements for an author who at the time of writing is still in his thirties, and who furthermore was actively involved in direct political activity between 1972 and 1980.

Yet despite the sheer quantity and range of Kroetz's literary activity, there is one feature in which it has remained entirely consistent throughout his career and which must be placed at the heart of all that he writes. His view of his function as an author has not altered since his first formative attempts at writing plays in the mid-sixties. If his work is reducible in any one aspect to a lowest common denominator, it is in this fundamental question of function.

For Kroetz literature is essentially a political activity. He cannot conceive of literature divorced from its political function: "Schreiben, ohne daß ich damit einen politischen Zweck verfolge, wäre mir zuwider." ⁴

4. Kroetz; WA, p.591.

Throughout his career he underlines this point again and again. On the one hand he decries the use of literature as an end in itself as "Formalomaniererei" and "Wort-hurentum" ⁵, while on the other hand he deplores with equal vehemence the literary treatment of the existential aspects of the human condition which transcend any social or historical context, viewing this contemptuously as "Urschleimtaucherei" and "Weggehen von den Menschen, von der Gesellschaft, von den Realitäten hin zu philosophischen Schlamm- und Dreckbauten" ⁶. For Kroetz both -- in all their varying forms and degrees -- are confessions of retreat into ivory towers.

The Austrian writer Peter Handke, a self-confessed "Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms" whose views have given rise to some professional antipathy between himself and Kroetz, writes of literature as being: "... das Mittel ..., über mich selber, wenn nicht klar, so doch klarer zu werden" ⁷. Kroetz rejects wholesale this self-oriented concept of literature, disassociating himself emphatically from this preoccupation with the self:

"Ich glaube, ich bin kein typischer Autor. Außer in der Pubertät habe ich nie wieder über mich geschrieben, nie wieder über Probleme geschrieben, die mich beschäftigen, und es gibt eine Menge Probleme." ⁸

5. Kroetz; WA, p.541.

6. Kroetz; WA, p.606.

7. Handke, Peter; Ich bin ein Bewohner des Elfenbeinturms, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1972, p.19.

8. Kroetz; "Ursula Reinhold: Interview mit Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Weimarer Beiträge 5/76, p.56.

Kroetz's fellow Marxist and dramatist Peter Weiss begins his career from a standpoint similar to that of Handke and develops gradually to a committed devotion to political theatre. Kroetz possesses this political conviction from the start: an author who is clear-sighted, honest and responsible must reject all literary activity which does not stand in the service of his political beliefs, "der kann nicht im Urschleim waten und mit onanistischer Innerlichkeit um sich werfen" ⁹.

With equal clarity Kroetz defines his political standpoint: he is a communist. Living in a capitalist country he is repelled by the glaring, though comfortably camouflaged, division of the population into privileged and underprivileged, into rich and poor, into few and many. In his political activity Kroetz strives for the abolition of these artificial and unjust social distinctions and their replacement by a classless social structure after the communist model.

His justification as an author resides in the spreading of enlightenment and the encouragement of political action in support of the exploited working classes in the Federal Republic of Germany. The need to take the part of these oppressed classes is emphasised by their tragic inability to gain insight into their own situation. As the critic

9. Kroetz; "Zur Diskussion: Beiträge vom Bonner Parteitag der DKP", in kürbiskern, Heft 3/76.

Reinhard Baumgart notes in his review of Stallerhof:

"Aufklärung über die Klassengesellschaft möchte Kroetz mit seinen Stücken betreiben, auf ungerechte Unterdrückung und Bewußtlosigkeit hinweisen, gerade weil sie dumpf, von jenen ertragen wird, die unter ihr leiden."¹⁰

The unawareness of the working classes of the mechanics of their own oppression is an inherent feature of capitalism. It is out of the outrage that he feels at this total "Ausgeliefertsein" of the underprivileged that Kroetz finds the fuel to drive his literary energy and the direction in which to employ it. Like the Marxist orator in Upton Sinclair's The Jungle he aspires to be "the voice of the millions who are voiceless"¹¹, a description which has in fact been applied to him frequently in his critical reception in Germany -- "Sprecher der Sprachlosen"¹².

In this capacity Kroetz aspires to spread enlightenment to and about the exploited working class, so that they may grow to understand their situation and the system they live in, and that they will be moved by this new insight to take action against this system. For it is not individual salvation from injustice that is Kroetz's goal, but the wholesale destruction of the social order

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10. Baumgart, Reinhard; "Dürfen Opfer schön sein?", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 26/06/72.
 11. Sinclair, Upton; The Jungle, Penguin Modern Classics, Penguin Books Ltd., 1976, p.359.
 12. Panzner, Evalouise; Franz Xaver Kroetz und seine Rezeption. Die Intentionen eines Stückeschreibers und seine Aufnahme durch die Kritik, Literaturwissenschaft-Gesellschaftswissenschaft. 23, Ernst Klett Stuttgart, 1976, p.10

which fosters such injustice. In this he would certainly agree with his fellow playwright Edward Bond, who writes:

"It is necessary to remove the causes of evil rather than to deal with any particular evil that crops up." ¹³

Kroetz's goal is nothing less than the abolition of the suffering caused by the inhumanity of class society. At its broadest, the political function of Kroetz's literary activity has been succinctly described by Peter Schaarschmidt: "Seine Absicht ist Änderung, sein Ziel ist es, das beschriebene Elend zu ändern." ¹⁴ Without this consistently pursued goal Kroetz cannot justify his literary activity:

"Man schreibt immer, weil man damit etwas bezwecken will. Da gibt es, meint man, unendlich viele Möglichkeiten. Ich glaube, eigentlich gibt es nur zwei: Entweder man hat Charakter, dann setzt man sein Talent für die Unterdrückten ein, oder man hat keinen Charakter, dann ist man das, was ich einen Musenficker nenne." ¹⁵

Given the vehemence of Kroetz's political conviction, one is compelled to ask why he elects to operate in the field of literature, when it is apparent that it is never more than a means to an end. It is certainly not the only vehicle available to him, and by no means the most effective. As Urs Jaeggi has written: "Die Lösung gesellschaftlicher

13. Bond, Edward; Interview with Peter Hilton, 26 April 1978, in Darlington Theatre Papers, Second Series, No.1, 1978, p.20.

14. Schaarschmidt, Peter; Das Moderne Volksstück: Sprache und Figuren, in Hein, Jürgen (Hrsg.); Theater und Gesellschaft, Das Volksstück im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Düsseldorf 1973, p.215.

15. Kroetz; WA, pp.592/3.

Probleme hängt nicht vom Schriftsteller ab." ¹⁶

One may, with justification, apply reservations to this judgement. Sufficient evidence exists for the claim that literature can, in some measure, exert an influence on reality. In general terms, the contribution of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin to the abolition of slavery or of Dickens's novels to the improvement of child labour conditions cannot be denied. Emphatic proof of specific political success is offered by Sinclair's The Jungle, which aided directly in the passage of the pure food laws in the United States, and, more recently, by Hochhuth's Juristen, which sparked off the so-called "Filbinger-Affäre" and led to the resignation of the incriminated Filbinger. Nevertheless, these remain exceptional cases; the rule points rather to a more restricted political efficacy.

That Kroetz is aware of this restricted scope is adequately documented in his essays and interviews. He readily acknowledges that he would rather be directly involved in politics, going so far as to say: "Ich säße lieber in Bonn im Bundestag, denn als Dramatiker im Theater." ¹⁷ While this statement makes clear the intensity of his political commitment, it at the same time begs the question of why he continues to write. In the same interview Kroetz

16. Jaeggi; op.cit., p.141.

17. Kroetz; WA, p.591.

attempts to justify his reasoning:

"Ich schreibe, weil ich nicht Politik machen kann. Es ist eine Ersatzhandlung, über die ich glücklicherweise verfüge." ¹⁸

Unable to fulfil his political ambitions within the sphere of politics itself, or at least of politics alone, Kroetz turns to literature as an alternative means of achieving this fulfilment.

On one level, the reasons for his inability to operate effectively on a purely political level are less the lack of personal endeavour than the realities of his political conviction. As a communist, and indeed from 1972 to 1980 an active member of the DKP, Kroetz is exposed to serious restrictions.

Not that he takes his political activity lightly: it remains at least as important to him as his more widely known and appreciated literary work, despite the lack of public acknowledgment. Evidence of this can be found repeatedly in interviews and essays, finding its most emphatic expression in an interview for the periodical Theater heute:

"Man kann sich von seiner Partei aufstellen lassen und kann, im Falle der DKP, sagen: Ich brauche mir keine Gedanken zu machen für den Fall, daß ich gewählt würde und nach Bonn käme. Wir überspringen die Fünf-Prozent-Klausel ja doch nicht. Ich habe mich, bevor ich mein Einverständnis für die Wahlaufstellung gab, sehr wohl und sehr genau damit beschäftigt, was es bedeuten würde, wenn ich Abgeordnete würde. Für mich hätte es vor allem geheißen: Mit dem Schreiben aufhören, denn die Schreibererei ist ja kein Aufsichtsratsposten. Und ich füge

18. Kroetz; WA, p.591.

hinzu: Ich hätte gerne meine Arbeit als Schriftsteller auf Eis gelegt und wäre lieber in die Politik eingestiegen." ¹⁹

The realities of his political position, however, create severe limitations to the effectiveness of any purely political activity. As a communist he has small chance of realising any aims in a society where his party can find little resonance among the people, let alone representation in the "Bundestag". Allotted less space by the media than the other parties, the DKP is unable to make significant use of these organs of communication as an effective public voice. It is and it is kept a minority group. Kroetz is obliged to look for other possibilities of political expression.

For Kroetz one possibility, and a viable one despite its limitations, lies in literary activity. He continues to view it as an "Ersatzhandlung", but as a necessary and, to some extent, a sufficient one:

"Da es aber derzeit für Kommunisten nicht möglich ist, solche politische Verantwortungen zu übernehmen, bin ich sehr froh, daß ich die Möglichkeit des Schreibens habe. Ich kann doch vieles von dem, was mir auf der politischen Zunge brennt, durch eine meiner Figuren sagen lassen. Ich kann mit wachem Auge die Vorgänge in der Bundesrepublik verfolgen und, wenn auch in bescheidenem Rahmen, Einfluß nehmen und Kritik üben. Das alles geht, weil ich Dramatiker bin." ²⁰

It is important to stress that Kroetz is fully aware of the limited framework within which he is operating. He is realistic enough to recognise that the direct political

19. Kroetz; WA, pp.558/9.

20. Kroetz; WA, p.591.

usefulness of his literary activity is severely restricted by the very fact that he is operating outside the direct political sphere, but he proceeds from the conclusion that a modest political effectiveness is better than none at all. Without the possibilities offered by literature he would be "zur Stummheit verdammt" ²¹.

In practice, however, he remains at all times conscious of the need to complement his literary activity with direct political involvement:

"So nütze ich auch, siehe Wahlkampf, alle Möglichkeiten, die mir gegeben sind, neben meiner schriftstellerischen Arbeit aktiv politisch tätig zu sein." ²¹

The decisive development in this came at the end of 1972 with his official entry into the DKP ²². The sincerity of his intention when he first began writing cannot be doubted, but only in the course of time did he realise that this

21. Kroetz; WA, p.591.

22. In 1980, perhaps mainly as a result of the conviction that the politics of the DKP do not adequately represent the needs of the working classes in the Federal Republic of Germany, being too rigidly formed by the ideological and material conditions within the GDR and the Soviet Union, Franz Xaver Kroetz resigned from the Communist Party. This action, however, reflects more a decision that is of interest for an understanding of Kroetz's character than a factor of far-reaching significance for the present analysis of his literary activity. Certainly, his departure from the DKP discloses a number of discrepancies between his earlier statements and his subsequent action -- e.g. concerning the necessity of party membership --, but these contradictions must remain secondary here. Within the scope of the present study it is sufficient to note that, in terms of ideological standpoint, Kroetz remains a communist and his literature remains a political venture.

determination alone was not enough. It was the logical step for a man of Kroetz's whole-hearted commitment to broaden his field of activity, and for him this was made possible by his entry into the Communist Party. He himself views this decision as an entirely necessary one, for both literary and political reasons:

"... da stellte ich fest, daß das Primitivste, was ich meinen Figuren vorleben konnte, mein persönliches politisches Engagement war. So würde ich dazu kommen, mein persönliches Bewußtsein zu entwickeln, und ich würde in der Politik die Möglichkeit haben, nicht nur mit Stücken, sondern auch mit Macht für die Rechte meiner Figuren einzutreten."²³

In reality, of course, the translation of this final hope into practice proved possible only on a modest scale, but whatever the actual results of Kroetz's literary activity in concrete terms, it is essential to realise that his entire literary output must be assessed by both political and aesthetic criteria.

This consideration raises the fundamental question of what literary medium Kroetz chooses to write in to achieve maximum political effect, and whether any literary form is, in fact, suitable for this end. In his essay Literatur und Politik Urs Jaeggi briefly highlights the two main problems involved in the attempt to employ literature as a vehicle of political influence:

"Wie eine Ästhetik, die politische Veränderung als möglich und notwendig behauptet, aussehen soll, und

23. Kroetz; WA, p.590.

wie sie die neuen Adressaten nicht nur finden, sondern auch formen soll, und zwar so formen, daß diese in einem Rückkoppelungsprozess selbst aktiv werden können, ist schwer zu fixieren." ²⁴

Kroetz, like all other political authors, has to decide, firstly, how to use his chosen literary form to embody his political ideas, and, secondly, how to apply this form in order to reach his desired audience. Both problems, especially the latter, set considerable obstacles to the fulfilment of his literary intention.

The medium for which Kroetz writes --- although not exclusively --- is the theatre. All of his best known and most effective work is in the drama form --- stage, radio and television plays. If one wishes to explain Kroetz's decision to write for the theatre in terms of biography, it is interesting to note that his first serious connection with literature --- that is, before he took to writing himself --- was through the theatre. He attended the "Schauspielschule" in Munich and the Max-Reinhardt-Seminar in Vienna, is a trained actor, and towards the end of the 1960s was engaged in a number of Munich's "Kellertheatern" (including Fassbinder's "antiteater") as well as being active in a provincial "Bauerntheater" in Gmund. His first serious literary experiences were therefore, in a practical sense at least, theatrical, and it is understandable that his first attempts at writing should also be for the theatre.

24. Jaeggi; op.cit., p.88.

Kroetz himself says of his literary beginnings:

"Ich habe Schauspieler gelernt, und weil ich zur Literatur über den Dialog gekommen bin, deshalb schreibe ich auch von Anfang an in Dialog." ²⁵

Kroetz soon disassociates himself from this comfortable simplification, however, realising that it is invalid to justify his decision to write "in Dialog" solely in terms of autobiography. A few months after making the above remark in an interview he correctly calls it in question:

"Ich schreibe fürs Theater, weil ich Schauspieler war?! Ich kann es wirklich nicht mehr sagen. Ich glaube, ich habe mit 15 an Kunst gedacht und bin zum Theater gekommen. Später habe ich nie mehr darüber nachdenken können, warum ich mich gerade für dieses Medium entschieden hatte.

Es ist halt mal so." ²⁶

At this stage Kroetz is moving towards the insight that his decision to write for the theatre can be justified only in terms of political usefulness, and not of personal biography. This insight also invalidates the argument of personal talent or inclination. It is true that, as a dramatist, Kroetz possesses an outstanding ability; it is perhaps all too natural that he should concentrate on the drama form as the best vehicle for his literary expression.

But while questions of experience and natural talent may provide reasons for Kroetz's writing for the theatre, they are never compelling reasons. If literature is indeed a surrogate for direct political activity, it must be

25. Kroetz; WA, p.598.

26. Kroetz; WA, p.587.

measured by the criterion of political usefulness, and Kroetz's choice of medium must be a question of finding the literary form that guarantees the greatest political effect.

In a discussion between Kroetz and the members of the periodical kürbiskern Jaeggi's question as to adequate literary form is raised with particular reference to the theatre:

"Man kann leicht sagen: Ein Theater, das verändert, ist prima. Aber kann das Theater das überhaupt, und wenn ja, wie?" 27

No definitive answer is produced by the discussion, and Kroetz himself seems to hover between the desire to believe in the possibility of social change through the theatre and the intellectual doubt that it can, in fact, be achieved. In his essay Soll der Kumpel Abonnent werden? he attempts to concretise these doubts:

"Das Theater ist die herrlichste Sache der Welt, um etwas darzustellen, das passiert ist; um Dinge darzustellen, die passieren müßten, dazu taugt es wenig und kann mehr Schaden anrichten, als es nützt." 28

This claim seems to suggest that the power of the theatre to represent reality is also its limitation, that the theatre is bound to a merely representational function involving the depiction of events and circumstances which are historically fixed and unchangeable. With the possibility of change removed, the political perspective is obliterated.

27. (Speaker not specified); in WA, p.593.

28. Kroetz; WA, p.544.

Kroetz subsequently concedes the shallowness of this reasoning. Even in the essay where the assertion is made, it is never clear precisely why the theatre should be viewed as incapable of presenting on stage changes desirable in reality. The claim perhaps has its basis in the relative artistic objectivity of the form. In fiction the author is omniscient and omnipotent; he always has the power to intervene directly into the work in order to comment, draw conclusions, summarise and generally to influence the reader's train of thought in whatever direction he wishes. In this way the writer of fiction has the possibility of allying illustration and interpretation without disturbing the unity and cohesion of the whole.

For the dramatist, Kroetz appears to argue, this is not possible, even though he remains as omniscient and omnipotent as the writer of fiction. A play unfolds as a sort of closed world. The illustration must incorporate the interpretation without any further assistance from the author. The road to external change leads over the application to actual reality of conclusions drawn from the observation of invented reality. Without the author's intervention and prompting the road remains untravelled.

Such argumentation, however, is simplistic. In the first place, there is no foundation for the basic premise that the theatre represents a closed world which it is unable to transcend. There is no compelling reason why

the events within that closed world cannot exert influence on the real world through the awareness of the audience. Authorial intervention may be helpful, but it is by no means indispensable. As Evalouise Panzner points out, the space between literary reality and actual reality, which the novelist crosses using a bridge, can be transacted in the theatre by an emotional leap:

"Die Darstellung zielt darauf ab, Empörung und Protest zu wecken und damit einen Denkprozess in Gang zu setzen, der der erste Schritt für Veränderung ist." 29

Once the leap has been made, the audience can begin to modify its attitude to reality in the light of what the closed world of the theatre has demonstrated on the stage. The novel may have the advantage of explicit comment on the nature of any desired changes, but this does not diminish the power of the theatre to evoke these changes in the consciousness of the audience. Since this is the real measure of effectiveness, it is by no means certain that explicit comment is necessarily any better than implicit suggestion.

In the second place, as has been evident at least since the appearance of Brecht, theatre is in no way restricted to its traditional, "naturalistic" manner, in which the author is obliged to remain invisible. The Brechtian theatre allows the dramatist as much access to authorial intervention as is afforded the writer of fiction.

29. Panzner; op.cit., p.88.

By means of "Songs", explanatory scene headings, "Aus-der-Rolle-Treten", for example, the playwright may make his presence -- and his purpose -- known. Theatre becomes the presentation of information plus footnotes. The concept of a closed world is invalidated, intellectual bridges are available.

In any case, the whole debate as to the respective merits of the particular literary genres as vehicles of political expression is secondary. The fundamental question for any political author remains: How effective can any literary form be as a practical political voice? In his essay Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit Brecht correctly points out that all literature intended as political activity is doomed to impotence if it is unable to reach the correct public, that is, those members of society who can use the political information to concrete ends:

"Die Wahrheit aber kann man nicht eben schreiben; man muß sie durchaus jemandem schreiben, der damit etwas anfangen kann." ³⁰

In this respect it is perhaps paradoxical that Kroetz should choose the drama as his literary vehicle. As he himself remarks, in his essay Bücherdeckel -- Sargdeckel?: "Theater ist, wie gesagt, kein Mittel, viele zu erreichen." ³¹ Yet precisely this is necessary if Kroetz is to justify his literary activity. To write in a vacuum would be to belie

30. Brecht; Fünf Schwierigkeiten beim Schreiben der Wahrheit, GW18, p.230.

31. Kroetz; WA, p.538.

his political intention. Kroetz cannot afford himself the luxury of writing for a timeless audience: he is "kein Schreiber für die Ewigkeit", but "ein Texter für diese Zeit"³².

Consequently, the state of the theatre in the country in which he lives places him before considerable problems. To all effects, the theatre in the Federal Republic of Germany is a bourgeois institution. It is precisely the people for whom Kroetz is writing who do not attend the theatre. Seen in this light his literary activity may be likened to his holding a speech on the evils of capitalism before an audience of successful industrialists.

Not that the problem is new. In 1893, when the ban on the performance of Hauptmann's Die Weber was lifted after one year, the reason was not the enlightened or liberal thinking of the authorities who had originally imposed it, but rather their simple realisation that the potential danger of the play as political agitation was eliminated by the fact that the prohibitive prices of theatre seats ensured a completely bourgeois audience; the workers for whom the play was primarily intended were effectively precluded from seeing it.

Nor, as Kroetz indicates, are the restrictions imposed

32. Kroetz; "'Kein Apostel Paulus und kein Schreiber für die Ewigkeit', Gespräch mit Franz Xaver Kroetz anlässlich der Uraufführung seines Stückes Männersache in Darmstadt." von Dietmar N. Schmidt, in Die deutsche Bühne, Heft 3, März 1972.

upon the workers of a financial nature alone:

"Theater an sich ist nun mal eine Spezies derer, die es sich leisten können, sowohl finanziell als auch sozial. Und das sind die, die das Geld haben und damit die Erziehung, die Ausbildung, die guten Posten. Schließlich das Abstraktionsvermögen. Und nur über die Abstraktion ist es möglich, von Dingen, die einem auf der Bühne vorgemacht werden, auf nicht Vorgemachtes zu schließen, von auf der Bühne Gezeigtem auf in der persönlichen Umgebung sich Zeigendes zu schließen." ³³

"Abstraktionsvermögen" is a sort of intellectual membership card for the theatre, and, for Kroetz, the number of holders is restricted by specific class conditions. As Brecht points out, the audiences who shed tears about the fate of Hauptmann's *Rose Bernd* are precisely the well-heeled representatives of the social system which the play implicitly condemns. Seventy years later Kroetz's *Bepi* meets the same fate. The workers possess neither the financial means to attend the theatre nor the intellectual apparatus to appreciate its products.

Kroetz views this state of affairs as being peculiar to capitalism. He refers to his own experience of the structure of the theatre in the GDR, in which he observes substantial differences:

"Etwa können die Werktätigen in der DDR mit dem Theater viel anfangen. Warum? Weil sich das ostdeutsche Theater mit den Werktätigen 'einläßt', von der ersten Probe bis zur letzten Vorstellung -- und zwar auf einem anerkannt hohen künstlerischen und technischen Niveau!" ³⁴

The attitude to the nature and function of the theatre in

33. Kroetz; WA, p.543.

34. Kroetz; WA, pp.539/40.

the GDR differs fundamentally from that in West Germany, where it remains, in Kroetz's eyes, the prerogative of a privileged few.

The whole social situation in the Federal Republic of Germany, in fact, means that Kroetz's literary activity is for the most part doomed to fall on deaf ears. As he himself concludes:

"Trifft inhaltlich sozialrevolutionäres Theater auf eine revolutionäre Situation in der Gesellschaft, kann es die revolutionäre Situation anheizen. Trifft es auf keine revolutionäre Situation, dient es zumeist bloß als Ersatzbefriedigung berechtigter Forderungen." 35

The current situation in West Germany offers Kroetz bleak hopes of inspiring significant political changes. His position is, in fact, particularly helpless. Not only does the intended information not reach the people it is intended for, but by reaching the wrong people it becomes distorted into an "Alibifunktion". Or, what is worse, it can be perverted to have the opposite to the desired effect. That is to say, by the depiction of the exploited in their poverty and misery, the theatre can serve to confirm the prejudices of the privileged, to perpetuate the myth of a natural hierarchy. F.N. Mennemeier sums up this danger of anti-capitalist theatre in a capitalist society when he writes of:

"... das Dilemma eines Volkstheaters ..., das das bürgerliche Publikum zwar fesselt, zugleich aber dahin tendiert, eben dieses Publikum in seinen negativen Vorurteilen zu bestätigen, und das gewiß

35. Kroetz; WA, p.544.

die Betroffenen selber aus ihrer Dumpfheit nicht aufzurütteln vermag, schon deshalb nicht, weil diese nicht das Publikum Kroetzscher Stücke bilden." 36

Of the two obstacles facing Kroetz therefore -- the inherent restrictions of the dramatic form as a political voice, and the impossibility of establishing meaningful contact with the correct public -- it is the latter that raises the more far-reaching difficulties.

Early in his career Kroetz vehemently asserts that his activity as a dramatist is of necessity political:

"Theater soll politisch sein, es muß es sein, denn es spielt vor Volk und es zeigt Volk und das ist ein Vorgang, der permanent politisch ist." 37

Despite its enthusiasm, however, this assertion owes more to naive hopefulness than to mature reflection, ignoring as it does the fundamental problem of how to establish contact with "das Volk". The above claim dates from the period of Kroetz's explosive literary breakthrough. Since then he has become more reflective about the nature and potential of his work and has come to more realistic conclusions about his intentions and their fulfilment. Now he would modify these earlier assertions -- to which may be attributed a considerable degree of youthful vigour and unreflected optimism activated by his meteoric rise to fame -- to the strength of wishes rather than convictions. In the meantime, the facts of practical reality have mellowed his initial

36. Mennemeier, F.N.; Modernes Deutsches Drama II, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München, 1973, p.292.

37. Kroetz; WA, p.521.

optimism. As early as one year after his sweeping claim that the theatre "spielt vor Volk", he admits that this hope cannot be reconciled with reality:

"Wo spielt sich das sogenannte Theater fürs Volk ab? Auf den staatlich subventionierten Bühnen der Bourgeoisie." ³⁸

If Kroetz is correct when he writes that the theatre in West Germany is meaningful only "wenn es sich bemüht, die Ungerechtigkeiten unseres Systems herauszufinden und aufzuzeigen" ³⁹, it is clear that he must aim to expose these injustices, not to those who profit from them, but to those who suffer from them, the mass of the underprivileged and exploited. However, he is forced to doubt the possibility of reaching this "Zielpublikum" through the theatre as it now is, a bourgeois institution. There seem to be two possibilities of reconciling this practical obstacle with his heartfelt aim.

The most obvious approach would be to change the structure of the theatre, so that it ceases to be the plaything of a privileged few. As it is, writing for the theatre constitutes acting against, rather than in, the interests of the "Volk". If Kroetz is to avoid this boomerang effect, the theatre must undergo extensive modification:

"Wir brauchen kein Theater, das denen, die sowieso alles haben, noch mehr zuschauert, wir brauchen Theater, das sich unablässig und unbestechlich um Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und sozialen Fortschritt bemüht." ³⁹

38. Kroetz; WA, p.537.

39. Kroetz; WA, p.558.

The call to change the structure of the theatre is clear and forceful, but as a solution it strongly resembles the mouse's suggestion of belling the cat. Kroetz can, of course, commit himself to writing plays for "das Volk", but this does nothing to alter the theatre as an institution. He is not entirely pessimistic, however, and attempts to lay some practical guidelines:

"Beweisbare Nützbarkeit gibt es über das Mittel Theater nur dort, wo kleine Theatertruppen für Zielgruppen produzieren. Wo also zum Beispiel vor Lehrlingen ein Stück über Lehrlings-Probleme aufgeführt wird. Und wo anschließend einen Nachmittag oder länger Informationen ausgetauscht und in der Diskussion verwertet werden." ⁴⁰

This suggestion comprises two basic elements. Firstly, it demands a shifting of the theatre's field of operation. The institution of the theatre in West Germany is too firmly established for its structure to be radically altered in one movement; the attempt to take the medium to the people may be seen as an attempt to broaden its perspective, to alter by expansion rather than by reconstruction. Secondly, it calls for the extension of the existing structure to incorporate meaningful discussion and analysis outwith the actual performance. Traditionally, when the curtain falls the play is finished and the audience leaves. It remains a matter of individual choice whether and how rigorously each member considers the implications of what he has seen

40. Kroetz; WA, p.545.

in relation to his own situation. Through this element of direct audience participation the link between theatrical reality and real reality is substantially strengthened.

The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are summed up by Kroetz in the following way:

"Die sich daraus ergebende Effektivität mag statistisch klein sein, aber auf das Ergebnis ist Verlaß." ⁴¹

In time, however, it may be possible thus to dissolve the deep-rooted distrust of the workers as regards the theatre and to bring about a situation where the "Volk" is encouraged to embrace an institution from which it has long been excluded. Significant steps towards this Utopia can be seen in the work of Dario Fo and Augusto Boal, working in similar conditions to similar ends.

The Italian writer, actor and director Dario Fo insists on the implementation of both the suggestions mentioned above. Firstly, he stipulates the avoidance of performance in traditional theatres, preferring his plays to be staged in workers' clubs, schools and similar venues that guarantee the appropriate audience ("teatro fuori dai teatri"). Secondly, he invites active participation from the audience in the form of discussions, in which he requests suggestions for improvements, additions or omissions which can then be incorporated in the play (cf. Non si paga! Non si paga!). The

41. Kroetz; WA, p.545.

final work bears his name, but it is often the product of collective energies in which Fo is a guiding, but not a self-sufficient influence.

The Brazilian director Augusto Boal is more radical. In his theatre he insists on the removal of the barriers between actor and audience in order to make the audience as actively participant as the actors. His experiments with "Zeitungstheater", "Forumtheater" and "unsichtbares Theater" constitute far-reaching attempts to reach this goal. In "Forumtheater", for example, specific scenes demonstrating various aspects of oppression in Brazilian society are acted out in public places, such as market squares, where contact with the "Volk" is assured. After the actors' performance the members of the audience are invited to intervene in the second performance whenever they take exception to anything in the original scene and to demonstrate how they would prefer it to be shown. In contrast to the original "Realbild" an "Idealbild" comes into being, as envisaged and created by the spectators themselves. Under the guidance of Boal the audience is then encouraged to construct the all-important "Übergangsbild":

"... d.h. die Teilnehmer sollen zeigen, wie sie vom realen zum idealen Bild gekommen sind. Wir haben eine Wirklichkeit vor uns, die wir verändern wollen. Wie können wir sie verändern?"⁴²

42. Boal, Augusto; Theater der Unterdrückten, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1979, p.54.

In this way the theatre elevates the normally passive "Volk" to an active role and encourages the workers to devise their own blueprint for action to alter the concrete political situation. It is the function of Boal's "Forum-theater", and indeed of all his theatrical activity, to breed direct political action:

"Das Forumtheater bewirkt keine Katharsis. Wir sind Stücke gewohnt, in denen die Schauspieler die Revolution auf der Bühne vollziehen, die Zuschauer sich in ihren Sesseln als siegreiche Revolutionäre fühlen und so von ihrem revolutionären Verlangen 'gereinigt' werden: 'Wozu eine Revolution draußen in der Wirklichkeit, wo wir sie doch schon im Theater gemacht haben?' Das ist im Forumtheater nicht möglich. Forumtheater und die anderen Volkstheater-Formen wecken im Zuschauer den Wunsch, in die Wirklichkeit umzusetzen, was im Theater geprobt wurde." ⁴³

The whole of Boal's theatre is geared towards this double goal of mobilising the "Volk" to action and self-determination -- "Der Zuschauer, passives Wesen, Objekt, soll zum Protagonisten der Handlung, zum Subjekt werden" ⁴⁴ -- and of helping not only to spread enlightenment, but also to implement concrete political change -- "Es genügt nicht zu wissen, daß die Welt verändert werden soll; wichtig ist, sie tatsächlich zu verändern." ⁴⁵

Because it does little to fulfil this second condition, Boal criticises Brecht's theatre as being merely "Theater der Bewußtmachung" ⁴⁶. His own theatre takes place in front

43. Boal; op.cit., p.58.

44. ibid., p.68.

45. ibid., p.69.

46. ibid., p.66.

of the people, for the people and with the people, and is therefore truly political. A measure of his success can be gauged by the fact that he was arrested and tortured by the Brazilian authorities in 1971 and had to leave the country in the same year. Boal has reached the stage where he is justified in claiming his theatre "ist nicht realistisch, es ist real" 47.

Brecht's theatre, on the other hand, remains realistic. Its form and function have been redefined, but not its field or method of operation. When the audience is directly challenged at the end of Der gute Mensch von Sezuan to find an answer to the problems raised by the play, it is still the wrong audience. The same is true of Piscator's adaptation of Credé's play §218, which ended with the destruction of all illusion on the stage and the direct confrontation of the audience with the question of the abortion laws, or of Peter Stein's Munich production of Weiss's Vietnam Diskurs, which was deemed a scandal because it finished with the descent of the actors into the auditorium and foyer in order to take a collection for the purchase of weapons for the Viet Cong. Certainly, all these are valid attempts to activate the critical analysis and commitment of the audience, but in each case the fact remains that the audience does not comprise the real

47. Boal; op.cit., p.80.

addressees of the plays in question, and thus the whole venture is effectively trivialised.

On the other hand, it is not enough merely to perform in surroundings that guarantee the required audience, such as in "Fabriken, Schulen, Sportarenen, Versammlungsräume"⁴⁸, as Peter Weiss suggests. This is of use only when, as in Boal's "Forumtheater" or in Fo's plays, the performance is conducted in such a way as to demand the active participation of the audience.

Kroetz would appear to be on the road to the same conclusions as Boal and Fo when he writes of performing before particular "Zielgruppen" with the aim of using these performances as the basis for a meaningful and concrete discussion. In practice, however, he makes little use of this possibility, and continues to write for the traditionally bourgeois theatre. He endeavours to widen the range of his political efficacy by expanding the field of operation of the medium, that is, by employing radio and television as vehicles for the dramatic form.

In this way he can continue to write in his most effective literary form -- with due allowance for technical modifications -- and enjoy the added opportunity of reaching a wider public. There is never any question but that this is a direct concession to his political ambitions. With his

48. Weiss; Stücke II/2, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, p.605.

natural preference for the stage because of the "life" of the dialogue -- "Der Dialog kommt nie so rein an den Zuschauer heran, als wenn er von der Rampe kommt" ⁴⁹ -- Kroetz explains his attraction for the alternative of television entirely in terms of practical political efficacy:

"Kommen wir weiter zur Frage: Wer: sieht: was: warum: wie: also? Dann muß ich klar antworten: Je mehr Zuschauer ich habe, desto lieber ist es mir. Es ist gar keine Frage des Mediums -- an sich -- sondern eine Frage der Masse. Das Fernsehen bietet derzeit die meisten Zuschauer, also ist es mein liebstes Kind. Würde Theater oder Hörspiel oder Lesung mehr Leute als Das Fernsehen erreichen, würde ich diesem den Zuschlag geben. Die Masse macht mich glücklich. Nicht das Medium." ⁴⁹

As an author, Kroetz's first love and greatest talent lie in the dramatic form; his political dedication, however, demands concessions from his literary activity. In an attempt to do justice to the claims of his political commitment without suffering any qualitative deterioration in his literature, Kroetz turns to television and radio. Reduced to a simple formula his reasoning runs:

"Willst du sagen, was du meinst, benütze die Bühne. Willst du tun, was du meinst, benütze Film und Fernsehen." ⁴⁹

It is not certain, however, that this shift of performing arena achieves more than a partial solution to Kroetz's basic problem. In the first place, he has to contend with the problem of representation. The opportunities for a communist author active in the Federal Republic of Germany to use

49. Kroetz; WA, p.588.

television and radio as a political platform are relatively scarce. As one sympathetic critic writes:

"Immer dann, wenn Kroetz mit seinen Mitteln versucht, seiner politischen Überzeugung Ausdruck zu verleihen, verglimmen die BRD-Bildschirme." ⁵⁰

It would be unrealistic, however, to contend that this assessment is completely accurate. To date, Kroetz has been fairly widely represented on both German television and radio. The former has broadcast Herzliche Grüße aus Grado, Der Mensch Adam Deigl und die Obrigkeit, Weitere Aussichten..., Maria Magdalena, Oberösterreich, Das Nest, Heimat and Mensch Meier, while Inklusive, Bilanz, Gute Besserung, Die Wahl fürs Leben and the "Hörspiel-Bearbeitung" of Das Nest have all appeared on radio. It is therefore clearly unfair to speak of a boycott of the communist Kroetz.

Certain restrictions remain, however. In conjunction with the television production of Oberösterreich a discussion group was planned for the analysis of problems raised in the play. This discussion was cancelled with the explanation that it did not correspond to the "Anforderung des ZDF-Staatsvertrages auf Sachlichkeit und Ausgewogenheit" ⁵¹. Kroetz and his discussion partners were accused of using the play as a springboard for the one-sided dissemination of communist propaganda. As a number of critics were quick

50. Ziller, Jochen; "Standortbestimmung eines Autors", in Theater der Zeit, Heft 1, Januar 1975.

51. Quoted in "Kroetz: Das ZDF verleugnet die Demokratie. Offener Brief des Autors/DKP-Mitglieder in der Diskussionsrunde", Süddeutsche Zeitung, 26/04/73.

to point out, the same television channel was not averse to the broadcasting of right-wing propaganda by Gerhard Löwenthal earlier the same evening. Communist sympathisers might be understood for questioning the criterion of objectivity applied in these two cases.

Nevertheless, the censure is only partial, as the generous number of Kroetz productions on television and radio testifies. The more serious problem facing him is the same one which dogs his work for the theatre: the problem of reaching the correct audience.

Initially Kroetz suspected the broadcasting authorities of deliberately manipulating the viewing times so that his plays were shown either so late in the evening that the "Werkstätigen" for whom they were intended had already gone to bed, or else at times when the alternative viewing was more attractive. These suspicions miss the point, however. The real problem is that the workers would prefer to watch the productions of pulp television, "John Wayne oder eben das Berchtesgadener Bauerntheater"⁵². Kroetz's intended audience would rather watch Tatort than Oberösterreich, just as they would rather read Edgar Wallace than Günther Wallraff, or as they would rather go to a football match than to a theatre. Even if the alternative viewing to a Kroetz play were something less interesting, it is highly probable that

52. Kroetz; WA, p.542.

the average working person, tired after a day's work, would simply switch off. Despite the heartening figures of individual ratings -- Maria Magdalena achieved a viewing figure of 46%, Weitere Aussichten..., broadcast at the late hour of ten o'clock in the evening, of 22% -- it remains doubtful whether Kroetz's sidestep into the medium of television has resolved the basic problem of gaining access to his intended public. Michael Töteberg describes Kroetz's theatre as being "mehr Theater über das Volk als Theater für das Volk" ⁵³; his work for television is, by the same token, equally fated to be "mehr Fernsehen über das Volk als Fernsehen für das Volk".

While Kroetz continues to write with unshakeable sincerity and inexhaustible energy, and to adapt his literary production in the light of experience, existing realities beyond his control persistently set obstacles between ambition and fulfilment.

In his essays and interviews Kroetz shows himself to be well aware of these obstacles, and his literary activity reveals his continuing efforts to come to terms with them. In all probability, however, he is fighting against hopeless odds, as it is doubtful that the basic premise of the viability of the theatre as an active political voice is more than a heartfelt hope with little substance.

53. Töteberg, Michael; "Der Kleinbürger auf der Bühne. Die Entwicklung des Dramatikers Franz Xaver Kroetz und das realistische Volksstück", in Akzente, Heft 2, April 1976.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny him credit for the energy with which he approaches the task. As Töteberg concludes in his essay on the development of Kroetz's dramatic work:

"Über den ästhetischen und politischen Wert der dramatischen Produktion Kroetz' kann man streiten, soziale Verantwortung und Aufrichtigkeit wird man ihm nicht absprechen können." 54

When one turns to an analysis of his work itself, it will be seen that it reflects an awareness of the problems inherent in the attempt to achieve political effect through literary expression. In questions of form, content, characters, language and action there is a consistent and distinct development in the plays of Franz Xaver Kroetz, which is determined completely by the need to overcome the obstacles to political efficacy created by the practical realities of his literary position and activity, and which can at all times be related to the unequivocal intention that underlies his whole work:

"Seine Absicht ist Aufklärung, sein Ziel ist es, das beschriebene Elend zu ändern." 55

54. Töteberg; loc.cit.

55. Schaarschmidt; loc.cit.

INTRODUCTION

"DER JUNGE MANN: Haben Sie auch das Stück Baal im Theater gesehen?

DER MANN: Ja, es ist eine Sauerei.

DER JUNGE MANN: Aber es ist Kraft darinnen.

DER MANN: Es ist also eine kraftvolle Sauerei."

Bertolt Brecht ¹

"GUNDERLOCH: E Stückelche Vieh stickt doch in jedem von uns drein!"

Carl Zuckmayer ²

Without the "scandal" that accompanied the first performance of Hartnäckig and Heimarbeit the emergence of Franz Xaver Kroetz on the German literary scene would certainly not have been so explosive. The events surrounding his première -- the stinkbombs thrown in the auditorium, the chanting demonstrators outside the theatre, the provocative reports in the popular newspapers -- all this hurled Kroetz into the public limelight, and indeed meant that his name was confined neither to the more serious newspapers nor to the comparative seclusion of the "Feuilleton". It is, in fact, fair to say that Kroetz owes his initial public impact less to his dramatic talent than to his violation of accepted

1. Brecht, Bertolt; Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit, GW7, p.2733.

2. Zuckmayer, Carl; Der fröhliche Weinberg, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main, 1976, p.54.

taste, for it was not primarily the literary medium which aroused interest, but the alleged distasteful excesses it was used to convey.

Subsequently much of his early work -- especially Männersache, Wildwechsel and Stallerhof -- continued to attract attention less by virtue of its dramatic merit than by the sensational character of its content. This is not, of course, to imply that these early plays were not treated as works of literature, but for a while at least, and with regard to the general public, Kroetz remained the creator of "haarsträubenden Schweinereien"³ rather than a dramatist of serious intent.

The cause of this initial uproar has since become historical. Public outrage exploded into flames with Heimarbeit, was sustained for a period by subsequent plays and then inevitably dwindled into insignificance. Time, as ever, has lent perspective, and what the heat of the moment fanned into headlines, distance has cooled into yesterday's news. Who could read Madame Bovary now, or Ibsen's Ghosts, and fully appreciate what all the fuss was about?

Already the public outcry before, during and after the performance of Heimarbeit and Hartnäckig is largely forgotten and had begun to disappear a few short weeks after the offending première. Six weeks later, in May, in

3. Discussion with the author, Trostberg, April 1977.

the same city of Munich, Michis Blut received its first performance with barely a murmur of public dissent. As Benjamin Henrichs wrote in his review for the Süddeutsche Zeitung:

"Diesmal, vor dem proT, erinnerte nur noch ein einziges kleines Polizeiauto an den Skandal von damals." ⁴

Nevertheless, the "Skandal von damals" sheds an interesting light on a feature of Kroetz's literary beginnings which continued to predominate in his subsequent plays and which also continued to be the aspect that attracted most attention, even within the focus of serious literary criticism. The initial outrage, though misplaced, was in essence provoked by what is the central feature of Kroetz's early work -- "das Extrem".

Perhaps the most effective way to arrive at a definition of this concept is to give a brief synopsis of Heimarbeit, for it is in this form that the general public first came into contact with the author's work. Bearing this in mind, it might be easier to understand the virulent protests of the citizens of Munich at his première in 1971.

Willy, a man of around forty, has fallen from his moped while drunk and lost the full use of one of his legs. Unable to continue with his earlier (unspecified) job, he is forced to earn his living as an outworker, while his wife Martha, five years younger, has had to take a part-time job as a

4. Henrichs, Benjamin; "Passion für die Elenden. Franz Xaver Kroetz inszenierte sein Stück Michis Blut im proT", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 17/05/71.

cleaner to compensate for the loss in income. While Willy was in hospital Martha has had an affair with another man, by whom she is now pregnant. The child -- which would be the third -- is unwanted, but the money for an abortion is not available; an attempt is made to abort the child with a knitting needle. The attempt fails, the child is born. He is slightly deformed and Willy and Martha can find no one to adopt him as they had hoped. Martha goes to stay with her parents and leaves Willy with the three children. One evening Willy lies on the couch and masturbates. He then drowns the baby while bathing him. He goes to Martha and asks her to come back now that the baby is dead. She returns. The police attribute the death to negligence, Willy having been overtaxed in looking after the three children on his own. With Martha back, life continues. She tells Willy to wash himself before they have sex.

Before considering the implications of this synopsis, it is worth comparing it to a resumé of another Kroetz play, Männersache, which actually appeared in the Abendzeitung, a Munich popular newspaper:

"Eine Metzgerin verliebt sich in einen Eisenflechter, vorher hatte sie es mit einem Hund. Der Eisenflechter erfährt es. Die Metzgerin erschießt den Hund und wird schließlich vom Geliebten selbst erschossen." ⁵

5. Müller, Andreas; "Ein Gewehr unter dem Schreibtisch. Gespräch mit der Suhrkamp-Entdeckung Franz Kroetz", in Abendzeitung, 27/11/70.

The contrast is startling. Both summaries take into account the extremely brutal events of the two plays, but there is a significant difference in their presentation. The four or five lines in the newspaper column remove all sense of cause and effect, all indications of motivation, background, justification -- in short, of context. Nowhere in this synopsis is the question "Why?" raised.

Skeletal though the account of Heimarbeit may be -- and though it is considerably longer than the synopsis of Männersache, it is still only an outline -- it does substantially more than establish a catalogue of violence. It provides at least a sense of cause and effect: it hints at the emotional sterility of the lives of Willy and Martha, at their miserable financial situation, at the loneliness and sexual frustration that lie behind Willy's brutal action. The violence is set against a recognisable background and shown to be part of a chain of events. While it remains upsetting, it no longer appears as violence for its own sake.

However, in the initial critical reaction to Heimarbeit little awareness was shown of the presence or significance of this context. The crowds of demonstrators at the première of the play had almost certainly not had the opportunity to read it beforehand, and so must have based their outrage on reports in the papers or passed around by word of mouth. Whatever their source, these reports centred on -- if not

consisted of -- mention of the attempted abortion with the knitting needle, Willy's masturbation and the drowning of the baby. It is mainly because of the extremely violent nature of these three incidents that Heimarbeit and Kroetz attracted such immediate and such vigorous attention. Without doubt the majority of Kroetz's early plays became known in such abbreviated form rather than through acquaintance with the text or a performance, with the result that the extremely violent nature of the content inevitably became their most salient feature.

Violence is, however, only one aspect of the extremity that characterises his early plays. Ultimately it is probably the least important of the three forms it takes, but it has been mentioned first because it is the one that first catches the attention of the public. It is the most sensational aspect. In performance in particular, the violence and brutality of the action leap immediately to the eye. It is only afterwards that one becomes aware of two further dimensions of extremity equally central to these plays -- the extreme nature of the language and the choice of social outsiders as protagonists.

The traditional drama accords characters on the stage greater eloquence and power of speech than they would command in real life. We have come a long way from the elaborate alexandrines of Racine and poetry of Shakespeare, but even

in theatre of a realistic -- or realist -- nature, characters tend to have a command of language that displays, for example, a facility for logical thought and argument, a gift for striking figures of speech and rhetoric, a readiness of wit, an ability to speak of the abstract as readily as of the concrete -- in short, an apparatus of linguistic proficiency that belongs to the author rather than to the characters.

This is true in varying degrees of all plays. Even in the extraordinarily lifelike dialogues of Pinter the author's shaping hand is apparent, and it is, of course, ultimately impossible to be completely true to life as even the process of selection involves artistic modification. The best one can hope to achieve is a convincing illusion. A Realist or Naturalist approach to drama attempts to make the language of the theatre as faithful to real life as possible by accurately reducing it to the everyday, the prosaic, the normal. Kroetz carries this reduction to the extreme. The characters in his early plays command a gamut of words pared down almost beyond the platitudinous. Their impoverished range of vocabulary scarcely suffices to accommodate the most basic needs of human communication. Language is not a bridge that brings these characters closer to one another, but an abyss that cleaves them apart.

This manifests itself not only in the banality, fragmentation and barrenness of the language, but also in its absence.

Pauses are accumulated and drawn out until it sometimes seems that more time is devoted to silence than speech.

In all this, Kroetz is deliberately implementing a drastic process of reduction, which he carries even further by his use of dialect. Dialect in Kroetz's plays is anything but the earthy expression of sound common sense and energy, as it is, for example, for Ludwig Thoma: Kroetz employs it as another facet of inarticulacy. One critic has accurately commented that his use of language in this respect involves more than dialect, being not only regionally but also socially bound, and consequently more of a "Soziolekt"⁶. The characters speak the Bavarian dialect of the lower working class, and this double particularisation underlines the linguistic poverty of the speakers. Deprived of the power of language, they are left in execrable helplessness in a hostile world -- speechless and powerless.

The characters themselves constitute the third aspect of Kroetz's depiction of the extreme. If the Naturalists contrived to bring the representatives of the working class into their literature, Kroetz has carried this further, to the extent of setting his plays round "Randerscheinungen", characters from the very bottom of the lowest social class. His early figures are outsiders, materially and emotionally deprived outcasts. From the thirteen-year-old, mentally

6. Jäger, Gerd; "Sind das denn bloß Geschichten?", in Theater heute, Heft 2, Februar 1973.

backward Beppi in Stallerhof to the crippled Helmut Rusterfer in Hartnäckig to the exhibitionist in Lieber Fritz to the three cell-mates in Dolomitenstadt Lienz to the joyless, robotic Fräulein Rasch in Wunschkonzert, each is an outsider, in whom critics have recognised anything from monsters to "Exoten". But whatever the reaction to these characters has been in terms of interpretation, their extreme position -- social and psychological -- has never gone unnoticed.

In the depiction of violence, use of language and choice of characters in his early plays Kroetz resorted in all three cases to a portrayal of the extreme. Despite accusations to the contrary, however, he did not do this as an end in itself. By its very nature the extreme tends first to provoke powerful reactions whose intensity can prevent reflection and analysis, so that the extreme appears to exist for its own sake.

The stoning of the baby in Edward Bond's Saved, for example, aroused immediate attention -- in the form of shock and disgust -- as the stoning of a baby. Analysis of what this incident meant only followed afterwards, and even then not universally. The same fate befell Martha's knitting needle abortion, the brutal language of Karl and Marie, or the sight of the myopic, retarded Beppi, to name but three examples.

The presentation of an extreme -- in whatever manifest-

ation -- constitutes a violation of the norm. As such, it is initially observed, not for what it signifies, but for its relation to the norm, and the greater the deviation from the norm, the greater is the surprise it produces. Kroetz brought characters on to the stage from the depths of the social landscape, the likes of which had never been seen in German drama before; he reduced language to a level of disjointed banalities and silences, language as the lack of communication to an extent which had never been seen in German drama before; he depicted on the stage acts of brutality and violence with a frankness and to a degree that had never been seen in German drama before. This triple assault on the norms of traditional German drama proved at first too severe for the receptive capacities of German theatre-goers, who were for the most part simply overwhelmed. At worst it produced the misinformed, outraged demonstrators outside the "Werkraumtheater" at the première of Heimarbeit and Hartnäckig, at best the critics, professional and lay, who sought to transcend their initial shock and attempted to digest this new phenomenon, or at least to register it without condemning it.

It was left to time to lend perspective. When the initial shock had subsided, attempts could be made to put the extreme in its context and to uncover Kroetz's intention in portraying it. Analysis undertaken in this perspective will show that his portrayal of the extreme is one of the

dramatic devices in the service of his unswerving double goal of "Aufklärung" and "Änderung".

This crucial perspective is too often ignored. As Peter Iden writes:

"Die Überschreitung von Normen eines objektiv wie auch immer geheuchelten Anstands, in der an sich ein aufklärerisches Moment steckt, kommt nicht los von der Verdächtigung, die gegen sie zu formulieren ist: daß der Effekt, den sie als Skandal macht, auch ein Erfolgskalkül ist." ⁷

Those who protested against Heimarbeit perhaps even today continue to besmear Kroetz's depiction of the extreme as an "Erfolgskalkül", but analysis of his plays will refute this accusation. It is, in fact, doubtful if the technique ever brought him success at all. In many cases his predilection for extremes brought him only adverse publicity, notoriety rather than acclaim.

However this may be, analysis of his early plays will lay bare the clear intention behind the so-called atrocities and excesses, and so discredit the suggestion of their being merely a stratagem to attract attention and manoeuvre himself into prominence.

In each of his plays and in each of the three fields of action, language and characters Kroetz uses the extreme to highlight the general and essential tendency, to expose the typical in the atypical, to show that what is reviled as

7. Iden, Peter; "Der Fleck auf der Kuttlerin ihrer Ehr", in Badische Zeitung, Freiburg, 20/01/72.

abnormal and excessive is a direct by-product of the so-called "normal" and "natural", to make clear that asocial behaviour in individual cases is the consequence of an asocial system.

For it is gross frivolity to refuse to see the extreme in its context. Only then can its representative value and function be understood. Hochhuth's Der Stellvertreter, for example, cannot be fully appreciated unless the Pope is regarded not only as the "Stellvertreter Christi" ⁸, or even as the "Sprecher der Christenheit" ⁹, but also as the representative of every moral being who remained silent in the face of the Nazi extermination of the Jews. Critics and audiences had little difficulty appreciating this: why should it be so different in the case of Kroetz?

The same alignment of perspective and concentration of focus is necessary for an appreciation of the crucial representative function of the extreme in Kroetz's plays.

For the sake of clarity it is of advantage to examine each of the three fields -- "Handlung", "Sprache" and "Figuren" -- separately, although this involves a necessarily artificial division. The amount of overlapping is considerable as, for example, the language cannot realistically be divorced from the characters who use it, nor the violence be assessed independently of either the social situation of the people who perpetrate it or the inarticulacy of

8. Hochhuth, Rolf; Der Stellvertreter, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1971, p.83.

9. ibid., p. 125.

which it is in many ways a consequence.

However, this separate analysis has the advantage of demonstrating that the same basic intention or function is common to all three aspects. In this way a clear overall picture of Kroetz's aim in the depiction of the extreme should emerge, and light will be shed on the reasons for the distinct development in his literary career, explaining the function of his "Darstellung des Extrems" as well as the reasons for his gradual but steady abandonment of it.

A) ACTION

"Violence is not a function of human nature but of human societies."

Edward Bond ¹

"Mein Alten hat mich als Junge regelmäßig verträumt, und ich hab mein Robert wat drauf gegeben, un Robert klatscht den Detlef wat drauf, jau, un wenn Detlef soweit is, gibt er Haue weiter, so is dat!"

Herbert Somplatzki ²

While it is, of course, essentially an artificial division, it is nevertheless admissible, for reasons of convenience, to blanket loosely under the heading of "early plays" those plays from Wildwechsel to Dolomitenstadt Lienz, that is, before the appearance of Oberösterreich and Münchner Kindl. It is not the case, however, that Kroetz at any one point in his career made a sudden or wholesale change in his approach to drama. The development has been more gradual, and the amount of overlapping between his earlier and later plays is considerable. Certain elements which become central in his later work -- the movement away from "Randerscheinungen" to the "Durchschnitt" in Wunschkonzert, or towards a less illusionistic concept of theatre in Dolomitenstadt Lienz, with its "Songs" and

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1. Bond, Edward; On Violence, in Plays I, Eyre Methuen London, 1977, p.17.
 2. Somplatzki, Herbert; Muskelschrott, Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt, Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, p.92.

"Aus-der-Rolle-Treten" -- and the later plays frequently retain features that were likewise typical of the early ones -- the brutality of the rape of Agnes Bernauer, or the "Sprachlosigkeit" of Hugo in Heimat. By the same token, Agnes Bernauer is an equally arbitrary limit for Kroetz's "later plays". The important point is not to create as up-to-date an account as possible, as this will always be superseded, but to highlight the essential developments in Kroetz's literary career. These developments are evident by Agnes Bernauer.

Accepting these arbitrary criteria as a working hypothesis, Oberösterreich remains the most reasonable point at which to mark the end of the "early Kroetz". It is the play which shows the most clear-cut signs of a distinct development in dramatic technique. While the earlier plays reveal in individual instances the movement from the extreme to the "Normalfall", Oberösterreich is the first of Kroetz's plays to incorporate this movement in all three fields of action, language and characters.

Turning first to the extremes of the "Handlung", one is struck by the extent of the spectrum of violence in these early plays. The audience is confronted with the depiction on stage of: the murder in Wildwechsel by Franz and Hanni of Hanni's father, who is first shot, then brutally clubbed to death as he lies wounded; the drowning in a

bathtub by Willy of his wife's illegitimate son in Heimarbeit; the suffocation in Geisterbahn by Beppi of her infant son; the killing of Martha and the severe wounding of her lover Otto in a bizarre shooting match in Männersache; the poisoning by Staller in Stallerhof of his farmhand's pet dog; the attempted abortion by Willy and Martha in Heimarbeit with a knitting needle, and by Karl and Marie in Michis Blut by means of a mustard bath; the brutal deflowering of the retarded Beppi in Stallerhof; the masturbation of Willy in Heimarbeit and of Sepp in Stallerhof; the act of fellatio in Männersache; the sexual intercourse by various couples in Wildwechsel, Hartnäckig, Männersache and Stallerhof.

Not actually shown on stage, but alluded to in the text are: the alleged sexual relationship between Martha and her dog in Männersache; Helmut's masturbation in Hartnäckig; Fritz's (invented) sexual fantasies and his (real) sexual exhibitionism in Lieber Fritz; Erwin's wish to castrate Franz in Wildwechsel; the abortion, called off at the last minute, of Beppi's child in Stallerhof; Oskar Schuster's sadistic "Wunschtraum" of punishing the policemen in Dolomitenstadt Lienz; the murder, narrowly averted, of Axel in Hartnäckig.

The list could be extended, but as it stands it contains the most serious "depravities" and "obscenities" in Kroetz's early plays. In any case, the process of listing is ultimately

trivial. The mere cataloguing of facts such as these presents a totally false picture of what takes place within these plays. By this method Macbeth would be reduced to a tale of murder and madness, and Kroetz's work would become the stuff of pornographic pulp. He himself is aware of the danger that his plays are assessed on this most superficial level and thus grossly misinterpreted. Of Männersache he writes:

"Dieses Stück... würde sich sogar dazu eignen, in St. Pauli aufgeführt zu werden. Es ist alles 'drin', was in einer anspruchsvollen Sex-Show sein muß, um dem Publikum zu gefallen; Geschlechtsverkehr, Sodomie, menschliche Perversion, Mord." ³

The already cited summary of the same play in the Abendzeitung tends to confirm this impression, and, assuming that the demonstrators at the première of Heimarbeit had acquired their knowledge of the play in a similar fashion, that is, in the form of an arbitrary skeleton of grisly details, it is easier to understand why they reacted in such a violent manner. Had the play indeed simply comprised scenes of abortion, masturbation and killing without any function beyond cheap sensationalism, public outrage would have been more acceptable. In the seventies, gratuitous sex and violence have succeeded to such an extent in permeating the novel and the screens of cinema and television that, given the sensationalist propaganda surrounding Kroetz's early plays, one might be justified in taking them

3. Kroetz; WA, p.553.

to be no more than extensions of this gratuitousness to the theatre.

If one is to condone at all the public outrage evoked by his first plays, it is possible only on the grounds of ignorance, for to know only that these plays contain scenes of violence is tantamount to ignorance. People who take such knowledge to be the equivalent of critical appreciation are the people who have never read Lady Chatterly's Lover but "know" it is pornography because the sexual act is described in it. Such criticism, while to some extent understandable, can by no means be taken seriously, for it has no other substance save emotional indignation.

Any valid criticism of Kroetz's plays must be based on knowledge of the text, preferably in performance. Only then do the isolated excesses appear in a context, only then does the case for obscenity dismantle itself.

In the event, however, this was not the case with Kroetz, at least not entirely. While a body of critics were able after first-hand acquaintance with the plays to see that there was more to Franz Xaver Kroetz than "haarsträubende Schweinereien", there remained a substantial number who continued to be outraged, and this on several grounds.

With regard to content, a number of critics persisted in seeing his plays as consisting merely of gruesome physical excesses presented solely for the purpose of sensationalism.

One critic goes so far as to reorganise the time sequence in Heimarbeit so as to place Willy's masturbation directly after his drowning of the baby⁴, a piece of perverse juggling that not merely ignores the interrelation of the acts, but wilfully distorts it to establish a direct link between sexual gratification and murder. Admittedly this is an extreme case of critical misrepresentation, but it is symptomatic of a general tendency to isolate the acts of violence from the contexts in which they appear and thereby to perpetuate the lie of violence for the sake of violence.

In terms of artistic form, the sensationalist nature of the content continued to dominate and in many cases prevented a real appreciation of the formal elements of Kroetz's plays. An extreme reaction would be that of the Munich right-wing politician Dr Wilhelm Zehetmeier, who, following his visit to the "Werkraumtheater" to see Heimarbeit, concluded:

"Man kann auf der Bühne vieles zeigen. Enthauptungen, Tötungen, Vergewaltigungen, aber all das muß einen gewissen Kunstwert haben..., das Stück von Kroetz ist doch ein dürftiges, mageres Stück. Für mich hat es keine künstlerischen Qualitäten." ⁵

Again, this is an extreme view, but it is exemplary of the attitude which refuses or is unable to see beyond the depiction of violence per se and thus to appreciate the form in which it is presented.

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4. Schneider, Herbert; "Herbert Schneider nimmt die Ferkeleien in der Kunst aufs Korn", in Tageszeitung, München, 26/03/71.
 5. Quoted in: Karasek, Hellmuth; "Wie man Volkswut in Szene setzt. Eine Münchner Premiere und ihre Begleitumstände", in Die Zeit, 09/04/71.

The criterion of authorial intention is at least equally important, especially given Kroetz's energetic political commitment. Bearing this in mind, it is of particular significance that precisely this question of intention failed to receive adequate consideration during his early period. The main causes for this were the very extremes of content and form. Audiences were generally too shocked and incensed by the excessively violent nature of the content and too repelled and disoriented by the stark naturalistic form to be able to approach the question of Kroetz's intention with anything more than a fleeting interest.

At the outset the prevalent judgement on Kroetz's aim as a dramatist was that he was simply jumping on the bandwagon of sensationalism. Extreme negative reactions sought to castrate his plays as "Bauerntheater mit modischer Sexbeilage"⁶, while many of the more serious critics, reluctant to condemn him as a simple pornographer, but nevertheless unable or unwilling to appreciate his real goal, dismissed his work as "ein bloßes Herzeigen ohne kritische Funktion"⁷.

Kroetz himself was well aware of the danger of the sensationalist nature of his plays blinding audiences to their underlying purpose. Questioned in an interview about the reactions to his early work, he replies:

6. Berndt, Hans; "Wo liegt der Weißwurst-Äquator?", in Saarbrücker Zeitung, 29/06/72; quoted in Panzner, op.cit., p.94.

7. Panzner; op.cit., p.36.

"Zweifellos hat mir das Reklame gebracht, aber nur negative, weil viele Leute, wenn sie meinen Namen hören, nur sagen: 'Ach, das ist ja diese Sau'." ⁸

This is doubtless a valid generalisation for this period in his career. By disqualifying Kroetz as a "Sau", outraged audiences could attest their own moral integrity. Part and parcel of this defence mechanism is the refusal to acknowledge any constructive intention on Kroetz's part.

This is no more than a shallow gesture, however, an evasion of the problem of violence in Kroetz's plays rather than a coming to terms with it. Nothing is solved by turning a blind eye or by calling the kettle black. The violence is there, it is certainly brutal, but there is undoubtedly more to it than that. To be fair to the sincerity of Kroetz's political goal, audiences should be prepared to be equally sincere in their attempts to understand his work, warts and all. Honest analysis will show that his treatment of violence on the stage, far from being cheap sensationalism or gratuitous embellishment, is a constructive attempt to call attention to and to prevent the perpetration of violence in real life.

The key to an understanding of the depiction of violence in Kroetz's plays lies in the awareness of context. It is a simple but crucial insight that none of the acts of violence -- from the most trivial to the most grave -- occurs in a vacuum. This may appear platitudinous, but it is precisely

8. Kroetz; in: Macher, Hannes; "Was alles zur Gewalt führt. Interview mit Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Die Zeit, 23/06/72.

this question of context that tended to be ignored or too rapidly dismissed in the initial reactions to Kroetz's plays. Lifted from their context, acts of violence appear as inexplicable effects, as inscrutable as earthquakes. Kroetz aims to expose the causes that accompany the effects; his subject is not violence, but the aetiology of violence.

The tendency of audiences to isolate the acts from the context in which they take place owes its origins in no small measure to the plethora of film and television violence that has been spreading since the end of the 1960s, and in which various acts of physical brutality from rape to murder are presented in such a way that the spectacle of violence becomes an end in itself. As a consequence, audiences are discouraged from looking for explanations: violence that is gratuitous can be equated with violence that arises from a nexus of cause and effect.

The mention of films suggests an appropriate parallel in the work of Kroetz. The German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder produced a film version of the early play Wildwechsel and a comparison of the two works will reveal a yawning abyss in their creators' attitudes to the material of violence.

In Kroetz's play care is taken to provide adequate evidence and prompting to allow the audience to analyse the causes for the murder of Erwin by his young daughter and her lover. Despite the undeniable brutality of the act -- Erwin

is lured to a lonely part of the woods, shot by Franz and clubbed with the rifle by Hanni to "finish him off" -- the murder remains the end result of a chain of cause and effect.

In Fassbinder's film version the balance between the murder and its context is wilfully distorted in deference to the sex-motif. His camera reveals a suspiciously frequent presence at scenes of sexual intercourse; there are numerous shots of Hanni undressing, a needless and silly close-up of Franz's genitals and, in general, a voyeuristic lingering on Hanni's nascent sexuality. As a result the audience is invited to see her merely as some budding nymphomaniac, rather than as a thirteen-year-old girl unable to cope with the discovery of puberty. Hanni is denounced as a sex-monster, and the theme of sex, an integral part of the motivation in Kroetz's play, is reduced to a mechanism for cheap thrills.

This is not the only instance of Fassbinder's denunciatory modifications to the original text. His cynical attitude to the characters is particularly highlighted in one invented scene in which Erwin falls on Hanni on the table in a slobbering spasm of sexuality. The suppressed, unspoken affection of father for daughter which Kroetz originally portrays is eliminated.

Perhaps the most unacceptable interference on Fassbinder's part is in his invented dialogue in the scene where Franz finds that Hanni has procured a pistol, as

they had tentatively suggested earlier. An entirely misleading connection between sex and violence is established when, after having made clear that the pistol is now available for the removal of Erwin, Hanni asserts authoritatively: "Jetzt wird gefickt!" The fact that her parents are in the next room and might overhear "macht besonders geil"⁹. In this way, the motive for the murder is reduced to sexual lasciviousness.

The whole tone of the Fassbinder film makes it hard for the audience to look at the murder in any other way than as an extension of lust, displayed for its own sake. The balance of cause and effect which Kroetz aimed at in his play has been destroyed. From the very start the audience is led to see the relationship between Franz and Hanni in terms of "cheap sex", and it is then difficult to see the murder as anything but "cheap violence". The context has been blurred, and one may be forgiven for failing to recognise it from Fassbinder's film if one has not read Kroetz's original text. Kroetz himself reproached the film for: "Alles, was an diesem Film obszön ist, die Verschleierung der Motive, die offene, unverständliche Brutalität, die geile Kameraführung"¹⁰, and indeed went to court to defend authors against becoming "Freiwild,... wenn es um die kommerziellen Interessen

9. In Wildwechsel, ein Film von Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Atlas Filmverleih GmbH, 1973.

10. Kroetz; letter published in Theater heute, Heft 4, April 1973; Fassbinder's reply published in the same issue.

der Produzenten geht" ¹¹. It is significant that, even today, many distributors of the film choose to adorn their advertisements with the titillating information: "UNGEKÜRZT".

Wildwechsel the film was quite a different thing from Wildwechsel the play, and Fassbinder is not Kroetz.

Predictably, however, one of the main effects of Fassbinder's film on Kroetz's reputation was to help to perpetuate -- and in some cases to create -- the myth of Kroetz the "Sau". However vehemently he later disassociated himself from the film, the damage was already done. The fact remains, however, that the film and the play are two fundamentally separate works, and it is unfair to impute to Kroetz the same short-term motivation of commercial success that would seem to lie behind Fassbinder's "Verfilmung". His play displays effects, Kroetz's play probes causes.

In Fassbinder's Wildwechsel sex and violence serve to titillate and/or to shock. Kroetz's play makes a determined attempt to outline the context in which the brutality takes place. That it in some ways falls short of this goal is a failure of craftsmanship, not of intention, and it is regrettable that formal shortcomings should lead to the tendency among audiences and critics to confuse reformist zeal with quick-sell commercialism, or, to borrow Ernst Wendt's

11. Kroetz; in: T.T.; "Im Wildwechsel-Streit gewinnt Kroetz gegen Fassbinder", in Frankfurter Rundschau, 24/12/74.

words, "jene Beschreibung der Zustände als die Schweinereien zu diffamieren, die diese Zustände selber sind" ¹².

Another interesting feature of Wildwechsel is that it is based on a real-life incident, as are several of Kroetz's plays. Oberösterreich and Sterntaler are also inspired by actual occurrences reported in the papers, and a number of plays derive from events that recur frequently in the press -- the seemingly inexplicable suicide gesture of Fräulein Rasch, for example, as Kroetz explains explicitly in the introduction to Wunschkonzert:

"Das Stück ist der Vorschlag zur Darstellung eines Sachverhaltes, der mir oft in Polizeiberichten aufgefallen ist." ¹³

The important point in this is the reminder that the violence in Kroetz's plays is not invented. The frivolous audience's first defence mechanism against, say, the murder of Erwin is the cry of improbability. The incident is decried as not being true to life and therefore of no consequence. This facile argument is thus swiftly gelded.

Kroetz's treatment of this and other crimes culled from newspaper reports aims to bring the violence of such events to the attention of the public in a way that the newspapers seldom do, that is, to bring it to the critical attention of the public. The coverage of atrocity in the popular press tends to restrict emphasis to the sensational headline, the

12. Wendt, Ernst; Moderne Dramaturgie, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, p.100.

13. Kroetz; GS, p.185.

gory photograph and the short account in which horror value is given preference over analysis. The end result is to create the same unreal vacuum as Fassbinder's film. Kroetz's plays aim to open up an extra dimension, to shift the emphasis from the gruesome effects -- which he does not deny -- to the gruesome causes.

Kroetz's perpetual attention to background and context makes it clear that the violence in his plays is committed, not by individuals, but by individual members of a specific social structure. The distinction is by no means tenuous. Violence in Kroetz's plays is a social phenomenon. In an interview with Hannes Macher at the start of his career he asserts:

"Ich glaube, daß meine Einakter mit Oh Calcutta, mit Pimmelherzeigen und solchen Sachen rein gar nichts, mit Sozialkritik dagegen eine Menge zu tun haben. ... Mir geht es um die Bewußtmachung von so Vorgängen wie: Warum bringt ein Mann das ledige Kind seiner Frau um? Oder: Warum hat ein Arbeiter ein Mädchen vergewaltigt? Nicht die Gewaltakte sind doch Gegenstand meiner Einakter, sondern die sozialen und geistigen 14 Zerstörungen, aus denen diese Gewaltakte entstehen."

This highly significant final remark -- one often quoted in defence of his early plays -- does not, however, completely express his intention. Like the plays themselves, it calls attention to the violence that exists in real life and asks the audience to see this violence in its causes as well as in its effects. However, still like the early plays,

14. Kroetz; in: Macher, Hannes; "Was alles zur Gewalt führt. Interview mit Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Die Zeit, 23/06/72.

it carries no explicit call to action and offers no practical guidelines for the elimination of the causes of violence.

Answering these two final criticisms will prove a thorny problem throughout Kroetz's career, as will be shown in a later context. Certainly, whether or not one accepts their central validity to political theatre, it is clear that Kroetz, in his early plays, substantially ignores them and prefers to concentrate on the identification of the origins of violence.

Simon Trussler begins his monograph on Edward Bond with the proposition:

"Bond does not write about violence: he writes about the effects upon the human spirit of a violent environment." ¹⁵

This could apply with equal accuracy to Brecht, whose attitude to the brutality and immorality of the underprivileged is succinctly expressed in a couplet from the song "Über die Unsicherheit menschlicher Verhältnisse":

"Wir wären gut -- anstatt so roh
Doch die Verhältnisse -- sie sind nicht so." ¹⁶

Kroetz joins with his colleagues in recognising asocial behaviour as a result of an asocial environment, and not vice versa.

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15. Trussler, Simon; Edward Bond, Writers and their Work 249, Longman, 1976, p.3.
16. Brecht; Die Dreigroschenoper, GW2, p.432.

In his essay On Violence Bond likens the human capacity for violence to the capacity of dogs for swimming: in contrast to breathing, it is neither instinctive nor necessary. To believe the contrary is to maintain that man is innately wicked, that his desire to inflict suffering on others is part and parcel of human nature. If this is true, violence is natural and inevitable.

However, the only way in which human violence can be considered natural is in the way that it is natural to animals -- as a biological mechanism for survival. A starving dog is more likely to attack another dog in order to get food than is a well-fed dog who has no reason to doubt the arrival of his next meal. The same is true of a starving man. This situation becomes political when the "well-fed man" turns to violence against the starving man if he feels his food and therefore his own survival are being threatened. In the society in which Kroetz is writing, this latter motivation becomes a specious rationalisation in the service of the defence of the status quo. It is as if there were enough food for both dogs, but one was hoarding it all, forcing the other to attack to save itself from starvation, and at the same time justifying the first's own use of violence in self-defence.

It is such a violent environment that drives the characters in Kroetz's plays to violence: it is the violence

bred by capitalism. His characters are deprived, materially and emotionally, by a social structure that allows a select few to enjoy a surfeit of well-being at the expense of the deprivation of a mass of others.

In Kroetz's eyes, the people about whom he is writing are predestined to violence, like so many Woyzecks:

"Ja, Herr Hauptmann, die Tugend,... ich hab's noch nit so aus. Sehn Sie: wir gemeine Leut, das hat keine Tugend, es kommt einem nur so die Natur; aber wenn ich ein Herr wär und hätt ein' Hut und eine Uhr und eine Anglaise und könnt vornehm reden, ich wollt schon tugendhaft sein. Es muß was Schönes sein um die Tugend, Herr Hauptmann. Aber ich bin ein armer Kerl!"¹⁷

Büchner was probably the first to articulate this vital truth with such passion, and the theme was consequently taken up with equal fervour by Brecht and explored in a number of plays. The relation between material welfare and virtue is mercilessly exposed, most famously in Mackie Messer's song in Die Dreigroschenoper:

"Ihr Herrn, die ihr uns lehrt, wie man brav leben
Und Sünd und Missetat vermeiden kann
Zuerst müßt ihr uns was zu fressen geben
Dann könnt ihr reden: damit fängt es an.
... Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral."¹⁸

Again and again one hears in Brecht's plays the echo of the words of the wretched Woyzeck: "Wer kein Geld hat -- Da setz einmal eines seinesgleichen auf die Moral in die Welt!"¹⁷ Johanna Dark sternly defends the "badness" of

17. Büchner, Georg; Woyzeck, in Werke und Briefe. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977, p.114.

18. Brecht; Die Dreigroschenoper, GW2, p.457.

the poor: "woher sollen sie denn eine Moral haben, wenn sie sonst nichts haben?"¹⁹; Shen Te laments her inability to be good: "Ich möchte es wohl sein, nur, wie soll ich meine Miete bezahlen?"²⁰; Galilei recognises the gap between virtue and misery: "Tugenden sind nicht an Elend geknüpft"²¹; the judge in Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe paraphrases Woyzeck's cry when he sings of the "belebenden Wirkung des Geldes":

"Denn mit leerem Magen und mit bloßen
Füßen ist man nicht auf Größe eingestellt
- - - - -
Aber wenn der Gute etwas Geld hat
Hat er, was er doch zum Gutsein braucht."²²

Despite their lack of explicit comment, Kroetz's early plays ardently take up this cry. In various ways they all demonstrate the impossibility of virtue for those whose lives are steeped in misery.

As a starting point it is interesting to consider the origins of violence in the theme of abortion. Unexpected pregnancy, emergency abortion, unwanted child -- the theme recurs throughout Kroetz's early work. In Oberösterreich it becomes the subject of the play, but already in Wildwechsel, Heimarbeit, Hartnäckig, Stallerhof, Geisterbahn and Michis Blut an unwanted child plays a central role. Each of the

19. Brecht; Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, GW2, p.705.

20. Brecht; Der gute Mensch von Sezuan, GW4, p.1479.

21. Brecht; Leben des Galilei, GW3, p.1296.

22. Brecht; Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe, GW3, p.982.

pregnancies in these plays is a practical, material consideration.

Martha's pregnancy in Heimarbeit means the prospect of a third child and a fifth mouth to feed in an already overcrowded household. Martha has been forced to take a job as a cleaner to compensate for the loss of income now that, after his accident, Willy is confined to earning his living as an outworker. They have no bathroom; an old-fashioned tub is placed in the kitchen when required and serves as a bath or "eine Art Ersatz für ein Waschbecken"²³, water having first to be boiled on the stove. The tub is a symbol of their poverty, and it is significant that Willy drowns the baby in it, killing the child, as it were, in a manifestation of the poverty which makes its existence an impossible burden. At the end, when Martha returns, she prepares to wash herself in the tub and Willy touches her sexually. The cycle is unbroken. They are back together again, but nothing has really been changed, despite the removal of the child. Their poverty continues; they are waiting for the next crisis.

Earlier they had tried to avert the difficulties which a third child would create by means of a primitive knitting needle abortion. It is clear to them that they can afford neither the child, nor the abortion. (The actual cost figure is here, as in other plays, explicitly mentioned.) It is

23. Kroetz; GS, p.48.

openly stated that if the money were available the child would be aborted:

"Martha: Wenn ich jemand wissen tät, der es für einen Hunderter macht oder umsonst, tät ich es sowieso abtreiben lassen." ²⁴

But the financial realities of their situation make this "normal" abortion unattainable, while at the same time making it unfeasible for the child to be born into the already overcrowded household. Finding the money for the abortion will lead to financial hardship now, having the child will lead to financial hardship later: the end result remains the same. The knitting needle abortion is an attempt to avoid this end result by drastic intervention. It is a hack at the Gordian knot.

A marginally less brutal attempt to abort an unwanted child is made in the laconic play Michis Blut, in the form of a mustard bath. The bareness of this short play is striking. It consists solely of dialogue -- and selected fragments of dialogue at that -- between the two characters, Karl and Marie. There are no stage directions, no indications as to the settings of their conversations, in fact no extra sources of information apart from the spoken words. And in these words there is a conspicuous absence of concrete data. There is no talk of money, no mention of the reasons for the "Laugn". Nevertheless, it is clear why the baby is not wanted.

24. Kroetz; GS, p.51.

When Marie announces her pregnancy, she is notably cool and Karl is distinctly hesitant in his reaction. Their conversation reveals their real misgivings:

"Marie: Willst kein Vater sein?
Karl: Doch.
Marie: Dann ist ebn so.
Karl: Wann.
Marie: Zwei Monat sinds, daß gwesn is.
Karl: Eine Freud könnt jetzt am Platz sein.
Marie: Genau. Man muß nicht immer das Schlechteste vermutn.
Karl: Eh nicht.
Marie: Ein Vater wirst werdn.
Karl: Genau.
Marie: Dann wars ned nix?
Karl: Nein. Eine Freud muß man die Menscha schon lassen.
Marie: Genau. Will nix, als wie eine Freud habn." 25

The distancing subjunctive of "Eine Freud könnt jetzt am Platz sein" makes clear the gap between statement and reality. Joy is precisely what they are not experiencing. In the following exchange the switch from subjunctive to indicative again highlights the distance from dream to reality:

"Marie: Auf der Sonnseitn müßt man sein, dann wär alles anders. Dann tät alles anders ausschaun. Aber man muß sich abfindn.
Karl: Genau. Man muß sich nach der Deckn streckn." 25

Here we are given a brief, oblique reference to the reasons for the attempted abortion. Karl and Marie are not "auf der Sonnseitn". The reality of their situation is made clear with marvellous economy in the very first words

25. Kroetz; GS, p.202.

of the play:

"Marie: Wenn mir nur ein Zimmer ham, gehst aufn
Abort." ²⁶

This is the only concrete reference in the play to the poverty of their living conditions. Consequently, and by virtue of being placed right at the beginning, it assumes considerable force. Everything which is said after this short sentence occurs in its shadow. When the child comes, it will be the third person to live in the single room.

In Heimarbeit the possibility of a regular abortion is mentioned in order to make clear that it is financially impossible; Michis Blut contains no such reference. The audience is left to make the connection between Karl's and Marie's wretched poverty and their attempted abortion. It is no accident that the scene before the "Laugn" finishes with Karl's resigned conclusion: "Man muß sich nach der Deckn streckn." ²⁷ The reality of their situation demands an abortion: the mustard bath is their alternative to a regular operation. In being witness to Karl's and Marie's apparently callous action the audience should experience the same feelings and come to the same conclusions as does Johanna Dark in Brecht's Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe after Cridle has endeavoured to reveal to her how evil, corrupt and unworthy of sympathy the poverty-stricken packers are:

26. Kroetz; GS, p.199.

27. Kroetz; GS, p.202.

what she has been shown is "nicht der Armen Schlechtigkeit, sondern der Armen Armut"²⁸.

What we have seen in the mustard bath is the reaction of helpless creatures to an unbearable situation. Not for nothing is the scene in which the mustard bath is performed entitled "Wiederherstellung der Ordnung". An abortion is needed to restore the order of poverty and suffering disrupted by pregnancy. Poverty further dictates the form of the abortion as surely as it dictates the "Ordnung" it serves.

The surface brutality of these two abortion attempts, however, continues to offend, even if the structure of cause and effect behind them is admitted. Describing Heimarbeit in his Schauspielführer der Gegenwart Siegfried Kienzle writes provocatively of the abortion attempt "auf offener Bühne unter lautem Wehgeschrei"²⁹. This is firstly misleading -- in the production referred to, this scene, as well as Willy's masturbation, took place on a high-backed couch facing away from the audience -- and secondly wrong-headed, as it suggests that the shock effect is fundamental to the play. This implication of brutality as an "Erfolgskalkül" obliterates the social criticism contained in Kroetz's work.

Kienzle is not an isolated case. There has been a persistent tendency among audiences to see Kroetz's extreme

28. Brecht; Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe, GW2, p.696.

29. Kienzle, Siegfried; Schauspielführer der Gegenwart. Interpretationen zum Schauspiel ab 1945, Kröner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1978, p.316.

cases as extreme cases and nothing more, and therefore to miss their crucial representative value. Kroetz uses the brutality of the abortion attempts as a metaphor for the brutality of the situation which causes them. He states this explicitly in his essay Meine MÄNNERSACHE:

"In meinem Stück Heimarbeit wird im untersten sozialen Milieu ein Kind mit einer Stricknadel abgetrieben. Es hieß im Kritikertenor: 'Randerscheinungen unserer Gesellschaft ...'. Aber ich frage: Wieviele Menschen gibt es, die Heimarbeit machen, wieviele Frauen gehen zum Aufbessern des Familieneinkommens putzen? Und ich frage: Wieviele Leibesfrüchte werden in der Bundesrepublik tagtäglich von Pfuschern, von Engelmachern abgetrieben? Beträgt die 'Randerscheinung' Heimarbeit ein paar hunderttausend Fälle? Vielleicht eine Million?" ³⁰

Abortion as Kroetz presents it in Heimarbeit and Michis Blut is indeed gruesome, but it is also an undeniable fact of the society in which he lives.

That the theme of abortion means more to Kroetz than the excuse to bring "Schweinereien" on to the stage is illustrated by its recurrence in Wildwechsel, Stallerhof and Hartnäckig, where the act is either not carried out at all or takes place off-stage. Another difference in these plays is that poverty plays a less central role than in Heimarbeit and Michis Blut.

Financial security, however, remains an important theme. Hartnäckig deals with the fate of Helmut Rustorfer, whose right leg has been amputated following an accident during his military service. His father now fears that his son will not

30. Kroetz; WA, p.554.

be able to take over the running of his "Gasthaus". Helmut's relationship with his girl friend Christine thus becomes a vital consideration both for Rusterfer and for her father, who also owns a tavern. In a conversation between the two fathers Rusterfer makes absolutely clear that, as far as he is concerned, Helmut's future depends on his marrying Christine and thus ensuring the financial security of his business:

"Rusterfer: Wenn es mit dem Helmut und der Christine bleibt, trotz dem Unglück, is bei mir alles beim altn. Der Helmut erbt. Mit zwei Gasthäuser und einer tüchtigen Frau wie der Christine is er als Wirt auch mit einem Fuß tragbar. Wenn das nix is, muß ich auf den Jüngeren zurückgreifen. Dann is ein Sohn mit einem Fuß sozusagen nur ein halber Sohn für mich. Ich setze ihm eine Rente aus und laß ihn einen Beruf lernen. Einen Gastwirt mit Holzfuß gibts nicht." ³¹

The theme of Hartnäckig is the fate of the "unfit" individual in the "Leistungs- und Wegwerfgesellschaft". Helmut is the victim of a cruel scale of values that automatically discards all those who fail to meet the demands made by the pressures of material success. Rusterfer is not the two-dimensional figure of the tyrannical, hard-hearted father, he is a representative of the "kleinere Geschäftsmänner" under constant pressure to retain their position in the business world. The future for Helmut is seen in financial terms and Christine thus ceases to be a partner in a relationship and becomes a term in a business

31. Kroetz; GS, pp.73/4.

deal.

Consequently, her pregnancy also becomes a factor in the business arrangement, not only for Rustorfer, but also for her own father, in whose view the impregnation of Christine was a manoeuvre on Helmut's part to save his own skin: "Das tut er mir an, damit er dich festnageln kann." ³²

For both interested parties therefore, the baby is no more than a term in an equation, never a potential living person. To right their equation the term is simply removed. In contrast to the situation in Heimarbeit and Michis Blut, here the money for a regular abortion is available, so the life of Christine's child is bought, an investment. This makes the act perhaps less brutal physically, but hardly in terms of what it signifies. A developing human life is rubbed out for purely financial considerations.

Another interesting feature of the abortion in Hartnäckig is that the decision is made, not by Helmut and Christine, but by their parents. While Christine is at least allowed to be persuaded of the sense of this course of action, Helmut is deprived of all say in the matter. His right to self-determination is ignored. His injury has disqualified him from active participation in the ruthless "Leistungsgesellschaft"; he is denied affection, compassion and the right to be treated as a normal human being. In this callous rejection we see how deprivation in the capitalist system

32. Kroetz; GS, p.72.

is not merely material.

The same fate befalls Hanni in Wildwechsel. The decisions imposed on her by Erwin and Hilda are, as in Hartnäckig, dictated by material considerations, although of a different nature than those to which Helmut is subjected. Other than in the three plays already mentioned, the abortion in Wildwechsel is not a question of the availability of money, for Hanni is a minor and could not obtain an abortion even if she could afford it. Ignorant of other methods of aborting the child, Franz and Hanni are faced with the unavoidable prospect of its birth. For Erwin, however, the tragedy is not one of adolescence failing to cope with the discovery of puberty, but one of material practicality. The child will stand in the way of any future marriage:

"Weil ein Filmschauspieler, dem alles wurscht is, kriegt sie nicht und ein Facharbeiter mit zwölfhundert im Monat, dem is es nicht wurscht. Das ist die Wirklichkeit, die herrscht." ³³

It is a moot point whether Erwin would be less outraged if Hanni's lover were in a position of financial prosperity, but at any rate Franz, nothing more than a casual labourer without even a place to sleep, is damned outright -- "der is nix, kann nix, hat nix" ³³. Erwin cannot conceive that his relationship with Hanni is based on anything but sheer lust; love cannot exist without a secure financial basis:

"Wenn das ein anständiger junger Mensch is, mit einer Familie wie mir, dann tät ich sagn, die Hanni is noch

33. Kroetz; GS, p.34.

ein Kind, aber es kommt die Zukunft, weil mir auch einmal jung warn. Aber ohne ein Geld gibt's keine Liebe, und ohne ein Beruf keine Frau." 34

To judge by his character as it emerges from the play, it is doubtful whether Erwin would in the event be as understanding as he makes out, but the direction of his thought remains clear. He is less enraged at the moral iniquity of Hanni's pregnancy than at the stupidity of her having an illegitimate child that will bar her way to marriage and financial security. Money makes his world go round.

In Stallerhof, however, and in its continuation, Geisterbahn, the emphasis shifts to the emotional misery of the capitalist system. The financial background to the abortion attempt is never stressed. In fact, the reason for the planned mustard bath is mentioned only once, and then briefly:

"Das weiß ich, meine Tochter, wo noch ein Kind is, das zrückblieb'n is, hat net schwanger zu sein, von einem altn Taugenichts." 35

Only by a generous stretch of the imagination could one take this derogatory description of Sepp to be of significance in the way that Erwin took it as important that Franz was just a casual labourer. Certainly, the parents in Stallerhof are far from happy that the father should be an aging farmhand who has never made anything of his life, but their main concern is for the fact that Beppi is not

34. Kroetz; GS, p.33.

35. Kroetz; GS, p.154.

only a minor, but also somewhat retarded. It is unlikely that she will come to a husband anyway, without the additional millstone of an illegitimate child. For these reasons it would be unrealistic to postulate the importance of financial considerations here.

If anything, there is a fear of shame and social disgrace behind the parents' desire to abort the child, but this motive, too, is merely peripheral. When Staller learns of Beppi's pregnancy, his first words to Sepp are: "Das kost dich zehn Jahr und mich die Ehr." ³⁶ But the theme is dropped here, and one is left to conclude that a basic human concern lies behind the decision to undertake an abortion. This is not to impute too noble feelings to the parents -- they do, after all, consider killing Beppi as an alternative solution to the predicament -- but just to see in them an understandable apprehension about the prospect of their retarded daughter bringing a child into the world. Staller and Stallerin see it as their responsibility to take Beppi's decision out of her hands in order to prevent what they consider would be an unacceptable situation. In their eyes the abortion is an act of common sense: Beppi is not asked what she thinks.

While it does not come to the planned mustard bath, Stallerhof is not free of violence. Sepp's brutal deflowering

36. Kroetz; GS, p.147.

of Beppi raised more than a murmur of public outrage. To understand the significance of this animalistic attack it is again essential to view it in its context of the relationship between Sepp and Beppi. The theme of the play is not Beppi's pregnancy, but the love story of the wretched young girl and the helpless old farmhand; Kroetz probes the reasons for the surface coarseness of this relationship. In his analysis we see the extent of their spiritual oppression.

Sepp and Beppi are both unloved. Neither hears a word of affection, encouragement or compassion; they are left to themselves to find any sense of warmth or dignity in their lives. In the opening scene of Stallerhof Beppi struggles to read a postcard from her godmother under the untender tuition of Stallerin, who refuses to allow the child any pleasure in the occasion and grumbles at the waste of time in sending a card in the first place. Her "assistance" in the reading means that mispronunciation earns a clout round the ear, while a correct answer receives only a reproachful grunt for not having known it immediately. When Beppi has finished, she hears no congratulations in reward; instead Stallerin summarily calls her to get on with some work:
"Abtrocknen sollst." ³⁷

By contrast in the following scene, Beppi sits enraptured in the byre listening to Sepp telling a cowboy-and-Indian

37. Kroetz; GS, p.137

story while he works. The content of the story is hackneyed in the extreme, but the important point is that Sepp takes the time to tell it, even though he is at least as busy as was Stallerin in the previous scene.

The third scene shows Sepp in his own loneliness, masturbating on the toilet, a fifty-nine year old farmhand who has spent his life in daily drudgery without anyone to care for.

All four characters are brought together in the fourth scene, which continues to show the isolation of Sepp and Beppi in the way Staller and Stallerin, probably not with deliberate malice or even consciously, perpetually put them down. Staller has no sympathy for Sepp's account of his hard life and sits smugly behind his own "success", complacently implying that anyone who does not make anything of his life has only himself to blame. Stallerin then reproaches Beppi for using the sticks of firewood as dolls and admonishes her to set the table. Staller, too, rather than allow her her little game, is disgruntled that she should still be playing with "Puppn" at her age. Both share the view that she should not be wasting her time playing when there is work to be done. Significantly, Sepp is the only one prepared to let her have her fun:

"Staller: Ausm Alter für Puppn is heraußn.
Stallerin: Eine Schand is es.
Sepp: Mei, wenna ebn spielen will.
Stallerin: Hat nix mehr zum Spielen, soll was
Vernünftiges machn.

Staller: Zruckblieb'n is.

Stallerin: Zruckblieb'n bist, hörst es, was der Papa sagt. Machst uns keine Freude." ³⁸

Instead of understanding for Beppi's state, her parents feel resentment, as if the unfortunate child had deliberately remained retarded in order to avoid work and be a general nuisance. Sepp, himself a lonely "nobody", is the one who shows compassion. And he in turn enjoys the response he receives from her, the first person to display an affectionate dependence on him.

Unfortunately this is not enough. As is demonstrated by the masturbation scene, Sepp is sexually frustrated. When the situation arises, he takes advantage of the opportunity to satisfy his sexual drive and deflowers Beppi, in admittedly brutal fashion, in a fairground. Granted, the scene is shockingly brutal, but it is by no stretch of the imagination, except the frivolous, gratuitous. Kroetz has shown that the world of loneliness inhabited by Sepp makes his "rape" of the helpless Beppi a disturbing, but understandable "Kurzschlußreaktion". Sepp is not a wicked old sex-fiend, but a lonely old man suddenly confronted with an opportunity to satisfy his sexual needs. The brutality is largely contingent. As a character from another of Kroetz's plays remarks:

"Wenn man einem ausgehungerten Hund einen Fleischbrock'n hinhält, dann beißt er dich in die Hand, so wild schnappt er zu. Wennst einen satten Hund fütterst, schleckt er dir die Finger ab, bevor er frißt." ³⁹

38. Kroetz; GS, p.140.

39. Kroetz; WA, p.368.

This could apply equally well to Sepp's sexual assault of Beppi. He has quite clearly been shown to be one of the starving dogs.

It is important to remember that Kroetz is here attempting, not to pardon Sepp's behaviour, but to explain it. By laying bare its causes Kroetz hopes, in the long run, to prevent the recurrence of such an act of violence. He is well aware that the actual brutality of Sepp's act is not diminished by its being socially and emotionally explicable, and no one should do him the injustice of misrepresenting his intention:

"Ich habe nicht die Absicht, Verbrechen zu beschönigen, aber ich will sie verstehen und will sie begreiflich machen. Ich will damit zukünftige Opfer schützen." 40

Sepp's case is similar to that of Willy in Heimarbeit, whose self-respect and self-confidence have been shattered by his threefold loss, having within a short space of time lost the full use of one of his legs, his job and finally his wife.

It is significant that, immediately before drowning his wife's illegitimate baby, Willy lies on the couch and masturbates. There is a direct causal link between his masturbation and the murder. The theme of Willy's sexual frustration has been touched on earlier in the second and third scenes, where his inability to establish a sexual relationship with Martha is brought out, and again in Scene 9,

40. Kroetz; WA, p.556.

where, after the arrival of the child, Willy remains tied to his wife by sexual need. At other times he uses the baby as an excuse for an argument, but in bed, even with the child crying in the next room, he is able to forget its presence in deference to his overpowering sexual drive.

Later Martha leaves him, advancing the baby as the main reason. Thus the sole source of sexual gratification for Willy is removed. His simple equation reads: to get Martha back the baby must be removed. Far from being formally offensive, Willy's masturbation is a powerful means of indicating the sexual deprivation that drives him to kill the child. Again, Kroetz is not pardoning, but putting the murder in a context in which it can be understood.

Isolation and rejection also play a crucial role in the motivation of Helmut in Hartnäckig, although he does not translate his impulse to kill his young brother into actual violent fact. Since losing his leg in an accident, Helmut has also lost his girl friend and his inheritance, and the pain of this double rejection must be magnified by the fact that it is inflicted on him by those closest to him. His impulse to hit back is understandable. Furthermore, pushing Axel into the "Odelgrube" will not only relieve his emotional outrage, it will also force his father to reconsider the question of his inheritance, as he will then be the sole heir to the family business.

That he cannot go through with his plan to kill Axel may

be attributed to the same indistinct feelings of affection that prevent Stallerin carrying out the planned mustard bath. But Kroetz is careful to remind us that the violence is still smouldering beneath the surface and may only require one final jolt to set it off. Rustorfer provides what may well be this final jolt when he further humiliates his son by burning his collection of pornographic magazines. Now that Helmut has lost his girl friend and has difficulty establishing a new relationship on account of his physical handicap, his sexual needs, like Willy's and Sepp's, have to be satisfied by masturbation. This no doubt depresses him enough without the added insult to injury from his father. Rustorfer's goading can only intensify his son's emotional torment, and the play ends significantly with the threat of Helmut's violent retaliation:

"Helmut: Das zahl ich dir heim.
Rustorfer: Willst deinem leiblichen Vater drohn?
Helmut: Wost dich an meinem Eigentum vergreifst." 41

Helmut's violent revenge, when it comes, will have been clearly motivated. Kroetz has shown the double threat to his well-being, material -- in the form of the loss of his inheritance -- and emotional -- in the form of his rejection and humiliation. His violence will be the attack of the starving dog.

Beppi, when she suffocates her infant son in Geisterbahn,

41. Kroetz; GS, p.84.

is reacting in the same way. Contrary to expectation, she has matured considerably with the birth of her child and is quite capable of looking after him, although conditions are far from ideal. Her parents, however, still wish it to be taken into a home where it can be properly looked after -- "ein gutes Heim, wo man sich um ihn kümmert"⁴². Beppi resents this attempt to steal her child and her new-found feeling of responsibility. The hypocrisy of Staller and Stallerin -- "Mir meinen es alle gut, wenn du das verstehst."⁴³ -- cannot conceal their desire to deny Beppi her independence and to push her back into the puppet role she occupied in Stallerhof. Beppi resists.

Violence is not her immediate reaction, however. Her threat of suicide is intended simply to warn her parents, and in the event she follows a less drastic course of action. She leaves home to move in with Sepp in his small furnished room in Munich, where she is able to remain with her child. Circumstances, however, go against her. Sepp dies of cancer, leaving Beppi alone with Georg. Staller and Stallerin feel obliged to intervene, and Beppi receives notice from the welfare office that the baby is to be taken into a home. Thus her personal happiness and independence are threatened; she is again having her decisions made for her. This time

42. Kroetz; GS, p.162.

43. Kroetz; GS, p.165.

she has nowhere else to go and no one else to turn to: unable to see any alternative, she kills the baby.

It is significant that the play does not end with the murder, but with a brief scene in prison when Beppi is visited by her parents. She has nothing to say except to ask for Konrad, her pet hamster, in whom she hopes to find some sort of surrogate, however inadequate, for her baby, so she can continue to enjoy the sense of responsibility and pleasure which motherhood afforded her. Kroetz is careful to leave us with this scene as an indication that the audience should concentrate, not on the murder itself, but on what it means.

The brutality of Männersache, arguably the most violent and fatalistic of all Kroetz's plays, also has its roots in the emotional defects inflicted by the "Leistungsgesellschaft".

Martha's sodomistic relationship with her dog -- if it is true -- is the resort of a woman unable to attain normal sexual satisfaction, an indication of sexual isolation in the same way as masturbation, only in more brutal form. Otto's debasing treatment of her is born of his own feelings of inadequacy, despite his pretence of "Überlegenheit". With the sexually inexperienced Martha he can play the all-knowing man-of-the-world, and derives great pleasure from his play of superiority in its various forms, from the verbal insults he heaps on her throughout the play to the denigration of having her perform sex where, when and how he wishes. In his work as an "Eisenflechter" -- although this is definitely

not made clear enough on Kroetz's part -- he feels devoid of self-esteem, and so is especially resentful of Martha's independence and success at work. In her private life, he has to dominate her in order to compensate.

Martha herself has been physically handicapped as a child, and, presumably out of fear of her being left on the shelf, her parents have raised her to take over the family "Kuttlerei". At the sacrifice of her emotional development they have tried to ensure her material security. Now, emotionally and sexually deprived, Martha is prepared to subordinate herself to Otto's affected superiority for the modicum of recognition she receives in return. Both Martha and Otto are playing games to escape their deep-rooted feelings of inadequacy.

These games, however, become deadly serious. The frightful shooting match in which the play culminates has its own bizarre logic. Both seek self-assertion -- Otto in domination, Martha in acceptance. Otto cannot dominate unless Martha subjugates herself; Martha cannot feel accepted as long as Otto wants only to dominate. Conflicting demands are made, which neither is able to satisfy without sacrificing his or her own need for recognition. When Martha tries to force the issue Otto cannot abandon his pose of "Überlegenheit", thus driving her to more extreme measures, until eventually she confronts him with a gun. Even here Otto will not back down. The starving dogs turn on each other.

Here we see another terrible feature of the violence in Kroetz's plays -- its self-destructive impulse. The bottled-up aggression of his wretched characters implodes, and the real causes of their suffering remain untouched.

The fruit-pickers in Rudkin's Afore Night Come are victims of a system that forces them to carry out slave labour, against which they naturally feel resentment. Unable to identify its real source, however, they unload their anger on the harmless drinker Roche, for no other reason than that he is a convenient scapegoat. The provincial nonentities in Fassbinder's Katzelmacher externalise their hate of their drab existences in the figure of the "Gastarbeiter" Jorgos, whom they assault in order to vent their rage. The killing of Roche and the thrashing of Jorgos are desperate reactions that do nothing to attack the system which is the real enemy.

In Kroetz's plays the situation is even worse, in so far as the violence is vented not merely on some innocent bystander, but frequently on the particular character's closest friends or relations, just as the unfortunate Marie suffers for the misdirected rage of Woyzeck. Thus Beppi, in her bewilderment and desperation, suffocates her own child; thus Helmut plots retaliation against his brother and father; thus Hanni initiates the murder of her own father; thus Willy drowns a helpless baby; thus Fräulein Rasch reacts to the discovery of the horror of her situation by attacking, not the situation, but herself.

Kroetz describes the tragedy of this misdirected violence in his introduction to Wunschkonzert:

"Würde die explosive Kraft dieser massiven Ausnutzung und Unterdrückung sich nicht, leider, gegen die Unterdrückten und Ausgenützten selbst richten, so hätten wir die revolutionäre Situation. So haben wir nur viele Fälle von kleinen, törichten Selbstmorden und Morden, die selbst wieder nur affirmativ funktionieren: die, die so weit sind, daß sie die Kraft und den Mut hätten, 'ihr eigen Leben in die Waagschale zu werfen', liefern sich selbst der Gerichtbarkeit ihrer natürlichen Feinde aus. Damit säubern sie unfreiwillig die Gesellschaft, gegen die sie klagen. Jetzt sind sie die Angeklagten und verschwinden in den Gefängnissen oder in den Gräbern, was das gleiche sein muß. Nur so ist es möglich, daß die unmenschliche Ordnung, in der wir leben, aufrechterhalten werden kann und wir weiter darin leben müssen." 44

Kroetz reveals the violence of the oppressed as a built-in mechanism for the justification and preservation of the status quo. In this way, Fräulein Rasch's suicide gesture demonstrates merely her own weakness, and not the wrongness of the inhuman system which causes it.

The aging spinster in Wunschkonzert tries pathetically to blot out her misery in a suicide gesture instead of turning her anger against the social structure that has made her life so wretched. She is perhaps the most striking manifestation of the isolation in which so many of Kroetz's characters find themselves; but whereas this isolation reveals itself largely in extreme situations, the tragedy of Fräulein Rasch exposes the extreme isolation of a

44. Kroetz; GS, p.185.

devastatingly ordinary situation.

The action of the play comprises:

"... die minutiöse Beschreibung eines von Tausenden gleichförmig verlaufenden Abenden im Leben des Fräulein Rasch, 40 bis 45 Jahre alt, häßlich, aber gepflegt, Angestellte mit 615.50 netto." ⁴⁵

At the end of this "Alltagsabend einer Einsamen" ⁴⁵, in which nothing has happened and not a word has been spoken, Fräulein Rasch carefully lays out ten sleeping tablets, swallows them, and waits.

Every one of the repetitive activities in the course of her evening -- eating, washing up, even the hobby of "Teppichknüpfen" -- is carried out with a compulsive regard for order. All pleasure, all interest, all individuality has been swallowed up; her life is a joyless round in which she is a slave to the compulsion -- "Ordnung machen" ⁴⁶. Benjamin Henrichs goes so far as to describe the play as "ein Stück über das Unsichtbarwerden von Menschen" ⁴⁶, and indeed Fräulein Rasch has become buried beneath the ceaseless activities she pursues in the name of order. Even after swallowing the pills she takes care to wipe up the spot she has made on the tablecloth. As Kroetz writes in the introduction to the play:

"Selbstmord vollzieht sich in vielen Fällen unglaublich ordentlich. Der Selbstmord, dessen Vorbereitungen ohne Übergang aus den täglichen und deshalb als normal erachteten Tätigkeiten heraus passieren, geschieht mit

45. Jäger, Gerd; "Selbstmord? Kroetz' Wunschkonzert in Stuttgart", in Theater heute, Heft 4, April 1973.

46. Henrichs, Benjamin; "In Ordentlichkeit sterben. Wunschkonzert von Franz Xaver Kroetz in Stuttgart uraufgeführt", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 09/03/73.

der gleichen Ordnungsliebe, gleich säuberlich, bieder und stumm-trostlos wie das Leben, das ihn verursacht hat." 47

When Fräulein Rasch swallows the sleeping tablets she is reacting to a new awareness of the stultification and stagnation of her existence, a life ruthlessly dictated by "Ordnungszwang". The violence of her environment reduces her to an impersonal, robotic function. Violence is not too strong a term for this process, for it is a brutal assault on the life-impulse. Fräulein Rasch experiences the ultimate isolation of the loss of her own personality. Gerd Jäger's at first glance curious remark, "die Verhältnisse ermorden die ihnen Unterworfenen" 48, in fact echoes Kroetz's intention in Wunschkonzert of illustrating the extent to which Fräulein Rasch is a victim of her environment.

This is valid for all the characters of Kroetz's early plays who resort to violence; they are as much victims as perpetrators. They commit acts of destruction and self-destruction, but they are equally the victims of an environment that fosters such acts. Kroetz is not turning a blind eye to the responsibility of his killers and rapists, but he does wish to draw attention to the other side of the coin:

"... nicht jeder Täter ist ein Opfer. Aber die meisten sind es... Um sie sollen wir uns kümmern. Sie sind die Spitze eines Eisberges von Elend und Ungerechtigkeit in der Bundesrepublik." 49

47. Kroetz; GS, p.185.

48. Jäger, Gerd; "Selbstmord? Kroetz' Wunschkonzert in Stuttgart", in Theater heute, Heft 4, April 1973.

49. Kroetz; WA, p.557.

Heribert Dengk in Dolomitenstadt Lienz sits in prison for theft. Deprived first of affection and attention in his upbringing -- "Im Heim war ich halt" ⁵⁰ -- and subsequently of any material security -- "Wenn ich selber ein Auto ghabt hätt, hätt ich es nicht gestohlen" ⁵¹ -- he can fairly claim to have been prepared by his environment for his present situation. Here, and throughout his plays, Kroetz gives the lie to the American Dream of the roaches-to-riches matchstick seller who eventually owns his own skyscraper. Dengk is a more realistic figure than Rocky Bilbao; the environment is not so easily conquered.

If one accepts the hypothesis that society creates situations of material and emotional deprivation, it remains necessary to explain in what way violence represents a reaction to this reality.

Basically the resort to violence is a defence mechanism. This can be split into three different manifestations, although there will be a considerable amount of overlapping, as the complex machinery of human motivation does not let itself be dismantled into neat categories of component parts. These three forms of defence may be described as: the attempt to nullify the oppressive situation, the desire to assert oneself in face of the oppressive situation, and the less

50. Kroetz; GS, p.341.

51. Kroetz; GS, p.285.

easily definable "gut reaction", the outburst of anger with no definite goal other than to release aggression caused by the oppressive situation.

Of these three mechanisms the most important is the attempt to nullify the situation of threat. The word "nullify" has been preferred to "solve" because the latter implies too strongly a process of conscious deliberation, whereas, more often than not, the reaction of violence is born of desperation and aims simply at escaping or destroying the oppressive situation rather than providing for a positive alternative. This anticipates the conclusion that the violence of Kroetz's characters is doomed to achieve no improvement to their situation.

The application of violence as a means of dealing with problems can be seen in the most trivial of cases. In Lieber Fritz Susi, the young daughter of Otto and Hilde, is slapped for spilling raspberry juice on the table. This simple expedient is intended to teach her not to let it happen again. When Susi starts crying, Otto's method of silencing her follows the same pattern; he blares: "Hör plärrn auf, sonst fangst noch eine!"⁵² The equation is simple: the threat of pain will stop Susi crying; the problem is removed. In Stallerhof Stallerin uses the "Ohrfeige" as an inducement to Beppi to make a better job of her reading. Beppi corrects herself, the immediate

52. Kroetz; GS, p.119.

problem of her reading is solved --- for the moment.

The short lifespan of these "solutions" is a typical feature of the use of violence as a remedy. It is present in these more harmless instances as it is in serious cases, and it is tragically characteristic of all of them that there is seldom any thought beyond the short-term effect. Franz and Hanni see themselves in a desperate situation. Hanni is pregnant but cannot get an abortion, while Erwin refuses to let her associate with Franz. In their eyes Erwin becomes an obstacle to their relationship. Killing him is a means of removing the obstacle and solving their problem. The consequences are not considered.

That the murder of Erwin does not solve their problem is self-evident, and Kroetz is certainly not claiming that it does. He merely demonstrates that this is the reasoning behind it. It is an attempt to solve, a primitive, useless attempt that reveals the inability to grasp even the most obvious of consequences. But to Franz and Hanni, with their restricted powers of thought and articulation, it appears to offer a way out of their predicament.

The idea of physical elimination providing a solution to an intolerable situation recurs in these early plays. Erwin's own reaction to the information that Franz has seduced his daughter is no less radical than the fate which later befalls him:

"Erwin: Den müssen's zum Tode verurteiln, den müssen's aufhängen.

Hilda: Wo mir keine Todesstrafe mehr ham.

Erwin: Dann müssen's sie's wieder einführrn für den Kindsverführer! Oder ich bring ihn mit die eigenen Händ um." 53

His alternative suggestion is only marginally less drastic:

"Erwin: Sowas müßert man ganz einfach kastriern. Wegschneidn und fertig." 54

(In parentheses one could perhaps note here how the motivation for violence does not let itself be reduced to one single element. While Erwin's prime consideration is to solve by elimination, he is clearly also moved by the urge to punish, to assert himself against Franz's inconsiderate behaviour, and also, quite simply, to release his boiling anger. For the sake of clarity, however, it is helpful to isolate the particular motive which plays the strongest role in each specific case, even though, on its own, it will never be enough completely to explain the act of violence.)

In Heimarbeit Willy has been left by his wife because he is unable to accept her illegitimate child. He is now in an even worse position of loneliness than before, especially in terms of sexual deprivation. He sees the child as an obstacle between him and Martha. The baby is removed, Martha returns and Willy's sexual problem is solved. Again the short-term nature of the "solution" is apparent.

53. Kroetz; GS, p.19.

54. Kroetz; GS, p.29.

The earlier attempt to abort the child also constituted an attempt to avert the problems -- mainly financial in this case -- it would create. This motivation underlies all the abortions in these early plays, even if, as in Stallerhof, the problems are not always primarily of a financial nature. In Hartnäckig Erl instigates his daughter's abortion in order to solve the problem of the future of his business; moral questions as to the fundamental issue of the destruction of a foetus do not enter into it.

In the same way, the murder of Erwin is not seen by Franz and Hanni as the elimination of a human life, nor the drowning of Martha's baby seen by Willy as the taking of a life before it has had a chance to live. The victims become depersonalised terms in an equation. The degree of desperation renders the lives **expended** in its solving insignificant. Thus the negro Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's novel Native Son kills his girl friend, Bessie, one of the few people close to him, out of sheer fear that she will give him away and cause his arrest. Bigger's situation is similar to that of many of Kroetz's characters. Here, too, is the situation of threat, the helplessness of the threatened, the short-term nature of the attempt to solve the problem, the direction of violence against a fellow-sufferer, the tragic lack of concern for human life born of fear, suffering and desperation -- the world of Woyzecks.

It is doubtful whether the "killers" in Kroetz's plays

have more than a vague consciousness of the full significance of their acts, or, if they do, whether they can do more than dully register such awareness. Helmut Rustorfer is probably the first to do more than realise that his violent intentions are wrong, when he cannot bring himself to push his brother Axel into the "Odelgrube". By killing his brother, Helmut would solve the problem of his disinheritance. He recognises, however, that he cannot just remove Axel as if he were no more than a physical obstacle barring his way like a locked door. That the temptation to do so exists is shown in scenes 18 and 19, where Helmut is clearly toying with the notion of engineering Axel's "accidental" death. For the moment, the violence is averted.

The extent to which these violent reactions are anything but solutions is epitomised by Beppi's killing her baby rather than let it be taken away from her to be put in a home. To some extent one may attribute to Beppi's mental backwardness an inability to consider the meaning of her act, but it would be unwarranted to condemn it as the idiot reflex of a cretin. Kroetz has shown her development from the helpless creature of Stallerhof, so one must consider carefully the implications of her killing before dismissing it as an imbecile lunge towards the solving of a problem. The element of solution is present only in so far as Beppi realises that she is to lose the child whatever happens, and that by killing it she at least takes the responsibility into her own hands.

It is here that the real significance of Beppi's act lies. It is basically an act of self-assertion. In Stallerhof she appears as some sort of work-machine, starved of affection and dignity. She is constantly ordered around -- "Abtrocknen sollst -- Deck den Tisch, gibt gleich Essen... Iß und tu net batzn -- Jetzt geh. Und nach der Beicht kommst gleich heim. Marmalad machn helfn." ⁵⁵ -- and is never allowed the freedom to decide anything for herself. Even the decision to abort her child, although not put into practice, is made by her parents.

With the birth of her child Beppi has for the first time in her life a feeling of responsibility. Consequently, her awareness of life and ability to think for herself increase enormously. There is a world of difference between the simple child of Stallerhof, sitting enraptured in the straw listening to Sepp's banal cowboy-and-Indian story, and the caring mother of Geisterbahn, clumsily but tenderly relating the story of Little Red Riding Hood to her infant son. She is not yet a fully developed personality, but her progress in this direction cannot be denied.

Staller and Stallerin, however, are not prepared to recognise this progress to independence. To them, Beppi is still their simple-minded daughter who has to get on with her work and let them decide what to do with Georg. But Beppi

55. Kroetz; GS, pp.137, 140, 146.

is no longer prepared to knuckle under to this ruthless guardianship. No longer the human plasticine of Stallerhof, she has begun to learn of the possibility of self-determination. The situation, however, does not allow her to exercise this new-found responsibility; her parents insist on taking the child away from her. Beppi reacts to the threat. Now when she cries "Mama, Papa!" ⁵⁶ it is not a helpless appeal to Staller and Stallerin, as was the pitiful "Papamama" ⁵⁷ at the end of Stallerhof with the onset of labour pains; now she refers to herself and Sepp, she is consciously asserting her own rights as the mother of the child. To enforce this self-assertion in reality she takes the child and moves in with Sepp.

At this point she has the possibility of positive self-assertion: violence is not necessary until circumstances make it so. When Sepp dies she has no other course of action which will enable her to continue in this positive vein. She will not be allowed to look after the child herself and she has no one else to turn to for help. For want of a positive outlet, her self-assertion takes on destructive form. By killing Georg, Beppi does not improve her situation in any way, and it is unlikely that she really hopes it will. The significance of the act rests in the gesture of defiance it embodies. In her -- sadly negative -- way, Beppi defends

56. Kroetz; GS, p.167.

57. Kroetz; GS, p.157.

herself.

She has already done so once -- successfully, positively -- by moving in with Sepp, and has thereby won a new insight:

"Sepp: Das is es. Wenn man die Zähne zeigt, nachad kann man alles habn. Bloß traun muß man sich eins." 58

Reluctant to give up this discovery of self-determination, Beppi would rather lose the child by her own hand than surrender to the practicalities of the situation, which would probably benefit the child, but at the same time return Beppi in the direction of the miserable creature she was in Stallerhof.

Beppi's action is, of course, tragically misdirected. Like the starving dogs who turn on each other, she does not attack her real enemy, and, just as Franz and Hanni end up in prison, and as Helmut will eventually, Beppi has only worsened her situation by her explosion of violence. Seen as an expression of self-assertion in the face of perpetual suppression, however, her action demonstrates a positive gesture beneath its ghastly exterior.

Not all self-assertion is positive, however. Much of it carries overtones of revenge or punishment, and much of it is plain egocentric thoughtlessness. This is equally evident in the trivial cases where violence is used, and it is worth remembering that the terrible murders and cruelties which are committed are merely intensifications of these commonplace reactions.

58. Kroetz; GS, p.168.

When Susi in Lieber Fritz spills raspberry juice on the table, her father's reaction is a callous and negative display of authority. It is callous because it was no doubt an accident on Susi's part, and negative because it accomplishes nothing except to make her burst into tears. The same is true of the "Ohrfeige" Rusterfer administers to Axel in Hartnäckig after the boy has spitefully thrown a dollop of pudding on the tablecloth. All that this accomplishes in the long term is to engender in Axel a germ of discontent that will, if such treatment continues, burgeon into violence itself. Violence breeds violence. Why, for example, has Axel deliberately messed up the tablecloth? Kroetz gives brief but clear indication of the reasons in the opening lines of the scene in the unaffectionate way both parents treat Axel, for example, in the way they scold him to "eat properly". It is reasonable to assume this nagging is a regular feature of Axel's upbringing. Throwing his pudding on the tablecloth is his expression -- for want of words -- of self-assertion; it is a gesture of defiance against the persistent hounding by his parents. Violence snowballs. If not blocked early enough, it will grow to the massive proportions of murder, as is threatened at the end of the play.

"Das Hauen nutzt nix" ⁵⁹, remarks, significantly, Helmut. As a result of continual persecution and emotional badgering

59. Kroetz; GS, p.81.

he himself is caught up in the rolling snowball, and will eventually turn to violence in order to assert himself. It is not one single "Ohrfeige" that gives birth to murder, but the accumulation of all "Ohrfeigen" and other instances of petty aggression. When Rusterfer humiliates his son by burning his magazines, this act must be understood as almost the last straw that will break the wretched Helmut's back.

Hanni is another victim of continual mistreatment. She is repeatedly subjected to physical reprimands -- for lying (p.25), for accepting a present from Franz (p.31), for breaking her promise not to meet him again (p.38) -- and when she comes to assert herself against authority, it is little wonder that her behaviour takes the same form of violence, only to a more drastic extent. And it is hardly surprising that she directs it against her immediate oppressor, meting out in kind the treatment she has received at the hands of Erwin. She too is caught in the rolling snowball.

It is a snowball that started rolling long ago. Hanni's mother relates how her own father once gave her a thrashing for wearing nylon stockings. The lesson of this beating -- that children are not to start thinking for themselves or making their own decisions until they are deemed old enough -- is now passed on. When Hilda tries to persuade her to break off her relationship with Franz, Hanni refuses. Hilda reacts just as her father did in her childhood:

"Hilda: Eine Ohrfeige kannst ham! In deim Alter gibt's⁶⁰
noch keine Liebe außer der zu deinen Eltern."

Erwin, too, with his memories of the "Nazis" and his hard war-time youth, clearly carries the heritage of violence within him. Hanni's ominous remark at the end of Hilda's account -- "Das hätt ich mir nicht gefalln lassn"⁶⁰ -- fore-shadows her later reaction to her physical and emotional oppression by Erwin. She passes on the heritage. In Wildwechsel the explosion of violence takes place, in Hartnäckig it does not: the difference is merely one of time.

Fritz has been subjected to the same brutal treatment as a means of curing his sexual peculiarity, and with the same lack of success. Physical punishment is a hopelessly inadequate method of correction. As his sister relates:

"Einmal hat ihn der Papa bei die Sauereien erwischt, da hat er am nächsten Tag gar nicht ind Schul gehn können, so blau hat ihn der Papa gschlagt. Aber es hat nix gnutzt."⁶¹

Following his prison sentence for exhibitionism, Fritz is faced with the problem of reintegration. Although his sister and her husband take him in and give him work in their nursery, Otto sees in him mainly a source of cheap labour and denies him any personal freedom or responsibility. Like Beppi, he is expected to accept a puppet role:

"Otto: So einer wie der Fritz hat eine Ruh zu gebn und sich zu fügn, aber nicht über anderer Leut Kopf weg eigene Weg gehn."⁶²

60. Kroetz; GS, p.27.

61. Kroetz; GS, p.116.

62. Kroetz; GS, p.132.

As long as Fritz shows himself content with his lot, the situation remains untroubled. However, in Mitzi, a thirty-nine-year-old, unmarried employee of the nursery, he finds affection and recognition as a human being. While Hilde and Otto have undoubtedly helped him, they have done little to give him confidence in himself or a sense of value; Mitzi's affection is more important to the ex-prisoner than the job. Fritz sees the chance of establishing a meaningful relationship and building for the future. Through Mitzi, he can realise himself as a person, just as Beppi does through her infant son.

For Otto, however, Fritz's decision to go away with Mitzi means only: "zwei Leut weniger im Betrieb, auf die ich gebaut hab"⁶³. He cannot see beyond his own self-interest. Fritz's happiness -- or, for that matter, Mitzi's: "Die Mitzi gehört zu meim Betrieb, und da brauch ich sie"⁶⁴ -- does not come into consideration. Otto reacts solely to his threatened financial security. He informs Mitzi of the real nature of Fritz's sexual peculiarity and persuades her to abandon the idea of going away with him. Fritz's attempt at self-assertion is repelled.

It would be understandable were he to react with violence against Otto. He has come from prison with the hope of forgetting his past and finding reintegration into society. To

63. Kroetz; GS, p.130.

64. Kroetz; GS, p.132.

remedy his sexual problem he has allowed himself to be castrated. (In a revised version of the play this drastic measure has been replaced by the prescription of "triebhemmende" pills.) He appears to have made a good start, finding work from his relations and affection from Mitzi. But suddenly the bubble is burst. His past is used to bar his way into the future. It is a measure of his character that he does not resign himself to defeat or react with an outbreak of violence. Instead he leaves the scene of his defeat to try again. His self-assertion is positive.

Nevertheless, if the incident with Mitzi repeats itself, if his past is continually dragged up and used against him, if he is repeatedly unable to make use of his freedom to determine his own life and so unable to find reintegration into society -- how long can it be before he hits out at those who persist in oppressing him?

There is a positive gesture in Fritz's decision to leave, but little hope of actual success. His pious hope that "Woanders is es ganz anders" is set against Otto's cynical, but probably more realistic, assessment that "Da is es das gleiche" ⁶⁵. At the start of the play Hilde has lied to her children that Uncle Fritz has been in America, and it is with the repetition of this lie that the play ends. Hilde answers her childrens' question with the reply that Fritz is now returning to America. With powerful economy, Kroetz

65. Kroetz; GS, p.134.

reminds us that the unfortunate Fritz is indeed returning to where he came from -- sooner or later back to prison.

Fritz has started with positive intentions of self-assertion, which violence will turn into negative effects. Often, however, the violence lacks even these positive beginnings and becomes simply an act of revenge, as when Staller reacts to the news of Sepp's affair with Beppi by poisoning his dog. Certainly, Staller sees himself as having been provoked, but were it merely a question of self-assertion it would have been sufficient to fire Sepp or chase him from the farm. The killing of Nelly is simply an act of revenge; the violence in his self-assertion is gratuitous.

Oskar Schuster's dream in Dolomitenstadt Lienz of chasing ten policemen naked through the snow from Lienz to Oberlienz with a whip is also a mixture of self-assertion and revenge.

Oskar is in prison awaiting trial for assault. However, it is not such a simple case of drunk and disorderly as it might seem. From various remarks throughout the play it becomes clear that Oskar is a victim of the "Leistungsgesellschaft". His fears and discontent may be summed up in the complaint: "Es ist halt allerweil einer da, der besser is als man selber."⁶⁶ One of the high points of his life is to have repaired a coffee machine while delivering bread to a canteen:

"Eine kleine Sensation. Ein einfacher Brotlieferant richtet eine komplizierte Kaffeemaschin. Einfach so...

66. Kroetz; GS, p.321.

das war ein schöner Augenblick, wie man es alle
bewiesen hat." ^{66a}

For once Oskar has triumphed over the system and achieved a sense of value. Later, however, he falls victim to the same standards of success, giving up his job as a delivery man for a more lucrative post as a sales representative, only to find himself unable to make headway with the sale of electric toothbrushes. His new job, in fact, brings in less money than the old one, but now that he has told his former colleagues of his step up in the world he finds it impossible to go back. His success with the coffee machine was a tiny, momentary victory over the "Leistungsprinzip"; the imbalance swiftly reasserts itself.

Schuster's descent down the ladder is material as well as emotional. He is now unable to keep up the hire purchase payments on the car he is so proud of, and faces the prospect of losing it. This combination of financial deprivation and emotional inadequacy leads to violence: "Wie der Grichtler an mein Auto langt, hats kracht." ⁶⁷ The outburst is impulsive rather than consciously deliberated, a reaction of despair triggered off by the actual removal of the car. Nevertheless, it is clearly a consequence of the material and spiritual hardship bred by the "Leistungsgesellschaft". West German society demands money and success -- often identical -- as

66a. Kroetz; GS, pp.361/3.

67. Kroetz; GS, p.365.

its membership card. Despite his efforts Oskar is limited to little triumphs with coffee machines: reality forces him to dreams.

When his dreams of success are dashed, he turns to dreams of attack. The violence of his fantasy of punishing the policemen is a reflection of the violence he feels against the inhuman society which has condemned him. It is a dream of visceral wish-fulfilment, which will probably come true, in some form, in Schuster's continuing battle for survival.

While this sadistic fantasy contains elements of mere revenge, one can also see Oskar's desire to assert himself, to revolt against the forces of society which have put him in prison. Self-assertion in the manner of the American Dream does not translate easily into reality. As his companion Hermann Rasch points out: "Mir san bloß Durchschnitt meine Herren, sonst nix." ⁶⁸ Unable to succeed in the system, Oskar and his cell-mates must attack it if they want to survive. As yet, Oskar attacks only in his imagination, but it is only a matter of time before he explodes into violence in real life.

The element of pure revenge in his violent dream is less substantial than in Staller's killing of Sepp's dog. When Martha initiates the shooting match in Männersache, the swing towards positive self-assertion is even more distinct, even though it is forced into such a negative manifestation. How-

68. Kroetz; GS, p.322.

ever, one should not be misled into seeing the duel as the mirror image of the violence she suffers at Otto's hands. There is certainly an element of mere hitting back in her reaction, but in essence she is attempting more than this.

Otto has reduced Martha to an instrument of satisfaction for his needs, both sexual and, more importantly, psychological, since her sexual subordination is a means of allowing him to consolidate his role as "der Überlegene". He is as dependent on her to provide this feeling of superiority as she is on him for her feeling of being wanted. He continues to insult and abuse her, more in order to bolster his own ego than to ruin hers. The special harshness of the situation is that it is at moments of intimacy that Otto feels the greatest need to make a show of his superiority. As they begin to have sex at the end of Scene I he exclaims: "Schön bist nicht, aber geil." ⁶⁹; immediately after orgasm in Scene 3 he callously remarks: "Weil das ein Erguß war. Aber der Letzte, wo ich dir beibring." ⁷⁰; in Scene 7, in response to her sexual needs, and at the same time to avoid admitting his own, he ridicules her: "So eine Geilheit is auch nicht normal." ⁷¹

The culmination of this sexual exploitation comes in the same scene, when he introduces her to the practice of fellatio, "Weil das üblich is und ein Genuß für den Mann." ⁷² Thus

69. Kroetz; GS, p.90.

70. Kroetz; GS, p.93.

71. Kroetz; GS, p.101.

72. Kroetz; GS, p.103.

Martha becomes completely an instrument of sexual gratification for Otto. There will be no gratitude -- "Wennst mich aber beißt, hau ich dir eine herunter." ⁷³ -- so there will be neither physical nor emotional pleasure for her in the act.

The sexual indignities which Martha must suffer are only one aspect of a general degradation to which Otto subjects her. For the most part she submits willingly, in the hope of winning Otto's affection through sacrifice and thus bringing them together. But this is precisely what he aims to avoid; he strives to keep her suppressed in order that his own fears of inadequacy remain hidden. He is, for example, jealous of her dog, Rolfi, afraid that it is a better lover than himself, but at the same time he does not want Martha to get rid of it, as that would make him feel bound to her. In Scene 4 Martha lies to him that she has carried out his earlier wish and killed Rolfi. Otto immediately backs down to prevent the incident being used to bring him and Martha together: "Das hätts nicht braucht, wo ich jetzt eine andere hab." ⁷⁴ Martha thus sees herself rejected once again.

Gradually, however, the worm turns. Significantly, in her self-assertion, Martha sees fit to jibe at the sexual potency and manliness which Otto has flaunted throughout. When Otto hears the dog barking while they are having intercourse Martha asks him if he is afraid of Rolfi's ghost:

73. Kroetz; GS, p.103.

74. Kroetz; GS, p.95.

"Otto: Bei mir gibts keine Angst.
Martha: Warum verläßt dich dann die Potenz?" 75

In the same scene she begins to answer him back, and finally she turns to the offensive herself in the following scene when she accuses Otto of having urinated in his sleep, a direct jibe at his manliness. After a prolonged assault on her own personality, Martha hits back. But her aim is more than the pure lust for revenge that prompts Staller to poison Sepp's dog; she seeks acceptance through protest. Hitherto she has obeyed all Otto's commands and made considerable sacrifices in the hope of creating the basis for a genuine relationship. Gradually she has realised that this is a dead end, that Otto will continue to exploit her, sacrifices and all, to his own ends. She changes her tactics; she is still prepared to make sacrifices, but now she demands recognition in return.

Recognition does not come, however. Finally, he threatens simply to leave, adding insult to injury by accusing her of lacking humility, and this after all the sacrifices she has made for him. Suddenly the truth becomes clear to her: "Hast überhaupts keine Achtung vor mir, das is es." 76 And in a reflex action she fires the first shot of the shooting match at the end of which she lies dead on the floor. But she has for the first time heard words of praise from Otto -- "Bist

75. Kroetz; GS, p.97.

76. Kroetz; GS, p.104.

tapfer." ⁷⁷, has received concessions from him -- "Wiederholst eben, weilst eine Frau bist." ⁷⁷, and has seen him do something for her -- "Bringt ihr das Gewehr." ⁷⁸ For the first time she has received the sense of recognition and equality Otto has denied her throughout. The tragedy of this self-assertion is that it is attainable only in such a violent and destructive manner.

Of course, in Männersache Kroetz is not advocating violence as a legitimate mode of self-assertion; he is trying to explain why Martha has to resort to it. More than any other of Kroetz's plays, Männersache has been criticised for its allegedly gratuitous violence, and it has to be admitted that the play contains some unfortunate weaknesses. The social definition and description of the characters, for example, are cripplingly vague, and the criticism of the society in which the play is set is thus emasculated. Furthermore, an overwhelmingly fatalistic impression is created, with the result that the shooting match appears as inevitable. Nevertheless, Männersache is more than the pornographic sex-thriller some critics choose to see it as.

Psychologically, at least, Martha's initiation of the shooting match is clearly motivated. While the shot that starts it off is a reflex action, the duel itself is undoubtedly an act of self-assertion for which the rest of the

77. Kroetz; GS, p.105.

78. Kroetz; GS, p.106.

play has prepared us. The metaphor of the shooting match certainly loses much power through its sensationalism, but this shortcoming of form should not blind one to the significance of the content. Männersache attempts to display effects and also to probe causes. The surface violence of Martha's self-assertion, however, has blinded many audiences to its underlying causes, and this blindness is encouraged by the degree of pure reflex in her reaction.

This element of "gut reaction" forms the third strand of motivation in the violence of Kroetz's plays. Violence often takes the form of a sudden explosive outburst with no other purpose than the release of aggressive energy. Motivation implies goal, but it is not always the case that someone turns to violence with a distinct goal in mind. In some cases violence occurs because someone steps on the detonator switch.

In Native Son the image of Bigger Thomas violently "blotting out"⁷⁹ the source of his oppression recurs whenever the strain of the threatening situation reaches the point where Bigger can no longer think clearly and he is taken over by the visceral desire to annihilate the source of his discomfort. Often in such cases, those concerned are hardly aware of why they are reacting so violently; their reaction explodes almost at random. As Kroetz remarks in his collection of interviews, Chiemgauer Gschichten:

79. Wright, Richard; Native Son, Penguin Modern Classics, Penguin Books Ltd., 1972, e.g. pp.153,179,333,369.

"Also ich find, es is eine irre Aggressivität eigentlich da in vielen Menschen -- ich glaub, eben weil sie an sich mit andern Dingen unzufrieden sind, reagieren sie sich da ab." ⁸⁰

Oskar Schuster's scuffle with the police when they come to impound his car is such a case of apparently aimless violence, although it may seem to him in the heat of the moment that he is attacking his oppressors. We know why he feels aggressive, but the eruption into violence itself is inexplicable in terms of achieving anything. Willy drowns the baby in order to get Martha back, Staller poisons Sepp's dog in order to exact revenge, Otto forces Martha to perform fellatio in order to assert his superiority, -- but Oskar merely explodes into violence. The absence is not one of causes, but of intentions. The senselessness of his behaviour is apparent to him too, albeit only afterwards:

"Hermann Rasch: Blöder Hund, wo des gar nix nutzt.
Oskar Schuster: Des hab ich mir nachher auch denkt.
Aber da war es schon passiert." ⁸¹

Oskar's outburst serves only emotional release. Such aimlessness is generally not typical of the violence in Kroetz's plays, especially where it occurs on a large scale, but occasionally frustration, anger, despair or loneliness becomes so intense that a violent outburst, while not accomplishing anything constructive, at least provides an outlet for bottled-up emotional distress and satisfies the immediate need to "blot

80. Kroetz; CG, p.41.

81. Kroetz; GS, p.364.

out" the oppressor.

Again, one can see examples of this behaviour in trivial cases. Masturbation, for instance, is a short-term solution to sexual loneliness. Willy does not get Martha back by masturbation, nor Sepp find the answer to his frustration, but both temporarily put a stop to the incessant loneliness that preys upon them.

Not all reactions are so harmless, however. The same sexual deprivation that drives Sepp to masturbation also leads to his brutal assault on Beppi. Suddenly confronted with the defenceless body of the young girl, Sepp reacts in the same, almost instinctive way that makes Oskar attack the policemen in Dolomitenstadt Lienz.

Much of the beating that takes place is also an instinctive reaction, this time of rage. Erwin is outraged when he learns that Hanni is continuing to see Franz and has accepted a gift of a coat from him. In the heat of the moment his thoughts become muddled by his anger and he explodes into violence:

"Erwin: Der Fetzn is von eim andern. Richtig. Er stockt und gibt ihr unvermittelt eine Ohrfeige ⁸²

In other instances one can read in intentions of punishment. Erwin later strikes Hanni for having broken her promise not to see Franz; Otto slaps Susi for spilling raspberry juice; Stallerin hits Beppi for apparently threatening her with a faggot. Each time there is the intention of punishment

82. Kroetz; GS, p.31.

behind the action, but equally there is each time the trigger of anger.

Of the three basic sources of violence, the instinctive "gut reaction" is the least frequent and the least important. The twin pillars of motivation that support the acts of violence in Kroetz's plays are the attempt to nullify an unbearable situation and the need to assert oneself in the face of constant oppression. But while the element of instinctive, emotional eruption is seldom enough on its own to warrant a violent outburst, it is frequently present with either or both of the two main motives, an added emotional bolster to a rational decision. When Hanni brutally clubs her wounded father to death, her sheer anger gives impetus to a decision to commit murder which is essentially an attempt to solve the problem of his interference. The emotional despair spotlighted by Willy's masturbation helps to drive him to the act of infanticide through which he hopes to get Martha back. It is pent-up frustration and resentment that explodes to release the flood of aggression in Martha's and Otto's shooting match. In each case the act of violence is unthinkable without the emotional trigger as a necessary, but not sufficient ingredient.

In the case of Fräulein Rasch all three motivations are evident in the one instance. At the end of one of any given number of evenings spent alone in her furnished room Fräulein Rasch makes the first blemish on her joyless existence and

swallows ten sleeping pills. As Benjamin Henrichs has pointed out, however, there is more to this moving play than the "simpl-sentimentale Geschichtlein, Titel: Wie Einsamkeit zum Selbstmord führt" ⁸³. Loneliness is certainly importantly present, but only as one strand in the triple pleat of motivation.

Fräulein Rasch's loneliness consists less in her isolation from others, than in her isolation from herself. She has lost all sense of personal identity and value. It is not only that she spends her evenings with only the radio or television for company, but that she has become a completely two-dimensional robot, absorbed into the "Ordnungszwang" of her existence. It is her sudden awareness of the emptiness of this existence that provides the emotional motor for her impulsive reaction.

However, to realise this is not to explain her suicide gesture. Having become aware of the truth of her deadening existence she asserts herself, revolts against "das Unmenschliche eines totalen Verlassenseins" ⁸⁴, and at the same time she harbours the vague hope of changing her life, of bringing something "unordentlich", "auffällig", "unvorhersehbar" to its stencilled regularity, anonymity and predictability. Her suicide gesture is a sudden rebellion, "ein plötzlicher, verwirrter Ausbruch von Abenteuerlust" ⁸³. It is self-assertion and the desire to change, triggered off by the emotional

83. Henrichs, Benjamin; "In Ordentlichkeit sterben. Wunsch-
konzert von Franz Xaver Kroetz in Stuttgart uraufgeführt",
in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 09/03/73.

84. Panzner; op.cit., p.33

impulse of her sudden awareness.

Even here, where the play ends with the act of violence itself, it is not the focal point of Kroetz's attention. It is not the suicide attempt itself that interests Kroetz, but its origins. In Wunschkonzert, as in all these early plays, despite individual variations and shifts of emphasis, Kroetz is exploring beneath the surface of violence to unearth its causes. By Dolomitenstadt Lienz the acts of violence have already taken place before the play begins or are projected into fantasy, as in Oskar's dream. The audience's attention is thereby directed to the deeper issue of their causes. Without portraying the crimes themselves, Kroetz has, in the documentation of the conversation of the three petty criminals, succeeded in providing enough evidence for the audience to understand how and why Hermann, Bertl and Oskar have come to be in prison, as well as making clear how their lives are likely to continue after they have served their sentences.

However, Dolomitenstadt Lienz represents merely a stylistic development in Kroetz's career, not a change of theme or intention. Each of these early plays probes the origins of violence and each, with varying degrees of success, aims at establishing the truth that "violence is not a function of human nature, but of human societies"⁸⁵.

85. Bond; On Violence, in Plays I, Eyre Methuen London, 1977, p.17.

Nevertheless, however clearly this is demonstrated by analysis of his plays, Kroetz remains open to a degree of justifiable formal criticism. After the initial, and ultimately insignificant reproaches of gratuitous violence and pornography, the first deeper criticism of Kroetz's early plays centred on the crucial issue of his "naturalistic" dramatic form. Brecht succinctly put his finger on the main shortcoming of Naturalism when he wrote: "es kommt alles nur vor, es kommt nicht nach vorn."⁸⁶ This reproach, in various forms, has been consistently levied at Kroetz from the outset, with some justification. Depiction is not necessarily identical with explanation.

This basic weakness can be subdivided into two specific shortcomings: the absence of causes and the absence of remedies. In their photographic realism Kroetz's plays tend to record fragments of reality, but without explanation, thereby allowing all manner of misinterpretations and manipulations of meaning. Furthermore, the plays close in on themselves, offering no positive perspective, and thus encourage an attitude of fatalism in the audience.

In effect, these two criticisms attack the twin goals of Kroetz's entire literary activity -- "Aufklärung" and "Änderung". For without explanation there can be no enlightenment, and without guidelines for action there can be no

86. Brecht; Arbeitsjournal 1938-42, GW, Supplementband, p.152.

meaningful change. To overcome this double danger, Kroetz's plays must lay bare the chain of cause and effect behind the violence they portray, and must also, without inventing some spurious Happy Ending, at least indicate that the explosion of violence is not the only possible outcome. As Benjamin Henrichs neatly formulates:

"Zweierlei müßte eine Aufführung zeigen: wie es zur Katastrophe kommt und daß die Katastrophe vermeidbar ist." ⁸⁷

With regard to the "Naturalism" of Kroetz's plays, the point has been made above that it is nonsensical, if one wishes to understand the violence they depict, to isolate the individual acts of brutality and aggression from the context in which they occur. Kroetz intends to show that such acts are responses to a violent environment. And it is doubtful whether the social context of these early plays can seriously be denied.

The real problem, however, is less the absence of the social context than the effectiveness of the one presented. As Panzner writes:

"... er gibt Abbilder von Situationen, ohne vorherliegende Entwicklungen aufzuzeigen, die als Hintergrund- oder weiterweisende Information dienen würden, was den Vorteil hat, sich voll auf die jeweilige Begebenheit und die dabei gewünschte Aussage beschränken zu können, und zugleich die Gefahr birgt, über eine Aneinanderreihung von Fakten nicht hinauszukommen." ⁸⁸

87. Henrichs, Benjamin; "Ein milder Wildwechsel. Das Münchner Theater der Jugend spielt Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 02/07/73.

88. Panzner; op.cit., p.22.

No matter how accurate the depiction of reality may be, the danger persists that, if it remains without comment, the audience will not see it as anything more than a contingent backdrop against which Kroetz plays out his private fates. Even a play like Oberösterreich, which, by its statistics if by nothing else, is firmly rooted in the West German "Leistungsgesellschaft", can be -- and has been -- lifted out of its context and reduced to generalisations. Its history is replaced by eternity, its sociological analysis by psychological rationalisations. Thus Sibylle Wirsing is able to describe Heinz and Anni as:

"... schlicht das Ehepaar Jedermann,... ganz gleich zu welcher kapitalistischen oder sozialistischen Gesellschaft es gehört." ⁸⁹

This denial or sidestepping of social specificity is a familiar strategy in dealing with literature which attacks the status quo. Rose Bernd was elevated to the same "eternal" plane as Goethe's Gretchen and became another illustration of a recurring human tragedy. In the same way Wirsing makes eternal "Jedermänner" of Heinz and Anni. Using the slightly more subtle strategy of psychological exegesis, reactionary critics were able to castrate Die Weber by establishing that Dreißiger's innate wickedness could not be construed as a fault of the society he served; so present-day opponents of Kroetz can point out that Rusterfer is a hard-hearted,

89. Wirsing, Sibylle; "Ortswechsel", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 13/11/74.

patriarchal tyrant and thereby distract attention from his sociological significance. By both methods, violence becomes a general human constant that is not contingent on particular social structure.

It must be conceded that Kroetz's naturalistic style does provide some basis for such evasive interpretations. His plays may be seen as hovering in a vacuum where social context becomes an arbitrary embellishment to private catastrophes. Knowing, for example, that Fräulein Rasch earns 615,50 DM a month working in a paper factory does not mean that her isolation and her suicide gesture are in any way connected with this. One might just as feasibly conclude that the whole tragedy is one of sexual loneliness -- remember Kroetz's remarks in the preface -- and self-destructive introversion in origin. There is no compulsion to relate personal grief to social circumstances. Kroetz would hope, however, that such compulsion exists:

"Ich glaube an die Möglichkeit, daß sich durch das Ansehen eines realistisch gestalteten Geschehens im Zuschauenden etwas verändert." ⁹⁰

Significantly, however, he modifies this claim in his very next sentence:

"Aber ich frage mich trotzdem: genügt das, kann ich nicht mehr leisten?" ⁹⁰

In the majority of cases Kroetz, using his naturalistic

90. Kroetz; WA, p.601.

approach, succeeds in depicting reality and in arousing anger and protest, but he soon realises that it is necessary to achieve more than photographic reproduction and the accompanying emotional response:

"Soll ein Prozess einsehbar werden, dann darf ich nicht, wie in vielen Filmen, die Realität abklatschen, sondern ich muß sie durchschaubar machen und so die Wirkung herstellen." ⁹¹

Kroetz must make his slice of life transparent in order to lay bare its mechanics. If his plays do not explain social phenomena, they must at least provide sufficient material and guidelines to enable and activate the audience to look for explanations. The critic Helmut Schmitz states the problem as follows:

"Das bloße Herzeigen von Situationen, die, wie abgeschnitten, aus jedem Zusammenhang genommen sind und quasi nur sich selbst darstellen, ist eine Geste der Hilflosigkeit: sehen können lange schon alle Menschen sehr vieles; das Theater braucht zuvörderst nicht mehr mit Unbekanntem vertraut zu machen, sondern in einer speziellen Schule des Sehens die richtige Optik vermitteln, Ableitungen und Zusammenhänge herstellen, auf Konsequenzen zuführen." ⁹²

While Schmitz underestimates the necessity of revealing unknown aspects of reality, he is accurate in highlighting the issue of making such aspects, known or unknown, transparent and therefore understandable.

With regard to the question of the "richtige Optik", it is interesting to consider one particular factor which has

91. Kroetz; WA, p.595.

92. Schmitz, Helmut; "Eine Frau, ein Leben, ein Autor -- ein Stück. Franz Xaver Kroetzens Wunschkonzert im Kammertheater uraufgeführt", in Frankfurter Rundschau, 09/03/73.

frequently been cited as a source of confusion in Kroetz's early plays -- the occasional contingency of the origins of some of the violence. As Kroetz himself warns with reference to Horváth:

"Man ist zu Unglaubwürdigkeit und also Unwirksamkeit der Aussagen verurteilt, wenn der Zufall die zwingende Konstruktion ersetzt." 93

As early as the première of Hartnäckig and Heimarbeit Benjamin Henrichs pointed out the implications of the fact that in both cases an accident plays a decisive role as the "Auslöser" of the action. The use of this "plumpen Zufallsdramaturgie" 94, he argues, dilutes the power of any social criticism. Willy has fallen drunk from his moped and lost the full power of one of his legs; Helmut has had a leg amputated following an accident during his military service:

"... der dramatische Vorgang ist also weniger durch eine soziale Misere als durch ganz privates Pech motiviert. Sozial-kritisch sind diese Stücke höchstens in einem diffusen und emotionalen Sinn." 94

At an open discussion after a Munich production of Hartnäckig in 1976, one member of the audience argued the significance of the circumstances of Helmut's accident, seeing therein an implicit criticism of the institution of military service. Indeed, Helmut himself draws attention to this in the play:

"Helmut: Da muß aber ein Unterschied sein, ob man mit einem Rausch an einen Baum fährt mit dem Auto,

93. Kroetz; WA, p.522.

94. Henrichs, Benjamin; "Abend der Sprachlosen", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 05/04/71.

daß einem der Fuß abgenommen werden muß,
oder ob man bei der Bundeswehr war und
gedient hat." 95

Further support for this claim may be found in the fact that the play was originally titled Der Soldat.

Furthermore, in Heimarbeit, Martha's pregnancy is a consequence of her own selfish act of adultery, not of any concrete social pressure. Sepp's death from cancer is directly responsible for the situation which threatens Beppi with the loss of her child. Social responsibility seems to be absent or negligible; these are indeed private tragedies, the results of coincidences or personal shortcomings.

However, one can exaggerate the significance of these instances of "Unfälle", "Zufälle" and "privates Pech". An accident is an accident. Any social criticism in its taking place during military service is oblique, tenuous, emotional. A simple change of perspective will refocus the audience's eye on the real centre of attention. This point is made with striking clarity in one of the interviews in Chiemgauer Geschichten. In conversation with a young girl employed in a home for mentally retarded children, Kroetz questions her fairly extensively concerning the backgrounds of these unfortunate youngsters. Eventually he raises the question of how and why such mental handicaps arise. Is it because the children have physical, "medizinische Schäden", or do they

95. Kroetz; GS, p.81.

have emotional, "familiär-gesellschaftliche Beschädigungen"?

Hanni's reply is highly revealing:

"Paß auf, da gib ich dir ein Beispiel. Ich hab einen ghabt, der war bsonders schlimm, der hat mich verprügelt und hat gschrien und Telefondrähte durchgschnittn und all so ein Scheiß. Ja, was war mit dem? Der is als kleines Kind dreimal vom Balkon runtergefallen. Jetzt is er so: Jetzt hat er einen medizinischen Schaden. Okay! Aber warum, frag ich dich, kann der dreimal vom Balkon runtergefallen sein?"⁹⁶

This vital change of perspective allows for a fresh, more revealing insight. The emphasis shifts from secondary causes to basic causes, with the result that the child's mental disability can be more fully understood. Kroetz, too, is asking his audience to delve deeper, to go beyond the "Un-und Zufälle" and unearth the real sources of the disasters he depicts in his plays.

There is much here of the "richtige Optik" of which Helmut Schmitz spoke. And it must be applied to effects as well as to causes. Not that Beppi is mentally retarded is important, but the way her environment reacts to her mental condition; not that Willy gets drunk and has an accident is central to Heimarbeit, but what happens to him as a consequence of his accident; the subject of Wildwechsel is not the coincidence of pregnancy, but the various reactions it gives rise to; the central feature of Lieber Fritz is not Fritz's sexual peculiarity, but the way in which society ostracises

96. Kroetz; CG, p.172.

and oppresses him because of it.

In short, Kroetz is asking us to see the full chain of cause and effect and not to select individual incidents which can be manipulated to support claims of timelessness, placelessness and general human validity.

Kroetz raises the question of the "richtige Optik" again in the essay Meine MÄNNERSACHE. Taking the newspaper headline: "19jährige Mutter läßt zwei ihrer Kinder verhungern"⁹⁷, he forcefully states the need for rigorous and properly directed analysis of the case in order to penetrate "hinter den Schlagzeilen"⁹⁷ and expose the reasons for this crime. Not only must the questions be thoroughly pursued, they must also be the right questions.

The same applies to Kroetz's plays. Nevertheless, his naturalistic technique raises the question of whether he can accomplish more than lead the horse to water. It is little use if Kroetz asks the right questions but the audience does not.

It is to be hoped, however, that the majority of viewers will feel that the intensive detail and sense of urgency in Kroetz's depiction of situations of human despair make the inception of a constructive "Denkprozess" in the audience inevitable. It is hard to believe that even the most insensitive or the most diehard anti-communist of viewers could

97. Kroetz; WA, pp.556/7.

seriously claim that Kroetz's early plays lack guidelines as to the origins of the violence within them. Some are subtle -- the symbol of the "Wasserbottich" in Heimarbeit; the superb opening line of Michis Blut that succinctly establishes the climate of poverty; others are direct and matter of fact -- the explicit statement of Helmut's disinheritance in Hartnäckig; Otto's clear opinion of Fritz's station in society in Lieber Fritz; and others, probably the most effective, are elusively provocative -- the sudden appearance of interest on Fräulein Rasch's face after swallowing the sleeping pills; Oskar Schuster's joy as he tells the story of how he repaired the coffee machine; the short scene in Stallerhof where, immediately before the scene in which he deflowers Beppi, Sepp is seen alone in his room, talking to his dog for company. Kroetz's plays are loaded with provocation.

Nevertheless, one is always brought back to the question: Is this implicit provocation enough? Is the opening line of Michis Blut, brilliantly economical though it is, enough on its own to make clear that Karl's and Marie's attempted abortion is a consequence of their severe financial hardship? Granted, the line occurs in a position of emphasis and its implications are clear after leisured analysis, but, in performance, how effective is it? Similarly, how much of the information in the introduction to Wunschkonzert comes across through the action of the play itself?

In his foreword to Saved Edward Bond declares the play to

be "almost irresponsibly optimistic" ⁹⁸ . He singles out Len's activity in the final scene of repairing the chair as an expression of hope, of "clutching at straws" ⁹⁸, which he views as the only realistic thing to do. The actions of the other characters -- Pam reading, Mary tidying up, Harry doing the pools -- are to be seen as further expressions of this desperate optimism. However, measured against the atmosphere of hopelessness of the rest of the play -- Len's continual rejection by Pam, the smouldering antagonism between Harry and Mary, the brutal stoning of the baby -- it is unlikely that Len's efforts in repairing the chair stand a chance of appearing at all "optimistic". Equally feasibly could they be seen as an expression of resignation, of the futility of trying to carry on, of the continuing lack of compassion and communication between people (Len's request for a hammer is ignored) -- in short, of the uselessness of clutching at straws. The implications of the title and the explicit comments of the foreword are really external to the play itself, the effect of which must be judged by its performance alone. By this criterion it is questionable whether Saved fulfils Bond's intention of social criticism.

Kroetz faces the same difficulty: reformist zeal is not enough. His Naturalism, using the term fairly loosely, would not seem to be the most effective method of embodying his

98. Bond; "Author's Note to Saved", in Plays I, loc.cit., p.309.

social criticism in his plays. Within this naturalistic approach the depiction of violence is no doubt intended to provoke the audience, through shock, into recognising violence as a real, social phenomenon which can and must be eradicated. What are the sterile statistics of the abortion figures compared to the living horror of Martha's lunges with the knitting needle? Kroetz's extreme representation of acts of violence aims to tear aside blinkers. It was not long, however, before he became aware of the built-in backfire of this approach -- shock shocks. Or it titillates.

A parallel may be drawn with another author who employs a similarly extreme, almost super-naturalistic technique -- the American novelist Hubert Selby jr. The violence in Selby's notorious Last Exit to Brooklyn out-Herods Herod in its relentless heaping up of gruesome excess. The chapter dealing with the prostitute Tralala is the most effective and horrific example of his technique, the atrocities escalating to unspeakable peaks until they reach one unbroken climax of horror. The sensitive reader is soon overtaken by incredulity and realises that the surface violence is intentionally unbelievable, a rhetorical device that first involves, then distances the reader, forcing him to the question of what kind of society can create Tralalas and the horrors that befall them. The not so sensitive reader on the other hand -- witness the trial report -- is shocked and shocked and shocked. He can see nothing but the elastic catalogue of

brutality and recoils in disgust. Or else he develops a perverse, lascivious interest in the never-ending degradation of Tralala's body. Either way, all sense of underlying purpose is blurred to invisibility and the author's intention is debased to pornography.

Kroetz runs the risk of suffering from the same backfire. Despite the clearly indicated social context of, say, Heimarbeit, the horror of its abortion scene tends to play to blinkered audiences of morally outraged Mrs Grundies or misdirected voyeurs. Kroetz's starving dogs tear themselves apart as a mere spectacle.

Kroetz was not slow to see the danger. As early as in Hartnäckig the violence does not take place within the play. The final scene makes quite clear that the atmosphere is pregnant with violence waiting only to be triggered off. By transposing the inevitable retaliatory attack on Rusterfer to a time outwith the action of the play, Kroetz avoids the danger that the audience will lose its critical faculty by being confronted with the actual spectacle of the brutality. The same is true of Lieber Fritz. The play has shown the difficulties Fritz faces in his efforts to reintegrate himself into society and, despite the faint gesture of hope, it ends with the almost certain knowledge that he will eventually be returned to "Amerika", to prison.

The effectiveness of this method measured against that of direct representation is a moot point. Wedekind, for

example, uses both techniques in Frühlings Erwachen. On the one hand he withholds from the audience the abortion and resultant death of Wendla, and, on the other, he frankly displays the masturbation race of the prison inmates. Which provides the stronger challenge to the audience to reflect about the implications of these acts is largely a question for individual viewers, but in Kroetz's case, to judge by the rush of negative criticism which greeted, above all, Wildwechsel, Heimarbeit and Männersache, it would seem assured that the disadvantages of his explicit depiction of acts of violence far outweigh the advantages in this respect.

While Hartnäckig sidesteps this danger, it remains open to the criticism of being too negative. This is the second prong of the critical attack on Kroetz's early plays. The violence remains an inevitable fact that has merely been shifted outwith the time scale of the play. If the first of Benjamin Henrich's criteria has been satisfied and the causes of the impending catastrophe revealed, it has not been shown "daß die Katastrophe vermeidbar ist"⁹⁹. This criticism can be levelled at all of Kroetz's early plays; it takes the reproach of the absence of comment a step further to demand the presence of constructive comment. In these plays the future remains for the most part a frightening blank: he does not even afford his characters the gesture of mending chairs.

99. Henrichs, Benjamin; "Ein milder Wildwechsel. Das Münchner Theater der Jugend spielt Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 02/07/73.

At the end of Hartnäckig Helmut has no other course of action but to strike back against his continuing repression, and he has no other weapon but violence. What else can Karl and Marie do about the impossible prospect of having a baby in their impoverished circumstances but abort it, and what other means does their poverty allow them except the primitive mustard bath? Each of the tragedies has its own dire inevitability.

The greatest danger in demonstrating the necessity of violence is that it could encourage a fatalistic pessimism in those who witness it. One can appreciate Kroetz's intention in displaying:

"... wie sehr der kolportagehafte Verlauf Notwendigkeit ist: Explosion ungelöster Probleme, unbewältigten Lebens".¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, if violence is shown to be inevitable, it is pointless to expose its causes. What use is "Aufklärung" if it is coupled with the implication that "Änderung" is impossible?

Of these early plays Wildwechsel, Heimarbeit, Hartnäckig, Männersache, Stallerhof, Geisterbahn, Michis Blut and Dolomitenstadt Lienz end in unequivocal pessimism. Willy gets Martha back, but only by murdering her infant son, and in effect nothing has changed; they have merely gained time till the next crisis. Martha in Männersache does make a gesture

100. Wendt, Ernst; Moderne Dramaturgie, loc.cit., p.114.

of self-assertion, but this is possible only as self-destruction. Stallerin cannot go through with the abortion, but the future, even with the baby and Beppi's progress, is a cul-de-sac. Dolomitenstadt Lienz appears to end with an open future -- "Nachm Einsperrn kommts Auslassn!"¹⁰¹ --, but the time-killing conversation of the three cell-mates makes clear that their release is only part of an unbroken cycle. Though the words are not spoken, we can be sure that "nachm Auslassn kommts Einsperrn wieder!"

Of the three radio plays in the Trilogie Münchner Leben, written in 1971 and 1972, Gute Besserung and Bilanz end in overwhelming resignation. At first this may appear a slightly preferable alternative to violence, but in effect it is no less tragic than any of the acts of brutality in the stage plays. The couples in both these "Hörspiele" have been sucked dry by life and flung away, dried-out empty husks with nothing to show for their slavery but vague longings for a better life. In Inklusive, the final play in the series, the younger couple Karl and Anna at least begin to question their present situation. But the tone of the play suggests that, after their holiday, this working couple will not follow up their examination of their circumstances, but will be dragged back into the stultifying rut of everyday life. The apathy that will envelope them is the keynote of the whole trilogy.

101. Kroetz; GS, p.311.

It is Fritz who makes the first notably positive gesture. His first attempt to find foot in society on release from prison is thwarted by the self-interest of Otto and Hilde, but commendably he does not give up after this defeat. Instead he withdraws to try again. Nevertheless, Kroetz leaves us with the almost certain knowledge that he has merely postponed his ultimate failure to achieve "Resozialisierung"; wherever he goes, "da is es das gleiche" ¹⁰². Reality will steamroller his positive gesture.

However, while the external forces of society remain hostile and destructive, it is worth noting the significance of Fritz's positive attitude itself. He is the first character in these early plays to display an awareness of his situation. In Fräulein Rasch this positive slant is further highlighted. Again, however, this is obscured by the nature of her reaction. Like Martha's spontaneous burst of self-assertion in Männersache, Fräulein Rasch's act of defiance turns in on itself to destroy her. Even were her suicide to succeed, it would be anything but a solution to her despair. The positive element in Wunschkonzert, as in Lieber Fritz, consists rather in the attitude behind the gesture. In this play we see a worm turning. As Benjamin Henrichs observes:

"Nachdem sich Fräulein Rasch jahrelang brav an Spielregeln gehalten hat, die nicht ihre waren, versucht sie nun trotzig, die Spielregeln umzustoßen." ¹⁰³

102. Kroetz; GS, p.134.

103. Henrichs, Benjamin; "In Ordentlichkeit sterben. Wunschkonzert von Franz Xaver Kroetz in Stuttgart uraufgeführt" in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 09/03/73.

Critics have argued speciously that Wunschkonzert -- to take a representative example -- provides:

"... keinen, aber auch gar keinen über Illustrierten-Ratgeber-Klischees hinausweisenden Anhaltspunkt, warum da eine noch nicht alte, nicht schlecht aussehende, alleinstehende Frau einen Selbstmordversuch unternimmt." ¹⁰⁴

They see no reason why this sudden act should take place on this particular evening, on which nothing unusual occurs. This approach misses the whole point. The evening of Fräulein Rasch's suicide gesture contains the final moments of a lengthy process of erosion. The error of the critics has been to demand something distinctive of this evening, whereas it is precisely its deadening sameness that is crucial. Fräulein Rasch's action is the result of an accumulated history of identical evenings: the camel's back is broken.

What does distinguish this evening from any of the preceding ones is not an external event, but an event of the mind; Fräulein Rasch is the first of Kroetz's characters to journey from ignorance to insight.

In Michis Blut Marie complains:

"Wissn müßt man halt, wie man dran is, dann tät man es schon ändern." ¹⁰⁵

The tragedy of Kroetz's early characters is that they all lack this vital insight. They are helpless, inarticulate,

104. Schmitz, Helmut; "Eine Frau, ein Leben, ein Autor -- ein Stück. Franz Xaver Kroetzens Wunschkonzert im Kammertheater uraufgeführt", in Frankfurter Rundschau, 09/03/73.

105. Kroetz; GS, p.201.

"nicht in der Lage, über das hinaus zu reflektieren, was sie direkt betrifft" ¹⁰⁶. Willy, Beppi, Hanni -- all murder as a gesture of helplessness. Hermann, Bertl, Oskar -- all sit in prison without understanding the real reasons why they are there. Rustorfer, Otto, Staller and Stallerin -- all are blind to everything beyond the superficial reality of their situation, and so hit out destructively. Fräulein Rasch -- and to a lesser extent Martha in Männersache -- makes a journey of the mind from ignorance to insight; now she tilts against the order of things in a desperate effort to change it.

Nevertheless, Wunschkonzert leads to another dead end. Fräulein Rasch will not die from the small overdose she takes, but the play provides no reason to believe that she will, in the morning, be able to transform her new awareness into positive steps to improve her situation and to restore the life-impulse she has lost in the treadmill. Fräulein Rasch's awareness marks really only the beginnings of insight.

In the introduction to the play, however, Kroetz indicates how he wishes her progress to "ein Stück Bewußtwerdung" ¹⁰⁷ to develop. Here he laments the tragic misdirection of aggressive energy by his wretched figures, who thereby succeed only in destroying themselves instead of attacking their real enemy --

106. Kroetz; in: Thieringer, Thomas; "Zwischen Angst und Narrenfreiheit. Der linke Bühnenautor Franz Xaver Kroetz zu seinem neuen Theaterstück", in Vorwärts, 05/10/72.

107. Rohde, Gerhard; "Ein Kroetz -- fürs Fernsehen. Erst-aufführung von Oberösterreich im Zimmertheater Heidelberg" in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 16/10/72.

"die unmenschliche Ordnung, in der wir leben" ¹⁰⁸. Fräulein Rasch is an example of this partial awareness which is enough to provoke aggressive reaction, but which fails to give it the correct direction. Here in the introduction is the first explicit accusation of society's guilt; here is the first exhortation to the oppressed to change the social order.

As yet, however, this exhortation remains outside the actual play. As described by Kroetz, Fräulein Rasch is one of the tragic cases referred to in the introduction, whose protest turns in on itself and destroys her. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the growing awareness on Kroetz's part that his dramatic technique as it stands might not be suitable for engendering the constructive, questioning response in the audience at which he is aiming. The introduction itself is not a significant technical development, as any play can be provided with an explanatory preface. Indeed Kroetz's first attempts to broaden the effectiveness of his theatre are all external -- the explanatory essay Meine MÄNNERSACHE, the accompanying comments to the plays given in interviews, the information provided in programmes. Of greater importance, however, are the internal modifications. From about the time of Dolomitenstadt Lienz, with its illusion-breaking "Songs", Kroetz begins to modify his dramatic technique so as better to fulfil his political purpose.

108. Kroetz; GS, p.185.

The first significant step in this development comes with Oberösterreich. Before moving on to this play, however, it is of interest to consider the history of Kroetz's "enfant terrible", Männersache, arguably the most violent of all his works. Here, more than in any other Kroetz play, the audience is bombarded with violence and horror and deprived of even the tiniest ray of hope. Talking of his naturalistic technique in general, Kroetz warns:

"Aber das ergibt ein derart passives und negatives Bild, daß es die, die es angeht, viel zu sehr deprimieren könnte, um noch eine Lösungsmöglichkeit anzubieten." 109

Of all his plays, Männersache is the most susceptible to this danger, and its metamorphosis in development reveals Kroetz's striving to render it politically more effective.

The first modification came, in fact, not from Kroetz, but, presumably, from Rolf Stahl, the director of the première in Darmstadt. In this production it was felt that Otto's and Martha's fate was too pessimistic. Without Kroetz's knowledge or consent the structure of the play was altered. The horrific duel was transposed to the start and its frightening reality was replaced by alienating stylisation. Otto and Martha acted out this scene wearing colossal papier maché heads and accompanied by the music from the famous spaghetti-western Once upon a Time in the West. This grotesque "Vorspiel" over, the play resumed from the beginning and continued as Kroetz

109. Kroetz; in Maus, Sibylle; "Wenn sie wenigstens tot wäre", in Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 07/03/73.

had written it, until the point in the final scene where Martha fires the first shot. Here it does not come to the duel; Otto sits and stares at Martha as she gets on with her work.

The reasons for this deviation from the original text were outlined in the programme. They reflect the feeling that the effect of the play, as presented by Kroetz, would be inescapably negative. The impression that the fears and antagonisms of Otto and Martha lead "zwangsläufig zur Katastrophe"¹¹⁰ offered no positive alternative. "Es muß eine vitale Hoffnung geben, die das Unerträgliche erträglich macht"¹¹⁰, continues the programme. Those responsible for the changes in the Darmstadt production justified their decisions as the attempt to introduce this "vitale Hoffnung" lacking in the original text.

In the event, Kroetz was not pleased with the alterations. He must, however, have had some sympathy with the reasons behind them. He later explained his doubts about the play in the essay Meine MÄNNERSACHE, where he declares that if he were to write the play again, he would certainly write it differently. Above all, he senses the danger of the hopelessness in which his characters are steeped:

"So schutzlos und nackt, wie ich Martha und Otto... entlassen habe, würde ich in Zukunft keine Figur mehr entlassen."¹¹¹

110. Quoted in: Schmitz, Helmut; "Theatersache. Eine Darmstädter Franz-Xaver-Kroetz-Uraufführung", in Frankfurter Rundschau, 17/01/72.

111. Kroetz; WA, p.553.

In 1973 Kroetz did rewrite the play, under the title Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch. In a short preface he defines it as:

"... die Neufassung von Männersache. Begründung: Was soll die dauernde und keinen Ausweg zeigende Darstellung vom Kampf der Geschlechter, wenn doch die Realität so anders und besser aussieht: Durch dick und dünn halten so viele zusammen und das ein Leben lang und länger oft, und wir anderen können es gar nicht glauben." 112

Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch attempts to redress the balance between positive and negative to introduce a "vitale Hoffnung". However, Kroetz does not radically change his technique, as he does in Münchener Kindl, nor does he blend in any new elements such as the "Songs" in Dolomitenstadt Lienz. Basically he remains true to his naturalistic depiction of everyday life and tries to build in the positive perspective within the scope of this technique.

The action of the play changes significantly. Otto is still presented in his guise of superiority, using Martha as an object on which to whet his own self-esteem. But in this new version Martha is no longer as docile as in the original. Almost immediately she challenges Otto's pose as the man-of-the-world who affects to know the difference between German and Russian caviar. She is proud of her imagination in keeping a diary, a talent which Otto lacks. She is considerably more aware of her financial security and the self-respect it brings. In Männersache she responds to the naked girls in Otto's magazine by asserting: "Das tät ich

112. Kroetz; dialog, p.34.

auch machen und das Geschäft aufgeben" ¹¹³; in the later version she says bluntly: "Das tät ich nicht." ¹¹⁴ Here she has no need to prostitute herself in such a manner. Later she confidently points out to Otto that she earns more than he does, and also draws attention to the added sense of dignity deriving from her independence.

Throughout Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch, in fact, there are additions, rephrasings and omissions in individual lines and in the action itself, all of which serve to demonstrate how Martha grows to a tentative awareness of her own dignity without being led at the same time "zwangsläufig zur Katastrophe". The first words of praise from Otto in Männersache -- "Gut hast geschossen" ¹¹⁵ -- after she has killed the dog, are here replaced by spontaneous admiration -- "Raffiniert!" ¹¹⁶ -- for her inventiveness in devising carnival costumes; praise for a creative rather than a destructive act. In the later version the dog is not shot at all; the need for violence has been eliminated.

Otto is not yet ready, however, to abandon his game completely. As in Scene 7 of Männersache, he callously tries to force Martha to submit to his sexual whims. This time she refuses, realising that if she obeys, Otto will continue to use her as and whenever he pleases. As a result Otto

113. Kroetz; GS, p.88.

114. Kroetz; dialog, p.38.

115. Kroetz; GS, p.99.

116. Kroetz; dialog, p.54.

virtually moves in with her, as she wanted, whereas in Männersache he continued to come and go as he chose. Later Otto again tries to assert his dominance by forcing her to perform fellatio, and once more she refuses, despite initial reservations. By this policy of refusal Martha succeeds in asserting herself gradually in the face of Otto's demands, with the result that the need for the melodramatic duel is removed.

In the penultimate scene Martha reads Otto a poem she has written, in which she professes her willingness to care for him, but at the same time sets limits and conditions to this readiness and asks understanding and consideration from him in return:

"Deine Magd in Freud und Leid will ich schon sein.
Aber nicht nur, denn mein Tagwerk verwelkt ja,
wenn ich dir immer zu Gefallen weinen muß.

Steh mir bei wenn ich müde bin am Abend,
weil der Tag dann hinkt und bricht,
und wo ich Saat vergraben hab tritt nicht hin,
paß auf." 117

Even if Otto does not understand the words of her poem, by the end of the play he has begun to accept its sentiment and to accord to Martha the respect due to her as a person. She asks him whether he would prefer her to wear glasses under the ultra-violet lamp, although this will produce two unsightly white circles on her otherwise browned face. Unexpectedly, Otto advises her to wear the glasses -- "weil die Augn

117. Kroetz; dialog, p.68.

vorgehn" ¹¹⁸. Martha's health is declared more important than her appearance. In Männersache Otto's answer would have been different, but in Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch Martha has won respect as a person in her own right.

The violent outcome of the original is no longer necessary. Reminiscent of Olga and Roelle in Fleißer's Fegefeuer in Ingolstadt, Otto and Martha can relate only in the same way in which their environment and upbringing has treated them -- aggressively. Thus Kroetz lays the blame for their shooting match at society's door. But Männersache is almost inescapably fatalistic in impact: what can it engender in the audience but a similar pessimism? The Darmstadt production constituted an attempt to provide a perspective of hope, but it tended to leave violence hanging in the air in the same way as in Hartnäckig. As there is no change in the relationship between Otto and Martha, there is nothing to suggest that the catastrophe has been avoided, and not just postponed.

By the end of Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch, on the other hand, there have been significant developments in both Martha and Otto. Their unequal seesaw position is balanced out in the course of the play. The only major modification in Kroetz's naturalistic technique has been a toning down of his "Sprachlosigkeit". His characters have been allowed to talk simply and naturally -- if not with complete articulacy -- about

118. Kroetz; dialog, p.69.

what they think and feel. In Act 3, Scene 2, for example, Otto refers to his inferiority complex without it seeming that the author is intruding to explain it; or, in Scene 4 of the same act, Martha gives voice to her feelings in her poem. By allowing the characters greater powers of articulation, Kroetz is able to make his depiction of reality considerably more transparent.

In Oberösterreich he continues this process. In the course of the play the world of Heinz and Anni is made transparent -- allowing for "Aufklärung" -- and the possibility of a positive future is indicated -- allowing for "Änderung". Granted, there is a deliberate restraint on Kroetz's part at the end of the play, warning against unconditional optimism. Like Fräulein Rasch, Heinz and Anni experience "ein Stück Bewußtwerdung" ¹¹⁹, but here too it is no simple matter to translate this awareness into reality.

Oberösterreich has been described as Kroetz's "Konsumstück":

"Das Thema von Oberösterreich läßt sich auf ein Datum aus der Sozialstatistik reduzieren: Ehepaare mit weniger als 1000 Mark netto im Monat werden durch eine unerwartete Schwangerschaft vor schier unüberwindliche Schwierigkeiten gestellt." ¹²⁰

With this simple sentence Hellmuth Karasek begins his review of Oberösterreich, continuing immediately to point out that

119. Rohde, Gerhard; "Ein Kroetz -- fürs Fernsehen. Erstausführung von Oberösterreich im Zimmertheater Heidelberg", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 16/10/72.

120. Karasek, Hellmuth; "Kleiner Mann, was nun? Qualtinger inszeniert Kroetz in Hamburg", in Die Zeit, 01/06/73.

Kroetz has, however, succeeded in raising his play above the level of the statistical. Kroetz has managed to specify the concrete social setting without abandoning the rich human texture of his figures. Even a writer of such indisputable compassion as George Orwell falls victim, to some extent, to the trap of collecting statistical evidence at the expense of human interest. The Road to Wigan Pier abounds with inventories of miners' rents, wages, social welfare subsidies and food bills; but whenever statistics cease to be identifiable with living human beings they become arid and devoid of meaning. It is people who invest statistics with meaning, and never vice versa. Oberösterreich deserves considerable acclaim for its balance of bald fact and vital human interest.

In terms of their financial situation Heinz and Anni are, to use Anni's words, "der gute Durchschnitt" ¹²¹, and certainly they have attained a level of modest financial well-being -- car and colour television, a new "Wohnzimmerschrank", an excursion to Lake Starnberg on Easter Sunday. With both of them working -- Heinz as "Ausfahrer", Anni as "Verkäuferin" -- they enjoy a life not without its little luxuries.

Kroetz conveys this simply and vividly in the first act, managing at the same time to reveal the fragility of this cosy world. In doing this, he avoids a crass resort to naked statistical data. All references to statistics are naturally

121. Kroetz; GS, p.399.

interwoven into the fabric of the play in the conversation of Heinz and Anni. Throughout this first act Heinz and Anni are made to reveal their dreams of happiness in the world of consumer goods -- in their longing to be with the stars of the television show in a fine restaurant; in Heinz's ambition to have a Manta instead of a common "Opel-Kadett" ¹²²; in their jealousy of their neighbours' expensive dish in the lakeside restaurant; in their breathless admiration of the handsome wage earned by Heinz's "Abteilungsleiter". However, precise as these concrete details are, they are never mentioned for their own sake. Kroetz is building his case, not on statistical data, but on human fates illustrated by statistical data. What he is illustrating here is the extent to which Heinz and Anni are hamsters in a treadmill.

The swimming pool is as much a wild dream as "eine eigene Insel im Meer" ¹²³. It is one of the endless supply of carrots dangled before the donkeys of the "Konsumwelt". The attainment of the Opel soon loses its importance when measured against the glories of the Manta; it becomes "ein Massnauto und kein Vergleich" ¹²². The gulasch loses its flavour beside the "Gericht mit Flambierung" ¹²⁴. In short, the objects so specifically mentioned are important only in their effect upon Heinz and Anni. Each contributes to the feelings of inadequacy and anonymity that make them such willing slaves

122. Kroetz; GS, p.388.

123. Kroetz; GS, p.387.

124. Kroetz; GS, p.390.

of the "Konsumgesellschaft".

Kroetz makes this clear from the outset. The television stars are admired:

"Weils etwas ham die zwei was einem imponiert und mit-reißt. Man vergißt sich selber ganz. Das is das Schöne daran, was Mut macht." ¹²⁵

They are living proof of the American Dream, models to be emulated. Heinz is openly jealous of his colleague for being able to afford a Manta, thus showing him that the next carrot is attainable and compounding his own sense of inferiority for not having achieved it. He is equally jealous of the impunity with which his new head of department can make advances to one of the cleaners. Heinz is so disturbed by this seemingly trivial incident that he is unable to consummate sexual intercourse with his wife. The audience can feel the same question that must be running through Heinz's head: Why does the "Abteilungsleiter" have the power and confidence to take such liberties, while he is unable to relate sexually to his own wife?

Heinz and Anni are like the anonymous black hero of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man, who dreams of getting a letter from his white masters to be handed to his next white employers. On secretly opening it he finds another sealed envelope, and in it another, and so on until he manages to open the last one. Inside he finds a note: "To whom it may concern: keep

125. Kroetz; GS, p.386.

this nigger boy running"¹²⁶; Heinz and Anni are kept running in the treadmill of consumerism.

Kroetz succeeds in conveying this so effectively that the audience can immediately understand Heinz's probing self-questioning in the final scene of the first act. His need for illusions can be seen as the fears of a man who feels himself just another product of the consumer society, a man indistinguishable from any other.

To a sensitive reader, this is clear from the action of the play, but, unlike his early plays, Oberösterreich provides extra clues to jolt the minds of the less sensitive, or more stubborn, audiences. Heinz's own remarks reveal his anxiety at losing his identity by becoming an interchangeable cog in an impersonal machine:

"Ich möchert etwas habn, was mir ganz allein gehört."¹²⁷, and, more strongly and explicitly:

"Mir is manchmal, wenn ich am Steuer sitz, oder auch im direktn Verkehr mit die Kundn, der ja persönlich sein muß, wie es heißt, als wär das gar ned ich, als wär das irgendeiner, der keine Bedeutung hat. Ich."¹²⁸

It should be stressed that this is Heinz speaking, not Kroetz. By allowing his characters greater powers of reflection and articulation, Kroetz has made it possible to express direct comment through them without, firstly, abandoning his naturalistic technique and, secondly, reducing his figures to

126. Ellison, Ralph; Invisible Man, Penguin Modern Classics, Penguin Books Ltd, 1976, p.32.

127. Kroetz; GS, p.399.

128. Kroetz; GS, p.400.

two-dimensional mouthpieces. The criticism of mere photographic reproduction has been eliminated without marring the depth or the accuracy of the depiction.

The reason for going into some depth here is to illustrate how, in Oberösterreich, Kroetz has combined the data of social reality with the way these concrete facts affect human beings; the end result is a rounded picture of a situation that is ripe for disaster. For this too is a play about violence, even if the violence does not take place.

Once again an unwanted pregnancy is the "Auslöser". But whereas in Heimarbeit or even in Michis Blut the unwanted child could be dismissed as a general human misfortune, in Oberösterreich it is indisputably a particular tragedy of the capitalist system. This is made sadly clear by the "Bilanz". The statistics of this reckoning will date, in the same way as Orwell's food bills of 1936 have become devoid of all significant persuasive effect through dating, but the significance of the stocktaking will outlive its details. More meaningful than the individual costs of "Kegelabende" and H.P. payments on cupboards is the sad conclusion that, to make room for the baby, Heinz and Anni will have to strip their lives of everything, "was eim Freude macht im Leben"¹²⁹.

In the event, Anni refuses to go through with the abortion, despite Heinz's exhortations. The importance of the coming baby, symbol of the life-impulse, is affirmed;

129. Kroetz; GS, p.410.

the positive perspective emerges.

Again, however, the transition from positive attitude to positive reality is perilous. Kroetz has shown that the advent of the baby will mean that Heinz and Anni have to live close to the "Existenzminimum". The step to violence is not a large one. As one critic correctly remarks:

"Daß es auch hier möglicherweise nur einiger Umstände, einiger zusätzlicher Pressionen bedurft hätte, um eine schlimme Wende herbeizuführen, deutet Kroetz nachhaltig an, wenn er den zitierten Schauplatz Oberösterreich zum Titel seines Schauspiels macht." ¹³⁰

On hearing the newspaper report of the man who murdered his wife because she refused to agree to an abortion, Anni decries any resemblance between Franz M. and her husband. After all, as she says to Heinz, "du bist doch kein Mörder" ¹³¹ There is no accident about the echo of the words of Franz M. himself: "Aber Mörder bin ich keiner." ¹³¹

When the baby comes Heinz will have to devote even more time to work to make up for the income lost when Anni gives up her job. Apart from the basic material sacrifices -- car, cigarettes, colour television -- he will have no time to pursue his ambition of studying for his "Abitur", which would enable him to attain the sense of individuality and self-respect he so craves. His own ambitions will be thwarted for the sake of the child. With time, the resentment he feels

130. Lange, Mechthild; "Ein normales Leben. Qualtinger debütiert als Oberösterreich-Regisseur", in Frankfurter Rundschau, 02/06/73.

131. Kroetz; GS, p.415.

now may turn into aggressive discontent, and thence to violence. Hellmuth Karasek is right when he declares:

"Kroetz handelt auch hier von den Katastrophen, die sich im Ausbleiben von Katastrophen ankündigen." ¹³²

In any case, the violence in Oberösterreich is secondary: the real subject of the play is, once again, its origins. The device of the newspaper report distances the actual violence from Heinz and Anni and, by inviting contrast with their situation, forcefully directs the audience's attention to the events and circumstances which have caused it. Elsewhere Kroetz expresses his intention:

"... hinter Schlagzeilen zu kommen, hinter solche, die schon geschrieben wurden und hinter solche, die erst noch geschrieben werden." ¹³³

In Oberösterreich he has succeeded in doing both.

It is, however, by no means inevitable that Heinz will find his way into the newspaper headlines like the unfortunate Franz M. Kroetz has portrayed the threatened animal and has laid bare the sources of the threat which might drive him to violent reaction. But he has not made this violence inevitable. By rejecting the abortion Anni and Heinz affirm life. Without their faith no change in reality is possible. Circumstances may indeed be against them, and their financial situation is made even worse when Heinz loses his driving licence and has to take a less well-paid job until it is returned; so it is clear that their positive attitude alone will not be enough

132. Karasek, Hellmuth; "Kleiner Mann, was nun? Qualtinger inszeniert Kroetz in Hamburg", in Die Zeit, 01/06/73.

133. Kroetz; WA, p.557.

to bring about a positive change. Nevertheless, the seeds have been planted. Heinz and Anni will pass on their new hope to their child and thus achieve change in the long run, as Anni's final words make clear:

"Das Kind is eine Ausnahm. Das muß anders werdn wie mir, sonst hätt das ja alles keinen Sinn. Von Anfang an. -- Hoffnungsvoll." ¹³⁴

This vague hope is developed in Das Nest to make the first concrete indications of what actual action is necessary to change reality.

In certain details Das Nest is strongly reminiscent of Oberösterreich. Its main characters, Kurt and Martha, belong also to "der gute Durchschnitt". In both plays the wife becomes pregnant, and a "Bilanz" of what the baby will mean in financial terms is drawn up. For Kurt and Martha, however, the child involves no severe financial sacrifice, although Kurt will remain dependent on overtime work.

Despite this material security, Kurt and Martha also head towards disaster. The decisive factors in their case, however, do not stem from "familiären Problematik" ¹³⁵, but from external developments. As a reward for his unquestioning industry Kurt receives a special assignment from his boss, which consists in dumping several containers of poisonous chemical waste, although Kurt is led to believe they contain merely "gegorener Wein" ¹³⁶. Unaware of the true nature of their contents, Kurt

134. Kroetz; GS, p.416.

135. Thieringer, Thomas; "Die Bedingungen des kleinen Glücks", in Vorwärts, 04/09/75.

136. Kroetz; WA, p.241.

empties the drums into the lake where he and his wife often spend their days off. Subsequently Martha bathes in the contaminated water with their infant son, who contracts dangerous "Verbrennungen" and has to be hospitalised. The subsequent action is succinctly summarised by Gerd Jäger in his review of the play:

"Kurt wird wach durch den Vorfall. Aufgerüttelt durch die Beschuldigungen seiner Frau ('Mörder'), richtet er seinen Zorn zunächst gegen sich selbst, er badet im vergifteten Teich und macht einige hilflose Versuche zum Selbstmord. Doch dann beginnt er zu denken, er durchschaut zum erstenmal seine Situation, seine Abhängigkeit, erkennt sich als 'dressierten Aff', wie ihn seine Frau in Wut und Erschrecken nennt. Er beschließt, sich und seinen Auftraggeber bei der Polizei anzuzeigen." ¹³⁷

Like Fräulein Rasch, Kurt experiences "ein Stück Bewußtwerdung" ¹³⁸, but unlike her, he is not led into a cul-de-sac of self-destruction. He recognises the pointlessness of suicide and manages to identify the real source of the disaster. He sees that he has been no more than a pawn in the game whose rules are determined by his boss. It is out of the realisation that this situation must be changed that Kurt decides he must go to the police.

Had it come to violence in the form of suicide -- as one might have expected of one of Kroetz's early works -- the two familiar dangers would have arisen. Firstly, the audience might have been riveted to the act itself and too shocked by

137. Jäger, Gerd; "Kann der kleine Mann sich ändern? Das Nest von Kroetz in Braunschweig und Zürich", in Theater heute, Heft 4, April 1976.

138. Rohde, Gerhard; loc.cit.

its brutality to try to understand its causes, and, secondly, the irreversibility of the act might encourage a fatalistic acceptance in the audience. By allowing Kurt to realise the wrongness of suicide and to accept the responsibility of going to the police, Kroetz avoids these dangers. For the first time he succeeds, "Wege zu zeigen, die weiterführen" ¹³⁹. Positive change, albeit on a modest scale, becomes a real possibility.

In Das Nest the starving dog realises that it must turn on the dog who is hoarding all the food. It is, however, not true that this is the first of his plays to communicate this insight. The failure of Hanni, Willy or Beppi to understand their situation does not prevent the audience from learning from their failure. The very hopelessness and misery of the characters' situations, combined with the unsparing urgency of Kroetz's presentation are just as likely to produce the "Lerngewinn" which Das Nest provides in more programmatic fashion.

The question of what, in fact, constitutes a "positive" play continues to cause some confusion. It is difficult to reproduce the schema of Das Nest without making it seem too much like a shallow stencil. This is the shortcoming of Kroetz's "Agitprop-Stück" Münchner Kindl, with its declamatory, didactic approach. It satisfies the criterion of the logical

139. Kroetz; WA, p.601.

presentation of factual data enabling the correct conclusion to be drawn from the material, but its actual effect is substantially diluted by its lack of human urgency. It is positive in logic and intention, negative in emotion and effect. While Das Nest does not fall into this trap, it is by no means the only dramatic form suitable for Kroetz's purposes.

Kroetz himself is well aware of this. Those who expected Das Nest to be followed uniformly by plays with a similar "positive" construction were disappointed. Certainly Kroetz wrote plays in which there was no violence -- Weitere Aussichten... (1974), Reise ins Glück (1975) -- but he had already done so with Inklusive (1971) or Die Wahl fürs Leben (1973). Violence was never an obligatory ingredient for Kroetz, yet neither was there a need to avoid it because it was considered either taboo or not "positive".

In Sterntaler the fifteen-year-old Karli robs an exchange-office using a toy gun. The police trace him to his home almost immediately, and when Karli again draws his toy gun in a gesture of defiance he is shot down by one of the policemen. (Those who find the story improbable are reminded that the facts are real: the play is based on the attempted robbery of a bank and the subsequent shooting of the fifteen-year-old Nicola Kalcer, to whom Sterntaler is dedicated.)

Despite the violent outcome, however, Sterntaler is not a "negative" play. What makes it more effective than, say, Michis Blut or Männersache is Kroetz's greater concern for

drawing attention to the effects of the social context on the characters. He accomplishes this in two main ways.

On the one hand, as in Dolomitenstadt Lienz, he introduces illusion-breaking "Songs", allowing the characters to step momentarily out of their roles to deliver significant information. Thus we have Mama Distl singing the ironic song in praise of the "Leistungsprinzip", according to which "Jeder Mensch hat seine Chance" ¹⁴⁰ in the competitive structure of West Germany. It is she, too, who delivers the equally ironic song praising hard work -- "Via Besen, Leute, werde ich noch Millionär" ¹⁴¹ --, which unmasks the delusions that are dangled in front of success-hungry refugees from the GDR to entice them into the treadmill. In contrast Karli sings of his marriage to his "Packmaschine" ¹⁴², which provides a more realistic picture of working conditions and rewards in the Federal Republic. In this way the "Songs" in Sterntaler stimulate the intellectual attention of the audience and provide for it an important extra focus.

On the other hand, as in Oberösterreich, Kroetz allows his characters greater articulacy with which to talk about their situation, not from the point of view of the omniscient author, but from their own point of view, voicing their doubts and dreams, desires and dependencies. The audience is thereby

140. Kroetz; WA, pp.202/3.

141. Kroetz; WA, p.207.

142. Kroetz; WA, p.193.

invited and enabled to measure their words against the reality of their situation. Thus we have the discussion between Herr and Frau Distl about the "Regel der Freiheit" in West Germany. Mama claims it is possible to become a millionaire by accepting and striving to implement these rules. Against this pious dream of success we have the bitter reality of her losing her flat because of illness, a contrast which shows up the injustice and inhumanity of a system in which only "Leistung" is acknowledged and failure is punished.

We are also put in a position to be able to understand Karli's attempted robbery. First we are made aware of the family's financial situation. Herr Distl has failed to further himself and has been reduced to just another cog in the machine; Frau Distl and Karli are harnessed to dull, spirit-sapping jobs that enable them to scrape together a modicum of comfort. Uprooted from east to west, they are like the ape whose head has been transplanted to the body of another ape, and with whom Karli feels a telling affinity -- "Ein Freund!"¹⁴³

We have been shown the close bond of affection between mother and son, the drudgery of their everyday work, the gradual but relentless erosion of their dream of "Sterntaler"; we have heard Karli's prattle of "das große Ding"¹⁴⁴, his romantic dream of stealing a fortune in a daring bank robbery; we have witnessed his personal feelings of inadequacy, as the

143. Kroetz; WA, p.191.

144. Kroetz; WA, p.185.

fat boy who has no success with girls; and we have been made aware of his suppressed energy: when his mother scolds him in Act I he flees into a mock dance, and later in the same act he seeks refuge in the physical outlet afforded by his chest expanders. When it comes to the main crisis after Frau Distl has lost her job, it is no surprise that Karli again takes flight into nervous activity, this time by attempting to turn his dream into reality by robbing the exchange-office. The act has been clearly motivated. The audience is able to understand why it comes about. Is it necessary, as Benjamin Henrichs suggests, to show that this outcome is avoidable?

Violence does not have to be averted on the stage to allow the audience to conceive of ways of averting it in reality. A positive play is not necessarily one in which there is a Happy Ending and the forces of good triumph. To take one well-known example: the "Lerngewinn" for the audience in Brecht's Die Tage der Commune consists precisely in the failure of the "Communards". Contemporary viewers are supposed to learn from their mistakes, in the play as much as in history.

The same applies to Sterntaler. It is valid to criticise a play such as Männersache, where the causes and the context of the brutality are not clearly or compellingly enough presented to convey the insight to the audience that the wild shooting match can and ought to be avoided. On the other hand, it is invalid to condemn Sterntaler on the same grounds.

Karli does not learn in the course of the play. He

experiences financial hardship, the boredom and frustration of a dead-end job, the crumbling of his and his mother's dreams of happiness: as a result he eventually tries to break out of this cage of suppression. The audience knows why; we learn though Karli does not.

The same is true of the distressing scene in Heimat where Hugo beats his grandchild Nathalie. Hugo, aging, widowed, has lost his job; society has left him in the lurch now that he is no longer of service to it. A simple game of "Mühle" with his grand-daughter develops into an initially harmless argument deriving from the spirit of oneupmanship. Childishly underlining her victory Nathalie repeats Hugo's earlier self-pitying remark: "Der Moor hat seine Schuldigkeit getan, der Moor kann gehen" ¹⁴⁵, without really understanding the meaning of her words. In the same innocent vein she adds the chant: "Arbeitsloser Bettbriesler" ¹⁴⁶; the injury to Hugo's self-respect is too great and he explodes into a desperate "Kurzschlußreaktion" of self-defence by brutally beating the young girl.

Nathalie, of course, is not the real object of his aggression, merely its unfortunate scapegoat. Hugo's explosive reaction has been caused by the social environment in which he lives. Past performance is neglected and he is flung aside like a spent battery. His assault of Nathalie is a misdirected

145. Kroetz; WA, p.304.

146. Kroetz; WA, p.305.

outburst of violence fueled by the sense of inadequacy and distress that the elderly man experiences. For the audience, seeing this act of violence is a learning process.

The same is true of Fräulein Rasch's suicide gesture, of Beppi's murder of her infant son, of Martha's abortion attempt, of Helmut's threatened revenge on his father. It is a matter of individual preference whether one learns more from the indication of a positive or a negative outcome, but it is a shallow mind that insists on the presence of the former for a play to have a positive effect.

In Agnes Bernauer both Agnes and Albrecht learn and change in the course of the five acts. They begin to gain significant insight into the nature of the capitalist system and decide to live in opposition to it. The play ends with the birth of their child in a humble "Arbeiterunterkunft" after they have turned their backs on the ill-earned wealth of Castle Werdenfels. As the baby -- once again symbol of hope for the future -- comes into the world, Albrecht reassures Agnes that he is beside her, and together, with their new insight and determination, they will face the future. In an earlier draft Agnes's experiences caused her to finish the play in a lunatic asylum. Kroetz himself, it would seem, had difficulty deciding which ending would produce the more positive effect.

In the final version, however, Kroetz retains the brutal robbery and rape of Agnes in a fairground. Here he demonstrates

how misguided is her well-meant attempt to show kindness to the wretchedly poor people of the village, like holding out a tender morsel of meat to a pack of starving dogs and being torn to pieces as they fight over it. Arguably Kroetz could have presented this insight in another form, avoiding the actual depiction of violence, but it is by no means certain that this would have been any more effective than the emotionally disturbing scene he eventually decided upon.

The amount one can learn from such scenes of violence is determined, apart from by the fullness of the characters, by the accuracy and urgency of the presentation of context and causes. For this reason the violence in Männersache and, to some extent, in Michis Blut and Heimarbeit fails. There the emphasis is too much on the act itself, and the audience is not encouraged to analyse and learn from what it sees.

With regard to the further criticism that the depiction of violence ipso facto hampers the learning process for the audience by implying the impossibility of positive change, Kroetz remains undecided about the extent to which any constructive change should be incorporated in the plays themselves. If his aim to change social reality can be achieved by the failure to change on the stage, the presentation of such negative events is valid. Stage violence that reveals the causes of violence in real life in a critical, urgent manner is already a measure for its removal.

In general, Kroetz has moved away from the depiction of

violence, but, as the rape scene in Agnes Bernauer or Otto Meier's destruction of his flat shows, he has not lost sight of the fact that the direct confrontation with acts of violence on the stage can give rise to an effective learning process for the audience, provided enough attention is paid to the illumination of causes and context. The extreme becomes an expression of the essential, its presentation a passionate cry for change. Franz Xaver Kroetz is writing, not about violence, but against it.

B) | LANGUAGE

"Beatie: 'Well, language is words,' he'd say, as though he were telling me a secret. 'It's bridges, so that you can get safely from one place to another. And the more bridges you know about the more places you can see!' [TO JIMMY] And do you know what happens when you can see a place but you don't know where the bridge is?"

Jimmy: [angrily]: Blust gal, what the hell are you on about?

Beatie: Exactly! You see, you hev a row!"

Arnold Wesker ¹

"... beinand san ma, daß's zwischen der Burschwoassi und uns koan Unterschied gibt. - Bloß's Mäu wenn ma aufmacha, dann san ma verlor'n, dann haut's uns naus aus der Rolln, zwega der Haidhauser Grammatik."

Karl Valentin ²

If the depiction of violent behaviour was the most immediately striking feature of Kroetz's early plays, the aspect that attracted most attention from a purely literary point of view was his use of language. The excesses of the "Handlung" were complemented by a poverty of language so extreme that it rapidly became referred to as "Sprachlosigkeit" and earned Kroetz the title of "Sprecher der Sprachlosen" ³.

The title is not unjustified. It is, however, dangerous to apply it too glibly, without giving sufficient thought to what the rather vague term "Sprachlosigkeit" entails. On

1. Wesker, Arnold; Roots, in The Wesker Trilogy, Penguin Plays, Penguin Books Ltd, 1975, p.90.

2. Valentin, Karl; Kreszenz Hiagelgwimpft, in Alles von Karl Valentin, R.Piper & Co. Verlag, München, 1978, p.65.

3. Panzner; op.cit., p.10.

analysis it reveals itself to be inadequate to describe accurately the real function of language in Kroetz's plays.

First and foremost, his "Sprachlosigkeit" is not silence. This most literal interpretation is also the least appropriate. One should not be misled by the wordless play Wunschkonzert, where the absence of language is a deliberate and unique stylistic device. Fräulein Rasch is "sprachlos" only in so far as she is alone in her room and has no one to talk to. Kroetz could have allowed her a monologue, as he does Frau Ruhsam in Weitere Aussichten... or the mother in Reise ins Glück, but he chooses to withdraw the vehicle of language altogether, intending thus to focus more strongly the audience's attention on the action of the play, on the full significance of Fräulein Rasch's repetitive, anonymous and joyless existence.

While silence in this sense is not fundamental to Kroetz's plays, it is certainly true that they contain many silences, or, to be more precise, many "Pausen". The distinction is not merely semantic. As Thomas Zenke remarks:

"Dem Leser der Stücke fällt sogleich eine äußerst häufige Regieanweisung auf, nämlich 'Pause' oder 'Intervall'. Ganz selten findet er 'Schweigen', das ja nicht dasselbe bedeutet wie 'Pause', sondern vielmehr eine Handlung."⁴

Here is the real core of the misleading term "Sprachlosigkeit". In all but a few cases, silence in Kroetz's plays

4. Zenke, Thomas; "Von der Wirklichkeit belehrt. Der Dramatiker Franz Xaver Kroetz wendet sich Brecht zu", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 10/01/76.

is not an action, but a state. It refers, not to a refusal to speak, but to an inability to speak.

Kroetz has frequently been compared to the English dramatist Harold Pinter in his use of language to depict the lack of communication between people. It is true that both playwrights share the ability to reproduce the language of everyday speech with all its flaws, repetitions, banalities and fragmentariness, but beneath this superficial similarity Pinter and Kroetz reveal distinctly different attitudes to the function and significance of this "Sprachlosigkeit".

In his essay Writing for the Theatre Pinter is quite explicit about his intentions:

"We have heard many times that tired, grimy phrase: 'Failure of communication'... and this phrase has been fixed to my work quite consistently. I believe the contrary. I think that we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming." ⁵

In Kroetz this element of deliberate tactics is almost completely lacking. On the rare occasions when it does occur it is at once apparent and stands in direct contrast to Kroetz's normal depiction of the failure of communication. It appears most fully in the twentieth scene of Wildwechsel, when Franz and Hanni deliberately talk round the awkward subject of shooting Hanni's father, now that she has managed to procure a gun:

5. Pinter, Harold; Writing for the Theatre, in Plays I, Methuen Paperback Edition, Eyre Methuen, London, 1976, p.15.

"Franz: Was hast'n du da?
 Hanni: Frag net so dumm. A Zahnbürstl.
 Franz: Wo hast'n das her?
 Hanni: Kauft.
 Franz: Gestohlen.
 Hanni: Kauft hab ich gsagt.
 Franz: Is ja wurscht. Gib mir's.
 Hanni: Was willst'n tun damit?
 Franz: Nix.
 Hanni: Dafür hab ich's nicht kauft.
 Franz: Für was hast es denn kauft?
 Hanni: Für nix.
 Franz: Gib mir's. Ein Mädchen braucht kein Gwehr.
 Hanni: Tu die Händ weg, das gehört mir.
 Franz: Gib mir's Gwehr. Wenn's dein Vater findet, haut er dich, wie beim Mantel.
 Hanni: Das werd ich schon verstehen, daß er's nicht findet. Das findet der nie.
 Franz: Was willst'n damit tun? Willst einen Hund erschießen?
 Hanni: Wieso ein Hund. Mir hat kein Hund was tan.
 Franz: Wer denn dann?
 Hanni: Niemand.
 Franz: Was redst'n dann?
 Hanni: Was hab ich denn gsagt?
 Franz: Du spinnst ja. Gib's Gwehr her.
 Hanni: Nimm's doch. Schau's dir an, oder hast Angst?
 Franz: Ein Gwehr." ⁶

Here there is no doubt that Franz and Hanni know more than they are saying. They know what is at stake, and their failure to put it into words is clearly a deliberate evasion to cover an underlying aversion to the brutal act they are contemplating. Now that the murder of Erwin has become a real possibility, their initial reaction, reflected in their apparent "Sprachlosigkeit", is to shrink uncertainly from the reality. Here, as Pinter puts it, "below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken" ⁷.

6. Kroetz; GS, p.35f.

7. Pinter; loc.cit., p.13.

Similar passages abound in Pinter's own work. One example of many is the uneasy conversation between Petey and Meg in The Birthday Party, revolving round the arrival of the car in which the mysterious Goldberg and McCann plan to take Stanley away. Neither Petey nor Meg dares openly to broach the reality of Stanley's departure:

"Meg: (coming down tensely, and whispering) Is there anything in it?

Petey: In it?

Meg: Yes.

Petey: What do you mean, in it?

Meg: Inside it.

Petey: What sort of thing?" ⁸

This excerpt is very similar to the Wildwechsel extract in the way the characters use language to avoid communication. But while for Pinter this use of language is typical, for Kroetz it is very much an exception. Moray McGowan succinctly sums up this important difference:

"Im Gegensatz zu Kroetz' im Sprachsee Ertrinkenden können Pinters Figuren oft sehr wohl schwimmen." ⁹

In Heimarbeit this tactic of affected inarticulacy occurs twice; once when Willy hides behind the pretext of drinking his beer and pretends not to know what Martha is talking about, thereby refusing to discuss the real issue of the danger of the baby catching cold; and again, more notably, in the seventh scene, when Martha's apparently idiotic question clumsily

8. Pinter; The Birthday Party, loc.cit., p.79.

9. McGowan, Moray; Sprache, Gewalt und Herrschaft. Franz Xaver Kroetz und die sozialrealistischen Dramatiker, in TEXT + KRITIK, Heft 57, Franz Xaver Kroetz, München, 1978, p.39.

conceals a more serious suspicion and Willy's tautologous answer knowingly evades it:

"Willy: Martha, komm zurück, dein Sohn ist tot.
Martha: Woher weißt du das?
Willy: Weil er gestorben ist." ¹⁰

Otherwise the technique is used infrequently and only in minor instances. For example, in Wildwechsel, when Hanni asks Dieter why, if he is a trained hairdresser, he is not working in a barber's shop, it is vanity that makes him give the evasive reply: "Das is nur vorübergehend." ¹¹ He would be quite capable of giving the real reason, namely incompetence, if he wanted to.

These, however, are isolated instances. Kroetz's "Sprachlosigkeit" has only tangentially to do with this deliberate rejection of communication. It is by no means a "conscious stratagem" ¹² as it is for Pinter, but a state of impotence.

It would, therefore, be more accurate to speak of "Sprachunfähigkeit". Even when Kroetz himself, in his early essay Horváth von heute für heute, acknowledges his debt to his precursor and praises "Horváths Erkennen der Sprachlosigkeit" ¹³, it is clear that he is referring to an inability to make use of language. As he explains:

"Für mich besteht die entscheidende dramaturgische Einsicht Horváths darin, daß er, vielleicht noch zusammen

10. Kroetz; GS, p.63.

11. Kroetz; GS, p.15.

12. Pinter; Writing for the Theatre, loc.cit., p.15.

13. Kroetz; WA, p.519.

mit Marieluise Fleißer, Stücke in die Theaterlandschaft einbrachte, die darauf verzichteten, zugunsten von Kunst und zuungunsten von Realität Meinungsgehalte des dialogischen Gefüges so ausgeweitet zu bereden, daß zwar Rückschlüsse auf die Genialität des Verfassers möglich sind, nicht aber auf die realistische Situation des 'kleinen Mannes', dessen Situation Volkstheater seit Horváth gültig meint." ¹⁴

Traditional theatre has always tended to embellish the language of real life. Obviously the eloquent alexandrines of Racine and the dynamic poetry of Shakespeare are not true to life, any more than the sparkling wit of Neil Simon or the clarity of Martin Walser. But the language of realistic or Realist theatre is also unnaturally stylised. The significant feature, as Martin Esslin says of Pinter, is:

"... the fact that traditional stage dialog has always greatly overestimated the degree of logic which governs the use of language, the amount of information which language is able to impart on the stage -- as in life. People on the stage have, from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Rattigan, always spoken more clearly, more directly, more to the purpose than they would ever have done in real life." ¹⁵

In short, language is not so effective a means of communication in reality as it is in the traditional drama.

It is, Kroetz claims, Horváth's service to have recognized this fact and to have reflected it in his theatre. It is of particular relevance to the "Volksstück" and to the language of the "kleinen Mannes", with whom Kroetz is also dealing. Here the discrepancy between stage and reality is especially

14. Kroetz; WA, p.519.

15. Esslin, Martin; Pinter: a Study of his Plays, Norton, New York, 1976, p.200.

glaring, and Kroetz admires Horváth's honesty in rejecting the traditional false eloquence of the "little man". He carries on to speak of:

"... die bewußte Katastrophe zwischen dem, was Horváths Figuren sagen und dem, was sie meinen, zwischen dem, was sie meinen müssen, weil sie dazu erzogen sind und dem, was sie zu meinen, obwohl sie es meinen wollen, nicht in der Lage sind." 16

"Nicht in der Lage": Kroetz is referring to a helplessness vis-à-vis language, to an "Artikulationsunfähigkeit" which he takes from Horváth's plays and depicts to an even more drastic degree in his own theatre. It is therefore rather misleading when he himself uses the term "Sprachlosigkeit", which may be more effective as a slogan than the unwieldy "Sprachunfähigkeit", but which certainly does not convey the sense of impotence he wishes to depict. Analysis of his early plays will bear this out.

Before continuing to investigate the function of Kroetz's "Sprachlosigkeit" and to establish its significance in the context of his work, it is necessary to isolate and examine its various manifestations.

It seems sensible to begin with the literal absence of language -- silence. It has been suggested above that Kroetz's frequent use of the stage direction "Pause" or "Intervall" instead of "Schweigen" is significant, in so far as the latter

16. Kroetz; WA, p.519.

implies an action, whereas Kroetz is depicting the opposite. Where for Pinter's characters a pause is a tactical device, for Kroetz's figures it marks the limits of their articulacy, the point at which language ceases to function.

A revealing example of this occurs in Lieber Fritz when Otto and Hilde are discussing the difficulties of helping Fritz now that he has been released from prison. Broaching the subject of the origins of Fritz's sexual peculiarity, their language fails them at the crucial point and they are prevented from attaining the vital insight to which their words are leading:

"Hilde: ... Einmal hat ihn der Papa bei die Sauerein erwischt, da hat er am nächsten Tag gar nicht ind Schule gehn können, so blau hat ihn der Papa gschlagen. Aber es hat nix genutzt.

Pause

Otto: Daß ausgerechnet mir so was jetzt aus der Näh erlebn." 17

Otto and Hilde could have gained the important insight that the callousness and lack of understanding shown by Fritz's father have contributed to his problem, and from this they could have drawn the conclusion that it is sympathy and understanding he needs now to help him regain his footing in life. But they are both incapable of building the necessary bridge to this insight. After the pause, a new topic -- typically selfish and narrow-minded -- is begun. The pause marks the end of reflection, or, as Harald Burger and Peter von Matt put

17. Kroetz; GS, p.116.

it:

"Pause steht statt einer antwort, ein angeschnittenes problem wird in der pause ad acta gelegt." 18

A similar scene occurs in Hartnäckig. During a discussion revolving around Helmut's accident, Frau Rustorfer makes the significant appeal: "Das muß man einsehen, daß die Gewalt nix nutzt." 19 No further discussion follows, however; Rustorfer is unable to make use of the opening offered by his wife. The issue of violence and the role it plays in his attitude to his son is left unexamined. The words are met by a pause; the conversation is resumed with a change of subject introduced by a typically self-centred remark. In this way a potentially productive exchange of ideas is throttled before it can begin. This phenomenon is accurately described by Peter Schaarschmidt:

"Mit den Pausen bezeichnet Kroetz die Stellen im Dialog, an denen die Figuren mit der verstandesmäßigen Durchdringung eines Problems und der entsprechenden sprachlichen Benennung am Ende sind. Daher kommt es nach ihnen zu keiner Fortsetzung des Gesprächs im Sinne eines weiteren Gegeneinandersetzens von Argumenten, die zu einem besseren Erkennen des Unverständlichen und einer möglichen Lösung führt." 20

This drying up of language is best illustrated in situations where an actual argument is taking place. In traditional drama the audience is used to an exchange of

18. Burger, Harald/von Matt, Peter; "Dramatischer Dialog und restringiertes Sprechen", in Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik, Berlin, New York, 02/01/74.

19. Kroetz; GS, p.81.

20. Schaarschmidt; loc.cit., p.214.

arguments and counter-arguments leading to the establishment of a point of view, either of the author or of one of the characters. In Kroetz's plays arguments are characterised by the lack of links in the chain, which means that no meaningful argument can take place. In such instances the function of the pause to mark the point at which language reaches the limits of its capabilities is particularly evident.

When Erl, in Hartnäckig, is trying to persuade Christine to have an abortion he crassly asserts that Helmut's "Verstümmelung" has damaged his character. To this spurious argument Christine answers: "Aber ich liebe ihn." ²¹ Erl has no argument against this claim; a pause ensues, after which he typically restarts the broken conversation with a fresh attestation of his own interests: "Die Operation tät ich zahlen, das kost einen Tausender und wär es mir wert." ²¹

Similarly in Männersache, when Martha raises the perfectly valid argument of having a right to some respect -- "Wo ich auch ein Mensch bin" ²² -- in answer to Otto's continual refusal to treat her as a person, Otto is unable to argue against this reproach. The customary pause sets in, after which he again tries to change the subject: "Ich brauch meine Freiheit." ²²

Earlier, during a conversation about the "Kuttlerei" that Martha owns and runs, Otto begins to feel he is being shown

21. Kroetz; GS, p.75.

22. Kroetz; GS, pp.100/1.

in a bad light. At first he offers objections in his defence, but as Martha continues to explain the advantages of her profession he finds himself unable to argue back and lapses into silence, broken significantly by his petulant reproach: "Reden kannst. -- Eine Frau, wo Metzger is, is eh unnormal." ²³

Frequently, however, the characters do not enjoy such a lengthy exchange as Otto and Martha do here. In Heimarbeit, for example, Martha is reluctant to go to bed with Willy and makes the excuse that she is too tired for sex because she has been working all day. The ensuing pause reflects Willy's inability to cope with this excuse, and it is broken only by his sulking accusation that Martha no longer has any feelings for him. The discussion does not get a chance to begin.

Whether or not a conversation is allowed to progress, it is clear that a pause marks its termination. A powerful example of this can be found in Lieber Fritz, when Otto tries to intimidate Fritz into giving up his plans of going away with Mitzi. In answer to the cruel jibe that Fritz will be unable to lease a "Gasthaus" because of his prison record, Fritz replies reasonably enough that they will be able to lease it in Mitzi's name. Otto is literally lost for words. When he does break the pause it is only to switch his line of attack by poking fun at Fritz's enforced sexual impotence: "Und von wem laßt es befriedigen?" ²⁴

23. Kroetz; GS, p.91.

24. Kroetz; GS, p.125.

It is conspicuous, in fact, how frequently the pause is followed by a display of verbal aggression. A clear example can be found in Männersache, when Martha explains to Otto the reason for her ability with plants:

"Martha: ... Weil ich ein Geheimnis hab. Die Erdn, wo ich verwend, hol ich auf der Wiesn hinter der Kirchen. Die is besser wie eine kaufte.

Otto: Gestohlen.

Martha: Wennst auf der Wiesn genau hinschaust, siehst Löcher drin, die sind von mir. Das sag ich bloß dir.

Otto: Eine Diebstahl is das.

Martha: Ein bißl Erdnholn wird schon erlaubt sein.

Kleine Pause

Otto: Bist unnormal, weil du allein bist und nicht schön." 25

Otto can think of no real reason to disapprove of Martha's behaviour except to offer the repeated accusation of theft. When Martha points out the triviality of this reproach, Otto has no counter-argument, and -- after the customary pause -- displays his annoyance in a brutal, unrelated and unfounded insult. For to remain silent would be tacitly to admit that Martha is right, which Otto cannot allow.

Similarly, at the end of the scene in Lieber Fritz in which Otto and Hilde discuss the problems caused by Fritz's arrival, Hilde tries to draw the realistic conclusion that they should all try to start afresh and not fall victim to glib prejudgements. Otto, however, is too worried about his business to accept such humane suggestions about helping his "criminal" brother-in-law. But since he is also unable to argue against what Hilde says he resorts -- again after a

25. Kroetz; GS, p.94.

pause -- to a change of attack in the form of an insulting accusation levied against his wife:

"Otto: Jedenfalls hast du mir die Sach einbrockt, und wenn etwas is, nachad is es deine Schuld." ²⁶

The pause which so often precedes such insults is, however, by no means obligatory. Its presence certainly heightens the audience's awareness that the abuse is a direct result of the inability to articulate, but were it included every time, its effect would be diluted through overuse. Nor need the insult be so extreme as in the already mentioned examples. Often it takes the form of a simple snide remark, as, for instance, in the trivial discussion in Wildwechsel between Hanni and her mother about being fat. When Hilda tells Hanni she has no need to worry about putting on weight, Hanni has no answer. Silence, however, would mean having to accept her mother's claim as correct, so she escapes with the simple remark: "Das verstehst doch du nicht." ²⁷

The simple disagreement in the form of a disparaging remark covers the inability of the speaker to use language in argument. When Hanni tries to explain away her meeting with Franz as pure chance and a matter of a simple exchange of greetings, "Wie normale Leut auch", Erwin cannot prove she is lying, and for want of a valid objection can only exclaim: "Ihr seid's keine normaln Leut." ²⁸ In their later conversation

26. Kroetz; GS, p.117.

27. Kroetz; GS, p.10.

28. Kroetz; GS, p.26.

in which Hanni tries to persuade him to agree to a meeting so that Franz can apologise for his behaviour, Erwin is not impressed by this apparent contrition and is reluctant to agree. When Hanni complains that he is being too stubborn -- "Das hat man davon, wo er's nur gut gemeint hat." -- Erwin has no argument against this assertion of meaning well and retorts simply: "Ihr habt's nix zu meinen." ²⁹

When Otto tries to dissuade Fritz from leaving with Mitzi, he repeatedly asserts that Fritz should be grateful for the chance he has been given in the nursery and that it is ungrateful to reward Otto and Hilde by leaving them in the lurch. Fritz, however, insists on his freedom to make his own decisions and points out his right to do so. Otto cannot dispute this, yet neither does he want to accept it. For want of an argument he counters: "Du hast kein Recht. Auf nix." ³⁰

Like the accusation of not understanding, this blunt denial of rights recurs in Kroetz's plays. Both take the place of counter-argument, when a character is incapable of stating his case or defending his point of view, but is at the same time unwilling to accept contradiction. Often these derogatory replies are more aggressive, as when Otto is flummoxed by Martha's quotation from the bible in Männersache: "Wer ohne Schuld ist, der werfe den ersten Stein auf meiner." Lost for words, he swiftly leaps into the attack: "Katholisch bist,

29. Kroetz; GS, p.39.

30. Kroetz; GS, p.131.

aber sonst eine Sau." ³¹ In Wildwechsel Hanni defends her right to her new coat on the grounds: "Was man geschenkt bekommt, gehört einem." Erwin cannot argue against this and resorts instead to an aggressive assertion of authority: "Jetzt kriegst dann eine Fotzn." ³²

In all these cases the insult is comparatively harmless. It is nevertheless important to take note of this use of verbal aggression in order fully to realise how, in more extreme cases, it can explode into physical violence. The inability to use language to cope with a situation is compensated for by verbal or physical aggression, depending on the intensity of the "speaker's" frustration.

The limits of verbal aggression seem to have been reached by Karl and Marie in Michis Blut. Here conversation deteriorates to an undisguised exchange of insults. The inability of Karl and Marie to communicate has led to the surrogate application of language as a sort of weapon, with strength of abusiveness replacing strength of argument:

"Karl: Mögn tu ich ebn nimmer.
Marie: Da werd man nicht gfragt, ob man mag oder nicht.
Karl: Satt bin ich.
Marie: Keiner is so wie du, weilst spinnst, das merkt man.
Karl: Du kannst ja nix dafür.
Marie: Ebn.
Karl: Was redst dann und mischt dich ein?
Marie: Hab auch ein Recht.
Karl: Nix hast du.
Marie: Versoffen bist.
Karl: Genau.

31. Kroetz; GS, p.97.

32. Kroetz; GS, p.31.

Marie: Asozial bist.
Karl: Schiach bist.
Marie: Ein Hamperer bist.
Karl: Eine Flitschn bist.
Marie: Bin ich nicht.
Karl: Bist." 33

Here words are used without communication. If there is a connection between Karl's and Marie's utterances it is only in the way that one blow is answered by another, as in a boxing match. As Ernst Wendt says:

"Sätze rufen nicht Antworten herauf, sondern einfach andere Sätze, isoliert dagegengesprochen, weil halt noch, aus Konvention, geredet wird." 34

The mouthing of insults is one of the ways in which Kroetz demonstrates the inability of his characters to use language as communication. Another is the drying up of language, not into silence, but into meaningless repetitions, tautologies and empty phrases.

On a minor level this occurs when Franz asks Dieter in Wildwechsel what he intends to do during the holidays and receives the meaningless reply: "Urlaub machen" 35; or when Dengk in Dolomitenstadt Lienz tries to impress on his cell-mates the extent of his dog's faithfulness, and can offer only the tautologous assertion: "Der hätt mich aus einer Kompanie ausserkennt, weil er mich so gut kennt hat" 36; or when Staller asks Stallerin what she means by the remark:

33. Kroetz; GS, p.200.

34. Wendt, Ernst; "Dramen über Zerstörung, Leiden, Sprachlosigkeiten im Alltag -- auf der Flucht vor dem großen politischen Stoff?", in Theater heute, Heft 5, Mai 1971.

35. Kroetz; GS, p.14.

36. Kroetz; GS, p.297.

"Besser spät wie nie" ³⁷, and receives no answer apart from the repetition of the phrase. In each case a barrenness of language is exposed which in turn reveals an intellectual sterility and spiritual emptiness within the characters. Dieter, Dengk and Stallerin try miserably to cover up their "Sprachlosigkeit" by uttering some sort of reply, but they remain as "sprachlos" as if they had said nothing.

Of course, the practical significance of these instances is negligible, but it is nevertheless important to observe from them the way in which the apparent use of words is, in fact, a manifestation of inarticulacy. Meaningless words are the same as no words at all.

What is true of these trivial examples is equally true in more important contexts. For example, the device of repetition used in the harmless case of Stallerin's remark recurs in Hartnäckig with more serious implications. Sensing Christine's misgivings about his amputated leg, Helmut attempts to explain away the problem by dismissing it as a blow of fate. She refuses to accept this, however, and Helmut knows no other way of continuing than by parroting his claim. ³⁸ He cannot answer Christine's objection and so is unable to initiate any meaningful discussion of his situation.

Similarly, three scenes earlier, when Erl is trying to persuade Christine to break off her relationship with Helmut,

37. Kroetz; GS, p.178.

38. Kroetz; GS, p.72.

he resorts to emotional blackmail by calling up the self-pitying memory of his wife's death. When Christine seizes on this to turn the argument against her father, Erl is helpless and can only repeat his pathetic remark:

"Erl: Mit seine Kinder straft einen der Himmel. Wo deine Mutter nicht mehr is, bist du mir entglitten.

Christine: Daß ich aber der Mutter ihre Arbeit mach, is verschwiegen.

Erl: Daß ich ein Witwer bin, is mein Pech." 39

The emptiness of words is made frighteningly apparent in a drastically brief scene in Michis Blut, consisting of three lines of dialogue which convey nothing more than silence:

"Karl: Es gibt für alles Gründe.

Marie: Ja. Wenn man sie weiß.

Karl: Ja." 40

Karl and Marie are referring to their stillborn child.

Where traditional stage dialogue would have allowed a discussion to develop in which the characters could have attempted to analyse their situation, Kroetz leaves them "sprachlos", and therefore helpless. The reasons for Karl's and Marie's tragedy are out of reach of the desperately limited apparatus of language they have at their disposal.

When Karl and Marie fall silent after their token dialogue, they are no more silent than before. In the later film script Milde Sorte -- written in 1975 -- Kroetz adds the following comment to a scene where the young boy Willi has

39. Kroetz; GS, p.71.

40. Kroetz; GS, p.206.

been reproached by his parents for failing to find a job:

"Willi sagt nichts, es würde ihm auch nichts einfallen." ⁴¹

It is this element of "Einfallslosigkeit" that characterises the language of Kroetz's figures, and which also informs the meaningless words of Karl and Marie in the above example. The words are spoken, "weil halt noch, aus Konvention, geredet wird" ⁴², but ultimately they are no more than another form of silence.

In Oberösterreich, when Anni asks Heinz what he means by the remark he has heard on television about the approach of a new ice age, his reply is the mere repetition of what he has just said: "Mir gehn einer neuen Eiszeit entgegen, hat ein Meteorologe gsagt." ⁴³ The words serve only to evade an explanation Heinz is incapable of.

In the same way, in the radio play Gute Besserung, Karl tries to justify his unwillingness to lend his nephew his car with the words: "Mein Auto is mein Auto." ⁴⁴ This tautology offers no argument; it is merely the expression of authority.

When Staller and Stallerin discuss the improvement in Beppi's intelligence since the birth of her baby, Stallerin raises the cautionary note that children tend to take after their parents. When her husband points out that this was

41. Kroetz; WA, p.54.

42. Wendt, Ernst; "Dramen über Zerstörung, Leiden, Sprachlosigkeiten im Alltag -- auf der Flucht vor dem großen politischen Stoff?", in Theater heute, Heft 5, Mai 1971.

43. Kroetz; GS, p.390.

44. Kroetz; WA, p.121.

obviously not true in Beppi's own case, she can only mutter: "Das war eine Ausnahm, sowas kann passiern."⁴⁵ The words are characterised by the same "Einfallslosigkeit" that causes Willi and other of Kroetz's figures to dry up into silence.

To a certain extent Stallerin's words appear to offer at least the vestiges of an argument, although the hackneyed formula of the exception that proves the rule is no more than the simplest of rhetoric. It is at best a "Scheinargument". This is another central feature of Kroetz's "Sprachlosigkeit"; his characters concoct arguments with little or no substance, imagining that the formal appearance of rational argument, however nonsensical in content, is preferable to the admission of defeat or ignorance.

Instances of this are plentiful in Kroetz's plays. Martha, in Heimarbeit, refuses to answer her daughter's query how to spell "Rhythmus" with the reason: "Ich wasch jetzt die Ursel."⁴⁶; Rusterfer rejects the possibility of his having caused the urine stains in the toilet with the specious reasoning: "Da biesel ich seit dreißig Jahren hinein. Die Tropfen sind neu."⁴⁷; Otto attacks Fritz's desire for independence with the reproach: "Als ob du eine Freiheit brauchn tätst, wost eh alles hast."⁴⁸; Christine dismisses her father's objection that it is impossible to plan pregnancy

45. Kroetz; GS, p.163.

46. Kroetz; GS, p.48.

47. Kroetz; GS, p.75.

48. Kroetz; GS, p.130.

from intercourse with the admonishment: "Redst, wo du nicht dabei warst." ⁴⁹

In some cases the speciousness of the argument reaches extreme proportions. Erl makes the ludicrous claim: "Aber das mit dem Kind beweist meine Theorie. Bevor er ein Krüppel war, hätt er dir nie ein Kind gmacht. So eine Verstümmelung is nicht nur äußerlich. Das verdirbt auch den Charakter." ⁵⁰ Otto tries to hurry Martha into shooting her dog on the grounds that: "Auf nüchternen Magen is der Tod leichter zu vertragen, das is bekannt." ⁵¹; when Staller and Stallerin contemplate killing Beppi, the mother theorises: "Es wird gesagt, daß etwa Narrische den Tod net spüren wie mir." ⁵²; in defending the honour of his daughter Erwin entangles himself in the circular logic: "Da kann sie nix dafür, sonst is sie nicht mehr meine Tochter, wenn sie was dafür kann, drum kann sie nix dafür." ⁵³

In the last example the facade of reason all büt collapses, as it occasionally does. At the end of the "Bilanz" drawn by Erl and Rustorfer, the latter concludes: "Einen Gastwirt mit Holzfuß gibts nicht.", to which Erl replies ingenuously: "Ich hab glaubt, die englische Prothesn is aus Leichtmetall?" ⁵⁴ He is stranded on the level of the literal.

49. Kroetz; GS, p.78.

50. Kroetz; GS, p.75.

51. Kroetz; GS, p.98.

52. Kroetz; GS, p.153.

53. Kroetz; GS, p.19.

54. Kroetz; GS, p.74.

This linguistic poverty is occasionally reflected in the very form of the speaker's utterances. Kroetz does not, however, make significant use of the interrupted or unfinished sentence favoured by Naturalist authors to simulate the fragmentary nature of dialogue in real life. Hauptmann, for example, makes frequent use of this device. To take just one example: on arrival at Krause's home in Vor Sonnenaufgang Alfred Loth is taken aback by the confused words of Frau Krause; his own confusion is mirrored in his words:

"Aber Frau...Sie werden doch...ich...ich heiße Loth, bin...wünsche zu...habe auch nicht die Ab..."⁵⁵

In this way Hauptmann reproduces the fitfulness of language in real life in an attempt thus to create an illusion of reality. It is perhaps surprising that Kroetz does not follow him in the use of this construction, as in the hands of a dramatist with such a precise ear for the eccentricities of everyday speech it could doubtless be used to powerful effect.

The closest he comes to this attempted reproduction of fitfulness is perhaps in Wildwechsel, when Hilda reproaches Erwin for making sexual advances at such an early hour. Erwin rejoins: "Wo Samstag is, wird das schon erlaubt sein unds Kind noch schlaft."⁵⁶ The syntax makes clear the faltering nature of the thought process.

The slowness and woolliness of thought that underlies this

55. Hauptmann, Gerhard; Vor Sonnenaufgang, Verlag Ullstein GmbH, Frankfurt/M-Berlin-Wien, 1976, p.7.

56. Kroetz; GS, p.9.

clumsy sentence also characterises the following extract from Heimarbeit, in which Willy's inability to think even the simplest matter through to the end is revealed by the way he lets himself be corrected by the matter-of-fact common sense of his ten-year-old daughter:

"Willy: Machts fertig, is schon Zeit fürs Bett.
Monika: Ich kann noch nicht, weil ich noch abwasch.
Willy: Nix, das machst morgen.
Monika: Dann is alles eintrocknet und geht nicht weg.
Willy: Bleibst auf, aber die Ursel verschwindet. Ich hab meine Arbeit." 57

Willy is aware of the truth of this common sense only as fast as it is explained to him: he cannot spontaneously formulate it for himself.

A more striking example of this, in a more significant context, occurs in Hartnäckig, when Helmut's parents discuss the problem of his inheritance. Rusterfer's responses reveal his inability to think the matter through for himself and thus actively to participate in the conversation. As his wife raises various points, he becomes aware of them, but without gaining any insight into the actual situation:

"Frau: Ich mein, daß beide Kinder die unsern sind.
Rusterfer: Das mein ich auch.
Frau: Dann darf man den Helmut nicht vor den Kopf stoßen.
Rusterfer: Das is auch nicht beabsichtigt.
Frau: Wenn man ihn enterbt, is das vor den Kopf stoßn.
Pause
Rusterfer: Dann enterbt man ihn ebn nicht.
Frau: Man muß ihn aber enterben, sonst schwimmt

57. Kroetz; GS, p.61.

der Betrieb hinunter. An die Zukunft muß man denken.

Rustorfer: Das sag ich auch. Auch unsere Zukunft steht auf dem Spiel." 58

Rustorfer is at the mercy of language as a ringed bull is at the mercy of the hand that pulls the rope.

Few of Kroetz's characters, however, are willing to let themselves appear so "sprachlos". On a simple level they disguise this helplessness either by a straightforward resort to brute insult or by ignoring the other person's words, thus allowing themselves to repeat their own point of view or to change the subject. In so doing they create an illusion of being in control, however tenuous it may be.

A simple, and frequently used, device in this respect is the escape into denials of guilt or responsibility. Witness the combined efforts of Staller and Stallerin to absolve themselves from guilt once they have been forced to accept that Beppi is going to have a child:

"Stallerin: Ich hab mein Bestes versucht, das is sicher. Ich kann mir kein Vorwurf mehr machn, das is auch sicher.

Staller: Hab ich was gsagt.

Große Pause

Stallerin: Es is ebn so, da kann man nix machn.

Staller: Na, mir nicht." 59

Similarly, when Erwin and Hilda discover that Hanni has been having an affair with Franz, their first attempts to analyse and understand the situation come to nothing. They

58. Kroetz; GS, p.74.

59. Kroetz; GS, p.156.

can do no more than helplessly confirm that it has happened, without being able to explain its causes. Having reached this stage, both hasten to absolve themselves from all guilt:

"Erwin: Jetzt is es redn zu spät, das hättn mir uns früher überlegn müßn.

Hilda: Willst mir einen Vorwurf machn?

Erwin: Wenn ich auf der Tour bin, kann ich nicht wissn, wo meine Tochter is.

Hilda: Willst mir einen Vorwurf machn?

Pause

Erwin: Das hast ja nicht wissen können, daß Kind plötzlich sowas anfängt, sonst hättn mir das ja verhindert, wenn mir das gewußt hättn.

Hilda: Ich bin mir auch keiner Schuld bewußt, weil ich mir nix zuschulden hab kommen lassn." 60

Later, after it has been discovered that Hanni is still meeting Franz after his release from prison, Erwin's anger becomes even more extreme. All his ranting, however, does nothing to improve the situation; his suggested solutions are limited to castration and murder. Faced with the failure to cope with the matter, he swiftly washes his hands of responsibility for it: "Keinen einzigen Vorwurf kann ich mir machen, keinen einzigen." 61

Of course, such denials of guilt, despite their vehemence, are nothing more than admissions of defeat, thinly disguised as its adamant denial. They reflect a last ditch attempt to use language to veil its own impotence. Of far greater importance in this respect are the various ways in which characters make use of language to affect rationality. The

60. Kroetz; GS, p.19.

61. Kroetz; GS, p.29.

appearance of reason is a far more effective tool with which to conceal inarticulacy. Unlike abuse or prevarication, apparent rationality creates an impression of authority and justification.

When Erl argues that Helmut's accident has damaged his character, his "proof" -- that Helmut never got Christine pregnant before -- is blatantly idiotic. He relies on the appearance of logic to cover the lack of substance in his argument.

The same is true of many of the would-be arguments advanced in Kroetz's plays by his "Sprachlosen". Even the inaccurate use of the two words "warum" and "weil" reveals the discrepancy between the formal expression of rationality and the actual substance of reason.

The simple question "Warum?", as used by Kroetz's characters, frequently means something quite different from the request for an explanation:

- "Heinz: Der Johanser hat seinen neuen Manta.
Anni: Warum?" ⁶² [= Wieso?];
- "Stallerin: Das war eine Ausnahm, sowas kann passiern.
Staller: Weil man sich nicht genug gekümmert hat.
Stallerin: Warum?" ⁶³ [= Was meinst du damit?];
- "Jonny: Wost nicht einmal ein Moped hast.
Junge: Aber du!
Jonny: Genau.
Junge: Aber keine Hercules 150RS.
Jonny: Warum?" ⁶⁴ [= Und?];

62. Kroetz; GS, p.387.

63. Kroetz; GS, p.163.

64. Kroetz; WA, p.40.

- "Anni: Gehn mir ins Wohnzimmer, weil ich dir etwas sagen muß.
Heinz: Warum?" ⁶⁵ [= Was denn?]

These minor instances might seem of no importance, but the imprecise use of the word indicates a woolliness of thought, an inability to grasp a problem directly and begin to come to terms with it.

The similarly inaccurate use of "weil" is perhaps more significant, in so far as, like the "Scheinargument", it reveals the desire of the speaker to assume a stance of authority based on the appearance of rationality, whereas there is no real causal foundation for its use.

When Oskar Schuster proudly reminisces about his spell as a waiter, he exclaims: "Da war den ganzen Sommer keine einzige Reklamation, weil ich das weiß." ⁶⁶ Expressed in this way, his claim carries more weight than if he had said: "Da war den ganzen Sommer keine einzige Reklamation. Ich weiß es." The decorative "Floskel" lends an air of conviction without actually offering any evidence to substantiate the claim.

Similarly, Otto tries to create the appearance of authority when disputing Hilde's objection that there is a substantial difference between a "Sexualverbrecher" and an exhibitionist. Otto bluntly rejoins: "Das is nachad gleich, weil das das gleiche is." ⁶⁷

The same tautological emptiness is present behind Hilda's

65. Kroetz; GS, p.394.

66. Kroetz; GS, p.237.

67. Kroetz; GS, p.131.

denial of guilt in Wildwechsel: "Ich bin mir auch keiner Schuld bewußt, weil ich mir nix zuschulden hab kommen lassn." ⁶⁸
On the surface this appears more reasonable than Otto's primitive assertion, but she too is merely sheltering her lack of explanation behind a facade of reason supported by the magic word "weil".

Two further "Floskeln" which are frequently used to create the impression of rationality are "trotzdem" and "warum denn nicht?".

The former is used to imply that the other's argument is not strong enough to carry any weight. This simple utterance enables the speaker to dispute an assertion without actually explaining why it is wrong. He thereby covers up the fact that he cannot argue against it, but at the same time creates a better effect than if he had answered with an insult or tried to change the subject. Examples are frequent in Kroetz's plays:

- "Hanni: ... Wenn das Kind nicht hätt passiern müssn, wär ich ja gar nicht hier.
Ärztin: Aber ihr habt's doch das Kind verursacht.
Hanni: Trotzdem -- das blöde Kind is schuld an dem ganzn." ⁶⁹;
- "Heinz: ... Da müßt etwas sein, was mir ganz allein gehört, was kein anderer hat. Wegn der Erkennung, verstehst.
Anni: lacht Mich.
Heinz: Trotzdem." ⁷⁰;

68. Kroetz; GS, p.20.

69. Kroetz; GS, p.43.

70. Kroetz; GS, p.399.

- "Schulz: Ich glaub halt, daß mir zu billig san. Mir
 könntn auch mehr verlangen.
 Wurzer: Siebn Mark und kein Abzug in der Stund. Wo
 hastn das sonst?
 Schulz: Trotzdem." 71

In each case the speaker has reached the point where he or she is incapable of arguing further and is forced into the defensive measure of hiding inarticulacy behind the disparaging "trotzdem", thus throwing the ball back in the other's court.

To a lesser extent the formulaic reply "Warum denn nicht?" fulfils the same function of allowing the speaker to avoid giving a proper answer without having to suffer the embarrassment of falling silent. Another significant aspect here, however, is the way this unimaginative formula reveals the emotional sterility of the speaker. The poverty of language parallels a barrenness of emotional experience and a lack of vitality.

Both of these implications are present, in varying degrees, in each individual case, and context will decide which is the stronger. The implication of the defensive covering up of inarticulacy is more apparent in the following extract from Bilanz:

- "Karl: Glaubst du, daß was gibt, nach dem Tod?
 Anna: Freilich, warum denn ned?" 72

The impression of a lack of emotional vitality is more evident in this simple exchange in Lieber Fritz:

71. Kroetz; WA, p.17.

72. Kroetz; WA, p.139.

"Hilde: Schmeckts?
Otto: Freilich, warum denn nicht?" 73

At the same time, however, Anna's reply reveals an apathetic lack of intellectual curiosity and Otto's answer is a simple method of avoiding starting a conversation with his wife and concealing the fact that he has nothing to say. The same double implication underlies other instances of the use of this convenient formula:

- "Franz: ... Hast Sehnsucht nach mir?
Hanni: Warum denn nicht?" 74;
- "Heinz: Wenn ich studiern hätt können, ich wär schon was wordn.
Pause
Glaubst?
Anni: Warum denn nicht?" 75;
- "Im Hotelzimmer, beim Geschlechtsverkehr...
Anna: Warum tust dich denn so anstrengen? Schwitzt ja.
Karl: Warum denn nicht?" 76

"Trotzdem" and "Warum denn nicht?" are not the only ready-made responses which Kroetz's characters rely upon heavily to cover up their inarticulacy. Two of the most popular "Floskeln" of this nature are the almost ubiquitous "genau" and "eben".

Their use, which, as Volker Canaris recognises, signifies "alles andere als Zustimmung" 77, amounts to a desperate

73. Kroetz; GS, p.119.

74. Kroetz; GS, p.16.

75. Kroetz; GS, pp.398/9.

76. Kroetz; WA, p.109.

77. Canaris, Volker; "Ein Volkstheater? Zadek als neuer Intendant in Bochum", in Theater heute, Heft 11, November 1972.

clutching at straws. Finding themselves devoid of words, characters resort to the mechanical uttering of "genau" and "eben" in order to create the impression of agreement or of having made a valid point, thus suggesting articulation and communication where they are in fact terribly lacking.

Both words occur frequently as surrogates for a counter-argument, when one character affects to read an agreement into the words of another. When Martha tries to persuade Willy to accept the consequences of the unexpected baby, Willy's reply is intended to express his feelings about not being the father, but Martha tries to twist his comment into an acceptance of what she has said:

"Martha: ... Ein Kind is kein Unglück. Andere wären froh, wenns ein Kind kriegen. Die täten weiß Gott was dafür geben, daß eins kriegen. Pause. Jetzt wo es passiert ist, nutzt es nix mehr, daß du beleidigt bist.

Willy: Was geht mich ein Kind an, wo ich nicht der Vater bin.

Martha: Genau. Ich laß es ledig melden, wenns da is. Dann tun wir uns beim Adoptieren leichter." 78

The same effect could have been achieved by a pause followed by a change of subject, but by using the convenient "genau" Martha conceals her inability to answer Willy's reproach and seems to create a transition from his words to her own.

Karl uses the same device in Michis Blut, pretending that Marie was really agreeing with him that it is too cold to go to the outside toilet:

78. Kroetz; GS, p.51.

"Marie: Wenn mir nur ein Zimmer ham, gehst aufn Abort.
Karl: Weils da kalt is.
Marie: Aber alles kann man sich ned gefallen lassn.
Karl: Genau." 79

On the surface, of course, this is a deliberate refusal to articulate. However, one must distinguish between this and the refusal to speak as it is presented in Pinter's plays, where the characters could explain or communicate if they wanted. This refusal in Kroetz's plays is a device to gloss over an inability; it is inarticulacy that necessitates the eyewash.

"Eben" is used in the same way. In Gute Besserung Hilde Ruhsam tries to console her sick husband with reasons for their son's failure to visit him in hospital. Karl, however, remains disgruntled. Sensing this, Hilde uses the first opportunity to change the subject, using the helpful little word to imply a mutually arrived at point of agreement where none exists:

"Karl: Wenn man sich über einen Besuch freun tät von ihm.
Hilde: Wennst länger da bleibn muß, kommt er bestimmt.
Karl: Lang kann es ned dauern.
Hilde: Ebn." 80

In this case there is at least a positive gesture behind the misleading "eben", but in the majority of cases its use conveys the same stubbornness and bloody-mindedness that underlies the other expressions of quasi-rationality. In the

79. Kroetz; GS, p.199.

80. Kroetz; WA, p.115.

following dialogue in Stallerhof Stallerin tries to suggest to her husband that they might take on the task of looking after Beppi's child, but Staller rides rough-shod over this idea -- against which he has, of course, no argument -- and pretends she was actually agreeing with him:

"Staller: Das Kind soll in ein Heim, dann hört das
gleich auf.

Stallerin: Man kann sich aber an alles gewöhnen.

Staller: Eben und das brauchts net." 81

Used in this way, "genau" and "eben" are "escape words", serving to imply points of contact and agreement where they are singularly lacking. In Kroetz's plays, conversations frequently consist of monologues in which each character is unable to build the necessary linguistic bridges to the thoughts of another. Each remains stranded in the desert of his own narrow-minded opinions and prejudices, closed to the chance of developing by learning from others. If "genau" and "eben" suggest agreement and productive communication, they in fact mean the opposite.

This is clearly illustrated in the following dialogue between Willy and Martha. The crying of the baby has given them the chance to discuss the problems in their relationship, but neither is able to take advantage of the openings created and the problem therefore remains untouched and unresolved:

"Martha: Du hast was gegen das Kind.

Willy: Gegen ein Kind kann man nix haben, das sowieso
nix dafür kann.

81. Kroetz; GS, p.162.

Martha: Eben. Es ist ein armes Kind, das jetzt jedenfalls da ist.
Willy: Gegen ein Kind kann man nix habn.
Martha: Das sag ich auch.
Großes Intervall" 82

In the ensuing pause the discussion dries up. Despite Martha's attempts to initiate a meaningful conversation, and despite Willy's apparent cooperation, their words fail completely to produce any significant exchange of ideas. Martha's two attempts to suggest agreement are empty mouthings.

A slightly different use of "genau" and "eben" is aptly illustrated in the following extract from Oberösterreich, where both "Floskeln" occur in the same short piece of dialogue during an unsuccessful attempt to consummate sexual intercourse:

"Anni: Bist müd?
Heinz: Ja.
Anni: Dann laßn mir es doch gut sein. Zwingen soll man sich nicht, das verdirbt bloß die Lust.
Heinz: Genau.
Anni: Gehst außer, wennst es ned willst.
Heinz: Wo noch gar kein Genuß war.
Anni: Ich brauch keinen Genuß heute.
Heinz: Ich auch nicht.
Anni: Ebn." 83

Once again the words are used to simulate agreement, but with the significant difference to the earlier examples that here both partners are trying to create the illusion of a decision mutually arrived at and agreed upon.

Consider by contrast the following extract from Lieber Fritz:

82. Kroetz; GS, p.57.
83. Kroetz; GS, p.391.

"Otto: Ein guter Arbeiter war er früher, wost weit hast suchn müssn, daß wieder so ein findst, wenn das mit der Veranlagung nicht hätt sein müssn.

Hilde: Ebn.

Otto: Aber jetzt is er kein guter Arbeiter auch nicht mehr." ⁸⁴

The imprecision of Otto's words allows Hilde to suggest a point of agreement where he is certainly not intending it; Hilde's "eben" is an attempt to pretend agreement.

In the Oberösterreich extract, on the other hand, Heinz and Anni both want to agree. It is true that the words "genau" and "ebn" do not reflect a genuine agreement, but they do here indicate a common desire to agree. Heinz and Anni want to accept the platitudes with which they try to rationalise his failure at lovemaking, because they do not want to face up to the disappointing truth.

In his analysis of the various "redensartliche Floskeln" which Kroetz's characters make use of, F.N. Mennemeier refers to their function of indicating a "fragwürdigen Mitmachen zur schlechten Welt" ⁸⁵. When Heinz "agrees" with Anni that it is pointless to make an effort, and when they both "decide" that they were right to stop because neither needs any pleasure, what they are doing is feigning acceptance of something which in fact considerably perturbs them, but about which they cannot talk.

This use of "Floskeln" or "sprachliche Ersatzhandlungen" ⁸⁶

84. Kroetz; GS, p.115.

85. Mennemeier, F.N.; loc.cit., p.294.

86. Kroetz; WA, p.519.

as a protective shell behind which characters hide their disappointment and unhappiness runs through Kroetz's plays. "Genau" and "eben" in particular are used so often in this way that audiences must very quickly realise that the words signify exactly the opposite.

When Karl and Marie talk about their situation after their child has been stillborn and Marie is lying sick, the desperate attempt to make the most of a bad lot is immediately apparent behind the feigned agreement implied by the convenient "Floskeln":

"Marie: Das halt ich schon aus.
Karl: Genau, das wird schon wieder. Jeden Tag sterben
Menschn. Ebn.
Marie: Ebn." ⁸⁷

The same is true of Fritz's and Mitzi's discussion of the sexual problems they are likely to have to face if they leave together and start a relationship:

"Fritz: ... Da gibt es viele Trix, die man anwendn kann,
wo ich mich nicht so erregn muß.
Mitzi: Genau, es gibt viele Möglichkeiten, und so
wichtig ist es auch nicht. Man braucht bloß
einen guten Willn, dann geht alles, was man
sich vornimmt.
Fritz: Das tät ich auch sagen.
Mitzi: Vielleicht wird es mit der Zeit.
Fritz: Genau." ⁸⁸

In Inklusive Karl and Anna try to talk themselves out of their reservations about their hotel room:

87. Kroetz; GS, p.207.

88. Kroetz; GS, p.128.

"Anna: ... Die zehn Minutn bis zum Strand, die tun ein ganz gut, wenn man die gehn muß.

Karl: Ebn.

Pause

Wenn ich ein Zimmer gnommen hätt, direkt am Strand, das is natürlich ideal, aber...

Anna: Man muß schon auf die Preise schaun, sonst kommt man zu nix. Auch der Urlaub is keine Ausnahme.

Karl: Ebn." 89

Superficially this feigned acceptance frees the characters from the difficulty of tackling a problem which they cannot articulate. However, the dissatisfaction beneath the surface is made clear in the following extract from Hartnäckig. Christine and Helmut bring up the subject of the sexual inconvenience caused by Helmut's accident, which has meant that they can have intercourse only when he lies on his back and she sits astride him. After their apparent agreement that this arrangement is quite satisfactory Christine shatters the illusion of acceptance and expresses her real feelings:

"Christine: Das is auch schön, wenn man sich dran gewöhnt.

Helmut: Genau.

Pause

Christine: Aber für immer möcht ich das nicht so haben." 90

Generally, however, Kroetz prefers to do without this explicit exposure and allows the apparent agreement to stand uncontested. The context in which the "Floskeln" occur is enough on its own to let their real significance become evident.

This is exemplified in the following dialogue from

89. Kroetz; WA, p.101.

90. Kroetz; GS, p.79.

Inklusive, where Karl complains about the unexpected dearness of all the extras on their holiday and Anna interrupts him:

"Anna: Da tät ich jetzt nicht dran denkn, wenn ich du wär, das genießn mir jetzt, und laßn uns von nix störn.

Karl: Genau." ⁹¹

The tone of Anna's words and her use of the subjunctive tense make it clear that she, too, is discomfited by the same worries which Karl has just expressed. It is no less clear that Karl is not fooled by her words, despite his apparent "Zustimmung". There is no genuine agreement here; the words cover a deep-rooted dissatisfaction and at the same time mask an inability to investigate the reasons for it.

In this respect the unthinking reiteration of "genau" and "eben" forms part of the arsenal of linguistic devices with which Kroetz's characters seek to conceal their inability to use language to comprehend their situation. The shortcomings of language mentioned up till now have been in the main direct failures -- the collapse into silence, the repetition of utterances, the resort to insult, the flight into denials of responsibility. There is, however, another type of "Sprachlosigkeit", which consists in the use of what Kroetz himself, in his essay on Horváth, has termed:

"... sprachliche Ersatzhandlungen, eben Floskeln, Meditieren in Schablonen, Sprichwörtern, Höflichkeits- und Unwohlighkeitsformeln." ⁹²

These linguistic surrogates serve to provide an apparently

91. Kroetz; WA, p.103.

92. Kroetz; WA, p.519.

"wortreiche Kommunikation" ⁹³ while in actual fact concealing the inability to use language in its proper function as a means of comprehending and relating to reality and other people. The "sprachliche Ersatzhandlungen" merely allow characters to talk round and thus cover up their difficulties. They constitute, to borrow one critic's term with reference to Kroetz himself, a "Redegewandte 'Sprachlosigkeit'" ⁹⁴.

Kroetz recognises that his own use of language continues Horváth's tradition of linguistic surrogates, but makes an important reservation:

"In der Welt der Werktätigen von heute gibt es diese Tradition des Kleinbürgertums nicht und also nicht die Sprache aus Floskeln, Verhaltensregeln, Höflichkeitsformeln, Sprichwörtern und verbalisierten Notständen. ... So funktionieren meine Figuren genau nach dem Schema der Horváthschen, eben nur mit dem Unterschied, daß ihnen die Sprache des Kleinbürgertums nicht zur Verfügung steht." ⁹⁵

Analysis of Kroetz's plays will confirm this assessment, although one is probably tempted to be less sweeping in the estimation of the extent to which his characters have lost their resources of linguistic surrogates. They may be less articulate than Horváth's figures, but they are by no means completely devoid of language.

It is possible to see one of the features already mentioned, the iteration of nonsensical reasoning, as belonging to this category of "sprachliche Ersatzhandlungen". On a direct

93. Schaarschmidt, Peter; op.cit., p.212.

94. Thieringer, Thomas; "Redegewandte 'Sprachlosigkeit'", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 13-14/12/75.

95. Kroetz; WA, pp.520/1.

level, the voicing of "Scheinargumente" reflects a straightforward inability to think through a point of view. On a slightly deeper level, however, it is significant how often characters try to give their opinions the appearance of reason and logic in order to conceal their real intellectual sterility. Even in the simple formula: "Wennst schlafst, wachst du!"⁹⁶ Otto is trying to endow his empty words with an aura of wisdom, to give his command to his son the appearance of authority without being merely authoritarian.

In other cases characters attempt to give their words more weight and conviction by borrowing them from other contexts and applying them indiscriminately to their own situations. Language used in this way invariably highlights its own hollowness.

The most immediate foreign context is simply that of standard "Hochdeutsch". All of Kroetz's characters speak, in varying degrees, in Bavarian dialect; the switch to the "Schriftsprache" is startlingly evident and constitutes an easy means of endowing one's words, however banal, with the appearance of greater authority.

Occasionally this can be conveyed by a single word. When Anni wishes to announce her pregnancy to Heinz she exclaims: "Sitz dich hin Heinz, ich muß dir was Wichtiges mitteiln."⁹⁷ The more usual word "sagen" is replaced by the more eloquent

96. Kroetz; GS, p.109.

97. Kroetz; GS, p.394.

"mitteilen" in honour of the gravity of the forthcoming announcement.

The same reasons prompt Helmut to choose the rather unnatural formulation: "Das ist das Schicksal, dem man nicht ausweichen kann"⁹⁸, when trying to reconcile Christine to the fact of his accident. Hilda tries to impress on Hanni her anger at her daughter's disobedience by intoning: "Das hat man von der Güte, die man dir angedeihn läßt."⁹⁹ In discussing the possibility of an abortion, Anni lends power to her sentiment that the baby is as much a human being as they are by slipping into the elegance of "Hochdeutsch" (as is expressly indicated by Kroetz in the stage directions): "Das ist ein Lebewesen so wie mir."¹⁰⁰

An even greater sense of authority can be created by borrowing words with connotations of popular literature and cinema. In Wildwechsel Franz toys with the idea of confronting Hanni's father with a gun, and considers the ultimatum: "... entweder Sie legen unserer Liebe nix mehr in Weg oder es passiert was."¹⁰¹ The dramatic turn of phrase has clearly been extracted from the pages of a cheap "Krimi" or from the television or cinema. In an attempt to lend importance to his sentiments Franz couches them in the highflown phrases of a

98. Kroetz; GS, p.72.

99. Kroetz; GS, p.20.

100. Kroetz; GS, p.404; note the ironic juxtaposition with the Bavarian "mir".

101. Kroetz; GS, p.33.

fantasy world of action and romance.

In a similar way Christine in Hartnäckig resorts to the vocabulary of romantic fiction when she implores her father: "Reiß mir den Helmut nicht aus dem Herzen!" ¹⁰²; her mother does the same shortly afterwards when she rationalises her indifference to Rustorfer's lovemaking with the second-hand sop: "Die Liebe is jetzt innerlich." ¹⁰³; and Rustorfer in turn makes use of the same specious eloquence when he encourages Helmut, following Christine's abortion, with the remark: "Die Weichen sind gestellt in eine neue Zukunft." ¹⁰⁴

Wherever such deviations occur, they are immediately apparent by the stark contrast to the normal range of expression at the disposal of the characters. By groping awkwardly outside the limits of their own vocabulary, Kroetz's "Sprachlosen" strive to assume the appearance of wisdom and authority suggested by the borrowed words.

There are three fields from which Kroetz's characters borrow with particular frequency -- the language of proverbs, of the claims of official authorities, and of the world of consumerism.

Speaking of the mass of dead, hackneyed phrases in the English language, George Orwell describes them as "mere thought-saving devices, having the same relation to living

102. Kroetz; GS, p.75.

103. Kroetz; GS, p.77.

104. Kroetz; GS, p.81.

English as a crutch has to a leg." ¹⁰⁵ The same may be said of the manner in which Kroetz's characters greedily borrow proverbs, official wisdoms and advertising slogans. In this way it is possible to replace personal thought and expression with ready-made formulae, which in turn generally carry a reputation of authority and thus enhance the impression made by the speaker.

The instability that actually underlies proverbs, however, is readily apparent. Even a casual examination reveals that an enormous number of proverbs expressing a piece of advice have a partner stating precisely the opposite: "Many hands make light work"/"Too many cooks spoil the broth"; "Nothing ventured, nothing gained"/"Better safe than sorry". The truth is that proverbs are little more than pithy formulae with which certain situations can be conveniently summed up, but which cannot be used to embody absolute rules. Their value depends on the extent to which they serve to illuminate particular situations.

For Kroetz's characters, however, they carry the implication of being time-tested and incontrovertible truths, and their citation in support of an argument constitutes something akin to indisputable proof. Proverbs thus quoted need not even have more than the flimsiest relevance to the point in hand. When Hilde warns Otto not to drink so much, he rejoins,

105. Orwell, George; The English People, in The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Volume III, As I Please, 1943-1945, Penguin Books Ltd, 1971, p.43.

("auftrumpfend", as Kroetz indicates in the stage directions):

"Ein sorgendes Weib hat kein Unterleib." ¹⁰⁶ There is no argument here. Otto is simply covering up his inability to argue with Hilde by switching to the attack, delivering his scarcely relevant insult as if it were a devastating piece of dialectic.

In the majority of cases proverbs are applied indiscriminately to whatever situation crops up, occasionally adorned by a shimmer of relevance. However this may be, the proverb is not measured against reality, as it should be if it is to be of any value, but merely applied blindly to it.

"Probieren geht über Studieren" is frequently misused in this way. Martha quotes it to justify her attempted abortion in Heimarbeit; her namesake in Männersache resorts to it before the bizarre shooting match with Otto; Marie uses it in defence of the dire mustard bath in Michis Blut. ¹⁰⁷ Yet none of these characters is demonstrating the result of a process of reasoning; they are merely repeating a piece of advice which they have heard used positively in other contexts. What is intended to be an incentive to constructive activity is debased to a meaningless justification of desperate attempts to salvage something from the wreckage of a hopeless situation. The proverb is quoted in an attempt to erect a facade of self-determination to support the illusion that each char-

106. Kroetz; GS, p.112.

107. Kroetz; GS, pp.52,105,204.

acter has rationally approached the problem in hand and made a reasoned decision as to how best to cope with it.

Proverbs should, as Burger and von Matt write, reflect "erfahrungswissen aus zweiter hand"¹⁰⁸, but Kroetz's characters are unable to distil this "erfahrungswissen" and measure the wisdom of the proverb against present reality. So it is that "Probieren geht über Studieren" becomes more an expression of helplessness and resignation than an indication of decisiveness and energy.

Nevertheless, even the appearance of wisdom is of importance to Kroetz's "Sprachlosen", and proverbs thus retain considerable value. Thus Hermann Rasch in Dolomitenstadt Lienz sprinkles his speech with a liberal dosage of proverbial wisdoms and pithy clichés -- "Irren ist menschlich", "Übung macht den Meister", "Hunde sind treu", "Ein guter Mensch wird selten fett", "Träume sind zollfrei", "Hart mußt du sein, Landgraf!", "Wer die Hosn voll hat kann leicht stinken", "Jeder is seines Glückes Schmied". He even couches the dubious assertion that prison is a necessary experience for a well-rounded personality in the form of a proverb: "Ein Mann ohne Knast ist wie ein Baum ohne Ast."¹⁰⁹

This command of proverbs allows Rasch to adopt the role of the shrewd man of the world, at least as far as his present

108. Burger/von Matt; loc.cit., p.283.

109. Kroetz; GS, pp.234,296,352,232,314,220,302,238.

companions are concerned. Through practice, he has learnt to make a relatively convincing show of his "wisdom". Edgar, in the later play Nicht Fisch nicht Fleisch, carries this technique one step further by casually resorting to a proverb in another language, thus augmenting the impressiveness of his words even more: "My home is my castle." ¹¹⁰

Not all of Kroetz's characters are as eloquent as Edgar or Rasch in their use of this device, however. In Michis Blut Karl and Marie resign themselves to having to make the best of their situation, and Karl at once tries to consolidate their decision by reiterating it in proverb form. Immediately afterwards, however, he utters a second proverb with no relevance whatsoever to the point in hand. Thus the meaninglessness of the first one is unmasked; it is no more than a convenient formula, invalidated by the lack of understanding with which it is spoken:

"Marie: ... Aber man muß sich abfindn.

Karl: Genau. Man muß sich nach der Deckn streckn.

Marie: Ja.

Karl: In der Nacht sind alle Katzn grau. Das sind auch Wahrheiten." ¹¹¹

Quoted in this indiscriminate manner, proverbs lose their strength as arguments. They remain perhaps "vorformulierte zusammenfassungen von erfahrungswissen" ¹¹², but without any relevance to the situation in which they are applied. As practical advice therefore, they are worthless.

110. Kroetz; DS, p.20.

111. Kroetz; GS, p.202.

112. Burger/von Matt; loc.cit., p.282.

That they can be used constructively is illustrated abundantly in Lieber Fritz. Mitzi makes intelligent use of the much abused "Probieren geht über Studieren" ¹¹³ when she encourages Fritz in the idea of starting a relationship with her; in answer to Otto's cruel jibe that he would rather be dead than suffer Fritz's operation, Fritz calmly replies: "Man darf die Flintn nicht ins Korn schmeißen" ¹¹⁴; trying to help Fritz overcome his doubts about the difficulty of making a fresh start, Mitzi urges: "Dem Mutigen gehört die Welt" ¹¹⁵; Fritz repeats this proverb shortly afterwards when trying to make clear to Otto the necessity of his leaving ¹¹⁶; when Fritz finally sets off his parting words are: "Wer wagt, gewinnt!" ¹¹⁷ Here proverbs are used in their proper function: to provide encouragement and guidelines for action.

Their use in Lieber Fritz, however, forms an exception. Generally they serve to lend an air of authority and wisdom to what is really authoritarianism and cant -- "Messer, Gabel, Schere, Licht, ist für kleine Kinder nicht" is tellingly juxtaposed with the direct command: "Wennst es zündeln nicht aufhörst, fangst eine" ¹¹⁸ -- or they are quoted in a desperate attempt to conceal the fact that the speaker is having to resign himself to an unpleasant state of affairs -- "Wer wagt,

113. Kroetz; GS, p.127.

114. Kroetz; GS, p.120.

115. Kroetz; GS, p.126.

116. Kroetz; GS, p.129.

117. Kroetz; GS, p.134.

118. Kroetz; GS, p.109.

gewinnt. Und das is ein Sprichwort" ¹¹⁹, exclaims Karl Heubl, the superficial energy of his conviction betraying the real sense of failure and inadequacy which he feels.

This discrepancy between words and meaning is usually glaring. In a moving scene in Geisterbahn Sepp laments his failure to stand up for himself. In support, Beppi eagerly pours forth the supply of encouraging proverbs she has learned from him. However, her blind enthusiasm shows she does not really understand what she is saying, and Sepp's hesitant, half-hearted "Mitmachen" shows how little faith he has in his own words. As he says, in summary as it were: "Das is ein Sprichwörtl sonst nix." ¹²⁰ Here, as so often in these plays, the proverbs are no more than puny attempts at self-encouragement.

On the other hand, it is no coincidence that the proverb that is used most aptly is the frequently recurring: "Man muß sich nach der Decke strecken" ¹²¹. Unlike the merely hopeful proverbial platitudes poured out by Sepp and Beppi, the fatalistic resignation of this proverb is securely founded on reality. In using it, the speaker forces himself to accept a situation which deeply displeases him, but which he cannot see any way of changing. Karl Ruhsam, for example, voices his reservations about the standards in the hospital. While

119. Kroetz; WA, p.148.

120. Kroetz; GS, p.168.

121. Kroetz; e.g. GS, pp.131,162,202,207,416 and WA, pp.127, 144.

his wife agrees with him, they both have to admit that treatment elsewhere is too expensive for their means, so that Karl will have to make the best of the present circumstances: "Man muß sich nach der Deckn streckn."¹²² The proverb is invoked in an attempt to mitigate the harshness of an unpleasant situation by creating the impression of inevitability.

The depressing extent of this helplessness in the face of apparently incontrovertible external forces can also be seen in the reliance on second hand knowledge, usually from some official source. Such muttered fragments as "heißt es", "das ist üblich" or "es wird gesagt" may appear to be of little importance, but ultimately they reveal the extent to which the speaker is dependent on opinions from an outside source. By citing anonymous authority characters seek to add weight to their own words, as if the mere suggestion of general validity made disagreement impossible, while in reality they are simply demonstrating their own inability to question whatever view is being expressed.

Kroetz makes extensive use of this device to great effect in Weitere Aussichten..., in which Frau Ruhsam struggles to come to terms with her enforced move into an old folks' home. In the opening minutes she mutters the familiar defeatist proverb: "Man muß sich nach der Decke strecken"¹²³, and her

122. Kroetz; WA, p.127.

123. Kroetz; WA, p.255.

monologue thereafter is liberally peppered with the almost incidental signs of her resignation -- "Das geht schnell, heißt es"; "Das is ein bleibender Wert, heißt es"; "Aber Einzelzimmer gibt es bloß, wenn man im Sterben liegt... Das ist üblich"; "Was sein muß, muß sein"; "Eine andere Umgebung macht einen anderen Menschen, heißt es"; and towards the end she summarises her situation with the words: "Man muß sich abfinden, als alter Mensch." ¹²⁴

These remarks, along with the frequent references to the words of her son and of the "Heimleitung", reveal how little control she has over her own fate. Not articulate enough to analyse her situation, she glosses over the pain and dissatisfaction which her removal into the home is causing her by affecting acceptance of generally acknowledged "facts". Once again we are witness to the "fragwürdigen Mitmachen zur schlechten Welt" ¹²⁵.

Compiling a brief list of the various external authorities summoned up in this way, Burger and von Matt identify:

"Zitat der öffentlichen meinung; berufung auf naturgesetzmässigkeiten; berufung auf undurchsichtige rechtspraktiken; berufung auf das vorbild der eltern; berufung aufs fernsehen." ¹²⁶

It is to the first of these sources, to public opinion, that Frau Ruhsam makes most frequent reference, as if the mere

124. Kroetz; WA, pp.256,257,258,259,262,266.

125. Mennemeier, F.N.; loc.cit., p.294.

126. Burger/von Matt; loc.cit., p.283.

invocation of this "authority" rendered further thought superfluous. Mama Distl resorts to the same sort of common knowledge when she reproaches her son: "Rauchn führt zum Lungenkrebs. Das is üblich." ¹²⁷ Marie consoles Karl after their child has been stillborn by claiming: "Eine jede Minutn verhungert ein Kind, heißt es." ¹²⁸ Stallerin seeks confirmation in the popular bromide: "Es wird gsagt, daß etwa Narrische den Tod net spürn wie mir." ¹²⁹ Each time the apparently causal appendage tries to summon up the impression of an opinion sanctioned by the authority of common knowledge.

The extent to which this device has replaced the speaker's individual thought process is made clear in one exchange in Michis Blut. Following the stillbirth of their child, Karl seeks consolation in the words of the Bible: "Wer nicht geborn is, is der Best, und wer früh stirbt, der zweitbest, sagt Christus." Marie is reluctant to accept this sop, but her objection is met by the admonishment: "Aber heißn tuts so." ¹³⁰ This reference to external authority constitutes a sort of proof; Karl is not articulate enough to measure the substance of the words against reality. When quoting external sources in this way, Kroetz's characters reveal themselves as unquestioning buckets to be filled with whatever information the outside manipulators please.

127. Kroetz; WA, p.184.

128. Kroetz; GS, p.208.

129. Kroetz; GS, p.153.

130. Kroetz; GS, p.204.

Science offers a popular source. Stallerin argues: "Die Kinder werdn die Eltern nach, das is wissenschaftlich." ¹³¹; Frau Stadel, in Der Unfall, claims: "Wenn man wenig schlaft, wird man krank, das is wissenschaftlich." ¹³²; Karl Distl expounds: "Die meisten Leute sterbn im Frühjahr, das is wissenschaftlich." ¹³³ Each time, the claim is verified by the indisputable evidence of "naturgesetzmässigkeiten".

Legal practice and television are also invoked in the same way. Stallerin consolidates her opinion by reference to the authority of the law: "Ein Vater hat das Recht, sein Kind zu besuchen, das is amtlich." ¹³⁴ Heinz shows his subservience to the all-knowing television in his blind parroting of the idea of a new ice age: "Dabei hams im Fernsehen gsagt, daß mir eine neue Eiszeit kriegn." ¹³⁵

Frequently the information heard from another source is repeated in such a way as clearly to reveal how little the speaker has understood what he or she has heard. For want of arguments Kroetz's characters are forced to accept the "facts" as reported by the various external agencies. For example, Dieter's casual remark in Wildwechsel about the Costa del Sol that "Das Salzwasser is so salzig, daß den Mund nicht aufmachn kannst" ¹³⁶ is the mere parroting of a snippet of information gleaned, in all probability, from a travel brochure and quoted

131. Kroetz; GS, p.163.

132. Kroetz; WA, p.21.

133. Kroetz; WA, p.145.

134. Kroetz; GS, p.164.

135. Kroetz; GS, p.390.

136. Kroetz; GS, p.15.

indiscriminately, without having been measured against reality, first or second hand, to gauge its accuracy. He is the slave and not the master of the words.

This incident is, of course, trivial, but the significance of such indiscriminate parroting becomes apparent when more is at stake than the simple discussion of holiday plans. In more serious contexts characters thus reveal what malleable subjects they offer for indoctrination. Later in Wildwechsel, for example, Erwin shows how completely he has swallowed the capitalist cant of the rewards of industry:

"Hilda: ...Denk an die Kinder in Indien, weil die verhungern.

Erwin: Dort solln's was arbeiten, dann ham's auch ein Geld und können essn. Das wissn mir am bestn. Nachm Krieg warn mir ärmer wie die alle miteinander in Asien, und schau uns heut an. Weil mir arbeiten." ¹³⁷

Like the American Dream, the German ethos of Work and Betterment is a carrot dangled before the exploited to keep them running; but Erwin, with his limited powers of language, cannot see through the eyewash.

Staller, with his complacent recourse to the German "Wirtschaftswunder" in support of his belief in the practical realisation of self-improvement, displays a similar blindness. That the economic miracle is an historical fact is not in question, but Staller cannot begin to measure the extent of its validity against present reality.

137. Kroetz; GS, p.22.

In the same way Karl Ruhsam in Gute Besserung is at the mercy of his doctor's words and cannot make a personal assessment of his own health. He is perturbed by his loss of weight, but nevertheless lets himself be persuaded by the doctor's explanation -- "Der Körper schrumpft ebn gsund" ¹³⁸ -- that this is a good sign. The words from an official source of authority carry more weight than personal insight and feelings, despite Karl's doubts.

Frequently, however, characters are entirely free from such reservations and willingly accept the "facts" with which society confronts them. In Männersache, for example, Otto is blind to the sordid reality of the pornography market, which propagates the glittering myth of glamorous models:

"Martha: Sind das Nutten, wo sich nackert fotografieren lassen?"

Otto: Hast eine Ahnung, was das sind. Fotomodelle, die ham mit Nutten überhaupt nix zu tun. Studieren die meisten, und weils das Studium nicht zahlen können, lassen sie sich abfotografieren. Dann hams wieder ein Geld und können ein Jahr lang leben." ¹³⁹

No doubt it is from the same pornographic magazines that Otto has his dubious information.

The world of marketable goods, with its particular "Konsumsprache", forms a source of considerable influence on Kroetz's "Sprachlosen". It is not only in the field of pornography that the language of advertising and salesmanship

138. Kroetz; WA, p.117.

139. Kroetz; GS, p.88.

exerts power over the consumer, who again is condemned to take the words at face value.

Kroetz powerfully illustrates the extent of this helplessness in one scene in Das Nest, in which Kurt and Martha recall the occasion when they were persuaded to buy a tie by a typically smooth-tongued salesman. Seeing that Martha has been attracted by a particularly expensive tie, he is quick to describe it as "'eine überdurchschnittlich teure, aber exquisit'" and to praise her for evincing a "'Qualitätsbegriff, was nicht jeder hat'" ¹⁴⁰. To the audience it is obvious that the sales assistant is indulging in simple flattery in order to make a sale. Kurt and Martha, however, fall victim to the soft soap and are led to make a far more expensive purchase than they intended.

This point recurs throughout Kroetz's plays. In Die Wahl fürs Leben the mother is persuaded to buy caviar as it is "vom besonderen Reiz für die kalte Platte" ¹⁴¹; the young boy in Milde Sorte dreams of his motorbike as "der beste Freund der Freiheit" ¹⁴²; Karli in Sterntaler lets himself be won over by the propaganda from the bank for the "Urlaubs-Sparstrumpf-Lochstopfer-Kredit" ¹⁴³.

Oberösterreich in particular is full of references to the magic of the "Konsumwelt":

140. Kroetz; WA, p.226.

141. Kroetz; WA, p.157.

142. Kroetz; WA, p.40.

143. Kroetz; WA, pp.211/2.

- "Anni: Wien.
Heinz: Eine Kaiserstadt.
Anni: Einmal fahrn mir auch nach Wien, gell.
Heinz: Münchn is eine Königsstadt, aber Wien is
eine Kaiserstadt, heißt es." 144;
- "Heinz: Willst eine Dampferrundfahrt machn?
Anni: Wo der Himmel 'stahlblau' is." 145;
- "Anni: ...Weißt, was ich gemacht hab, zur Feier des
Tages? Einen Krappnsalat, das is der Lieblings-
salat von Curd Jürgens." 146

In Act I, Scene II the dependency of Heinz and Anni on the sparkling phrases of sales promotion is highlighted in their adulation of the luxurious Manta automobile and a garden swimming pool respectively. The eloquence of the advertising material leads Heinz to denigrate his perfectly adequate car as "ein Massnauto und kein Vergleich" ¹⁴⁷ and Martha to extol the virtues of fountains in the form of ducks. Advertising sets standards which Kroetz's "Sprachlosen" raise on to pedestals because they are not equipped to measure the actual truth or relevance of the claim.

A particularly glaring example of this subservience is offered by one scene in Das Nest, in which Kurt and Martha sadly reveal their malleability:

"In der Wohnung von Kurt und Martha. Martha macht das Abendessen, Kurt blättert in einem großen Katalog mit neuen Autos. Kurt trägt einen Pullover.

Martha: Merkst du was?

Kurt: Was?

Martha: Obst was merkst. Pause Ein Unwohlbefinden vielleicht?

144. Kroetz; GS, p.385.

145. Kroetz; GS, p.390.

146. Kroetz; GS, p.395.

147. Kroetz; GS, p.388.

Kurt: Warum?
Martha: Fühlst dich wohl in deiner Haut?
Kurt: Ja.
Martha: lächelt Ich muß dir nämlich etwas verraten:
Seit mir ein bißl sparen wegn dem Butzile, da
spar ich auch im Haushalt.
Kurt: Überall ein bißl weg, und es geht.
Martha: Ebn, und drum nimm ich kein 'Lenor' mehr für
die Wollsachn, kleine Pause, weißt es eh, die
'Frau mit dem schlechtn Gewißn'.
Kurt: Reklame." 148

In performance this exchange invariably gives rise to laughter among the audience, but one should not forget the grim truth it contains. Martha identifies with the housewife in the advertisement who has a bad conscience because she has washed her husband's pullover with a cheaper brand of washing powder. The silly slogan has been elevated to the status of a fact.

If Kurt is quick to mock his wife here, he shortly afterwards reveals his own subservience to the "Konsumsprache" when he enthusiastically praises the merits of the latest automobile model, which he reads verbatim from the catalogue like a litany. Blinded by the glamour of the words, Kurt cannot begin to see the car as a car; it is a golden carrot to be chased.

The way in which Kroetz's figures are manipulated by the language of consumer goods, as well as by that of official authorities and proverbs, provides a strong indication of the function of "Sprachlosigkeit" in these plays. It is not

148. Kroetz; WA, p.230.

enough to isolate and describe the various features of this inarticulacy, one must also ask what role it plays in Kroetz's politically committed theatre.

In effect, the inability to use language as an instrument of reflection, analysis, articulation and communication results in the failure to control one's environment and to shape one's future. Without language one has no insight into the actions which one is part of and cannot, therefore, influence them. The "Sprachlosen" then become the puppets of the "Sprachfähigen".

Kroetz sees the phenomenon of inarticulacy as a direct product of the capitalist system, in which the majority without means is manipulated by the minority with means, as illustrated in the way Kroetz's "Sprachlosen" are at the mercy of the language of consumerism. In this context language is a weapon in the class conflict. The primary function of language for the underprivileged is therefore as a means of self-defence.

Kroetz makes this point explicitly in his theoretical and polemical writings. In his essay on Horváth, he writes:

"Menschen, die gelernt haben zu reden, können sich verständigen, oder, was wichtiger ist, sie können sich wehren." ¹⁴⁹

He repeats the assertion in an essay on the state of the theatre in the Federal Republic of Germany:

149. Kroetz; WA, p.520.

"Und Sprache gebrauchen können, heißt sich verständlich machen können, heißt organisieren können, heißt letztlich: sich wehren können!" 150

In both cases Kroetz stresses the importance of self-defence over and above the basic aim of communication. For language is not an end in itself: it is important only in so far as it enables the user to be in control of his own situation.

In this respect Hans Wysling does not go far enough when he writes of Kroetz's characters in his essay Brechts Enkel:

"Die drei Grundleistungen von Sprache können nicht mehr vollzogen werden:

1. Sprache vermag den Menschen nicht mehr zu sich selbst zu bringen. Er kann sich seiner selbst nicht mehr bewußt werden.
2. Sprache vermag den Menschen nicht mehr über sich hinauszudeuten. Er kann sich nicht transzendieren.
3. Sprache vermag nicht mehr zu kommunizieren. Sie kann keine zwischenmenschliche Bezüge mehr herstellen." 151

Kroetz might well agree with this analysis -- as far as it goes. The concepts of awareness of self, transcendence of self and communication with others cannot, for the committed communist, be left hovering in a vacuum. They acquire meaning only by virtue of the particular historical and social context in which they occur. Inarticulacy, every bit as much as violence, is a social phenomenon. For Kroetz's "Sprachlosen",

150. Kroetz; "Subventionssauerei", in Neues Forum (Wien), Heft 229, Februar 1973.

151. Wysling, Hans; "Brechts Enkel", in Neue Züricher Zeitung, 20-21/09/75.

therefore, the essential "Grundleistung von Sprache" consists in its function as an instrument of self-determination.

As suggested, there are basically two types of "Sprachlosigkeit" in Kroetz's plays. One could perhaps refer to them as direct and indirect inarticulacy.

By direct inarticulacy is meant the straightforward inability to use language. This manifests itself in silences, the repetition of words, the resort to abuse, the escape into denials of guilt, the failure to understand another's words, and the inaccurate use of words.

By indirect inarticulacy is meant the attempt to conceal this inability by the use of "sprachliche Ersatzhandlungen", that is, by the indiscriminate borrowing of linguistic constructions from other sources to be used quasi-authoritatively in random contexts. This manifests itself in the adoption of proverbs, of "Floskeln" such as "genau" and "eben", of the external form of arguments from other contexts, of the stylised phrases and slogans of cinema, press and popular literature, and in the slavish adherence to the claims of official authority, notably those of the consumer society.

It may be argued that this distinction is of no effective meaning, but to a certain extent the two types of inarticulacy can be related significantly to the two main reactions of Kroetz's figures to their oppressive environment: violence and apathy.

Generally speaking, the reaction of apathy precedes that

of violence. In demonstrating the way in which the "Sprachlosigkeit" of the characters leads to fatalistic resignation Kroetz relies predominantly on what has been termed indirect inarticulacy.

By borrowing language from other sources, characters seek to cover up the inadequacies of their own. Ultimately, however, they merely replace one type of failure by another. They become the servants of the borrowed words, empty buckets to be filled with whatever the "Sprachfähigen" choose. These figures remain unable to analyse, comprehend, compare, draw conclusions, make plans -- in short, to use language meaningfully. They are demonstrating, not "Sprache", but "Geschwätzigkeit". As Ernst Wendt writes:

"Jeder sagt was, repetiert vorgefundenen Sprachschutt, aber keiner kommt mit seinen Worten an die eigenen Nöte heran, an die der anderen schon lange nicht." 152

This empty mouthing of "Sprachschutt" is bad enough. What is worse is that, like the man who wears a mask until his features grow to fit it, Kroetz's characters adapt to fit the words they have affected, until eventually they become their slaves. Heinz swallows the outpourings of automobile advertising and yearns to escape his "Massnauto"; Martha genuinely has a bad conscience because she has used an inferior washing powder. They have lost the power of discrimination

152. Wendt, Ernst; "Franz Xaver Kroetz: Eine neue Heimatkunst", in Programmheft 5, Staatliche Schauspielbühnen Berlins, Spielzeit 1973/74; Quoted in Panzner, op.cit., p.85.

and are forced to accept at face value the words thrown at them.

It is not only the world of consumer goods whose language threatens to reduce Kroetz's "Sprachlosen" to plasticine figures. The television and newspapers, the apparatus of bureaucracy, law or business, the pronouncements of science and various experts -- all exploit the listeners' inarticulacy in order to impose their own point of view.

Deprived of the means of argument -- language -- Kroetz's characters are incapable of thinking in any way except as a lifeless process of "Sichabfinden", unable to protest against the situations inflicted upon them. When Otto, for example, is asked how much tax is deducted from his wage, he answers: "Red vom Netto. Brutto durchschaut man nicht."¹⁵³ His listless acceptance is typical of Kroetz's characters. The various linguistic surrogates to which they frequently resort are an attempt to veil this defeatist apathy. They have no language with which to protest, so they use the remnants which they do possess to gloss over both their dumbness and their dissatisfaction.

There comes a point, however, beyond which they will not be pushed. As Elvira Högemann insists:

"Kroetz' Figuren sind nicht unendlich manipulierbar. Sie verfügen über einen eigenen humanen Anspruch und

153. Kroetz; GS, p.90.

Impuls, der ihnen Widerstandskraft verleiht und sie zum Handeln bringt." 154

The tragedy of this transformation into action is that it is doomed to be destructive. Without language, these characters cannot formulate constructive courses of action, so when the point is reached at which their "eigenen humanen Anspruch und Impuls" enables them to transcend their apathy to give voice to the emotional nexus of anger, dissatisfaction and frustration within them, their only reaction is an uncontrolled outburst of animal energy. Violence is, as one critic puts it: "die letzte ohnmächtige Artikulation der Sprachlosen" 155.

This connection between "Sprachlosigkeit" and "Gewalt" can be seen more clearly in the instances of what has been called direct inarticulacy. A better illustration cannot be found than in the scene in Wildwechsel where Erwin has discovered the coat which Franz has made a present of to Hanni. In the face of her father's furious ranting that she cannot accept such a gift, Hanni stubbornly protests, until:

"Erwin: ...Er stockt und gibt ihr unvermittelt eine Ohrfeige
Die Red bleibt eim weg." 156

This incident, in fact, equates violence with inarticulacy:

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154. Högemann, Elvira; "Stücke über kleine Leute. Der Dramatiker Franz Xaver Kroetz", in UZ, Duisburg, 24/11/72; Quoted in Panzner, op.cit., p.83.
155. Karasek, Hellmuth; "Kleines Lexicon deutschschreibender Dramatiker der Gegenwart. Franz Xaver Kroetz oder: Die Sprache funktioniert nicht", in Theater heute, Jahressonderheft, 1972.
156. Kroetz; GS, p.31.

in Wendt's formulation: "wo Worte versagen, setzt dann die Tat an." ¹⁵⁷ The special tragedy of Kroetz's characters is that the threshold at which their language fails them is frighteningly low. The words at their disposal are inadequate for dealing with anything more significant than the drudgery of the daily round.

Consequently, bearing in mind Bond's words that human beings are violent animals only in the way that dogs are swimming animals, it is easy to understand why the intrusion of problems into the lives of these "Sprachlosen" has such catastrophic consequences. When unforeseen difficulties disrupt the balance of their lives -- unexpected pregnancy in Wildwechsel, Heimarbeit, Stallerhof, Michis Blut, Helmut's accident in Hartnäckig, the threatened removal of the baby Georg in Geisterbahn -- none of the characters involved is in a position to analyse the situation and try to come to terms with it, "sind sie völlig aufgestört und hilflos, verbleibt ihnen nur noch der Ausweg in Apathie oder ins Verbrechen" ¹⁵⁸. Kroetz sees this inability unequivocally as a failure of language:

"Würden die Figuren so viel sprechen, wie es ein konventionelles Stück verlangt, würden sie, da sie nicht dumm sind, irgendwann auf ihr Problem stoßen. Weil sie der Sprache mächtig wären, würden sie es aufdecken." ¹⁵⁹

157. Wendt, Ernst; "Franz Xaver Kroetz: Eine neue Heimatkunst", Programmheft 5, Staatliche Schauspielbühnen Berlins, Spielzeit 1973/74; Quoted in Panzner, op.cit., p.85.

158. Panzner, op.cit., p.24.

159. Kroetz; "Vorbemerkung zur Heimarbeit", printed in Spectaculum 15, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1971.

Deprived of the linguistic equipment needed to be able to perceive and analyse their problems, Kroetz's "Sprachlosen" are blind both to their source and to their remedy; they are left with the alternative of resignation or violence. Common to both reactions is the lack of insight into the situation and the consequent failure to decide upon any constructive course of action.

In Wildwechsel, for example, neither Hanni nor Franz is really aware of how they came to plan and carry out the murder of Erwin. Hanni can see no further than the immediate fact of her pregnancy and pathetically tries to foist the blame for the murder on to the child; Franz is equally blinkered and hides his inability to understand behind the convenient excuse of fate: "Jetzt sind's alle beide tot, das is Schicksal." ¹⁶⁰

When the human instincts buried deep within Fräulein Rasch suddenly surge to the surface to disrupt her robot-like existence, she is not articulate enough to put them into words. She cannot analyse this swelling up of frustration and dissatisfaction; the need for action caused by this exploding "Emotionsstau" is satisfied only by her self-destructive suicide gesture.

Similarly, Otto and Martha cannot discuss their situation and are thus unable to unearth the reasons for the hostility and resentments in their relationship. With the help of

160. Kroetz; GS, p.44.

language they could, for example, isolate and identify Otto's inferiority complex as the consequence of his being a replaceable cog in the industrial machine. This leads to his exaggerated need to feel superior in his relationship with Martha, whose financial independence in turn intensifies his need to dominate and humiliate her. Having identified the source of the problem, Otto and Martha could take steps to remedy it. But they do not have the language: instead they give way to the senseless violence of the shooting match. Here, as so frequently, Kroetz is showing:

"Wie die Sprachlosigkeit Zuflucht sucht in Bereichen, wo Sprache nicht verlangt, Antwort nicht gefordert wird, nämlich in der Hinwendung zum Tier." 161

In Geisterbahn Kroetz is especially concerned to indicate the link between language and self-determination and to show how the helplessness caused by inarticulacy eventually manifests itself in destructive violence.

After leaving Staller and Stallerin to live together, Sepp and Beppi have made considerable progress. With the birth of her child, Beppi's mental powers have increased noticeably. In Stallerhof she was the captive audience to Sepp's banal cowboy-and-Indian story; in Geisterbahn she has become the narrator, happily telling the story of Little Red Riding Hood to her baby. She has begun to use language actively.

Sepp, although still plagued by fears of his inferiority,

161. Panzner, op.cit., p.92.

has at least begun to think more positively about his situation and realises the need for self-assertion. With the help of this insight, he is able to counsel Beppi:

"Jetzt mußst fehlerfrei redn lernen. Das is das Wichtigste. Wennst redst, bist ein anderer Mensch." ¹⁶²

Here Sepp clearly expresses what is implicit in the following exchange in Michis Blut, where Kroetz makes clear for the audience, but not for Karl and Marie, the importance of language for self-determination:

"Marie: Wenn ich mich ned mit dir einlassn hätt!
Karl: Was dann?
Marie: Das sag ich nicht.
Karl: Weil dir nix einfallt.
Marie: Mir werd nix einfalln.
Karl: Genau. - Lauter.
Marie: Ich hätt viel zum Sagn. Da tätst aber schaun." ¹⁶³

In his advice to Beppi, Sepp manages to formulate the necessity of articulacy, not only for Beppi, but also for her child, who will thus be able to shape his own life. The dream, however, cannot become reality. Circumstances overtake them before they have the chance to make use of their new consciousness. When unforeseen problems intrude upon their lives, they are left with the familiar reactions of apathy and violence.

When Sepp dies, Beppi is struck dumb. The only words she can muster are those of the exercise she has just been proudly reciting:

162. Kroetz; GS, p.170.

163. Kroetz; GS, p.201.

"Herr von Hagen, darf ich's wagen, Sie zu fragen, welchen Kragen Sie getragen, als Sie lagen, krank im Magen, im Spital von Kopenhagen.
Große Pause." 164

Her language is hopelessly inadequate for the experience.

Paralysed by Sepp's death, she is reduced to the role of a spectator: she accepts it dully, passively, without participation -- "sprachlos".

Subsequently she tries gamely to bring Georg up as best she can. Shortly afterwards, however, she suffers a second blow in the form of a letter from the municipal welfare office. The cold, impersonal wording of the letter reflects the hostility and inscrutability of the situation which confronts the wretched Beppi:

"Beppi: Sehr geehrtes Herr Frau Fräulein Staller.
Laut Fürsorgeentscheid vom 30.3.1972 wird die vorübergehende Einweisung ihres ihrer Sohnes Tochter Georg Staller geboren am 10.1.1971 in das Städtische Kinderheim Sankt Emmeran München Feldkirchen, Feldkirchener Straße 217 bestimmt.
Sie haben sich diesbezüglich am 25.5.1972 im Kinderheim Sankt Emmeran mit obig genannter Person um 7 Punkt 30 Uhr einzufinden. Das Mitbringen persönlicher Gebrauchsgegenstände wie Kleidung, Wäsche, Spielzeug e te ce ist erwünscht. Stadt München. Abt. Vormundsschaftsgericht i Punkt Groß A Punkt Anton Klein Amtmann." 165

The contrast between the language of officialdom and Beppi's own is extreme. The words of the legal notice reduce Beppi to the status of a statistic to be acted upon. One is reminded of Beatie's helplessness in Wesker's Roots when she

164. Kroetz; GS, p.175.

165. Kroetz; GS, p.180.

tries to draw unemployment benefit and cannot get past the jargon of the officials: "I didn't know how to talk see, it was all foreign to me." 166

Beppi reacts to this unbearable situation by resorting to violence: she kills Georg. The helplessness of this act is too often overlooked, and not only here, but in all the "Gewaltakte" that occur in Kroetz's plays. Geisterbahn makes abundantly clear that the lack of the power of language is much more than a superficial impediment: it is a drastic emasculation, equivalent to the loss of the power of self-determination. The deprivation of language is every bit as serious in its consequences as any form of material deprivation, with which, in Kroetz's eyes, it is inextricably linked as a form of capitalist exploitation.

When it comes to making this clear within the scope of a stage play, Kroetz is immediately faced with a fundamental problem. How can the playwright ensure that situations and actions which are outwith the range of his characters' understanding and language are nevertheless comprehensible to his audience?

Following his policy of authorial non-intervention Kroetz has to let his figures speak for themselves; but this, of course, is precisely what he is claiming they are unable to do. In traditional Naturalist drama this problem is generally

166. Wesker, Arnold; op.cit., p.90.

solved by the inclusion of one character endowed with greater articulacy -- Moritz Jäger in Die Weber --, who might even appear in the role of a scientist or "Forscher" -- Alfred Loth in Vor Sonnenaufgang. Through the articulacy of these figures the author himself can speak. Kroetz, however, refuses to allow such characters in his plays and therefore restricts considerably the possibility of the direct expression of the political ideas he wishes them to embody.

Kroetz formulates another aspect of this problem in this way:

"Wenn man die Realität der kleinen Leute beschreibt, kann man normalerweise keine Perspektive aufzeichnen. In einer Obdachlosensiedlung kann ich die Leute nicht über Sozialökonomie, über Politik, die Kirche reflektieren lassen. Da wird vom Essen geredet oder von anderen unmittelbar lebensnotwendigen Dingen; dort kann ich keine positiven Utopien aufbauen." 167

How can Kroetz ensure the indication of the positive perspective without sacrificing the authenticity of his depiction of "Sprachlosigkeit"? Kroetz the playwright is back with another aspect of his familiar problem: his double political goal of "Aufklärung" and "Änderung" seems incompatible with his dramatic technique.

Before turning to this question, however, it is worth making a brief digression in order to assess the importance of a hitherto unmentioned feature of the language in Kroetz's

167. Kroetz; "Kunst im Zeichen der politischen Aktivität. Gespräch mit dem Schriftsteller Franz Xaver Kroetz -- Des Autors Fragen an die Intendanten", in Die Rheinpfalz, 02/09/72.

plays -- the Bavarian dialect.

It is hard not to think of Kroetz as being a Bavarian dramatist. Like Ludwig Thoma, he roots his plays firmly in the language of his South German origins, a language which unmistakably colours all his work from Wildwechsel to the present. At the same time, however, he uses it to a completely different end than does his famous predecessor. The Bavarian of Thoma's characters is fluent, coherent, "schlagfertig"; for Kroetz the Bavarian dialect is a feature of an impoverished vehicle of communication. The first is an aspect of "Sprache", the second of "Sprachlosigkeit".

The wit and aggressive rhetoric of Schormayer in Der Wittiber is in striking contrast to the flatness and helplessness of Sepp's speech in Stallerhof. Schormayer is an inflexible, opiniated patriarch whose obstinacy brings about the disintegration of his family and eventually drives his son to commit murder; but he is anything but "sprachlos". His reticence concerning his indecorous sexual behaviour is a refusal to speak about something he considers best left alone, and in repelling the hostility he encounters because of his escapade he displays a more than competent command of language. Sepp, on the other hand, can do no more than repeat his self-pitying assertions of being plagued by bad luck. The important point is not so much the difference in class -- Schormayer is a "Gutsbesitzer" and Sepp a "Knecht" --, for

Schormayer's own farmhand, Hansgirgl, is also far more articulate than the hapless Sepp, and Staller far less so than Schormayer. It is simply a question of articulacy. Schormayer can retain the impression of being in control because he is able to argue; Sepp is "sprachlos" and so pushed to and fro by circumstances over which he has no control.

It is a joke, in Die Medaille, when the simple farmer's complaint about the weather -- "'s Wetter sollt anderst sei. Viel z'trucka is." -- is set against the pompous officialese of the mayor -- "Die anhaltende Dürre ist der Landwirtschaft wenig zuträglich." ¹⁶⁸, and Schweigl is certainly not deceived by this bombast. Beppi, on the other hand, is helpless before the godlike vocabulary of the letter from the welfare office, and Erwin, in Wildwechsel, is paralysed by the language of officialdom to the extent that he is terrified of going to the authorities on his own.

When Lenz, the farmhand in Magdalena, answers Leni's question: "Wia schmeckn dir nacha de Knödl?" with the brusque reply: "Wia s'halt schmecka." ¹⁶⁹, he is not lost for words, but deliberately avoiding a proper answer in order not to have to start a conversation with the wretched Leni. But when Martha asks Otto to explain what he means by saying she knows nothing about sex, his repetition is not a refusal to enter into the

168. Thoma, Ludwig; Die Medaille, in Theater. Sämtliche Bühnenstücke, R.Piper & Co. Verlag, München, 1964, p.215.

169. Thoma; Magdalena, loc.cit., p.43.

subject, but a way of concealing the fact that he cannot explain or justify his remark:

"Martha: Mit dir is eben kein Auskennen.

Otto: Weil du nix verstehst.

Martha: Dann erklärst es, wenn ich es nicht versteh.

Otto: Kennst dich nicht aus mit die Männer, das is der Fehler." 170

The point of this comparison is to establish that the essential difference between the Bavarian dialect as used by Thoma and Kroetz is not one of form, but of function. In the early farce Hilfe, ich werde geheiratet! (and, to a lesser extent, in the figure of Katterloher in Globales Interesse) Kroetz shows that he is capable of creating characters who use language in the same way as Thoma's farmers and "einfaches Volk". The farmhand Dammerl, for example, with his crude jokes and earthy "Schlagfertigkeit", is clearly more akin to Schormayer than to Sepp. (In terms of comic quality and vitality, however, the characters of Kroetz's farce do not bear comparison with those of Thoma's plays and novels.)

The truth is that Kroetz is using Bavarian dialect with a specific, politically oriented function that is vastly more significant than the actual form of Bavarian. In prefatory notes to several of his plays he indicates that the choice of the Bavarian dialect is largely arbitrary ¹⁷¹, and in the "Anmerkungen" to Das Nest he states explicitly that, while

170. Kroetz; GS, p.93.

171. Kroetz; e.g. in Wildwechsel (GS, p.8), Agnes Bernauer (WA, p.316), Oberösterreich (GS, p.384).

his characters speak in Bavarian dialect, the play is by no means restricted to Bavaria.¹⁷² Here he touches on the crucial point that the significance of his use of Bavarian does not lie in its geographical setting. Stallerhof could be transposed to a farm in Schleswig Holstein in the same way as Bond's Saved could be set in Glasgow or Birmingham. Männersache is a Bavarian play only in the way that Wesker's Roots is a Norfolk play. Kroetz's plays could be set anywhere where the material and political conditions of the characters are reproduced.

As Gerd Jäger recognises, the essential point is "daß das Dialektsprechen untrennbar mit der sozialen Definition der Figuren zusammenhängt"¹⁷³. As one might expect from Kroetz, the class situation of his characters is of greater import than their geographical location.

It is, therefore, misplaced to accord too much attention to the purely linguistic side of the Bavarian dialect in Kroetz's plays, despite its omnipresence. Nor is it tenable, on the other hand, to dismiss it as coincidental local colour. Its real relevance lies in its function as a "Soziolekt"¹⁷⁴, a dialect whose restrictions have social as well as personal origins. It is a dramatic device to highlight the "Sprachnot"

172. Kroetz; WA, p.220.

173. Jäger, Gerd; "Kann der kleine Mann sich ändern? Das Nest von Kroetz in Braunschweig und Zürich", in Theater heute, Heft 4, April 1976.

174. Jäger; "Sind das denn bloß Geschichten?" in Theater heute, Heft 2, Februar 1973.

of the characters and to draw attention to its political implications.

It is possible that in illustrating the various features of Kroetz's "Sprache der Sprachlosen", the extensive list of plays referred to may have created the impression that quotation has been more or less random. One might therefore conclude that Kroetz has remained without significant development in his use of language. This impression would be grossly misleading.

For the sake of breadth and depth, the attempt has been made to select from as many of Kroetz's plays as possible. The intention behind this was to provide a comprehensive range of evidence against which to measure the claim that, from start to finish, Kroetz's "Sprachlosigkeit" in its various manifestations has at all times been part of a conscious literary device in the service of his double aim of providing enlightenment and provoking change.

At the same time, one can discern a threefold development in his use of language, a development determined by his desire for greater efficacy in the realisation of his literary/political aim.

The first strand in this threefold development consists in the intensified use of linguistic devices already used in earlier plays. Not only do certain features of language appear more frequently, they also appear in individual plays

in more concentrated form, thus highlighting their implications for the audience. The first stages of this process of intensification can already be seen in the early plays.

The device of quoting proverbs recurs throughout Kroetz's plays, generally with a different meaning depending on the particular context. A proverb can imply the replacement of thinking by a ready-made formula; it can reveal the helplessness of the speaker who is faced with an apparently time-tested truth; it can indicate the attempt to create an illusion of eloquence. In most cases the individual context provides the key. In Lieber Fritz and Dolomitenstadt Lienz, however, Kroetz uses proverbs in a markedly consistent manner.

In the earlier play he uses them to highlight the differences in the attitudes of the two sets of characters -- Fritz and Mitzi, and Otto and Hilde. In this way he underlines how the constructive efforts of Fritz to make a new start are thwarted by the narrow-minded self-interest of Otto.

For Fritz and Mitzi proverbs represent useful pieces of advice to be referred to for encouragement in considering positive, self-determining decisions -- "Probieren geht über Studieren", "Dem Mutigen gehört die Welt", "Wer wagt, gewinnt"¹⁷⁵. For Otto and Hilde, on the other hand, they represent the dogmatic invocation of authority -- "Messer, Gabel, Schere, Licht, ist für kleine Kinder nicht."¹⁷⁶,

175. Kroetz; GS, pp.127,129,134.

176. Kroetz; GS, p.109.

the replacement of argument by a second hand formula -- "Ein sorgendes Weib hat kein Unterleib" ¹⁷⁷, or the admission of resignation -- "Man muß sich nach der Decke streckn." ¹⁷⁸ It is significant that when Mitzi uses the same proverb she wrenches it out of its fatalistic context and applies it in a positive way to her own situation, to encourage her to make use of her not being tied down in order to go away with Fritz. ¹⁷⁹ In contrast, after she has been persuaded by Otto to abandon this plan, that is, after she has been dragged down into the same narrow-minded bog as Otto, she for the first time makes use of a proverb in a negative way, when she disparagingly remarks on Fritz's dream of freedom: "Man soll nicht mit dem Kopf durch die Wand." ¹⁸⁰ In this way Kroetz uses proverbs to differentiate the positive from the negative characters, and to underline how difficult it will be for Fritz in his struggle for rehabilitation.

In Dolomitenstadt Lienz Kroetz uses proverbs to underline the theme of the characters' intellectual poverty and to show how this contributes to their being the slaves of their environment.

By peppering his speech with proverbs, Hermann Rasch seeks to erect a facade of intelligence. But however casually Rasch flicks off his wise saws, what they really reveal is

177. Kroetz; GS, p.113.

178. Kroetz; GS, p.131.

179. Kroetz; GS, p.127.

180. Kroetz; GS, p.134.

his sad lack of intelligence. He does not understand the world he lives in, any more than his cell-mates, who are taken in by his show of wisdom. As is made more evident by the "Songs", none of them has been able to see through the "von Werbung und Illustrierten vorgekitschten Traum vom kleinen materiellen Glück" ¹⁸¹, and this failure to comprehend is reflected in the way they react -- Rasch apparently actively, Dengk and Schuster passively -- to the authority of proverbs. Ultimately all three are condemned to unresisting acceptance of the formulae, victims of both the language and the claims of their social environment.

It is, of course, true that Kroetz has already used proverbs in this way, but in Dolomitenstadt Lienz he uses the device consistently throughout the play. It is in this consistency that the significant development lies. Another example of this can be seen in the use of "Konsumsprache". In their slavish quotation of various advertising slogans and catchwords characters reveal their dependency on the world of consumer goods. In Oberösterreich Kroetz raises the use of this device from isolated instances to the status of a leitmotiv, with the result that it gains tremendously in clarity and power.

In a similar way, Frau RuhSAM in Weitere Aussichten... constantly repeats the tell-tale phrases of resignation with which she accepts her removal into an old folks' home. Kroetz

181. Kroetz; "Zwischen Angst und Narrenfreiheit. Der linke Bühnenautor Franz Xaver Kroetz zu seinen neuen Theaterstücken", in Vorwärts, 05/10/72.

thus underlines the theme of the play: in the ruthless "Wegwerfgesellschaft", despite her physical and mental good health, Frau Ruhsam is powerless against the anonymous decision to discard her into a home. All that is left to her is enforced "acceptance", which Kroetz makes abundantly clear through the formulae of "Sichabfinden" with which her monologue is riddled.

In Serntaler Kroetz uses a similar technique to highlight the crucial link between inarticulacy and violence. In earlier plays he has done this in isolated instances, as in the powerful scene in the otherwise relatively feeble text Milde Sorte, where the father is unable to analyse the reasons for his unemployment or to articulate his feeling of frustration and impotence. Unable to concretise this problem in language, and faced with his wife's inability to help him to do so, he explodes into a violent burst of destructive energy and destroys the rosaries which the whole family is dependent on producing in "Heimarbeit". In Serntaler Kroetz consciously builds this causal link between "Sprachlosigkeit" and "Gewalt" into the fabric of the play.

Reproached by his mother for being lazy, Karli covers up his inability to give an excuse by flinging himself into physical activity in the form of a wild dance. Following the "Song von der Wohnung", in which the need for a home as a place of security is contrasted with the money-oriented

property advertisements in the newspaper, Karli is unable to articulate the contradiction he feels. Again he compensates for his "Sprachlosigkeit" with a burst of physical activity, this time by exercising with his chest expanders. Later he is unable to convince his audience of young children of the authenticity of his grandiose claims of having been in America and being able to speak English. To counteract the failure of his words he plunges himself energetically into a cops-and-robbers chase -- "Richard Kimble! Auf der Flucht!"¹⁸²

Physical activity is established as a compensation for emotional cul-de-sacs marked by the failure of language. In the final act, therefore, when Martha Distl's dreams of beating the "Leistungsgesellschaft" have been shattered, the audience is in a position to understand Karli's impulsive robbery attempt.

By building this causal connection between inarticulacy and physical activity into the very structure of the play, Kroetz increases the likelihood of the audience becoming aware of it. Had he employed a similar technique in, say, Heimarbeit, the widespread incomprehension at Martha's attempted abortion might arguably have been reduced. This intensification of individual linguistic devices distinguishes Kroetz's later plays -- from approximately Oberösterreich -- from his early ones.

182. Kroetz; WA, p.195.

A second significant line of development in Kroetz's writing lies in the introduction of greater articulacy on the part of the characters, although few of them actually attain to a complete mastery of language. Even this partial articulacy, however, has the effect of increasing the formal explicitness of the plays. Given Kroetz's movement away from the acts of violence in order to focus attention on their causes and remedies, this development towards verbal clarity is predictable.

To say that Kroetz moves away from "Sprachlosigkeit" towards articulacy is not to say that none of the characters in his earlier plays was ever capable of formulating his own reaction to a particular situation. Erwin concisely sums up the practical difficulties created by Hanni's involvement with Franz, for example:

"Weil ein Filmschauspieler, dem alles wurscht is, kriegt sie nicht und eim Facharbeiter mit zwölfhundert im Monat, dem is es nicht wurscht. Das is die Wirklichkeit, die herrscht." 183

With equal clarity Rusterfer explains to Erl his plans for the future of his business, which he sees as jeopardised unless the crippled Helmut marries the "healthy" Christine; Otto lucidly explains to his wife his fear of losing "Arbeitskräfte" if Fritz goes away with Mitzi. Despite the narrowness of vision in all these cases, Erwin, Rusterfer and Otto all

183. Kroetz; GS, p.34.

manage to formulate and express their thoughts.

However, these are isolated instances: each of the three otherwise displays ample evidence of inarticulacy. Erwin, for example, cannot understand or argue against the decisions of his employers -- "Jetzt wolln sie den Abschlag vierzehntägig machn. Wegn der Buchhaltung... die machn mit uns, was sie wolln" ¹⁸⁴; he is afraid of confronting bureaucracy -- "wo ich's mit die Ämter nicht kann" ¹⁸⁵; he cannot see through the clichés of the gutter press and cheap literature -- "der hat's verführt mit dem Geist, und sie is wehrlos gwesn" ¹⁸⁵; his solutions to problems are emotional reactions untempered by reason -- "Umbringen tu ich's, wenn's nochmals passiert, bevor's zwanzig is, das kannst ihr von mir sagn, sonst fallt mir nix ein" ¹⁸⁵; he unquestioningly accepts the rose-tinted propaganda of the economic miracle -- "Dort solln's was arbeitn, dann ham's auch ein Geld und können essn. Das wissn mir am bestn. Nachm Krieg warn mir ärmer wie die alle miteinander in Asien, und schau uns heut an. Weil mir arbeitn." ¹⁸⁶

The same is true of Rusterfer and Otto. Their moments of articulacy are no more than flashes, and blinkered ones at that. The first evidence of a more consistent articulacy occurs in Dolomitenstadt Lienz, although it is true that Fritz in Lieber Fritz manages to have some idea of his situation and

184. Kroetz; GS, p.10.

185. Kroetz; GS, p.19.

186. Kroetz; GS, p.22.

to formulate his own plans for the future. Within the play itself, however, this positive development is reflected only minimally in the language, mainly in the encouraging use of proverbs and in hopeful assertions of confidence --- "Was man sich ausdenkt, das muß man durchführen." 187

In Dolomitenstadt Lienz it is the language of the characters itself which reveals an increase in articulateness. Not that Rasch, Dengk and Schuster can fully analyse and comprehend their situation, however, nor can they formulate constructive plans for the future. In their time-killing chit-chat, however, one can see the germs of articulacy, the beginnings of insight which a little more thought would allow to come to the surface.

Beneath the skin of their light-hearted dreams of winning the pools, for example, is hidden an important insight about the connection between poverty and criminality. Kroetz allows this to come almost to the surface when he has Dengk remark:

"Wenn mir im Toto gwonnen hätt, wärn mir alle ned da." 188

The theme is taken up again soon after, with the same degree of tangential contact, when Dengk passes the apparently meaningless comment:

"Wenn ich selber ein Auto ghabt hätt, hätt ich es nicht gestohlen." 189

Finally, in one brief exchange, the link between poverty and

187. Kroetz; GS, p.133.

188. Kroetz; GS, p.231.

189. Kroetz; GS, p.285.

crime is all but explicitly stated:

"Dengk: Einen Millionär, der wo im Zuchthaus is, den mußst suchn. Genau.

Rasch: Klar, da kommst ja auf gar kein abwegign Gedankn, wenn eh alles stimmt." ¹⁹⁰

Here, through the words of his characters, Kroetz gives voice to what he sees as one of the main reasons for the criminality of Hermann, Heribert and Oskar. The link between poverty and crime is not fully discussed; it is placed as a "Denkanstoß" in the consciousness of the audience.

A second main theme, the potential criminal or anti-social consequences of a childhood spent in an orphanage, is treated in a similar way. Kroetz allows the "Heimkind" Heribert Dengk to drop occasional telling remarks about his upbringing -- "Wies mich aus dem Heim entlassn ham, da hab ich mir gsagt, weil jetzt die Freiheit anfangt." ¹⁹¹; "Aber das hams ned verstandn, daß man es nicht gewohnt is, was bei die andern ned is." ¹⁹²; "Ich hab ja gar ned gwußt, wie das geht die Freiheit." ¹⁹³ Dengk's childhood in the home was the first rung in the ladder down to crime. The sudden arrival of freedom flung him into a sink-or-swim initiation into a society built on competition and survival, for both of which the austerity, impersonality and lack of affection of his upbringing had left him unprepared. These are the further

190. Kroetz; GS, pp.352/3.

191. Kroetz; GS, p.265.

192. Kroetz; GS, p.267.

193. Kroetz; GS, p.269.

implications beneath the surface of Dengk's recurrent complaint: "Im Heim war ich halt." ¹⁹⁴

The theme of "Leistungsdruck" is touched upon in the same way. Oskar Schuster's frequent references to his "successes" in life -- the episode with the coffee machine, his reliability as a waiter, his standing within the family -- reveal how hungrily he yearns for a sense of recognition to cover up the fact that he is little more than a miserable hamster in the treadmill. At one point he briefly touches upon the source of his dissatisfaction, without being articulate enough to analyse it further, when he remarks: "Es ist halt allerweil einer da, der besser is als man selber." ¹⁹⁵ The insight contained in these instances goes a long way towards explaining why Oskar attacked the policeman who came to impound his car.

Related to the theme of the oppressiveness of the "Leistungsdruck" is the consequent process of depersonalisation to which the so-called failures are subjected. Kroetz again allows this aspect to come to the surface in the conversation of the three prisoners.

An interesting example can be found in Rasch's remark:

"Das Lernen is heut eh passé. Bei uns daheim hats gheißen: wer lernt kost was, und wer arbeit bringt was." ¹⁹⁶

194. Kroetz; GS, p.341.

195. Kroetz; GS, p.321.

196. Kroetz; GS, p.326.

Underneath his smug tone Rasch is, without being fully aware of it, articulating the West German ethos of the criterion of profit. Those who fail to satisfy this hungry god become social rejects. One of the consequences of this rejection is the depersonalisation of the victim; to use Rasch's words:

"Man muß einfach abschalt'n und denk'n, man schläft. Genau. So tun, als ob man gar nicht man selber wär, sondern ein ganz anderer, wo ein nix angeht." 197

What Rasch is describing here is loss of identity, the split between body and personality: the brain must switch off and leave the body to function automatically, while "man selber is ganz woanders" 198. But what Rasch and Dengk confusedly see as something desirable, is in reality a helpless submission to a world which will ruthlessly exploit their switching off to make them into unresisting "Arbeitstiere".

The point is too important to be mentioned only once. Earlier it is raised in Rasch's repeated exhortation to Schuster: "Ned studiern, Oskar, des is nix." 199, and again when Rasch and Dengk discuss the desirability of passively sitting out the remainder of their sentences:

"Dengk: Wenn man nachdenkn anfängt is man schon verlorn.
Rasch: Nickt Abschalt'n. Mir ham Pause. Basta.
Dengk: Das ist ja die eigentlich Straf, daß man dasitzt und nachdenkt. Genau.
Rasch: Gar ned aufkommen laß'n, es Nachdenkn. Die Zeit vergeht von selber, da braucht man nix tun dafür.
Dengk: Lacht: Nachm Einsperrn kommts auslaß'n.
Rasch: Abschalt'n." 200

197. Kroetz; GS, p.272.
198. Kroetz; GS, p.275.
199. Kroetz; GS, pp.230 and 250.
200. Kroetz; GS, pp.244-7.

Clearly these words have a different meaning for the three cell-mates than for the audience. Rasch, Dengk and Schuster cannot see through them, otherwise they would be incapable of speaking them. It is precisely because they have switched off that they can see their pathetic resignation as desirable. In turn, this apathy prevents them from undertaking anything to change the order of things: the hierarchical system is thus perpetuated.

While all this is not actually said in the words of Rasch, Dengk and Schuster, it is certainly implied. The partial articulacy of the three inmates gives the audience the basis on which to reflect about the causes for the crimes of these petty criminals. If they do not provide fully thought out and formulated answers, these moments of articulacy make available the keys to the answers. For this reason Dolomitenstadt Lienz is a more effective play than, for example, Männersache, where language does not have this provocative function.

This process of "articulisation" continues in Oberösterreich. Again Kroetz treats the theme of depersonalisation, but unlike Rasch, Heinz is aware that this is a harmful process and desperately feels the need to confirm his identity. Kroetz lets him voice his fears in the form of a vague questioning of his situation and the hesitant expression of his deep-rooted wishes:

"Heinz: Ich möchert etwas habn, was mir ganz allein gehört.

Anni: Was?

Heinz: Etwas Bsonders." 201

Hesitantly he gropes his way towards a clear articulation of what this fear consists in:

"Heinz: Wenn ich in der Früh in der Firma anfang, den Wagen start und an die Rampn fahr zum Aufladn, dann denk ich mir, da sind jetzt noch dreißig neben dir. Da müßt etwas sein, was mir ganz allein gehört, was kein anderer hat. Wegn der Erkennung, verstehst." 201

What Heinz is afraid of is, to borrow the words of Marx and Engels, that he becomes "ein bloßes Zubehör der Maschine"²⁰², an impersonal, replaceable cog. In the same scene he goes on to paraphrase this with considerable clarity:

"Heinz: Mir is manchmal, wenn ich am Steuer sitz, oder auch im direktn Verkehr mit die Kundn, der ja persönlich sein muß, wie es heißt, als wär das gar ned ich, als wär das irgendeiner, der keine Bedeutung hat. Ich." 203

Hard on the heels of this insight, Heinz goes on to indicate the consequences of this anxiety in his private life. In time the persistent fears of inadequacy which predominate at work are expanded to consume also the personal sphere:

"Heinz: Aber manchmal, wenn wir zwei beinand sind, weil es zu die Intimitäten kommt, is wie in der Firma.

Anni: Wer?

Heinz: Man macht etwas, irgendeiner der zufällig man selber is, sozusagen, und das ham schon Millionen vorher gmacht, ganz genauso.

Pause

Keine Persönlichkeit dahinter." 203

201. Kroetz; GS, p.399.

202. Marx/Engels; Manifest der kommunistischen Partei, Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1975, p.50.

203. Kroetz; GS, p.400.

It is the fear of becoming even more invisible that underlies his doubts about the prospect of having a child. Heinz and Anni will have to work even harder and make even more sacrifices in order to afford the luxury of bringing up a baby. Consequently Heinz will have even less chance of finding his identity and feeling fulfilled. Such are the thoughts behind his worried remark:

"Heinz: Ich will mich hinstelln können vor das Kind und sagn: das is dein Vater, schau, auf den kannst du stolz sein, weil er etwas erreicht hat im Lebn. So soll es sein. Der is jemand." 204

Heinz wants to break free from the shackles of anonymity and become a self-determining individual with a distinct identity and value. The same desire is buried in Otto in Männersache, but in his case it is buried so deep that it has no chance of ever being articulated. The audience is left to deduce it from the evidence of his behaviour. In Heinz's case, Kroetz adds the evidence of the character's words.

In this respect it is interesting to note the greater articulacy accorded to Otto and Martha in the revised version of Männersache, Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch. Just as Kroetz avoids the violent outcome in the later version, he consciously reduces the "Sprachlosigkeit" of his characters in order to achieve greater clarity.

It is true that Otto remains largely inarticulate, although

204. Kroetz; GS, p.405.

Kroetz allows him to make the occasional remark which contains valuable information for the audience, if Otto himself does not quite grasp it. For example, in voicing his annoyance at not having received the monthly bonus at work, he reveals how much he is the puppet of his employers:

"Otto: Da hats eine Prämie gebn.
Dreiundvierzig Mark.
...
Aber nur einmal.
Jetzt komm ich nicht mehr hinauf.
Ich weiß ned warum.
Bei die bestn bin ich,
aber die Monatsprämie kriegt immer ein anderer,
Pech." 205

On the other hand, he is now able to admit openly that his perpetual complaints about Martha's dog were merely a pretext to start an argument -- "Um den Hund geht es überhaupt nicht mehr." 206 --, and at one point he broaches the crucial theme of the reasons for his feelings of inadequacy:

"Otto: Und wie steht ein Mann da,
der sagn muß;
Die Frau, wo mein Herz is,
is selbständiger Metzger,
und verdient mehr wie ich." 207

The real development in articulacy, however, belongs to Martha. She even manages to compose a poem expressing her thoughts and reservations about her relationship with Otto. But apart from this she provides a text-book example of Kroetz's

205. Kroetz; dialog, p.43.

206. Kroetz; dialog, p.57.

207. Kroetz; dialog, p.62.

dictum of language as a means of self-defence, her articulacy having led to greater self-awareness and thence to the increased ability for self-development. This articulacy can be seen mainly in her marked ability to argue back against Otto's insults and assert her own value, for example when defending her work as a butcher:

Otto: Ein vollwertiger Metzger bist du nicht.

Martha: Nein, weil mir spezialisiert sind.

...

Otto: Aber eine Frau, wo Metzger is,
das is sowieso unnatürlich.

...

Martha: Denn ein Metzgermeister is ein schwerer Beruf,
der viel Liebe und Können braucht,
Ich hab alles erreicht, und zwar als Frau." 208

This increased awareness of her independence gives her the necessary self-esteem to resist Otto's attempts to humiliate her. Where in Männersache she complies with his selfish sexual demands, in Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch she refuses. As a result Otto gradually accepts the idea of moving in with her, and some sort of honest relationship between them can begin. The shooting match has become redundant, and in its place has arisen a situation of mutual acceptance.

In this revised version Martha and Otto undergo a "Lernprozess", although it is not reflected in the language in a completely explicit manner. In the radio play Die Wahl fürs Leben the journey to enlightenment takes place through the actual discussion in which Karli and his parents take part.

208. Kroetz; dialog, p.44.

In the course of the play he is able to convince his parents of the correctness of his choice not to accept the well-paid but morally questionable job offered him.

The important difference between this father-child conflict and that of Rusterfer and Helmut, or Erwin and Hanni, is that Karli is articulate. He is therefore capable, not only of analysing his situation for himself, but also of explaining his conclusions to his parents. In this way the positive perspective is opened up.

Karli's objections to working for Krauss-Maffei are twofold, and both find their expression in Karli's own words:

"Karli: ... Ob es in der Sowjetunion oder in China oder in Amerika Menschen gibt, die Panzer bauen, ist das für mich kein Grund, auch welche zu bauen. Ich glaub, daß Menschen, die Rüstung und Waffen herstellen für den Krieg, sich früher oder später schuldig machen. Mit den Kugellagern, die wir herstellen und an denen ich mitarbeite, kann ein Panzer schneller vorwärtskommen und länger ohne Verschleißerscheinung rollen. Jetzt laß diesen Panzer nur ein Kind überrollen, nur einen Rekruten, vielleicht nur in einem Manöver einen Fuß abfahren - - Nein, ich mag das alles nicht verantworten, ich glaub, man muß ohne Gewalt auskommen, ohne Gewalt Streitfälle regeln. Ich brauch gar nicht daran denken, daß die Kugellager helfen, daß der Panzer schneller einer flüchtenden Einheit nachfahren kann, daß er sich im Gelände lautloser und behender an eine Grenze, einen Wall oder eine Siedlung herantasten kann, um dann zu schießen. Nein! Ich bin gegen den Krieg, gegen die Gewalt, auf welcher Seite und warum auch immer, also muß ich persönlich auch danach handeln. Wer Rüstung macht, macht Krieg. Ich nicht."

With equal clarity he formulates the need to make use of his

freedom to choose:

"Karli: ... jetzt kann ich entscheiden, nach meinem Gewissen, nach meinem Herzen, nach meiner Sympathie! Das ist doch ein großer Fortschritt, und den muß man doch ausnützen!" ²¹⁰

The arguments are quoted in full to show the extent of Karli's articulacy. In possession of this power of language he is able to argue against his father's blinkered assertion: "Eine unmoralische Arbeit gibts überhaupt nicht." ²¹¹; against his mother's fear of what the neighbours will say if he refuses the job ²¹²; against the defeatist conclusion: "was ich nicht tu, tut ein anderer." ²¹³; against the narrow-minded materialism of the argument: "privat sollt man eine Einsicht habn und dem Vorteil nix in Weg legn." ²¹⁰; against the noble-sounding sophistry: "Die Wehrtechnik is immer voraus, das is ein alter Schnee. Später kommt es dann der Zivilisation zugute." ²¹⁴; against the short-sighted vision: "Kannst stolz sein, Karli! Die Firma is richtig. Da is deine Zukunft! Der Forschung gehört die Welt, weil man die Technik braucht." ²¹⁵

Similarly, Karli is able to draw a parallel between what he would be doing and the "Mitläufertum" of the war:

"Wenn ich die Juden nicht vergas, dann vergast sie ein anderer und wird befördert. Also vergas ich sie. Weil den Juden kann es gleich sein, wer sie vergast, und ich krieg meine Beförderung." ²¹³

210. Kroetz; WA, p.168.

211. Kroetz; WA, p.169.

212. Kroetz; WA, p.172.

213. Kroetz; WA, p.166.

214. Kroetz; WA, p.163.

215. Kroetz; WA, p.162.

Eventually he can convince his father of the wrongness of his failure to refuse to work in Dachau during the war, and finally he formulates the need for change -- "Weil die Welt nicht stehen bleibt." ²¹⁶ -- and to make his parents aware of the importance of being the first to protest against an unsatisfactory state of affairs: "Einer muß anfangen." ²¹⁷

Without Karli's articulacy this insight could never have been achieved. Fräulein Rasch's recognition that something is far wrong with her life can be expressed only in a self-destructive gesture. The availability of language makes insight not only possible, but also translatable into change.

A similar "Lernprozess" takes place in Das Nest. Following the accident in which his infant son almost dies as a result of bathing in water which Kurt has unwittingly contaminated with chemical waste, he is bitterly reproached by his wife as being no better than "ein dressierter Aff!" ²¹⁸ This attack jolts Kurt into reflection, and he is able to progress beyond the half-hearted contemplations of suicide and the unproductive "Läuterungsprozess" with which Kroetz might have let an earlier play finish to penetrate to the heart of the matter:

"Kurt: So ein wie mich, den schickt man morgn los, wie ein kleinen Bubn zum Einkaufen. Wie weit tät das denn gehn, bis da drin einmal etwas 'nein' sagt? Was kann man alles befehl'n, einem wie mir?" ²¹⁹

The same articulacy prompts him to act in accordance with

216. Kroetz; WA, p.174.
217. Kroetz; WA, p.177.
218. Kroetz; WA, p.241.
219. Kroetz; WA, p.246.

his new insight: he reports both himself and his employer to the police for being responsible for the dumping of the chemical waste. Like Karli, he has recognised the importance of taking the first step.

Agnes Bernauer follows the same path. Her journey to awareness, however, is conveyed to the audience more by her actions than by her actual spoken words. Rather than witness the argument, as in Die Wahl fürs Leben, the audience is expected to follow the same thought process as Agnes and come to the same conclusions.

Agnes's articulacy is shown in her ability to analyse experience. She can, for example, learn the following lesson from her harrowing experience in the fairground:

"Wenn man einem ausgehungerten Hund einen Fleischbrockninhalt, dann beißt er dich in die Hand, so wild schnappt er zu. Wennst einen satten Hund fütterst, schleckt er dir die Finger ab, bevor er frißt. Is das jetzt, weil das eine Tier gut is und das andere schlecht?" 220

After Herma's lengthy account of Ernst's arduous road to his present wealth, Agnes sees through her attempt to justify her husband's behaviour and attitudes. She pithily formulates the relevant objection:

"Und das Schlechte, was ihr erlebt habts, das gebts jetzt an die andern weiter, gell!" 221

She recognises the necessity of rejecting the world of Castle Werdenfels -- "Der Albrecht muß weg hier, damit er ned erstickt." 222 -- and sees, like Karli and Kurt, the need

220. Kroetz; WA, p.368.
221. Kroetz; WA, p.366.
222. Kroetz; WA, p.369.

to translate insight into action -- "Laß uns weggeh'n und irgendwo --- anfangen!" ²²³

This is the model development -- from ignorance to enlightenment, to action, to change; it is a development made possible only with the help of language.

However, just as Kroetz in his later plays does not feel the need to eliminate violence in order to ensure a positive perspective, neither does he feel obliged to endow his characters with articulacy for the same purpose. A further possibility that remains open to him -- and which constitutes the third line of development in Kroetz's use of language -- is the introduction of new linguistic devices. Through these Kroetz is able to convey more information to the audience while still enjoying the advantages to be gained from the portrayal of "Sprachlosigkeit".

Dolomitenstadt Lienz contains the first of Kroetz's attempts to widen the scope of his language -- the "Songs". For the first time he breaks away from his illusionistic concept of theatre and allows his characters to step out of their roles to deliver a number of songs, the purpose of which is to enable Kroetz to make more explicit, critical statements than is possible through the articulacy of the three cell-mates. The songs restate and illuminate a number of central themes already touched upon in the everyday conversation of Rasch, Dengk and

223. Kroetz; WA, p.369.

Schuster.

In "Der Song von der Freiheit", for example, Kroetz underpins the theme of the all-important role of money in West German society. He contrasts the fate of the actor Heinz Rühmann with that of his three inmates. Rühmann is able to indulge his dream of flying only by virtue of his wealth:

"Daß Heinz Rühmann fliegen kann
verdankt er einem Zufall
In einem Schaufenster sah er Flugzeuge
und sagte sich: ich werde Flieger". 224

In contrast, Oskar Schuster's dream of having a fine car is shattered because he is unable to keep up the payments. Without money, the "Zufall" of seeing the car is completely worthless.

Kroetz returns to the theme of money in "Der Song von der Ehe", in which he decries the venality of emotions. His attack on the materialistic considerations that dominate the business of marriage culminates in the ironic refrain:

"Das Herz allein entscheidet
alles andere gilt mir nichts". 225

In "Der Song von der Hoffnung" Kroetz shifts his focus to the corrupt machinations of the "Konsumwelt", which keeps the helpless consumer under perpetual pressure to buy the latest products and thus to keep the treadmill turning -- pressures which the three cell-mates are hopelessly ill-equipped to withstand:

"Kauft ihr Leute kauft nur ein
das hält die Großen groß
und die Kleinen klein" 226

224. Kroetz; GS, pp.261/3.

225. Kroetz; GS, p.305.

226. Kroetz; GS, p.355.

The theme of the ruthlessness of the "Leistungsgesellschaft" is taken up again in "Der Song vom Durchschnitt", in which the little man's predestination to failure is made clear:

"Denn wer heute fünftausend verdient
der hat schon morgen zehn
und wer heute fünfhundert verdient
der hat schon morgen nichts" ²²⁷

The loss of opportunity suffered by Dengk in the orphanage is brought explicitly to the audience's attention in "Der Song vom Heim". Here Kroetz contrasts the lives of Princess Caroline and a "Heimkind" in order to illustrate how the different environments create grossly unfair discrepancies in preparing for life in the competitive world of capitalist West Germany.

The final song, "Der Song von der Lektüre", revives the theme of the deadening of the mind caused by the prison environment. The trivial reading matter at the disposal of the three cell-mates offers no stimulation, serves only to deaden and stifle. It implies the vicious circle one enters into with one's first acquaintance with prison -- an environment shaped to nourish the doctrine of "Abschalten".

Each of the six "Songs" provides extra material to stimulate the audience's critical appreciation. As such they constitute an important supplement to the "naturalistic" action of the play. Kroetz repeats the technique in Sterntaler,

227. Kroetz; GS, p.322.

interrupts the flow of the play with another six "Songs".

Of these, four relate directly to the theme of achieving the goals of the West German social system. Each contrasts bitterly with the reality of the situation. When Karli and his mother sing of buying a flat -- "Eine Wohnung die braucht jedermann" ²²⁸ -- and breaking away from the squalor of the "Obdachlosensiedlung", when Mama sings of her plan to work her way to the top -- "Via Besen, Leute, werde ich noch Millionär" ²²⁹, or when Karli sings of the dream holiday -- "Mama, 'ne große Reise wird gemacht" ²³⁰, in each case the hard facts of reality -- as represented by the drudgery of "Heimarbeit", the financial hardship brought about by Mama's sudden illness, or the impossibility of keeping up the rent payments -- stand in stark contrast and show their dreams to be as fragile as the fairy tale of "Sterntaler".

The fourth song of this group, and the most explicit, is juxtaposed with Papa Distl's sentimental invocation of the model plane, on which he dreams of escaping from the hardships of life. The mawkishness of his song clashes with the seeming directness of his wife's:

"Papa: Flieg, Modellflieger flieg,
flieg für mich übers Meer
nur Wolken rings her -- nichts hält dich.

228. Kroetz; WA, p.188.

229. Kroetz; WA, p.207.

230. Kroetz; WA, p.212.

Flieg, Modellflieger flieg,
flieg für mich zum Mond hinauf,
setz dich wie ne Fliege drauf -- und raste." 231

And:

"Mama: Jeder Mensch hat seine Chance,
greift er zu, dann wird er was,
ganz egal, was auch passiert,
nur der Wille, der regiert!" 232

By means of the juxtaposition, however, Kroetz makes clear that although Mama Distl appears to be realistic about succeeding, her actual chances bear as little relation to reality as does the romanticising of her husband. The "Song" ironically exposes the hollowness of her dogged belief in the myth of Work and Betterment. Like her husband, she is dreaming.

For the final song, in which Karli describes the reality of his work situation, Kroetz introduces the additional device of slide projections to give the words of the song greater impact. For example, when he sings:

"Ich bin verheirat mit der Packmaschin,
ich bring sie nämlich nicht mehr los,
sie bringt zwar meinem Chef allein Gewinn
und hockt trotzdem am Wochenende auf meinem Schoß." 233,

Kroetz adds the "Lichteinblendung: Karli und die Packmaschine vor dem Traualtar".

Although the quality of the "Songs" in Sterntaler has been disputed -- "Man sollte sie streichen" 234, concludes one critic, and he is not alone -- their dramatic function is

231. Kroetz; WA, p.204.

232. Kroetz; WA, p.202.

233. Kroetz; WA, p.193.

234. Rohde, Gerhard; "Drüben wär' das nicht passiert? Kroetz' Sterntaler in Braunschweig", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 22/01/77.

clear. They constitute the most conspicuous linguistic innovation by means of which Kroetz tries to balance out the difficulties of limited critical expression created by the "Sprachlosigkeit" of his characters.

In Münchner Kindl he makes an equally far-reaching attempt to increase the critical impact of his play by contrasting inarticulacy with the explicitness of propaganda. In contrast to his customary naturalistic mode of writing, he has here produced an "Agitpropstück", which he himself describes as "eine Verneigung vor Brechts Sprache" ²³⁵.

The play, written specially for the occasion of a "Tribunal gegen Mietwucher und Bodenspekulation" ²³⁵ organised by the DKP, spotlights the glaring discrepancies between rich and poor in the Federal Republic of Germany. In the words of his anonymous narrator Kroetz clearly states his theme:

"Weniges ist noch immer so Vieler Los.
Und Wenige sind noch immer
so Vieler einziges, schmerzliches Schicksal.
Das muß anders werden." ²³⁶

With equal clarity he pinpoints the principles of capitalism as the origin of this injustice:

"Das Wort mein zeigt,
wo die Armut der Vielen ihren
furchtbaren Weg nahm." ²³⁷

In illustration of this claim Kroetz lets a number of

235. Kroetz; in: Thieringer, Thomas; "Der Autor und der Politiker: ein und derselbe. Jungdramatiker Kroetz zur heutigen Uraufführung seines Münchner Kindl auf einer DKP-Veranstaltung", in Frankfurter Rundschau, 21/07/73.

236. Kroetz; GS, p.479.

237. Kroetz; GS, p.481.

figures "speak". On the one hand characters such as Baron von Finck, Prinz von Thurn und Taxis, and the Wittelsbachers are allowed to list their possessions. In contrast to these representatives of staggering wealth, Kroetz presents the last letter of an old man who hanged himself because he was to be turned out of his flat after twenty-five years; a Turkish worker who sells his labour for 250,- DM a week; a pensioner who worked her whole life as a maid on a country estate, was turned out and had to take a furnished room where she is now not allowed to keep a dog for company.

Returning to the earlier documentary tone, Kroetz then proceeds to deal with the question: "Wie wird man so reich, daß es der Kopf nicht fassen kann?" ²³⁸, concluding with a factual summary of the "Bodenrecht" policies of the CDU/CSU, FDP, SDP and DKP.

At this point he reverts to the naturalistic mode and introduces a working class family threatened by eviction. Their reaction is one of resignation. Victims of inarticulacy, they are unable to understand their situation and therefore to protect themselves; all they can do is mutter: "Ausziehen heißt ... ausziehen." ²³⁹ They accept it like fate.

Kroetz then breaks the naturalistic illusion with the narrator's impassioned cry: "DOCH MAN KANN SICH WEHREN UND

238. Kroetz; GS, p.491.

239. Kroetz; GS, p.496.

MAN MUSS" ²⁴⁰, and proceeds to outline the suggestion of the DKP to form a "Bürgerinitiative" to fight against the ruthless profiteering and exploitation practised by the rich. The play concludes with the encouraging statistics of past protest actions and the heartening cry: "Wehrt euch!" ²⁴¹

Apart from the naturalistic interludes, Kroetz has replaced his characteristic "Sprachlosigkeit" by very precise articulacy. In Münchener Kindl it is Kroetz who speaks, and this suspension of naturalistic personae in favour of an omniscient authorial voice allows for clarity, both in the analysis of the situation depicted and in the expression of constructive measures for its improvement.

The failure of the play -- it has been performed only on this one occasion, and Kroetz himself later refers to it somewhat dismissively as "ein damals notwendiges Experiment" ²⁴² -- is, however, caused by precisely this articulacy, or, to be more exact, by the imbalance it serves to create between didacticism and human interest. Münchener Kindl reads too much like a political tract, and it is hard to believe that it could be appreciably more effective in performance, for its characters are little more than ciphers and its statistics too far removed from tangible human fates to retain any vitality. It is a cold inventory, inadequate for the purpose of bringing to life the reality of the injustice and misery

240. Kroetz; GS, p.497.

241. Kroetz; GS, p.502.

242. Kroetz; quoted in: Töteberg, Michael, loc.cit..

against which it inveighs.

A far more successful attempt to use the same device is made in Die Wahl fürs Leben. Here Kroetz reduces the volume of factual information from the smothering welter of statistical data presented in Münchner Kindl to a selection of concise insertions, devoting the bulk of the play to the discussion between Karli and his parents. Thus a healthier balance is struck, with Kroetz underpinning the main points of this discussion in such brief interjections as:

"Jede dritte Steuermark geht -- offen oder verdeckt -- in die Rüstungsindustrie." ²⁴³

The longest insertion consists of eleven lines, but still retains the sharpness which gives the statistics their dramatic power:

"Im 1. Weltkrieg zerstörte Krupps Mörser 'Dicke Bertha' die belgische Festung Lüttich. Kaiser Wilhelm dekorierte dafür den alten Krupp mit dem Eisernen Kreuz.
Im 2. Weltkrieg zerstörte Krupps 80-cm-Eisenbahngeschütz 'Dora' die sowjetische Festung Sewastopol. Hitler sprach dem mittleren Krupp 'höchste Anerkennung für unvergleichliche Leistung' aus.
Nach seiner Haftentlassung 1951 als Kriegsverbrecher schwor er, nie wieder Waffen zu produzieren.
Seit 1968 baut die Firma Krupp wieder Waffen: Für das Heer, für die Luftwaffe, für die Marine." ²⁴⁴

In contrast to Münchner Kindl Kroetz has here managed to make his documentary material provocatively instructive. The human interest of the action of the play and the sparingly used authorial intrusions mutually illuminate one another.

243. Kroetz; WA, p.171.

244. Kroetz; WA, p.162.

Despite the effectiveness in Die Wahl fürs Leben of this device of authorial articulacy, Kroetz has to date made use of it only here and in Münchner Kindl. The same is true of the "Songs", which likewise feature in two plays only (unless one includes the later "Libretto" ²⁴⁵ Jumbo-Track). For the rest he remains true to the tenets of his illusionistic concept of theatre, and the significant developments in his use of language occur within the framework of the naturalistic drama.

Together with the intensified use of specific linguistic constructions and the increased articulacy of certain characters, there is a general trend in Kroetz's plays towards greater transparency of language. He shapes the conversations of his figures with greater deliberation so that the audience becomes aware of meanings which the speakers themselves do not necessarily intend or even realise.

It is not always easy to draw a hard distinction between such cases and instances where the speaker himself is aware of the implications of his words. For example, when Schuster recounts the episode of the mended coffee machine, does he notice the connection with his earlier remark: "Es is halt allerweil einer da, der besser is als man selber." ²⁴⁶ ?

Other cases are more clear-cut. For example, in

245. Kroetz; DS, p.97.

246. Kroetz; GS, p.321.

Dolomitenstadt Lienz, the brief mention of the consequences of physical punishment remains on the level of personal experience. But Rasch's generalisation: "Was man am eigenen Leib erlebt, das prägt sich ein." ²⁴⁷ must immediately be noticed by the audience, especially when followed by Dengk's revealing jibe about the consequences for Schuster of his father having beaten him: "Er schlägt bloß Polizistn." ²⁴⁸ The words here mean more to the audience than to the speakers.

This device of transparent language is used to great effect in Sterntaler. Kroetz allows Mama Distl to assume the appearance of articulacy in order to reveal instead the extent of her inarticulacy. By parroting the slogans of freedom, opportunity and "Leistung" Martha shows how completely she has been fooled by the distorted picture propagated by the system and thus become the willing slave of her environment.

In the important third act, on Christmas Eve, Mama and Papa Distl discuss their situation in West Germany since their emigration from the GDR. Mama has clearly accepted the values of the "Leistungsgesellschaft", and expounds the importance of "der Anschluß an die Normalität" ²⁴⁹, the ethos of the survival of the fittest -- "Die Bestn kommen hier zu was, wie man überall lesen kann; weil die Gutn haltns aus und um die Schlechtn is ned schad!" ²⁴⁹, and the pre-eminence of the freedom-principle -- "Hier darf man sich nix erlaubn, sondern muß einen

247. Kroetz; GS, p.342.

248. Kroetz; GS, p.343.

249. Kroetz; WA, p.202.

eisernen Fleiß an den Tag legn, weil hier die Freiheit über alles geht." ²⁵⁰ The audience, however, sees through her facade of articulacy and can agree with her husband's hard-boiled realism: "Hier muß man über Leichn gehn, dann wird man was, sonst ned." ²⁵¹

In two cases in particular Mama Distl's blindness to the real meaning of her words is especially glaring. When she argues: "Drübn is die Sorge, daß die Leut überzeugete Kommunistn werdn und hier, daß sie reich werdn." ²⁵⁰, she understands the latter to be the more desirable goal. And when she asserts: "Drübn gibt man sich Mühe um die Menschn, und hier gibt man sich Mühe um die Freiheit." ²⁵⁰, it is freedom she sees as the positive value.

Throughout, the audience is able to contrast her words against the reality of her situation as presented in the rest of the play. Having swallowed the half-truths and the rhetoric of the "Leistungsgesellschaft", Martha Distl has become a willing hamster in the treadmill. Her hopes of success in this system are as flimsy as the "Sterntaler" of the title. Real articulacy leads to insight, as it does for Agnes, Kurt or Karli (in Die Wahl fürs Leben); Mama Distl's words are no more than self-deception. Her blindness is the audience's insight.

A similar use of transparent language occurs in the short play Reise ins Glück. The unmarried mother travelling with her

250. Kroetz; WA, p.205.

251. Kroetz; WA, p.206.

baby to spend Sunday with the father conducts a monologue during the journey, in which she endeavours to fabricate a dream reality celebrating the joy of the planned meeting. Significantly she frequently refers to the future in the present tense in the attempt to make her wishes reality:

- "Ein Zug trägt einen in die Ferne, wo es schön is." ²⁵²;
- "Der Papa steht auf dem Bahnhof wie nix, weil er eine Freud hat mit uns." ²⁵³;
- "Nach der Begrüßung, die herzlich is, wird der Kinderwagen zusammengeklappt, damit er in den Kofferraum paßt. Dann steigen mir ein, vorne, sitzen neben dem Papa und schauen ihm zu, wie er fährt, weil mir einen schönen Ausflug machen." ²⁵⁴

The continual use of the present tense in this way is, on its own, enough to make clear to the audience that the reality of the meeting is not going to be as rosy as she hopes. But Kroetz also begins to undermine her dream in more conspicuous ways. In one instance she lets the mother break the illusion directly:

"Alles bewegt sich und die Kinder Winken. Jetzt winkt kein Kind, aber unterwegs kann es vorkommen." ²⁵²

Elsewhere, in one of her little fantasies, Kroetz lets her change from the conditional tense to the present as she tries to convince herself of the reality of the dream:

"Wenn der Zug nur uns fahren tät, dann müßt er immer dort stehen bleiben, wo es schön is. Der Lokomotivführer tät auf ein Handzeichen von mir im Rückspiegel warten. Wenn ich mit der Hand so mach, dann weiß er, hier gefällt

252. Kroetz; WA, p.269.
253. Kroetz; WA, p.271.
254. Kroetz; WA, p.273.

es ihr, und dann steigt er auf die Bremse und bleibt stehen und mir steigen aus und gehen spazieren." 255

In the course of her monologue, her romantic dreams are gradually dismantled. Far from buying them "ein kleines Haus mitten im Wald" 256, the father is not even likely to be waiting at Rosenheim station. The unmarried mother's words, as is made clear from her confusion of tenses and, less successfully, by the rather overworked leitmotif of her nervous laughter, are mere self-deception.

Gradually, she herself begins to make more realistic references to her situation, without, like Martha Distl, realising their full implications:

- "Da wird der Zug dann aber nicht so leer sein, wie jetzt, weil alle Leute wieder zurück müssen. Aber ein Plätzchen findet sich schon, wenn man sich klein macht." 257;
- "Nicht auffallen, das is die Kunst, mit der man sich Sympathien erringt, sagt der Abteilungsleiter immer und lächelt. Deine Mama mag er." 257;
- "Die wo sich jetzt für die Staubzulage stark machen, wer weiß, ob die morgen noch da sind, sagt der Abteilungsleiter." 258

Such remarks show that the mother is as unable to discern the harsh facts of reality as she is to see through the flimsiness of her dreams, although deep down she must feel she is somehow deluding herself. Just before the train pulls in to the station, she begins to admit to herself that the

255. Kroetz; WA, p.270.

256. Kroetz; WA, p.272.

257. Kroetz; WA, p.274.

258. Kroetz; WA, p.277.

father will probably not be there, and so gives voice to a doubt which for the audience is a virtual certainty.

The transparency of language in Sterntaler and Reise ins Glück is particularly clear, occasionally even overworked. In performance in particular the latter text rings hollow and unnatural. Far more successful in this respect are Weitere Aussichten... and Oberösterreich. Frau Ruhsam's monologue as she prepares to move into the old folks' home says a great deal about the injustice of casting this robust old woman to the side simply because she has reached a certain age, but she does not explicitly call it an injustice. The same is true of Heinz's vague self-questioning and his and Anni's remarks about various consumer goods: doubts are raised and dependencies shown, without the speakers articulating them in so many words. At the same time this transparency of language is finely weighted so as not to sound unnatural, and is consequently more effective than in Reise ins Glück.

An interesting development is reached in the later play Nicht Fisch nicht Fleisch, in which both Hermann and Edgar display considerable articulacy in defending their own positions, while simultaneously revealing a glaring inability to escape from their own blinkered perspectives to see the issues at stake in their entirety. Hermann painstakingly analyses and propounds the necessity of political commitment and action, but loses sight of the people whose lives are involved. Edgar

justifies his behaviour in terms of his rights and duties as an individual, but fails to see the disruptive effects this stance has on his colleagues, i.e. he fails to recognise his political responsibilities. Despite their apparent eloquence, both characters have only a partial understanding of the overall situation. It is for this reason that, as the title implies, they both fail. Confronted with the limited articulacy of Hermann and Edgar, the audience can build the necessary bridges to the relevant conclusions.

If Kroetz can be accused of not having taken care to provide these bridges in some of his plays, in Maria Magdalena he is open to the opposite reproach. This play is a failure because Kroetz oversteps the border between irony and denunciation; what is intended to be self-revelation through language degenerates into crass abuse. Words are stuck into the mouths of the characters which reduce them to the level of Aunt Sally figures for the audience to knock down. It is easy to understand Achim Freyer, who, in his production of the play, transformed the characters into distorted monsters with papier maché limbs.

It is unlikely that anyone in real life could support Mama's complaint:

"Zuerst muß [Gott] sich um die Katholischen kümmern.
Das wird wohl unser gutes Recht sein,
wo mir so viel für ihn getan ham." ²⁵⁹

259. Kroetz; GS, p.422.

It is unlikely that any policeman could be imagined reacting to Mama's death with the comment to his colleagues:

"Machen Sie weiter, meine Herrn,
das is eine Privatangelegenheit." 260

It is unlikely that anyone could find realistic a father who reaches the same conclusion as Huber:

"Jetzt,
wo ich zurückdenk ist es sonnenklar.
Wenn mich einer beraubt,
daß ich da nicht sofort an
meinen Sohn denke,
das ist direkt unnormal." 261

It is true that Kroetz, in Maria Magdalena, is attacking the venality of life in the capitalist system, and that these extracts are intended to reveal the extent of the pre-eminence of money in all spheres of life (in these cases in religion, law and human relations). But Kroetz is overstating the point. The scales have been blatantly weighted for the sake of the argument, and thus the characters are reduced to puppet mouthpieces. Kroetz has lost sight of the balance between self-revelation and denunciation. For example, it would have been enough to let Papa cry pathetically:

"Mitgift! Das is doch vorbei!
Vergangenheit!
Heute heiratet man der Liebe wegen."

As such, the audience would certainly have seen through the sentimentality of his words; but Kroetz forfeits the whole effect by adding Leo's caustic reply:

260. Kroetz; GS, p.446.

261. Kroetz; GS, p.454.

"Ich nicht.
Ich bin ein normaler Mensch." 262

Such exaggerated "Pointers," engender only disbelief; Kroetz has become a victim of overkill.

Yet there is no need for these excesses. Mama's straightforward reservation about Leo's suitability as a son-in-law -- "Der Leo wär schon recht./ Bloß sein müßert er was, das is es." 263 -- conveys quite adequately how money-oriented the business of marriage is. Leo is perfectly articulate about the laws of survival in the capitalist system:

"Was klein ist stirbt.
Was groß ist wächst.
Heißt das Gesetz der Stunde." 264

Papa makes an almost casual remark highlighting the pre-eminence of money in their society:

"Spiel mir was auf dem Klavier vor, für was hab ich es kauft und euch lernen lassn." 265

Kroetz, however, is not content to leave it on this comparatively simple -- and effective -- level. There are a few borderline cases where he reaches the limits of credibility, as when he has Marie appeal:

"Lieber Gott, mach daß das Kind ein Abgang wird." 266,
or when he lets Leo warn of the dangers of being too human:

"Aber ein Schutz muß sein vor den Gefühlen,
sonst is man menschlich,
und das is schlecht,
wenn man noch nicht in sicherer Entfernung is." 267

262. Kroetz; GS, p.442.

263. Kroetz; GS, p.428.

264. Kroetz; GS, p.437.

265. Kroetz; GS, p.449.

266. Kroetz; GS, p.429.

267. Kroetz; GS, p.434.

Therafter he deteriorates unequivocally into denunciation. Even well-tested devices like the ironic reference to the authority of science is reduced to a parody of itself when Mama expounds:

"Es is eine Frage der Zeit
das Leben.
Das is wissenschaftlich." 268

The same is true of the characters' borrowings from the language of popular media, as when Marie tries to affect self-importance by saying:

"Das machen mir zwei nicht,
daß du der King bist
und ich die blöde Kuh." 269,

or when Mama waxes eloquent about her death:

"weil ich hinüber muß in das Reich der Schatten". 270

It is this crass overstatement that contributes in the main to the steamroller approach of Maria Magdalena and is responsible for its failure, and it is revealing that Kroetz has never again used language in such a way. Benjamin Henrichs entitled his review of the play: "Kroetz verliert die Sprache", and put his finger on one of its key shortcomings when he wrote: "die Sprache ist nicht gehört, sondern konstruiert." 271

It is no longer spoken by people, but by figures in an argument.

268. Kroetz; GS, p.431.

269. Kroetz; GS, p.462.

270. Kroetz; GS, p.420.

271. Henrichs, Benjamin; "Kroetz verliert die Sprache. Maria Magdalena, eine Komödie frei nach Hebbel, in Heidelberg uraufgeführt", in Süddeutsche Zeitung, 08/05/73.

Despite its failure, Maria Magdalena is consistent with Kroetz's literary development with regard to the use of language. It belongs to that group of plays in which he attempts to make his language more transparent, so that insights that remain obscured from the characters -- in varying degrees -- are nevertheless conveyed to the audience. It is a dangerous technique, the lurch into unnaturalness (as in Reise ins Glück) or denunciation (as in Maria Magdalena) being easily made. When the delicate balance is achieved, however, as in Oberösterreich, it is a highly effective one.

Of the developments mentioned -- the intensified use of linguistic constructions, the introduction of illusion-breaking elements such as "Songs" or the insertion of factual information, the increased articulacy of the characters and the transparency of language -- it is the final two (or one, for they are really two aspects of a general trend towards more explicit statement) that exert the most persistent influence on Kroetz's style. Extreme inarticulacy belongs to characters in his early plays, such as Karl and Marie or Otto and Martha, but is absent from the later works.

Initially, Kroetz recoiled violently from what he considered an unrealistic and therefore dishonest use of language in depicting the working classes, arguing that they are too often attributed "einen Sprachfundus..., der ihnen de facto nicht zugestanden wird von den Herrschenden"²⁷². In this he

272. Kroetz; WA, p.525.

sees a serious discrepancy between literature and reality:

"Weil Brechts Figuren so sprachgewandt sind, ist in seinen Stücken der Weg zur positiven Utopie, zur Revolution gangbar. Hätten die Arbeiter bei Siemens das Sprachniveau der Arbeiter Brechts, hätten wir eine revolutionäre Situation." ²⁷³

There is clearly more than a grain of truth in this argument. Nevertheless, stated in this manner, it fails to take notice of the stages between "Sprachlosigkeit" at one end of the scale and total articulacy at the other. The most significant development in Kroetz's use of language has been his recognition that this blanket judgement is subject to very definite reservations. Without denying the "restricted code" inherent in the lower social strata, it is unrealistic to reduce all members of this class to the level of, say, Karl and Marie (although they are by no means isolated cases). Gradually, Kroetz sees the advantages of according his characters greater articulacy, remaining at the same time sufficiently aware of reality to retain many features of the "Sprachlosigkeit" depicted in his early plays, albeit not in such an extreme degree.

The consequences for Kroetz's theatre are plain: the greater flexibility of language on the stage allows the author to make clearer and more effective political statements. It is Kroetz's particular talent to have achieved this without sacrificing the accuracy or intensity of his depiction of

273. Kroetz; WA, p.525.

people whose command of language remains, in varying degrees, limited.

However one views this development, Kroetz's attitude to the significance of "Sprachlosigkeit" in his plays does not alter, even if his treatment of it changes appreciably. From Wildwechsel onwards, the inarticulacy of the characters in his plays is a social phenomenon and never a purely linguistic one. As he warns:

"Also, anstatt, daß man sagt, sie sind von den Verhältnissen, die sie gemacht haben, geprägt, sagt man, sie sind 'sprachlos'." 274

In this way, the political implications of the plays are eliminated; the characters and the problems which they are confronted with are removed from the political sphere and placed on a general, "human" level. To a certain extent the early plays, with their lack of sociological information and sketchy social context, encourage this political disqualification, and Kroetz's subsequent work reflects the attempt to maintain the depiction of "Sprachlosigkeit" while strengthening the explanation of its causes.

In his slim volume of profiles of immigrant workers, Leben im gelobten Land, Max von der Grün describes the consequences of being unable to use a foreign language:

"... ohne die Sprache zu beherrschen, ist man in einem fremden Land ein Stummer, da wird man einfach wohin

274. Kroetz; "Programmheft zu Das Nest", performed in the "Modernes Theater München", 1975/76.

gesetzt, man kann sich nicht wehren, weil man sich nicht verständlich machen kann, man ist nur ein Gegenstand und kein Mensch." 275

In essence, Kroetz's figures have the same problem: they are mutes in their own country. They share the consequences of "Sprachlosigkeit" in being unable to defend themselves, whether it be the total inarticulacy of Karl and Marie, or the blinkered command of language of Mama Distl or Hermann in Nicht Fisch nicht Fleisch. "Sprachlosigkeit" is a cruel social injustice against which Kroetz is protesting on behalf of those who have no words. The development in his treatment of inarticulacy derives from his desire to increase the clarity and energy of his protest, to progress from a merely descriptive representation of the problem of "Sprachlosigkeit" to one which strives to explain and activate.

275. von der Grün, Max; Leben im gelobten Land. Gastarbeiter-
porträts, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag GmbH & Co.KG,
Darmstadt und Neuried, 1975, p.110.

C) | CHARACTERS

"Doktor: Woyzeck, der Mensch ist frei, in dem Menschen
verklärt sich die Individualität zur Freiheit.
--- Den Harn nicht halten können!"

Georg Büchner ¹

"das neue theater wendet sich so an den gesellschaftlichen
menschen... das individuum bleibt individuum, wird aber ein
gesellschaftliches phänomen, seine leidenschaften etwa
werden gesellschaftliche angelegenheiten und auch seine
schicksale."

Bertolt Brecht ²

In the course of the analysis of violence and language
in Kroetz's plays it becomes increasingly obvious that the
three-way division into "Handlung-Sprache-Figuren" is an
artificial one. The previous two chapters offer sufficient
evidence to confirm that it is unrealistic to suggest that any
one aspect can be treated independently of the other two.

It is especially important to bear in mind how contrived
this division is when dealing with the characters, for
ultimately the violence and inarticulacy Kroetz describes are
of significance only to the extent that they illuminate the
lives of the figures through whom they are depicted. Certainly,
the two phenomena cannot be relegated to the status of
"accompanying circumstances", but they do remain part of the
end, which is the clarification and improvement of the

1. Büchner, Georg; Woyzeck, loc.cit., p.119.

2. Brecht, Bertolt; Arbeitsjournal 1938-42, loc.cit., p.112.

situation of the people whose lives they inform.

Given this hierarchy of importance, it may seem odd that the acts of violence and the restrictions in articulacy have been discussed before the characters themselves. The reason for this -- as has been stated -- is simply that in performance the audience becomes aware first of the visual aspect -- "die Gewaltakte" --, then of the aural aspect -- "das beschränkte Sprachvermögen" -- before finally coming to consider the characters. The order of discussion reflects the order of this process of assimilation: the final area of attention, the characters, remains in both cases the most important.

In this third category also, Kroetz is dealing with extremes. At the same time as he was dubbed the author of "haarsträubenden Schweinereien" and the "Sprecher der Sprachlosen", he soon became credited with an almost obsessive interest in "Randerscheinungen", a term that was quickly to become as current as the notorious "Sprachlosigkeit".

While Kroetz later showed reservations about the accuracy of this latter term, the various phrases used to describe his characters -- ranging from "Außenseiter der Gesellschaft" ³ and "Existenzen nahe am Nullpunkt" ⁴ to "Comic-Strip-Existenzen" ⁵ --

3. Panzner; op.cit., p.15.

4. Michaelis, Rolf; "Tragödienstadel", in Theater heute, Heft 8, August 1972.

5. Stone, Michael; "Schwerer Tabak -- krümmelweise. Franz Xaver Kroetz' Wildwechsel in der Werkstatt", in Tagesspiegel, 01/12/72.

are to a large extent supported by his own definition of them in a newspaper interview as "meistens geistig, finanziell und manchmal auch seelisch in Randsituationen Lebenden" ⁶.

A brief look at some of the protagonists in Kroetz's plays will bear out the accuracy of this observation. Beppi is a mentally retarded farmer's daughter; Fritz is an exhibitionist with a criminal record; Helmut has had a leg amputated; Hermann Rasch, Heribert Dengk and Oskar Schuster are in prison awaiting trial; Willy is physically handicapped; Hanni is a thirteen-year-old girl unable to cope with the onset of puberty; Franz, her lover, is a jobless piece of driftwood.

This catalogue, however, does little to explain the real nature or significance of the term "Randerscheinung". There appears, for example, to be a considerable difference between the backward Beppi and the seemingly normal Franz. This difference, however, is merely one of degree. Certainly, Beppi's plight appears to be by far the more deplorable, but it is not in this glaringly noticeable external appearance that the truly "extreme" in Beppi consists. What makes of her a "Randerscheinung" is, significantly, something different. As perceptively described by Rolf-Peter Carl:

"Nicht die Tatsache, daß die heranwachsende Beppi geistig zurückgeblieben ist, macht sie zum chancenlosen

6. Kroetz; quoted in Panzner, op.cit., p.15.

Außenseiter; erst die Umgebung, in der sie mit dieser Behinderung groß werden muß, bewirkt diese Weichenstellung." ⁷

Beppi's mental condition should not obscure the fact that her "Außenseitertum", as much as that of Franz, is a social phenomenon. Kroetz's characters are to be seen in their social and historical context, and not as cases of private psychological interest.

There is a second crucial point of contact between Franz and Beppi. It is by looking beyond Franz's apparent normality that one becomes aware of the abnormality that lurks beneath the surface. He belongs to that category of figures whom Hellmuth Karasek describes as "Outcasts, die uns nach ihrer sonstigen Unauffälligkeit durch ihre Straffälligkeit auffallen" ⁸. Franz, like Otto or Fräulein Rasch, disrupts the illusion of normality by a sudden act of violence. Ultimately, his "Extremität" thus becomes as outstanding as that of Beppi or any of the other characters to whom the title "Randerscheinung" appears at first glance more applicable.

The accuracy of this term, like that of "Sprachlosigkeit", is therefore dangerously suspect. In the first place, it makes no attempt to treat the characters as social phenomena, but

7. Carl, Rolf-Peter; Franz Xaver Kroetz, Autorenbücher 10, Verlag C.H.Beck und edition text + kritik, München 1978, p.60.

8. Karasek, Hellmuth; "Kleines Lexicon deutschschreibender Dramatiker der Gegenwart. Franz Xaver Kroetz oder: Die Sprache funktioniert nicht", in Theater heute, Jahressonderheft, 1972.

places them in a vacuum as private individuals. As such, it contradicts Kroetz's intention, as paraphrased by Helmut Walbert, of demonstrating "daß diese Menschen nicht an sich, als Person zerstört sind; sie sind Systemgeschädigte" ⁹.

In the second place, the term "Randerscheinung" suggests that the characters Kroetz describes are no more than isolated cases with little relevance to society as a whole. For Kroetz, however, it is of the utmost importance to be aware of the representative value of what he later describes as "die sogenannten Randgruppen unserer Gesellschaft" ¹⁰. The seeming normality that shrouds Franz Bermeier until his callous act of murder contains the warning that one should not look for the extreme merely in sensational cases. The corollary is also true: that what appears to be extreme is no more than a symbolic representation of the norm. Hellmuth Karasek describes Kroetz's plays as:

"... allesamt unter Beschädigten unserer Gesellschaft spielend, sie also im pervertierten Extrem musterhaft spiegelnd." ¹¹

In this respect, Kroetz's menagerie of wretched derelicts must be seen as occupying, not outsider positions, but "scheinbare Außenseiterpositionen" ¹².

9. Walbert, Helmut; in WA, p.594.

10. Kroetz; WA, p.599.

11. Karasek, Hellmuth; "Kleines Lexicon deutschschreibender Dramatiker der Gegenwart. Franz Xaver Kroetz oder: Die Sprache funktioniert nicht", in Theater heute, Jahres-sonderheft, 1972.

12. Nössig, Manfred; "Kroetz und wir: zur DDR-Erstaufführung von Oberösterreich in Rostock", in Theater der Zeit, Heft 1, Januar 1974.

In one of the earliest published interviews with Kroetz the young author refers explicitly to the social and political function of the characters in his plays:

"Meine Stücke sind die Antwort auf die Leute, die mich umgeben. Leute, die von der kapitalistischen Leistungsgesellschaft überrollt werden, die verzweifeln, ohne zu wissen, warum, Leute, jenseits von Artikulation und Sprache." ¹³

Here, at the very outset of his literary career, Kroetz emphatically locates his characters in the context of a capitalist social structure. They are not interchangeable ciphers around whom he constructs fables of murder, sex and brutality; nor are they arbitrarily selected special cases whose gruesome acts of violence are the sole justification for their appearance in a play. They are deliberately chosen "extreme" examples of the wretched many who are the victims of an oppressive social system.

Nevertheless, while this may be clear to Kroetz, it is by no means certain that audiences will reach the same conclusions from seeing his plays. Once again he is faced with the "Problem des reinen Vorzeigens" ¹⁴. As with the depiction of violence and inarticulacy, Kroetz initially runs the risk in his portrayal of characters of being misinterpreted because of his refusal to provide explanatory comment. His figures tend to appear timeless and rootless, and therefore to

13. Müller, Andreas; "Ein Gewehr unter dem Schreibtisch. Gespräch mit der Suhrkamp-Entdeckung Franz Kroetz", in Abendzeitung, 27/11/70.

14. Kroetz; WA, p.603.

incorporate existential rather than social problems. Even if Kroetz succeeds in evoking the social context in which the characters appear, he remains open to the criticism that his depiction remains no more than an "Aneinanderreihung von Fakten" ¹⁵ of no critical significance.

Consequently, if the social context is obscured, the intended representative function of Kroetz's characters becomes equally blurred. It is impossible to see them as "über sich hinausweisenden Exempeln" ¹⁶ of the capitalist social structure. They become at best representatives of an unfortunate few on the outskirts of the system; but even then they remain anomalies rather than symptomatic instances of the whole.

Kroetz's first task, therefore, is to provide a clearly delineated social context that will enable, if not compel the audience to see the characters primarily as social phenomena.

In the words of Brecht:

"Nicht das 'ewig Menschliche' [soll] in Erscheinung treten, nicht was angeblich alle Menschen zu aller Zeit tun, sondern das, was in unserer Zeit, zum Unterschied zu anderen Zeiten, Menschen bestimmter gesellschaftlicher Schichten, zum Unterschied zu anderen Schichten, tun." ¹⁷

It is, of course, a problem familiar to Kroetz, as, for example, in endeavouring to depict violence as a feature of society rather than of individual human beings. Much of what

15. Panzner; op.cit., p.22.

16. Panzner; op.cit., p.21.

17. Brecht; Zu "Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe"; Beschreibung der Kopenhagener Uraufführung, in GW17, p.1083.

has been said in the chapter on violence about the presentation of the social context is equally relevant here, and it would be redundant to repeat all the arguments to come to the same conclusions. Here it should suffice to recap on the arguments concerning two of the most outstanding cases -- Michis Blut and Heimarbeit -- with the emphasis this time on the characters.

These two plays have been chosen because of their susceptibility to the criticism of being set outside any social or historical context. Karl and Marie in particular seem to be devoid of any social definition whatsoever: they are faceless creatures of unspecified social status whose story unrolls in a vacuum. Had this play, like Männersache, been summarised for the Abendzeitung, it might have been described as follows:

"Eine Frau wird schwanger. Sie und ihr Mann versuchen, das Kind durch eine Lauge abzutreiben. Der Versuch schlägt fehl; das Kind kommt tot zur Welt. Die Frau liegt kurz darauf im Sterben."

It is, in fact, not even certain that Karl and Marie are married. However this may be, their story comes across as an essentially private tragedy, and consequently the political statement of the play is eliminated.

It is not altogether true, however, that Karl and Marie are denied all social definition. In the very first line of the play Marie admonishes Karl to go to the toilet, thus making it clear that they have only one room to live in. Although one cannot specify the degree or origins of their financial hardship, the fact that they are forced to live in a single room

indicates considerable material deprivation.

This deliberate highlighting of their poverty is of prime importance, in so far as it provides the reason for the attempted abortion which forms the core of the play. The baby would be the third mouth to feed, the third person to live in the single room. In addition to the increased financial problems caused by the arrival of the baby, Karl's and Marie's personal relationship would also suffer. In their cramped living conditions their relationship has deteriorated to a level of considerable verbal hostility: the added stress arising from the problems of raising a child in the already overcrowded room would no doubt lead to a further decline, possibly degenerating into physical violence. (One cannot, of course, prove that Karl and Marie were not callous and aggressive before they started living together, but it is reasonable to assume that their present hostility is, at least in part, a result of their having to live in such impoverished conditions.)

This opening line is therefore of great significance in indicating the answers to three fundamental questions: Why are Karl and Marie so hostile to one another?; Why do they attempt to abort Marie's child?; Why does the abortion take such a primitive form? In all three cases the answer can be found in their financial circumstances. Seen in this context, the action of the play becomes comprehensible. Karl and Marie cease to be existentialist ciphers or representatives of human misery per se, and can be particularised as impoverished members

of a social structure where personal well-being is quite simply dependent on money.

However, the objection remains that Kroetz's evocation of this social context is too vague and delivered with insufficient emphasis; the audience does not recognise the reproduction of its own society. In Heimarbeit the outline is presented with more deliberation. The play contains certain similarities with Michis Blut. The same atmosphere of familial hostility is established in the first scene and continues throughout the play. Martha becomes pregnant; in this case the baby will be the fifth mouth to feed in the overcrowded home. For want of money Willy and Martha also attempt a primitive abortion which likewise fails. Later, in Willy's drowning of the baby, one sees the deterioration into physical violence which was imminent in Michis Blut.

In neither play is Kroetz attempting simply to chronicle a tragic account of misery and brutality without comment: he is endeavouring to uncover "die sozialen und geistigen Zerstörungen, aus denen diese Gewaltakte entstehen"¹⁸. In Heimarbeit the key to an understanding of the play again lies in the financial situation of the characters. Willy and Martha are probably better off than Karl and Marie, but their living conditions are still

18. Kroetz; in: Macher, Hannes; "Was alles zur Gewalt führt. Interview mit Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Die Zeit, 23/06/72.

relatively primitive. For example, they have no bathroom and have to make use of an old-fashioned tub to bathe themselves and the two children. One senses the bitterness in Willy's words:

"Was ein Bad kost? In neue Wohnungen is von Haus aus eins drin. Die bauen keine Wohnung mehr, wo kein Bad drin ist. Is drin wie ein Klo." ¹⁹

Willy and Martha, however, are obviously not able to afford to move to one of these envied new flats. In fact, in order to make ends meet at all, Martha has had to take on a job as a cleaner now that Willy has lost his regular job and is dependent on "Heimarbeit". This financial necessity has in turn led to personal resentments between Willy and Martha. She is reluctant to continue their sexual relationship, not so much because of her physical tiredness -- her explanation: "Wenn ich putzt hab, bin ich müd." ²² is just a pretext -- as from her resentment at having to work. This is made clear in her remark: "Wennst eine gscheite Arbeit hättst, braücht ich nicht putzn." ²² In other words, their sexual problems are a direct consequence of a situation caused by financial hardship.

The same financial hardship prevents them from coping with the concrete problem of Martha's pregnancy. Like Karl and Marie, they cannot afford to have an abortion; nor can they afford to have the child. Martha carries out a grisly

19. Kroetz; GS, p.49.

attempt to abort it herself with a knitting needle.

This measure, like the mustard bath in Michis Blut, is a failure. After the birth of the child their situation deteriorates until Martha decides to leave Willy to live with her parents. Earlier, as she was going into hospital, Willy reminds us of the financial difficulties the new baby will create: "Wenns den Vater wissen tätst, dann hättn mir wenigstens Alimente. Das ist auch ein Lichtblick so ein Geld."²⁰ Now, left alone to care for the three children, Willy is clearly going to be hard pressed to survive.

At the same time, Kroetz does not let us forget Willy's considerable sexual frustration. Now that Martha has left him, masturbation remains the only way of satisfying his sexual needs. In the long term this is obviously an inadequate solution. Willy considers his situation and comes to a simple conclusion: he drowns the baby. In his blinkered perspective this act will, firstly, bring Martha back to him, thereby relieving his sexual frustration, and, secondly, ameliorate their financial situation by removing the extra mouth to feed.

Willy's act of murder is therefore quite explicable. He and Martha are not exotic monsters: they can be localised as victims of a money-oriented society and their actions

20. Kroetz; GS, p.54.

can be explained as products -- extreme ones perhaps, but products nevertheless -- of this social system.

The same process of social localisation applies to all of Kroetz's characters: it is naive or blinkered to consign them to some abstract landscape. The more serious criticism that can be levelled against Kroetz is that he provides no compelling reason to conclude that this social background constitutes a determining factor in the definition of the characters.

On analysis, however, this criticism proves to be porous. It is unlikely, for example, that the tragedy of Männersache could plausibly be set in the framework of a non-capitalist society. Otto's crippling inferiority complex stems from his sense of being a mere cog in the industrial machine. He is resentful of Martha's independence and projects his fears in the form of aggression directed against her, notably in the realm of the personal and sexual. Martha, on the other hand, suffers from the stress of having to confirm her self-sufficiency as a business person at the expense of her emotional life. Having had to devote her energy to running the "Kuttlerei", she has not had the opportunity to develop productive sexual or emotional relationships, and so is perversely willing to submit to Otto's humiliating treatment. When her self-respect finally asserts itself it is irreconcilable with Otto's fears, and this explosive situation erupts into violence. It is violence that has been explained as a product of a particular environment.

Similarly, the difficulties littering Fritz's path to social reintegration are economic in origin. Kroetz makes clear that Otto's interference in Fritz's private plans is occasioned by exclusively financial considerations. The welfare of his nursery is threatened by Fritz's departure, so he intervenes to dissuade Mitzi from accompanying him. Otto acts to safeguard his own interests; the pre-eminence of material survival obliterates personal ties.

Nevertheless, while Kroetz would maintain that neither Otto would be the sort of person he is, were he not living in a capitalist society, others might object that there are selfish, narrow-minded individuals in every social system, and that these psychological factors are of greater significance than any economic considerations. One recalls the widespread reaction to the figure of Dreißiger in Die Weber, who is abhorred as an evil man, but not as the product of an evil system. The political impact of the play is thus blunted. How can it be proved that Karl and Marie would not have had such a cannibalistic relationship if they had lived in a socialist or communist environment? In Heimarbeit there is no economic explanation for Martha's adultery, which does, after all, result in the pregnancy that sets in motion the chain of events ending in infanticide. The examples multiply: Rustorfer's concern for his business can be seen as an instance of universal, human self-interest; Beppi's fate has its origins in her mental backwardness, not

in her financial circumstances. Furthermore, as discussed in the chapter on violence, the role of accidents -- Helmut's amputated leg -- and coincidences -- Sepp's death of cancer -- can be raised to the level of determining factors.

From a political point of view Kroetz is faced with an impossible task. Although each of his characters can be located in the same specifically capitalist society, they can just as easily be lifted out of it. The question of social definition is one of these endless arguments to which there are no final answers, but only opinions. The interpretation of political plays is to a vast extent a question of perspective.

It is perhaps not out of place to make a brief digression to highlight this point. One needs only to recall the eternal debates revolving round the plays of Brecht to see how thoroughly the literary criticism of a text by a politically committed author is coloured by personal political beliefs. Die Maßnahme is the most celebrated case, but many other examples can be chosen. The fight between Garga and Shlink in Im Dickicht der Städte, for example, is construed as being of existential or political significance, depending on the standpoint of the critic.

The American Frederic Ewen supports the existential interpretation, insisting that the real "Dickicht" is life itself, and proclaiming:

"... der sogenannte 'Boxkampf' ist in Wirklichkeit ein Drama der Einsamkeit und ein verzweifelter Versuch, zu

einer Kommunikation zu gelangen, sei es auch durch einen Kampf, in einer Welt, die Abstand hält und jeglicher Kommunikation trotzt." 21

Of markedly anti-communist persuasion, Martin Esslin embraces this generalising view and categorises the play as a forerunner of the theatre of the absurd:

"This strange play anticipates the plays of Beckett, Ionesco, and Adamov, which it resembles by its insistence on the impossibility of communication." 22

On the other hand, the East German group of writers Bunge, Hecht and Rülicke insists upon the particularisation of the fight in a capitalist society:

"... dieser 'Kampf an sich' -- eine idealisierte Form des Klassenkampfes -- macht deutlich, daß sich die Menschen unter den Bedingungen des 'Dickichts' der kapitalistischen Millionenstädte nicht nahekomen können." 23

Brecht himself seems to alter his view of his own play according to the state of his political consciousness. In a short preface to the play -- written between 1921 and 1924 -- he encourages an existentialist interpretation, describing the fight as an "unerklärlichen Ringkampf" and advising the audience:

"Zerbrechen Sie sich nicht den Kopf über die Motive dieses Kampfes, sondern beteiligen Sie sich an den menschlichen Einsätzen, beurteilen Sie unparteiisch die Kampfform der Gegner und lenken Sie Ihr Interesse auf das Finish." 24

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21. Ewen, Frederic; Bertolt Brecht. Sein Leben, sein Werk, seine Zeit, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1973, p.99.
 22. Esslin, Martin; Brecht: A Choice of Evils, Heinemann Educational Books, London, 1973, p.248.
 23. Hecht/Bunge/Rülicke; Bertolt Brecht. Leben und Werk, Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1963, p.29.
 24. Brecht; Im Dickicht der Städte, GW1, p.126.

Looking back, in 1954, on his early plays, Brecht redirects his attention to the "wirklichen Kampf, der vor sich ging und den ich nur idealisierte, [den] Klassenkampf." ²⁵

The same disparity of judgement will apply to any play of a politically involved author: literary criticism is inseparable from political standpoint. Consequently, while Kroetz recognises the need to clarify and emphasise the social context of his plays, he has good reason to entertain no illusions about the success of his endeavour. Be that as it may, from approximately Wunschkonzert onwards he shows a marked interest in establishing a firm connection between his characters and their particular social context.

This is not to say that this intention is completely absent from his earlier plays. In Wildwechsel, for example, he introduces information which helps the audience to understand Erwin's attitude to his daughter's relationship with Franz. At the breakfast table Erwin refers briefly to the way he is manipulated by his employers:

"Jetzt wolln sie den Abschlag vierzehntägig machn. Wegn der Buchhaltung... die machn mit uns, was sie wolln." ²⁶

This remark starts off what is obviously a recurring discussion about the possibility of Erwin's being transferred to long-distance deliveries. A perceptive member of the audience will notice the implications about the consequences of this

25. Brecht; Bei Durchsicht meiner ersten Stücke, GW17, p.949.

26. Kroetz; GS, p.10.

move on the security of the family -- "Hilda: Wegn die hundert Mark und aus is es mit der Familie." ²⁷ -- and realise how Erwin's anxiety about Hanni's future is tied up with his insecurities at work. He is at pains at home to compensate for these insecurities by affirming the value of his role as Father in the family unit, where he regains his sense of identity. With this insight it is easier to understand his reaction to Hanni's affair with Franz. His stubbornness has sociological origins, it is not merely personal cantankerousness.

The problem is that the information that leads to this vital insight is delivered almost incidentally. One might overlook the family discussion as trivial chit-chat at the breakfast table, just as Marie's reproach to Karl to use the toilet is in danger of being seen as an arbitrary remark to start Michis Blut. Certainly, it is arguable whether such oversights are the fault of Kroetz's lax provision of data or of the audience's lack of perception, but, however this may be it is in Kroetz's interests to ensure they do not recur.

In Wunschkonzert he makes the first marked attempt to localise his characters -- in this case Fräulein Rasch -- unequivocally in a particular social setting. The wordless play is prefaced by a description of the protagonist's material conditions and social status, together with a lengthy reflection on the fatal consequences which the mercilessly

27. Kroetz; GS, p.11.

ordered and monotonous lives of people such as Fräulein Rasch can have. In the play itself he unites these two elements and shows how they lead to the suicide gesture of this wretched "Arbeitstier".

As discussed earlier, however, this play has also been seen as a purely private tragedy. In performance, the vital information provided in the preface cannot be communicated. At best it can be printed in a programme, but even if this is admitted as a satisfactory solution, the audience is free not to draw too rigid a connection between this prefatory information and the character of Fräulein Rasch, whose suicide gesture might just as feasibly be the result of depression caused by her "einzigsten, frühen, kurzen, peinlichen und traurigen Fall von Liebe"²⁸. Indeed, it is conceivable that this impression of a "human tragedy" will be encouraged in performance if her impersonation by the actress is a convincing one.

In any case, as outlined in the chapter on violence, the problem of convincingly defining the social context in which the plays take place is an insoluble one: horses will be led to water. Even the careful delineation of the West German "Leistungs- und Konsumgesellschaft", which forms the cast-iron foundation of Oberösterreich, is cheerfully dismissed by critics such as Sibylle Wirsing, who proclaims that Heinz and Anni are eternal ciphers, "ganz gleich zu welcher kapitalistischen oder

28. Kroetz; GS, p.186.

sozialistischen Gesellschaft" they belong. ²⁹

If these two characters can be so effortlessly redefined, despite Kroetz's painstakingly drawn social picture, what chance do Karl and Marie stand of being recognised as victims of the same capitalist society? How complete does the picture have to be before it cannot be dismissed as contingent?

In Agnes Bernauer Kroetz might seem to have succeeded in achieving the necessary completeness. Ernst Werdenfels is understandable only by virtue of his social definition. Even his name reflects his progress from the lower to the upper regions of capitalist prosperity and the concomitant hardening of the emotions he undergoes in the process. Agnes can be understood only as a girl of poor birth married into wealth. Her journey to insight is determined by the experiences she goes through by changing from one world to another. She learns, not that Ernst is an evil man who exploits the poor, but that he is the representative of an evil system which exploits the poor. To deny all this one would need a very large set of blinkers.

It is nevertheless in this direction that Hans Schwab-felisch moves in an article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Having concurred with his colleague Georg Hensel that, with Agnes Bernauer, Kroetz has written "ein Märchen" ³⁰,

29. Wirsing, Sibylle; "Ortswechsel", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 13/11/74.

30. Hensel, Georg; "Der gute Mensch von Straubing. Agnes Bernauer von Franz Xaver Kroetz -- Uraufführung in Leipzig", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 11/05/77.

Schwabfelisch continues:

"In Märchen werden Verhaltensweisen dargestellt, gute und böse; zwar vor einem unwirklichen Hintergrund, doch mit einem Kern unantastbarer Wahrhaftigkeit." ³¹

While this sentence acknowledges the nugget of truth at the heart of Kroetz's play, the rest of the article concentrates on spotlighting the unrealistic nature of the social context in which it is set. Schwabfelisch is glad that the director of the East German première managed to resist the temptation of presenting the action of the play as a "wirklichkeitsnahen Plot... , der hanebüchene frühkapitalistische Sozialverhältnisse in der Bundesrepublik wahrheitsgetreu nachzeichne" ³¹. Finding this idea more than faintly ridiculous, Schwabfelisch eagerly finds confirmation in the words of the director of the Leipzig theatre where the production took place: "'Verhaltensweisen, wie sie Kroetz darstellt, gibt es auch bei uns in der D.D.R.'" ³¹. For good measure he concludes in his own words: "Es gibt sie überall, möchte man hinzufügen." ³¹

Again, Kroetz's efforts are in vain: Agnes Bernauer is uprooted into the realm of the fairy tale and thus trivialised. It is easy to see how simply his earlier plays, where the social context is generally more weakly presented, can be shifted into similar abstract zones.

To appreciate Kroetz's plays as he would wish them to

31. Schwabfelisch, Hans; "Agnes Bernauer unter Proletariern. Kroetz' Legendenstück in Wuppertal. Westdeutsche Erstaufführung", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 07/10/77.

be understood, the audience must be prepared to do its share of the work. Kroetz is not a schoolteacher dictating a lesson; he is a dramatist depicting human fates, in which he hopes the audience will recognise the reflection of a certain type of society. His characters are neither inexplicable anomalies nor monsters from the fringe: they are deformed specimens of a deformed society.

Kroetz underlines this representative social function in his early essay Meine MÄNNERSACHE, in which he protests energetically against the tactic of the critics of dismissing the violence, language and characters of his early plays as marginal and exceptional cases. In answer to the protests against the brutality of Martha's attempted abortion Kroetz draws attention to the immense number of illegal and dangerous abortions performed daily by "Pfuschern" and "Engelmachern". With reference to his allegedly unrealistic depiction of inarticulacy he points out the everyday problems suffered by anyone who is reprimanded by his boss, confronted with bureaucracy or questioned by representatives of authority, and finds himself suddenly "sprachlos". Finally Kroetz turns to the characters themselves:

"... ich frage: Wieviele Menschen gibt es, die Heimarbeit machen, wieviele Frauen gehen zum Aufbessern des Familieneinkommens putzen?... Oder bei HARTNÄCKIG: Helmut hat nur ein Bein. Die Geschichte eines Krüppels. Randerscheinung? Wie viele körperbehinderte Menschen gibt es in unserer Gesellschaft? Ein paar hunderttausend?!... Deshalb: Vor-sicht mit dem Begriff Randerscheinung, Asoziale, Nicht-

repräsentative, Minderheiten ...

Wenn man unsere 60 Millionen genau unter die Lupe nimmt, dann zerfallen sie zuletzt alle in Randerscheinungen." ³²

With particular regard to the characters, Ernst Wendt was among the first of the critics to appreciate the crucial representative function which Kroetz here so explicitly avows. While others hastily bundled his figures into boxes labelled "Exoten" and filed them away for the attention of future literary historians, Wendt remains rooted in reality:

"Was am Rande der Gesellschaft zu spielen scheint, erweist sich durch Kroetzens beharrliche Beschreibungswut und seine protokollarische Genauigkeit als ein repräsentativer Querschnitt, den wir eigentlich nicht so gern wahrhaben möchten. Denn so sehr am Rande, daß sie uns exotisch vorkommen dürften, existieren Kroetzens Figuren gar nicht: Sie leben mitten unter uns, und ihre Sprachnot, ihre Triebnot, ihre Liebesnot, ihre soziale Not, ihre Verhaltens- und Arbeitszwänge sind unser aller." ³³

Elsewhere the perceptive Wendt draws attention to the second crucial insight concerning Kroetz's characters, pointing out that these "Randgruppen der Gesellschaft" are really "unfreiwillig an den Rand Gedrängte" ³⁴. Their position, far from being organic, is quite clearly a result of social pressures.

Among Kroetz's earlier critics, however, Wendt remains the exception rather than the rule, and Kroetz's subsequent work

32. Kroetz; WA, pp.554/5.

33. Wendt, Ernst; "Franz Xaver Kroetz: Eine neue Heimatkunst", Programmheft 5, Staatliche Schauspielbühnen Berlins, Heft 28, Spielzeit 1973/74.

34. Wendt, Ernst; "Dramen über Zerstörung, Leiden, Sprachlosigkeiten im Alltag -- auf der Flucht vor dem großen politischen Stoff?", in Theater heute, Heft 5, Mai 1971.

reflects the preoccupation with the task of clarifying these two aspects of his characters. If they are to be considered as outsiders at all, then only as "Außenseiter, die... nach Millionen zählen" ³⁵ and as "Zurückgelassenen" rather than "Zurückgebliebenen" ³⁶. Only then can one draw the necessary conclusions about the state of the society which creates and perpetuates them, and which Kroetz is striving so fervently to change.

One method of approaching the question of the representative social function of Kroetz's characters is to consider the figure who is arguably the most extreme of them all, an outsider even among the outsiders -- Beppi.

It is inviting to accept the immediate impression that Beppi's outsider position consists primarily in her mental backwardness. Even those who mean well by sympathising with her as a "poor soul" are guilty of misunderstanding her situation. Kroetz would not wish his audience to succumb to this humanitarian commiseration, as it diverts attention to non-political criteria which he would not recognise as valid.

Rolf-Peter Carl examines this at length in his discussion of Stallerhof, in which he pinpoints the crucial fact that it is not Beppi's backwardness which makes of her an outsider,

35. Schmidt, Dietmar N.; "Stallerhof im Malersaal, Hamburg", in Die deutsche Bühne, Heft 8, August 1972.

36. Karasek, Hellmuth; "Liebe ganz anders. Kroetz-Uraufführung im Hamburger Malersaal", in Die Zeit, 30/06/72.

but the way in which her environment reacts to this impediment.

His conclusions are worth quoting in full:

"Unter den Lebensbedingungen des bayerischen Kleinbauernhofs wird die Lernschwäche der Tochter -- körperlich wohl mitverursacht durch eine hochgradige Kurzsichtigkeit -- zu einer Belastung, der sich niemand stellen will und kann. Von diesen Existenzbedingungen ist ausdrücklich kaum die Rede; es wird nicht gesagt, daß im Haus und/oder in der Landwirtschaft damit eine Arbeitskraft fehlt, daß der Generationswechsel auf dem Hof (also auch das Altenteil der Eltern) zum unlösbaren Problem wird, daß die Hausgenossenschaft einer 'Schwachsinnigen' als Schande, wenn nicht gar als ständiger, leibhaftiger Beweis eigener Sündhaftigkeit angesehen wird. Aber all das wird schon in den ersten Szenen bildhaft deutlich. Beppi ist langsam, aber sie ist nicht blödsinnig. Macht sie etwas falsch, sind die Eltern mit (Körper-)Strafen gleich bei der Hand. Erfolgserlebnisse werden ihr dagegen nicht zugestanden; ihre Leistungen werden wie selbstverständlich hingenommen -- am Maßstab des 'Normalen' gemessen, erscheinen sie doch immer als zu gering. Ihre Zurückgebliebenheit wird ihr vorgeworfen wie eine absichtsvolle Kränkung der Eltern, die ihre Verweigerung an affektiver Zuwendung daher auch als angemessene Reaktion verstehen." ³⁷

In the same way, it is inadmissible to dismiss Sepp as an old good-for-nothing out for the gratification of his sexual needs. He must be seen in the context of the standards of the "Leistungsgesellschaft": his failure to satisfy these criteria has contributed in large measure to his being an emotional outcast. He is a victim as well as a villain.

While it is difficult, as Carl concedes, to see the relationship between Sepp and Beppi as "einen Modellfall mit dem Anspruch auf gesamtgesellschaftliche Repräsentanz" ³⁸,

37. Carl; op.cit., p.60.

38. Carl; op.cit., p.61.

it is thoughtless to discard them simply as individual cases, explicable by psychological exegesis alone. And while it is true that neither Sepp nor Beppi is capable of analysing their situation, and that Kroetz does not intervene to provide such analysis, the evidence and impetus for a sociological interpretation is implicit in the play. As Carl concludes:

"Was auf der Bühne gezeigt wird, fordert ohne weiteren Kommentar eine Änderung der Verhältnisse, die solche Deformationen zur Folge haben." 39

Each member of the audience, unless he is as "sprachlos" as the characters he is witnessing, must build the bridges himself. The answers to the most urgent questions are contained in the text.

Why are Beppi's parents so hostile towards her? -- Not because she is backward, but because her backwardness means, for Staller and Stallerin, an extra person to support who cannot pay her way by contributing to the running of the farm. Why does she remain so backward? -- Not because her condition is an unalterable physical state, but because her parents' unsympathetic treatment of her means that she receives no encouragement and so is unable to fight against it. (That such progress is possible is illustrated by her competence as a mother in Geisterbahn.) Why does Sepp take sexual advantage of Beppi? -- Not because he is a dirty old man, but because

39. Carl; op.cit., p.70.

his failure in the "Leistungsgesellschaft" means that he is emotionally starved, and Beppi offers the first opportunity for him to relieve his sexual and emotional hunger.

These and other vital questions can be answered in terms of social pressures and circumstances. The recurrent objection that the origins of Beppi's mental condition cannot be explained in a similar way is misplaced. Not that or why Beppi is retarded is of importance, but what happens to her because she is retarded. Only once this correct perspective has been established can one begin to understand her representative social significance.

It then becomes possible to see that Beppi's mental state is an intensified mirror image of Sepp's, and that Sepp in turn stands for the hundreds of thousands of victims of the inflexible laws of the "Leistungsgesellschaft". His inarticulacy is, in concentrated form, the helplessness of millions of fellow citizens like Erwin in Wildwechsel who are struck dumb when confronted "mit die Ämter"⁴⁰. His lack of self-respect and security reflects that of countless others, like Otto in Männersache or Heinz in Oberösterreich. His brutal assault of Beppi is the result of built-up frustrations shared by millions, similar to Oskar's dream of humiliating the policemen or Hugo's sudden thrashing of Nathalie in Heimat. In each case Beppi performs the same mirror function from a point even further down the scale -- in her mental backwardness and verbal clumsiness, in her complete loss of identity and helplessness,

40. Kroetz, GS, p.19.

in her murder of Georg. Beppi fits into an overall picture of a social structure of which Sepp, and countless unnamed others, are an integral feature.

What is true for Beppi applies also to the rest of Kroetz's so-called "Randerscheinungen" -- for example, to Willy, Helmut and Fritz. The first two are physically handicapped, the latter is psychologically stigmatised by his sexual exhibitionism. Again, however, it is not these superficial impediments that make them outsiders, but the reaction of their environment to their physical or psychological deviation from the norm.

Willy's accident directly causes the situation which leads to his killing the baby. His "Außenseitertum", however, does not consist in this act of murder. The physical handicap resulting from the accident, apparently the "Auslöser" of his problems, is really no more than the trigger for the demonstration of his latent outsider position, which consists in his deprived social circumstances, both financial and emotional.

As a consequence of his accident Helmut realises that he represents little more than a puppet in his father's plans for the continuation of the family tavern. As such, the loss of a leg has disqualified him from integration into society. He is discarded by his father, and later by his girl friend, because he no longer fulfils the requirements of the norm.

The accident has brought to the surface what was previously comfortably veiled.

The same is true for Fritz. His environment is unwilling to accept him because of his history of exhibitionism. As long as he is prepared to accept the way he is tolerated by Otto and Hilde, he can be absorbed into everyday life on the level of an "Arbeitstier". As soon as he takes steps to re-establish himself in society on a more independent, dignified level, however, he is met with hostility. Mindful of the financial consequences for his business, Otto intervenes sharply to prevent the departure of Mitzi and forces Fritz to drive off alone into his uncertain future.

At the same time, Fritz's fate points to the difficulties to be faced by anyone being released from prison. The deviation from the norm need not be of as extreme a nature as in Fritz's case: the petty criminals in Dolomitenstadt Lienz will encounter the same fate on their release. In fact, any deviation from the standards of the "Leistungsgesellschaft", criminal or not, will result in condemnation and rejection. This is illustrated by the fortunes suffered by Willy and Helmut after their accidents. It might be argued that these are also extraordinary instances, but this can hardly apply to, say, Otto and Martha in Männersache, who do not suffer from any such external or criminal stigma. Yet they are as much outsiders as any of the others, in the misery of their

social situation. Unable to communicate their private fears to one another, they seek to cover them up by confronting one another with:

"... das... , worin sie sich dem anderen überlegen glauben: sie ihre armselige Selbständigkeit als 'Geschäftsfrau', er seine bloße biologische Rolle als Mann und die größere sexuelle Erfahrung." 41

It is easier to see the representative value of this than that of Beppi's or Helmut's situation, where the issue is clouded by physical or mental impediments unrelated to social causes. Nevertheless, the reservations about the evocation of the social context retain their substance. It is, for example, impossible to specify where the origins of Otto's inhumanity to Martha lie. In Männersache we see only the effects of social pressures.

From approximately the time of Dolomitenstadt Lienz Kroetz makes a conspicuous attempt to clarify and emphasise the social definition of his characters, a development which once again goes hand in hand with the movement away from the extreme towards the average.

At first glance this play seems to have brought us again to extreme cases in an extreme setting -- three criminals in prison awaiting trial. However, this superficial impression is misleading, as Kroetz is at pains to point out in a newspaper interview:

41. Carl; op.cit., p.35.

"Die Menschen, die in Dolomitenstadt Lienz auftreten, sind von der Art und Herkunft, wie ich sie in meinen übrigen Stücken gezeigt habe, ausgepowert, hilflos den 'Zuständen' ausgeliefert; kurz, es sind kleine, arme Würstchen. Nur, daß sie diesmal nicht in ihrer normalen, trostlosen Umgebung auftreten, gewiß auch keine Außenseiter sind, wie manche meiner bisherigen Gestalten, sondern sozusagen zum guten Durchschnitt gerechnet werden können und eben -- wegen Kleinigkeiten -- mit dem Gesetz in Konflikt geraten sind. ... Die drei Männer, die hier vorkommen, sind das, was man leichte Fälle nennt, gewiß keine Verbrecher, so etwa ein Junge, der geklaut hat. Doch diese Menschen, sind sie einmal mit dem Gesetz in Konflikt geraten und im Gefängnis gewesen, werden sich nicht mehr aus einem verhängnisvollen Zirkel befreien können, dazu sind sie zu unstabil, hilflos und die Gesellschaft gibt ihnen keine Hilfe." 42

The conversation of the three cell-mates bears out the truth of Kroetz's words.

For Heribert Dengk orphanage, military service and prison are to be understood as links in a chain. His origins have deprived him of affection, security and a sense of identity. His childhood was a blank page; he has had to turn to his dog for the affection denied him by the people about him; the orphanage, which offered only the choice of becoming a joiner or an agricultural worker, prevented him from learning a trade of which he could feel proud; the direct reason for his criminal offence is to be found in the familiar financial deprivation that accompanies the barrenness of his emotional life -- "Wenn ich selber ein Auto ghabt hätt, hätt ich es nicht gestohlen." 43 In short, he has been denied the

42. Kroetz; in: Thieringer, Thomas; "Zwischen Angst und Narrenfreiheit. Der linke Bühnenautor Franz Xaver Kroetz zu seinen neuen Theaterstücken", Vorwärts, 05/10/72.

43. Kroetz; GS, p.285.

chance of a decent start in life, the importance of which he recognises himself -- "Wo der Anfang das Wichtigste is. Sonst gehst unter." ⁴⁴

For Oskar Schuster the main contributory factor in his descent into petty criminality has been his loss of identity and self-respect in the fiercely competitive capitalist system. Its iron standards of success have so disrupted his sense of values that he views his everyday ability to mend a coffee machine as some unspeakable triumph. Apart from this brief upsurge of enthusiasm and the similarly exaggerated pride he takes in his capabilities as a waiter, Schuster is consumed by the all-pervading fear: "Es ist halt allerweil einer da, der besser is als man selber" ⁴⁵, the millstone round his neck that perverts his energy and dignity into resignation and a sense of worthlessness.

Talking of his family, Oskar cheers up briefly. Here he finds the sense of value and belonging which he otherwise lacks. His pride as he praises his wife's cooking or describes his son's shyness stands in abrupt contrast to his normal apathy, and also to the aggression that marks his only other display of enthusiasm, in the malicious fantasy of chasing ten policemen naked through the snow on his motorbike. In this "Wunschtraum" Schuster directs his aimless aggression against the representatives of the laws that govern his

44. Kroetz; GS, p.347.

45. Kroetz; GS, pp.309/11.

existence.

The confused nexus of complexes and aggressions fostered in Oskar Schuster by the pressures of his environment also explain his present imprisonment. Having changed his job in an attempt to climb the social ladder, he finds himself unable to maintain the slightly higher position he has achieved. As a consequence he slumps into financial difficulties and his car is impounded; in the heat of the moment his smouldering resentments burst into flames. In this outburst we see the legacy of violence he has inherited from his childhood: "Wo ich mich am meistn dran erinnert, des san die Prügl." ⁴⁶

Hermann Rasch shares the same feelings of anonymity and worthlessness as his companions. Like Dengk, he never had the chance to learn an interesting or rewarding trade: "Das Lernen is heut eh passé. Bei uns daheim hats gheißn: wer was lernt kost was, und wer was arbeit bringt was." ⁴⁷ From this we may gather that his childhood was marked by financial stringency. Like Schuster, on the other hand, he suffers from his lack of success in the "Leistungsgesellschaft". In the one field where he appears to have demonstrated some minor talent, as a violinist, he regrets not having been good enough to make use of it. He is one of the nameless mediocrities whose plight

46. Kroetz; GS, p.343.

47. Kroetz; GS, p.326.

he sings of in the "Song vom Durchschnitt".⁴⁸

Despite his attestations -- "Eine herrliche Jugend hab ich ghabt"⁴⁹ -- Rasch has clearly had anything but a wonderful childhood; nor can his spell with the orchestra have been as marvellous as he pretends -- "Das war vielleicht die schönste Zeit in meim Leben."⁵⁰ Were these claims true, it is unlikely that he would now suscribe so willingly to the escape offered by "switching off" -- "Man muß einfach abschalt'n und denk'n, man schlaft. Genau. So tun, als ob man gar nicht man selber wär, sondern ein ganz anderer, wo ein nix angeht."⁵¹ This is the resignation of a man who has failed to make anything of his life and reacts by voluntarily subsiding into self-stultification.

Listening to the time-killing conversation of the three cell-mates, one realises that, far from being extraordinary criminal personalities, they are closer to "Menschen wie du und ich" than one is at first willing to admit. One understands the pressures and fears which have dogged their lives, and the circumstances which have led to their present situation. One does not need to have been a "Heimkind" oneself to comprehend Dengk's predestination to a life of petty crime. Nor is his story applicable only to the comparatively small

48. Kroetz; GS, pp.322-6.

49. Kroetz; GS, p.340.

50. Kroetz; GS, p.318.

51. Kroetz; GS, p.272.

number of orphans in West Germany. The essential element in Dengk's upbringing is the lack of affection and of a sense of belonging which has left him hopelessly ill-equipped for survival in the stress-ridden, success-oriented "Leistungsgesellschaft". He is materially and emotionally predestined to fail.

It is even easier to see the representative value of Oskar Schuster's situation. His feelings of inadequacy are those of a failure in a system built round a code of competitiveness and success, his fears the symptomatic anxieties of "Mr Average".

By the same token, it is hard to disclaim affinities with the resignation shown by Hermann Rasch in the theory of "Abschalten". How many millions of people -- most of them better off than Rasch -- with mind-numbing jobs as charladies, construction workers, office clerks, consciously or subconsciously divide their time into the week, during which they switch off, and the weekend, when they come alive?

Taken together with the fact that the hitherto widespread "Sprachlosigkeit" of his characters and the degeneration into acts of violence are also treated with greater moderation, the depiction of Rasch, Schuster and Dengk consolidates the impression of recognisable social types, with whom Kroetz takes the first significant steps away from the extreme by creating figures with whom we can, to a considerable extent, identify.

Any doubts that might persist that the cell-mates constitute exceptional cases by virtue of their being in prison are dispelled in the case of Fräulein Rasch in Wunschkonzert. Here Kroetz confronts us forcibly with "die Extremität des Gewöhnlichen, des Alltags" ⁵². He accomplishes this in the character of one of countless anonymous workers whose lives are without high or low points, consisting of the same eternal round of stultifying routine. Fräulein Rasch is invisible like the narrator of Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man -- like the negro in American society she is taken for granted and ignored. She is a lifeless robot with neither identity nor emotional substance. It is some undefined awareness of this deadness within her that prompts her to swallow ten sleeping tablets. Significantly, as the play finishes, she sits waiting: "aber auf ihrem Gesicht ist plötzlich Interesse festzustellen." ⁵³ It is as if she hopes in some perverse way to rediscover her identity in the threat of death.

Evalouise Panzner points out the representative value of this apparently exceptional occurrence:

"Daß es nur Ausnahmen sind, die aufgrund eines solchen Lebens schließlich den Versuch unternehmen, sich umzubringen, ändert jedoch nichts an der eigentlichen Aussage des Stückes, die man auf diese Weise vom Tisch wischen zu können glaubt." ⁵⁴

52. Anon.; in the introduction to: Walbert, Helmut; "Herstellung eines Kindes im Umgebungsunfreundlichen", in Theater heute, Heft 11, November 1972.

53. Kroetz; GS, p.195.

54. Panzner; op.cit., p.37.

Nevertheless, the reproach of non-representative extremes adheres also to Fräulein Rasch. With Heinz and Anni in Oberösterreich Kroetz takes effective steps to eradicate it. It is not just the ever-present paraphernalia of the "Konsumwelt" that gives them their clear social definition. Placing Fräulein Rasch in the deadening environment of her little world, complete with Neckermann furniture, is not enough to prevent the audience from seeing her as an individual, divorced from this social background. It is the thoughts and fears laid bare in the conversation between Heinz and Anni that establish the connection between the characters and their environment, allowing the audience to see how the former are shaped and sustained by the latter.

The whole of the first act of Oberösterreich is aimed at spotlighting Heinz's and Anni's dependence on the treadmill of consumerism and the consequent effects -- in the form of loss of identity and dignity -- on their private lives. We know why, for example, Heinz tells Anni about the indecent approaches made by his boss to the cleaning lady. We are shown how this occurrence has inhibited Heinz in his own lovemaking, estranging him from his own wife while his social superior enjoys some unchallengeable sexual power. So befuddled is he by his constant exposure to the brainwashing propaganda of advertising -- abundantly illustrated throughout this first act -- that he never has time to investigate the reasons for

such depersonalisation. His thoughts centre on acquiring the latest automobile model, not on clarifying the power structure of which he is a victim.

With Oberösterreich it is hard to dismiss Heinz and Anni as outlandish fringe blemishes that provide no insight into the state of the society in which they live, as was possible with Karl and Marie, for example. While some critics suggest that they earn unrealistically little and can therefore be disqualified as atypical, consideration of the facts would show Kroetz to be more accurate when he writes of the play:

"Ich zeige da ein junges Arbeiterpaar, dem es nach den landläufigen Vorstellungen eigentlich recht gut geht, das heißt, beide zusammen verdienen ordentlich und sie können sich all das -- auf Raten -- leisten, was das Leben 'angenehm' macht, wie Auto, Fernsehgerät usw." 55

Audiences, however, are soon discouraged from drifting into complacent conclusions about the comfort and security of this apparently "ganz normales Familienleben" 56. Anni's unexpected pregnancy confronts the couple with the following dilemma: if they are to be able to afford to raise a child, they will have to renounce everything, "was ein Freude macht im Leben" 57. In Sibylle Wirsing's words, they have to make the choice between "Volkswagen oder Kinderwagen" 58. Their happiness becomes a financial consideration.

55. Kroetz; in: Thieringer, Thomas; "Zwischen Angst und Narrenfreiheit. Der linke Bühnenautor Franz Xaver Kroetz zu seinen neuen Theaterstücken", Vorwärts, 05/10/72.

56. Panzner; op.cit., p.47.

57. Kroetz; GS, p.410.

58. Wirsing, Sibylle; "Kroetz-Art", in Der Tagesspiegel, 10/08/73.

The same is true for Willy and Martha, but the brutality of the attempted abortion in Heimarbeit tends to prevent audiences from recognising it by causing them to recoil in horror. This sense of horror is avoided in Oberösterreich, where we are shown Heinz's and Anni's matter-of-fact reckoning that a baby at this stage in their marriage is a financial liability. We can understand their situation, although not all of us will share it. Similarly, when we learn of the thirty-one-year-old Austrian who murdered his wife in a fit of rage because she refused to agree to an abortion, the parallel to the situation in the play is clear. Kroetz is at pains to illuminate Heinz's and Anni's perilous position within the framework of "normality". As Mechthild Lange suggests:

"Daß es auch hier möglicherweise nur einiger Umstände, einiger zusätzlicher Pressionen bedurft hätte, um eine schlimme Wende herbeizuführen, deutet Kroetz nachhaltig an, wenn er den zitierten Schauplatz Oberösterreich zum Titel seines Schauspiels macht. Vom Gewöhnlichen zum Außerordentlichen, vom Banalen zum Sensationellen ist oft nur ein kleiner Schritt." 59

Despite the proximity of Heinz to the edge from which he could be plunged into the abyss of the "Randerscheinungen", Oberösterreich finishes on a positive note. It is in this that one finds the second development of political significance in Kroetz's characters. As well as shifting his focus to more

59. Lange, Mechthild; "Ein normales Leben. Qualtinger debütiert als Oberösterreich-Regisseur", in Frankfurter Rundschau, 02/06/73.

typical social types, he also turns his mind to the depiction of "entwicklungsfähige Menschen" ⁶⁰. What really distinguishes Heinz and Anni from Kroetz's earlier figures is their attempt to determine their own future by a gesture of opposition to their circumstances.

By refusing to have the child aborted -- on Anni's initiative and with Heinz's support -- they affirm the life-impulse in the face of oppressive circumstances. As their calculations show, bringing up the child will involve the renunciation of all the luxuries in their lives. In addition, Heinz loses his driving licence on a charge of drunken driving and has to accept a less well-paid job until it is returned. Nevertheless, they remain committed to having the child in the hope that its life will be better than their own. In all likelihood the hard truths of reality, in the form of material hardship and its emotional consequences, will steamroller their hopes, vague as they are. As Rolf-Peter Carl writes:

"Die Kategorie Hoffnung ist damit zwar ins Blickfeld gerückt, von einer aktiven oder gar kämpferischen Sicht kann jedoch nicht die Rede sein." ⁶¹

Fritz makes a similar gesture of self-determination, which will also be crushed in the end by the weight of prejudice with which reality confronts him. Heinz and Anni continue this vein of optimism, with slightly higher chances of

60. Jäger, Gerd; "Ein dressierter Aff ist auch ein guter Mensch", in Theater heute, Heft 5, Mai 1975.

61. Carl; op.cit., p.83.

success. Kurt and Martha in Das Nest mark the first concrete success in the long battle.

Their situation is analogous to that of Heinz and Anni, with the difference that they are even closer to the recognisable norm as far as their financial conditions are concerned. Their stocktaking produces the result that they, in contrast to their counterparts in Oberösterreich, can afford to have a child.

However, this financial security -- which is fragile enough: Kurt, a lorry driver, is dependent on a thriving economy which will provide him with the necessary overtime work -- only masks the real precariousness of their situation. Like Heinz and Anni, Kurt and Martha are trapped in the swamp of consumer goods -- Martha with her bad conscience for not having used the recommended washing powder, Kurt with his childlike deification of the latest car on the market. Like Heinz, Kurt suffers from fears of anonymity and needs his wife's reassurances of his worth.

Their security is built on false premises, on unquestioned reality. Underneath lies a deep-rooted fear, which comes to light in Kurt's relief that the siren of a passing police car has nothing to do with him. Their respect for "Ordnung" is founded on this fear. They accept it blindly and are ready to pass on this acceptance as a great virtue to their son -- "Das wird man ihm beibringen müssen, daß eine Ordnung is,

von Anfang an." 62

It is because they do not question the conditions of their security that Kurt can be manoeuvred like a puppet by his employer, the embodiment of this principle of incontestable authority. Unable to see how he is being exploited, Kurt concludes that the preferential treatment he receives is based on recognition of his industry. He is therefore glad to take on a special job, which turns out to consist in dumping poisonous chemical waste into a lake, in which his son bathes and nearly dies.

After this near catastrophe Kurt, again like Heinz, is pulled dangerously close to an act of violence that would plunge him into the world of "Randerscheinungen". However, he resists the temptation to commit suicide, and, under the determined prompting of his wife, begins to analyse his situation more deeply. As he attempts to rationalise his dumping of the chemicals and repeats the glib excuses his boss has given him, Martha explodes:

"schreit Der Chef hat gsagt! -- Und wenn der Chef sagt, bring mir den Kopf von deinem Kind, das is für das Kind ungefährlich, aber ich gib dir hundert Mark dafür, dann tust es auch, weil es der Chef sagt, gell! Kleine Pause, dann leiser Du bist ja überhaupts kein Mensch, das muß mir immer entgangen sein, sondern höchstens ein dressierter Aff! Dein Chef, das kannst glaubn, is ein Verbrecher un sonst nix, aber mit dem bin ich nicht verheirat, sondern mit dir. Und es is schlimm für eine Frau, wens feststelln muß, daß an ein wie dich die schönsten Jahre hinhängt hat." 63

62. Kroetz; WA, p.229.

63. Kroetz; WA, p.241.

Shaken awake by this torrent of abuse, Kurt begins to think through his situation and comes to realise the wrongness of his passive behaviour. From here he makes the vital step from insight to action. He realises, firstly, that it is necessary to accept the responsibility for his action by reporting himself and his employer to the police, and also that the whole system of "Ordnung" in which he had always believed is built on the exploitation of people like Martha and himself:

"Martha, niemand kann uns einen Vorwurf machn, weil mir so waren, du und ich, wie mir warn. Die wo über uns sind, die sorgn schon dafür, daß unsereins gar ned zum Leb'n erwacht, wie man so sagt." ⁶⁴

Kurt defends himself. Where earlier he insisted on teaching his son the importance of "Ordnung" by setting an example in their allotment, the play finishes with the infant crawling unrestricted in the middle of the flower beds. Kurt says tersely: "Laß ihn." ⁶⁵

While Benjamin Henrichs interprets this gesture as a "Liebeserklärung an die Unordnung" ⁶⁶, it is more realistic to see in it Kurt's realisation of the wrongness of accepting value judgements imposed from above, without first checking their relevance to his own situation. It is the start of the

64. Kroetz; WA, p.247.

65. Kroetz; WA, p.251.

66. Henrichs, Benjamin; "Bayerischer Kommunismus, nestwarm. Über den Dramatiker Franz Xaver Kroetz und sein neues Stück Das Nest", in Die Zeit, 05/09/75.

fight back.

Of course, it is a long road to actually changing the system, but at least Kurt has realised the need for personal action. At the same time, he acknowledges the necessity of allaying this insight with political commitment. Where earlier he was glad to have nothing to do with the trade union -- "Wo der Chef immer gsagt hat, daß er es ned gern sieht" ⁶⁷ --, he now recognises the value of their support -- "Die Gewerkschaft, das sind viele." ⁶⁷ Kurt's political consciousness has been awakened: the start has been made.

The importance of making the first move is recognised also in Die Wahl fürs Leben. "Einer muß anfangen" ⁶⁸, agrees Karli's father after the lengthy discussion which forms the substance of the play, and in which the freshly graduated engineer explains to his parents his scruples about participating, even on the lowest level, in the armaments industry.

Karli has not reached his decision easily. Although his parents are in a better financial situation than, say, Willy and Martha, they belong still to the lower income bracket. The father is disgruntled at the expense of the humble celebration for Karli and harps on about the cost of his son's studies -- "I hab ned 20 Jahr Geld in dich hineingesteckt, damitst dann ein Radlmechaniker wirst." ⁶⁹ Karli's mother is

67. Kroetz; WA, p.251.

68. Kroetz; WA, p.177.

69. Kroetz; WA, p.163.

less perturbed by the financial outlay than by the mediocrity of their lives; her concern for her son's future revolves around the desire to aspire to something better -- "Man muß sich abhebn, von der Masse, die einen umgibt. Dann macht es Spaß, das Leben. Mir ham immer bloß zur Masse ghört." 70

The family are outsiders in the same way as Franz in Wildwechsel is an outsider. The numerical superiority of such ordinary existences does not alter their position on the edge of the "Wohlstandsgesellschaft". They are the invisible mass on which the pyramid system of capitalist society is founded.

Karli's insight, however, shows that he has wakened up to reality. He not only recognises and formulates his scruples, he also acts accordingly by refusing to accept a remunerative position that conflicts with his principles. Like Kurt, he makes the first vital step. He raises himself above the masses, not in the manner envisaged by his mother -- i.e. by succeeding in the system, the solution propagated, for example, by D.H. Lawrence and still energetically entertained in pseudo-progressive circles --, but by making the infinitely more significant decision to challenge the validity of a system of values with which he cannot agree.

Kroetz's Agnes Bernauer undergoes a similar process. She comes from the same lower class background and her financial circumstances are noticeably worse than those of the family

70. Kroetz; WA, p.163.

in Die Wahl fürs Leben. In the opening scene, at her mother's funeral, her father coarsely consents to her marrying a rich man, solely as a financial consideration. This marriage duly comes about. In one sense, therefore, Agnes raises herself above the masses to live in staggering wealth in the Werdenfels' family castle overlooking the village. Ernst Werdenfels advises her to count her blessings: "Es gibt Obere und es gibt Untere im Lebn. Sei froh, daß oben bist." ⁷¹

Agnes rejects this advice, however, and proceeds to the insight that this system is wrong and must be changed. Her experiences with the people from the village teach her that the Werdenfels's wealth depends on a see-saw system, with the accumulated weight of the "Heimarbeiter" keeping them firmly at the bottom and the Werdenfels family up in the air. Once aware of this injustice, Agnes takes the consequences: she turns her back on the castle and returns to the village, persuading Albrecht to accompany her. Again the first step is taken, and it is in this decision -- and its implementation -- that she genuinely lifts herself above the masses.

If Männersache is the play most open to the reproach of depicting rank outsiders of an extreme degree, the revised version, Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch, clearly shows Kroetz's

71. Kroetz; WA, p.342.

movement towards "entwicklungsfähige Menschen" of the likes of Kurt, Karli and Agnes.

Furthermore, one persistent criticism of Männersache is that the action allows the audience to understand something of the trigger mechanism of an act of violence without learning much about the chemistry of the explosives. In the course of the play we see the fuse burning, we are waiting for the bang; but we are little wiser as to why Otto and Martha are the way that they are. This is the question neglected by Männersache and answered to a considerable extent by Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch, where the bizarre shooting match becomes understandable as a product of social pressures. In fact, it is no longer necessary.

The initial situation of the characters, however, remains the same. Otto is the complex-ridden "Eisenflechter" who hides his fears under a guise of superiority; Martha is the aging "Kuttlereibesitzerin" who has sacrificed her private life for her independence in business. Their social definition remains that of "Randerscheinungen", not only in their material circumstances, but also in the emotional complexes forced on them by the pressures of the social structure.

In the later version Kroetz is at pains to suggest the origins of these complexes, and thereby to avoid the danger, run in Männersache, of letting Otto and Martha appear as

private individuals rather than as features of the social landscape. For example, in Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch he allows Otto to state explicitly the cause of his underlying feelings of inferiority towards Martha:

"Otto: Und wie steht ein Mann da,
der sagen muß:
Die Frau, wo mein Herz is,
is selbständiger Metzger
und verdient mehr wie ich." 72

In Martha's case Kroetz emphasises the connection between her pride in her financial independence and her emotional and sexual deprivation. On the one hand she can assert dynamically:

"Denn ein Metzgermeister is ein schwerer Beruf,
der viel Liebe und Können braucht.
Ich hab alles erreicht, und zwar als Frau." 73

On the other hand she has to admit:

"Wennst du von der Früh bis in den Abend
im Geschäft stehst,
was glaubst
wie das beansprucht.
Lacht
Da is Privatlebn klein geschrieben." 74

This clarification of the social definition of the characters thus serves to make the play more readily understandable on the level of social criticism. At the same time Kroetz strives to open up the positive perspective by allowing Otto and Martha a degree of insight into their situation and having them act accordingly.

72. Kroetz; dialog, p.62.

73. Kroetz; dialog, p.44.

74. Kroetz; dialog; p.45.

Martha's explosive reaction has been replaced by a process of gradual realisation. She makes decisions to shape her own future, as, for example, when she refuses to comply with Otto's perfunctory demands for sex at the end of Act II. The immediate effect of this refusal is to drive Otto away, but she has strength enough to insist to herself that she has acted correctly, and subsequent developments bear out her decision. At the start of the next act Otto appears to have moved in with her, in contrast to his behaviour in Männersache, where he continues to come and go as he pleases.

This refusal is Martha's most conspicuous act of self-assertion, but she continues the process on a more everyday level, refusing to kowtow to Otto's play of superiority and authority. Furthermore she demands from him recognition of the effort she has put into their relationship, and also support in her attempts to make a success of it. She expresses this explicitly in her poem and in her later accusation:

"Martha: Aber du hast eine Eigenschaft,
daß du alles kaputt machst,
was ich aufbau für uns.
Das weiß ich jetzt.
Otto: Aber nicht mit Absicht.
Martha: Aber tun tust es." ⁷⁵

Initially Otto appears to be as stubborn as ever, but in the conversation following this final outburst of Martha's he shows that he is at least willing to accept her as a person.

75. Kroetz; dialog, p.68.

When she asks him whether she should wear protective glasses under the ultra-violet lamp, Otto unexpectedly agrees -- "weil die Augn vorgehn"⁷⁶. It will be a long struggle and Otto will have many relapses into his chauvinist role before they are able to establish a relationship based on mutual self-respect, but the start has been made.

In each of these four cases where the movement away from the extreme in the depiction of the characters has been accompanied by the opening up of the positive perspective, it can be seen that the significant development is not in purely material terms, but within the personalities of the characters. Kurt, Karli, Agnes, Martha and, to a lesser extent, Heinz and Anni all undergo a "Lernprozess" denied the outsiders of the earlier plays.

This trend, however, is not universal. Just as not all of Kroetz's plays from Oberösterreich or Dolomitenstadt Lienz are devoid of violence or peopled with articulate figures, neither do they involve uniformly positive, self-determining characters. What does remain constant is the movement towards figures who are more easily recognisable, more "average" (if one can use this term meaningfully), without losing sight of the extreme elements in their situation.

In the introductory notes to Heimat Kroetz draws

76. Kroetz; dialog, p.69.

attention to this "Extremität des Gewöhnlichen" ⁷⁷ in the figures of Hugo and Nathalie. Aware of the problems that the latter's age must cause for the production of the play -- it has as yet been performed only in a slightly modified television version -- he insists that it is crucial to present her as being six to seven years old:

"Es wird schwer sein, hierfür geeignete Kinder zu finden. Dessen war ich mir bei der Konzipierung und bei der Realisierung des Textes sehr wohl bewußt, ich wollte aber trotzdem nicht darauf verzichten, meinen Figuren und Schicksalen auch eines über ein kleines Mädchen hinzuzufügen. Zu groß ist die Gruppe der Kinder, zu verletzlich und zu wenig repräsentiert." ⁷⁸

The same applies, implicitly, to Hugo. Grand-daughter and grandfather are "Außenseiter, die... nach Millionen zählen" ⁷⁹. The problems they face are conditioned by their social insignificance. Nevertheless, as with Fräulein Rasch, the apparent ordinariness of their lives endows them with a more easily recognisable representative value as figures in a particular social landscape.

However, it might be argued that the term "outsiders" is itself too extreme to cover Hugo and Nathalie. Their financial situation, for example, can hardly be compared with that of the impoverished Karl and Marie. While their Christmas celebrations are relatively austere, Hugo manages

77. Anon.; in the introduction to: Walbert, Helmut; "Herstellung eines Kindes im Umgebungsunfreundlichen", in Theater heute, Heft 11, November 1972.

78. Kroetz; WA, p.284.

79. Schmidt, Dietmar N.; "Stallerhof im Malersaal, Hamburg", in Die deutsche Bühne, Heft 8, August 1972.

to save enough to buy a new car, certainly a luxury their counterparts could never afford. Nevertheless, financial considerations still play a vital role in their lives in the way the perpetual struggle for money has dulled their emotional sensibilities.

In Nathalie's case this struggle has robbed her of her childhood. Hugo has brought her up to have different priorities:

"Hugo: Spielen brauchst nicht, das tun die anderen, mir arbeiten, weil mir schlau sind! Und bringen es zu was!... Nur wer arbeitet, soll essen. Heißts." ⁸⁰

In the fifth scene we are shown the practical effects of this doctrine of work:

"Auf dem Spielplatz. Es sind mehrere Kinder, zum Teil mit den Eltern, da. Nathalie unter ihnen, sie putzt, räumt Abfall aus den Körben, vor den Sandkästen, reinigt die Schaukel, die Klettergitter, räumt die Wiese ab, etc.
Manchmal kommt es vor, daß andere Kinder mit ihr in Kontakt kommen, sie ansprechen oder daß z.B. ein Ball vor ihre Füße rollt oder sie -- wegen ihrer Arbeit -- mit den Kindern zusammenkommt. Passiert das, dann erschrickt Nathalie und arbeitet schnell, am besten weiter weg, weiter." ⁸¹

Her reaction is understandable. Hugo is the figure of authority in her life: she believes and obeys him. He, for his part, has been left to bring her up on his own, and cannot do otherwise but indoctrinate her with the three values that govern his own life -- the holy trinity of Work, Money and Survival.

Hence his pride when Nathalie displays her cunning in collecting the discount stamps which have been left lying by

80. Kroetz; WA, p.288.

81. Kroetz; WA, p.289.

customers in the supermarket. He openly encourages this activity, in preference to her amusing herself by drawing, "wos nix bringt" ⁸². For the same reason he allows her to neglect her reading lessons in deference to this more profitable behaviour; education is secondary.

Nathalie's life is all work and no play: she is a dull girl. When Hugo gives her a doll her first reaction is fear ("Nathalie erschrickt außerordentlich" ⁸³), and her first "games" with it reflect the joylessness of her own childhood:

"Nathalie: Mir tun nicht spielen, sonder arbeitn. Gell, daßd es gleich weißt. Du hilfst mir. Auframma heifa, abschbuin und saubamacha, und wennst brav bist, amoi aufn Schbuiplatz schaukeln. Nickt. Damitst was lernst, wennst groß bist. Wies geht im Lem. Und wehe wennst ned fleißig bist, na gibts wos aufn Hintern, weil mir spielen arbeitn! Jetzt woäßt es!" ⁸⁴

"Mir spielen arbeitn": the world of play is completely strange to Nathalie, who views it with suspicion as something unnatural. The doll seems to awaken her in some way to this world and she begins to explore the possibilities of the playground. That its pleasures are foreign to her is demonstrated by her reaction to a ride on a "Schaukelpferd" ⁸⁵, which she experiences more as an ordeal than as a source of enjoyment.

Under the influence of her grandfather, Nathalie is growing up for life in the treadmill, the same life that he

82. Kroetz; WA, p.290.

83. Kroetz; WA, p.293.

84. Kroetz; WA, p.295.

85. Kroetz; WA, p.294.

has endured. As Rolf-Peter Carl writes:

"Arbeit und Geld sind die Koordinaten, die Sein und Bewußtsein der Figuren bestimmen, darin unterscheidet sich das Kind schon kaum mehr vom Großvater. Sein Spiel hat nur insoweit Raum, als es einem der beiden Pole zuzuordnen ist: wenn es nicht ohnehin arbeitet, statt zu spielen, dann spielt es mit dem Alten um Geld oder es 'spielt' arbeiten." 86

Joy has been eradicated from her life in almost clinical fashion, just as it has been eroded in Hugo's by the relentless pressure of earning a living.

When Hugo loses his job, therefore, it is easy to understand the demoralising effect it has on him. Earlier he indirectly reveals his fear of this eventuality in conversation with Nathalie:

"Hugo: Mir ham es gut, da kann keiner was sagn. Das sag ich dir. Nickt Da sitzt jetzt so mancher da heut und weiß es nicht, daß er im nächsten Jahr ein Arbeitsloser sein wird. Die Wirtschaft. Und vielleicht jünger wie ich." 87

When the unspoken fear becomes reality, Hugo is shattered. He tries to conceal his unemployment from Nathalie, but is eventually found out, even though she is too young to understand the extent of this blow to her grandfather's self-esteem. The loss of his job physically unnerves the old man, who begins to wet his bed, while emotionally it fills him with doubts about his value and resentments about his treatment. This combination of Hugo's emotional turmoil and Nathalie's inability to understand it leads to a brutal

86. Carl; op.cit., p.118.

87. Kroetz; WA, p.292.

outbreak of violence. Not meaning real harm, Nathalie goads her grandfather as she beats him at "Mühle", repeating the words she has heard him mutter in self-pity and adding the cruel jibe of being a bed-wetter. Her last insult combines three savage blows to Hugo's tattered self-esteem -- "Alter Depp, Bettbiesler, arbeitslos!"⁸⁸. At this point the violence explodes and Hugo gives his grand-daughter a severe beating. She has become the scapegoat for his pent-up frustration, shame and anger.

That it does not come to more serious violence later is due largely to chance. Having run away from the home to which she was sent after the thrashing, Nathalie returns to Hugo. He realises that the police will be coming to look for her and underlines his determination not to let her be taken away again by fetching his old army revolver:

"Hugo: Und wenns Schwierigkeitn machn, dann schießn mir uns den Weg frei. Richard Kimble. Auf der Flucht!"⁸⁹

In all probability there is here a deliberate echo of the words of the young Karli in Sterntaler, who later tries to live up to his claims by attempting a robbery with a toy gun. Hugo, however, is taken aback when the police actually arrive and forgets about his revolver as they take Nathalie away. Afterwards he acts out in fantasy his courageous

88. Kroetz; WA, p.305.

89. Kroetz; WA, p.310.

refusal to hand her over. It is a moot point as to how disturbed he would have to have been before firing on the policemen in real life: had he done so, however, it would have been an understandable -- though not excusable -- reaction. For Hugo, the abduction of Nathalie is the last straw. The sudden loss of his job has shaken the foundations of his life; having lived to work, he now finds his life devoid of meaning. It is clear that he will want to strike out at those who have come to take away the child who represents the last connection with emotional stability. Thus it is possible to understand how the cold-blooded murder of two policemen could have been committed by this perfectly normal old man, who would consequently have been flung into the world of criminal "Randerscheinungen".

Kroetz has shown, however, that this is precisely what Hugo is not. He is a normal old man who, reminiscent of Heinz in Oberösterreich, is pushed by circumstances close to killing. As Panzner concludes:

"Vor außergewöhnliche Situationen gestellt, reagieren diese Menschen mit der einzig ihnen verbleibenden Ausdrucksmöglichkeit: der Gewalt." ⁹⁰

Hugo and Nathalie are victims. Kroetz compares them implicitly with the caged birds described in one of Nathalie's reading lessons. Deprived over a long period of time of the possibility of flight, the birds inevitably lose the power of

90. Panzner; op.cit., p.15.

their wings. Hugo and Nathalie are prisoners in the cage of survival, their energy taken up in serving the twin gods of work and money. To them applies the Marxist tenet: "Das Sein bestimmt das Bewußtsein", a conclusion echoed in similar words by Martha in Das Nest:

"Woher soll ein Vogel wissn, daß er fliegn kann, wenn er sein ganzes Leben lang bloß mit Mäus zamkommt." 91

Heimat has been discussed in some detail in order to recall the similarities between Kroetz's treatment of violence, language and characters. While the tendency in each case has been to move away from the extreme, Heimat illustrates plainly that this trend is not valid for all his later plays. The fight between Hugo and Nathalie is distressingly brutal, especially considering the ages of the characters; Hugo is substantially "sprachlos" -- not merely because he has difficulty reading, but because of his inability to use language to understand his own situation -- and Nathalie is clearly developing in the same direction; despite superficial "normality", both grandfather and grand-daughter are helpless outsiders from the illusive security of the "Wohlstandsgesellschaft". The consequence of this threefold "extremity" is that the positive perspective remains a closed door. As Carl concludes:

"Weder die positiv-wegweisende Gestalt noch der erste Schritt, mit dem sich jemand zur Wehr setzt, sind auszumachen." 92

91. Kroetz; WA, p.248.

92. Carl; op.cit., p.117.

Heimat thus illustrates Kroetz's reluctance to believe in the necessity of positive, self-determining figures for the political effectiveness of his plays, just as he refuses to abandon the portrayal of violence and inarticulacy in order to create a "positive" play. The resignation and failure to learn of several of his later characters bear this out.

The three radio plays from the beginning of his literary career -- Inklusive, Gute Besserung and Bilanz -- interestingly foreshadow the later plays in this respect. The characters in this Trilogie Münchner Leben can be distinguished from contemporaries such as Beppi, Willy or Karl and Marie by virtue of being markedly less extreme. They belong rather to the type of figure represented by Heinz and Anni, unobtrusively "average", like thousands of others.

Karl and Anna Heubl, the elderly couple in Bilanz, look back on their lives and find much that disturbs them. Apart from occasional mutterings of dissatisfaction, however, all they can do is take refuge in the apathetic platitude: "Man muß sich nach der Deckn streckn."⁹³ Of the two, Karl is more aware of the emptiness of his life, and in his hesitant protests we can see how and why their married life has become what it is. As we would expect, the reasons for its hollowness are directly related to social pressures.

In the first place, their existence has been haunted by

93. Kroetz; WA, p.144.

the constant struggle for money. We are made aware of this in the first scene, in which Karl and Anna discuss the things they have had to do without for lack of money -- "Operett'n", "Ausflug", "Bälle". While Anna's reaction does not extend beyond a deep regret, Karl at least manages to recognise the source of these deficiencies:

"Karl: Bei der Scheißsparerei, wenns hint und vorn ned reicht. Die wo ein Geld ham, die können leicht gleichgültig sein, mir ned.

Anna: Sparn is normal.

Karl: Aber mir ham zuviel sparn müssn. Mir hättn uns viel mehr leistn können, wenn mir mehr Geld ghabt hättn." 94

This scene also makes clear the consequences of this financial struggle on their emotional lives. The absence of excitement or any sort of individual experience has drained their lives of meaning. Anna clings for this meaning to the traditional sop of life-after-death -- "Wenns da nix gebn tät, nachm Lebn, dann hätt doch unser ganzes Lebn kein Sinn." 95 --, to which Karl murmurs his agreement. Both feel cheated of any kind of experience that might have endowed their drab lives with a sense of meaning:

"Anna: Mei, wenn ich dran denk, wie ich jung war, was hab ich alles gmeint, werd passiern, bis ich älter bin!

Pause

Du mußt bloß ein bißl wartn, hab ich immer gmeint, das kommt schon noch. Das Leben, das geht erst noch los, das hab ich noch mit 30 denkt. -- Nix is kommen." 96

94. Kroetz; WA, pp.137/8.

95. Kroetz; WA, p.139.

96. Kroetz; WA, pp.142/3.

Karl's thoughts on the subject are virtually identical:

"Karl: Wenn ich jetzt sterb, was hab ich dann gmacht. 68 Jahr. Ich könnt keine Stund erzähl'n von mir, wo interessant is. Überhaupt die letzten 10, 15 Jahr, die sind schnell vergangen. Weil die Eindrücke ned da warn, weil es immer das Gleiche war, jeder Tag wie der andere, das is es. Wenn man keine Eindrück hat, dann vergeht die Zeit wie im Flug... Geld hätt man hab'n müss'n, dann is schon was anderes. Aber mir ham kein Geld ghabt." 97

Karl at least recognises that their energies have been so consumed by the everyday struggle for money that they have never had the chance to do anything which would have provided the now so sadly missed "Eindrücke". The end result is loss of identity. They have, over the years, become less resisting and less demanding until they have forgotten who they are. Now, as they get closer to death, they begin to awaken and to sense the fears of "das Verschwinden in der Masse der Austauschbarkeit" 98. In words that strongly recall the doubts of Heinz in Oberösterreich, Karl muses about the replacement of his personality by his anonymous function at work:

"Da is mir, als tät da irgendeiner sitzn, der halt 40 Jahr Elektriker war bei Siemens. Irgendeiner, da wo ich hingeh und sag: 'Grüß Gott', weil mir uns von der Firma herkennen. Grad so.

Pause.

Betont hochdeutsch Flüchtig ebn.

Pause.

Aber was der mit mir zum Tun hab'n soll, das weiß ich ned." 99

For both of them, life has passed and left them nothing.

97. Kroetz; WA, pp.143/4.

98. Carl; op.cit., p.135.

99. Kroetz; WA, p.148.

Despite Anna's insistence that she has her memories to look back on, her hesitancy reveals how much she is trying to put a brave face on her dissatisfaction:

"Eigentlich wars doch ganz schön unser Lebn und man soll sich ned beklagn, oder? Andere ham den ersten Krieg ned überlebt und andere den zweitn. Das muß man auch bedenkn." 100

Karl, however, refuses to succumb to this comfortable but numbing self-delusion, and bewails the dullness of his life, yearning for a single pleasing memory, a single moment that would give them the feeling: "daß des nur mir erlebt ham können, daß des nur mir sein können." 101 It is Karl, too, who senses there is something wrong with the system which can cheat him in this way. He sees how he has been exploited at work by the carrot-and-donkey mechanism, only to be discarded later without a second thought and with little gain from his industry.

He is also aware that he is now too old to change things, and is angry with himself for not having attempted to do so while he was young enough to have achieved something. He has at least progressed to the insight that he has been cheated; Anna has no conception of the causes of her situation and tries to convince herself that she and Karl are being ungrateful, that the fault lies in them and not in the system:

-- "Nur wenn man spart, kann man sich was leistn!" 102;

100. Kroetz; WA, p.147.

101. Kroetz; WA, p.149.

102. Kroetz; WA, p.138.

-- "Aber man muß zufriedn sein. Wenn man denkt, wie schlimm es hätt gehn können. Was einem alles erspart bliebn is. Man braucht bloß an andere denkn!" ¹⁰³;

-- "Weil mir keine Erinnerung ham. So ein Schmarrn, Karl. Heut siehst wieder alles schwarz." ¹⁰⁴

Reminiscent of Jurgis in the first three quarters of Upton Sinclair's The Jungle, Anna accepts everything without protest. The system is incontestable and her life therefore becomes a constant process of coming to terms with the discomforts it heaps upon her instead of trying to penetrate to the source of its glaring injustices.

Kroetz poignantly draws attention to these injustices in her account, towards the end of the play, of the "schöne Erinnerung" ¹⁰⁵ in her life. In her youth she has had a chance encounter with some apparently noble personage on horseback, and in her mind this fleeting and trivial incident has been elevated into a moment of lasting value. However, while she clings to this paltry memory, the noble rider, the Baron von Wedel, will not have given the incident a second thought. He and his kind can pick and choose their memories; they will never be found rummaging in their pasts for "Eindrücke" as Karl and Anna do. And though there are considerably more people in West Germany like the Heubls than like the Baron von Wedel, it is the former who are the outsiders. Karl and Anna are

103. Kroetz; WA, p.144.

104. Kroetz; WA, p.147.

105. Kroetz; WA, p.149.

outsiders because they are the rule and not the exception.

The same may be said of the middle-aged couple in Gute Besserung, also written in 1972. In the time-killing chit-chat exchanged between the seriously ill Karl Ruhsam and his wife, they reveal how similar are their regrets and resentments to those of the Heubls. Like millions of others they have lost their identities beneath the facade of their functions in the "Leistungsgesellschaft".

In a world where one is immersed in work -- for familiar reasons: "Hilde: Ohne die Überstunden, da hätten mir so manchen schönen Gegenstand nicht in der Wohnung." ¹⁰⁶ -- without, however, deriving any sense of achievement or satisfaction, trivialities can take on absurd importance. We have seen this in Oskar Schuster's glorification of the mended coffee machine and in Anna Heubl's memory of the encounter with the Baron von Wedel. For Karl Ruhsam, his car has assumed a similar exaggerated significance. He regards it as a sign of achievement, as does Hugo in Heimat, as something that raises him above the masses and makes him more than the anonymous worker he so obviously feels himself to be. He is ludicrously reluctant to let Hilde wash it while he is in hospital -- "wenn ich dann komm, wird es fachmännisch gemacht" ¹⁰⁷ -- and unduly possessive when his nephew wishes to borrow it -- "Wenn ich tot bin, dann kann mit dem Auto jeder fahren, der will. Aber

106. Kroetz; WA, p.128.

107. Kroetz; WA, p.119.

ned solang ich leb." ¹⁰⁸ In a sense, Karl Ruhsam's car is his "schöne Erinnerung" in a life otherwise devoid of achievement.

Again, this barrenness of experience is accompanied by a feeling of anonymity. We see this in Karl's fantasy about having a transplant. His illness and confinement in hospital have made him aware of his interchangeability: in his fantasy he compensates for this with the unhealthy dream of being a hospital celebrity -- being interviewed for popular periodicals, attaining vicarious fame as the recipient of medical technology, being swamped with visitors as a result of his new fame. The reality behind the fantasy, however, is more serious. In it we see Karl's need to be recognised as an individual, a need born of the stultifying work process which has robbed him of his personality and reduced him to an accessory of his machine.

Another drastic effect of Karl's immersion in his work is hinted at in his reference to the visitors he would receive as a famous patient. Kroetz draws attention to Karl's loneliness on more than one occasion. At the start of the play Karl eagerly explains how pleased he would be to receive a visit from his son; his change of mind about lending his car to his nephew depends on Otto's coming to visit him; when Hilde rises to leave, he is loth to see her go. There is more to this than the simple boredom of a hospital patient. To under-

108. Kroetz; WA, p.120.

stand it fully one has to look at Karl's life before his illness.

The coordinates of his life, as for many of Kroetz's characters, are work and money. It becomes clear during their conversation that the Ruhsams have lived through times of financial hardship and have consequently acquired a distorted conception of work as the be-all and end-all of existence:

"Karl: Wenns mich nimmer arbeitn lassn, könnens mich auf den Friedhof tun, so is es gemeint, dann hab ich keine Freud mehr zum Leben. Wo man sich an die Arbeit gewöhnt hat, weil es das einzig Sichere is im Leben." 109

In financial terms, enforced retirement will mean having to live on a pittance of a pension. More important than this material hardship, however, will be the blow to Karl's self-respect. To be a "Frührentner" is a sign of failure by the unrealistic standards he has set himself. The realisation that his illness could mean his exclusion from the work process is intolerable to him, who has raised "die Arbeit selbst zum Inbegriff von Leben und Sicherheit" 110. That this unquestioning dedication to work has, contrary to his expectations, been his undoing, is highlighted by his doctor, who warns him:

"... vor lauter Abrackern und Schuftn Tag und Nacht liegt er jetzt da, der Herr Ruhsam, und mir müssn seine Unvernunft wieder kurieren." 111

109. Kroetz; WA, p.126.

110. Carl; op.cit., p.133.

111. Kroetz; WA, p.129.

Perhaps set thinking by the doctor's words, Karl begins to re-examine his attitude to work and to analyse the connection between the mass of overtime he has put in and his present illness. He concludes that his devotion has indeed brought him no benefits. On his release he plans to join the union -- "ein Rückgrat is da, das einen auffangt". He follows this announcement with the significant remark:

"Glaubst, ich tät nicht Besuche habn, wenn ich in der Gewerkschaft sein tät? Lacht Und wie, das weiß ich aus eigener Erfahrung, da is ein Zusammenhalt." 112

Here we are taken back to the theme of loneliness and asked to see it in a sociological context. In Karl's recognition of the value of solidarity at work the audience is asked to see a parallel between his isolation there and his loneliness in his private life. Trapped in the treadmill of "Arbeit", Karl has neglected to develop his human relationships.

The "Arbeitsprozess" therefore has far-reaching material and emotional effects for Karl Ruhsam, despite the apparent normality of his life. His severe illness and the shadow of death have jolted him out of his unthinking lethargy and made him realise the hollowness of the existence he has led up to now. One senses, however, that this awareness, as for Karl Heubl, has come too late.

For the young couple in Inklusive there exists the

112. Kroetz; WA, p.129.

chance that they will follow up their nascent insight and eventually translate it into action. The old age and illness which restrict the perspective in the other two plays of the trilogy are absent here, although a similar process of stock-taking occurs in all three, with similarly depressing results.

For Karl and Anna in this, chronologically the first, play of the Trilogie Münchner Leben, it is their package holiday in Grado that prompts them to look back critically on their lives and compare their wishes against reality. This stocktaking gives rise to the albeit hesitant "Lernprozess" with whose faltering first steps the play ends.

Despite their determined attempts to convince themselves that "im Urlaub, da herrschen andere Gesetze" ¹¹³, it is clear that Anna's earlier remark is closer to the truth: "Auch der Urlaub is keine Ausnahme." ¹¹⁴ The most stringent of the laws governing their lives is, of course, the law of money.

Although they are reluctant openly to admit it, the pleasure that Karl and Anna derive from their holiday is threatened by having constantly to watch their pockets. This is neatly summed up in a casual remark made during a boat trip:

"Anna: Das is die erste Fahrt mit eim Schiff auf dem Meer.

Pause

Das muß man genießn.

Karl: Genau, wos sauteuer war." ¹¹⁵

113. Kroetz; WA, p.107.

114. Kroetz; WA, p.101.

115. Kroetz; WA, p.104.

Similarly, Karl and Anna feel compelled to make use of every facility offered in the package for which they have paid "810 Mark alles inklusive" ¹¹⁶. Whatever they do, they are haunted by Anna's refrain: "Das muß man ausnutzn" ¹¹⁷. They feel obliged to go swimming at every opportunity, to return to the hotel for every meal, to go to an open air concert for which they have free tickets. They even nurture the unkind hope that it will rain during this concert, as they will not be among those to lose money if there is no refund.

This holiday, which is supposed to represent their free time, is ruled just as much by the law, articulated by Hugo, that "Geid regiert die Weid" ¹¹⁸ as are their daily lives. Karl finds it impossible to relax when he has continuously to think about the expense of his pleasure. Buying a leather bag cannot be a spontaneous act; the cost has to be mulled over and the purchase carefully considered.

By the same token, Karl and Anna have a mortal dread of attracting attention because of their thriftiness, in the same way that Heinz in Oberösterreich is mortified lest anyone think he and Anni have never seen "ein flambiertes Gericht" before. ¹¹⁹ The question of tips therefore becomes a complicated issue:

116. Kroetz; WA, p.101.

117. Kroetz; WA, pp.102, 104, 111.

118. Kroetz; WA, p.293.

119. Kroetz; GS, p.389.

"Anna: Gibst du dem Kellner eigentlich ein Trinkgeld,
wenn mir fahrn?
Karl: Warum?
Anna: Wo mir den Vollpensionsgutschein ham, is das
nicht notwendig. Genau.
Karl: Das is alles inklusive.
Anna: Genau. Aber ghörn tät es sich schon, glaub ich.
Karl: Mir gibt auch niemand ein Trinkgeld.
Anna: Bist auch kein Kellner, sondern ein Angestellter.
Karl: Dann geb ich ihm ebn ein Trinkgeld.
Anna: Besser is schon, bevor man sich blamiert, weil
die dann sagn, man weiß nicht, was sich ghört.
Karl: Ebn." 120

Here we see the little man's fear "aufzufallen". Karl
and Anna have lost their identities and are content to remain
faceless in the crowd. Hence the need for their discussion
at the open air concert:

"Anna: Und wo dürfn mir sich dann hinsetzn?
Karl: Wo mir wolln.
Anna: Aber da is eine Unterteilung, das sieht man.
Karl: Auf die vordersten Plätze müssn mir sich ja
nicht setzn.
Anna: Sonst schaut das so komisch aus. 121
Karl: Ebn, mir setzn uns in die Mittn."

Their desire for "Unauffälligkeit" is part of the apathy
with which they accept their anonymity. It is the same wish
to remain unnoticed that dominates their everyday lives, whose
laws have been transferred virtually wholesale to their
holiday. Work and money remain the poles around which their
lives revolve. What Karl and Anna could be like otherwise is
indicated in a number of brief exchanges. For example, Karl
displays more tenderness than usual in his lovemaking:

120. Kroetz; WA, p.103.

121. Kroetz; WA, p.108.

"Anna: Bist ebn nicht müd. Sonst bist schon müd.
Karl: Heut hab ich auch nicht den ganzn Tag garbeit.
Sondern bin in der Sonne glegn. Da is ebn leicht." 122

He is sexually more attractive to Anna because of his tan:

"Anna: ... Schön is es. Bist ein ganz anderer.
Karl: Wie?
Anna: Ebn so.
Karl: Weil ich braun bin.
Anna: Nein. Aber sonst bist kasig.
Lachen
Karl: Im Werk scheint ebn keine Sonne hinein. Das
müssns erst noch erfindn, sonnendurchlässige
Dächer für die Arbeiter." 123

They both realise that Karl would benefit from more holiday
time:

"Anna: Du tätst mehr Uralub brauchn.
Karl: Genau: Sagn mir sechs Wochn, das wär richtig,
dann könnt man eine Woche verwendn für daheim --
Anna: Die Türn müßten wieder gstrichn werd'n.
Karl: Ebn. Für so was und dann hätt man einmal drei
Wochn und einmal zwei Wochn. Das wär richtig." 124

Finally, the hints of social criticism bubbling under the
surface of each of the previous three extracts come to the
fore, and they begin to question the justice of this system
which keeps some people slaving away in the treadmill while
others seem to have unlimited leisure time:

"Karl: Jetz geh schon zu, andere Leut ham überhaupt nie
ein Urlaub.
Anna: Aber es gibt auch Leut, die können drei- und
viermal im Jahr am Meer Urlaub machn.
Karl: Genau.
Anna: Ebn.
Karl: Die ham aber auch drei- und viermal soviele Geld
wie mir.
Anna: Genau.

122. Kroetz; WA, p.111.

123. Kroetz; WA, p.110.

124. Kroetz; WA, p.103.

Karl: Das is ebn der Unterschied.

Anna: Und die arbeitn auch ned mehr wie du, oder?

Karl: Bestimmt ned. Aber das is ebn so.

Anna: Warum eigentlich?" 125

The vital question has been asked. Karl and Anna begin to realise that their package holiday is no more than a breather, by no means a valid compensation for the drudgery of their everyday lives, to which they will return when the fourteen days are up. We may hope that a "Lernprozess" has been initiated and that Karl and Anna, being younger than the Heubls and free from illness such as plagues Karl Ruhsam, have more chance of following up their glimmerings of insight to effect some change in their lives. But on the evidence of the play they have a long way to go before they can escape the rut.

In all three plays of the Trilogie Münchner Leben the atmosphere of apathy is dominant. (It is probably no coincidence that the names of the characters are so similar: apart from their ages, they are largely interchangeable.) The Heubls are too old to start again, Karl Ruhsam will probably succumb to his illness without being able to put his new insights into practice, and Karl and Anna will return from Grado to the factory floor and the kitchen and never give their incipient doubts another thought. While a degree of positive insight is granted in each case, the future remains bleak.

125. Kroetz; WA, p.112.

The same is true for Frau Ruhsam in the later play Weitere Aussichten..... Here again we have an apparently "normal" character who can nevertheless be categorised as a "Randerscheinung". Frau Ruhsam is an old woman who is pushed to the side now that she is (supposedly) too old to be of use to society. Her age -- or rather, the way she is treated by her environment because of her age -- makes of her an outsider.

At the end of the play her sad conclusion is: "Man muß sich abfinden, als alter Mensch." ¹²⁶ She thus resigns herself to being discarded into an old folks' home as if it were quite natural. The injustice lies in the discrepancy between the impersonal act of officialdom and the vitality of its object. Kroetz draws attention to this in the preface to the play:

"Ich warne: Je 'jünger trotz des Alters', je lebfrischer und kräftiger die Frau Ruhsam dargestellt wird, umso größer ist letztlich die Tragik des Stückes, das ja auf das Elend, und zwar das ganz gewöhnliche Elend des Alterns und Abgeschobenwerdens hinweisen will." ¹²⁷

Her fate, despite its cruelty, is "ganz gewöhnlich". One is reminded of Fräulein Rasch, with the reservation that her suicide gesture tends to emphasise the notion of the extreme, while Frau Ruhsam's apathetic acceptance of her lot is doubtless more common. In essence, however, there is little difference between the fates shared by the two women: both

126. Kroetz; WA, p.266.

127. Kroetz; WA, p.254.

are victims of social indifference. In terms of political efficacy, however, it might be argued that Weitere Aussichten... is the more successful play.

The social context of the later play is clearer than in Wunschkonzert, without being intrusive, and one is discouraged from seeing in Frau Ruhsam's monologue merely the private sadness of an old woman. For example, when she speculates about her prospective room-mate in the home -- "weil sie ja auch eine alte Frau sein wird mit ein paar Erinnerungen und sonst nix" ¹²⁸ --, we are made aware of the representative value of her fate. She is not an exceptional case being held up for psychological interpretation, but one of hundreds of thousands of old folk in the "Leistungsgesellschaft" whose lives have been devoid of individual experience and are now being rounded off in enforced anonymity in the hands of "eine Fürsorge, die zur Entmündigung wird" ¹²⁹. Although Kroetz refrains from setting this politically oriented perspective in the foreground of the play, the audience is able to see Frau Ruhsam's story in its social context and is thus encouraged to draw conclusions about the system in which it takes place.

Reise ins Glück is similar in structure to Weitere Aussichten... and deals with the fate of another allegedly

128. Kroetz; WA, p.259.

129. Carl; op.cit., p.115.

normal female figure from the edge of the so-called "Wohlstandsgesellschaft", although an unmarried mother is certainly further from the accepted norm than the Frau Ruhsams and Fräulein Raschs of this world.

By virtue of not being married, the mother in Reise ins Glück is relegated to the role of an outsider. Survival is possible only by the suppression of her personality and by resigned acceptance of whatever may happen to her. "Nicht aufmucken, is das beste. Wer den Kopf bloß hebt, der kriegt eins drauf. Wer unten is, is unbemerkt." ¹³⁰, says the grandfather in Agnes Bernauer, and the unmarried mother here is a living example of this philosophy of resignation. She compensates for her refusal to act by perpetually fleeing into a world of fantasy: she lives with her son in cosy security in a cottage in the woods built by the father; the train driver has to stop at her behest; her son later marries a princess or a millionaire's daughter. Her reality, however, demands constant self-denial and self-effacement as the price for survival. In all innocence she intones:

"Nicht auffallen, das is die Kunst, mit der man sich Sympathien erringt, sagt der Abteilungsleiter immer und lächelt. Deine Mama mag er." ¹³¹

Steeped in such blind apathy, there is no way for her out of her rut. She accepts, and with her dismal self-

130. Kroetz; WA, p.336.

131. Kroetz; WA, p.274.

effacement she is laid open to a whole host of pressures from her environment. In her monologue she touches upon these pressures without analysing or elaborating on them. Carl draws up the following list:

"... die Einsamkeit in der Großstadt, die Diffamierung der ledigen Mutter in kleinstädtischer Umgebung, ihre Schutzlosigkeit gegenüber plumpen Annäherungsversuchen, die Heimunterbringung von Kindern berufstätiger Mütter, die Unsicherheit des Arbeitsplatzes angelernter Fabrikarbeiterinnen, den niedrigen Organisationsgrad gerade in dieser Gruppe und das Fehlen notwendiger Schutz-¹³² vorrichtungen für gesundheitsschädliche Tätigkeit."

It will be noted that these are by no means private or individual problems. Work and money are once again the coordinates upon which survival depends. Fear of losing her job keeps her running blindly in the treadmill, ever receptive for the glib words of her employer: "Wer aber schon einmal drin is im 'warmen Lodenfrey-Nest', der hat nix zum Befürchten, sagt der Abteilungsleiter, wenn er so is, wie deine Mama sich auszeichnet!"¹³³

Sacrifice, constant fear and self-deception are the price of survival. Her journey, far from being into happiness, is into resignation and failure. The emptiness of her life at work is carried over into her private life. As the train nears Rosenheim her dreams are rapidly dismantled:

"Jetzt wird es Zeit, daß man sich vorbereitet, gleich fährt er langsamer der Zug, weil er in Rosenheim is, und dann steign mir aus und der Papa nimmt uns in die Arme.

Pause

132. Carl; op.cit., p.117.

133. Kroetz; WA, p.276.

Wenn er nicht da is, weil es sich einfach ned hinausgegangen is, weil etwas Unvorhergesehenes hat eintreffn müssn, wie es heißt, oder weil er daheim bleibn muß bei die andern, wo ein Glück ghabt ham, weils vorher da warn, die Familie, die eigentliche, und mir dagegen ein Irrtum sind -- wenn er nicht kommt, brauchn mir ned wartn." 134

In her monologue, however, one can find flashes of rebellion, just as Karl Heubl and Karl Ruhsam begin to poke through the blanket of resignation that has covered their lives. Here the ostracised mother resolves to prevent her son falling into the same straits as she has been flung into. While sensing how difficult it will be to give him the right start -- "Hinaufkommen soll schwer sein, wenn man zu weit unten anfangen muß, sagt man." 135 -- she recognises how important it is that the start be made -- "Du mußt dich einmal wehrn, das is notwendig. Bei mir is vielleicht schon zu spät, aber bei dir geht alles erst noch los." 136

It is the same sort of grim resolve as shown by Anni in Oberösterreich, based more on hope than on concrete plans. She is not aware of precisely what is wrong with her situation or what has caused it, but she does feel the loss of personality she has suffered and the stultifying anonymity of her existence. It is this that she wants to spare her son; he must be the master of his own fate:

"Bei der Mama is es schon drin, daß man einen Respekt hat vor jemand und gar ned weiß warum und kann es nicht ändern, aber bei dir darf das einmal gar ned aufkommen,

134. Kroetz; WA, p.280.

135. Kroetz; WA, p.275.

136. Kroetz; WA, p.277.

da muß eine Weite sein, wo man sich verlaufen kann
und weil du stark bist, kommst vorwärts." ¹³⁷

It remains, however, a vague hope. At work, fear of losing her job keeps her a willingly exploited beast of burden, actually proud of her refusal to join her fellow workers in the fight for an improved ventilation system to combat the dangerous amounts of dust in circulation in the "Schneiderei" where she works. Naively, she believes her distance from the issue will earn her recognition and a wage increase.

From the point of view of plausibility, however, the scene in which she relates this information rings somewhat untrue. One senses how Kroetz has contrived, at the expense of naturalness, to introduce his specific political criticism. This failing applies to Reise ins Glück as a whole and makes it a less satisfactory play than, say, Weitere Aussichten..., which avoids this unrealistic pinpointing of social injustices and integrates its political criticism more smoothly into the text.

However this may be, the mother's blindness to her exploitation at work bears out the truth of Kurt's observation in Das Nest: "Die wo über uns sind, die sorgn schon dafür, daß unsereins gar ned zum Leb'n erwacht." ¹³⁸ Her head of department keeps her supplied with sops, and so she is led

137. Kroetz; WA, p.277.

138. Kroetz; WA, p.247.

to suppress the occasional twinges of dissatisfaction and protest that make their way to the surface:

"Manchmal kommt es schon vor, daß die Mama am liebsten aufstehn tät vom Sitz und etwas sagn tät, sie lacht hell aber das vergißt man schnell wieder. Weil man muß." ¹³⁹

She accepts. She accepts that she and her son are "ein Irrtum" ¹⁴⁰, forced to go it alone, without support even from those closest to them (as is typified in the hostility and rejection shown by her grandfather). They are ugly scars on the face of West German prosperity, hastily covered up and forgotten.

Unlike Kurt, Agnes or Karli, she wins no positive insight into her situation, beyond a vague resolve that her son's life must be better. In practical terms she has only her dreams to offer. Money is clearly a prerequisite for happiness in the society in which she lives, as we see in her fantasies of her son's marrying a millionaire's daughter or of her becoming rich and famous like Elizabeth Taylor. More realistic, but no less dependent on money, is her dream of sending her child to a boarding school and thus opening the door to later success.

Towards the end of her monologue she tries to imagine a world in which equality is more than a catchword, thus evoking, albeit vaguely, the contrast with a communist social order.

139. Kroetz; WA, p.277.

140. Kroetz; WA, p.280.

These thoughts, however, also remain on the level of idle dreams and provide no **material** for a factual comparison with the GDR or any other socialist or communist system. They retain a certain significance as "Denkanstöße" for the audience, but this political perspective is too faintly evoked to be of any real value in the stimulation of political consciousness. The young mother remains too much a private figure.

The contrast with the GDR and the overall social context of the play are somewhat more successfully evoked in Sterntaler. The Distl family are outsiders in the literal sense of the word: they have emigrated from east to west to start anew and to realise the glittering dream of prosperity. Yet they are never able to escape their resemblance to the ape pictured in Stern, whose head has been separated from its body and then re-attached. It is no coincidence that Karli carries this picture around with him and refers to the ape as "ein Freund" ¹⁴¹.

This metaphor for the family's situation sheds more light on the reality of their position than do any of their dreams -- Mama Distl's fantasy that she can work her way to the top by dint of her industry as a cleaner, Papa's sentimental flight to security in his model plane, Karli's childish dreams of bank robbery. All are revealed for the illusions that they are.

Reality is Karli's mind-numbing attachment to the "Pack-

141. Kroetz; WA, p.191.

maschine", his mother's slave labour in the "Putzkolonie", her subsequent illness as a result of excessive working hours, her inability to pay the rent because she was not insured while working, Karli's brief encounter with a homosexual in an attempt to earn money quickly, Papa Distl's failure to find a job as a teacher, his consequent loss of self-respect and collapse into apathy and drinking -- reality is the destruction of the dreams they have brought with them from the GDR; it is financial and emotional hardship combining to kill body and spirit. The ape's head cannot be grafted on to its new body. The world which they envisaged as conforming to the American Dream resembles more Brecht's water-wheel, an unchanging system in which only the ciphers are interchangeable:

"Freilich dreht das Rad sich immer weiter
Daß, was oben ist, nicht oben bleibt.
Aber für das Wasser unten heißt das leider
Nur: daß es das Rad halt ewig treibt." 142

After their journey from east to west, the members of the Distl family have become assimilated into the mass of faceless, nameless workers that form the base of the pyramid structure of the "Leistungsgesellschaft"; they are more uncounted outsiders.

The positive perspective makes a somewhat indirect appearance in Sterntaler, insofar as the alternative of communism is suggested in contrast to the capitalism of the

142. Brecht; Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe, loc.cit., p.1007.

Federal Republic of Germany. The lengthy discussion between the parents in Act III suggests that the injustices under which the family suffer would not be possible in the GDR, and the play ends with Papa's emphatic assertion: "Drübn wär das nicht passiert!" ¹⁴³

However, as only one side of the contrast is treated at any length, the comparison is unsatisfactory. Kroetz makes it too easy for himself. It is always easier to attack the unacceptable than to make constructive suggestions for its replacement, and Kroetz's vague references in Sterntaler fall far short of this more difficult goal. Nevertheless, the criticism of the competitive capitalist system is clear: the Western myth of equal opportunity is exposed as the reality of ruthless exploitation. The Distls are grist to the capitalist mill.

Sterntaler thus provides another illustration of Kroetz's reluctance to subscribe to the pre-eminence of the positive perspective. Ending as it does in violence (Karli's attempted bank robbery and subsequent shooting), apathy (Papa's collapse into self-pity and drinking) and defeat (Mama's inability to overcome their poverty), Sterntaler fits more comfortably into the scheme of Kroetz's first plays, while Das Nest, Die Wahl fürs Leben, Agnes Bernauer, Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch and Oberösterreich all point in the optimistic direction of

143. Kroetz; WA, p.217.

"entwicklungsfähige Menschen" ¹⁴⁴.

It is fair to conclude, therefore, that Kroetz's treatment of characters shows two distinct lines of development. On the one hand, Kurt, Karli (in Die Wahl fürs Leben), Agnes and the Martha of Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch all make decisions that show the awakening of political consciousness. On the other, Hugo, Frau Ruhsam, the Distl family and the unmarried mother in Reise ins Glück all remain helpless in the face of their environment and without control over their own lives.

Common to both trends, however, is the discernible movement towards the "Durchschnitt" in terms of social definition. This, as has been suggested, is not the same as an abandonment of the depiction of the extreme. Rather it denotes a shift of emphasis to what has tellingly been called "die Extremität des Gewöhnlichen" ¹⁴⁵, the depiction of the outsider position in what may be described as a closer approximation to the norm.

Kroetz's aim has never been to display outrageous and exceptional cases for their own sake. His "Randgruppen" must be defined as social phenomena and not as individuals, as political instances rather than psychological cases. Irrespective of the nature and degree of their "Außenseitertum", the char-

144. Jäger, Gerd; "Ein dressierter Aff ist auch ein guter Mensch", in Theater heute, Heft 5, Mai 1975.

145. Anon.; in the introduction to: Walbert, Helmut; "Herstellung eines Kindes im Umgebungsunfreundlichen", in Theater heute, Heft 11, November 1972.

acters in Kroetz's plays are all members of the same crippling social system. Common to all is the failure to satisfy the demands and standards of the dog-eat-dog society. Beppi is disqualified by mental backwardness, Karl and Marie by poverty, Heribert Dengk by being an orphan, Hugo, Frau Ruhsam and the Heubls by old age, Helmut and Willy by physical disability, Fritz by sexual abnormality, Inge (the peripheral figure in Heimat) and the protagonist of Reise ins Glück by being a deserted mother and an unmarried mother respectively, Nathalie and Hanni by childhood, Rasch, Dengk and Schuster by their criminal records. A whole host of characters is relegated to the position of outsiders by the loss of their personalities in the spirit-crippling "Arbeitsprozess" -- Sepp, Otto and Martha, Mitzi, Heinz, Kurt, Fräulein Rasch, the Ruhsams, Anna and Karl in Inklusive, Martha Distl.

Referring to Heimat in particular, Rolf-Peter Carl attributes to Kroetz the belief in the possibility:

"... aus einer Reihe von Einzelstudien schließlich doch -- additiv -- das Bild der Gesamtgesellschaft zusammensetzen zu können." 146

It is difficult to accept that Kroetz seriously envisages the achievement of this goal. The task of constructing such an accumulative picture of the whole social structure is manifestly so enormous that it seems unlikely that any author would ever undertake to complete it. Kroetz has written no

146. Carl; op.cit., p.118.

play about a "Gastarbeiter" (although a Turkish family appear in Milde Sorte), a homosexual, a drug addict or an adopted child. The list of outsiders is numerically incomplete, and in all probability must remain so. To ask for a definitive list, however, is to have the wrong perspective. More important than merely adding the separate experiences and fates of a number of characters is to distil their essence and arrive at the features common to them all. Kroetz demands a concentration of vision that focusses on this common essence of "Außenseitertum", which may be defined as social unfitness.

One must stress, however, that this social unfitness is to be seen, not as a fault or weakness of the characters -- which would mean an acceptance of society's standards as legitimate --, but as a ruthlessly applied false criterion. Kroetz's characters are victims of a cruel social system, which must be changed.

In the two distinct threads of development identified -- the process of moderation leading to the presentation of more "average" cases, and the partial acceptance of the positive perspective -- we can recognise familiar tendencies. In each of the three fields of violence, language and characters, Kroetz has tended to move away from his depiction of the extreme without, however, completely abandoning it.

The question which must now be asked is how does Kroetz's

changing attitude to the extreme relate to his fervently avowed political goal of providing enlightenment and inspiring change: "Seine Absicht ist Aufklärung, sein Ziel ist es, das beschriebene Elend zu ändern." ^{147?}

147. Schaarschmidt; loc.cit., p.215.

3. CONCLUSION

"Daß die Realität auf dem Theater wiedererkannt wird, ist nur eine der Aufgaben des echten Realismus. Sie muß aber auch noch durchschaut werden. Es müssen die Gesetze sichtbar werden, welche den Ablauf der Prozesse des Lebens beherrschen. Diese Gesetze sind nicht auf Photographien sichtbar."

Bertolt Brecht ¹

"Un sanglot tout nu n'est pas beau: il offense. Un bon raisonnement offense aussi... Mais un raisonnement qui masque un sanglot, voilà notre affaire. Le raisonnement ôte aux pleurs ce qu'ils ont d'obscène; les pleurs, en révélant son origine passionnelle, ôtent au raisonnement ce qu'il a d'agressif."

Jean-Paul Sartre ²

The main conclusion drawn from the separate analyses of violence, language and characters in Kroetz's plays from Wildwechsel to Agnes Bernauer has been that Kroetz has consistently tended to move away from his depiction of the extreme without completely abandoning it. It is interesting to note the continuation of this trend in Mensch Meier, a "Volksstück in drei Akten" ³ written in 1977.

Reversing the order and beginning with an examination of the characters, one sees that, with the Meier family, Kroetz is still dealing with outsiders. In financial terms the family is not well off. Otto works on the conveyor belt at BMW; his job consists in fitting screws into "Seitenverkleidungen" as they pass down the endless belt.

1. Brecht; Der Messingkauf, GW16, p.520.

2. Sartre, Jean-Paul; Qu'est-ce que la littérature?, Collection Idées, Gallimard, Paris, 1972, p.42.

3. Kroetz; dns, p.7.

Like Hugo in Heimat he is one of countless faceless workers performing a monotonous, mechanical function for scant financial reward. The family cannot even afford a separate bedroom for the fifteen-year-old Ludwig, who has to transform a corner of the living room into a "Schlafefcke" every night.

Heinz and Anni admire the stars of a television show for their impressive aura of self-confidence and style. In the same way, Otto and Martha admiringly follow the television transmission of the wedding of Queen Silvia:

"Martha: Wieviele Könige gibts denn noch auf der Welt? Die kann man an die Finger von einer Hand herunterzählen. Also ist man dankbar, wenn man es erleben kann, so ein Ereignis." ⁴

Their own lives being devoid of glamour and anything that could be called "Eindrücke", as Karl Heubl puts it in Bilanz, they compensate by forgetting their own personalities and identifying with the sparkling lives of celebrities.

Reality, in which money is a constant source of worry, is more bitter. Otto is unable to consummate intercourse with Martha because his mind is occupied with the fear of having lost his expensive ball-point pen, one of the few luxuries he has allowed himself. Later he is disturbed by the suspicion that the waiter in the beer cellar might have cheated him out of ten marks, and he cannot rest until he has accounted for the missing sum. The way in which Otto

4. Kroetz; dns, pp.11/12.

is obsessed by this comparatively small amount of money is reminiscent of the uncertainty that characterises the mood of Karl and Anna during their holiday in Grado.

Also shared with Karl and Anna, among others, is Otto's and Martha's fear of being too conspicuous. This fear contributes largely to their vulnerability for the world of consumer goods. When buying a casual suit for Otto, they feel obliged to choose one more expensive than they would like to pay, in order to preserve appearances:

"Man sollt es halt nicht gleich sehn, daß ich bloß⁵ irgendein Arbeiter bin, der einen Ausflug macht."

It is easy to understand the crushing shame they experience later at the supermarket cash desk when Martha discovers she does not have enough money to pay for all the groceries. Their embarrassment at what is really only an awkward moment is escalated into shame because they appear to have committed an offence against the holy cow of money. To make this quite clear Kroetz introduces the scene by having Otto voice his relief that he and Martha are not like the unfortunate woman in the next queue, with her sparse provisions. Their own rude awakening is, as Kroetz describes it, "eine Mordsblamage"⁶. Their little nest of security is built on precarious foundations, and a change in income could easily disrupt it, just as it

5. Kroetz; dns, p.21.

6. Kroetz; public reading from Mensch Meier in the "Theater in der Leopoldstraße", Munich, April 1978.

has affected the life of their neighbour in the queue. Hence Otto's anxiety in Act II, Scene I that he could be dismissed from work at a moment's notice, like his colleague Gruschke -- "wie vom Erdbodn verschluckt" ⁷.

Such -- largely unspoken -- anxieties about their financial security keep the Meiers moving precariously on the thin ice of their existence. And it is friction caused by financial worries that finally results in their crashing through this fragile support.

As so often in Kroetz's plays, the child is the symbol of hope for the future. Through Ludwig, Otto and Martha dream of transcending their position as "Massenmenschen" ⁸, and for this reason both are against his becoming a humble "Maurer" and wish him to aspire to something better. Their ambitions, though well-meant, prove to be unrealistic, and eventually the strain created by Ludwig's continuing unemployment sets in motion a chain of actions and reactions that rips asunder the family security. Ludwig's consequent lack of money inevitably destroys their well-intended aspirations, as surely as it leads to the gruesome abortion attempt in Heimarbeit.

It is important to remember why Otto and Martha are so insistent about Ludwig's finding a better job. In the treadmill of the capitalist system they are anonymous,

7. Kroetz; dns, p.33.

8. Kroetz; dns, p.59.

interchangeable hamsters; Ludwig is to be their vicarious success over the system:

"Martha: Der Papa is ein Arbeiter, auch wenn er nicht schlecht verdient. Da kann man nix mehr ändern. Aber du mußt (sagt es hochdeutsch) die nächste Sprosse erklimmen, sonst hätts das doch alles gar keinen Sinn, was man für dich tan hat." ⁹

The resemblance between Otto and Martha Meier and Heinz and Anni, Kurt and Martha, the family in Die Wahl fürs Leben, is obvious. They share the same fragile financial security, loss of identity and lack of meaningful personal experiences that have been identified as recurrent features of West Germany's "Außenseiter, die... nach Millionen zählen" ¹⁰.

At the same time there has been the familiar gravitation towards the typical. The brief descriptions of the characters at the start of the play draw attention to their "normality", and therefore to their representative value. Nor can one claim that the Meiers live in extreme financial hardship. Though their flat is not large, it contains a colour television and a small room where Otto can indulge in his hobby of building model aeroplanes. Karl and Marie in Michis Blut would not spend money on an expensive ball-point pen. While Otto's job is drear, it enables him to support the family and spares them undue

9. Kroetz; dns, p.25.

10. Schmidt, Dietmar N.; "Stallerhof im Malersaal, Hamburg", in Die deutsche Bühne, Heft 8, August 1972.

financial embarrassment. In short, the Meier family are "der gute Durchschnitt" ¹¹, as Anni describes herself and Heinz. For both families Kroetz shows how close to the edge is their apparent security. In Mensch Meier we see again "die Extremität des Gewöhnlichen" ¹².

Furthermore, the articulacy of the family members is in some ways markedly restricted. Otto and Martha are, for example, blind to the glib slogans of "Konsumsprache". Martha admires the more expensive casual suit: "Der andere hat mehr (lächelt) den Duft der großen weiten Welt" ¹³; Otto enthuses about his pen: "wo er herrlich in der Hand liegt und eine glasklare Schrift fertigt" ¹⁴; both are fascinated by the wedding of Silvia and Carl Gustav: "Das ganze Volk is auf den Beinen und huldigt dem Paar! Kleine Pause. Eine Märchenhochzeit ebn." ¹⁵

More significant than this inability to see through the gilded language of consumerism is their failure to use language to understand and control their own situation. Otto is dumbfounded by the sudden and apparently inexplicable dismissal of forty-seven work colleagues, but his only reaction comes in the form of emotional frustration and surrogate aggression directed against Ludwig. He cannot

11. Kroetz; GS, p.399.

12. Anon.; in the introduction to: Walbert, Helmut; "Herstellung eines Kindes im Umgebungsunfreundlichen", in Theater heute, Heft 11, November 1972.

13. Kroetz; dns, pp.21/2.

14. Kroetz; dns, p.17.

15. Kroetz; dns, p.14.

analyse the problem critically and naively imagines himself to have been in control of his own situation by his apathetic acceptance of the new working conditions imposed from above. While others oppose these new conditions, Otto hastens to agree with the foreman:

"Ich hab ja gsagt, ja, gern, das geht leicht und da hat er mir auf die Schulter geklopft und 'brav' gsagt. Ich weiß, was das heißt.

Kleine Pause.
Sicherheit heißt das." 16

He lacks the insight to see that, far from controlling his own future, he is merely letting himself be manipulated like a puppet. If, as Kroetz has written, to use language means "sich wehren können" ¹⁷, this is precisely what Otto is unable to do.

Martha is no better. She can offer no help in the question of the sudden dismissals at work and flees into the familiar proverb: "Man muß sich nach der Decke streckn" ¹⁸. It is all she can do to push the problem into the back of her mind because she is incapable of coping with it critically: "Die sieben jetzt eben die Älteren aus. Da bist du nicht dabei." ¹⁸

However, Otto and Martha are not completely "sprachlos". Martha in particular is shaken awake by events and

16. Kroetz; dns, p.34.

17. Kroetz; "Subventionssauerei", in Neues Forum (Wien), Heft 229, Februar 1973.

18. Kroetz; dns, p.25.

makes the crucial journey to "Erkenntnis". Earlier she is more adamant than Otto in defending the glamorous show of the royal wedding, but after the violent explosion in which Otto virtually wrecks the household she begins to analyse her situation, and comes to the conclusion that she cannot continue to live with her husband under the given circumstances:

"Anspeibn muß man sich halt lassen, wenn es einer tut, aber bloß einmal, Otto." ¹⁹

Like Agnes Bernauer, Martha takes the further step from insight to action: she moves out to find a job and a room of her own. When she realises that Otto's reluctance to let the relationship end is interfering with her own independence, she moves again, this time without giving him her new address. With language she has insight, and with insight she can defend herself.

Ludwig undergoes a similar development. He realises that his chances of finding an apprenticeship such as Otto envisages are slim; rather than continue along this cul-de-sac, Ludwig also leaves home to follow a more realistic course of action by finding employment as a "Maurerlehrling".

Only Otto remains at the mercy of language, although he at times appears to take some uncertain steps towards articulacy and insight. It is he, for example, who points

19. Kroetz; dns, p.57.

out that the happiness of Silvia and Carl Gustav is facilitated by their wealth and position, rather than being some universal blessing. At this stage he would appear to be critically more aware than Martha, and this is borne out by his later -- almost eloquent -- reflections on his reduction to the status of a machine, to be switched on and off as required:

"Otto : Manchmal is mir, sie schaltn mich ab.

Martha: schaut

Otto : nickt Bloß die Arbeit geht noch. Weils Band geht. Aber wenn Pause is, dann schaltens uns ab. In der Früh um siebn schaltens uns ein, damit mir arbeiten, von sieben bis viertel vor neun. Von viertel vor neun bis neun tuns uns ned ausschalt, da lassens uns herumstehn und mit die Kollegn redn und eine Brotzeit essn und Pläne schmiedn. Um neun gehts dann weiter bis viertel nach zwölf. Von viertel nach zwölf bis eins dürfn mir in die Kantine, weil es Werksgelände is.

Martha: Fantasiert, der Mensch.

Otto : Dann gehts weiter bis um fünfe oder siebene, wenn Sonderschicht is. Am Feierabend schaltens uns endgültig aus, wie die elektrischen Schreibmaschinen und stülpn uns einen Schonbezug über, damit man ned staubig wird." ²⁰

Otto also seems to realise how this loss of dignity and personal value suffered at work has consequences on his private life and on his own opinion of himself. He admits to Martha that he would rather masturbate than go to her for sexual intercourse, not because he is disgusted by her, but because he is disgusted by himself.

Otto therefore seems to be on the way to the same

20. Kroetz; dns, p.45.

self-awareness and lucidity which Martha and Ludwig arrive at. This impression is strengthened by the powerful scene in which he conducts an imaginary "Was bin ich?" monologue in front of the television. In this bitter self-examination Otto considers what his work -- which is the same, for him, as his life -- has made of him, and comes to the conclusion that he is now no more than a "Schraubenzieher" ²¹. The man has become an accessory of the machine he serves.

Yet he concludes this lengthy monologue with the pained confession: "Ich kann mich nicht mit mir abfinden. Komisch. Ob ich will oder nicht." ²² Despite his apparent articulacy Otto is unable to penetrate to a real understanding of his situation and thus remains essentially "sprachlos". His language suffices for the vague formulation of his distress and anxiety -- "Mir is, als wenn ich in einem Loch stehn tät, und ich will hinaufsteign, wo es hell wird, zehn Meter über mir. Aber da is nirgends ein Griff und alles glatt." ²³ -- but it is not enough for a critical analysis of his situation and the devising of constructive action. Like the mother in Reise ins Glück, Otto can find hope for the future only in useless daydreams:

"Mein Gott, größer möchert ich sein um zehn Zentimeter und schön und alle Weiber tät'n mir nachschaun, und wenn mir eine gfallt, dann lach ich sie bloß

21. Kroetz; dns, p.53.

22. Kroetz; dns, p.54.

23. Kroetz; dns, p.58.

einmal kurz an und dann gehts schon mit und liebt mich, und viele Freunde, weil ich reich bin und alle frei halt und Reisen um die ganze Welt und wo man hinkommt, wird man abgeholt und begrüßt, keine Sorgen, keine Einsamkeit, kein Unglück, bloß die Freiheit." ²⁴

Unable to make the vital step to full understanding and action, Otto is left a hopeless wreck, deserted by wife and son, slumped in front of the television, halfheartedly masturbating, drunk and blabbering, finally breaking out in tears. Without language, he cannot defend himself, in stark contrast to Martha and Ludwig.

The disturbing scene in which we see Otto's disintegration in front of the television set is adequate proof that Kroetz has not abandoned his depiction of excessively violent behaviour. Earlier, at the start of the second act, he foreshadows the later breakdown into violence in Otto's aggressive goading of Ludwig. Here Martha can avert the outbreak by coaxing Otto to talk about what has upset him so much -- thereby drawing attention, incidentally, to the connection between inarticulacy and aggression ²⁵ --, but the disaster is only temporarily evaded. After the public humiliation in the supermarket Otto explodes in rage and subjects his son to a shaming interrogation as to the whereabouts of the missing DM 50,-. The outcome of this brutal cross-questioning is that Ludwig

24. Kroetz; dns, p.60.

25. Cf. an almost identical situation in Act II, Scene I of Der Stramme Max.

leaves home and Martha begins to call in question the validity of her relationship with Otto.

Otto is also affected. His attitude to Martha simmers with unspoken hostility until a trivial incident triggers off a chain reaction that ends in frightening violence. After repeatedly spilling beer on the carpet -- first inadvertently, then deliberately -- and sensing his wife's reproach as she cleans up the stains, Otto suddenly shatters the bottle on the table and begins to demolish everything within reach -- television, vases, cupboard, chairs, carpet, even his own collection of model planes. His wild rampage ends with the complete loss of self-control:

"... plötzlich geht ein Riß durch ihn, er rast mit der ganzen Kraft, die er hat, auf eine Wand zu, stößt sich dort mit aller Gewalt den Kopf dagegen, er jault auf, er macht es aber wieder, versucht, mit dem Kopf durch die Wand zu kommen." ²⁶

It is a disturbing picture of the collapse into uncontrollable animal violence; yet it is not the complete picture conveyed by the play.

Hartnäckig ends with Helmut's tacit promise to exact violent revenge on his father for his continuing discrimination. In Mensch Meier a similar reaction could be understood on the part of Ludwig, who has been persistently provoked by his father. Instead, he takes constructive action, leaves homes and finds employment as a bricklayer's

26. Kroetz; dns, p.43.

apprentice.

In Männersache Martha's sudden awareness of her exploitation by Otto causes her to erupt into violence by initiating the gruesome shooting match. In Mensch Meier her namesake takes positive action, leaves home and starts to build up an independent existence.

In both cases the violent outcome is avoided. At the end of the play they discuss their chances for the future, concluding:

"Ludwig: Und der Papa!?"

Martha: zuckt die Achseln, ruhig: Muß es auch.

Ludwig: Was?

Martha: Was mir tun. Lernen." 27

Instead of violence, we have progress in the form of a "Lernvorgang"; the positive perspective has been opened up.

Overall, therefore, Mensch Meier confirms the continuation of Kroetz's trend of modifying the depiction of the extreme without completely discarding it. More significant, however, is the introduction of a new element in his dramatic technique, which one might describe by recalling Brecht's formulation of the "Fixieren des Nicht-Sondern" 28.

In the writings collected under the title Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst Brecht advises his actors, when demonstrating a character's behaviour or response, to show not only what the character does, but also what he does not

27. Kroetz; dns, p.67.

28. Brecht; Kurze Beschreibung einer neuen Technik der Schauspielkunst, die einen Verfremdungseffekt hervorbringt, GW15, p.343.

do. By this process of contrast the character's behaviour appears in stronger relief. Applied to the play as a whole this technique serves to highlight its sociological implications, insofar as it shows that what happens is not the only possible course of action, thereby emphasising the particular historical element in whatever is being depicted and undermining the impression that it is either natural or unchangeable.

In Mensch Meier this illuminating element of contrast is incorporated by having Otto develop in one way, his wife and son in another. Martha and Ludwig learn, Otto does not. Because they have been able to learn, Martha and Ludwig can respond to events in a non-violent manner; because Otto has not learned, violence remains his only reaction. Martha and Ludwig act in a constructive manner, while Otto's behaviour is hopelessly self-destructive. Their ability to analyse and learn allows and incites them to fight to improve their situation; his failure to analyse and learn plunges him into defeat and resignation. The positive perspective is indicated at the same time as the negative outcome is demonstrated.

This simultaneous presentation makes possible a fuller understanding of both elements. The contrast leads to a mutual highlighting of both developments and, as a result, the play becomes more effective as a sociological and political document, not to mention as a work of

literature.

It is a technique used by Kroetz for the first time, although a comparison of Männersache and the revised version Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch offers a similar balance of positive and negative perspectives. He develops the technique further in Wer durchs Laub geht... -- yet another treatment of the same material -- in which he sets Otto's need to dominate Martha against her determination to resist it, as demonstrated in Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch. Unlike the second version, however, Wer durchs Laub geht... ends with Otto's desertion of her. Nevertheless, Kroetz leaves us in no doubt as to the correctness of Martha's behaviour, as is shown by the extremely perspicacious entries in her diary. By indicating a pessimistic outcome Kroetz is trying to guard against unreflected optimism while stressing the need to resist an oppressive situation, precisely because of the harshness of the consequences.

Nicht Fisch nicht Fleisch provides another variation of this technique of contrast, in the form of the depiction of two characters, both of whom, as the title of the play suggests, fail to achieve proper insight into their situation. Edgar is so rooted in his individual problems as to lack effective political awareness, while Hermann is so blinkered by political issues as to lose sight of the human beings whose lives they affect. Kroetz portrays two inadequate responses in order to indicate the happy medium which the

situation really calls for.

It is unlikely that all this is a conscious echo of Brecht's conception of the "Fixieren des Nicht-Sondern", but the similarity is apparent. For Kroetz this technique constitutes an important development in the search for the synthesis of a dramatic form that is both artistically pleasing and politically effective.

This has been the most pressing and consistent problem for Kroetz throughout his literary career. From the beginning he has insisted that his literature is unequivocally in the service of his political commitment: his problem has been how to translate this commitment into politically effective theatre. As has been frequently suggested, it is one thing to show political reality on the stage, and quite another to influence it in real life. His task is not made any easier by his rejection -- in practice at least -- of the alternative of redefining the theatre to incorporate performance, firstly, outside its traditional (bourgeois) habitat and, secondly, depending on the involvement of the audience in an active, creative capacity, as exemplified in the theory and practice of "Theatermacher" such as Dario Fo and Augusto Boal. Kroetz prefers to remain within the confines of conventional theatrical production.

Bearing in mind this common theatrical ground, as well as the similarities of their political convictions, it is interesting to consider Brecht's attitude to the same

problems faced by Kroetz.

First of all, both would agree that the writing of plays has nothing to do with the holy cow of Art. Brecht exclaims: "es ist nichts mit der Tempelidee!"²⁹, and Kroetz asserts more specifically: "Schreiben, ohne daß ich damit einen politischen Zweck verfolge, wäre mir zuwider."³⁰

It follows that if every play is "eine bestimmte gesellschaftliche Aufgabe"³¹, the function of the theatre must be defined by its effect upon the audience. A play can no longer be regarded as something complete in itself, to be enjoyed for its own sake; its value must be measured by the extent of its activist appeal. The theatre must encourage "gesellschaftlich eingreifendes Verhalten der Zuschauer"³², it must be able:

"... mit künstlerischen Mitteln ein Weltbild zu entwerfen, Modelle des Zusammenlebens der Menschen, die es dem Zuschauer ermöglichen [könnten], seine soziale Umwelt zu verstehen und sie verstandesmäßig und gefühlsmäßig zu beherrschen."³³

Obviously, such a conception demands a clear and firm political stance on the part of the playwright. Again Brecht and Kroetz are in agreement in their rejection of capitalism and their support of communism and the cause of the under-

29. Brecht; Das Theater als sportliche Anstalt, GW15, p.49.

30. Kroetz; WA, p.591.

31. Brecht; Über den Bühnenbau der nichtaristotelischen Dramatik, GW15, p.447.

32. Brecht; Über praktikabel definierte Situationen in der Dramatik, GW15, p.248.

33. Brecht; Über experimentelles Theater, GW15, p.295.

privileged working class. The starting point for both Brecht and Kroetz is the reality of contemporary capitalist society, and their common aim is to change this society;

Brecht in Die Maßnahme:

"Nur belehrt von der Wirklichkeit, können wir Die Wirklichkeit ändern." ³⁴

The object of their theatre is "Meisterung der Realität" ³⁵ from a communist standpoint, and to this end the depiction of reality on the stage must serve the changing of reality in real life. Brecht and Kroetz share a conception of Realism that envisages "die Abbildung der Wirklichkeit zum Zweck der Einflußnahme auf die Wirklichkeit" ³⁶.

As such, it is clear that in their basic attitude to theatre both dramatists have much in common. It is when we come to compare their attitudes to the artistic form necessary for the fulfilment of this political aim that divergences begin to arise.

Kroetz's early plays are marked by their extreme naturalistic approach, while Brecht wholeheartedly rejects this concept and evolves his own theory of "episches Theater". He sees the fundamental shortcoming of Naturalist theatre as residing in its purely descriptive nature:

"... einer, der einen Stein fallen läßt, hat noch

34. Brecht; Die Maßnahme, loc.cit., p.663.

35. Brecht; Formalismus, GW19, p.413.

36. Brecht; Hemmt die Benutzung des Modells die künstlerische Bewegungsfreiheit?, GW16, p. 716.

nicht das Fallgesetz dargestellt, noch einer, der den Fall eines Steins lediglich genau beschreibt." 37

Brecht demands from the theatre the laying bare of the laws behind the events depicted and the critical examination of these laws.

In a speech on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Brecht's death in 1976, Kroetz acknowledges the wisdom of this judgement: "Der neue Realismus -- also von Sperr bis meinetwegen Kroetz -- ist zu oft ein nur beschreibender Realismus!" 38 He continues to stress the need for a development to "sozialistischer Realismus", as Brecht envisaged it:

"Wir zeitgenössischen Dramatiker müssen von ihm lernen, daß es nicht genug sein kann, meinethalben engagiert and leidenschaftlich zu be-schreiben und nur darzustellen, was man vorfindet, den eigentlichen Prozess der Veränderung durch Entwicklung aber aus dem Drama hinauszuverlagern, sozusagen darauf zu spekulieren, daß der Zuschauer von allein draufkommen würde, zu sehen, daß die ihm vorgetragenen Zustände so unhaltbar seien." 38

Once more the two dramatists appear to be in agreement. But while one can define the concept of "Socialist Realism" fairly clearly in terms of function, it remains to be seen if it can be reduced to a single set of dramaturgical rules. Consider Brecht's famous definition:

"Realistisch heißt: den gesellschaftlichen Kausal-komplex aufdeckend/ die herrschenden Gesichtspunkte als die Gesichtspunkte der Herrschenden entlarvend/

37. Brecht; Der Messingkauf, GW16, p.517.

38. Kroetz; "Zu Bertolt Brechts 20. Todestag", in kürbiskern, H1/1977.

vom Standpunkt der Klasse aus schreibend, welche für die dringendsten Schwierigkeiten, in denen die menschliche Gesellschaft steckt, die breitesten Lösungen bereit hält/ das Moment der Entwicklung betonend/ konkret und das Abstrahieren ermöglichend." 39

As a statement of the goal of Socialist Realism this is clear enough, but it does little to clarify the question of the form this theatre must take. Brecht's own attempts to realise his aim evince a variety of forms and varying degrees of success. The "Lehrstücke", for which he held such high hopes, are not only emotionally sterile and unpalatable, but also met with widely diverging interpretations that raise the question of their political usefulness. The parable form of Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe made its subject matter seem unreal through simplification and contrived abstraction. Mutter Courage left audiences with the same feeling of helplessness and resignation as does Männersache. Die Mutter, regarded by many as a high point in Brecht's career, is an arid tract with negligible mobilising power and was furthermore greeted on its first appearance with marked disapproval in official communist circles. Die heilige Johanna der Schlachthöfe is an exciting experiment in form, but it remains strangely schematic in performance, a vehicle for a theory rather than its dynamic demonstration.

Brecht insisted that his new epic theatre was the

39. Brecht; Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus, GW19, p.326.

appropriate dramatic vehicle for the transport of his political ideas, but the practice of political theatre tends to blur boundaries in this formal taxonomy. Edward Bond describes his Early Morning as Socialist Realism, Brecht says the same of Die Mutter, and Kroetz of Stallerhof. The elasticity of the definition doubtless accommodates other plays and approaches, and warns against reducing it to fit a single set of formal rules. As Brecht himself points out in his Schriften zur Literatur it would be unreasonable to expect the concept of Realism to be a constant. The Realism of Dos Passos is inevitably not the Realism of Balzac, and both should be measured, not against each other, but against the reality they describe. In the same way, Kroetz's Realism should not be judged by comparison with Brecht's Realism.

Nevertheless, there are two significant criticisms of an excessively naturalistic approach to which Kroetz ought to give serious attention. Firstly, such a technique runs the risk of being merely descriptive, and therefore politically ineffectual. Secondly, and more significantly in the present context, the restricted scope of the segment of reality depicted does not allow for a criticism of the society as a whole. In Kroetz's case this reproach is particularly relevant because of his preference for "extreme" cases. In his own words, his intended social criticism is

emasculated:

"weil die Beispiele, an denen allgemeingesellschaftliche Mängel angeprangert werden, immer an Extremen abgehandelt werden." 40

Kroetz brings this into direct relation to Brecht when he acknowledges in his "Brecht-Rede" that his early models, Ödön von Horváth and Marieluise Fleißer, can no longer satisfy his dramatic needs. In another context he elaborates on this conclusion:

"Vor allem um den kleinen und (in den Figuren) kleinsten Bereich meiner Stücke zu verlassen und mehr gesellschaftliche Zusammenhänge, mehr Hintergründe, also größere Flächen zeigen zu können, bedarf es des Brecht." 41

It is this latter problem of broadening the social context that causes Kroetz the greater difficulties. The reproach of mere descriptiveness is less penetrating: strictly speaking, it is unlikely that any dramatic reproduction of a segment of reality can be regarded as merely descriptive, as the process is of necessity selective and stylised. In Kroetz's case, however, this can be seen as "ein nur beschreibender Realismus" insofar as it concentrates on the accuracy of the depiction of the characters and their situation. Rolf-Peter Carl accurately describes Kroetz's early plays as being concerned with the limited goal:

"... Wirklichkeit -- auf einen überschaubaren Ausschnitt reduziert -- abzubilden. Der 'Realismus'

40. Kroetz; WA, p.587.

41. Kroetz; WA, p.571.

seiner ersten Dramen liegt in der Stimmigkeit der Bestandaufnahme, in dem Entwurf von Charakteren und Verhaltensweisen aus einer Kenntnis erster Hand, nicht in der Offenlegung von Zusammenhängen, der Aufdeckung von Zwängen, dem Freilegen von Strukturen." ⁴²

Stallerhof, to take a random example, is perturbingly effective in portraying the frustration and loneliness of the farmhand Sepp, the isolation and helplessness of Beppi, the resentment of Staller and Stallerin. On a human level, it is upsettingly clear why Sepp and Beppi clutch at the shreds of affection and security they afford each other, and why Beppi's parents oppose this relationship. What is lacking is the wider social perspective of the characters and their situation. Kroetz has shown the falling stone, but not explained the law of gravity.

Nevertheless, he remains reluctant to deny his early plays all possibility of political efficacy, expressing his faith in the belief that the confrontation with a realistically depicted segment of reality must affect the audience in some way. And while he later acknowledges his reservations about this claim, it is not completely unfounded.

If it is true that Kroetz's early, more naturalistic plays do not in themselves explain social circumstances and processes, it is also true that they aim at provoking "Denkanstöße" in the audience, and that this is the first

42. Carl; Zur Theatertheorie des Stückeschreibers Franz Xaver Kroetz, in TEXT + KRITIK, loc.cit., p.2.

step to analysing and understanding the situation depicted. Rather than provide explicit social analysis, these plays draw attention to social conditions by powerfully evoking the plight of various oppressed members of the West German "Leistungsgesellschaft". Their political efficacy lies in the strength of this provocative appeal. In a review of Wunschkonzert Clara Mengk speaks of a theatre "das nur aufzeigen, aufmerksam machen will"⁴³, but it is by no means clear that this derogatory "nur" is justified.

Brecht himself concedes the possibility of the practical political usefulness of this sort of theatre, which he refers to broadly as "aristotelische Dramatik". He recalls the celebrated public response to Friedrich Wolf's Zyankali, which achieved:

"... den großen Erfolg, daß die proletarischen Frauen, die es gesehen hatten, eine gemeinsame Aktion veranstalteten und erreichten, daß die Krankenkassen nunmehr die Bezahlung von Verhütungsmitteln übernahmen. Dieser Fall, der nicht der einzige, nur der deutlichste ist, den ich kenne, zeigt, daß diejenigen nicht recht haben, die befürchten, es würden durch Stücke aristotelischer Bauart zwar soziale Impulse erzeugt, aber auch gleich wieder verbraucht."⁴⁴

At the start of his career at least, Kroetz sympathises with this view of the potential emotional effect of his plays on the audience, who are thereby shaken into political action. This is compatible with his own estimation of the

43. Mengk, Clara; "Naturalismus bis zum bitteren Ende", in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 13/03/73.

44. Brecht; Über praktikabel definierte Situationen in der Dramatik, GW15, p.248.

driving force which led him to write plays in the first place. A study of his work will, Kroetz claims, lead to the conclusion:

"... daß das soziale Engagement, das in ihnen steckt, nicht aus einer gesellschaftlichen Analyse des Autors kommt, sondern aus Erschrecken und Zorn über die Zustände, wie sie sind." 45

It is the same anger which Männersache, Hartnäckig and the rest of these early plays seek to engender in the audience. Kroetz strives to spread political awareness through the arousal of anger, indignation, compassion.

In this respect Kroetz's attitude appears to differ substantially from that of Brecht, who, for example, posits the following responses to be expected from the respective audiences of "traditional" and "epic" theatre:

Der Zuschauer des dramatischen Theaters sagt: Ja, das habe ich auch schon gefühlt. -- So bin ich. -- Das ist nur natürlich. -- Das wird immer so sein. -- Das Leid dieses Menschen erschüttert mich, weil es keinen Ausweg für ihn gibt. -- Das ist große Kunst: da ist alles selbstverständlich. -- Ich weine mit den Weinenden, ich lache mit den Lachenden.
Der Zuschauer des epischen Theaters sagt: Das hätte ich nicht gedacht. -- So darf man es nicht machen. -- Das ist höchst auffällig, fast nicht zu glauben. -- Das muß aufhören. -- Das Leid dieses Menschen erschüttert mich, weil es doch einen Ausweg für ihn gäbe. -- Das ist große Kunst: da ist nichts selbstverständlich. -- Ich lache über den Weinenden, ich weine über den Lachenden." 46

However, apart from the references to the emotions themselves, Kroetz's demands of his audience would be

45. Kroetz; WA, p.589.

46. Brecht; Das epische Theater, GW15, p.265.

similar, if not identical, to those Brecht makes of "der Zuschauer des epischen Theaters". Like Brecht, his aim is that the audience be shaken into awareness of an unjust social situation which can and must be changed. Both aspire to a critical response, but where Brecht's theatre appeals "nicht so sehr an das Gefühl, sondern mehr an die Ratio des Zuschauers" ⁴⁷, Kroetz recognises the mobilising power of the emotional appeal. Kroetz would not object if his audience wept along with the weeping actor, a goal which Brecht contemptuously dismisses. However, Kroetz does not aim to provoke tears for their own sake, but as an emotional trigger to set off a practical reaction. To borrow Brecht's words, he strives to provoke tears, anger, frustration as "sozial produktiven Emotionen" ⁴⁸. He recognises the practical value of emotional identification: "Echtes Mitleid ist der Motor für Hilfe." ⁴⁹

This question of the dramatic value of emotional identification is the second major point on which Kroetz and Brecht markedly differ. However, again there are significant points of agreement. For example, when Brecht reproaches the Aristotelian concept of drama for evoking pity and fear for the purpose of catharsis -- "die

47. Brecht; Betrachtung über die Schwierigkeiten des epischen Theaters, GW15, p.132.

48. Brecht; Kleines Privatissimum für meinen Freund Max Gorelik, GW15, p.471.

49. Kroetz; WA, p.575.

Reinigung des Zuschauers von Furcht und Mitleid durch die Nachahmung von furcht- und mitleidserregenden Handlungen" 50 --

Kroetz would certainly agree. For him, the evocation of any emotion is a means to a practical end. As Michael

Töteberg writes:

"Mitleid ist für Kroetz -- im ausdrücklichen Gegensatz zu Brecht -- eine erste, unreflektierte Vorstufe zum politischen Bewußtsein." 51

For Brecht, "Mitleid" is a self-consuming firework.

It prevents the adoption of an analytical attitude. Identification with Lear's anger means we cannot see it, firstly, as misguided and, secondly, as changeable. Furthermore, compassion for the plight of an individual character is counter-productive; the tears that we shed consume our energy and thus preclude us from critical, political action.

Such argumentation, however, is specious. It is a nonsense to presume that the human response can be divided so conveniently into "Gefühl" and "Ratio". Any such theoretical compartmentalisation collapses like a house of cards in practice. While Brecht recognises this, especially in his later theoretical writings, and despite his recurrent insistence that his theatre does not deny the importance of emotions, he never satisfactorily reconciles the two. It is also interesting that two of his most powerful plays

50. Brecht; Kritik der "Poetik" des Aristoteles, GW15, p.240.

51. Töteberg; "Wohin das Mitleid führt. Agnes Bernauer von Franz Xaver Kroetz", in TEXT + KRITIK, loc.cit., p.33.

are the "Aristotelian" Furcht und Elend des dritten Reichs and Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar, both of which rely heavily for their effect on the evocation of "Mitleid" in the sense of Kroetz's words, as a "Motor für Hilfe".

In his interviews and polemical writings, as well as in his plays, Kroetz shows little respect for Brecht's rather wholesale condemnation of the non-political nature of "Mitleid". He expresses this concisely in his essay on Die Maßnahme:

"Die Einsicht in die Verhältnisse, denen Menschen ausgesetzt sind, führt zur Anteilnahme, diese äußert sich im Mitleid -- zuerst." ⁵²

His final warning word makes clear that he is aware that the generation of compassion in the audience is not enough on its own; but Kroetz recognises its vital "Sprengkraft" and accepts that this can be used as a means to his political ends.

It is perhaps not too far-fetched here to recall Brecht's injunction that it is not enough to use the theatre to transport information and transmit enlightenment, but that it must also arouse "die Lust am Erkennen" ⁵³. The generation of compassion provides this crucial element of motivation that mobilises the desire to take political action.

The compassion awakened in the audience by Wunschkonzert

52. Kroetz; WA, p.575.

53. Brecht; "Katzgraben"-Notate. Politik auf dem Theater, GW16, p.774.

hungers for explanations for Fräulein Rasch's disturbing suicide gesture. It is simply not true that "Mitleid" uselessly consumes energy in a vacuum, or that feelings can be isolated from the intellect. It is a person with an impoverished emotional life who can sit through this play only to go home after the performance emotionally spent, but without asking why Fräulein Rasch swallows ten sleeping tablets.

Brecht suggests that the theatre should attempt to replace the traditional emotional responses of "Furcht" and "Mitleid" by "Wissensbegierde" and "Hilfsbereitschaft".⁵⁴ Yet he never explains why either should preclude the other. There is no reason why anyone should be moved by Fräulein Rasch's fate without wanting equally strongly to understand it and help those like her in real life. Brecht's conception of compassion is an unnaturally restricted one.

By the same token, however, it would be unrealistic for Kroetz to defend the dramatic value of "Mitleid" without being aware of its limitations. First of all, it again raises the question of the restricted political efficacy of "Denkanstöße" as measured against that of explanatory depiction and analysis. Concentration on the arousal of compassion at the expense of the delineation of "die größeren, abstrakten, gesellschaftlichen

54. Brecht; Über experimentelles Theater, GW15, p.301.

Zusammenhänge" ⁵⁵ may tell the audience something about social effects, but it says little about social causes. To use Brecht's terminology, theatre that aims to achieve its effect through "Mitleid" might enable us to experience "Erlebnisse", but it does not enable us to arrive at "Urteile". ⁵⁶ The social perspective is blurred, and consequently, as Rolf Michaelis writes of Stallerhof in particular, the effect of Kroetz's plays is to produce "weniger eine Anklage als eine Klage" ⁵⁷.

A second shortcoming of Kroetz's evocation of "Mitleid" is conditioned directly by the extreme in his characters. Confronted with the helpless Beppi the audience could conceivably be emotionally so disturbed that the desired progression from compassion to analysis does not take place. Alternatively, the audience's emotions are indeed aroused, but not in the intended form of compassion. When Sepp masturbates on the toilet in Stallerhof our immediate reaction is not identification with his loneliness and frustration; rather do we recoil in a combination of shame, embarrassment and disgust at seeing the farmhand's most private activities being laid before us with such frankness. As Paul Kruntorad observes: "Zeitweise fühlt man sich in

55. Kurzenberger, Hajo; "Negativ-Dramatik, Positiv-Dramatik", in TEXT + KRITIK, loc.cit., p.12.

56. Brecht; Aufbau der Figur, GW15, p.399.

57. Michaelis, Rolf; "Tragödienstadel", in Theater heute, Heft 8, August 1972.

die Rolle eines Voyeurs versetzt." ⁵⁸ This sensation of being an intruder at the keyhole and witnessing such private affairs creates an emotional turmoil and forces us to switch off our critical attention.

A third counter-productive effect of the generation of emotional involvement derives from the fact that, while the characters and situations depicted may succeed in evoking our compassion, the element of the extreme in the portayal may simultaneously give rise to a sense of hopelessness: the plays produce apathy instead of action. As Kroetz himself warns, his depiction of the extreme runs the risk of generating:

"... ein derart passives und negatives Bild, daß es die, die es angeht, viel zu sehr deprimieren könnte, um noch eine Lösungsmöglichkeit anzubieten." ⁵⁹

The best example of this can probably be seen in the extremely pessimistic Männersache.

In all these cases the political usefulness of the evocation of compassion is substantially undermined; it is by no means "der Motor für Hilfe" ⁶⁰ which Kroetz envisages. It also fails to satisfy the conditions under which Brecht is willing to sanction what he calls the Aristotelian emotions of pity and fear, namely: "jene Zustände unter

58. Kruntorad, Paul; "Späte Uraufführung:Geisterbahn von Kroetz in Wien", in Theater heute, Heft 12, Dezember 1975.

59. Kroetz; in: Maus, Sibylle; "Wenn sie wenigstens tot wäre", in Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 07/03/73.

60. Kroetz; WA, p.575.

den Menschen zu beseitigen, wo sie voreinander Furcht und miteinander Mitleid haben müssen." ⁶¹ In brief, such emotional involvement is non-political in effect: it does nothing to indicate or encourage the possibility and necessity of change.

This leads directly to the question of the revelation of the positive perspective, a third area of dramatic form in which Kroetz and Brecht show divergent opinions.

In terms of function, the positive perspective is part and parcel of Brecht's conception of Socialist Realism, whose goal it is:

"... solche Abbildungen der Wirklichkeit zu geben, daß die abgebildete Wirklichkeit 'meisterbar' [wird]." ⁶²

In terms of dramatic form, however, Brecht's attitude is more ambiguous. Inspired by Mutter Courage, the dramatist Friedrich Wolf challenged Brecht as to the desirability of the positive perspective:

"Denn da wir beide mit den Mitteln der Bühne die Menschen weiterbringen -- verändern wollen, ist die Wandlung des Menschen auf der Bühne und im Bewußtsein des Zuschauers ja das Endziel." ⁶³

Brecht, however, posited the reasonable objection that the first of these criteria is by no means essential, provided the latter is satisfied.

Brecht's plays confirm that he does not rigidly equate

61. Brecht; Der Messingkauf, loc.cit., p.526.

62. Brecht; Über Filmmusik, GW15, p.490.

63. Wolf, Friedrich; "Formprobleme des Theaters aus neuem Inhalt", in Dramen, Röderberg-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1979, p.475.

a "positive" play with a "positive" outcome. Against the exemplary "Lernvorgang" of Die Mutter or Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar we have Trommeln in der Nacht, in which the "Heimkehrer" Kragler turns his back on the Spartacists and the revolution to settle for the comfort and security of married life. Only in the final scene does Furcht und Elend des dritten Reichs offer constructive resistance to the evil spread of Nazism; the rest of its scenes merely record aspects of its cruelty and injustice. The rise of Arturo Ui is not stopped. The revolutionaries fail in Die Tage der Commune.

One must therefore be careful when deciding precisely what Brecht means when he advocates the need for plays which move out of "dem Stadium, in dem sie die Welt interpretieren helfen, in das Stadium, in dem sie sie verändern helfen" ⁶⁴. Which mother teaches us more -- Wlassowa or Courage?

In Kroetz's earlier plays it is only in Lieber Fritz that we encounter a positive gesture in Fritz's determination to tackle the problem of re-integrating himself in society, and not until Oberösterreich that we see the first real glimmer of hope for the future in Heinz's and Anni's decision to have the baby. Even in these two cases, however, the positive perspective is anything but a concrete

64. Brecht; Thesen über die Aufgabe der Einfühlung in den theatralischen Künsten, GW15, p.246.

possibility.

Otherwise Kroetz's early plays are uniformly and deeply pessimistic. Wildwechsel, Heimarbeit, Männersache and Geisterbahn end in murder or killing, Wunschkonzert in a suicide gesture, Michis Blut in the wait for death after an improvised abortion attempt, Dolomitenstadt Lienz with the three cell-mates locked in the vicious circle of petty crime and punishment, Hartnäckig with the threat of violent revenge from the disinherited and discarded Helmut on his father. It is a disturbing catalogue of misery.

As such, these plays do not seem to satisfy the criteria of Socialist Realism, insofar as their general tendency is to depict social circumstances in a fatalistic light. But Kroetz, like Brecht, does not view this as being inconsistent with his avowed goal of political change:

"Möglicherweise erzeugt die Kraft der Tragödie, die Gewalt des Scheiterns, im Zuschauer mehr Widerstandskraft, ein Das-hätt-ich-mir-nicht-gefallen-Lassen, das ist ja unglaublich, nein, so kann es nicht sein." 65

Elsewhere he explicitly compares the "positive" potential of his "negative" technique to that of the seemingly more straightforward delineation of a "Lernvorgang":

"Ist es vielleicht gar so, daß über die Katharsis des Vorlebens von diesen großen Tragödien die Leute zu mehr Widerstandskraft kommen als durch diese gradlinige Beschreibung einer positiven Reaktion? ... es muß sich doch zeigen, was mehr auslöst, ob

65. Kroetz; in Reinhold, Ursula; "Interview mit Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Weimarer Beiträge, 5/76, p.52.

das private Schicksal, das furchtbar traurig endet, nicht letztlich mehr bewirkt, das weiß man ja nicht, darüber gibt es keine Untersuchung, daß die Leute 'rausgehen und sagen: Da siehst Du es, das ließen wir uns nie gefallen! Vielleicht sind sie so positiver verändert als wenn sie sehen, ah, Menschenkinder, der ist gut, und dann überhaupt nichts mehr tun." 66

Kroetz believes in the mobilising effect of an accurately and powerfully depicted disaster. The political power of a "negative" play rests not within the structure of the play itself, but in its activist appeal. As in Mutter Courage or Zyankali, the negative outcome in Kroetz's early plays gives birth to positive insight and action. In this respect, Kroetz demonstrates the validity of Brecht's assertion in Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks:

"Es braucht sich keineswegs nur um die Wiedergabe gesellschaftlich positiv zu bewertender Handlungen und Haltungen zu handeln; auch von der (möglichst großartigen) Wiedergabe asozialer Handlungen und Haltungen kann erzieherische Wirkung erwartet werden." 67

In this question of the positive perspective, therefore, it can be seen that Brecht and Kroetz ultimately occupy similar standpoints, although Brecht is probably more insistent on the need for "positive" events and characters. As he warns: "Das Unglück allein ist ein schlechter Lehrer." 68

66. Kroetz; "'Wenn das Theater Machtverhältnisse zeigt, ohne Menschen zu zeigen, ist es für mich uninteressant'. Gespräch mit Franz Xaver Kroetz. Exklusiv für die horen", in die horen, Heft 92, 4 Winter 1973.

67. Brecht; Zur Theorie des Lehrstücks, GW17, p.1024.

68. Brecht; Formprobleme des Theaters aus neuem Inhalt, GW17, p.1148.

Given the excessively pessimistic picture created by Kroetz's preference for extreme cases, it is clear that this reservation applies even more strongly to his own work.

Mindful of this, he concedes the need "Wege zu zeigen, die weiterführen" ⁶⁹. While remaining sceptical of oversimplifications -- "Positives Stück --- positive Menschen, das ist mir zu simpel" ⁷⁰ -- he recognises the value of a more positive approach in his writing. By presenting characters who are capable of self-development, Kroetz will be able to encourage the audience to learn the same lesson as is learnt on the stage.

Nevertheless, he remains aware of the danger of the pendulum swinging too far in the other direction and producing a Marxism-by-numbers kit with no relation to reality:

"Toll progressive Stücke gibt es -- dramatisierte Leitartikel, der ganze Lenin brav aufgeteilt, und das Ganze so unrealistisch, falsch und fad, daß ich keine fünf Zeilen davon lesen mag." ⁶⁹

For Kroetz, it is misguided to set up an artificial, black-and-white division between positive and negative. To present either at the exclusion of the other is to give an unrealistically one-sided reflection of reality:

"Eine fatalistische Grundeinstellung zu Mensch und Gesellschaft läuft dem sozialistischen Realismus zuwider, das ist klar und jedermann verständlich, aber zwischen dem verachtenden Fatalismus, der Schwarzmalerei und der positiven Grundeinstellung, dem Vertrauen, ja der Gewißheit der Veränderung

69. Kroetz; WA, p.601.

70. Kroetz; WA, p.606.

gibt es viele Schattierungen des Herantastens, der Hilflosigkeit, der Verzweiflung, des Hoffens, die sehr wohl in den Bereich des sozialistischen Realismus fallen." ⁷¹

Kroetz's literary problem is to find this happy medium.

Whether or not one conducts such an explicit comparison with Brecht, the conclusions thus reached can profitably be applied to an analysis of Kroetz's literary development. To increase the political efficacy of his plays Kroetz has to modify the extreme Naturalism of his early work in three respects.

Firstly, he has to ensure that his depiction of reality achieves more than "ein bloßes Herzeigen ohne kritische Funktion" ⁷². Kroetz must transcend this photographic realism to make reality transparent, to produce plays that are "Modell und nicht photographisches Abbild" ⁷³. In this way, the laws governing the events in his plays can be understood as historical phenomena.

Secondly, he has to ensure that his appeal to the audience does not take place on an emotional level alone. The plays must also appeal to the critical, political consciousness of those who witness them.

Finally, he has to encourage the audience to recognise

71. Kroetz; "Zu Bertolt Brechts 20. Todestag", in kürbiskern, H1/1977.

72. Panzner; op.cit., p.36.

73. Carl, op.cit., p.82.

the positive action necessary to change the oppressive circumstances depicted in his plays. The emphasis must be shifted away from the fatalistic resignation of "Personen ohne Schicksalsfähigkeit"⁷⁴ to the delineation of a situation from which the audience, if not necessarily the characters themselves, can learn.

Kroetz recognises the terms of this threefold demand, but he remains understandably reluctant to implement them without reservation. It would be wasteful for him to sacrifice those elements of his dramatic talent which he exercises with the most skill, solely in the attempt to satisfy such criteria at all costs. An indication of the consequences of this approach can be found by examining the "Agitpropstück" Münchner Kindl.

Kroetz later refers to this play as "ein sehr brauchbares Stück, mit vielen Mängeln"⁷⁵, but the fact that he has never again attempted a similar venture -- the projected play KPD lebt! has never materialised -- suggests that he has considerable reservations about the usefulness of this technique.

To achieve greater transparency in his depiction of reality, Kroetz provides explicit statistical data about the unequal distribution of property and wealth in the

74. Panzner, op.cit., p.12.

75. Kroetz; in: Reinhold, Ursula; "Interview mit Franz Xaver Kroetz", loc.cit., p.54.

Federal Republic of Germany; to counteract the appeal to the emotions created by the solid, flesh-and-blood figures of the worker family, the pensioner and the old lady who is forbidden to keep a dog in her miserable little flat, Kroetz presents us with completely two-dimensional puppet characters who cannot possibly interest us as human beings and serve only to appeal to our intellect as mouthpieces for socially relevant information; to inspire hope for the future and to provide guidelines for action, the play ends with a number of suggestions for a course of defensive action and the urgent cry to take it. As such the three criteria suggested above have been met.

Nevertheless, Münchner Kindl is not a success. As Curt Hohoff warns: "je dicker der Zeigefinger, desto magerer das Drama"⁷⁶. Kroetz has not redressed the balance between emotional appeal and intellectual stimulation, between artistic form and political comment: he has merely weighted the scales in the favour of the latter. He has indeed removed the element of the extreme, but without replacing it by anything that will sustain the audience's interest; he has failed to arouse "die Lust am Erkennen"⁷⁷.

Kroetz's mistake in this "Agitpropstück" was to try

76. Hohoff, Curt; "An der Sprachlosigkeit entlang. Das Theater des Franz Xaver Kroetz", in Merkur, Heft 2, Februar 1976.

77. Brecht; "Katzgraben"-Notate. Politik auf dem Theater, GW16, p.774.

to broaden the political perspective at the expense of the profound compassion for the suffering of his characters. The real nature of his literary dilemma is the integration of his political statement into his powerful and accurate portrayal of living human fates.

In this respect, an interesting parallel might be drawn with a literary genre popular in Germany some forty or fifty years earlier and sharing the same burning interest for the political situation of the day: the "Zeitstück".

The majority of these "Zeitstücke" are now known only to literary historians. The few whose names have survived -- such as Zyankali, §218, Revolte im Erziehungshaus -- remain seldom performed today. Their relevance seems to have vanished with the decline in actuality of the various issues they deal with. It is conceivable that Kroetz's plays will meet a similar fate for the same reason.

It is likely, for example, that the "Dokumentarstücke" of the 1960s will lapse into oblivion like the "Zeitstücke", with the exception of a similar handful of examples. Already such notable plays as Weiss's Vietnam Diskurs and Kipphardt's In der Sache J. Robert Oppenheimer have lost much of their power with the passage of time. Of course, the writers of the documentary theatre were writing specifically for a contemporary audience with little claim to eternal validity, as were Wolf, Crédé, Lampel and the other exponents of the

"Zeitstück". As the name implies in both cases, the immediate aim was short-term political effect and comparatively little attention was paid to long-term literary recognition.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that a number of these "Zeitstücke" have transcended their particular "zeitgebundene" function to stand as acceptable dramas in their own right, although the power generated by the social actuality of the content has necessarily diminished greatly. Wolf's Zyankali is probably dramatically the most effective of these plays.⁷⁸

Its lasting vitality is due not least to the persistent relevance of its theme -- as probably applies also to the appeal of Kipphardt's Oppenheimer play to present-day audiences. Yet this alone is not enough to explain its survival. What makes Zyankali, of a number of plays dealing with abortion, remain a dramatically compelling play after fifty years is its successful integration of a personal fate and its larger political context. Interest in the character is allied to interest in the political circumstances which shape his development. Wolf, like his legendary contemporary and colleague of Brecht, Erwin

78. Hochhuth's Der Stellvertreter is perhaps the most likely candidate to represent a parallel among the plays of the documentary theatre.

Piscator, recognised the importance of the appeal to emotional sensibility which Kroetz was to employ to the same ends half a century later. Günther Rühle describes the function of the "Zeitstück" as being:

"... den Zustand zu beschreiben, zu informieren und aufzuklären, zu enthüllen und das Interesse der Zuschauer für das Zukünftige zu aktivieren." 79

But where other "Zeitstückautoren", as well as Brecht, followed this goal by appealing largely to the intellect, Wolf and Piscator realised the potential in mobilising the emotions and sought to establish the "Einbettung eines Einzelschicksals in seinen Zeitzusammenhang" 80.

In a short note on the "Zeitstück" Brecht himself concedes the need not to lose sight of the human conflicts and fates through which a political statement is made and which prevent the presentation of the political conflicts from being "blutleer und schematisch" 81. The problem is how to achieve this balance of private and political conflicts so that neither side is stressed at the expense of the other.

Heinrich Leopold Wagner's Die Kindsmörderin, Hauptmann's Rose Bernd, Wolf's Zyankali and Kroetz's Stallerhof/Geisterbahn all deal with the theme of "Kindsnot", and

79. Rühle, Günther; "Das Zeitstück", in Theater in unserer Zeit, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1976, p.90.

80. ibid, p.104.

81. Brecht; Die Dialektik auf dem Theater. Zeitstücke, GW16, p.935.

all make a strong appeal to the emotional sensibility of the audience. But not until Wolf's play do we find a direct confrontation with the society in which the tragedy of the human fate takes place. Wagner and Hauptmann have written a "Klage", Wolf and Kroetz an "Anklage". The latter not only depict and lament, they attack the system that has bred the disaster: their theatre of portrayal becomes a theatre of demonstration and mobilisation.

The same integration of emotional appeal and intellectual criticism is achieved by another author from the same period as the "Zeitstück", whose plays, however, do not belong in the same category -- Ödön von Horváth, generally acknowledged as being the first exponent of what has come to be known as "das kritische Volksstück".

Horváth, like Sperr and Kroetz after him, clearly has nothing to do with Brecht's famous description of the "Volksstück" as "für gewöhnlich krudes und anspruchloses Theater"⁸². All three deal with the misery of the underprivileged in the cannibalistic capitalist system. Horváth's figures, like those of Kroetz, are "kleine, arme Würstchen"⁸³ struggling to survive; they possess a language of hand-me-downs and linguistic surrogates which is hopelessly inadequate for the task of dealing with the pressures of

82. Brecht; Anmerkung zum Volksstück, GW17, p.1162.

83. Kroetz; "Zwischen Angst und Narrenfreiheit. Der linke Bühnenautor Franz Xaver Kroetz zu seinen neuen Theaterstücken", in Vorwärts, 05/10/72.

reality and which leaves them victims of their environment.

Like Wolf's "Zeitstück", Horváth's "Volksstücke" appeal to both the emotions and the intellect. The audience is, for example, moved by Klostermeyer's desertion of Elisabeth in Glaube Liebe Hoffnung, but it also understands the pressure on his career and can explain his behaviour as a socially determined phenomenon. We might at first feel shocked by Elisabeth's embezzlement of DM 150,- from the "Präparator", but we soon learn why she had to act in this way. We are appalled by her suicide, but we understand the chain of practical events which brings it about. The emotional involvement mobilises our critical analysis and fuels our call for change.

In his study Qu'est-ce que la littérature? Sartre rejects the use of tears or arguments in isolation and proclaims the value of "un raisonnement qui masque un sanglot"⁸⁴. Horváth, Wolf and Kroetz have come to a similar conclusion, although in their case it would probably be more accurate to speak of "un sanglot qui masque un raisonnement". If superficial priorities have changed, the goal remains the same -- the fusion of emotional stimulation and critical analysis.

However, rather than try to categorise Kroetz by reference to past examples, it is more profitable to use these examples as parallels or guidelines to highlight

84. Sartre; op.cit., p.42.

the essence of Kroetz's dramatic technique in its own right. There are significant points of contact with and divergence from Brecht, the "Zeitstück" and "das kritische Volksstück" of Horváth and Fleißer, and these points can be used to arrive at a definition of Kroetz's theatre, or, more significantly, of the development in Kroetz's theatre in the effort to achieve greater political efficacy.

It has been suggested that Kroetz has reason to harbour reservations about the practical political effectiveness of his early plays on three grounds: his portrayal of reality has not been made transparent; the balance between the appeal to the emotions and to the intellect is unequal; the positive perspective is lacking.

It has also been suggested that Kroetz's portrayal of the extreme -- in the three fields discussed: violence, language and characters -- can be seen as a contributory factor in the restricted political impact of his plays. The violence shocks the audience into a state where it cannot adopt a critical attitude; the inarticulacy of the characters prevents Kroetz from letting them explain themselves as social phenomena; their situation on the fringe of the social landscape precludes them from representative value. In brief, the whole atmosphere of hopelessness created by Kroetz's austere Naturalism engenders resignation in the audience. His intention of enlightenment and his

activist appeal are neutralised.

An awareness of both these sets of problems has appreciably affected Kroetz's literary development. As we might expect, his later plays show a gradual process of moderation of the extreme, "um der größeren Verständlichkeit willen"⁸⁵, as Kroetz himself explains. As always, the literary vehicle is subordinate to the political intention.

The previous three chapters have dealt with the various ways in which Kroetz has toned down his depiction of the extreme and to what ends; at this point a summary can be drawn up.

The characters, beginning with Fräulein Rasch and the three cell-mates in Dolomitenstadt Lienz, have become more recognisable and closer to the accepted norm. This process is continued and intensified in Oberösterreich, Das Nest until Mensch Meier and Nicht Fisch nicht Fleisch. The result of this has been to highlight the social definition of the characters and thus to clarify the historical and social relevance of the plays.

The articulacy of the characters has increased in the same way. Rasch, Dengk and Schuster hover on the edge of articulacy, Heinz and Anni struggle to its dim beginnings, Kurt and Martha make the first faltering steps to insight,

85. Kroetz; WA, p.587.

Agnes Bernauer completes the journey to "Erkenntnis" and action. The availability of language thus permits the clearer indication of social circumstances and processes, as well as the introduction of the positive perspective.

Also in the field of language Kroetz abandons his hitherto rigid adherence to realistic dialogue alone. In Dolomitenstadt Lienz and Sterntaler he introduces "Songs" which allow him to speak directly to the audience. In Münchner Kindl and Die Wahl fürs Leben, he inserts statistical information that appeals explicitly to the audience's intellect. Both these measures serve, firstly, to clarify the social context and significance of the plays, and, secondly, to achieve "die Verhinderung einer folgenlosen Mitleidshaltung"⁸⁶ by providing factual data.

From Oberösterreich onwards Kroetz also makes use of what has above been termed the "transparency of language". While the characters themselves remain "sprachlos", the audience is able to penetrate to the real meaning of their words. For example, while Mama Distl adamantly defends the "Leistungsgesellschaft", we are able to see the attack on the inhumanity of this system which Kroetz is making through her words. Here again Kroetz is undermining the purely emotional appeal of his characters and forcing us to adopt a critical attitude to them, their

86. Carl; op.cit., p.74.

situation and their behaviour.

Violence also becomes less frequent from the time of Dolomitenstadt Lienz, in which it occurs on the level of the report of Oskar's "Rauferei" with the police and of his fantasy of punishing ten policemen. In Oberösterreich the murder takes place in a newspaper report, while in reality Heinz and Anni make the courageous decision to have their baby, despite the risks involved. A similar resistance to violence is demonstrated by Kurt in Das Nest, Agnes Bernauer and Martha and Ludwig Meier. This replacement of violence by insight makes possible the indication of the positive perspective. The audience is not only shown the predicament of the characters, but also encouraged to improve it.

In Die Wahl fürs Leben Kroetz successfully modifies the element of the extreme in all three fields of violence, language and characters, and thereby succeeds in answering the threefold criticism of inadequate specification of the social context, undue neglect of the appeal to the intellect, and fatalistic absence of the positive perspective.

The figures of Karli and his parents are drawn realistically and with compassion, but at the same time they are instantly recognisable in their social context. Identification with them goes hand in hand with awareness

of the social implications of their situation.

The articulacy of the characters and the provocatively inserted statistical data allow the social context to become transparent and understandable. At the same time, the data provide an explicitly intellectual appeal to the audience, thus complementing the emotional "Triebkraft" of the human interest in Karli and his parents.

Violence has been made redundant. It has been replaced by a "Lernprozess" presented in simple, realistic and convincing terms. The audience is shown the guidelines for positive action and, not least because of its identification with the characters, is encouraged to follow this example.

The balance has been achieved: Kroetz has succeeded in presenting the "Einbettung eines Einzelschicksals in seinen Zeitzusammenhang"⁸⁷ without loss either to his artistic principles or to his political commitment.

As has been suggested throughout this study, however, Kroetz has remained reluctant completely to abandon his interest in the extreme. The dramatic model epitomised by Die Wahl fürs Leben does not constitute the only way to achieve the aspired to balance of aesthetic and political effect. The essential qualities of this play on the

87. Rühle; loc.cit., p.104.

political level are its power to generate interest, to provide enlightenment and to call for change. It is possible to reproduce these qualities within a different dramatic form, one which does not discard the depiction of the extreme.

Of the three fields of violence, language and characters it is in his choice and portrayal of characters that Kroetz shows the most consistent concern for a moderation of the extreme. The later plays include no such vaguely defined figures as Otto in Männersache, Karl and Marie in Michis Blut, or Willy and Martha in Heimarbeit. Certainly, the characters remain "Außenseiter" and "Randerscheinungen", but in a socially recognisable manner. Frau Ruhsam is pushed to the side because she is deemed to be of no further use to the "Leistungsgesellschaft", which has neither time nor sympathy for the aged; the unmarried mother in Reise ins Glück is a social millstone. As a result of endowing the figures in his later plays with a more easily recognisable social status Kroetz avoids the twofold danger of their being interpreted as private tragedies on the one hand, and as irrelevant fringe appearances on the other.

In the case of language, the moderation of the extreme is less rigorous. Characters in the later plays display varying degrees of articulacy, from Heinz's vague form-

ulations of his hopes and fears to Agnes Bernauer's clear insight and decision to act. Other characters, however, remain sadly "sprachlos", even if, like Mama Distl, they appear to have gained in articulacy. Despite the words that pour from their mouths, neither the unmarried mother of Reise ins Glück nor Frau Ruhsam in Weitere Aussichten... can be said to be articulate. On the other hand, Hugo in Heimat does not even have the illusory compensation of this apparent articulacy; he remains every bit as "sprachlos" as the figures in the early plays, without insight into his situation and swept along by his environment like driftwood.

It is with regard to violence that Kroetz remains most reluctant to renounce his concern for extreme cases. Even Agnes Bernauer, despite its positive "Lernvorgang", contains a brutal rape scene. In Nicht Fisch nicht Fleisch, Kroetz's most recent play at the time of writing, Hermann's work-mates insert a pump into his anus and fill him full of air in response to all the hot air he emits in his political tirades. Clearly Kroetz does not subscribe to the view that the portrayal of violent acts is a deterrent to the generation of political awareness. This is in keeping with his continuing distrust of the equation between a positive outcome and a positive play. Kroetz believes that as long as the social context is accurately and powerfully con-

veyed and the characters are portrayed as rounded, flesh-and-blood figures with a definite social definition, the third prerequisite for the success of his theatre, the call to action, can find expression through the presentation of a "negative" plot seen through the eyes of a politically committed observer.

This is the second prototype that will enable Kroetz to achieve the happy balance between artistic form and political aim. Heimat, for example, presents Hugo and Nathalie as "lebendige, runde, widerspruchsvolle Menschen" ⁸⁸ and at the same time locates them firmly in a specific social landscape. Reality is made transparent so that the pressures placed on Hugo and Nathalie are made understandable as social phenomena. "Mitleid" is consciously aroused in the audience to activate its sympathy for the wretchedness of Hugo's and Nathalie's situation. The brutal beating of the little girl by her grandfather, the near tragedy of the "shoot-out" with the police, and the bleakly pessimistic ending of the play all contribute to the generation of indignation and rage in the audience and thence to a critical analysis of the social causes for their tragedy. The activist appeal of the negative outcome is as effective as the positive "Lernvorgang" exemplified by Die Wahl fürs Leben. The element of the extreme, part-

88. Brecht; Aus einem Brief an einen Schauspieler, GW16, p.731.

icularly in the case of violence, can effectively be used to evoke a critical, political response in the auditorium, and thus justifies its inclusion in Kroetz's politically oriented theatre.

Heimat and Die Wahl fürs Leben follow different routes to the same goal -- the mutual assimilation of human concern and political effect, or, in Kroetz's words, the solving of the problem:

"... emotional, politisch mit den Figuren voranzukommen, Aussagen zu vergrößern, also gesellschaftskritisch zu entwickeln, ohne dabei die Qualität der genauen Menschendarstellung, der unverkitteten Story, des Humors, der Liebe zu den Figuren vor allem zu verlieren." 89

These are not the only two plays in which Kroetz achieves this balance. To the "positive" group, of which Die Wahl fürs Leben is perhaps the most effective example, can be counted Oberösterreich, Ein Mann, ein Wörterbuch, Das Nest and Agnes Bernauer. To the "negative" group, of which Heimat is probably less effective than Sterntaler or Weitere Aussichten..., belongs also Reise ins Glück, which, because of its formal contrivance, is the least satisfactory of the four plays.

Mensch Meier, discussed in some detail at the start of this chapter, represents an interesting further development, the full significance of which can be better

89. Kroetz; WA, p.612.

appreciated at this point. It indicates the dramatically effective element of contrast by indicating both the negative and the positive aspects of the situation.

Kroetz follows his principle of presenting an "Auschnitt" endowed with representative value. He portrays the Meier family as tangible characters in a particular social context. This context is highlighted by the illustration of the effects which social pressures have on the Meiers' private lives. Through productive emotional identification with the characters the audience is encouraged to examine its own situation critically, in order to find the laws that govern the fall of the stone. The disturbing picture of the family's private life therefore creates both the incentive to understand -- "die Lust am Erkennen" ⁹⁰ -- and a frame of reference by which they can be understood.

Mensch Meier is also effective in satisfying the criterion of the positive perspective -- "nicht nur Abbilder zu geben, sondern auch Vorbilder" ⁹¹. At the same time as he enjoys the powerful activist appeal of the pessimistic outcome -- as illustrated by Otto's disintegration and failure to learn -- he also mobilises the constructive energy of the audience through the indication of a positive

90. Brecht; "Katzgraben"-Notate, GW16, p.774.

91. ibid., p.818.

course of action -- as illustrated by Martha's and Ludwig's "Lernvorgang". Otto's disturbing collapse serves only to underline this optimistic outcome.

The increased dimension of political efficacy enjoyed by Mensch Meier is achieved without the loss of any of the advantages of Kroetz's "naturalistic" theatre and without radically altering the structure of these early plays. He has succeeded in transforming his so-called "descriptive Realism" into what he himself terms "sozialistischen Realismus"⁹² without being unfaithful to his literary principles. His descriptions of reality remain as accurate as before, and the emotional appeal of his plays is unmitigated. Within this framework the extreme retains a significant place, albeit in certain respects in appreciably modified form. Kroetz retains these basic features and combines them with a greater concentration on wider social implications to create an emotionally and intellectually satisfying whole.

Writing some fifty years earlier, Erwin Piscator warns categorically of the dangers of descriptive theatre, irrespective of the strength of the political conviction of the author:

"Wir fassen das Theater nicht auf als einen Spiegel

92. Kroetz; "Zu Bertolt Brechts 20. Todestag", in kürbiskern, H1/1977.

der Zeit, sondern als ein Mittel, die Zeit zu verändern." ⁹³

In 1972 Hagmut Brockmann echoes Piscator's warning in his review of Wildwechsel, "Ein Spiegel erklärt nicht" ⁹⁴, and, although the explicit comparison with a mirror is not always present, it has been a recurrent criticism of Kroetz's plays, particularly of the early ones, that they fail to transcend this merely reproductive function.

Without accepting this view wholesale, it is clear that it contains much that is true. In the course of his literary career Kroetz has endeavoured to escape the restrictions imposed on him by his dramatic technique. As analysis of his later work shows, however, he has not so much abandoned his "Spiegelbilder der Gesellschaft" as he has endowed the mirror with powers greater than those of mere reflection. He has created a "Zauberspiegel".

It is the function of this "magic mirror", of which the extreme is an intrinsic part, to provide recognisable pictures of contemporary reality in such a way as to reveal the social laws that govern them, to make the audience emotionally and intellectually aware of the injustice of these laws, and to activate in the audience the desire to change the social system to eradicate this injustice and replace it by the justice of a humanitarian order based

93. Piscator; op.cit., p.175.

94. Brockmann, Hagmut; "Ein Spiegel erklärt nicht", in Spandauer Volksblatt, Berlin, 01/12/72.

on the principles of Marxism.

Kroetz's "Zauberspiegel" differs from a conventional mirror in a number of ways which enable him to realise his political goal:

Kroetz's mirror reflects not only external appearances, but also internal mechanisms.

Its reflection goes beyond the immediate spatial and temporal boundaries of its frame.

As a result of these two features, Kroetz's mirror depicts not states, but processes.

The picture reflected by the "Zauberspiegel" is not cool or disinterested, but passionate and aiming to arouse passion in those who look into it.

Its image is consequently not objective and impartial, but unmistakably "parteiisch".

The "Zauberspiegel" aims not only to reflect, but also to explain and activate.

While Mensch Meier stands as an effective example of the implementation of this "Zauberspiegel", two significant reservations remain. Firstly, it is by no means Kroetz's only successful play; secondly, it is not a perfect political play (assuming for the moment that such a thing exists).

In different ways a number of Kroetz's other plays effectively hold up the "magic mirror" to reality. Wunsch-

konzert is every bit as powerful as any of the later plays -- particularly in performance -- although its aim is less to provide explanation of social circumstances than to provoke the audience to look for such explanation. But, in effect, this is no less an achievement than that of the similarly effective play Die Wahl fürs Leben, which powerfully depicts a constructive "Lernvorgang". In terms of their effect upon the audience the two plays are comparable.

By the same token, the pessimistic Sterntaler is no less effective than the optimistic Das Nest; the "menschliche" portrayal of Frau Ruhsam in Weitere Aussichten... achieves no less than the "gesellschaftliche" depiction of Ernst Werdenfels; the inarticulacy of Karl and Marie imparts as much information to the audience as the statistical data of Münchner Kindl; the abortion, murder and masturbation in Heimarbeit arouse as much participation and initiative in the audience as the cool reasoning of Karli in Die Wahl fürs Leben.

The "Zauberspiegel" is not a rigid stencil. Within the framework of a basically realistic theatre Kroetz has considerable artistic freedom, which he can exploit without endangering his political efficacy.

At the same time, however, he has not achieved complete political efficacy. From Wildwechsel to Mensch Meier and beyond, Kroetz remains restricted by his inability to present

wider social circumstances and processes on the stage. He concedes this important limitation in his "Brecht-Gedenkrede", and at the end of 1979 acknowledges the cul-de-sac in which his inability to resolve it has landed him:

"Es ist die Form des realistischen Schreibens, aus der ich keinen Ausweg finde. Es fehlt mir an einer, wie auch gearteten, neuen Ästhetik. Ich lande immer wieder beim Wohnküchen-Gasherdd-Realismus, der ja schon immer eine Tendenz zum Naturalismus hatte." ⁹⁵

In practical terms this means that his theatre is inevitably rooted in the realm of the private, familial, which prevents him from exercising wider, specifically political comment:

"Ein Beispiel: Ich wollte etwas schreiben über das Aussterben des wichtigen, traditionsreichen Berufs der Drucker und Setzer. Und dabei stellte ich fest: Ich rutschte immer wieder in mein Schema -- Vater, Mutter, Kind, Angst. Ich konnte den technischen Vorgang und das gesellschaftliche Umfeld nicht darstellen, es wurde klein und unfrei. Ich klebte zu sehr an naturalistischen Partikeln." ⁹⁵

While Kroetz is a master at showing the effects of social pressures on the private lives of members of the Federal Republic of Germany, he has not yet succeeded in demonstrating the actual workings of the social pressures, their abstract mechanics, nor in explaining the theory or laws which determine them. His brand of Realism is not even equal to the task of presenting char-

95. Kroetz; "Die Erotik ist zerbrochen. Warum Dramatiker Franz Xaver Kroetz keine Stücke mehr schreibt", in Abendzeitung, 22-23/12/79.

acters from another social class than that of the victims, despite his awareness that:

"Wenn ich über die Macht Aussagen machen will, muß ich die Mächtigen zum Reden bringen." 96

To offset his social underdogs, however, he has so far offered only the "Aufsteiger" Ernst Werdenfels, the Aunt Sally figures in Münchener Kindl and the equally bloodless puppet of the "Stadtrat" in Globales Interesse. In practice, Kroetz concentrates on the other side of the coin:

"... wenn das Theater Machtverhältnisse zeigt, ohne Menschen zu zeigen, dann ist es für mich uninteressant." 97

His persistent concern for the presentation of convincingly real human beings prevents him from adopting a more Brecht-oriented dramatic technique and thus seriously limits the extent of his political efficacy by shackling him in the realm of the kitchen.

In the above-mentioned interview in the Abendzeitung Kroetz announces that he has written enough plays -- rather a hasty judgement, in view of the appearance of Nicht Fisch nicht Fleisch and his work on Furcht und Hoffnung der BRD -- and has turned his attention to his novel, Der Mondschein-

96. Kroetz; WA, p.591.

97. Kroetz; "'Wenn das Theater Machtverhältnisse zeigt, ohne Menschen zu zeigen, ist es für mich uninteressant'. Gespräch mit Franz Xaver Kroetz. Exklusiv für die horen", in die horen, Heft 92, 4 Winter 1973.

knecht, in which he hopes to be able to overcome the shortcomings of his dramatic technique and gain access to a wider spectrum of possibilities for the expression of his political ideas.

The success of this conversion to prose is difficult to assess, as the novel suffers considerably from its lack of unity and the sporadic nature of its construction. It is more a collage of fragments than a satisfying whole. However this may be, and however Kroetz decides to employ his literary energies in the future, his efforts are doomed to meet with the same kind of critical backlash that has dogged his career up till now. The very nature of Kroetz's political persuasion substantially undermines his chances of effective political success. As a communist in the Federal Republic of Germany, he is fighting against daunting odds.

This study has attempted to concentrate on a predominantly literary analysis of Kroetz's work, with regard to the various dramatic techniques used in the attempt to engender political enlightenment and initiate political change. It is all very well to advance the concept of a "Zauberspiegel" as a form of Realist theatre which, by virtue of its consistent appeal to the emotions and its calculated use of "extreme" violence, language and characters, endeavours to raise a merely descriptive Realism

into a dynamic, aggressive "sozialistischen Realismus" ⁹⁸. It is unrealistic, however, to forget the practicalities of the political situation in which Kroetz lives and writes, and which renders his literary activity to a large extent politically ineffectual. In the final analysis, Kroetz's work requires judgement on the basis of its political effectiveness, as well as by virtue of its literary merits. The aim of providing enlightenment and inspiring change is ultimately a political goal, and the sad reality of Kroetz's position is that, despite the literary talent that he has persistently demonstrated, his plays are in all likelihood doomed to be reduced to what he himself, in reviewing a novel by August Kühn, called "Papier und gute Absicht" ⁹⁹.

Emile Zola remained at liberty to write twenty volumes in his cycle of novels attacking a diseased social system; it was not until his reaction to the Dreyfus affair was published by the press in the form of an open letter ("J'accuse") that he was sent to prison.

98. Kroetz; "Zu Bertolt Brechts 20. Todestag", in kürbiskern, H1/1977.

99. Kroetz; "Große Familie. Über Zeit zum Aufstehen von August Kühn", in Die Zeit, 10/10/75.

"Denn immer wieder muß gesagt werden, daß das politische Theater ein Mittel, und zwar ein sensibles Mittel innerhalb eines großen Prozesses ist, dem es zwar helfen, den es aber niemals ersetzen kann."

ERWIN PISCATOR ¹⁰⁰

100. Piscator; op.cit., p.243.

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The first section of the following bibliography lists all the works by Franz Xaver Kroetz published up to December 1983.

The remaining three sections are deliberately selective. To attempt an exhaustive bibliography of secondary sources would be a vain enterprise. Kroetz is a prolific writer and his works attract continued and widespread attention, such that the output of critical material, including his own comments in interviews, essays and articles, is constantly expanding. With regard to his earlier works, such secondary sources are adequately documented in the work by Evalouise Panzner and in the issue of TEXT + KRITIK devoted to Kroetz. Both these sources are specified in the third section of the present bibliography. With regard to information on more recent secondary sources, it is to be expected that this can be found in:

Franz Xaver Kroetz

Herausgegeben von Otto Riewoldt
Suhrkamp Taschenbücher Materialien
st 2034
Suhrkamp Verlag
Frankfurt am Main

This work is due for publication in January 1984.

The final three sections of the present bibliography therefore contain references only to sources mentioned in the thesis itself. References to Kroetz are arranged in chronological order; other sources are specified in alphabetical order.

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