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The Representation of Disability in Contemporary German Literature: From the GDR to Today, through Daniela Krien's 'Muldental' and Peter Stamm's 'All Days Are Night'

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Abstract

This paper explores the representation of disability in two contemporary German literary works. I will address the issues of identity, power and abuse, (in)tolerance and inclusion, and family dynamics while underscoring the concept of normalcy. 'Muldental' (2014), which is also the name of a district in North Saxony, Germany, is Daniela Krien's first work that brings to the fore physical disabilities: back in the GDR, the Stasi takes advantage of Hans' multiple sclerosis to put pressure on his wife who is forced to spy on people in return for which Hans, who, as an artist, works with his hands, will be provided with better medication. Years later, in the now-capitalist country, Hans copes with his new identity as a wheelchair-bound father and husband who is unable to care for his family. In the novel 'All Days Are Night' (2013), the beautiful, successful TV host Gillian loses her job following a car accident that leaves her disfigured and moves to a remote place in the Swiss mountains to start a new life: Peter Stamm forces the readers to reflect on internal oppression, what qualifies as a disability, and what is perceived as (un)acceptable by multifaceted societies.

The Representation of Disability in Contemporary German Literature: From the GDR to Today, through Daniela Krien's 'Muldental' and Peter Stamm's 'All Days Are Night'

The present paper focuses on the representation of disability in works by two writers of contemporary German literature, Peter Stamm and Daniela Krien. In German-speaking countries, there has been little attempt, so far, to include Disability Studies as a research topic in the field of German literature – or of Foreign Literature, generally speaking. One single conference on Disability Studies in the German-speaking world has occurred in the past few years – in Berlin, Germany, in 2018. This interdisciplinary conference shed light on the importance of a new understanding of the concepts of disability by reflecting on a more inclusive society. Davis' assessment that '[i]f disability appears in a novel, it is rarely centrally represented.' (Davis 2013: 9) gives rise to the question of what qualifies as a disability. Stamm's novels, for instance, may not be perceived at first glimpse as thematising disability if its understanding is reduced to physical impairment. As a researcher and teacher of Contemporary German Literature, I assert that there is an urgent need for embracing Disability Studies in the field of German Literature Studies. I believe Davis' statement that 'the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the university quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her.' (*ibid*) should be critically scrutinised. Ableism, above all, does appear in numerous contemporary literary works under its multi-faceted nature. My paper will show that both inclusion and discrimination are recurrent themes that run through Daniela Krien's 'Muldental' (2014) and Peter Stamm's 'All Days Are Night' (2013): both literary works make the readers reflect, among other things, on normalcy in relation to disability and the urgent need for a more inclusive society.

Particularly noticeable is that research on works of the successful German writer Peter Stamm from Switzerland, whose debut novel 'Agnes' was published in 1998, does not cover the topic of disability. This seems paradoxical as many of Stamm's characters suffer from mental disabilities, especially depression – the female character Agnes in the eponymous novel 'Agnes' appears to be one of them. The novel 'All Days Are Night', in German '*Nacht ist der Tag*,' is Stamm's only work which thematises first and foremost physical disability – through the disfigured female character Gillian. Unlike Stamm's, Krien's rise as a predominant writer of the German-speaking world is recent: she published her first novel 'Someday We'll Tell Each Other Everything', in German '*Irgendwann werden wir uns alles erzählen*'– that immediately became a best-seller translated into many languages – in 2012. As opposed to Krien's other literary works, 'Muldental' is not exactly a novel: it is rather a collection of ten stories. 'Muldental' is similar to Krien's first novel as far as the topics of life in the countryside and of the (collapse of the) GDR followed by the reunification of both parts of Germany are concerned. Like Krien's previous works, this collection of stories brings to the fore the topic of discrimination as a former GDR citizen struggling to adapt to capitalism in the reunified Germany. 'Muldental' is the first of Krien's works that underscores the topic of physical disability – the German word *Muldental* can be translated as *Valley of the Hollow* or *Valley of Depression*. Hans Novacek's multiple sclerosis is at the core of the opening story 'Muldental' of the eponymous collection of stories. Nevertheless, the reader must wait until the closing story 'Muldental II' to hear again about Hans: even though Hans' funeral is depicted in the opening story, the reader learns only in 'Muldental II' that the ill, disabled man actually died by suicide. Hans' son Thomas, from whose perspective the closing story is told, talks about major changes he and his mother Marie make 'after his suicide' (208)[i]. Krien's choice to enhance the topic of disability by dealing with it in the opening and closing stories of her first collection of stories may hide her long-lasting wish to represent disability through her literary

works due to her own experience with disability. In fact, Krien is the mother of a physically and mentally disabled child, which is why she decided to become a writer. According to her own words, the amount of time she spends caring for her child would not allow her to have a more conventional job (Lippitz and Prosinger 2019).

'Disability has long been studied within the applied health sciences, framed as a medical problem needing a medical solution.' (Vijayan 2021: 15). I will demonstrate that this perception of disability applies neither to Hans Navacek in 'Muldental' nor to Gillian in 'All Days Are Night'. Hence, the main similarities and differences regarding the way disability is represented as opposed to normalcy through Gillian's disfigurement and Hans Novacek's battle with multiple sclerosis will be focused on. The concept of (disrupted) identity will be explored in relation to the issues of power, abuse and dependency, (in)tolerance and inclusion, ableism with regard to employment, and family dynamics.

One major difference between the depiction of Hans Novacek in 'Mudental' and Gillian in 'All Days Are Night' is that, while there are many details about Gillian's life before the car accident that caused her disability, there is no scene showing Hans' life before his illness. Consequently, the emphasis is placed on Hans' loss of autonomy, his dependence on others, especially his wife Marie, and family dynamics. As opposed to Hans', Gillian's disability is less about dependency than about evolving from a beautiful young woman who works on TV and enjoys being looked at to a woman who suddenly feels the need to hide due to her injured face.

In the first part of the novel 'All Days Are Night', the story is told from Gillian's perspective while she is at the hospital after her car accident that left her disfigured: Gillian has to cope with her injured, painful body and with her face that no longer has a nose. When she is asked by a policewoman if she needs any psychological assistance, Gillian answers: 'I need a new nose' (27). Though Gillian is told that '[i]n six months there will be little or no trace' (6)

as her doctor explains to her the forthcoming nose operations and insists on the fact that '[p]lastic surgery has made great strides.' (7), Gillian experiences anxiety about her new identity and a kind of insecurity regarding the way she will be perceived by others. Her questioning shifts from 'What's left of me? And what is what's left more than a wound? Can it ever heal?' (19) to 'Will that be "me"?' (*ibid.*). This last question shows her fear of never being herself ever again concerning the issue of a disrupted identity. Academic research on the relationship between faces, disfigurement and identity illuminates a 'widespread tendency to equate facial appearance with "personal identity"' (Perpich 2010 in Martindale and Fisher 2019: 1504) as it is suggested that one person's face is 'the bearer of personal identity' (*ibid.*). Thus, the kind of disfigurement Gillian has to cope with causes her to feel that her identity has been weakened or damaged: 'She tried to bring the pain onto harmony with her face, to make one single image, but she couldn't do it. The picture was incomplete, the proportions didn't work.' (10). As she is waiting for her nose operation, she reaches the point where she simply cannot 'recognize herself in that flesh. She saw eyes, eyebrows, mouth, but they formed no whole.' (11). As Le Breton states, '[a]ny alteration of the face puts at stake the sense of identity. Disfigurement destroys the sense of identity of an individual who can no longer recognize himself or be recognized by others.' (Le Breton 2014 in Martindale and Fisher 2019: 1506). Furthermore, Carty *et al.* findings suggest that 'blind facial transplant recipients may adjust more easily after surgery, since they cannot see the results and the identity transfer, which is assumed to have taken place.' (Carty *et al.* 2012 in Martindale and Fisher 2019: 1504).

Rather than believing her doctor's praise of the magic of plastic surgery, Gillian reflects upon her future appearance: 'one day there would be a person with a different face, who would be her.' (22). As Barnes notes, one consequence of disability may be that one is perceived as 'abnormal and or somehow less than human' (Barnes 2020: 11), which is striking in one conversation Gillian has with her father, who tells her that even though after her first operation

'she could theoretically go home' (18), 'it's probably advisable to stay in the hospital until you're half' (*ibid*.). The last part of his sentence is clarified by Gillian: 'You mean until I look like a human being again?' (*ibid*.). Such psycho-emotional consequences of disability can be referred to as 'internal oppression' (Rieser 1990 in Barnes 2020: 11). Furthermore, the topics of (in)tolerance and discrimination are implicitly introduced by Gillian. Gillian is implying that she should not be seen with such an injured face: she may be suggesting that people would not want to see her, or, to go one step further, that she would be rejected by society because she does not look *normal*. According to Davis, '[t]he "problem" is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the 'problem' of the disabled person.' (Davis 2013: 1). This is to say that '[t]o understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body.' (*ibid.*). Davis insists on the fact that '[t]he idea of a norm is less a condition of human nature than it is a feature of a certain kind of society' (*ibid*.) and points out that 'the social process of disabling arrived with industrialization and with the set of practices and discourses that are linked to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation, and so on.' (*ibid.*).

During her stay at the hospital 'the only thing she could endure was the presence of the doctors and nurses' (17). Even after leaving the hospital, '[s]he didn't want to see any of her friends, no one she had known from before, who would compare her new face to the old one.' (83). Having her parents visit her at the hospital is challenging for Gillian, mainly because of their behaviour. As a matter of fact, they do not look at her when they speak to her. Even after her second nose operation, her mother 'turned aside and started crying' (63) when Gillian first visited her parents after the accident. In her research on 'Perspectives on "Attitudes" toward Disabled Persons', Ingstad studied the situation of disabled people in a developing country – Botswana, Africa – and was told by one of the countrymen that 'you must understand that in this country people hide their disabled family members at the lands' (Ingstad 1995: 248). Some

of her findings are that '[i]n all societies the beliefs about the causes of impairments may have consequences for action.' (Ingstad 1995: 253). Gillian's face is a reminder to those who look at her of the car accident that killed her husband, thus Gillian's parents may cry not only because their daughter has lost her beautiful face, but also because they mourn the loss of their son-in-law Matthias: thus, their knowledge on the cause of Gillian's disfigurement may influence their attitude towards their daughter. For Gillian, at any rate, being a widow 'was more shocking than her injury, than Matthias's death, than anything.' (84).

As soon as she can leave the hospital, Gillian is depicted in situations where she is hiding from people. She literally becomes obsessed with hiding and purposely drives to places where she thinks she cannot be seen, such as the empty city stadium. One must keep in mind that Gillian is a famous TV star. For that reason, her obsession with hiding her face can be seen as a consequence of being both a disfigured person *and* a celebrity. An incident at the hospital confirms the role played by Gillian's fame in regard to her ability to cope with her disrupted identity: photographs of her at the hospital are published in a tabloid newspaper. Her father's lawyer refuses to defend her: 'She was of public interest, it made it difficult to defend her privacy. If you shared your happiness with journalists, you shouldn't be surprised if they were interested in your misfortune as well.' (83). Gillian's obsession with hiding from people appears to be due to her attempt to protect her privacy.

The description of her arrival at home after leaving the hospital enhances Gillian's having to cope with her disrupted identity. Her living arrangements remind her that being seen by others was no issue for her before her accident. So far, 'she was living in a shop window or an aquarium' (27) and '[a] person standing outside could see into the living room, but that had never bothered Gillian' (*ibid.*). A home is supposed to be a place where one feels protected, but here the opposite is likely to happen. Gillian is affected by every single thing about her home that reminds her of her new face. Even looking at a picture on her walls is disturbing and

heartbreaking: 'Marilyn, the same face ten times over, lifeless as an advertising poster' (30). The most obvious reason why looking at Andy Warhol's pop art painting of Marilyn Monroe pains Gillian is the eternal beauty of that young woman's face - it is reproduced ten times but never changes –, as opposed to Gillian's own face: a face that used to look beautiful but has changed more than Gillian ever thought possible; a face that will never look again the same as before.

Stamm's novel 'All Days Are Night' enhances the relationship between disability and unemployment and brings the concepts of power and abuse to the fore. After her first nose operation, Gillian's boss 'had suggested expanding her editorial function, since she wasn't able to appear in front of the camera for now' (82). After her second operation, she eventually decides to quit her job. She doesn't want to go 'back to editorial to receive anyone's sympathy' (83) because of her new face, which is considered unacceptable by society. Her experience of inner oppression is reinforced as her colleagues in the editorial department try to be kind to her – she does not want to be treated as a victim. Overall, she has already experienced a loss of power by losing her job as a TV host, and at least one of her colleagues takes advantage of her disability: 'She didn't feel like writing scripts for Maia, who, thanks to her accident, was getting the chance to move from her desk to in front of the camera.' (*ibid.*).

Gillian eventually moves to her parents' holiday house in the Swiss mountains, where she gets a job in a holiday hotel. She feels comfortable there because the visitors are from Germany, so they don't know who she is. At the hotel, she reunites with her old friend, the artist Hubert, who had taken naked photographs of her before the accident. Gillian's remarks to Hubert about her being given a job as the Head of Entertainment despite her face makes the reader reflect on the need for a more inclusive society: 'When I began here, I looked so horrible. I'm surprised they gave me a job at all.' (131). Even though Berger notes that 'nondisabled people are often uncomfortable, even fearful, around people with disabilities, as if the disabling

condition might be contagious' (Berger 2013: 8), one may feel irritated and even appalled about Gillian's comments as it appears that she is the one who discriminates herself *before* others do. One may wonder what a character like Gillian would sound like more than ten years after Stamm wrote his novel: Has society become more inclusive? Would Stamm write the same novel?

Most importantly, Gillian's readiness to have Hubert exhibit the photographs of her face after the accident and until her last nose operation suggests how much she has changed. She has managed to construct a new identity. She no longer feels like hiding from people, on the contrary she wants to share her experience with others. Her new job allows her to display many of her skills, for instance, to 'do a little bit of acting' (129) in evening plays for the hotel visitors.

Just like Gillian in the Swiss mountains, Hans Novacek lives in a place surrounded by beautiful nature – the story 'Muldental' takes place in the countryside of North Saxony. The place where he lives with his wife Marie and their son Thomas reminds the reader of the beautiful, pastoral setting of Krien's first novel 'Someday We'll Tell Each Other Everything'. In her essay about the representation of nature in Krien's debut novel, Westphal underlines the metaphor of the blossoming landscapes that were once used by the former German chancellor Helmut Kohl when Germany reunified (Westphal 2016: 87). Kohl was referring to his hope for the former communist GDR to grow economically – to *blossom* – following the Fall of the Berlin Wall. The place Muldental appears to be a blossoming landscape – literally speaking – through its flowers and fruits, cherries in particular. The emphasis on the beauty and liveliness of the blossoming nature from the opening scene until the end of the story strongly contrasts with the tragedy of Hans' life. Hans does not blossom in any way – neither did the part of Germany that used to be the GDR.

Hans' first words are 'Marie! Marie!' (12): Hans sits in his wheelchair inside the house while his wife stands on a ladder, busy picking cherries in their garden on a hot summer day.

Thus, Marie is introduced in a way that makes her look much more superior than Hans. His sitting in a wheelchair makes him look smaller – and more vulnerable – than other adults who just stand, but his wife is portrayed standing on a ladder, that is, patently higher. As Hans asks her what she is doing, she answers that she is picking cherries. Rather than commenting on the harvest, he tells her: 'I am not dead yet, Marie, not yet' (*ibid.*). Marie replies: 'I know that' (*ibid.*) before he asks her to roll him to the kitchen because he is cold. Marie does not sound as if she is astonished by her husband's words. The concept of habit, along with the body routines of the disabled Hans, is very much present in the first 'Muldental' story. Hans talking about not being dead yet can be seen as a litotes: a way for Hans to express how dead he already feels deep inside himself because of his disability even though his body is still living. At the same time, his statement, added to the fact that he always feels cold even though it's hot, foreshadows his imminent death. Hans seems to be trying to tell Marie that he is having suicidal thoughts. He often shows strong emotions, mainly anger, while Marie remains calm. He and his wife – his caregiver – do not seem to speak the same language.

Hans' anger and bitterness reach the highest level when he destroys his son's ceramic art. Thomas had been trying to make ceramic art following his father's illness, which no longer enabled him to work as a ceramic artist. Hans often shows signs of jealousy towards him. One day, Hans enters what used to be his own workroom, holding a knife. He lets his wheelchair roll, and 'with his arms outstretched, he tore down everything he could reach from the shelves' (22) while yelling. This scene is the only one in which Hans' shows physical strength as he moves across the workroom 'with a strong swing' (*ibid.*) so that 'clay pots flew through the air and shattered on the ground" (*ibid.*).

Unlike Gillian, Hans does not manage to be happy despite his disrupted identity. Apart from being bitter about losing his job as a ceramist, he is angry about the mentality of the Germans in the reunified Germany. When Marie informs him that their son Thomas has been

successful at selling ceramics on the Medieval Market, Hans does not show any enthusiasm nor is he proud of his son. Instead, he remarks that since the collapse of the GDR 'people have been becoming even more stupid than they were before. Medieval Market – what a nonsense.' (14). It sounds unusual for a former GDR citizen to imply that people in the GDR were stupid. Most Germans who have experienced life in the GDR tend to recall the way they managed to achieve their goals by supporting each other despite missing lots of (material) things people had in Western countries: in other words, they praise their creativity and their capacity of coping with the communist regime despite obvious difficulties and their lack of freedom. Many of them truly sound nostalgic[ii]. Hans, however, associates the GDR with his multiple sclerosis, with his wife's betrayal, and thus with the Stasi.

The Stasi visited Marie on a hot summer day, as she was picking cherries. The depiction of beautiful nature with the blossoming of lilies, in particular, brings to the fore the contrast between the seemingly peaceful, idyllic place and the horror of the communist dictatorship: 'Lilies bloomed on the banks of the stream' (15). The dialogue between the Stasi and Marie is interspersed by Krien's descriptions of the liveliness of nature: 'The lilies bloomed yellow, white and orange' (*ibid.*). At that point, Hans is already suffering from multiple sclerosis, but he is still physically capable of making ceramic art. In addition, he has been involved in the escape of some of his fellow artists to West Germany. He is the father of the ten-year-old Thomas and has a wife whom he trusts but who, unbeknown to him, is having an affair with another man. As the Stasi spy on everyone, they use their powerful position to put pressure on others and to threaten them: they blackmail Marie, and she is forced to write reports for them about people who visit Hans in his workroom. In exchange for her reports, she is provided with medication for Hans. Years later, Hans learns about Marie's betrayal, for which there is no forgiveness.

As Hans has increasingly become physically disabled in the years following the reunification of Germany, the concepts of power and abuse appear in a different perspective than the event involving the Stasi. Though Hans has lost the power to do things physically healthy people do, he seems to be the one who dominates others, at least his wife and his son. Hence, he orders Marie to get him food and drink, to put on the light, push his wheelchair from one room to another, etc. Everything at home is done so as to not disturb him; he shouts and gets angry if his wife does not obey him. He seemingly takes advantage of his physical disabilities – that cause him to depend a lot on others – in order to get what he wants, and he uses his wife's above-mentioned betrayal to his benefit. In one of the numerous everyday scenes between him and Marie, he asks her to give him something to drink, but this time she replies: 'You can take something yourself. On the table, there is –' (20). Hans interrupts her: 'But I want you to do that. You owe me that, Marie.' (*ibid.*). Marie's answer that '[m]y God, other people have a fate too' (*ibid*.) is perhaps an attempt to make him realise that he should not be as self-centered as he is. Maybe she is trying to show him that *all* human beings are vulnerable and dependent on others in different ways, as it is suggested by Hirschberg and Valentin in their essay on vulnerability and dependency (Hirschberg and Valentin 2020). Rather than empathising with her words, Hans tells her that he has 'no interest in other people' (20). Marie does end up asking him whether he would like to drink tea or water. Hans simply replies: 'Fruit juice' (*ibid*.): his wish for a drink different from the one Marie wants to give him may be seen as a provocation. Moreover, it could be Hans' way of expressing his own freedom – the only freedom he can still experience despite his disability. As Kittay notes, '[p]eople with disabilities continue to suffer from discrimination in jobs, education, and housing, and are deprived of capabilities as basic as the freedom to move about' (Kittay 2011: 49). May it be during the day or at night, Hans always expects his wife to be his caregiver, but, as Marie notices in her inner thoughts, he never says thank you. Hans' not saying thank you may be

because he believes Marie owes him by being his caregiver due to her betrayal in the GDR; at any rate, Hans is portrayed as a bitter person who refuses to show gratitude to those who help him.

'In most dominant theories of justice, dignity is coupled with the capacity for autonomy. A person's well-being or welfare is usually a prerequisite to autonomy, but when individuals find themselves dependent on others (as many people with disabilities do) for self-care, economic security, and safety, the *dignity* which comes with autonomy appears threatened.' (Kittay 2011: 50). Hans' bitterness may be because of what disabled people see as a loss of dignity. His wife's betrayal may have contributed to this feeling as well. Hans' attitude towards his wife and caregiver, however, forms a contrast to the dependency concept Kittay argues in her rhetorical questions:

> Is it not better to acknowledge our dependency as a feature of all human life, and to develop relationships that are genuinely caring and respectful? Is it not better for relationships of dependency to be replete with affective bonds that can transform otherwise unpleasant intimate tasks into times of trust and demonstrations of trustworthiness, gratifying, and dignifying to both the caregiver and the recipient of care? (Kittay 2011: 54).

Kittay, who has a disabled daughter, supports the 'construction of an ethics of inclusion' (Kittay 2011: 51) where 'caregiving work is the realization of this conception of self, both when we give care generously and when we receive it graciously.' (Kittay 2011: 54).

As far as the narrative point of view is concerned, there is a shift from Marie's perspective in 'Muldental' to Thomas' perspective in 'Muldental II': whereas two of the three parts of 'All Days Are Night' are told from Gillian's perspective, neither of the two 'Muldental' stories is told from Hans' perspective, which makes him appear inferior to his wife and his son. Nevertheless, after his death, Hans hasn't completely lost his power: one can argue that he is

still living through Thomas' artworks and through haunting of the house. His disability is still present through the sound of his wheelchair wheels that Thomas believes he can sometimes hear in the evening and through his bitterness: 'In fact, [Thomas] had wanted to go away. Away from the hate-infested house, away from the place that seemed to have stored the father in the walls, ceilings and floor and that continued to breathe out his [father's] bitterness.' (206) Both Marie and Thomas hesitate to leave the house full of bitter memories, but they choose to stay and make the best out of the negativity associated with Hans' disability: 'the mother, who had not received any visitors for years because of the father's unpredictability, decided to make hospitality her profession' (207). Thus, she and Thomas remodeled the house after Hans' death.

Thomas becomes a successful artist by leaving behind his father's authority: 'It was only after his father's death that he ventured into making free art. It filled him with deeper satisfaction than the everyday pottery.' (211). Notwithstanding the obvious negative impact of Hans' disability – and of the bitterness caused by his disrupted identity – on his son and wife, Hans' heritage is a lot about his art. After his death, what remains intact are his '[e]xcellent artworks that were now of great value' (219). Thomas does not seem to perceive that he may have inherited his passion for art from his father, but the reader does: in that manner, the collection of stories ends with Hans' talent as an artist prevailing over all the negativity associated with his disability.

In conclusion, both Gillian and Hans are depicted as vulnerable people hiding from others, but Gillian evolves to work with her disability while Hans works against it. While Hans Novacek embodies the darkest side of disability, which leads him to dependency, joblessness and, bitterness, causing him to commit suicide, Gillian is successful at constructing a new identity. As Vijayan puts it, 'it is a beautiful irony of life that able bodied people take life for granted and very often overlook the finer aspects of life, while disabled people keep their eyes open for opportunities and count their blessings one by one.' (Vijayan 2021: 19). Gillian

embodies that kind of disabled person, and the representation of disability by Stamm and Krien forces the reader to reflect on the various aspects of disability, especially on ableism and dependency. So far, German Literature Studies have not delved into what it is to be 'a whole person' (Luserke-Jaqui 2020: 201, translated from the German *ein ganzer Mensch*), not just someone with deficiencies: literature studies all over the world must become inclusive. I agree with Gugutzer and Schneider who hope that the growing research interest in human bodies, since what is referred to in social sciences as the *body turn*, will lead to understanding disability not as a destiny but rather as a chance to build a more inclusive society based on new body utopias (Gugutzer and Schneider 2007: 48). Foucault raises people's awareness of what he calls the 'Utopian Body':

> But my body, to tell the truth, doesn't allow itself to be reduced so easily. It has, after all, its own fantastic resources; it too possesses places without place and places deeper, more obstinate even than the soul, than the tomb, than the enchantment of magicians. (Foucault 1966, translated from the original French).

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[i] 'Muldental' is Daniela Krien's only literary work that has not (yet) been translated into English. The quotes in English that appear in the present paper are my own translation from Krien's original German. As for quotes from scholarly works written in German or in French, I notify through my paper the translations that I made into English as a French-German bilingual person with proficient English skills.

[ii] My assessment is based on my own everyday observations and on conversations with former GDR citizens who are still living in the Eastern part of Germany, where I personally moved fifteen years after the reunification.