

**The Painting of a Disabled Man from the 16th century -
a participatory action research project**

presented to the
San Francisco Bay Area Disability Studies Consortium
on Feb. 23rd 2007

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1. Introduction

Petra Flieger

Innsbruck and Ambras Castle

Innsbruck is the capital of Tyrol in the Western part of Austria. About 120 000 inhabitants live in Innsbruck, which is a City in the Alps. You can take public busses to go skiing in the afternoon and you often see people walking through the City in their ski boots and wearing skis on their shoulders. There are many small villages around Innsbruck which more and more become part of the larger region of Innsbruck. There´s a large CIL in Innsbruck, it´s main activity is to organise and coordinate personal assistance for women and men with disabilities. But it also offers peer counseling and is politically active in the ongoing fight for equal rights and opportunities for disabled people in Tyrol.

The University of Innsbruck was founded in 1669 by Emperor Leopold I. Today there are about 25 000 students at the University of Innsbruck, many come from South-Tyrol in Italy, from Germany and from Vorarlberg, the most Western part of Austria.

Ambras Castle is situated on a hill in one of the small villages close to Innsbruck, it can be seen for miles around and is one of the most important sights the city. It´s the only subdivision of the Museum for Art-History in Vienna that´s situated outside of Vienna. It´s historical and cultural significance is very much linked to the personality of Archduke Ferdinand II (1529-1595), he was a very open minded Renaissance prince and committedly promoted the arts and sciences. He converted the medieval castle into the present Renaissance castle where he founded the famous Ambras collections. There´s the Upper Castle where people lived in the 16th century, and the Lower Castle, where Ferdinand II installed a collection with the most modern criteria in mind, a cabinet of wonders and curiosities. The current presentation attempts to reconstruct the archdukes cabinet of wonders. It´s unique because today it´s still situated and shown in the same rooms as it had been in the 16th century.

The cabinets of wonders were collections of what people considered marvels or oddities at that time - they served to remind the person watching the Cabinet that there was no limit to what God could do. There are several portraits of people who attracted attention at that time. E.g. of a giant and a dwarf, of hairy people, who were fully covered with hair. The lives of some of these people are partly very well documented like that of Petrus Gonsalvus. There´s also a painting of Gregor Baci, a man whose head was transfixd by a lance who was nevertheless still alive. The idea was that man was God's greatest creation and so there were many wonders and varieties in man, just as there was in the rest of creation.

This is where the Painting of a Disabled Man has been hanging and shown since the late 16th century. Many visitors must have seen it when they walked through the cabinet of wonders, but no closer or scientific attention has ever been payed to it. The Painting of the Disabled Man from the 16th century was the starting point of our research project on the cultural representation of disability.

The Research Project

The project was financed within the framework of the scientific programme TRAFO (TRansdisciplinary FOrms of research in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Studies) that was launched by the Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture in Austria. In the context of this programme "transdisciplinary" means that academic research connects and cooperates with holders of non-academic knowledge. Projects had to be based on a research approach that was problem oriented and participatory. This is why TRAFO was expressly defined as a methods programme, the focus should be on the transdisciplinary research process itself. In Austria, apart from

single action research projects of the 1970s and 1980s there´s almost no tradition or experience with participatory action research in the field of disability.

The research project „The Painting of a Disabled Man - Study on the representation of disability and its relevance to the present“ started in March 2005 and was finished in December 2006. There were three cooperating institutions: The Institute of Educational Sciences at the University of Innsbruck with Volker Schönwiese as project manager, the museum of Art-History in Vienna with its collection at Ambras Castle and the Center for Independent Living in Innsbruck. The project´s main goals were the creation and organisation of an exhibition at Ambras Castle and the publication of a scientific reader with collected articles. Both goals were to be realized in cooperation with a reference group of women and men with disabilities (Mürner/ Schönwiese 2006; Flieger/ Schönwiese 2007). This participatory approach of the project should finally lead to recommendations for working with referencegroups as a means of transdisciplinary participation.

The researchers were: Volker Schönwiese and Ulrike Pfeifenberger, University of Innsbruck
Petra Flieger and Christian Mürner, free lance scientists

Margot Rauch, Museum of Art-History in Vienna – Ambras Castle

The members of the reference group were: Heinz Brantmaier, Karin Flatz, Anna Reiter,
Christine Riegler, David Sporschill, Harald Strauber,
Georg Urban, Erika Zwicklhuber.

In the course of the project two other historical paintings were found that are significant for the analysis of the cultural presentation of disability: a leaflet from 1620 showing Wolfgang Gschaidt, a carpenter with a disability and a small picture from 1578, showing Elizabeth, a woman with a learning disability.

2. The Social Gaze at People with Disabilities

Volker Schönwiese (Translation: Josef Berghold)

The portrait of a sixteenth-century man with a disability

The focus of my presentation is a highly remarkable portrait, which until very recently, however, had gone completely unnoticed by the scholarly community. This painting shows a man with a disability who lived in the second half of the sixteenth century. It is exhibited in the Kunst- und Wunderkammer (cabinet of wonders) at Ambras Castle near the city of Innsbruck. (The Castle's collections are a subdivision of the collections at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna.) My analysis is concerned with



the visual representation of disability, in its relevance both to everyday life and to science, from the past up to the present (cf. Flieger/ Schönwiese 2007)

Painting of a man with a disability, 3rd quarter of the 16th century: Sammlung Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien)

The painting shows a naked man with a disability, lying on his stomach, on a dark green cloth, which rests on a table or pedestal. The limp and deformed body is painted in an entirely realistic style. The founder of the “Kunst- und Wunderkammer” was Archduke Ferdinand II of Austria, Count of Tyrol (1529-1595). An inventory drawn up for the first time in 1621 offers detailed information on his portrait collection. The curator of Ambras Castle, *Margot Rauch*, on the basis of the inventory and of traces found on the painting has been able to verify that right from the very start, the body of the man with a disability had been covered by a sheet of red paper. If a patron wished to see more, he or she could lift it and take a direct look at the naked body. Thus this painting represents an historical document that has no comparable counterpart. It brings into sharp focus the deeply ambivalent gaze of the modern age at disabled persons, a gaze located between curiosity, fright, and detachment.

Presumably this man was included in the category of “natural jesters” (see also *Mürner* 2003, 104ff.) who were factored into performances of courtly self-representation. “Giants”, midgets, and “hairy men” (hirsute persons) were considered wonders of nature. “*The representation of these human wonders was ‘equivalent’ to the portraits of the prince, his family, and the members of other dynasties. And they were exhibited alongside the princely paintings in the same gallery. In this way, Archduke Ferdinand II presented himself as a world ruler over his world of wonders*” (*Bernuth* 2003, 50).

In the depiction of a triumphal procession of Emperor Maximilian I at the beginning of the sixteenth century, there are also two carts with “jesters” — one of them showing “jokers” and the other so-called “natural fools.” Jesters served to amuse the Emperor and the spectators. The jokers faked their foolishness and interacted with the public accordingly (see *Schönwiese, E.* 2001, for more on the tradition of the “masquerade of stupidity” in Tyrolean popular drama since the 17th century). The natural fools, on the other hand, were in and of themselves simply a cause for laughter. The depiction

of natural fools on a simple peasant handcart, with ruggedly grown shrubbery, points to a perception of “naturalness” and “human wonders.” Indeed, they might well have become a valuable piece of property in curiosities’ cabinets, and worth being put under special protection (*Bernuth* 2003, 51-53).

Basically, “human wonders” broke down into two categories: first, the strangers (that is, persons of foreign descent, comprising also a subcategory of “cretins”—in today’s understanding, persons with limited learning abilities—who in some regions were known to exist in conspicuous numbers); and second the natural fools and physically abnormal persons, such as of “miraculous birth” (Siamese twins, for instance), whose existence was interpreted as a divine message with prophetic meaning (*ibid*, 53f., and *Mürner* 2003, 34f.).

According to Rauch (2005), portraits like the one of the man with a disability are not to be counted among the depictions of persons with prophetic meaning: “These ‘monsters’ ... do not fall under the category of omens; rather, they constituted a source of study, of amusement, and of esthetic pleasure.” In this context, Rauch also points to grotesque paintings in contemporary banquet halls, in which a host of monsters and part-human, part-animal creatures are depicted. “Looking at the monsters, and depending on the circumstances, the early-modern observers thus felt amusement, admiration, distraction or horror, but above all, wondrousness. This amazement, particularly in the context of the cabinets of wonders, served as a stimulus for investigation, as an original act of insight, as an impetus to unveil the secret” (*ibid*). Yet one may well assume—as Rauch also writes—that the objects in the cabinets of wonders stood for a variety of meanings and served quite diverse interests.

- One possible meaning results from the context of the self representation of power over “jesters”;
- Another one is to be searched for in the context of the era of the Counter Reformation, in specific religious motives—certainly in the presentation of God’s power as the creator of nature. But perhaps also in the theme of the “Imitation of Christ,” the deformed and, according to religious projections, “suffering” body of the man with a disability possibly serving as a trigger for special associations;
- A third motive could be the emerging interest in systematic knowledge.

The 1620 Portrait of a Disabled Carpenter



A leaflet published in Innsbruck in 1620, and which up to now is known only to small circles of art historians, depicts a disabled carpenter lying in bed. His name was *Wolfgang Gschaider*. The leaflet explains in meticulous detail that the carpenter, after suffering from excruciating pain in his left arm and in his back for three days, became completely paralyzed. For fifteen years now, it reports, he has been unable to move any part of his body except for his eyes and tongue. The readers are asked to offer alms for the “poor cripple” and to pray for him in the nearby church of the Dreieiligen (the Three Saints). The body of the carpenter *Wolfgang Gschaider* is shown to be suffering in every respect, and his posture resembles that of Jesus Christ after having been taken off the cross.

Leaflet 1620: Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck

As an “Imitation of Christ,” disability is generalized into the epitome of all human misery and used to exhort humility. The man with a disability is thus utilized to provide everyone with a mirror of his or her own wretchedness—a typical topos that still haunts us today:

“Here is presented to Thee / O Christian man / a living death / or a death alive / the quite outrageous / but truthful portrait still here today in Ynßprugg near the church of the Three Saints / just in front of your eyes / as a mirror / to remind you of the general / trouble and wretchedness of this world.”

And: „You see a holy ghost in an insane body...”

Furthermore it is commented in following summarized way: If you want to pay for high spirits you should do that soon, give the poor cripple alms and pray in the church of three saints.

This leaflet has a remarkable context:

- Appeal to think about yourself – especially about your own death – when seeing the man with a disability
- Usage of mass media
- Separation of body and spirit as a mass-medial strategy to reinforce the drama
- Appeal to donate money to the man with a disability
- Institutional interests of hospital and church:
 - Financing of institutions (donations)
 - Usage of the leaflet in political and ideological strategy in counter reformation
- Usage of the phrase „poor cripple“ in this connection. This is one of the earliest usages of the word cripple

(cf. Mürner/ Schönwiese 2007)

So this leaflet is probably the first document of the beginning of campaigns like telethons with their ideological function.

This religious appeal in the spirit of the Counter Reformation to the population of Innsbruck, on the one hand, and to the modern-age scientific gaze, on the other, amounts to two entirely different perceptions of disability coexisting side-by-side. The contrast between the depiction of the man with a disability in the stately Ambras Castle and the depiction in the 1620 leaflet intended for the common people is unmistakable. A highly religiously tinged, pitying gaze as opposed to an ambivalent and enlightened one.

The Portrait of Elisabeth

The historian and curator of Ambras castle *Margot Rauch* tells us that the portrait of Elisabeth (round 1578) is part of the miniature portrait collection of Archduke Ferdinand II, which comprises more than a thousand portraits. Like many others, this portrait might be a copy of a large painting. She says that there are two portraits depicting Elisabeth, but unfortunately they seem to be lost as the whereabouts are not identified. One portrait was painted by Jakob Seisenegger, the court painter of Emperor Ferdinand I. The other one belonged to Anna, Duchess of Bavaria, who was the older sister of Ferdinand. The portrait is engraved with the following words: ELISABET STVLTA (= foolish, simple-



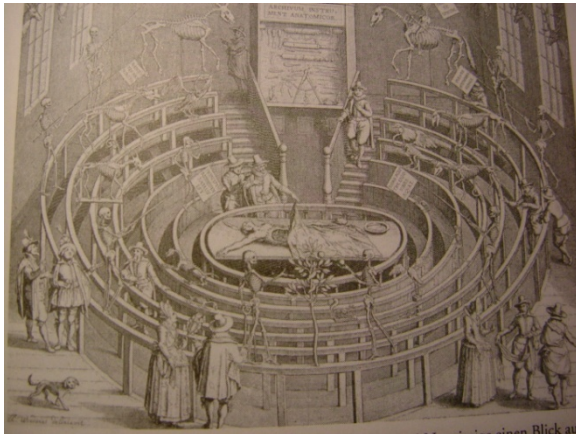
The Painting of a Disabled Man from the 16th Century – a PAR project

mind (Elisabeth). *Rauch* tells us that the golden dress shows silver decorations which can be interpreted as an allusion to her character. There is every reason to believe that Elisabeth played an important role within the family, as numerous portraits of her were made, and she was always presented wearing jewelry and luxurious dresses.

My question is, whether the symbols are personal attributes of Elisabeth, more general attributes of natural fools or inversely general cultural symbols, which relativise the traditional understanding of the natural fools as sort of jesters who are laughed at. For example: Does the moon mean that Elisabeth was personally unstable or is the moon an general or alchemistic female symbol in opposition and conjunction to manliness? In this case the symbols could be a sign of honor and not a sign of deficiency. Or: Does the donkey mean that Elisabeth was foolish or is there a connection with the rider and the cultural meaning “imitatio Christi”? Is there a connection with symbols of apocalypse, apocalyptic woman, Moon-Madonna and [counter-reformation](#) (cf. Oberhöller 2007) ?! can not believe that the symbols are only attributes of foolishness of Elisabeth. In terms of Disability Studies I think we have to be interested in a cultural interpretation and an interpretation which preserves dignity of Elisabeth.

The Development of a Dissecting Gaze

One may assume at least an indirect correlation between the portrait of the man with a disability in the cabinet of wonders and the development of the medical sciences in the sixteenth century. Medical doctors counted among those who contributed to Ferdinand II's collections, and a lively exchange



between the various rulers' courts existed. But there is no direct indication of a medical concern as a reason for the inclusion of the painting in the collection. Yet the nakedness of the body, and the very detail-oriented depiction of the man with a disability (a feature lacking any other contemporary example) almost forces one to see a connection to the development of the medical gaze.

Break in a public autopsy, Leyden 1610. In: *Kathan* 1999, 37

In the sixteenth century, many doctors at universities were busy opening human bodies. Their foremost concern was not to explain, but to dissect, to investigate, and to describe, in order to generate a cartography of the human body.

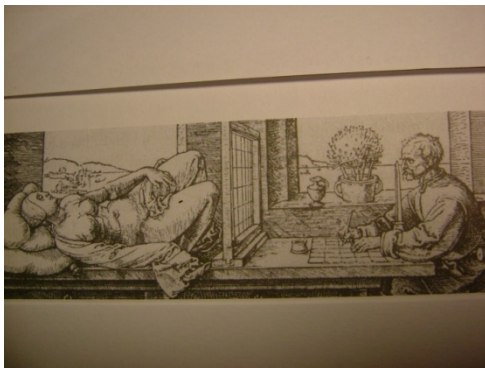
Gertraud Egger (1999) writes: “With the advent of the Modern Era (also in the medical disciplines), a paradigm shift takes place from the teleological view to the mechanical and functionalist view ... [In this development,] an essential factor in the history of autopsy and in a changed anatomical gaze takes place which constructs the body starting from the skeleton (that is, no longer from the entrails outward or from top to bottom). As a result, the functions of the various body parts, a taxonomy of the physique as well as a reconstruction of its mechanical locomotive possibilities, gradually become

ascertainable. In this way, in anthropology, a new pattern of thought emerges that describes humans as a machine-being that can be newly and repeatedly constructed.”

The French philosopher René Descartes, roughly a century after the reported origin of the portrait of the man with a disability, developed a basic formula of the human being: body = (equals) machine, animal = body = machine, human being = body = machine + mind/soul (see *Kathan* 1999, 22). As *Kathan* emphasizes: “Strictly speaking, Descartes only formulated theoretically what was already being done in practice. In the autopsies of the sixteenth century, the body was perceived and treated as a machine or a clockwork mechanism. With Descartes, it then became consistently subjected to the functional logics of the machine. What is essential in *Descartes’s* machine model is not the idea that the human body works like a machine. Rather, it is the effort of being able to perceive it as a machine; that is, to place it into a space in which it can actually be seen in this way” (ibid, 23).

The portrait of the man with a disability may be considered evidence of the then newly emerging view of the separation between body and mind. Not only is the man’s body exposed to an isolated gaze, but one can also make out a clear division between head and body: The head, complete with hat and ruff, confers a history and social status. The body is split off, as it were, and what dominates, with observant distance, is a realistic gaze at the deformations presented.

If the early anatomists obviously found it difficult to imagine the body in a socially isolated way (ibid, 19), the portrait of the man with a disability presents evidence of a connection between body and mind which is made conceivable by ways of a contrasting structure. The body’s deviation from the norm, documented in a startled or matter-of-fact manner, is set in contrast to the head’s normality. The machine model hasn’t yet taken hold; the deformed surface won’t yet be opened; the distance isn’t yet absolute.



In sixteenth-century arts, the cartography of the body is significant – just think of the 1538 etching “A Draughtsman Drawing a Reclining Woman” by Albrecht *Dürer* (see ibid, 25f.).

Albrecht *Dürer*, „Der Zeichner des liegenden Weibes“, 1538 In: *Kathan* 1999, 26

The drawing illustrates the following scene: A woman lying on a table is drawn by an artist sitting at that table. Between the artist and the woman there is a big wooden frame, which is divided by strings into rectangular segments. In this way, the artist or draughtsman can perceive the reclining woman, segment by segment. Thus he is also able to render her shape, with correct perspective proportions, on a sheet of paper equally divided into rectangular segments. *Kathan* writes: “*The grid allows the two spheres of experience [of the artist and the woman] to come apart; it even neutralizes them. The orientation of the perspective is a sign of a new hierarchy of the senses. The grid of threads and the spirit level emphasize vision and allow other sensations to become a disturbance*” (ibid, 26).

This dissecting and unemotional gaze also corresponds to the newly emerging gaze of the medical sciences. As sixteenth-century doctors practiced autopsies, they had to protect themselves from their own feelings and from the problems inherent in breaking the taboo of intruding into the human body.

To that end, one helpful measure was using above all the bodies of debased persons, such as someone who had just been executed. Another means of creating emotional distance consisted in performing the autopsies as public spectacles at universities, such as in Ferrara or Padua.

Here, too, references can be made to the portrait of the man with a disability. The painter produces a cartography of the body lying on a table by depicting the deformations with the greatest possible precision. The aim is not only the drawing up an isolated protocol (or documentation), but also its inclusion in the classification system of the cabinet of wonders, and in this context, its presentation to an elite public.

The preconditions for a pedagogic utilization of the taxonomy are created, similar to the way in which the spectacle of autopsy entailed research and teaching. Cabinets of wonders will receive this pedagogic function starting at the end of the seventeenth century. For example, the Art and Natural History Specimens Chamber founded in 1698 by *August Hermann Franke* in Halle, on the Saale river (Germany), which had been established through the influence of pietistic ideas for school instruction and was also meant for the lower classes.

Understanding Disability

In today's understanding, disability is a phenomenon that can only be conceived of in the context of social and individual constructions and reconstructions. Agents and conveyors of these reconstructions are

- historically arising images
- systematic images created by the sciences
- images conveyed in individual socialization, and
- images of disability produced or reinforced through the media.

The phenomena of socialization arising through institutionalization as a result of these images should also be included (see *Schönwiese*, V. 2003, 175-181). The gaze by disabled persons today—especially from the perspective of the Independent Living Movement—on the sixteenth-century portrait is not informed by art history. Rather, directly or indirectly, it is a gaze through these constructions, an assuring gaze at oneself, at the conditions of one's socialization and biography. The issue of a splitting-off between body and mind still leaves its mark on multifarious efforts of rehabilitation. Splits and separations—also in the sense of structural violence—characterize the practice of special education; through therapy, this constitutes an important background of the socialization of disabled persons today.

With this in mind, spontaneous questions arise: Did this sixteenth-century man have similar experiences? Did he perhaps receive “support” and could thus be presented to others with pride, along the lines: “*Look, how heavily disabled and still so successful*”? Or was he reduced entirely to the role of a passive object of curiosity, merely fit out with hat and ruff in order to look more acceptable to the courtly observers, and not attracting any interest as a person: for example, simply presented in a medical lecture or reproduced in a medical textbook? Or is the painting, rather, a documentation of the self-confidence of the person in question, who takes advantage of the opportunity given to him, asserting himself as a member of humankind? Independent of how meaningful these questions may be from an art historian's perspective, and regardless of the possibility of finding any plausible answer

to them, the portrait may well be important today merely by virtue of it being able to stimulate such queries.

Beyond the existential dimensions of the question of personal integrity and of meanings of life, or of their loss and mourning, disability, as a product of social attributions of self-fulfilling character, accomplishes a societal function. René Girard assumes that there is a general historical pattern of collective violence, existing in every human civilization and effective above all through the creation of scapegoats. As he writes: “... *the crises that are triggers to broad collective persecution are always experienced by those concerned in more or less the same way. In every case, the strongest impression that remains is the feeling of a radical loss of what is truly social, the destruction of the rules and ‘differences’ that define the civilized order*” (Girard 1992, 23f.). “*There are thus universally applicable features in the selection of victims ... Apart from cultural and religious criteria, there are also purely physical ones. Diseases, mental derangement, genetic deformities, consequences of accidents and physical disabilities in general are apt to attract the persecutors ... There is something of a taboo about the term ‘abnormal’ itself, as there was about the expression ‘plague’ in the Middle Ages; it is at the same time noble and cursed—‘sacer’ in every conceivable sense of the term*” (ibid, 31).

It can be shown over the entire period of reported human history that time and again, major social crises—wars, political struggles for power and radical changes, economic breakdowns, epidemics of diseases such as the black plague, or natural disasters—were acted out through the persecution of Jews, strangers, “witches,” “deformed people,” socially conspicuous persons, and so forth. An eloquent example is the persecution of disabled people in the context of the witch-burning that peaked in the seventeenth century.

Besides these extensive persecutions, the normalized and everyday-life societal function of disability consists in providing a projective screen for existential and socially produced (induced) fears. Disabled persons can be used to defend against and act out problems that everyone is afraid of: accidents, diseases, poverty, or death. The scare arising at the observation of disabled persons feeds from this. Its premise is that the subjective perspective of the disabled person is not known, that disabled people are, in the broadest sense of the term, isolated, that their everyday-life conditions of exchange in today’s socially organized spheres of life (such as kindergarten, school, work, housing) are limited. The exclusions are signs of declining differentiation, which in times of crisis—for instance during the Nazi era—entail a rationally calculated policy of extermination.

There is no body of historical research that would be able to give a sufficient account of the ambivalence of the view of disability with the help of appropriate documentation. Obviously, disabled persons must also have been, over long historical periods, accepted, and they lived under the same (bad) conditions as the other members of society. In general, persons who study the history of disability are more aware of the record of persecution, less of the phenomenon of its repression and denial. To a large extent, it is only with the reception of Michel Foucault’s works that approaches of discourse have been developed that are able to show the methods of producing disability (Schmitt 1985; Egger 1999, Stiker 2000). The portrait of the man with a disability from the cabinet of wonders at Ambras Castle may be seen as a document of this historical ambivalence.

Considering average life circumstances in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the man with a disability obviously lived under conditions that provided for his well-being, and surely he had a relatively high social status—assuming at least that the hat and ruff on the painting were not used

merely as an outfit for the occasion. At the same time, he is exposed to a horrifying and distancing gaze, making him an object both of social projections and scientific classification. This is also reflected in the centuries of ambivalent attitudes of owners, curators, and administrators towards the question whether the public could at all be expected to look at the painting. In this context, the fact of its having been generally neglected—not least also by the expert community—up until very recently is already quite significant in and of itself. From the concerned point of view of today's disabled persons (and their friends) emancipation movement, it can certainly be considered an act of liberation that the portrait of the sixteenth-century man has been brought out of the closet, that he is acknowledged to have a history and perceptible importance, and that the related ambivalences can be coped with.

The Gaze at Disabled Persons as Conveyed by the Current Media

Current media representations of disabled persons take up the existing social images of disability and reinforce them. They are thus significantly involved in the cultural production of disability. A typology of the gaze at disabled people was developed for the German exhibition “Der (im)perfekte Mensch” (“The [im]perfect Human Being”) (*Deutsches Hygiene-Museum* 2001; *Lutz et al.* 2003; see also *Schönwiese, V.* 2003):

- The astonished and medical gaze
- The annihilating gaze
- The pitying gaze
- The admiring gaze
- The instrumentalizing gaze
- The excluding gaze

The three early Modern Age depictions that I've been speaking about can probably be classified from this typology quite readily. However, on closer analysis, it would be difficult to assign them to only one category.

At any rate, it cannot be denied that similar to a range of sixteenth-century leaflets (cf. *Mürner* 2003), today's media still reports with part astonished and part pitying comments, for instance, about “Siamese twins” or small persons.

The exhibition “Der (im)perfekte Mensch” probably wasn't able to afford sufficient room for an inclusive gaze; nor for a critical gaze by directly concerned disabled persons. *Hinz* (2002) criticized the exhibition for connoting certain elaborate peculiarities.

A critical counter-gaze by concerned disabled persons must surely be formulated in a more in-depth manner and connected with social science theories. This is a major aim of the field of Disability Studies, which the contributors to the research project presented here feel committed to.

The transformatory gaze

Because of the presented difficulty of a general typology of the gazes at disabled people the deeper interpretation of single pictures becomes more significant. The validity of above presented systems of categories will increase if they can be constructed, differentiated or verified in deep analyses. Otherwise the analysis of images is concentrated on manifest contents.



I would like to give you an example for this.

Sunflowers and the smile

Front page of the Benetton catalog „sunflowers“ 1998

Garland Thomson classified the the Benetton catalog “the sunflowers” to a category “disabled persons pitiful but not hopeless”. Therefore she writes: „*The rhetoric of sentiment has migrated from charity to retail in late capitalism’s scramble to capture markets. For example, the cover of a 1998 Benetton public relations brochure distributed in stores employs a chic sentimentality in documenting a school for developmentally disabled children that Benetton supports and outfits*” (*Garland Thomson* 2001, 356) And she writes: “*Sentimental cuteness and high fashion come together in this public relations brochure’s presentation...*”. (ibid 357)

The mentioned shift of charity in the direction of commercial advertisement is important. But latent contents are not analysed, the classification to “pitiful but not hopeless” is in relation to an analysis of manifest contents.

“Sentimental cuteness” does not describe the smile of the disabled person in the picture sufficiently and the meaning of the title “the sunflowers” which characterises the whole catalog. The smile has to be analysed closer.

A highly ambivalent area of labeling is the smile of disabled persons. *Valerie Sinason* (1992, 141f), a renowned psychoanalyst practicing at the Tavistock Clinic in London, who works with persons with learning disabilities, describes typical characterizations of disabled children, adolescents or adults, which often begin:

- “*X is a lovely young man. He is happy all the time. It is just that he bites staff,*” or
- “*She is very happy, except she hits her forehead all the time,*” or
- “*His school said that he was very happy, he smiled all the time, it was just that he masturbated in assembly.*”

As yet, the “nature” of this smile has hardly been investigated. One approach to analyzing this phenomenon may begin from the assumption that a transformation of affects takes place under conditions of social isolation or violence. This may start very early in an individual’s life. In infantile socialization, *Rene Spitz* (cf. *Sinason* 1992, 146) considers smiling the first psychic organizer: it structures perception and establishes the start of ego development. It is employed for the infantile dialogue, and the “first smile” constitutes one of the most commonly accepted milestones in the development of human communication. But at a very early stage this smile may also undergo a transformation and reflect a situation of isolation and rejection. Indeed, rejection, slights, and violence may be answered by a baby with a smile. Hence a smile can represent the desperate response to an uncontrollable situation, one where dialogue is impossible. *Spitz* described the perception of babies as “coenaesthetic” (cf. *Niedecken* 2003, 42f); he characterized the child’s extensive inner sensitivity and, in its self-perception, its “harmonious” blending with the environment. The change from a relaxed to a desperate smile occurs in a “transitional space,” in which coenaesthetic perception would otherwise stimulate the development of ego boundaries towards the environment and the capacity to deal with objects and initiate dialogue. In fact, *Spitz* showed in the 1950s that babies might be severely agitated if their development of dialogue was prevented through isolation and denial of contact, and that they might even be mortally threatened. Desperate smiles may be regarded as an expression of a

significant intermediate stage of defense against anxiety in the face of a biographically determining communicative restraint.

Sinason's above-cited characterizations of disabled persons indicate that the "handicapped smile," the affirmative symbolization of destruction, is only one consequence of this situation. Infants and children also resist. Among other things, the resistance of disabled persons manifests itself in the form of stupidity, (auto-) aggression and provocative maladjusted behavior. Thus, so-called mental disability often makes up what *Sinason* describes as "*becoming stupid out of grief*." Moreover, *Sinason* has demonstrated how significant sexual abuse may be in this context, and how stupidity may be seen as a desperate attempt to repress and forget. This form of resistance continues to co-produce precisely the biographical origin of the mental restriction or disability, representing a dilemma known to cause the most multifarious of disorders. Institutionally grounded traditional psychiatry and special education have thrived on the convention of individualizing disability, which can be seen as an effect of interruption of dialogue and of isolation. Treatment, therapy, and education primarily aim at the individual child, whereas social contexts are either marginalized or suppressed. One may almost speak of aggressive support. Understandably, desperate parents are largely unable to escape this process. A student of mine reported about her visit to a family with a disabled child, where the mother, under the guidance of doctors and physiotherapists, applied the *Vojta* method (cf. *Aly* 1999, 132) to the child, a highly manipulative and currently very popular therapy:

"A photograph showing the girl immediately after a session of Vojta treatment, where she was able to prop up the upper part of her body particularly well, hung like a visually recorded trophy ... above the dining room table. Numerous framed children's photographs cover the wall, but for me, this particular photo sticks out; perhaps it is the attempt to convey that through the most intensive exercise—after the Vojta sessions, I am told, she is always particularly content and even-tempered, and above all her whole body, from head to toe, is completely relaxed—some degree of normality is reached (yet, in spite of everything, the red dent on her breastbone is unmistakable). I was appalled by this method of treatment: to see how this 'crimson child, crouched like a frog,' attempted to free herself from certain positions. After a particular exercise one could subsequently see the imprint of the fingernail on the child's breastbone ..." (*Murnig* 1998).

There must be a reason why the individualizing perspective sustains itself in such an obstinate manner, despite all the knowledge about systemic contexts that has caught on and become almost a matter of course among experts. Perhaps it is because individualization, as a hallmark of modern (but also post-modern) political strategies of undermining solidarity and rendering people more "flexible" (cf. *Beck* 1992), requires persons labeled as "non-productive" to legitimize the social structures, that is, power interests. The effectiveness of the individualization strategy is revealed by the fact that—unconsciously—it is firmly rooted in our society. Taking her cues from *Erdheim, Niedecken* characterizes this phenomenon as the "phantasm of disability." Phantasm is described as a collective psychological configuration in which societies unconsciously support their systems of domination on the individual level and thus allow them to appear as if they were unchangeable and predetermined by nature (*Niedecken* 2003, 82). The individualized view of disabled persons is socially required and continues to be reproduced through diverse social settings, such as charitable fund raisers. Under such conditions, the matter of course by which disabilities are identified in everyday life, and the difficulties encountered by attempts at deconstructing disability in the framework of inclusion, testify to the enormous compactness of the emotional roots of the phantasm of disability in our enlightened Western society.

The demolished potential space and the invasion of the phantasms occur due to social tendencies of devaluation, repression, and annihilation, which the concerned persons are also at times able to

formulate directly. As a disabled woman reports (cf. Mason in Sinason 1992, 143): *“A message clearly and firmly slipped into my unconscious saying that people would prefer it if I died ... I am now 30 years old. Only now am I beginning to realize that I do not have to smile all the time, and that I can achieve mediocrity without feeling someone will come along and ‘put me out of my misery.’”*

The projective imputation of suffering and misery is an indispensable part of the phantasm of disability. Fredi Saal, a man with a disability who escaped the Nazi murder machinery by chance, writes: *“No, it is not the disabled person who experiences him- or herself as abnormal—she or he is experienced as abnormal by others, because a whole section of human life is cut off. Thus this very existence acquires a threatening quality. One doesn’t start from the disabled persons themselves, but from one’s own experience. One asks oneself, how would I react, should a disability suddenly strike, and the answer is projected onto the disabled person. Thus one receives a completely distorted image. Because it is not the other fellow that one sees, but oneself. This leads to a paradoxical behavior: One’s glance at the Other instills suffering, as it were—and therefore one avoids this person’s presence”* (Saal 1992, 8).

Anxiety is the motivating force which becomes operative in this context. It is only by dint of anxiety that social phantasms can take hold in the psyche.

The ultimate goal of an assimilating pedagogy, which seeks to remove this contradiction, is to teach strategies to the concerned persons in order to reduce the Others’ anxieties. In other words, the “handicapped smile” is the symbol of self-effacement which aims at reducing society’s anxiety in the face of the uncontrollable other.

In the fall of 1998, a series of advertising posters entitled “Sunflowers” was produced by the well-known international garment corporation Benetton—“sunflowers” being the term for the depicted persons with learning disabilities.

In her introduction to the Benetton catalog, best-selling Italian author Susanna Tamaro writes: *“From my window I see hills, fields, and woods, and further back the outlines of an extinguished volcano. The corn fields alternate with sunflower fields. I have always loved these flowers because of their stubborn cheerfulness and the compliancy with which they follow the sun. Next to me, on my desk, I see the smile of these children, of these young people. Still more suns that illuminate my room. There is joy in these glances: a simple, undeniable joy. In these pictures, there is no violence, no assault at all, no coercion to smile ...”*

Here is another quote from the catalog:

“‘I believe that the disabled children and adults are actually angels,’ says Paola, Stefano’s mother (and marketing director of Benetton), ‘because they know no malice, no lies, no falsehood.’ I believe this, too. We are not the ones who sacrifice ourselves for these children—as a certain, purportedly benevolent rhetoric claims; it’s they who sacrifice themselves for us. They come into the world with shining eyes in order to break open the armor surrounding our hearts, opening them for the greatest gift, which is the most difficult to accept: the uncalculating generous nature of love.”

This text might be discarded as kitschy. But with its posters, Benetton is pursuing a very successful advertising strategy. In my opinion, this can only be due to the fact that it is based on a firmly established consciousness, or rather unconsciousness, which is then transformed into a commercial message. Benetton wants to be provocatively authentic and display naked reality. Their posters on HIV, on dying in wars, or on the sexuality of nuns and priests follow this line. Benetton wishes to enlighten (cf. Heinze-Prause 2000). Yet one may ask, wherein lies the social enlightenment of these smiling disabled children and adolescents? Clearly it is in the fact that they exist and may be publicly presented as persons. This could mean that by virtue of this initiative, isolation is being broken down. But the way in which this presentation is carried out serves and reinforces the habitual labeling. Establishing an analogy to plants—to sunflowers—represents the nature metaphor that leads to the

dehumanization of disabled persons. This dates back to a scientifically legitimized tradition of the early nineteenth century, one that led directly to eugenics. The following statements made in 1821 serve as an illustration (*Johann von Knolz*, cf. *Schmitt* 1985, 63) that relates to persons with learning disabilities as they would be described today. Then they were commonly referred to as “fexen”; the scientific term was “cretins”:

“If the fex, however, is not a human being, then he is an animal, something which [according to ‘physical anthropology’] should be visible already from his face, which has ‘become, for the most part, the guzzling tool, the jaw, and the muzzle’... The fexen are ‘relegated’ even further ‘downwards into the class of low animals.’ Their enormous digestive force indicates that they border ‘the animal classes in whom, apart from the belly entrails, hardly any other entrails have awoken; that is, the so-called plant animals’... ‘The belief in the plant nature of the cretins takes on an increasingly compelling character. Since just as in the case of plants, their genital development shows the highest unfolding’. The only advantage the fexen have compared to plants is ‘that they need not die immediately after having dropped their seed.’”

From the 1980s onwards, this animal and plant metaphor was also taken up in the framework of the new euthanasia debate; suffice it to recall *Peter Singer’s* formulation of “human vegetable” (Singer 1984, 104). In this debate on the value of life, there is an attempt to define persons who may be killed. A concrete background to this is the consistent practice of aborting fetuses once Down syndrome or another disability is detected. One may well ask whether the plant metaphor on the Benetton poster may not also symbolize, and thereby reinforce, this reality. At any rate the description’s almost existential-esoteric tone of voice is suggestive. When it is claimed here that disabled persons are angels who know no malice, no lies, no falsehood, this is so fantastic that one has to ask what is actually being signified. Basically, there is no human being like this, but rather perhaps an angel—a reference to the hereafter—or a plant. It is also stressed that persons with learning disabilities sacrifice themselves for us, that they redeem us from the evils of our psychic armor-plate. A pseudo-religious allegory comes to the fore, in which the persons with learning disabilities end up showing us the uncalculating generous nature of love. This blend of plant-likeness and otherworldliness—fundamentally a metaphor of dying—is symbolized though the smile. In the posters, these indications are combined with the attempt to break taboos, which aims at direct emotionalizing and is sustained by the images, not the text, precisely through the public exposition of persons with learning disabilities. Strikingly, Benetton did not hazard to show older persons; they obviously had to take children, adolescents, and young people. Children depicted on posters naturally attract more sympathy than older people. The imagination of disabled persons remaining forever children is also played with—another truth which obviously is intended to be conveyed in this context. Though in most institutions where disabled persons are assisted one no longer speaks of “our children”—even referring to adults—the question remains whether, with regards to them, a historical infant representation might nonetheless have survived. As part of the Enlightenment, concepts of reason, technical rationality, and progress emerged, and discourses were initiated for the purpose of social order und disciplining, which split off the unreasonable (cf. *Foucault* 1990), the non-rational, the deviant and the a-social, all of which inhibited progress. The image of children as not yet developed adults, of childhood as a linearly conceived developmental deficiency, gave way to an almost infinite educational optimism. Through medical-psychiatric models of diagnosis, a splitting-off process may have taken place, according to which disabled persons—who by definition could be educated only in limited ways—had to remain children in the sense of small adults, forever dependent and unable to stand on their own two feet.

Fundamentally, the entire poster campaign is about an affirmative “colonization of the minds through visual perception,” as *Roswitha Heinze-Prause* (2000), who has analyzed Benetton’s advertising

posters, puts it. But through the potential public discussion triggered by the display, the dialectics of such attempts involves the possibility of making definitions of the situation transparent. Hence both emancipatory effects and the reinforcement of reification and thus annihilation are equally possible.

Smiling in the 16th Century?

What has been said so far may help to understand the smile of the man with a disability in the portrait of the 16th century. By many viewers the smile is described as superior, intelligent and self-confident. I would rather suggest a very ambivalent facial expression which symbolises gained self-confident, deprived socialisation and dependence. We know the competent way out in such a situation: to be cynical in a way that is intelligent and provokes a relaxed laugh. This nicely fits in to the culture of laughing of the renaissance.

Elisabeth doesn't laugh, which is difficult to understand. Does it symbolize a realistic consciousness of a woman with a learning disability who doesn't have to fight for social acceptance through smiling? If this could be interpreted this way it would be a further evidence for a possible personal acceptance of a person with a learning disability.

Dandelion



Spring awakening. In: Ja zum Leben. 1998, 35

A further current picture is described in connection with metaphors of plants.

You find it in a brochure of the 100-years-anniversary of a traditional home for persons with learning disabilities (Ja zum Leben 1998). The first impression is that it isn't anything unusual. It shows a group of persons with learning disabilities and their carers standing in front of a field of dandelions in spring.

The only obvious thing is that these disabled persons must spend live and spare time in large groups. Next to it, though, is the text "Transformation - a parable" (Kosicki 1998, 34) which unexpectedly connects the picture with a metaphor. The beginning of the parable is that a dandelion in a field asks the nutrients in the earth if they want to become a dandelion. They should dissolve painlessly and let themselves be absorbed. This is how the nutrients became plants. A rabbit hopping past asks a dandelion if he wants to become a rabbit. He must let himself be eaten but then he could move freely. And so the dandelion became a rabbit. Then a hunter came past and asked the rabbit if he wanted to become a human being, then he could create stories and fly to the moon. But he would have to let himself be shot dead, skinned, cooked and eaten. In tears the rabbit said yes. The ending of the parable was: *"Then god came past and said to the human being: 'Wouldn't you like to ...? Would we?'"*, a citation of the bible and *"the transformation we are letting ourselves in to costs us everything."* (all ibid).

The metaphor of the dandelion, which is in the emblem of the home, represents a transformation metaphor connected with the disabled persons. Why does the gaze at disabled persons trigger the desire of transformation and sacrifice? The only thing I can see here is that disabled persons are being used as a symbol of suffering, sacrifice and life after death which can be connected with the

term of *imitatio christi*. Of course there is a connection here with the home led by nuns. Despite this the dandelion metaphor has a general meaning in which it characterises persons with disabilities as not really human creatures between earth and god. Being a human being is not automatically a fundamental right, it is connected with the demand of the alteration to a higher happiness. Disabled persons are only accepted in the function of being a symbol of transformation. The personal expressions of these persons, who entirely depend on the Institution (Goffman 1973), are unknown and unimportant in this constellation.

This second example can be seen as an indication with which metaphors Benetton could work with. We can see that in the transformation from Caritas to commercialization more latent contents are used than we can analyse in the first moment while seeing the nice design and the friendly/cute smiling disabled person. However, it is sure that latent meaning of the advertisement brochure is perceived unconsciously by the recipient of advertisement processed in the sense of reproduction of the structures of meaning.

Prospect

1982 Sandfort demanded in a declaration respect for the perspectives of disabled persons and generally put like this: "We demand the creation of conditions which give us the hope in a humane live with equal rights in a democratic society. In a society which doesn't force us to consider our skills as insignificant and which doesn't alienate our positive qualities, a humane society which respects us." (Sandfort 1982, 212)

Meanwhile this is not only a demand on nondisabled journalists and representatives of media and advertisement anymore, it is also a demand on self-representation of members of the Independent Living Movement and People First Movement.

In the traditional media you can find here and there self-representation of people with disabilities which break through the transformatory gaze. An example therefore is the portrait of Veronika Hammel



which was produced by the German People First project "Ohrenkuss" and which was printed with an understanding journalistic text in *Brigitte*-women (Nr. 2/2006).

The photograph is also shown as an interesting supplement to the portrait of Elisabeth from the 16th century in the exhibition "The painting of a man with a disability" (Mürner/Schönwiese, V. 2006, 35).

Veronika Hammel. In: *Mürner/Schönwiese*, V. 2006, 35

It is still regarded: „The subservient people hardly can control the social representations over themselves." (Champagne 1997, 78)

But the existence of self-presentations like the one of Veronika Hammel can produce a structure of contrast to the media products which are affirmative in the social defence of anxiety. The self-presentations can help to cope with the defence of anxiety, which does not seem possible in the enlightenment of the latent meaning of the media's representations of persons with disabilities. Again we have to claim: "Nothing about us without us".

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3. The participatory approach of the Research Project „The Painting of a Disabled Man from the 16th Century“ – selected findings and conclusions

Petra Flieger

A study by the Research Center for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester tried to find out which historical and temporary materials on living with a disability there are in British museums and collections. The study concludes with the following recommendation on further research activities: “An important aspect of this research would be dedicated time spent working with groups of disabled people on their response to, and interpretation of objects to create display materials that integrate a multiplicity of voices.” (comp. RCMG 2004, 23) This perfectly describes the central activity of our research project: A project group that to a large extent consisted of women and men with disabilities was looking for answers and interpretations to a historical object. Simultaneously they developed materials for an exhibition as well as a publication that reflect a variety of perspectives.

The design of the participator action research approach

As the key topic was the cultural representation of disability we drafted a research design that intended to emphasize and to strengthen the view of women and men with disabilities within the whole research process. The reference group was meant to advise the researchers and to comment their activities, as e.g. Turnbull and Friesen described the role of a so called participatory action research committee: „The PAR committee advises assertively, candidly and comprehensively on all aspects of research – its initial planning, implementation, interpretation and utilization.“ (Turnbull/Friesen 1995, p. 3) This was pretty much what I had in mind when writing the project application. As far as I’m familiar with literature on participatory action research it’s unusual that a project with a rather theoretical and historical topic has such an approach; usually, PAR projects have a more practical orientation like e.g. the evaluation of services provided for people with disabilities or research on the autobiographies of women and men with disabilities.

There were two strategies in the design of the research project to make it participatory: first, two of the researchers themselves had a disability, Volker Schönwiese, the project manager, and Ulrike Pfeifenberger, a young researcher. Second, women and men with disabilities that have a close relationship to the CIL in Innsbruck participated in a reference group as described by other authors before (comp. e.g.: Turnbull / Friesen 1995; Heron / Reason 2001; Walmsley / Johnson 2003). Four of the participants hold an academic degree. Participants were paid on an hourly basis depending on how many meetings they attended. The meetings were moderated by one of the researchers, most of the time Volker Schönwiese was the moderator. Minutes were kept for each of the meetings, those minutes were the database for describing and analyzing the research process in the end.

Basic structure: meetings on a regular basis

The reference group met 14 times in 22 months, mostly researchers and reference group met together, there were just two meetings of the reference group without researchers. These meetings were the basic structure, the temporal and organisational framework for participation in the research process. At the end of project there was an additional final meeting for reflecting and evaluating the project which was moderated by an external moderator.

From the beginning, the whole project was laid out openly and very much oriented toward the process itself. In the beginning, this was hard for both the researchers and the participants as neither were sure which roles they should play or which responsibilities they should take over. But by and by

this openness turned out to be an advantage because it opened up new ways of dealing with and replying to the historic painting for all people involved. Different kinds of individual activities and personal commitment developed, e.g. Frequent or unfrequent participation in the meetings, different ways of dealing with the topic like artistic, scientific or toward every day experience. Informal activities like having dinner together after the meetings or e-mailing between the meetings played an important role for the development of a distinct identity as a project group. By and by, the originally two groups of researchers on the one side and participants on the other side grew together and became one project group.

In the final project reflection the whole project as well as the model of the reference group were evaluated as very successful by all participants. Apart from one person that left quite at the beginning, no one left, so the group was extraordinary consistent. This seems to indicate that real participation took place, because: „If participants notice that they are only included in selected research activities, that they receive little recognition for their work, that their presence in the project is because of political or funding reasons, and all of it is in the guise of participation, they will likely view such practices as tokenism or window dressing and leave.“ (White et al. 2004, p6) The perseverance and consequence of the participants during the whole project was unexpectedly high. In this process the group structure relieved the individuals, because it was no problem if one missed one meeting, you could join in with the next.

Topics

A variety of topics were discussed in the formal as well as the informal meetings: the researchers tended to give more theoretical input, whereas the participants focused more on their experiences of living with a disability. But according to their work background they, too, provided theoretical background: e.g. Christine Riegler had worked on the issue of gazes toward disabled women and men before, David Sporschill and Erika Zwicklhuber as social workers informed on social security issues. In the beginning it took a while that participants became familiar with the historical and theoretical topics of the research project. It turned out as a disadvantage that the whole project had been drafted by researchers and that participants had entered the process later. At one point even the question arose if we should continue researching the old painting. But of course there was a binding treaty with the ministry. So the central challenge was to find ways of getting deeply involved with the historic painting as a starting point and, simultaneously, giving voice to the different individual perspectives. Christian Mürner made a major contribution in this regard when he suggested to write a dictionary on the painting of a disabled man together.

In retrospect, there was a major shift in regard to the topics dominating the project: from images of resp. gazes on people with disabilities toward the self presentation of women and men with disabilities with a distinct focus on an emancipatory gaze. This shift very well reflects the strong influence of the reference group. Thus, the historical painting of the painting of a disabled man was put into a completely new and enlarged context: For the Museum of Art History at Ambras Castle this way of creating an exhibition is very unusual and innovative: never before have they created an exhibition with a historical object as the starting point, bridging to the present and presenting an issue with contemporary materials.

At the project reflection people agreed that working for the research project was enriching in many ways for all of them. There were different views on disability, though, that might be due to different forms of disability. But discussing these differences was considered enriching and fostering identity. In any way, the diversity of perspectives within the reference group rose the quality of the projects outcomes. „A broad range of participants is beneficial to the project because it can increase the social validation of the project´s goals, procedures, and outcomes and result in development of a wider range of resources, information and perspectives.“ (White et al. 2004, p 4)

Interests of participating Institutions

Three quite different institutions were cooperating as partners in the research Project „The Painting of a disabled man”: A scientific institution, a cultural institution and a civil rights organisation. In retrospect, it would have been important to make the needs, aims and goals of these institutions transparent at the beginning of the project, because the „basis for the successful management of cooperation is the serving of interests.” (Dienel 2004, 46) This didn't happen, and so the respective interests just slowly became obvious in the course of the project. That led to conflicts again and again.

In retrospect, it appears that Ambras Castle was mostly interested in organising an exhibition and neither in the transdisciplinary process nor in the priorities of the other cooperating partners. Volker Schönwiese and Petra Flieger definitely underestimated the role of the exhibition in the project as a whole, they just by and by found out how dominating and powerful the realisation of the exhibition turned out to be.

Through the course of the project the issue of accessibility gained importance: it was one of the major issues out of an Independent Living perspective and a political guideline out of question. In the project application accessibility was not even mentioned, so this is an excellent example of how participation of women and men with disabilities influenced the research project in a way that it became meaningful for their lives and improved their quality of life. (comp. Doe / Whyte 1995; Chappel 2000; Walmsley / Johnson 2003) The aim of accessible rooms for the exhibition was a consequence of the strong participation of disabled people. Ambras Castle was not at all aware of this and there were some major conflicts about accessibility as the Castle itself is just poorly accessible. During these conflicts the reference group played an important role because it could clearly speak out for the aims of people with disabilities. We finally agreed on a compromise: the exhibition rooms are situated in the first floor of the Upper Castle, where a steep natural ramp leads up to. For visitors who use a power chair this is usually no problem, others may need assistance and Ambras Castle makes efforts to provide this.

For the researchers related to the University this didn't come as a surprise because all of them had in one way or another a close relationship to the Independent Living Movement and were familiar with its political principles. They were more troubled in situations where scientific rigor was demanded of them, e.g. toward the Ministry or at conferences. This is a typical phenomenon for participatory research, as White et al. point out: „Eliminating the detachment, which was historically maintained by the researchers, may be perceived as resulting in biased and unscientific research.” (2004, p4) For researchers this is often a demanding and challenging balancing act.

Different activities to participate

As was pointed out in the project reflection it was very important for participants that they could do more than just comment on what researchers were doing or advise them. It was essential that participants could engage in concrete activities. E.g. some of the participants themselves produced objects for the exhibition at Ambras Castle: the dolls by Karin Flatz, paintings by Georg Urban and the network of keywords by David Sporschill. All participants wrote keywords for the small dictionary on the painting of a disabled man, some more, some less, as it was convenient. Last but not least, some ideas for the exhibition were born in the discussion at the meetings, e.g. the peep tubes for different gazes on disabled people or the video installation. Finally, almost everyone was involved in the detailed organisation of the exhibition at Ambras Castle.

From the outset it was not at all obvious who would take over an active resp. an inactive role. This seems to be another advantage of the basic group structure because it opens up a flexible and

wide scope for activities. In the project reflection the process of growing together was considered an outcome of the intense cooperation and exchange.

For the continuity of the group it was important that there was payment for participation. In many PAR projects this is not the case: researchers are being paid, participants are supposed to volunteer but this is often a reason from them to leave research projects as is pointed out in literature (comp. Pringle / Sonpal-Valias 2000; White et al 2004)

As mentioned earlier Christian Mürner suggested working together on a dictionary on the Painting of a disabled man. I personally find the outcome of this idea quite extraordinary: it's a text of about 50 pages, all the researchers and participants contributed to it, some wrote just one or two keywords, others wrote seven to ten. Everyone described keywords that were important to them in regard to the historical painting, they are in alphabetical order with references to other keywords as is usual for dictionaries. Here's a list of selected keywords: cover, ambivalence, fear, accessibility, disability studies, legs, arms, portrait, gaze general, gaze on the painting of the disabled man from a women's perspective, gaze on the painting of the disabled man from a men's perspective, curious gaze, medical gaze, pitiful gaze, emancipated gaze, DanceAbility, Solitude, cabinet of wonders, curiosity, relationship, power, people with learning disabilities. It was the reference group's wish to include the perspective of people with learning disabilities, so we got in touch with a People 1st project in Innsbruck and found a guest author, Monika Rauchberger, a woman with a learning disability, who wrote 3 keywords for the dictionary. The dictionary is a major part of the publication we produced for the exhibition. The second main part is the catalogue for the exhibition, below the catalogue texts are references to the respective keywords in the dictionary. So the objects of the exhibition are related and linked to the dictionary as regards contents. I consider this an excellent example of how a participatory approach in research can in the end lead to unusual outcomes and products of a new quality.

Recommendations for working with reference groups as a means of transdisciplinary research

Participation of stakeholders in the phase of drafting a research project

We recommend to start participation of stakeholders as soon as a research project is being drafted. This makes sure that participants identify with the project's topics and aims. There should be financial resources for this phase of participatory research.

Payment for participants

Participants should receive adequate reimbursement for their involvement. Financial resources should be somewhat flexible so they can be adapted to the individual activities participants might engage in during the course of the project.

Meetings on a regular basis

On the one hand they provide the basic participatory structure, on the other they make informal activities possible.

External moderation

Meetings should be moderated by an external person for better efficiency and transparency. With external moderation it's easier to make clear roles and responsibilities and to deal with conflicts. Furthermore, interests of the participating institutions need to be made clear and need to be managed.

Variety of activities for participants

For participants in reference groups there should be a variety of activities they can engage in. The researchers should be open minded toward suggestions and ideas of participants even if they seem to be irrelevant or not important in the first place. They might be of great value and importance in the long run.

Orientations toward the process

Participatory action research projects should be designed in a very open and flexible way. This is an advantage for the development of diverse and unexpected approaches. There should be space for the development of roles and activities of the participants as well as a broadened understanding of the researchers' role.

Conclusion

From the viewpoint of the project "The Painting of a disabled man" the model reference group for realizing a participatory approach in transdisciplinary research projects can be considered successful. It's a challenging concept but the reference group structurally anchors participation of non-scientific stakeholders into the research process. This causes a variety of communication and exchange processes among the cooperating groups that might finally lead to new topics and outcomes. The consequent participation of women and men with disabilities strengthened the equal rights and independent living perspective as well as the emancipatory gaze toward people with disabilities in the whole research project.

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Foto: Monika Zanolin

The Exhibition at Ambras Castle, Innsbruck

Dec.-June 2007

Compare the catalog: *Mürner, Christian/ Schönwiese, Volker* (Hg.): Das Bildnis eines behinderten Mannes. Das Bildnis eines behinderten Mannes. Bildkultur der Behinderung vom 16. bis ins 21. Jahrhundert. Ausstellungskatalog und Wörterbuch. AG SPAK Bücher, Neu Ulm 2006

Mottos of the 6 rooms:

„Let us throw off the absurd amazement which overcomes us at unfamiliar appearances.“
(Michel de *Montaigne* 1588)

„The gaze of another shapes my body in its nudity.“ (Jean Paul *Sartre* 1943)

„In the jester the monarch saw the right to exist of other live-forms.“ (Erwin *Riess* 2003)

„When I say that I am a women with a disability, then I am talking about my identity.“ (Simi *Linton* 1998, retranslation from German)

„You have to control your pity, otherwise it can do harm.“ (Stefan *Zweig* 1939)

„You have to change the gaze with which you behold, not the object.“ (Jean *Dubuffet* 1980)



Painting of a disabled man

3rd Quarter of the 16th century, oil on canvas, height 110 cm, width 135 cm
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (Museum of Art History), gallery of paintings, inv.-no. GG 8344

The painting of a naked man lying on his stomach is one of the few preserved paintings of that time, which shows a person with a disability. In

the Ambras collection it was first mentioned in 1666.

As there are only a few clothes left, it is difficult to determine the man's social status. The ruff he wears is an item that was developed in Spanish fashion. In the end of the 16th century it used to be an accessory of courtly fashion, but soon it became a piece of clothing which was worn by officials as well. The red cap was worn by young princes, scholars, artists and jesters alike.

The picture is divided into two separate parts: The "dressed" head shown in the upright position forms the contrast to the "naked" body, lying on the table. The intelligent, vivid look is in contradiction to the immovability and powerlessness of the body. In addition, the self-confidence, which is expressed

in his look, does not harmonize with the helpless position of his body. But it is exactly this ambiguity which today makes the charm of the painting. However, the painting did not always look like that! According to the catalog, a piece of red paper covered the man. A strip of black paper can still be seen from the right shoulder down to his buttocks. The strip shows pieces of red paper, but as no other signs of red paper are visible it probably was hanging loose over the body (Margot *Rauch*).¹

¹ Compare the text of Volker *Schönwiese* in his handout: The social gaze at disabled persons. The portrait of a sixteenth-century man with a disability.



Elisabeth

round 1578, paper on wood, height 11.5cm, width 9.5cm

Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum (Museum of Art History), gallery of paintings, inv.-no. GG 5424

The portrait is part of the miniature portrait collection of Archduke Ferdinand II, which comprises more than a thousand portraits. Like many others, this portrait might be a copy of a large painting. We know that there are two portraits depicting Elisabeth, but unfortunately they seem to be lost as the whereabouts are not identified.

One portrait was painted by Jakob Seisenegger, the court painter of Emperor Ferdinand I. The other one belonged to Anna, Duchess of Bavaria, who was the older sister of Ferdinand. The portrait is engraved with the following words: ELISABET STULTA (= foolish, simple-minded Elisabeth). The golden dress shows silver decorations which can be interpreted as an allusion to her character². There is every reason to believe that Elisabeth played an important role within the family, as numerous portraits of her were made, and she was always presented wearing jewelry and luxurious dresses (Margot *Rauch*).

² Compare the comment by Volker *Schönwiese* in his handout: The social gaze at disabled persons. The portrait of a sixteenth-century man with a disability.



Wolfgang Gschaidter

From: Symbolum Oenipontanum - Ynsprügger Warzaichen

leaflet according to Andreas Spaengler, printed by Daniel Paur, Innsbruck 1620

Height 473mm, width.291mm

Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum (Provincial Museum of Tyrol Ferdinandeum)

The leaflet is based on the model made by the copper engraver Andreas Spaengler (Schwaz, 1589-1669?). The leaflet depicts the carpenter Wolfgang Gschaidter (also Gschaidt) from Innsbruck, who was considered to be the city symbol. According to the text, Wolfgang Gschaidter had been lying there “stiff like a piece of wood” for 15 years. Bearing in mind the suffering carpenter, readers and viewers were asked to go to the Dreieiligen Church in

Innsbruck to perform penance and to “give alms to the poor cripple”. Wolfgang Gschaidter always served as a warning symbol which was used to demonstrate the frail of life. An edition of the Ulm city library proofs that this presentation used to be very popular as many issues of the leaflet were published (Christian Mürner).



Peep Tubes



DanceAbility

Foto: Monika Zanolin

The pitiful gaze:

In general, the ability to feel pity or sorry for someone, is considered to be a human virtue. As far as the social aspect is concerned, this kind of behaviour is even desired in human relationships. That's why we say: grief shared is half grief. However, a pitiful look given by one person can be interpreted completely different by the one who gets it. Pity sometimes can do more harm than indifference, because to express pity can also be humiliating for the one you feel pity for. Thus, disabled people are seen in a way which robs them of their personality, and it often cannot be understood that they experience their existence and identity by virtue of their disability.

The curious gaze:

First of all, the curious gaze is a neutral gaze, free from any prejudice. In other words the person who is looked at is not judged at all, in contrast to the medical gaze or the pitiful gaze. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves, why do disabled people get curious gazes anyway? Why does disability arouse curiosity? Because those who are regarded as “healthy” consider disabled people to be unusual; because in former times disabled people simply were “put away”, and even today they are often “sent” to institutions or workshops; because their disability is often concealed, and they are excluded from society due to structural and social barriers. Thus, they are not “visible” and when you meet disabled people, their appearance suddenly means something special. That is why they simply do not have the opportunity to be part of the human variety living together.

The medical gaze:

The medical gaze on ill or disabled people is a focused look. It exactly concentrates on a person's significant characteristic, which is seen as an illness or disability. Doctors are “experts” in the field of illnesses and the respective therapies. Thus, they take on an active part as they judge and value the patient. In this context, the disability is often seen as a deficiency which bears the danger that the person with the particular “deficiency” is defined due to his or her illness or disability and thus, he or she is humiliated. With regard to the medical gaze the question is: “Can you do justice to a person, can you see the person in his or her unity, totality and uniqueness if the main focus is put on (apparently) existing deficiencies?”

The emancipated gaze:

The emancipated gaze is not subject to social judgment or ideas of what is normal. It meets the look of the other one, accepts it but is not subordinated to embarrassment or anxiety. The emancipated gaze is challenging and opens towards the environment. Moreover, a person with an emancipated look does not depend on the judgmental looks given by other ones. Disabled people with an emancipated gaze know that the fact of having a disability cannot be judged objectively (Christine Riegler).



Bruchlandungen /Crash Landings

Martin Bruch, years of origin 1996-2001

Length 275cm, height 45cm

Photos, wood, cardboard, glass

Martin Bruch was raised in Hall and now lives in Vienna where he works as a photographer and filmmaker. He has multiple sclerosis which results in balance impairment. He started to seize situations of falling down as an artistic opportunity. Whenever he fell, he made a picture of himself lying on the floor (1996 to 2001). Thus, the photo series "Bruchlandungen" (crash landings) together with a picture book that contains 312 photos was produced. In his works the artist expresses the unpredictability of his falls and furthermore documents on a particular phase of his life. It can be seen as a "work in progress" which touches the field of performance and action. The photos shall encourage the beholder to think about the things which are not or can not be shown, as they are just in one's imagination (Martin *Bruch*).



Portrait of Veronika Hammel

From the Magazine „Ohrenkuss“, Model: Veronika Hammel, 2004

Photographer: Mathias Bothor

Paper on cardboard, framed, height 59cm, width 42cm

In the year 2004 a long cherished dream came true. People with Down Syndrome posed for the „Ohrenkuss“ Magazine and were photographed liked professional top-models. „Ohrenkuss“ is a special magazine which is produced by people with Down syndrome. Sometimes, words can also be „weapons“ and even the intonation we use when we are speaking to others expresses respect. Respect was also the basic idea of the photo shooting; the objective was to pay respect by promoting disabled people regarding their visual appearance. Thus, they were presented in a „good-looking“ way. Disabled people are often humiliated as they are presented in discriminating dresses or even naked.

With regard to her photo, the model Veronika Hammerl commends: „I am beautiful, look at my flower. It think my hair is stylish, and I am sitting in a comfortable position. And my shoes are stylish. I also think my tattoo is great! “ (Katja de *Braganza*)



Foto: Monika Zanolin

Karin Flatz, Dolls

3 large dolls (2006), height 176cm; 7 small dolls, height 58cm
Paper-maché, acrylic paint, textiles, lacquer

The South Tyrolean resident Karin Flatz works as an independent artist and basically deals with the image of disabled people today. She uses dolls made of paper-maché to 3-dimensionally demonstrate the present situation of disabled people. She wants to create different perspectives which shall lead to a change of paradigm regarding the notion of what is normal and what is disabled. The green color somehow reflects the displeasure, underlines the irritation of the usual and allows the reflection of one's own projection. When you "meet" these dolls, the effect is inevitable and the question of identification will be raised. The objective is not to create a shadow of new esthetics but to replace a world of illusion by another world of illusion. It is all about playing a game of views which are supposed to blur the image of disabilities and clear the way for new perceptions (Karin *Flatz*).

The “Schlumper”

In 1984 women and men with different disabilities got together with the painter Rolf Laute, an artist of Hamburg. They opened a gallery in what is known as Townhouse Schlump near the Schlump subway station in Hamburg. In the following, they established the organization “Friends of the Schlumpers” and implemented the project “Professional Schlumper”.



Uwe Bender, 2006

The hand
height 100cm, width 75cm
Chalk on cardboard

Uwe Bender comes from Wesermünde. At the age of five he moved to the Alsterdorf Institute. Today he lives in a supervised group home in Hamburg-Altona and has been a member of the “Schlumpers” from the beginning.



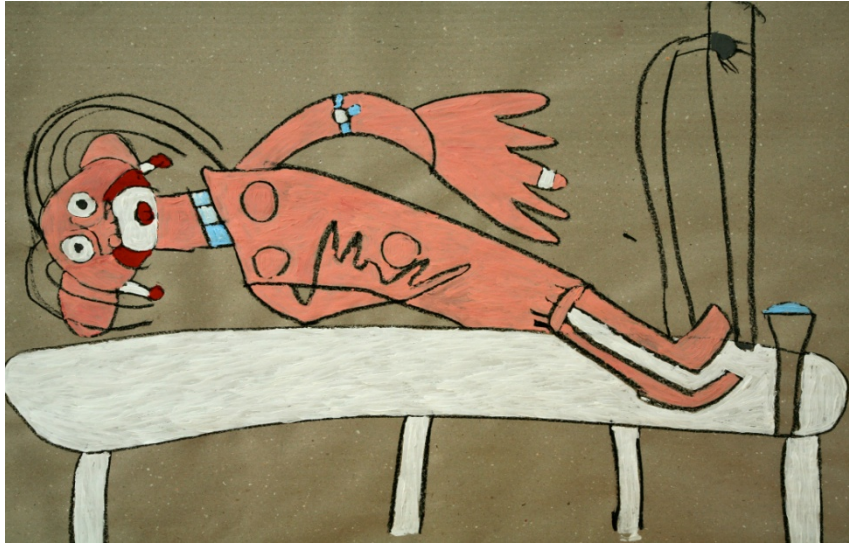
Bernhard Krebs, 2006

Study regarding the painting of a disabled man

height 70cm, width 100cm

Paint on paper

Bernhard Krebs lives in his own apartment in Hamburg and became a member of the "Professional Schlumper" in 2005.



Horst Wäble, 2004

Bathing Accident

height 70cm, width 100cm, Paint on paper

Horst Wäble used to work in the Alsterdorf Institute. Today, he owns an apartment where pedagogical care is provided. He is part of the gallery community and a "Friend of the Schlumper" (Christian Mürner).



Georg Urban, 2006

8 abstractions regarding the painting of a disabled man

height 49.4cm, width 42cm

Color pens on paper

Georg Urban (Innsbruck) is a member of the "Tiroler Kuenstlerschaft" (Tyrolean Association of Artists). In 1996 he received the Austrian Graphics Award.

This piece of art deals with the interaction of the colors blue and red, in other words with the interaction of contrasts. It is also about abstract areas, which bend, curve, and get narrow and wide. Each element stands alone and leaves room for different associations. The structures approach each other in such a way that they displace themselves at the same time. The abstract is less threatening than the concrete, which is why exactly these particular shapes and color combinations were used. The graphics do not provide a name. Thus, the beholder inevitably names them, and due to his or her individual view they are torn out of their "being". Omitting special features leads to the fact that only the individuality remains, which must/cannot be changed. The picture of the human being is reduced to the absent, in other words to the omission (Georg *Urban*).



Hans Witschi, 1997

Andreas Groegli, Study 1-3

Height 60.96cm, length 45.72cm

Acrylic on cotton

Hans Witschi produced 3 studies based on a photograph showing a therapist and a person who has arthrogryposis. The position of the patient's hand perfectly expresses the problem. If the top of the pen points down, the patient's hand gets dirty. If the pen is held the other way round, the patient cannot really touch the paper. However, the studies are inconsistent, because on one picture the sheet of paper is stained with red color; on the third picture "the painter" changed the pen for a glass of syrup. The position of the hand reminds us of a conductor, a person who conjures up something.

Hans Witschi was born in Switzerland and has been contributing to numerous exhibitions in his home country, Germany and the US since 1970. In cooperation with Paolo Poloni the documentary "WITSCHI GEHT" (Witschi is leaving) was produced. The film is about the artist moving to New York, where he still lives (Christian *Mürner*).



A Relief of the “painting of a disabled man”

The relief painting tries to make the historic painting of a disabled man accessible for blind people.

Eva Papst from the Federal Institute for blind people and Johannes Reiss, an independent web-developer, have adapted the painting for the exhibition shown at Ambras Castle.

The transformation from visual to haptic information, which can be “felt” or “touched” via one's fingers, can be understood like a translation from one language into another one. The challenge of this transformation is to significantly reduce the varied and differentiated visual information. A special printer is used which can produce seven different levels. This is a complicated procedure but basically it can be said: the darker the color, the more intense the print. The background of the original painting of a disabled man is very dark. Hence, the background was not imprinted on the relief in order to guarantee that frame, figure and outline remain recognizable for the haptic perception. Furthermore, the relief does not have the same size like the original, because large objects are difficult to catch. A detailed description of the painting in Braille and additional information about where to touch it perfectly complete the relief. (Petra *Flieger*)

Monika K. Zanolin, 2006

schau/show (look/show)

DV Pal 16:9, video installation on three screens, 490 seconds each, sections of 13 people



Faces without bodies, bodies without heads, single body parts. Single sections of pictures limit the view on the person as a whole. This video installation deals with the central idea of the view and the duality of spirit and body. Faces, upper parts of the body and individually chosen body parts can be seen. The single parts are projected non-synchronously and shifted, which makes it difficult to tell which head belongs

to which body or body part. What is it that makes a person? A single part of the body? The body itself? The head? The gaze? How can a gaze touch you? When is it considered to be attacking? The camera takes a look into the faces and to the bodies of the portrayed people. The people on the other hand present themselves and look back. The "Schau/Show" was created by Monika Katharina Zanolin. She took her master photographer diploma in 1972 and a diploma at the London International Filmschool in 1985 (art and technique of filmmaking). Since then she has been working as a freelance photographer. (Petra Flieger)

Dominik Huber

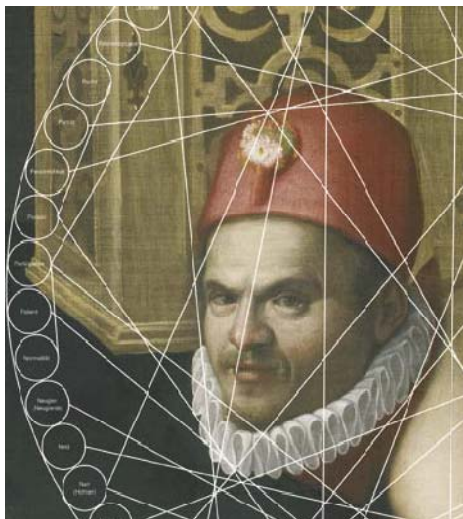
Truck Hood

Length 13.6m, height 2.7m

Thermo-jet colors on Hood

Dominik Huber was born in Upper Austria in 1983. In his leisure time the young man with Down syndrome pursues his artistic abilities. Everything started in summer 2003, when his parents were looking for suitable activities for him to do. It had to be something that corresponded to Dominik's artistic gift. That is how the idea was born to decorate hoods, which were spread on the floor, so the artist could start to decorate them according to drafts that had been made in cooperation with one of his friends, an arts student. Today, the exceptional hoods are used by many haulage firms to make their vehicles more beautiful.

The hood is separated into two rectangles of almost the same size. On the left side you can see a house with a garden and a man who wears a hat. The picture is separated by a red stripe and the logo of the haulage firm. On the right side of the hood another house can be seen. The hood is dominated by angular, colorful shapes from which the houses and figures emerge (Anna Reiter, Petra Flieger).



David Sporschill

Network of Keywords regarding the painting of a disabled man from the 16th century

Reproduction of the original painting; height 110 cm, width 135 cm

The small dictionary regarding the painting of a disabled man from the 16th century is an essential result of the common work done by the research team. It contains

keywords which are supposed to give you an idea about this and other paintings, exhibits and about the living condition of disabled people in the past and today. The keywords do not stand alone; on the contrary, they refer to each other and are used to explain other terms. This graphic shows the framework of how the terms relate to each other and to the painting, on which the entire research is based. (David Sporschill)