

Summary (English)

The present study „*Aesthetics of Access – Körper, Macht und Kultur im Theater für Gehörlose und Hörende*“ [„*Aesthetics of Access – Power, culture, and the body in theatre performances directed to Deaf and hearing audiences*“] discusses specific kinds of aesthetics which potentially emerge in theatre performances directed to Deaf and hearing spectators. The notion of aesthetics covers on the one hand the aesthetic arrangement and staging, on the other hand a mode of perceiving, criticising and analysing art.

In order to describe an aesthetics of such kind, different dispositions of perception of various audiences have to be taken into account. However, these physical differences cannot be reduced to a concept of deafness as deficit i. e. as hearing loss. In fact, by referring to the medical model of disability, the social model of disability and the cultural model of Deafness, the examination of the deaf body shows that – besides the anatomic-physiological differences between the deaf and the hearing – social processes of exclusion as well as cultural and linguistic differences are equally significant. Furthermore, the body is always embedded in power structures which – as examined in this case – are asymmetrical and force the deaf into an inferior position. These structures are also to be found in academia and theatre. Hence, structures of domination do not only influence the perception of the relevant theatre performances, but also have to be taken into account during the analysis. Furthermore, the perception of performances is informed by cultural differences between the Deaf and the hearing. The Deaf constitute a distinct linguistic and cultural community with its own (aesthetic) norms and values, which differs from the hearing community. Therefore, a critical discussion on notions of culture and above all on (hitherto rather unsatisfactory) concepts of Deaf culture is necessary. In order to consciously acknowledge the heterogeneity of perception, even when writing from the point of view of a hearing researcher, I combine performance analysis with methods of Cultural materialism. This enables me to include perspectives, interpretations and (aesthetic) criticism from the Deaf into the analyses.

The application of this theoretical framework to the analysis of various theatre performances from different European countries creates the opportunity to then examine its validity. While it becomes obvious that in simultaneously interpreted performances

the emergence of a new aesthetics is – consciously or unconsciously – being inhibited, other productions take the heterogeneity of the audience into account. Already during the process of staging the play, they develop different varieties of an Aesthetics of Access, namely in the forms of sign dance, bilingual performances, and visual theatre. The analysed performances serve different purposes, which manifest themselves in the various kinds of relations to each other that the Deaf and hearing spectators find themselves in during the performances.

Hence, although it can take different forms, an Aesthetics of Access always takes the different conditions of perception of a mixed audience into account. The respective performances result from intercultural (Deaf and hearing) productions, which do not only consider the physical and linguistic differences between the spectators, but also the power structures that can be found in theatre and society. Thus, an Aesthetics of Access can involve the demarginalisation and appreciation of sign language and/or serve a didactic, inclusive or political function by reflecting and challenging present hierarchical structures and cultural norms.