

## 4. NETWORK MEETING INTERKULTUR RUHR

### TRANSLATING. COLLABORATION IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY

07/03/2017, Ringlokschuppen Ruhr, Mülheim an der Ruhr

Minutes: Marouane Mhadhbi



A reception with vegan snacks and drinks has been set up for the guests from different organizations and partners of Interkultur Ruhr.

Johanna-Yasirra Kluhs (Interkultur Ruhr) welcomed the guests to the 4<sup>th</sup> network meeting of Interkultur Ruhr and mentioned that this meeting session will be dealing with translation and the aesthetics of translation. She recommended the book "Fremdsprechen". Written by the author and translator Esther Kinsky in a poetic style, the book deals with translation and interpretation from a culture theoretical and poetological perspective. Johanna thanked the Ringlokschuppen Theater and mentioned its unique approach to multiculturalism.

### Part 1 of the meeting

Johanna introduced the speakers of the first session: Jess Curtis, an international performer and choreographer and his project "Gravity". Jess started his presentation by introducing

# ἰἡἡἡ

himself, and straight away he started an activity that involved the audience by asking them to move in the room, looking at each other. Later on, he mentioned that his work is mainly about the bodily and sensorial practices of translation. Jess was not the only speaker as he introduced the audience to the sign language translator Simone Bury (KurzStummFilmFestival Essen, Diakonie Essen) standing next to him. Jess who has a PhD in performing studies, talked about his latest project “The way you look (at me) tonight”, created with Claire Cunningham, an activist disabled dancer (she performs on crutches) and choreographer from Scotland.



Jess explained that his work was based on Alva Noe’s book “Action in Perception” and quoted: “...what I see or what I feel is created by the movement in the world”. Different elements influence our perception of the world (age, gender etc.). He showed us a trailer of his work (available at <https://vimeo.com/160236230>).

Jess also explained the notion of “peripheral fluctuation and peripheral vision”. He involved the audience in another activity by watching him moving in the space without losing him from the own peripheral vision. “This game creates some kind of a relationship with the audience”, Jess said and he ended this task by a quote from Bill Shannon, who is dancer and theorist with disabilities (arts & disabilities): “...make a way to access the world a meaningful experience”.

Jess then talked about another strategy called audio description (growing fast on platforms like Youtube & Netflix) which enables the inclusion of more and more persons with

# Inter

disabilities. This approach is related to the age element (so not only to visually impaired persons) to facilitate the access to a larger audience.

One of the guests confirmed that there is a theatre in Münster which is already using this strategy. As an observer (as part of the audience), Jess brought our attention to the relationship between language and movement. He asked the audience a question: “Does the description come from the inside or the outside?” Audio description is about choices: choosing what is important to describe. This is when we got introduced to the “(in)adequacy of language”: as an interpreter I can never cover enough information, a person who is watching the performance would ask why someone covers this and not that?

Jess involved the audience in another activity: He asked us to observe our bodies when we speak out (or lead) our actions: Do I say what I do or do I do what I say? What comes first?

He continued by defining the “(In)adequacy of language” and explained more about the modes of access: what is relevant for people with impairment? Is it the music? Is it the text? Chloe Philipps from the United Kingdom, a visually impaired artist, surveyed how a close relationship to the audience works and feels in the surrounding environment. Audio Description can thus be used as a creative tool.

When it comes to a blind or visually impaired person, how do these people understand the space? Some artists used the technique of seating surrounding which, according to Jess, this technique offers a 3D sense of what’s happening in the room. Jess then showed an example of audio description. Regarding “deafness / hearing impairment audience / hard-hearing”, Jess mentioned that German sign language is actually not German, instead it differs from Germany to Austria, just as the English sign language differs from the United States to the United Kingdom. This is one reason why it could be challenging to find translators. Another challenge are the dynamics of visibility in choreography which is described as “the politics of placement”. The individual perception depends on where the interpreter stands on stage. Jess also explained the term “spatial syntax”. As the sign language only exists in space, it’s very important to explore the language.

Another issue is the so-called “access conflicts”. In theatre, while dancing in the dark, the audience only hears what is happening on stage, but many different interpretations of what’s actually going on are possible. The interpreter has to be in light (or the subtitles), but this alternative could be challenging for blind people. As being in a dark space is a complete loss of control for them, spectators with such disability become very vulnerable. Jess finished his presentation with a quote of Antonin Artaud “...to break through language in order to touch life is to create or recreate the ‘theatre’”.

After this first part of the meeting the guests of Interkultur Ruhr enjoyed a break in order to get in contact with different organization members and partner networks.

# ᐱᐱᐱ



## Part 2 of the meeting:

Johanna introduced Bridget Ngencho Fonkeu (TU Dortmund, Afro-Mülheimers, The Silent University Ruhr), the dramatic advisor Michael Eickhoff (Theater Dortmund) and the archeologist, translator and cultural worker Jabbar Abdullah (Roman-German Museum, Landesbüro Freie Darstellende Künste NRW) for the open panel discussion.

Bridget started her presentation by introducing her theory of Germany as multilingual society. She played an audio recording of a person combining three languages (English, German, French) and a Cameroon local language during a phone call this person made on his journey in the subway.

Bridget spoke about multilingualism in Mülheim an der Ruhr. In Germany, which is claimed to be a monolingual country, Bridget argues that Germany is a multicultural and a multilingual society. She showed the audience one product she found in a German supermarket whose description is written in three different languages.

Johanna asked Michael Eickhoff if this approach of multilingualism is now being more considered on an institutional level. Michael states that to answer this question it is important to look at two different levels. The institution as an artistic process and the influence of the content offered. Which content is shown for the people who newly arrived in Germany?

Michael told the audience about the initiative that the Theatre in Dortmund took to translate a play called "Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches" from the author Bertolt Brecht, which deals with the topic of being a foreigner and how we deal with foreigners and Germans. So

# آية

the translation of the play into Arabic is not just about understanding, it's meant as a reaching hand for the Arabic speaking audience. It is a way of acknowledging plurality in the German "Leitkultur".

Johanna then asked Jabbar Abdullah if he considers the institutions in Germany as open for new cultures and if he could share his own experience regarding this topic. Jabbar told the audience about the challenge of reaching people when implementing a multicultural / multilingual approach and that the Literature festival he initiated in 2016 in Cologne is a good example for this issue. The institution "Alte Feuerwache" had a lot of difficulties to get funding even though the project was opening new horizons for such an approach.

Johanna asked Bridget: "What is the difference between the Silent University and the TU Dortmund?" Bridget explained that the Silent University represents a space where being accepted and acknowledged is a priority, where is no language barrier as participants could express themselves in that language they feel the most comfortable at. At a normal university in Germany, you would need to study for an entry qualification test (called DSH, German Level C1 nowadays after it was B2 in the previous years). So language could be a challenge. It is important to highlight the process of negotiation of language between different speakers.

As a part of the audience, I was asking myself at that moment if the language skills really tell how much of creativity, potential and skills a person really has, and if the institution (a normal university for instance) in this context could play a negative role when it comes to inclusion of multiculturalism. I was also wondering if multilingualism should be a new strategy considered when it comes to the admission of new Non-German students by offering more English taught courses.

Johanna forwarded the question to Michael Eickhoff from the Theater Dortmund: "Is the language flexibility in institutions, as a matter of missing capacities, limited?" Michael said that until now there is almost no Arabic speaking theatre manager in Germany. But it is important to ask ourselves what the community needs (in a context of a micro German society). The decision of choosing the theatre play by Brecht for example, which was set up shortly before Hitler and the Nazi era, and translate it into Arabic, gives the possibility to discover the institution from a new perspective and attracts new people to the theatre.

Johanna asks Jabbar who chooses the appropriate content in this context. Jabbar said that in his field, there was an offer for a project from Landesbüro Freie Darstellende Künste NRW in Dortmund to translate application texts from non-German speakers into Arabic and make them so accessible to the jury and the funding. Bridget states that the solution regarding the needs of the society might not only be the language. The question today is if the community is ready to accept and accommodate this learning approach. When we hear different accents and dialects, is Germany ready to accept that people speak German differently with all the varieties that we hear in our daily life?

As a result of the panel discussion, debating "normality vs. deviation" in relationship to the aesthetics of theatre, everyone from the podium agreed that what is happening in theatres should be transported to schools and homes. The discussion went on. Michael said it is not

# ገጽ

about being right or wrong in theatre, but it is about being relevant. If we see nowadays the Arabic and Turkish people and their interest in music and performative arts, we assume the increasing need of the multiculturalism approach in various fields.

Bridget argued that Germany is a post-colonial space, not from a physical spatial perspective but from a psychological view. It is now important to give a voice to reality and to create a space of visibility to all people of all cultures in the German society today. Jabbar for instance has made the claim “Raqqa am Rhein”. Raqqa is the name of the city in Syria where he is originally from, and he considers Cologne as home, that is where this appellation derived. Michael confirmed that nowadays “the broken German” is in itself a field of studies and is slowly influencing the written German. His recommendation: “Enjoy the complexity of a new linguistic phenomenon!”



One of the persons present in the audience was wondering if the refugees who recently came to Germany, are introduced to the past of Germany and the war that Germany has been through. Maybe the new arrivals should take into consideration the German past to be able to start a new present, and maybe they are particularly interested in what is being offered to them or they want to see something else.

Kirsten Ben Haddou from the Silent University, who studies in the trauma field, showed that refugees who have arrived in Germany do not want to be confronted with any factors that remind them of the war they fled from. Which for me as a part of the audience seemed logical without knowing about any studies. Kirsten added: “They want to see something else where? Who could assume what they want and who confirms that they are only interested in

# Inter

music and dancing evenings?" I totally agree with Kirsten's point, but this tendency of generalizing the points of interest is totally misleading, too.

One guest from the audience gave a very good reply to another guest's question regarding the challenge of financing multilingualism and multiculturalism. "But relating it to the expenses spent by the German government in weapons and war instruments, so needless to say what is more interesting." Michael said that the basic questions are who is responsible within the institutions and who is deciding for which direction does it want to go. And that might be problematic (the audience laughed as the word problematic was used often, and some called it even the word of the year).

Bridget had the final word. She concluded in nice words: "Let us try to bring all people along, to reach out for all people, and accept each other, that's the only thing we could make this country a better place for everyone." All in all the meeting was very fruitful, and it allowed the participants to have a discussion during the break and exchange contact, and from a content point of view, many topics have been discussed that deal directly or indirectly with translation and multilingualism.

--

*Marouane Mhadhbi kommt aus Tunesien und studiert seit vier Jahren in Deutschland im Studiengang „Angewandte Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaften“ an der TU Dortmund. Seit dem Jahr 2015 ist er Stipendiat bei der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Er beherrscht fünf Sprachen, hat in verschiedenen Ländern gelebt und dabei in unterschiedlichsten Berufsfeldern gearbeitet (Frankreich, Thailand, Vereinigte Arabische Emirate, Spanien). Zurzeit arbeitet er als Übersetzer (Deutsch - Arabisch und Deutsch - Englisch) für verschiedene Theaterstücke im Mülheimer Ringlokschuppen.*