

Performing the Erotic in Polish Theatre: Disability, Normativity, and Desire

Anna Piniewska

University of Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

This paper examines how the sexuality of people with disabilities is represented in the work of the Polish ensemble Theatre 21. It addresses the persistent exclusion of disabled people—particularly those labelled as intellectually disabled—from the sphere of legitimate sexuality. The study explores how contemporary performance can challenge cultural norms that frame disabled bodies as asexual, dependent, and perpetually childlike. Grounded in cultural disability studies and drawing on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson [2009] and Lennard J. Davis [1995], the analysis situates sexuality within the broader problem of normativity. The research is based on a theatrological analysis of two productions: *The Show* (2019) and *Libido romantico* (2022). In *The Show*, sexuality is articulated through parody, confession, and staged interviews, culminating in a performer with Down syndrome declaring: “my body is sexual.” This moment confronts the audience’s infantilizing gaze and publicly asserts sexual subjectivity. In the Polish context, where people with disabilities are still often denied the right to an erotic life, *Libido romantico* expresses resistance to this reality and presents erotic-romantic love as a legitimate and autonomous experience. The findings indicate that the theatre of people with disabilities destabilizes dominant assumptions about normativity and embodiment by reclaiming erotic visibility as a form of artistic and political agency. The paper contributes to ongoing discussions on inclusion, embodiment, and sexual citizenship, offering insights relevant to both academic research and inclusive cultural practice.

Index Terms

Disability, Theatre, Erotic, Norm, Sexuality