Abstract

This article focuses on representations of sign language, Deaf people, and interpreters in the arts and the media, through the analysis of buzz—such as the Lydia Callis’s episode and the national anthem at the Superbowl—and of spaces granted to sign language users on various stages, such as concerts and theaters. Beyond “access” in the performing arts, this article argues that contemporary mises en scène of sign languages are sites of tension and confusion between a view of sign language as a means of communication and a view that allows sign language its own artistic expression and creativity. The author invites readers to reflect on models for shared public discourse space in which Deaf people are not only the recipients and beneficiaries of communication access laws but also the agents of the mise en scène of their language.

The increasing appearance of interpreters and sign language users on television and the Internet, as well as in social media, has led to a buzz in their wake, particularly in some widely broadcast cases. This unprecedented media coverage of sign language is particularly marked in the United States but is by no means confined...