



Please provide a brief response regarding the workshop you wish to present. Workshops only.

TITLE of paper and performance demonstration

The Redemptive Theatre Experiment: When the Performance Is in the Silence

Abstract

In this creative research project, we further explore a theatrical form that we are tentatively calling “redemptive theatre” – theatre that tells stories of people struggling with a mistake, a burden of guilt or an experience of being wronged. We created this form in the context of privileged South Africans navigating the landscape of systemic injustice and unconscious bias. We have performed iterations of redemptive theatre five times and, through a participatory action research process, documented the form and its principles. The process has shown itself to consist of three distinct phases: first, identification of the story; second, developing the script; and third, the performance. After the initial identification process, it was performed and reworked three times to produce the current structural design. Then it was workshopped with a group of MA researchers to learn more specifically about the ways in which silence can be activated through structural interventions in the performance.

We present this design to encourage performances that reframe dominant and habitual narratives, disrupt boundaries, challenge stereotypes and give people a chance to redeem themselves, both in their own eyes and in other people’s. The form of redemptive theatre aligns with Jacques Rancière’s idea of an aesthetic regime and the concept of democracy as a redistribution of what can be seen, heard and experienced. By framing stories that are politically unpopular, we bring stories to the fore that are silenced (unseen and unheard). Significantly, we bring stories that create noise in the bodies of audience-participants in the form of questions, emotions and reflections on biased perspectives.

The Redemptive theatre paper will explore the theoretical framework of the project and risk initial ‘findings’ as far as some understanding and further questions have emerged since the project was introduced at the first ARA conference in 2020.

The Redemptive theatre performance demonstration will offer an experience of the work and explore in particular the ways in which the form attempts to activate silence.

Initial findings regarding the form itself were published as below. We are now interested in

Khutsoane, T., Janse van Vuuren, P. & Nkosi, L. (2021). Redemptive theatre: When the performance is in the silence. In P. Janse van Vuuren, B. Rasmussen & A. Khala (Eds.), *Theatre and democracy: Building democracy in post-war and post-democratic contexts* (pp. 163–172). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.135.ch08>

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