

Prosthetic memory and performance art: towards an embodied approach to post-war reconciliation

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Performance art centralises the dialogic connections between the body's materiality and its role as a signifier, and can be discussed as a base for the initiation and dissemination of *prosthetic memory* (briefly defined as transferred, interpersonal memory that instils political and ethical thinking in individuals). A close analysis of two archived performances by two Theertha-based performance artists and related interview data provides a context for examining the performing body's dual function as a repository and conveyor of traumatic memory that draws on viewers' personal archives of knowledge along with spatial and temporal implications, leading to affect, empathy, and critical reflection through self-reflexive, experiential engagements with performance. These interconnections are useful in addressing restrictive theoretical formulations of reconciliation, providing possibilities for a somatic (rather than merely conceptual) understanding of reconciliation as an embodied process. For instance, in this study, concepts such as embodied memory and *kinaesthetic empathy* facilitate an exploration of the possible impact that the relationship between *prosthetic memory* and performance art can have on expanding and challenging preconceptions and formal approaches to post-war reconciliation in Sri Lanka. Such analyses are essential because while it is identified as part of post-conflict peace building needed for rebuilding social institutions in the aftermath of conflict, reconciliation itself is a contested concept that is often approached in terms of restrictive, exclusionary narratives such as truth, peace, and forgiveness. The praxis of performance art reinforces the heterogeneity of both memory and reconciliation, and lends itself to framing reconciliation as a performative, discursive process. As such, reading these three fields in relation to each other constitutes an interdisciplinary encounter that could help deconstruct binarising, generalised approaches to reconciliation in specific post-war contexts, thus broadening and redefining the theoretical and methodological foundations of reconciliation.

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