

Encounters with Otherness in the Work of Dorothy Heathcote

[DAVID ALLEN](#)

MIDLAND ACTORS THEATRE, UK

[AGATA HANDLEY](#)

UNIVERSITY OF ŁÓDŹ

ABSTRACT

Dorothy Heathcote observed that three things dominate in using drama in the classroom: the concept of “frame”; the deliberate infusion of “the other”; and “conventions” to keep the “human face” at the centre (n.d. a). Her praxis may, indeed, be seen as a form of encounter with alterity, or the “face” of the “Other”.

Levinas has been described as the “philosopher of the Other”. He defined ethics in terms of the relationship to alterity: he posited a “face-to-face” encounter with otherness, which leads to a shift from the “for-itself” to the “for the other” (2006, p. 174). He made it clear that what he called the “face” of the Other is not the literal (physical) face, but rather, the responsibility we feel for the other person.

In recent years, there has been a significant turn to Levinas

among educational theorists. Gert Biesta suggests that Levinas “opens up a dialogical space where pedagogy becomes—or can remain—an event rather than being a pre-programmed process”; creating opportunities for students to respond, not as “the modern rational cogito, but as the Levinasian responsible and ‘response-able’ subject” (2003, p. 67).

This article—based largely on unpublished materials from the Dorothy Heathcote Archive—focuses on a drama which she led in Alberta, Canada, in 1982, which may be seen as creating a space for “response-ability”, through a series of “focussed encounters with ‘otherness’” (Heathcote, 2010, p. 19). The participants had asked to do a drama about a plane crash; the article outlines the steps which led them, not only to recognise the horror of the event, but to bear witness and take responsibility for the plight of the “Other.”

In a note written c.2002, Dorothy Heathcote observed that three things “dominate in using dramatic elements” in the classroom:

1. Concept of changing *frame*, the window thro’ which we decide to view.
2. The deliberate infusion of “*the other*”
3. *Conventions* to keep the human face i.e. feeling / thinking balance (n.d. a; emphasis in original)

The reference here to the “human face” may be seen in Levinasian terms, as an encounter with the “face” of the “Other.”

Levinas has been described as the “philosopher of the Other” (Hutchens 2004, p. 14). He defined ethics in terms of the relationship to alterity. He posited a “face-to-face” encounter with otherness, which disrupts the individual ego: there is a shift from the “for-itself” to the “for the other” (Levinas, 2006, p. 174). He made it clear that what he called the “face” of the Other is not the literal (physical) face, but rather, the responsibility we feel for the other person. As Hutchens observes, the Other commands the self to “exercise its powers completely on behalf of the other. It calls the self’s freedom into question and then demands that it use it responsibly” (2004, p. 21).

In recent years, there has been a significant turn to Levinas

among educators and educational theorists.¹ In part, this may be seen as a response to the neoliberal model of education, with its emphasis on efficiency, performativity and accountability, designed for “the production of potential workers with a portfolio of accessible and measurable skills” (Strhan, 2012, p. 14). It has also been seen, more broadly, as a reaction against the Western epistemological tradition, that reifies the development of the “rational autonomous being” as the central goal of education (Strhan, 2012, p. 14).² Joldersma describes this model as “coming to know this or that. Or, perhaps more accurately, coming to know this as that; to know is to correlate *this* (thing) in terms of *that* (idea).” Learning in this model “means having an adequate grasp on something, comprehending it, inserting it with a concept. ... By ever widening the ego’s circle, the conscious subject encompasses exteriority to reveal the known world (Joldersma, 2008, pp. 43-44). In other words, this is a process of cognitive mastery, in which “the subject is conceived as a *cogito*, as a being whose first relationship with the world (including other human beings) is a *knowledge* relationship, and where it is only on the basis of this knowledge that the subject comes to act” (Biesta, 2003, p. 62; emphasis in original). Levinas, however, challenged the idea of the subject “as a substantial center of meaning, as a *cogito* who is first of all concerned with itself, and only then, perhaps, if it decides to do so, with the other” (Biesta, 2003, p. 62).

As Gouping Zhao argues, Levinas gives teachers the tools to rethink education, so that it might become “about encountering the new and strange, about being interrupted and called into responsibility to the Other” (2018, pp. 2-3). This demands a shift from the focus on mastery and control, to openness to alterity and the unknown; from “learning about” things, to “learning from” the Other (Todd, 2003, 8-10). This relationship “is neither a knowledge relationship nor a willful act of an ego” (Biesta, 2003, p. 63). Roger Simon recognises that it is not possible to simply “broker” Levinas’s work into “the programmatic regularities of a pedagogical methodology” (2003, pp. 45-6). Nevertheless, Biesta suggests that Levinas “opens up a dialogical space where pedagogy becomes—or can remain—an event rather

¹ See, for example, Todd (2003), Egéa-Kuehne (2008), Strhan (2012), Joldersma (2014), Zhao (2018).

² See, for example, Strhan (2012), Joldersma (2008), Biesta (2003), among others.

than being a pre-programmed process". Education, in this view, is not about passing on knowledge or truths, but about creating opportunities for students to respond, "*not* as the modern rational *cogito*, but as the Levinasian responsible and 'response-able' subject" (2003, p. 67; emphasis in original).

In Heathcote's praxis, drama may be seen as an event, an embodied encounter with otherness. In her 1992 article "Stewardship: A paradigm for education?", she called for an education system based in "stewardship", as an alternative to the "mechanistic world paradigm" (1992a, p. 12). Her definition of the term may be seen as synonymous with responsibility and "response-ability"³: among its elements, she included the capacity to de-centre from self; the responsibility willingly undertaken; and a dedication "to service by self and not to self-service" (1992a, pp. 22-3). She stated:

For me stewardship is acknowledging that everything else around you is not you, you acknowledge the other but not yourself. Everything that is not you, has to be attended to. Stewardship is actually engaging with what there is around you and attending to it. (As cited in Matusiak-Varley, 2016, p. 239)

This is, indeed, a paradigm shift, from "learning about"—collecting and storing "stocks" of knowledge—to "learning from" everything that is "not you".⁴

This article—based largely on unpublished materials from the Dorothy Heathcote Archive—focuses on a drama which she led in Alberta, Canada, in 1982, which may be seen as a series of "focussed encounters with 'otherness'" (Heathcote, 2010, p. 19).

DISTANCE AND PROXIMITY

In the note on "drama elements" quoted above, Heathcote refers first to the concept of "frame", the "window through which we decide to view" an event (n.d. a).⁵ She claimed that "frame" gives children "the power to operate" in a drama, but also, "the responsibility for their

³ Defined by Kelly Oliver as "response to address" (2001, p. 5).

⁴ As far as we are aware, Heathcote did not know Levinas's work

⁵ Heathcote took the concept of "frame" from Erving Goffman (1986).

behaviours in operating, and that's of course why they think more deeply" (n.d. b). She defined nine types of frame, each with a different relationship to the event, from being a participant in it, through "guide", "agent", "authority", "recorder", "the press / storyteller", "researcher", "critic", and "artist" (Heathcote, 1991a). Frame should be distinguished from "role"; as we will see, the children might be in *role* as "shepherds," but within that role, they might be variously *positioned* in the frame of "guides" or "recorders" (etc.), in relation to the event.

On several occasions, she used the "Good Samaritan" story to explain the concept of frame. In the story, a man who is travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho is attacked and beaten by robbers on the road, and left for dead. Heathcote suggested that children might take the role of shepherds who witness the event from their position on the hillside above the road. In this way, they would become "guides" to it, who have to report on what they saw to others. In the scenario which Heathcote developed, however, they would also become implicated in the situation: they would realise "that their hut had been used by the thieves. And they have seen it [the assault], and know they have been seen seeing it" (Heathcote, 1991c).⁶

Heathcote's frames may seem to imply moving away from emotional involvement in an event. She made it clear, however, that she always chose the frame(s) which would "get the children closer to the event", even though "in the beginning, when you look at 'frame,' people think I'm taking children away from the event" (Heathcote, 1991b). She described the Good Samaritan story as "a horrendous tale. It is so evil"; her aim, in the drama, was to "get the full horror of what it must have been like" (Heathcote, 1991b). She argued that the "participant" frame, "where the children act the story", would actually take them "furthest away" from the event, because they "will never get into it that way" (Heathcote, 1991b). It would be beyond their ability to act it convincingly, and/or too remote from their own experience for them to realise the "full horror of what it must have been like".⁷

⁶ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from Dorothy Heathcote are from this source.

⁷ In his Ph.D. thesis, John Carroll observed that the frame of participant requires "a high level of acting skill", and work from the teacher over an extended period to develop "a deep level of feeling response to the context", and to sustain belief. Other frame distances "do not require this same level of acting skill to be effective. They require an attitudinal commitment to the role from the pupils" (1986, pp. 123-5). Heathcote herself argued: "By removing from them the need to be skilful, in the

In the role of shepherds, the children were trapped, in effect, into a prolonged engagement with the problem. As Heathcote observed:

You are actually wanting people to consider the nature of taking enormous risks, getting rid of prejudice, and helping a seeming enemy—and possibly being deeply endangered because of it. That's what the Good Samaritan might be about. So it doesn't matter which frame you chose, it's chosen to get nearer to it, not further away. (1991b)

As shepherds, the children's situation in some degree parallels the Good Samaritan's own: they face enormous risks, to help someone who is a stranger to them. They have to choose between protecting themselves, and taking responsibility for the Other, and testifying for him. This dilemma may be seen (in Levinasian terms) as a choice between the "for-itself", and the "ethical self", based in "a priority of the for-the-other" (Levinas, 2006, p. 182).

The role of shepherds establishes a community with a limited viewpoint, a settled sphere of responsibility and reference (i.e., looking after sheep). Into this world, there is an irruption of the Other, which disturbs them in their isolation. Their position (on the hillside above the road) is, literally, separate and distanced from the event; yet, they are summoned to respond. They may choose to remain bystanders, in the comfort of their own "jouissance" of the world (to use a Levinasian term) (Levinas, 1969, pp. 12-13). Indeed, there is pressure on them to turn away, to protect themselves; and yet, as witnesses, they are ineluctably implicated in the event. This community can never be the same again: even if they ignore the call to respond, they will have to live with the knowledge of their choice, their denial of the suffering of the Other.

We may see the participants' position in terms of what James Hatley calls the "suffering witness". This is a witness to violence and suffering, who feels responsible, even though they could not do anything to change the situation. Hatley writes:

Burdened by the other's suffering, we are called upon not only to

expressive mode, you leave them free to penetrate extremely deeply" (as cited in Eriksson, 2009, p. 160).

understand or, at the very least, to give a historical record of a particular act of violence, but also and in the first instance to witness it. By witness is meant a mode of responding to the other's plight that exceeds an epistemological determination and becomes an ethical involvement. ... [O]ne is summoned to attentiveness, which is to say, to a heartfelt concern for and acknowledgement of the gravity of violence directed towards particular others. In this attentiveness, the wounding of the other is registered in the first place not as an objective fact but as a subjective blow, a persecution, a trauma. The witness refuses to forget the weight of this blow, or the depth of the wound it inflicts. (Hatley, 2000, pp. 2-3)

The participants in the Good Samaritan drama may be led to a recognition of the "horror" of the event, not only in its effect on the victim, but as a "subjective blow" to themselves. In Levinas's terms, "subjectivity is sensibility—an exposure to others, a vulnerability and a responsibility in the proximity of the others"; and this "wound" that begins in sensibility, "calls upon an irrevocable responsibility" (Levinas, 1991, p. 77). There is a move, then, from distance to closeness, or what Levinas terms "proximity" (1991, p. 5): a closeness that is not based in spatial contiguity, but in openness or exposure to, and priority for, the Other.

"FACING THE GORGON"

The same paradoxical move from distance to proximity may be observed in a drama that Heathcote led in 1982 in Canada. This was part of a teacher training event; in her introductory remarks to the teachers, she said that one of her "obsessions" was "to establish 'the other'"—partly to focus the children's attention, so they did not feel "stared at", but also, she said, to get them "to pay attention to something other than self" (as cited in Craig, 1986, p. 28).

The group that she was working with asked for a "plane crash" drama. She recalled: "Now I said to myself, no way can they 'pretend' an air crash. It will just be pretending. I shall spend all my time trying to help them express agony; what I want them to understand is—understand it" (as cited in Hesten, 1994, p. 228). It was clear to Heathcote that the group had images in their heads of "crashing

through the jungle ... and we're all going to be dead, and play doctors". They would "play" at the drama, in other words; and there would be an element of "jouissance" here, in the simulated experience of danger and adventure. Rather, as we will see, there was an emphasis in the drama on imagining the event, on "witnessing" over direct involvement; but this, again, was intended to move them closer, ultimately, to a recognition of the "full horror of what it must have been like" (Heathcote, 1991b).

There is a wider issue here, in terms of the difficulty of bearing witness, in drama, to the reality of extreme or traumatic events. In *The drowned and the saved* (2017), Primo Levi's reflections on life and death in the Nazi death camps, the author states that only "those who saw the Gorgon", i.e., who witnessed the horror and were permanently silenced by it, can be seen as the "complete witnesses": they have met the monster's deadly gaze that turns people to stone, and they "have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute" (Levi, 2017, p. 70). In other words: only the "complete" witness can truly know the terror of the limit-experience. In *The birth of tragedy* (1872), however, Friedrich Nietzsche argued that the Greek theatre created a form to enable the spectator to look into the abyss of human suffering—"to gaze into the horror of individual existence, yet without being turned to stone by the vision" (1956, p. 102). In other words: faced with extreme events, art can play the role of Perseus' mirror shield (which the hero used, in the myth, to be able to look in the face of the Gorgon).

Heathcote's frames may be seen as a form of artistic "mirror" that, in approaching an event indirectly or at a distance, enables it to be faced, "yet without being turned to stone". Frame distance shifts the drama participant away from being *in* the event, to the position of the "witness". In the Good Samaritan drama (and, as we will see, in the plane crash drama), this is the position of the "suffering witness": one who endures "the impossibility of suffering the other's suffering" (Hatley, 2000, p. 5). At the same time, there is a move towards a recognition of the "horror" that the "complete" witness experienced—i.e., towards seeing what they saw, albeit by means of a protective form.

THE IRRUPTION OF THE EVENT

Through negotiations with the group, Heathcote established that the location of the plane crash would be in a remote area of Northern Canada, and they would be in the role of engineers who were working there, testing electrical equipment in low temperatures, who would, by chance, be the first to “witness” the event, by picking up radio signals on some of the wireless equipment they were testing. A key element of the drama was that, when the crash occurred, it would be part of a “routine day” for the engineers; a sudden irruption in their world, a “call” to respond.⁸ Like the shepherds, this was a community with a settled sphere of responsibility and reference. The event would disturb them in their isolation, and they would have to take action: there was no-one else in this remote location who could. (This may be seen in Levinasian terms: he argued that, when the Other commands my attention, I am the only one who can answer: “no one else can be substituted for me” [Llewelyn, 2002, p. 219].)

The group established their “routines” for testing different kinds of equipment, “for strength of materials, correct writing, correct instructions” etc. (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995, p. 97). Heathcote herself prepared a tape recording of the final moments on the plane, that the group would overhear. The sounds evoked the crash: it began with ordinary conversations on the plane, with food being served; then, the first signs of concern from the pilots, and “an almighty rushing sound”, followed by an eerie silence. The group listened to the recording several times before the drama began. Heathcote observed:

I always show people the end of something. I never work on, “We don't know what's going to happen.” What I work on is: we know *what*, but we don't know *how*. That to me is far more important. If we know what, we stop rushing towards it [i.e, the crisis event] and we stay slower at working out how it shall be.

Knowing what will happen in advance may be seen as a form of “protection *into* emotion, not from emotion” (Bolton, 1984, p. 139; emphasis in original). The participants are “shielded,” in effect, from being shocked or perturbed by the sudden event; and yet, as we will

⁸ “in its mortality, the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me” (Levinas, 1989, p. 83).

see, they may still “stumble on authenticity, the authentic response” (Heathcote, 1985). In other words: they may be caught “off guard” in the moment, in the way they respond to the event.⁹

In her article “Signs (and portents?)” (1982), Heathcote created a list of thirty-three drama conventions, which she described as ways of placing the “human face” at the centre of the work (Heathcote, 2007), and creating “focussed encounters with ‘otherness’” (Heathcote, 2010, p. 19). They range, for example, from a teacher actually present and working in role, to a “depiction” such as a portrait, through objects or documents to represent a role, and so on. The recording of the plane crash was an example of number 27 in the conventions list: “A conversation overheard” (Heathcote, 1982, p. 26). Arguably, hearing the recording several times in advance helped to prepare the participants to take on the frame of “witness.” The horror of what happened was suggested, but not spelled out, in the recording: the gaps were there for the participants to fill with their imaginations, and the silence at the end was powerful in its implication of loss and death. The frame gave the group a paradoxically involved-yet-removed relation to the event: they were not present at it, neither were they confronted directly with the horror of it; at the same time, they became “witnesses” in their imaginations.

The group entrusted Heathcote with the task of finding the right moment in the drama to play the recording. She told them: “I promise you I won’t do it until you’re really deep in your testing of your washing machines and so on” (i.e., in their routine jobs as engineers, testing equipment). She recalled:

And we get very, very deeply immersed [in the testing]. So, the second hour, you see, is taken up with deliberately not hearing a black box [recording]. Reports get written. Just a bit, not much. And they keep looking, and I say, “Do you want me to [play the recording]?”

“No, not yet, not yet, not yet.”

⁹ This is how Heathcote defined “off guard”: “in the no-penalty zone of the fiction, you can be caught unaware, and take yourself by surprise, that you’ve thought of something in a way you hadn’t quite seen it before. ... I think there are all sorts of breakthroughs that can happen” (1992b).

Because it's only when, by their will, they are deeply involved, that the black box [recording] will happen.

It seems, then, that the group wanted to delay the moment of hearing the recording, to sustain the experience of the drama. Their primary focus was on the routine tasks, but there was an underlying tension in every action: “we are alert to anything unusual *because we are so careful in following routine*” (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995, p. 97; emphasis in original). This is Heathcote’s account of the reaction when, finally, she played the tape:

And when it happens, the girl [as the first “engineer” to hear the recording]—this is what I mean by this stumble on authenticity. The girl simply puts her pen down. [Long pause.]

“Did you hear anything then?”

And the kid said, “No.”

“I’m sure I heard something, like an engine.”

Somebody over there says, “I think I heard something. What was it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Try again.”

“Well, I know I’ve not moved the [radio] station, but I’m not picking anything up. But they said something about a whiteout.”

Everybody’s stopped, and they gathered round. They’re as near to a plane crash as they’ll ever get. At least I hope they’ll ever get.

Heathcote observed: “at that point you have got the beginnings of understanding of an air crash. This terrible, terrible shocking silence” (as cited in Hesten, 1994, p. 229). Even though the drama had been pre-planned, there was an “authentic” response, it seems, in the moment. It is paradoxical that this could occur, even though the

participants knew in advance what was going to happen, and had already heard the recording several times. The moment may have been experienced as a “call” to responsibility / response-ability: from this moment, they had the “burden of knowing.” As Heathcote observed:

they're in a terrible dilemma. Only one person can be fairly certain they picked something up. It's a terrible responsibility to try and get Air Canada and ask them if they've got a plane missing. You see what I mean by the quality of work?

Arguably, this was not simply the burden of responsibility to report the crash: the pauses and silences indicate that there was an internalised response, a recognition, if not of the horror of the crash, then the trauma of becoming a “suffering witness”.

THE DEATH OF THE OTHER

François Raffoul has observed that, in Levinasian terms, it is the mortality of the Other which ultimately “calls me to responsibility”:

It is as if the death of the other concerned me even before my own death, as if it had priority over my death, as if the death of the other put me into question, as if I would be an accomplice if I did nothing! ... Responsibility for the other—non-indifference to the other—is not leaving the other die in his or her death-bound solitude. I am responsible for the death of the other in this first sense. (2010, p. 195)

In the drama, the plane crash was returned to again and again, in different ways. In one episode, the group decided that, as the only people in the vicinity, they should fly over the crash site in a helicopter. (Heathcote recalled a moment in another drama, when a group faced a similar, “terrible responsibility”, in the realisation that “nobody's available to go except us” [1988, p. 17].¹⁰) The group stood around a

¹⁰ The drama was set in the time of a military coup. The participants were in role as journalists, who had to decide to leave the country, or try to look for a fellow journalist who had gone missing (Heathcote, 1988).

long roll of paper, and looked down, as if flying over the site of the crash, and scouring the landscape through imaginary binoculars. Heathcote told them to put marks on the paper to represent trees. Then, they added evidence of damage to the trees from the impact of the crash. The outcome was a representation of the landscape which was like a “terrible wound”:

And there is no plane drawn. There's only trees broken. It's terrible to look at, and so right. The talk is of things like, “Somebody's luggage”; “There's a bit of the tail plane there”; and so on.

At times, they stood back to look at the “map” they had created: “And I say, ‘You can actually see it, can't you? See how it hit there, and went there, and now there's that—a great gouge through there, and all those broken trees’.” At this point, Heathcote observed, the frame had shifted: the participants were now “recorders”, compiling detailed evidence of the event; flying over the site

to record how we think the order of the experience must have been. So you've got somebody saying, “Take me over the tail again. No, it must have come out after the door, because there's a piece of tree there ...” (Heathcote, 1991b)¹¹

In this way, the *frame* can change, even though the *role* might stay the same.

Like the shepherds on the hill in the Good Samaritan drama, the group were given a distanced, “bird's eye” view. (Heathcote observed that, at this moment in the drama, “the bird's eye view and the distance is what I have to get”.) They did not witness the crash itself, but only the terrible aftermath, the fragments or traces of the event. The blank roll of paper perhaps suggested the expanse of barren landscape which the helicopter flew over; the kind of landscape where nothing at first is visible and then, as the eyes adjust, some objects become clear. The remote, snow-covered land itself suggested “death-bound

¹¹ Heathcote suggested that the same task—flying over the crash site—could be done from different frame perspectives, such as “researcher”, looking for common patterns by comparing it to similar crashes. A doctor, on the other hand, might act as a “guide” to explain the physical trauma he/she observes in the crash victims; and so on (1991b).

solitude” (Raffoul, 2010, p. 195), the emptiness and silence of death. The signs (of trees etc.) acted as a focal point, to evoke mental images in the participants; as they looked at the marks on the map, they could imagine the “terrible wound” of the crash. The very length of the paper, moreover, may have evoked a dawning awareness of the scale of the tragedy, and of their own responsibility for the event—their own “subjective wound”.

The “map” is another example of one of Heathcote’s conventions (“Any document or written account other than a letter, which refers to a specific person or event” [Heathcote, 2006¹²]). Together, the signs of the crash—the damaged trees, the plane fragments—evoked the “absent presences” of the crash victims, and the trauma of their deaths. The map itself was a form of shield or mirror, to enable the drama participants to “gaze” indirectly at the event. The primary level of responsibility was as “recorder,” making a minute examination of the event, but the secondary level was the responsibility of the “suffering witness”. The sequence can be seen as an example of what Edward Bond has called “accident time”, when things seem to move slowly, resembling “the stillness at the centre of the whirlwind. ... We are suspended in the accident” (2000, p. 48). In accident time, “we see more, and we see more precisely” (Bond, n.d.).

The marks on the paper may be seen in terms of what Levinas termed “trace”: “a small presence of something that is absent” (Pöggeler, 1987, p. 70). Trace is always enigmatic and incomplete: it “reminds us of what we have not witnessed and have to approach via conjecture” (Gross & Ostovich, 2016, p. 3). It invites reading, but also imagination, to complete the “gaps.” As Dorota Glowacka observes, it “can be understood as that which *makes it possible to imagine* the events that, in their extreme impact on human lives, seem to defy existing representational strategies” (2012, p. 19; emphasis in original). Many of Heathcote’s conventions deploy trace, and are in accord with what Glowacka terms a “poethics of disappearing traces” (“Within the poethics of disappearing traces, the other—ungraspable in an image or word—can attest to its existence from behind the figure, as an echo of what has been forgotten” [Glowacka, 2012, p. 165]).

In the next episode in the drama, Heathcote invited the group to

¹² This is from a revised version of the conventions list, which Heathcote sent to Eileen Pennington (2006, December 31). Copy preserved in the Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University.

“invent a couple of passengers each, or some aircrew”:

And all the people are invented. You can't have them in the plane, if you haven't invented them. They can't be allowed to crash, if you won't be responsible for the nature of the people they are, because that's logical. And so, we invent.

Heathcote looked for ways that she could make these people “live” in the drama. We may observe a progression, from a more “distanced” view (flying over the landscape in a helicopter), to an increased awareness of the crash victims as individuals. The victims were not real but imagined; and yet, the word “live” implies they became “absent presences” that existed in the imagination of the participants. The fact that the victims were invented maintained an awareness that this was a fiction, and this in itself was a form of protection for the participants. Nevertheless, they progressively moved closer to the victims *in their imaginations*. They had, in a sense, a dual responsibility: to *invent* the “lives” of the victims *within the drama*, and yet also, to honour them as if they had really lived; to invent and name them, and in effect, to respond to their “call,” and become responsible to them in their deaths.

To make the victims “live”, Heathcote turned again to her conventions. As we have seen, they were designed to evoke “focussed encounters with 'otherness'” (Heathcote, 2010, p. 19). In this case, she decided that the crash victims would “live” by “the last thoughts they have”—an example of convention 17: “An account of a person written as if from that person, but read by someone else” (Heathcote, 1982, p. 25). The group each noted down the passengers’ “last thoughts”; for example: “I'll be first out no matter what. Where's the exit? Right. Push. Get out of the way” (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995, p. 100). The children put these notes on the “map” of the crash, in places where they thought the victims might lie; so the drawing was, as Heathcote saw, becoming rich with different layers, and multiple “traces” of the dead.

Heathcote recognised that, through these tasks, the group were “very closely bonding” with the imagined victims of the crash; “they weren't just treating them as nothings”. Moreover, they were moving closer to imagining their experiences in those last moments before the crash—as if seeing through their eyes, as the real (“complete”) witnesses of the crash; and so, towards what Levinas called “substitution”: the possibility of putting oneself in the place (or in the

shoes) of the Other, or “being-in-one’s-skin, having-the-other-in-one’s-skin” (Levinas, 1991, p. 115).¹³ In the next episode, the group created envelopes for individual passengers, containing objects which they might have had with them at the time of the crash. One envelope, for example, held a plastic barrette and comb; a half-finished letter (“Dear mother... sorry I've not been writing lately...”); some diary pages listing hospital appointments; a kidney dialysis appointment card; and a bookmark inside a book, with an illustration of praying hands (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995, p. 101). The “last thoughts” of each passenger were also added to the envelope. The participants were engaged here as creators of a “poethics of disappearing traces”: selecting objects to act as “traces” of the people who had died. Each of them then took an envelope which someone else in the group had created, and tried to interpret the contents. Again, there was a shift in frame (but not in role): at this point, Heathcote suggested, they were functioning as “critics”. (She observed: “Don't think of the critic as the person who criticises. ... The critic interprets” [1991b]). The task was to interpret these “traces” as evidence of how the passengers may have responded to the impending crash: “what they think the person at that moment may have understood—I don't like the word ‘felt’; understood”. For example, the boy who studied the envelope containing the donor card (etc.), commented:

“Well, I think she was in deep trouble, because this kidney dialysis card is very new, and I think, you know, she's—she's obviously been making a flight to start this life on dialysis. And this letter to her mother, she can't go home. That's terrible,” he said.

I said, “I know.”

“And those hands [on the bookmark]. Well, maybe she was religious. Is there any evidence that she was religious?” ...

You can't imagine anything so moving, as we're all sitting here, as this “critic” interpreted this lady. (Heathcote, 1991b)

¹³ There is much more to Levinas's notion of “substitution” than this, but space does not permit us to discuss it in detail.

This is an example of a form of a hermeneutical reading of “trace”, to imagine the “absent presence” of the Other. The boy’s comments suggest that the task again led to a still closer form of “proximity” or “substitution”, of “having-the-other-in-one’s-skin” (Levinas, 1991, p. 115).

At the start of the drama, Heathcote had promised the group: “If you trust me, I’ll give you an air crash.” Now, in the final stages, they experienced being in a plane crash, albeit in a controlled (distanced) way. It was agreed that Air Canada had decided to use the evidence gathered from the crash, to “teach aircrew the kinds of human behaviours that can happen in plane crashes”. The children created a kind of “simulation” of the crash: they arranged themselves in the seats of a mock-up of the airplane, as if they were “robots” that had been programmed to represent the thoughts and actions of the people in the crash. The passenger’s “last thoughts” were placed on their knees. Again, then, the roles were being given life after death “by the last thoughts they have”. In the background, there was a continuous sound of the plane’s engines, and the “black box” recording was played over and over. Heathcote took on the role of a trainee stewardess, who could “activate the model”, and ask them: “How is it? Can you teach me not to panic?”

That’s when they got their plane crash. They got it through the convention of being a robot representing somebody else’s life, for the benefit—so they were my “guide” to the crash. Not so that I would just understand, but so that I could appreciate something of what might happen.

The episode, then, took the form of a “briefing”, a warning to the trainee stewardess, that “This may happen to you”. In this way, the children were in the position of the people in the crash; but they were primarily focused on the responsibility of explaining, for the benefit of the stewardess, and demonstrating behaviour, as part of a training exercise. This did not distance the emotion so much as “protect” them into it. At the same time as they were explaining behaviour, they were also providing testimony about what happened, and seeking to “speak” for the Other. In the role of “robot,” they did not *become* the Other; and yet this was closest they came to substituting for them, or being in their shoes. They were not the “complete witnesses”, but were trying to

represent them, and convey their thoughts and feelings to someone who had no idea of the real horror. They could never, finally, know what the “complete witnesses” saw; they could only attempt to speak for them. As Glowacka observes: “The witness’s task is to recover these traces [of the Other’s existence] but also to pry open the strictures of one’s own tongue in order to allow the other’s voice to be heard through one’s speech” (2012, p. 18).

Over the course of the drama, the group’s frame position had shifted several times; but in each frame, there was a central tension, in the responsibility to bear witness “to the other’s plight”, to “remain true to him or her” (Hatley, 2000, p. 3). Heathcote observed that, if she had had more time, the next episode would have been to create a memorial; so the group would work, at the end, in the frame of “artist”, again attempting to provide testimony, and “speak” on behalf of the Other.

As we have seen, the different frames created a measure of protection: there was a primary focus on the task (as “recorder”, “critic”, etc.). At the same time, they demanded a continued attention and “gaze” at (the “traces” of) the event (e.g., flying repeatedly over the “map” of the crash site to record its details, and so on). In this way, the participants could stare into the face of “the Gorgon”, as through a mirror; but they could not look away. Working through frames was also a way of de-centring the self, placing them always-already in the position of witnesses, as “a mode of responding to the other’s plight that exceeds an epistemological determination and becomes an ethical involvement” (Hatley, 2000, pp. 2-3). At the same time, as we have seen, there was a move towards “substitution”. This was not the same as identifying or “merging” with the people in the event, however; but rather, simultaneously being “in-one’s-skin” *and* “having-the-other-in-one’s-skin” (Levinas, 1991, p. 115). The group could try to understand the experience, and move close to substitution, while always remaining “*themselves in their head*” (Heathcote, n.d. c; emphasis in original).

In the final phases of the drama, the children were realising their own knowledge, by explaining it, or representing it to others. This was not knowledge in the form of cognitive mastery, or “learning about”; rather, the group were “witnesses” who were passing on their learning to an other, or to future others as yet unknown. In Levinasian terms, this was learning “through the other and for the other” (Levinas, 1991, p. 114); and this always-already carries an ethical involvement.

Heathcote's praxis may be described, then, as a form of "coming into presence"—in the sense of an encounter with the (absent) presence or "face" of the Other, and a recognition that everything around you "is not you", and "has to be attended to" (Heathcote as cited in Matusiak-Varley, 2016, p. 239).¹⁴

SUGGESTED CITATION

Allen, D., and Handley, A. (2023). Encounters with otherness in the work of Dorothy Heathcote. *ArtsPraxis*, 10 (1), pp. 52-74.

REFERENCES

- Becker, A. (2019). (Re)framing the subject(s) of rights. In C. Roux & A. Becker (Eds.), *Human rights: Future directions* (pp. 31-52). Springer.
- Biesta, G (2003). Learning from Levinas: A response. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 22, pp. 61–68.
- Bolton, G.M. (1984). *Drama as education: An argument for placing drama at the centre of the curriculum*. Longman.
- Bond, E. (2000). *The hidden plot: Notes on theatre and the state*. Methuen.
- Bond, E. (n.d.), *Density: Notes on drama and the logic of imagination*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Carroll, J. (1986). *Taking the initiative: The role of drama in pupil/teacher talk* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Newcastle.
- Craig, T. (1986). Towards an understanding of the drama work of Dorothy Heathcote at Fairview, Alberta. In J. Blakey, L. Nosbush (Eds.), *Creativity: Pathway to the future* (pp. 27-52). Alberta Teachers' Association.
- Eg a-Kuehne, D. (Ed.) (2008). *Levinas and education: At the intersection of faith and reason*. Routledge.

¹⁴ The phrase "coming into presence" was used by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, to refer to "the coming into presence of a unique singular *who* in the presence of the community" (Becker, 2019, p. 45; emphasis in original). It is hopefully clear that we are using the phrase in a different (Levinasian) sense.

- Eriksson, S. A. (1990). *Distancing at close range: Investigating the significance of distancing in drama education*. Åbo.
- Glowacka, D. (2012). *Disappearing traces: Holocaust testimonials, ethics, and aesthetics*. University of Washington Press.
- Goffman, E. (1986). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (B. Berger, Trans.). Northeastern University Press.
- Gross S. & Ostovich S. (2016). Introduction. In S. Gross & S. Ostovich [Eds.], *Time and trace: Multidisciplinary investigations of temporality* (pp. 1-7). Brill.
- Hatley, J. (2000). *Suffering witness: The quandary of responsibility after the irreparable*. State University of New York Press.
- Heathcote, D. (n.d. a). "Elements of teaching" chart, produced as part of the Hexham Hospital Garden Commission project at Queen Elizabeth High School, 2001-2. Unpublished manuscript. Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Heathcote, D. (n.d. b). "Dorothy's responses to teachers' comments: 7. You never seem to cast the children into different parts." Unpublished manuscript. Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Heathcote, D. (n.d. c). "What is involved in drama work?" Unpublished manuscript. Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Heathcote, D. (1982). Signs (and portents?). *SYCPT Journal*, 9, pp. 18-28.
- Heathcote, D. (1985). Recording of training session at H.D.T.A., 24 May [Video]. Copy preserved in the Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Heathcote, D. (1988). Sequencing. In K. Harvey and K. Williams (Eds.), *Aspects of drama for learning: Dorothy Heathcote talks about sequencing, planning, styles of teaching and other topics* (pp. 7-17). Kohia Teachers Centre.
- Heathcote, D. (1991a). *Making drama work: Curriculum matters*, Tape 8 [Video]. University of Newcastle.
- Heathcote, D. (1991b). *Dorothy Heathcote video archive, Series B, vol. 1: Frame distancing; outline of drama planning and sequence (M.A. Studies)* [Video]. University of Central England. Copy preserved in the Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Heathcote, D. (1991c). *Dorothy Heathcote video archive, Series B, vol.*

- 3: *Frame distancing; episodes (M.A. Studies)* [Video]. University of Central England. Copy preserved in the Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University.
- Heathcote, D. (1992a). "Stewardship: A paradigm for education?" *NATD Broadsheet*, 9 (3), pp. 8-23.
- Heathcote, D. (1992b). *The thin screen* [Video]. University of Newcastle.
- Heathcote, D. (2006). Conventions based on theatre practice but easily available to the classroom teacher. Unpublished manuscript. Dorothy Heathcote Archive, Manchester Metropolitan University. (Accompanied by letter to Eileen Pennington dated December 31.)
- Heathcote, D. (2007, 9 February). National Association for the Teaching of Drama event, with Eileen Pennington, at the University of Warwick. Private audio recording.
- Heathcote, D. (2010). Productive tension: A keystone in "Mantle of the Expert" style teaching. *The journal for drama in education*, 26 (1), pp. 8-23.
- Heathcote, D. & Bolton, G. (1995). *Drama for learning: Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach to education*. Heinemann.
- Hesten, S. (1994). [The construction of an archive and the presentation of philosophical, epistemological and methodological issues relating to Dorothy Heathcote's Drama in Education approach](#) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Lancaster].
- Hutchens, B. (2004). *Levinas: A guide for the perplexed*. Continuum.
- Joldersma, C.W. (2008). The importance of enjoyment and inspiration for learning from a teacher. In D. Egéa-Kuehne (Ed.), *Levinas and education: At the intersection of faith and reason* (pp. 43-55). Routledge.
- Joldersma, C. W. (2014). *A Levinasian ethics for education's commonplaces: Between calling and inspiration*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Levi, P. (2017). *The drowned and the saved* (R. Rosenthal, Trans.). Simon and Schuster.
- Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1989). Ethics as first philosophy. In S. Hand (Ed.), *The Levinas Reader* (pp. 75-87). Blackwell Publishers.
- Levinas, E. (1991). *Otherwise than being* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Kluwer

- Academic Publishing.
- Levinas, E. (2006). *Entre nous* (M.B. Smith & B. Harshav, Trans.). Bloomsbury.
- Llewelyn, J. (2002). *Appositions of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas*. Indiana University Press.
- Matusiak-Varley, B. (2016). [*Dorothy Heathcote: A model for alchemical leadership*](#) [Doctoral dissertation, Durham University]. Durham e-theses.
- Nietzsche, F. (1956). *The birth of tragedy and the genealogy of morals* (F. Golfing, Trans.). Doubleday.
- Oliver, K. (2001). *Witnessing: Beyond recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Pöggeler, O. (1987). West-East dialogue: Heidegger and Lao-tzu. In G. Parkes (Ed.), *Heidegger and Asian thought* (pp. 47-78). University of Hawaii Press.
- Raffoul, F. (2010). *The origins of responsibility*. Indiana University Press.
- Simon, R. (2003). Innocence without naivete, uprightness without stupidity: The pedagogical *kavannah* of Emmanuel Levinas. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 22 (1), pp. 45-59.
- Strhan, A. (2012). *Levinas, subjectivity, education: Towards an ethics of radical responsibility*. Wiley.
- Todd, S. (2003). *Learning from the Other: Levinas, psychoanalysis, and ethical possibilities in education*. State University of New York Press.
- Zhao, G. (2018). Introduction: Levinas and the Philosophy of Education. In G. Zhao (Ed.), *Levinas and the philosophy of education* (pp. 1-8). Routledge.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

David Allen is Artistic Director of Midland Actors Theatre (UK). The company is currently lead partner on an Erasmus Plus project on Rolling Role, following previous projects on Mantle of the Expert and the Commission Model. David runs the Facebook group, "The Commission Model of Teaching," and the website www.mantlenetwork.com. He is the convenor of the annual *Dorothy Heathcote Now* conference. He is the author of numerous books and articles on drama including *Performing Chekhov* (1999) and

Stanislavski for beginners (1999/2015), and co-author (with Agata Handley) of “The Commission Model of teaching” (*Saber & Educar*, 31 (1), 2022).

Agata Handley is Assistant Professor in the Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź, Poland. Her main areas of interest are: contemporary British poetry; the culture of the English North; memory studies, and intermedial issues. She is the author of *Constructing identity in the poetry of Tony Harrison* (2016/2021). She is Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Text Matters: A Journal of Literature, Theory and Culture*. Her current research includes ekphrasis in anglophone literature and culture, and intertextuality in music videos. Recent articles include “The poet as public intellectual: Tony Harrison’s war poetry” (*British Journal of Educational Studies*, 70 (5), 2022).