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DISTANCING AS TOPOS IN PROCESS DRAMA

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A frame reference for the chapter is the concept of topos. In classical rhetoric, topology (Gr. topos ‘place’) is an idiom for places (topoi) or locations (Lat. loci) where the orator (or the artist pedagogue in this context) can find viewpoints from which arguments can be drawn (Andersen 2004, 154; Eide 2004, 133). In the present context, topos implies a mode or position from which a concept is perspectivised and reflected on. Following this idea, topology suggests a ‘landscape’ of available approaches, expressions, and contents. For example, distancing can be regarded as a topos in process drama – exhibiting a scope of qualities and features – pedagogically and aesthetically. The distancing topos has a long history within literature and theatre theory and in aesthetics. In my doctoral study, Distancing at Close Range: Investigating the Significance of Distancing in Drama Education (2009), I traced some historical backdrops and spotlighted significant developers of the distancing concept, like Viktor Shklovsky (1893–1984) and Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), and in process drama, Dorothy Heathcote (1926–2011). Uses of distancing were observed as shared features in their praxes, applied to arouse interest, commitment, and reflective engagement for the participants of their artistic work.

The intention of the chapter is to broaden the understanding of distancing in drama/theatre work and to rectify the reductionist impression that distancing is primarily about alienation and detached rationality. It sets out to uncover and exemplify more dynamic potentials of the concept, such as breaking internalisation and automatisation of dominant social narratives or ideologies in everyday life. In this respect, estrangement is introduced as a more relevant dimension than alienation, alongside variants like defamiliarisation or making strange, which will be elaborated further on.

Distancing is a composite topos, comprising at least three different orientations: protection, aesthetic principle, and poetic–didactic device (Eriksson 2009). Distancing as protection – a psychological aspect of distancing – is a strategy in the drama classroom aimed at safeguarding participants’ actions from consequences of ‘the real’. Distancing understood as aesthetic principle – an ontological aspect of distancing – is closely related to the awareness of fiction and form in drama, and thus to fiction as protection as well. Distancing purposefully used as poetic–didactic device(s) implies generating engagement and reflection in the drama experience – an epistemological aspect of distancing.

The distancing topos is complex and nuanced because it operates across all three orientations. It has both a temporality dimension and a spatial dimension: the drama can move...
back and forth in time and place; it can historicise, actualise, and defamiliarise; and it has a metaphorical dimension, like in parable and analogy. A topological view of distancing means seeing it as a dimension beyond dichotomies like involvement versus detachment or feeling versus reason. Rather, it should be regarded as moving along a continuum of such qualities or combining them (Eriksson 2009, 45).

Resources for realising distancing in its various alignments can be devices like dramatic conventions (Heathcote 1984d; Neelands and Goode 2000), but also objects, language, verse, music, pictures, and role can work as distancing/estrangement devices, some of which will be exemplified. The ways they are used to structure drama for teaching and learning belong to the pedagogy of a drama session. But they are also part of a poetic register of forms and methods available within the drama subject. A topos-oriented pedagogy, correspondingly called didactic topology (Nyrnes 2002), is concerned with taking different perspectives, with looking at events through different frames. Framing is also a topos in itself in drama education (Heathcote 1984d, 163; O’Toole 1992, 109–113; Bolton and Heathcote 1999, 64–65; Heggstad 2008, 89–116; Eriksson 2009, 139–154; Boland 2013, 53–64; Davis 2014, 84–89; Bethlenfalvy 2020, 215–217). It is a structuring device that appears particularly useful in process drama. It can be seen in close connection with distancing and will also be considered later. Readers should note that there are some differences in conception and uses of framing among the cited writers. But this is not a theme in this chapter.

Process drama, a term most likely first coined by John O’Toole (1990), designates a genre of educational drama focusing on collaborative investigation and problem-solving through a process of exploration (O’Toole 1992; O’Neill 1995; DICE Consortium 2010; Davis 2014). Heathcote is often regarded as a forerunner of process drama, which is commonly associated with her theory and practice. It was developed further by others, notably by Cecily O’Neill (Bolton 1998, 228). Process drama is an improvisational genre involving frequent alternation between participating and observing, a position that is occasionally referred to as ‘perception’ (O’Toole 1992, 9; O’Neill 1995, 125; Bolton 1998, 266; Haseman 2006, 202; Davis 2014, 54). The ‘perciipient’ in process drama has much in common with the ‘spect-actor’ (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 1994, 238) in Augusto Boal’s forum theatre.

Much process drama is also characterised by recurrent alternation between keeping the drama going and stopping the drama; it has an episodic rather than linear composition – or dramaturgy – and sometimes the boundaries between real life in the classroom and the fictitious life in the classroom drama are blurred – like blurred genre in performance (O’Neill 1995, 121). It often has a dramaturgy similar to Brecht’s epic theatre form (Allern 2008; Eriksson 2009). Participants in process drama are involved in negotiation of meaning (O’Toole 1992) by actively partaking in creating the dramatic fiction: “Like spectators in the theatre, [participants in process drama] live within two overlapping circles of experience – that of the dramatic world and that of their own actuality. But participants in process drama actively inhabit both the real world and the imagined world” (O’Neill 1995, 119, emphasis in original). It is not uncommon in process drama that the participants are basically being themselves – i.e. they are not playing characters as in a play, they are just putting themselves into someone else’s shoes (Heathcote 1984a, 49) – with the awareness that they are taking part in a dramatic fiction. This is a significant aspect of what is meant by distancing in a topological sense. It does not mean an escape from who they are but rather the opposite: to gain a different perspective of themselves in the imagined situation – being oneself but trying out different attitudes and values (Bolton 1979, 64; McGregor, Tate, and Robinson 1980, 11–12; Heathcote 1984a, 51; 1984b, 71; Davis 2014, 66, 97). I regard David Davis’ second dimension concept (Davis 2014, 96), originally derived by Bolton, as an attitudinal aspect, which helps to both find a
connection with role and move the drama forward. Drama offers a variety of behaviours (Heathcote in Barnes 1993, 53:55) and possibilities for altering attitudes without refraining from an awareness of self in the process. “You don’t ask a child to stop being [oneself]. /.../ What you are asking is: try this attitude on and see what happens” (ibid 55:07). In contemporary process drama, there is a concern that participants must have opportunities to explore different attitudes and values in order to question dominant perceptions of reality and see through culturally based social or individual narratives (Davis 2014; Bethlenfalvy 2020). I regard the acting mode in such explorative drama as dominantly epic (rather than naturalistic), with a quality of representation (rather than characterisation). The limited scope of this chapter does not allow for a discussion of this. But historical references for the point of view are, for example, the term ‘acting-out’ (McGregor, Tate, and Robinson 1980, 11–12), Gavin Bolton’s dialectics of ‘being’ and ‘describing’ (1984, 125), and Bertolt Brecht’s learning play model (Steinweg 2005; Eriksson 2009, 101–103).

Protection as distancing is not necessarily concerned with protecting participants from emotion, a notion that has been raised by some authors in the drama education literature (Davis 2005, 2014; Bethlenfalvy 2020). In my opinion, this notion has grown from misreading of the theory and practice of Brecht, whose uses of defamiliarisation effects (Verfremdungen) are not primarily intended to alienate from emotion but to effect a dynamic synergy of reason and emotion (Eriksson 2009). In fact, as Darko Suvin underlines: “the notion that [Brecht’s] work is unemotional, or split between reason and emotion, is obsolete and misleading” (Suvin 2008). In the Brecht-reception today, this is widely accepted. In the present context, it is also of interest to reference a paper by a Norwegian colleague, Ellen Foyn Bruun, who states that “the theatre of Brecht, in arts education, offers useful insight into empathy as a competence engaging feeling and intellect likewise” (2018). Rather than impeding emotion, distancing can prepare a safe enough space for the participants to be both engaged and detached (O’Neill 1995, 120; Bolton 1998, 200; Eriksson 2009, 36, 47–49). By apparently moving away from the event at first, it helps participants get closer to the event. Distancing is also a central device to help participants in being aware of their positions in the two worlds – the imagined world and the real world – which can be explained in Bolton’s famous expression of what this simultaneous awareness of the two worlds amounts to: “I am making it happen” and “it is happening to me” (Bolton 1979, 53). It offers the participants an opportunity for reflecting on the experience – in, or from, a feeling context.

This viewpoint is related to Bolton’s deepened discussion of the aspect in relation to Boal’s concept of metaxis (Bolton 1984, 141–142), to Janek Szatkowski’s concept of aesthetic doubling (Szatkowski 1985, 143, 163), and to Ulrike Hentschel’s concept of other reality (Hentschel 2010, 136, 143). These are all concepts dealing with the same phenomenon (although with some difference in nuance): an understanding of the dramatic experience as realised in a kind of double-layering of ‘realities’, in which the player is both him/herself and another than him/herself in simultaneous presence, with an awareness of being there in interaction with the tension between the two realities. This tension, which can elicit both cognitive and emotional experience and reflection, I believe constitutes the main potential for learning in and through drama. Heathcote has fittingly described how this simultaneous presence gives the teacher who wants to teach through role (teacher-in-role) a rich variety of functions, precisely through the shifting between role time and task time, a shifting that is also – in my opinion – dependent on a mastery of distancing: “The teacher [is] frequently engaged in hopping deftly, sliding elliptically, switching abruptly, or even bestriding the two worlds of fiction and reality. It may be just a matter of seconds that a role is held and then dropped – and then assumed again” (Heathcote and Bolton 1995, 30; emphasis in original).
It is a significant pedagogic point that the participants in process drama, before it starts, have to agree in the ‘now’ (the classroom reality) to accept another ‘now’ (the fictional reality) as something ‘real’. It belongs to the theoretical underpinning of educational drama that these ‘nows’ coexist, that the actual and the virtual are feeding off each other by providing opportunities for reflection upon the fictional experience, so that experience and learning can take place as a formative process for the participants, rather than a summative conclusion provided by the teacher – as in conventional teaching. This coexisting dynamic is reliant on distancing.

By now it should be clear that the topos of distancing in process drama is a more complex matter than it may seem at a first glance. I have already mentioned distancing as protection from threatening exposure (safety net or no-penalty zone) and distancing as demarcation of the imagined reality from ‘the real’ (aesthetic principle). In the following, the focus will shift to conceptualisations of distancing understood as poetic (artistic) device(s), with a primary function of providing a different, fresh perspective of the world. This is also the Brechtian and the Shklovskian conception, to which Heathcote’s notion of distortion can be included (1984c, 114f). In another article, I have discussed this notion under the umbrella term poetic distortion (Eriksson 2014). It is distancing from habitual circumstance, a mechanism of seeing from a new angle, which is the strategy of making strange. Brecht calls it Verfremdung and Victor Shklovsky calls it ostranenie, which have a similar meaning. Making strange in order to get at a new understanding of a situation is in Brecht and Shklovsky a politically motivated strategy. There is the intention of using the art form to make change, like in Brecht’s famous line from his learning-play, The Measures Taken: “Change the world: it needs it” (1995, 25). Process drama does not necessarily operate with the same outspoken political agenda as a Brechtian Lehrstück; rather, it commonly operates with an intention of creating new awareness and an interest in investigating a social dilemma or a political situation. In recent orientations to process drama by Davis (2014) and Ádám Bethlenfalvy (2020), in which the work of Edward Bond is an important theatre art reference, there is a clear intention to disclose culturally set meanings and question dominant social narratives through the drama work. An example from Heathcote, which will be discussed towards the end of the chapter, illustrates a political process drama orientation. Before doing that, I shall make a little detour, to focus more specifically on the concept of estrangement (or Verfremdung or ostranenie), which are all conceptions of the same topos, namely a poetic and didactic factor for creating critical reflection.

In English, Verfremdung is often misleadingly translated as alienation. But in the Brecht-reception in English (e.g., Willett 1984, 221; Wright 1989, 19; Brooker 1994, 193; Jameson 1998, 39), it has been pointed out that its secondary meaning of ‘putting off’ or ‘feeling alienated’ is not what Brecht wanted to express with his concept. So, it is relevant to look at other terms to convey the V-effekt, for example defamiliarisation, which indicates putting that which is familiar in a new light.

However, Verfremdung is also translated as estrangement in English. This nuance illustrates better the notion of questioning something, that things and circumstances ought not to be taken for granted, that no representations need to be conceived of as absolute and final. Brecht asks: “What is Verfremdung?” and answers: “Making an event or a character strange means first of all stripping the event or the character of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them” (Brecht 1963c, 101; my translation). Estrangement is about motivating critical thinking as well as activating critical thinking in practice. That seems to be a dynamic pedagogic thought even in the arena of the classroom.
Similarly, in Russian Formalism, *priem ostranenie* means using an arts device to make something strange or remarkable. The Formalists called this function *des-automatisation*. Des-automatisation expresses Shklovsky’s thesis that it is the task of art to free people’s perception from the mindless reproduction of things and events. He says: “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known” (1988, 20). Further, he says that daily life routines – *habitualisation* – make our perception automatic and dull, that the practical actions of everyday life weaken our awareness so that we no longer see, we just recognise: “Habitualization [sic] devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war” (Shklovsky 1988, 20).

This is equivalent to Brecht’s idea of Verfremdung, when he says: “One was looking for a kind of presentation, by which the familiar could become conspicuous, the habitual amazing. Common events should appear strange, and much which seemed natural should be recognised as artificial” (Brecht 1963a, 196; my translation).

And it is in good keeping with Heathcote’s conditions for learning through drama, when she talks about “[r]emoving the situation when I could from prejudicial view, so as to enable a new view without the burden of an old label which prevents review” (Heathcote 1978, 21).

What these authors have in common through such citations is an interest in creating change, and, inspired by a wondering, to make people look at the world with new eyes, with an intention to improve it.

The idea of estrangement has a long tradition in rhetorics, for example in the category of *figuration* (from tropes and figures), which represents various forms of paraphrasing expressions signifying conversion or transformation. Metaphor is a good example, and similar poetic devices like metonymy, simile, allegory – and irony, dichotomy, or parallelism – are all well-known devices in theatre as well, only not usually thought of there in rhetorical terms. But rhetorics takes an interest in what takes place beyond the normal everyday language (Andersen 1995, 69), and this interest includes the aesthetic and the pedagogic (Andersen 1995, 70). So, whilst figuration is a means of creating beautiful and pleasant language, for example through rhetorical repetition, reversal, or word play, it is also well fitted for instruction, for example through fable and parable (Eriksson 2011). Figuration is, in a word, a device for expressing matters in ways that break with the ordinary. A basic principle in figuration is to take a new turn, to find a new twist, in which the notions of both change and strange are embedded. In fact, rhetoric theory considers transformative expressions to have an estranging function; rhetorical tropes and figures are estrangement devices.

In my opinion, the field of figuration belongs to the topological field of distancing, and in Brecht good examples of rhetoric figuration can be found, for example in *The Measures Taken* (*Die Maßnahme*). Here is an example of the figure of *simile*, which is a form of metaphor:

> Misfortune doesn’t grow on the breast like leprosy; poverty doesn’t fall like tiles from the roof; but misfortune and poverty are the work of Man. Want is cooked in the pots on the stoves, and misery is the only food.

*Brecht 1995, 26*

In my dissertation (Eriksson 2009), I demonstrate that the notion of making strange pervades much of what Heathcote does, even if I have found only one mention in her publications of ‘making strange’ specifically:

What I’m trying to do […] is to shake the reader out of the conventional view of the curriculum, by using the principle of ‘ostranenie’ defined by Viktor Shklovsky as being
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‘that of making strange’. We very readily cease to ‘see’ the world we live in and become anaesthetized to its distinctive features. The arts permit us to reverse that process and to creatively deform the usual, the normal, and so to inculcate a new, childlike, non-jaded vision in us.

(Heathcote 1984e, 127)

Some examples may help illuminate what estrangement amounts to: from a poem with music, from visual art, and from a video excerpt of Heathcote’s drama pedagogical practice. The audio and video links work for streaming. There is a social criticism theme embedded in all three examples.

The first example is from the first two verses from Brecht’s cunning poem “Gegen Verführung” (Against Seduction). (The musical arrangement for this version is by Hans Leo Haßler; the singers are Carmen-Maja Antoni and Johanna Schall.) With biting irony, Brecht takes a well-known Lutheran psalm and negates its content by making the familiar melody and Biblical words strange, by affirming what the Bible condemns. Nearly every word, phrase, and image contained in Brecht’s poem is derived from the Lutheran Bible. Brecht turns the scriptural argument upside down, and his device is estrangement:

https://1drv.ms/u/s!AjebEk9sYsIlid12t5r-5mrNlHIXxg

Lasst euch nicht verführen!  
Es gibt keine Wiederkehr.  
Der Tag steht in den Türen;  
Ihr könnt schon Nachtwind spüren:  
Es kommt kein Morgen mehr.

Lasst euch nicht betrügen  
Das Leben wenig ist.  
Schürft es in schnellen Zügen!  
Es wird euch nicht genügen  
Wenn ihr es lassen müsst!

From: Die Hauspostille (Brecht 1927)

Translation: Tom Kuhn and David Constantine (2019)

Walter Benjamin laconically comments: “It goes without saying that the title ‘Household Messenger’ is ironic. Its message does not come down from Sinai or from the Gospels. The source of its inspiration is bourgeois society” (Benjamin 1998, 44).

The second example, Pieter Brueghel’s famous painting Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, is in itself conceived of as a Verfremdungseffekt. One needs to get at it at close range in order to find what is happening according to the title (Figure 2.1).

It takes a while before the connection to the Icarus myth is discovered by the viewer, i.e. the legend about Icarus who made for himself wings of wax but plunged into the sea when the wax melted when he came too close to the sun. We first see a landscape with a farmer ploughing the earth, a shepherd with his sheep, and a man fishing from the shore with a rod. All three seem totally unaffected by the splash caused by Icarus, far down in the right-hand corner. However, having eventually noticed it, our curiosity is alerted, and we start reflecting: Will a change take place now in the relationship between the characters, or will their world just continue without any interest whatsoever in the creative daring deed just
performed close by? This small detail, found only by studying at close range, is an estrangement effect; it has humour and irony; it creates interest and engagement. Brecht mentions the realism in the paintings of Pieter Brueghel the Elder as representing a kind of model for epic realism, and it becomes clear from Brecht’s Arbeitsjournal (1977, 310) that Brueghel has been of great importance to him.

The third example is a video snippet from a drama structure devised by Heathcote with a group of 12-year-olds at Blakelaw School in Newcastle in 1980. Even if my video sample is only of VHS quality, it still provides an impression of how Heathcote makes use of estrangement devices that both surprise the students and at the same time engage them: https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21ADLs9FjdC0rryt8&cid=25C2626C4F129B37&id=25C2626C4F129B37%21159467&parId=root&o=OneUp

The excerpt demonstrates teacher-in-role. Heathcote represents the managing director of the company Chisso, which has discharged aluminium waste into the ocean, causing the fish and the people eating the fish become deformed (Figure 2.2). The background story is real, from Japan from about 70 years ago, thus constituting an example of distancing used as historisation. Heathcote does not play a character; she represents the director, applying an epic way of playing, including direct communication with the audience-participants and the use of symbol props, for example polluted fish as paper cut-outs and power objects for the director: big glasses, reference to business news, and a telephone. The objects are references and estrangement devices at the same time. The whole situation is improvised. It is interesting that the girls in the sequence, who come from a working-class background in Newcastle “where women’s voices are not normally heard” (Heathcote – interview 2005), gradually become more empowered by the resistance they encounter from the director. (They represent in the situation fishwives from the Minamata Bay village where Chisso polluted the ocean in the 1950s.) In the article from 2011, I analyse ‘at close range’ distancing devices applied by Heathcote in an introductory parable sequence of the video.

In the videoed workshop, Heathcote sets up different frame contexts for the pupils: first as members of a UN investigating panel and then later as people from the same context they are investigating. In my opinion, framing belongs to the reservoir of distancing devices available in process drama, as does frame distance. This is a terminology that Heathcote has taken from Erving Goffman’s frame theory (1986). The present context does not allow for

Figure 2.1 Pieter Brueghel the Elder: Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, ca. 1558
Location: Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels.
discussing either frame theory or Heathcote's use of it in any detail. However, a condensed
description of frame distance can be understood as seeing from a new angle and with a point
of view (Hesten 1994, 173, 176; Eriksson 2009, 138ff.). It involves taking the optical idea of
a new angle one step further, recognising the possibility of looking at an object from various
‘distances’, which is also a device for making situational perspective shifts in the drama. In
my dissertation, different illustrations of frame distancing are presented and discussed from
the optical metaphor of frame as a lens (Eriksson 2009, 142–148). The following chart, visu-
alising how different “lenses” are available for looking at an event, was originally developed
by Heathcote together with John Carroll in 1979/1980 (Eriksson 2009, 149) (Figure 2.3).

I find Heathcote's illustration of how the various frame distances enable shifting points
of view quite useful in drama teaching. If one takes as a starting point the idea that drama
(or theatre) in itself constitutes a frame through which an event is created, which is an event
different from the real reality, one has the first frame in the illustration: the dramatic frame.
Frame constitutes the boundary between being in or out of fiction and being in and out of
role. The demarcation of these two states of being is also a form of distancing, in the sense
that it is the awareness that something is a fictional event that makes it possible to perceive it
as something different from the real reality. Distancing in this case is the awareness of fiction,
i.e. the distance between reality and art (Eriksson 2007).

The possibility of looking at an event from various ‘distances’ or ‘perspectives’ is well
illustrated in Heathcote’s The Good Samaritan drama, based on the Biblical parable told in
the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, verses 25–37. Here she operates with nine different frames
through which the event of mugging the Samaritan is explored:

1 **Participant**: students enact the whole story or particular episodes.
2 **Guide**: events are related by an eyewitness. Students are shepherds who saw the
mugging and the teacher is a wife asking them why they came home so late.
3 **Agent / demonstrator**: students are asked to relive events or explain them. In a
modern TV programme about courage, a crippled businessman (the teacher-in-role)
explains how he had been mugged by robbers 20 years earlier and how a teenager with
a Mohican hairstyle saved his life. Students are actors who attempt to recreate the events
according to the businessman’s description.
4 **Authority**: reconstructing events from the position of power. The results of such
a reconstruction are important, e.g. the law can be changed. Students as high priests of
the temple want to know who tells bad stories about priests and Levites who did not help
even though they should have. High priests summon witnesses.
5 **Recorder:** reconstructing facts. Students help the teacher (in the role of a Roman consul stationed in Jerusalem) to write a report to Rome about the incident. Students have to find out background information about the ordinary life of the Romans.

6 **Press:** providing a biased commentary on the event. For some reason, the incident is considered important enough to focus on. Students scrutinise the style of three different British newspapers (*The Independent*, *Daily Mirror*, and *The Guardian*) and then try to put the Good Samaritan story into the style of one of these newspapers.

7 **Researcher:** students are consultants hired by the Good Samaritan Hospice* to produce a logo, a brochure, and a TV programme about the hospice. *A hospice is where the terminally ill who would otherwise be in hospital are looked after in the short period before their death.
Critic: students are asked to compare the event with other events. An example is not given, but this frame lends itself well to bringing in contemporary parallels [my comment].

Artist: expressing the story in an artistic form. Students are asked to design stained-glass windows for the Good Samaritan Inn at the end of the Channel Tunnel. [This is a frame for transforming the event; it could well be a scene, or scenes, about a contemporary incident inspired by the parable. My comment.]

(The British Council 2004)

As already suggested, the strategy of framing is in principle little different from the well-known device in literary theory (and in rhetorics) of the ‘shifting point of view’ or ‘narrative viewpoint’. The difference exists in the concrete action levels that the drama mode sets in motion. Another way of explaining the model is to express it through a first-person singular task perspective, as expressed through the captions over each frame in the Heathcote chart above, for example, “I am in the event”. Task perspectives enable different role possibilities to be enacted, as already indicated in the nine frames. Through such role functions as designers, historians, observers, enquirers, explorers, storytellers, onlookers, inventors, reporters, witnesses, summarisers, editors, directors, commentators, memoir writers, and artists, a whole arsenal of pedagogic strategies become visible, none of them linear as in conventional teaching (or for that matter in conventional dramaturgy). In addition, a whole battery of rhetorical–poetical devices are available, for example many of the so-called drama conventions (Heathcote 1984d, 166–167; Neelands and Goode 2000), because within each frame the chosen role will have a status, a style of language, certain accessories or materials pertinent to the role, and probably a communication hierarchy – and each frame will imply a different kind of responsibility relevant to what is a logical behaviour or culture within the given frame. Such storerooms of available strategies and devices are in rhetoric theory referred to as copia (Lat. ‘wealth, abundance, full-bodied’). It signifies a “capital” of arguments and linguistic formulations (Eide 2004, 42), that is, a supply of appearances, conventions, and effects to draw on. Every drama teacher should consciously build for him/herself a copia of available forms for the pedagogy in the drama classroom.

To sum up, distancing/defamiliarisation/estrangement is a significant topos in drama teaching. I have identified three basic uses of distancing:

• Distancing as a means of creating protection in dramatic playing (protection)
• Distancing as a defining principle for creating fiction (principle)
• Distancing as a poetic and pedagogic figuration (device)

Within the latter category, I discussed distancing as Verfremdung – a category of estrangement – and indicated connections between making strange devices in a rhetoric tradition with distancing devices in process drama. In doing that, I also attempted to delineate a pedagogy of process drama inspired by rhetoric analysis; I referred to it as didactic topology. What the idea of topology offers to an alternative pedagogy of drama teaching is the opportunity to work in a nonlinear fashion, through episodes, by, for example, looking at events from different perspectives, like in Heathcote’s model of frame distance. Frame distance, in turn, involves two distancing dimensions: (a) distance from the actual event, and/or (b) a role distance authority in connection with the event. The first dimension creates a spatial/temporal distance. The second dimension creates gradations of detachment and empathy in relation
to role. It should be noted that Carroll has inscribed role conventions in his later reworking of the chart (Carroll 1986, 6; O’Toole 1992, 110), several of which belong to Heathcote’s original conventions (Heathcote 1984d, 166–167). Detachment in role execution, i.e. representation as opposed to deep belief in character, is activated via the given responsibility that the framing requires.

By relating Verfremdung to the pedagogy of process drama, I have suggested the importance of applying aspects of distancing/estrangement as a basic approach for this genre. Within the tradition of Verfremdung in educational drama and theatre, there is an obvious political, theatrical, and epistemological potential. This potential for playing, reflection, and action is significantly associated with the topos of distancing, as I see it. Thus, I contend, process drama can be productively applied as a vehicle for stimulating change.

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Notes

1 Poetic understood as an aesthetic term is closely related to poetics. Poetics deals with the nature, style, form, and dramaturgy of dramatic art. It concerns itself with the theory and practice of the art form and can be viewed in parallel to pedagogy in teaching.

2 Didactics is a commonly used term for pedagogy in Northern Europe. It denotes the art of teaching, implying, in a wider sense, the theory and practical application of teaching and learning.

3 Time indicator. Transcribed by the author.

4 In his book Rainbow of Desire (1995, 43), Boal describes metaxis as the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. Influenced by Boal, several authors in the drama education field have adopted his term (Bolton 1984, 141; O’Toole 1992, 13, 237; O’Neill 1995, 119; Davis 2014, 52; Bethlenfalvy 2020, 24, 130). Boal’s use of the term metaxis has been critiqued by Tor-Helge Allern in the article “Myth and Metaxy, and the Myth of ‘Metaxis’” (2002, 77–85). It is important to draw attention to this important criticism, which seems to have been largely overlooked in the professional discourse in the drama education community. Allern’s own position on the question of aesthetic knowing is based on Gregory Bateson’s theories: that knowing in drama is characterised by a special combination of primary and secondary mental processes (Allern 1999).

5 Teacher-in-role is in itself a dramatic genre, which belongs to the process drama tradition and is often ascribed to Heathcote. The process drama literature offers ample examples of TIR work. A straightforward start for the uninitiated reader can be Bolton and Heathcote’s So You Want to Use Role-Play? (1999).

6 From the DVD: Bertolt Brecht gesungen von Antoni & Schall. 1999 Patmos Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, Düsseldorf.
Distancing as topos in process drama

This was originally published online in the Teachers’ Forum, the British Council’s Warsaw Office: https://web.archive.org/web/20090529032551/https://elt.britcoun.org.pl/elt/forum/tctd.htm (08.04.2021). For the record, the Good Samaritan example from Heathcote’s practice has also been discussed in a video recording (Heathcote and Draper 1991) and more recently analysed by Davis (2014, 84–89).

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