



ISSN 2040-2228

Vol. 5 No. 1
April 2014

Drama Research: international journal of drama in education

Article 14

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Abstract

As human individuals we live our lives within several embedding systems in Time, so that we are always dealing with multiple temporal conceptions. A general classification of these time frames might include the Abstract, Cultural, Geological, Biological, Organizational and Transactional, and suggests that people will either attempt to bring these various time frames into some sort of harmony or segregate them in order to live different parts of their lives in relation to different time conceptions. In view of this then, as art practitioners the ways in which we routinely shift the dramatic action into alternative time frames in drama no longer appears to be so remarkable or strange. But how has this facility evolved? And how can new teachers of drama be assisted in identifying different conventions of time for use in the development of their own dramatic experiences in classrooms?

Without going into great detail, Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode outline the relationships of time in theatre and drama in the following observation:

In literary forms, narrative sometimes follows a natural sequence of time where one event follows another chronologically, but it can also use conventions that fracture and distort a natural sequence – flash backs/forwards; letters; third person commentary, etc. In theatre the same is true: time either unfolds at life-rate or is taken to be a completely elastic material that can be stopped, accelerated and replayed through the use of conventions. (1990, 2000: 95)

Dorothy Heathcote writing with Gavin Bolton (1999) presents an outline to five or six broad experiences of time in drama:

- a) The past recalled as narrative
- b) Present actions mixed with asides in the past tense
- c) The use of the present tense in a narrative accompanying virtual actions
- d) 'Now' time
- e) 'Now time' with implied 'demonstration'
- f) 'Real' time

But Heathcote's practice often seems to have extended far beyond these simple guidelines. In developing process drama experiences with teachers, while there is rarely a problem negotiating groups or individuals into accepting and entering fully into a particular time frame whenever it is introduced into a drama activity, the challenge lies in getting teachers to initiate such shifts in the time frame into their own work. This seems especially true of those teachers who, perhaps out of a need for safety, appear to cling doggedly to the sequential, naturalistic tradition in their drama work, and show great reluctance to liberate them-selves from it.

This paper attempts to build on Heathcote's demonstration of shifting Time frames in her own practice. But, in the hope that they may be of some use to new teachers of drama, it also offers for further consideration a compilation of fifty alternative Time frames identified and collated from the author's personal experiences with process drama work over several years. Many of these frames are of relatively recent origin, and the author goes on to suggest that such a list may be further extended in future as new conventions appear in response to further encounters with emerging technologies.

Introduction

Among the many memorable reflective statements that Dorothy Heathcote made during her tenure at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne was one that went something along the lines of, “I don’t think that I could ever wear one of those digital watches, because they only tell you what time it is NOW, instead of what time it is in relation to all other times.” She would then quickly follow this up in her inimitable fashion with, “Of course what I really need to wear on **my** wrist is a sundial.”

It is the view of Joseph McGrath and Janice Kelly (1986) that as human individuals we live our lives within “several embedding systems” in Time, so that, like Dorothy, we are always dealing with “multiple temporal conceptions”. They list these time frames as *Abstract, Cultural, Geological, Biological, Organizational and Transactional* (McGrath and Kelly 1986: 52-56), and suggest that people will either attempt to bring these various time frames into some sort of harmony or segregate them in order “to live different parts of their lives in relation to different time conceptions”. In view of this then, the idea of shifting into alternative time frames in drama or accommodating the compartmentalizing of experience no longer appears exceptional or unusual.

Drama practitioners often shift the action into different time frames using different conventions of time in the development of their drama work, yet, beginning and early career drama teachers often ask, “How do you do that? I would never have thought of doing that.” So, a major challenge lies not simply in negotiating teachers into accepting and entering fully into a particular time frame whenever it is introduced into a drama activity, but in encouraging them to initiate such shifts in the experience of time into their own work. This seems especially true of those teachers who tend to cling doggedly to the naturalistic tradition in their drama work, and show great reluctance to liberate themselves from that.

Jonathan Neelands and Tony Goode (2000) outline the relationships of time in theatre and drama without going into any great amount of detail:-

In literary forms, narrative sometimes follows a natural sequence of time where one event follows another chronologically, but it can also use conventions that fracture and distort a natural sequence – flash backs/forwards; letters; third person commentary, etc. In theatre the same is true: time either unfolds at life-rate or is taken to be a completely elastic material that can be stopped, accelerated and replayed through the use of conventions.

(Neelands and Goode 2000: 95).

Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote (1999) confine themselves to outlining just five or six broad experiences of time in drama:

- a. The past recalled as narrative
- b. Present actions mixed with asides in the past tense

- c. The use of the present tense in a narrative accompanying virtual actions
- d. 'Now' time
- e. 'Now time' with implied 'demonstration'
- f. 'Real' time

(Bolton and Heathcote 1999: 66-68).

While a number of other drama scholars have also written about time, among the most useful and persuasive connections between drama in education and a more in-depth consideration of time and space are to be found in the work of Richard Courtney (1989a 1987b). It is he who reminds us that "Theatre is a temporal art form: the form exists in Process." He then goes on to outline some of the several levels of time of the Dramatic Action, and as he observes, "...all assumed to be simultaneous" (Courtney 1987b: 137). He then breaks these levels down as follows:

- a. Performance time; the length of clock-time of the action;
- b. The fictional now: "a perpetual present time" (Thornton Wilder);
- c. Plot time: the temporal sequence and order in which events are presented; the events as the audience immediately knows them;
- d. Chronological time: the period of time supposedly passed between the first and last incidents of the plot, irrespective of the order in which they are presented; the sequence of events the audience assumes;
- e. Historical time: the historical period of the action (even if it was yesterday); it is a dramatic paradox that although dramatic action always occurs in the present it always represents a time that has gone; Drama is in the Present but of the past;
- f. Cosmic time: the "origin" Ritual-Myths collapsed time, making past/present/future into one time where the Sacred performance resurrected all life and the cosmos; all major plays retain elements of this structure albeit tacitly.

With this broader summation of the levels of time experienced in drama Courtney steers practitioners towards a more serious consideration of both the semiotics of time: chronemics; and by inference, the semiotics of space: proxemics. Winfried Nöth (1995) provides a useful guide to both, from which it quickly becomes apparent that for the drama practitioner, at least, the two are closely interwoven and inter-related. Nöth cites Bruneau indicating that time-experiencing involves "biological, physiological, perceptual, objective, conceptual, psychological, social and cultural" (Nöth 1995: 286) levels, thus indicating the trans-disciplinary character of chronemics. This in turn resonates with the terms "informational polyphony" and "density of signs" used by Barthes (Barthes 1972: 262) to characterize the multiple semiotic dimensions of theatre. Yet examples of time being given adequate consideration for purposes of semiotic analysis of drama in an educational context appear hard to come by.

What follows is simply an attempt to explore and identify some of the different ways in which time can operate in the theatre and in film, and by inference, in drama

in education, and to offer them for reference by practitioners when structuring process drama work.

A total of fifty annotated Time frame experiences are outlined here. These have been identified from drama work done with Dorothy Heathcote, as well as others that have emerged from personal observations and general practice. These manifestations of Time in drama have been grouped under a series of thematic headings which might assist teachers in understanding a little more about the ways in which they can be used in directing and re-directing dramatic action.

- a. Time in the Telling of Stories
- b. Simple Time Shifts and Controls
- c. Speeding up, stretching and reversing time
- d. Video technology inspiring Drama
- e. Depicting multiple times and places
- f. Time as vision
- g. Depicting the exact time of the dramatic action
- h. Time as tension giver
- i. The passage of Time
- j. Interaction with other times
- k. Indications of other times

No doubt the number of examples given here will eventually be extended as additional conventions are identified, as we continue to respond to our experiences of time in this fast-moving age. New conventions may well emerge from additional innovative encounters with technology and also as a result of our sometimes varied and subtly nuanced social experiences.

Time in the Telling of Stories

Now Time (Dramatic action unfolding in the immediate present)

This is most crucial when considering Drama of any kind, and was something Dorothy Heathcote never tired of emphasizing. The concept also resonates strongly with Courtney's 'fictional now' and Thornton Wilder's 'perpetual present time' (cited in Courtney 1987b: 137). The dramatic action is always perceived by participant and observer as happening 'now', whether it is playing out an episode depicting the historical past, an alternative present or the speculative future, it produces the feeling that it is happening 'now'. It is for this reason, that even while the participants know they are participating in circumstances, which are entirely fictional, these are, however, experienced as real. The experience of 'now time' is what gives the drama its sense of immediacy or 'liveness', a sense that as 'self-spectators' participants observe themselves as being present at and part of the unfolding of an action rather than receiving a report of that same action which has happened elsewhere.

Narration I (Past Voice accompanying actions unfolding in 'now time')

This is one of the most fundamental techniques in theatre and drama, and when used by teachers, is often referred to as teacher-directed drama. In terms of time, narration most frequently relies on the simple past tense of the storytelling voice, mainly because the telling of stories by a third party in the present continuous tense can sometimes feel unnatural and awkward. With narration, however, even as the story is narrated in the past tense, the action unfolds and is shown/demonstrated in the present of the 'now time' of the drama.

Narration II (Present Voice of participants describing their actions)

In some instances the present tense can be used to great effect where participants in the process drama deliver narrative descriptions of their actions as if they are happening now. For example, "I'm ringing the front door bell and I wait what seems ages...and the door is opened by this chap..." (Bolton and Heathcote 1999: 67). This can be an extremely effective device but is more difficult to sustain than past tense narrative for extended periods of time. In addition, although it may appear to involve telling the story in the present tense, it nonetheless, implies that the episode in question has already taken place in the past.

Narration III (Past Voice narrated asides mixed with present action)

A story can be narrated in the past voice but the narrator can suddenly shift directly into the present action and be engaged in direct speech or conversation with someone else and return to the narrative as in:

'A young man was walking down the street one day when he met a friend coming towards him... "What are you up to, then?"

"I'm going to the football match."

"I may as well go with you. Let's go."

So the two young men walked on towards the football stadium together....'

Simple Time Shifts and Controls**Flashback** (Past action shown to be happening now)

From the 'now time' of the current action of the drama the action suddenly shifts to a depiction of past events, which in their own turn begin to unfold in the 'now time' of the drama. Flashback is a common device used in film, television and the theatre. Flashback technique was used to great effect in Polly Teale's remarkable play *After Mrs Rochester* (2003). The main location in which the action of this play unfolds is the house in Devon where the West Indian writer Jean Rhys lived in 1957. It is inside the same locked room that the events of her life begin to unfold as memory for the

main Rhys character but as visible encounters for the audience and the actors who depict them. Most of the play is acted out in a series of flashbacks that tell the story of her personal struggle and creative triumph. In process drama flashback remains a most useful device for moving around a story. However, in classroom drama the shift in time has to be represented clearly in a physical way, while in film it may be done with sharp editing, dissolves, music and sound effects.

Flash Forward (Future action shown to be happening now)

This again is a common device (especially in film) used to depict what will or might occur in the future, for example, a visual representation of a premonition, vision or event about to happen. It does not appear to be used as frequently as the flashback. An example from literature might be Hans Christian Anderson's (1994) *The Little Match Girl*, in which the poor girl in question sees herself in different future situations, while the reality of the present produces its final tragic outcome. A good example in theatre would be J.B.Priestley's (1994) play *Time and the Conways*, in which the action of Acts 1 and 3 continues chronologically, but the action of the intervening Act 2 is imagined in the same location eighteen years into the future.

Time Frozen I (Still image/Tableau – A dramatic moment captured)

In process drama this device of capturing a moment of the action is widely available and used to focus on a particular instant, the present moment suspended if you will. The normal flow of time is stopped and a moment held indefinitely, the better to reflect on its significance in the action or to ponder the nature of the relationships between the participants in the event. There is something empowering too in being able to capture time in this way, which for all of us in real life circumstances is beyond our natural ability, yet we continue to be fascinated by the still photograph even in this age of video recording. In process drama this capturing-of-time-convention is frequently used as a strategy to present a still-image to the participants from which they may draw inferences and about which they are free to speculate. It can be used in conjunction with the drama strategy of thought-tracking to gain some insight into what the roles in the still-image are really thinking. Dorothy Heathcote (1991a) has also made distinctions in the form of the still image, e.g. the portrait which is two-dimensional which participants observe from in front; the effigy which is three-dimensional which participants can walk around and observe from different angles and perspectives (Heathcote 1991a: 166).

Time Frozen II (Suspension of Time as Action Interrupted)

The distinction is made here between Time captured in the still image or tableau described above and the suspension of linear Time in order to interrupt the action temporarily. In this convention the dramatic action is temporarily interrupted and Time suspended in order for a narrator or other role to comment, reflect, disrupt or clarify some aspect of what is being depicted, before being allowed to continue. Two clearly distinct Time experiences are depicted in such a situation i.e. that of the normal flow of events and that of the commentator.

Speeding Up, Stretching and Reversing Time

Real (clock) Time (Time unfolding at life rate)

It is important to realize that the participants in the drama are experiencing time as unfolding at life rate even as they enter into a fictional depiction. So, even if, by general agreement among the participants in a drama, time has been frozen, real clock time in their lives continues to move inexorably forward. In some situations, however, the drama itself may unfold at life rate, so that the events of the drama unfold as they might do in life. An hour in the drama may be the equivalent of an hour in real time. Process drama may involve tasks which can only be completed in the time it takes to do them i.e. at life rate in real time.

Time Compressed (Speeding up time)

The compression of events is a feature of any drama that does not unfold in the equivalent of real time. Many examples can be found, since the temporal sweep of most dramas extends beyond the actual playing time. Pfister (1988) cites Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* as a particularly rich example of this compression.

...at the beginning of the (final) soliloquy the clock strikes eleven and Faustus reacts to it with desperate exclamation 'Now hast thou but one bare hour to live' (line 132); after thirty lines it then strikes eleven thirty, provoking Faustus' comment 'Ah, half an hour is past; 'twill all be past anon' (line 162) and after no more than a further nineteen lines, at last, the clock strikes midnight, causing Faustus to shout 'It strikes, it strikes!' (line 181) (Pfister 1988: 285).

Similarly several months or even years may pass during the course of a play's action. This experience of time in the theatre carries over into process drama. In a ritualized depiction of the classic Greek tale of 'Theseus and the Minotaur' with a group of children, the broad sweep of the tale of events in Athens, followed by the voyage to Crete, the confrontation with the Minotaur, the escape from Crete and the return journey to Athens, were undertaken in less than one hour.

Time stretched

In film, one of the best examples of stretching time is Robert Enrico's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* (1962) where an American Civil War civilian spy and prisoner accused of sabotage, is sentenced to be hanged from a bridge. The noose is put around his neck and the sentence carried out, but instead of dying, the rope breaks and his body falls into the river below and he swims to safety, making the journey back to his wife and child. However, in the final moments of the film the action returns to the bridge and we realize that all of this was in fact a split second fantasy, and the man is summarily and shockingly executed. This can be replicated in process drama by suspending the linear time of the action in order to follow the thoughts or dreams of a particular character before picking up the time of the main action once

again. A variant of this stretching of time also seems to be at work during the delivery of the aside or dramatic soliloquy.

Slow Motion (Action slowed to less than life rate)

Another type of time-stretching device, the use of slow motion, is extremely useful for teachers using process drama. Originating in film and television where it is a widely used technical effect, in drama it requires the skill and concentration of the actor in which it becomes an embodied effect, in order to fully execute it successfully. It is very useful in bringing some physical control to bear when dealing with a violent incident or slowing down a split second action, which needs to be observed more carefully. In the theatre it can be used to 'replay' significant moments of the live action of an event. This is an example of a popular dramatic device that did not and could not have existed before the advent of film. In that respect its use as a dramatic device is of recent origin.

Quick motion (Action speeded up to faster than life rate)

The compression of events has already been discussed, but the device of quick motion is taken from the speeding up effect also found in films. Like slow motion it has to be embodied and is dependent on the actor's skill at being able to complete actions at faster-than-life rate, as well as the need for high levels of concentration and physical control. It can be used in the theatre, particularly in combination with flickering 'strobe' lighting to create a comic effect akin to the slapstick chases and confrontations of the early silent movies. In recent times it has been used increasingly in vampire, zombie and other horror movies to create an unnerving sense of something extraordinary and threatening, and for heightening the impact of unexpected violence. Once using process drama to explore Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Shakespeare 1982a) I was able to use quick motion to help students turn the stage directions for the 'dumb show' into a comic improvisation resembling a silent movie.

Time Unfolding Backwards (Events occurring in reverse order)

This is not always easy to achieve and the main example identified in discussion with students was the film *Memento* (2000). Strictly speaking, time does not reverse itself in this film, although a series of incidents are depicted in reverse order, including some strictly filmic effects in which a Polaroid photograph 'un-develops' itself, and ejected shell cases 'jump' back into the gun. The main protagonist of *Memento* has short-term memory loss and is shown attempting to make sense of where he is and where he has been in both time and space (Klein 2001). While watching a two-hour long 'rewind' would in all probability be very trying, a story can be told as a series of episodes presented in a reverse sequence. One can also bring into play here the old adage that a story has a beginning, a middle and an end, though not necessarily in that order, and cite several examples of plays in which the story starts at the end and finds its way back to the beginning and back again. Billy Wilder's movie *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) is a good example, made more remarkable by the fact that it is narrated by a protagonist the audience witnesses being killed during the opening sequence of the film.

Video Technology Inspiring Drama

Rewind (Video convention of reverse action and sound)

With this dramatic device, derived from video technology, students can come closest to actually running time backwards, at least for a short space of time. A play performed by students in a schools' Drama Festival included the West African trickster folk hero Anansi functioning as narrator. Anansi was equipped with a large remote control which he used from time to time to rewind and replay sections of the story. This time convention is again one that could not have existed before the development of video technology, which put the viewing of films under the control of the viewer and not a projectionist. It emulates the quality of a video rewind and is often used for comic effect.

Video Fast Forward

Although bearing some resemblance to the 'quick motion' described above, the video fast forward reflects the element of 'control' associated with the kind of video/DVD technology which has become widely available to consumers over the past few decades. Participants, when asked to fast forward will often try to reproduce the characteristic sounds of a rapidly advancing soundtrack to accompany their actions.

Single Frame Advancement (Another video-inspired convention)

Another dramatic device inspired by video technology is single frame advancement where the dramatic action is controlled to the extent that it 'plays' like a video recorder and is capable of moving the image forward, but only one frame at a time. This particular strategy was used effectively with a group of sixth form students who were studying Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1981). Starting with the scene in which the poker game is taking place, students created a still image of the characters present and used the single frame technique to move them into positions which would reveal the underlying sexual and emotional tensions and/or relationships between them. This allowed both the participating and watching students to see clearly these changes taking place from moment to moment in the depicted situation as some of the characters began to slowly shift their positions in the scene.

Single Frame Reverse

This is the same as single frame advance except played in reverse. It is a useful device for slowly retracing the action of a dramatic episode and identifying points at which emotion or attitudes begin to change.

Pause (Interruption of video-style action)

Still image or tableau is related to the photograph in that it captures a moment in time. In drama that same image can then be activated. A distinction was made earlier between the still image and a temporary interruption of the action by 'freezing' it. The video pause is similar but with the subtle difference that it suggests a temporary interruption of the action related specifically to the rewind, play or fast forward capability of video technology.

Looped Time (Same action sequence can be replayed repeatedly)

Again this is a temporal convention, which traces its origin to the development of film and video technology. An episode or live action sequence in drama can be 'looped' like a film so that the participants simply return to their starting positions and act out the sequence repeatedly. Such a temporal device can be used in tandem with others, so that the loop can be reversed, stopped, advanced one frame at a time etc. Television stations often use this effect in sports situations where the audience may see a goal scored repeatedly or an athlete crossing the finishing line over and over again. Dorothy Heathcote used this convention in the early nineteen eighties in a drama about the exploits of Robin Hood, during which the sound of a galloping horse was heard approaching, followed by a stolen silver spoon being thrown through the window opening of a poor peasant's cottage. This same sequence was repeated over and over again like a film loop as the participants determined its meaning.

Depicting Multiple Times and Places

Same Place/Different Times

If in drama time is spatial and space temporal as outlined by Richard Courtney (1989a), then for drama to occur, something has to happen in a given space, which is located in the time of the action. Similarly, time has to be located in a particular place. Any action/activity is located somewhere in time or space, even where the exact location or time period is unspecified (as with many of the plays of Samuel Beckett for instance). This makes it possible to depict the same location in space but with different actions being played out simultaneously or, for the sake of better focus, alternately in different time periods. Arthur Miller's temporal device in Act One of *Death of a Salesman* (1961b) has the main protagonist standing in his kitchen while his memory of his sons as young boys in the past, and in the yard, is played out simultaneously (Miller 1961b: 21-23).

Different Places/Same Time

Similarly, concurrent dramatic action in two or more different locations can be depicted. This is a device used in a number of plays by Alan Ayckbourn. In his play *Bedroom Farce* (1979), for example, three bedrooms in three different houses are depicted on stage, with the action sometimes unfolding sequentially and sometimes

simultaneously. In process drama it is always possible to follow characters out of a story and depict their lives and experiences as events which are running parallel to the main action of the story. It can probably be best summed up in the rather hackneyed expression “meanwhile, back at the farm”.

Different Places/Different Times

Late nineteenth and twentieth century technology ushered in the long-distance telephone call across time zones. Today the Digital Revolution allows real-time messaging across time zones. I can ‘chat’ with a friend in Singapore who is therefore in a different place and in a time zone several hours ahead of me. For me it may still be Monday while he is well into his experience of Tuesday. But drama can do more. Once again, Polly Teale’s play *After Mrs. Rochester* (2003) depicts scenes from Jean Rhys’s childhood while the older Jean Rhys looks on. In one sequence the actor playing the older Jean Rhys sits in her house in Devon in 1957 looking at herself as a child (played by another younger actor) reading Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre* in Dominica sixty years earlier. Two other actors in another area of the stage depict the encounter in *Jane Eyre* between Mr. Rochester and Jane which the younger Jean is reading. So, three locations in three different time periods linked by the memory of the main protagonist are depicted simultaneously. They are, namely a) Jean Rhys’ house in Devon, England in the nineteen fifties; b) the Caribbean island of Dominica of Jean’s childhood during the eighteen nineties and c) the fictional setting in Yorkshire, England of Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in the eighteen forties. Clearly this invaluable convention of depicting multiple locations in multiple time periods is easily transferable to process drama in the classroom.

Time Travel (*The Time Machine*, *Doctor Who*)

Travel through time is a staple of science fiction, but drama uses the creative imagination to project participants into a variety of historical or speculative time periods, thus making time travel a possibility in terms of imagined experience. Examples from film and television include H.G.Wells’s *The Time Machine* (2005) and the popular British Broadcasting Company television series *Doctor Who*.

Time as Vision

Seeing the Current Location in the Future from the Present

This temporal device is useful in the depiction of future events resulting from prophecy, or warnings of fortune tellers, soothsayers etc. The main protagonists are able to see events which will unfold in that location in the future.

Seeing Another Location in the Future from the Present

In the frequently dramatized story of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens (2003), the Ghost of Christmas yet to come indicates to Mr. Scrooge what will befall him by showing him his own tomb.

Seeing the Current Location in the Past from the Present

This is different from a flashback because the main protagonists are looking at what happened and are not involved in the action. Again this device is used mainly with reference to the location yielding up more information whether in an historical or a supernatural setting.

Seeing Another Location in the Past from the Present

Jamaican playwright Dennis Scott uses this device in his play *An Echo in the Bone* (1985) to open up a 'Nine Night' wake ceremony into a series of historical vignettes which depict the participants' history of suffering and injustice. These are seen by the other characters present and take place in a variety of locations, although viewed throughout from the location in which the wake is being held.

Depicting the Exact Time of the Dramatic Action

Historical Time Period

The historical time period during which the dramatic action has its setting may be of particular significance and require some clear signing into existence. In process drama, this may not require the kind of elaborate costuming necessary for a fully staged historical drama, though it may require some elements which assist the pupils in understanding the particular period in which the drama is set. This is critical, for example, in the case of say Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (2000a) because we know that historically the drama takes place in 1692.

Time of Day or Night

Time of day may be of particular importance to the dramatic action; an escape by night; a vigil; afternoon tea; a duel at dawn etc. Once again, in the theatre the technical elements of costumes, settings, lighting and sound may help to establish the time of day. In the classroom it may be carefully selected properties, and/or references in speech, which help to establish the time of day. In some plays the time of day progresses or shifts and is sometimes referred to directly in the dramatic dialogue.

Seasonal Time (of the year)

Seasons and holidays can help establish the time frame of a drama, Christmas, and the experience of the seasons of Spring and Autumn in some countries, with mango time, rainy season, planting time and crop over as identifiable times of the year in the Caribbean. There may also be a seasonal temporal characteristics attached to the experience of natural phenomena e.g. drought; tides; flooding; hurricanes etc. Seasonal variation may also be attached to social organization e.g. university semesters; the sitting of Parliament; bird-shooting season etc.

Exact Date may be Important (eg St Crispin's Day in *Henry V*)

Specific dates may hold particular significance in a drama – e.g. September 11, 2001 or what has become known as 9/11. Every society has its significant dates when the commemoration of important historical events. One devised drama may trace events leading up to the reading of the proclamation announcing the Abolition of Slavery in Jamaica on August 1st, 1834, while other examples might include Armistice Day, Independence Day, or the date of natural disasters such as , Hurricane Katrina, the Haitian earthquake or a major tsunami.

The Time Before the Drama

No dramatic representation begins in a vacuum. Characters in a play may make references to events preceding the main action of the drama. The same is true of process drama. References in a drama about AIDS to the siblings' parents having both died as a result of AIDS-related conditions presented a situation which might be explored further. Considering the experiences of the parents helped to shed further light on the plight of their orphaned children.

The Time after the End of the Drama

A drama may attempt to 'tie up loose ends' and reach a satisfying conclusion which may involve the death of a tyrant and the ushering in of a new period of freedom and prosperity, or with that great symbol of comedy, a wedding, and ensuing happiness. Or events may lead to a conclusion which is more open ended. But these different endings generally point to a new time period during which the story will continue in another direction. An example is the process drama work done with teachers on Robert Browning's ballad *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (2000: 30-38), which was used to explore the bereavement of the parents of the children who follow the Piper into the mountain at the end of the story, the time of the action being six months after their children's disappearance. This time frame is also typically the inspiration for many story and movie 'sequels'.

Time as Tension Giver

Non-time or the Absence of Time

While all dramatic action must unfold in time and space, in the theatre sometimes the precise location and time sequence is vague. Richard Schechner cites an example from the Theatre of the Absurd:

Throughout *The Bald Soprano*, Ionesco hints that he is denying time. The clock strikes a variety of times, none of them correct and several of them impossible. The Fireman reminds his listeners that he is "going to have a fire in exactly three-quarters of an hour" (Schechner 1988: 25).

Schechner goes on to suggest that what he calls 'circular', 'bracketed' and 'non-time' are characteristic of a more open dramatic structure (1988: 25). There are elements of this more open approach to time in dramas that do not necessarily provide any definite resolution to their respective dilemmas.

Time and Suspended Animation

In the film *Aliens* (1986), actress Sigourney Weaver plays the role of Lieutenant Ripley, an astronaut who has been drifting in space for fifty seven years in a state of hyper-sleep or stasis, but who returns to Earth to find that while she has hardly aged at all, her daughter has become an old woman and pre-deceased her. This kind of speculative use of parallel time periods which operate at different rates of progression is also to be found in stories like the Grimm Brothers' *The Sleeping Beauty* (2002), C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2002) and Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* (1994).

Time Out of Sync (Mortals and Immortals)

Legends and mythology frequently contrast the temporal experiences of mortals with those of gods and deities, for whom the mortal experience of time has no meaning. Immortality is also a prize sought in these myths and legends, e.g. the Fountain of Youth; Shangri-La etc.

Time Limitations (Action to be completed within a given time frame)

Time can sometimes function in the drama as one of the main contributors of tension to the dramatic action. The pressure on the protagonists to complete a certain task within a given time period can produce a very tense 'race against time' situation. Meeting deadlines in drama can generate enormous pressure on the participants to complete a project within a given time frame. This was the case in a process drama done with students operating in role as junior lawyers in a law firm who were gathering evidence for a formal hearing. Their 'evidence' which comprised a number of different projects, had to be ready by an appointed date and time in order for it to be presented at the formal hearing which would be attended by their parents and other invited guests (Bowell and Heap 2013: 68).

Time Reconstruction (Reconstruct the time taken to complete an action)

In certain situations it may be necessary to reconstruct the time frame of a particular incident. This is particularly true of dramas, which might involve some kind of crime scene. The reconstruction of a time frame in the case of say, dating objects in an archaeological dig might also be a situation in which time takes on a particular significance.

The Passage of Time

Time/Duration I (The arc of the entire unfolding action of a play)

The duration of a stage play may vary enormously. It may take the form of a five or ten minute vignette. On the other hand it may take more than four hours to stage a production of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (Shakespeare 1982a) or several more to stage an epic such as Peter Brook's production of Carriere's *The Mahabharata* (1987)

Time/Duration II (Of a single action depicted)

Can also be about the time it takes to perform an action: the duration of a kiss; the length of time it takes to eat a meal e.g. the character John Proctor eating in a production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (Miller 2000a). Some of the 'underground' movies of the nineteen sixties and seventies played with this notion – in Andy Warhol's film *Empire* (1964) very little happens. Audiences are often severely tested by a silence which appears to go on too long or by stillness or an action completed over a protracted period of time, such as waiting, sleeping or watching.

Symbolic Representation of Time Passing

One of the most obvious symbolic representations of time passing is probably the clock. Time passing may be presented visually on the stage in many different ways e.g. in a production of Aimé Césaire's play *A Tempest* (2000) this was achieved by projecting alternating images of sun and moon moving progressively across a cyclorama. Process drama can adopt, simpler, more accessible means, albeit that they too have their origins in the theatre, sound effects of a clock ticking, or the chiming of the hour using the school bell or the passing of time symbolically represented by the placing of stones on the ground to mark the hours, a convention readily adaptable to the classroom.

Interacting with Other Times

Bringing the Past into the Present

Examples of this convention are to be found in a host of different movies in which the past is inducted into the present in a variety of ways. For example in the movie *Frequency* (2000), due to a disturbance in the aurora borealis a young man is able to contact his dead father 30 years in the past by means of an old 'ham' radio and thereafter create an alternative history. In one of her documented dramas *Pieces of Dorothy* (1985) Dorothy Heathcote gives us a clear example of this when she invites a young woman in role as a lady gardener from the eighteenth century to visit with a group of children with the invitation, (which is also a negotiation) – "Will you bring your century into our century?" Her now famous work with Australian Drama practitioner, John Carroll as Doctor Lister is perhaps one of the best examples of bringing a person from the past to interact with the pupils of the present (Heathcote 1991a: 131-137).

Bringing the Future into the Present

Similarly the future can also be brought into the present. The movie *Terminator* (1984) uses just such a convention to bring something from the future to act upon the present in order to change the direction of future events. Again this is most likely to be regarded as a feature of science fantasy and speculative fiction.

Dream Time/Trance Time

In rituals where persons go into trance or states of possession, time is experienced in a different way. As Richard Schechner points out, "To be in trance is not to be out of control or unconscious. The Balinese say that if a trance dancer hurts himself the trance was not genuine" (Schechner 1988: 175). Many dramatists have drawn on the element of possession prevalent in indigenous folk rituals and ceremonies and portrayed this on stage, so that this aspect of temporal experience might very well be portrayed by participants in process dramas which draw on traditional elements, without necessarily entering into a trance state.

Repeat Time (Repeated action in different ways)

The idea of dramatic action being played as a film loop has already been mentioned, but one of process drama's most useful temporal tools is the ability to repeat episodes over and over again, although the repeated actions may undergo a series of subtle adjustments as the progression continues.

Indications of Other Times

Alternative Futures

In process drama the conditions pertaining to the present can be altered to produce a range of different future outcomes, which can be tried and tested and seen. There can be a range of endings to a story, because drama makes these alternative outcomes available, not merely as speculation but as experience. It would be possible to test several different outcomes for a particular process drama for example.

Foreshadowing

This is a very useful dramatic device. A good example of foreshadowing can be found in the soothsayer as in 'Beware the Ides of March' in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1998b). Also, the notion of 'present absence' – five people sitting at a dining table set for six, heralds the arrival of another person to complete the picture. Foreshadowing can be laid in to the drama almost as a signpost/index/indicator of things to come – Heathcote's woodworkers preparing to build the Cross for Christ's crucifixion; or sharpening swords before Thomas Becket's assassination; each one foreshadows a major event.

Pre-destiny

The plays of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (1988), and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1979c), use the temporal element of pre-destiny to underscore the tragedy of "one who struggles against natural forces and is crushed by fate" (Pickering 2005: 29). Whatever steps are taken to avoid the outcomes predicted in prophecy serve only to move their protagonists inexorably closer to their tragic fate. Tragic drama uses this cruel aspect of time, an aspect which can also be harnessed in process drama, particularly in classical and mythological stories such as these.

Eternity or Outside of Time

In a short essay on Time, writer A.C. Grayling (2009) observes:-

Both Eastern and Western philosophy and religions have typically had complicated views about time. In much Indian thought time is regarded as mere appearance; the major Western religions typically claim that divinity exists eternally – "outside time" – thus implying that time is an artefact of experience in our sub-standard finite world

(Grayling 2009).

In dramatic portrayals involving deities and the supernatural there may be no clear indication of an experience of time.

Conclusion

This broad outline of fifty temporal frames for drama is not meant to be exhaustive, and there may be some who will disagree with the sometimes finely nuanced distinctions that have been made between them. However, the major point being made here is that the depiction of Time represents just one aspect of the complex nature of the art form of drama. It is, in fact only one element among the many that are available for teachers of process drama to use in their pursuit of meaningful learning experiences for their students. It remains for us to consider just how readily such temporal frames as are available to us through process drama can be applied to a broad range of twenty first century learning communities, in an attempt to bring meaningful change to the general educational landscape.

The main emphasis of this survey has been on drama's available temporal frames as being among the principal elements via which the shift into fictional experience is achieved. This brief exploration, however, gives rise to a number of further questions relating to the type of thinking required for successful process drama experiences to be achieved. Several implications emerge relating to the future training of teachers and facilitators of process drama, including the need to develop a cadre of teacher-artists who can plug into the strengths of drama both as an aesthetic experience and a learning methodology. If Process Drama does, in fact, hold within it the potential for a more emancipatory type of education, then, as this investigation illustrates, it

may have something to do with its ability to transform the participants' experience of Time and Space.

As Dorothy Heathcote carefully notes :

Drama time perforce is experimental (doing, from within agreed social contexts) and 'loses' the clock time studentship, so embraces responsibility for outcomes and considerations of morality and ethics (Heathcote 2010b: 9).

For her this type of virtual reality is universally available, for as she says, "Drama, like Theatre, is akin to another time-space-room which all the participants recognise is available when required for learning" (Heathcote 2010b: 9). But in the same way that scientists continue to seek their own answers to complex questions about Time and Space, for teacher-artists this room called Drama remains difficult to fathom and just like Dorothy, we can only continue to learn by trial and error and from careful observation.

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DramaResearch:

international journal of drama in education

ISSN 2040-2228

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