

The Archive Speaks: Exploring Heathcote's Praxis as a "More-than-Human" Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Heathcote's contributions to drama education have traditionally been explored through a predominantly humanist philosophical lens, emphasising human-centred meaning-making through shared dramatic inquiry and personal reflection. More recently, however, process philosophy and posthuman/new material feminist theory and practice have generated alternative ways of understanding the material, relational, and affective dimensions of her praxis as that which is always "more-than-human".

Accordingly, this article draws upon a workshop event entitled "The Archive Speaks" that took place during the 2025 Dorothy Heathcote Now Conference hosted at Manchester Metropolitan University. Using an imaginary framework that was facilitated by Heathcote's own pedagogical innovation, Teacher-in-Role, and one of her thirty-three drama conventions, the workshop invited participants to

explore objects borrowed from the Dorothy Heathcote Archive currently held at Manchester Metropolitan University. Inspired by Brian Massumi's notion of a relational architecture, we explore these objects as affective provocations, where assembled materials within an imaginary frame generated ideas related to Heathcote and her influence on drama education and personal drama teacher histories. We conclude by theorising what more Heathcote's praxis can offer Drama education as a conduit for affective resonance that is always "more-than-human".

INTRODUCTION

One way in which Dorothy Heathcote conceptualised her dramatic pedagogy was through the metaphor of the crucible (Mantle of the Expert Network, 2023a). In this metaphor, drama creates a circumstance in which teachers and learners stir up knowledge together, generating the conditions for new understandings to emerge. Within the field of drama education, this process is still largely theorised as human-centred; collaborative activity between humans creates the conditions for meaning-making, while the act of knowledge-making itself resides with the individual. In emphasising the importance of reflection to her dramatic endeavours, Heathcote can be said to reinforce this human-centric orientation (see Heathcote, 1977 in O'Neill, 2015, p. 53).

In Western thought, reflection has been largely shaped by a Cartesian account of the subject as the cogito; a detached mind that is distinct and separate from the world it seeks to know. While seminal thinkers on reflection since Descartes, such as Dewey (1910) and Schön (1983), have sought to close the gap between the subject and the world, the autonomous thinking human remains at the centre of the reflective process (Hébert, 2015). As Hébert (2015, p. 366) elaborates, in the reflective models of both Dewey and Schön, knowledge occurs as a consequence of a cognitive pause in the subject's direct experience of the world; however miniscule this pause may be. Reflection as an epistemological concept is therefore principally concerned with how humans cognitively process experience to reach new understandings about the world and how to act within it. This is central to Heathcote's own educational project which identifies the

“marriage” of experience and reflection as fundamental to her dramatic pedagogy:

All my teaching lures, strategies and skills seek this marriage. It is my golden key to my mind’s working and my practice. For I believe experience without reflection leaves the person hungering for more...So every teaching tool I have has been hewn to supply and feed reflection. (Mantle of the Expert Network, 2023b)

More recently, however, scholars and drama education practitioners have begun to explore what can be understood as the “more-than-human” dimensions of Heathcote’s praxis (Hatton, 2024; Hickey-Moody and Kipling, 2016; Ramsay, 2025). As a concept, more-than-human draws on process philosophy, from Alfred North Whitehead through to Deleuze and Guattari (see Manning, 2013, Manning, 2016) and is further developed within related posthuman/new material feminist theories and practices (Coole and Frost, 2010). This perspective offers a very different account of agency and knowledge-making to that posited by humanist philosophies and associated theory. In this account, the capacity to act is not the sole remit of the reflecting human subject. Instead, agency is distributed across human and non-human assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) composed of multiple things, bodies, forces and affects that are in a continual process of change. Following Deleuze and Guattari, this is what Jane Bennett (2010, p. 23) theorises as the “agentic assemblage” through which agency emerges as a consequence of energies and forces circulating within what are always “living, throbbing confederations” of vital materialities. For Erin Manning, process philosophy thus invites questions that are “ecological” and “relational” by foregrounding how humans connect to all other matter and energies making up the world (*Post Philosophies and the Doing of Inquiry*, 2021). Whereas Bennett, in a bid to counter the positioning of matter as passive substance, draws attention to the lively nature of matter within assemblages, Manning focuses on the change produced by things and forces acting together. To this end, she opts for the term “agencement” over assemblage, arguing that assemblage too often foregrounds a fixed “object or existent configuration” at the expense of “a sense of movement and connectibility, of processual agency” (Manning, 2016, p. 123).

Against this theoretical backdrop, this article re-imagines Heathcote's praxis as a more-than-human, relational, and affective pedagogy, in which meaning emerges through the dynamic interplay of people, objects, environments, and affects rather than residing solely within individual reflection. It advances this proposition in three interrelated ways: first, by offering a theoretical reframing of Heathcote's praxis through process philosophy and posthuman/new materialist perspectives; second, by developing The Archive Speaks workshop as a practical model that enacts this reframing through its aesthetic framing, use of objects, and collaborative conventions; and third, by considering the implications of this approach for drama education, particularly in relation to how reflective practice, classroom environments, and drama education might be reconceptualised as distributed, embodied, and collectively produced processes.

AN EVENTFUL WORLD

To attend more closely to agencement as the how of change in the making, Manning and her close collaborator Brian Massumi often turn to Whitehead's (1978) understanding of the event. For Whitehead, reality is constituted by what he terms actual occasions or "drops of experience" (Whitehead, 1978, p. 18). Consistent with a relational worldview, each actual occasion or drop of experience feels or grasps and is felt or grasped by other occasions in a process Whitehead terms "prehension" (Shaviri, 2009). An event is an extended set of actual occasions, or a "multiplicity of becomings", that hold together to create the things, including humans, perceived in everyday experience. However, these things are never static; they are always undergoing change. Shaviri (2009, p. 17) vividly captures this through Whitehead's own example of the famous monument Cleopatra's Needle on London's Victoria Embankment: "Cleopatra's Needle isn't just a solid, impassive object...Rather, it is eventful at every moment... the mere standing-in-place of Cleopatra's Needle is an event: a renewal, a novelty, a fresh creation". This process culminates in the event's endpoint or satisfaction (Whitehead, 1978, p. 40), after which it perishes. What remains is not a finite thing or substance but a quality of experience that is passed on as potential for occasions to come. As Massumi writes, "the coming occasion's passing will bequeath the potential-grabbing change its own activity has created to successor

experiences, for their self-creative taking” (2013, p. 9).

Whitehead expands on how potential inherited from previous actual occasions is prehended by occasions in the making through his account of the proposition. Although propositions are usually understood in terms of truth or falsehood (Shannon, 2021), for Whitehead the proposition concerns how certain past potentials are taken up as relevant to the creative unfolding of new occasions. More precisely, the proposition functions as a “lure for feeling” (Whitehead, 1978, p. 25) grounded in domains that are first and foremost aesthetic and affective rather than cognitive and rational (Shaviri, 2009, p. 65). To return to the notion of agencement as “processual agency”, it is the event in the process of its own unfolding that decides (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 42-43) what it will become, not anything external to it. Human subjects may briefly materialise out of this process, but they are never prior to events that are always “more-than-human” occurrences (Manning as cited in Massumi, 2015, p. 149).

“ALL MY TEACHING LURES...”—HEATHCOTE’S PRAXIS AS A “MORE-THAN-HUMAN” PEDAGOGY

Building on Whitehead’s theorising of the proposition as a “lure for feeling”, Manning and Massumi (2014) identify what they term “enabling constraints” as integral to their own creative research and praxis. Enabling constraints concern how collaborative activities are aesthetically primed towards a creative outcome without ever determining in advance what that outcome should be (Massumi, 2015, p. 73). Enabling constraints align with what Massumi (2013, p. 53) also describes as a “relational architecture”; an aesthetic set up that is designed to disrupt existing patterns of behaviour and ways of being by being oriented towards “the disseminating end of things, toward potential expansion”. Relational architecture is entangled with another key concept associated with Manning and Massumi, semblance. Semblance in this context is when the “virtual actually appears” (Massumi, 2013, p. 16, *italics in original*) as the more-than of the artistic encounter. In other words, it is that which without being actually present is felt as potential:

Setting up an interaction is easy. We have a number of templates for that. But how do you set it up...so that the relational potential it

tends towards appears...These are technical questions essentially about framing, about what it means to frame an event situationally...You're creating ways of making the lived relation really appear. You're operating on the qualitative level of thinking-feeling, where you are pooling styles of being and becoming, not just eliciting behaviours. (Massumi, 2013, p. 52)

Although there is no evidence to suggest Heathcote drew upon process philosophy, we propose her “teaching lures”, as principally concerned with the aesthetic framing of the drama event and what this might elicit, are consistent with the notion of the enabling constraint as theorised by Manning and Massumi (2014). That is to say, they can be approached from the perspective of the more-than-human and the virtual potential of the drama event that exceeds the individual. As Heathcote herself observed, “drama is about filling the spaces between people with meaningful experiences” (Heathcote 1977 in O'Neill, 2015, p. 53). This observation suggests her awareness that it is the aesthetic framing, and the affects it generates, that shape what later emerges as individualised, reflective engagement with what is taking place. Following Massumi (2013), we propose that this is consistent with the concept of a relational architecture that begins not with individual human subjects but with the more-than-human drama event, and the potentials it generates, to be prehended or felt by events to come.

The paper now develops this “more-than-human” account of Heathcote’s dramatic pedagogy in relation to a workshop event entitled *The Archive Speaks* that took place during the 2025 Dorothy Heathcote Now Conference hosted at Manchester Metropolitan University. This workshop evolved out of previous research bringing together Heathcote’s praxis, reflective practice with student Drama teachers, and the ecological and relational worldview opened up by process philosophy and posthuman/new material feminist theory and practices (Ramsay, 2025).

HOW THE WORKSHOP EVOLVED

Interested in how process philosophy and posthuman/new material feminist theory and practice might expand how reflective practice is enacted with postgraduate students training to be secondary school drama teachers, Alison’s doctoral research called upon Heathcote’s

dramatic pedagogy to create a drama workshop focused on becoming teacher experiences. Workshop activities were imagined not as techniques for stimulating reflection, but as propositions, or “lures for feeling”, active in the emergence of both subjectivities and novel perspectives on student teacher experiences and future aspirations.

The first proposition was to position student teachers as investigators of a mysterious happening. More specifically, the workshop used a fictional frame to imagine the Drama studio, which was the primary teaching space used by student Drama teachers enrolled on the Post Graduate Teacher Training Programme (PGCE) in question, had somehow become sentient. This fantastical circumstance resulted in the studio manifesting objects, things and video footage associated with Drama student teachers and tutors who had previously inhabited the Drama studio space. This included university tutor archives belonging to “Becky” and “Alison”, as tutors teaching on the programme. These archives contained objects, things, resources and documents associated with Alison and Becky’s personal teacher histories.



Figure 7: “Alison’s” university tutor archive (see Ramsay, 2025, p. 106).

As a device within the drama workshop, university tutor archives were

inspired by one of Heathcote's thirty-three conventions, "objects to represent a person's interests" (Heathcote 1980 in O'Neill, 2015, p. 75), and functioned as additional lures for capturing interest through the process of collaborative dramatic inquiry.

Key to the workshop's relational architecture was the fictional worldbuilding. This brought together diverse human and non-human elements that, acting together, created a very particular agentic assemblage (Bennett, 2010). Dim lighting and mysterious music operated as atmospheric players in the unfolding drama. The studio entrance was adorned with hazard warning tape and keep out signs. In addition, Teacher-in-Role was utilised to facilitate a jump into what Heathcote refers to as the "now time" of drama (Heathcote, 1980 in O'Neill, 2015, p. 71-72). This involved tutors adopting roles as university security guards called into action on learning that the studio had switched into a sentient state. Tutor roles as security guards maintained enough authority to influence the shape of the drama but were not endowed with knowledge to know why the studio was behaving the way it was, thus leaving this open to investigation. This role choice was in keeping with Heathcote's concern for adopting roles that allow the teacher flexibility when working in role within the drama (Anderson, 2012, pp. 35-36; O'Neill, 2015, p. 38). The security guards occupied what might be considered a middling status position in which the teacher/facilitator in-role holds some authority but not enough to dominate the action or foreclose inquiry. In *Mantle of Expert*, for example, this is crucial: the teacher must be able to influence the direction of the drama without becoming the sole source of knowledge or decision-making. Heathcote often described these roles as those that allow the teacher to steer without steering, enabling them to shape the frame while still leaving space for students to take responsibility, make discoveries, and generate meaning. This, we suggest, is resonant with Manning and Massumi's (2014) notion of the enabling constraint as an intervention that orients creative activity toward novel outcomes without ever determining what those outcomes might be.

In-role, tutors greeted student Drama teachers outside the studio and informed them of what was occurring before inviting them into the space to investigate the mysterious happenings further. However, a condition of this entry was that each participant shared with the studio their earliest drama memory, written down and collected by the security guards. As discussed by Ramsay (2025), this became the

spur for in-role collaborative activities focused on how the past might inform becoming teacher experiences. This included a further proposition in which student teachers were invited to create their own teacher archive and then share this with their peers. Subsequent analysis of the workshop outcomes explored the collaborative process as a mode of reflection concerned not with what student teachers do not know or need to learn, but with the potentials they carry, which are surfaced through dramatic inquiry as a relational event, rather than an individual cognitive act. This became the starting point for The Archive Speaks workshop, which in addition placed Dorothy Heathcote, her influence, and her legacy at the heart of proceedings.

THE ARCHIVE SPEAKS WORKSHOP

For the workshop The Archive Speaks, held in the same Drama studio at Manchester Metropolitan University, a similar fantastical framework was both imagined and realised through an assemblage of objects, materials, lighting, sound, and the repurposing of security guards through Teacher-in-Role. Participants were initially greeted outside the Drama studio by the security guards, who informed them of the strange events, and invited them into the studio to investigate further, on the condition they share their earliest memories or impressions of Dorothy, which were collected in a jar. In this instance, however, the archive manifested by the studio contained objects borrowed from the larger Dorothy Heathcote archive held at the university.



Figure 8: View of The Archive Speaks on entry.



Figure 9: Ariel view of the archival contents.

The objects included: typed notes on yellowing paper detailing Heathcote's thoughts on drama as pedagogy; a more recent set of notes outlining a collaborative "art project in the Derby Royal Hospital"; an audio cassette of songs; a white video cassette box entitled Making Drama Work; Curriculum Matters, featuring a black and white image of a middle-aged Dorothy; a faded mid-twentieth-century book documenting numerous theatrical set designs; and a large paper teaching resource depicting the silhouette of a large house and garden, along with a smaller paper version of the same garden. As an assemblage, these objects became a trigger for collaborative activities, sparking conversations and ideas about Heathcote, and her influence on both drama education and personal drama teacher histories and practices.

A further proposition was created in the form of The Manual for the Hidden Archive, detailed below, attached to clipboards and referred to by the security guards when guiding participants into the mysterious world of the drama. This functioned not as a set of procedural instructions, but as a deliberately playful provocation through which participants could encounter the idea of the archive as living, embodied, and collectively authored. Positioned within the drama education workshop exploring the notion of a "living archive," the manual disrupted conventional understandings of archiving as a static, curatorial act concerned with preservation and classification. Instead, it framed the archive as emergent, relational, and contingent upon the bodies and memories now present in the room. In this way the manual provided a relational architecture for semblance, as the potential of the archive, to be felt.

Manual for the hidden archive

1. To enter the studio, you must first write down a memory or an impression that you have of this person called Dorothy Heathcote and place it in this jar.
2. Place the jar of memories in the archive.
3. Scrutinise the things in the archive. Consider these questions:
 - Which object resonates with you?
 - What do you want to know about the object?
 - What impression do you get of the person's interests

- or concerns in encountering these objects?
 - What impression is created by the collection of objects?
 - What is missing?
4. Share your thoughts with others. Capture your thoughts on the clothing item provided. Hang the collected impressions on the washing line.
 5. Make an essence machine inspired by the collected impressions. An "Essence machine" is a technique where performers use repetitive sounds and movements to collectively represent an idea, object, or process, like a machine. It is also known as the "human machine" ... and is used in drama for teamwork, creativity, and focusing on physical theatre.

How it works:

Start: One person begins with a simple, repeatable movement and a corresponding sound.

Join: As others get an idea for a movement and sound that connects to the first person's part, they physically link up with another performer to join the "machine".

Build: Each person adds a new, repetitive movement and sound that connects to the parts around them until the entire group is part of a single, coordinated machine.

Develop: The group can explore different aspects, such as changing the tempo (speeding up or slowing down) or shifting the volume of the sounds.

Interpret: After a performance, the group can discuss what they think the machine represents, and an observer might be able to guess the original theme, even if it has evolved.

6. Give the essence machine a title. Write the title on the

clothing template provided and add it to washing line—for example, “misunderstood genius”.

7. Make your Drama archive from what is available to you in the space and share it with others. What would you want to include in your archive and what impressions would you want it to generate?

We now offer our impressions of the potentials that emerged through The Archive Speaks workshop. To do so, we adopt a diffractive approach to analysis (Barad, 2007, p. 25), whereby insights from different disciplines and bodies of theory are read through rather than against one another. The events generated by the workshop’s relational architecture are therefore read through both Heathcote’s praxis and posthuman new material feminist theories. Following Youngblood Jackson and Mazzei (2016, p. 105), we present these not as reflections on what occurred, but as a way of attending to the forces and materialities acting on and through the workshop assemblage.

TOWARDS THE DISSEMINATING END OF THINGS—THE MANUAL FOR THE HIDDEN ARCHIVE AS A RELATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

We propose The Manual for the Hidden Archive, and its different stages, operate more as enabling constraints than a set of procedures. In a Heathcotean sense they are carefully crafted structures that orient participants’ attention and shape the dramatic encounter. Heathcote frequently argued, drama requires “trouble” and “tension” to generate meaning (Heathcote, (1980), cited by O’Neill (2015), pp. 71–72), but it also requires form and frames that hold the work in place long enough for participants to think, feel, and act with purpose. The manual’s instructions thus echo her long-standing commitment to designing conditions in which reflection can emerge through action rather than outside it.

The opening instruction requiring entry to the studio through the inscription of a memory or impression of Dorothy Heathcote established a threshold ritual. By writing and depositing a recollection into a jar, participants enacted a performative gesture of contribution. The archive began not with authoritative documentation, but with fragmentary, subjective traces. Memories emerge of meeting Dorothy

for the first time, of being advised by her, and of even participating in one of her workshop events or “dramas”. Other contributions surface memories of learning about her through a teacher, drama association, or participation in a training event, and suggest her perceived significance and intrigue. Entangled with these memories are impressions of Dorothy; she is old, seems to know a great deal, and is a carrier of stories; at the same time, she is young and playful, even childlike. In this sense, the workshop foregrounded the instability of memory and the plurality of narrative, positioning the archive as a site of affective and interpretive negotiation rather than historical fixity. The act of entering safely through contribution also redistributed authority: access was conditional upon offering something of oneself. Participants are invited to enter this “world” of the workshop, not as a form of escapism, but as a working space, or a laboratory where ideas are tested, dilemmas may be confronted, and where ways of being are explored. Dorothy Heathcote imagined the Drama classroom as a form of “laboratory”, in which the students and teacher collaborate (Allen and Handley, 2025 p,14), and *The Manual for the Hidden Archive*, with its purposefully playful instructions, was similarly inspired.

The act of placing the jar of memories in the archive further establishes a threshold ritual that is simultaneously symbolic and material. It marks entry into the fictional world while also foregrounding the archive as a living, collective entity shaped by the contributions of those who encounter it. Following Manning and Massumi (2014, p. 98), we might say this threshold crossing ritual helps to position the unfolding event centre-stage, not individuals or individual subject positions. This gesture also resonates with contemporary critiques of reflective practice that challenge the idea of reflection as a purely cognitive, individualised act (Hébert, 2015; Linds and Vettraino, 2015). Instead, reflection becomes distributed across bodies, objects, and the environment, emerging through the material act of placing a felt memory or impression into a shared container. The jar itself becomes a participant in the event. As an object it carries and modulates affective traces as potentials, actively shaping the unfolding inquiry. This corresponds with Manning (2020, p. 23) who understands the objects that constitute any archive as “springboards” for further process, rather than as entities that capture and define what the archive is.

Instruction number three and the invitation to scrutinise the objects

in the archive deepens this relational dynamic. The questions posed, “Which object resonates with you? What do you want to know? What impression is created? What is missing? activate a mode of inquiry that is at once interpretive, affective, and material. The instruction echoes Heathcote’s own care for objects (Mantle of the Expert Network, 2023c) which she deployed to anchor dramatic inquiry in concrete materials that could provoke thought, emotion, and action. As noted above, this is exemplified by Convention 15 where objects are used to represent a person’s interests. Rather than inviting abstract reflection on the archive, the manual directs attention to the agency of objects and the impressions they generate. This aligns with Bennett’s (2010) theorisation of “vibrant matter,” where objects exert force and participate in meaning-making, and with Manning’s (2016) emphasis on agencement through which materials and movements co-produce events. In this sense, the archive is not a passive repository but an agentic assemblage whose textures, histories, and absences shape participant’s responses. For example, the worn typescript on drama in education was handled, read aloud in fragments, and treated as partial evidence of past pedagogic thinking, prompting participants to speculate about its authorial intent, its relevance, and what might be absent or obscured. Similarly, the large paper collage, illustrating a grand house, ornate garden and a possible site of a dig or some sort, alongside a smaller version of the same landscaped garden, became focal points for shared interpretation, with participants curiously clustering around them, tracing images and annotations, and offering provisional readings that were taken up, reshaped, or contested by others. In these moments, the objects oriented the inquiry, inviting particular movements, gestures, and lines of questioning, and thus acting as more-than-human participants in the unfolding event. In keeping with Heathcote’s emphasis on working “in role,” the archive was encountered not as something to be observed from a distance but as something to be worked with, where meaning emerged through an affective and relational engagement between bodies, materials, and the evolving dramatic frame.

In this way, the manual illustrates how Heathcote’s praxis can be contemporised through posthuman and new materialist perspectives. It demonstrates that reflective practice in drama education need not be confined to introspective cognition but can be understood as an emergent, relational process shaped by the interplay of humans,

objects, atmospheres, and affects. The manual's instructions choreograph this interplay, ensuring that the "living archive" is encountered not as a static collection but as a dynamic event that speaks, provokes, and participates in the making of new understandings.

OF WASHING LINES AND ESSENCE MACHINES

The next instruction in the manual, number four, asks participants to 'share your thoughts with others. Capture your thoughts on the clothing item provided. Hang the collected impressions on the washing line". This act further extends the inquiry from individual encounter to collective composition, while introducing a distinctly playful aesthetic to the proceedings. The "clothing items" were not actual garments but paper cut-outs reminiscent of the outfits found in vintage paper-doll books, evoking a familiar childhood game that Heathcote might have drawn upon to invite reflective engagement to emerge.



Figure 10: Image of the clothesline with cut out clothing attached.

As with the memory jar, the clothing cut-outs serve as lures that draw out potentials within the process of collaborative dramatic inquiry. Following Manning (2020, p. 93), we might say they momentarily become "way stations", or temporary holding points, for "compositional forces seeking a new taking-form". Through the clothing cut-outs, multiple Dorotheys emerge, briefly converging as a partial and contingent figure shaped through archival encounters. This emergent

Dorothy is a “renaissance woman” invested in the business of make-believe, casting a “dramatic eye on the world”. She is also figured as mysterious and worldly, with a concern for codes, instructions and clues. Hanging these annotated cut-outs on a washing line transformed the space into a provisional exhibition, echoing Heathcote’s use of visible, spatial arrangements to hold collective thinking in play. The washing line, with its everyday domestic associations, underscored the ordinariness and ephemerality of the archive while simultaneously elevating it as a site of communal authorship. As impressions accumulated, the line became a material record of distributed reflection—an assemblage of paper garments, handwritten traces, and shifting interpretations. In this way, the manual continued to choreograph a more-than-human pedagogy: one in which understanding emerges not solely through verbal exchange but through the interplay of bodies, objects, atmospheres, and the playful conventions that structure the event.

Instruction number five of the manual incorporates the creation of an “Essence Machine” (Heathcotean in spirit, though not exclusively hers). As a collaborative improvisational form, the machine requires each participant to add a repeatable gesture, movement, and sound, physically linking to others to construct a shared mechanism. Within the context of a living archive, this technique becomes metaphorical as well as methodological. The archive is rendered as assemblage: partial, interdependent, rhythmic. No single component carries meaning alone; significance emerges through proximity and relation. The invitation to alter tempo or volume further underscores the archive’s mutability, as well as its capacity to shift emphasis, reinterpret itself, and evolve over time.

Crucially, the subsequent instruction (number six of the manual) involved the request “to give the essence machine a title” and to write the title on another clothing cut-out that was then added to washing line. While the physical structure of the machine was shared, its meaning was not fixed, and this introduced a productive tension between collective creation and personal interpretations. Once more, the clothing templates functioned as material “way stations” where potentials within the essence machine were momentarily held, transformed, and brought into temporary form. Through these emergent titles, the archive was reconfigured as a site of “tactile recollections”, a mode of “creative enquiry”, and a means of “catching

moments in time". The washing line, displaying these titles publicly yet provisionally, evoked the everyday materiality of display and the temporality of exhibition. Meaning was neither sealed nor singular; it hung lightly, open to revision.

The final instruction—to create one's own archive from what was available in the space—completed the conceptual arc. Here, archiving became an act of composition rather than conservation. Participants curated objects, gestures, words, and spatial arrangements, acknowledging that the archive is always constructed from what is materially and socially accessible. The emphasis on "what is available" resonates with contemporary new materialist thinking, in which meaning arises through the entanglement of bodies, objects, and environments rather than through detached observation. The final instruction transforms archiving into an act of natural understanding: a reframing of what one already knows through the encounter with the more-than-human forces of the space. The archive becomes not a record of the past but a living proposition that asks others to see, feel, and think differently through the materials that have been gathered and shared.

Taken together, the manual reframed archival practice as embodied inquiry. It blurred distinctions between documentation and performance, between memory and invention, and between individual and collective authorship. In doing so, it offered drama education not merely as a pedagogical tool, but as a methodological intervention. The archive becomes more than a repository of the past, but rather it is an active, negotiated, and living process.

A PROCESS FOR CHANGE—WHAT MORE CAN HEATHCOTE'S PRAXIS BECOME

Heathcote argued that "we expect good fathers, husbands, honest citizens, fine, sensitive friends, tolerant and understanding neighbours to emerge from the classes we teach but we do very little to help these traits to come along" (Heathcote, 1974, p. 4). Our contemporary approach to Heathcote's praxis is as an always more-than-human pedagogy, and in this "event" we echo her sentiments by positioning her work within the broader provocation of the title for this special issue: "What sort of schools do we want, and what sort of society do we want?" By drawing on archival materials that are central to a

practical workshop we offer a radical re-imagining of a learning opportunity in which imagination is foundational to our social life.

As facilitators reflecting on the workshop, we note initial encounters with the archive were sometimes marked by hesitation; some participants indicated early scepticism that gradually shifted into curiosity and engagement as they worked in role. Others articulated a sense of being drawn in through the freedom of the task, describing an experience of working with a pedagogical sensibility that felt open, adaptable, and not bound by prescribed method. In responding to the artefacts, participants frequently connected their engagement to a perception of Heathcote herself as a practitioner in continual movement—someone whose work evolves, adapts, and “becomes more” over time. These moments suggest how the material presence of the archive, in conjunction with the dramatic frame, generated an affective shift: from uncertainty to investment, from observation to participation. In this way, the objects did not simply represent some of Heathcote’s past practice (merely stuff taken from the archive that might be of interest), but actively contributed to a shared sense of inquiry, inviting participants to act “as if” they were archivists (in-role) in a more-than-human process of becoming that the workshop sought to evoke.

In proposing Heathcote’s praxis as a more-than-human pedagogy, we situate drama education as a site where collective imagination is rehearsed, contested, and renewed, and drama practice becomes a crucial cultural technology. Here imagination emerges as a political force, one that enables empathy, nurtures democratic habits, and expands the boundaries of who and what counts within the learning community. By examining Heathcote’s archive alongside contemporary classroom practice, we demonstrate how drama education not only cultivates the imaginative capacities required for creative futures, it suggests that if we want our future schools to be capable of shaping humane and sustainable societies, we must attend to the imaginative work that underpins them. Drama, in this sense, is about world-making: a pedagogy through which learners practise seeing differently, acting ethically, and imagining the “more-than-human” worlds they might collectively bring into being. Heathcote’s praxis has often been described as “homespun,” elusive, or even mystical, in part because it lives only in the moment of its creation and therefore resists easy documentation. Yet this ephemerality is precisely where her

pedagogical force resides. Heathcote insists that drama must serve “a process for change” (Heathcote, Johnson, and O’Neill, 1984, p. 115) and that each time she enters a classroom she seeks to mobilise the art of drama toward new social understandings. Her continual return to the six elemental binaries of theatre—stillness and movement, silence and sound, darkness and light—underscores her belief that classroom drama and theatre share a common grammar through which meaning is made. During the workshop, one participant captured this when responding to the following Heathcote quotation as a provocation,

Now you see, the theatre resonates its signing. It doesn’t just say it in words; it says it because there’s a combination of form, matter, colour, space, light. Now I think that’s what a classroom is: if you take trouble, that’s what a classroom is...Now it seems to me that a sensible teacher says, “I’ll do the best resonance in this lesson, in the ways the signs are needed for this learning, that I possibly can. (Heathcote, 1982 in *Mantle of the Expert Network*, 2023d)

What was remarked upon was how shifts from silence to sound and from darkness into light, generate a feeling of the world rearranging itself around you. What Heathcote recognised as a new understanding of our relationships emerges when participants attend to the significance of actions and events, to the knowledge that lies beneath the surface of behaviour, and to what things ultimately amount to. Central to this is her notion of the self-spectator (*Mantle of the Expert Network*, 2023e), the participant who is simultaneously acting and observing, generating action while remaining conscious of how that action is shaped. As Muir notes, this reflective stance parallels Brecht’s “how it was” mode, foregrounding critical distance rather than immersion. Heathcote structures her work to create deliberate connections between fiction and reality so that the “product” of drama becomes society in action—thinking, knowing, living. Her articulation of drama as a process for change—easement, conclusion, a new view, a whole new beginning, or a new awareness—anticipates later understandings of drama conventions as dynamic ways of shaping time, space, and presence. Although she acknowledged that conventions remained under-theorised within *Mantle of the Expert*, their deliberate ambiguity and generative tension are what give Heathcote’s projects their vitality. As Neelands and Goode (2015)

argue, conventions enable participants to make, explore, and communicate meaning through theatre form. In Heathcote's hands, they become a means of possibility (Wagner, 1976) through which learners encounter the world anew. While Heathcote's conventions have historically been understood as tools for structuring action, reflection, and shifts in perspective, the workshop reframed them as sites where human and nonhuman forces co-produce the conditions for learning. It is in this sense that we understand them as 'speculatively pragmatic' (Manning in Massumi, 2015, p. 165), insofar as they remain open and exploratory while being grounded in events. Rather than treating conventions as primarily cognitive or representational devices, the workshop illuminated how they operate within dynamic assemblages of bodies, materials, atmospheres, and affects. This shift does not displace Heathcote's original intentions; instead, it extends them, revealing how her techniques already anticipate contemporary concerns with relationality, ecology, and the vibrancy of matter. As one participant alluded to at the conclusion of the workshop, with specific reference to *Mantle of the Expert*, the classroom environment should have an "aesthetic feel", without which a mantle can feel not only disconnected from theatre but also "static". In this light, conventions such as Teacher-in-Role, objects-of-significance, or the manipulation of light and sound become more than dramaturgical strategies. They function as what Bennett (2010) describes as vital materialities—elements that exert force, shape attention, and participate in the unfolding of the drama. Additionally, Manning's (2016) notion of agencement further helps articulate how subtle shifts in movement, tone, or spatial arrangement within these conventions open new relational possibilities. The teacher's role, the placement of an object, or the atmospheric charge of a dimly lit room all contribute to what the event becomes.

CONCLUSION

This contemporised reading aligns with the workshop's design, where objects from the Dorothy Heathcote Archive were not treated as static artefacts but as affective provocations. Their textures, histories, and material presence shaped the participants' responses as much as the fictional frame or the Teacher-in-Role. The workshop thus enacted an ecological and relational mode of inquiry—one in which learning arises

from the entanglement of bodies, materials, memories, and environmental cues. By foregrounding these entanglements, the workshop demonstrated how Heathcote's praxis can be understood as a more-than-human pedagogy which mobilises the full ecology of the classroom to generate new understandings.

Crucially, this approach does not abandon reflection, which remains central to Heathcote's work. Instead, it repositions reflection as something that emerges within events rather than after them. Reflection becomes distributed across the assemblage—felt in the atmosphere, activated by objects, and co-produced through collective action. In this way, the workshop extends Heathcote's "marriage of experience and reflection" into a broader relational field, where meaning-making is not solely the product of individual cognition but of the dynamic interplay of forces that constitute the dramatic event.

Positioned at the intersection of this reconfigured reflective field, our collaboration as two drama education specialists working at Manchester Metropolitan University attending to the broader future of drama in the curriculum, mirrors the generative interplay that characterised the intellectual partnership of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton. Just as Heathcote's embodied, affective, and situational praxis (Heathcote, Johnson and O'Neill, 1984; Wagner, 1976) intersected with Bolton's analytic, cognitively oriented framing of drama as learning (Bolton and Davis, 2010), The Archive Speaks workshop required us to negotiate our distinct pedagogical orientations while articulating the shared principles emerging from the event. Whilst the *Manual for the Hidden Archive* operates as a contemporary framing device akin to the conceptual tools Heathcote and Bolton developed together, we are able to observe and recall how meaning-making unfolded not only through human reflection but through the distributed agency of materials, bodies, atmospheres, and affects. In facilitating the workshop and analysing its outcomes, we have found ourselves engaged in a similar process of conceptual naming: identifying the tensions, frames, and affective provocations that shaped participants' engagements, while also acknowledging the more-than-human forces that co-produced the event.

This collaborative naming of practice aligns directly with the aims articulated in the abstract. By situating the workshop within an imaginary frame facilitated by Teacher-in-Role, we invited participants to encounter archival objects not as static artefacts but as lively,

affective agents capable of stimulating new understandings. In doing so, we are extending recent scholarly efforts to contemporise Heathcote's praxis through process philosophy and posthuman/new material feminist theory (Hatton, 2024; Hickey-Moody & Kipling, 2016; Ramsay, 2024). The workshop demonstrates how Heathcote's pedagogical innovations are being reimagined as conduits for affective resonance, and our collaboration thus becomes part of a wider project to reposition Heathcote within 21st-century educational discourse, not as a figure anchored in a humanist past, but as a practitioner whose work anticipates contemporary concerns with materiality, relationality, and the distributed nature of agency. In this sense, the workshop, as well as our analysis of it, offers a way of understanding how Heathcote's praxis can continue to inform and invigorate drama education today, providing schools and teachers with a framework for engaging with the world as a dynamic ecology of human and more-than-human forces. What emerges from this work is not simply an alternative understanding of archives, but a reorientation of how we prepare teachers for an uncertain world. If learning arises through the entanglement of bodies, materials, environments, and affects, then teacher education must move beyond models that locate knowledge within the individual. Instead, it calls for pedagogies that cultivate responsiveness, relational awareness, and an openness to emergence. In this respect, drama education offers more than a subject methodology; it becomes a crucial space in which future teachers can rehearse ways of working with complexity and ambiguity. This more-than-human framing has relevance beyond the UK, speaking to international concerns about how to prepare educators for rapidly changing contexts. By positioning imagination as collective, embodied, and material, this approach situates drama as central to developing adaptive, ecological, and future-facing teaching practices.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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