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Operational Sequencing: Coping with Contingency in Process Drama

By Kjersti Hustvedt and Thomas Rosendal Nielsen

Abstract

In 1979, Gavin Bolton posed a question that is still fundamental to the development of process drama: 'Is it possible to steer a course that does not come down in support of any particular point of view but causes children to examine and re-examine their own views and values?' Inspired by Bakhtinian theory, Brian Edmiston developed a solution to this in the 1990s: the principle of 'dialogic sequencing'. Aiming to escape the conflict between relativism and absolutism, we present an alternative to Edmiston's approach, based on Niklas Luhmann's theory of 'operational closure': *operational sequencing*. The principle is presented in the context of the previous debate between Edmiston and Joe Winston, and its application is demonstrated and assessed in our prototype process drama, *Fertility Miracles*.

The Contingency Problem

At the turn of the new millennium there was a debate in the RIDE journal between Joe Winston and Brian Edmiston. The subject of this debate was 'Drama as Ethical Education', and it revolved around the challenge posed by the contingency of values in late modernity: How do we teach values in a society where there are no secure principles or grand narratives that demand universal consent on moral action? How can we work from this premise in our teaching, without embracing a form of relativism that makes us incapable of ethical action and reflection? Their debate can be seen as part of a broader discussion within drama research in the 1980s and 1990s regarding how to cope with values in what was then described as postmodern society. Even if drama research (and Winston and Edmiston) has moved on with new theoretical perspectives since then, some of which reconfigures or displaces the problem of relativism and absolutism entirely, the debate has inspired us over the last decade to work with process drama from a constructivist perspective.

The debate between Winston and Edmiston relate to the development of process drama in the tradition from Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton. While the epistemology of the so called Newcastle school of drama can be said to be at least partially progressive or Romantically

founded in its claim for teaching universal or transcendental values, Winston and Edmiston both develop their drama practices from epistemological theories that claim not to be metaphysically grounded (Winston 1998, Edmiston 1994, 1995, 2000). Coming from a Scandinavian drama tradition that is, on the one hand, heavily influenced by The Newcastle School and on the other hand is influenced by dramaturgical research and development based on a constructivist epistemology (Lehmann 2002, Krøgholt 2002), we have been inspired by this debate, to suggest a principle for structuring process drama, 'operational sequencing' (an alternative to Edmiston's idea of dialogical sequencing), and discuss its practical use in a specific process drama, *Fertility Miracles*, which we have developed over the last couple of years. The idea is basically to displace Edmiston's Bakhtinian idea of 'dialogue' with a Luhmannian idea of 'operational closure', in order to escape a binary logic of values. This is (unsurprisingly) not as easy as it sounds. But before we get down to that, we will summarize the issue.

If we perceive values as contingent – that is, dependent on differences in perspectives and social and historical conditions – a strict (liberal) relativist would find it problematic to exercise a practice that aims to change participants' minds regarding a certain understanding of a subject, because it imposes the values of the teacher on the student, even though another perspective would reveal the foundations of this practice as contingent on the particular teacher's perspective and situation. From this perspective, no person should impose his or her individual point of view on another, and such a 'universalist' or 'absolutist' practice that doesn't reflect its own historical contingency must be rejected on the basis of this (absolute) value of relativism.

If we maintain the need to use drama for ethical empowerment, this kind of relativism seems to be unfeasible. The assumption that any value is as good as any other is useful for the deconstruction of dogmatic moral positions, but useless for guiding moral action. Even if it may be justified philosophically, it does not help a participant to take an ethical stance on the perceived and acute problems in the world. Secondly, it is questionable whether a consistent relativism is at all possible in practice; as teachers, we will always be engaged with values, even if we are not aware of them. The contingency of values is not the freedom to choose any values you like, but the condition of being part of a world that is already loaded with values and observing the possibility that these values might have been and might become different. As

Nietzsche – the precursor of late modern relativism – says, in *Twilight of the Idols* (1995, p. 48): ‘When we speak of values, we speak with the inspiration, with the way of looking at things, which is part of life: life itself forces us to posit values; life itself values through us when we posit values’.

The problem of contingency is inherent in the tradition of process drama (in spite of an inclination to universalism in the first generation). Eriksson has made the case that Heathcote’s application of distancing techniques accepted multiple perspectives (cf. Eriksson 2011), and Bolton actually formulates the problem very precisely in his early writings:

Is it possible to steer a course that does not come down in support of any particular point of view but causes children to examine and re-examine their own views and values? It seems possible that by drama for understanding we mean a constant enlarging or shifting of perspective so that the participants have to reassess their current understanding. (1979, p. 134).

Both Joe Winston and Brian Edmiston intended in their debate in 2000 to avoid the pitfalls of absolutism and relativism. Turning to neo-Aristotelian and poststructuralist theories, both aim for open practices where the student is empowered to reflect and act ethically in a world without transcendental values. However, neither is satisfied with the other’s solution to the problem. Winston argues that the Bakhtinian theory that Edmiston uses as a theoretical framework tends to be too relativistic, and paradoxically, that Edmiston’s practice of dialogical sequencing does not live up to his intentions of an open dialogue, as it challenges the values of the participants in a way that tends to replace them with values determined by their teacher (Winston 2000).

By contrast, Edmiston argues that the neo-Aristotelian theory on which Winston bases his work is not sufficiently radical to deal with the value problem. Furthermore, he argues that Winston’s practice does not seem to allow the participants to experience the conflict between different discourses, and therefore, they never really get the chance to develop what he refers to as ‘ethical sensibility’ (cf. Edmiston 2000).

Both Edmiston and Winston may claim that the other has a reductive reading of the theories and practices of the other. We will not be the judges of that. It is evident that both have made valuable contributions to the field of applied drama,¹ and we find the problems posed by their mutual critique pertinent to the development of drama in schools. The value problem is not just a challenge to be solved. We see it as a constitutive 'flaw' in the genre that gives rise to a range of possible variations, and we believe it is possible to reframe the problem in a way that leads to a new line of development that we find attractive. .

From our perspective, it seems that the use of neither neo-Aristotelian nor Bakhtinian theories establish sufficient space for students to re-examine *their own* values through the drama. The neo-Aristotelian approach reintroduces the practising of virtues as a more or less safe ground for privileging some values over others. The Bakhtinian approach solves the problem on the theoretical level, by aspiring to disclose how discourses and values are culturally constructed, and at the same time insisting on our responsibility to participate in further (re)constructions, but the binary logic implied in the framing of 'dialogue between discourses' easily conceals a 'master discourse' that remains hidden, even to the teacher.

Edmiston's principle of *dialogical sequencing* is described as going through the following three cycles in drama work (Edmiston 1994):

1. students develop some extended discourse about aspects of a subject from one position
2. they develop additional discourse about similar aspects from at least one different position
3. the discourses are dialogized and dialogue is internalized.

Dialogizing a monologic discourse means confronting it with another discourse in a way that makes it take into account the other discourse(s), and thus become dialogic. This is a short repetition of one of Edmiston's examples (2000), The Space Traders Drama: 1) students play senators, who, in the first session of the drama, decide to sell their 'least valued people' to a space trader from another planet; 2) in the second session, the students imagine the thoughts

¹ Hustved (2013) offers a detailed analysis of the debate in her dissertation: *Kontingente iakttakelser: Bidrag til en konstruktivistisk dramapedagogikk*. (Contingent Observations: Contribution to a Constructivist Approach to Applied Drama).

and feelings of the families of the people being sold; and 3) in the third session, the students – back in the position of senators – faced by the suffering and resistance of the people, decide to revoke their decision.

The problem with this approach is that the principle of dialogical sequencing easily reduces the complexity of a theme to a binary opposition that implicitly affirms a distinction between a prejudiced discourse (easily attributed to some of the students) and an enlightened discourse (easily assumed to be that of the teacher, who initially draws the distinction between the discourses, through his framing of the drama). As evidence of the efficacy of the drama described above, Edmiston shows how one of the students moved from a cynical discourse to an empathic discourse. The question is whether either of the discourses has been ‘dialogized’ by the other, or whether the drama has simply consolidated the distinction and hierarchy between a cynical/prejudiced and an empathic/enlightened approach to the world; if so, we are back to the practising of virtue.

Operational Sequencing

Briefly, *Operational sequencing* is another attempt to answer the question stated in the above-mentioned quotation of Gavin Bolton. As a didactic problem, the value problem is first a practical one. As dramaturgy and drama teachers in higher education, we know the difficulty of creating open-ended but still focused learning processes without making our values transparent and open to critical scrutiny. Still, we find ourselves returning to the tradition of process drama time and again, because it offers both very useful strategies for framing fictionalized learning situations and rich theoretical reflection on the questions the form raises.

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The didactical problem is also a dramaturgical problem. We enter this field of investigation as dramaturges. Basically, we observe the experiment presented below in the same way as we would observe a theatrical performance: Our method is to analyse what happens *in* the performance, what is made observable, what is ascribed value, and by what aesthetic means and effects through the overall dramaturgy of the process drama. Thus, we try to extract which *perspectives and relations* are given form through the performance, and we assess how the

process provides such affordances, rather than discuss the personal experience or alleged learning outcome of any individual or group.

The starting point for the experiments presented is theoretical. Both authors of the present article have produced dissertations in the fields of dramaturgy and applied drama based on the systems theory of the German sociologist, Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998). In her dissertation, *Contingent Observations: Contributions to a Constructivist Drama Pedagogy*, Kjersti Hustvedt redescribes the tradition of process drama from the perspective of a constructivist theory of education, in order to point out a way to transcend the absolutist/relativist problem. The problem is, if we recognize that no observation or judgement is possible without hierarchical value distinctions (or operational closures, in the terminology of systems theory), how can we frame a process for negotiating values through drama that does not make a single, binary value distinction – for example, the distinction between tolerance and intolerance – the hidden precondition of any observation and judgement made in the process? Hustvedt's answer to this is condensed in the principle called *operational sequencing* (Hustvedt 2013, p. 285), which is a modification of Edmiston's concept of dialogic sequencing. The idea is to structure the process drama through the following four steps:

1. participants observe subject matter from the perspective of one operational closure (i.e. value distinction)
2. participants observe subject matter from the perspective of at least one other operational closure
3. the preceding observations are subjected to a second order observation (i.e. the distinctions underlying the earlier observations are observed)
4. the basic operational closure framing the process drama is observed *in toto*

A detailed example is presented below. The theoretical implication of this is that the relativist strategy of observing all values (except absolutism) as equal from the outset, and thus, the hope of creating a 'true' open-ended process, is relinquished. Instead, operational closures and value distinctions are taken as necessary preconditions for any process, and the negotiation of values is kept 'open' through a tightly framed strategy of succeeding transpositions. The four steps let us distinguish among three such transpositions: a) a lateral displacement of the point of

observation from one perspective to another (1.-2.), b) a vertical displacement of the point of observation from observing *something* to observing *how* something is observed (2.-3.), c) a deconstruction of the basic values that make the earlier observations possible.

The principle of operational sequencing also rejects the absolutist idea of transcendental values, by observing all values as the products of contingent observations. However, instead of generally praising ‘openness’, or ‘dialogue’, for that matter, as a means of avoiding hegemonic framing, we put our bet on the possibility of perpetual displacement of points of observation, and on producing local transparency in the value distinctions that predetermine the observations made in and through the process drama.

Fertility Miracles

The following section presents the assessment of our attempts to realize the principle of operational sequencing in an experimental process drama called *Fertility Miracles*. The research methodology performed may best be described as a variation of practice-based research (Nielsen 2012). The basic tenet of this methodology is a principle of ‘double framing’: Where some variations of practice-based research aims at collapsing the distinction between what is known in Scandinavia as ‘scientific’ (academic) and artistic or pedagogic knowledge, we insist on letting the distinction between these two perspectives guide the process, on shifting between the roles as teacher and the role as researcher and on the double output of the process. The researcher is grappling with the contingency problem as stated above on a general level through the production of academic discourse, while the teacher is solving the question of how to produce a process drama that produces ethical reflection on a specific issue through the production of a performative practice (cf. Haseman 2006). Both outputs have value in themselves, and we find it more productive to facilitate an interchange between these perspectives rather than collapsing them.

The first prototype was developed in the spring of 2013, and tested, video-documented, and evaluated by two separate classes of first-year students, studying applied drama as part of their Bachelor’s programme in dramaturgy, at Aarhus University. Approximately 25 to 30 students in their early twenties participated in each class, and the sessions (excl. evaluation) lasted three hours. The framework was revised slightly on the basis of our evaluation before the second test,

in the spring of 2014, which again comprised two run-throughs with similar participants. The specific object of analysis for this article is the second test (2014), based on video recordings and notes from the evaluation.

We chose surrogacy as the learning area for our process drama. Our students are in their early twenties, which mean that most of them have no experience as parents, but will soon be confronted with choices regarding family settling and the realities of decreasing fertility, and thus we assumed that this would be a pertinent, but not too well-known topic for them. In addition, the use of surrogate mothers is a complex theme, involving economic, juridical, political, ethical, and personal issues and perspectives. In Denmark it is illegal to perform gestational surrogacy in medical clinics, to receive money for being a surrogate mother, or to make public announcements in order to contact potential surrogate mothers. The Danish Council of Ethics advises the retention of these restrictions (May 2008). However, we personally find it very difficult to see through the complexities of the theme and take a firm ethical stance. This qualified the subject for our experiment, although it should be possible to make the principle of operational sequencing work, even with a theme on which the teacher holds firm beliefs.

The following table, inspired by the planning structure of Howell and Heap (2013), should give an overall impression of the structure of the drama.

Sq.	Action (context)	Position (role)	Perspective (frame)	Device (sign)
1	Fertility Clinic, California A communications officer (TiR) informs the participants of the possibilities of surrogacy offered by	Participants as potential Scandinavian clients, divided in pairs and a few singles.	The commercial perspective (the clinic) and the personal, family perspective.	The drama begins with a video commercial for the clinic, <i>Fertility Miracles</i> .

	the clinic, and the participants get to interview a former client (TiR) about his experience with the clinic.			
2	Family tableaux The participants make group photo arrangements of different family constellations: e.g. child + egg donor + surrogate mother + social father + social mother.	Participants as families, observers, and 'sculptors'.	Theatrical perspective on the heterogeneous family, condensed in a well-known, 'staged' situation.	Camera: teacher makes photos of the tableaux.
3	Consultation In groups of four, the participants improvise the first conversation between clients, doctor, and potential surrogate mother.	Clients, doctor, surrogate mother.	Family perspective divided among clients/surrogate mother. The doctors (students) direct the interviews.	Role-cards. (One sentence with a designation of a dramatic objective for each role).
4	Editorial office In two separate teams, the participants brainstorm and	Journalists and editors (TiRs).	Media perspective. The two teams represent a left-wing, intellectual newspaper (<i>Information</i>) and a	Journalistic video feature marks the beginning: <i>Rent a Womb</i> . The participants are

	research potential angles on surrogacy for an article series in two different profiled newspapers. Ends with presentations of angles and research in pairs. NB: this single sequence constituted a third of the whole drama.		more conservative, intellectual newspaper (<i>Kristeligt Dagblad</i>).	given pre-printed written materials (articles, law-material etc.) and access to the internet.
5	Focus group In two groups, the participants are interviewed as adult surrogate children in a focus group hosted by anthropologists (TiR) who do research for the Danish Council of Ethics.	Surrogate children, researchers (TiR).	Family perspective. The participants are framed by prompting/asking their relatives, and by inviting them to describe the moment they found out about the nature of their origins, and how they reacted to it.	Transition video (journalistic feature): <i>Surrogate Mom Keeps Babies</i> .
6	TV debate: <i>The Devil's Advocate:</i> Some of the participants are interviewed in a TV	Audience, TV host (TiR), expectant parents of surrogate child,	'Impossible' perspectives/media perspective. Three debates: expectant parents	Transition video (entertainment feature): <i>Celebrities who used surrogates</i> .

	debate between people who would never meet outside a fictional reality.	adult surrogate child, Danish politician, Sarah Jessica Parker, "Hustvedt" (as herself), student.	debate with their future adult child; American TV star debates with Danish politician; "Hustvedt" (as herself) debate with student (as himself).	Theatrical setup: auditorium, stage lights, exaggerated imitation of TV show rituals: forced pacing, talking to the camera, clapping, cheering, etc.
7	Council of Ethics Advisory Board The participants are asked to evaluate - as themselves - the four present ethical guidelines published by the Danish Council of Ethics.	Teacher, Students.	Ethical perspective. The participants are asked whether anything in the present ethical guidelines should be changed, in their opinion.	Transition video (scene from Fritz Lang's <i>Metropolis</i> , 1927): <i>Maria's Transformation</i> . Guidelines by the Danish Council of Ethics written on blackboard. The drama ends with a replay of the <i>Fertility Miracles</i> video (cf. sq. 1).

The implementation of the *operational sequencing* principle in *Fertility Miracles* may now be assessed, by answering the following questions related to the implementation of the structure:

1. What kinds of observations and observations of observations are given form by the participants (leaders and students), in and through the two performances of the process drama?
2. How and to what extent does the framing of the drama initiate and accomplish the transposition of the four steps outlined for the principle of operational sequencing?
3. How and to what extent does the principle of operational sequencing expand the possibilities of observation beyond a single, dominant, binary logic?

Emergent three-act structure

1. What kinds of observations and observations of observations are given form by the participants (leaders and students), in and through the two performances of the process drama?

The following section will give a more detailed account of the different perspectives and observations made available to the students through the framing of the process drama – supplementing the table above by describing how the interaction of perspectives unfolded in the specific realizations.

The general answer to the question – which is substantiated in the account below – is that the dramaturgy of the process drama produces three acts. Act I (sequence 1, 2, 3, lasting around 40 to 45 minutes in total) is the *exposition* which works mainly through first order perspectives. Act II is (sequence 4, lasting around one hour including a short break) can be seen as the *complication* through second order observation. ACT III (sequence 5, 6, 7, also lasting around an hour) provides a *deconstruction and partial resolution* through a more complex interplay between first and second order observation in the final sequences.

The process drama is also structured in a way that continually makes the participants alternate between observation from within the dramatic framework as a parent, surrogate child, journalist, and so forth, and observation as an audience outside the dramatic framework, in relation to the other participants, the teacher in role (TiR) and the interspersed film sequences. It is a central part of the dramaturgy that it does not aim for complete immersion, but alternates between dramatic and theatrical modes of observation.

Act I. In the first three sequences the theme is established through a range of first hand perspectives: the participants observe from positions within a family and within the health care system and through a number of mediated accounts (video documents), and the theme emerges in this way as a polycontextual problem determined by a range of strong emotional, economical, juridical and ethical concerns.

Initially, the video introduction² presented the theme from a very positive, but at the same time, conspicuously commercial perspective. In the first sequence, the participants were framed as future parents of a surrogate child, and this and the following sequence (family tableaux) introduced them to the theme of the drama. The teacher (Nielsen) framed the students as Danish couples (and a few singles) who had just arrived at a surrogate clinic in the United States. In this first sequence, the participants received a lot of technical information about the different forms of surrogacy, and they had a chance to ask questions of both a clinic official and a former client. The introductory sequence did not invite the participants to be critical of the subject; they were framed in a position where they had already decided that they wanted to use a surrogate mother. The questions asked by the students in the videos address emotional and technical issues related to the former client's process, and the general possibilities of surrogacy, for example: 'Do you still have contact with the surrogate mother today?', 'May I, as single parent, choose the semen donor myself?' (Fertility Miracles 1, recording 1, 18:38 and 22:14, translated from Danish), etc.

In the second sequence, the participants were asked to pose for family portraits, and this expanded the theme to involve the complexity of family relationships in the age of surrogacy. The portraits show different constellations, from a family where a surrogate child grows up with two biological parents, to a family with two social parents, two donors (biological parents), and a surrogate mother. In the third sequence, the participants were again positioned as clients in the surrogacy clinic. They developed short, simultaneous group improvisations from the following situation: a potential surrogate mother and a doctor are having a meeting with the would-be parents, to find out whether the surrogate mother and the parents are a good match. The students played their roles more independently in this sequence, but still from positions

² American Fertility Institute, LLC:
<http://www.fertilitymiracles.com/international/index.html?gclid=COe9w9yF47UCFcVb3godFigAnA> (accessed 21.05.2015).

that did not facilitate critical consideration regarding surrogacy. The video recordings shows that the students mainly repeated and varied the things they heard in the introductory sequence, but they expanded their investigation somewhat, into the motives of the potential surrogate mother, and they explore and act out different kinds of emotional attitudes to the situation.

Act II. The fourth sequence – which alone comprises the second act – posits a shift in system reference. From observing from the family system and health system in the first act, the students are now framed to observe from the perspective of the media system. Journalistic reportage (video) about surrogacy in India marks this transition.³ The film explains how women can earn up to 10 years of income by renting out their wombs; it shows that it is five times cheaper to use a surrogate mother from India than one from the United States; and it asserts that surrogacy is a major industry in India, estimated at 445 billion American dollars. Thus, the video introduces a critical global and economic perspective on the subject.

After the foregoing transition, the participants were divided into two groups, framed as journalists at two different newspapers, and they were asked to do research for a series of articles on surrogacy. The teachers played the editors of the newspapers, and facilitated a brainstorming session on angles and themes related to surrogacy with the two groups of journalists. The students/journalists were the main contributors to the brainstorming, but the teachers/editors participated and added perspectives. Pairs of students/journalists then chose one of the topics from the brainstorming session, and were given half an hour to research their topic (using printed material and access to the internet), before they presented the team with an elaborated idea for an article. This allowed the participants to observe the theme from a wider range of different perspectives, and to problematize specific aspects of the theme: the economic aspect of the surrogacy industry, the reasons to choose surrogacy, adoption vs. surrogacy, surrogacy from the child's perspective, law vs. ethics, the mother-child bond, political stances related to surrogacy, and so on (FM1-recording 3, 0:00-20:00).

³ The VJMovement: *Rent-a-Womb: Outsourcing Surrogacy in India*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBHs6OI6xls> (accessed 21.05.2015)

The second act enabled two layers, both producing an increase in complexity: First, the reconstruction of a range of different lateral perspectives, from the individual to the socio-economic, from the religious to the scientific, from the conservative to the liberal (newspaper or party). Secondly, it allowed the students to observe from a second order position, that is, to observe and reconstruct how others observe the subject, and in this case, these second order observations were constrained by the value distinctions of the media, such as news criteria and journalistic ideologies. If they had been framed as scholars or artists in this second act, they would also have been making second order observations, but then these would have been constrained by scientific or artistic values, instead. These differences are of course important. The journalistic perspective arguably maintains a more critical and sensationalist mode of second order observation, which in this case contrasted with the affirmative and technical modes of observation of the first act.

Act III. After the fourth sequence, which comprised the second act of the drama, the transition was marked by another reportage video, this one about a surrogate mother who wants to keep her babies.⁴ In the fifth sequence, the participants were framed as adult children of surrogacy, participating in a focus group conducted by an anthropologist (Nielsen and Hustvedt as TiR in two parallel sessions). The researcher interviewed the group about their experiences as surrogate children, centring on the moment when they first learned about their origins. The participants' contributions to the interview ranged from playing characters that had not experienced any problems with being a surrogate child, to those who had broken off all contact with their families after they learned the truth. The method of improvisation probably made the students seek variety (which is more satisfying dramatically), rather than aim for 'statistical realism', and thus a lot of different personal stories were produced, unfolding a range of emotionally significant details. This sequence first worked to explore the 'blind side' of the previously established family system, which focused exclusively on the parents' perspective. It also served to reactualize the emotional, first order engagement with the problem before proceeding to the final deconstructive action.

⁴ ABC News, *Twins Meant for Adoption, But Surrogate Mom Keeps Them*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8P1Eqk2_M0 (21.05.2015).

A video about celebrities who have chosen surrogacy⁵ was used as a transition into the sixth sequence, the TV debate. Up to this point, infertility had been presented as the main reason for choosing surrogacy, but this video also offers the perspectives of career, age, and physical appearance as reasons for having a baby through surrogacy. The ensuing TV debate, called *The Devil's Advocate*, was presented as an 'unreal space', where impossible meetings may take place. The host (Nielsen, TiR) arranged a series of confrontations between perspectives already introduced earlier in the drama: a couple of parents-to-be debated with their future, adult, surrogate child, the celebrity, Sarah Jessica Parker debated with a Danish politician, and Hustvedt as herself debated with one of the students. In this final debate, Hustvedt was confronted with questions about her own teaching agenda, and the student was asked to consider whether they had been manipulated by the dramatic frame. This is the point where we, from inside the framing, tried to observe the basic operational closure of the framing itself, the fourth step in operational sequencing. This is a most problematic point of the experiment which will be discussed further below. The rest of the participants acted as an audience to the situation, and thus were able to experience these confrontations from second order perspectives.

A video clip from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927), showing the transformation of Maria,⁶ marks the transition to the seventh and last sequence: The Council of Ethics Advisory Board. The participants are – as themselves and as members of the board – asked to evaluate the four present ethical guidelines regarding surrogacy in Denmark. Thus, the third act comprises three displacements of perspectives established in the first two acts: from parent to child within the family system, from a 'realist' media system exploring lateral perspectives on the subject to a 'diabolic' caricature of a media system that enables 'impossible confrontations', and finally, from exploring the subject from within a clearly demarked fictional frame to discussing it from a position on the border of the fictional frame.

⁵ Hollyscoop: *Celebrities Who Have Used Surrogates*, <http://realestate.aol.com/blog/videos/space-makeovers/517679594/> (accessed 21.05.2015).

⁶ Fritz Lang: *Metropolis – Maria's Transformation*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcReykfvqi4> (accessed 21.05.2015).

2. *How and to what extent does the framing of the drama initiate and accomplish the transposition of the four steps outlined for the principle of operational sequencing?*

1. participants observe subject matter from the perspective of one operational closure (i.e. value distinction)
2. participants observe subject matter from the perspective of at least one other operational closure
3. the preceding observations are subjected to a second order observation (i.e. the distinctions underlying the earlier observations are observed)
4. the basic operational closure framing the process drama is observed *in toto*

Even the relatively detailed account above is reductive compared to the actual complexity of reciprocal observation taking place in the described communication processes, but we can of course evaluate how the game played out in the horizon of what was expected (planned).

The dramaturgy of Fertility Miracles involves the transposition between the first two steps of operational sequencing by allowing the participants to observe the subject matter, surrogacy, from the first order perspective of several operational closures: for example, the family system, the health system, the media system, the system of morals, and so on. A range of additional perspectives is presented through the video clips and the available research material in the fourth sequence. Thus, the shifts in perspective are not guided primarily by an alternation between positions for or against surrogacy, but the first two acts *do* reflect a kind of binary logic, moving from an affirmative and close relationship with the subject to a critical and distanced relationship. This binary logic is to some extent a shortcoming of the experiment with respect to our declared intention to move from dialogic to operative sequencing and we will propose an explanation and a solution to this below.

The transposition from step two to step three of operational sequencing (the 'vertical' displacement of the point of observation) requires that some of these first order observations are subjected to second order observations. That is, not only should the participants make second order observations (as when watching the video or reading articles and law material in their journalistic research, or observing the contributions of their fellow participants), they

should observe *their own preceding observations* from a second order. There are three sequences in the drama where the participants are invited to do that.

I. Fourth sequence, the editorial office. As journalists, the participants observed a range of perspectives from the second order perspective of the media system, including positions of observation that had been explored earlier. Compared with Edmiston's Bakhtinian concept of *ventriloquation* (where the student is confronted with her own earlier perspective through the teachers' (re)enactment) these second order observations did not refer to any *specific* earlier observations, but instead reduced them to generalized perspectives in the broader landscape of perspectives on the subject.

II. In the sixth sequence, the TV debate, a range of earlier points of view was confronted and observed from another (second order) perspective. Compared to the fourth sequence, the reference to earlier observations is much more specific here.

III. Seventh sequence, The Council of Ethics Advisory Board. The participants were asked to discuss the current four ethical guidelines regarding surrogacy, published by the Danish Council of Ethics. The participants spontaneously referred to earlier observations made in the drama when arguing for their personal stance on the four guidelines. The task of responding to the four different guidelines prevented the students from simply taking a position either for or against surrogacy. Instead, a lot of very specific suggestions and objections were made, responding to both observations made earlier in the drama, and observations made by other participants in the discussion. In this way the drama does not end with a decision that provides a solution to a dilemma and thus would confirm a binary distinction between two main perspectives and rule in favour of one side and dismiss the other.

The transposition to the fourth step of the operational sequencing demanded that the values of the teacher and the operational closures of the structure of the process drama be made transparent to the participants. The final debate between the student and Hustvedt in the TV sequence made the problem observable, although arguably not transparent:

Hustvedt is in the final part of the sequence confronted as the ‘puppeteer’ behind the drama, in an attempt to disclose, and thus undermine, the authority bound to the position of the teacher, and embedded in the planning of the drama. The TV host (Nielsen) asks Hustvedt why she has chosen the theme, and she answers that we (Nielsen and Hustvedt) wanted to pick a theme on which we, as teachers, did not have a clear moral opinion beforehand, but that her point of view on the subject has changed from ‘doubting positive’ towards ‘less doubting negative’, through working with the theme (FM-recordings 5, 13:00-14:20). A student is then asked whether he experienced the framing as biased: in the first play-through, the student found the drama slightly biased against surrogacy, in the second play-through, the student did not find the drama biased. Hustvedt and the students seem to be answering the questions sincerely, but – as with every other such theatrical disclosure – what is revealed may be only another mask. The testimonies did not prove anything, but the ‘deconstructing’ question is raised as part of the drama, and each of the students sitting in the audience could test the testimonies against his or her own experience.

What happened instead is that a sequential order (planning then execution then reflection) was converted into a simultaneous order (reflection on planning in execution). This procedure does not produce a higher ground from which to assess everything clearly, quite the reverse: it levels the hierarchies between ‘the framing perspective’ and ‘the framed perspective’, and between inside perspectives and outside perspectives, by making the perspective of the teacher and the ‘planning perspective’ observable as just another perspective inside a conflicted situation.

The debate did disclose that the teacher in the role as herself, and following her, the student, evaluated the drama in terms of *positive/negative bias towards surrogacy* and *manipulative/balanced* framing of the drama. If we assume that the basic operational closure of the process drama structure *in toto* is the distinction between ‘for or against surrogacy’, and the basic value may be described as our slight inclination against surrogacy, then we have succeeded in making the values of the framing transparent and thus mark their contingency. But if that is the case, we have not transcended the binary logic of dialogic sequencing. It looks like there is a paradoxical dynamic between the intention to disclose and the intention to avoid the trap of binary logic.

3. How and to what extent does the principle of operational sequencing expand the possibilities of observation beyond a single, dominant binary logic?

The short answer is that the binary logic is not transcended to the extent we had promised. Ironically, it seems that our insistent attempts to balance the sides, and our insistence on disclosing how we might fail at these attempts make the binary logic re-emerge alongside the principle of operational sequencing. Hustvedt's reflections on the TV debate disclose the theme of positive versus negative stances towards surrogacy as the structuring logic of the drama, and introduces the observation of a balance between the sides as an important criterion for evaluation. Nielsen's inquiries about manipulation in the debate imply a (possibly naïve) distinction between manipulating/open dramaturgy as another criterion for evaluation.

Still, the experiment is more complex than this reductive observation of it from inside the sixth sequence. Fertility Miracles neither starts nor ends with a binary dilemma. Instead, a polycontextual problem is constructed through the process. The participants in the first act are framed as people who have already made their choice about using surrogacy, the distinction between an affirmative and critical perspective is not observed as relevant at this point, but rather the range of motives and complications involved in the particular practice of surrogacy. In the second act, the students are framed as people who wish to expand the complexity of the problem by mapping different possible perspectives, as journalists. In the third act, the tragic limitations of our knowledge are observable in different ways: the parents' inability to ensure a good life for their children, in spite of every good intention, the contingency and incompatibility of political perspectives on the global scene, the teacher's inability to either control the action of the drama or to make any hidden control mechanism completely transparent. Finally, the participants on the ethical advisory board avoid taking a general stance for or against surrogacy. Their discussions give the impression that many of them have acquired a relatively complex understanding of the subject, which makes them differentiate between different forms of surrogacy (traditional vs. gestational), different reasons for using a surrogate (infertility, homosexuality, age, cosmetic reasons) and different conditions (is money involved, or not, from which part of the world does the surrogate mother come), when they evaluate the possibilities, consequences, and problems related to using surrogacy (cf. FM1-recording 6, 00:05-16:00, FM2-recording 8, 0:07-13:07). The principle of operative sequencing thus gave form to something else than a discussion on "for or against surrogacy".

A strong rudiment of dialogic sequencing may nevertheless be traced in the overall structure: the first act marks an affirmative discourse on the subject, the second act marks a critical discourse on the subject, the third act confronts and 'dialogizes' these two different primary stances. The deconstructive dramaturgy of the TV debate confirms a binary distinction by posing the question of whether the dramatic framework and the teacher are biased for or against surrogacy, as the important final question. Furthermore, even if the students discuss a lot of particulars and distinguish among lots of conditions in the final discussion, the underlying issue remains as a subtext in each contribution: what is right, and what is wrong? No univocal answers are offered, no consensus is established, and no vote is made, but the binary logic remains.

Coping with operational closure *and* contingency

The question is, how is this binary logic a problem? Maybe it is not? If we want to create ethical empowerment based on a system's theoretical concept of operational closure, we may be bound to accept the binary code of the system of morals: right/wrong as one of the distinctions guiding the communication in the process drama. Then, the break with the binary logic of dialogic sequencing would not be on the level of a basic operational closure of the process drama (the ethical "code" of the drama in systems theoretical terms), but on a subsidiary level (the ethical "programming" of the drama). The aim would then be: 1) to establish more than two different, contingent answers to the question of how to handle the binary distinction between right and wrong in relation to a specific subject. 2) To observe the teacher's bias inside the process drama, not as the basic code of the drama as such, but simply as one operational closure amongst others that emerge in and through the interaction. As long as the teachers perspective is made observable, whether it be through a candid confession or an aggressive manifestation, it is possible for the participants to question its authority. The operational closure of the teacher loses the power of invisibility, and even if it still holds a place of privilege, it can be observed and confronted as just one ethical programme on the same principal level as all other programmes that are observed through the drama.

On another practical level, the structure of *Fertility Miracles* may be improved, based on this recognition. First of all, the progression of the three-act model might be replaced by a dramaturgy of at least four acts, in order to avoid the dialectical logic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. What we need instead is a logic of perpetual horizontal displacement, and that may require the establishment of at least three main systems of reference (operational closures) from which to observe. Secondly, in the TV debate (or its equivalent), when the participants (teacher *and* student) are asked to reflect on the limitations of the dramatic framing from within, it may be worthwhile to avoid addressing the question of bias on a general pro/con or manipulation/openness level. Instead, the teacher should simply be asked about her perspective on the subject, and the students should reflect on what perspectives are privileged and how, instead of addressing 'manipulation' in terms of an either/or. Even the use of the word 'manipulation' is problematic, as it implies the same naïve idea of openness that this method aims to overcome, and it may prompt the student to focus on the supposed intentions of the teacher, instead of the specific frames and actions that have taken form in the process.

There is a lot of terrain yet to be explored in how to merge this ethics of transparency and reflection with an ethics of action. But with the adjustments suggested above, we claim that the principle of 'operational sequencing' comes one step closer – even than Edmiston – to realizing an answer to the problem posed by Bolton, without getting caught in the old doldrums between relativism and absolutism. Coping with contingency in process drama is about accepting the premise that any drama structure will, of necessity, be both open and closed, then designing a framework of learning where both the student *and* the teacher are compelled to cope with the contingency of their own values, *and* to assert moral judgements, in spite of it all.

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Video Recordings

Fertility Miracles 1 (1-8), 2014. Recording of first drama session. 10.03.2014. Available from author.

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