



## Interacting Productively with the Familiar and the Strange

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### 1. The familiar--the strange--creativity

Interacting with the strange in intercultural encounters (with special reference to Julia Kristeva and Erich Fromm)

Repeatedly heard in recent debate on matters of intercultural education has been a core demand: no longer shall intercultural encounters be solely, or even primarily, about the other person or the stranger as such; instead, what is needed is a deepened sense of the familiar vis-à-vis the strange. The Turkish journalist and author Zafer Senocak, writing in an essay on the topic of intercultural dialogue, has expressed this demand succinctly: „Our culture depends on us knowing strangers. But we happily blind ourselves to this fact. How does a stranger impact on us? What goals do we have in encountering him? And do not these questions matter no less than asking who is a stranger and how he got to be this way?“ (Z. Senocak, *Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft*, 1997, 27.)

An important early step towards resolving questions of this kind was taken by Julia Kristeva in her book, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, which was published in 1988. One sentence is particularly trenchant: „*Etrangement, l'étran-ger nous habite: il est la face cachée de notre identité...*“ (J. Kristeva, 1988, 9) [„Strangely, the stranger is there inside of us: he is the hidden side of our identity...“ (J. Kristeva, 1990, 11).]

This statement, indeed, voices more than the meanderings of an academic interest or one preoccupied by didactic method, more even than the mere recalling of a previously neglected

aspect. When Kristeva talks of *the hidden side of our identity*, what she is really signalling is a specific view of human beings, analytic and dialectic at once. There is:

- *an analytic aspect*, because (in contrast to the conscious self) the „hidden side of identity“ refers to its unconscious nature, and
- *a dialectic aspect*, inasmuch as Kristeva conceives of the familiar and the strange, conscious and unconscious, identity and non identity, as all dialectically interlinked.

Kristeva's notion of the strange also draws sustenance from some dazzling literary exemplars (Camus, Nabokov) as she works her way through literary highpoints in the history of European culture and religion that have pronounced on the problem of *interacting with the strange*, but with particular reference--as a foil for all other interpretations--to Freud's analysis of the *uncanny*.

The latter concept, which is without any single matching term in French, is usually rendered by a phrase: *l'inquiétante étrangeté* (i.e. „a disconcerting strangeness“) (S. Freud, G. W. Vol. 12, 231). Although Freud addresses the idea of the strange neither in this context nor anywhere else for that matter, Kristeva attempts to derive the strange from the *uncanny*. Here she presses into service an ingenious--if not always convincing--line of argument that attempts to build on Freud's own analysis: To the analyst Freud she imputes a pedagogic (!) intention: „*Subtle analyst that he is, Freud does not speak of strangers: he teaches us to track down the*



*stranger in ourselves.*“ (Kristeva, 1990, 209)

At this point some critical questions arise: Did the strange really turn Freud into a pedagogue? More likely, pedagogy was a non-starter with him all his life! For another thing, nothing but trouble arises for pedagogy by having Kristeva, in her theoretical reading of the strange, nail her colours wholly to the controversial mast of classical Freudian drive theory. Suitably interpreting concrete experiences of strangeness would ultimately be possible, on this line of argument, only when undertaken within the relevant psychoanalytic battery of concepts and specialised jargon. Especially in the practice of intercultural education, which in any case is pitched not at trained psychoanalysts alone, this tactic would avail little. On the other hand, the question arises, especially in point of intercultural learning processes, as to whether mediating a cogent psychoanalytic concept of the strange really matters all that much here.

More convincing (because graspable without recourse to far-ranging theoretical postulates) are Kristeva's arguments, at least when they are mounted in concrete terms and adopt a phenomenological approach to analysing the *uncanny*. As, for example, when she writes:

„It is indeed weird, encountering another person--someone we take in with our eyes, ears, nose, but cannot consciously 'grasp.' The other person leaves us behind, separated and disconnected; ... „No less weird is this experience of the abyss between me and the other, who is shocking to me--I don't even take him in, so perhaps the reason he annihilates me is that I deny him. Face to face with a stranger, whom I reject and identify with at the same time, my firmly staked out boundaries dissolve, my contours melt away. ... The variants of the uncanny, of disconcerting strangeness, are multiple: all rehearse the difficulty I have in positioning myself towards the other, even as they re-open the path of identification--projection on which my climb to autonomy is based.“ (Kristeva, 1990, 203.)

If these reflections are of interest, it is chiefly because the encounter with a stranger is formulated here as an open ended, an autobiographical, problem, the solution to which can only lie in the ego engaging critically with itself.

Here, however, the ego is exposed to two opposing temptations:

- It can deny what is strange by psychologising and aestheticising its reality--as described in Freud's analysis--in the sense of something uncanny and alien, and so abandon itself entirely to the fascination of novelty.
- But it can also deny what is strange by attempting to explain its reality exhaustively and seamlessly and to encapsulate it with in a concept.

Remarkably, Kristeva is well aware of the doubled-edged nature of the problem (Kristeva, 1990, 204, 8-15), but without really going on to draw the right conclusions. Instead, it seems that she is all too willing to allow aesthetic-cum-phenomenological interpretations of the strange, for one thing, and attempts by psychoanalysis to rationalise away the strange, for another, to keep uneasy company.

What seems, however, more promising is to chart a middle course in interacting with the strange. This might consist in not fleeing into the extremes mentioned and in keeping both factors--the resources and energies of emotion and imagination, the ordering and structuring powers of the ratio--in a productive balance. This course would--to speak with Hermann Glaser--allow for a certain *ambivalence in human existence*, such as is *repeatedly addressed in myths and in world literature*: „Great danger threatens from another if we come too close, while still seeing the stranger in him; great happiness results when we draw closer to another and inner closeness is established.“ (H. Glaser, 1997, 20.)

Which brings us closer to an approach to interacting with the strange that harks back to Erich Fromm. It should seen against the background of his social and cultural critique, as well as the real-world utopian-cum-humanist blueprint he developed as his own positive contribution<sup>1</sup>. Fromm's interpretation of the strange is--

<sup>1</sup> Just how much contemporary bite Fromm's ideas still have is better exemplified in two recent publications: Rainer Funk, Helmut Johach, Gerd Meyer (eds.), *Erich Fromm heute. Zur Aktualität seines Denkens*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000; and Johannes Claassen (ed.), *Erich Fromm: Erziehung zwischen Haben and Sein*, Eitorf: Gata-Verlag, 2002.



in contradistinction to Kristeva's--not dependent on a complex theoretical frame of reference, although he too assumes that *the strange*, or (in personified form) *the stranger* or *strangers* repeatedly serve as screens on which to project unwelcome feelings that have, for that reason, been repressed and consigned to the unconscious.

Using simple language emanating from a still unbroken humanist tradition--this perhaps as a further point of difference to Kristeva - FROMM formulates the relationship between „ego“ and „the strange“ as follows: „This attitude toward the „stranger“ is inseparable from the attitude toward oneself. As long as any fellow being is experienced as fundamentally different from myself, as long as he remains a stranger, I remain a stranger to myself too. When I experience myself fully, then I recognize that I am the same as any other human being...I discover that I am everybody, and that I discover myself in discovering my fellow man, and vice versa. In this experience I discover what humanity is, I discover the One Man.“ (E. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, 1962, p. 172.)

Thus for Fromm too the familiar and the strange are dialectically interrelated. But just why this is so he attributes less to individual drive destinies and more to social alienation, which, on his account, prevents people from living the sort of lives they are best suited for. As Fromm has also shown, especially in his writings on the *Psychology of Normalcy* (E. Fromm, 1954), such alienation is a daily fact of life. Nobody can completely evade it, but given that it is made by humans it can in principle also be overcome by humans. What is called for, apart from the *discovery of mankind in a single person* as cited in the passage above, is trust in our productive and creative powers. Fromm's essay, *The Creative Attitude* (E. Fromm, 1959, 44), illuminates on what such an attitude would mean.

As the title itself indicates, Fromm is not thinking of creativity in the sense of creating something new, such as a work of art; what he has in mind rather is the creative attitude per se, which although necessary for creation, including the creation of works of art, nonetheless exists

independently of these. (Ibid.) It is in this sense that Fromm, in his essay, sets out several benchmarks for a creative attitude:

- Ability to see (or to be aware of) and to respond
- a capacity to concentrate
- A capacity for self-experience
- Ability to accept conflicts and tensions resulting from polarities, instead of avoiding them (E. Fromm, 1959, 44, 49, 49, 51).

About this list two things are worth noting: (1) The abilities alluded to invariably transcend purely intellectual or cognitive skills and encompass the whole person, with all his faculties, resources, and energies. (2) It is to be expected that the above-mentioned abilities will also prove particularly valuable in interacting with the strange, since they place the problematic of the familiar and the strange in a universal anthropological frame--which is a key requirement for any serious treatment of the issue of intercultural education within a global context.

Equally, this makes clear that in assessing the relationship between the familiar and the strange, but also with regard to what is involved in creativity, what really matters are the underlying anthropological images--and people in different cultures develop their own versions of these. At the same time the converse is no less true: images of what is human cannot be manufactured at will whenever we have to embark on a serious intercultural dialogue with one another. Anyone, for example, who takes his bearings from a particular image of man that one-sidedly couples the insider / outsider divide, the fine line between the familiar and the strange, to the fact of belonging to a specific national, ethnic, or religious group--or, to put it more generally, anyone championing a one-dimensional, reductionist image of man--has ipso facto disqualified himself from any intercultural dialogue worthy of the name.

Analogous considerations apply to what makes for creativity. Whoever defines human creativity in terms of a product to be supplied, or its utility to a specific group for a specific goal or ideology, is championing an image of human beings that would instrumentalise the latter's creative resources and potential for particular



ends, that refuses to serve human beings for their own sake. Whoever, by contrast, esteems and seeks to foster, as Fromm so singularly does, the creative resources in people for what they are, will also be open to recognising and acknowledging these resources in himself and in others too--and will be so independently of the nation, culture, or religion to which he happens to belong. Moreover, basic trust in human creativity is at once the sine qua non for the ability to build bridges over the differences, rivalries, and conflicts that divide people.

## 2. The shock of *the strange*

Challenges facing *pedagogic* and *social* work in the intercultural context. Exemplary comments on recent research into the practice of intercultural education (cf. articles by H. Kordes and M. Cohen Emerique)

Given the sheer volume of publications on issues relating to intercultural learning and intercultural education, any remarks on the current state of research in these fields cannot hope to be complete or representative. Justification for selecting the exemplary articles we did must therefore be linked to certain criteria paradigmatic of the epistemological focus here addressed. Equally, it is linked to the premises formulated in the first section. Accordingly, I refer the reader to two authors, whose articles appeared in a volume published in 1999 (sponsored by the German-French Youth Office): *Guide de l'Interculturel en formation* (Demorgon / Lipiansky 1999): H. Kordes, „Les expériences d' étrangeté“ (166 – 175) and M. Cohen-Emerique, „Le choc culturel, méthode de formation et outil de recherche“ (301--315).

Common to both articles is the assumption that to experience the strange in an intercultural encounter necessarily involves experiential reciprocities on the part of all concerned, with the parties seeing this as less a problem than an opportunity. But if it is to be the latter, it must be made a springboard to tackle issues arising from one's own socialisation, upbringing, and culture. Both articles therefore take their bearings from the latest approach to intercultural learning (alluded to above in section 1).

Hagen Kordes' article is based on typical cases of experienced intercultural strangeness, such as e.g. may occur in pupil exchanges at the high school level or when migrant families move into local neighbourhoods. He tries to interpret these cases in terms of various likely theoretical benchmarks. The article by Margalit Cohen-Emerique, on the other hand, presents an intervention method that can be used in training social workers or pedagogues.

The interpretative work performed by Kordes in his paper on a theoretical level is delegated, so to speak, in the method she favours, as a practical challenge and task for trainees to solve. The latter are invited--after suitable preparation and subject to suitable guidance--to grapple with memories of experienced strangeness taken from their own lives or career tracks.

In these two papers, the cases are chosen to good effect; likewise the method is convincing, especially compared with standard methods of disseminating pure knowledge or discussing problems. Still, the question remains as to whether the verbalisation of memories of experienced strangeness can alone suffice, as it is hoped, to induce radical changes in the attitudes and conduct that trainees display in everyday life or in their professional routines. (M. Cohen-Emerique, 1999, 302.)

It cannot be my intention here to diminish the importance and the benefits of the method presented by Cohen-Emerique, all the more because it plainly has a stimulating and motivation-boosting effect on the trainees, which pays dividends on the pedagogic level.

But one cannot refrain from wondering if the use of such methods should not be preceded by a sensitising process directed at a different level--namely the real-world experience of the stranger within as mediated by symbols.

Such a suspicion is supported by the above mentioned argument, which states that a one-sided attitude to the strange, tied solely to conceptual rationality, is just as wanting as its psychologisation or aestheticisation, both of which amount to banalising or even denying the real-world other. At the same time, Fromm's arguments in support of a *creative attitude* urge just such a sensitising process.

There will be many whose lifelines are such





that they do not require sensitising along these lines; others again will immediately balk at the prospect. But it has been our experience that most people are willing--not just intellectually and discursively, but also emotionally and existentially--to open themselves up to the stranger in themselves and in their fellow man. Moreover, those so sensitised can inject positive feedback into a group process whenever the conditions are right. In the sections below, my goal will be to set out the relevant conditions for modes of sensitising conducive to interacting with the strange; also, to further elucidate these modes by reviewing concrete cases and experiences. However, some conceptual clarifications are first called for.

### 3. The distinction between *intercultural learning* and *transcultural sensitivity*

Prerequisites for implementing and optimising them in basic and advanced training

Apart from the problem of a paucity of depth and follow-through in tackling the familiar and the strange, debate on intercultural education and intercultural learning has suffered from the ambiguity--and therefore the noncommittal nature--of these very notions. For all the countless attempts made, no one seems yet to have succeeded in drawing clearly delineated boundaries between the adjoining terms of *multi-cultural*, *intra-cultural*, *inter-cultural*, and *trans-cultural*.

This stems, among other things, from the fact that these terms, depending on where the beholder is placed, are liable to be evaluated differently--a function, in turn, of the various biographical and/or historical and cultural ways of approaching the problem of the strange.

It is evident that people whose lives have been shaped by migration, a bi-cultural background, or a mixed marriage or relationship, will approach the problem of the strange in a different way; inevitably they will evaluate it rather differently than those who have passed their lives rooted in one and the same culture. Another point is that use of the above terms in the various linguistic and cultural contexts will, to an extent, result in considerable semantic slippage.

Thus the term *inter-cultural* and its equivalents in other European languages (German *interkulturell*, French *interculturel*, Italian *interculturale*, and so on) seem largely to have gained international acceptance. But what would seem not so clear-cut, and subject to variation in the different languages, is how *multi-cultural* is to be demarcated from *trans-cultural*.

Thus on numerous occasions we find the terms *multi-cultural* and *inter-cultural* being used--perhaps carelessly--as synonyms; whereas *trans-cultural* is, with few exceptions, virtually restricted to English (mostly, though, without its meaning being discernibly different from *inter-cultural*).

It is quite unclear whether *intra-cultural* can be used at all--or if so, just when and how. In those cases where some do use it (i.e. to distinguish relationships within an ethnic group from those between different ethnic groups), we find that there are others who make no bones about using *inter-cultural* to refer to both kinds of relationships, since, as they see it, regional cultures or specific subcultures qualify no less as cultures in the full sense of the word.

For the reasons set out, it seems unlikely that the terminology about to be proposed will bring to an end this Babylonian confusion of tongues. Perhaps, however, my proposals will gain a more favourable hearing if I hasten to add two riders by way of clarification:

My terminology refers primarily to basic and advanced training in the narrower sense. The proposed terms can be clearly demarcated from each other within this frame, so that they are no longer perceived as rival concepts but as complementary ones.

*Multi-cultural* should therefore be restricted, as it mostly is already, to formally describing the co-existence of different cultures, without this in any way implying that the nature of the relationship has been addressed or linked to some kind of evaluation.

*Intra-cultural* (and/or *inter-cultural*) and *trans-cultural* should be given a complementary, functionally differentiating meaning. The following are to be distinguished:

(1) *Intra-cultural and intercultural learning*, characterised by activities like observation, analysis, structuring, discursively engaging with



differences, problems and conflicts arising from encounters within and between the cultures. This allows the familiar and the strange to be perceived in their diversity, situating and comparing the two and acknowledging them in their otherness (the principle of *cognitive dissonance*).

(2) *Trans-cultural sensitisation* characterised by the sometimes emotional sharing of existential issues and experiences which, transcending all cultural differences, arise from mutual empathy (the principle of *emotional consonance*). This allows the stranger to be perceived as a human being, thus bringing, even on the emotional level, within the pale of the familiar whatever is strange about him, yet without having to deny or instrumentalise it in the process:

The advantage, we submit, of bringing greater precision to our terminology and semantics is that it permits us to drive home (in a way conducive to methodological rigour) the distinction we wish to make between a) a cognitive-discursive and b) an emotional-existential mode of interacting with the strange.

Universities, vocational training centres, even national and church academies, private initiatives and open universities--all of these include in their curricula courses on how to interact with the strange, as well as on issues of intercultural learning.

Apart from providing information on other countries and cultures, and even on ethnic minorities inside one's own borders, these courses usually address general intercultural problems or conflicts, to which they bring to bear a variety of pedagogic methods and approaches. In our terminology, their chief orientation is to intercultural learning. Now if trans-cultural *sensitisation* is to be injected as an additional element, it is no bad idea to position it upstream from the processes of intercultural learning.

For it is more likely that poor trans-cultural sensibility will block intercultural learning than that the opposite will occur--that a dearth of information or poor cognitive skills will impede the trans-cultural sensitivity that is being sought.

The sequence is therefore not hierarchical. To that extent, it is worth dwelling on how both approaches can be melded into a single

overarching concept.<sup>2</sup>

Given the innovative character of trans-cultural *sensitisation* (in the sense here proposed) it will be appropriate to train the spotlight on it alone in what follows. In this regard, the theme of interacting with the familiar and the strange is sufficiently open-ended for highly variegated forms and media suitable for trans-cultural *sensitisation* to be deployed. However, in light of these considerations, it seems meaningful--and feasible--to state a limited number of general principles that must on no account be lost sight of.

*Sensitisation* should be carried out in conditions that encourage the strange to be encountered with a *minimum of fear*, the point being to bypass rote defence mechanisms--at least on a trial basis.

While *sensitisation* should enable a symbolic experience of both strangeness-in-familiarity and of familiarity-in-strangeness, it should also enable one that is autobiographical and person-sensitive and, to that extent, *material*.

*Sensitisation* should use the *creative* resources and potentials in participants to open such perspectives as there may be for interacting with the unfamiliar in ways that are novel and different.

The following case--the program of a creative workshop using mask-making and creative writing as its media--is an attempt to flesh out the above principles in terms of form of content.

#### 4. Masks

##### Encounters with the familiar and the strange

Presentation of a creative workshop

##### Content and goals

This creative workshop provides a forum where issues of personal and cultural identity and development can be worked through. Through creative acts, participants discover themselves as

<sup>2</sup> As part of the social work curriculum of Hamburg's University of Applied Sciences, an approach has been developed of which more will be said later --it involves making masks and is the object of a study program spread over a two-semester period that goes under the name „Intercultural Social Work“



*both* familiar and strange. Moving beyond language and cultural conventions, a new awareness arises of one's own limitations but also of novel avenues of expression and communication.

Some practical pointers for participants

- Please try to empty your head of all outside cares and responsibilities
- An absolute must is that participants attend all consecutive sessions from start to finish. Participants will be expected to talk openly within the group about their own work and to be equally open to the work that others are doing.
- Casual clothing is recommended, suitable for relaxation exercises (e.g. trainers, gym shoes).
- Please bring the following items with you: insulated mats, blankets and the like. So you can stretch comfortably during the relaxation exercises. (If you have any favourite CDs bring them along too--to play as background music while working with the masks.)
- All masks and texts created remain the property of the authors. The group will decide on whether the results should be presented outside the group, i.e. to a wider audience.
- We ask participants to actively engage, both before and after the workshop, in evaluating the work that has been done; all findings will flow into a parallel research project and be made available to the researchers.

## Program

First day: Introduction to Working with Masks, First Steps

Morning:

- Finger painting one's own name (a game of fantasy)
- First phase of guided fantasies (to break the ground)
- Hands-on skills: how to make a mask
- Second phase of guided fantasies: the body

has its own language, we listen in  
What our hands know: a mask of clay is born

Afternoon:

- Layer by layer: The mask of clay mask gives way to a mask of paper or fabric
- Third phase of guided fantasies (to finish the day)

Second day: Maskmaking and Creative Writing

### Morning:

- Writing: In the beginning was the word
- Fourth phase of guided fantasies: Words too come from the body
- A first text is born: We set down how we react to the as-yet-unfinished mask.
- Presentation: We acquaint the group with our first 'vision' of the mask

### Afternoon:

- Masks: Giving birth and being reborn
- Reading out the text „A Fire Mask's Story” (Dorothee Weigel)
- The moment of birth: Separating the paper or fabric mask from the clay form.
- The devil is in the nuts and bolts: The mask still needs an artful finishing touch

Third day: Reality and Fantasy - Masks as Transitions

### Morning:

- Starting out: We visit the museum's permanent collection of masks
- Participants invited to play games with the masks:
- Reconnoitring: We test and gain a feel for the affective qualities of the masks--looking in the mirror, in role plays with others, in first choreographic essays

### Afternoon:

- We are the mask: Based on an idea, a script, a piece of music, a dance, etc., we attempt both singly and within the group to bring the mask to life



## 5. Exemplifying the approach

Some comments based on previous experience

### a) Mask making

Making your own mask is at the heart of this approach. Masks are primordial forms of human expression and human communication. They are found in all cultures and their deployment is as old as humanity itself. This is why masks make excellent vehicles for creative work in a workshop devoted to trans-cultural learning.

The introductory round, which involves *finger painting one's own name*, serves not only to break the ice but leads us into the topic as such--for names too are masks which people either hide behind or express themselves through.

To the phases of *guided fantasies* fall the central task of inducting participants into the creative process, as individuals and as a group. Apart from the obvious function of creating the right atmospheric condition, the point is to relax the body while simultaneously raising the senses to heightened powers of concentration. The ritualised nature of the *guided fantasies*, based as they are on repetitive elements, will give participants a sense of blending with the group and being sheltered by it; though each person retains full self-possession, he finds himself being challenged to come up with first a provisional image and then the definitive form of his own mask.

*The role of the facilitator* is restricted, in this process of discovery, to furnishing help of a technical or mechanical kind and sometimes pedagogic or psychological support, yet without issuing any kind of substantive or formal guidelines. Mechanical skills, acquired through the facilitator's own experience of making masks, plus a goodly portion of sympathetic insight, are the chief exigencies of the role he plays here.

Assuming that the conditions are all met, and that the spatial and material conditions are as they should be, then the hands of the participants will now be fashioning the blank of the mask of their own accord--either finely chiselling it from clay or roughly sculpting it from crumpled up paper and crêpe ribbon.

On top of this grows, layer by layer, the paper or tissue mask proper. How this process

unfolds and what it can mean for the creators of the masks is strikingly expressed by a story a participant at an earlier workshop wrote.

Text: *A Fire Mask's Story*

Once upon a time there was a fire mask sleeping safely in a trunk, where it was quiet. Deeply asleep, it began to dream of its earlier life. „My maker, who was very creative, made me from clay. She worked quick, first forming my big mouth--ready to cry or laugh? Which is still a mystery to me and probably to my maker as well. Next she made a round nose, cheeks and deep-set eyes and then to crown it all she put flames on top of my head. At this stage I was still rough and coarse, so my creator began to smooth out my face, feeling my features develop under her fingers until finally my face was as smooth as glass. But my maker's work wasn't over yet because my features had yet to be fixed by covering my face--and all of its bumps and hollows - with a transparent film. Then a quiet and wondrous time began for both of us as my form was carefully covered in three layers of paper, stuck together with lots of glue: first brown paper, next newspaper, and finally brown paper again. This took some time and occasionally my maker would go off and leave me alone, though I knew she would come back. Again and again my creator stoked and modeled away at my face, until my skin became soft and smooth. During this time each of us noticed how intimate we were becoming.

After the paper layers were finished I felt cold and wet, so my maker put me in a warm place overnight to dry. How good this felt! The next day I was still a little damp, but eventually I dried out and hardened into a real mask. My birth was imminent. I sensed my creator wanted to release me from the clay, but she approached me too timidly.

Was she afraid she would break me? I was nervous and scared because I knew I couldn't achieve this alone. Thanks be to God, a friend of all masks appeared and made sure my birth was successfully accomplished. Two swift cuts with a knife and I was retrieved from the heavy clay. I was suddenly free, a being of lightness. My creator held me in her hands, relieved that I





was unharmed but for the two cuts that would soon heal, leaving me whole again. It is so wonderful to exist I am filled with joy. I know my creator feels the same way too. (Weigel, 1995, 39)

## b) Creative writing

The writing workshop is a kind of mini-workshop in its own right, albeit closely tied to the mask-making process. So the invitation to write something on the mask-in-the-making is usually issued--also for practical reasons--while the mask is still drying, i.e. prior to its birth.

Writing is preceded by a guided fantasy, which leads into the writing process by activating the image of the mask as an internalised image of its author and deliberately confronting him with this. Thus the challenge is posed of admitting that the mask perhaps has a *message* to reveal and, if so, to react by getting something down in writing. The form this writing takes is left entirely open and will emerge from the situation. Many are initially content to describe the mask accurately, only to find that this leads on to remarkable discoveries.

Others are directly inspired by the mask to pen some lines of poetry. This, in turn, may take a variety of forms: a description, a lyrical monologue, a dramatic dialogue--or any other genre known or unknown.

Here are two examples, selected too for their bearing on the intercultural thematic complex, that may serve to illustrate the general thrust of such poems. The first one is by Claudio, a participant from Italy.

### The Cloth with No Meaning

*I was a cloth with no meaning,  
A cloth I still am,  
But in your eyes I take  
My meaning.*

*And you?  
In whose eyes  
Do you take your meaning?  
Me?  
I was a sound with no meaning,*

*A warm feeling,  
An insignificant urge.*

*In blue eyes that laugh  
I have a meaning.  
For I dance, I sing,  
And I give to drink.*

(Quoted from Lüdemann, 1996, 52.)

The following points might be of interest here: Despite his less-than-perfect knowledge of German, the language in which the poem was written (the above is a translation), Claudio was able to spontaneously get down these lines; a little later, for the benefit of the other Italian participants, he even *translated* the poem *back* into his mother tongue. But it was only with the German *original* that he was truly satisfied. The title, *The Meaningless Cloth*, derives from the fact that Claudio used an old dishcloth he found lying around to fashion his mask from.

The second example comes from a workshop conducted at the University of Applied Sciences, Hamburg, this time for foreign students, all of whom, coming from many different countries, had applied to study a wide variety of subjects at tertiary level. The workshop was intended as an intercultural program to round out the German courses the applicants had just completed. Theresia, who came from Indonesia, composed the following poem on her *laughing mask*, about which, as she herself said, the most beautiful thing was that she could use it to make others laugh:

### laughing

*I am laughter  
I listen, that makes me laugh  
I see, that makes me laugh  
I smell, that makes me laugh*

*I am the 'lucky one'*

*I am the language we all speak:  
the children laugh  
the girls laugh  
the boys laugh  
the women laugh*



*the men laugh  
the Americans laugh  
the Europeans laugh  
the Africans laugh  
the Asians laugh*

*each face has laughter  
why don't we make peace through laughter?*

(Quoted from A. Haji-Aghalar, and D. Bison, diploma project, HAW Hamburg 2002, 48)

### c) Dramatic productions and stage work with masks

Masks are by their very nature, as a perusal of cultural history shows, not simply decorative objects, nor are they mere props for masked balls or carnival processions.

Rather their *true* nature reveal itself in ritual or in playacting, i.e. when people are set in motion by masks, physically and emotionally, intensely living out the metamorphosis they find overtaking them. At our mask workshops, what usually happens is that the need is felt, at some point, for some improvised stage work with masks, after which the workshop concludes.

Participants may, if they choose, extend and deepen their engagement with masks at a special workshop of their own supervised by drama pedagogues or play therapists. Also, such a workshop can further foster or deepen processes of trans-cultural learning. But to review the prerequisites for this option to make sense, or the relevant methodological considerations, would lead me too far a field.

### 6. Notes on prerequisites for the creative process and its general conditions

Aspects of cutting-edge research and development

Where the argument has been heading will now be apparent: The *success of trans-cultural* sensitisation stands or falls on whether a creative attitude arises, indeed they are just two aspects of the same thing. But does this mean that success

depends on chance throwing up favourable general conditions or on having a happy blend of participants? Well, yes and no. - Yes, insofar as the general conditions make all the difference; No, insofar as these may not be left to chance but need to be deliberately shaped.

But if we agree basically with the priorities and arguments urged so far, then reflection on how the general conditions of trans-cultural sensitisation are best shaped obtrudes as a clear goal of research and development. The question that needs answering is this: How can the general conditions for courses in trans-cultural sensitisation be set so as to give participants every prospect of achieving a creative attitude?

Nor need research and development of the requisite kind start from scratch: It can draw on long years of experience in conducting creative workshops, including a fill of related case documentation and analysis.

What essentially is needed is to optimise current practice, also to ponder more deeply where it is heading. But this necessarily implies a readiness on the part of practitioners to engage in much soul-searching and self-scrutiny.

As a working hypothesis of what a provisional definition of the *creative attitude* might look like, we are fortunate in having Fromm's above theses to start from.

Thus we have been able to devise a guided interview, reflecting these theses in their broad outline. This could be then made available to participants, individually and group wise, at the conclusion of the workshop, the idea being to record what their experience had been of the creative attitude in the dimensions discriminated by Fromm.

Additionally surveyed in the guided interview was the dimension of the group process as another, presumably pivotal, plank of the creative attitude. On no account must the guided interview be so phrased that it merely confirms the already known and tried-and-tested, while omitting to ask the tough critical questions.

To an extent indeed this is ruled out by Fromm's theses themselves, which include perceiving reality as veridical as possible, plus the ability to live with conflicts and tensions born of polar opposites, as the central plank of the creative attitude. The essential point is that the the-



ses on which the survey turns should be applied as comprehensively and authentically as possible to the actual interview situation. Work has already begun on implementing and evaluating the interviews, but there is still some way to go.

First experiences suggest, though, that the guided interview is performing to expectations, for interviews usually do trigger intensive processes, deepening the workshop experience as a result. They are, to that extent, felt to be a necessary and welcome boost to the sensitisation process.

It has proven useful to conduct interviews not as one-on-one affairs, but in small groups of two or three participants. The necessary degree of mutual trust is already there as a result of the shared workshop experience, and the small group situation is accepted as a self-evident extension of the learning processes initiated in the workshop.

The workshop program has been well received on the whole. Suggested changes or addenda concerned points of detail, for the most part person- or situation-dependent; at any event, they were not directed against the basic structure. In-depth conclusions regarding substantive aspects of the learning experiences voiced must await careful evaluation of a sizeable body of interviews.

It remains but to add that the efforts I have described to optimise the general conditions and to deepen the learning processes are part of the *Dianoia Project*, conducted under the mantle of the EU's *Leonardo Da Vinci Program*. In addition, a number of European universities are currently pursuing research and development leads relating to work with masks, the first fruits of which were presented at the *Conference of Lifelong Learning and the Arts*, which was held in Glasgow from 5th--8th July 2002. (Cf. *Proceedings*, Glasgow, 2002.)

## 7. Future prospects: Symbolic shaping and acting in the intercultural and trans-cultural context

The basics of a self-reflection aligned to the whole personality, i.e. true to its aesthetic, ethical, and political aspirations

It is not just chance that *persona*, whose ety-

mology goes back to the Etruscan *personare* (= to sound through), coming down to us then via the Greek and the Latin, originally designated not a *person* (in the modern sense of the word) but a *mask*, a meaning that survives still in the English *persona*, referring to the outer façade or personality a person chooses to cultivate, but which is out of step with his true inner self. Etymology tells us that *persona* was the name of the mask worn by actors in Greek tragedies, implying that their words *sounded through* the mask.

The function of the chorus in Greek drama is known to have consisted in transcending, on the symbolic level of a staged production, the individual destiny of the protagonists (and the audience too), in order to confront the latter with the truth, tragic though this might be. This was at one and the same time the precondition for *catharsis*, i.e. the *cauterising effect* that tragedy was said to have on the psyche, in the sense, as it were, of an ancient form of *personal* education; by the same token, it has an aesthetic and ethical import as well as a political one--given the drama's centrality in the life of the *polis*. *Person* in the modern sense has strayed far from its original meaning, undergoing in the course of cultural history, so it would seem, semantic diffusion on a grand scale. But if for Goethe, as we know, *personality* was the *highest happiness of the children of earth*, so the diversity of modern derivations--*personal*, *personality defect*, *inter-personal*, *person-sensitive*, *highly personal*, and the like--only testifies to the panoply of meanings the word can hold.

How much more sensible (if not sorely needed) it would seem to recall the original meaning, enunciating, as it does, a way of viewing humankind in its *conditio humana* that is at once critical, self-reflective, and existentially holistic.

Working with masks as part of trans-cultural education can indeed, as the above reflections have hopefully shown, point the way back--and forward--to a holistic *education of the personality* in the sense here outlined.

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