
Cultural Identity and Cultural Difference

Conceptual Framework of the Grundtvig Multilateral Project: „Identity and Difference: Creative Artistic Exercises as Didactic Support in Adult Education“

1. How Cultures Emerge

To the degree that – within the modern world – borders and limitations go down, distances dwindle and people, groups, classes, companies, institutions, nations and societies interact globally and a society of pluralistic lifestyles and worldviews also forms internally, the diversity of differences is being realized – languages, religions, laws, traditions, worldviews, political models, artistic ways of expression, myths and beliefs, perceptions, hopes and abilities, yet everything we summarize in the concept of *culture*. The global diversity and colourfulness of cultures becomes an everyday experience. One can observe in amazement how completely different others perceive, interpret and culturally shape what seems self-evident to us. The others differ from us; they talk differently, pray differently, interpret the world differently, treat each other differently, have different goals, different values; they *differ* from any other cultural group, even from us and “our own ones”, from “my own kind”.

Cultural diversity is not about individual differences (these may also become part of it); it is collective phenomena: language, religion, traditions etc. are always shared by more or less large groups of people and thus are *common* to them; those who are part of a culture, speak the *same* language, share the same religion, follow the same traditions etc. Since no-one is alone with his language, religion, his traditions etc., i.e. with his culture, but is part of a more or less large group which speaks, believes, thinks, acts etc. as he does, which he shares culture with, that means which he belongs to, is associated with, is *identified* with and which he in return can relate to. Regarding cultural characteristics, people who belong to one culture are thus *the same*, whereas they *differ* from other people who have another language, religion, traditions etc. Therefore, cultural characteristics serve for *both*, differentiation *and* identification, recognition of being different *and* realization of (cultural) “identity”.

What creates internal equality and social thus constitutes external dissimilarity and difference. This indicates the dialectical nexus of both terms: no identity without difference; no difference without identity. What (culturally) distinguishes myself from others, connects to my own kind – indeed, it is even the difference of cultural phenomena that constitutes the identity of those belonging to this culture: I owe my cultural identity to my cultural differing from others, who do not belong to my culture. If cultural dissimilarity and diversity were lost, so would be cultural identity.

On one hand, cultural identity is created passively – by being related to a certain cultural nexus by others – while, on the other hand, it is also created actively by relating oneself to this cultural nexus and (helping to) shape it: he is one of them – I am one of us! This is where

I belong to, they are like me, and these are “my people”. Cultural otherness and dissimilarity are not perceived with respect to one’s own group; instead there are similarity, familiarity, shared identity, “home” – simply (cultural) identity. However, familiarity can only originate from diversity; home is impossible without outlands.

Thus, fighting or compromising cultural dissimilarity and diversity ultimately means to affect and jeopardize cultural identities – even the own one. Reversely: preserving and acknowledging cultural diversity means to bolster and appreciate cultural identities – including the own one.

But what is beyond this purely conceptually-logical nexus practically? What actually is “cultural difference”, how is it developed and what does it mean to have a “cultural identity”?

To answer these questions, we will refer to a constructivist approach:

The Social Construction of Reality

Humans are social beings and inhabit the world in groups. There, they will realize diverse phenomena within their surroundings as well as their own group. At first, the *meaning of those* phenomena for people is not clear, i.e. what one can do with them, what they stand for, whether they need to be handled cautiously, which forces and powers manifest through them etc. Acquiring the world’s and life’s phenomena means to attribute them a bearing, to *interpret* them, to bestow them with *mind*, to explain them, to create correlations, to name them and to relate them to each other.

This “world construction” is an active, productive process, throughout which people create their world by distinguishing and naming things, states and situations and bestowing a specific, meaningful existence upon them by *interpretation* (instead of only deducing or recognizing them in a naively-realistic manner). For instance, the phenomenon of death – to be comprehended, understood, digested and for people to know what to do with it, which behaviour is appropriate with respect to death – is subject to an interpretation according to which the soul must leave the body and adjourn to some other world. At the same time, respective ideas, images of this other, metaphysical world must be created.

As man has always been a social being, these are *collective* constructions: the accomplishment of interpretation as well as the meaningful acts and rules of behaviour arising from it, are frequently created collectively by people within processes, which last over considerable periods. They are collective property, people’s collectively self-created world “beyond” natural phenomena: their “*culture*” as a second “social” nature in the sense of a cosmos full of names, ideas, interpretations, and rules to collectively acquire, control, and interpret the “prime” nature.

Thus, all cultural phenomena (such as language, religion, value systems etc.) are interactively borne social creations, habitualized interpretations of reality, collective explanations and solutions (e.g. to the issue of death and the question of what is to follow it, of the edible or inedible or the appropriate habitation). From this perspective, culture means: created, produced normality, certainty, familiarity. Being socially constructed, culture is not “natural” but instead a “made” arrangement, which in fact is based upon (rarely ever wilful) agreements and institutionalized consensus, i.e. upon social processes. This is how social systems are formed, which ensure people can jointly inhabit their world, communicate it and take their bearings.

Epistemological Note

Humans, first of all, experience their world in form of perception, i.e. as an undifferentiated continuum of sensory inputs and sensations. To distinguish things, to realize and recognize them, to know what they “are”, humans need to establish terms to this “weave of sensations” which organize and structure it, distinguish and identify details. This is their accomplishment by which they create a discernable world: realization is not passive assimilation and projection but active construction. The cognitional act spawns, creates the realized world. Thereby, humans come to two limits: first, the material world’s immanent structures and second the limitations of concepts. It is controversial, whether humans simply create concepts upon the structures of the material world and consequently their own experiences with it (materialism) or if these concepts (also respectively potentially) reflect immanent structures of a transcendental, spiritual world in which humans participate through concepts and that bestows them with an objective truth (idealism). Humans use such concepts differently and depending on their origin, experiences, points of view, interests, perspectives. Consequently, they live in different “realities”. Communication, mutual clarification and agreement are precondition for social understanding. Many theories of cognition disregard the necessity of social understanding as they focus on the abstract of “man”. However, in real there is always simply “mankind”.

The Stability of Cultural Creations

As culture is not “contrived” by one single person but emerges from a process of social interpretation and is therefore commons which are passed on intergenerationally, cultural interpretations and constructions seem “objective”, seem to be *reality*, as everybody in one’s surroundings shares and thus permanently validates them. Cultural phenomena thereby turn into natural facts; their “constructive nature” becomes unknowable. Cultural phenomena seem “natural”, self-evident, normality as such. If this were not the case, cultural interpretations could not provide any certainty as to insight and orientation within the world. As everybody involved believes in something and adjusts their behaviour to it and expects it as normality from everybody else, it becomes *social reality*.

However, unlike “prime” nature, this “second” nature remains immaterial, a purely mental construction, which is not given but created, produced and thus a social, human “invention”. Being a “social invention”, though, culture is less binding, less imperatively valid, and less self-evident than “prime” nature. Nevertheless, to facilitate social agreements and enable social interaction, it must be binding, valid and stable to those who collectively created it. Thus, every culture at the same time develops its own stabilizers: mutual expectations, processes of institutionalization and complex systems of legitimization. These again are social constructions which claim “truth”, define abnormalities and the extent to which such may be accepted and will be sanctioned, respectively. That means, the social construction of reality maintains itself. Future generations perceive it as actuality, as “social facts”, as “reality”, as natural and objective, as given structure that can’t be doubted.

At the same time, this is a process of *alienation*, as man’s creation escapes his control and retroacts in a formative, directing and defining manner. For the individual, this “second nature” is his normal world. For him, it is just as real and objective as prime nature – its stones, mountains, rivers etc. - is. His language, religion, value systems, social rules, his own role, his relation to others, his ideas of good and evil, permitted and forbidden, his challenges and

aims – all of it is his natural habitat. He will not exceed its borders and is usually not aware of its relativity and “created-ness”.

Internal Social Differentiation and Social Identity

Despite their relative stability and various mechanisms to maintain social systems that have become binding, cultures and cultural spheres - the more complex they become – are not at all homogenous. Instead they again create various differentiations and subcultures, some of which are being accepted or (re-) integrated in the medium term. These social construction processes also originate interpretations and differentiations of those people who bear them. The members of a certain society or cultural sphere are (within the course of history) being arranged, classified, differentiated – the members are bestowed with structure, internal order, they become assessable, distinguishable – and thus become an *item of social construction and interpretation* themselves. Along with arising differentiations, subgroups, different ranks and classes with varying functions and privileges, standards and rights and eventually manifold role models resulting from different expectations towards human behaviour and being, will emerge.

This means: one social creative flow generates human interpretations and constructions, which culture relates to a specific (differential) role and a specific meaning: aristocrat or peasant, entrepreneur or worker, Bavarian or Prussian, catholic or protestant. Thus these subgroups and their respective members themselves become objects of social interpretation and construction processes which allocate them to specific “social identities”. In return, these are related to specific and different functions, experiences, points of view and perspectives, which manifest in different *mental models* and may form *subcultures* among the collective overall cultural.

In a way, any society provides a number of role models for its members as a part of its culture. These are nothing but “identity patterns”, “identity schemes” that describe what is characteristic for someone who is subject to this pattern - what he may or may not do, what can be expected from him or not, “what kind of person he is”. Internally differentiated societies also create differentiated social identities, which differ from each other: an aristocrat “is” another person than a peasant, he speaks differently, acts differently, he has different rights, rates things differently etc. Within a certain culture or society there is therefore a differentiated range of social identities related to specific characteristics, functions, habits, behaviours. In absence if this culturally created differentiation there would be no personal social identity. To enable identification, first of all groups, subcultures, denominations etc. need to be distinguished, classified, identified in their external dissimilarity as well as their internal homogeneity, named and labelled.

From this point of view, also the individual person as member of a specific (sub-) culture is “socially created”; a person arises from a social construction process, a *social identity* accrues as a sum of cultural expectations and interpretations. This social identity shapes a personality down to its sentiments and perceptions, hopes and desires, thoughts and ideas. Thereby, people become members of their own community and think, feel and desire just what is common and expected within it – and thus in return ensure stability of the social nexus and its cultural constructions.

The idea of “individuality” – the individuals’ uniqueness and distinctiveness beyond social identity – is a historically comparatively recent one that is linked to the Christian-occidental cultural sphere: The idea of “self” and a “self-identity”, respectively, a purely individually-personal existence apart from any social definition and attributes.

Cultural Conflicts and Cultural Change

Depending on one's own position within an overall system, there are different socially sanctioned viewpoints and perspectives which do not necessarily need to comply with those of other groups or social positions within one culture but can actually be mutually exclusive. Interpreting the same tree as either source of shade and natural beauty or timber may lead to most controversial acting with respect to that tree and represents a possibly escalating *conflict* within this culture. After all, socio-cultural "constructions" have not been intended or created systematically; they rather "developed naturally". Therefore, interpretation and re-interpretation processes definitely involve conflicts, rebellions, deviations and schisms. What is true and self-evident to one person may not at all be so for another. Social construction collides with social construction. This calls up the question of conflict resolution, of execution powers and forms of governing.

As in this sense internally different cultures are not at all without contradiction, they remain vibrant. New interpretation processes need to run off repeatedly and there is social or cultural *change*. Social interpretation and construction processes are never finished and complete; instead they continue, are permanently flowing, are always potentially present and can always be manifested. This basic socially creative process also always shows when a new team forms and starts to arrange its internal relationships: new forming groups first of all must work out their "culture" – their norms and rules, their internal differentiation, their role allocation etc.

Cultural interpretations and constructions are no constant, consistent concepts which are once established and will then be given for all time. Instead - by interaction with other group members - they will be repeatedly created in a self-reinforcing manner and are subject to more or less concealed changes. For instance, a new religious group with innovative beliefs, that interprets and treats certain phenomena totally different than established religions do and also comes to different conclusions, may arise among an "established" society (cf. e.g. Reformation or various heretic movements). Suchlike developments, which lead to different, possibly contradictory interpretations and constructions of reality which may collide within one culture, can result in internal conflicts, secessions, religious wars etc.

The fact that such breaches within a culture are possible, proves the process of social creation; the creativity of social agreements are definitely always potentially effective even within very structured, obviously firmly established societies and may permanently jeopardize established orders as soon as respective new experiences, conflict situations or previously unknown phenomena need to be integrated. Therefore, potentially static, rigid socio-cultural constructions tend to seal off from transformation and internally establish complex control systems which serve to maintain established interpretation schemes (see e.g. Inquisition)¹. Therefore, internal change – i.e. the implementation of new interpretations and constructions – is usually only accomplished within the frame of conflicts, which are frequently decided by violence. In such cases, one group intends to change, frequently even overthrow an established order against another group's will. If this revolution is not accomplished, a classical alternative may also be flight or emigration: the differing group is not able to establish its reinterpretation within the frame of the existent culture and will not find any acceptance within it either, on the contrary it is even rather persecuted; therefore, it splits from its previous culture also materially and seeks new places to establish its own culture, i.e. a place at which it is

¹ Social systems that institutionalize socio-cultural change itself are comparatively recent phenomena (market, capitalism, democracy).

free to construct its own social reality (this is how the Puritans colonized North America's East Coast).

2. Intercultural Encounters

Cultural Diversity

From this constructivist point of view, all cultural phenomena are human-social “constructions”, i.e. human creations, manifestations of group's creative powers, which ultimately originate, create and produce *their* world. It is a permanent *social creation process*.

The described culturally creative force to socially construct reality is inherent to any social group. Social interpretations and constructions begin as soon as a group forms and its members start to interact and communicate with each other, thus developing their group dynamics. However, any group that considers itself related follows *its own specific* way. Different groups may, according to their respective situations, experiences and conditions, come to completely different conclusions, i.e. to basically different cultural interpretations and constructions. Each single social formation develops *its own* process of culture creation and will eventually have its own culture. This can be realized, for instance, by the phenomenon of “corporate identity”, which varies from company to company.

Thus, on the level of societies, “cultural diversity” emerges around the globe as well as within each of these societies. From interacting networks' shared identity, completely different cultures arise: sometimes separated from each other, sometimes conflicting, sometimes by schism and separation. This also means that a mutual culture may emerge when people interact and relate to each other, or – on the contrary – wherever people meet and interact, on one hand they draw on their shared culture and its traditions, and thus re-confirm it. On the other hand there is also this potential to create culture (no matter how latent it may be) due to which a new collective culture in the sense of mutual new interpretation and construction accomplishments can be formed.

Within the global process of cultural development, different societies – probably depending on their respectively different conditions, situations, perceptions, experiences, findings, survival necessities etc. – show very different and differing social constructions and individual, deviating cultural creations. Thus, all over the world, various significantly different cultural solutions and interpretations for sometimes specific, yet frequently always the same existential human issues and themes have been and are still being “invented” and developed - partly independently, partly also correlatively. As long as it is about generally the same terms of human existence – life and death, this world and hereafter, good and evil, growth and decay, seasons, storms, tillage, hunting etc. – these different cultural solutions are surprisingly similar to each other, refer to the same and can thus be basically compared to each other and understood.

The world has always borne many different, variously differentiated, distinctly complex, possibly even differently sophisticated cultures and cultural responses of diverse degrees of relationship at the same time – and thus facilitated a variety of languages, religions, political systems, worldviews, value systems, standards of conduct and interpretation of world and man. These different cultures – partly due to great distances, which were difficult to overcome – have independently developed, spread, split again etc. for a comparatively long time. Foreign cultures have made contact and occasionally grew in mutual conflict. Some deliberately isolated from others, some fought each other, and others mutually inseminated and affected

each other. Sometimes they assumed each others cultural solutions on more or less amicable terms or merged with each other. Some cultures perished, others survived and some dominated others for a certain while.

That means, wherever there is cultural diversity, there is also contact and conflict between the single cultures, there are *intercultural contacts*. *What exactly happens when different cultures meet and make contact to each other?* When different “constructions of social reality” encounter each other?

Foreignness

When cultures encounter each other, one experiences that others perceive the same things completely differently, solve the same problems completely differently, orientate themselves in the same type of situation on totally different expectations, standards, values etc. They “are” completely different from oneself – which is usually not only realized and unemotionally taken notice of. Instead it moves, astonishes and confounds us - anyway, it arouses emotions and causes reactions.

First and foremost, any culture is “ethnocentric”, i.e. it observes and evaluates another culture and its interpretations and constructions from its own point of view (as it has no other one at hand). From this personal point of view – from this own perspective – the respectively foreign culture and its accomplishments are not only different but *strange* – i.e. compared to one’s own, it is deviating, uncommon, and even peculiar. However, the experience of foreignness is either-way; we are “*strange to each other*”.

Foreignness means, something is completely different from what one is used to. It is surprising, unexpected, does not correspond to one’s own points of view and habits, does not consort with one’s own expectations and ideas, does not appertain to the familiar image – it unsettles and confuses. Because the foreign always conveys a secret basic message, a subtext, which reads: it does not necessarily have to be the way you know it, it could also be all different, there are alternatives, and your world is not the whole of the world. This is the first impact of encountering the foreign: *it relativizes the self, cracks it, and calls it into question*. What has been the undoubtedly normal, natural so far realizes its relativity. The established order, the routine of established resolutions, existent self-evidences are broken – simply by the bare existence of something different, foreign.

Foreignness is not a neutral concept; it always bears a value. That means difference is not only unemotionally taken notice of, it is always *evaluated*. This evaluation of the foreign is obviously ambivalent: it *both fascinates and scares*. On one hand, it may tempt, tease, amaze, arouse admiration; one would like to get to know it better. On the other hand, it can scare, cause fears, resistance and refusal, provoke disgust and aggression, which may sometimes directly proceed to fighting the foreign. The current debate of intercultural contact is particularly worried by this second, dark side which leads to hostility towards foreigners. What can we do to gain better understanding of it?

Intercultural Conflicts

The spontaneous reaction to bewilderment by the foreign usually is rather disaffirmation and resistance against the foreign. At most, it is appreciated by those who are dissatisfied with existing conditions anyway and desire something different, something new. However, all others – those who feel related to their culture and have strongly internalized its rules – perceive

the foreign a threat they must defend against, an unreasonable demand they have to reject or even fight.

Several forms and levels of this resistance against the foreign - varieties of hostility against foreigners – can be made out:

The foreign as an aberration from the norm

When we meet foreign cultures, the first thing we tend to notice is in what ways they differ from our own culture; we notice what the others do differently and which rules and customs that are important to our own culture they breach. We feel an aberration from the self. Depending on how our own culture sanctions or tolerates these differences, the foreign will also be sanctioned or tolerated. For aberrations occurring within our own culture, there is an entire array of applicable sanctions (i.e. reactions) available – anything from feeling embarrassed, to mocking, to verbal attacks, or even the threat of violence and/or punishment that includes an open use of violence, up to the physical extinction of the different-minded.

Therefore, when the foreign is experienced as an aberration from the self, it must be fought by using the cultural methods available – with the sole aim of directing the foreign back onto the “correct” path. In extreme cases, this can lead to the negation, suppression and extinction of a foreign culture, and to the enforcement of the exclusive right of the own (defining) culture’s existence. “In Germany we speak German; we do not wear headscarves during school and we treat honour killings as a crime.” This scheme is often used against cultural minorities that exist within other cultures. How aggressively this scheme is applied depends on the culture’s sanctioning rules against said aberrations, which again are related to the level of importance these rules and behaviour patterns found within the own culture have.

However, the scheme only applies if we identify ourselves with our own culture and its given standards, and if we consider sustaining these as meaningful. Persons, on the other hand, who have in some way distanced themselves from their own culture, or cultures whose strength in terms of commitment claims and persuasive powers have decreased, tend not to sanction the foreign, but instead feel that their own cultural constructions have been “discredited”, or shaken; to regard a foreign culture’s constructions as better, more convincing, more modern ... and to surrender and subordinate oneself to this other culture, to accept its constructions that were once perceived as an aberration (but this feeling having been overcome) is a form of cultural self-abandonment by which the foreign and exotic is adopted without question and the self is (partly) replaced. This, for example, was the case in Europe towards the end of the 19th Century, when it hoped to flee from its own “decadence” by adopting parts of the (old) Indian culture, especially esotericism.

The foreign as an attack on the self

However, the foreign is not merely something different – a violation of norms – that must be redirected back on track by means of applicable sanctions. It may trigger an irritation that reaches much further when it is interpreted as a provocation, a challenge and attack on the self – on a person’s identity. Encountering the foreign may cause our own culture and its standards to be shaken, and its strenuously maintained stability and unquestioned legitimacy may become frail. Doubts may arise: perhaps the way we do things is not the right way after all? Perhaps the others, the foreigners, are right? Perhaps their cultural solutions are better, more effective, etc.? We then no longer interpret the foreign as an aberration from our self, but as an attack on it – and must therefore accordingly reject and fight it. The self must be

defended from the foreign, something that is not simply accomplished by “proving” the self to be correct and by strengthening our own legitimacy, but also by proving the foreign to be wrong – not merely in terms of thought, but physically – by means of persecution and eradication. Hereby, our own culture no longer attempts to force the foreign back onto the path of virtue, but directly confronts it: he who provokes and questions must be removed, destroyed. It is a culture’s way of self-defence against the foreign in order to protect and sustain itself.

Widespread forms of this type of battle against foreign cultures can be summarized in the title “defence by degrading”: for example, we can either register the foreign as an *odddity* and return back to our everyday lives, or we can shake our heads over it. We can also usurp (and thereby neutralise) it by interpreting or classifying it, giving it a name and a type – pigeonholing and labelling it, so to speak, and thereby also neutralising it. We may also mock the foreign and declare it worthless, primitive, underdeveloped, inferior. Then our suspicion towards the foreign transforms into concrete *prejudices*. People especially tend to place foreign cultures at stages of development their own culture has long left behind: “They’re a little behind,” or “they’re stuck in the Middle Ages.” Cultures can also counteract being relativized by the foreign by offering “interpretations” for it, by demonstrating its “faults”. The foreign then becomes wrong, primitive, ignorant, underdeveloped, bad, evil, abnormal, sick, deviant; only our own culture – the self – is healthy, superior, right, strong. This is the *racist way* of dealing with the foreign.

Degrading a foreign culture is a way of immunising our own culture against being relativized by the foreign. Because our own cultural patterns are unstable in terms of social constructions, the foreign ideas that may question these must be rejected and degraded: they must be openly proven wrong and it must be shown that they are based upon superstitions and falsities and cannot possibly be valid. The best way, of course, is simply by belittling or pitying the members of foreign cultures in their misdirection. The apparently inferior culture must then no longer be acknowledged.

This form of reaction – degradation – appears to suffice as a means of defence, as long as the encounters with foreign cultures remain scarce. It will work only as long as we rarely meet representatives of foreign cultures, and if there is always the option of returning to the safety of our own culture after such encounters.

Another more active form of defence against the foreign and of asserting the self is *proselytization*: this is the drive to convert the foreign to our own beliefs, an attempt to convince it that it must become like the self. It is a way of “overcoming” the foreign, an attempt to change the foreigners and their foreign morals and customs, their religions and social structures, in such a way that they “become like us” – because then the foreign would no longer be foreign; it would be assimilated and therefore part of the self – and everything would be back in order. On top of that, it would allow us to feel good about having saved a foreign soul and having considerably contributed towards its development; to have given it the possibility to access truth and the modern world – salvation of the soul.

What if, however, the foreign is not willing or able to adapt to the self? Then it must be *actively fought*. If our own culture cannot be stabilised by degrading or proselytising the foreign, then the conflict must take on different, more active forms: those of different faith not willing to accept the superiority of our culture must – if there is no other way – be fought physically, if necessary extinguished (cp. among many examples: the history of the Cathars).

This will inevitably occur – and now we have reached a very important factor – if defending our own culture against the foreign provocation *is connected to concrete material or economical interests*. The cultural dispute (e.g. regarding democracy issues or the implementation of human rights, etc.) can quickly become an ideological excuse in order to pursue these

interests. Similar circumstances may be the case when young unemployed persons turn against migrants and their cultures for allegedly stealing our jobs. There is only a single step between proselytization and colonization, suppression, fighting, or extinguishing the foreign, which is mainly distinguishable by the – sometimes more and sometimes less – brutal methods applied. These methods always serve the purpose of negating, marginalising or extinguishing the foreign, and of pushing the self back into an unquestionable and unrivalled light again.

An important factor here is that our own culture's rightness and trueness are also proved by its political and military or economical superiority – like a proof of God's existence (the stronger side is also in the right). With a successful military conquest, the rightness and validity of our own culture is proven and the foreign threat simultaneously repelled.

The less certain a person is of their cultural identity, and the less stable they stand within it, the more likely an encounter with the foreign will result in defensiveness, conflict and fighting. Someone who is at peace with their culture and certain of its strength, someone who takes their culture's system for granted and natural, will be less likely to feel provoked by the foreign. However, these people will tend not to confront it either, but merely ignore it or, at the most, shake their head at its oddity. Only persons who have become unsure of their own cultural identity will feel threatened by the foreign and actively fight it.

The foreign as an indication of the conformability of culture

The shock after encountering the foreign may cause us to do more than “merely” question a culture's central foundation. In the worst case, this question may transform from that of who is in the right or whose God is the right God, etc., into a principle relativization of (also foreign) cultures. After meeting a foreign culture, we may suddenly become aware of the way our own cultural world is constructed and built. Things we understood as natural and true before may turn out to be mere constructions (“things can be done differently, too!”). A culture's generally “constructed” character and its unstable foundation – its relativity – become visible. Our culture's constructions and its right to legitimation thereby lose their absolute validity and stability – because: how can a culture possibly claim strict commitment from its members when it was arbitrarily man-made?

In this way, the foreign may have a relativizing and “opening-eyes” type of effect – for both parties. An encounter with the foreign may cause our cultural world to lose its right to commitment and allow a person to realise that their world is changeable, re-constructible, and can be shaped. When encountering a foreign culture, the latent possibility becomes apparent that everything can be seen and constructed in an entirely different way.

On the one hand, this relativization offers a wide range of possibilities for intercultural tolerance and provides fertile grounds for intercultural encounters (see next chapter); however, it also makes clear that those who identify themselves with their culture and are used to abiding by its clear standards and rules may fall into a bottomless pit. Due to the relativism that accompanies the constructivist perspective, these peoples' social identities, their values and beliefs, their certainties, are questioned and also deeply shaken. The idea that it might, in some way, be possible to *either* pray to Allah, *or* to the Jewish *or* the Christian God, is absolutely unimaginable for many people – because, after all, there can only be one true God. The idea to allow others to believe in their God without questioning our own, or even entirely turning to Atheism, at first seems unthinkable.

On an individual level, this means: the encounter with a foreign culture may cause a person to question their self-assurance and certainties, their implicit orientation and, until then, un-

questioned and absolutely legitimate social identity. It poses the question of beliefs in the first place and forces the individual to come to terms with it. Encountering the foreign means that the frame of the currently valid order becomes visible and at the same time questionable. The current rules and normalities are thereby robbed of their absolute claim to validity. Certainties no longer exist, and a person may become unsure of their feelings; the current way of thinking and the things perceived as natural become questionable. The own social identity is extremely threatened – threatened by disintegration and diffusion.

Rejecting the foreign goes hand in hand with preserving and defending the own cultural identity, with the drive to preserve clear orientations and to maintain easily comprehensible values that are clearly defined – black and white, up and down, good and bad – and not have to deal with new complications and confusing aspects (U. Beck). Xenophobia, in this case, is an expression of fear of the own culture's possible diffusion, the fear of losing given structures of social identity, and the fear of being forced to expose oneself to the sharp twists and turns of individualisation – to an individual existence that reaches beyond given cultural parameters. This is a conservative defence mechanism triggered in defensive persons or groups who find their identity solely by belonging to a culture, and who are dependent on its clarity, its integrity and its absolute validity. Since they must always define the right and true culture, they are unable to accept the idea that, despite, or perhaps even because of, the relativity, constructedness and diversity of cultures, one might be able to live a rich and productive life.

The foreign as a trigger for development – cultural diversity is strength

Fighting the foreign as a means of defence because it might reveal the relativity of the self and thus pose a threat to our cultural identity is probably the most “archaic” reaction to the foreign.

As a matter of fact, a foreign encounter may result in two entirely different reactions: for one, it may help to reveal what “the self” actually comprises, i. e. show our specific characteristics and mannerisms. Secondly, it may inspire a person to actually seek cultural exchanges and teach new ways of thinking that will enrich the self.

Identity from differences and self-identity

If the foreign did not exist, one could not comprehend the self as such. Less theoretically said: the foreign helps our own culture and each individual person to recognize themselves, to understand their own characteristics, and to see everything that is not the self in a separate light. If there were a culture that had never come into contact with another culture, it would never be able to become aware of its own distinctive characteristics and mannerisms because it only knows its own interpretations and constructions. This means: only if we encounter, compare and confront other cultures can our own culture's characteristics be revealed to us, and thus make it possible for such a thing as *cultural identity* to evolve in the first place! An encounter with the foreign therefore does not only question our own identity, but it also creates it. Because: identity can only be determined if an opposite, a non-identity, exists. Only by confronting the non-identity and its differences can the identity itself be constituted.

This is purely logical thinking, though it describes an actual social process: when encountering a different culture – the foreign – we do not only notice what makes this foreign culture different from us, but at the same time we notice how our own cultural traits make us different from it, the traits that are important to us and have affected us in the past. We usually so take

our cultural heritage, our *cultural identity*, for granted – like a “second nature” – that we are not even aware of it. Only when encountering the foreign culture we begin to notice how we, too, have been culturally shaped; we realize in what ways we are merely children of our nature, and that the things we took for granted should not be taken as such because they are merely expressions of our specific culture. Thus, the encounter with the foreign can help both an entire culture, as well as an individual person, to gain self-assurance, i. e. to gain an awareness of the self and one’s own characteristics and strengths.

This insight offers an even further-reaching option: the possibility – at first in the cognitive sense – to gain *distance* from our own socio-cultural identity, which in a way represents a “social skin”, and become aware of how we have been moulded in the past – of our imprints; we are then able to differentiate between our social identity and our *self-identity* as a unique person with a personal contour and a unique personality structure that we have developed over time and that we are aware of. The cultural affiliation and imprint (cultural identity) are very much part of this self-identity, but do not solely constitute it. Thus, encountering the foreign may not only make us aware of our own cultural heritage, but within the process of realisation may allow us to experience that “I” am made up of something other than my cultural heritage – namely the psychic apparatus that is capable of reflecting on the own cultural heritage after an encounter with the foreign, and thereby placing itself “outside” of this imprint and taking on a transcending position. This topic will be studied further on.

Cultural diversity as opportunity and strength

As stated previously, encountering the foreign can also pose a chance to enrich the self:

The foreign, as demonstrated earlier, questions the constructions and interpretations of our own culture by offering an *alternative* viewpoint, which again is based on similar constructions and interpretations, but arrives at different conclusions. This fact clearly outlines the constructedness of cultural solutions, which again those who feel their cultural and social identity slipping away from under their feet because of them believe must be fought.

However, being aware of the “constructedness” of anything culture-related does not only pose a threat to the own social identity, but at the same time offers a possibility to *open up to new ideas*.

While the foreign disrupts and troubles the existing order by relativizing it, it simultaneously creates room to reflect on this order. The foreign guides us away from normality. It principally shows: things do not necessarily have to be the way they are now, but can be different. Once we become aware that certain conditions have been constructed and socially manufactured, we also realise that these conditions can be altered and *designed*. This means: an encounter with the foreign raises awareness of the fact that things do not have to be accepted the way they are, thereby creating *openness for innovations*. Something new may evolve out of the foreign. The foreign stimulates our desire to think in new realms, to think sideways – experimentally. It creates the desire to abandon our worn-out comfortable paths and it provokes by confronting us with alternative options. A new idea cannot be born without allowing the foreign to happen because everything new, when compared to the old, is foreign at first.

Besides awaking our awareness that things can be changed and our willingness to undertake these changes, an encounter with the foreign also creates an abundance of concrete *impulses, ideas, and possibilities for changes*. Cultural interpretations and constructions can be viewed as specific collective interpretations of phenomena and joint solutions to problems. In general humane terms, this means that cultures provide interpretations of metaphysics, of (the purpose of) life and death, explanations for natural phenomena, ideas of man, ideolo-

gies, ideas regarding the construction of the world and its origin, etc., or describe the basic social order. This can also be applied to concrete practical terms: ordinary phenomena are perceived and interpreted in an entirely different light. There are different ways of thinking, experiences, ideas and ways of approach to such prosaic situations as organising and moderating a meeting or promoting business cultures, queuing at bus stations or the choice of tonight's aperitif.

If we do not feel questioned by an encounter with the foreign, but are instead able to get involved with it, we will find an incredible amount of *other* possibilities to deal with the question of life, its situations and problems. Every culture faces the same or similar anthropological, social, economical, medical and other essential questions; and each culture, depending on its social construction of truth, has chosen different aspects of these, emphasised different links, and developed other interpretations and solutions. That is why there is also Chinese or Indian medicine besides Western medicine, and besides African clothing there is Indian or Arabic clothing; besides free market economy there is planned economy; besides American management there is Japanese management; besides industrial agriculture there is ecological agriculture, and besides aggressive marketing methods there are customer oriented markets; besides capitalism there are several categories of socialism, and besides Bavarian-style pork there is Irish or Swedish style, etc., etc.

Across the world, the creativity of cultures has generated an incredible amount and diversity of thoughts, perceptions, ideas, religions, languages, social structures, mannerisms, work structures, family structures, educational systems, technologies, organisational structures, housing types, solutions to everyday problems; there is a gigantic reservoir of impulses, tools, ways of realisation – a trench full of solutions, an enormous pool of ideas. In any culture these are never finished processes, but the search for new paths and solutions based on each culture's principle grounds and ideas always continues. Where different cultures meet, where diversity is not encountered and fought as a threat, but where there is a desire to approach the foreign with an open mind, curiosity and interest, an impressive learning arena can be created – alongside an unimaginable supply of help, tools, tested solutions and surprising methods that will always trigger new developments and innovations.

When different cultures meet something entirely new and unexpected can happen; from the touching and interfusing elements a *new idea* can be formed. Cultural contact does not always result in conflict and war, but can mark the origin for new, creative and "better" solutions: where the paths of previously unrelated elements cross, new paths may be created, whose origins may no longer be visible but then have created their own new quality. Using this diversity productively can only be accomplished if it is maintained, i. e. if it is not used for conflict, proselytization, degradation and oppression and, in attempts to adapt and subject it, gradually reduced until it is entirely lost. Cultural diversity can only unfold its potential if the *identities of the elements* do not become arbitrary and undistinguishable, but if their differences are instead maintained and accepted as values and are consciously nourished. Therefore: Identity *and* difference!

Promoting the treasures of diversity and using its chances is a very current and urgent challenge to tackle in our globalized world. At the extent to which distances between cultures are declining and encounters and exchanges are becoming more frequent and intense, and the extent to which cultures are learning more and more about each other, there must be ways of meeting and co-operation found that are based neither on principles of hegemony and racism or on defence and degradation. Instead, an appreciation and awareness of the uniqueness of each culture must evolve. That is why conditions must be created that allow for cultures to *turn towards each other with curiosity* on the basis of acknowledgement and with an awareness of their own identity. This is the other attitude one can hold towards the foreign

and different: *an interest for something that is not like me, that is different from my expectations, feelings and beliefs.*

Of course, the foreign ideas must be tested for compatibility and must be adapted and adjusted. Sometimes it is impossible to assume an attribute, though it might trigger ideas and impulses for adequate developments within our own culture; sometimes it is simply stimulating to see how an African deals with similar problems in an entirely different way than we would. Either way, intercultural encounters can trigger impulses for development in all parties involved and always inspire us to re-think old and seemingly natural ideas.

This is the productive and constructive side of foreign encounters. The foreign provides the opportunity to develop the self – this applies to a cultural, as well as a personal and individual level.² However, it is not enough to simply tolerate differences. These differences must also be especially appreciated and must be acknowledged as legitimate values. In company integration policies, for example, the integration and homogenisation strategy has given way to a strategy of appreciation and use of diversity (“diversity-management”).

However, this productive side of diversity cannot work as long as the foreign is foremost perceived as a threat and therefore degraded. It is also at risk as long as proselytising, imperialist, colonialist or capitalist interests and strategies are not seeking to learn about the foreign and its characteristics, but are instead mostly interested in using it to enhance the self and to subsume it or to create something uniform out of the diversity of cultures in the “melting pot of nations”. Recognising cultural diversity as a strength principally excludes all “new forms of global mass culture” (Stuart Hall). There is tension between maintaining cultural diversity and current tendencies to homogenise everything, which are definitely based more around economical interests than a convergence of cultures.

“Experiencing and appreciating diversity has a positive impact on society” (Charter of Diversity). It is the European method.

3. Intercultural competence

Maintaining cultural diversity is therefore an important political goal in the globalised world and a top challenge to global resource management. This is the core topic of “Identity and Difference”. A precondition on a cultural level is “intercultural competence”, i. e. the ability to interact with people from other cultures in a productive and satisfying way for all parties involved. This includes the ability to grasp, understand and value the specific concepts of perception, thought, feeling and acting – the differences – when dealing with people belonging to foreign cultures. Ways must be found to stop people from perceiving differences as a threat to identity and from fighting said differences as a means of maintaining their own identities.

An important precondition to reach this goal is, without a doubt, changing and overcoming aggressive and defensive encounters between cultures and thus paving the way for more open meetings, based on mutual appreciation and curiosity. This means: it must be under-

² This also applies to an entirely psychological level: “If I shield myself from the foreign within me and from the things I do not like about myself, I will stagnate. People who do so anyway, create a fake form of self-assurance for themselves; but this way does not provide grounds for innovation.” B. Waldenfels, in: Brand 1 Nr. 4/09, S. 85

stood and supported that (cultural) identity and differences go hand in hand and can only be maintained together. Cultural diversity can only unfold its usefulness if it comprises a diversity of undamaged cultural identities that do not (only) question each other, but also strengthen, acknowledge and verify each other.

How can such encounters be created, what would they look like, and what must people be capable of doing and learning in order to realise them?

Foreignness is not an aberration

The goal is self-evident and easily formulated: we must find and realise ways of encounter by which we do not degrade and fight the foreign, but instead turn towards it with empathic understanding, acknowledgement, unconditional appreciation (acceptance) and curiosity, while being aware of our own identities – and actually meaning what we say (congruence). These classical “communication-boosting attitudes” (C. Rogers) definitely also set the preconditions for any kind of productive intercultural dialogues. But how can we avoid letting them float around like unachievable ideals and degenerate into ethical finger-pointing claims? How can these attitudes be learned properly and precisely? This question can only be answered if we understand the conflicts and challenges these attitudes pose at the moment of encounter between the “different”.

Previously, we have learnt that we always see and experience representatives of foreign cultures from our own culture’s standpoint. Any other way would be impossible. The problem here is that, from this standpoint, the foreign always appears as an *aberration from the self* and is, thus, accordingly sanctioned in order to adjust and make it normal. The first step must therefore be to find a way in which we are able to perceive the foreign – not as an aberrant way of behaviour, but instead acknowledge and accept it as a different form of behaviour.

This concept is based on the relatively familiar idea of separating descriptions and judgements, of being able to observe while keeping opinions quiet – until our judgement is no longer measured according to our own standards but the standards are instead provided by the foreign itself, allowing it to be judged by its own standards. This means not judging the foreign culture by our standards, but being able to grasp and comprehend it directly; we must be able to become aware of and describe the foreign culture’s characteristics, its distinctiveness, differences, background and relations, without comparing it.

We can only productively communicate with people of different cultures *if we avoid interpreting their way of thinking, experiencing, feeling, as well as their behaviour patterns, as an aberration from the “right way” – meaning our way – but instead factually acknowledge and interpret their ways as self-standing options and are able to find a sincere interest in them – without involving our own standards.*

Strengthening one’s own cultural identity

When the other, the foreign, is perceived as a threat, that puts the self in question, attitudes like tolerance, respect of the different, and pleasure in diversity are suicidal. The threat to the own fragile cultural identity experienced in diversity rather brings about a fight of diversity, as we saw, and entails that the other, the different, that the other creative cultural solution must be defeated and fought for the sake of self-assertion. Diversity and difference then aren’t anything to rejoice in, that one takes on enthusiastically, but something that one has to defend, shield, wall off, and fight.

Whether the foreign is threatening and questioning the self, doesn't only depend upon the aggressive, provocative, challenging appearance of that particular foreign(er), but also upon whether and to what one permits being challenged, feels threatened and responds to provocation (or rather interprets certain characteristics or behavioral patterns of the foreign(er) to be provocative). We have already seen that this is less the case, *the more distinct and stronger the consciousness about and development of one's own sociocultural is*, the more secure one is of it, the calmer one can encounter the foreign. This cultural identity can only emerge when one is positioned somewhere at home. It isn't rooted in the global, but in the local (S.Hall) as the place one can speak from, to position oneself, and that offers support and that is the source for stories from the past, that serve for the construction of the individual and collective identity.

Herein then lies a practical approach, another rule of intercultural competence: *One can only have an intercultural dialogue in a fruitful manner, when one has clearly understood one's proper cultural identity, and is aware of it and free of inferiority problems!* The recognition of the other and foreign is only possible upon the grounds of recognition of the self and the love of it. At the beginning of intercultural competence, thus, is the proper personal and cultural identity, its full development and affirmation.

This also concurs with our consideration, that the cultural encounter is fruitful only when the individual cultures actually participate in this movement presently, actively, genuinely and with self-confidence, with all their diversity and difference.

The base that must be created thus consists of a reflection upon one's own culture and the promotion of a conscious relation with it. One actually must recognize it and assume it as a given (not actually personally identify oneself with it), that is to develop an emotional relationship with it, its blossoms, its history, and its down sides- and with how it formed "my self", my personality and co-determines my ego. Sociocultural identity isn't synonymous with the culture I originate from, it may very well form a boundary with it. Yet: I must form a stable, self-confident relationship with my cultural background of any kind, in order to be able to meet the foreign open-mindedly, to not be in a defensive position from the beginning.

Interestingly, we have already encountered above that the best measure for this stage of learning is *the encounter with other* cultures: Herein, in the process of formation of a cultural self-confidence, lies one of the essentially possible effects of an encounter *besides* (culturally) experiencing it as a threat. In the other, I may find myself. If I experience what others do differently, how they react, feel, and act differently, I will realize how I (and my own kind) react, feel, and act and what differences and specialties there are here. This, of course, can only succeed when I yet think, feel, and act, that is when I have already somewhat adapted my own culture. In intercultural encounters, only what is already there, may be realized.

That is: the formation of intercultural competence begins with the absorption, or rather development of a proper, clear cultural identity, that one then must become aware of and, *in doing so*, is put in perspective and can finally be transcended- overcome.

The intercultural attitude

This emphasis of the proper cultural identity as the base of an entire cultural process of learning may seem paradox at first glance, for identity also means that by being different, a boundary to the other is stressed. This becomes less paradox, though, when one realizes, as shown, that cultural diversity is only fruitful when the differences and diversities are truly upheld. Yet, this only happens when they are actually experienced, that is, when those affiliated with different cultures truly represent and realize these.

On the other side, naturally, one has to avoid, that the emphasis and promotion of the proper cultural identity leads to walling-off and devaluating, and finally to fighting other cultures, or rather other cultural solutions, so that a phenomenon like “cultural chauvinism” emerges. This is a critical, neuralgic point that now goes beyond of traditional forms of “enculturation” and cultural literacy. A new “intercultural” attitude is in demand here: It must be possible to *recognize the variety of the different cultural forms and designs, but also to recognize their similarities (equivalence, equal rights)- but to still stand by one’s own cultural roots.*

This becomes possible when, in realizing one’s own cultural identity in the mirror of the other cultural identities, simultaneously their socially constructed character becomes evident and see-through, without causing a shock or loss of one’s own cultural identity, that is when it’s not experienced as a relativization or questioning, but as an immovable social fact, as a condition of the human-social existence, that questions social life as little as the circumstance of finality of life or the joy of living it. Every person should become aware and not grieve over the fact that cultural forms didn’t develop from natural processes and aren’t God-given, that they are neither eternally valid nor truth-apt, for the enormously creative power of the social, that can inspire and awe is owed to this.

For clarification, an analogy from the next chapter is inserted here in anticipation, that is a very real, accurate picture of what is meant here: if one considers i.e. the fine arts and their history, they will note many different eras, schools, styles, concepts, and works. No image is like another, no style is better or worse, more or less true, more or less accurate than the other, everything coexists in a great variety and diversity, can be observed, animates the proper understanding of art or artistic work and inspires amazement about the abundance of artistic solutions and effects- and yet, no artist or viewer ever has the idea to dislike impressionism because there is expressionism, or to dislike the works of Marc because Kandinsky painted in a different way, or even to consider this a reason to stop painting, because everything is relative, anyways. Every style, every work can be enjoyed, appreciated, loved for its own sake, and can only be understood in its peculiarities, and yet enriches everyone’s lives.

To understand this, means to be able to adapt a basic “intercultural attitude“ that leads to the ability to have “intercultural encounters”. The ability consists in meeting *the variety of cultural solutions free of prejudices, even though none is absolute or final, but always a (limited)work by humans, that is “social construction”*. I may well ask myself, which cultural solutions I personally prefer, analogous to whether I prefer looking at impressionist or expressionist paintings. Yet, this is a completely irrelevant, absurd, very subjective fact with regard to cultural diversity, that may be important for the person making the judgement, but not for the value of diversity. A very different attitude toward this is more appropriate: *to take all these “generations“ serious, take interest in them, to try to understand them, to comprehend the immanent solutions, to learn from them to accept and take along stimuli and impulses.* In principle, this can only succeed in a climate of acceptance and mutual trust, supported by respect and appreciation of the foreign.

When meeting other foreign cultures, one without any doubt meets cultural solutions, that oppose one’s own values and principles and that evoke a strong aversion (i.e. female circumcision in Africa). The intercultural attitude now doesn’t demand to approve of such phenomena, or to act on the assumption that they ought to be accepted since they are part of a foreign culture. Yet, even such cases are about encountering them with unprejudiced interest and to understand what is expressed here, culturally. Furthermore, “intercultural attitude“ doesn’t mean having to tolerate and accept everything that foreign cultures offer, but it may well include to demonstrate the contradictoriness of those customs and the own criteria- by all means with the objective of initiating a process of rethinking, or rather altered actions. Yet,

this will succeed, when it is attempted upon the grounds of appreciation and acceptancy (that is not to be equalized with the identification with the foreign!).

Insight into the basic, general “compoundedness” of social and cultural creations takes the claim to absoluteness from them, yet neither has to weaken the identity proper nor lead to skepticism, relativism, or disappointment. On the contrary, this constructivist existentialism is a kind of humanism (Sartre), for it leads to a respect of the creative power of the human being, to compassion for their hardships and their failures, to admiration of their bravery, their spirit, and their indefatigability.

To waive any claim to absoluteness, not only promotes tolerance and puts one’s own fantasies of supremacy and omnipotence into perspective, but also accounts for and enables a new attitude toward the foreign, that is constitutive for the intercultural dialogue: what is meant is the *fraternal interest* in the other, or the others and their cultural answers; only when I’m not convinced of being right and doing the only right thing anymore, it makes sense to turn to the considerations and approaches of the others and take interest in them. One can get into the colorfulness and variety of cultural manifestations as such- even when one doesn’t agree (and doesn’t have to) with everything, that is part of this variety. It is just interesting and informative to see how the questions and problems that I know, as well, were taken up and handled, what solutions they found, what prerequisites they started from and which ideas are manifested therein. It may then be in the sense that one recognizes which cultural solutions one does *not* want to accept for sure, which one is a step back in their opinion or is incompatible with the proper cultural concept.

This *curious* interest in the other, the foreign, openness towards the surprises that it has to offer, that is the attitude for intercultural encounters. This interest basically is *self-less and unprejudiced* for it doesn’t originate from one’s own objectives and intentions, but just from the desire, to understand the other, the foreign, to truly find out what it is like, where its strengths, weaknesses and limitations are. It quasi is about “interest without interest” in the foreign, that doesn’t originate from distinct objectives and intentions, not from compulsions of exploitations and desire of power, but from the old, original, scientific curiosity to know what keeps the world together.

Being able to meet the foreign

This curiosity, this interest are directed toward the foreign as the unknown, the new, the not yet identified, that one can meet with a great open-mindedness, that one can’t figure out before, for whose understanding conception that were brought along, and preconceptions are rather harmful. To engage with the new requires that one has a grasp of the new, that one can perceive it at all. This, in turn, doesn’t succeed, when one approaches the matter with certain expectations- for one can’t have those when meeting the new- or when cognition is understood as completing a checklist. The mode of knowing that is appropriate for the foreign, can only be *openness*, the willingness to be *surprised* anytime and to have a look at what one may have seen one-hundred times yet, as if it were for the first time. Surprises aren’t always pleasant, by no means. They often interrupt the circles of the familiar, the secure, the professional, and also make for the fact that the entire process can’t be planned, but resembles a journey to the unknown. But one exactly has to tolerate that: In meeting the foreign, one is never on completely safe grounds, and even where one might assume to know the matter quite well already and to handle it quite well, one is suddenly disabused and has to experience, how everything that one thought to know collapses and dissolves. The dialogue with the foreign thus also knows the crisis, desperation, helplessness.

Insofar, the intrigued meeting with the foreign, the dialogical conflict, retains a calming, tense, adventurous element and all attempts to approach it have an experimental character. This could be reduced, if the foreign were defined, interpreted, set more firmly, if it were allowed more categories. Yet, it wouldn't be the foreign then, but adapted to me and the horizon of my view of the world. Ethnologists had to painfully learn to consciously illuminate the schemes and implicitnesses shaped by western culture, in order to strip them off in meeting foreign cultures. What may seem like a "village" in Indonesia to the western eye, maybe has little resemblance with the characteristics of a village in Germany- that is why using the term "village" for what one sees may set one on an entirely wrong track. This example shows: the dialogue with the foreign can only be held in an appropriate manner, when one can view the categories of one's own view of the world, one's own- necessarily culturally shaped- consciousness, can *transcend* and virtually have a look at them "from outside".³ Part of being interested in the foreign, is to not have a look on it through one's own glasses and to judge it with one's own categories, to quasi reduce it to the standard measure proper, but to completely *open up to the foreign and its structures*. Analytic-deductive modes of knowing don't help here, one needs a highly developed phenomenology. In the center is attention, open alertness (vigilance) for something one doesn't even know, but that must be able to attract someone's attention. It is about a meditative attitude of opening towards something that one can't grasp, but that must be able to reach someone. In doing so, one can learn a lot from ethnologists, among others.

The dialogue with the foreign will always remain an adventure that may always fail, too. To meet the foreign, I must be ready to question myself and my previous knowledge and to always reconstruct my own impartiality. Everything could be completely different, than one believes- that is an important aspect of the "ethnological" attitude and a condition for the intercultural dialogue. To engage with the foreign always means to take a risk, that one might end up somewhere completely different than desired- or maybe even nowhere. This open process, whose result shows in the course of the process, demands to engage with it wholeheartedly and to permit being carried to a destination one doesn't know. "The foreign is more than I can understand. It is the impulse for understanding" (B. Waldenfels).

Understanding the identity of the self beyond the cultural identity

This path of intercultural dialog yet demands an additional step, an essential prerequisite on the part of those who want to follow it. One can only handle the fact of the "constructedness" of socio-cultural worlds productively, when one takes a stand in them, that is when one has a cultural identity themselves- but at the same time is able to take a greater position from where can see through the constructedness and relativity of the own cultural identity. Thus, one needs a point of view beyond or outside of the cultural constructions and interpretations, from where these may be recognized as such, overlooked, and appreciated. Even to see through and recognize one's own culture as a (necessary) "construction", without being thrown into chaos, presumes the awareness of an individual identity behind or beyond of the social. Above, we named this instance "*I-identity*", that is as a kind of self-confidence that reflects itself, thus can dissociate itself, without losing itself.

People who engage in the intercultural dialogue, who want to meet and appreciate the foreign, need this ability, to somewhat disengage with their own cultural identity, without ever

³ The basic problem of any translation, that always assumes that there quasi is a "subtext", a comprehensive grid, that enables transformation from language into the other, is rooted here.

giving it up, and to expose themselves to the foreign, without feeling challenged themselves. People with a weak self, who depend upon the supporting corset of their sociocultural identity, can only expose themselves to the foreign with great difficulties, because they experience it as a threat to their identity, as an attack on their self and thus fight it (i.e. by resorting to force): To them, the foreign is hostile, irritating, disturbing. Not until they experience, that they “are” not their part, their cultural identity, their place in their culture, but that they are “someone” regardless of that, that their actual personality their “self” starts where all these social and cultural determinations end- not until then, they can expose themselves to the foreign, the cultural variety without reservations.

The idea of the identity of the self assumes that beyond the cultural and social influence there is an independent, universal instance of the individual person. This thought model of the personal “self” isn’t easy to grasp, for it implies the radical individualization of the human (each single human being is an individual, distinctive, unique personality) up to the point where they become equal in this individualization or rather as individuals. In the model of the self, identity and difference coincide with another: all human beings are equal in their maximum sophistication (as individuals). That is, they are characterized by having a completely individual “self” in the same manner. In that sense they are equal (identical) as human beings, and completely different at the same time.

As a matter of that fact, it may well be legitimate, to pursue what all humans have in common, independent from culture, a transcultural anthropology, so to speak, a general anthropology of “transcultural” significance, quasi to formulate a “natural history of the self”, where the ability basically particular to the selves to create very differentiating common cultural works, is described (like in the sense of the constructivist approach described in the beginning). – For the rest, it becomes evident in turn here, that this thought of a transcultural self that has come to terms with itself, that any person owns in a distinct shape (with proper, individual “rights), is rooted in the Christian west, and is by no means conceptualized in all cultures. If anything, this thought may be one of the central feats that one culture group can introduce to the concert of world cultures.

This, of course, doesn’t mean that only that person engage in an intercultural dialogue with the foreign, who “abandoned” their culture. If that were possible at all, it would be an impoverishment and a diffusion of the cultural identity. The self leaves the cultural-social identity completely untouched, states, approves it- but in order to just do this, it must release it, put itself above or beyond it; it can only recognize this cultural identity reflexively- and regard and appreciate all other cultural identities “selflessly”, that is independent from its own cultural imprint and perspective. Only persons with a strong self succeed in the just demanded “ethnological” point of view, those who know about the formative power of their mental models, who don’t even imagine to be able to disengage in them- but who yet are able to question the subjective limitations of these mental models, being aware of such imprints, and to cross them and to meet the other, the foreign beyond them. If I know that my perspective is shaped by my culture, but that I’m not identical with my cultural imprint, then I can meet the foreign more carefully, gently, interrogatively (instead of judgmentally), distancing myself from me and my expectations, reflecting myself, and hope to do it justice.

People with a strong self can tolerate much foreignness, those with a weak self dread the foreign (B. Waldenfels)

4. Identity, difference, and arts

In order to prepare the individual for the encounter with the foreign in a globalized world, where diversity and the variety of cultures not only tolerate and approve of another, but also to be able to recognize and seize the chance therein, we described a basic path of learning in the last chapter:

- It starts with the exercise to not perceive and judge the foreign as a deviation from the self, but as something different, independent that bears its own criteria for judgment.
- Next, *strengthening the cultural identity proper* and overcoming potential problems of inferiority are necessary; part of this is becoming aware of the cultural identity proper while encountering the foreign, to cross it, to distance oneself from it;
- Additionally, there is the promotion of an “*intercultural attitude*” for the recognition of foreign cultures, where their diversity and „constructedness“ becomes evident and is considered a strength;
- Furthermore, the competencies and procedures must be developed, that are necessary for the practice of the “*curious interest in the foreign*” and a dialogue with it;
- Concludingly, the cultural identity ought to be understood and crossed from the perspective of the individual authority of the identity of the self.

What can art, what can *artistic activities* contribute to this development of *intercultural competence*?

Art and the perception of the other

In the *consideration of art* one can already practice thoroughly how irrelevant one’s own liking is (“I like it”, “I don’t like it”) and how it is about perceiving self-forgetfully in that sense, what there is. In doing so, one can discover how in this phenomenological exercise, after a period of looking and retention of the own judgment, the piece of art starts to “speak” itself, how one discovers details, that one missed before and how one penetrates into this work deeper and deeper.

One can discover the same, when one views the works of colleagues in an art class and consciously doesn’t start with the judgment, but with collecting impressions of what there is, that is what can be perceived there. And finally this unprejudiced perception is part of all proper activity efforts: when one imagines exactly what to paint, draw, make, play, and the actual artistic work shall only be the “implementation” of these imaginations, then, usually, there is no artistic result. An artistic process demands, to get involved in what there is in an unprejudiced manner, without making one’s own imaginations the guidelines of one’s actions, to wait, which possibilities the work begun has, and to realize what’s possible.

Art and cultural identity

The cultural identity of a people, of a group is, among others, expressed in its art forms and pieces, in the works of its masters, and especially in what one calls “folk art”, above all in folk songs, folk music, in the dances and games of a particular people, and in the instruments and traditional clothes. These folk cultural elements are distinctive and typical for a culture, a

region, a linguistic area. To incorporate them means to get in touch with that culture, to come closer to it, to touch its identity.

Preoccupation with the masterpieces will most likely remain receptive- regarding in general. In doing so, one may ask which artistic problems the master faced and which solutions he found for them. This, then rather involves a general process of “creating culture” than with a special cultural identity. One can approach this topic by examining how this artist drew from traditions and forms of the shared culture group, to what extent he represents this culture group, and which special stylistic devices, etc. were at his disposal by being part of this culture group.

Reverting to “folk art”, one can also chose active forms within the scope of general processes of education- even such that deal with artistic competence- that is to work artistically with the participants. In doing so, generally one can draw from wide-ranging traditions and rich experiences, that not only testifies the richness of this culture, but also grants some deep insights into its very inside, its atmosphere and images, its themes and problems, and over and over again into its specific handling of general-human questions. A highly interesting question may be for instance, how this- or a foreign- culture absorbs, interprets and processes universal experiences- love, farewell, birth, and death, seasons, etc. which aspects of a theme are emphasized and how they are “dissolved”. In doing so, one can always ask himself, whether and how this means of treating one’s own examination of these topics helps. This then is a part intercultural dialogue itself, examination of the foreign as a source of new insights and stimuli.

In this manner, preoccupation with folk art may help to clarify and deepen one’s own cultural identity. Yet, it also can- when it is about the art of foreign peoples- grant an immediate access to the cultural identity of other peoples, or culture groups- in order to clarify much of the cultural identity proper in reference. In doing so, the specialties and peculiarities of comparative experience and observation can become evident.

So, this is about art as a cultural inheritance, as an expression of culture, and here the level of the works is important, that is what is existent as an artistic product. The boundary to an art-historical reflection is blurred.

The promotion of an intercultural attitude trough art

„Intercultural attitude“ signifies a attitude, in which the variety of cultural achievements is appreciated/ understood as a value and as a means of expression of an enormous creative productivity.

In the last chapter, the plethora and wealth of the (fine) arts were already used as an image/ a symbol for the nature of cultural variety par excellence. In many places, at different times using the means of different stylistic periods, pieces of art are created that aren’t subject to a system or higher direction, but are produced by their individual authors, created as answers to individually specific situations and questions. In doing so, no artist neither minds that there already are other pieces of art, nor that there have been and will be other but theirs. They just create in a different manner every time. They always try anew. In doing so, they ignore the laws that others before or besides them meant to make. In fact, they search for and devise their own laws, and break them again. It is part of artistic creation to always try new means again, to invent them, not to proceed according to the rules, but to always create new rules, that then again are anteceded by the next ones.

Art history is as chaotic and productive, as multifaceted and colorful, as dynamic and heteronymous as cultural development itself, and just like it, produces one thing above all: variety, again and again a new diversity of styles, that it never tires producing again, surprisingly, in an endless progression, in an endless variety.

Therein lies its only secret that the new styles distinguish themselves from all previous, that they push limits, dare the unknown, unseen and what has never been heard of before, express the new and shocking, teach to perceive in a new way and make new levels of consciousness available. And even though this entire development occurs chaotically and in an inordinate manner, throngs of art historians labor to find its legalities and to reconstruct an evolution- not without success.

Here, there are certain parallels to natural history, whose principle obviously is neither causal, functionalistic, nor teleological, but just an artistic one: the lavish variety of means and shapes in nature doesn't follow any use or coerciveness, but emerges from the principle of creative creation and fulfills its purpose by itself.

In processes of intercultural education, art (as art history or examination of art) can serve as an introduction to this principle of creation, and to the sense and efficacy of the variety of cultural productions and constructions. In doing so, one can experience some of that power and the living conditions of the constructive, and to absorb this image, so that it may become an attitude and help avoiding wrong questions on spirit and purpose, as well as on principles of order and rules relating to cultural variety. Thus, one can learn, what "social constructions" are in the context of cultural development, their approach, creation and replacement. Maybe one can reach the inner course of "social construction of reality" in this manner.

This might happen even more impressive, when one not only leaves of with examination of art, but introduces participants themselves to active artistic processes, to let them paint, play music, sculpt, dance or act. Here we first have to respond to two basic principles of practical art that clarify the relationship of identity and difference very essentially:

The world of colors as well as the world of notes, *are* real images of the relation of (cultural) variety and identity, they can teach essentials of this relation:

- The colors: Each color itself has a special expression, intrinsic value, identity. There is an endless plentitude of different colors⁴ (that can be classified, of course), that ultimately resulted from the contact, mixture, and encounter of the three elementary colors. This is characteristic: Where colors touch and penetrate, new colors with a new quality originate. This touch and penetration prerequisites, that the characteristic properties remain untouched- where everything converges randomly, no new identity forms, but dirty brown. And: Each color makes for another value, another sound in the vicinity of another color, they mutually carry, strengthen or weaken another. Above all: Only many colors together, where each of them has its place and neighborhood, form a picture, a painting, where none of the chosen colors shall be missing. Every color is important, none can be done without.
- The world of notes, or music is likewise: Every tone has its character, every instrument "its" sound. A great plentitude results from relatively few key tones. Where notes sound together, a new world of harmony and sounds forms: an incredible variety that is based on clear identities. When this variety of sounds is bundled, put in order, linked to form mo-

⁴ Estimates know 25.000 different colors

tives, themes, and melodies, and brought in a rhythmic measure, a symphony arises from the individual sounds.

Thus, when one paints or plays music, *one acts interculturally*, lets the variety of identities sound together and can experience how something comprehensive, a complete world arises, something that couldn't exist without the single elements, and that is more than the sum of these elements at the same time. Truth of a "higher order"- paintings, symphonies- arise when these elements keep their identity, and enable something new of a new quality when sounding together.

Thus, painting, playing music, acting, or dancing basically is a practice of the intercultural attitude (even when one only plays pieces from their own culture- just because this is comprised in playing music). This effect can be increased significantly, when one opens up to the foreign, i.e a folk song from a different culture group while dancing or playing music, etc. and tries to empathize with it, or by creating something new from elements of different cultures. This is important in doing so: It is not only about views and theoretical thoughts, but about the principles of the process of cultural creation as well, as the principles of the process of cultural creation, like the essential relation of identity and difference necessary therefore, are *executed in action, and in doing so, not only comprehended cognitively, but above all: experienced!* It is about this experience, when the relation of identity and difference shall solely not be known, but actually become an attitude.

Adhering to the theory of learning through actions, competences form when the learners are put into a situation, where exactly those competences are demanded from them and they cultivate or develop these abilities, by using them already. In doing so, protected, exemplary situations are necessary where the desired demands can be reflected in appropriate tasks, and the learners who act-outside or in the run-up to reality- can hence develop the desired competencies. *Artistic-practical situations offer exactly such potential for practicing the development of an intercultural attitude with the "model" of the artistic task.*

In addition: In the artistic process, the practicing one carries out the creative action, that is the base of their painting, piece of music or acting, as well as the base of the social "construction" of cultures. The learners become the creators of their cultural item themselves and get in touch with those creative forces behind cultural education. There also are artistic forms of working in a group, where the process of *social* construction, thus the shared generation of a creation with its special legalities, limits, and problems can be experienced and learnt by them.

In this manner, participants can get in touch with process of creating culture, experience their strength and cliffs and, by means of their own experiences, understand the proceedings and directions of matters. It becomes evident that "social construction" actually means "social creation" and that creating forces are at work everywhere in the cultural process. Thus, it may become easier to comprehend, why Beuys spoke of society as a "social sculpture" and that this wasn't just an effect-full analogy, but a realistic description of social forces and principles of proceedings that are incorporated here. Cultures, cultural contributions are results of complex social processes of creation; they are borne by humans in a creative process, whose specialties, proceedings, and conditions may be experienced in the artistic process: the creative isn't separable, but adheres to the same laws and principles where- ever it appears.

This is the lesson that can be learnt from the artistic practice in connection with intercultural learning.

Additionally, there is another possibility of the development of educational processes through artistic activities: One can develop and arrange *exercises with an artistic assignment* with whom intercultural connections and legalities can *manifest* themselves. Here, artistic exercises help understanding the general conditions and requirements of intercultural dialogue, better understanding meeting the foreigner better cognitively, becoming aware of what happens then. Three steps are necessary for the development of such artistic exercises for processes of education:

- In the first step, the structure of the (intercultural) real situation, that causes the problem, must be grasped and the emotional mood expressed in a picture, if possible (i.e. insecurity= fear of the unknown= like walking on thin ice);
- The second step is about finding a metaphor for the core of the problem in the individual artistic medium (painting, dance, acting, music), that either depicts the problem situation, so a solution can be found fast experimentally, or already represents the solution- that is a new behavioral pattern.
- In the third step, evaluation, the solutions must be made aware (reflected) and trans- fused back to the real problem (and actually tried there).

For artists working in intercultural education, it is about re-accessing the metaphoric content of the elements of the individual artistic discipline, to always open up new accesses to the methods in them that create awareness. As a matter of that fact, they must always get to know their tools of trade better with regard to the infinite number of “metaphoric” possibilities on one hand- and on the other hand must realize where these implicit metaphors of the artistic elements are contained hidden. They must then learn from these experiences and insights, to develop artistic exercises and sequences that can be realized, that solve the initial problem, so it can be experienced, learnt, and seen anew. At the same time, these exercises offer the opportunity, to handle the intercultural topic in the artistic medium that is to try something new in it, that may be re-translated to the real situation.

In this core function of artists employed in the educational processes with artistic exercises- translating a complex vital matter or issue into their artistic medium, or in a metaphor appropriate for this medium, that is a situation that is dealt with artistically- it is indeed about a centrally *artistic* process, something like the “core business” of artists, that is always about finding a basic metaphor (it may also be a distinct “metaphorical” method of work or basic topic) that is the initial situation from where all further processes can develop.

Art develops the interest in the foreign and teaches competences and dealings for meeting it.

The artistic process itself is an active meeting with the foreign, the unknown, that the artist gets involved with, that he gets exposed to, struggle with, and that bears new surprising, unexpected results. The steps of this artistic process serve as an example for the steps of the inner process of an intercultural encounter that contain all requirements that were formulated above to be able to meet the foreign and deal with it productively:

Professional artists describe their proceedings for working artistically, as follows:

1. When they start, they don't know what the outcome will be like. Some may assign a task to themselves or they act on a certain question, *but they have no imagination of the objective*. In case they do have such an imagination it loses its significance over the

course of the process. Some artists even fight their premature imaginations, and try to consciously blind out everything that they know about the topic or material, yet. They try to meet their counterpart, their artistic matter openly and in an unprejudiced manner and to devote themselves to the matter unselfconsciously. They don't have a concrete objective or intention they strive for. The process they engage in, is like a journey to an unknown land. In the beginning is the anticipation that one wants to go somewhere, one has an imagination what it is supposed to look like there. Yet, one doesn't know whether this "land" exists or whether one will be able to make it there.

2. Instead they "play" to meet their counterpart, its possibilities and limitations dialogic-exploratively. In doing so, "playing" means to "do trials with the material without any intentions", to experiment, to sometimes intervene very consciously, to see how the material reacts, what the results look and feel like. In this manner, one can get to know the foreign, as world of new shapes and means of expressions is formed. Here, something like artistic freedom is experienced, that is a creative freedom. While playing, the artistically engaged frees himself from the seriousness and bondage of reality and may transcend it. In the artistic act, a world can be created "on" a world- that is the world of art. The things, gestures, sounds, and movements are playfully given new meanings, they are converted imaginatively without any strict purpose, one tries what's in them.
3. In doing so, artistic discoveries can be made that fascinate that may be new, that the artist may want to look into, that capture him. Sometimes he may just see that "from the corner of the eye" and have to struggle to hold, arrest it, to quasi free and elaborate it. Often, the freedom of playing is over then, the artist proceeds more conscious, purposeful, he has found a thread that he follows. Here, rational and intuitive moments constantly intertwine. With a bit of luck- and the corresponding abilities of perception- a yet unknown perspective of the matter, the material discloses therein and they find a new layer, a new background, unveil a new reality that one may see in the piece created.
4. This may be full of relish, but it can also be wearing, irritating, and unsettling. The insecurities of the beginning must be tolerated. It isn't sure at all, whether a continuative discovery may succeed, that one may find something at all that continues, when one might think to have found it, it is lost again easily. The artistic procedure is full of unclarities, uncertainties, and ambivalences, full of meanders and blind alleys, and crisis is a fundamental experience of each artist. He can't avoid it, he can't master it cleverly, but only expose himself to it and "actively wait" until a solution appears. Some indeed speak of a "mystic moment of the conception of an idea", that can't be forced into existence, that can't be "ordered", but that one has to become aware of when it shows itself. Exactly therein is a power: In the often tried certainty that a solution may appear through the matter itself, this matter is questioned over and over again and its answers can be deciphered.
5. Thus, artistic actions basically are an active, practical dialogue with a "foreign" counterpart – throughout which something one is usually not aware of can be perceived and new qualities that usually remain concealed are discovered in things. Within this process, problems are solved and results are obtained by a most specific way of proceeding, which might be called "active questioning" of things in impartiality. Therefore, this approach also always constitutes a personal manifestation of activeness, transformation of the encountered and anticipation of what is to come.

Thus, we call an action "artistic" if

- fixed results to be achieved are given, and neither are any immanent ideas or purposes required;
- materials to play and experiment with unbiased, and try out something new, possibly even surprising with, are deployed and respective space is allowed for;
- new findings are possible, and there is freedom to seize and shape them;
- it guides through uncertainties and crises which need to be overcome by perceptions and impulses of the matter itself; and if
- new, yet unknown solutions which allow for new insight and findings on the respective matter may result out of it.

This artistic process itself may be considered paradigm for successful intercultural dialogue. What drives the artist is curiosity, interest in the unknown, the foreign. This will only be revealed to him if he encounters it with great openness and impartiality. In this course, he is always looking for something new, still unknown; he is always willing to get surprised just anytime. Part of this is to also contemplate well-known phenomena as if they were viewed for the very first time. An artist is an adventure-seeker who gets involved with an open end process, a journey into the unknown, the unpredictable - which he allows to guide him towards what possibly results from it, what can be revealed by encountering the respective material. To do so, he must also open himself up, put his expectations and prejudices aside, and get involved with the counterpart in a possibly unbiased way. The dialogue with the material – which turns into this counterpart and bit by bit generates the artwork – is in the focus of all this. However, this is not always an even and trouble-free process; the way also frequently leads into blind alleys and results in crises. The artistic process also allows for learning to stand the disturbing, the exciting, the incomprehensible and waiting for solutions to come.

Being able to act artistically means to practically contact one's own creative potential, which is less about sudden inspirations and expressive explosions but far more about abilities and conducts such as: setting oneself into an unintentional and unbiased state, being able to play, having a palate for the exceptional, the special, the future, being able to realize trends, getting involved with the matter's internal dynamics and so on.

This means, on one hand the artistic process is a metaphor for intercultural dialogue, which could be analyzed and studied as artistic process. However, at the same time it is also material, concrete practice field for the respective dialogue, on which all conducts, skills and reactions required for plain intercultural dialogue can be trained.

Therefore, getting involved with artistic processes and, in the course of this, training exactly these central "intercultural competencies" repeatedly within the frame of artistic challenges and projects, can be a most profound preparation for encountering the foreign. However, artistic activities can only fully unfold the respective potential in the scope of adult education, if they are appropriately reflected and their impulses and stimuli are recognized as metaphors for the intercultural context.

The respective correlation is actually present as soon as people from different cultures or subcultures manage to mutually work on artistic tasks and projects. Among other reasons, artistic activities are particularly suitable for this purpose, as they allow for encounters beyond language barriers: artistic expression (with the exception of dramatic arts) does not depend on the use of language. It may be strongly influenced by a particular culture; however, it can still be understood across cultures and allows for transcultural communication. At the

same time, the dialogue directly confers its requirements towards the active artist upon the foreign partner from another culture: thereby, artistic cooperation with a member of a foreign culture turns into a case of practical use of intercultural competence, which is simultaneously developed in this event. It is evident that this correlation is most obvious in performing arts – which are basically social arts – such as drama, dancing and music. Nevertheless, in this case it is probably not enough to simply make music or dance with each other. Instead, mutual artistic work probably needs to be deliberately perceived under the aspect of intercultural encounter, contact with the foreign, and must be elaborated (assessed, reflected) appropriately.

Arts and Self-Identity

As we have learnt, intercultural dialogue basically requires three things from those, who participate in it: they need to be aware and certain of their own cultural identity; they must spare unbiased curiosity and interest in the foreign, the counterpart; and they must be able to stand the relativity of anything cultural, by not relating to their own culture but to themselves as a generally trans-cultural human being, a “self” – thus finding their own position beyond any cultural imprint and becoming self-conscious and autonomous towards it. Can this significant step in consciousness and development also be supported by artistic activities in educational processes?

First of all, the capacity of artistic acting, as described in the previous section, itself contains material components of self-like, self-strong conduct. This can be illustrated by three aspects:

Above all, being able to act artistically means the ability to overcome open processes. Open processes are un-plannable, uncertain, and unpredictable processes which cannot be figured out in advance. Open processes are always uncertain, risky processes, which cannot be fully controlled, whose end and result are not known and whose success is not guaranteed. This means, people who are able to act artistically, are able to act in uncertainty. Artistic acting is the prototype of acting in uncertainty and is some kind of pattern for dealing with uncertainty. Both of it requires the doer to not rely upon external orientation but on himself – a precondition for being able to get involved with non-ethnocentric encountering the foreign. As becomes obvious, being able to act artistically is actually an essential basic skill to manage modern life, its uncertainties and contingencies. The artistic process allows for learning the skills of acting in uncertainty.

However, being able to artistically act also means the ability to break away from strict terms of reference, to not adhere to imperatives, rules and norms, to not wait for what others say but to discover one’s own potential and use it to push forward to the unknown, to feel – as Picasso says – “secure within the insecure”. Being able to act artistically means to feel and confirm one’s own independence; being able to act independently means to find one’s way in the world, to experience oneself as a “self” which is able to set “self-initiating” processes in motion and which knows this skill’s conditions as well as its limitations and knows how to separate them from boast and fantasies of omnipotence. The artistic process allows for learning the skills of unique, creative acting.

Finally, being able to act artistically means to be able to create the world, to develop, execute, “produce” something and – as far as many forms of arts are concerned – to definitely do so in cooperation with others. The artistic process resembles to the process of “social reality construction”, the process of cultural development and advancement. Creating something is significantly different from controlling something, forming something, enforcing one’s

will upon a certain state, forcing things or changing the world by violence. Design is always an artistic process as described herein. This does not only apply to nature but also to any kind of social and cultural designs – from interpersonal relationships to the creation of social institutions and circumstances. The artistic process allows for everyone to learn being an artist and help shaping “social sculptures” (Beuys). Thus, the artistic process allows for learning the skills of creation, in particular of social creation as (collective) self-accomplishment.

Thus, being artistically active per se challenges and encourages the self-entity which is necessary for a successful dialogue with the foreign. However, this is still comparatively general. Artistic challenges can also tangibly encourage single people’s self-awareness and development of self-identity. A particularly effective tool is artistic engagement with oneself; artistic processing of personal, biographical experiences. These may relate to one’s own person (like, for instance, in form of an autobiography or a self portrait). However, it can also be narrowed down to single, neuralgic experiences in one’s own life and their transformation into a piece of art. “Identity is a tale; it is the story of ourselves that we tell ourselves to find out who we are” (Stuart Hall).

It is always about thematizing one’s different forms of appearance – which can only be accomplished by creating a certain conscious-distance to oneself and thereby discovering a nexus within the variety of one’s own life or by wondering, what all of this has to do with me. In this context, artistic processing of difficult, traumatic experiences, which are split off from awareness and self-image and could be integrated by artistic work, seems particularly essential. It might also support self-awareness to compare one’s own artistic approaches to certain challenges to those of others and, thereby, get directly confronted with oneself – the visual difference, what have I done – who am I?

Suchlike autobiography-oriented artistic works are no documentation of past events but consolidations, also super elevations, intensifications of these events, which may come to light through hidden patterns and coherencies. This means, these artistic proceedings of one’s own biography serve as a medium to self-awareness, which in a way leads to the “truer” story beyond the actual one and gets out those issues that immediately clarify something essential about myself. Life itself can be considered “a piece of art” – and by doing so, one is almost naturally led to wondering about the artist who this piece of art is to be attributed to, who has lived the respective life. For the purpose of an artistic elaboration of one’s own biography, it does not make much sense to simply undergo these experiences again, to want to re-live them. As they need to be artistically *designed*, they dissociate from “me” and “I” gain exactly the position beyond the circumstances which is necessary to review, arrange and set them in relation to others – the observer’s position of self-identity. Without a doubt, this, too, can be improved by purposefully arranged artistic exercises as to realization.

Additionally: artistic creation is not simply a stroke or a character or a colour or a tune. Instead it bears something called *expression*. “Expression” stands for an emotional value, a sentiment related to the creation; something which is not only the flat matter (stroke etc.) but adheres to it as an emotional value, exceeds it, and means something. This aspect of artistic expression is what constitutes the actual difference between an artistic and a technical drawing. It guarantees artistic activities - also within the scope of adult education - are really something artistic, something related to arts, and not just any training program.

Realizing expression, possibly even being personally able to bestow creations with it, requires a certain kind of sensibility, the ability to purposefully apprehend the *emotional qualities* in things, or rather: to *sense* them. It is about the ability of perceiving and realizing moods and atmospheres, being able to receive the concealed messages in things, becoming

sensible to what “resonates”, what “gets through emotionally”. It is about being open to emotional flows and issues.

In particular people with a scientific background have severe difficulties with this, as “expression” can hardly or even not at all be described by common scientific means – just like anything related to emotion or sentiment. Whatsoever the objectivity of expression and its respective perception are assessed to be – it is beyond certainly debate that this level does exist, even it cannot be counted, weighed or measured but simply *experienced*. At this point, the artistic amateur realizes – possibly after initial resistance – that he lacks a certain point of view. He realizes things, items, and elements and is also able to distinguish them, but in the first place he lacks the sense required for perceiving their expression. To artists, this level of emotional experience is simply always present. Many of their creations orient on exactly this. For the artist, it frequently even bears more reality than the matter itself. And this expression may also constitute the observer’s first approach to an artistic work, when he wonders: what, actually, am I experiencing when I look at this work, what kind of emotions does it provoke in me?

Art always has to do with emotions and experience and also significantly acts through feeling and experience. However, this can only be realized if the participants have developed respective “organs” to even perceive this level with. Artistic activities may help to form such “organs” – the “*sense*” for expression, for the emotional itself and in things. Because something turns into “arts” by expressing something that exceeds bare objectivity and pushes forward into this sphere of experience and feeling. To be able to participate in it, one must develop a “feeling” cognitive ability.

This particular cognitive ability is most supportive in encountering the foreign, as it is this sensibility - this feeling - itself that makes the foreign culture’s essential dimensions accessible. In this respect, this aspect supplements the last section’s statements. However, this ability to perceive “expression” is also what it takes to gain access to oneself, to one’s own ego and to become aware of one’s own identity, as this self-identity cannot be measured or illustrated. It is a conscious and emotional fact, which can rather be experienced by the circumstances of one’s own life in comparison to those of others and by what remains beyond conflicting and inconsistent role model expectations, than it can be realized. These days, “*ambiguity tolerance*” – the ability of realizing ambiguities, bearing them and still being able to act – is considered a constituent criterion for self-identity (and essential precondition for intercultural competence). The respective ambiguity tolerance can be trained in artistic exercises, as it is actually challenged by the issues of expression.