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The Technologies of Listening

Our cultural differences are a given in the Europe we live today. Historic differences weigh on the present time. Turning these differences into assets and a generous welcome to an unknown future is a challenge. It means making visible today's wrinkly Europe with its hidden, juxtaposed folds, shielding us from the insight that this is - in fact - our common strength.

I travel Europe. After landing in Warsaw airport, I take a taxi. The driver is silent at first, then the conversation picks up. He wants to talk about the Eurovision Song Contest, having just seen it for the first time. He says that it was fantastic to hear music from all European countries, music he didn't know existed. He has an idea that the European Union should develop through music. This should be a weekly event; live music from all countries. Not just the "hyped" artists should be asked, also good amateurs and wannabes. And every week all EU citizens could vote. A new winner next week. And the next. And the winners would have their music played regularly and make careers all over Europe. His eyes beaming with happiness.

Languages are different, mirrors of their cultures. The language we use, frames our thoughts and deeds. We must be able to name both problems and possibilities – and to tackle them. Movement behaviour, mimicry and gestures communicate beyond words, just like sound, music, imagery, dance... Language can be interpreted widely and inclusively through new technologies, methods and ways of learning. Art and other cultural forms of expression can enhance our definition of language and communication. Linguistic, communicative development is essentially about various techniques of listening. To build a successful society we need to care for our

environment and the people who inhabit it. What are we listening to? Whom? A taxi driver? How?

The people of Lampedusa are able to sympathize with the struggle and suffering of the refugees, despite the burden it puts on the limited resources of their little community. They see these troubled visitors in the eye and understand something that is less clear to us, who must see through a media filter. The people of Lampedusa meet fellow men, listen, look, feel and talk. The rest of us share the event through imagery, sound and words communicated through folds of varying depth. The idea of art may seem distant from this scene, but it is indeed appropriate for what it can do to sharpen our senses and activate thoughts to constructively question what is represented.

Artists are a strong, critical force in society's structure; art widens cultural norms, language and societal norms; it visualizes and comments on xenophobia, fear, and aversion to "the other". Contemporary art integrates and creates communion, engages in dialogue through new forms of Gestaltung/representation; it activates and lends a voice to the unheard. Some young artists I'm in dialogue with send me keywords: get knowledge, transfer knowledge, be close to other humans, sharing, crossover, transdisciplinarity, openness and - we are in this together...

The technologies of listening are our tools to capture a diversity of ideas for a pluralistic cultural development, including room for also for commercial arenas as Eurovision song contests. Wrinkly Europe mustn't be ironed out to a flat surface, but keep on living with its manifoldness. The challenge for the future is not to let these folds dim the view. The close encounter with "the other" must be valued as a precondition for linguistic, communicative development. We must all dare to state our case, insist and show what we can. Art is a way.

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