

## **Intercultural Education's Fictions:** pedagogical movements in intercultural encounters as art

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### **Intercultural Education as Fiction**

**What** would it mean for intercultural communication pedagogy to consider its research as fiction? Can knowledge about intercultural encounters perhaps only ever be speculation about pedagogical, formative processes? Can it ever only make a good guess as to the *possible* relationships formed in the process of encounter - between the various "I"'s, and their self and other-conceptions, and how these translate into real world action and pedagogical expectations? What if intercultural education research is never more than a mode of (more or less 'artful') storytelling about processes of intercultural *formation*; processes that we can only indirectly access. In other words, can movements and moments of intercultural formation only be observed, analysed and narrated *after* the event – when we try to create allegories around the aesthetic effects these encounters had - on our understanding of self, other and world? **Should** we consider intercultural encounters as aesthetic phenomena and intercultural education as creating fictions in response?

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### **Intercultural encounters as aesthetic phenomena**

The Levinas-inspired turn in intercultural communication seems to point in that direction. With Levinas' help, scholars conceptualise the meaning of self, other and otherness – within an *emergent* aesthetics of what Ferri (2018) refers to as 'dialogism' (2018). Dialogism focuses on the *performative movement* of interpretation in intercultural encounters, in order to avoid two foregone trends in intercultural communication pedagogy: the trappings of a pre-mediated ontology (e.g. in the intercultural competence models of Byram et al), as well as the transcendent axiological value claims of emancipatory education (see MacDonald and O'Regan 2013). From how I understand the IC literature however, this turn away from ontology and transcendent values seems to be framed in the literature as an *ethical* – not an *aesthetic* – turn as such. With Levinas, ethics (as a form of 'meta-ethics') is thought as preceding ontology as a form of knowledge. In other words, the *existential state of being in relation* is considered to precede any disclosure of *being* (ontology) as knowledge. This described existential state of *being in relation*, in intercultural encounters has indeed aesthetic

effects: it *forms* the observing “I”’s relationship with its conception of self and other, in often unpredictable ways in the encounter - bringing forth various subjectivities. Given that formation is brought forth through the aesthetic of dialogism then - should we not regard intercultural encounters as aesthetic phenomena?

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### **How do you research in dialogism?**

I will argue in this paper that intercultural communication’s (new) Levinas-inspired focus on the aesthetics of ‘dialogism’ – that is its emphasis on the performative movement of interpretation in intercultural encounters, leads us to look at intercultural encounters as aesthetic phenomena. But what does that exactly mean for intercultural education methodologies? How does one research intercultural encounters when these have aesthetic effects that *form* our relation to – and understanding of - of self and other in a shared world? What kind of knowledge is produced from such existential position of already always being in relation? The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013) encourages us here that this situated, dialogic – perhaps even messy - nature of intercultural encounters is not by any means an obstacle to truth in education research.

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But what kind of truth are we talking about here? Gadamer was, like Emmanuel Levinas (1969; 1985; 1989), influenced by their teacher German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s (2006) notion about the basic structure of human being’s existence in the world: our state of *Geworfenheit* – our thrown-ness –in the world. And if being-in-the world precedes our *understanding* of being, how can we ever speak ‘objectively’ – how can we ever establish a subject-object relationship even, in order to make meaning of this state of *being* in the world (e.g. what it means to live interculturally), when we cannot reach a God’s eye view, and make out a reliable starting point from where to think from?

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### **Levinas and Heidegger**

Levinas indeed agreed with Heidegger that life cannot be surveyed from a God’s external and eternal vantage point when it is lived by human beings in a finite situation. He however also objected vehemently to what he saw as Heidegger’s “paganism” – which is the idea that

being was more or less slave to its own limitations and possibilities in a finite, historical world. In rejection of Heidegger's turn to Nazism in the 1930's, which Levinas regarded as a philosophical consequence of de-spiritualising being to this mere *presence*, he added that it was indeed true that we were existentially "thrown" – but that it was also important that we consider that there is always also something radically external to our own finite being, which fractures and breaks into our fishbowl view. For Levinas, this was God in Judaism.

### **The miracle of understanding**

What kind of knowledge can we expect to produce then in intercultural education, if we assume that we cannot ever get away from our being in the world – and also always have to take into account that being perhaps contains a dimension (God, Infinity), that I cannot ever fully grasp and accommodate into my finite schemata of understanding? It sounds rather complicated.

Gadamer (2013) might help us to calm our epistemological panic here. First of all, he would perhaps say, we need to understand that the *miracle of understanding* that emerges from intercultural encounters is knowledge of a unique kind. It is certainly of a different kind to the knowledge that we normally expect to create in the natural, and often also the social sciences. Intercultural encounters, when we consider them aesthetic phenomena, produce a different kind of knowledge to that of the other sciences, because art always understand itself *as being part of the (cultural, historical) world*, and not external to it (e.g. part of an external, natural world). As a result, art cannot be easily observed as if it was abstractable from that embeddedness; neither as knowledge that transcends time and space, nor as knowledge that is only located in my subjective experience. Art as a mode of knowledge is always already in relation with the historical and cultural world at the point of observation – and this include me, the observer. The meaning of aesthetic experiences, like those that constitute our intercultural lives, then unfold, indeed, in our *encounter* with the arte-facts and of course, most importantly, with the people, and the specific historical, social, cultural worlds they speak of; a world which we are, ourselves, of course, also part of and that we help shaping. Encountering art is therefore always also an encounter with ourselves, and with that, a mode of self-understanding (Gadamer 2013, p.87). If art is a mode of knowledge, and encountering an artwork means understanding and sharing in that cultural and historical knowledge the artwork speaks of, the question poses itself.

What kind of truth is this? What kind of truth is revealed in this encounter then - beyond the mere subjectivity of the person? Gadamer (2013) suggests that truth is revealed given a certain conduct of interpretation; a conduct of dialoguing in the world that is open to “alterity” whilst searching for something that is external to mere subjectivity. He writes

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‘A person trying to understand a text or a person [in the moment of encounter] must be prepared for it to tell him *something*. This is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness [that is a consciousness trained in the art of interpretation] must be from the start, open and sensitive to the text’s [and we shall add a person’s] alterity’ (Gadamer 2013, p. 282).

For Gadamer, an openness to radical alterity is at the heart of the reach beyond subjective truth in dialogue; for Levinas dialogue itself is conditioned by responsibility to the other – given our being in relation.

### **Slide 9 The hermeneutic task of interpretation**

For Gadamer (ibid), the circular, hermeneutic task of interpretation consists therefore in the continuous working out of our fore-projections, so that we can stay open to the truth that might be revealed in the moment of encounter. Our fore-projections describe the expectations that we entertain in relation to what there is to gain from the act of listening, reading and interpreting the other, as person or text. In other words, the task of interpretation, for Gadamer (ibid), always involves the continuous describing, testing, questioning, and thus revising, of our fore-projections, as the expectation we have when encountering, and re-encountering (and re-encountering) the other – so that we might arrive at a truth (whatever that might be in the end) that indeed *transcends* our own subjectivity. But again, what kind of truth is this? The hermeneutic conduct of interpretation works from the viewpoint of dialogue and encounter with the world (which implies Levinas’ ethics of being-in-relation), even if this does not necessarily guarantee that the search for truth will be a harmonious one. It allows us to ‘read’, that is to understand intercultural experiences and intercultural encounters as aesthetic experiences; i.e. as experiences that *form* and bring forth certain subjectivities in specific socially and historically, dialogically located events.

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In other words, intercultural encounters are treated as productive phenomena – as producing emergent, aesthetic effect; aesthetic effects that form the relationship between my observing “I” and my understanding: of my-self and the other self in a world that we share. Interpretation (in life and art) then always involves an act of self-inquiry and, necessarily, a certain intellectual open-mindedness, and, with Levinas, an awareness of our state of already-being-in-relation with others with who we share this world. Gadamer (ibid) writes further: SLIDE 10 -‘The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias [even if we can never escape our own situatedness in the world], so that the text [and we shall add the person] can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings’ (p. 282). The prerequisite for this open-ended, continuous hermeneutic movement of interpretation towards an experience of truth, according to Gadamer, is a keen awareness of the potential tyranny of our implicit and explicit prejudice, because these make us deaf to the voice of this textual or embodied other.

### **Slide 11-The danger of signification**

Levinas would of course add that it is this very prioritisation of words as constitutive of communication and interpretation, which can increase this risk of making us deaf to the other. Levinas (1985) refers to this as the danger of ‘signification’– the act of absorbing the other into pre-established patterns of meaning and expression that can deny the other’s possibility for action. Levinas (1989) uses the metaphor of prayer, in order to describe the hope, but also the risk, which accompanies this movement of interpretation within the aesthetic of encountering the other; when we are inextricably in relation, and seeking to respond to the ethical demand placed on us; but always also runs the risk of reducing the other to the same. When otherness is absorbed into signification, according to Levinas (1969), symbolic violence can, potentially, ensue: ‘interrupting their [the other’s] continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action’ (Levinas 1989, p. 21).

### **Slide 12 – Being with the Other**

Like Gadamer’s call for a keen awareness of one’s intellectual open-mindedness and honest self-inquiry into our fore-projections, Levinas (1989) contends, that our conduct of interpretation (in life and research) needs to acknowledge this a-priori otherness of the other - through a gesture of interpretation as listening and paying attention to the other’s radical alterity. For him this is first of all a ‘being with the other’ (1989, p. 149), even before any

words are spoken. The moment of encounter, Levinas suggest, indeed produces also a certain self-discovery - a 'bearing witness to oneself' (1969, p. 201). Here, the "I" experiences their actuality (in all their cultural and affective, ethical bounded-ness) within the flowing, performative movement of open-ended dialogue with the other.

### **Slide 13 =The self in the flow of encounter**

This self, that is experienced within the flow of encounter, is however not thought as a discrete rational category; that is a self that existed prior to, or independent of, the event. As Arnett (2003) reminds us, Levinas does not conceptualise this self – that emerges from the encounter - as a controlling, willfull, agentic "I". It is described as a more porous kind of I; that is always already inextricably in-relation to the other – before any words are even spoken. And with that, this is a I that is always already called to respond to the other's ethical demand for response, with unforeseen consequences thereof. This 'responsive self' (Arnett 2003) only takes specific form when answering to this ethical demand for response posed by the other's embodied presence (in all their 'strangeness'). In other words, the self only forms within the moral-aesthetic movement of dialogue, and the communicative possibilities, responsibilities and risks opened by the specific moment of encounter.

### **Slide 15- How can we access these formative processes?**

This of course also means that that the formative process itself can only ever be made accessible to others after the event – through *allegory*. In other words, during the immersion in an intercultural encounter as an aesthetic (and Levinas would act ethical act) – thoughts and feelings and moods are brought forth and subjectivities are indeed formed – but process and time are not fully predictable anymore. In other words, during the immersion in an aesthetic event – that disrupts the 'ego' - the direction of the arrow of time is uncertain. We experience ourselves perhaps, for a moment at least, as transcendent.

### **SLIDE 16-The unscientific-ness of aesthetic experiences**

As German educational theorist Mollenhauer (2014), would suggest: time and process become unpredictable in intercultural encounters, because aesthetic experiences are, by their nature, not repeatable (and thus predictable) in the way that processes in the natural and social sciences are (where cause and effect are often appropriate frames of interpretation). As Levinas already hinted at in his conception of the 'responsive self': the idea of rational

autonomy, of a self that can confidently steer the process of communication, becomes a somewhat 'counter-factual idea', when considered in the context of aesthetic experience.

SLIDE 17 – It is not of course that Mollenhauer (ibid) suggests that we should just let go of the ideal and pedagogical aim of educating self-governing autonomous individuals, capable of reason and rationality. He would perhaps add however that, as education researchers, we should admit that any such pedagogical notions (no matter how they are exactly defined in the end), can only ever point towards *possibilities* (and hopes). In other words, their emergence, the realisation of these notions, *cannot be guaranteed* to manifest empirically in pedagogical reality – and as such, they always stay, in some ways, fictions and hopes.

SLIDE 17- The formation of self and other (and any accompanying notions of what we want self and other to become) can then only be named and narrated when looking 'backwards' into the future (so to speak); when interpreting, in the present, one's own and other's aesthetic experiences in light of one's own and other's past expectations for the future. There is then an ultimate unscientific-ness about aesthetic experiences, because they can never fully guarantee to *realise any* pedagogical aims – dependent as they are on our looking backwards into the future. In this respect, aesthetic effects can also not be easily narrated in terms of their 'ethics', that is in terms of their emancipatory and liberatory value and outcomes of course, as this would presume a fully pre-mediated image of what makes a free and emancipated human being– against which our aesthetic experiences can then be fairly measured. Mollenhauer (ibid) points out that aesthetic experiences ultimately pose a provocation for education research, when it seeks empirical or ethical guarantees. What kind of provocations are these?

### **Slide 18-Provocation for education research**

When we assume that intercultural encounter yield aesthetic effects, we are confronted with questions: How does the 'I' stand in relationship to her fore-projections in the moment of the intercultural encounter as an aesthetic event? How does the retrospective description of aesthetic effects – where the 'I' narrates to itself its understanding of it-self and the other, or where the researcher's seeks to understand the formation of self and other; how do these retrospective descriptions map onto the more structural, sociological descriptions of societal reality (e.g. of oppression, discrimination)? In other words, how does the fiction of aesthetic experience stand in relation to what we would call a (pedagogical) reality – with its own fore-projections (that is pedagogical aims and practices)?

SILDE 19- A further complication is of course added when we take Levinas' focus on an ethics of embodiment into account. The moods, sentiments, bodily sensations and feelings (good and bad) that can be brought forth in intercultural encounters do not have an equivalent in the words, in which we describe the same sentiments in our everyday life. In other words, embodied aesthetic effects evade full signification in words. It can even split consciousness, as Mollenhauer suggests, locating us 'in-between' words and experiences. We can conclude then that aesthetic experiences do not only *not* stand in a continuous relationship with the idea of a discrete, rational "I", but also do *not* easily map onto what we would describe as our pedagogical reality (with our aims for certain transformations for example).

### **SLIDE 20-What is aesthetic emancipation?**

And as a result, aesthetic emancipation, as Mollenhauer argues, must be thought differently to what we refer to as social and political emancipation. The utopian territory of aesthetic emancipation is the 'I's self-image, which becomes accessible to others only in the (retrospective) description of aesthetic experience. The descriptor 'utopian', Mollenhauer warns, in fact does not fully capture the nature of aesthetic effects either. It is only appropriate as a description if we think 'utopia' in its original meaning: as a 'non-place'; liberated from *all* practical-realist expectation and connotations. In other words, we should not expect aesthetic effects to be neatly translatable into a utopian blueprint that can then be mapped onto an image of a pre-mediated better future. Conversely, the experience that the 'I' describes to itself in the moment of the aesthetic effect is, albeit taking place in a non-place utopia (that somehow stands outside of pedagogical reality), also no trivial 'make-believe' as such. In fact, from the perspective of the 'I's encounter and aesthetic experience, the "I"'s interpretation (of its self and the other's self; and the truth of experience) is only fictional in relation to pedagogy's own fore-projections. In other words, the "I" fictions are only fiction in relation to pedagogy's expectation, when it aims for and expects the production of certain subjectivities and actions (ethical, rational and so forth), so they can be neatly fitted into its pedagogical horizon. From the perspective of the moment of intercultural encounter however - an encounter, as Mollenhauer (1990; 2014) says, that is not borrowed from the past or sacrificed for a supposed future - all other 'realities' (including pedagogy's expectations) - must appear to the "I" as productions of fictions - whilst the "I" philosophises to itself into its own dis-continuity.



**Slide 21- Philosophising into the gaps?**

Given these tensions and discontinuities between aesthetic experience and pedagogical reality, can intercultural education also only ever philosophise into the gaps: *between* the ethical demand to conceive of aims and practices that can support ‘the good life with and for other, in just institutions’ (Ricoeur 1992, p. 170, quoted in MacDonald and O’Regan 2009, p. 9) in the here and now, and the necessary incalculability of such aims. Can it only ever philosophise into the dis-continuity of intercultural education’s own expectations of transformation? - given the opaqueness of the inner life, Levinas’ radical exteriority of the other, and the nature of aesthetic experience itself – which evades neat articulations and utopian dovetailing.

**Slide 22 -Interpretation as prayer?**

To come back to Levinas (1989) - the moment of encounter with another, and the movement of interpretation therein (in life, in research), always entails indeed a vulnerability, in which the self acts as if in prayer, as Levinas puts it. When a word is offered by the responsive self, he proposes, the subject ‘lays himself open and, in a sense, prays’ (ibid, p. 149, quoted in Gehrke 2010). The prayer is that despite the risk of signification, and the finite nature of the interlocutors, the moment of interpersonal interaction may also reveal a more transcended truth about who we (as self and other and we) are and perhaps also who we can become (even if this cannot be fitted into a utopian blueprint; or narrated easily in the word of ethics and epistemology).

SLIDE 23 - Given the difficulty of narrating the aesthetic effects of intercultural encounters, signification – or what Levinas (1985) calls ‘the said’ (p. 88) – in education research can then also be fore-stalled (or perhaps slowed down at least) by de-prioritising the notion that it is the words that we speak as such, which are at the heart of communication. Rather than the words as content and signification, it is the aesthetic-ethical experience of being-in-relation; the performative act of embodied dialogue as such – what Levinas calls ‘the saying’ (ibid) - which is seen as constitutive of communication. It is this movement of *being in communication* (which includes the non-verbal and embodied aspect of human personal interaction), that is put forward by critical intercultural education scholars (Arnott 2003; Gehrke 2010; Ferri 2013) as the linchpin of an existential, relational ethics of intercultural communication.

Levinas's ethics, Gehrke argues (*ibid*), allows intercultural communication studies to evade the risk of systematisation - of pre-mediated concepts of otherness and ethical rules - so that the Other is not assimilated into identification – but is perhaps allowed to dwell in what Mollenhauer described as the utopian non-place of aesthetic emancipation - relieved from practical-realist expectations that can be easily absorbed into pedagogical or sociological reality.

SLIDE 24- Given Levinas' awareness of the Holocaust and his philosophical break with Heidegger's ontology of presence, he was painfully aware of the violence that can ensue, when signification leads to actions that do not only destroy every possibility for the other's action, but deny the very possibility of being (Levinas 1989, p. 21). Despite this risk and danger, interpretation cannot get away from working this very tension and danger and possibility - between the 'said' of words and the open aesthetic of the 'saying' in its performative dimension. Here, interpretation must take into account the positively fictional texture of aesthetic experience, in which the responsive "I" narrates its experience to itself in the moment of encounter, thereby escapes signification through a pedagogical reality but is also bound in the bond of sociality.

### **Slide 25 -Our prejudice against prejudice**

Gadamer even draws our attention to the fact that, in fact, *all* understanding always necessarily involves such form of preliminary signification – which are our fore-projections. This pre-judice, as well as the act of self-inquiry into our fore-projections, and our awareness and sensitivity of the risk of interpretation, are part of any successful attempt of understanding the world. And nobody can perform this act of self-inquiry and other-inquiry *on our behalf*. In other words, nobody can relieve us of the risk of interpretation.

Gadamer then seems to say, quite pragmatically, that we can never get fully away from our pre-judice; it is part and parcel of our existential state of being in the world. And perhaps we can then also add to Levinas' concern about the dangers of signification and the symbolic violence that can potentially loom in the act of interpretation. We cannot deny our mimetic tendencies to signify and represent the world (to ourselves and to others - in thoughts, gestures, in language, art, academia etc.). Aristotle would even go so far as to say that this drive to signify is at the root of our natural human tendency to philosophise, that is to marvel at the world in wonderment, and gain pleasure from our acts of trying to make sense of its

order. Human culture, including myth-making, theatre and philosophy for Aristotle, and intercultural education research for us, are, at its heart, a response to our enjoyment in understanding the world around us, and sharing that knowledge with others, including ourselves of course.

### **What is a prejudice**

Do we have to review our prejudice against prejudice, given that we cannot liberate ourselves from it, but cannot understand the world without it either? A pre-judice, in its legalistic meaning denotes ‘a judgement that is rendered before all the elements that determine the situation have been finally examined’, as Gadamer writes (2013, p. 273). In German legal terminology, a pre-judice is described accordingly as a ‘provisional legal verdict rendered before the final verdict is reached’ (ibid). In other words, a final judgement (as a ‘just’ negative consequence for the person involved in legal dispute, for example) depends precisely on the *positive value* of the provisional pre-judgement (the prejudice), which precedes, and is integral to, the final judgement (ibid). Can there be truth without pre-judice then? Gadamer would say probably not.

### **The enlightenment tradition**

Our pre-judice against the term prejudice, he argues, is inherited from the notion of scientific truth that stems from Enlightenment rationality – where it originated as a critique of religion as an ‘unfounded judgement’. Due to the fact that religion did not derive its claims to truth from an empirical basis – as God (like consciousness, aesthetic experience) - cannot be observed and measured according to the same external scientific criteria that one uses to ascertain the natural laws – religion was stripped of its claim to truth. It was declared a pre-judice. This is where the term ‘pre-judice’ gained its negative connotation.

The German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (who held Hegel’s chair in philosophy at the University of Berlin since 1882), was the one who re-claimed the positive value of pre-judice for education in the human science tradition. As a committed liberal thinker, he declaimed against the enlightenment’s own dogmatic tendencies and absolutisations, when it requisitioned ‘tolerance’, ‘liberalism’, ‘criticality’ and ‘scepticism’ - in theory and practice - whilst simultaneously intolerantly condemning, as unscientific prejudice, all attempts to understand the human qualities of the individual - in their non-generalisable personal, historical and biographical emergence (Löwisch 2002, p. 107). For Dilthey, such

enlightenment intolerance - where it basically acted against its own proclaimed principles - showed itself, for him, in the immovably abstract claims about ethics (e.g. reflected in Kant's categorical imperative). It was also revealed, for Dilthey, in the discipline of education science's attempts to formally and systematically define educational aims and methods, in accordance with the tenets of the empirical scientific method, whilst also refusing to take account of the inner (spiritual—psychic) life and experience of a person.

### **SLIDE 28-A reflective philosophical education science**

As a result, pedagogical science was called by Dilthey to reflect its (valuable) principles, goals and values - in light of the individual's *experience* of these educational aims in praxis. The observation description and analysis of educational actions (e.g. between educator and student) were hereby to lead to a reflective approach to education's normative underpinnings. It was to enable a testing and reflecting on the normative propositions underpinning educational practice, as well as to support the improvement of practice, in light of this theory-praxis nexus. This call for a reflective, philosophical science of education was importantly framed by what Dilthey considered human beings' natural tendency to self-inquire, and aspire after a continuous development of their inner (psychic, spiritual) capacity/inner life of the soul [Seelenleben]. This inner life, in true enlightenment style, was thought by him to guide the individual's actions in the world, and with that, the flourishing of the person, and that of society (Löwisch 2002, p. 110-111). Dilthey's teleological understanding of the progressive development of the 'life of the soul' of the human species, was hereby not understood as a content-driven telos, based on a purpose-driven, abstract metaphysical guiding principle (ibid). It was firstly described as a structural, aesthetic feature – a movement of human being's Seelenleben. Despite being conceived as a future-bound, progressive transformation, which certainly implies a somewhat normative movement of education; human being's inner life also evaded a fixed idea and content-based image of the human (anthropolog/Menschenbild). In other words, the ontology of the human species' inner life (of the soul), including its future state, according to Dilthey, could not be universally stated, because it was seen as open-ended and always unfinished – always in development. And given this necessarily incomplete knowledge of what people substantially *are* or *could be*, then of course complicated any formulation of the kind of normative assumptions about human flourishing that could confidently carry us beyond the vagaries of history and culture.

SLIDE 29- Pedagogy, for Dilthey, is a human science, a ‘Geisteswissenschaft’, because pedagogy constitutes a system of historically-bound, man-made culture. Pedagogy, as a cultural system of educational aims and practices stands as a human, aesthetic expression. It is a response of humans’ historical encounter: with the objects, processes and people of the educational world and the questions that are raised as a result- which also always point beyond the limitations of our possibilities in the world.

### **Slide 30-Conclusion: Intercultural education must be a fiction**

In the context of the Levinas-inspired turn in intercultural communication, pedagogical theory is perhaps a response to those questions that are raised in the encounter with a historical world, which revealed the vulnerability of communication, and the dangers of signification: a silencing of other’s speech and actions – in new, contemporary ways and guises. But, given our existential state of being in relation – Levinas, Gadamer and Mollenhauer seem to teach us – we have no choice than to take the risky step of interpretation that nobody can perform on our behalf. And as a result, the truth of our stories about intercultural formation, and its production of subjectivities (in research), can only ever be partially, and indirectly, validated inter-subjectively; and in a way that considers the challenges, impossibilities, joys, risks and dangers of interpretation.

SLIDE 31- What would such storytelling in intercultural education look like in light of this strangeness of intercultural encounters and their aesthetic effects? Mollenhauer encourages us to tell idiosyncratic stories, in which the contingent self that is brought forth in intercultural encounters *can* be brought forth in language - through metaphors. What would be the truth criteria for these artful (or not so artful) fictions that intercultural education produces? Mollenhauer would emphasise that they have to resonate with the idiosyncratic stories of other selves (p. 493). In other words, intercultural education’s fictions would be recognisable (and made recognisable) in all their strangeness – to a self who encounters them with the same aesthetic-ethical conduct of interpretation, in which there were produced. The hermeneutic (or perhaps better hermeneutic-phenomenological) circle keeps circling in all its wonky-ness.

Intercultural encounters, as Ferri (2018) concludes in her recent book on Intercultural Communication, represent the opportunity to discover otherness in the familiar, and to accept

the fact that both self and other remain unknowable (p. 96). Can intercultural education philosophise into the gaps of this unknowingness -- to tell idiosyncratic stories that might make recognisable the very contingency of self and other formation (and, of course, the contingency of our conceptions and pedagogical expectations of them). Will anybody recognise the stories' truth value? Perhaps not. As a human science, intercultural education asserts the very vulnerability that Levinas declares at the heart and hope of communication itself. This is why intercultural education is, and must be, a fiction.