

**Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©) -
a possible approach to European screenwriting training
in the light of the development of a new European cinema**

**by Dr. Alexia Meyer-Kahlen, M.F.A.
*art & analysis***

*"If Europe wants to have a valid industry, it must have a philosophy,
an aesthetic, a vision, a dream, a history of its own."*

Stephen Cleary (quoted after Joan Álvarez)

As writers, we all know one thing, and that is our writing process. In some writers, this 'knowing' might take on the form of a more intuitive feeling of what to do next and how to do it, in others, the 'knowing' might be based on a more conscious reflection of the different stages the writing process organically moves through. And especially in the literary domain of writing, many writers have used their process itself as the very subject of their literary ponderings and considerations.

This intimate familiarity each writer has with his or her own process, including all the trials and tribulations that come along with it, I would like to suggest as the very foundation for a possible answer to the challenges in the training of European screenwriters and their trainers alike. Everything I can tell you about this approach you, as writers, actually already know, because it is centred around the fundamental matrix of the creative process itself. I am calling this approach *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)*.

In this article I would like to show how and why *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)*

- can be applied to every creative process, i.e. to every self-organising system that manifests "something" out of (seemingly) "nothing", from the development process to the actual writing process itself, from pre-production to post-production to distribution
- if applied, is able to optimise the run of each creative process, elevating it to a state of effortless flow, synergy and synchronicity
- is immediately applicable, since it is an instrument of diagnosis, method and result all in one

Three basic assumptions (every writer knows)

"Finding contemporary stories that really travel needs a philosophy on life."

Istvan Szabo (quoted after Joan Álvarez)

The approach of *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)* is based on three somewhat 'philosophical' assumptions about the nature of reality. As writers we are already quite familiar with those assumptions since they are closely correlated to experiences we make with our own writing process:

1. "You never enter the same river twice."
2. "It is easier to go with the flow than to struggle against it."
3. "A great stream can never be controlled, but it can be navigated."

1. "You never enter the same river twice" *or* Life is Creative Process

Modern quantum physics and Eastern wisdom traditions alike are telling us that all life is in constant flux and change. The universe is creating itself anew and is dissolving back into its origin in each split second. This uninterrupted process of evolution and involution seems to be the deepest and most essential nature of all that exists.

As writers, we are very familiar with this creative pulsation between unfolding and enfolding, whether we are aware of it or not. We all know the fickleness of the 'creator spiritus' that powerfully demands to be heard whenever and wherever it appears, otherwise punishing us with abandon and desertion.

This coincides with Greek mythology, where we can find a description of three different 'gods of time': Chronos, Aeon and Kairos. While Chronos symbolizes linear, measurable time, and while Aeon is a symbol for the duration of time, Kairos stands for coincidence, the coming together of everything necessary for something to manifest. While Chronos is the time that can be experienced with the help of man-made measuring instruments, such as watches, Kairos can never be "made" but can only be immediately experienced in the moment he appears. Kairos is radically linked with the "now", in one instant flashing out the depth of the present moment, and if we do not recognize and seize the unique moment, this particular creative impulse is lost forever.

As writers, we have all learned, at least to a certain extent, to be sensitive to such moments of Kairos and to follow them to the best of our abilities. We know of their preciousness and their uniqueness, being acutely aware of the creative current underlying our ordinary perception of ourselves and of the world. To quote Virginia Woolf in *A room of one's own*:

"What is meant by 'reality'? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable - now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech - and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us."

2. "It is easier to go with the flow than to struggle against it" *or* Synchronicity is Success

If we can agree that all of life, underneath its seemingly separated and linear surface, is actually a continuous and simultaneous process of creative evolution and involution, of uninterrupted arising and ceasing, it becomes obvious that it is much easier to move along in synchronicity with this mighty undercurrent, than to try to struggle against it.

Not only is it easier to go with the flow, but approaching any kind of creative challenge from the level of the creative matrix itself, it is possible to tap into the very wellspring of potentiality of self-organising creativity. If we manage to actually enter and stay in synchronicity with the creative matrix level, we find ourselves in a state of optimum performance that at the same time is completely effortless. As writers, we all know these

times when things are just flowing together under our pen or keyboard, and in these rare moments our task seems to be reduced to simply bear witness to the magic unfolding and to bring it onto the page.

But for most writers this is not the whole story. For them the creative process is connected with great strains and difficulties, they are lacking original ideas, they experience themselves as being stuck somewhere in the process and blocked in their creative capacities. And even if they somehow "get the thing going" it is characterized by great effort, mental torture and mostly unsatisfying results. Actually this happens so frequently, that many writers take blocked creativity to be a token of creativity itself.

How is this possible in the face of a universe that is constantly recreating itself?

3. "A great stream can never be controlled, but it can be navigated" *or* The Creative Matrix is the Key to Synchronicity

Even though "being in the process", as we have seen, seems to be our most "natural" state and likewise the most "natural" state of the world, we still need to learn how to navigate this underlying creative current, and for us writers, more than for anybody else, this is a lifelong task.

We all have made the experience of what happens when we tried to prematurely force a creative idea, being "ready" before the story itself was at that stage, when we tried to impose a certain dramaturgy even though we could actually feel that the story wanted to take another turn, when we internally couldn't agree to what one of our characters turned out to be - on all of these occasions, where we tried to impose something on the creative flow, tried to force it in one way or another, rejected what offered itself to us in an organic way, we were destined to fail miserably: our stories crumbled, our characters faded or we never even got to the first page.

Navigating the creative process is an experience altogether different. It is what we more or less consciously do when we go along with the underlying process, when we are 'in sync' with it and experience ourselves at the height of our competence and creativity. At those times, where we act as skilful navigators, we utilize our personal experiences and our knowledge of our process to the fullest, which brings us in touch with the matrix of the creative process itself. It is this universal matrix level which is serving as the key to unlock synergy, synchronicity and effortless flow.

Cultivating an understanding as well as different ways of accessing the matrix level of the creative process, thus getting more and more rooted at this level, is the approach of *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)*.

Understanding Creative Matrix - stages and challenges

The matrix of the stream: The 5 Stages of the Creative Process

There are many ways to describe the creative undercurrent, its twists and turns that seemingly can never be anticipated, and each writer would certainly find his or her own way and words for doing so. However, when comparing the testimonies of many creative artists, not only

writers, but likewise painters, sculptors, composers etc., we can distil five different stages each creative process is moving through. These 5 stages I call:

1. Inspiration
2. Incubation
3. Illumination
4. Imagination
5. Verification

In the run of a creative process these five stages can occur both consecutively as well as simultaneously. Each phase however requires specific interactions and interventions that can reach from more or less passively 'holding' the process to very specific actions. Doing the right thing at the right time is thus the key to successfully initiate a creative process and to let the inner movement of the process unfold without interrupting its natural flow.

What is more, each and every creative process seems to be moving through these five stages; we can find them in the writing process itself, in the development process of creative material as well as in the development of organisations, we find them in the personal and spiritual development process of individuals as well as in the development of professional visions. That is why these five stages can be considered something like the universal matrix of the creative process itself. And in each case it seems to be an astonishing fact that when we are in touch with this universal matrix level, the related process runs with utmost synchronicity and effortless flow.

The rapids and undercurrents: The 5 Challenges of the Creative Process

In order to gain access to this matrix level of creativity, in order to enter the stream right in its centre, where it flows fast and smooth, without being capsized in the rapids or running on ground in the shallows, one needs to face the particular challenges each of the five phases is presenting us with. These challenges are:

1. To recognize inspiration
2. To understand incubation
3. To accept illumination
4. To coordinate imagination
5. To synthesize verification

This points to a crucial aspect, which is often overlooked when dealing with the development of written material: The writer can never be separated from his or her own process. If we focus too much on abstractly transmitting craft and methods and lose track of the very particular person in front of us with its particular relationship to the creative process presently unfolding, we have overlooked the single most decisive factor for blossoming creativity.

Without further elaborating on the possible pitfalls of each of these challenges I would like to move straight on to the essential question of how we can live up to these particular challenges, how we can face and successfully master every single one of them: We do this by adapting our attitudes and actions to the very nature of the process we are dealing with.

Navigating Creative Matrix - attitudes and actions

Gaining access: The 5 Inner Attitudes of Navigation

It is one of the curiosities of dealing with the creative process in all its varied forms and appearances that seemingly minimal interventions, such as focusing on some inner movement or a particular inner attitude, can take us the farthest. In the face of a particular challenge the creative process is presenting to us our truly connecting with a particular inner attitude can serve as an entrance gate to the matrix level of the process. The five inner attitudes of navigation thus represent five gates or pathways to the creative matrix that we can use at any point of the process, whenever we feel stuck, blocked or, ideally, right from the beginning of the creative process we are navigating.

We can :

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Recognize inspiration through... | SELF-confidence |
| 2. Understand incubation through... | courage |
| 3. Accept illumination through... | one-pointedness |
| 4. Coordinate imagination through... | appreciation |
| 5. Synthesize verification through... | release |

In this brief overview given here I mainly want to point out that it is actually possible to cultivate a personal understanding of the matrix underlying all forms of creative process and, on the basis of this understanding, to train in accessing the matrix level of the creative process by adequately responding to its challenges.

Getting rooted: The 5 Creative Actions of Navigation

At this point I would like to add a word of caution: We should never think that through the 5 inner attitudes we can in any way manipulate our creative process or its outcome, regardless of how well we might know it. What we can do however by the help of the 5 inner attitudes is to enter into and hold an open space inside of us where creative unfolding and enfolding can take place, allowing us to recognize that it actually always has been there.

As we get more and more accustomed to entering into and holding this open space, getting deeply rooted in the creative matrix, we are able to not only effortlessly move along with the process, but to apply it towards the unfolding and manifestation of new visions - of personal or professional, of individual or of collective nature.

If we manage to authentically contact and identify with the inner attitudes described above, we are able to:

1. Trustfully invite vision
2. Fearlessly receive vision
3. Lucidly hold vision
4. Joyfully manifest vision
5. Unintentionally communicate vision

In this way it becomes possible to truly integrate the universal evolutionary dynamic into one's life and work, so that successfully manifesting creative visions no longer needs to be the seeming result of luck or grace.

Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©) - results

In closing I would like to point out in how far the approach of *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)* in its stunning universality and simplicity of application could be a possible answer to the complex challenges of European screenwriting training, especially in the light of the development of a new European cinema.

Let me pick up on some of the challenges the development of a European cinema and the European screenwriter's training are facing, as pointed out by Joan Álvarez in the article *New challenges in European Screenwriters' training* as well as by Arjen Van Dalen's *2 or 3 things I know about her*, to illustrate how they can be addressed by a *CMN©* approach:

- The 'national factor' both in terms of industry and in terms of narrative/aesthetic traditions, serving as an internal obstacle for the creation of a cinema with a distinct European identity
- Hollywood cinema with its mass-orientation and -appeal, backed up by a far superior distribution and commercialisation system, which is acting as a huge constraint on the development of a culturally rooted European cinema
- Government subsidies and public funding, which, while making the realization of more ambitious films possible in the first place, at the same time possibly prevent an orientation towards what the audience wants, since it is a statistic fact that four out of five European cinema goers prefer Hollywood cinema
- The impossibility of pointing out the factor(s) responsible for the financial and/or artistic success of a film
- The long lasting European policy of the author, which has impoverished the screenwriter's role vis-à-vis the director-producer relationship
- The lack of development European projects are still burdened with
- The Screenwriter training programmes being far from homogenous and communication as well as exchange of experience still being poor.
- A lack of didactical background of the screenwriting trainers
- The difficulty to define precisely what the European way of filmmaking is because of the large number of identities existing in Europe
- A range of European training programmes working with American screenwriters applying American-influenced approaches
- 80% of the screenwriters receiving training in English

How can *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)* be applied towards these challenges?

If we want to tackle and realize the dream of a European cinema that is artistically convincing as much as it is appealing to greater European audiences and if we want to do so by skilfully addressing the challenges of European screenwriting training, we need:

1. To trustfully invite the vision of a synthesis of creative expression, marketability and audience's taste, which implies working with the complex relationships between writer, producer/funding entity and audience.

Confidently inviting the vision of a comprehensive team approach clearly is a multileveled task, since it involves developing

- a. a vision for the relationship between writer - producer/funding entity (including the relationship to the trainer as intermediary between the demands of the industry and screenwriters)
- b. a vision for the relationship between writer - audience
- c. a vision for the relationship between writer - director

2. To fearlessly receive this vision includes letting go of old concepts and work styles as well as particular identities, if it should prove necessary. It takes courage to fully trust in the process and not to hold on to anything, not even to a narrative or aesthetic tradition or to national identity.

3. To lucidly hold our vision by focusing on what is naturally and organically showing itself in the very process. This kind of one-pointedness is probably the single most important factor for letting the absolute uniqueness of any given creative project shine forth. In other words, we don't need to be overly concerned with Hollywood mass production if we focus on the uniqueness which we do have, rather than on the production and distribution muscle we seemingly miss.

4. To manifest our vision with deeply felt joy about each creation. Rather than worrying for example about the heterogeneity of European screenwriting programmes or of European identities we should instead welcome and appreciate heterogeneity as a unique expression of the time, place and circumstances involved. At the same time, we should not hesitate to learn from American approaches, rather than applying them in a formulaic and dominating way, as is mostly done in the Hollywood film industry, incorporating them in the manifestation of our own unique visions, thereby strengthening their inner rhythm and balance.

5. To communicate our vision by unintentionally releasing it into the world. Only this kind of unintentional release allows for the quantum leap of synthesis that is possible at this stage of the process. Being well-grounded in our process there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of.

The approach of *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)*, which radically emphasizes inclusion and synthesis rather than exclusion and separation thus

- organically centre points the script and the development stage
- aligns the multileveled relationships and interactions involved in the development process by fostering change of attitudes and work habits up to organizational patterns
- accommodates difference and cultural identity by celebrating uniqueness
- acknowledges the reality of the industry by incorporating production demands (financing and legal issues), audience taste (marketing) and commercialisation strategies (distribution) into one systemic approach
- naturally emphasizes team work
- supports the innate didactic and wisdom of the writer and his creative process

I had initially said that I would like to use the intimate knowledge each writer has about his or her own process as foundation for suggesting a possible answer to the challenges of European screenwriting training. Hopefully I have been able to show how with the capacity to understand and navigate creative matrix each person involved in the creative process, be it as writer, as producer / funding entity or as screenwriting trainer, can actively cultivate ways of accessing this matrix level by developing and applying some particular inner attitudes and actions in correlation with the particular challenges at hand. What is so remarkable is that once we have gained an experiential understanding of the creative matrix level, it simultaneously serves as the method of navigation itself as well as being its very result.

The central vision of working with the creative matrix rests on the notion of a resource and potential based *edu-care* rather than on an input based education. In other words, the approach of *Creative Matrix Navigation (CMN©)* is an expression of the belief that all the solutions are already inherent in the creative challenge itself, whatever its nature, and that the creative process contains the power that will carry it through to its best possible maturation and completion -- it is just a matter of recognizing and reconnecting with that innate power.

To discover the innate intelligence and power of the creative process in my view presents a viable approach to European screenwriting training in the light of the development of a new European cinema.