



# Culture Clash?

## Finding a common language

By Tim Laurence

**It's a warm summer night in Sao Paulo. A group of passionate Brazilians are laughing, dancing, shouting and crying. Some of them are managing all at once. It's taken me twenty years, but I've finally realised one of my goals, which was to teach the Hoffman Process in Latin America.**

What is it about the Process that attracts people from Latin cultures such as the Italians, Spanish, Peruvians and Argentinians, as well as those from more reserved cultures such as Germany, Canada and the famously buttoned-up British? Bob was once asked by a journalist interviewing him for an Austrian newspaper:

**Journalist:** 'Mr. Hoffman, who exactly is the Process for?'

**Bob:** 'Anyone who had a mother or a father.'

Bob Hoffman's vision was to help change the world 'one person at a time' and slowly, his work spread out from San Francisco around the world. It now covers North and South America, Europe, Australia and a corner of Asia.

Now Brazil, itself the size of 30 European countries, has five Hoffman centres and, after the USA, has more people attending the Process than any other country. The UK, a land of slightly smaller dimensions, is in third place.

Brazil is special though, not just because it's so large and exerts a pull on our imagination, but because it was the first country where the Process was translated into a different language and, to some extent, adapted to a culture very different to that of the USA.

Since I was first involved with Hoffman in 1989 I've been lucky enough to teach the Process in ten countries. In my first year of teaching, I alternated between the west coast of the USA and the east coast of Canada every single month. I was struck by some of the clear differences between the course participants. In California, people seemed to have more drama in their backgrounds: more divorce, more addiction, more millionaires and bankrupts, and were very forthcoming in laying it all out. The Canadians were more gentle, more quietly spoken, and took more persuasion to put their cards on the table. Yet all showed the same human qualities: wishing to change their lives, to have a clearer idea of who they were beyond any past conditioning. Everyone had known some emotional

distress in their lives, often depression or anxiety. Everyone wanted closer connection, whether with loved ones, friends or colleagues. In short, all of them were wishing to experience this great mystery and delight of being human.

I've found this true of Russians, Sudanese, South Africans and Chinese, without having to travel these days. The UK probably sees more nationalities than any other Hoffman centre - many courses have between 8 to 12 countries represented, since English is most people's second language these days and London is such an international hub. A typical course will have some Dutch and Scandinavians, some eastern Europeans and a scattering of long-term expats originally from other English-speaking countries. Invariably there will also be some Arabs from countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Perhaps it is Hoffman's popularity among the Arab people that has been the most surprising thing for myself and, judging by their reaction, for many others as well. In 2006 on a Process at Florence House I met Abeer Almeffleh, originally Kuwaiti but living in Bahrain. I asked her then if there was anything we needed to be culturally sensitive about and, perhaps with her attention more on her own Process at the time, she replied that she needed to think about that before giving her answer. As it turned out, it was Abeer who invited us to work in Bahrain and a year later we were about to start a course there when she gave me the answer I'd been waiting for 'Tim, you know I've thought a lot about your question. As long as you put on this Process with the clearest of intentions, then we will accept it in the depth of our hearts. Do it the way you do it best, not the way you think it needs to be adapted.'

I was surprised by that. Yet her remark reminded me of an insight that had jumped out at me from one of my all-time favourite books, a witty and learned commentary on my own people, *Watching the English* by Kate Fox. She, a social anthropologist, had been given this advice by her father, also an anthropologist (a family pattern, perhaps?)

'Don't be misled by the ethnographic dazzle'. By which he meant, don't let your eyes be dazzled by the brightness on the surface; go underneath.



Hoffman International Conference, Barcelona 2012

But of course there are differences, and though Bob's overall week-long structure is maintained by us and all the members of our International community, we are free to adapt certain aspects to a group's or individual's needs. For instance, in the UK, we are used to the fact that some people may have spent more time in a boarding school environment than they actually did with their parents. They will examine the influence on how their persona adapted to this 'home' and its effect now in the present: their attitudes to authority, how they deal with emotions, and of course basic issues such as trust and safety.

For some groups, shame may be more of an issue than for others. I've noticed it particularly hits a chord with Irish participants, though it also gets a strong response with Arabs. Again if we feel it's more appropriate, we may spend more time on transference, on how mother and

father figures set up the primary models for others in our lives. In France, the only country I know where philosophy is taught at secondary school level, and where Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am' has lodged itself firmly in the national psyche, more time is spent on discussing concepts. Working there, I can remember at times having to fight with my own impatience, saying to myself, 'Can we just please do the exercise and not keep talking about it?'

So the cultural differences are there and Hoffman reflects that from country to country. However, as Bob would be the first to point out, we're all the same under the surface. Deep down we all want love and acceptance in our relationships and peace with our past.

For more information on the Hoffman Process around the world please visit: [www.hoffman-international.com](http://www.hoffman-international.com)

### The voice of Hoffman is global



#### Bahrain

**Abeer Almeffleh - Therapist and Transpersonal Counsellor**

I was worried that the Process might have views and ideas that would be in conflict with my culture, religion and upbringing but I was able to adapt the majority of the Process principles easily.

Personally the course reconnected me to my higher self, deepened and widened my compassion for myself and others. It also helped me re-embrace the whole of me! On a professional level it helped me follow my ultimate desire to help others by studying to be a therapist and a transpersonal counsellor - dare I say one of the very first in my region speaking both Arabic and English. I have been working as a therapist for the past 6 years and have my own practice 'Basicself'.

The Process changed the relationship I have with myself and that affected all my other relationships, especially with my mum. We can now look into each other's eyes and sit for hours talking. I have found deep love and compassion and a great sense of inner peace.



#### Bermuda

**Monica Jones - Artist**

I decided to do the Hoffman Process after noticing that a few friends were looking younger and more relaxed and each one had the same answer. They'd done Hoffman and yes, I wanted some of that! I asked if they thought it'd benefit

me and each one said 'definitely'. So I booked myself in for what turned out to be the most memorable week of my life.

I felt as if Hoffman allowed me to let go of more negativity and created a more positive outlook for myself and my life than any other personal development course I've ever done. It was worth every penny I spent in air fares and accommodation as well as the course fee. Since the Process, my life has changed immeasurably. My husband, three children, son and daughter-in-law have now all done the course, and it's impossible to measure how much better our relationships are now.

I'd tell anyone considering the Process to only do it if they genuinely want to change their lives. I also tell friends thinking about it, that if they knew what they were going to get by doing the Process, then they'd put on their running shoes and run there as fast as they could, as I literally do think it's the best investment I've ever made in myself.

[www.monicajonesartist.com](http://www.monicajonesartist.com)



### The Netherlands

**Mathieu Van Straaten -  
Financial Consultant**

I'm an international consultant and manager at a financial company. I decided to do the Process in the UK in 2012. I was in my mid 30's and felt stuck in the same negative behaviour and although

coaching had brought me lots of insights, nothing had changed at a practical level. I was aware that a lot of things holding me back originated in my childhood and wanted to address them. Moreover I really wanted to give my two young children a different start, free of the baggage that I carried. The births of my children had also shaken up my workaholic lifestyle. I tried continuing to work the same hours, but I was torn because I wanted to be there as a father. The resulting internal conflict was exhausting and I ended up not enjoying either role.

My advice for anyone thinking of doing the Process would be don't do it because others do it. Do it because you want to change your life for the better. I really think it works best if there's a pain that brings you there, something that really motivates you to change. Once you're there, commit fully. Engage completely with whatever comes, it's a unique experience and you'll get the most out of it when you step into it 100%. Dutch culture is much like English culture and the spoken exercises on the course are all easy to understand. The Process is actually more about expressing yourself in other ways than verbally. After the course continue to work on increasing the positives and diminishing the negatives. You get out what you put in... Nowadays I often ask myself what I'm putting in; if the answer is 'not a lot' I stop complaining and escaping and try to invest. I call it life gardening; keep pulling out the weeds and planting the flowers.



### Dubai & New Zealand

**Andrea Anstiss -  
Transpersonal Psychotherapist**

I was inspired to do the Process after meeting Tim at a talk in Dubai. The course gave me many insights, but an unconscious vindictiveness towards my parents proved particularly significant. The pressure I

experienced to be perfect, as the only daughter, prevented me from being able to relax and spend time with them. I had more fun, being myself, on the other side of the world.

After the Process that changed quickly and dramatically. We bought a holiday house in a beautiful part of New Zealand where I spent precious time with them. I am profoundly grateful I did, as family bereavements occurred a few years later. Having this renewed connection with New Zealand meant I was present to support my mother through her prolonged grief around the sudden death of my brother and my father's passing which occurred soon after.

My husband did the Process just two months after I completed it. That was a major win for us! Our relationship improved greatly from then on. Remarkably he took up oil painting straight after his Process and our walls are now covered in his work. It was like his left-sided engineering brain suddenly welcomed this creative aspect of him. He is much happier and fulfilled in himself. He is less of a work addict Yey!

My advice to anyone considering doing the Process is: just do it! In 100 years time maybe no one will remember you – but they will feel the extra light you contributed to the world.

The Hoffman Process is available in 17 countries worldwide.  
[www.hoffman-international.com](http://www.hoffman-international.com)

*relationship  
therapy  
london* 



020 8876 2439  07710 283 832

*listen  
be heard  
restore your  
connection*



with relationship expert *Sabine Young MA*

Certified Imago Relationship Therapist & Consultant  
Accredited Psychotherapist & Supervisor  
UKCP - MBACP

[www.relationshiptherapylondon.co.uk](http://www.relationshiptherapylondon.co.uk)

**Matthew Pruen Life Coach**  
London | Brighton | phone | skype

for self esteem | relationships | life-vision  
creativity | joie de vivre



**07976 843715**  
[mail@matthewpruen.com](mailto:mail@matthewpruen.com)  
[www.matthewpruen.com](http://www.matthewpruen.com)