Introduction

This book explores the creative and educational potential of masks and their life- enhancing properties as a means of communication. There is ample scope for people of all ages to enjoy constructing masks of their own and exploring them through language, drama, dance, mime, movement and music *(figs. 1–2)*. All the ideas and activities are tried, tested and workable, having been used and modified over the years in many different situations.

The processes for making masks outlined in Projects 1 to 6 use paper- construction and brown paper gum- strip techniques, which are adaptable for the classroom and for non- specialist workshop *(figs 3–5)*. Project 7 to 8 go on to explore more specialized methods. The

Fig. 1 *(facing page). Helmet-mask made from papier-mâché and topped with a cylindrical hat adorned with tissue paper flowers, on parade at the Notting Hill Carnival, London, in 1992. This mask is reminiscent of the North Tyrolean carnival masks.*

Fig. 2. *Children and adults at an open-air paper mask-making workshop, led by the author. York Early Music Festival. Summer 1987.*

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process of mask- making is explored from the design stage through to practical use. The aim is to stimulate ingenuity in the full imaginative use of materials and the exploration of the principles of design.

Each chapter on mask- making provides vital information and theory in addition to practical, topic- based advice. This means that the reader can be assured that practice is underpinned by theory and knowledge. Whenever masks from different cultures are cited, information to set them within their cultural context is given. In projects 1 to 6, step- by- step mask- making processes are outlined, but there is scope for the reader to develop his or her own solutions to practical problems. Each project has extension activities at differing levels of complexity for exploring the meaning and imagery of the masks once they are made, through expressive arts activities. Where appropriate, there are suggestions for further reading and additional sources of ideas.

The chapter 'Masks and Resources' outlines some of the important arguments surrounding the whole ethical issue of using artefacts from other cultures as resources for our own creative work. Masks make exciting visual stimuli, but it would be irrelevant to bring a set of ready- made masks for groups to use, largely because they will have no point of reference for understanding them. In such instances their response might very well be to fool around and make fun of the masks. Clearly there is some point in introducing masks from other traditions to drama students or in an actor's training; but with young people the main value of maskwork is in what they learn from the process of making their own mask and by devising their own project. Even then we should be aware that there might a limit to what can be achieved.

As someone trained in both Theatre and Education, I have long recognized that masks have a value in the training of actors and in the art of performance. I have also been aware that their potential as a means of personal expression or educational resource has hardly been recognized. The approach described in this book originated, therefore, as an extension of my theatre training and from a desire to formulate techniques and ideas that could be utilized within the classroom at all levels of education, or at home, or in the studio.

At this point it is worth mentioning some of the superstition that surrounds the effect of wearing masks. Admittedly some people have reservations about the wearing of masks because, it is rumoured, they unleash 'uncontrollable' powers in the wearer. It is true that, in general in our society, masks are debased and often have associations with the 'darker' side of human nature, but this has more to do with the wearer's intentions than with the properties of the mask itself. It is a fact nevertheless, that in much ethnographic literature, unique psychological states are reported in conjunction with the wearing of masks. For example, people are described as 'becoming' the

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Fig. 3. *Scene from Japanese Noh in performance.*

spirits, the dead or whatever the mask was meant to represent. It is, however, impossible scientifically to verify such mental conditions as distinct psychological states.[1]

Moreover, the belief that traditional masked celebrations act as a release for emotional or irrational behaviour is based on false assumptions. Although the mask might very well represent some demon of antisocial behaviour, more knowledge of traditional mask ceremonies reveals that the wearing of the mask is surrounded by restriction, convention and taboo. Society stipulates exactly who should wear what kind of mask and only members of a certain lineage, of a specified age or sex, or with a special quality, may don a particular mask. The privilege of the mask rests upon subtle notions of style and timing.[2] Society harnesses the power of masking for its own ends. These might be cathartic: to heal, to inform or to castigate, but such ceremonies are not a free- for- all.

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Fig. 4. *'Bird Man' wears a mask constructed from paper and card and worn like a hat. York Early Music Festival. Summer 1987.*

Fig. 5 *(facing page). 'Neptune and his Helper'. Neptune wears a mask made from green and silver painted Mod-Roc with cloth hair. York Early Music Festival. Summer 1987.*

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Wearing a mask for theatrical performance is an exacting discipline. For example, the training of actors in Bali and Japan, where a tradition of masked theatre is maintained, is both long and arduous. Even in Japan it is an art associated with the old order and demands formality, constriction and tradition.[3]

Mask theatre demands great sacrifices from the performers; their challenge is to make the wooden mask move as if it were alive. When on stage the actor must reflect the mask but also remain separate from it in order to maximize its presence, keep time and synchronize with the action on stage *(fig. 3)*.[4] To perform without conscious mastery of this art would render the mask meaningless and the effect would be not so much damaging as cheapening.[5]

Those using this book will look at what is offered and judge their own starting points, depending upon the ages, interests and abilities of the groups with which they are working. I have used these ideas with groups in England at all key stages of the National Curriculum, ranging from preschool children through to students in advanced classes. I have also used them with community theatre groups involving people of all ages and for my own work in the theatre.

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Fig. 6 *(top left). Mask made from recycled materials, designed and worn by undergraduate student. Workshop, led by Andy Earl, Hull School of Architecture. September 1996.*

Fig. 7 *(bottom left). Shell mask in production of 'Ocean World'. Designed in a workshop led by Anita Latham and worn by a student at Newland School for Girls, Hull. 1994.*

Fig. 8 *(right). Cardboard mask made for a disabled Colombian man by his children. Street carnival, Karlskrone, Sweden. Summer 1991.*

The projects can be adapted and incorporated into particular modules within Art and Design courses, or Drama, Expressive Arts, Theatre and Performing Arts courses. Mask- making lends itself to strategies designed to forge natural links between a whole range of Craft, Design and Technology modules and English, Drama, Dance, Music, Mime and Movement activities. Projects could be devised for basic Mathematics; others could be useful in Geography, Sociology and Religious Studies. There is limitless scope in mask- making for those planning large- scale group events, when communities come together for festivals, carnivals, parties or fund- raising events *(figs. 4–8).*

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