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Truth as a challenge to pedagogical thinking. Approaches via the "Opera Village Africa" by Christoph Schlingensiefel¹

Verdade como um desafio para o pensamento pedagógico. Abordagens via "Opera Village Africa", de Christoph Schlingensiefel¹

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Abstract: Truth, or rather the truths of and in representations of cultures, represent a challenge in pedagogical thinking. Using the ambivalent example of Christoph Schlingensiefel's art project "Opera Village" in Burkina Faso, a way of encountering forms of life as a practice of immanent critique is presented. By interweaving

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All original german quotations have been translated into English.

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hermeneutic and postcolonial perspectives, conditions for the success of such a new encounter of the intercultural foreign are formulated in order to find moments of truth as snapshots.

Keywords: intercultural, forms of life, postcolonial, hermeneutic, (moments of) truth, representation, social transformation

Resumo: Verdade, ou melhor, as verdades das e nas representações de cultura equivalem a um desafio no pensamento pedagógico. Usando um exemplo ambivalente do projeto de arte “Opera Village”, de Christoph Schlingensiefel, em Burquina Faso, uma forma de encontrar formas de vida na prática de crítica imanente é apresentada. Entrelaçando a perspectiva hermenêutica e a pós-colonial, condições ao sucesso desse novo encontro do estrangeiro intercultural são formuladas a fim de se acharem momentos de verdade como cópias instantâneas.

Palavras-chave: interculturalidade, formas de vida, pós-colonialidade, hermenêutica, (momentos de) verdade, representação, transformação social.

In the article „Zeigt das wahre Afrika!“ (“Show the true Africa!”) published in the weekly newspaper “Die Zeit” (03/2006) in 2006, author Henning Mankell (1948-2015) criticises the western media for showing Africa as a place of misery, death and warlike violence, thus painting a false picture of the continent. He calls for the portrayal of the “true Africa”. In the article “AfrikaSpiegelBilder und WahrnehmungsfILTER: Was erzählen europäische Afrikabilder über Europa” Philippe Kersting (2011) evaluates Mankell’s demand as “naive and problematic” (Kersting 2011, p. 3). For according to Kersting, the representation of “true Africa” does not exist at all: Africa could “only exist in a double plural. On the one hand in the plural of the multiple realities on Africa and on the other hand in the plural of the multiple realities in Africa” (Kersting 2011, p. 3). Instead of the demand for the representation of the true Africa, Kersting therefore calls for “Show another Africa” and “Perceive another Africa!” (cf. Kersting 2011, p. 3).

1. CLASSIFICATION OF FINDINGS AND OBJECTIVES

From a postcolonial perspective, from which Kersting speaks, it is possible to show “another Africa”, but it is impossible to show a “true Africa”. For the postcolonial perspective is characterised in its epistemic foundation by turning away from the idea that there could be a category of “truth” or a category of “cultural identity” in terms of cultural representations. Rather, the postcolonial perspective is concerned with investigating the mechanisms and strategies by which supposed “truths” and so-called “cultural identities” are produced. The word postcolonial marks the time after colonisation and refers to continuities and parallels to colonial power relations in the world today, specifically to the elevation of Western civilisation to the norm, which continues to exist in a changed form in the globalised world. Inequities, relationships of dependence, domination and exploitation are permanently (re-)produced, albeit in a different way than in the time of colonialism. As a result of colonialism, Europeans have reflected back to the formerly colonised peoples and cultures a “degrading image of themselves”, which then became one of the “most powerful tools of their oppression” (Taylor 1992/2017, p. 14), as it had a massive impact on the self-perception and self-attribution of the colonised. Specifically, the colonised have learned to see themselves through the eyes of the oppressors, to think of themselves in their categories. In a postcolonial perspective, the (power) relations that continue to re-stage these attributions of identity should be exposed, so that change becomes possible.

The demand for the depiction of a "true Africa" is – read postcolonially – nothing more than a discursive pattern, a linguistic strategy to mark an image of Africa as true, and thus to make the represented idea of cultural identity appear natural, essential, holistic or "God-given", in order to emphasize this "true" image in the mixture of competing attributions of meaning. The talk of "true Africa" is merely a European pattern of interpretation, a foreign attribution, but it nevertheless has an effect on the Africans' self-understanding and intensifies the suppression of their own self-conceptions. In a postcolonial perspective, different representations of Africa exist side by side or one after the other; they are always representations of Africa that are in principle equally valid. On the one hand, every image of Africa is created by *someone*, from certain interests, with certain effects and consequences. On the other hand, each picture of Africa shows only a small part of everyday life, so Africa can always be represented differently.

Now the question arises whether we can meet Mankell's demand for the representation of a "true Africa" in a postcolonial way of thinking. Mankell, as the "Zeit" article also shows, is anything but theoretically naive; rather, he is a "postcolonial-informed" person, i.e. he is aware of the postcolonial critique of powerful, hegemonic representations. But unlike the postcolonial thinkers, Mankell is not concerned with merely collecting the different and always "different" representations of Africa. Rather, he has an evaluation of Africa's representations in terms of a moment of truth in mind. Let's take Mankell seriously for a moment, let us assume that a "true Africa" could be shown. In what way, we would then, have to ask, could "true Africa" become visible and from where does the talk of "true Africa" theoretically derive its validity?

The aim of our article is therefore to find a way to understand the relationship between "Europe" and "Africa" in a different way than (merely) in the (post-)colonial disposition, namely in a way that succeeds in representing the "true Africa". From a philosophical-hermeneutic theoretical perspective it is possible to speak of a true respectively truer Africa. Thus, the encounter of competing forms of life, provided that it succeeds and a process of social transformation is set in motion, leads to a true(r) form of life. Successful intercultural encounters can be described as the practice of immanent critique of forms of life, as Jaeggi (2014) points out following Hegel and Marx. In this sense, the new state of a form of life gained through intercultural transformation is true – and truer than the old one – because it contains within itself the processing of the inadequacy of the old position.

We are looking for a case study that will help us to better understand the meaning of an encounter of forms of life as a practice of immanent critique, which at the same time does not negate the postcolonial critique, which is unquestionably still justified, since postcolonial conditions continue to inscribe themselves in every intercultural encounter under global social conditions. The German film and theatre director, author and action artist Christoph Schlingensief (1960-2010) worked until his death on the project "Operndorf-Afrika", a place of "intercultural encounter" (Schlingensief in operndorf-afrika.com 2019e) near the West African Quagadougou in Burkina Faso. Mankell is one of several donor-friendly supporters of the project "Operndorf Afrika" (cf. Niermann 2013, p. 18), presumably an indication of the hopes Mankell himself associated with this project.⁴

Our article is structured as follows: After the introductory remarks, in point 2 "Post-colonial perspectives on alterity" and in point 3 "Immanent critique of forms of life – a hermeneutic perspective on alterity" the theoretical perspectives already briefly outlined in the introduction are differentiated, so that they can subsequently function as spectacles with different visual acuties and blind spots through which the "Opera Village Project" in its contradictory character becomes recognisable. In point 4 "Decolonialism: Epistemic

⁴ Even if we are aware that there are likely to be ruptures and contradictions between the ideas, the media representations of the "opera village" and the material concretisation and social and intercultural practice on site, the following account is based solely on the media representation of the opera village. This is quite legitimate in view of the objectives of our article.

disobedience and border thinking” we discuss the extent to which it is legitimate to adopt a postcolonial or an intercultural hermeneutic perspective in search for a new form of relationship between Europe and Africa. For “with the demand for epistemic decolonisation, a radical decoupling from modern European thinking” (Knobloch 2020, p. 228) is called for, which underpins both the hermeneutic and the postcolonial perspective in order to promote the control of subjectivity and knowledge, which is inherent in education and transformation processes in particular, as an essential moment of colonial rule (cf. Knobloch 2020, p. 228). After the appointment of the theoretical field we will deal in point 5 with the case study “The Opera Village Africa (Schlingensiefel) – between postcolonial Critique and the Educational Encounter with the Cultural Foreign”. For it is part of the art project to refer again and again, explicitly or implicitly, to the hermeneutical potentials of intercultural encounter, as well as to postcolonial critique. The entanglement between the contradictory theoretical discourses that are repeatedly brought into consciousness and the ambiguous everyday practice that takes place is structurally inscribed in the work. The opera village becomes recognisable as an ambivalent place, whereby the contradiction is understood as a motor of social dynamics and dialectical transformation, in the execution of which the “true Africa” can be shown for a moment. The contribution ends with a summary in point 6 “Conclusion: Show the true Africa!”.

2. POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES ON ALTERITY

Africa cannot be represented in itself; rather, the representation of Africa has always been the result of a relationship between “Europe” and “Africa”, in which “Europe” adopts the Western view, in which “Africa” is grasped or altered as the Other. It is a process in which the colonial Other is produced through differentiation. In the work “Orientalism”, which is regarded as the founding document of postcolonialism, Edward Said (1978) uses the example of the devaluation process of the Orient to illustrate how Europe’s self-confident identity came about as a result of differentiation between the West and the Others, and exposes this division of the world as binary oppositional fiction. Postcolonial criticism constantly reminds us of the hegemonic social situation that underpins this relationship. According to Anderson (2018), hegemony refers to the “predominance and superiority of an actor (state, institution, organisation, individuals) in political, military, economic, religious and cultural terms. Other actors have only limited opportunities to assert their interests vis-à-vis the hegemon” (Schlottmann/Wintzer 2019, p. 301).

While postcolonial research in the 1960s and 1970s focused on the history of colonisation and its effects on the culture, economy and politics of colonised countries as well as on the processes of independence, the 1980s saw the establishment of theories and models that examined all forms of colonial power relations, which, despite the legal and political sovereignty of the former colonies, continued to shape the relationship between the West and other countries even after decolonisation (cf. Schlottmann/Wintzer 2019, p. 303). Specifically, postcolonial thinking focuses on the analysis of discourses and symbolisms. For it is through linguistic and visual representations that normative images and ideas emerge that mark Africa as culturally and civilizationally underdeveloped and that discursively constitute identities, concepts and practices at the level of representations (“othering”). It is the concern of the postcolonial perspective to criticise these social realities. Unquestioned self-understandings are deconstructed, i.e. exposed to the patterns through which reality is constituted along these assignments of meaning. In the repeated naming and reflection of the previously unspoken power relations lies the chance to become aware of the hegemonic structures and consequently the chance to change the relationship under still persistent global power relations. By making these assignments of meaning visible, changes of the individual, social and political situation become possible.

At the same time, the exposure of representations as technologies of domination, which draw antagonistic lines of difference between the colonised and the colonising, can only ever support the process of decolonisation at the beginning. For cultures do not meet, as the Indian postcolonial cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabah argues, as temporally stable, closed and pure entities, so-called container cultures, in the sense of a cultural notion of cultural essentialism. Instead, new meanings, interpretations and interpretations of meaning are constantly emerging in the uninterrupted debates and discussions. In the 1990s, Homi K. Bhabah emphasized the necessity of a Third Space in his work "The Location of Culture" (1994). In this cultural interspace, it would be possible to enable the productivity of the inconsistent, of difference, in other words, to develop and negotiate cultural diversity instead of consolidating differentiations in a juxtaposition of foreign colonial and colonised cultures. Colonial power relations become apparent while at the same time rebelling against colonial structures, so that cultural difference is constantly being recreated. Homi Bhabah calls the processual and creative re-construction of identity hybridity. "The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha/Rutherford 1990, p. 211 after Bonz/Struve 2006, p. 144).

The possibilities of articulating the oppressed will be discussed against the background of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's text "Can the subaltern speak? (1988/2008), before which the claim of social negotiation of meaning appears once again in a different light. For Spivak doubts that the complex mechanisms of oppression can be easily levered out or circumvented so that the oppressed subjects can from now on simply "speak, act and know" (Spivak 1988/2008, p. 276). She demands that the oppressed and unrepresented, the subalterns, be heard. This does not mean that the marginalised are too passive to defend themselves; rather, "speaking" in the rhetorical question that serves as the title of her text means the complete execution of the act of speaking, which includes listening. The subalterns, however, are often not listened to. Spivak therefore sees one of the main tasks of postcolonial intellectuals who are marginalised and come from the global periphery as representing the subalterns and at the same time self-reflectively referring to their own way of dealing with the representation of others by, among other things, repeatedly bringing their own privileged role in the social structure into consciousness. Spivak calls on postcolonial intellectuals to recognise their own role as perpetrators, instead of seeing themselves merely as victims of Western racism (cf. Nandi 2006, p. 132).

Since 2000, the interdisciplinary research field of Critical Whiteness Research (cf. Arndt et al. 2017) has become established. The element connecting the different approaches is the change of perspective: Racism is now recognised and negotiated as a problem of white people rather than as a problem of the "People of Colour". This demands that whites no longer remain invisible by observing and investigating others, but rather take a reflective look at themselves and that "whites" are also investigated from a "black perspective", changing their position from the described and imagined to the describing and imagining.

In the course of postcolonial critique, the perspective on development research and development cooperation was also shifted. In the course of the over sixty-year history of development research, various development theories were formulated with the aim of explaining underdevelopment and making recommendations for development, which were criticised as monocausal, Eurocentric, under-complex, geodeterministic and not very self-reflexive. The basic dilemma of development research was to set development constitutively and at the same time to critically question it. Post-development approaches therefore abandon the motive of development, also in order to prevent from the outset that the history of European progress is merely transferred to other countries. The aim is to achieve autonomous self-organisations of local, regional and national communities (Schlottmann/Wintzer 2019, p. 305; Ziai 2012).

3. IMMANENT CRITIQUE OF FORMS OF LIFE – A HERMENEUTIC PERSPECTIVE ON ALTERITY

In the following, the contact of a form of life with other forms of life is understood as a problem or crisis that challenges to transformation processes of one's own and foreign forms of life. Jaeggi calls forms of life

„culturally shaped forms of human coexistence, orders of human coexistence, which comprise an ensemble of practices and orientations, but also their institutional manifestations and materializations. Differences in forms of life are thus not only expressed in different beliefs, values and attitudes; they manifest themselves in fashion, architecture, the legal system and ways of organising the family, in what Musil calls the 'durable fabric of houses, laws, regulations and historical traditions' that makes up our lives" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 20).

The encounter of different cultural forms of life becomes a successful process of social transformation if such a process is understood as a rational learning process caused by problems and crises, to which the participants always have to relate themselves self-reflectively. For "the question of the success of a form of life as a learning process also includes the reflexive accessibility of this process, or more generally: how those involved in a form of life can behave or relate to it" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 316). If transformations occur in the course of a rational learning process during the contact of forms of life, the result is again a form of life, but one in which the former form of life is suspended, in the sense of being contained. Since the new position takes up the position to be overcome, it can be said that this new life form, as a receiving transformation of the old, is more true than the old form of life.

„Transformative immanence is a process in which 'the new', the successful practice as opposed to the old, and the transformed, richer norm can only be won by dealing with the 'old' and overcoming it, not by ignoring it. The respective 'new state' would be 'truer' than the old one, as long as it solves the problem, eliminates the deficit or the one-sidedness that drove the old state into crisis or confronted it with a problem" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 303).

Forms of life, which are transformed in the course of rational learning processes in the encounter with other forms of life, are successful forms of life, in contrast to organisations of living together which are neutral to the form of life and which are characterised by failure of the transformation process. "Failed forms of life suffer from a collective practical reflection deficit, a learning blockade. In other words, they are not able to solve the problems they face or to adequately perceive the crisis experiences they are exposed to as experiences and transform themselves accordingly" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 227).

The rationality of social dynamism brought into play here is neither to be understood as a self-evolving and compelling process of development, nor does it come to a predetermined end or assume that humanity as a whole is moving forward.

„These are processes of varying magnitude, which are in different relationships to each other, but which do not have to claim to add up to a uniform progress movement. There is then not just one central crisis, but a variety of interfering sources of disturbance, which may also be systematically interrelated. The aim is thus to reformulate a strong position in the philosophy of history that does not share the teleology of the latter, i.e. the assumption of an inevitably necessary sequence of stages of social development, but rather 'pragmatically deflates' it, so to speak, and can also refer to manifold (even small-scale) transformations, without prejudging their interaction in a 'large whole'" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 318).

The argumentation, which has so far only been briefly developed, follows here and then the book "Kritik von Lebensformen" ("Critique of Forms of Life") presented in 2014 by the philosopher Rahel Jaeggi, in which she answers the question "Can forms of life be criticised? (Jaeggi 2014, p. 9), and thus opposes "ethical abstinence" in this question with the elaboration and argumentative defence of a certain form of critique that is not pursued from an external authoritarian perspective, but arises from a process in which critique and self-critique are intertwined.

The model of the immanent critique of forms of life, which Jaeggi strongly advocated, is neither dependent on external standards nor does it remain within a frame of reference of internal (inter-) subjective standards. Rather, the standard is found in the criticised, i.e. in the matter of the problem or in the success of problem-solving processes themselves. For immanent criticism draws its standards from contexts that are contradictory in themselves. This means that by joining the contradictory inherent norms of a problem, it also criticises them. The immanent critique thus starts at moments of crisis and tension within a form of life, and transcends this starting point. Oriented "to the crises into which social practices and ideals can fall, [immanent critique] is the critical ferment of a form of life's self-transformation" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 259). The transformation is possible because forms of life contain a moment of openness of experience and permeability, if they are not compulsive and dysfunctional. This transformation process "can be described as an ethical learning process or, more old-fashioned, as a process of emancipation, which according to this assumption is triggered by the critical thematisation of one's own and other forms of life" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 60).

The claim to truth and validity of the contact between rival forms of life is thus based on the "criterion of the successful overcoming of the problems, crises and contradictions inherent in the conditions to be criticised - ultimately on the rational and enriching character of the development process itself, which is initiated by the immanent criticism" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 304). This happens with and through the individuals and through the self-reflective reference to the rules of social dynamics. Jaeggi formulates the significance of individuals for the transformative learning process of forms of life as follows:

„Furthermore, it must be assumed that the new forms of life have not simply asserted themselves behind the backs of individuals. If existing practices are to become a learning process, they must be changed through the collective and (to a certain extent) reflexively accompanied transformation by those involved in the respective practical context" (Jaeggi 2014, p. 329).

This quotation touches on the essence of immanent criticism: it gets by without meta-language games and Archimedes' point. Instead, it starts out from a concrete historical and socially situated context and transcends it at the same time. For this it is necessary that the socio-historical situation be criticised as contradictory, because without this criticism the contradiction would not be visible. The analytic procedure of the critic is thus indispensable so that the contradictoriness of the context can be recognized and transformation can take place from here.

4. DECOLONIALISM: EPISTEMIC DISOBEDIENCE AND BORDER THINKING

Here we take up the decolonial perspective, from which it becomes clear how the relationship between (post-)coloniality and modernity is not only questioned, but also has to be rethought, and what role the humanistic, hermeneutic approaches of a Western character and the postcolonial approaches (may) play in this. From a postcolonial perspective, it is fundamentally doubted that references to humanistic theories can be helpful in order to reflect on the shaping of the relationship between "Africa" and "Europe", which would

claim to be a relationship of equals. For the social-philosophical-hermeneutic theories on education, transformation and emancipation are products of modernity, or more precisely, they have developed in the course of the European Enlightenment, so that the humanistic rationality of European modernity is inscribed in them (cf. also the summary and commentary on this discussion at Rösen 2018). The control of subjectivity and knowledge is emphasised as an essential moment of colonial rule:

„The control of subjectivity and cognition – one could also say: the control of education – was already a central moment of colonialism in so far as it enabled the colonised to recognise the legitimacy of colonialism. For colonialism must also appear legitimate to the colonised insofar as it serves their own education. This educational task can be justified by the colonial difference, i.e. by the intellectual and cultural inferiority of the colonised and the superiority of the colonisers” (Knobloch 2020, p. 229).

Therefore Walter Mignolo (2012), a prominent thinker on decolonialism and member of the interdisciplinary research collective of the same name, which is active above all in Latin America, calls for the following which also includes the sociologists Edgardo Lander and Aníbal Quijano, the educationalist Catherine Walsh, the ethnologist Arturo Escobar and the philosophers Enrique Dussel and María Lugones, calls for epistemic decolonisation, a radical decoupling from modern European thinking (cf. Knobloch 2020, p. 228). From a decolonial perspective, the relationship between coloniality and modernity presents itself in such a way that the criticism of the coloniality of modern education was made from a power-critical perspective, which in turn must be described as modern because it emerged from the experience of coloniality. Modern thinking can therefore not easily be understood as a purely European project and traced back to a merely European and Western intellectual history. In the course of the criticism of modern thinking, there is also a reversal of the colonial epistemic power relations: “While European colonialism and Western hegemony was legitimised by the intellectual and cultural superiority of ‘Western civilisation’ over the ‘rest’ of the world, it is now critical voices from the non-Western world that point to the limitations of European horizons” (Knobloch 2020, p. 231). This decolonial interpretation of the circumstances exposes two premises as mere assertions. It becomes clear that neither the assertion that humanism is a purely European project nor the assertion that only the West is epistemically powerful is true.

On the basis of this finding, the concern of the decolonials can be understood as being that the relationship between postcolonial critique and epistemic modernity, i.e. hermeneutical theoretical perspectives that developed in the course of the Enlightenment, should be renegotiated by focusing on the unquestioned and established philosophical boundaries between these theoretical horizons (cf. Knobloch 2020, p. 231). Decolonial theory relies on a borderline thinking based on the experience and knowledge of the coloniality of modern education. This leads to “understanding one’s own education and the self-image and world view associated with it both as emancipatory and in this sense modern, and as oppressive and in this sense colonial” (Knobloch 2020, p. 235). This colonial attitude, which sets one’s own self-image and world view as non plus ultra and classifies, categorises and evaluates the culturally foreign in one’s own patterns of perception, description and interpretation, is not only to be found in the West, but also in the former colonies; it can be found both among those who argue hermeneutically and those who argue postcolonially. So how can the epistemologies of postcolonialism and hermeneutics be brought into play without lapsing into a colonial attitude? Decolonialism answers this question: Border thinking makes it possible to switch back and forth between different offers of identity, i.e. to identify oneself and others in a double way, both with modernity, understood as a process of education and liberation, which is figured in intercultural encounters and hermeneutically framed in an epistemic sense, and with postcolonial critique, in the sense of

a fundamental critique of global social conditions, which also underpins every intercultural encounter. Accordingly, Mignolo comes to the following assessment of the future:

„The global future will not be designed or filled by an ethno-class or by a secular or religious ideology, but it will be inter-epistemic, dialogic and plurivisual. In this way, border thinking will become an inevitably critical and decolonial method of epistemic and political projects that fill up the trenches and reveal the imperial complicity by which the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality are linked” (Mignolo 2012, p. 206 after Knobloch 2020, p. 236).

The prerequisite for this decolonial border thinking as a form of thinking, living and acting is the attitude of “epistemic disobedience”, which enables us to understand social conditions on a local, regional, national and global scale as being changeable again and again, and to be capable of action in the communal sphere, and which on the other hand enables us to open ourselves up again and again to the culturally foreign, to be (existentially) touched by it and (unpredictably) to be changed by it. This attitude is not an easy one, it has to be brought into consciousness and practised. It is the foundation of a global future that is neither concerned with re-westernization or the completion of the project of Western modernity, nor with the de-Westernization and restriction of Western modernity in favour of “the politics of the economically strongly emerging economies (China, Singapore, Indonesia, Brazil and Turkey followed by Japan)” (Mignolo 2011, p. 7 (IV)), but rather with the “emergence of a global political society decoupled from re-westernization and de-Westernization” (Mignolo 2011, p. IV). Decolonialism is understood as a third force that “claims existence in the construction of a future that must not be left to the intentions of re-Westernization or de-Westernization” (Mignolo 2011, p. 8 (IV)). How can this decolonial attitude of epistemic disobedience be successfully practised? In our view, the “Opera Village Africa” can be recognized, at least in its framework, as a forward-looking project, as an intervention, as an intervening practice of transmodernism (Enrique Dussel). The project can be described as transmodern, since it is “significantly fed by the (marginalised) possibilities of exteriority”, meaning the hitherto excluded, the exterior cultural stranger, the oppressed as the subject of exteriority, and since it describes „a beyond yet to be constructed that transcends (Western) modernity” (Kastner/Weibel 2012, pp. 13 and 14).

Access to the case study “Opera Village” has the advantage that, as a work of art, it reveals the complex and contradictory structures and dynamics of intercultural encounters as well as their transformative potential as if through a burning glass. For Schlingensiefel’s art has the claim to make transparent the rules of the game and the possibilities according to which a successful intercultural encounter takes place, as well as the resistances of reality which can restrict, limit, distract or prevent intercultural contact, in concrete terms, the persistent post-colonial structures. Communication of the principles according to which an intercultural encounter can succeed, as well as provocation of postcolonial criticism towards the project and the project management are thus part of the artwork itself. By making the rules of intercultural encounters under (post-)colonial social conditions transparent, we become aware of them on the one hand, and on the other hand this transparency is an essential component of every successful encounter, since only by turning to the social, political and economic rules that underpin the encounter is it possible to consciously deal with them and thus potentially change the otherwise involuntary colonial automatisms that characterise the field of European-African encounters.

At the same time, we also encounter some difficulties in its representation by taking the case study from the field of art – especially as we think about this place from a distance. It goes without saying that Schlingensiefel’s vision does not follow a metaplan, but – in keeping with the previous explanations – must be understood as a work in process. In view

of the many fractures between discourses, lived experience and ideas, it is more important to repeatedly establish conclusiveness and to anchor oneself anew and gain a foothold in the permanent change of perspectives. This addresses one of the main challenges of the Schlingensief project, which Niermann (2013, p. 24) characterises as follows: “The complete disentanglement of the various dimensions of the opera village alone is a complex task of thinking that must fail, because Schlingensief’s cosmos cannot be grasped on the level of analytical understanding alone, but touches on self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, on feeling itself”.

5. THE “OPERA VILLAGE AFRICA” (SCHLINGENSIEF) – BETWEEN POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE AND THE EDUCATIONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE CULTURALLY FOREIGN

Christoph Schlingensief, born on 24 October 1960 in Oberhausen (Germany) (cf. Gaensheimer 2011a, p. 357), was a controversial and popular artist. For Janke and Kovacs (2011, p. 9) he was “an artist who worked at the pulse of political, social and media developments”, for Gaensheimer (2011b, p. 39) one of “the great and important artists of our time” and for Elfriede Jelinek (in Janke/Kovacs 2011, p. 49) “THE artist par excellence”. However, through his films, theatre and opera productions, projects and actions that addressed political and social issues, he was also perceived as provocative, irritating, ambiguous and confusing (cf. Gaensheimer 2011b, p. 39; Niermann 2013, p. 66). His works include „United Trash“ (Film, 1995/96), „eine Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir (A Church of Fear of the Stranger in Me)“ (Fluxus oratorio, 2008), „Mea Culpa“ (ReadyMadeOpera, 2009), „Sterben lernen – Herr Andersen stirbt in 60 Minuten (Learning to Die - Mr Andersen Dies in 60 Minutes)“ (Theatre, 2009) and „Via Intolleranza II“ (Opera, 2010), among many others. His work was influenced by Fluxus and Joseph Beuys, but also by Richard Wagner (cf. Gaensheimer 2011a, p. 23).

In 2008, Christoph Schlingensief was diagnosed with cancer and died on 21 August 2010 in Berlin. He processed his experiences with cancer in productions between 2008 and 2010, among others. After his diagnosis, he made the decision to build the “Opera Village Africa” with opera house, school and hospital (cf. Schlingensief in Blasberg 2009). After a long search, he found a place for his opera village about 30 km away from the capital of Burkina Faso. Schlingensief had the desire to do something “useful” with art. The opera village should be a place of international meeting, artistic exchange and work. The plans for the opera village were drawn up by Francis Kéré, a native of Burkina Faso.

In the speech at the laying of the foundation stone on 8 February 2010, Schlingensief stressed the relevance of education and the construction of the school (cf. Schlingensief 2011, p. 104). For it is there that the children and youths “should develop their own images, learn their regional music, build musical instruments, form bands, make recordings, make films” (Schlingensief 2011, p. 104). On 8 October 2011, the school of the opera village was opened; today, 50 pupils (50% girls) can study there in six classes. The school has an artistic focus, which can be seen, among other things, in the equipment with a film projection room, workshops and a sound studio. It also offers extra-curricular artistic activities, such as workshops with artists from Burkina Faso (cf. operndorf-afrika.com 2019b). In order to provide the pupils with a warm meal, there is a canteen, which is run with the help of mothers and grandmothers. Furthermore, there is a hospital ward in the opera village, which focuses on emergency medical and dental care as well as on obstetrics and health education (especially dental hygiene) (cf. operndorf-afrika.com 2019c). There are flats on the premises for the school and hospital staff.

The architecture of the opera village is characterised by the fact that local building materials are combined with European technology in a climatically suitable construction

method. The architect of the "Opera Village Africa", Francis Kéré, follows a concept of social architecture. This is based on a construction method that takes into account local conditions, possibilities and needs and involves the population (as workers) in the building process in order to enable sustainable building processes and maintenance (cf. operndorf-afrika.com 2019a). All rooms and buildings are designed in such a way that it is possible to live together and be together.

A festival hall with rehearsal rooms is to be built in the centre of the opera village. Although this building does not yet exist, cultural events have been taking place since 2012, organised by programme director Alex Moussa Sawadogo (cf. operndorf-afrika.com 2019d). In addition to the exchange with regional artists, an exchange with international artists through artist-in-residence programmes is also planned, and guesthouses have been built for the artists. In addition, there is a library as well as literacy courses and further education with an agricultural focus in order to enable a self-sufficient supply in the long term.

Since Schlingensiefel's death, his widow Aino Laberenz has taken over much of the coordination of the realisation of the opera village, for which she established a foundation in 2012 (Stiftung Operndorf Afrika). Horst Köhler (former German President) has been patron of the project since 2011. Acceptance of the opera village in Burkina Faso can be seen from the fact that the Burkinabe government employs the staff of the hospital and school. In the long term, the entire project is to be transferred to the Burkina Faso government, thus enabling the residents to exercise sovereignty (cf. operndorf-afrika.com 2019e). Even now, jobs are being given exclusively to Burkinabe.

In Christoph Schlingensiefel's works one can always find links to Beuys. Whereas earlier projects of Schlingensiefel's had direct references to Beuys' works of art (e.g. in „Eine Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir“/ "A Church of Fear of the Stranger in Me", in „Hase“/"Hare" and „Fettecke“/"Fat Corner"), in "Opera Village" he takes up the concept of social sculpture. Social sculpture is based on an expanded concept of art. With the statement "Everyone is an artist" Beuys means that everyone is a designer who helps to shape society as a social sculpture (cf. Buschkühle 2017, p. 452). Behind this assumption is an enlightened, anthropological, pedagogical concept of art. Art can become a social/civil initiative. Schlingensiefel, too, is ascribed not only to removing the boundaries between artistic genres, but also to removing the boundary between art and life (cf. Schweeger 2011, p. 328). Art is a way of influencing social processes; it can also be seen as a form of democracy (cf. Steinmeier 2011, p. 338). His expanded concept of art is based, like that of Beuys, on the conviction that something "new, great" can arise from the connection of life, i.e. human activities and art (Steinmeier 2011, p. 339), if art means life. For Schlingensiefel (and Beuys) art can be understood as a (social) process.

Schlingensiefel keeps this social process going by means of contradictions: Thus the "Opera Village Africa" is both in one, a modern project of the formation and reshaping of forms of life or of cultural identity in relation to cultural alterity, as well as a (post-) colonial project, which with its realisation necessarily forms a part of the colonial matrix of powerful persistent global-societal dependency relations spanning the globe. (Post-) colonial critique and intercultural encounter of the culturally foreign are intertwined in this project, they reinforce and inspire each other. Using exemplary facets of the project, it will be emphasised in the following that the opera village repeatedly challenges us to change perspectives and positions. In the course of this dance of points of view, cultural identity can always emerge anew in the confrontation with the cultural foreign. It also becomes clear that the "true Africa", as well as the "true Europe" cannot be found once and for all in this project. But it can be found again and again in the effort of the lively movement of thought, language and feeling in the transforming encounter. In this sense, the following facets of the project are to be understood as traces on which the "living movement of thought, language and feeling" can ignite:

- Schlingensief repeatedly uses the terms “Africa” and “Europe”. On the one hand, this is used to name the socially effective categories. This naming is necessary because these terms belong to the socio-historical context that is to be analysed and transformed in the „Opera Village Project“. On the other hand, these terms can also be read in the sense of external attributions, so that the difference between Africa and Europe, which should actually be transformed, is permanently reified (cf. on the necessity of reification through language: Schlottmann 2012).
- The social process can be seen in the realisation of the project by the people involved in the opera village. Here, Schlingensief’s extended opera concept is combined with the demand “To each his opera! (Niermann 2013, p. 93) becomes clear. In contrast to the frozen “high culture opera”, Schlingensief sees opera in the “Opera Village Africa” as an instrument of communication and encounter, as a possibility of “knowledge-, culture- and feeling-transfer between Africa and Europe” (Niermann 2013, p. 91). In this form of opera, various art forms come together and result in a living social organism that interacts with its environment and society. In this way the opera can also be a place of healing (cf. Niermann 2013, p. 92). At the same time, Schlingensief emphasises the concept of “opera” prominently in the title of his work, thus evoking the criticism of the postcolonials, who denounce the fact that it is precisely artistic (and scientific) practices that mostly unconsciously re-stage the colonial mechanisms of oppression. Schlingensief himself reveals the motif of his choice of words by referring to the staging of the contradiction between the image of “European high culture” and his request to understand “opera” as a form of life as well as a concept of art. His declared aim is to reflect on the concept of art through these deliberately provoked misunderstandings (cf. Schlingensief 2014, p. 166).
- For Schlingensief (2011, p. 103) “the wealth of Burkina Faso [...] lies in the spiritual purity of its inhabitants”. By this he means the “possibility of feeling things that do not always show themselves in pure physicality” (Schlingensief 2011, p. 18). In this sense he would like to “learn from Burkina Faso!” (Schlingensief 2011, p. 18). The “Opera Village” and the encounter with Africa should enable a sensitivity, a wholeness. Niermann (2013, p. 96) puts it like this: “Africa is once again the opportunity to see this [in its openness towards the other] in the face of the other and finally to question oneself.” His aim is to experience himself in the encounter with the foreign, with the seemingly other, and to sharpen his own perception, “in order to get to know the ‘foreign’ in his ‘own’” (Niermann 2013, p. 108). This statement allows us to discuss the kind of relationship that Schlingensief has in mind with his project. The question arises whether he is interested in a relationship at eye level or whether it is just a relationship in which the other is functionalised in the context of self-discovery. Schlingensief also speaks of his desire to “officially steal” from “Africa”. It is his declared concern that “Africa” should not be “put on the wrong masks” (Niermann 2013, pp. 86, 90), but that the images of Africa (but also those of opera) should be revealed. By using the expression “officially stealing”, Schlingensief intends to mark his art project as a hegemonic practice and provokes the discussion about his art project as a colonial system.
- With the “Opera Village Project“, Schlingensief breaks out of “classical” development aid with the help of art in the sense of social sculpture, since social and economic inequalities are not at all an issue at first glance. But even if this project does not seem to correspond to “classical” development aid (cf. Niermann 2013, p. 100), it does have aspects of it. This is expressed, among other things, in the organisation of the project, even if Schlingensief himself describes it as a work of art and others as a “provocation of conventional development thinking” (Niermann 2013, p. 118). In contrast to development projects, the approach here is carried out through art. Nevertheless, even Schlingensief (2014, p. 171) admits the hidden feeling “that Africa is after all a very important continent, that one has to intervene and, yes, help there”.

Thus, the project homepage also calls for donations for the opera village, a practice of classical development aid.

- The „Opera Village Project“ provides a form, with the wish that the Opera Village be used in a participatory, emancipatory way for free development, and yet the “form” of the Opera Village is needed in its function to be what it intends to be. It must be used as a place of (intercultural) exchange and learning as well as artistic activity in order to fulfil this (desirable) image of the staging of encounter, liberation and freedom.
- Schlingensiefel speaks of the contrast between a highly reserved Europe and a living, spiritual Africa and evokes postcolonial criticism through this practice of othering. Niermann (2013, p. 66) sees in the opera village above all a possibility to link up apparent contradictions in a new dialogue. One does not have to remove them, one can leave them as they are and thus make them a subject of discussion. This is why he concludes that the opera village is “not a postcolonial theory machine”, but rather “a plea for overcoming an outdated mode of rule”. The opera village enables new perspectives through the encounter with the foreign.
- The film about the opera village (YouTube: Christoph Schlingensiefel Operndorf Afrika, minute 9:08-9:50) shows how Schlingensiefel climbs the red hill, the site of his opera village. As Schlingensiefel phrase it, “actually it’s a mysterious place and it’s so great to slowly get to know the secret now and then take the others with you later and show them, like a little boy, where the treasure might lie. And the treasure is yourself and the other person and the whole and that is what I have been looking for all my life, that the whole is the treasure, and some of it may be deformed. The truth is the whole. Exactly”. This provokes the assessment that Schlingensiefel is setting himself a monument through the opera village. Even if Schlingensiefel wants to resist the colonial habitus, he remains a “white” artist who has started a (development) project to realise his own longings, wishes and dreams.
- The change of perspectives and positions as a prerequisite for the true cultural identity, which has to be won and portrayed again and again, is made possible by the production of “Opera Village Africa”. In contrast to a merely post-colonial critical perspective or a merely hermeneutically educational and transformation-theoretical perspective, here both perspectives are set in relation to each other in order to create new spaces of possibility for the relationship to the culturally foreign and to oneself. By switching back and forth between a hermeneutical perspective oriented towards understanding and education and a (post-)colonial critical perspective, one’s own space of experience can be expanded and re-narrated. In this paradoxical figuration of postcolonial critique and the “opening encounter”, which must be constantly redesigned, the boundaries between here/me and there/the other are permanently shifting. It is always possible to find new points of reference, possibilities for both sides in the encounter to question and redesign their own self and world relations (cf. Knobloch 2020, p. 234).

6. CONCLUSION: SHOW THE TRUE AFRICA!

The question of the possibility of representing the “true Africa” was reformulated into the question of how the relationship between “Europe” and “Africa” can be understood and shaped differently from (merely) in a (post-)colonial manner, so that the “true Africa” can come to light. We asked about the possibilities and limits of an intercultural encounter of forms of life in which the “true Africa”, just like the “true Europe”, can take shape. For if social transformation succeeds in the course of contact between competing forms of life, both sides of those involved in the dynamics are always involved in the change at the

same time. The forms of life were understood as cultural entities that “are not individual options, but super-personal forms of expression with public relevance” (Jaeggi 2014, p. 22) and “living conditions that can be shaped and transformed by people” (Jaeggi 2014, p. 58).

It became clear that cultural representation in postcolonial and hermeneutic perspectives is of varying importance. Whereas in a postcolonial perspective representation is understood as an attribution that determines the identity of the other, representation in a hermeneutic perspective is a stopping point in a process of intercultural contact that has always been ongoing, and thus can only ever be seen as a snapshot in a river that freezes for the moment of representation and allows structures to become visible, but which in the next moment is already subject to the process that leads to a transformation and thus produces new snapshots or representations. While it is pointless in a postcolonial perspective to speak of “identity” in relation to a cultural form of life, the hermeneutic position assumes an identity in difference:

„The talk of social learning processes must therefore assume such an identity of difference: After a transformation brought about by learning, the corresponding form of life must be the same as another; if an experience is to have been made while learning, the subject must still be able to identify this experience in his identity and at the same time be changed. Learning implies a continuity in discontinuity” (Jaeggi 2014, p. 329).

And in this processual and transformative sense, we can say that the representations that emerged as transformations of contradictory social and historical contexts in the course of the immanent critique of forms of life are true(r) than the previous representations.

Using the case study “Opera Village Africa”, five formal criteria can be summarised as conditions for the success of a new kind of encounter between the intercultural foreigner in which a “true Africa” and a “true Europe” can be presented: 1) There can be no simple answers to how “true Europe” and “true Africa” can be presented under postcolonial globalised social conditions. 2) “True Europe or Africa” can only be shown in places that have an ambivalent character, i.e. places where the critique of postcolonial practice is constantly updated and where, despite this, intercultural encounters and understanding are constantly being ventured into anew. 3) If the ambivalence of the social and historically situated context is not concealed, but rather repeatedly analysed and brought up for discussion, and if there is an opening to the culturally foreign of the awareness of what frames one’s own encounter, both sides can opt for the social dynamics that change the quality of the relationship, so that both forms of life in contact with each other are transformed. 4) The true(st) is not something that one person experiences about the other in a distant observer position. Moments of truth are rather dependent on an execution; what is meant is an encounter in which both sides open themselves to something in common. 5) In an intercultural encounter, which is characterised by the fact that both partners in the relationship are sensitised both to the opportunities of an understanding encounter and to the re-production of postcolonial conditions, the attitude of “epistemic disobedience” is practised as a prerequisite for thinking in terms of boundaries. In this way, the conditions for the possibility of change are created, which in the course of coping with practical contradictions and conflicts, are figurative in a crisis. At the same time, moments of truth can never be expected to be found. However, the conditions for this can be kept favourable.

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