Art of Wagnis
Christoph Schlingensief’s Crossing of Wagner and Africa

December 4 to 6, 2015 at Iwalewahaus in Bayreuth

Schlingensief during Wagner-Rallye 2004; Richard von Seydewitz
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Introduction

The German director and action artist Christoph Schlingensief is well known in Bayreuth for his staging of Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal* at four Bayreuth Festivals from 2004 to 2007. Schlingensief’s long-term treatment of Wagner’s music, as well as his fascination with the African continent, is of special interest for Iwalewahaus and its focus on modern and contemporary art from African countries and the African Diaspora.

From the 1990s on Schlingensief’s films, stage productions, performances and installations make both Africa and Wagner a subject of discussion and also interweave the two motifs. Examples for this merging are the stage play *The Berlin Republic or the Ring in Africa* (1999), which implies an early version of the idea to confront Africa with Wagner, or the film *The African Twin Towers* (2005), which was shot in Namibia and covers protagonists like the couple Siegfried and Winifred Wagner.

Schlingensief’s interest in Africa started in 1993 when he first visited Zimbabwe. In the following years he continuously incorporated Africa as a topic in many of his works: from the movie *United Trash* in 1995 to his last stage production *Via Intolleranza II* in 2010. The most important and last work dedicated to Africa (and also to opera of course) is the *African Opera Village*, currently built in Ziniaré, 30 kilometres from Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso’s capital. The main festival hall that shall become the centre of the village does not yet exist, but a
primary school, a health clinic and a recording studio have already been built. After Schlingensief’s death in 2010 his efforts in implementing his vision are carried forward by his wife Aino Laberenz and the Burkina born architect Diébédo Francis Kéré.

The opera village represents Schlingensief’s ambitions to confront everyday life with art but it is also implies political messages. He wanted the opera village to become a place for the production of images of Africa that differ from well-known pictures of famine and war, which people in Europe consume every day. For him Europe should instead receive unique African artistic expressions that are free from influences and limitations of the established European art world. Of course, the underlying imagination of Africa as a virgin ground is highly disputable as Schlingensief reproduced narrations of Africa untouched by European born modernity and all that comes with it. At the same time he was an artist who could be highly reflective and even aggressive at the very same handed down narrations on Africa as *Via Intolleranza II* shows at its best.

During the three days conference academics and artists will examine whether and in what way the connection of Africa and Wagner, as represented in the opera village, can be justified – aesthetically, historically or politically. What can be learned from Schlingensief’s attempt of producing rather unusual connections?
Overview of Panels

Panel 1
Wagner, Schlingensief and Africa: Tracing the Connections
This panel is an introduction to the three cornerstones of the conference. It discusses the historic relation between theatre and religion up to Wagner and Schlingensief. It presents Schlingensief’s application of the Christian desire for salvation in his various works and discusses how this influenced his vision of the African Opera Village. Moreover the panel presents the theatre production The Berlin Republic (1999) as an early attempt to cross Wagner’s Ring of the Nibelung (1876) with the contemporary European dealing with the African continent.

Panel 2
Enhanced Interrelations: Schlingensief Out of Europe
This first panel on Saturday examines Schlingensief’s works by making use of anthropological perspectives that seek to alienate what is common to a European audience. In comparing cultural institutions from Africa with practices found in Schlingensief’s oeuvre it promises unusual approaches to his productions. The panel also introduces Schlingensief’s Deutschlandsuche (1999) as a work that confronts Africa with Wagner and vice versa.
Panel 3
Approaching the Meister: Schlingensief’s Esteem of Wagner’s Operas
The third panel distinguishes different stages in Schlingensief’s approach to Wagner. It introduces Schlingensief’s realisation of Wagner’s *Parsifal* (1882) during the Bayreuth Festival from 2004 to 2007 from a first-hand perspective. The panel finally examines Schlingensief’s attempt to integrate elements of *Parsifal* into the stage production *Mea Culpa* (2009) and presents Schlingensief as an anytime-actor embodying the character of Parsifal himself.

Panel 4
From Prototype German to the Universal Wagner
Saturday evening focuses on the connection between Wagner, respectively opera, and the African continent. Opera is introduced as a global phenomenon demonstrated by different opera productions from Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition a lecture performance traces the African roots of the Parsifal story as written down by Wolfram von Eschenbach during the 13th century.
Panel 5
An Opera Village in Africa
This panel deals with the *African Opera Village* by examining the *Animatograph* (2005-2006) as a central concept and predecessor to the opera village. It discusses the appropriation of the opera village in Burkina Faso by the local population. By consulting first artistic outcomes the opera village is furthermore presented as a place somewhere in the tradition between the (pre-)colonial mission station and Foucault’s Heterotopia.

from shooting of *The African Twin Towers*; Aino Laberenz / Filmgalerie451
## List of Speakers

**Chambers, Lee**  
(Musicology, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, USA)  
Africanicity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Total Work of Art. Selfhood, Social Architecture, and the Operatic Imagination in Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa

**Davis, Jack**  
(Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, USA)  
Schlingensief Plays Parsifal. Melancholy and Community in Mea Culpa

**Degeling, Jasmin**  
(Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, Universität Bochum)  

**Dorsch, Hauke**  
(Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Universität Mainz)  
Wagner and Schlingensief as Griots – Prolegomena to an African Perspective on two German Artists

**Echtler, Magnus**  
(Religionswissenschaft, Universität Bayreuth)  
Pissing the Sacred. Schlingensief's African Opera Village as Fundraising Heterotopia

**Hegenbart, Sarah**  
(Courtauld Institute of Art, London, England)  
Christoph Schlingensief's Opera Village Africa and the Multi-Perspectivism of the Animatograph
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  (Institut für Ethnologie, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt/Main; Université Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso) | The Schlingensief Opera in Burkina Faso: A (poisoned?) gift |
| **Scheer, Anna Teresa**
  (Theatre and Performance, University of New England, Armidale, Australien) | The Berlin Republic or the Ring in Africa. Christoph Schlingensief’s Theatro-Political Farce |
| **Vierke, Ulf and Siegert, Nadine**
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from shooting of *The African Twin Towers*; Aino Laberenz / Filmgalerie451
Lee Chambers  
Musicology, Texas Tech University, Lubbock

Africanity, Cosmopolitanism, and the Total Work of Art:  
Selfhood, Social Architecture, and the Operatic Imagination in  
Contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa

Popular, intellectual, and critical reception of opera often assigns to it the power to escape the mundane, to defy the limits of normal human ability through song, and to reach beyond the self and its present, local constraints to the new worlds made possible by music. Opera thus serves as a method to mark difference from vernacular life, while historical discourses on musical ontologies have associated European art music as modern, objective, literate, transcendent, and autonomous and African music as ancestral, embodied, oral, auto-biographical, and communal. Employing these distinctions, many scholars of African music have tended to focus on traditional and popular repertoires rather than native African involvement in the realm of opera, a category that often serves as a referent to a Eurocentric, imperial, or bourgeois legacy in the arts.

The present study compares and examines themes of development, cultural expansion, and artistic agency as expressed in promotional materials for three operas from Sub-Saharan Africa: Watafiti’s *Utenzi Gerezani*, Mulatu Astatke's *Yared Opera*, and Zé Manel Fortes' *Bintou Wéré*. Like Schlingensief’s vision for *Operndorf Afrika*, rhetoric surrounding each of these productions suggests the power of artistic expression for building
societal, architectural, and economic infrastructures; expanding conceptualizations of the African self; and entangling the processes of musical creativity with those of everyday life. Drawing from the musical phenomenology of Kenyan philosopher John Murungi, I focus on the concepts of cultivation, cosmopolitanism, and multimodality in opera history as an interface with Murungi’s assertion that African musicians are grounded to landscapes, serve as “architects” of human selfhood, and utilize the tools of humanity for multimodal, functional purposes.

The imperial tropes associated with opera—such as cultivation, revelation, and power—are retained in the cases studied; at the same time, “Africa” and the African self are prioritized as centers for the creation and interpretation of these conventions, repositioning opera and its accompanying power as objects of human, rather than foreign, heritage. The affirmation of “opera” through the prioritization of “Africa” and its collective experience of modernity subvert the exclusive ownership of opera by the West. The medium of opera thus serves as a site of global contact, and the occasion of opera expresses the transformational engagement of multiple worlds. In this regard, the experience of opera continually reveals and reshares the African self, its environments, and its relationship to the worlds beyond the stereotypes that have marked the continent in the hierarchies of musical modernity. Opera is positioned as a functional, global instrument for human expression, escaping the mundane by simultaneously challenging the socio-geographic assignment of opera and the reification of Africanity. The African self is framed
as a flexible entity that expands to absorb and re-embody the world of opera and its potential for cultivation.

Karin Witt as Senta in *The Flying Dutchman*; Aino Laberenz
Jack Davis  
Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of West Georgia, Carrollton

Schlingensief Plays Parsifal:  
Melancholy and Community in Mea Culpa

Richard Wagner’s opera Parsifal ends with the renewal of a community and the reinstitution of a ritual: the hero Parsifal heals the suffering Grail King and reestablishes the grail ceremony. Christoph Schlingensief’s “ReadyMadeOper” Mea Culpa (2009), which makes use of Wagner’s Parsifal as its primary source material, at first seems to do the same. But instead of healing a wounded community or individual during the final act, Schlingensief’s opera imagines the founding of a new community: an Operndorf in Burkina Faso. But most of Mea Culpa is not about this imagined community; rather, it follows an actor playing Schlingensief through various stages of living with cancer. And, though there are many characters on stage, including actors playing his dead father and his wife Aino Laberenz, the entire cast of the opera seems to speak with Schlingensief’s voice. Mea Culpa does not stage an individual hero who heals a community, but rather a community of characters who channel the persona of a single individual. Furthermore, not only was he often portrayed as a kind of “pure fool” in the press, especially following his staging of Parsifal at Bayreuth in 2004, Schlingensief cast himself as a Parsifal-like character in his autobiographies as well. In fact, throughout much of his late work, Schlingensief could be said to be “playing” Parsifal.
In my paper, I will examine this constitutive tension between Schlingensief’s communal vision of social justice (as expressed in the *Operndorf*) and the melancholic, narcissistic persona he projected in his adaptations of the *Parsifal* story in his late work in the theater and beyond. I will use Roberto Esposito’s thought on the relationship between melancholy and community to argue that the contradictions inherent in Schlingensief’s final works reveal a compelling perspective on the *Operndorf*, which suggests that the persona Schlingensief projected is not in opposition to his final transcultural experiment in unconventional community, but rather essential to it.
Jasmin Degeling
Institut für Theaterwissenschaft, Universität Bochum

Schlingensief and the African Opera Village.
Practices of Conversion and Technologies of the Self in the Context of Schlingensief's Autobiographical Project

Wir sollten uns lieber darauf besinnen, unseren Verein der Selbstbeschäigten und Selbstgeschädigten aufzulösen, endlich wieder haftbar zu werden, endlich wieder zu sagen, ja, ich bin gar nicht der, der ich bin. Das Beste wäre, wenn wir unser Kulturgeld nach Afrika geben und sagen: Macht damit, was IHR wollt. Aber gebt uns bitte die Chance zu lernen...(Christoph Schlingensief)

My ongoing PhD-project addresses Schlingensief’s autobiographical works in both his two late books, So schön wie hier kann's im Himmel gar nicht sein and ich weiss, ich wars, in performances such as Eine Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir, Mea Culpa and Via Intolleranza II, and in Schlingensief's weblog and interviews. In the context of this workshop I would like to argue that Schlingensief's reference to Africa could to be seen in the broader context of a problematisation of the western culture of selfhood. Modern subjectivation privileges a deeply Christian history of salvation and conversion and shapes various cultural dreams of transformation of both self and society that also deeply inform our perceptions of African cultures. From this perspective, Schlingensief's works do not only contribute to a post-colonial critical discourse on imaginations of Africa and wishful discourses of transformation, rather they are exerting a problematisation of an ongoing western discourse of
subjectivation by analyzing conceptions of conversion, salvation, healing and disease as well as cultures of confession.

In their secular, modern versions these practices interrelate with the modern conception of autobiography. Initiating a medium of subjectivation building on very old techniques of the self, autobiography became a literary genre out of a diverse history of practices of self-constitution mediated by writing and it contributed to constructing the unity of person and oeuvre like flip sides of the coin. Therefore Schlingensief's reference to the genre of autobiography (in his two books as well as in the performances) challenges constructions of introspection, privacy and practices of confession. The border between life and art is crucial for any artistic endeavor which examines practices of conversion and cathartic aesthetics. The late theater productions by Schlingensief's team are going back to important contexts of negotiating the interrelation of art and life, for example the early forms of performance art in the 20th century such as Fluxus, Happening or Aktion, creating a “Fluxus-Oratorium” or a “Ready-Made Oper”. Citing these artistic traditions by transversing different media settings between opera, film, performance art and liturgical elements, the stagings experiment on refiguring both aesthetic means of catharsis and new possibilities of self-care. In my presentation for this workshop, I would like to focus on examining the ways the references to the African continent and the experiences with the African people engaged in the African Opera project contribute to these aesthetics of existence.
Hauke Dorsch  
African Music Archives, Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz  

Wagner and Schlingensief as Griots –  
Prolegomena to an African Perspective on Two German Artists  

When claiming to look at Wagner and Schlingensief with an ‘African perspective’ this paper does neither claim to represent ‘the’ African perspective nor does the presenter claim to speak from an African position (which would be ridiculous, given that he is a European). Instead, this paper aims at continuing the somewhat forgotten anthropological strategy of using non-Western concepts in describing Western phenomena and thus gain new perspectives through this ‘exotization’ of the author’s ‘own’ society or culture.  

Griots and griottes are musicians and historians, genealogists and storytellers, praise singers and institutionalized opposition. The West African institution of the griot was established centuries ago and until today griots and griottes serve as legitimizing and criticizing agents of those in power. This paper will look at the social position of griots and griottes, the power of their art and at the strategies they use to praise and criticize the powerful. Comparing the griots’ and griottes’ social role, aesthetics and artistic strategies with those of Wagner and Schlingensief, this paper aims at adding a new perspective to our understanding of the art of these two German and global artists.
Magnus Echtler
Department for the Study of Religion, Universität Bayreuth

Pissing the Sacred.
Schlingensief's African Opera Village as Fundraising Heterotopia

With the African Opera Village, Schlingensief created – in his own transgressive style – a sacred space or heterotopia. Building upon the structural predecessor, the mission station, the central church/religion is replaced with the opera house/art, which likewise provides the transcendental locus for the secular institutions of developmental aid, the school house and the hospital. It is artistic space, space for the social sculpture with the promised power to challenge and alter hegemonic social order, which serves to distinguish the opera village from competitors in the charity business.

My argumentation is based on two main sources. First, to represent the producers’ side, I make use of the movie “Knistern der Zeit” by Sibylle Dahrendorf (2012), a film that works both as a memento to the late Schlingensief and as an introduction to his latest project, the Opera Village. With regard to the economic needs of the Opera Village project, the film functions as advertisement, because it gives its audience, bourgeois Europeans, reasons or incentives to donate to this charity organisation. Second, on the side of the consumers, I utilise the guestbook entries written by mostly European visitors to the African Opera Village. I argue that both sources agree in proposing/accepting the Opera Village as a heterotopia, “a sort of
simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live” (Foucault 1986: 24). On this shared ascription of transcendental/transformative value to the Opera Village rests its qualification as a social sculpture. At the same time this extended concept of art provides the main reason why someone should support the project. Art lies at the heart of the fundraising machine.

What about the art of the Opera Village then, given that the opera house is as yet not built, that the central stage remains empty? I argue that two artistic projects associated with the Opera Village, Marie Köhler’s book Mach dir ein Bild (2013) with photographs taken by pupils from the Opera Village school and the concert/workshop/film of “Im Exil: Festival au désert” in Berlin as part of the Schlingensief retrospective (Jan 2014), can be regarded as challenging for European notions of high-art or Africa. They provide the bourgeois consumer/donator with the promised surplus value of the project, transformative art, on top of the more conventional success in schooling and medical care that the project’s website informs about regularly. However, the art of the Opera Village, just as the charity organization that provides its institutional frame, remain firmly lodged in the neocolonial frame, between blatant economic inequalities and the reverse imagery of the decadent Europe in need of salvation from primordial Africa, conditions that Schlingensief also reflected upon in his art.
Sarah Hegenbart  
Courtauld Institute of Art, London

**Multiplied Realities:**  
**Christoph Schlingensief's Opera Village Africa and the Multi-Perspectivism of the Animatograph**

This paper explores the reading of the Opera Village Africa as Christoph Schlingensief's final animatograph – an artistic device fostering multi-persectivism. It will critically examine Jörg van der Horst's observation that the animatograph manifests Schlingensief’s deep engagement with Richard Wagner. Might the animatograph be a contemporary approach to the Wagnerian ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk? Scrutinising the trajectory behind Schlingensief’s animatograph – following the route from its early beginnings as rotating stage via its staging in Iceland, Namibia and Neuhausenberg to its final stage as Opera Village in Burkina Faso – will contribute to answering this question. This will lead to an argument for the necessity of an art-historical engagement with the Opera Village.
Stephan Jöris
Assistant of Wolfgang Wagner (1987–2009), Management
Bayreuth Festival

Schlingensief – Parsifal – Bayreuth.
Reality and Irreality

As early as 2001 Martin Kusej was appointed for the Parsifal of 2004. However in May 2003 he resigned. Therefore the appointing of Schlingensief for the staging of Parsifal in 2003 was an involuntary process from the beginning – a process that continued until the end of the production in 2007. The boisterous, ever-changing creative will of Christoph Schlingensief clashed with the – although flexible and adventuresome – but most of all inescapable mechanisms of an opera production for the Bayreuth Festival. Prerogative of interpretation and interpretation-playfulness pulled on one and the same piece. "I think the experiment was successful", said festival director Wolfgang Wagner. In my view, it was never finished and should not and could not ever be finished.
Lore Knapp  
Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft, Universität Bielefeld

Schlingensief and the ‘Case of Wagner’

Like Nietzsche, Schlingensief was by today’s standards “bound up with Wagnerizing”. In numerous statements on Bayreuth he defended himself against categorisation as a Wagnerian, and yet incorporated Wagner’s music into just about every one of his own works. This paper distinguishes three phases in Schlingensief’s engagement with Richard Wagner. Prior to Bayreuth, it was above all the potential impact and the reception history of Wagnerian music that played a role in Schlingensief’s work. During his production of Parsifal, he drew nearer to a Wagnerian aesthetic, which he consistently interpreted through syncretism and private mythology. In the third phase, scenes from Wagner’s operas – for the most part the closing scene of Tristan and Isolde or the transitional music of Parsifal – became a major part of his own work.

This complex relationship between critique and affirmation was also explored by Schlingsief in his parodies of Nietzsche, Mea Culpa and Sterben lernen! Many features of his aesthetic can be found in Nietzsche, where they took the form of criticism of Wagner. What Schlingensief consciously exaggerated corresponds to Nietzsche’s polemical critique in The Case of Wagner. The second act of Mea Culpa recalls Nietzsche’s warning that there was a danger of “suffocating under the rumination of moral and religious absurdities”. Schlingensief’s assertion that
his cancer developed during his rehearsal work in Bayreuth is reminiscent of Nietzsche’s polemic: “Is Wagner [...] not rather a sickness? He makes sick whatever he touches”. As though his own work had had similar effect on the Burkinan actor, Schlingensief declared dramatically on his blog just before the premier of Via Intolleranza II that “everyone is sick”. Just as a festival community rallied around Wagner, Schlingensief had his own so-called theatre family. In contrast to Wagner, who styled himself as a ‘composing visionary’, Schlingensief drew attention to this tendency by way of bold, religious self-staging. Schlingensief’s engagement with Wagner builds upon the illusory within his art, which, as Nietzsche criticized, transformed the musician into a showman. This critique of showmanship, of gimmickery and its impact, is carried to extremes by Schlingensief. In so far as he plays with illusion, however, he himself strives for as big an impact as possible. Schlingensief parodies the fact that Wagner merely wanted to achieve effects. The very moment his own productions begin to have an effect, he destroys them again, because he is interested in something more intrinsic or real than impact. At the same time, precisely this aspiration to an unattainable ideal represents a profoundly romantic streak in Schlingensief’s aesthetic, which will be explored in this paper.
Daniel Kojo-Schrade  
Arts and Cultural Studies, Hampshire College, Amherst

*Parcival, Feirefiz – Parsifal.*  
Re-enacting Africa in Richard Wagner’s Parsifal

The performance lecture Parcival, Feirefiz – Parsifal engages with Wolfram von Eschenbach’s literary character Feirefiz, described by the author as “A knight from Affricke, like a written-on leaf of parchment, black and white here and there”. Feirefiz is a central character in Eschenbach’s novel Parzival (13th century), where he has a key role in helping his brother Parzival find salvation. Richard Wagner (1813-83) erased the figure of Feirefiz from the Parzival legend in his 1882 opera Parsifal.1 Wagner’s popular version of the story therefor promotes the narrative of a homogeneous white Europe, a narrative that despite a very different reality is still dominant today. Based on a series of painting installations entitled Brother Feirefiz pa1 – and a performance entitled Brother Feirefiz pe1, the performance lecture Parcival, Feirefiz – Parsifal highlight’s the character Feirefiz and re-inscribes it back into the cultural canon.

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Fabian Lehmann
Iwalewahaus, Universität Bayreuth

Before the Opera Village.
Africa and Wagner as Long-Time Topics in the Oeuvre of Schlingensief

The last and ongoing project of Christoph Schlingensief, the construction of something he called an „opera village“ in Burkina Faso, is strongly connected to his engagement with Richard Wagner, not only but also during the time he directed the Wagner operas *Parsifal* (2004 – 2007) and *The Flying Dutchman* (2007). This can be read in his posthumously released autobiographical sketches *Ich weiß, ich war’s*: “My work in Bayreuth, the staging in Manaus as well, are of course connected to the idea to build an opera in Africa“.² But Bayreuth and Manaus only describe high points in a long time engagement with the myth and the music of Richard Wagner.

As *United Trash* (1995), *The African Twin Towers* (2005) or the *African Opera Village* (2008 – ongoing) prove, not only Wagner but also Africa is a central topic in Schlingensief’s oeuvre. From the 1990s on Africa and Wagner both appear in his films and theatre productions, his performances and operas, his installations and books. Most interesting and fascinating however, is Schlingensief’s approach to interweave these two topics. The

² „Meine Arbeit in Bayreuth, auch die Inszenierung in Manaus haben natürlich was zu tun mit der Idee, ein Opernhaus in Afrika zu bauen“.
aesthetic connection of Wagner and Africa – which is more a harsh crossing than a harmonious merging – is unerhört in both senses of the German word: quite outrageous and unheard-of.

In my presentation I will introduce selected works by Christoph Schlingensief where at least one of the two topics appears as a key aspect. In doing so I will exemplarily focus on the so called Wagner Rallye (1999) through the desert of Namibia, the former German colony Deutsch-Südwestafrika. It was part of the project Deutschlandsuche ’99 (1999), where Schlingensief and his team visited locations connected to German history. The trip to Namibia included an interesting performance where Schlingensief used a small tape recorder to play the opera Siegfried of Wagner’s Ring-tetralogy to a seals colony at Cape Cross. What seems to be only a weird combination of late romantic music, a coastal area in southern Africa and innocent marine mammals at first glance becomes more reasonable when one takes account of the historic period Wagner lived in. I will show how Schlingensief used the historic protagonist and all the connotations that inevitably come with the name Richard Wagner to visualise complex historic relations and a history of thought in 19th century Germany.
The relationship between liturgy and theatre is old and full of tensions. From its origin theatre is a form of *leiturgia* – that means it is part of the public, political and cultic activities of the *polis*. Early Christianity is strongly opposed to theatre because of its pagan and cultic context. Actors as well as other artists (like painters) have to give up their profession in case they want to be baptised. Instead, Christianity develops its own form of theatre: Christian liturgy. The sacred play of Christian worship is based on an enormous claim: God himself, the ultimate ground of life and being, is present. The liturgical ministers seem to be the actors of the play, but in truth it is God himself who acts. After the time of persecution the public cult of the church is able to unfold. Christian liturgy generates its own forms of architecture, music and literature. It shapes and penetrates the lives of Christians. During the middle ages new forms of dramatisation develop which begin to break with their ritual context. In the modern age theatre takes leave of its liturgical and religious origins. Later, the Romantics rediscover religion. By means of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, romantic art-religion searches for self-redemption. The relationship between art and religion becomes parasitic. Art has the duty to „rescue“ religion, writes Richard Wagner. It can „idealise“ religious symbols „and so reveal the profound truths they contain.“ My paper will briefly look on the history of liturgy and theatre up to Wagner and analyse how
Christophs Schlingensief deals with this tradition. Schlingensief struggles with both realities – Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Christian worship (which he experienced as an altar boy in Mühlheim/Ruhr) – and exploits them. At the same time Schlingensief’s exploration leads him into non-Christian and non-European cultures respectively. There, everyday life and religious rites overlap each other much more than in western, secularised societies.

scene from *Mea Culpa*; Georg Soulek
Koku Gnatuloma Nonoo
Figuration ‘Gegenkultur’, Universität Innsbruck

Christoph Schlingensief’s Opera Village Africa: Countercultural Vision?

Christoph Schlingensief’s innovative artistic relation to the African continent and his vision of the Opera Village in Burkina Faso can be seen as a kind of cooperation which expresses and opens new ways of understanding unknown African realites. The interweaving of aesthetic, social and politcal situations in Schlingensief’s theatre is characteristic of some forms of postdramatic theatre and shares strong similarities with much of pre-colonial African performance arts. Pre-colonial and popular theatre in Africa somehow functioned as a medium of control for the regulation of the social, religious and political life. David Kerr remarks that «class formation and social innovation were very much part of pre-colonial history, and were reflected intimately in the performing arts. [...] The way in which pre-colonial African societies organized their labour to create the necessities of life was mediated in an intimate way by popular theatre ».3 It is therefore of interest to analyse the orginary function of “social and aesthetic“ life in the pre-colonial African societies’ activities and the link between this “social and aesthetic“ life. This helps

3 David Kerr: (1995), African Popular theatre, from pre-colonial times to the present day, James Curry (Oxford), Heinemann (Pertsmouth N. H.) EAEP (Nairobi), David Philip (Cape Town), Baobab (Harare), p. 4.
then to understand whether the African Opera Village can be seen as a countercultural visionary concept for development (cooperation) and as an archive of local artistic practices.

What are the aesthetic, societal and political functions, which show similarities between the artistic activities of Schlingensief and African (pre-colonial) performance arts? What makes Christoph Schlingensief and his theatre countercultural? What does Schlingensief really aim at with his theatre and the African Opera Village? Does the African Opera Village purely transpose the European understanding and conceptualisation of arts in Africa? Can the vision and objectives of the African Opera Village catalyse social and political changes in Africa?

This contribution aims firstly at a comparative analysis of Schlingensief’s “Aktion 18, tötet Politik“ and the pre-colonial African Kote-tlon-theatre of the Bamana people in ancient Mali in order to find similarities as well as the aesthetic, societal and political functions, which link the artistic activities of Schlingensief and African performance arts. Secondly, this will help to demonstrate that the African Opera Village is a symbolic catalyst with religious, aesthetic, didactic, therapeutic, social and political objectives not only for social and political changing in Burkina Faso/Africa, but also for changing in the nature of the development cooperation between Africa and Europe.
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German Messages in the Bottle to Africa – Schlingensief’s Actionist Project Deutschlandsuche

This paper will explore the actionist project “Deutschlandsuche” focusing on its so called “Deutschland versenken” part. How are we to read the “message in the bottle” Schlingensief released from the United States of America to Namibia? As an unconditional surrender, a postcolonial withdrawal of developmental intentions? As an attempt to reverse the balances of power in development work? Taking into consideration Schlingensief’s reflections on the image the paper will explore Schlingensief’s dialectical approach to the production, consumption and projection of images. The paper aims to conclude with challenging Schlingensief’s German gaze and the prominent role of the Wagnerian soundtrack in the project as a whole.

On November 9th, 1999, surrounded by the sound of Wagner’s “Ring of the Nibelung” Christoph Schlingensief jettisoned a suitcase, stuffed with 99 objects from his prior Germany tour (a tankard, a dead mouse, reader’s letters and other), and an urn into the Hudson River. With the Statue of Liberty in the background holding up high its enlightening torch, Schlingensief proclaimed: “99 Gegenstände der Deutschlandsuche werden hiermit versenkt und treten die Reise nach Namibia an.”
In a follow up interview with Alexander Kluge (2000) Schlingensief explained that he meant to turn over the relicts of Germany to another nation which was free to do with it whatever comes to its mind. Schlingensief went on that he hoped anyone who finds the suitcase would build something with it and even though the object built might not be understood by any German at first sight, this then moment of unsettling would create an innovational drive. This comment will be examined referring to postcolonial and post-development critique. Paying particular attention to Schlingensief’s reflections on images the paper will then continue examining Schlingensief’s genuflection in front of the Statue of Liberty that took part only minutes after symbolically jettisoning Germany into the Hudson River. Understanding the Statue of Liberty as a visual representation of the hegemonic power of western capitalism and as a globalized icon of its idea of freedom, Schlingensief stated his genuflection as an act of humility to the surface of images. Referring to Schlingensief’s “work on images” the paper will explore how this genuflection in front of the Statue of Liberty relates to the project “Deutschlandsuche” as a whole.

Proceeding to concluding comments the paper will challenge the project’s original idea which was a search for Germany. It is to wonder, if this intention resulted in Africa being integrated into a German vision once again?
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The Schlingensief Opera in Burkina Faso: A (Poisoned?) Gift

Schlingensief’s idea of the opera village was that of a dynamic centre, a centre that, once built, should develop by itself and would tear its dynamics, including its management concept, from the inspiration of the people living around. This idea stands quite in contrast to approaches of modern development interventions where a well discussed concept of orientation and management before even the start of the construction is regarded as crucial. Anyway, in both concepts - and perhaps in the Schlingensief one even more as in the development workers` "appropriation" is crucial — "appropriation" understood as the acceptance by the people concerned and as a firm commitment of all parties with the respected roles and implications clarified. Also, in both concepts "sustainability" is the key aim: all actors starting a project want this project to last and to become independent – with the time – from their initial founders.

Starting from these reflections, the present paper regards first at the perception and the appropriation of the primar "beneficiaries" of the Schlingensief opera village, i.e. the residents of the nearby villages. Their initial implication and perception will be contrasted to their actual ones and the idea that they have now - some 5 years after the start of the project - on its future and their role in
it. In a second step, this perception and its inherent degree of appropriation of the project by the nearby villages' inhabitants will be put into the context of the two management concepts (the Schlingensief one and the development specialists one) cited above. In sum, this will lead to an "educated guess" on the future and sustainability of the opera village.

construction site of the *African Opera Village* in January 2014; Frieder Schlaich
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‘The Berlin Republic – Or the Ring in Africa’:
Christoph Schlingensief’s Theatro-Political Farce

Over nearly three decades, the iconoclastic work of the late German filmmaker, theatre director, activist and artist, Christoph Schlingensief (1960-2010) constituted a radical aesthetic response to the politics of his time. In the 1990s, he consistently engaged with contemporary German political issues and questions of national identity. 1999 saw the newly elected Chancellor Gerhard Schröder take up residency with his new wife in the brand-new living quarters of ‘the new Berlin’, close to Potsdamer Platz. The former hub of ‘old Berlin’ had been completely rebuilt and reflected Germany’s rise in the global economy with the brands of the Daimler/Chrysler and Sony Centre buildings dominating the skyline. While the media focus was on the architectural novelty and the cultural promise of the old/new site, the dominant political issue in early 1999 was the debate around dual-citizenship for foreigners. Schlingensief’s ‘light comedy’ The Berlin Republic – Or the Ring in Africa’ took on the themes of neo-colonialism, inflated notions of ‘newness’ and the conservative political response to the dual-citizenship issue. His production at the Volksbühne Berlin began with the absurd premise that two million Africans were standing outside the city demanding entry, while the incumbent couple bickered and exchanged banalities in their new Ikea home. Already dissatisfied with his new role, Chancellor Schröder dreams of a trip to Africa
with the purpose of disseminating German art and culture as exemplified by Wagner’s operatic *Ring* cycle, but finds himself deteriorating...

Despite its scurrilous treatment of Germany’s so-called ‘media chancellor’⁴, the piece, with its improvisational revue structure, evoked an atmosphere of fin de siècle despair. This paper will ask how Schlingensief’s production engages with issues of German neo-colonialism in Africa and question what relevance Wagner’s *Ring* has to Schlingensief’s *Berlin Republic*. I will propose that his negative vision of the ‘new Berlin’ perceived it as an Ikea model, or stage-set for a theatrical farce, in which politicians of all colours were immersed in selective amnesia in regard to Germany’s diverse and problematic pasts.

I plan to present this paper accompanied by images on powerpoint slides. I also have a section of the production on DVD to show, if time allows.

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