

# Practising the Art of Wagnis

## An introduction

Since mid-2014, we at Iwalewahaus, University of Bayreuth, became increasingly interested in the works of Christoph Schlingensiefel and in what we call the “Schlingensiefel approach”: a practice more focused on the process instead of the outcomes, without fixed expectations for results – an adventuresome artistic practice. Schlingensiefel lived this approach as a filmmaker, action artist, director for theatre and opera productions and as a visual artist in as far-flung places as Berlin, Vienna, Bayreuth, Manaus in Brazil, Lüderitz in Namibia, in Zimbabwe or in Burkina Faso.

Our research on Schlingensiefel coincided with exhaustive retrospective exhibitions in both Berlin and New York in 2013 and 2014, which enabled us to conduct an extended overview of his work. Also the impressive exhibition at the German pavilion for the Venice Biennale in 2011 and the increase in comprehensive text collections and monographs over the last years greatly helped our understanding of Schlingensiefel’s extensive oeuvre. To date, research on Schlingensiefel had been mainly conducted within German discourses, but the international exhibitions opened the doors to a more international discussion. A fruitful contribution in this context was the book *Christoph Schlingensiefel: Art Without Borders* (Intellect, 2010), edited by Tara Forrest and Anna Teresa Scheer, as it was the first comprehensive publication on Schlingensiefel in English.

With this background in mind, we want to contribute to the still limited international awareness of the work of Christoph Schlingensiefel but this time focus on particular topics within his oeuvre. What could have been more fitting than to start with obvious relations? As an institution in Bayreuth, we are confronted with the cult on Richard Wagner every year. Schlingensiefel’s staging of the Wagner opera *Parsifal* between 2004 and 2007 is fresh in people’s minds here in Bayreuth, and hence this seemed to be a good starting point. But since Iwalewahaus is first of all dedicated to modern and contemporary visual arts from the African continent, we were also interested in the works by Schlingensiefel related to this field. In the end, these two topics, Africa and Richard Wagner, both as distinct and entangled in Schlingensiefel’s oeuvre, became our focal interest.

Both topics have appeared in Schlingensiefel’s works as a motif since the mid-1990s, but Africa, especially, as a long-term theme has not gained much scholarly attention so far. Today, public attention is limited to the African Opera Village, near the regional capital Ziniaré in Burkina Faso. This, of course, does vividly highlight Schlingensiefel’s attachment to the African continent. Interestingly, when Schlingensiefel presented his still novel idea of a festival hall in Africa around 2009, he used to refer to Bayreuth. For his plans in Burkina Faso, the Bayreuth festival hall became an opposite pole, a point of reference that was quite important to work off of. Early collages, made by Schlingensiefel’s artistic assistant Thomas Goerge, presented the African festival hall as made of set pieces of rural African huts that in their outward appearance reconstructed the Bayreuth festival hall.

In his autobiographical fragments, published after his death by his widow Aino Laberenz, Schlingensiefel stressed:

My work in Bayreuth, the staging in Manaus as well, are of course connected to the idea of building an opera in Africa. (Schlingensiefel 2012, 164)<sup>1</sup>

From the Wagner productions in Bayreuth and in Manaus, where Schlingensiefel had staged Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* in 2007, to the festival hall in Burkina Faso, Schlingensiefel left the centre of the Wagner cult in long and quickened strides to search for the meaning of opera in the periphery. Schlingensiefel's reference to Bayreuth and Manaus not only made sense as an artistic antithesis, or because of his personal experiences connected to these places, but also to raise curiosity and publicity that allowed the Opera Village project to gain some momentum from its beginning.

When talking about Wagner, it is important to notice that Schlingensiefel did not care much about the actual person Richard Wagner; instead he conjured the myth of this prototype-German figure. The same is true for Africa. Whenever Africa became a topic, it was about highly idealized and blissful imaginations of "another world". Another quote from a conversation with Alexander Kluge demonstrates Schlingensiefel's appropriation of both Africa and Wagner:

For me this is beautiful when it comes to Wagner: I understand him just as little as I understand Africa. (Kluge and Schlingensiefel 1999, min. 00:05:25)<sup>2</sup>

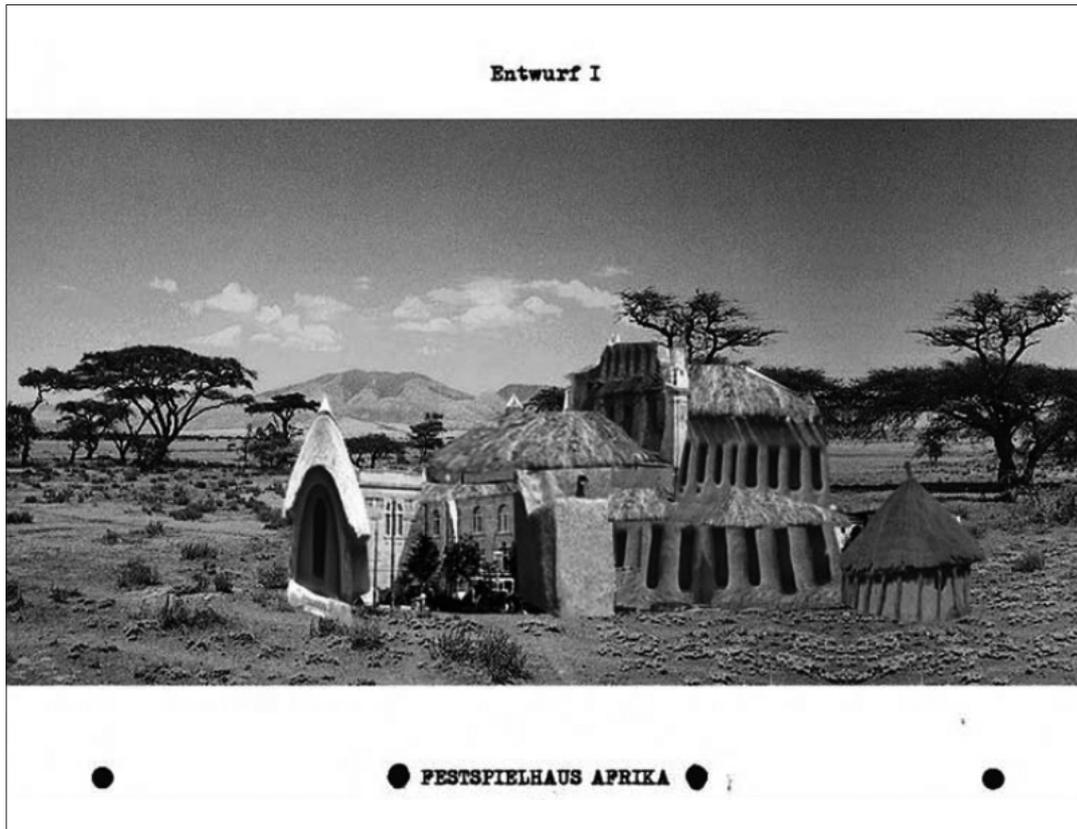
An understanding in the sense of a hermeneutic interpretation was never of great significance for Schlingensiefel; on the contrary, he lived to mislead and contradict. For his affectionate play with the ambiguous, he could either be condemned or admired. Condemned, because he allowed himself to talk about complex problems without having a sturdy understanding of them. For the same reason, he could be admired just as well, standing out as unique radical and intrepid. Schlingensiefel referred to myths and images that are so loaded and burdened that facts only rarely come to light. This is obvious for our dominant Central European image of Africa, but it is also true for our conception of Richard Wagner. As Germans we can project the ambivalences of our self-perception on this proto-German composer like on no other. Musically and technically, the operas of Wagner were far ahead of their times, but regarding their subjects they continued the romanticist tradition and referred to the mythic roots of German poetry. For the King of Bavaria, Ludwig II, Wagner cultivated a courtly, even subservient demeanour, but in his hate for Jewish competitors he exhibited racist and vulgar traits.

Most interesting and fascinating for us here are Schlingensiefel's works that interweave both Wagner and Africa. This aesthetic assembling of the two topics – which resembles a harsh crossing more than a harmonious merging – is *unerhört* in both senses of the German word: quite outrageous and also unheard of. This crossing became a focal point in our research and it can be found in many of Schlingensiefel's works. To give just one example from the *Parsifal* production: As a subtle note on stage, the audience read side by side the words "*Gral*" (grail; a mysterious, live-giving cup that is prominent in

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1 Translation from German by Christine Whyte.

2 Translation from German by Christine Whyte.



The page from the booklet *Festspielhaus Afrika* (2009) shows a montage of the imagined future festival hall. The booklet was meant to visualize Schlingensiefel's plans for the later Opera Village. Image by Thomas Goerge.

Wagner's *Parsifal*) and "Kral" (kraal; a layout of village huts common to Southern Africa that results in a circular communal space in the middle) – words, that do not share anything beyond their similar pronunciation. But our question was: If such confrontations can also reveal insights and generate questions that only emerge from the combination of the two topics, what happens when Wagner's operas as representations of "European high culture" are taken from their original context in central Europe; when they become displaced and dislocated, as Homi Bhabha (2004, 149) would say, and negotiated within a context where Wagner is widely unknown and where opera has no tradition? But this question already entails another, a previous one: Is it fair to understand Africa and opera as two separate spheres without any connections? Trying to answer those questions also has a beneficial side effect: it automatically creates counter images to a homogenizing representation of the African continent as well as to the, to a great extent, deadlocked image of Richard Wagner.

Schlingensiefel's plays on words and images became most fascinating when they worked as an impulse to start research on relations that are anything but obvious, that means, when we were able to detach ourselves from the works of Schlingensiefel without losing its initial stimuli. That is why we decided to use a painting from Daniel Kojo Schrade's series *Brother Kyot P01bk15 – P08bk15* (2015) for a cover for this book. Schrade's paintings, as revealed in the book's third chapter, address the thirteenth

century origin of the Parzival epic and its connection to the African continent – a connection that is not to be found anymore in Wagner’s operatic adaptation.

### **Wagner and Africa as long-time topics in the oeuvre of Schlingensief**

Schlingensief’s interest in Africa began in 1993, initiated by a friend’s advice to visit Zimbabwe. That year, he travelled to the African continent for the first time. Only two years later, *United Trash* was released – a film completely shot in Zimbabwe. By that time in his mid-30s, Schlingensief was already an experienced filmmaker who also had done a number of stage productions at the Volksbühne in Berlin. Before *United Trash*, he had spent more than four years working on three movies that focused on the mostly tragic changes in German history – films that became a classic series known as the “*Deutschlandtrilogie*” (Germany trilogy). After focusing on the German self-conception for many years, Africa at this point might have become a welcome opportunity for Schlingensief to shift to political absurdities outside of and far from the well-known German context.

Interestingly, when Schlingensief later was asked about *United Trash*, he was very clear about the lack of quality in the movie’s story, but particularly in its representation and display of Africa. As he explained, by the time of the shooting, he was not really interested in the situation of Zimbabwe itself; instead, he wanted to capture a stereotype image of Africa to use as background for the absurd, cartoon-like story of the film (Schlingensief 2012, 169). In the early 1990s, Schlingensief did not question his position as a German director in Zimbabwe but was keen to experience adventures as a filmmaker, just as Werner Herzog did in the Peruvian Amazon region when he shot *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). However, the basis was laid for Schlingensief’s engagement with Africa, and it also marked the beginning of his engagement with cultural relations between Europe and Africa.

Then, as early as in 1999, he already anticipated the idea of an African opera. This time it was indeed meant as a mere displacement of the conventional European understanding of opera and not yet the altered understanding of opera represented by the African Opera Village. He realized this fantasy in a stage play, translated as “The Berlin Republic – Or the Ring in Africa”, where the then German chancellor Gerhard Schröder is driven by the obsession to eventually bring Wagner’s *Ring of the Nibelung* to Africa. This stage play must be Schlingensief’s initial confrontation between Wagnerian operas and Africa.

Towards the end of the same year, Schlingensief travelled to Namibia to celebrate a *Wagner Rallye* through the former colony German South West Africa.<sup>3</sup> This was part of the larger project “Searching for Germany ’99”. The various places in Namibia here were integrated into a journey through Germany and German-speaking Europe represented by towns like Graz, and New York as a destination of German emigration. During this journey through German history at the end of the second millennium, Wagner’s compositions always accompanied Schlingensief and his team, also in Namibia. As a result, the *Wagner Rallye* included a performance in which Schlingensief used a tape recorder

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3 This first *Wagner Rallye* was later followed by a second one. In 2004, for the Ruhr festival in Recklinghausen, Schlingensief was even more consistent with the label “rally” and arranged a “race” of ten cars through the Ruhr area, where the drivers had to answer questions about the localities they drove through. Mounted on the roof of the cars were loudspeakers that blasted Wagner’s music into the streets.

to play the opera *Siegfried* (1876) from Wagner's Ring-tetralogy to a colony of seals at Cape Cross. Years later, Schlingensief was asked to explain this particular performance. His answer then was simple:

This was a connection that one had to try out some day. There is a door that has not been used, I will now use it. (Kaiser and Schlingensief 2004)<sup>4</sup>

What at first glance seems to be only a weird combination of late romantic music and marine mammals at a coastal area in southern Africa becomes more reasonable if one takes into account the historical period in which Richard Wagner lived:

Richard Wagner was born in 1813, the year that saw the Battle of Leipzig, a fundamental event with decisive consequences for the process of the German nation building. It determined the following decades. Thirty years later in 1848, the year of the German Revolution, Wagner gave a speech at the republican patriotic society in Dresden. His speech addressed the question of how the republicans must position themselves towards monarchy. But Wagner, for some reason, found himself compelled to also talk about possible German overseas territories and promoted the idea of founding "here and there a young Germany" (Wagner 1911).<sup>5</sup> In fact, to describe Wagner as a serious colonial agitator would impute a political influence that he only wished to have. But Wagner's speech points to a longing for an imperial influence articulated by a German elite during mid-nineteenth century, comprising the educated bourgeoisie, aristocrats, missionaries and businessmen that were all small in number but influential (Conrad 2008, 24). And as can be learned from Susanne Zantop's *Colonial Fantasies* (1997, 16), words like Wagner's sowed the seeds for the implementation of the imperial fantasies.

Indeed, 35 years later, Chancellor Bismarck finally gave in to the constant demands for participation in overseas colonial conquest, based on the model of the British or the French Empires. That year, in 1883, the German Empire was only twelve years old, and Wagner, by now already 69, died in his study in Venice. So the year of Wagner's death became the year when Heinrich Vogelsang, representative of the Bremen merchant Adolf Lüderitz, raised the German flag at the bay Angra Pequena and founded the base for the town still called Luderitz – today a coastal town in Namibia of 12,000 inhabitants. This land acquisition under deceptive circumstances became the precondition for the official proclamation of the first German colony in Africa.

Schlingensief's performance in *Wagner Rallye* demonstrates the pre-colonial urge of the German elite to become an imperial power. It highlights this historic era, represented in the very life span of the composer. With the help of the figurative means of art, Schlingensief used the historic protagonist and all the associations that inevitably come with the name Richard Wagner to visualize historic relations and a history of thought in nineteenth century Germany.

The next decisive work followed a full five years later in 2004, when Schlingensief's engagement with Wagner was finally crowned by a call to direct the opera *Parsifal* for the Bayreuth festival. It should not go unmentioned, however, that in the interim the venerable record label Deutsche Grammophon had asked Schlingensief to choose Wagner compositions for a music compilation. This CD then was released in 2001 as

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4 Translation by the editors.

5 Translation by the editors.

“Christoph Schlingensiefel meets Richard Wagner”. From a today’s point of view, the compilation looks like an indicator for Schlingensiefel’s increasing acceptance by a bourgeois establishment that is aware of his ongoing engagement with Wagner’s music – certainly a precondition for his call to Bayreuth.

For four seasons, Schlingensiefel thus staged Wagner’s last piece of music theatre, *Parsifal*. The merit of this production lies in the unconventional visual realization that enriched the reception of a Wagner opera with unique imagery. In not limiting itself to an actualization of the characters and the stage design, which is the usual and expected way in German *Regietheater*, this staging took another path. It did not simply illustrate the libretto but found images in a more associative manner, an act that to this day remains a huge provocation for the devotees of Wagnerianism. Schlingensiefel also used film projections on stage that he had shot on journeys through Nepal and Namibia before his first Bayreuth season.

After the second season in 2005, Schlingensiefel again flew to Namibia, this time to realize the third edition of his rotating-stage-installation *Animatograph* and to carry out his last great film project *The African Twin Towers* at the same time. The *Animatograph* installation was constructed as an open-air piece in Luderitz’s settlement called Area 7, where it doubled as a kind of film set. In the end, the movie was never realized, but of the more than two hundred hours of footage some 70 minutes were cut into a documentary about the film shooting. This documentary shows Schlingensiefel, acting as his alter ego “Christoph”, who is eager to implement the requests of his employer “Ms Wagner”, portrayed by Irm Hermann. However, in the documentary, the lines between the fictitious character and the “real director” Schlingensiefel blur repeatedly. Thus one also sees Schlingensiefel trying desperately to bring together his Bayreuth experiences with German colonial history and the images of the terror attacks of 9/11.

After the *Parsifal* production in Bayreuth, Schlingensiefel was forced to shift his focus to another topic: the one of serious illness and looming death. He was confronted with the diagnosis of lung cancer and processed his experiences on stage in various plays dealing with disease. One of them is *Mea Culpa* from 2009, a play subtitled “A ReadyMade Opera”. This play integrates the prelude from *Parsifal* as a ready-made and uses the means of music theatre to form a rather operatic play. By the time *Mea Culpa* was staged, Schlingensiefel had already announced the implementation of his vision of an opera house in Africa, but he was still searching for an appropriate location in various African countries. This delusional search for salvation is addressed in *Mea Culpa*, and – here already – Schlingensiefel mocks his own vision of an African opera house. Whenever the actor playing Christoph starts to give a talk about his ideas or presents a model of the opera house, the play quickly shifts focus to another scene. Only one year later, the play *Via Intolleranza II* is already completely dedicated to the Opera Village. Ultimately, the play discredits his ambitions for the newly found site in Burkina Faso – of course, not without simultaneously campaigning for it.

*Via Intolleranza II* is the last and remaining artistic document in which the actors, including Schlingensiefel and nine actors from Burkina Faso, negotiate the idea of the African Opera Village. Very revealing is the epilogue to the play. Each time the stage play was presented, this final monologue was performed by Schlingensiefel, even when he was already extremely weakened by his illness. This final monologue is a furious flush of words, inconsistent and contradictory but at the same time its message is very clear. It says a lot about Schlingensiefel’s vision, about the fears and anger and all the *faux-pas* and insoluble contradictions that were an essential ingredient to the Opera Village from the beginning on.

*Via Intolleranza II* self-critically demonstrates that Schlingensiefel's interest in the African continent was naïve and highly problematic, because his narrations of Africa were projections of virgin ground, untouched by European modernity and devoid of the blessings and suffering that came with European industrialization. Especially while afflicted by cancer, Schlingensiefel imagined Africa as a last resort where he focused all his hope. But in his late years, he could be highly reflective and aggressive, all the while handing down narrations on Africa. Not only the epilogue but the whole play demonstrates these contradictions at their strongest.

The foundation stone for the African Opera Village was laid in February 2010 near Ziniaré in Burkina Faso. Designed by Burkina-born architect Diébédo Francis Kéré, the buildings, a primary school, a recording studio, an infirmary and a sports grounds, provide the "village's" infrastructure. Here, where art and life are meant to become inseparable, the school surely remains the heart of the complex. Three hundred children are schooled in art, film, and music classes supplementing the typical subjects of a Burkina Faso education. After Schlingensiefel's death in August 2010, his efforts have been carried on by his widow Aino Laberenz and her small Berlin-based team. By now, two stages of the building process have been completed. Only the festival hall, the envisaged centre of the premises, has not yet been built. It is planned to be a place where the cultural events take place and where people gather for meetings. Due to a lack of funding, it remains uncertain whether this central building will come to realization.

While Schlingensiefel played with the notion of a Fitzcarraldo-like enterprise in Manaus, in terms of the Opera Village, the comparison with the eager businessman who does everything to bring his beloved Italian tenor Enrico Caruso to the Amazon region would be misleading. As Schlingensiefel continually explained, the Opera Village should be all about "true African" forms of expression. The Opera Village was meant to remain free from European operas and European notions of art in general. This ambition goes hand in hand with an supposed African environment, one that does not have any relations to the outside world and thus has the potential to create unique artworks that can enrich the nothing but self-focused European art industry. This idea of a virgin ground from which new artistic expressions will arise has a long tradition in the European interest in Africa and does not go unchallenged in the book's third chapter, focusing on the Opera Village and Africa in general.

The Opera Village can be understood as the culmination of Schlingensiefel's interweaving of Wagner and Africa, at least in regard to the initial associations this project used to provoke. One way to understand what the Opera Village and the crossing of the two topics stands for in general and what they mean is to view them within the long tradition of works realized by Schlingensiefel and his team. As his productions always built on one another, the analysis of earlier works indeed helps us understand the more recent ones. Nonetheless, by presenting all these different works in review within the linearity of a text, we do not intend to suggest that they are all part of a teleological development where the Opera Village is the logical consequence of everything that happened before. This would entail retrospectively projecting a main idea where there actually is none. Hortensia Völckers und Alexander Farenholtz from the executive board of the German public foundation Kulturstiftung des Bundes, on the occasion of Schlingensiefel retrospective in Berlin, once demanded to maintain:

... attentiveness, so the productivity, the courage and the wild imagination that Christoph Schlingensiefel defended during his life, would not be posthumously polished and replaced by a straight path through the rough territory called “reality”.<sup>6</sup>

### **The structure of this book**

This publication includes both scholarly as well as artistic approaches from international authors and builds on a two-year research process that included a lecture series at Iwalewahaus as well as an international conference from December 4 to 6, 2015. This book documents the contributions and expands the material significantly.

The first chapter of this book deals with Schlingensiefel’s use of the Wagner motif. Referring to the history of theatre, Benjamin Leven presents an overview of the ambivalent relation between theatre and Christian liturgy from the beginning of the Christian era to the romanticists joining of religion and art. In this long and conflict-stricken history, Leven introduces Richard Wagner and Christoph Schlingensiefel as directors who staged their very personal understanding of Christian belief. The questions remains as to whether Schlingensiefel was more of a critic of Christianity or a priest of the “religion of art”.

Lore Knapp follows to investigate Schlingensiefel’s engagement with Richard Wagner and distinguishes four phases that facilitate a bird’s eye view of the long tradition of Wagner in Schlingensiefel’s oeuvre. As Lore Knapp describes, Schlingensiefel initially drew from the reception of Wagner, but later the contemporary artist incorporated scenes from Wagner’s operas into his own productions. In the last phase, Schlingensiefel tried to find his own “artwork of the future” in the Opera Village.

Jack Davis links Schlingensiefel’s assumed persona in *Mea Culpa* and his autobiographies to the character of Parsifal. Davis argues that Schlingensiefel “playing himself” as Parsifal can be related to the psychoanalytic discourses on narcissism, mourning and melancholy surrounding the Nazi past in post-war West Germany. Schlingensiefel’s performance as a “melancholic narcissist extraordinaire” can be read as an acknowledgement of the melancholy which Roberto Esposito suggests is actually a condition of community.

In her article on the myth of Wagner, Susan Arndt provides a close investigation of Wagner’s writing as well as the history of thought that Wagner builds upon. She shows how Wagner’s thinking was part of an imperial, mid-nineteenth century mentality grounded in racism and anti-Semitism and resulted from and also supported an imagined *white* superiority. Building on this, Arndt asks if it is possible to separate Wagner’s art from his ideas and encourages a more careful listening and reading of his operatic works.

The second chapter focuses on one of Schlingensiefel’s early productions titled “The Berlin Republic – Or the Ring in Africa”. Anna Teresa Scheer discusses this piece in the context of the political situation in Germany in the late 1990s, when what was dubbed the “Berlin Republic” replaced the city of Bonn as Germany’s capital. In an apparently light comedy, Schlingensiefel portrays the new chancellor Gerhard Schröder as a farcical figure obsessed with Wagner and Africa and thereby critically addresses the selective amnesia of Germany’s colonial past.

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6 Translation by the editors.

Relating to another work of the same year, Sarah Pogoda addresses the larger but hardly accessed project that translates as “Searching for Germany ’99”. She explores its interconnections between Germany, Wagner and Africa that culminate in the *Wagner Rallye* through Namibia. Pogoda thoroughly examines Schlingensiefel’s employment of Wagner’s *The Ring of the Nibelung* and analyses the usage of textual metaphors and performed images philologically, thus providing insights into Schlingensiefel’s aesthetic strategies.

Sarah Hegenbart focuses on the *Animatograph*, a rotating stage installation exhibited at different venues around the world, which plays a central role in Schlingensiefel’s later work as a device to merge time and space. Hegenbart offers different interpretations to the central theme of time and space and shows how these are connected to Schlingensiefel’s presentation of the *Animatograph*. Schlingensiefel integrated the installation also into the project *The African Twin Towers* and thus created another direct connection between Wagner and Africa.

Fabian Lehmann analyses the booklet “Festival Hall Africa” that was published in 2009 to promote the idea of the Opera Village. In comparing the booklet to Alexander Kluge’s literal montages, he argues that it tries to activate its recipients, just like Kluge’s stories do, since both authors exercise the art of questioning the presentation of historical “facts”. Lehmann demonstrates how the booklet unsettles the reader’s ability to differentiate between fact and fiction. The booklet rearranges history and thereby unveils Wagner’s fiction of a homogenous *white* Europe.

Wolfgang Spahn’s artistic contribution intertwines Wagner and Schlingensiefel in referring to both artists’ influence from the romantic movement of the nineteenth century, as Ricarda de Haas points out in her reading of the series of photographs. Spahn visualizes in his manipulated slides what Rüdiger Safranski argues when he states “*das Romantische*” is detached from the historic period of Romanticism that Wagner lived in (Safranski 2007, 392–394). The romantic continues to exist and lives on in the work of artists like Schlingensiefel.

The text by the artist Philipp Khabo Koepsell is a transcript of a spoken-word performance originating from the exhibition “FAVT: Future Africa Visions in Time” at Iwalewahaus in 2016/2017. In his poem, Koepsell takes the reader back to the German colonial occupation in Africa, referring to the celebrated music of its time: Wagnerian operas. In doing so, he raises the question as to whether the idea of cultural superiority also resonates in Richard Wagner’s compositions.

In his *Notes on The Crossing*, Johan Thom takes up images from contemporary media discourses and connects them to the world of opera as manifested in Leoš Janáček’s opera *Jenufa* from 1904. In addition to this documentation of a public performance, Thom realized the site-specific intervention *A luta continua (Victory etc.)* at Iwalewahaus during the conference in December 2015. It took place both inside and outside the building. Inside, the oversized protest signs worked as a reminder of the student protests in South Africa that were taking place at the time. Outside the building, the banner “Victory etc.” could be read as a claim to triumph over intolerable conditions via the arts, without foregoing one’s humour.

The third chapter concentrates on the Opera Village and the relation between contemporary European and African artistic practices. In his contribution, Magnus Echtler regards the Opera Village as a heterotopia in Foucault’s sense. For his analysis, Echtler uses entries from the Opera Village’s guest book and interprets scenes from Sibylle Dahrendorf’s documentary film *Crackle of Time*. While the Opera Village promises

to invert the dominant power relations between Africa and Europe, for Echtler, it continues the logic of development-aid, using art merely as a distinguishing feature.

In a similar way, Andrea Reikat took Schlingensief's claims at face value in conducting field research in the communities adjacent to the Opera Village. She argues that the involvement of the local population is essential for the project to become a sustainable institution, especially since the encouragement of intercultural exchange was a central argument of the project from the beginning. Reikat therefore confronts the Opera Village's self-presentation with the appraisal articulated by the local population.

In referring to quotes from the script of *Via Intolleranza II*, Wilfried Zoungrana demonstrates how Schlingensief emphatically criticized Europe's continuous pretension to know what kind of help countries in Africa are supposed to need. Zoungrana worked for Schlingensief as a translator and later joined the cast of *Via Intolleranza II*. To answer the question of whether or not the Opera Village is an appropriate way to strengthen Burkina Faso's artistic diversity outside of the capital, he argues, it is something that should be left up to, first of all, to the people of Burkina Faso.

In the following essay, Koku G. Nonoa chooses a post-dramatic and transcultural point of view to discuss Schlingensief's performance *Aktion 18* as well as the Opera Village. In stark contrast to a self-sufficient notion of art, the voodoo-inspired *Aktion 18* from 2002 was an urgent answer to anti-Semitic statements by a leading figure of the German liberal party FDP. According to Nonoa, in its function, this performance is comparable to pre-colonial performing arts in Africa. Likewise the Opera Village addresses similar societal functions and also challenges European concepts of art.

The text that follows presents a conversation between Sénouvo Agbota Nestor Zinsou, Alain Ricard and Koku G. Nonoa. Building on Nonoa's comparison of the Schlingensief performance *Aktion 18* with pre-colonial theatre in Mali, Zinsou and Ricard discuss European influences in African theatre. Zinsou draws from his own experiences as a director in Togo before the political situation forced him to leave the country to find exile in Germany, while Ricard refers to his research on directors like Zinsou and Wole Soyinka. They both argue that in times of global exchange theatre has become a global artistic form just as well.

In his article, Lee Chambers refers to the musical phenomenology of Kenyan philosopher John Murungi in introducing the experimental music theatre piece *Utenzi Gerezani* by the Tanzanian artist collective Watafiti. Chambers examines Wagnerian-infused themes of cultural progress, metaphysics, artistic agency and multimodality. Enriched with references to Wagner's aesthetic theories, Chambers argues that Schlingensief's, Watafiti's and Murungi's ideas challenge the socio-geographic assignment of opera and its tropes to Europe alone.

An attempt to test the characters and motifs in Wagner's operas under the conditions of contemporary urban South Africa is to be found in the works of photographer Jürgen Hinterleithner. He interprets characters from the operas of Wagner, like Freia, Loge or Erda, in consideration of the reality of today's situation in South Africa.

The last artistic contribution links back to the book's cover. In his series of paintings "Brother Kyot P01bk15 – P08bk15", Daniel Kojo Schrade points to the origins of the Parzival story as found in the thirteenth-century epic by Wolfram von Eschenbach. Schrade dedicates his paintings to the foggy figure Kyot, whom Eschenbach names as the source of the story he had written down.

The last chapter of the book zooms into the local experience of Schlingensief in Bayreuth. Schlingensief's staging of *Parsifal* in this provincial town occurred more than a decade ago. The once upset tempers have cooled down; the memories of the lucky few

who were able to see the production have become condensed, overlapped and further developed. The chapter “Recordings from Bayreuth (and Ouagadougou)” provides a space for those memories of cultural activists and professionals from Bayreuth who not only saw the *Parsifal* production but also actively participated in its preparation, performance and discussions around the piece. As these interviews and essays present personal memories of individuals in their own words, they do not present a complete reconstruction of the events in Bayreuth at the time. Rather, they present a subjective plurality of stories, which sometimes overlap and support and sometimes contradict each other. The last chapter therefore describes the situation we were confronted with when we asked Bayreuth citizens about their memories of Schlingensiefel’s production for the Bayreuth festival. The last text of the chapter changes time and place, however, and addresses Schlingensiefel’s attempt to realize his festival hall in Burkina Faso.

Introduced by Frank Piontek who had produced a CD on Schlingensiefel’s interpretation of *Parsifal*, based on a comprehensive interview with the director, Alexander Hauer’s text offers glimpse into the auditorium of the Bayreuth festival hall as a spectator. While Hauer presents his reading of *Parsifal*, Stephan Jöris, who worked for the direction of the Bayreuth festival, gives insights into the production of the opera. To present another perspective on the production, Sénouvo Agbota Nestor Zinsou reports his experiences as an extra – who finally refused to play his role. Zinsou’s essay was originally written for publication in Bayreuth’s local newspaper *Nordbayerischer Kurier* in 2004, but this is its first printing. In another interview, Axel Gyra, Ursula Kaiser and Harald Unger, members of the movie club Die Leinwand, demonstrate that Schlingensiefel’s engagement with Bayreuth was not limited to the festival hall. Gyra, Kaiser and Unger initiated probably the first-ever retrospective of Schlingensiefel’s work already in 2004. The last contribution to this chapter is Peter Stepan’s reconstruction of travel to Burkina Faso. At this time in 2009, Stepan was the founding director of the local liaison office of the Goethe Institute. In his text, he provides a detailed account of Schlingensiefel’s first days in Burkina Faso as well as the circumstances that made him decide to realize his ambiguous plans for an African Opera Village right there.

The editors

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