Reproduction, deconstruction, imagination
On three possible *modi operandi* of economic education

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- Within economic education institutionalized economic interpretation schemes are being passed on.
- This paper sketches out three possible *modi operandi* of passing on these schemes.
- Reproducing relies on a repetitive and largely unconscious teaching process.
- Deconstructing aims at a critical penetration and relativisation of interpretation schemes.
- Imagining creates new schemes in order to be able to cope with the tangible life-world.

Purpose: Current economic education is in urgent need of reform – both in terms of content and in terms of didactics. This paper aims at contributing to this reform by outlining possible directions economic education might take or combine in a purposeful way.
Design/methodology/approach: This article considers economic thinking as interpretative institutions and identifies three possible types of handling these institutions in the context of economic education. All of the types are developed in a comparative analysis from existentialist educational philosophy and subsequently brought into dialogue with recent discourses and practices of economic education.
Findings: Whereas reproducing relies on a largely unconscious passing on of economic interpretation schemes, deconstructing them fosters their pejorative penetration. Imagining aims at the development of new interpretation schemes that allow for economic thinking and action in resonance with a tangible life-world. A possible interrelation of the three modi operandi is being outlined in the conclusion.

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1 Introduction

"Human life is not simply 'lived', it is constantly being construed, interpreted, understood in terms of a 'meaning'" (Fink, 1970, p. 17).[1] What pedagogue and philosopher Eugen Fink expresses with this sentence is not just common sense in philosophical anthropology or existential philosophy. Understanding and pursuing human beings in their perhaps most essential traits as interpreting and meaning-generating beings is also one of the cornerstones of contemporary social research, e.g. in institutional economics (Hodgson, 2006, p. 2). As human beings we are never 'raw', but move from the earliest days on in a medium of meaning, interpretations, language, stories, images, of ritualized relationships with the world and with ourselves. And even what we as groups, communities or societies consider to be conceivable and feasible, appropriate or tabooed, is determined, negotiated and passed on in substantial parts in such "interpretative schemes" or "frames (*Deutungsmuster*)" (Keller, 2005, section 26).

Against such a background, political economy and economics can be understood as producers of interpretative schemes about 'the' economy. Michel Foucault, for example, has identified it as an essential characteristic of modern economic thinking that it is able to present abstract thoughts as truths in a credible manner, subsequently shaping collective practices (Foucault 2006 [1978-79]). Not the understanding but the *production* of realities thus seems to be an essential feature of economic thinking (McKenzie, Muniesa & Siu, 2007; Mirowski & Nik-Khah, 2017, p. 130; Bäuerle 2020). The supposedly simple question of what 'the' economy actually is makes it clear that the primary object of interest is not simply 'there', like the crystal is for a geologist. What we consider 'economy' is always dependent on interpretation. It might even be said that 'the' economy is this interpretation, or that it *becomes* this interpretation as soon as we collectively perceive, talk and act in terms of the interpretation at hand.[2]

Anyone taking such a stance towards economic thinking will find that the supposedly 'core truths' or 'laws' of economics to be precarious. Rather, on the one hand, the specific cultural, historical, political and economic conditions that promote or prevent this or that narrative, interpretation or image about the economy come into focus. This is what research programmes such as the *Social Studies of Economics* (Maeße, Rossier, Pühringer & Benz, 2020) or research on economic imaginaries (Beckert, 2016; Ötsch & Graupe, 2018 & 2020) are trying to do. On the other hand, within such a research programme, different forms or modes of the transmission of economic narratives, interpretations or images enter centre stage. In what way is economic knowledge produced and passed on? It is precisely this interest that is the subject of this article. I do not approach the object of investigation of economic interpretation schemes by disclosing them in a discourse-analytical way, by arranging them in schools or by tracing them back to their origins in genealogical terms. Rather, I would like to outline three different ways of *dealing with* economic interpretation schemes and enable an analytical distinction between them. Not the *what* of these interpretation schemes, their content, but the *how* of passing them on is thus the focus of my interest. I will illustrate this using the example of economic higher education.[3] The paper takes into account sociological research on the field as well as methodological debates and individual case studies in economic higher education. Although it thereby provides empirical examples of the theoretical distinction introduced, the paper should neither be misunderstood as its empirical justification nor as a ready-to-use didactical approach. It rather aims at introducing a new interpretation scheme that allows for a differentiation of three pedagogical practices of handing on interpretation schemes.

In order to pursue this aim, I will refer to existentialist educational philosophy, especially the works of Maxine Greene and Eugen Fink. As already indicated, this point of reference in educational theory is only appropriate because the handing down of socially shared interpretation schemes is, as it were, the main subject of educational considerations (Fink, 1970, p. 59 f.). Both

authors mentioned offer a formulation and demarcation of reproductive (Chapter 2), deconstructive (Chapter 3) pedagogies and finally imaginative (Chapter 4) ways of dealing with interpretation schemes. All of them will be reflected within the field of economic higher education. Although I consider a fundamental change in economic higher education to be necessary, I would like to highlight in advance that I do not want to play off the three types against each other, but rather outline their respective characteristics as precisely as possible in order to allow for a conscious pedagogical decision between them. In the final conclusion (Chapter 5) I will discuss possible relationships between them.

2 Reproduction

In his 1970 book 'Erziehungswissenschaft und Lebenslehre', Eugen Fink deals with the basic question of different ways of dealing with the phenomenon of human meaning-making. His starting point is the systematical and historical unveiling of the mythical character of interpretation schemes in what he calls the 'closed society'. Although he by no means wants mythical or closed societies to be understood as undervalued (Fink, 1970, p. 48), he emphasizes with reference to the latter:

> "They move within an atmosphere of meaning, without actually 'producing' any meaning; they consistently confirm a mode of living that is inherently encompassed, but they do not create it themselves, they reproduce, but do not produce a human sense of existence." (Fink, 1970, p. 104)

Closed societies operate on foundations of meaning which they for their part do not question or criticize. They rather allow for their status to remain inviolable, even sacred. Thus these mythical foundations of meaning are also superordinate to the fields of technology, science and arts. Everything that can be known or done must in the last instance be related to the myth, or be meaningfully interpreted and justified within its framework (ibid., p. 66). Thus the myth can never be thought and acted upon, but always only *in* and *with* it. As a synonym for the concept of myth, Fink also chooses that of the 'ideal' and underlines:

> "The most powerful and most pulling force in the educational power of an ideal, its magic, lies in the fact that it understands itself, that it simply exerts a man-shaping violence 'for no reason', without a why and without justification, and that only within its field of meaning do people justify themselves - before it." (ibid., p. 20)

The ideal is thus given, in a fundamental sense *evident* and non-negotiable. The meaning of life does not have to be found, criticised or interpreted; it must above all be followed and passed on. However, this standard itself is not explicitly stated. Fink speaks of a largely "unconscious" (ibid., p. 106) *modus operandi* of the closed society, which needs not name its most formative and important institutions: "Being is standardized by itself, but has no insight into its own draft of norms" (ibid., p. 163). The central task for those responsible for education and educational institutions is to maintain the repetition, as accurately as possible, of the inscribed interpretation schemes: "The educator behaves reproductively, he is an imitator" (ibid., p. 108). And what is to be reproduced or imitated is rooted in the collective ideal image: "*Bildung* is subordinated to the image, education to the drawing ideal" (ibid., p. 170), "practice only carries out what theory has outlaid" (ibid., p. 208). In such an understanding of human interpretative activities, the educational goal is achieved when the ideal at hand is also followed by future generations (cf. ibid.; see also p. 209). Teaching is thus not carried out for the sake of the educational subject, but for the

sake of the ideal; so that the collective custom may continue to be kept alive and unchanged in collective thinking and practices.

While Fink develops a systematic elaboration of societies and educational institutions that cultivate a closed, reproductive approach to interpretation schemes, Maxine Greene deals with the same phenomenon from a decidedly critical perspective, taking into account the effects of a reproductive pedagogy on contemporary social life. In her essay collection "Releasing the Imagination. Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change", in an echo of Fink's understanding of the myth, Greene chooses the metaphor of the 'motionless cloud', which overshadows her field of work as a social theorist: "It is the cloud of givenness, of what is considered 'natural' by those caught in the taken-for-granted, in the everydayness of things. I also think we have to hold in mind that the modern world is an administered world structured by all sorts of official languages" (Greene, 2007, p. 196). In contrast to Fink's remarks on the closed society, which repeatedly allude to supposedly 'archaic' or at least pre-modern societies, Greene describes it as an essential feature of *modern* societies that they operate in a mode of the given and the natural, in many places guided by the 'managed' and the 'structured'. She identifies language to be the primary medium of socialization in such a mode. And she adds that the specific language of the 'official' and 'given' is usually to be conceived of as an instrument of power:

> "More often than not, they are the languages of domination, entitlement, and power; and there are terrible silences where ordinary human speech ought to be audible, silences our pedagogies ought somehow to repair. The modern world is, as well, a world where what we conceive to be our tradition is petrified, located in private enclaves, or surrounded by auras that distance it from lived experience, from the landscapes of our lives. Too few individuals are being enabled to crack the codes, to uncover that in which they are embedded, to appropriate visions and perspectives legitimately theirs." (ibid.; see also p. 9)

In contemporary educational institutions, learners were understood as "passive receivers of predigested information" (ibid., p. 34) and eventually educated to live a "mechanical, conforming, robotic life" (ibid.). According to such an understanding, pedagogical communication degenerates into a one-way road in which the learners, as with Fink, only have to receive or embody an already established educational outcome. They are not actors, but objects of the educational process, and even this only in so far as they comply with the objectives set *by others*. For Greene, living through such an educational experience and having to learn the language belonging to it is an expression of modern, institutionalised power relations and must be rejected.

With reference to Jürgen Habermas, who criticizes the 'distortions' of a contextless communication (ibid., p. 46), she finally expands her diagnosis of the contemporary educational process by a consequential aspect, which is then also prominently reflected in her positive draft of educational processes (see chapter 4). Thus education *for* and *in* the given and the language through which this given is evoked has a directly corrosive effect on social references, on which personal and also cultural developments so urgently depend on. For in the language of the given, the references are already set, but set abstractly in a sense that corresponds to the logic and legitimacy of the educational contents and structures. However, these references need not necessarily have anything to do with the thoroughly intertwined life and experience of the learners. Against this background Greene admonishes:

> "They [the students] must not be resigned to thoughtlessness, passivity, or lassitude if they are to find pathways through the nettles, the swamps, the jungles of our time. Nor can they be left to the realm of separateness and privacy that makes community so difficult to achieve and alienates the fortunate from those who remain tragically in need." (ibid., p. 34)

Greene's primary educational task is thus the formation of a "critical community" (ibid., p. 198), in which everyone has levelled opportunities to communicate and improve the way they live. However, such a society is prevented precisely where people in educational contexts have to learn a language that is designed to survive traditional dogmas and which wraps the legitimacy of this language in the aura of unquestionable legitimacy or normality. Such a language does not encourage a confrontation with the world, but at best allows the adoption of a passive, reproductive attitude in favour of the fulfilment and continuation of an externally induced norm (ibid., p. 19 & 180).

If we now want to use these pedagogical considerations for a deeper understanding of economic higher education, we should first of all, for terminological reasons alone, make reference to the recently published volume of Walter O. Ötsch (2019), in which he describes contemporary societies as fundamentally mythical societies. The collective interpretation schemes of "economized societies" (Ötsch, 2019, p. 14) are also based on unquestioned categories that now, paradoxically, have a scientific, namely economic, origin.[4] With reference to Mises and Hayek, Ötsch reconstructs it as an essential momentum of neoliberal or 'market radical' thinking that the legitimacy and origins of 'The Market'[5] must not be questioned. At best, one should think within and on the basis of Market results, namely the price signals, but not beyond them. The fact that people cannot and *must* not deal with the background of the meaningful mediator named The Market can be seen as the central power base of radical market thinking. Such an undertaking would be tantamount to a 'Pretence of Knowledge' (F. A. Hayek) and would violate the humility that humans have to show towards the The Market (see Ötsch, 2019, p. 83 ff., 438). Thus the mythical character of market radical thinking is epistemologically circularly secured - the postulate of a superhuman performance of The Market is grounded in the myth (to be followed) of a superhuman performance of The Market. Not an argument, but an *imperative* guarantees the superiority of The Market. What remains to be done in such an understanding is to submit to The Market and reproduce its 'laws'. In this sense, radical market thinking is governmental thinking in Foucault's sense *par excellence*, which "aims to create a social reality that is simultaneously presupposed as already existing" (Bröckling, Krasmann & Lemke, 2000, p. 9; my translation). In this respect, radical market thinking is strictly speaking not productive, but reproductive thinking, since it tries to iteratively realize *idealiter* presumed concepts in the tangible life-world.

In the context of a mythical market society understood in this way, economic higher education can be reflected as a significant institution within which the myth is reproduced as a collectively dominant horizon of meaning and passed on to future generations. In the sense of the two philosophers consulted here, it would be decisive that within education, the myth is not rationally being justified or revealed in its intellectual basic structure. Such a stance would certainly relativize or even threaten the unquestionable and thus stabilized myth. In the sense of reproduction, the pedagogical practice is rather dependent on a mode of incessant repetition in an aura of unquestionability. In fact, recent analyses of the dominant didactic medium, the economic textbook, show that they rely both on a permanent repetition of the given on one hand and on an omission of contextualizing or relativizing aspects of the dominant narrative on the other hand (Bäuerle, 2017, p. 266; Graupe & Steffestun, 2018). This applies both with regard to potential alternatives for approaching economic phenomena from a methodological or theoretical point of view (van Treeck & Urban, 2016; Rebhan, 2017), and with reference to the philosophical (Graupe, 2016) or historical (Klamer, 2007, p. 230) contextualization of a market dogmatism itself. Colander (2007, p. 47) summarizes it as follows:

> "Students have little sense of background to the debates or the techniques and do not understand why they developed and of what use they are. Instead, the students are thrown into the particular approach, and a particular technique, and told to learn it."

A more recent empirical survey also shows that, from the perspective of undergraduate economics students themselves, heteronomous framing is as much a part of their study experience as the tacit self-evidence of a mathematical approach and the absence of real-world references or contextualisation of contents taught. Both aspects are promoted by a communicative culture that largely prevents discussions and relegates students to what Maxine Greene calls "passive reception" (Greene 2007, p. 124) (Bäuerle, Pühringer & Ötsch, 2020, p. 156):

> Cm: in all these lectures there is no discussion about anything, it's just, it's just (.) one sender and many receivers and it's not reciprocal, it's hardly reciprocal and there is no questioning and it's just neoclassical <laughing>
> Bm: └standard(theory)

An escape from this mode, through the expression of doubt or critical questioning for instance, often leads to the defence and ultimately the substantiation of the dominant dogma (cf. ibid.).[6] Especially the strong focus on highly abstract study contents that offer students no connection to their (economic) life experiences, combined with rigid teaching, examination and modularisation settings, promotes the experience that Greene calls 'silencing': the loss of a linguistic ability with regard to one's own life processes (see also Graupe, 2016; Düppe, 2009, p. 55 & p. 122 f.). At the same time, the now reproduced ways of life and meanings in the context of economic higher education are becoming a new normality, which in turn form a resonant interrelation with dominant narratives of an economized society (Bäuerle, 2020).

Whereas for ancient mythical societies, a reproductive handling of collective interpretation schemes certainly provided coherence and stability, today this *modus operandi* can mean a real danger for individuals, disciplines, but also societies - namely when the reproduced interpretation schemes prove to be dangerous or harmful to their survival. Such a case seems to exist in the context of economic higher education, where traditional interpretation schemes not only do not enable graduates to deal with economic and financial crises (Kapeller & Ötsch, 2010), ecological (Liu, Bauman & Chuang, 2019; Green, 2012) or social disparities (van Treeck, 2016), but also undermine a sheer awareness of such realities.

Nevertheless, and this seems to me to be of paramount importance, a reproductive mode in dealing with interpretation schemes is by no means to be rejected or condemned categorically. After all, such a quasi-automatic and unconscious mode - according to the cognitive sciences for example - constitutes over 90% of cognitive processes (cf. Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 13). The reproduction of acquired thought, language and patterns of action and of emotional and physical practices as an omnipresent 'background noise' is thus crucial for a successful and meaningful social life. Nevertheless, these interpretation schemes may be reconsidered and changed in the sense of a critical or creative development - for example in the light of crises to be overcome.

4 Deconstruction

An approach to interpretation schemes that are to be sharply distinguished from reproductive ones can be seen in what I would like to describe here with the practise of *deconstruction*. Let alone the etymology of the term suggests a dismantling or disintegrating character, whereby here, too, a moment of *construction* and thus of production still remains.[7] A deconstruction of collective interpretation schemes cannot be equated with their destruction. Rather, it is to be described as their productive degradation.

Fink identifies this approach as a historical and systematic countermovement to the closed society and assigns it to the Enlightenment and, beyond that, to what Nietzsche called 'European nihilism' (see below). Fink considers science as a specific social institution that cultivates and promotes this approach. And he characterizes the Enlightenment as a scientific and rationalistic

penetration of the world, driven by the sting of doubt: "Every genuine science [is, L.B.] - finds itself in a constant 'fundamental crisis'. [...] All sciences are always questioning themselves and are endlessly carried on by a radical self-distrust" (Fink, 1970, p. 44).[8] The objects into which this sting of doubt is projected are the traditional interpretation schemes (of a socially valid morality, for example, or of disciplinary paradigms), which are no longer taken for granted, but rather subjected to a sceptical decomposition:

> "Critical reflection disintegrates the traditional custom, has a community-dissolving effect, breaks and destroys a beautifully bound form of life." (ibid., p. 85)

> "A completely different tendency in life awakens with 'reflection', with the critical, suspicious, heretical spirit, with the self-assertion of individual reason against the great traditional powers, with the desire for doubt, for scepticism, for the destructive power of negation." (ibid., p. 110)

With the 'individual' character of reason, it is also indicated that the actor of this deconstruction is no longer a collective but an individual. One can say that the deconstruction of interpretation schemes is a critique of the individual against society:

> "The self does not sacrifice itself for the 'general', does not strive to be its pure expression and mouthpiece, but boldly takes its own side, tries to exist at its own risk. This is not only an intellectual movement, but also a moral one. It is the urge for emancipation, for free self-assertion in one's own self-consciousness, an urge for independence." (ibid.; see also p. 111)

Instead of protecting and passing on long-standing myths, narratives and traditions, they are now being shaken to their very foundations. In their meticulous and argumentative interpenetration, their constitutive contradictions, historical contingencies and irrational elements are revealed and rationally explained. Max Weber called this process the "disenchantment of the world" (Weber, 2004 [1919], p. 13). On the one hand, it leaves behind a myth that has become questionable and lifeless, which no longer enjoys any binding force, and on the other hand, it leaves behind scientifically founded interpretation schemes, which indeed initiate an enormous expansion of theoretical and technically usable knowledge, but which in turn is no longer able to raise a closed or coherent world view (cf. Fink, 1970, p. 100 & 137 f.). Thus, following Fink, the emancipated subject is on the one hand freed from the collective ballast of tradition, but on the other hand no longer knows about a binding meaning of its existence or can at best develop such a meaning to the limits of *its own* existence. A fragmentary, boundless coexistence of quite different and contradictory interpretation schemes emerges, with drastically limited binding forces for social cohesion. In the successive disappearance of *socially* binding interpretation schemes, this 'nihilism' is addressed, which Nietzsche proclaimed in a diagnostic way with the proclamation of the 'Death of God' and which receives the name of post-modernism during the course of the 20th century. For Nietzsche, it basically consists of the following: "*That the highest values devalue themselves*. The aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer" (Nietzsche, 1968 [1887], p. 9).

Furthermore, and here the 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002 [1944]) comes into play, the piercing doubt carries a real danger in itself, inasmuch as it always remains antagonistically related to something to be deconstructed, which in turn it needs, but nevertheless destroys. Even a decidedly scientific endeavour still lives from cultural, e.g. linguistic, traditions that it has not produced itself, that it seeks to deconstruct rather than to reproduce. "There is no more fitting image for this result than the parable of the man who successfully saws off the branch he is sitting on" (Fink 1970, p. 137 f.). Such blindness towards

one's own conditions of existence can ultimately threaten the existence of a deconstructive approach to interpretation schemes; precisely when the doubt does not also extend to the scientific self and thus ultimately becomes dogma itself.

Fink and Greene assess the "disbelief in metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984 [1979], p. xxiv) as a loss also against this background. Greene (2007, p. 2), for example, writes in a clear delineation from postmodernism:

> "I also feel deeply dissatisfied with what postmodern thinkers describe as 'bricolage', or 'collage', that style of communicating often thought suitable for the present time, when old myths, oppositions, and hierarchies are being overthrown." (Schrift, 1990, p. 110).

It is far from her intention to interpret a collage of the most diverse narratives as a virtue or gain and to implement it pedagogically. As chapter 4 will show again, she focuses on integrating approaches or languages, which do not leave people in their individual interpretation schemes. Fink, too, is critical of a pluralism of unconnected juxtapositions that has arisen through deconstruction (cf. Fink, 1970, p. 197).

Such a deconstructive approach to interpretation schemes certainly results in a completely different educational process than is the case with reproductive educational processes. The focus does not lay on unquestioned transmission, but rather on a scientific penetration of an objectified world, divided into various subjects and disciplines. Learners are not trained as bearers of myths, but as critical subjects or objective observers who can approach phenomena in a methodically controlled and intersubjectively comprehensible way. This understanding of education is oriented towards an ideal of 'adequacy', i.e. a correspondence between intellect and matter. Fink speaks of the scientific ideal of "theoretical truth" (ibid., p. 36) and at the same time critically notes that according to this ideal man is primarily being perceived as a thinking (but not as an acting) being. Due to the absence of a central dogma, on the one hand, deconstructing educational processes are freer and more open. This holds true for its potential contents as well as for its forms (didactics). On the other hand, however, it becomes incomparably more difficult for educators to choose appropriate contents and forms; a necessity and burden that educators in reproductive educational contexts do not have to deal with. What can, what should be taught? Based on which justifications? At what point can learners be considered competent or educated? What are standards for good and evil, for right and wrong? These are questions to which no binding answers can be given in a deconstructive setting (cf. Fink, 1970, pp. 168 & 175).

Even if, as explained in chapter 2, standard economic higher education today exhibits comprehensive reproductive traits, a worldwide discourse on its critical and decidedly plural readjustment was sparked at the latest by the financial and economic crisis of 2008 (cf. ISIPE 2014). Contents have been criticized as too one-sided, abstract and unquestioned, their forms as too rigid, and boring. Some of the courses, platforms or even curricula that have been developed in this context critically deal with standard economics. The online platform Exploring Economics and the newly founded study programs, institutes or even universities in Bernkastel-Kues (Cusanus Hochschule für Gesellschaftsgestaltung), Duisburg-Essen (Institute for Socio-Economics) or Siegen (M.A. in Pluralist Economics) are just a few examples of impulses from the German speaking area alone.

On the other hand, and in the sense of a post-dogmatic economic higher education, these teaching innovations also rely on a variety of interpretation schemes of the economic in the broadest sense (theories, methods and disciplines), which allow a *new*, *different* approach to the phenomenon of the economy. Within this discourse, pluralism (of theories, methods and disciplines) has been established as a central concept. Its antagonistic demarcation from standard economic approaches is a conventional means and necessarily rests upon the relation of critical

discourses to the central dogma that (still) needs to be deconstructed (cf. the overview by Düppe, 2009, p. 220). Slowly but steadily novel, pluralistic educational programmes nowadays do not only offer a multifaceted and multi-perspective critique of their standard economic counterparts, but also offer further interpretation schemes, in and through which economics can be interpreted.[9]

Nonetheless, and this is occasionally reproached by mainstream representatives, the new interpretative diversity is no longer united by a unifying 'metanarrative' or paradigm. Certainly, overcoming the dominance of a single such paradigm was the ultimate aim of a decidedly deconstructive pluralism in the first place. If successful, this kind of pluralism seems (at first) to be leading to what Bigo & Negru (2008, p. 134) call a "scattered pluralism" or what Kapeller & Dobusch (2012, p. 1043) call a "disinterested" or even "selfish" pluralism; a pluralism of co-existent but separate paradigms or schools working separately according to their own interpretative procedures. Such forms of pluralism, however, are usually dismissed as deficient against the tacit background of a monistic or even dogmatic understanding of (economic) science.

To summarise: a deconstructive approach to interpretation schemes does not take anything for granted or as self-evident. It is characterized by constant restlessness in working through potential patterns of meaning, which through these upheavals always take on new faces. This leads to an expansion, but also to an uncertainty of human knowledge, since more is known, but the question of the 'why?' of this knowledge can no longer be answered in a satisfying and socially binding way. The economic heterodoxy offers a rich spectrum of such knowledge stocks, to which economic higher education programs can tie up and which can at least intellectually break up, revolutionize and supplement a consolidated orthodoxy. If the associated intention is to be able to think *differently* or *more* than those who have been trained in standard economics, then such pluralistic training also exists in relation to a dogma to be deconstructed. It lives in and from a progressive difference and differentiation and thus ultimately also from the standard economic dogma itself. This seems at least implicitly to represent the 'why?' of a good part of the movement for more pluralism in economics. An understanding of pluralism that is to be distinguished from this one arises with a further approach to collective interpretation schemes, which explicitly starts with the question of the meaning of human (or here: economic) thought and action and in this way makes the genuinely new and socially shared the very core subject of educational processes.

4 Imagination

For Maxine Greene as well as for Eugen Fink it can be considered the underlying intention of their educational philosophical work to develop a viable alternative to reproductive or deconstructive approaches in the field of education. Although their alternatives differ in some respects, they do share some central commonalities, which will now be discussed and made fruitful for the field of economic higher education.

A first decisive break from reproductive or deconstructive procedures lies in the determination of the *actors* of interpretative and, among them, especially educational processes. Where the transmission of unquestioned myths is performed by a largely unconscious collective, guided by socially recognized guardians of these beliefs, in the archetype of deconstructive dealings with interpretation schemes it is the daring individual who works by means of his own mind. Greene and Fink contrast these two types of actors with a dialogical 'critical community' (Greene) and a 'counselling community' (Fink). These educational communities are egalitarian with regard to central facets of their activities and try to produce a conscious, i.e. linguistically composed educational experience in a joint reflection process. In this sense, it is *productive* communities that Fink (cf. Fink, 1970, pp. 111 ff.) and Greene have in mind, in the double sense that they create their interpretation schemes and, as it were, *consciously* produce *themselves* within them:

> "In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying, and the like. Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common; they have to find ways to make intersubjective sense. [...] It is a question of what might contribute to the pursuit of shared goods: what ways of being together, of attaining mutuality, of reaching toward some common world." (Greene, 2007, p. 39)

What is decisive here is that the individual is neither absorbed in a collective mass, nor that the individual stands completely on its own, but that it enters into co-existence based on a free decision, realizes it as an activity in order to finally also produce something together: "she or he feels what it signifies to be an initiator and an agent, existing among others but with the power to choose for herself or himself" (ibid., p. 22; see also p. 167).

The products of such a common process are, as already mentioned, the constitution of the educational community itself and, once again, interpretation schemes. Through the creative and conscious process, as well as in their relation or contextualization, these interpretation schemes overcome the quality of those that we had come to know in reproducing and deconstructing processes. A starting point for the systematic further development is the insight that an unquestionable reiteration as well as an incessant critique runs the risk of finding itself trapped in an idealistic loop (in the philosophical sense of the word). Put more simply: there is a threat of losing the tangible life-world. For both procedures focus on the *content* of an interpretation, but not on the productive generation of the *relata* of and in an interpretative relationship (i.e. human being and world). The belief in myths and a deconstructive pluralism, in their strong reference to ideals, images, or more generally speaking the sphere of interpretation, threaten to lose sight of a world of phenomena to be understood or changed. Greene and Fink therefore develop their approaches to education consistently directed towards the world and the possibilities of interpreting and ultimately shaping it. The interpretation schemes generated by educational communities are thus always related to a world that the members of the same inevitably share, interpretatively cope with and to a certain extent also produce.

The question of dealing with interpretation schemes is thus transferred to the question of dealing with the world. The 'world' is not an external, objective phenomenon that could be described in a distanced way. Both philosophers know about the contingency and dependence of the outside on the interpreting inside. But instead of getting involved in a boundless mirroring of the world in the light of the most diverse possibilities of interpretation, they propose to use, also in the sense of an empowerment, this interpretative potential in favour of the interpreters as well as the interpreted. The activity of interpreting thus gains a measure and a limit, a reference to something or someone that will never be conclusively outlined or caught up by *any* interpretation. This addresses, as it were, the insight into the limitations of the interpreter as well as the interpreted (cf. Greene, 2007, p. 26). Both carry within them a moment of unavailability: while the interpreter never knows enough or satisfyingly how to interpret correctly, the interpreted can never be captured or 'mapped' conclusively. This applies not only to the interpreters as a community, but also to them as individuals.[10]

For this open *modus operandi*, the term of *imagination* shall now been introduced. The understandings of imaginative educational processes represented here are always dependent on a common language, which, although supported by other aesthetic forms of expression, must ultimately lead to a common language again. Educational processes are thus primarily and constitutively *dialogical processes* that cannot be without open communication or 'consultation' (cf. Greene, 2007, p. 5). Against this background, Greene describes her understanding of imagination:

> "To call for imaginative capacity is to work for the ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise. To ask for intensified realization is to see that each person's reality must be understood to be interpreted experience - and that the mode of interpretation depends on his or her situation and location in the world. [...] To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or 'common-sensible' and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might lie, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably *is*." (Greene, 2007, S. 19)

Fink's 'pragmatic perception' is also an imaginative, i.e. *productive*, quality:

> "In a stronger sense, each act of perception is pragmatic, which not only accomplishes the discovery of facts, but rather produces the perceived in perception. [...] Man never brings forth the things of nature through his perception, but he brings forth the meaningfulness of the human world as creative finite freedom - and here perception and production can coincide." (Fink, 1970, p. 39)

> "Imagination also has a most positive power. It is a dealing with the possible - certainly, with that which is not. But in this way it also opens up paths for freedom, breaks open spaces for action: the unreal becomes the model for what is to be realized." (Fink, 1970, p. 127; see also p. 189)

What is decisive and sharply to be differentiated from speculative or utopian procedures is that both Greene and Fink's imaginative educational processes refer to concretely lived or liveable practice. Not the multifaceted configuration of a platonic *u-topos*, a non-place, or the contemplative heightening of an inwardly directed consciousness (cf. Greene, 2007, pp. 25 f.), but the imagination of a concretely realizable collective option for action is the 'result' of the educational processes understood in this way. And for both Fink (1970, p. 24 f.; see also p. 99) and Greene, this innovation goes beyond the naming and reassurance of common (thoroughly crisis-laden) practice. It can allow for transformative practices as well, that allow for shaping shared reality beyond the presumably 'given' world (Greene, 2007, p. 177).

In an educational process understood in this way, on the one hand - qua practice - the reference to the world is established, but at the same time the possibility of transcending in *practical* terms is opened up. It is thus not a theoretical reference to practice and the world that reobjectifies it and distances the actor (or learner) from it. In this respect, no decidedly theoretical knowledge is generated, although theoretical knowledge must certainly be consulted in order to be able understand (post)modern practices shaped by theories: "But the 'theoretical' is now in a service function" (Fink, 1970, p. 37). What is proposed is rather a rethinking and discussion of common collective practice in order to imagine something 'new' (Greene) or 'crisis-solving' (Fink) at the edges of this ability to think and speak. This imaginative practice is always a world-oriented one: "our transformative pedagogies must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation" (Greene, 2007, p. 51).

By avoiding a rift between thinking and acting, the question of the 'transfer' of theoretically developed knowledge into practical (or technical) execution of the same becomes obsolete (cf. Greene, 2007, p. 210). Finally, the negotiation and transformation of practice is now itself the central object of the educational process. Even if this negotiation in its imaginative potential may already be regarded as productive in itself, the options for action considered must

ultimately prove their worth: "The self-binding nature of human freedom in the decision to possibly be able to do the imagined gives the project the actuality of an action" (Fink, 1970, p. 127). The act is no longer negotiated as a distanced phenomenon that can be described, but as a changeable topos of common reflection. In a situation in which the meaning and purpose of human existence has become fragile, in which a passive repetition as well as an incessant criticism have become questionable, there still remains the path of a *common articulation of a common purpose* in and through jointly considered practice. The participants are not formed as believers, knowers or doubters, but as common and conscious shapers of their experienced life-world.

Notwithstanding these numerous intersections in Greene's and Fink's educational philosophy, one central difference should be pointed out here. As with Fink, the common educational process is more urgently and pointedly related to a shared need or even crisis. His 'counselling community' considers the common practice with regard to its immanent crisis-ladenness and against this background to the 'crisis-solving' which promises to overcome shared distress:

> "The most important basic feature of common counselling is the exposure of all to a shared need and danger. One finds himself sitting in the same boat [...] The understanding openness for the common threat awakens the concerned conver-sation in which an understanding of the meaning of the situation and a saving way out is sought" (Fink, 1970, p. 185).

In this respect educational activity is a common concern, which works with an urgency towards a decision (cf. ibid., p. 190), which is to be done in view of the crisis: "This applies to the manifold fields of human action: to politics, to moral self-determination, to technical work - and to education" (ibid., p. 187). And one can imaginatively add: this also applies to the economy.

The planned character (cf. ibid., p. 99) of social practice that emerges from such a counselling process sharply contrasts with Greene's educational process, which is designed for the moment of opening practices: "But the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected" (Greene, 2007, p. 28). For Greene, the real 'crisis' that educational institutions have to deal with today is that young people are not able to name their experiences. Especially if these experiences also consist in an economic, political, ethnic, gender-related, etc. marginalization, then purely reproductive educational processes threaten to perpetuate these injustices. Young people are then not only *not* given a language to describe their experiences, but they are also denied the opportunity to develop a language for new experiences on their own:

> "We have to be articulate enough and able to exert ourselves to name what we see around us – the hunger, the passivity, the homelessness, the ‚silences'. There may be thought of as deficiencies in need of repair. It requires imagination to be conscious of them, to find our own lived worlds lacking because of them." (ibid., p. 111)

Greene counters this with an educational process that enables people to open, find and change their language: "The young can be empowered to view themselves as conscious, reflexive namers and speakers if their particular standpoints are acknowledged, if interpretive dialogues are encouraged, if interrogation is kept alive" (ibid., p. 57). At the same time, it underlines the didactical necessity to offer learners a plurality of languages (of interpretation schemes) in order to actually find his or her tone. This must go beyond verbal or mathematical languages into aesthetic forms of expression, which is why Greene and the educational institutions that refer to her[11] make the study of arts in the broadest sense (painting, music, poetry, etc.) a core

component of their didactical work.[12]

However, this plurality of languages is transformative in the strict sense of the word only when they are used by learners in relation to their collective practice. Only when language is used to describe common experiences and to open up new experiences does what Greene calls a "critical community" emerge (ibid., p. 196). Strictly speaking, this community then *has* no common language (or identity, nationality, etc.), but *makes* it (see ibid., p. 59). In this performative turn lies, as with Fink, ultimately also the categorical break with the Enlightenment, insofar as common values are no longer bindingly *known*, but *made*. With reference to Richard Rorty and the common values formulated Greene summarizes: "The point is to try to live by them and make more and more inclusive the number of people to which 'we' refers" (ibid., p. 194; see also p. 70).

Where already deconstructing approaches to interpretation schemes showed a distance to standard economic higher educational practices, imaginary approaches seem even more distant.[13] Nevertheless, recent advances such as those by Robert Shiller (2019) show that an examination of the phenomenon of *verbal* language (or other aesthetic forms of expression) should be of the greatest interest, at least for economic *research,* precisely because of its social impact, i.e. its creative potential. On the one hand, Shiller raises this undertaking in the sense of a social responsibility of economists who do not simply observe economic phenomena, but rather bring them straight to life through their observations and thus also bear a responsibility for a crisis-laden economic reality (cf. ibid., p. xvi f.). On the other hand - and decisively - he once again takes the detour of generating theoretical knowledge *about* narrations and their possible effects, in order to ultimately be able to improve the predictability of the future in the present (cf. ibid., xiii ff.). This approach is to be distinguished from *initiating* narratives or imaginations about current or possible economic practices together with others (at least the peers). Shiller *observes* narratives; he does not want to *make* them (although he certainly knows that observation itself is creative).

His access to language is problematic, however, mainly because knowledge of it is ultimately placed at the service of a theoretical dogma. Narratives are conceptualized as "important, largely exogenous shocks to the aggregate economy" (Shiller, 2017, p. 968) and the knowledge generated about them is thus used to better understand or improve in some way what is understood by 'aggregate economy'. Interpretation schemes in the form of narratives are thus understood as phenomena *external* to the economy, but potentially threatening it pandemically. They are not perceived and conceptionalised as openings to a new understanding and practice of economic activity itself.

A familiar approach to economic higher education can be found in the proposals of Moosavian (2016) or Hartley (2001, see esp. pp. 152 ff.). Here, graphic visualizations or 'Great Literature' are used in the service of standard economic theory. This approach does not open the space for interpretation, but merely changes the medium and didactics of the interpretation to be reproduced. Although their didactics also allow for open interpretations in parts, the extensive didactics based on paintings of Watts and Christopher is ultimately also geared towards reflecting predefined economic "concepts and issues" in selected works (cf. Watts & Christopher, 2012, esp. pp. 418 f.).[14]

The Leipzig deliberation seminars follow a categorically different path. Their didactical approach, originally developed by the 'Forschungsgruppe Erwägungskultur Paderborn' (cf. Benseler, Blanck, Greshoff, Loh, 1994) and subsequently refined for teaching purposes (cf. Blanck, 2002), was used at the University of Leipzig over 24 semesters by Friedrun and Georg Quaas in the field of economic higher education. The core element of deliberative didactics is the discussion and preservation of alternative perspectives - in the Leipzig case in the form of academic texts - on a given problem or phenomenon (cf. Blanck, 2002, p. 9 ff.). The consideration of different alternatives should not lead to their accumulation or their mutual deconstruction, but should ultimately sharpen an awareness of the limitedness but also the potential of each

alternative. The process of deliberation itself is the decisive factor here, insofar as not only the handling of a phenomenon is considered, but also the discourse ethics of social interaction.[15] Both facets (content and form) of the deliberation process thereby encourage a permanent self-reflection, which lead to an extensive documentation of the seminars.[16] Although the pedagogical setting is established around the common practice of deliberating and imagining, it remains open to what extent the texts dealt with are able to promise or possibly also to change a collective practice outside the seminar context (i.e. in experiences of globalization, for example) (see also Quaas & Quaas 2015, p. 4).

It is precisely this question that is addressed by the didactical approaches of Marc Casper, who lets students themselves generate a literary approach to economic phenomena and a common understanding of 'economy' consistently from the shared student narratives about their economic experiences (cf. Casper, 2019). Through their reflected and dialogically shared experience, students develop an understanding of what the economy could or should be. His work with masterstudents points in a similar direction and aims to develop a common understanding of the "meaning and value of the entrepreneurial" starting from the practices and sense-making processes of the seminar participants (cf. Casper, 2017, p. 3). In both teaching concepts, students are encouraged to develop interpretation schemes for the category and subsequent practices of the economy (or the entrepreneurial) together and in the discussion of their social experiences.

In a transdisciplinary context, the I.L.A. workshops also aim at developing a new sense of the economic and subsequently initiate concrete projects of socio-ecological transformation. Its starting point is an examination of the concept of the 'Imperial Mode of Living' (cf. Brand & Wissen, 2018), which describes the collective practice of Western societies in a global dimension and notes its devastating effects on societies and nature. Although the primary interpretation of collective practice is thus subject to a strong (albeit widely documented) interpretation and illustrated by numerous examples of everyday economic practice (see I.L.A. Kollektiv, 2017), the declared intention of their educational work is to engage in an open exchange about possible ways towards "a solidary coexistence on our planet".[17] The process of changing interpretation schemes is consequentially carried out in order to change common practices. Furthermore, the teaching design of economics courses at Cusanus University also try to enable students to creatively shape economic facets of their lives, constantly considering and altering the relationship between economic thought and action. Using the example of a module on the 'Contexts of Economic Action', Johanna Hopp and Theresa Steffestun describe how such a connection can be implemented and didactically grounded in modularized Bachelor courses in economics and what challenges such an approach involves (Hopp & Steffestun, 2020).

These impressions of imaginative ways of dealing with economic meaning-making in the context of economic higher education are by no means exhaustive. However, they give an impression that, firstly, they are not as far away as one might assume and, secondly, that they are contributing in quite different ways to a renewal of economic thought and action.

5 Discussion and conclusion

This article has investigated three different ways of dealing with the phenomenon of (economic) interpretation schemes: reproduction, deconstruction and imagination. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize once again that an exclusive decision for one of the approaches is in my view problematic, perhaps even illusory. What should deconstruction be directed against, if no reproduction would have taken place in the first place? How can we imagine without the critical impulse of a doubting deconstruction? And how is the imagined ultimately to be established if it is not reproduced? It seems important to me that at least the educator be aware of the potential diversity, function and perhaps also dangers of these three (and possibly other)

approaches. Against the background of the evident dangers for humankind and nature exemplified by a quasi-mechanical reproduction of market-related beliefs, future economic higher education must undoubtedly include deconstructive and imaginative approaches.

However, educational goals and didactical procedures should not only be based on disciplinary awareness, but also on an awareness of student motivations for dealing with economics and on a knowledge of the life-world in which students (must) live during and after their studies of economics. After all, they are the ones who have to grapple with ecological, economic, political and other social challenges in and with the interpretation schemes they have learned. Standard economic higher education currently lacks both a life-world orientation and an orientation towards student motivations (see Pühringer & Bäuerle, 2019), which greatly increases the danger of students losing their sense of meaning. Instead of pouring abstract economic 'meaning' into them in the manner of Paolo Freire's container (Freire, 1981 [1973], p. 57) and hoping that this pedagogical practice will make sense for someone or something, students should be invited to question the conditions of economic thought and action in central areas of the curricula and, beyond that, to develop and live out their own foundations of meaning and objectives of economic practice.

For instance, a historical as well as philosophical deconstruction of dogmatic economic education and its contents could itself serve as an introduction to economic education. What kinds of economic discourses as well as practices do students experience in their daily lifes? How would standard economic education frame these experiences? When, why and how did the interpretation schemes offered by economics or by different sources actually evolve? By raising awareness for the contingency, deviations and possible alternatives for economic thought and practice, a course or even curriculum could subsequently cross over to more imaginative elements. Crucially, these considerations should always be bound to real-world experiences and challenges, thereby omitting a purely idealistic looping of interpretative schemes. In order to allow for inclusive counselling processes, the experience will most commonly be collective experiences (e.g. climate crisis, tackling the Coronavirus pandemic, national economic policies). Teamwork practices, free spaces for catching up with the collectively learned and rather reflexive examination procedures (e.g. presentations, essays, portfolios) could complement the learning experience and allow for specific problems for smaller groups or individuals. In a final stage, the perspectives gained could be complemented or even translated into processes of institutionalization, thereby empowering students to actually reproduce their insights and visions in their respective contexts. Possibly, this step could transcend the classroom and actually reach into the realms where students' economic experiences and questions actually root.

Economically educated people should not only be able to recite or criticize and contextualize scientific theories or market-related dogmas, but should also be able to produce their own and increasingly shared images and practices of what the economy and economic action could mean. How else will future economists be enabled to participate in a public, democratic discourse about a future worth living?

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ENDNOTES

[1] All translation of the quotations of Fink were carried out by myself. The pedagogical writings of Fink still remain untranslated.

[2] That this applies precisely to the real of 'the' economy can be seen, for example, by referring to the pre-dominant methodological focus in contemporary economics. It is not a common object through which a unity of the field of 'economics' is produced (discursively), but rather the access, the interpretation of economics (cf. Becker, 1978, p. 5; Mankiw & Taylor, 2014, pp. 17 & 30). The professions' 'oblivion of the life-world' in the course of its formalisation

has substantially promoted this primarily *interpretative* self-image (cf. Düppe, 2009 for the historical origins of this epistemic self-understanding of economics).

[3] The main tenets of the framework offered within this paper can certainly be adopted from economic tertiary education to economic secondary education. In fact, both Greene and Fink developed their philosophy of education with strong references to secondary education (without ever excluding tertiary education due to a rather general, philosophical outlook). Still, especially when it comes to didactics as well as the modulation of the three types outlined, differentiation of secondary and tertiary level will be crucial but will not be made topic of this paper.

[4] On the religious origins of economic thought, see Agamben (2011). On its conceptualization *as* religious thought, see Nelson (2001).

[5] I follow with this notation those of Mirowksi and Nik-Khah (2017) and Ötsch (2019). On the one hand, it points to the anthropomorphic character of The Market, which is granted human capabilities as an independent actor. On the other hand, it refers to the metaphysical character of The Market with superhuman qualities and abilities, which, among other reasons, give it a primacy over political processes (see Ötsch, 2019, p. 10 ff.).

[6] See: "Those being contested often react with increased self-assertion. So it can also happen that the external impulse to self-criticism turns into a dogmatic self-assertion and uncritical consolidation, its salvation turns into the opposite" (Fink, 1970, p. 11).

[7] On this ambiguous history of the term see Weimar, Fricke, Müller (2007, p. 335).

[8] This is less true of economic research, where Walter O. Ötsch & Silja Graupe in particular have presented a foundation of economic thinking as pictorial or imaginative (see Ötsch & Graupe, 2018; 2020). See also Beckert, 2016.

[9] In this context, see the Exploring Economics platform (online, last access 26.03.2020): https://www.exploring-economics.org/de

[10] This insight also leads to a changed role of the teacher. She or he also no longer knows definitively what is to be reproduced or deconstructed (cf. Fink, 1970, pp. 177 f., pp. 221 f.). He or she, too, must expose himself or herself to a process of interpretation that is open in principle, into which he or she knows how to bring in more experience and possibilities of interpretation, as it were, but which he or she, as the person responsible, must (under)support above all. In addition to specialist knowledge, such an educator is therefore urgently dependent on a *process knowledge* of basically open educational processes. This shift ultimately also reflects the shift of a given world of observable things (and things to be reproduced) towards a world emerging at the moment of interpretation.

[11] See (online, last access 26.03.2020): https://maxinegreene.org/ and https://www.mghs.nyc/

[12] This diversity of expression is also relevant for future specialists. For they too, in their specialization, never lose the necessity to name their concretely experienced life world together with others (ibid., p. 57 f.).

[13] This is less true of economic research, where Walter O. Ötsch & Silja Graupe in particular have presented a foundation of economic thinking as pictorial or imaginative (see Ötsch & Graupe, 2018; 2020). See also Beckert, 2016.

[14] Cf. the extensive image collection and its didactic preparation (online, last access 26.03.2020): https://intra.krannert.purdue.edu/sites/econandart/Pages/Home.aspx

[15] It thereby shows a strong familiarity to what Dobusch & Kapeller (2012) sketch out as 'interested pluralism'.

[16] Cf. for the Leipzig seminar (online, last access 26.03.2020): http://evoeco.forschungsseminar.de/. For further seminars see https://groups.uni-paderborn.de/ewe/

[17] See also (online, last access 26.03.2020): https://ilawerkstatt.org/