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Be Close to Real Life and Go Transnational: American Studies in the Example of Alfred Hornung

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Fair bows to a man and scholar who has dedicated more than five decades of his life to promote and internationalize American studies in Germany, the US, and China in particular. As editor of leading journals such as *Amerikastudien/American Studies* and more recently *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, Alfred Hornung has served the community of American scholars around the globe to publish and share their knowledge production about US American literature, culture, history, and politics. As mentor, he has guided many young scholars and accompanied them on their way into tenure-track American studies professorships. For many years in his function as DFG representative, he supported American studies projects of high caliber to get funding. In 2013, for outstanding contributions to American studies, Alfred received the Carl Bode-Norman Holmes Pearson Prize of the American Studies Association in Washington, DC; in 2014, he was elected a Member of Academia Europaea: The Academy of Europe (London). This international recognition is well deserved. Already during his years at the Julius Maximilian University in Würzburg, he helped build important bridges between that university in Germany and institutions in the US: in New Mexico, Texas, and New York State. He motivated and inspired his students to go and study abroad and broaden their horizons. And, with the foundation of the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies in Mainz, he helped build another milestone for current and future transnational study of US American literature, culture, history, and politics. "Going West" and "Going East," Alfred has succeeded in extending bridges for American studies and academic exchange on a global scale. I have known Alfred for more than forty years and first met him as a student at the Julius Maximilian University Würzburg in 1982. He was one of the instructors who wrote me a letter of recommendation for a DAAD scholarship that brought me to the University

of Mississippi, Oxford, in 1984. He also connected me with scholars at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at Ole Miss such as William Ferris, later chair for the Endowment of the Humanities under the Clinton administration, and Charles Ragan Wilson. He regularly toured the US and visited German students from his home university to find out how they were doing studying abroad; indeed a very profound commitment to guidance and supervision. I eventually ended up completing my MA and PhD at the University of Mississippi. When I returned to Germany to continue with a postdoc project at Humboldt University, Berlin, Günter H. Lenz, Rüdiger Kunow, and Alfred Hornung were essential for getting my foot back in American studies in Germany. During my professorship at the University College Cork in Ireland (2004–2006), I invited Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Alfred Hornung as keynote speakers for the international conference Inventing America in Cork in 2005 with the idea of supporting the transnational turn in American studies. I have dedicated about twenty-five years of my academic life to hemispheric, inter-American, and transnational approaches to the study of the Americas. Alfred's dedication to transnational American studies has certainly inspired me to broaden my research in American studies by joining the direction of inter-American studies and encouraged me to launch the online journal *fiar forum for inter-american research* as a multilingual and interdisciplinary journal in 2007. As Director of the International Association of Inter-American Studies (2009–2023) and as representative of the International Committee of the ASA for four years, I met Alfred repeatedly at international conferences seeking dialogue for further internationalizing American studies. Alfred's work on Horace Kallen certainly was an early trigger to think about American studies in transnational terms; Alfred's work on autobiography and life writing inspired my most recent research and book projects on life writing and forms of narrating disability. I share his belief that the study of memoirs, autobiographies, and life writings provides long-lasting influence for the development of literary, cultural, and social studies and underscores the important role the humanities have to play in our social lives. Without a doubt, I was very glad that he accepted my invitation to become part of a conference and book project on life writing at the Center for InterAmerican Studies in Bielefeld in 2023. In my work, I have put great emphasis on building bridges and connecting in particular North and South in the Americas. Now, as German director of the Maria Sibylla Merian Center for Advanced Latin American Studies, CALAS, a network that brought together three German and four Latin American universities, I feel that a larger Latin American studies community has welcomed me as American and inter-American studies scholar in their midst. In my new function I hope to create further dialogue, links, and bridges between American studies and Latin American studies. Building bridges is certainly inspired by you, Alfred! Happy Birthday! In our current turbulent times, academia needs to strengthen dialogic, transnational, and horizontal communication for knowledge production and diffusion. You have been a great model! Keep on keeping on!

Bielefeld,
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