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For Alfred on His Eightieth Birthday

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The request to come up with some personal remarks on my relationship to Alfred Hornung on the occasion of his eightieth birthday makes me think back to the time when, for both of us, it all began. We met at the very beginning of both our academic careers, when, in 1977, Alfred had just finished his doctoral dissertation and, joined later by Rüdiger Kunow, became junior lecturer at the University of Würzburg. Only a few years younger than he and still in the process of completing my own dissertation, I held a similar position at the University of Mainz when the collegiality of the German Association for American Studies and personal sympathies led to a research cooperation between Gerhard Hoffmann, Alfred's mentor, and Klaus Lubbers, my own supervisor. Among other younger colleagues in both departments, this rapprochement also brought Alfred and myself into closer contact. For me, the following conferences, discussions of research projects, and personal conversations led to eye-opening insights regarding the diversity of academia even within the same field. As a scholar, Klaus Lubbers was a model of rigorous research on demanding book projects, which he pursued with enthusiastic dedication and a dose of asceticism, as, in predigital times, such engagement included abstemious sojourns in badly heated archives. This individualist conception of academic life also suited my own reclusive tendencies.

When, en route to one of the earliest German conferences on postmodernism, held in Bad Alexandersbad and organized by the Regensburg Americanist Hans Bungert in the late seventies, the Mainz contingent stopped at the University of Würzburg, I had the first inkling of a different, less introverted style of academic self-definition. With glee and pride, Gerhard Hoffmann, then editor of the journal *Amerikastudien/ American Studies,* showed us an array of issues with colorful covers, a recent innovation. As it literally heightened the visibility of the journal and the discipline of

American Studies, Hoffmann was overjoyed by this innovation, which he had initiated. He himself was a mesmerizing presence, whose wide-ranging interest in literature and the arts "fascinated him, and he knew how to fascinate other people, and how to galvanize them for his innovative projects," as Alfred remembers him. Hoffmann pursued this fascination by the organization of symposia and the recruitment of charismatic academics such as Ihab Hassan. For the 1979 annual convention of the German Association for American Studies, Hoffmann managed to invite as speakers John Barth, John Hawkes, and William Gass, then stellar figures of American postmodern metafiction. These uninhibited celebrities radiated a glamor hitherto unknown at such conferences. In the wake of these endeavors and with the support of his research assistants, Hoffmann published a three-volume study of the contemporary American novel from modernism to postmodernism, which brought together the crème de la crème of German American Studies and an international array of prominent theorists and scholars including Malcolm Bradbury, Christopher Bigsby, and Jürgen Habermas. This work also had space for essays by the Würzburg and Mainz brood, consisting largely of Gudrun Schindler, Heide Ziegler, Rüdiger Kunow, Wolfgang Riedel, Alfred, and myself.

What was striking to me was the both literal and figurative colorfulness and public orientation that marked what I considered the Würzburg style. It manifested itself in multicolor journal covers as well as the inclusion of illustrious names in conferences and publications. In my observation, there were unequally distributed advantages and drawbacks to both the Würzburg and the Mainz approach. Introversion in Mainz translated into relatively liberal time management and ease for one's own research. Frequent trips to Frankfurt airport to meet renowned speakers, weekend seminars, and extended doctoral colloquia as well as after-conference parties at hospitable Gerhard Hoffmann's gallerylike home full of artworks, and frequent academic guests staying overnight, were wonderful opportunities to imbibe a vibrant atmosphere of intellectual and intercultural stimuli. But, for people not as strong-willed as Alfred, such total immersion could also detract from other obligations, notably the timely completion of dissertations.

In hindsight, the atmosphere of Würzburg American Studies in the seventies appears to me as the ideal breeding ground for the qualities Alfred turned into his own interpretation of scholarship and public intellectualism. His interest in postmodernist avant-gardism shows in many of his publications but its international character led to his much wider engagement with transnational and global phenomena as integral aspects of American Studies. Perhaps as a continuation of his childhood belief that the characters who die in the pages of books, on stage, or on the screen die in earnest, Alfred developed a uniquely intense fascination with interrelations of life, literature, and art, which manifested itself already in his doctoral dissertation on the muckraking movement, a group of journalists and writers of the Progressive Era, among them Upton Sinclair, who exposed corruption and demanded social reform. It manifests

itself even more strongly in Alfred's second book, a study of major American autobiographies.

Alfred has pursued both these research priorities—postmodernism morphing into transnationalism as well as life writing, often in combination—to this day, in mind-boggling intensity and variety. In the early years of his Mainz professorship, he coorganized conferences and coedited volumes juxtaposing autobiographical writing from English- as well as French-speaking contexts by Alain Robbe-Grillet, Serge Doubrovsky, Rachid Boudjedra, Maxine Hong Kingston, Raymond Federman, Ronald Sukenick, Michelle Cliff, and others. He compared autobiographical formations in the drama of August Strindberg and Eugene O'Neill as well as the fiction of Federman, Thomas Bernhard, and Samuel Beckett. With respect to life writing, he published an essay with the programmatic title "The Personal is the Fictional" on Philip Roth's novel *I Married a Communist*, which indirectly thematizes Roth's own marital crisis. He edited a collection on American lives and, recently, wrote two biographies for the German-language market, one on Jack London and the other on Al Capone. Focusing on transnationalism, he coedited volumes on African American and Arab American cultures. He wrote on transnational Jewish culture, interrelations between Franz Kafka, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick and, ingeniously, between Horace M. Kallen and Daniel Cohn-Bendit. He addressed 9/11 and Ground Zero, which are, of course, also sadly transnational phenomena. In publications on ChinAmerica, Confucius and America, and planetary citizenship, he reflected on how the Pacific triangle of Australasia, China, and the United States might reorient American Studies. His fascination with China yielded books on ecology and life writing in transcultural and transnational perspectives, published in both English and Chinese, as well as essays on topics as diverse as Chinese garden culture and ecological life writing, therapies of Chinese medicine reflected in medical narratives, and even on life writing in the mountains of Tibet.

Interrelations of life, literature, and culture shape much more than only Alfred's scholarly work. The absorption of private by professional concerns which he experienced at the beginning of his career in Würzburg perfectly fits his willingness to dedicate himself to American Studies with all his energy and without reservation. Even more completely than his mentor, he understands American Studies as a task to be lived and pursues its furtherance and transnational growth by accepting duties of cooperation, administration, and organization, which in number and importance match his scholarly achievements. In addition to his astounding capacities as editor, teacher, and scholar (his CV lists close to two hundred publications), Alfred's open-mindedness laid the groundwork for international activities which in their entirety amount to a kind of personalized transnationalism. He became general editor and/or member of editorial boards of book series such as the American Studies Monograph Series, as well as numerous journals, such as *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, *American Studies Journal*, *Atlantic Studies, European Journal of Life Writing*, *Contemporary Foreign Literature* (Nanjing), *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, *Journal of Life*

Writing, and *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, some of which he also cofounded. He accepted visiting professorships at a host of renowned seats of learning in North America, among them Columbia, Austin, Albuquerque, Albany, Oxford, Mississippi, Toronto, and Vancouver. In Europe, Alfred held guest professorships at the universities of Ghent, Dijon, Bergen, Vienna, Odense, and Warsaw. And he also worked at different universities in Beijing.

For many years Alfred acted as an administrator in sundry capacities. Most importantly, he initiated the Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies as its founding father. Turning "retirement" into a meaningless nonword, he has acted as Research Professor and the Obama Institute's Speaker from its inception in 2016 to the present day. Beyond his home institution, Alfred held, and still holds, important positions as president, vice president, and committee member in national and international boards and societies. Among them are the National Review Board of the German Council of Science and Humanities; the German Association of American Studies; the Society for Multi-Ethnic Studies: Europe and the Americas; ASA and IASA, the (International) American Studies Association; the World Ecological Organization, Beijing; the Institute for World Literature at Harvard University; and the International AutoBiography Association. For his stellar achievements, Alfred was recognized by the American Studies Association in 2013 and was awarded the prestigious Carl Bode-Norman Holmes Pearson Prize, an honor reserved for scholars who have made what the ASA deems "outstanding contributions to American Studies."

Alfred certainly made the most of his talents, channeling them with determination and efficacy in total commitment to American Studies. An American colleague from the University of Texas at Austin told me once that Hoffmann thinks big. Alfred thinks even bigger, I believe, in addition to being able never to lose sight of the feasibility of his commitments. *Ad multos annos*, Alfred!