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Alfred Hornung—An Inspiring Transnational Scholar

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I have known Alfred Hornung since the 1970s when we were colleagues as research assistants in American Studies at the University of Würzburg. He impressed me first with his contributions to the Oberseminar, an advanced graduate symposium on American literature organized by Professor Gerhard Hoffmann. I especially remember his extensive paper on Edgar Allen Poe, in which Alfred presented a psychoanalytic reading of Poe's writings from a poststructuralist perspective. Poststructuralism and postmodernism more generally were a special focus of the Oberseminar, and this openness to new international tendencies in literary and cultural theory was one of the hallmarks of the discussions in the seminar, an attitude which influenced all of the participants in some way or other in their future careers. Alfred was one of the most active and productive members of the group and very soon started publishing, together with Hoffmann, what became the earliest essays and books in Germany on postmodern theory and literature. I myself was also infected by this fascination with speculative theory and aesthetics, which later led me to write for a while on areas such as deconstruction and the history of literary theory.

Our ways parted when I left Würzburg and moved to England and then to Paderborn for my PhD and habilitation. But we reconnected sometime later when I invited Alfred to contribute a key chapter on postmodernism to the collaborative *American Literary History* (*Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte*) that I edited for Metzler Verlag.[1] The volume became a standard reference work of American Studies in Germany not least due to Alfred Hornung's extremely knowledgeable, wide-ranging, and informative account of the most significant developments, stylistic innovations, and individual authors' aesthetic profiles from the 1950s to the 1990s. The chapter served as a widely used basis for university classes and remained an authoritative source on recent American literary history through its successive actualization in the

second, third, and fourth editions of the *Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte* (fourth edition coedited with Timo Müller, 2024).

Another source of inspiration for my work was Alfred's expertise in autobiography and life writing as one of his lifelong areas of study. My own interest had moved into ecocriticism and cultural ecology, but our paths crossed again when Alfred organized an interdisciplinary symposium in Mainz on *Ecology and Life Writing*, to which he had invited international experts in the field and which provided new inspiring contexts for my research. The symposium resulted in a substantive volume that Alfred coedited with Zhao Baisheng in the American Studies Monograph series (2013), featuring a contribution by Alfred on Chinese forms of ecological thought, which underlined the transnational orientation of his research and further opened scholarly attention to hitherto neglected non-Western approaches to ecology and literature.[2] This ecocosmopolitan orientation likewise shaped his contribution to the *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* (2016) on "Ecology and Life Writing in Transnational and Transcultural Perspective."[3] Alfred's wide-ranging productivity in the field of life writing will no doubt find a new culmination in a comprehensive *Handbook of Life Writing* that he is currently editing, again with a transnational orientation, together with Helga Schwalm, a colleague from English Studies, as part of the DeGruyterBrill Handbooks of English and American Studies series of which I am one of the coeditors.

Alfred Hornung's expertise in literary life writing aligned itself with another key area of transdisciplinary research when he initiated the dialogue with the life sciences, particularly with the School of Medicine at his home university of Mainz. Building on his long-standing contact with the Center of Narrative Medicine at Columbia University, where he had been guest professor in the 1980s, he devised an innovative interdisciplinary graduate program for the exploration of the relationship between Life Writing and the Life Sciences, which was approved and generously funded for two four-year periods by the German Research Foundation. In this Graduiertenkolleg, which was codirected by his Mainz colleague Mita Banerjee, he was a major intellectual presence, who managed to win renowned international scholars and writers to act as external cooperators, first and foremost among them the American writer Siri Hustvedt, a highly regarded specialist in combining literary life writing with the life sciences in her autobiographical and fictional works. As one of the critical friends of the program, I was able to witness and greatly profit from the productivity of this truly interdisciplinary program, which resonated in manifold ways with my own work in cultural ecology and the environmental humanities.

It was in this context, too, that Alfred and I cooperated again in a book project on Siri Hustvedt's oeuvre titled *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works* (2016), to which he contributed an essay on life writing and neuroscience in Hustvedt's autobiographical work *The Shaking Woman*.[4] The intense exchange with Hustvedt herself, who collaborated on the volume, with coeditors Johanna Hartmann and Christine Marks, and with the other national and international contributors produced

a multifaceted and multidisciplinary volume that illuminates the rich epistemic, ethical, and therapeutic potential of literary life writing in its dialogue with the life sciences demonstrated in Hustvedt's writings.

I have always enjoyed cooperating with Alfred on various projects and admired the constructive, dialogic manner that characterized his approach to knowledge and academic debate. With his inexhaustible energy, his innovative ideas, his vast knowledge, his versatility in contemporary theory and literature, and his unceasing fascination with ever new interdisciplinary explorations, Alfred Hornung has been a key figure of inspiration for his colleagues and has played a shaping role in the evolution and current state of transnational American studies in Germany and beyond.

Notes

1 Alfred Hornung, "Postmoderne," in *Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte*, 4th edition, ed. Hubert Zapf and Timo Müller (Metzler, 2024).

2 Alfred Hornung, "Chinese Garden Culture and Ecological Life Writing," in *Ecology and Life Writing*, ed. Alfred Hornung and Zhao Baisheng (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013).

3 Alfred Hornung, "Ecology and Life Writing in Transnational and Transcultural Perspective," in *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, ed. Hubert Zapf (De Gruyter, 2016).

4 Alfred Hornung, "The Shaking Woman in the Media: Life Writing and Neuroscience," in *Zones of Focused Ambiguity in Siri Hustvedt's Works*, ed. Johanna Hartmann, Christina Marks, and Hubert Zapf (De Gruyter, 2016).

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