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For Alfred

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My first memory of Alfred Hornung is from when I was 17 years old. It's Mainz University's open house for prospective students, about to graduate from high school in a year. A man comes up on the stage of the humanities building's largest lecture hall. He is wearing a burgundy turtleneck sweater and a dark grey jacket. He turns on the music (still a tape deck at the time) and the lecture hall is filled with Pink Floyd's "We Don't Need No Education … ." I remember thinking, "This is what I want to do." That evening, I told my parents (a little to their dismay) that I wanted to be an Americanist.

Now, so many years later, I am struck by how this image encapsulates so many of Alfred's qualities: as an Americanist, a scholar, but also as a mentor. Many years later, when I had moved into academia myself—only owing to his guidance and mentorship—, I came to appreciate more fully what his playing "we don't need no education" meant that day. It meant being unorthodox; it meant putting students first, not university rules or regulations, always; it meant founding new programs and new organizations, with the WEO (World Ecological Association) among them.[1] In 2000, Alfred became founding president of MESEA—"Multi-Ethnic Literatures of Europe and the Americas" (formerly MELUS Europe); from 1999 onwards, he participated in the founding of IABA, the International Auto/Biography Association.[2]

At the University of Mainz, he cofounded the Center for Intercultural Studies (ZIS). One of the public events ensuing from this is something Alfred and I joke about to this day. Once a year, Mainz University presents its programs and research institutes at a fair held at the city's market square, seeking to explain to the public what our research is all about. At one of these events, Alfred went up onstage and talked, in German, about the Center of Intercultural Studies. When he had finished, the moderator proceeded to congratulate him on his knowledge of the German language, mistaking Alfred—with his dark hair and mustache—for being Turkish German. This is something we just talked about last week on a car trip to the US Consulate's annual

summer event: I told him that he has long become an honorary migrant, because on so many different levels, he has always been in solidarity with those of us who have migrated from places other than Franconia. This, too, has meant so much to me: When so many of my colleagues and even friends (this is German academia in the early 2000s) told me I was paranoid, making things up, Alfred assured me that it was okay to speak about all the things that, in Germany, people still seem to talk about only reluctantly: that it was not "bad taste" to speak about systemic racism and the fact that even seemingly benevolent remarks about our "excellent command of the German language" may have a sting in them.

But for Alfred, playing "We Don't Need No Education" that day at the university's open house event also meant being profoundly unafraid in committee meetings. When I decided that I wanted to write my *Habilitation* or postdoc thesis on a comparison between ethnic American literature and ethnic German literature, he said, "go ahead," knowing that it was what I needed to do to explore my own roots.[3] When I submitted my thesis, apparently there were some who said that this no longer constituted American Studies. All Alfred seems to have replied, was: "Says who?"

There is so much in that moment. I talked to many of my colleagues and friends about this, and they all said the same thing. Almost magically, Alfred was always there when we needed him most. He always had our back. And not just academically, but personally. Whenever there was a crisis in our lives, he would magically appear and quietly stand beside us, guiding us on.

When I started my first professorship at the University of Siegen, it meant that I had to leave Mainz. I remember saying to Alfred, "I can't do it without you." In the quiet way he has, he nodded and said, "We can still work together. And yes, you can." (Now, of course, this phrase has taken on many different meanings, to which I will return in a minute.) Little did we both know that years later, I would return to Mainz, becoming his successor for the position he held then in the Department of American Studies. Now, it seems that there is no end to what we could do, together. Again, Alfred had the vision, and unlike me, he was unafraid, and defiant or at least suspicious of some aspects of university protocol. He suggested we should found an Obama Institute for Transnational American Studies,[4] based on Shelley Fisher Fishkin's idea (and his own) of transnational American studies[5]; and he said that we might want to team up with the life sciences, forming the Research Training Group "Life Sciences, Life Writing: Boundary Experience of Human Life between Biomedical Explanation and Lived Experience."[6]

There is a deep sense of humility but also of profound gratitude when you realize that every step you took would not have been taken if it had not been for that one mentor who always had your back. Alfred is an extremely private person, and I think that he does not like to talk about feelings. I have almost never seen him get emotional. So, as I write this, I realize that I may never be able to tell him all the things that I want to tell him. But I know that he knows already everything that I might say.

Notes

[1] Alfred Hornung, and Zhao Baisheng, eds., *Ecology and Life Writing* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2013.

[2] Alfred Hornung, "Participating in the International Formation of The Autobiography Society and Its Flagship Journal *a| b: Auto| Biography Studies*," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 40, no. 2 (2025): 365–71.

[3] Mita Banerjee, "Bollywood Meets the Beatles: Towards an Asian German Studies of German Popular Culture," *South Asian Popular Culture* 4, no. 1 (2006): 19–34.

[4] Alfred Hornung, ed., *Obama and Transnational American Studies* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2016).

[5] Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies— Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57; and Alfred Hornung and Nina Morgan, "Introduction: Recognizing Transnational American Studies," in *The Routledge Companion to Transnational American Studies*, ed. Nina Morgan, Alfred Hornung, and Takayuki Tatsumi (Routledge, 2019): 1–8.

[6] Alfred Hornung, "Life Sciences and Life Writing," *Anglia* 133, no. 1 (2015): 37–52; and Mita Banerjee, *Medical Humanities in American Studies* (Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018).

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