

Beate Neumeier and Victoria Herche
(Guest Editors)

Narrating Lives – Telling (Hi)stories

Transcultural Readings

Essays in Memory of Kay Schaffer

This issue of the 'Zeitschrift für Australienstudien | Australian Studies Journal' is unusual in the journal's history in more than one sense. First and foremost it is unique in its dedication to an exceptionally passionate scholar and compassionate human being, a pre-eminent feminist critic, a superior life writing scholar and human rights expert in Australian academia with a global reach. In honor of Kay Schaffer's excellent achievements this issue assembles essays by colleagues and friends from Australia, the United States of America and Germany, who share her interests and were inspired by her work and her personality. While all essays connect with one of Kay's key areas of research, they are not limited thematically to an Australian context, expanding the geographical scope of the journal to explore links between different areas of research beyond disciplinary boundaries. This is in keeping with Kay's transdisciplinary curiosity and the ever increasing scope of the geographical focus of her own research, amply documented in her many monographs and co-authored publications: 'Women and the Bush: Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition' (1987/1988); 'In the Wake of First Contact: The Eliza Fraser Stories' (1995/1996); 'Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition' (with Sidonie Smith 2004); 'Women Writers in Postsocialist China' (with Xianlin Song 2014).

It was the very influential foundation of the International Auto/Biography Association (IABA) in Beijing in 1999, in which Kay along with American, Australian, Chinese and European life writing scholars participated, which opened up an international collaboration in which she played a major part. While I, Beate, experienced Kay from the sideline at the IABA conference in Melbourne in 2002, we officially met at the IABA conference in Mainz, Germany, organized by my husband, Alfred Hornung in 2006. I was immediately taken by her vibrant personality and her many scholarly and professional achievements, which would eventually channel into the establishment of Australian Studies at the University of Cologne. I admired the power and energy she had invested in the development of Women's Studies at the University of Adelaide, in serving as President of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia and on the editorial boards of the 'Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature', of 'Continuum', and of 'Hecate'. Most of all I felt inspired by her incredibly impressive writing, and from the charismatic lively engaging presentation of her work at consecutive IABA conferences, as well as during her tenure as guest Chair at Cologne University.

When my colleague Dany Adone and I established the Dr. R. Marika Chair of Australian Studies at Cologne University with the support of the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst, we immediately turned to Kay to be the first Chair holder in literary studies in 2010. Kay's research focus on gender studies and her interest in Indigenous Australian writing ('Indigenous Australian Voices: A Reader', co-edited with Jennifer Sabbioni and Sidonie Smith, 1998) made her an ideal first representative, setting the course for those who followed. Her stay was decisive for the development and eventual inauguration of the Centre for Australian Studies at Cologne University in 2017. The shaping of the Centre's three focal research and teaching areas on Indigenous cultures, on the environment and on migration, owes much to Kay's inspirational influence. I am so grateful for her scholarly and professional inspirations and pleasant conversations we shared during her stay. In this spirit, a weekend at our home in Mainz led not only to the exploration of wineries in the Rhine Valley in the company of her husband Robert Iseman, but also to the conception of a conference in Cologne, the outcome of which turned into our co-edited book on 'Decolonizing the Landscape: Indigenous Cultures in Australia' (2014). Kay's presence as guest Chair engendered the interest in Australian Studies among Cologne University students and among my team of young researchers who profited from Kay's expertise and advice. Particularly close relations formed with Friederike Danebrock and Victoria Herche. Over and above her foundational role at the University of Cologne, Kay Shaffer shared her Australian Studies and life writing expertise with colleagues and students at other German universities in frequent guest lectures. In her repeated participation in the Summer School on the Cultural Study of the Law at the University of Osnabrück she brought her Human Rights expertise to bear.

I, Victoria, met Kay for the first time as a student in 2010 during her time as guest professor at Cologne University. In my role as personal assistant to the Chair I not only had the chance to attend all of Kay's seminars and lectures, but also supported her in all bureaucratic and everyday occurrences (she every so often called me her 'Governess'). While I had close connections to Australia through friends and previous visits, it had until then never occurred to me to specialize in the field of Australian Studies academically. Kay's inspiring teaching and generosity in sharing ideas and texts (the reading material she left with us filled several harddrives) laid the foundation of my interest in the field of Australian cinema which eventually, some years later, resulted in my dissertation project on Coming of Age in Australia. She has always been supportive to younger colleagues and students, we very much enjoyed her company and benefited from her intellect. When the summer term had ended, students of her seminars handed over farewell cards and presented her flowers. On their last day, the entire Cologne team accompanied Kay and Robert to the train station and waved them goodbye in tears. Within the short period of one semester, Kay had shaped and inspired us tremendously.

During a six months visiting fellowship at Monash University, Melbourne, in 2014/15, I was invited by Kay and Robert to spend several days in their beautiful home in Adelaide. Their hospitality has been unmatched, they spoiled me with

an incredible amount of food, wine, stories, and books. It was such a pleasure to spend these days with them and to also meet their family. We spent a memorable day in Coorong National Park, the coastal lagoon south-east of Adelaide. I vividly remembered how Kay had taught the Hindmarsh Island Bridge controversy to us Cologne students in her seminar on “Indigenous Australia: Literary and Visual Cultures” in 2010. This day on the traditional lands of the Ngarrindjeri people was foundational for me to further appreciate the acknowledgement of Aboriginal Country. Kay has taught us the importance of who owns a story, of who tells a story, the role of knowledge as a means of power, and to respect when one is not meant to know.

While I am grateful for the regular emails and exchanges we had after this visit until her untimely death in December 2019, it also aches me to think that this was the last time I saw her. I will be forever grateful that I had the chance to have worked closely with her. She is greatly missed.



The contributions to this issue of the ‘Zeitschrift für Australienstudien | Australian Studies Journal’ reflect Kay’s wide spectrum of affiliations while at the same time foregrounding the intricate interweaving of relationships which Kay encouraged and facilitated, bringing people together and teasing out shared interests and concerns across different disciplinary contexts. The opening essays are by Sidonie Smith (University of Michigan) and Kateryna Olijnyk Longley (Murdoch University, Perth), two eminent scholars and longtime colleagues and friends of Kay who – since the days of the foundation of IABA in Beijing – have shared her interest in and dedication to life writing. Sidonie Smith’s very personal memory “For Kay, and the Collaboration we Shared” beautifully captures Kay’s achievements and vibrant personality focusing on 25 years of their private and professional relation which resulted in two co-edited books, on ‘Indigenous Australian Voices’ (1998), and ‘The Olympics at the Millennium’ (2000), followed by the co-authored book on ‘Human Rights’ and ‘Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition’ (2004).

Kateryna Olijnyk Longley’s essay “Life Games: Memory and Postmodern Biography”, written in 1998, remembers the joint trip with Sidonie, Kay and their partners to the foundational IABA conference in 1999 which brought together

life writing scholars from all over the globe with a profound impact on the proliferation and evaluation of life writing in academia. Kat's exploration of the link between postmodernism's distrust of memory and reality and the simultaneous "desire for [...] personal stories, stories of the self" is even more timely today in the context of social media as a platform of life writing and the construction of "alternative truths" in the current post-truth era. Focusing on the hybridity of life writing in-between non-fiction and fiction her essay centers on self-consciously fragmentary literary texts (ranging from Jean Baudrillard and Roland Barthes to Victor Burgin and Stephen Muecke), engaged in the game of seemingly "deny[ing] the possibility of memory and reality while simultaneously seeking and invoking them".

By contrast Paul Arthur (Edith Cowan University, Perth) sets out to disentangle "Fake History, Trauma, and Memory" by looking into two very different diasporas in Australia, namely that of Ukrainian immigrants and that of displaced Aboriginal people, with respect to the role of digital technology in collecting, preserving, and making public hitherto denied and silenced histories. For this comparative analysis Paul Arthur juxtaposes his own family history, the 1949 immigration of his Ukrainian grandparents and his mother Kateryna Longley and life in the Ukrainian diaspora in Adelaide and Perth, with the history of Indigenous displacement in his hometown Fremantle.

Paul Arthur's project of bringing silenced histories to public attention is also the central concern of the essay on "Biological Warfare in North America and Australia: Smallpox and Colonial Violence" by historian Norbert Finzsch (University of Cologne). His exploration of evidence for a "genocidal colonial biowarfare" against Indigenous people in Australia draws on evidence of such practice in North America between the 1760s and the 1780s. Using the criminal law terms of "means, motive, and opportunity" he makes the case for a calculated dissemination of small pox amongst Indigenous people in Australia in the late 1780s.

Stephen Muecke (University of New South Wales/Notre Dame University) looks into the continuous relevance of Indigenous knowledge and its increasing global perception and acknowledgement in the wake of the current climate crisis. Stephen Muecke's award-winning writing crosses boundaries between genres and cultures, between fiction and non-fiction, between Western and Indigenous science arguing for a process of continuous transformation. Kay has explored this shared interest in notions of "connectivity" in her discussion of Muecke's 'No Road' (1997) in our co-edited book on 'Decolonizing the Landscape'. In his essay Muecke takes Kay's and Sidonie Smith's investigation of "local and global transits of storytelling" in 'Human Rights and Narrated Lives' as starting point for his own exploration of "Creativity, Critique and the Problem of Situated Knowledge". In correlating Donna Haraway's and Bruno Latour's concepts of modernity he foregrounds the relevance of Indigenous sciences in the context of the Anthropocene.

The focus of these essays on Indigenous cultures and the colonial history of oppression of Indigenous rights ties in with Kay's interest in and research on forms of decolonization and human rights issues, which Kay extended to other geographical regions in the second decade of the new millennium when she

co-authored with Xianlin Song (University of Western Australia) a volume on 'Women Writers in Postsocialist China' (2014). Song's essay on "Grass Roots Activism for Rural Women in China" evolved from this collaboration as the research data were collected on a field trip Xianlin Song and Kay took together to Beijing in 2011. The essay explores the work of the 'Cultural Development Centre for Rural Women' in Beijing which aims at making the voices of women migrant workers heard through publications using women's stories and "offer[ing] advice in the form of self-help manuals".

In his essay on "Kenneth Slessor, Film Writing, and Popular Culture" Philip Mead (University of Western Australia/University of Melbourne) engages with the life and work of poet and journalist Kenneth Slessor (1901-1971), tracing his "largely unnoticed" contribution to the emergence of film criticism in Australia. Philip Mead presents Slessor's film writing as a fascinating "case study in the history of print culture in mid-twentieth century Australia" and a "unique chronicle of one of the prehistories of contemporary media culture". Philip Mead's piece also calls for a more detailed biographical analysis of the film writing of Slessor, whose personality and life emerge from these texts.

The final section of essays follows Kay's extension of Australia-related issues to contemporary cultures outside of Australia across different media and art forms. Despite their widely different topics they share Kay's concerns about intercultural dialogue and transcultural communication.

Sabine N. Meyer (University of Bonn) investigates "Transculturality and Filmic Practice: Cultural Difference and Transcultural Belonging in 'Babel' (2006)" in the context of oppositional readings of the film as demonstration of either the failure or the success of communication. Meyer's own approach to the "multi-narrative, non-linear drama which links stories taking place in Japan, Morocco, Mexico, and the United States" through the framework of transculturality enables her to foreground the film's thematic as well as formal emphasis on the necessary coexistence and entanglement of cultural difference and transcultural belonging.

Notions of geopolitical and cultural mechanisms of exclusion in relation to aspects of human interconnectedness, which Sabine N. Meyer emphasizes in her reading of 'Babel', are also central to Friederike Danebrock's essay on "The Ninth Prison: Desert Islands and no Witch in Margaret Atwood's 'Hag-Seed'". Drawing on the intersections between diverse histories of exclusion Danebrock focuses on the witch Sycorax from 'The Tempest', whose abject femininity is haunting Shakespeare's play from the margins, not even mentioned in Margaret Atwood's novel adaptation (2016). According to Danebrock's reading Atwood's transfer of the plot of 'The Tempest' "from an island of exile to a modern-day prison" and her omission of any reference to the magic of the "blue-eyed hag" disambiguates Shakespeare's text leaving no room for albeit marginalized "repositories of liberative fantasies" of alternative worlds.

Beate Neumeier's essay "Of Boats and Walls: Migrating Iconographies" intersects with the previous ones as it looks into recent art projects centering on notions of the boat and the wall in relation to present and past examples of forced migration targeting international audiences. Ranging from art installations (exhibited at the Venice Biennale 2019 and the Sydney Biennale 2018 as well

as in Prague 2017) to immersive art (performed in Paris 2019) the examples draw on geographically and historically different contexts, raising questions about how art addresses the difficulty of speaking to global spectators in a call for an ethical response and with the hope for forging a global solidarity community as prerequisite for change.

In the final essay, “‘Listen to your tribal voice’ – Embodying Locality in German-Australian Music Performances”, Victoria Herche addresses an exploitative example of a transnational and intercultural encounter as a forum for esoteric and exoticized images of colourful ‘authentic’ ethnicity. In 1998, German musician Peter Maffay created an album called ‘Begegnungen’ (encounters) in collaboration with artists from all corners of the world, including the Aboriginal Australian band Yothu Yindi. It is discussed in what ways Aboriginality and ‘world music’ is performed in the context of international solidarity, how cultural connotations circulate and how these meanings are publicly understood by Maffay’s audience.