

From the editors of this issue

“The most magnificent plant which the prolific soil of New Holland affords is, by common consent both of Europeans and Natives, the Waratah”. What is remarkable about this otherwise simple statement? Readers will notice that in a rare moment in history, Aboriginal and European views about the beauty of nature coincided. The release of the first published book on the Australian flora, *A Specimen of the Botany of New Holland* (1793–1795), marks this historical moment. Although the author and botanist James Edward Smith never went to colonial New South Wales and although he published material sent by other naturalists, he vividly wrote what seemed true and natural to him. Was this the view of the enlightened scientist? A view that suggests there is “by common consent” across cultural borders, geographical spheres and despite different perceptions of the world and her creation one same impetus to learn: Men’s and women’s ability to marvel about the known and to get excited about the unknown.

Inspired by this truth, the editors of the *Australian Studies Journal* follow the axiom of enthusiasm: To marvel, to question, to learn and to spread knowledge. A large part of this special issue has its origin in a Symposium which was held in 2014 at the Interdisciplinary Centre for European Enlightenment Studies at the Martin-Luther-University in Halle (Saxony-Anhalt). The Symposium, organized by Dr. Therese-Marie Meyer, was titled “Enlightened Powers: American, French, and British Interactions in Botany Bay, 1788–1800”.

It is the first time that the *Australian Studies Journal* hosts a special, thematically focussed and guest-edited issue. We are delighted to present highly innovative research lying at the core of transnational and comparative studies between Europe, Australia, and America. The special issue shows intricacies and complexities of a fundamentally global world in the late eighteenth century. The contributions discuss the multiple facets of enlightened agencies, ranging from military and political history, over microhistory (*Alltagsgeschichte*) to the history of science, race, and culture. The special issue foregrounds the necessity for more transnational research in order to better understand the complex mechanisms of global, national, and regional histories.

The special issue deeply reflects the aim and scope of this journal to study Australia from multiple and inter-disciplinary angles that see perspectives from the distance not as a reiteration of a ‘tyranny’ (in this context Eurocentrism) but an essential element of the kaleidoscopic nature in which Australian Studies should be practiced. We therefore explicitly welcome and foster similar endeavours of guest-editing conference proceedings, workshop contributions or any other forms of special issues for this journal. Next to the Symposium section – which partly deviates from this journal’s style guide to meet the customs of archive referencing – we also present regular contributions to Australian Studies, including reviews of Antonella Riem’s *A Gesture of Reconciliation* (2017) by Professor Dieter Riemenschneider, Mandisi Majavu’s *Uncommodified Blackness* (2017) by Dr. Stefanie Affeldt, Regina Ganter’s *The Contest for Aboriginal Souls* (2018) by Dr. Lina Pranaitytė-Wergin, and Martina Horáková’s *Inscribing Difference and Resistance* (2017) by editor Dr. Oliver Haag.

In his article "If Land was a Head: A Critique of 'Country'", Dr. Mitchell Rolls, cultural anthropologist at the University of Tasmania and President of the International Australian Studies Association (InASA), presents a critical reading of the different notions of head-hunting and country in cross-racial debates in Australia that also exhibit facets of exoticism and racialisation. Mitchell Rolls' outstanding analysis takes up a controversial issue: The author argues "that notions of land and country are readily sentimentalised along the lines of 'the earth is my mother'" whereby "such sentiments also provide a ready means for Aborigines who have never lived on country to nevertheless explain its significance to them". Country is a complex and fundamentally historical terrain that nurtures identity politics and legal debates. It is a concept that is dynamic and peppered with moralisation that render nuanced and differentiated approaches often delicate and thus all the more timely and pioneering. The editors of this issue wish to invite other researchers to join this discussion. In another context, Danielle Norberg's review essay of Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish – A Novel in Twelve Fish* illustrates that "the creation of a fictitious counter-narrative questions the established version" of historiography and "opens up new ways of debating history and, thus, enters the very current discussion about Indigenous history in Australia".

Finally, we like to thank Professor Frank Schulze-Engler for the offer to publish his poignant memories of a good friend and colleague, Professor Geoffrey V. Davis who died in November 2018. Geoffrey Davis was known for his extensive expertise in Indigenous and Postcolonial Studies. Our thoughts are with his family.

This issue would not have been possible without Dr. Therese-Marie Meyer's editing of the special section, Dr. Victoria Herche and Dr. Stefanie Affeldt's meticulous technical assistance and layout work, and Professor Beate Neumeier's (Centre for Australian Studies, Cologne) generosity to fund the print copies. The editors' profound gratitude finally goes to our contributors. Our field of Australian Studies may thrive like the beautiful blossom of the Waratah.

Henriette von Holleuffer & Oliver Haag (March 2019)