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Melancholia

Anja Schwarz

University of Potsdam

Corresponding author: Anja Schwarz: anja.schwarz@uni-potsdam.de

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I was a latecomer to *Cultural Studies Review*, joining the editorial board only when the journal was already in the process of losing financial backing and institutional support. One of the first messages I received from Managing Editor, Ann Standish, was Katrina Schlunke's and Chris Healy's 2017 letter to the board in which they raised the possibility of 'winding-up'. I am also a latecomer to Australian cultural studies, first learning about it in 1999 as an undergraduate exchange student to the University of Queensland with a BA in German *Kulturwissenschaften* in my pocket and a particular interest in Australian multiculturalism and its discontents. In my classes at home we had read some of the instrumental publications from The Open University's cultural studies series. More often, however, we had engaged with a distinctly German way of doing cultural studies, focusing on Cassirer, Warburg and Benjamin, among others, with a heavy dose of the Frankfurt School and French theory thrown in for good measure.

I remember distinctly what made Australian cultural studies such a thrilling discovery for me back then: the writing was deeply democratic and frequently creative; the research distinctly political and often post- if not necessarily decolonial in outlook. All of it was of immediate significance to the here and now ... only that, when I embarked on a PhD in Berlin in 2002, I would come to read the essays published in the *Journal of Cultural Studies*, in *UTS Review* and later *Cultural Studies Review* in a different time and place altogether.

So it was as a latecomer, distanced by time and by geographical remove, that I learned something about Australian cultural studies' own belatedness from André Frankovits's evocative 1987 description in *Screen* of an 'inordinate number of Left academics wandering round Australia but talking about Birmingham.'¹ Ien Ang and David Morley would draw on this observation when they sat down in 1989 to take stock of cultural studies' global travels as a 'highly exportable item.'² Frankovits's comment provided them with an apt example of the field's 'transplantations' and allowed them to critically reflect on lingering colonial dependencies in Australian academia, where intellectual exports 'have often ironically echoed

the original map of British imperialism's conquests.³ It was neither in *Screen* nor in *Cultural Studies*, however, that I first encountered Frankovits's displaced academics. I rather stumbled across them in Graeme Turner's more recent and much harsher retrospective characterisation of early Australian cultural studies as fundamentally Anglo-centric, where the teaching was 'infested with readings and examples drawn from the UK.'⁴

Tracing the travels of Frankovits's comment allows me to invoke an experience that frequently characterises academic labour: we often can't help but engage simultaneously and, by necessity, anachronistically with all the conversations that have gone before us. And yet, the reasons why I continue to find Frankovits's wandering academics so alluring certainly run deeper. I remain drawn to them, at least partly, because their outmoded yearning for another time and place, together with Frankovits's, Ang and Morley's, as well as Turner's different takes on their predicament, read like a brief (and admittedly very much skewed) history of Australian cultural studies – a tradition that would soon produce its own 'inherent silences and limited horizons', as was forcefully argued by John Stratton and Ien Ang already in 1996.⁵

My fascination with Frankovits's unsettled academics is not fully exhausted by this however. I remain drawn to them, also, because I can't help but read them as allegories of a particular type of scholarly melancholia; embodiments of our inability, as academics, to let go of locales and ideas that belong to different times and places. It is their melancholic state that lets me interrogate my own position as a European scholar doing Australian cultural studies. In how far am I 'wandering round Berlin' but talking about Melbourne, Sydney, or Dimboola, thereby always already out of touch with the here and now in both, Australia and Germany? What an impasse!

Katrina Schlunke's and Chris Healy's invitation to contribute to the final issue of *Cultural Studies Review* reached me on the road to Toulon for this year's European Australian Studies Conference. It was here, in Europe, that I met up with Stephen Muecke and other scholars long committed to the history of this journal. And it was here that Ghassan Hage's keynote on 'lenticularity' helped me think about my melancholic relationship with Australian cultural studies not so much in terms of its shortcomings but in terms of its inherent potential.⁶ Hage's criticism of modernity's obsession with 'mono-existence' and his trust, developed from fieldwork with the Lebanese diaspora, in our capacity instead to inhabit a multiplicity of locations (albeit not all of them all the time and with the same commitment) much better characterises the kind of cultural studies work I have been doing over the past years: researching, for instance, the history of Australian objects in the vast colonial collections of my home town and thinking about their place in German and Australian memory cultures.

As we bid farewell to *Cultural Studies Review*, I would therefore like you to imagine this European scholar not so much as a melancholic figure mourning the ruins of Australian cultural studies, but as a lenticular dweller, committed to cultural studies work that develops out of the entanglements of both locations. It is through such translations into other contexts – be they conceptual, geographical or pedagogical –, I believe, that the journal's commitment to critical innovation, political intervention and creative textuality will continue to have a life.

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Endnotes

1. André Frankovits, 'Letters', *Screen*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1987, p. 122.
2. Ien Ang and David Morley, 'Mayonnaise Culture and Other European Follies', *Cultural Studies*, no. 3, 1989, p. 135.
3. Ang and Morley, p. 136.
4. Graeme Turner, *What's Become of Cultural Studies?*, London: Sage, pp. 125-126.
5. Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, 'On the Impossibility of a Global Cultural Studies: 'British' Cultural Studies in an 'International' Frame"', in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 380.
6. Ghassan Hage, 'No Way: Australia from the Radical Point of Non-Belonging', Conference of the European Association for Studies of Australia: Alter/Native Spaces, 18-20th September 2019, <<https://pod.univ-tln.fr/video/0670-conference-de-hage-ghassan-no-way-australia-from-the-radical-point-of-non-belonging>>.