

Ganser / Lechner / Maly-Bowie / Schörghuber (eds.)

Caring for Cultural Studies



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Alexandra Ganser / Elisabeth Lechner /
Barbara Maly-Bowie / Eva Maria Schörgenhuber (eds.)

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A Tribute to Monika Seidl

With 4 figures

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Notes on the Cover

The image on the cover is a clipping of a textile print by the artist Luise Cibulka-Kubelka. The tapestry graced Monika's office wall, enveloping the space in warmth and coziness.

The quest for the copyright – a pleasant surprise. As it turns out Luise Cibulka-Kubelka is an old friend and approved with “Natürlich bekommen sie die *Abdruckgenehmigung ganz herzlich*[.] Monika hatte ja in Ihrer Studienzeit versucht mir Englisch näher zu bringen.”

Photo by Barbara Maly-Bowie, 2022.

Alexandra Ganser

Preface: For Monika

To me, a hero is somebody who's prepared to
stick their neck out, to step out and walk tall,
and to live life.

– Vivienne Westwood

Sticking her head out, stepping out, walking tall, and living life is what defines a hero in Vivienne Westwood's view; a hero of Monika Seidl's in her own right, Westwood captures here Monika's outstanding qualities as an academic, a colleague, a person. As her day of retirement was drawing near, I was asking myself whether a *Festschrift* would be too uncool of a present for her: somehow old-fashioned and quaint, at worst an embarrassing performance of reverence to an alleged authority she has always been skeptical of in the first place. But I saw in front of me a book that would be the result of a labor of love. On the one hand, Monika's own: her *care* for cultural studies as much as for her students; on the other, the labors of love of all those participating in this project, giving back little when we, as former students of hers (like myself) or as long-term colleagues at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, have received so much from Monika. Thinking of and talking to many of Monika's former students and collaborators, I was convinced that this book would be a creative act of celebrating Monika's work and, more importantly, of engaging with it both personally and academically. This conviction was more than justified when I read the wonderfully variegated, thoughtful, and truly caring contributions by an international crowd of cultural studies buffs: your allies and associates, former students and fans, colleagues and collaborators, many of them presenting in this book the intellectual harvest whose seedlings you have helped sow.

Caring for cultural studies is what I personally had the opportunity to learn as a student at this Department in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when cultural studies as a politically engaged, critical project and methodology finally arrived here: with the late Kurt Albert Mayer, whose Monday evening cultural studies courses brought Gramsci and Grossberg, graffiti and the Grateful Dead to the classroom, and with Monika's "Beginning Theory" courses, in which a handful of conspirative peers were eager to learn about Roland Barthes, polysemy, or the transition from modernist to postmodern theorizing. Back in the late 1990s, what we used as teaching material were black-and-white copies of cartoon textbook

excerpts like Monika's favorite "Beginning Theory" series; the digital age was only just beginning. It might not sound like much, but it was all the world to me and my fellow students (like Julia Pühringer, also a contributor to this book): there was literally no cultural theory anywhere else to be found in the curriculum apart from these courses, and Monika was an ideal teacher, spreading her enthusiasm: not about *learning* theory, but about *using* theory to understand the world and the cultural texts that surrounded us in our everyday lives. Popular culture was a serious academic subject in these classes, and in these classes only.

What a long way we have come. That cultural studies is now a fixed part of the curriculum is a result also of Monika's dedication and determination; it has been a sea change, and Monika its steadfast captain. It is a legacy to be truly proud of since, as the contributions to this book make evident, it has been deeply inspiring and critical for the professional lives of so many people who studied with Monika. From fashionable queens to James Bond, from the world of myth to that of melodrama, from computer games to TV series, Monika's teaching and research has been much too varied to be summarized here. The articles that make up this anniversary collection reflect (on) a kaleidoscope of her interests and insights and showcase a cultural studies community that she has helped foster in Vienna, also by bringing some of its most influential voices to our department for guest lectures and professorships. All of us, I dare say, are committed to democratizing the university and higher education in general, and to enabling critical thinking about, while always taking seriously, popular culture, its rich and varied, if often formulaic, forms and expressions, its affective and ideological functions, its practices and aesthetics.

On a more personal note, over so many years – it's hard to believe it's been really decades – Monika has been a mentor, a colleague, and a friend: I thank you, Monika, from the bottom of my heart for so many hours of motivating and inspiring conversations, of simply showing me that 'this is how it can be done': with care, with passion, with never-ending questions, and some hard work, too. Merely initiating this *Festschrift* as hopefully the present you have dreamed of, dear Monika, I also want to thank my wonderful co-editors Elli Lechner, Barbara Maly-Bowie, and Eva Maria Schörgenhuber, who have made this book possible due to their careful and tireless, diligent work – I cannot think of a better team than you guys. Thanks also to our publisher Brill, especially Oliver Kätsch at V&R unipress, to Adam Baltner for copyediting assistance and to Monika Fahrnberger for formatting the book, as well as to the Department of English and American Studies for supporting its publication. Last but not least, it is the contributing authors who have made this *Festschrift* into a memorable testament to Monika's impressive work in, and her big-hearted care for, cultural studies and its peeps.

Alexandra Ganser is Professor of North American Studies at the University of Vienna, executive director of the Centre for Canadian Studies and a colleague and former student of Monika.

Elisabeth Lechner / Barbara Maly-Bowie /
Eva Maria Schörgenhuber

Introduction

Fest-schrift

Retirements happen in many ways, be it with flowers, awkward silences, or sighs – this *Festschrift* shall make sure Monika Seidl's doesn't happen too fleetingly. When Alexandra Ganser, our colleague and also a former student of Monika's, approached us with the idea of editing a *Festschrift* together, we were quickly on board. But of course! A *Festschrift*, after all, describes a material product of celebrating scholars on special occasions and Monika's efforts should receive such accolades. While a *Festschrift* is this very German, some say quaint genre, *fest-schrift*, we suggest, can be read differently as well. It may also mean something like firmly written, strongly inscribed, for the record. This edited volume is a physical testimony to how Monika made cultural studies meaningful. Through her teaching, research and institutional work, the formation of cultural studies, especially at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna, bears her signature. It is a tribute not just to her, but to the very ideas why cultural studies matter and why they will matter in whatever shape they continue to exist.

This *Festschrift* brings students, colleagues and fellow travellers of Monika's into a multigenerational, geographically scattered and even multilingual dialogue about her and cultural studies – one that is admittedly broad, and moving between serious and serious fun, but one that is unified by an attitude of care. The three of us writing this introduction are also part of this conversation: we speak collectively, from various positions as Monika's (former) students, colleagues, tutors and assistants, and also friends.

We also – literally – had many conversations about this *Festschrift's* introduction, which, to be quite frank, seemed impossible to write. First of all, the genre is immensely challenging in terms of its communicative goals: we want to express our honest, heart-felt gratitude to Monika (without overdoing the pathos), celebrate her legacy, look back on her and thereby also cultural studies' past, while also projecting and actively nurturing its future. Second, the won-

derfully diverse contributions showcase a broad repertoire in terms of subject matter, style, and age of their authors; in intellectual, regional and disciplinary traditions as well as language and format, they are impossible to logically organise. Yet, while reviewing the contributions and Monika's research output, one of Monika's oldest tricks, the scrapbook, struck us as a salient *modus operandi* also for this introduction. Monika Pietrzak-Franger and Annegret Pelz experiment with exactly that method in their contributions, and Julia Pühringer and Barbara Maly-Bowie also mention it as a very Monika thing to do. Scrapbooking can be read as "a bricolage set against the aesthetics of available textbooks and typewritten verbatim scripts. A visual mark of a caring and nurturing approach [...] experienced in the branch of cultural studies later adopted and tended to by Monika" (Maly-Bowie 137). The scrapbook – in contrast to the more exclusive photo album, which consists of strictly selected material – follows a logic of inclusion, multimediality, haphazardness, yes, maybe even serendipity (Seidl "Das Scrapbook" 205). It takes the mundane and coincidental seriously in its meaning-making potential and allows for multiplicities to emerge from chance encounters. Why, we asked ourselves, not channel a scrapbook spirit that allows for this kind of productive serendipity, which the Merriam Webster dictionary defines as the "phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for." The contributions appear not completely random now, but in alphabetical order. This is a pragmatic choice, but more importantly, it does away with difficult hierarchical and thematic priorities. As a matter of beautiful coincidence, the volume happens to start with our youngest contributor and current tutor of Monika's, Magdalena Berger, reflecting on her "lecturing like a rockstar," and ends with John Storey, an emeritus rockstar, as it were, and crucial companion of Monika, as reviewer of her *Habilitation*, invited guest professor, and author of key texts in the field. What a surprising, but valuable and really quite agreeable editorial moment!

About Caring for Cultural Studies

As our understanding of the field is deeply influenced and shaped by Monika's way of doing cultural studies, the title of this *Festschrift* tries to capture this legacy, but also our gratitude and the contributors' shared sense of commitment to *Caring for Cultural Studies*. More specifically, the volume's title draws on an eponymous journal article published in 2019 by Ted Striphas for Lawrence Grossberg's retirement as editor of the journal *Cultural Studies*, some might say the ultimate rockstar of the field. We critically discussed Striphas's article in one of Monika's rather informal PhD Jour Fixes, a space dedicated to coming to-

gether, exchanging ideas and developing current projects, a space of care in itself – for our academic endeavours and each other.

Back then, we missed a more thoroughly gendered critique of care in Striphas's article, but we also found many relatable conditions and concerns about cultural studies, and had similar ideas of Monika as an "infrastructuralist" (11). Striphas re-articulates culture and care by following Raymond Williams on the etymology of culture in an agricultural sense. "[T]aking care of" and cultivating cultural studies (Striphas 7) was also one of Monika's agendas. Now, as we continue the affective gesture to pay tribute to, in our case an Austrian, caring figure in cultural studies, our citation of the article is underwritten by the intentional practice of acknowledgement, of building on the work of others, not stealing or plagiarising – also a tiny act of care.

Yet we also recognize a pressing need to care more for cultural studies, according to Striphas now a "waning scholarly formation" with "a shrinking institutional footprint," its heyday long gone (3). It is a twentieth-century project that has become more difficult in the twenty-first century. According to Lawrence Grossberg, one of the reasons that makes it easy to "abandon cultural studies" is the "growing division between intellectual and academic life," which leads to academic careers that are "increasingly individualized (often demanding claims of originality constructed in terms of self-branding) and subject to quantitative measures within disciplinary norms" (43). In these increasingly careless, precarious structures of neoliberal academia, doing cultural studies often means navigating a harmful university culture that "privilege[s] self-optimization and productivity that can only be achieved through self-exploitation and (ab)use of power within social and institutional hierarchies" (Maly-Bowie 133). As Magdalena Berger stresses in her contribution, in these circumstances, "Monika's reasonable conduct with her staff seems like a revolutionary act" (31).

We feel joy and honour about – but also the limitations of – caring for cultural studies and working in this editorial team, when all of us have very different affiliations and unclear futures in academia. These are symptomatic of the particular, ambivalent circumstances of occupying a hybrid, interstitial space between academia and neighbouring fields. Difficult and precarious as it might be, we choose to see this as an asset, though. We take cultural studies with us, be it to other workplaces, parenting and all our relationships. Conversely, our extra-mural experiences re-inform and enrich our university work, our teaching, research and publication efforts. Cultural studies informs our public communication, the institutional diversity work we do, our activism, and our consumption of popular culture. In that sense, reading John Storey's contribution to this volume is inspiring, as he advocates for a utopian, hopeful notion of cultural studies. He argues that reading utopian fiction "provides us with a language of hope which can in turn enable us to articulate a desire for a future better than the

present. Without hope it is hard to act at all. Hope is the feeling that something is possible” (213). Such a rendering of cultural studies as a critical – yet hopeful – mindset of collaborative worldmaking helps us “sustain the resistant energy of imagining the world differently, together, as willfully optimistic subjects (Ahmed)” (Lechner and Kohlenberger 116).

Doing Cultural Studies with Care

Instead of cementing cultural studies’ status as a persisting academic “residuum” (Striphas 4), this volume mobilises cultural studies through notions of care. As a start, all of the contributions are permeated by care, explicitly or not: taking the time out of busy schedules to compose and craft a contribution, engaging with Monika’s legacy, and more broadly with cultural studies as a political or pedagogical project, in Austria and elsewhere, already expresses care. What is more, in the current moment, the theme of care resonates even stronger, as the pandemic, the climate crisis and wars have propelled a discursive explosion around the notion. From #yeswecare to “carewashing” (Chatzidakis and Littler), the current conjuncture is marked by a crisis of care. One, because there is a staggering lack of care – politically, institutionally, and individually – but, two, because care is at the same time all over the place. If “caring is all we seem able to do” (n.p.), as sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom fears, democracy is in trouble: if care is just conceived of as a fleeting affective investment and not as a material practice that requires action as well as substantial budgets for the disenfranchised and marginalised, care is as useless and empty a word as “diversity” in the hands of corporations during pride month.

These increasingly visible and contradictory discourses prompt debates that have had a home in cultural studies for a long time: around the power (and limits) of structures and agency, about solidarity and inequality along the lines of race, class, gender, ability and age, about (media) representation and redistribution on national and global scales. Such care debates also reinvigorate the political relevance of cultural studies beyond the (pay)walls of the ivory tower. Accordingly, Barbara Maly-Bowie suggests conceiving cultural studies as a care-project more generally. She considers the conjunctural analysis of “reigning carelessness” in *The Care Manifesto* by the Care Collective as “one of the most relevant and impressive works in cultural studies” (133), because their broad notion of care encompasses both hands-on care work and the social and intellectual capacity “to provide the political, social, material, and emotional conditions that allow the vast majority of people and living creatures on this planet to thrive – along with the planet itself” (6).

In this volume, we find a variety of articulations of this structural carelessness and respective antidotes. Roman Horak's analysis of "empty politics" in Austria operates with a similar idea of lack of care: following Stuart Hall, he diagnoses a form of authoritarian populism within a capitalist structure of feeling marked by a utopia-free politics of the centre that does not really care about anything else but itself (73). Such wider notions of political carelessness and the proliferation of neoliberal self-care also lead Anette Pankratz to identify another emerging structure of feeling: the many "UKanian" formations of "cringe and awkwardness," James Bond, Hugh Grant and Boris Johnson among them, which do not only guarantee "high cult" capital (...) but also seem to be the best strategies in times of unease and crisis" (172). It is, however, not surprising that such care-less cringe "correlates with (white male) privilege and power – [thereby] both ridiculing and normalising it" (172). Through Timo Frühwirth and Sandra Mayer's diligent archival work on life-writing documents such as letters, poems and legal papers, we learn about other privileged men, this time in Austria. Their research lays bare the intricate networks of official and private care duties around the house of British-American poet W.H. Auden in Kirchstetten, which even involve the then Austrian Federal Chancellor Bruno Kreisky.

Doing cultural studies with care, however, does not only mean rigorous investigations into macro and micro levels of culture, it also means learning how to point out and respond to these often invisible norms and power structures that shape our culture and everyday lives – and thereby making them assailable, creating the conditions for imagining otherwise. Such thinking across (disciplinary) boundaries and insisting on context, contingency, and complexity is cultural studies' strong suit. We are all aware this is not an easy sell, a "transferable skill" you can put to profitable use on late-stage capitalist job markets. But isn't the broad cultural studies way of creating knowledge exactly what we need in order to find answers to the multiple, interdependent crises of our time? As Grossberg puts it in his contribution to this volume:

Cultural studies seeks to produce better – richer, more complex, more nuanced – understandings of what's going on in the world, because it knows that one can change the world, gain some agency over the tides of change, only if one understands – at the intersection of theory and concrete empirical determinations and contestations – the conditions of possibility and impossibility. (Grossberg 33)

Elisabeth Lechner and Judith Kohlenberger, and also Julia Pühringer, illustrate how cultural studies fuels such a necessarily collaborative, dialogic and carefully attuned project of worldmaking, also outside of academia. "Build networks" Julia Pühringer (186) learnt from Monika, and Judith Kohlenberger calls to mind that "[w]e are not doing cultural studies, or any form of academic inquiry for that

matter, in a social vacuum, but always actively contributing to how and in which ways the world can (and will) change” (Lechner and Kohlenberger 120).

This kind of intellectual and social responsibility is a form of care that also prominently feeds into many of the contributions engaging with the pedagogical spirit of cultural studies. Thomas Kühn reminds us of Stuart Hall’s role as an intelligible teacher which is ”deeply informed by his view that the study of culture represents both a theoretical activity and an emancipatory commitment” (111). He revisits two classics from 1997, which we still find referenced and taught in many cultural studies classes in German-speaking higher education: Stuart Hall’s *Representation and Signifying Practices*, and the *Media and Representation* lecture transcript and video. Equally linking media, cultural studies and teaching, Christian Huck introduces his most recent efforts to establish the platform *cultural-studies.org* as an alternative form of educational communication. He reflects on the contradictions of learning with social media and thoroughly frames his experience with another key figure in cultural studies: Raymond Williams and particularly his theories and experience of communication, media and teaching as a “practical material activity” (77). Sabine Harrer turns to Monika herself as a key figure of cultural studies and media education by reflecting on the ways she instilled the radically critical and utopian perspective to game studies she now employs in her own scholarly work, teaching and game design:

What if we were allowed to look at things like identity, representation, ideology and power without the fear that what we might find might not be Truth? What if instead of Truth, we would find ambiguity, interpretation or possibility, and what if this was also okay? Seidl’s teaching has been instrumental in encouraging such questions and inspiring our curiosity in the hidden, the problematic and the marginalised in culture and society. (Harrer 52)

Susanne Reichl makes a similar move to connect cultural studies with her own research focus: the study of children’s literature. As Monika’s real-life office neighbour, she metaphorically opens the door between these related fields and treats cultural studies as a “big sister” when it comes to engaging with the politics of representation (198), but she also takes Raymond Williams’ quote of cultural studies as “a vague and baggy monster” to heart to follow the monsterly in children’s literature itself and academic work more generally – monsters that need to be cared for as much as taken care of.

In their “monstrous” multiplicity, cultural studies are never monolithic. The incoherent capitalization of “Cultural Studies” or “cultural studies” in this volume, the usage in the plural or singular is not an editorial glitch: it caters to the variety of traditions and ideas that have informed the different manifestations of cultural studies. We, thus, face the conundrum of cultural studies as a strand in its own right and at the same time a strand that becomes most meaningful only as an

interdisciplinary, unfolding discourse, never in isolation, but always in friction with too purist assumptions about other disciplines. The variety of contributions to this volume also testify to the simultaneous broadness and specificity that renders cultural studies a necessarily “messy, murky and simply huge” area of study (Seidl “Vienna Calling” 136). Monika herself quotes Graham Murdock, Professor of Culture and Economy, who reminds us that

the original project of cultural studies was precisely to disregard formal divisions between disciplines and fields and to work in the cracks, both theoretically and politically. It was a celebration of trespass and border violations in the interests of constructing a more complete analysis of culture (Murdock 90–91, qtd. in Seidl “Vienna Calling” 135).

The contributions to our tribute to Monika show that doing cultural studies with care is not only about care as an object of study, it is also a mode of analysis, involving an ethical imperative and an active practice. In the institutional context of cultural studies such questions of care need to feed into “infrastructural” (Striphas 11) departmental practices, curricula, topics for research and teaching. One of them is a much-needed, thorough engagement with diversity efforts and inclusion politics that mean more than superficial representation and the performative gesture of illustrating university leaflets with photos of diverse groups of students. Cultural studies has been, can be and should be a space for meaningful diversity. This starts via critical media analysis, a broad repertoire of theory and material, through which students get to discuss the material conditions of inequality, read texts by BIPOC or disabled authors and reflect queer ways of living, allowing for moments of identification impossible elsewhere. With a plethora of methodological and theoretical tools, cultural studies encourage and enable scholars and students to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway).

Furthermore, it insists on continued efforts to sustain an “unruly presence” (Saha and van Lente 223) rather than affirming the status quo in highly exclusive epistemic cultures, through pushing for fair hiring practices, sufficient modes of funding, job security and more. Caring for this kind of diversity, creating inclusive academic learning and research environments is work, time- and resource-intensive labour, mostly unpaid and often unacknowledged. Diversity work is hard work, a kind of labour that is never finished.¹ In that sense, cultural studies is never a hopeless endeavour, and an increasingly relevant one. It takes both negative and positive affect seriously, as scholars use analyses of the af-

¹ Sara Ahmed’s recent stocktaking of cultural studies curricula is telling here: “[A] fantasy of inclusion is a technique of exclusion. Recently when I have examined more curricula in cultural studies more closely, I have been struck by just how many courses are organized around or even as a white male European genealogy. Looking more deeply, it seems that this is more the case than it was before; that some curricula have become less diverse over time” (*Living a Feminist Life* 112).

fective-material conditions of living to think about possible openings, potentials for agency and “lines of flight” (Deleuze and Guattari 15). Monika herself was also always looking for openings instead of closures.

Monika’s Version of Cultural Studies

Our understanding of cultural studies as and via care is deeply influenced by Monika’s, whose efforts materialised in an actively wilful attempt to shape the workplace, the curriculum and the relations as caring. In other words, Monika’s version of cultural studies is one of care-ful departmental strategies, research and teaching.

Working the Structures, Shaping Institutions

At the department in Vienna, Monika is the mother of cultural studies for many, not because she was one of the first ones to engage with the field, but because she continuously employed strategic work to establish cultural studies as a viable strand in the curriculum. Monika’s way irritates a usually male history of Fathers of British cultural studies. As Monika delineates in her 2021 recount of Austrian cultural studies titled “Vienna Calling” for the German *Journal of the Study of British Cultures*, Monika gives special credit to the care of the late Pat Häusler-Greenfield (1945–2016) who “initiated” her “under her wings and together [they] set to work on the new curricula” (Seidl “Vienna Calling” 134). Taking advantage of the increasingly neoliberal structures of university, ironically, resulted in the inscription of cultural studies courses and a professorship in the discipline: “Strategically throwing in ‘culture’ under the guise of utilitarian requirements demanded when universities advanced ‘market orientation’ (keyword: ‘employability’) helped a lot when the Bologna-conforming curriculum developed” (134). This process also marks the beginnings of a recognizable institutionalisation of cultural studies at Austrian universities, one that, as she explains, does not follow “large-scale strategies [...] but rather (..) small-scale departmental tactics” (133), mostly linked to English departments.

Monika navigated, on the one hand, a gradual move away from regional surveys, which made room for an interdisciplinary approach that builds on theories of culture and power. On the other hand, she helped create a space away from literary studies for anti-canonical critical media analysis and popular culture to be studied, sometimes as a fierce critic, but also a best friend, or often a nice neighbour. Today, students cannot circumnavigate at least basic training in cultural studies and many carry it to secondary schools, since most of the stu-

dents at the department are future teachers and extend the formation's reach and impact. The highly popular "Critical Media Analysis" classes, which were installed under Monika's lead, for example, but also simple tools like Monika's favoured "substitution test" are part of her legacy at the department: "What if, instead of a woman, we saw a man in that dishwasher advertisement? Can you tell me why you're laughing?" Monika would inquire with a whimsical smile, reverberating through generations of students.

Beyond her role as spokesperson and coordinator for cultural studies, she also served as director of studies (2006–2010), carefully shaping curricular requirements and contents, and – climbing up the administrative university career ladder – held the position of deputy university head of studies ("Vizestudienpräses") from 2010–2014. But, Monika asks herself and her audience in the above-cited article, "may we sit back complacently and be happy about our institutional achievements?" "Certainly not," she is sure (Seidl "Vienna Calling" 134). Or as Sara Ahmed puts it: "It seems once the pressure to modify the shape of disciplines is withdrawn, they spring back very quickly into the old shape. We have to keep pushing; otherwise things will be quickly reversed to how they were before" (*Living a Feminist Life* 112). Thus, even after her sick leave, she returned to university, of course beyond stylish with her ultrashort white pixie cut, and with a new perspective on self-care, to get back to what she loved, secure the presence of her field at the department and inspire even more cohorts of students with cultural studies done 'the Monika Seidl way.'

Denaturalise What Seems Natural – Doing Research the Monika Way

Sabine Harrer in her contribution to this volume describes Monika's analytical approach poignantly as "simultaneously theoretically rich, entertaining and rigorously rooted in visual evidence" (52). Methodologically speaking, all of Monika's scholarly work is textual analysis oriented, employing a broad notion of text, and certainly less empirical and sociological than cultural studies in an anglophone context often is. She operates with close readings of media and visual practices, and aims at a re-articulation and mobilisation of what seems too naturalised and fixed. "There are four words which encapsulate Monika Seidl's cultural studies lessons for me: *denaturalise what seems natural* (see also Barthes 1972)," Sabine Harrer recollects in her article (51). She exemplifies this by Monika's own scholarly analysis of the ordinary practice of making avatars sit down in video games, which can shed light on the articulation of gender, space and bodies (Seidl "On Heavenly Swords"). It is, after all,

in the unnoticed, seemingly irrelevant details that hegemonic norms can spread most freely, precisely because they tend to be ignored or dismissed. Sitting, as Seidl shows, is just one among many micro-expressions such as fashion choice and body postures where gendered norms have congealed and travelled across media ranging from famous paintings to commercials, fashion items, feminist art and video games (Harrer 56).

Monika's expertise in art history (what we would do for her unmatched eye for detail and her Warburgian mnemosynetic insights!) and popular culture, as well as feminist perspectives on visual culture and media more generally, allow her to lay bare the struggles and ambivalence of power, normative practices, and culture. Popular culture matters to Monika also because it negotiates the fine line between the ordinary and the extra-ordinary. There is the materiality of everyday culture that fascinates Monika: exemplified by a bag of old letters found in an attic in Lower Austria that happened to be W.H. Auden's. She eventually handed them over to Timo Frühwirth and Sandra Mayer and thereby founded Austrian Auden Studies (141). Or the mundane technique and aesthetics of the scrapbook that Annegret Pelz picks up in her contribution to reflect on Monika's work at the research platform "Mobile Cultures and Societies," and more specifically the subproject "Constituting Global Convivence. Album – Collection Book – Portable Archive." Monika Pietrzak-Franger employs similar scrapbook aesthetics in her contribution to grasp the extraordinariness of celebrity, high-fashion, art, cinephilia, and royalty in their popular culture re-articulations, which have enticed Monika in her scholarly work on Bond, Vivienne Westwood and other fashionable kings and queens more generally.

As her research shows, Monika Seidl's thinking is grounded in semiotics and structuralist perspectives, it is concept-driven but clearly not concept-loyal – an approach that also involves an inherent critique of elitist, essentialist and reductive ideas of culture and literature, the field she was trained in. Her *Habilitation* develops the notion of "retro-active performativity" in the context of Shakespeare adaptations, for example, in which she proves her skill of collapsing and rethinking simple dichotomous assumptions, in this case of old and new, original and adaptation. In other publications she employs visual techniques as productive conceptual leads: Her choice of *silhouettes*, *close ups*, and *framing* to theorise and analyse a wide repertoire of material from Bond ("One Silhouette") to Hitchcock's shower scene ("Moving Images") to portraits of fin-de-siècle ladies ("Framing Isabel"), illustrates her interest in the paradoxical nature and re-articulation of form and content.

Her enthusiasm for the conceptual and the theoretical does not outweigh a thorough engagement with the very regional and material contexts of culture, though. Monika is keen to reflect especially the British-Austrian connections in her scholarly work. In her dissertation she investigated British literary renderings of Vienna in the 1930s, her research on W.H. Auden is marked by British-

American-Austrian trajectories, and her efforts to establish more research into Raymond Williams in the German speaking area (*Über Raymond Williams*) presuppose a practice of cultural studies as a contextual project that is attuned to the peculiarities of one's own positionality.

About Raymond Williams, Pursuing the Trivial – Investigations into Popular Culture and Fashionable Queens. Body – Power – Gender: It does not surprise that the majority of Monika's research output is heavily linked to conferences, be it conference proceedings to her own symposia or those that stem from her papers elsewhere. Conferences require collaborative and interdisciplinary efforts, which suit Monika; they are sites of ongoing scholarly debates, but more importantly, sociality. The big conferences under her mentorship "About Raymond Williams" (2006), "Fashionable Queens" (2010) and "Pursuing the Trivial" (2012) created a sense of community on a global scale, tending to a multigenerational network of scholars interested in British cultural studies and its current formation. This *Festschrift* would not exist without these efforts.

It is apparent that Monika mastered the vastness of the field, its murkiness and methodological openness, deeply convinced that cultural studies should encourage "[p]icking and choosing [...] according to one's interest and seeing patterns, identifying connections and working on nodal points" (Seidl "Vienna Calling" 136). Monika's approach of re-imagining, re-framing and not getting too comfortable with what is naturalised and fixed also follows a pedagogical impulse, a mode of working she deliberately passed on to her students. To the many hopeful analysts of popular culture she supervised over the years – with such patience and care – she must have said a thousand times: "Start with the material! It will lead you to the right questions and, thus, to the theoretical concepts needed!" What a simple, yet incredibly helpful piece of advice for students of all levels stuck in "the theory part" of their papers.

Wings and Wigs – Learning from Monika

As the authors of this introduction are all former students of Monika, we'd like to specifically address Monika's role as a dedicated teacher. Monika took teaching seriously, while not taking herself too seriously in the best possible way. More than a repository of anecdotes, it stresses the pedagogical spirit and origins of cultural studies, and Monika's ability to live up to it. She always believed in teaching and learning as a material practice that should open up more than it closes down. Channelling the late bell hooks, Monika worked towards keeping alive the idea of the classroom as "the most radical space of possibility in the academy" (hooks 12). Her serious but always fun approach to the task was guided

by student-led teaching which – at least temporarily – did away with widespread top-down structures.

More importantly, her personal pedagogical project is grounded in a belief in people, especially students, their agency and value, which the contributions by Julia Pühringer, Ranthild Salzer and Magdalena Berger confirm. “Being seen in such a way almost gives you something like wings,” as Ranthild Salzer (202) beautifully puts it. Her teaching principles seem self-evident: students deserve to be listened to and learned from. Their contributions and interests matter. Holding these beliefs close throughout one’s career, however, and putting them into practice for decades cannot be taken for granted at all. Her against-the-grain, non-dogmatic, pragmatic and down-to-earth approach can be boiled down to: with the few possibilities we have, we do what is possible (and even better as a style icon, as Julia Pühringer points out). Elisabeth Lechner remembers: “Monika’s infectious enthusiasm is certainly one of the reasons why I remember her classes so vividly. We should really remind ourselves to build our research and teaching efforts around notions of “joyous affect,” shouldn’t we? Isn’t this what cultural studies is all about? Making these connections and deeply felt insights that linger long after a seminar is over?” (117). Monika’s teaching did not only happen in higher education alone. In the 1980s, Monika taught English and German in a secondary-school context. Before finishing her dissertation in 1994 (“‘Civil War in the Self.’ Britische Schriftsteller über das Wien der frühen dreißiger Jahre und die Februarkämpfe 1934”), Monika worked as a German language and literature teacher in St Andrews, Scotland, from 1987–1989, which would manifest itself in her adopted, distinct Scottish accent. Countless other language teaching engagements followed afterwards (British Council, English as a foreign language teacher at the English department at the University of Vienna) and she was frequently busy as a guest lecturer in various prominent locations like the Bundesministerium für Unterricht und kulturelle Angelegenheiten or the Duke University Vienna Study Programme. Especially during her time at the University of Klagenfurt (2001–2002), and the Donau-Universität Krems (2004–2008), she was responsible for the fields of British Cultural Studies and Cultural Studies, Visual Culture and Media Education, respectively. In 2012, Monika was a guest lecturer for the MA program *Kulturanalyse* at the University of Zürich. Her time as president of the Austrian Association of University Teachers of English (AAUTE) from 2004–2007 also mirrored her continued commitment to secondary education. Caring was also part of her duties as mentor for the University of Vienna’s mentoring programme (2008–2009).

Monika’s teaching career at the Department of English and American studies is lined with a plethora of courses, mirroring her interest and expertise in various academic topics and signalling a stand-in for the engagement with countless students throughout the years. The beginnings are marked by her language

classes (“Sprachübungen”) before we can find many literary classes as well as seminars for the establishing of a cultural studies way of thinking such as “The Cultural Studies Generation” (Winter Term 2005) or “Approaches to Cultural Analysis – The British Way” (Summer Term 2007). Later topics also mirrored Monika’s manifold research interests, including seminars such as “Prada, Pringle and Pyjama Queens: The Culture of Fashion in the Foreign Language Classroom” (e.g. Winter Term 2010), “One Class is Not Enough: The World of James Bond” (Winter Term 2011), “Victorious, Happy and Glorious: Representations of Female Royalty in Anglophone Literature and Culture” (e.g. Winter Term 2020) or large introductory lectures like “Introduction to Anglophone Cultures and Societies: Highlights of British Popular Culture” (e.g. Summer Term 2014), just to name a few.

Apart from her own classes, Monika was always open for international, trans-departmental, university-spanning exchange and encouraged her students to organise truly diverse lecture series studded with many greats in the field: one on the notion of “(Be)Coming Home” (Summer Term 2018) with David Morley and another one on the politics of sex and porn (“Screening Pleasure,” Summer Term 2017) with Linda Williams come to mind here. Such events allow for the kind of scrapbook spirit we have also come to appreciate in this *Festschrift*: Guest lectures by esteemed scholars were allowed to coexist with those of early career researchers. “Discussing the Complexities of ‘Disgusting’ Sex in Lena Dunham’s *Girls*” was the first full lecture Elisabeth Lechner ever gave to a room full of eager students. Emboldened like that by her supervisor Monika, many more would follow.

Regardless of the topic, taking one of Monika’s classes surely meant a sharpening of one’s academic and specifically cultural studies skills. It might have also meant that during an exam proctored by one of her assistants, Monika would walk in donning a gigantic white baroque-style wig, wishing all the best to students only to head to a carnivalesque *Faschingsgschnas* at the Dean’s office afterwards. “She puts on a show,” as Magdalena Berger phrases it in her contribution (30). Yet what no list or recount of Monika’s activities, however extensive it may be, can properly portray is the very obvious care that Monika directed towards many of her students and colleagues. What comes to mind is not only the work that always must have gone into the preparation of her classes but also the diligent, spot-on feedback one got as a student of Monika’s (granted, some of the scribblings were hard to read though).

It is worth mentioning that Monika’s practice of care-ful cultural studies has always extended far beyond academic contexts and career networks, beyond doing groundwork for cultural studies at the department and nurturing its flourishing ever since. As a caring boss, teacher and true *Doktormutter* with a lot of experience and broad knowledge in feminist theory and gender studies, she