

## OBITUARY FOR AXEL SCHILDT (1951–2019)

*May your hands always be busy,  
May your feet always be swift,  
May you have a strong foundation,  
When the winds of changes shift.*

Bob Dylan, Forever Young, 1973/74

When we asked Axel Schildt in May 2003 whether he would be prepared to help as a board member with the creation of a new ›hybrid‹ history journal – which did not yet have a name or any authors – he immediately agreed. Over the following years, and despite all his other obligations, he was a dependable partner, voicing well-founded criticism but also often providing support and encouragement from a naturally warm and charitable disposition. His interests in media history, social history and the history of ideas gave him a keen eye for the possibilities and functions of journals. In an unpublished presentation at a conference of the German Literature Archive in Marbach in November 2016, he described journals as a ›political and cultural magnetic field‹, an ›intellectual fellowship‹. The history of journals, he said, could ›be used as the key to a cross-media intellectual history‹. Though he was referring more narrowly to the remarkable ›boom in journals in the first years following the Second World War‹, the brief ›journal spring‹ before the currency reform, he was also expressly interested in the ›longer-term continuity‹ of the medium.<sup>1</sup> Against this background, it was only logical that he was personally involved in a number of journals as author and advisor – with his unique combination of broad perspective, careful observation and healthy pragmatism.

Axel Schildt was far more important for the identity of the *Studies in Contemporary History* and its realisation than his two short, eloquent articles in the ›Literature Revisited‹ section may at first suggest.<sup>2</sup> His clear sense of the relevance and timeliness of topics, of original perspectives and of promising authors was often invaluable. Although German history was his primary and passionate interest, he kept up with a very broad range of research trends and debates – and expected no less of others. He could be a rather acerbic reviewer when it came to upholding fundamental stan-

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- 1 Axel Schildt, Konjunkturen, Krisen, Programmatiken: Deutsche Zeitschriften nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg. Presentation at the conference ›Die Zeitschrift. Sinn, Form, Konjunktur‹, 17/18 November 2016 in Marbach; see the report at <<https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-6922>>.
  - 2 Schildt, Zur Durchsetzung einer Apologie. Hermann Lübkes Vortrag zum 50. Jahrestag des 30. Januar 1933, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 10 (2013), pp. 148-152; Schildt, Zwischen Hoffen und Bangen. Südafrika im Blick westdeutscher Intellektueller der 1960er-Jahre, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 13 (2016), pp. 360-364.

dards of quality. In the summer of 2018, for example, he wrote: ›My review [...] is attached, sadly not very heartening reading. I think I'll have to go and read a thriller.‹ It is no coincidence that all the obituaries mention his sense of humour, his ironic repartee.<sup>3</sup> Axel Schildt took academia seriously, but not too seriously; this distinguished him from certain other historians and made him a role model, particularly for many younger scholars.

When Axel Schildt commented on a somewhat difficult text for our journal in September 2018, he added: ›I wish you wisdom in your editorial work.‹ This wish has now become his legacy, much too soon.

Jan-Holger Kirsch on behalf of the editorial team and the editors  
(Translated from the German by Joy Titheridge)

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3 See for example Martin Sabrow, Die Jahre, die er kannte. Zum Tode des Hamburger Zeithistorikers Axel Schildt, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 April 2019; Norbert Frei, Moderne Zeiten. Ein großer Verlust: Zum Tod des Historikers Axel Schildt, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 April 2019; Kirsten Heinsohn, Der etwas andere Intellektuelle. Axel Schildt (1951–2019), in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 12 April 2019, URL: <<https://www.hsozkult.de/news/id/news-1294>>; Marianne Zepp/Christoph Becker-Schaum/Roman Schmidt, Nachruf auf Axel Schildt (1951–2019), 12.4.2019, URL: <<https://www.boell.de/de/2019/04/12/nachruf-auf-axel-schildt>>.