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Aleida Assmann. *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues*. Grundlagen der Anglistik und Amerikanistik 36. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2012, 248 pp., € 17.80.

Aleida Assmann's *Introduction to Cultural Studies* is the translation of her 2008 *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft: Grundbegriffe, Themen, Fragestellungen*. As the title already suggests, what distinguishes her introduction to the burgeoning field of Cultural Studies from other such works is that she operates along a number of different concepts, rather than providing a genealogical overview of the divergent 'schools' or theories that have dominated the discipline.

The book is structured along the lines of seven central concepts – signs, media, the body, time, space, memory, and identity – preceded by an introductory chapter that, on the one hand, provides the reader with an overview of different concepts of culture – "three concepts that involve value judgements, and three that do not" (12) – and a short assessment as to the differences in the assumptions and methodologies of Cultural Studies as they evolved within Anglophone academia, and *Kulturwissenschaften* growing out of a German context, respectively. As the introductory chapter, every following conceptual chapter provides a short summary at the end, as well as a 'select biography' on the topic.

The choice as to what constitutes a central topic worth to be included in such an 'Introduction to Cultural Studies' is, by default, arbitrary. That the selection comprises none of the three concepts that, for decades, have made up the (admittedly questionable) triumvirate dominating Cultural Studies – race, class, and gender – might seem surprising. While Assmann points out that 'gender' "is subsumed under the chapters 'media,' 'body' and 'identity'" (12), 'race' and 'class' are not even mentioned, although they, too, are cursorily addressed in the chapters on the 'body' and 'identity.'

The chapter on the 'sign' comprises a concise assessment of the relevance and the effects that the linguistic turn has had on the study of culture, several models of communication, as well as a short subchapter on the linguistic theories of J. L. Austin and Charles Sanders Peirce. Here, as in all other chapters, one of the strengths of the book that becomes apparent is that the theoretical considerations are always accompanied by illustrations through concrete examples. What is a bit surprising, however, is that the author, in an *Introduction to Cultural Studies*, almost exclusively relies on literary examples to do the job, which would seem counterintuitive considering the considerable enlargement of the subject matter that Cultural Studies has brought with it.

However, the following chapter on media enlarges the scope, and addresses the perpetual growth of different media as well as their ability to store and reproduce information. The subchapters address "Media as mediators" (2.1.), the different qualities of "Oral and written" media (2.2.), different concepts of authorship (2.3.), and the growing importance of intermediality and ekphrastic aspects in "Text and image" (2.4). The entire chapter addresses the diverse dimensions of mediality, such as semiotic, material, technical, and social (cf. 57).

Chapter 3 addresses the 'body' in its various relations to media, gender, and agency, and provides a genealogy of the changing importance of the different senses in relation to the body, as well as the latter's triangular connection to the 'mind' and the 'soul.' Moreover, it discusses aspects of sexuality, the gendered body, artificial bodies, body techniques and body writing/tattoos, and body staging. Considering the enormous richness of the history and the material

on this field, Assmann manages to convey and interrelate these different aspects with an admirable clarity and conciseness, which also characterize all the other chapters.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover terrains possibly even larger in their potential scope than that of the body: those of 'time' and 'space.' The chapter on time comprises subchapters on "Cultural bases for the experience of time," "Literary Stagings of the Present" and "The Nightmare of history." Although the author again manages to include, connect, and discuss a large variety of temporal aspects, the topic suffers a bit from the space it is allotted, and the literary examples are given too much prominence – although one has to mention that some facets of this theme are relegated to and taken up again in the chapter on 'memory.' The chapter on space addresses both the roots and the consequences of what has become known as the "spatial turn" (cf. 139), and analyzes the concept of space along different literary stagings and dramatizations as 'metropolitan labyrinth' (Thomas De Quincey, Edgar Allen Poe, Virginia Woolf), center and periphery (Frederick Jackson Turner and Joseph Conrad), and 'mythical landscape' (Leslie Marmon Silko). Within these subchapters, Assmann addresses related fields such as 'empire,' the 'flaneur,' the 'frontier,' 'colonization' and 'decolonization,' and 'roots.'

The sixth chapter on 'memory' is, needless to say, a strong one, considering the fact that Assmann's impressive work on cultural mnemotechnics has been instrumental in helping this concept to "become a major new area of cultural studies" (167). While the first subchapter on "Basic concepts of memory research" tackles issues such as the difference between remembrance (*Erinnerung*) and memory (*Gedächtnis*), active and passive, episodic and semantic, embodied and disembodied, and individual and collective memory, as well as trauma, the second subchapter serves to illustrate these conceptual divisions with examples taken from one of her favorite literary references that she repeatedly resorts to throughout the volume – William Shakespeare. What falls a bit aside in these illustrations is the concept of a collective cultural memory – be it national, ethnic, or tribal – that has been so important especially in postcolonial studies, although it is evoked in the 'space' subchapter on Silko.

The final, seventh chapter on 'identity' comprises, among others, excurses on subjectivity, social being, gender, authenticity, and split/multiple identities under the heading individual identities; the second subchapter condenses "Collective identity – race, nation, culture" on a little more than three pages which, considering the significance of all three concepts, seems to give them too short a shrift. The third and fourth subchapters are devoted to the relationship between identity and the canon (7.3.) and "wanderers between cultures" (7.4.); among the latter, Mary Antin, Joseph Conrad, and Salman Rushdie serve as

points of reference to problematize notions such as intercultural identity, hybridity, and border crossings that have dominated recent, postcolonial debates.

Assmann's rather unorthodox approach along conceptual lines allows her to combine the historical verticality of different theoretical and methodological developments with the horizontality of the seven main concepts she identifies as central to Cultural Studies. Such a selection is, needless to say, arbitrary, and one could prolong it by other, important categories such as race/ethnicity, ideology, myth, narrative, ethics, et al. What such a conceptual methodology allows for is to present, combine, and juxtapose different theories and schools, and to provide a (sometimes too) concise overview on important fields within Cultural Studies. With its innovativeness, richness, its summaries, clear structure, poignant applications, and extensive reference list, this remarkable volume will certainly gain entrance into university curricula, although its self-imposed limitation on exclusively literary examples might reduce its applicability to non-literary disciplines to a degree.

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