
Recently, the field of cultural studies has witnessed the publication of several introductions. Some of them allude to the discipline as a site of controversy, referring to its "critical" dimension (During 2005) and its "debates" (Barker 2002) in their titles. Two new books, at a first glance, seem to adopt a neutral stance. Nevertheless, they illustrate that teaching cultural studies can be tackled from very different educational positions. Aleida Assmann's *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft. Grundbegriffe, Themen, Fragestellungen* (2006) is deeply rooted in the tradition of text-based German Kulturwissenschaften, whereas Merle Tönnies's and Claus-Ulrich Viol's *Introduction to the Study of British Culture* (2007) exemplifies the British approach to cultural studies, which mainly focuses on non-literary representations of culture.

After a clarifying differentiation between Kulturwissenschaften and cultural studies, Assmann unfolds a diachronic perspective on her subject. In her introduction she combines aspects of European history and philosophical thought with literary readings, thus highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of cultural studies. In order to frame the key concepts *sign, media, body, time, space, memory* and *identity*, Assmann draws on linguistic theory, anthropological thought and briefly refers to cultural topography. Her account of the historical development of the notion of the "self" is very informative, as is her concise delineation of media history that starts from oral traditions and finishes with the TV- and CD-ROM generations. The instructive sketch of the imagist movement as well as the readings of de Quincey, Poe, Woolf etc., illustrating the concepts *time* and *space*, however, exemplify

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that classical literary representations receive most of the author’s attention. The unambiguous title of the publication is therefore somewhat misleading. As the cover text tells the curious reader, Assmann aims to closely connect main issues of cultural studies and literary texts, and hence explores both fields with equal interest.

Assmann’s introduction deserves praise for its pedagogical qualities. The author not only introduces complex terminology and theoretical thought, but also immediately explains them in simple words and with examples from everyday life or literature. She uses, for instance, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* to show that reflections on the nature of language date back at least to the eighteenth century, thus sharpening the reader’s awareness of the historical dimension of the development of knowledge. On the whole, the book resembles a carefully knotted net: main questions and analytical categories function as nodes, theories and terminology as nodules, all of which are connected by discursive threads spun from historical developments and literary readings that illustrate cultural responses to social processes.

However, highly controversial issues such as class and gender do not really feature in this introduction. Moreover, in terms of literary analysis Assmann hardly breaks new ground, but adds one more reading of Shakespeare or Conrad to the bulk. She barely touches upon the contended aspects of these texts, though, and thus reinforces the established canon. While depicting the relation between culture and (high brow) literature as immanent, the author forgoes a discussion of other cultural artefacts. Assmann does not mention photography, film and TV as representations of culture in their own right, but in relation to literature in order to outline how the latter responded to the challenges of new media. However, the bibliographies following each chapter partly compensate for this thematic void, since they not only list older seminal texts, but also recent publications on other areas of study, such as media making or film analysis.

The introduction by Tönnes and Viol offers a complementary approach to cultural studies. Unlike Assmann, the authors focus on neither the history of ideas nor diachronic cultural developments, but address their subject from a decidedly contemporary vantage point. The content page, however, reads similar if less conventional, and prepares the reader for a discussion of representations, images, ethnicity, class, gender and cultural geography. Interestingly, the authors use the city of Oxford for a case study illustrating their central concepts, and include various materials for analysis. Readers are required to grapple with theoretical and literary texts, postcards, the OED, websites, student reports, statistics and maps in order to gather knowledge about Oxford, cultural studies and the particular issue at stake. Using many practical examples, the authors profoundly discuss and aptly apply structuralist (Barthes, Levi-Strauss) and post-structuralist (Derrida) theory as well as concepts of class (Bourdieu), gender (Butler) and identity (Hall). In their readings of literary texts, Tönnes and Viol hardly rely on canonized texts, but mainly focus on little known authors from post-colonial backgrounds. Moreover, they implicitly undermine the idea of a canon, not only by using popular romances as material, but also by pointing out the features these share with highly valued texts.

Particularly engaging is the personal relation between authors and readers that this introduction establishes. Students are directly addressed and made aware of helpful further reading as well as the difficulties their tasks may imply. The “we”, occasionally adopted in the text, indirectly highlights that the reader is not only included, but a constituent part in the act of knowledge building. Furthermore, the text often involves the addressees in the issues in question and forces them to explore their own identity and gender affiliations. It
encourages readers to do research and field work, guiding them through these activities. Moreover, it provides student-friendly summaries at the end of each chapter and works with very recent appealing material.

This innovative topical approach proves to be very suitable for introducing students to different fields of cultural studies. The authors, however, as they discuss Oxford's function in the building of the British Empire, deliberately project a controversial image of Oxford and prompt students to "read" the renowned city against the grain. Thus Tönnies and Viol ask them to question established institutions as well as the power structures these represent and maintain. It is a key characteristic of the book to always point to the strengths as well as the shortcomings of concepts, theories and institutions. Consequently, it trains its readers to test existing categories for their validity and inquire into different, new ways of thinking. At no point does this introduction suggest that there are final answers. Its main achievement may therefore be that it ideally produces critical subjects who are fully aware of the world as a place of ambivalence and controversy.

Ideas need space and time to develop. Nevertheless, the authors could be more concise at times. This remark, though, does not apply to the first and least convincing chapter which lacks explicit summaries and evaluations of the material to be dealt with. This chapter marks a departure from the generally very accessible structure of the book and might even put off beginners. It starts with a very complex theoretical text by Roland Barthes, at the end of which the reader only finds comprehension questions that remain unanswered. This is quite unfortunate, since the text provides the terminological basis for further analysis – however, only to those willing and, most of all, able in terms of language skills and intellect to plough their way through five pages of structuralist theory. Far less frustrating is the fact that the book repeatedly asks its readers to work with material it simply cannot provide, such as specific TV-series.

Assmann closely links key concepts of cultural studies with basic knowledge in English literary history. Therefore, her introduction is very helpful for university teachers who devise new densely packed bachelor courses. It is concisely written, in a neutral style and it provides easy access to theory and terminology that is indispensable for cultural as well as literary analysis. In its overall structure it resembles an informative lecture course to be consumed by a receptive audience. By contrast, Tönnies's and Viol's publication reminds one of a lively seminar. It relates analytical categories and theoretical approaches to Oxford – the place as well as the notion – and uses heterogeneous material to illustrate the scope of contemporary cultural studies. It consciously activates readers and thus emphasises their role in the process of knowledge creation. Furthermore, it familiarizes students with the political implications of cultural studies, while it heightens their awareness that any institutional structure tends to represent its ideological foundation as a natural, hence legitimizing fact.

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