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Introduction to Cultural Studies

Topics, Concepts, Issues

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Preface

The impetus for this English version of my Introduction to Cultural Studies originally came from my students, who told me that they preferred to read and learn about English texts and theories in the original language. I gladly accepted their suggestion that I should have the book translated and thus make it accessible not only to students of English but also to an Anglophone readership.

This book differs from other volumes of its kind in two ways. One is that it provides an introduction to concepts, questions and theories derived from the German Kulturwissenschaften without marginalizing British and American approaches to the subject. The second is that its structure is not dictated by various theoretical trends, schools and paradigms, but by seven major themes that have emerged as important and productive areas for cultural research: signs, media, body, time, place, memory, and identity. The subject of 'gender' does not have a chapter heading of its own, but is covered in various forms by the chapters on media, body and identity.

The aim of this book is not to instruct so much as to stimulate the interest and independent thinking of students from various backgrounds by providing them with a fund of general knowledge, texts, tools, ideas, questions and inspirations for their own readings and intellectual endeavors. Much care has been taken to introduce theories and concepts not in the abstract but within a concrete framework of texts and contexts which illustrate their potential in action. Theory and text, concept and example, historical knowledge and contemporary concerns have therefore been woven together as closely as possible.

Over the last two decades cultural studies have been newly established or expanded at many universities. After this foundational phase they are currently undergoing a process of reorientation. There are at least three interdisciplinary fields emerging that pose new questions and claim to transform our knowledge of humans and culture in the future:

- cognitive neurosciences and empirical aesthetics
- research on sustainability and ecocriticism
- digital humanities.

These new perspectives and transformations will have to be followed very closely as they evolve, but an engagement with them would go beyond the scope of this introduction. The second edition therefore includes only minor changes, such as a small extension on postcolonial London and some additions to the bibliography. It maintains the improvements of the 3rd and 4th German edition in terms of readability, corrections and updated bibliography, which now contains a slight preponderance of English titles. I am deeply indebted to David Henry Wilson,

who has managed to smooth out my sometimes cumbersome German sentences, making the text much more lively and accessible. The dedicated support of Janine Firges has been a huge help. She has devoted a great deal of time and scrupulous attention to the details of this English edition, weeding out mistakes and inconsistencies. Last but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Carina Lehnen from the Erich Schmidt Verlag, who has supported this translation project from the start and seen it through every stage of the printing process.

September 2019

Aleida Assmann

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