

Review:

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**Remi Hess & Christoph Wulf (1999) (Eds.) Grenzgänge. Über den Umgang mit dem Eigenen und dem Fremden [Walking the Border. On the Treatment of Self and Others]** (Europäische Bibliothek interkultureller Studien). Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 232 pages, ISBN 3-593-36138-8, DM 42.- / sFR 38.70 / öS 307.-

**Key words:**

intercultural studies, intercultural relations, Germany, France, DFJW, education

**Abstract:** This collection of essays deals mainly with experiences and outcomes of more than two decades of research undertaken in conjunction with the Deutsches Französisches Jugendwerk (DFJW, German-French Youth Council). In many of the essays, Ewald BRASS, long-time director of different departments of the DFJW, is honored. The book contains valuable insights and suggestions about intercultural work, yet deviates significantly from the topic suggested in the title.

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## 1. General Observations

Edited by two professors of education, this book includes twelve essays from a variety of perspectives and disciplines, including education, pedagogy, philosophy, sociology, and psychology. Many of the essays contain helpful suggestions as to how pedagogical work in an inter-cultural setting can be successful, and include a number of insightful reflections about the challenges and promises that a world increasingly marked by processes of globalization might face. Yet some of the essays hardly seem to fit into the overall topic which the title of the volume suggests, namely the issue of borders (geographical as well as mental) and the approach toward, or treatment of self (Eigenes) and things alien (Fremdes). Whereas a brief acknowledgment of support from the Deutsches Französisches Jugendwerk (DFJW, German-French Youth Council) for the publication of this volume, and a cryptic dedication to Ewald BRASS, long-time head of different departments of the DFJW (according to HESS initially in charge of Department IV—research and training, and later in Department VII—experimental programs and pedagogical research) provide hints that the book is in large part concerned with the DFJW and BRASS, the title and subtitle of the book fail to mention this important aspect of the book altogether. Either the title of the volume, or its subtitle, should have mentioned the fact that the volume in large parts seeks to pay tribute to Ewald BRASS; without such forthright

acknowledgment, the reader will at least initially be bewildered by the frequent references to both DFJW and BRASS. Regrettably, the reader learns—apart from many positive, personal testimonials about BRASS, and short, scattered references to different aspects of BRASS's work with the DFJW from 1974-1996, and about his Chilean-German-French descent—not much concrete information about the honoree. Not even the important question, whether BRASS moved from Department IV to Department VII (thus HESS, p.92), or whether the department itself merely was renumbered (thus BARBIER, p.121) is answered satisfactorily by the book. The introduction, presumably written by the editors, but not signed, contains a brief attempt to synthesize the subsequent twelve main essays under the general category of things intercultural to provide cohesion to the collection however the end result leaves the reader uninformed of how exactly the individual contributions form a coherent whole. [1]

## 2. Individual Essays

The first essay, by Christoph WULF, introduces the problem of "the other" in a differentiated, sophisticated fashion, suggesting mimesis as a potential method of approachment between self and other. In a second, brief essay, Klaus EDER advances a witty, post-enlightenment critique of multiculturalism as a "media production (Inszenierung) of commonality" (p.45) among different cultures, aimed at the avoidance of a war among civilizations. While such media production of presumed commonality will not necessarily achieve a better understanding, EDER argues, the attempt at communication and dialogue still remains paramount, if only to render the participants sensitive to unbridgeable gaps of (non-) understanding, and a developing self-reflective stance. [2]

Jacques DEMORGON's essay recalls two decades of research undertaken in conjunction with the DFJW, gathering together rather unrelated outcomes of that research, and providing a theoretical reflection on the processes and dialectics involved in such research. DEMORGON emphasizes the concept "transductive relationships" as a central experience in his work on intercultural relationships. According to DEMORGON, such relationships, "instead of emphasizing a radical cut between a closed identity and an alterity ... [bring about] the uniqueness of coming together" (p.71) and thus escape both a reductionist sameness, as well as a divisive alterity. [3]

Remi HESS, in a rather extensive essay, similarly nostalgically harks back to his experiences with the DFJW in general, and with Ewald BRASS in particular; much of the essay reads rather like an autobiography only somewhat tangentially related to the topic at hand. Thus one finds in HESS's essay loosely related reminiscences about his first meeting with BRASS, reflections about his family of origin, a great number of names of people HESS met in his career, occasionally brief descriptions about research projects, including minor details such as travel-reimbursements, and personal impressions about a wide variety of topics, including the German reunification, as well as reflections about his work as editor of a variety of publications. A common thread is missing from this jumble, and the occasional lapses in memory (p.87) makes it more difficult to benefit from this

essay. Michel BERNARD's essay also portrays BRASS as its center of attention, analyzing the coming together of different cultural backgrounds into one personality such as Ewald BRASS. BRASS's ethnic backgrounds (Chilean—German—French) serve as a background, against which BERNARD develops a reading of the "paradoxes of the intercultural," i.e. various coincidentia oppositorum coming together in the person of BRASS. [4]

Hans NICKLAS devotes his essay to ruminate about the possible tensions among different civilizations, taking Samuel HUNTINGDON (1993) as his point of departure, but coming to a very different conclusion. Utilizing the work of the early twentieth century Austrian Marxist Otto BAUER (1907), NICKLAS adumbrates a process of globalization that still leaves room for peculiarities of particular cultures / nations. Following BAUER, NICKLAS favors the process of "apperception" as a viable option to better understand the reception of foreign elements of culture into one's own: "the foreign elements undergo change and are modified in the process of reception, thus they become transformed to fit one's own culture" (p.132). René BARBIER, in a rather perceptive essay speculates about "small-spirited education" (p.135) and security-obsession that plague the educational-cultural systems of many nations and argues for a more open-minded educational vision that values spontaneity, intuition, and interpersonal relationships. Such values, BARBIER argues, help in shaping an identity that is critically aware of its own "lack of being" (Seinsmangel) (p.159) in its experience of the other, and thus allows for the realization that the self is essentially a "dynamic" (prozesshaftes), and interactive whole" (p.160). [5]

Jean-René LADMIRAL's essay on different modes of translation of classical texts stretches the framework of the collection beyond the tolerable, as it engages in a discussion about preferred modes of translation of classical texts. While the discussion itself is highly interesting (particularly in light of the fact that the essay itself is a translation from a French original), it neither fits the overall theme of the collection, nor does it contain any homage ad BRASS, either. Indeed, the paper seems to have been originally delivered to a conference of linguists, as an odd, obscure reference to future conference-proceedings, of which this essay claims to be a part, suggests (p.174). [6]

Gunter GEBAUER's essay constitutes a quite interesting reading of the Merchant of Venice and human vulnerability, yet the essay only tangentially touches on the issue of interaction between self and other. Gabrielle VARRO and Djaffar LESBET offer an insightful critique on the category of "mixed families," arguing against a privileging of mixed national origin as a determinative criterion for categorization of marriages. Ursula STUMMEYER analyses possible nexi between the understanding of male-female dichotomies and that of self-other. Juxtaposing critiques of Luce IRIGARAY (1989/1994) with issues deriving out of post-colonial studies, she points out important parallels between both dichotomies. In the last essay, Burkhard K. MÜLLER playfully recaptures the life of Ewald BRASS in a fairy-tale. [7]

### 3. Concluding Remarks

While some of the essays clearly fall outside the question under consideration, namely the issue of border and national or ethnic cultural identity within processes of increasing globalization, and while the many laudationes ad Ewald BRASS—deserving as they may be—distract the focus on the general question, many of the essays collected in this volume do provide insightful comments and helpful suggestions for intercultural work. Helpful, for example, is DEMORGON's remark that misunderstandings are oftentimes far too quickly "wished away." WULF's suggestion to approach the issue of the other through mimetic play is highly useful, and BARBIER's almost Buddhist suggestion to use meditation to challenge neurotic national security-obsession, while probably not highly practical, it is nevertheless an intercultural experience in its own right, almost reminiscent of WULF's mimesis. The collected essays also give witness to the importance of theoretical reflections about intercultural studies, such as the research made possible by the DFJW and Ewald BRASS. The translators of some of these essays, Hella BEISTER and Gabriele WEIGAND, deserve special mention, as their thankless job of translation from French to German is mentioned only briefly in passing. Only a few typographical and grammatical errors plague the volume. Notwithstanding the several shortcomings mentioned in the foregoing, the book does contain a number of helpful suggestions and reflections on intercultural praxis. [8]

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