

---

## M.Taugis on H.J. Grabbe & S. Schindler's (eds) *The Merits of Memory*.

---



### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7612>

DOI: 10.4000/ejas.7612

ISSN: 1991-9336

### Publisher

European Association for American Studies

### Electronic reference

"M.Taugis on H.J. Grabbe & S. Schindler's (eds) *The Merits of Memory*," *European journal of American studies* [Online], Book reviews, document 8, Online since 27 July 2009, connection on 31 August 2022.  
URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7612> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.7612>

---

This text was automatically generated on 31 August 2022.



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International - CC BY-NC 4.0  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

---

## M.Taugis on H.J. Grabbe & S. Schindler's (eds) *The Merits of Memory*.

---

- 1 Hans-Jürgen Grabbe, Sabine Schindler (editors), *The Merits of Memory. Concepts, Contexts, Debates*. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2008). 404 pp. ISBN 978-3-8253-5315-5.
- 2 *The Merits of Memory* presents the reader with the contributions to an international conference entitled "The Merits of Memory: Uses and Abuses of a Concept" which was held in June 2005 at the Leucorea Foundation in Wittenberg. In the introduction, Hans-Jürgen Grabbe and Sabine Schindler describe the historical and cultural context of the conference. They also explain that the goal of the conference was to assess and to explore the implications of the recent memory boom, focusing primarily but not exclusively on the United States. Each contribution investigates a specific manifestation of collective memory without ignoring the fact that collective memory is a problematic concept which has to be carefully defined and clarified. Thus most of the essays are both case studies and theoretical reflections on the concept of collective memory.
- 3 The book is divided into seven parts. In each part collective memory is studied in a specific relationship or context. The first part includes contributions from Jens Klenner, Juliane Schwarz-Bierschenk and David Glassberg, and concentrates on the relation between memory and space, examining in particular monuments and landscapes. In the second part, the focus is on the relationship between history, memory, and the quest for recognition: Patrick Hutton and Jay M. Winter contextualize the memory boom and assess the respective virtues, roles and uses of history and memory in historical context, while Peter Carrier analyzes the sociological functions of collective memory. The third part examines the relationship between politics and memory: Max Paul Friedman investigates the political uses of memory especially in the aftermath of war and dictatorship, and Kerwin Lee Klein shows the Christian Right's religious and political exploitation of the discourse on memory and the theologization of American history in the Christian conservatives' crusade against

secularism. The fourth part is devoted to the collective memory of immigration with contributions from Roger Daniels, Joachim Baur, and Heike Bungert, while Sabine Schindler evaluates the attempts to redefine collective memory as a transnational or cosmopolitan concept. In the fifth part, the connection between individual and collective memory is scrutinized in a number of textual and visual representations of American history, among them Eva Boesenberg's essay on the slave narratives, and Kristina Rödder's contribution on WWII. In this section Volker Depkat shows that autobiography can be seen as an intricate bridge between individual and collective memory, and between memory and historiography. The sixth part examines the forms, effects and implications of certain visual representations of the American past. Ingrid Gessner studies the visualization of Japanese-American Internment experience presented in a museum and a traveling exhibition which was finally converted into an online virtual exhibition. Karsten Fitz explores the visual representation of women's participation in the American revolution in mid-nineteenth-century history painting, pictorial histories, lithographs and woodcuts. Winfried Fluck investigates the representation of the Vietnam war in a selection of American movies including *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*. In the seventh part Udo J. Hebel suggests several promising avenues of research including the places of transnational memory and commemoration, and the issue of reductive and selective representation, to name but a few.

- 4 On the whole, this collection of essays steers an interesting middle course between two extremes: on the one hand, the vituperative rejection of the concept of collective memory as an elusive notion and a misleading metaphor exploited for political purposes, and on the other, the uncritical valorization or adoption of this concept. The book's balanced approach is characterized by a justified emphasis on a rigorous investigation of the concept of collective memory. Jens Klenner's essay and Sabine Schindler's persuasive criticism of the notion of cosmopolitan memory exemplify this intellectual rigor.
- 5 More specifically, in the essays, this theoretical investigation does not confine itself to the recapitulation and clarification of the central concepts introduced by Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora: collective memory, *lieux de mémoire* (emblematic sites and other symbolic elements referring to a communal past and in which memory is crystallized), and *milieux de mémoire* (the settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience). The contributors' investigations also enrich and criticize the previous theoretical framework defined by these central concepts. For example, Jens Klenner shows that Maurice Halbwachs' definition of collective memory presupposes the existence of a community living in a geographically restricted area and characterized by mutual beliefs and social cohesion, which is hard to find in a context of social fragmentation. Jens Klenner notes that this fragmentation was perceived and deplored by Pierre Nora in his seminal text on the realms of memory. Many contributors also show the relevance and complementarity of the conceptualizations of collective memory offered by Jan Assmann, Aleida Assmann, and Jeffrey Olick.
- 6 More importantly, the previous conceptualizations of collective memory did not take into account a number of elements which enrich and complexify the analysis of collective memory, for instance the role of individual interaction or dialogue with the sites or places of memory. According to Jens Klenner, this interaction can be analyzed thanks to Michel de Certeau's reconceptualization of space as an element "practiced,"

altered and appropriated by individual pedestrians or visitors. Thus Klenner shows how the collective memory embodied by the monuments or places of memory is actually reappropriated and changed by individual memorial practices, that is, by the individual uses of these spaces of memory. Similarly, many contributions show that even if collective memory is often a construction or representation of the past which is sometimes used to gain social recognition and political power, it does not only lead to cultural conflicts or political oppression. Conflicting collective memories can also produce cultural interaction and change, accommodation and compromise, for example in the landscape installation studied by Juliane Schwarz-Bierschenk: Albuquerque's *Cuarto Centenario* memorial to the Spanish settlement of New Mexico.

- 7 *The Merits of Memory* also suggests that although collective memory is a concept that certainly requires further clarification and justifies critical interrogation, it is still an unavoidable, albeit imperfect, concept to explore the emergence and manifestations of neglected memories in social groups subjected to various forms of discrimination, oppression, and domination.

Michaël Taugis, University of Poitiers, France.