

## **Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies**

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Is memory an example of successful adaptation among homo sapiens? – this hypothesis permeates the 40 chapters of the *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*. This volume edited by Anna Lisa Tota and Trevor Hagen approaches the field of memory studies from multiple perspectives, from sociology and philosophy to psychology and biology even.

The book is divided into six parts, complemented with index, illustrations, all carefully edited. Part One presents a number of theories and perspectives. Here, main concepts of memory studies are discussed with the hindsight of several decades that have passed since they first stormed social sciences. Collective, communicative and cultural memory as well as their relation to history all receive attention there. Patrick H. Hutton's thorough analysis of Pierre Nora's 'sites of memory thirty years after' deserves special praise for its careful reconstruction of the process in which this concept arose, as well as for a succinct and effective exploration of the criticism surrounding Nora's theory. Similarly, Jeffrey Olick's reflection on different national traditions with regards to history and their impact on how memory is being 'performed' in various countries contains revealing insights. Ann Rigney's interpretation of culture and memory as non-genetic inheritance is a must for understanding the volume as a whole.

Somewhat less consistently, Part Two ("Cultural artifacts, symbols and social sciences") contains several texts – some with a philosophical touch – which see memory in terms of responsibility and in the context of routines which relieve us from the burden of continuous decision-making (as in the term 'organizational memories' coined by Thomas S. Eberle). Hans Ruin's study on the way memory operates in relation to the dead tackles the important phenomenon of the politicization of bodily remains and the cultural meaning of 'proper burial' and funeral rites.

Part Three ("Public, transnational and transitional memories") deals with the processes of globalization. Here, David Inglis offers an obligatory and noteworthy reflection on the de-contextualization of the memory of the Holocaust. In another article, Trevor Hagen analyses patterns of counter-memories running alongside official memories in East Central Europe with a focus on Bohemia. Another very interesting contribution is the chapter on urban spaces and city cultures, whose author invites us to look at what physically surrounds us as not only

the product of top-down efforts, but also of mnemonic needs that the urban residents evince. The last chapter, introducing the Yellow Star Project, could also be read as an introduction to Part Four of the book, dealing with 'today's digital ecosystem' and technologies of memory. Tourism, literature, music, cinema, and photography are examined in the context of their impact on cultural and memory formation. Combined with recent digital developments, they may have a uniting, rather than separating, effect on the cultures they originate from, as observed by Carrie Collenberg-Gonzalez. At the same time, digitalization and technology may help to create desired, but fake pasts easier than ever. Those manipulations are one of the topics of Olga Shevchenko's chapter, in which she provides a good overview of the state of the art in the field of "photography and memory".

Given that "candles burn low, flowers wilt, and paper decomposes" (p. 290), memorial work has always reached out for more reliable and durable means, though even statues made of stone may be destroyed at moments of political upheaval. In the arguably most interesting contribution to the volume, Zachary Metz hints at the transformative power of successful memory sites, with a special focus on Holocaust memorials.

The contributors to Part Five ("Terrors, violence and disasters") take us on a journey from South-East Asia, Japan, through the USA and Chile to Italy, Spain and Great Britain, analyzing the struggles over memories of both manmade violent events and natural disasters. The authors observe as the Irish Potato Famine, the genocide in Cambodia, the Chernobyl incident, earthquakes in Japan or terrorist attacks in Italy, New York, Madrid and London are transformed from national to cosmopolitan narratives of an increasingly global concern. The authors suggest that some of those events have never been 'adequately' inscribed into local public debates, and thus remained 'unaccomplished memories' on the local level, but recently transpired globally. Alexandra Delano's and Benjamin Nienass's thought-provoking text examines the contested memories of 9/11 in the context of unknown immigrants, who died that day, but remain invisible in the WTC memorial. The authors ponder questions of inclusion and exclusion from the community of grief. Other chapters deal with similar problems of political divisions overshadowing memory, institutional amnesia, and conspiracy theories being the result of silencing certain topics. Chapter 33 on the 2005 London bombing contains interesting reflections on the status of victim, usually one-dimensionally presented in the media "as being entirely faultless in all their attributes" (p. 432). This brings to mind and could be complemented by a reference to the recent scholarship of Daniele Giglioli and his philosophical reflection on the position of victims in current Western societies ("a victim as the hero of our times"). [1]

Part Six ("Body and ecosystems") explores memory from the perspective of bodily functions and the place of man in nature. Here, the authors analyze memory disorders and the role of confabulation in social relations, respectively, as well as one particular aspect of memory studies that has become increasingly intriguing for scholars in recent years, namely that of body memories: Can the body remember? Questions of phantom limb syndrome or the way our fingers move on the keyboard may be interesting for a general reader, but the last chapters dealing, for instance, with heart or cellular rhythm and the emergence of cell memory, with evolution and soundscapes, lack obvious conceptual links with the initial parts of the volume.

This is also my primary criticism of this work. What was the purpose of such a broad compilation of texts from disparate disciplines? Its main positive effect is that we get a sense of the multiple perspectives from which the topic may be dealt with. But most readers will inevitably have to skip major parts of the book, which will remain

for them either uninteresting or simply incomprehensible.

The earlier chapters will be of interest for social scientists and historians as well as for newcomers to the field, as many authors made an effort to present the state of the art in the disciplines they represent. Even though the handbook does not explicitly discuss any of Poland's memory issues, it may of course be useful in understanding the processes taking place there. For scholars dealing with Polish memory culture, it offers a broad theoretical background complementing recent major publication projects like *Modi Memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci* (2014) and a growing list of titles dealing with Poland's difficult memory and commemoration of World War II in general and the Holocaust in particular (see the most recent books by Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Dariusz Libionka and others). Two important perspectives recurrent in the volume deserve particular attention in this regard. The first one deals with the potential of scholarship to provide visibility for neglected and ignored experiences in public memory. The second deals with memory as having healing properties for both individuals and groups. Trauma incorporated into identity and the implications of that process are important elements in the chapters written by Jeffrey Goldfarb, Alejandro Baer, and Natan Sznaider. They reveal a double-edged feature of memory. Through its liberating force, it has the potential to open up "closed" societies as it did in the 1980s in the East European communist bloc. However, it may also work conversely by closing "open" societies, by empowering xenophobia, if one considers contemporary developments in some parts of the very same geographical region. If one wants to understand the mechanisms behind the latter, in order to learn how to counteract this process, the "Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies" will offer a kaleidoscope of different approaches and explanations.

[1] Daniele Giglioli, *Critica della vittima: un esperimento con l'etica*, Roma: Nottetempo 2014.◆◆◆

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