

## Reviews

**Save As...Digital Memories**, edited by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Hardback, pp. 209, £52.00, ISBN: 978-0-230-54252-5. Language: English

The new text *Save As...Digital Memories* discusses how new technologies change what we remember. Cheap data storage and easy retrieval of digital information on a global scale are the two essential elements that make issues around memory different from other ways of remembering in previous times. Online memorials, blogs, mobile personal devices, and social networking web sites are among the modes of digital archiving discussed in this book.



History is written by the victors. This is a famous quote attributed to former wartime British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Although Churchill is widely believed to have uttered these words at some point in his career, there is no physical record to prove this. During his lifetime, documentation was primarily written or photographed, and neither of these formats has captured this utterance from the prominent statesman. On another level, this well-known truism and its variants address a crucial aspect of how societies remember. The preservation of collective memory depends on the power structures that are able to preserve it into the future.

When orality was the primary mode of communication and transmission of knowledge, the best orators and those who had the power of the word dominated the narratives and information that was passed on from one generation to the next. The technologisation of the word through writing and the rise of the printed word in recent centuries relegated orality in favour of literacy as the dominant mode of disseminating knowledge from one generation to the next. The subsequent invention of other ways of capturing visual and audio occurrences has made it possible for memories to be preserved in more vivid ways, giving rise to another aphorism: a picture speaks a thousand words.

With the advent of digital technology it would seem that much of what goes on in our everyday lives is captured through the same technology we use to communicate: emails, websites, photos, and a slew of other methods of getting our thoughts and ideas across to others are immediately captured, or at least have the potential of being captured, in ways that are unprecedented in history. Thus it would seem that history is no longer written exclusively by

the more powerful social forces but multiple narratives are remembered through new technologies that can capture everything we do, from the trivial to the most significant moments of our lives.

How are digital media technologies shaping human memory? This is the central question tackled by all the writers in this collection of essays edited by Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading. Aside from a well-placed collective 'Introduction' to the book and the various sections of the volume, each of the three editors contributes an essay. Their essays fall neatly into each out of the three sections that make this anthology: discourses, forms and practices.

Andrew Hoskins' 'The Mediatisation of Memory' positions the first section on 'Digital Media Discourses' in the broader framework of memory studies. In doing so, Hoskins picks Frederick Bartlett's classic text on the psychology of memory from 1932, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, as a way to approach the subsequent scholarly literature in this area focusing on the ways media shape collective memories. By contrast, Paul Longley Arthur's 'Saving Lives: Digital Biography and Life Writing' zooms in on personal memories. In examining Web 2.0 in the context of life writing, he discusses the future of biography in an environment where public self-expression has taken a turn towards the sharing of the everyday in equal measure with the extraordinary. The other digital memory discourse captured in the first subsection of the book is that of fictional narrative. Sidney Eve Matrix reflects on the links between technology, memory and identity that dominate the cyberpunk film genre. *Vanilla Sky*, *The Final Cut* and *The Matrix* are central to her analysis of the three ways memories are handled, manipulated and remembered in this genre.

'Memobilia: The Mobile Phone and the Emergence of Wearable Memories' by Anna Reading opens the second part of the book, 'Digital Memory Forms'. The chapters in this section address the dialectics of history and memory, the organic and the inorganic, and 'old' and 'new' media. Reading examines how memory forms are shaped by the mobile phone through a study the use of the camera in phones used by victims of the 7 July 2005 London Underground terrorist bombings, and further research with young people on general telephone use in the same city in 2006 and 2008. In the process she coins the term 'memobile' to discuss the mobile phone as a prosthetic or wearable personal device capable of memory capture as well as mediation of communication. Andrew Jakubowicz explores a different form in 'Remembering and Recovering Shanghai: Seven Jewish Families [Re]-connect in Cyberspace'. Taking as his starting point the webumentary about the Jewish diasporas in Shanghai during World War II he co-created under the title *The Menorah of Fang Bang Lu* in 2002, Jakubowicz argues that Web 2.0 technology can change people from passive consumers of history to interactive researchers of enhanced forms of disseminating and archiving collective memory. Moving back to a digital format that has lost popularity in recent years, 'Archiving the Gaze: Relation-Images, Adaptation, and Digital Mnemotechnologies' by Bruno Lessard takes the CD-ROM form as its subject of study. Lessard's particular focus is on a CD-ROM produced by the artist Jean-Louis Boissier about the work and writings of the French philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the process, Lessard considers Boissier's assertion that images are not understood in isolation but through the relations they enact, creating new meanings in the archive that were not present in the original event they document.

The four chapters in the third and final section of the book, 'Digital Memory Practices', deal with specific uses of the Internet to create memories and histories. These practices include personal digital archives, wikis, blogs, online museums, digital stories, digitised oral histories and social networking web sites. The popular social networking web site Facebook is the subject of Joanne Garde-Hansen's 'MyMemories: Personal Digital Archive Fever and Facebook' that uses Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1996) as a theoretical framework from which to launch an investigation of the power structures embedded in archival practices. It is very timely to see such a contemporary location for the sharing and storage of personal memories be critically analysed beyond the issues of privacy that dominated the popular press in the months immediately after this book was published. The critical stance towards commercial hegemonies continues in 'Digital Storytelling and the Performance of Memory' by Jenny Kidd. In this chapter, the importance of public service broadcasting in enabling user-generated content is contrasted with the profit driven and revenue seeking websites that dominate the Internet. Margaret Clarke's 'The Online Brazilian Museu de Pessoa' maintains a similar point of view in relation to a non-Western perspective on memory preservation through a curated collection of memories at the virtual Museum of the Person's online digital archive founded in Brazil. By contrast, the closing chapter, 'Remixing Memory in Digital Media' by Shaun Wilson, argues that we are at a serious risk of being overwhelmed with data through the new collection and preservation technologies that are available to the masses in ways that are unprecedented in history. Controversially, Wilson proposes that it is necessary to forget to make memories valuable, because it is the ephemerality of memory that makes it precious.

All in all, *Save As...Digital Memories* is an excellent collection of essays about an area of study that merits closer attention in the humanities. Although it is a broad survey of the main issues related to the subject, it avoids superficiality. While some of the themes raised in many chapters in this book deserve to be explored in much greater depth, this collection offers a very useful map for what is as yet a relatively uncharted territory in memory studies, particularly because the most significant technological improvements are fairly recent and remain in a rapid state of development.

## References

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

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