

**Saved from Oblivion: Documenting the Daily from Diaries to Web Cams.** *By Andreas Kitzmann.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004. 204 pp. ISBN 0820461954 (pbk.).

*Saved from Oblivion*, a book in Peter Lang's Digital Formations collection, is York University Andreas Kitzmann's first book. Explaining the origins of the book is a tale: you find in a subway car, in which all the seats are empty except yours, a notebook that is clearly a personal diary. Would you dare open it and flip through the pages? Maybe, maybe not. It's up to you. What strikes Kitzmann in this is "the question of why anyone would feel the need to rigorously document the thoughts and deeds of everyday life. And more curiously, why anyone would want to spend time going over such material" (p. 1). Without answering these profound questions, Kitzmann raises another related issue: what is the status of our relation to the technologies we use to write down and record our daily life? And what is the difference, if there is one, between the acts of writing down our daily activities in a diary and performing it directly on a Web cam? What about the *place* of the media itself? Could this place influence our relation to the intimate sphere of our life?

For Kitzmann, the notion of place "can be understood literally as the surface or object upon or within which the act of self-documentation is inscribed . . . . Place is something that is experienced, lived, negotiated, and constantly in flux" (p. 6). Three media—the personal diary, the home video, and the networked Web cam—are thus approached from four points of view, which in turn construct the four parts of the book: media place, private place, real place, and time place. Kitzmann emphasizes that "[t]he aim is not to create a tidy chronology or typology of 'media experiences' but rather to probe the manner in which a given experimental realm . . . is framed, structured, expanded, and contracted by the general or archetypal modes of self-documentation featured in this study" (pp. 99-100).

The first part of the book concentrates on the appearance of the media. The use of the diary arose along with the emergence of an ego, that of the camera marked the rise of stardom, and the network was developed in a postmodern era of continuous change and hybridizing. The second part focuses on the public/private dichotomy. The purely private is associated with the diary and home videos. But what we are facing with the Web cam is a public privacy, where the private and the public are blurred but not interpenetrated. As Kitzmann argues, "There must be a certain conception of privacy that can be countered with and thus employed as a resource for public scrutiny and consumption" (p. 82). The third part concerns reality: positive reality is the banal one, as experienced in daily life; negative reality is one which can be created via computers; while returned reality is associated with the use of networks, by which we could catch a glimpse of "the Real Thing and the rush that can momentarily be experienced or even anticipated from getting close to a moment of authentic experience" (p. 116). The fourth part concerns time. The diarist lives in still time, where she thinks about her life and tries to understand herself by taking account of her past, present, and future actions. Future time, on the contrary, is in movement. Photographs and home movies are to be placed in that category. When you videotape or photograph your children, for instance, you think about their growth, and about how time passes so rapidly. Real time, thirdly, is obviously a connected time. On television and the Internet, we experience a so-called present, even if it's just a screen with nothing behind it. Further, on the Internet, real time can be communitarian; we are part of a whole set of potentialities, in which we can play a role, be an agent. In network time, we are facing "quasi corporealities" (an idea drawn from Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual*, 2002), for which the notions of presence and absence, of real and unreal, are pointless.

Kitzmann's aim was "to probe a selection of contemporary forms of self-documentation in order to better understand the relationships between media topologies and the material and experiential conditions encountered within" (pp. 3-4). In this, he succeeds. But it's difficult not to see his book as a history of self-documentation media. The chapters are orga-

nized in a technological way in a manner that charts the development of technology—from the simplest to the more complex—which is noticeably parallel with the course of time. Kitzmann, as a champion of hybrids and flux, could have mixed its objects more, instead of separating them in chapters.

This is not to deny the merits of this book, for it offers a great many thoughtful ideas. The problem is that the author should have treated them more thoroughly. The notions of quasi-corporeality, of place as a continuous flux, of network time, of the dirty aura (which is “all about the Real Thing and the rush that can momentarily be experienced or even anticipated from getting close to a moment of authentic experience,” p. 116), and the possible-worlds theory could have benefited from a lengthier discussion.

In sum, this book is very well written, and the style is fresh and dynamic; for instance, each part is introduced by the ongoing process of the depart situation, that of the subway. There are some minor copyediting errors: Jennycam instead of Jennicam (p. 115), Orson Wells instead of Welles (p. 155), and Paul Virilio given as the author of a book by Jean Baudrillard (p. 156). However, *Saved from Oblivion* fulfills its objectives. Although I would have appreciated it had Kitzmann gone further in some interesting fields, such as the dirty aura, he provides us with a thorough and elegant contribution to the study of self-documentation media. My wish is that he soon takes his pen—or, more probably, his keyboard—and goes further in those fields he pointed to.

#### Reference

Massumi, Brian. (2002). *Parables for the virtual*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

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