In *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*, Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister take on the ambitious task of compiling a unique collection of essays exploring the relationship between photography and cultural memory. To their credit, the essays in this volume successfully demonstrate that the meaning of any photograph is constantly shifting, fluctuating, and subject to renewal—an observation that challenges conventional readings of the photograph’s capacity to offer a conclusive or total picture of the social world it portrays. The inspiration for *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts* was a symposium of the same title that occurred in the Institute for Cultural Research at Lancaster University. A primary aim of the book is to develop new strategies for reading photographs while contributing to a growing debate around cultural memory that seeks to redefine cultural memorialization so it is perceived “as an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future” (p. 4). Contributors analyze war photographs, family snapshots, images of colonized landscapes, and art photography within the context of the places where these images can be viewed. The successful combination of varied insights, from work on cultural memory and visual culture to analysis of photographic acts, makes this a unique collection of essays, an exemplary model of interdisciplinary scholarship, and a valuable asset to Berghahn Books’ “Remapping Cultural History” series.

“Locating Memory: An Introduction,” provides a succinct overview of some important approaches to the analysis of photographs and photography. Kuhn and McAllister also raise key questions about photography as a medium of representation, encouraging students and scholars of communications alike to engage critically with photographic acts. The book is then organized into three thematic sections: “Identities,” “Dis/locations,” and “Reframings”. The contributions in each flow together logically to form a coherent body of scholarship that “explore[s] the emancipatory potential for reframing, through photographic acts, our ‘normative’ narratives of gender, nationhood, ‘race’ and ethnicity, our conventional understandings of the relationship between the past and present and the ways in which our fields of vision are structured by relations of control” (p. 7). The most striking essays address some of these concerns while offering interesting perspectives for exploring relationships between photography and cultural memory.

Contributions to “Identities” examine important familial, national, racial, and ethnic dimensions of the historical relationship between visual practices and power. Andrea Walsh’s piece on the work of Native artists Jeffery Thomas and Greg Staats is exemplary of the potential for photographic acts to produce alternative ways of seeing and representing First Nations identities. Challenging conventional representations of the collective experience of Aboriginal peoples, Thomas and Staats avoid recognizable motifs and portray individual experiences of place, history, and identity in postcolonial Canada. For Walsh, the artists’ complex and multilayered visual practices help collapse an existing void between public histories and the private experiences of First Nations peoples (p. 49).

By identifying the feelings of dislocation experienced through present efforts to relive the past, contributions to “Dis/locations” help unpack commonly held assumptions about the role of visual practices in understanding the relationship between past and present. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer provide a fascinating account of their journey to find
Vapniarcka, a former Nazi concentration camp. Seeking to link Holocaust “postmemory” to place, the authors discover a general loss of the memories they are searching for among local inhabitants. An old photograph eventually leads to the site and allows the group to temporarily relocate a fragment of this forgotten past. However, participants are left with uncertainty about what the search has actually accomplished, making it apparent that even with visual documentation, locating the past continues to be a complex and contradictory process that never produces perfect results.

“Reframings” contains three essays examining the way cultural memories associated with photography (public, personal, or artistic) are contingent upon the shifting contexts within which images are viewed. Patrick Hagopian’s essay demonstrates how the legacy of certain Vietnam War photographs is informed by prevailing interpretations of the historical experience and how readings of these images evolve over time. Readers are also reminded of important visual, psychological, and political factors that must be accounted for when passing judgments on the public impact of a particular photograph. Hagopian sums up these sentiments by noting that

“[a] photographic act does not end with the tripping of the shutter and the exposure of the film; nor with the creation of the image in the processing lab. Nor even does it end with the first publication of the photograph. The photographic act is mirrored to infinity with each new publication of the photograph and each new viewing.” (p. 201)

This notion of the photographic act being mirrored to infinity directs attention to an important absence in *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*—a limited emphasis on the increasing proliferation of digital imaging technologies and their impact on the construction of knowledge. Just as the editors make reference to Benjamin, Kracauer, and other writers motivated by a shift from older mechanical technologies toward modern electronic modes of communication (p. 5), today scholars must examine the rapid dissemination and widespread influence of digital photography. To be fair, a short footnote in Kuhn and McAllister’s introduction addresses this absence by commenting on the need for research that explores “the implications of digital imaging technologies for the future uses of photography, in invoking, or erasing, memory and location” (p. 17). Consequently, questions and concerns raised about analogue images throughout the book offer multiple points of departure for critical analysis of these very recent and revolutionary developments in photography. For instance, future work might consider how personal, familial, local, ethnic, and national dimensions of locating memory are influenced by digital photographic acts.

Through *Locating Memory*, we develop an enriched awareness of photography’s uniqueness as a medium of representation. Together, the essays in this collection “seek out the partial views that have been eradicated from our social landscape; they search for temporal disjunctures that evade linear time; [and] they look for the instabilities that show power is not as pervasive as it seems” (p. 15). As a result, looking at photographs takes on new meaning, as we are left to consider the implications of imaging technologies and visual practices that produce partial, unstable, and tenuous knowledge of our social world.

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