Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form
Routledge Studies in Rhetoric and Communication

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   Sighting Memory
   Edited by Anne Teresa Demo and
   Bradford Vivian
Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form
Sighting Memory

Edited by Anne Teresa Demo and Bradford Vivian
for Noah—
the brightest and most memorable part of our lives
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Enter the word “memory” into any internet search engine. The majority of results will include information on purchasing memory cards, flash drives, random access memory upgrades, and all manner of hardware and software for personal computing. Memory is increasingly synonymous in popular usage with processes of information storage and retrieval through visually-based technologies. The profound influence of such media on basic definitions of memory is evident in the rapidly expanding list of English terms that associate the work of remembering with the workings of computer technology: memory mapping, memory chip, memory cycle, memory cell, memory card, memory caching, memory disk, memory bank, memory store, and others. Already plentiful associations between memory and visual media will be even more axiomatic in the future. In January of 2010, the Apple corporation released its eagerly anticipated tablet computer, the “iPad,” which technology analysts have described as a possible “fifth” or “final” screen, meaning that it would seamlessly integrate all previous media screens—film, television, personal computers, and portable communications devices—into one portal. To remember in late modernity is to store, send, or retrieve content through a digital constellation of increasingly integrated visual channels.

But the results of one’s hypothetical internet search will also yield, interspersed among these predominant findings, a smaller number of old-fashioned resources: personal memory aids. One can easily access in cyberspace a variety of organizations boasting improved memory skills for a diversity of personal applications, from college students studying for exams to elderly people hoping to offset the cognitive effects of aging. Such resources of personal memory training represent contemporary self-help equivalents to the classical ars memoriae, the art of memory with which students in the Greco-Roman and later European traditions acquired copious knowledge of the arts, humanities, and sciences by acquiring habits of powerful mental recall. A simple internet search thus provides a suggestive juxtaposition between contemporary technologies of memory and the classical art of memory, between impersonal media of instant data retrieval and the personal discipline of rigorously honing one’s capacities for memorization and cognitive agility over the course of a lifetime.
Associations between memory and visual phenomena supply the common denominator between these apparently antithetical paradigms of memory (the one impersonal and technological, the other personal and artistic). Memory is fundamentally visual in either case. The panoply of available memory hardware and software fuels the omnipresent visual environments of late modernity. Memory in computational or digital form is noteworthy not only for its technological aspects but because the reorganization of space and time it engenders has accordingly transformed the content and appearance of cultural memory writ large. The mediated sum of popular culture forms is now preserved indefinitely, on any number of viewable databases, and the historical artifacts that populate museums or other archives are increasingly accessible in virtual as well as physical space.

Individual proficiency in the classical art of memory depended on a host of visual exercises, and contemporary techniques of memory improvement continue to rely on visually-based learning. The *ars memoriae* required orators to conjure elaborate mental images of roomy palaces or public spaces in order to memorize lengthy and complex discourses. “The classical sources” of this art, Frances Yates remarks, “seem to be describing inner techniques which depend on visual impressions of almost incredible intensity.” Hence, she surmises, “the ancient memories were trained by an art which reflected the art and architecture of the ancient world, which could depend on faculties of intense visual memorization”—on capacities for “seeing the places, seeing the images stored on the places” of what one wished to remember. Present-day programs of personal memory enhancement embrace psychological models of sensory input that prioritize visual memorization and recall (as in the examples of flash cards or object-recognition memory quizzes). Both personal and computational, or artistic and digital, memories find their *raison d’être* in the visual media upon which they rely. To remember, then as now, is to see.

A variety of historical roots nourish modern metaphorical affinities between images and memory. Plato’s likening of the memory in our souls to a wax tablet upon which experiences or sensations leave impressions of varying endurance remains one of the most canonical representations of memory as visual media. Traditional associations between memory and images have acquired renewed importance in contemporary society, at a time when visually-based technologies are routinely employed in both grand and modest efforts to preserve the past amid rapid social change. Numerous studies of visual culture explore the artistic, social, and political significance of myriad visual artifacts; numerous studies of public memory analyze diverse ways in which communities fashion, preserve, and transform representations (or images) of their shared past. *Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form* investigates myriad intersections among visual and memorial forms in modern art, politics, and society. The subtitle of this volume—*Sighting Memory*—is a trope meant to express its basic theme: the following chapters generate valuable insights concerning not only how
memories may be seen (or sighted) in visual form but also how visual forms constitute noteworthy material sites of memory.

The case studies that comprise this book expand our understanding of intersections among visual and memorial forms by scrutinizing the simultaneous preservation and loss of memory that can occur through visual means—or, by the same token, the simultaneous permanence and transience of images that assist personal and collective recollection alike. The operating principles of both the classical *ars memoriae* and contemporary technologies of memory suggest that visual media can efficiently and reliably hypostasize the putative contents of memory. Whether in digital storage or in one’s well-kept mental storehouse, we presume an ability to mechanistically retrieve either part or all of our memories through some form of sight (be it externally or internally directed). Our volume is motivated not by the goal of simply identifying metaphorical associations between visual and memorial forms; we propose, more substantively, that one may glean a host of insights into material intersections among visual culture and practices of memory by exploring in equal measure the potency and fallibility of images as mediums of the past or, conversely, by examining the simultaneously authentic yet manipulated qualities of memory as conjured through visual modes. This collection adds to existing scholarship on visual culture and collective memory an enhanced awareness of the profoundly significant paradoxes of presence and absence, of preservation and dissolution, inherent in efforts to remember through visual means or to render visible the contents of memory.

One of the most spectacular (in the full sense of that term) contemporary illustrations of these paradoxes concerns the digital alteration of photographs documenting the 2006 Israel-Lebanon conflict. Reuters news agency became embroiled in an international scandal when it was forced to admit that at least two images of the conflict it published were photographically manipulated before being widely distributed. The most widely reported incident concerned Adnan Hajj, a longtime Reuters photographer based in the Middle East, who altered one of his photographs of an Israeli air strike on Beirut by dramatically multiplying and enhancing the plumes of dark smoke rising from the city, thereby suggesting an even more destructive Israeli assault. Hajj’s photojournalistic doctoring was only one instance of a more general wave of photojournalistic manipulations featured in press coverage of the Israel-Lebanon conflict apparently intended to turn international opinion against Israel. Presumably raw and unmediated visual evidence of Israeli aggression, however, was extensively fabricated. The wildly reversible status of such images, which signified both objective truth and subjective fabrications of truth, indicates profound implications for popular memories of local, national, and international events. Hajj’s dramatically embellished photographs were globally reproduced and disseminated via numerous media outlets, thus becoming immediately affixed in international memories of a historic and geopolitically significant military conflict.
Yet the memories in question changed dramatically when the visual sham was revealed. Hajj’s photojournalistic manipulations—originally published as seemingly authentic documents of death and destruction—now document the very ease with which one may employ commonly available digital software in order to influence public perceptions of historical events. Image and memory, then, not only share the same material substance; we are increasingly habituated to experiencing that substance as a source of verisimilitude and chicanery at once.

*Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form* presents a detailed and thematically organized analysis of such complex material (and not merely metaphorical) intersections among memory and visual forms that will broaden our understanding of their mutual provenance. The volume builds upon and synthesizes a hitherto loosely related cluster of inquiries into past and present associations between visual and memorial forms. Its primary contribution is to demonstrate more concretely the potentially indivisible union of seeing and remembering in modern art, society, and politics—to show how visual artifacts materially facilitate practices of remembrance and, conversely, how the work of memory consists in viewing the past from an artful or strategically selected vantage. Our contributors aptly address these thick imbrications among visual and memorial dynamics from international as well as interdisciplinary perspectives: the case studies to come feature a wide spectrum of not only disciplinary perspectives but also cultural experiences, encompassing Cuban, European, North American, and Pacific (in other words, global) practices of spectatorship and remembrance. Any narrowly defined disciplinary or cultural approach to the central theme of this volume, we contend, would fail to account sufficiently for the patently transnational and intercultural character of seeing as a mode or remembering, or of remembering as a mode of seeing, in modern public culture.

Modern scholars of memory frequently analyze the use of visual artifacts to commemorate the past, as in the cases of public monuments, memorials, architecture, cinema, or other visual media. The respective work of Andreas Huyssen, James Young, and Barbie Zelizer are especially prominent examples of such scholarship. Each of these commanding figures in the field of memory studies investigates the form and function of collective memory through visual phenomena, ranging from urban environments, conceptual art, and monumental symbolism to photojournalism, documentary film, and popular culture artifacts.

The diverse interdisciplinary field of visual culture concomitantly demonstrates how visual artifacts gain their social, political, and moral significance by representing noteworthy historical events or by manipulating dynamics of time and space. Indeed, early commentaries on photography and cinema marveled at their ability to preserve the past in palpable authenticity. Preoccupations with these dimensions of photography suffuse classic volumes on the subject by Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Alan Trachtenberg. The notion that photography is inherently a medium of
memory is palpable in Sontag’s famous claim that “To collect photographs is to collect the world,” that they “appropriate the thing photographed.” Contemporary studies of visual culture examine the dynamic ways that visual representations in general acquire historical or memorial meaning as a result of their cultural and technological circulation. The respective scholarly projects of W. J. T. Mitchell, James Elkins, and Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaities emphasize the intrinsically malleable significance of images as such.

Numerous contemporary visual artists and designers, finally, explore cultural preoccupations with memory characteristic of the present era. Artists of all stripes, ranging from Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus* to Doris Salcedo’s post-minimalist sculpture, exhibit delicate sensitivities to how one’s chosen visual aesthetic either accommodates or forecloses specific kinds of recollection. From photography and digital media to public art installations and conceptual performances, contemporary artists routinely demonstrate the power of visual forms to evoke compelling senses of memory while also dramatizing its personal, cultural, and technological variability.

These different realms of academic study and cultural activity, concerning either memory or visual form, draw from scattered sources and exemplars among their counterparts; yet they remain substantially separate domains of inquiry or endeavor. Some of the most authoritative anthologies on either subject include individual studies of images that involve themes of memory or individual studies of memory grounded in visual representations; in either case, however, one *topos* retains notable primacy over the other. Artists whose work explores questions of memory and vision and scholars of visual culture or public memory, moreover, seldom appear in a common venue for the expressed purpose of concerted interdisciplinary exchange. *Rhetoric, Remembrance, and Visual Form* furnishes that venue.

Interspersing the work of visual artists and designers among more conventional academic scholarship is crucial to the aims of this volume. Artistic works reproduced and analyzed in chapters to come illustrate vividly the curious paradox that defines material intersections among visual cultures and cultures of remembrance in late modernity: the perception that visual representations of temporal events are both trustworthy and illusory, that the recollected past in visual artifacts can seem not only authentic but hyper-real; yet the past as such and the visual media through which we view it (or re-member it) are ephemeral and inherently polysemic cultural forms. Such is the state of both spectatorship and remembrance, or remembrance as spectatorship, in late modernity (as illustrated by the example of the Reuters agency’s embarrassingly refutable visual evidence). The forms of visual media that we entrust to preserve memories of the past (photography, recorded testimonies, online archives, and more) function selectively, and are inherently susceptible to distortion, such that they
deprive us of sight and memory precisely in appearing to furnish them. The academic and artistic works collected in this volume share an acute sensitivity to this interplay of presence and absence, of constant conjunction and disjunction among visual and memorial forms, which shapes not only aesthetic but also material intersections among memory and images in contemporary art, politics, and society. Memory in these cases is not merely a metaphor with which to describe bytes of data signified on digital screens; and the visual dimensions of such intersections are not simply metaphorical substitutes for cognitive mental operations, as in the classical *ars memoriae*. The notion that visual forms and forms of memory share the same ostensible substance is one of the most deeply engrained structures of feeling in late modernity.

The studies collected in this volume offer richly varied paths to a common end: the rhetorical form and function of the materiality that inheres between images and memory. We contend that images powerfully invoke memory, and that memory is profoundly informed by visual media, through rhetorical dynamics: visual and memorial forms coalesce according to the ways in which practices of interpretation, argumentation, or communication assign shared meaning to them. Maurice Halbwachs’s premise that even individual memories depend upon “collective frameworks” of interpretation, such that “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present,” has become a basic assumption of modern memory studies. Hariman and Lucaites symmetrically observe that “picture viewing” is an interpretive activity; all those who view a single image may “seem to see the same thing, yet the full meaning of the image remains unarticulated.” But the interpretive, argumentative, or communicative content of images as well as memories is—like the interplay of presence and absence that suffuses their shared materiality—radically indeterminate. The studies in this volume address the rhetorical confluences of visual and memorial forms—their relations as orchestrated through patterns of interpretation, argument, or communication—by investigating how images may express seemingly permanent and transient impressions of the past, or the ways in which the past acquires the appearance of simultaneous objectivity and distortion through visual means. Memories may be sighted, and images may provide material sites of memory, for some viewers rather than others. The relevant rhetorical question is why material intersections among images and memory sometimes succeed and sometimes fail as persuasively wrought depictions—or sightings—of past and present reality.

The following essays are grouped according to their illustrations of provocative and enduring questions about sight and memory in modern art, politics, and society. We seek, in every case, to locate the dynamism intrinsic to overlapping practices of seeing and remembrance in ways commensurate with James Young’s approach to memory, meaning, and monumental form. He proposes, in his oft-cited analysis of Holocaust monuments, not “to fix the monument’s meaning in time, which would effectively embalm it,” but
to “reinvigorate this monument with the memory of its acquired past, to vivify memory of events.”\textsuperscript{13} Our contributors “vivify” the co-production of sight and memory, of memory and sight, in order to animate rather than “fix” the profound resonance of \textit{place and space}, \textit{monuments and memorials}, and \textit{media and mediums} as dynamic sites of artistic, social, or political exchange in modern public culture.

The works in Part I, “Places and Spaces,” explore how physical locations and environments constitute deeply evocative loci of memory. Visible remainders of the past comprise the material substrate of memory in such locales and environs: to view landscapes and cityscapes is to remember the past imprinted and continuously reprinted on their natural or physical contours. Our contributors reveal that substrate to be neither static nor neutral but vital and ever changing in its spatial shape and significance.

One can see regional history, for instance, in landscape surveys. Andrea Hammer draws upon recent scholarly work that treats landscape as a vast mnemonic device while examining remnants of Simeon DeWitt’s original 1790 topographical survey of central New York State. She documents how newly emerging imperial power in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State was inscribed on the ground and in the mind, erasing a prior landscape of cultural myth and memory before being partially written over by newly emerging identities. Urban art installations, in addition to rural landscapes, may prompt viewers to perceive multi-layered historical significance in seemingly mundane metropolitan environs. Margaret Ewing examines the art of Christian Boltanski, Shimon Attie, and Günter Demnig, maintaining that their works elicit viewers’ personal awareness of history. The manner of viewing that artists invite at sites of traumatic history, she argues, allows visitors to apprehend the full complexity of German history and identity in the newly reunified state more deeply than through written texts or other forms of art.

One may travel far and wide to explore places and spaces as loci of memory. Romantic tours of Greco-Roman ruins inspired by European travel literature exemplify how habits of seeing, remembering, and travelling materially intersect. Paul Duro investigates travel literature that chronicles voyagers’ impressions of classical places, monuments, and artworks. These texts, he maintains, demonstrate an “anticipatory memory” or “preemptive nostalgia” based not on previous experience but on perceptions, expectations, and desires gleaned through memoirs, travel guides, prints, photographs, and films prior to one’s visit to the actual sites. Hence, Duro shows how visual memory can ironically precede corporeal experience. The liminal space of cemeteries, which embody both landscape features and ornate architectural design, can also constitute a defining site of collective memory. Malcolm Woollen studies the Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm, Sweden (built between 1915 and 1941), for this reason. He argues that the cemetery reveals a unique Swedish attitude towards death and an understated declaration of national values based not on state-sponsored
narratives of tragedies or heroic victories but on everyday life. The cemetery illustrates how memory may visibly and materially express quotidian national identity without relying on monumental histories of military heroism or sacrifice.

Part II, “Monuments and Memorials,” is comprised of scholarly and artistic work that considers how subjects which resist both visual representation and coherent communal recollection compel us to question the material form and rhetorical function of conventional monuments and memorials. Our contributors seek to unsettle, in this context, the visual as well as commemorative conservatism or didacticism that often suffuses the officially sanctioned significance of monuments and memorials. Their work shows how the material features of monuments and memorials may organize a vibrant nexus of innovative and potentially transformative artistic, social, and political practices.

Memories of the often appalling indirect consequences of modern warfare defy the generic conventions of typical monuments and memorials. Ekaterina Haskins explores the dynamic possibilities of ephemeral grassroots memorials by examining the *Eyes Wide Open* traveling exhibit dedicated to casualties on both sides of the Iraq War. She considers how its symbolism enables multiple audiences to assume an active role in the commemorative process. Her analysis demonstrates the challenges that advocates of memory may face in seeking to render visible the tragedies of war conventionally withheld from state commemoration. An investigation of how to interpret the meaning of horrific historical events in monumental or memorial form would be incomplete without reflecting on the artistic process involved in producing those forms. Kingsley Baird discusses the creative processes and memorial functions of *The Cloak of Peace* (2006), his commissioned stainless steel sculpture in the Nagasaki Peace Park. Baird uses the sculpture to highlight a particular challenge that confronts memory artists as well as the viewing public: how to reconcile the charged space between two primary “forms” of memory—the work’s inhabitation of an amorphous public space and viewers’ reinterpretation of its memorial symbolism—in order to bear witness to unresolved historical traumas.

The characteristically modern and late modern experience of accelerating historical or temporal mobility poses additional challenges for those who attempt to memorialize frequently unnoticed, anonymous tragedies. Robert Bednar investigates how mass transit can both cause and complicate the need for collective remembrance. He analyzes roadside shrines that attempt to memorialize the thousands of motorists killed annually in automobile accidents by unexpectedly reminding drivers and passengers of the dangers which attend automobile travel. Efforts to memorialize private, or publicly excluded, processes of grief in still other contexts can also teach us much about the limits of conventional memorial forms. Dee Britton examines numerous challenges to the designation of *Dark Elegy*, a sculptural installation designed to commemorate those killed in
the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, as a national memorial to victims of terrorism. The essay documents trenchant bureaucratic objections to the design, due to its vivid representation of human vulnerability, thereby illustrating incidents of contestation between instrumental and cultural representations of collective memory.

The contributions collected in Part III, “Media and Mediums,” investigate critical relationships between unusual media or mediums of memory and the rhetorically malleable aura they lend to objects of memory. In every case, the material properties of a given medium facilitate corresponding practices of visual remembrance. Here, as in the preceding sections of the volume, our contributors delineate the inherently plastic matter of the media or mediums in question, demonstrating that they function not as neutral channels of representation but as essentially animate forms in the production of sight as memory, of memory as sight.

Discovering uncommon vantages on historical atrocities compels us to remember events anew through atypical visual media. Frances Guerin explores the possible appropriation of amateur photographs taken by German perpetrators as both agents of and witnesses to the barbarous events of the Holocaust and World War II. She considers how military atrocities may be seen and thus memorialized from radically uncommon perspectives—in this case, amateur photographs taken by Nazi soldiers of the very mass killings on the Eastern Front in which they participated. The mediums of household possessions and intimate embodied experience may shape patterns of remembrance in similarly terrifying episodes of forced migration and geopolitical exile. Ernesto Pujol addresses the formation of artistic memory, spinning an autobiography of remembrance in order to demonstrate the role of personal recollection, from childhood to adulthood, in spurring the creative process. He evocatively meditates in both words and images upon the multi-form ways that familial belongings and even our bodies can manifest coalesced patterns of remembrance and migration, as in the case of his family’s experiences during and after the Cuban Revolution.

The constitutive media of popular culture fundamentally inform the character and significance of widely disseminated memories in addition to intimately held recollections. Ned O’Gorman and Kevin Hamilton examine how the rise of the U.S. as a nuclear power depended on the careful negotiation and manipulation of collective memory. They propose that the U.S. did so by shifting the visual emphasis of nuclear armament in public discourse from such fearsome icons as the mushroom cloud to a new icon: the nuclear console operator, who demonstrated control and rightful dominion over an otherwise fearsome technology. Traditional visual arts, in comparison, hold equally important clues to major transitions in the development of modern public remembrance. Johanna Ruohonen discusses memories of war as expressed in and evoked by Finnish public art, especially public painting. She focuses on the political functions of such seemingly non-political works and, in doing so, demonstrates the critical functions of apparently innocuous public art
in generating collective memories of national history and reproducing storied ideals of present-day national identity. Ordinary persons, finally, help to fashion new mediums of memory not merely as conventional spectators but as active documentarians of historical events. Travelers and tourists collect visual mementos of both ordinary and extraordinary sights, thereby illustrating ingrained habits of remembering through visual tokens. Emily Godbey examines how Americans have understood disaster and tragedy as sites of consumption and leisure. She explores the production of postcards, souvenirs, portrait-making, and personal photography in relation to historical disasters. Godbey seeks to explain how and why Americans have commemorated scenes of tragedy with mementoes and pictures much as they have learned to document or preserve tokens of family vacations.

The aforementioned chapters combine to form a robustly interdiscipli-
ary investigation rooted in regional, national, and international experiences. Their findings illuminate how memories may be seen (or sighted) in visual form and how visual forms constitute noteworthy sites of memory. The chapters boast a diversity of methods and disciplines from the arts, humanities, and social sciences; such diversity, however, coheres in the volume’s consistent focus on rhetorical practices of communication, interpretation, or argumentation that motivate conjunctions of visual and memorial forms. Our contributors provide, despite differences in method, literature, subject matter, and nationality, an especially rich and thematically unified exploration of strategies according to which the production of visual artifacts and the work of remembrance materially intersect in ongoing processes of artistic, social, and political expression. The following studies consequently attend, with especial nuance and insight, to the complicated ways in which groups and individuals strive to make meaning from the simultaneously durable and ephemeral material of memory and images alike.

NOTES


7. Sontag, Photography, 3, 4.


Bradford Vivian and Anne Teresa Demo


Part I

Places and Spaces
1 Memory Lines
The Plotting of New York’s New Military Tract

Andrea Hammer

Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice.¹
—Michel de Certeau

Plot:
1. (a) A small piece of ground, generally used for a specific purpose. (b) A measured area of land; lot.
2. A ground plan, as for a building; chart; diagram
3. The series of events consisting of the outline of the action of a narrative or drama
4. A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose; scheme²
—Peter Brooks

You can see it best from the air: central New York’s regular grid of plots and lines, the spatial medium of its roads, streets, cities, and towns that literally directs our movement through and placement within the landscape.

These are the remnants of New York State Surveyor General Sim- eon De Witt’s original 1789 survey of central New York State’s New Military Tract, some 2,625 square miles of bounty lands carved out of the Six Nations territory to remunerate New York’s Revolutionary War soldiers for their service. De Witt subdivided the land into twenty-eight townships, each 60,000 acres and as square as possible, each further subdivided into 100 square lots of 600 acres, with six lots reserved to support schools and churches, larger claims, and compensate for lands under water.³ Such boundaries make enduring marks on the landscape.

It’s been well over 200 years since this spatial order was inscribed onto a complex of older, indigenous cultural landscapes. In that time the materials, even the uses, of these boundaries have changed while the lines themselves persisted. They’ve evolved into dirt, gravel, and paved roads; they’ve become foot paths transformed into fence lines; they’ve emerged as hedgerows, edge conditions, field discontinuities, crop boundaries,