The second example is more surprising. Amid all the tales of tension, high drama and intrigue – ranging from the Wars of Independence, through the push toward the Pacific, the Civil War and the emergence of a modernized and industrial America – it is the discussion of the presidential election in the year 2000 that strikes a real chord. For while the events surrounding the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and the development of a War on Terror remain raw, emblazoned on the memory of anyone with a passing interest in America, they have also served to obscure the events of the 2000 election. That contest, which saw Al Gore pitched into political battle with George W. Bush, challenged the very foundations of American democracy. The outcome – which involved legal disputes, allegations of voting irregularities and a spat in the Supreme Court which saw the justices voting along party lines – would have threatened the constitutional well-being of many countries. In Britain, for instance, it is not too difficult to imagine the impact that a similar set of events would have on the parliamentary system. The events surrounding the 2000 election, Reynolds argues, were the culmination of schisms in American society that can be traced back to the 1960s; it was a period of unremitting rancour and extremist opinions. Yet, in the face of all this, America regenerated itself: the 2008 election, in fact, reinvigorated electoral politics in a way that had seemed unimaginable four years earlier. Herein lies the essential lesson of this "new" American history. America's capacity to reimagine itself and to absorb the most trying of historical lessons has created a new endpoint for the current American tale. This, as Reynolds finishes his exceptional book by noting, is a "history that matters if we want to get a bearing on where this youthful old country may be going in the future" (584).

University of Nottingham BEVAN SEWELL

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Hans-Jürgen Grabbe and Sabine Schindler (eds.), *The Merits of Memory: Concepts, Contexts, Debates* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2008, €52.00). Pp. 404. ISBN 978 3 8253 5315 5.

The past couple of decades have witnessed the emergence of a new, trans-disciplinary, and as yet loosely defined field in the humanities: "memory studies." The publication of Pierre Nora's multivolume *Les Lieux de mémoire* (1984–92) revived an interest pioneered by Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s, converging with new social history to create an increasing concern with memory as an analytic category and organizing paradigm. Following the publication of Nora's landmark study in the United States in 1996, memory has rapidly become established in US academia as a relevant (and marketable) buzzword across a number of scholarly fields.

The outcome of an international conference on The Merits of Memory: Uses and Abuses of a Concept, held at the Leucorea Foundation, Wittenberg, in 2005, this volume, unlike many collections originating from conferences, features long and fully argued essays rather than short occasional papers. The range and solidity of the enterprise is further reinforced by the excellent work of the editors in arranging and presenting the contributions, providing them with a perspicuous layout and a thoughtful introduction. The essays take stock of the ongoing discourses of memory

in and across a variety of disciplines and topics, showing how historiography, globalization, immigration, hegemony, identity, religion, nation, civilization, ethnicity, war, film, visual representation, media, entertainment, and tourism variously inflect our understanding of memory and are in turn inflected by it.

Displaying a plurality of methodological frameworks and theoretical approaches, contributions engage the most influential theorizations of memory that have set the stage for later studies, as well as their current developments. Existing models are thus examined, cross-fertilized, and critiqued. Some of the contributions (Klenner, Carrier, Friedman) display a mainly theoretical orientation, testing the potentialities of the paradigm in a variety of relations, and offering examples that range from nineteenth-century Europe to Nigeria, Armenia, Kazakhstan, or post-dictatorship Argentina and Chile. The Holocaust is an almost mandatory reference point, the retrieval of survivors' memories being one of the most powerful impulses behind the contemporary interest in memory. The relationship between memory, history, autobiography, and historiography is a major concern, reflected in critical periodizations and surveys of memory studies (Hutton, Winter) or investigations of their more specific intersections (Depkat). Another concern surfacing in many essays is the impact of communication technologies on the marketing, "visitability," and perception of sites of memory, as well as the way globalization affects the contemporary creation and circulation of cultural memory, traditionally predicated on the nation-state and the organic community. Of special interest in this sense is Sabine Schindler's cogent critical examination of competing accounts of "cosmopolitan memory."

A majority of the essays focus directly or indirectly on the United States, assessing the promise of memory for American studies (Hebel) and offering a truly fascinating range of instructive case studies. Glassberg interrogates the specificity of American sites of memory in a comparative framework; others analyze the accrual of different and competing meanings to sites of contested memory, such as celebratory monuments in New Mexico (Schwarz-Bierschenk), the Immigration Museum at Ellis Island (Baur), or the exhibitions recalling the Japanese American internment (Gessner). Immigration, ethnicity, and war are also central to other essays, which investigate the creation of myths of immigration (Daniels) and shared perceptions of ethnicity in migrant communities (Bungert), examine the interplay of individual and collective memory in slave (Boesenberg) or war (Rödder) narratives, or reconnoitre the field of Vietnam war movies (Fluck).

Collectively, by adding to theoretical argument the persuasiveness of accurate case studies, the essays enrich and articulate our perception of the generative potential of memory for scholarship. In spite of their undeniable range and forcefulness, however, one cannot completely repress a sense that at least some of the current work in memory studies is not so much producing new insight through a new lens, as verifying established knowledge from a new angle, or packaging traditional scholarship in currently fashionable terms. To this skeptical mind, the single essay in the volume that is openly critical of the current "memory boom" – Klein's analysis of its affinities with the principles and rhetoric of the New Right – will undoubtedly sound refreshingly heretical.

Given the importance of narrative to any conceptualization of memory, one would perhaps have expected some attention to literature as a specialized way of

retrieving, interpreting, and circulating past experience; the question of fictional narrative, however, is only raised by Fluck, and in a discussion of war movies. Equally surprising is the scanty attention devoted to gender – the only exception being Karsten Fitz's examination of visual representations of women in the mid-nineteenth century – especially in view of the role memory has played in feminist as well as in gay and queer studies. However, calling attention to the inevitable lacks of such a collection is only a way of bearing witness to its impressive width and representative sweep.

Università di Napoli "L'Orientale," Italy DONATELLA IZZO

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Mary N. Woods, *Beyond the Architect's Eye: Photographs and the American Built Environment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009, £32.50/ $49.95). Pp. 368. ISBN 978 0 8122 4108 2.

Conventional architectural photography often idealizes buildings and erases human presence, so notes Mary N. Woods in her recent book, *Beyond the Architect's Eye: Photographs and the American Built Environment*. As an architectural historian, Woods attempts to negotiate more interdisciplinary terrain by placing modern architecture alongside developments in the visual arts, urban studies and cultural geography from the 1890s to the 1940s. Whereas similar studies have relied solely on dominant urban landscapes, that overwhelming obsession with "skyscraper culture," or else images that mostly represent deserted, neutralized buildings and spaces, what the author refers to as the "scopic conventions" to cater to the architect's supreme vision, Woods is more interested in the culture of images that mediated the American built environment up until World War II, exploring rather those photographers who complicate the heart of American iconography – that foggy but spectacular New York skyline, those absolute Frank Lloyd Wright shots, and the FSA versions of southern life. Ultimately, she examines the convergence of these two crafts within the modernist enterprise not only to probe photography's power "to weave time and human presence back into the built environment" (xxiv), but equally to trace how our built environments are shaped just as much by their users and observers as by the original designers and builders (xxxii).

The book is divided into three substantial chapters running in roughly chronological order: each profiling a different site (the "new" New York of the early 1900s, the rural South of the 1920s–1930s, and a burgeoning Miami of the late 1930s–1940s) and photographer (Alfred Stieglitz, Frances Benjamin Johnston, Marion Post Wolcott), though Woods adeptly fills out each scene with a number of photographers, either from within related circles or, more effectively, with counterpoints who provide alternate portraits of place. This is particularly the case with the second chapter on the Old South, with Woods's bid to pin the work of Frances Benjamin Johnston against the more iconic images of Walker Evans, Margaret Bourne-White and other FSA-bred photographers, as well as lesser-known contemporaries such as Henry Clay Anderson and Eudora Welty, only an amateur photographer at the time. In a similar vein, and where she offers her most insightful, hearty analysis, the third