

SEM51. Memory landscapes and heritage storytelling: Human voices and their digital representations

51A 12 September 16:30-19:00, PN 5

51B 13 September h 8:30-11, PN 9

Convenors

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Abstract

Commemorating the past and reconnecting it with the present in tourism and cultural heritage branding has become a way of integrating different personal and collective timescales (Lemke 2009, 2023) into digital storytelling. This includes multimodal strategies to create 'memory landscapes' in (cross-)digital genres and texts in English – e.g. promotional videos and institutional websites, travel diaries/blogs, web-based accounts of migration and diaspora, etc. – that reconstruct and relive individual and collective journeys through time and space, exploiting master narratives to navigate the global and local worlds. The seminar will investigate humanity and the humane within multidimensional, transmedial forms of tourism and cultural heritage (e.g. Vasta & Manzella, 2024; Coccetta, 2024), also in a cross-cultural perspective: the focus will thus be on how memory landscapes and cultural heritage are transformed through remediation (Grusin & Bolter, 1999) and resemiotization (Iedema, 2003) in digital texts receptive to such storytelling. Contributions are invited which undertake critical multimodal discourse analyses that (dis-)articulate heritage voices of communities in the English-speaking world, including those using English as a Lingua Franca.

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SEM51. Papers

51A 12 September 16:30-18:30, PN 5

- *Narrating the self. Second-generation immigrants, identity, and the humane* (Cristina Arizzi, Università di Catania)
- *The Stoop as digital theatre* (Anthony Baldry, Università degli Studi di Messina)
- *Narrating European cultures, heritage and history: The case of European capitals of culture promotional videos* (Francesca Coccetta, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)
- *Ombudsmen/ombudswomen as mediators and managers of cultural heritage in Canada* (Rosalba Rizzo, Università degli Studi di Messina)

51B 13 September h 8:30-11, PN 9

- *Tracing the origins of Italian tourism narratives in the digital age: A database for investigating language, cultural memory and identity construction* (Mirella Agorni, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia)
- *Oral, written and visual memory landscapes: evaluating recordings of personal memories of Ireland* (Deirdre Kantz, Università di Pavia)

- *Cultural preservation and critical multimodal discourse analysis: Interpreting UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Pietro Manzella, Università degli Studi di Udine)
- *Dress code as a storytelling resource in the preservation of identity* (Mary Ellen Toffle, Università degli Studi di Messina)

SEM51. Abstracts

Tracing the origins of Italian tourism narratives in the digital age: A database for investigating language, cultural memory and identity construction

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Tourism promotion plays a key role in shaping collective memory and national self-representation. This presentation will introduce a digital research tool developed as part of the PRIN DIETALY project, which explores the evolution of Italian tourism discourse in English from the early twentieth century to the present (Agorni, 2025). The database allows users to explore how Italy as a tourist destination has been narrated over the years, highlighting the historical roots of images and themes that continue to shape tourism communication today. It shows how institutional and individual voices have contributed to the construction and circulation of memory landscapes in different periods.

This open-access database brings together metadata on over 600 English-language tourism texts - including brochures, guidebooks and digital media - collected from libraries and private archives. Unlike broader travel-related collections such as *Europeana* (a European digital platform for cultural heritage), the Dietaly archive foregrounds language and mediation: materials are classified by date and language of publication, genre, translator, promotional aspects, visual elements, and geographical and thematic focus. This structure invites researchers to trace the discursive and multimodal strategies through which Italy has been framed as an international tourist destination, and highlights the role of language mediation in shaping cultural heritage through tourist communication.

While the database does not reproduce full texts, it provides detailed metadata to support both qualitative and quantitative research, allowing for customisable exploration. Its multimodal structure facilitates research through a cross-search mode, allowing researchers to retrieve texts and analyse how past promotional materials have been recontextualised in contemporary tourism discourse. Through access to rich metadata, the database lays the foundation for research into the origins and development of narrative patterns that reshape cultural memory and reframe heritage for international audiences (Mandolessi, 2024; Opgenhaffen, 2022; Velhinho, & Almeida, 2023).

By foregrounding the interplay of language, image and translation, the presentation reflects on how digital tools such as this database can recover and reanimate past voices in institutional tourism promotion (Battilani 2023). It thus contributes to broader discussions about how memory landscapes are mediated through language - and how digital archives such as this one can support critical engagement with the past from a transcultural perspective.

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Narrating the self. Second-generation immigrants, identity, and the humane

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By being born in a new country to immigrant parents, second-generation immigrants both embody and shoulder the responsibility of navigating from family histories and experiences to new realities. Drawing on scholarship in narrative identity (Bamberg, 2004; De Fina, 2003; Lundby 2008) and personal and collective timescales (Lemke 2009, 2023), this paper intends to explore how second-generation immigrants in the US discuss their identity through self-narration,

negotiating cultural memory (Vasta & Manzella 2024), belonging and assimilation in transnational contexts. As a preliminary step, a small corpus of 30 TEDx talks delivered by second-generation immigrant speakers with various cultural and linguistic backgrounds has been created and annotated through the affordances of OpenMWS (Taibi 2023). These talks reflect themes of linguistic tension, multicultural adjustment, intergenerational tension and interdependence.

The goal of the analysis is to unveil the discursive rendering of the tension between the personal dimension of growing up and constructing an identity in a new country and the collective dimension of meeting family expectations. Special focus will be placed on the negotiation of language as a means of expression, e.g. code-switching, and as a paradise lost and regained in the construction of personal identities, e.g. onomastics (Amit & Dolberg 2023). The temporal framing of the talks, mediating past, present and future is also taken into account. The analytical model created for the corpus annotation is designed to detect the function of discursive strategies such as agency, intertextuality, emotional stance and irony, interlacing them with the main identity issues discussed, e.g. hybridity, belonging, exclusion, family heritage.

Finally, the analytical model will be examined in relation to the multimodal features pertaining to the performance and the integration of different semiotic systems, e.g. gestures, facial expressions, use of visuals, pauses, as narrative boosters. Overall, these narratives reveal that self-narration functions as an investigating strategy in the deeply human complexities of identity and belonging, and at the same time discloses the humane desire to be seen, heard, and understood across generations and cultures.

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The Stoop as digital theatre

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“Ouch you need some voice coaching” is the final remark that one host makes about the other’s singing in Ep. 6 of *The Stoop* podcast series. This “slip-up”, almost certainly planned, is a strong clue to the true inspiration and professionalism lying behind this acclaimed podcast series. Billed as *Stories from across the Black diaspora* (<https://www.thestoop.org/>), and thus concerned since its inception in July 2017 with reflection on how society has shaped the identities of Black people, especially those of African American women, the series is in reality a demonstration of how soul searching can be achieved in podcasting through the carefully-staged blending of the human voice and music.

The Stoop obviously fathoms African Americans’ yearning, as diasporans, to explore their cultural heritage – hence the many references to Africa (on average ten per episode) and individual African countries throughout the 111 episodes so far broadcast. Indeed, in their “celebration of Black joy in all its diversity”, hosts Leila Day and Hana Baba turn private thoughts into public confessions as they “start conversations and provide professionally-reported stories about what it means to be Black and how we talk about blackness in America, and globally” (<https://www.thestoop.org/aboutthestoop>). But while the series celebrates the struggle for individual and collective freedoms hailing “marginalized groups that [...] fought colonialism and oppression” (Ep. 23), *The Stoop* is far more than a forum for the oppressed.

Named after the stepped entrances to New York condominiums that expressed “the sub-culture which was the creation of children [that had] an impact no less enduring than the school, the church, and perhaps even the family” (Clark 1967:99), the series turns this hybrid private/public space into a digital theatre where people “stoop out”. *The Stoop* is thus

significant not for calls for freedoms and recognition of human rights – many other podcast series do this (Vasta 2022, 2023; Vasta and Baldry, forthcoming) – but rather for *how* it creates digital stooping. The presentation provides a succinct corpus-based critical multimodal discourse analysis (Baldry and Kantz 2022) of the series’ construction of theatrical soundscapes blending together voices and music through recourse to singing, chanting, and skilful control of voice prosodies which – in conjunction with other resources such as remediated clips sourced from other podcast series – create narrative landscapes that are truly memorable and distinctively multimodal.

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Narrating European cultures, heritage and history: The case of European capitals of culture promotional videos

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This presentation will explore cultural heritage in relation to 60 promotional videos for 34 European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) in the 2007-2025 span. How videos capture the cultural uniqueness of the ECOCs and promote cultural diversity, but also memory landscapes will be explored. The presentation will highlight the benefits of using a corpus-assisted Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CMDA, Vasta & Baldry, 2020; Coccetta, 2024) in the understanding of the strategies used to evoke the past. The presentation will also consider marketing aspects that use cultural heritage and the memory of the past with the ultimate goal of attracting tourism and investments. In this respect, the award of the title European Capital of Culture made to a city by the European Union represents an opportunity for cities to enhance their brand image in the eyes of their own inhabitants and the whole of Europe; indeed, from a socio-economic standpoint, the title is a catalyst for the city’s cultural development and urban revitalization as well as a boost in tourism (European Commission, 2025). For this reason, it is important for cities aspiring to the ECOC title to make sure that their place identity is well-created in all the ECOC-related materials, including their bid-book and promotional materials, and in line with the expectations of the ECOC calls. The presentation draws on Lemke’s (1995a/b) theory of intertextual thematic formations to support the CMDA approach.

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Oral, written and visual memory landscapes: evaluating recordings of personal memories of Ireland

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An Internet search for “recording personal memories of Ireland” returns many examples of websites that stimulate individual contributions for the creation of oral, written and visual archives forming a collective memory of Ireland, its history and its people (Fox *et al.*, 2021). These projects take different forms. Some are based on submissions of individual contributions sent in as a response to the website invitations. They include:

- a) institutional projects such as the *Memory Book Project* promoted by *The National Museum of Ireland - Country Life* <https://www.museum.ie/en-ie/museums/country-life/projects/memory-book>;
- b) business initiatives such as the *Life Recordings* video-based project by Salthill Media “to preserve your personal journey for future generations” (www.salthillmedia.com/liferecordings) and the oral history archive organised by *Irish Life & Lore*, a family business dealing in antiques and cultural heritage, “capturing thousands of Irish voices from all regions of the country” (www.irishlifeandlore.com).

Others are based on oral records collected by local communities such as the *Bere Island Oral History Recordings* project that brings together individual efforts to preserve their ancestry, cultural heritage and identity, (bereisland.heritagecork.org/people/recording-our-bere-island-stories).

A fourth category includes interview-based research projects undertaken by research organisations: a first example is the project undertaken by the Bodleian Libraries (libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/oralhistory/ireland) entitled *Breaking the Silence: Staying at home in an emigrant society*; a second example is *Oral History Network Ireland* (oralhistorynetworkireland.ie/networking) which references many such projects including the *1913 Alternative Visions Oral History Group* collecting interviews from all around Ireland (1913committee.ie/blog).

A final category includes initiatives from journalism such as *Ireland's Own*, a monthly magazine which publishes *Just a Memory* podcasts and written stories contributed by individual readers and *The Treasure Vox* organised by the journalist Karen Tomkins (www.thetreasurevox.ie). Using a corpus-assisted CMDA (Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis) approach (Baldry & Kantz, 2022; Kantz & Baldry, 2024; Vasta 2020, 2023), the presentation will be concerned with providing a brief description of the diverse genres and their characteristics that the creation of memory landscapes entails.

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Cultural preservation and critical multimodal discourse analysis: Interpreting UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*

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The UNESCO website (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>) contains videos and podcasts that interpret intangible cultural heritage, which is defined in the Convention itself as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity [...] compatible with existing international human rights instruments as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development”.

After a brief exploration of the notion of safeguarding, defined in the Convention as “measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education”, the presentation will critically examine strategies, genres and semiotic resources used when educating about the links between sustainable development and intangible cultural heritage. These are described in the Convention as “manifested inter alia in the following domains: (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship”.

The presentation will focus on domain (a) and explore a series of six animations entitled *Teaching and Learning with Intangible Cultural Heritage in Asia and the Pacific* (UNESCO, 2021) produced in UNESCO-ICHCAP-APCEIU partnership, with additional support from Chengdu Culture and Tourism Development Group L.L.C, and characterised by animation techniques (Baldry & Thibault, 2006, pp. 44-46, 60-61) that focus on integrated visual-verbal strategies (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Vasta & Baldry, 2020) in relation to models of multimodal analysis relevant to the school environment (e.g., Zollo, 2024). The presentation’s main takeaway is to encourage thinking and, above all, to place a greater focus on intangible cultural heritage within the promotion of sustainable tourism (Manzella, 2024), for example in secondary schools for tourist experts.

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Ombudsmen/ombudswomen as mediators and managers of cultural heritage in Canada

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What are the functions of ombuds in Canada? This paper will argue they are mediators between individuals and public institutions and thus play a major role in defending the civil and human rights of vulnerable individuals in Canadian society especially in relation to its indigenous communities. However, in addition to their social functions, ombuds also have a significant discourse role to play in ensuring that the voices of these communities are heard by the general public. The paper uses a corpus of a hundred videos in which Canadian ombuds present their credentials to the public and give voice, often via TV news outlets, to the findings of their case reports. The paper will thus exemplify how these technical ombud reports come to be remediated through videos that enact an expert-to-lay discourse process. The examples shown in the presentation link up with efforts to preserve the indigenous way of life with its memories of a different lifestyle and cultural mindset compared to that entailed by migration to large Canadian cities.

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Dress code as a storytelling resource in the preservation of identity

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Political events create discourse, but discourse, in turn, shapes political events. Bearing in mind that discourse preserves the memory of the past, this presentation examines the discourse surrounding the enforced silence, following the withdrawal of Western forces from Afghanistan in 2021, of Afghan women and their resistance to Taliban efforts to erase their identities (Toffle, 2024). Though shaped by many factors, the close relationship between heritage storytelling and the preservation – through multimodal discourse – of otherness (Staszak, 2008; Thiesmeyer, 2003), diversity (Van Dijk, 2001) and women’s expression of their role and status in society (Tannen, 2014) can be highlighted by investigations which reveal how power can be contextualized, gained, and lost, in relation to cultural constraints affecting dress codes (Tarlo, 2010). The colour, size, shape, degree of cover of what we wear influences how we feel and how others interpret our identity, intentions and social position. Yet we take for granted the unconscious messages we send and receive through our clothing until forcibly reminded of their significance in visual politics. Indeed, Kress & Van Leeuwen – after observing that different modes such as image, speech, gesture, are constituted differently by different social users, who work from “different social cultural-semiotic constitutions” and “inhabit specific socio-political-cultural places” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2006: xvi) – argue that the starting point of any description involving valuations, uses, etc. should be a result of focusing on the semiotic resources of the social group under scrutiny: image as a mode “will then have its place appropriate to the social and hence semiotic constitution of the group” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, xvii). In keeping with these observations, frame-based analysis of news reports and documentaries illustrates how the various techniques of self-representation serve, on the one hand, to protect and shield Afghan women, but also to explain their circumstances to Western viewers using the strong metaphorical imagery of dress code to highlight hidden attitudes, prejudices, and stereotypes. As part of the demonstration that dress code impositions designed to repress individual identities are ironically destined to place those affected in the limelight, the presentation will illustrate the use of visual metaphors to underscore that ultimately human voices can never be silenced.

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